Webs of Ruin and Bloom: An Analysis of the Overseas Chinese Networks in Cambodia

by

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ACCRONYMS

AALBA—Asian American Licensed Beverage Association; this abbreviation is specific to Philadelphia, however, there are similar organizations throughout the U.S.

ACC—Association of Chinese in Cambodia; founded in 1990

ACTC—Association of Chinese Teochew in Cambodia

ASEAN—Association of Southeast Asian Nations

CAA—Cambodian Association of America

CCP—Chinese Communist Party

CESO—Committee for the Establishment of Social Order and Security for the Capital of Phnom Penh

CSU—California State Universities

FANK—Khmer National Armed Forces; military under Lon Nol

ICP—Indochina Communist Party

MAA—Mutual Assistance Association

NAPALC—National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium

NSC—U.S. National Security Council

NUFK—National United Front of Kampuchea; founded in 1970 by Khmer Rouge and Sihanouk

ORR—Office of Refugee Resettlement

PAV—People’s Army of Vietnam

PRC—People’s Republic of China

PRK—People’s Republic of Kampuchea; name of Cambodia under Vietnamese occupation

RCA/RMA—Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance

S-21—Security Prison 21; a former Phnom Penh high school turned into a torture and execution center.

SEATO—Southeast Asia Treaty Organization

TEA—Teochew Entrepreneur Award

U.S.—United States of America

UCC—United Cambodian Community

UCLA—University of California, Los Angeles

UFNSK—United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea; Vietnam’s Cambodian army unit built on Khmer Rouge defectors

U.N.—United Nations
France gives Cambodia independence 1953

Geneva Accords 1954

Second Indochina War/Vietnam War begins 1955

China begins the Great Leap Forward 1958

China ends the Great Leap Forward Soviet Union halts food aid to China 1962

U.S. and Soviet Union agreed on Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty 1963

First Chinese nuclear device detonates October 1964

China begins the Cultural Revolution Sino-Soviet alliance splits 1966

Lon Nol overthrows Sihanouk 1970

U.S. commences Operation Menu 1969-1975


President Nixon visits China 1972

U.S. pulls out of Vietnam 1973

Khmer Rouge captures Phnom Penh Sino-Vietnamese alliance split Vietnam unifies 1975
Tea(r) Family Tree
*only includes those who are mentioned

Lao Lai Gong (Great Paternal Grandfather)  
Kong  
Lao Lai Ma (Great Paternal Grandmother)  
Khov Kim

Bung  Barry (Bu)  Jonie (Cheng)  Lena (Kheng)  Stacy (Shoi)  Chy

Chhong  Betsy Taing (Deng)

Ammie (author)

Taing Family Tree
*only includes those who are mentioned

Lao Ghua Gong (Great Maternal Grandfather)  
Boukim  
Lao Ghua Ma (Great Maternal Grandmother)  
Cherry Tang (Chheang Ngor)

Pauline (Cheng)  Steven (Leng)  Susan (Seng)

Sina Chheng  Betsy (Deng)  Chhong Tea

Ammie (author)
INTRODUCTION

While I was growing up, I had a lot of difficulty conceptualizing my cultural identity. I knew that I was ethnically Chinese, but that my family had come to the United States from Cambodia as refugees. Aside from the common struggle of a first-generation Asian-American trying to navigate their Asian heritage in an American environment, I struggled to understand, locate, and make sense of my cultural identity as a Chinese-Cambodian. Whenever people inquired about my ethnicity, I had a tendency to answer first that I was Chinese, followed with a contrasting interjection declaring my Cambodian affiliation. It was difficult to map my identities, and even harder to analyze the ways in which they coexisted or were perhaps in tension with each other. I did not know which part of my identity was stronger – my Chinese side or my Cambodian side – or if they were equal parts of my sense of self. This was because even though my parents are ethnically Chinese, they are able to speak both our Teochew-Chinese dialect and Khmer fluently, not to mention that our family had resided in Cambodia for a couple of generations and are survivors of the Khmer Rouge’s Cambodian Genocide. That being so, how could I not identify with such an impactful component of my family’s existence?

After my parents divorced and remarried, I learned some major cultural and experiential differences between Chinese-Cambodians (Sino-Khmers) and Cambodians (Khmers) by living with my Khmer step-father, Sina. One of the first things I noticed was the different types of food dishes – as usual, we had a mixture of both Chinese and Khmer cuisines, but I began to learn how to distinguish what was Chinese and what was Khmer based on whether or not Sina was cooking. I noticed
the same distinction among our languages – my parents usually spoke a blend of Teochew, Khmer, and English and I was able to understand the essence of what they were saying without comprehending every single word. Sina, on the other hand, only spoke Khmer and English, thus, I was more able to recognize the striking differences between Teochew and Khmer. Furthermore, after Sina and his extended family joined our family, we began recognizing some Cambodian holidays like the Khmer New Year.

With Sina’s entirely Khmer background juxtaposed by my family’s Sino-Khmer background, I realized that we were barely Khmer at all. I noticed that in the blend of languages that my parents spoke, the words I did not fully understand were, in fact, Khmer. That was because as children, we were never taught Khmer, only Teochew and English. We did not celebrate any Khmer holidays, nor did we share Khmer spiritual beliefs. My parents did not feel the need to pass down the Khmer language as my generations of Chinese-Americans had no need for it in America. Our religion was rooted in ancient Chinese Mahayana Buddhism and deity worshipping while the Khmer practiced Theravada Buddhism, a school of Buddhism that has long been established in Southeast Asia (discussed in Chapter 1). The fact that my parents did not pass down these chunks of Khmer culture, I think, is informative of which parts of themselves they had deemed most important to carry on into the next generation. However, I wondered why this was the case. I knew their experience in Cambodia had been horrifying, but wouldn’t this just have made their lives that much more intertwined with the Khmer struggle?
Before I began my research, the possibility of ethnicity playing a role during the Cambodian Genocide did not cross my mind. I knew that Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge targeted intellectuals and elites in order to erase capitalism and knowledge of old corrupt Cambodia as well as to obtain power, but I never stopped to question who the intellectual elites were and who had the power. Furthermore, I did not consider the distinct networks and cultural philosophies that influenced survivors’ ability to re-establish themselves in a new country like the United States. It was only after I considered these questions that I turned to my parents and asked about their hard stance on passing their Chinese identity onto their children, to which they answered, “We are Chinese, so we come from China. Even in America and Cambodia we are Chinese” meaning that wherever we may be, our heritage is Chinese. We may assimilate to our new surroundings as migrants, but our roots will always be Chinese.

I later found through my research that their hard hold on their Chinese culture proved to be common among other Sino-Khmer. Since the Chinese diaspora dispersed into Southeast Asia, the Sino-Khmer have clung to their Chinese roots while simultaneously integrating with their Khmer surroundings. Their ability to employ both identities have allowed Cambodia’s Chinese minority to excel in their dialectic areas of trade and professions; many of which were business and governmental. As a result, Sino-Khmer were able to rise as a minority elite that accumulated much opposition in Lon Nol’s Khmer Republic, Pol Pot’s Year Zero, the Vietnamese occupation, and so on. Still, the Sino-Khmer managed to endure in Cambodia and quickly recovered as refugees in the United States and elsewhere. The Sino-Khmer have struggled in claiming a full identity, however, I believe that this
grey state is both the access point that fuels their ability to propel forward along as their Achilles heel since they will always be “outsiders.”
**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

With the personal mission to understand my cultural position and ethnic history in Cambodia, my objective for this research project is to unravel the contested forms of identity and experience for Sino-Khmers throughout Cambodian history, up until their general recovery in the United States. This includes insight into: 1) Chinese migration and diasporic ties in order to comprehend the complexity of the networks that extend across nations and dialects. 2) The effects of French colonization as it pertains to the structure of education development and economic manipulation by Sino-Khmers. 3) An analysis of China’s circumstances in the Cold War and its influential role in Pol Pot’s Year Zero. 4) Vietnamese occupation which further spurred Sino-Khmer emigration. 5) The cultural differences among the Sino-Khmer and Khmer in order to understand its possible effects on the recovery process. 6) The role of Chinese networks in the refugee and recovery process. While this project will cover the history of Cambodia in depth, its main focus is the political use of anti-Chinese sentiment and the resilience of one of Cambodia’s most important minority groups, the Chinese/Sino-Khmer.

I will speak about Sino-Khmers as part of the Chinese diaspora in Cambodia, with occasional focus on specific dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, and so on as dialectic classification plays an important role in identifying the Sino-Khmers’ historical professions and their consequential repression. Furthermore, I will utilize my family’s narrative as a particular case and guide of a specific Teochew experience in terms of their migration to Cambodia, Lon Nol’s Khmer Republic to, eventually, the Sino-Khmer migration to the United States. Their stories will cover
the years under Prince Sihanouk, General Lon Nol, Pol Pot, and the Vietnamese, followed by their experiences in the refugee camps and their eventual recuperation in the United States. It is important to note that my family’s experience is just one of many Sino-Khmer stories, however, it is the ethics and networks they share as Chinese that I find most interesting and essential to the experience of the Chinese diaspora.

*Note: Overtime, Cambodia has undergone many name changes during its many regimes. I will indentify the name for each regime once that regime is introduced, however, I will refer to the country as “Cambodia” throughout this thesis.
CHAPTER 1: ANCIENT CAMBODIA

The influence of fossilized prejudices and fears carries on into modern times, thus, it is crucial that we remember and consider Cambodia’s past when trying to understand Khmer people’s relationships and motivations in politics within Cambodia and its neighbors. The Khmer people have over 2,000 years of recorded evidence of their extraordinary accomplishments as a maritime empire, along with its unforgettable collapse. These ancient interactions provide insight into the influence of a state religion, the inspiration and aspirations of Pol Pot’s Year Zero, as well as to the modern relationships between Cambodia and its neighbors Vietnam, Thailand, and China.

FUNAN

Though it is indisputable that Khmer society has existed years beforehand, the earliest legitimate documentation is of the Khmer entity – known

and named by generations of Chinese embassies—Chenla. Chenla was located in the northern area of the Mekong River—it’s land mass can be recognized as today’s Laos—and resided as a vassal to the southern kingdom of Funan, also named by the Chinese and referred to as the “Kingdom of the Mountain” (see Figure 1)—it can be recognized as today’s South Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia (Briggs, 1951).

Located in the southeastern region of Asia, Funan was fortunately planted in the middle of China and India’s commercial waterways. This allowed Funan to flourish economically and culturally by trading and welcoming educated leaders from India to settle along its borders. By the 5th century A.D., Funan was so heavily Indianized that an Indian brahman under the name of Kaundinya was able to rise as the King of Funan. Under his rule, Funan was introduced to the worship of Indian deities, a Central Indian alphabet, and honorific titles such as -varman which indicates a ruling class (Briggs, 1951). Even with such Indianization, Funan still favored various forms of Buddhism along with Hinduism (Hall, 1981).

Prior to Funan’s Indianization, the ancient land had no known written language. In fact, all that we know of the Kingdom of Funan comes from China who assembled information over centuries by collecting tribute from these subordinate kingdoms. This long-engrained power dynamic was eventually aligned with European imperialism and settled in as strong anti-colonial sentiments in Southeast Asia. Such attitudes are important to note when we look to the future suspicions of the Chinese diaspora.
CHENLA

By the 6th century, Chenla had managed to gain its independence from Funan, force Funan into vassalage, and annex its land to create the Khmer Empire (Briggs, 1951). Interestingly though, Chenla had already been heavily Indianized at that point as well, thus, its ruling leaders continued to utilize the honorific title of -varman along with other Brahmanic customs, making Hinduism the dominant following and the Court religion (Hall, 1981).

As mentioned before, historians have been unable to acquire any knowledge of what the Khmers had called themselves during this ancient period, instead, their reference to the names “Funan,” “Chenla,” and “Khmer” come from ancient Chinese documentation. Furthermore, throughout Chinese documentation of this ancient land, Funan, Chenla, and Khmer often refers to both the country and people that is today’s Cambodia and Khmer people (Biggs, 1951).

Sometime around 706, Chenla split into what is referred to as Land Chenla (Upper Chenla) and Water Chenla (Lower Chenla); we know of this split from Chinese documentation of Upper Chenla’s first voyage to the Chinese embassy in 717 (Hall, 1981). There is, however, no record of Lower Chenla’s visits to the Chinese embassy –if there were any– though there is documentation by ancient Javanese who attacked the land in the late 700s. Lower Chenla was known as Water Chenla because of its access to the Mekong Delta and though they reaped the benefits of the river, the open water also left them vulnerable to attacks by Malay pirates from “Java” (Chandler & Overton, 2017; Hall, 1981). Java may refer to Java itself, the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, the Srivijaya Kingdom, or all four.
By the late 6th century, Jayavarman I was established as King and inscripted evidence indicates that he was the first king to maintain a Buddhic domain, one without an invocation to the Brahmanic gods (Briggs, 1951). This, along with other scraps of evidence, have led historians to believe that Jayavarman I’s reign was asserted by means of a revolution, perhaps through the reunification of Chenla (Briggs, 1951). His long reign, however, was afflicted by social and political chaos as well as a plague of impoverished lands. Disorder and mayhem continued as the kingdom divided into thirds after Jayavarman I was overthrown by an undocumented usurper (Briggs, 1951). In addition to internal division and decades of civil war, this once great land was continuously invaded by the Javanese of the Srivijaya Kingdom and was eventually conquered, which made Chenla a Javanese vassal.
GOD KINGS

The land experienced years of conflict until King Jayavarman II was instituted as a puppet sovereign in 790 by the Javanese of the Srivijaya Kingdom (Chandler & Overton, 2017). He went on to defy his overseers and reunited the kingdom, declaring its independence in 802 which officially founded the Khmer Kingdom known as Kambuja-desa (see Figure 2) (Chandler & Overton, 2017). Under his rule, the Indian Brahmanic cult of the Devaraja was introduced to the Khmer people as a proclamation to the Javanese that Jayavarman II was the rightful monarch; the rights were performed by qualified priests, therefore, the Devaraja was marked as a free and independent monarch who is servant to no other than the gods’ will (Mabbett, 1969).

To the casual eye, the institution of this cult was simply made to proclaim independence from the Javanese and set course for a new rule. However, its absolutist overtone stuck and went on to establish the pyramid-like system that continues to describe the social codes of behavior and value in Cambodia today. These god-kings had the power to create and manipulate these social categories —referred to as varnas—however they may best suit the state’s purpose, whether it be administrative or economic (Mabbett, 1977). For example, Jayavarman V (969-1000) was known to have created 2 new varnas: the khmuk vrah kral/arcana and the karma-ntara. Individuals in Jayavarman V’s new varnas held exclusive rights over revenues of certain villages and its rice fields as well as other privileges of authority (Mabbett, 1977).

These varnas, however, did not incorporate the slaves that made up a substantial portion of the population (Mabbett, 1977). This leads us to believe that
varnas were largely representative of the occupational classifications held by free Khmers, some of which were made by royal appointment (Mabbett, 1977). However, the recorded varnas are not representative of the Khmer population’s professions which was largely agricultural (Mabbett, 1977). Instead, many of them refer to government, educational, or religious occupations. Thus, it is assumed that the Devaraja governed two general varnas: one where he held absolute control over administrative and trade sub-groups, and another where the ordinary population abided by general state laws.

Nonetheless, the Devaraja and his inheritors were set at the zenith of this pyramid as divine god-kings – a notion that is still respected to this day – who act as a medium between the almighty gods and the social order of Earth. With this authority over definitions of class, status, rank, and role relationships, the Devarajas truly ruled as god-kings. They were, however, tolerant of other religious worships such as Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism, so long as the worship of the Devaraja was recognized as the state’s form of religion and law (Briggs, 1951).

Jayavarman II was followed by powerful Deveraja who expanded the empire by means of territory, art, and technological advancements in agriculture: King Suryavarman II (1113-1150) built what is now the world’s largest religious monument, the Angkor Wat, and King Jayavarman VII (1181 -1219) built the enormous Angkor Thom (Peang-Meth, 1991). These monumental achievements have reverberated throughout history and are a symbol of Cambodia’s greatest period. This point in time was greatly admired by another Cambodian absolute ruler, Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge; in one of his speeches, Pol Pot had proclaimed that if Khmers
could build Angkor Wat, they could accomplish anything with similar guidance (Peang-Meth, 1991).

This period of astonishing power soon withered from overstretching boundaries; the kingdom expanded as far as the northern border of Laos, the eastern border of today’s Myanmar, and the southern Malay Peninsula, giving its rule over the entire Mekong River valley (see Figure 3)(Briggs, 1951). These expansion campaigns reveal the formidable power of the Khmer Empire, however, they have since proved to be extremely costly.

Combined with the construction of great temples, these imperialist endeavors quickly depleted the kingdom’s resources and left them vulnerable to new rising powers.

**THERAVADA BUDDHISM**

Under Jayavarman VII, Mahayana Buddhism became the dominant religion, although the cult of the Deveraja was still the official religion of the state; Jayavarman VII was able to do this by blending the two religions together which can be seen through the placement of an enormous Buddha statue in his Bayon temple (Hall, 1981; Puri, 1955). Jayavarman
VII’s tolerance allowed Theravada Buddhism – a sect of Buddhism which proclaimed that individuals could achieve enlightenment through one’s own efforts – quickly increased its presence throughout the kingdom. It is important to note that the stark differences between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism is the emphasis of the bodhisattva: Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes the role of the bodhisattva as they delay their own enlightenment in order to assist others first. Because of the significance of support, Mahayana Buddhism often relies on other godly figures such as deities to provide aid on the path to enlightenment. Meanwhile, Theravada Buddhism emphasizes the importance of the individual and their private journey of enlightenment.

It is believed by historians that one of the prominent missionaries of Theravada Buddhism was, in fact, Jayavarman VII’s son (Hall, 1981). Furthermore, it is believed that Theravada Buddhism managed to flourish due to its method of preaching; the monks spoke directly with the people, unlike the state that ruled religion through a systematic hierarchy and punitive punishment (Hall, 1981). Moreover, Theravada Buddhism embraced the impoverished which made up a majority of the Cambodian population.

Theravada Buddhism became so prominent that King Indravarman III (1296-1309) abdicated from the throne in 1309 to avoid mandatory practice of the state religion and devoted himself to the practice of Theravada (Briggs, 1951). It is unclear when exactly Theravada Buddhism became the state religion, however, historians suspect that this religious shift took place sometime during Jayavarman Paramesvara’s reign (1327-1353). Evidence shows that during his reign, Cambodia
was already working to convert other nations such as Laos, with a successful baptism of Lan Chang, the first independent King of Laos, into Theravadaism at the Khmer Court shortly after 1353 (Briggs, 1951). Furthermore, Jayavarman Paramesvara’s death date is unknown whilst being the last king to be mentioned by inscriptions—he was also the last king to use the honorific title -varman; historians believe that this is due to the passing of the Devaraja cult and simultaneously, its tradition of celebrating the king’s achievements by carving it into stone (Hall, 1981). Thus, after years of suffering extreme hardships from war and monumental construction, the Khmer people promptly accepted the promise of a peaceful soul offered by Theravada Buddhism and a new way of thought was born.

The rise of Theravada Buddhism, however, failed to override the engraved ideology of the Brahmanistic social pyramid and its emphasis of the spiritual medium, the god-king. This emphasis of the god-king endured, even through the fall of the absolute monarchy and the institution of the Cambodian Constitution in 1963. The Constitution upholds this notion with such quotes, “All powers emanate from the King,” “The King is the Supreme Chief of the State. His person is sacred and inviolable,” and “Every Cambodian owes loyalty to the King” (Peang-Meth, 1991). This social pyramid of Brahman influence continues to be reflected in modern times as the traditional Khmer division of three general social categories for its population are as follows: the sdech as royalty; the neamoeun montrey as nobility with two subgroups: the neamoeun montrey Thom as high nobility such as ministers and the neamoeun montrey toch as lower nobility such as functionaries and high-level
merchants; and the reastr as common people and peasants. Such classifications persist as respectful social behavior within Cambodia today (Peang-Meth, 1991).

**WAR WITH THAILAND AND VIETNAM**

As the Khmer Kingdom began to shift in ideology, the ancient Thai people migrated from China’s borderlands to establish the Sukhothai states sometime in the 12th century (Briggs, 1951). Inscriptions indicate that for many years, the Thai had initially served under the Khmer during the wars against the Annamites – ancient Vietnamese. However, after a Thai chieftain married a daughter of the Khmer King sometime in the 13th century, the Thai states united to become the Sukhothai Kingdom and proceeded to battle with the Khmer for years, gradually taking land and prisoners (Briggs, 1951). Similar affairs occurred between the Annamites and Khmer. The Annamites moved southward after freeing themselves from China’s grip in 939 and occupied the land right above the Kingdom of Champa, to eventually organize as the Dai-Viet Empire. For unknown reasons, Khmer King Suryavarman II began attacking the Dai-Viet around 1123-1124 and even pressured his vassal kingdom, Champa, to assist his venture until Jaya Indravarman III made peace in 1136 (Briggs, 1951).

After Jaya Indravarman III came into power, the Khmer Kingdom began its decline and Champa was the first of its subordinates to break away and declare independence. This proved to be disastrous for Champa as they were left alone to defend themselves against the Annamites who had been advancing southward for centuries (Briggs, 1951). As expected, by 1471, the Annamites had extinguished the
kingdom of Champa, which consequently removed the only buffer zone between Cambodia and the Dai-Viet (Peang-Meth, 1991).

Eventually, the Sukhothai Kingdom was succeeded by another Thai kingdom in 1350, the Ayuthia—often referred to as Siam (Briggs, 1951). This power shift within the Thai kingdoms did not affect Cambodia’s agenda until 1594, when the Siamese conquered Lovek—today’s Kampong Chhnang Province in Cambodia—and organized the annihilation of surviving Cambodians in the area (Hall, 1981). In a political move for influential power in Cambodia, Siam strategically provided aid to Cambodian Prince Soryopor so that he could claim the throne in 1603 and be named Barom Reachea IV (Hall, 1981). As part of the arrangement, Reachea IV presented the Siamese with suzerain power, however, he was eventually forced to abdicate—it is unclear who made this push—in 1618 in favor for his son, Chey Chettha II, who declared independence from Siam (Hall, 1981).

As Chettha II took over the Khmer throne in 1618, Cambodia continued to be caught between a rock and a hard place; threats from Siam swarmed in from the West while tensions with the Dai-Viet lingered in the East (Hall, 1981). Siam made efforts to restore its power in Cambodia from 1623-1625, but was defeated by Chettha II and his brother, Prince Outey (Hall, 1981). In an attempt to eliminate the Siamese threat, Chettha II strategically joined forces with the Annamites by marrying an Annam Nguyen dynasty princess in 1620 (Peang-Meth, 1991). This alliance eventually resulted in official support by the Khmer state for Vietnamese settlements in Prey Nokor of Cambodia—today’s Saigon (Hall, 1981).
Following Chettha II’s death in 1628 was a series of murders within the royal family as they made attempts—with either Malaysian or Vietnamese support—to sit on the throne. Chey Chettha IV claimed the throne at age 19 in 1674, however, not without opposition; his cousin, Ang Non, made multiple attempts to dethrone him, some of which were aided by Siam (Hall, 1981). An analysis of why Siam would provide aid to Ang Non suggests that Siam’s goal was to fuel the civil war within Cambodia and further its weakening (Hall, 1981). Ang Non received aid from other Cambodian enemies as well, and successfully captured Phnom Penh with help from the Vietnamese. Ultimately, however, Chettha IV arranged a deal with the Vietnamese and put an end to his cousin’s endeavor; he accepted Vietnam’s suzerainty upon Ang Non’s defeat which resulted in Vietnamese annexation of the southeastern province in the low delta of Cambodia and its renaming as Saigon (Peang-Meth, 1991).

Afterward, Chettha IV focused on making legal reforms such as abolishing the death penalty. However, he abdicated in favor of his nephew in 1695. This abdication proved to be short lived as he was reinstated days later after his nephew’s untimely death. In 1699, an invader with Vietnamese support started making his way up the Mekong toward Kompong Chhnang until they were defeated by two princes, a son of Thommo Reachea and Ang Em, the son of former rebel Ang Non (Hall, 1981). With an eagerness to resign, Chettha IV abdicated the throne for a second time to Ang Em after his battle with the Vietnamese invaders; historians suspect that the pressure of Vietnamese movement southward was overwhelming for Chettha IV (Hall, 1981). Ang Em, however, was an incapable king and was deposed in 1701 and Chettha IV
obligatorily took the throne for a third time (Hall, 1981). Upon reclaiming the throne, Chettha IV was faced with another Vietnamese rebellion. After he managed a successful counter-attack, Chettha IV abdicated for the third time in 1702 in favor of his 12-year-old son, Thommo Reachea II, while ruling as regent for only two years before deposing him and reclaiming the crown (Hall, 1981).

With his final abdication in 1706, Chettha IV managed to create 2 ex kings and 1 king – Thommo Reachea II, who inherited the throne after his father’s death (Hall, 1981). These men spent the next couple of decades competing for the throne as the Vietnamese and Siamese provided fuel for their own benefit. For example, the Vietnamese aided Ang Em in chasing out Thommo Reachea II in 1710 and retaking the throne (Hall, 1981). In 1714, Siam attempted to reinstate Thommo Reachea II, but failed...only to invade again in 1722 and force Ang Em to pay tribute (Hall, 1981).

Such rivalries, encouraged by Siam and Vietnam, continued for generations until Cambodia’s establishment as a French protectorate in 1863 under Norodom I (Chandler & Overton, 2017; Peang-Meth, 1991). Such political interactions and their warring aftermaths stuck with Cambodians as they made attempts to recover in the next decades to come. Eventually, these engraved prejudices against their neighbors were utilized by other powers, such as China and the U.S., in the Asia front of the Cold War which I will expand on in the chapters to come.

**SUMMARY**

The fact that a majority of the information cited above come from Chinese documentation indicates some kind of Chinese lordship over these Southeast Asian
kingdoms. While upholding their own entities, many of these kingdoms attended Chinese embassies to pay tribute; it is possible that Upper Chenla, unlike Lower Chenla, avoided destruction due to an exchange of protection and patronage with China. It is interesting, though, that even with the tremendous evidence of consistent homage to China, Southeast Asia – particularly Thailand and Cambodia – are largely influenced by Indian culture rather than Chinese culture. It is also interesting to note the differences in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism as the latter, a self-sacrificing perspective enlightenment, is largely recognized by ethnic Chinese rather than the former which is prominently practiced by ethnic Khmers. Even with Theravada Buddhism’s dominance, it is clear both culturally and constitutionally that the influence of the Deveraja is still alive in modern times. God King, Head of State, and eventually, Prime Minister, Norodom Sihanouk is a key character in Chapter 4 as we will discuss his influence during the Khmer Rouge’s campaign against Lon Nol’s regime as his embodiment of the all-powerful Deveraja made him the rightful leader of Cambodia; his connection to this ancient concept of royalty ignited devoted loyalists to follow and support the Khmer Rouge’s agenda.
CHAPTER TWO: THE CHINESE DIASPORA

In the Chinese language (Mandarin dialect), the Chinese diaspora is commonly referred to as “Huaqiao,” meaning “overseas Chinese.” This term is meant to refer to the migrants as sojourners (Than, 2012). The tone of this referral to the Chinese diaspora implies an expectation of loyalty as it specifically describes any Chinese living abroad whose ancestors are traceable to China. Huaqiao differs from the term diaspora in that it emphasizes the roots of a settler whereas the latter focuses on trans-border connections and the matter of dispersion (Than, 2012). This term reverberates through the diaspora, demanding us to never forget our roots. As my parents had said, no matter where we go, we will always represent the Chinese motherland.

Nonetheless, whether Chinese claim the term to be Huaqiao or the general Chinese diaspora, Chinese people have been immigrating to countries like Cambodia since ancient times, making the Chinese diaspora complex in terms of its migration waves, dialectic influence, and group coordination. This chapter will consider the influence of mass immigrations prompted by conflict in mainland China and its effects on Chinese nationalism and dialect networks throughout its diaspora. As general influences begin to unfold, this chapter will bring into focus the Chinese diaspora in Cambodia as it relates to Cambodia’s historical events and its trade structure.
EARLY MIGRANTS

Historical documentation cites that the Chinese began migrating as early as the 13th or 16th century (Chan, 2005; Than, 2012). Though immigration to and emigration from China had been taking place since ancient times, China did not have documentation of a significant emigration wave until the mid 19th century (Wong, 2005). Before this wave of emigration, Confucian ideology played a significant role in discouraging overseas migration; it emphasized loyalty to the ancestral land of China and its cultural superiority (Wong, 2005). Furthermore, during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), severe penalties were put in place to discourage emigration; this was primarily because of Qing efforts to prevent Ming Dynasty loyalists from establishing rebel bases overseas. Nonetheless, such penalties became milder by 1894 (Wong, 2005; Xiao, Fang, Zheng, & Zhao, 2015). Still, evidence shows that the Chinese continued to take these major legal and natural risks for better opportunities in steadily increasing numbers.

Like emigrating from any country, leaving China was full of hardships during both the travel and settlement processes; if migrants were lucky enough to make it to their destination, they were then tasked to find a home and survive in an unknown land with an unknown language. Despite these impending difficulties, many individuals still decided to make this journey for there were far more serious problems in China such as a hostile political atmosphere, widespread poverty, scarcity of agricultural land, and overpopulation (Than, 2012; Wong, 2005). Many of those who left were able to do so based on the fact that they resided in coastal regions such as Fujian and Guangdong. With such a rich history of maritime expeditions, it
makes sense that these coastal people would look towards the sea for solutions (Wong, 2005).

According to a 2003 estimate, the Chinese diaspora consists of about 33 million people who migrated from either China or Taiwan; of these migrants, 76% reside in Southeast Asia, making it the largest host of the Chinese diaspora (Nonini, 2013). Additionally, it has been noted that Southeast Asia had been a popular destination for Fujianese, Teochew, and Hakka to migrate as Chinese communities have been long established in the region (Wong, 2005). As these dialects are based in coastal regions, it is possible that these diasporic communities have been long established due to consistent trade and migrations southward throughout centuries. Wherever the first migrants settled, newer migrants are always encouraged to follow in order to maintain familial or dialect ties.

**MODERN MIGRANTS**

Since the 19th century, China had experienced an influx of migrants both leaving and entering China. This paralleled flow of migration, however, ceased and began favoring emigration in the 20th century as the Japanese began its second invasion (1937-1945), adding to the already materialized chaos by the Chinese Civil War of 1927-1950 (Myers, 2012).

The Chinese Civil war revolves around the conflict of two parties, the Chinese Nationalists—who were governing China at the time—and the rising Communist Party. Though these two had originally allied against the first Japanese invasion in the 1890s, this alliance was all but uncomplicated: the Nationalists had broken the
alliance early on with a surprise attack against the Communists. However, Japanese aggression forced the two parties to rejoin in a second united front for the Second Sino-Japanese War (Myers, 2012). With the ending of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1945, the two parties erupted into full-blown warfare in 1946 despite U.S. diplomatic attempts to make peace (Myers, 2012).

Though the Nationalists had the advantage due to their initial surprise attack, the Communists had better propaganda, a higher morale, less corruption, a weak economy under Nationalist rule, effective generals and the support of the Soviet Union (Myers, 2012). With all of this, the Communist Party managed to drive out the Nationalists from the Chinese mainland and paved way for the next chapter of Chinese misfortune under Communist leader, Mao Zedong (Myers, 2012). Besides the strong premonitions of a grueling new regime, China had already been experiencing years of a downward spiral economically, politically, and socially. Apart from social chaos, China had also experienced numerous natural disasters such as floods and drought which, along with the crumbling agricultural economy, made famine more widespread. For these reasons, many —like my mother and father’s family— were motivated to escape and move on, thus, producing another wave of Chinese emigrants in the 20th century.

In 1948, my maternal grandfather’s (Boukim) grandparents migrated from China to Cambodia by boat in order to escape the communist party’s takeover. This made Boukim’s parents the first generation of his family to be born in Cambodia.
Though these migrations were made in an attempt to avoid the current and forthcoming disasters of Mao’s Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, those who migrated to Cambodia ended up in a brutally similar fate as Mao’s regime would soon inspire Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot. Even so, they prolonged this unfortunate fate by relocating, a strategy they would utilize again within Cambodia as they attempted to avoid the rising Khmer Rouge.

Under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), China faced its first isolation period since the Qing Dynasty and from 1949 to 1978, migration to and from the country was once again against the law and strictly enforced. The CCP criminalized border crossing without proper documents and condemned overseas connections as they were deemed as reconnaissance attempts; violations of these strict isolation policies resulted in placement in either a labor camp or jail (Zhou, 2009). Nonetheless, as before, Chinese people took the risk in order to save their future. This emigration hiatus lasted for three decades and had severe consequences for the relationship between Chinese Nationals and the Chinese diaspora. With the prohibition of overseas relations, diasporic communities were no longer able to make contact with friends and family in mainland China which resulted in a stronger sense of ethno-nationalism with an emphasis on overseas dialect, though it is evident that these dialect loyalties had already existed (Zhou, 2009).
After U.S. President Nixon visited China in 1972, China finally opened its doors in 1979. Once the emigration hiatus had been lifted, China experienced a massive flux of departing Chinese Nationals (Zhou, 2009). Despite this, China sponsored thousands of scholars and students through academic exchange and study abroad programs. The new Open Door Policy made way for economic reforms that generated an immense amount of foreign investment within China; more than 75% of these investments came from the Chinese diaspora in the 1980s (Zhou, 2009). With large amount of investments by the Chinese diaspora and an increased effort by Chinese government in positive foreign relations, Chinese people were able to restore transnational family ties and rebuild their migration networks (Zhou, 2009).

However, this has not always been the case. For a long period of time, the Chinese government did not have any representation in foreign countries and were unable to utilize any powers to protect their citizens abroad (Wong, 2005). Thus, Chinese who emigrated did so at their own risk and formed mutual reliance among other Chinese immigrants for protection and development (Wong, 2005). These clusters of mutual support produced a unique system of communication and economic aid abroad and are referred to as networks or associations.

**KHMER LABELS FOR CHINESE**

Historical records indicate that Chinese have been immigrating to Cambodia since the 13th century (Chan, 2005). Just as China had experienced its flux of migration movement in the 19th century, Cambodia, too, experienced a substantial wave of Chinese immigrants in the 19th century (Chan, 2005). Upon their arrival, the
Khmer people developed terms to refer to the significant Sino-Khmer minority and their specificities such as migration wave, origin, generation, and cultural practice.

“Cenchiw” translates to “raw Chinese” and is meant in reference to the earliest Chinese migrants (Chan, 2005). These migrants were generally men as they originally migrated to Cambodia in search for gold while their wives awaited their return in China (Chan, 2005). A specific characteristic of the Cenchiw was that they did not want to adopt the Khmer language. Instead, they married Khmer women, not only because there was a scarcity of Chinese women, but because they needed them as translators (Chan, 2005). Thus, these Khmer women were integrated into Chinese communities and learned to speak Chinese fluently. There are very few of the original Cenchiw today, however, the term is still applied to Chinese in Cambodia who speak very little Khmer like my great maternal grandfather (Lao Ghua Gong). The term Cenchiw in regards to women, though, imply a different story. Cenchiw women came to Cambodia a couple of years later to follow their husbands who had migrated before them, many of these women found themselves in circumstances of infidelity and abandonment. Thus, these women tended to re-marry Khmer men and learned the Khmer language as well as the culture (Chan, 2005).

Second and third generation Sino-Khmers are known as “Cen,” “Kouncen,” or “Kounciwcen” in which the former simply refers to Chinese ethnicity, the second as children of Chinese, and the third as grandchildren of Chinese (Chan, 2005). The Khmer language even has terms for Chinese-Khmer intermarriages and Sino-Khmer children such as “Koun-Kat Cen” or just “Koun-Kat” which directly translates to “cut child” (Chan, 2005).
While the Khmers use these terms to refer to the Sino-Khmer, most Sino-Khmers call themselves “Kmae-yeung” (Chan, 2005). Though this translates into “we Khmers,” the term only means to denote placement of the Chinese as they belong to Cambodia without reference to Cambodian origin (Chan, 2005). For those who assimilate to Khmer society by means of intermarriage, such as the Cenchiw women mentioned earlier, they can be described as “coul-Kmae” which literally means “entered the Khmers” (Chan, 2005). The term coul-Kmae, however, does not revoke Sino-Khmer of their Chinese identity as the term can still be applied to those who are active members of Chinese associations and/or send their children to Chinese schools (Chan, 2005).

Furthermore, the Khmer language has terms to differentiate the dialects of the Chinese who immigrated into Cambodia: “Cen-Katang” refers to Cantonese, “Cen-Hainan” refers to Hainanese, “Cen-Keh” refers to Hakka, “Cen-Hokkien” refers to Hokkien, and “Cen-Teochiu” refers to Teochew (Chan, 2005). The existence of these terms that refer to Chinese dialect origins reflects the Southern Chinese demographic that has historically resettled in Cambodia.

**FRENCH COLONIZATION**

Before Cambodia was seized as a French protectorate, the Sino-Khmer had informally congregated into networks known as “huiguans” which were based on the five major dialects. Once the French colonial period began in 1863, France considered the economic power of the Sino-Khmer as they had managed to develop into an influential merchant class that controlled internal trade and industry, and
enlisted them as administrative authorities on domestic affairs (Hall, 1981; Chen, 2015). This meant that these five huiguans were allowed to maintain autonomy in customs, tax, education, policing, foreign trading, and more (Chen, 2015). This ability to self-govern separated Sino-Khmers from the socio-political affairs of Cambodia as the Norodom dynasty ruled simultaneously under French Indochina’s protectorate regime (Hall, 1981). After France granted Cambodia independence in 1953, these huiguans became voluntary social organizations that persist today as economic powerhouses in Cambodia; these social organizations however, were not without struggled during Cambodia’s anti-Chinese era (discussed later in Chapter 3 and 4).

**DIALECTS**

Being part of the Chinese diaspora can be difficult at times, depending on where they are immigrated to, as some countries are better prepared for incoming migrants than others. For instance, most developing countries are simultaneously sending and receiving immigrants which can be chaotic and often results in restricted permanent settlement and/or a lack of modern integration policies (Zhou, 2009). Thus, intergroup dynamics in the East become more complicated as the migrants are left to organize themselves with multiple varying factors whereas in the West, the western racial hierarchy is clearly dominated by white male Christians (Zhou, 2009). For example, though there is some intersection in vocabulary, the different Chinese dialects are mutually unintelligible among the diaspora. Only literate Sino-Khmers are able to communicate regardless of their dialect background due to the uniform Chinese characters. Furthermore, friends and relatives who speak the same dialect or come from the same region in China are generally considered as “kin” amongst ethnic
This feeling of kinship, then, makes strange lands more welcoming and has thus encouraged convergence of specific dialects in certain areas rather than utilizing physical or religious features as a means for relativity.

Thus, with dependence on a singular dialect for communication reasons, Sino-Khmers naturally gravitated to arranging themselves via dialect. When analyzing the significance of these networks in the Chinese community, it is important to consider the social exchange between individual Chinese and the Chinese collective. By this, I mean to look at the method of convergence since membership is attained through application by the individual and requires acceptance by the network/associations. This implies that each member must consent to the organization’s mission, functions, values, norms, obligations, potential benefits, and affiliation with a specific image (Chen, 2015). As a Teochew Chinese-American, I believe it is easy to identify with other Teochew Chinese simply because of their Teochew background. When I met my friend Khiem, a first-generation Teochew Chinese-American from Vietnam, we instantly clicked because of our shared Teochew culture; we shared similar dishes, language, religion, and customs. With these cultural similarities and collective memories, it is likely that individuals already share these values and would be eager to belong—especially as immigrants to a new country.

My father, Chhong, was born as the third child to Kong Tear and Khov Tear. At the start of this story, Chhong has two brothers and three sisters; Bung, Bu (Barry), Cheng (Jonie), Kheng (Lena), and Shoi (Stacy). As the third generation living in Cambodia and first
generation born in Cambodia, Kong and Khov gave their children Cambodian names though they are ethnically Teochew Chinese. For years, before the rise of the Khmer Rouge, the Tear family owned and managed a noodle factory in Kampon Thom City, Cambodia.

Within their estate, they housed Chhong’s grandparents, Lao Lai Gong (Great Paternal Grandfather) and Lao Lai Ma (Great Paternal Grandmother), livestock, and Khmer orphans; Khmer parents would drop off their children and ask for the Tear family to raise them while also putting them to work. Chhong called these orphans “slaves,” though he emphasized that they were well taken care of; after they found life partners, the Tear family would give them moderate gifts as they left to start a new life. Afterwards,
they too would bring their children to the Tear family and leave them to work just as they had. Along with these orphans, the Tear family had a paid working staff composed of families. One of these families was my maternal grandmother’s, another Teochew Chinese family. My mother’s maternal grandmother (Lao Ghua Ma) worked in the kitchen as the Tear family’s head cook while her children—including my maternal grandmother Chheang Ngor (Cherry)—were employed within the noodle factory. My mother’s maternal grandfather (Lao Ghua Gong) did not work and instead, befriended Kong. Such friendship and interaction indicates a hierarchy of dialect and class. Though Lao Ghua Gong was essentially of lower economic class due to his family’s working status, he was still able to befriend Kong thanks to his dialectic ties.

Here, I would like to give an example of an association’s bylaws as described by Shihlun Chen (2015): For the Association of Chinese Teochew in Cambodia (ACTC), Section Two Article IV describes 3 levels of membership: Natural, Basic, and Permanent. Natural members are Teochew who are 18+ years old, reside in Cambodia, and agree with the Association’s goals. Basic members are required to register with the Association and pay a membership fee. Permanent members are funding members who own the Association’s fixed assets and pay
membership fees in 5-year increments (p. 11). Though these are the written bylaws, Chen’s field evidence shows that there is no formal system to mark members’ membership status nor are there set amounts for fees or determined due dates (2015; p. 12).

Generally, different dialects are known to specialize in varying areas of trade. For example, my family are Teochew who are known to specialize in business. Because of this homogenized occupation, the Teochew have their own business associations, some of which have their own awards to encourage business development. For example, the Teochew Entrepreneur Award (TEA) which celebrates entrepreneurship and contributions to the Teochew business community (Yin, 2016).

In Cambodia, Teochew-Khmer businesses ranged from retail trade to restaurants and were generally located in urban areas like Phnom Penh; in fact, Phnom Penh has its own Teochew Association to cater to its massive Teochew population. Additionally, these businesses expected contribution from members of the whole family which resulted in skills and eventually, the business, to pass down from generation to generation, thus, keeping everything within the Teochew network (Chan, 2005).

Boukim’s parents owned their own Pho restaurant in Phnom Penh and with the steady income they were able to put Boukim through Chinese primary school and eventually college. Despite that, Boukim did
not enjoy the college experience and quit after two years. He felt that the only jobs college prepared him for were government controlled jobs such as those in education and law enforcement. After dropping out of school, Boukim went on to work as a mechanic for a couple months, then in a plastic bag factory for over a year, until he finally settled in Battambang as a butcher. He felt that this job had more freedom than the others he had tried and was truly content with the life a butcher.

As for Chhong, his family owned and managed a noodle factory in Kampon Thom City, Cambodia for three generations. They made their living selling noodles to grocery stores, restaurants, and vendors. Chhong described his family as a noble merchant class, though he said this classification applied to a majority of the Teochew Chinese.

Later, when they migrated to Phnom Penh, Khouv worked as a sugar cane vendor while Kong co-owned and managed a beer import company with relatives who had already resided in the city. Their main source of income was Kong’s beer import company. It was a dangerous endeavor since the company imported beer that was brewed in the countryside, also known as
Khmer Rouge territory. After 4-5 years of its running, the business started to die due to the increased momentum of the Khmer Rouge campaign, and as Khouv’s low income proved, vending competition in Phnom Penh was tough due to the influx of migrants from the rural area and smaller cities. So, Chhong’s family migrated Northwest to Pailin.

Overall, these associations are utilized in order to maintain economic connections to the dialect group’s place of origin as well as its corresponding diaspora in other countries. For example, a Cantonese Association was able to set itself up in 1991 in Phum Katang, Cambodia thanks to the support from the Cantonese Association of Phnom Penh and Vietnam (Chan, 2005).

Hokkien have proclaimed to be the very first Chinese settlers in Cambodia and look to the old temples of Hokkien deities as proof of their ancestral expeditions. For example, Cheng He was a Chinese admiral who charmed Southeast Asia with his naval strength in the 15th century and was consequently deified as San Bao Gong, the three-jewel lord, with inscriptions on Wat Nokor in Kompon Cham, Cambodia (Chan, 2005). No matter the chronology of their arrival, Hokkien have proved to be a prominent dialectic group as many of them settled in urban areas like Phnom Penh or Battambang and rose to high government positions. This made urban areas safe for Hokkien and subsequently, easier to form Hokkien Associations.
Unlike the other dialects, the Hakka dialect does not refer to a place of origin. Instead, the Hakka are known to be scattered throughout China as a result of successive migrations from the 10th century onwards (Chan, 2005). Because of this, Hakka are described as Chinese gypsies and are sometimes negatively stereotyped as country bumpkins (Chan, 2005). Despite this, there are noteworthy Hakka businessmen and women such as Aw Boon Par, the founder of the Tiger Balm Empire. The Hakka migratory patterns, though, made it difficult to form a Hakka Association in Phnom Penh; Yu Heing failed to arouse interest for a Hakka Association in 1989—which I suspect was due to the widespread anti-Chinese sentiments at the time. However, he was finally able to arouse enough interest in 1994 (Chan, 2005).

These associations were established first, around the natural accumulation of dialect groups, followed by French direction and proved to be crucial in helping newcomers once they arrived to Cambodia. These associations not only provided newcomers with immediate social capital, but also employed them while teaching them to navigate the community’s job market and lent money to start up new businesses (Than, 2012). Ultimately, in a place surrounded by unfamiliarity, Chinese immigrants found refuge in their clustered areas and celebrated their similarities. It is important to note that while there are dialect specific networks, many Chinese are known to speak multiple dialects; my maternal grandmother (Cherry), for example, speaks Teochew, Mandarin, and Cantonese though she has Teochew origins. This language overlap, thus, manifests the social networking capability that allows Chinese to connect among each other within the entire diaspora (Chen, 2015).
Upon the establishment of a dialectic associations, these communities tended to fund, build, and manage their own schools. Some academics believe that the diasporic communities maintain their Chinese identity via these schools in hopes of returning “home” one day to China (Than, 2012). No matter the reason, the Chinese diaspora were skilled in staying connected with their counterparts in China, Cambodia, and in other countries via these Chinese-medium schools as well as media outlets, associations as mentioned above, and in more modern times, through the internet (Than, 2012). Chinese media outlets, like Chinese schools, have been known to exist since the early 20th century; they were both, however, banned due to anti-Chinese policies from 1970-1990 which will be covered in the next chapter (Pal, 2016). Most importantly, though, is that these schools were created to make up for the lack of formal education funded by the government and were maintained by specific dialects while allowing for open enrollment by other Chinese dialects as well as Khmer.

Given that Phnom Penh was the nation’s capital and thus, had the largest congregation of Sino-Khmers aside from having the densest general population, it is and was home to many Chinese schools. I use “is” and “was,” as some of these schools had been destroyed during the anti-Chinese period I mentioned earlier, but have since been rebuilt. Duan Hua, for example is Cambodia’s most famous and largest Chinese school with around 7,000 day students and 3,000 night students in 2005(Chan, 2005). Aside from fees for tuition, Duan Hua is able to run thanks to the fact that it was constructed for and by the Phnom Penh Teochew Association —
though not exclusively—who fundraise and encourage wealthy members of the Teochew community to donate (Chan, 2005). In one of its biggest and most successful fundraising campaigns, the Teochew Association enlisted the aid of Teochew businessman, Kheav Se Pung, owner of *Huashang Ribao*, the oldest and best-established Chinese newspapers (Chan, 2005; Pal, 2016).

Phnom Penh housed other Chinese dialect schools too. For example, the Cantonese Association had its own middle school with about 1,200 students by the late 1960s (Chan, 2005). It was difficult, however, to open a school without an established association. For example, Yu Heing, who I mentioned earlier as the founder of the Phnom Penh Hakka Association est. 1994, was originally unable to establish the Hakka Association in 1989 and therefore had to seek assistance from Hakka Associations in Hong Kong, Canada, Malaysia, and Thailand in order to fund and open a Phnom Penh Hakka school in 1992 (Chan, 2005). Additionally, many of these schools were forced to close during the Cambodian anti-Chinese period of 1970-1990 which will be covered in Chapter 3 (Pal, 2016).

**SUMMARY**

The formation of these networks has and continues to assist the Chinese minority of Cambodia to excel both economically and socially. Though they were originally informal, French legitimization under its colonial era created a separate ruling class that generated a great divide between the Sino-Khmer and general Khmer community. Not only did French organization mark Sino-Khmer as outsiders, Sino-Khmer’s self-description as “Kmae-yeung,” which was only meant to denote
placement, or “coul-Kmae,” which means “to enter the Khmers,” further indicate Sino-Khmers as Chinese who live among Khmers rather than immigrants who intend to fully take on a newfound Khmer identity.

Cambodian independence from France did little to dissolve the dialectic powerhouses as they simply became voluntary institutions/associations. While their ability to make up for the Cambodian government’s lack of formal public education highlighted their organizational abilities, it further lifted them as an elite minority while the majority of the population were country farmers who either could not afford or did not see the benefits of formal education and thus, remained a peasant class. Such class distinctions and racial divergences definitely did not apply to all persons, however, were morphed into the criteria that motivated general anti-Chinese sentiment as a means to eliminate elitists.
CHAPTER THREE: CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Since its decline as a magnificent empire, Cambodia has been caught in the middle of feuding powers. The French salvaged what remained of Cambodia after the Vietnamese and Thai tug of war and made the state a French protectorate in 1863. However, this did not prevent further conflict. Instead, Cambodia continued to be dragged from one hostile situation to another by greater, much more foreign, powers.

With the ongoing threat of conflict, Cambodia did what it could to survive, until paranoia set and political leaders convinced themselves that the foreign danger resided within their own nation. In this chapter, I will cover the complications of foreign relations that Cambodia had to endure and analyze its influence on the anti-Chinese phenomena and forthcoming genocide under Pol Pot.

FRENCH COLONIALISM AND WORLD WAR II

During Cambodia’s French protectorate era of 1863-1953, France virtually controlled everything. They even had the authority to choose god-kings, the last of which was Norodom Sihanouk, who was installed at age 19 in 1941 (Carlton, 1996).

During World War II (1939-1945), Japan had conquered the French Indochina as Axis Powers and Allied Powers fought the main front in Europe. Japan, however, purposefully left Sihanouk in place and pressured him to declare independence from France in 1945 (Jeldres, 2012). This independence did not last long and for a short time, France retook Cambodia. Eventually, they gave Cambodia independence in
November 1953, renaming it as the “Kingdom of Cambodia” and making it the first country of the three French Indochina nations to gain its independence (Jeldres, 2012).

Overall, WWII was a catalyst that furthered conflict between Cambodia and other foreign powers. Nonetheless, Japan’s involvement in Southeast Asia proved to Indochina nations that the European powers were not invincible, and led nations like Cambodia and Vietnam to declare independence from France. In spite of that, France opposed Vietnam’s declaration, just as they had opposed Cambodia’s, only they did not eventually give Vietnam independence. Instead, France established a puppet state in Southern Vietnam which led to the First Indochina War (1946-1954). By the time of the 1954 Geneva Accords, Cambodia was able to attend as an independent entity and voted on the decision that resulted in the temporary division of Vietnam (Jeldres, 2012). This outcome subsequently split Vietnam into pawns of the Soviet Union (USSR) and U.S.’s Cold War (1947-1991) as the USSR utilized the North and the U.S. utilized the South.

Though European colonialism came to an end around the conclusion of WWII, Southeast Asia’s anti-colonial sentiment had already molded into a significant force that shaped political and cultural elites as they perceived their relationships with the international world. These anti-colonial feelings attributed to rising fears of China’s potency as the Chinese had traditionally claimed sovereignty of Southeast Asia since ancient times; referring to the fact that knowledge of ancient Southeast Asian history comes from generations of Chinese embassies who were able to
document Southeast Asian development as they regularly sent representatives to China to pay patronage (Hall, 1981).

Ruling powers of Southeast Asia have historically been known to validate their power legitimacy by creating a domestic-foreign enemy which were, more often than not, the Chinese minority due to its large population in the region (Cho & Park, 2013). Generating anti-Chinese sentiment became even easier for ruling powers after China became a renowned world power after its Communist Revolution in 1949, for Southeast Asian rulers could utilize the fear of spreading communism. On the other hand, this ignited an increased feeling of nationalism for the Chinese diaspora, a feeling that had since been deemed negative after the catastrophe of WWII (Hall, 1981). In consequence, Southeast Asia became uneasily suspicious of a potential Chinese “fifth column” in their midst (Hall, 1981). This was especially true in Cambodia as ethnic Chinese continued to dominate all economic activities.

The truth of the matter, though, was that the Chinese diaspora, too, were co-adjustors to European colonialism. They were classified as elites because of their dialectic tendency to specialize in certain professions and secure positions as middlemen for distinct areas of trade. Additionally, their ability to organize and form dialectic networks allowed for a rich social life, making them capable of funding schools to better prepare themselves for administrative positions. Nevertheless, their status as powerful outsiders was not popular among Khmer locals and new governments often targeted the Chinese to incite heated passion during elections (Than, 2012). Having said that, it is important to keep in mind that Cambodia had not begun coordinating elections until the last years of the French protectorate –though
there are plenty of arguments of when the first “free and fair” elections took place (Vickery, 1992). Once these elections concluded, new Cambodian leaders were generally known to begin implementing policies with the purpose of disrupting Chinese affairs in business, employment, education, and cultural expression (Nonini, 2013).

Overall, anti-Chinese sentiments aligned with anti-colonial sentiments as an expression for the desire of autonomy, and was especially prevalent after Mao’s Communist Revolution as Southeast Asia was alarmed by China’s expansionist potential; a notion that manifested in the Sino-Vietnamese split in 1975 (Cho & Park, 2013).

BEGINNINGS OF THE SINO-SOViet SPLIT

The Cold War of 1947-1991 is the most intricate web of ruin that led to the destruction of Cambodia, its people, and culture. Though it began in Europe with feuding politico-economic systems of democratic/capitalist West and Communist East in 1947, the Cold War did not open its Asian front until 1950 with the start of the Korean War (Fukoka, 2012). This opening led to USSR Premiere, Joseph Stalin, and the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) Chairman, Mao Zedong to form the Sino-Soviet Alliance, a powerful, yet unstable force. In general, the Sino-Soviet friendship was based on 3 specific elements: party, military, and economic relations meant to halt U.S. activities in the Asian Cold War (Lüthi, 2010). The brunt of the Asian Cold War, though, was the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Its complexity not only involved covert and overt action, but also diplomatic negotiation and manipulation by the U.S.
and Sino-Soviet Alliance. Eventually, with a few commands by feuding powers and lenient policies, Cambodia was inevitably dragged into extensive brutality on the Asian Cold War front.

In early 1950, during Vietnam’s struggle for independence from France in the First Indochina War, the PRC agreed to deliver large scale military aid to the Vietnamese communist effort, making it the first country to diplomatically recognize an independent Vietnam (Lüthi, 2010). In turn, the North Vietnamese gave praise to Mao’s Great Leap Forward, a notion that did not sit well with the USSR as they had expressed concern for its radical programs (Ford, 1999; Lüthi, 2010). Thus, the first signs of a Sino-Soviet conflict appeared in November of 1954, when the USSR expressed disagreements on the PRC’s rate of economic industrialization, socialization, and consequently, independence from the USSR (Ford, 1999).

North Vietnamese leaders admitted that they were aware of the Sino-Soviet rift and noted that “they did not want Vietnam to become a source of new disagreements between the USSR and China, which is what they keep in mind when they seek aid,” and even encouraged the two parties to mend their relationship for Vietnam’s sake (Lüthi, 2010, p. 323-324). Thus, Soviets attempted to persuade China into joint Vietnamese action between January 13-14th, 1955, however, the PRC rejected the proposal and instead, demanded that the Soviets pressure the Americans in the West (Lüthi, 2010). A few days later, PRC propaganda claimed that the Soviets had attempted to deceive China and on January 18th, the PRC demanded that North Vietnam cut all ties with the USSR (Lüthi, 2010).
By July 1960, Sino-Soviet relations were unraveling to the point that the USSR gave notice to all of its visiting Chinese experts—who were cooperating in support of the Sino-Soviet alliance—to leave the country within the month and in September, threatened to halt aid to China (Ford, 1999). Later, in an attempt to covertly chastise Mao, the USSR demanded all members of the communist bloc to set aside their nationalist agendas that would otherwise put the world of Communism at risk with divisive activities (Ford, 1999). Furthermore, the USSR claimed that around this time, China refused to grant exit visas for Soviets requesting repatriation and by 1961, forcefully imposed Chinese citizenship on these Soviet citizens. Those who resisted Chinese citizenship were dismissed from jobs, denied their share of food rations, and were expelled to streets if they lived in state housing (Lüthi, 2010). This led to 3 weeks of exchanged accusations and counter accusations by Soviet Ambassador Chervonenko and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Hanfu about Sino-Soviet border control (Lüthi, 2010).

Though Sino-Soviet relations were under heat, the USSR continued to offer aid to the PRC in 1961 due to its harsh famines; on February 27th, they offered 1 million tons of grain and 500,000 tons of sugar on loan and by March, the PRC requested another 300,000 tons of grain (Lüthi, 2010). In 1962, the USSR was forced to face its own shortcomings and reconsidered its aid to China; after a final exchange of rice, Soviet food aid ended and overall aid to the PRC generally diminished (Lüthi, 2010).

Nonetheless, throughout these mixed signals of aid and slander, both the PRC and the USSR had been divisively distributing domestic propaganda against the other
(Ford, 1999; Lüthi, 2010). For the PRC, the main nuisance of the Soviet partnership was their leaders’ tendency to patronize the new China rather than approach them as a communist equal (Bernstein, 2015). By 1963, the Intelligence Community was able to agree that the basic issues that fueled this Sino-Soviet conflict was general incompatibility in national and party interests (Ford, 1999). Consequently, the USSR was forced to reconsider China’s leadership role in the communist effort in Southeast Asia due to these ever increasing difference in opinion on domestic communist development (Ford, 1999).

Such difference in opinion were laid in Mao’s programs for the Great Leap Forward where Mao boasted of its success and blamed any shortcomings on natural disasters, all while Premiere Khrushchev approved aid shipments and labeled it as a radical endeavor. Later, PRC President Liu Shaoqi would admit that the downfalls of the Great Leap Forward were 70% due to human errors and 30% due to natural disasters (Lüthi, 2010). In remorse of his failed Great Leap Forward, Mao temporarily retreated from daily decision making on domestic affairs (Lüthi, 2010).

Though Chinese military and economic aid to Vietnam dates back to 1949, the PRC increased aid in the summer of 1964 in anticipation of U.S. involvement (Lüthi, 2010). Meanwhile, the USSR generally held a hands-off policy toward the Vietnam conflict under Premiere Khrushchev. However, after his removal from office, the USSR increased assistance from October 1964 to February 1965 (Lüthi, 2010). Still, Sino-Soviet disagreements continued throughout the Vietnam War as both sides encouraged their Vietnamese ally to reconsider its relationship with the other power.
Such disagreements included disputes on whether to use air or land to transport arms to North Vietnamese troops (Lüthi, 2010).

Another scratch on Sino-Soviet relations was the PRC’s aspirations for nuclear weapons development. The USSR disapproved of the PRC’s pursuit and denied all of their attempts to receive Soviet aid in nuclear development (Lüthi, 2010). Unsurprisingly, the U.S. supported the Soviet’s unwavering dismissal of Chinese requests for nuclear developmental aid; the U.S. worried that if China obtained nuclear power, defense of U.S. allies in Southeast Asia would be impossible (Lüthi, 2010). Furthermore, Mao continued to push the U.S. and USSR closer together with his reckless remarks about nuclear war; he consistently told visitors that China has continued to survive despite significant losses of the population, therefore, he was unafraid of nuclear warfare (Bernstein, 2015). Thus, the U.S. and USSR worked together and agreed on a Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963, which was followed by 106 other nations within the year, furthering the PRC’s isolation (Lüthi, 2010). Though the PRC continued with its development, having the first Chinese nuclear device go off in October 1964, the USSR assured the U.S. that it would not be a threat to either party (Lüthi, 2010).

Throughout this partnership, both the PRC and the USSR accused each other of straying from true Marxism-Leninism, while claiming themselves as true leaders of the communist effort (Lüthi, 2010). This eventually led Mao to believe a Sino-Soviet split was necessary to secure his political supremacy and start the Cultural Revolution, a movement meant to preserve “true” communist ideologies. As a result,
Mao worked behind the backs of his advisors and pushed Sino-Soviet party relations to a definitive split in the Summer of 1966 (Lüthi, 2010).

**SIHANOUK’S DOWNFALL**

Before the start of the Vietnam War in 1955, Sihanouk abdicated from the throne in favor of his father. By doing this, Sihanouk was able to move forward and form the Popular Socialist Community, a political party that quickly became the dominant influence in Cambodian politics at the time (Carlton, 1996). Upon his father’s death in 1960, Sihanouk retook power, however, not as a monarch, but as the Head of State (Carlton, 1996). Though he did not officially hold the prime title until his father’s death, Sihanouk was still very much in power.

As Head of State, Sihanouk adopted a neutralist policy and played all sides of the Cold War conflict in order to obtain aid from the U.S., the USSR, and the PRC. This strategy is apparent in Sihanouk’s consistent negotiations throughout 1956; the PRC would invest capital in Cambodian commercial undertakings, the USSR would supply industrial equipment as well as technician instructors, and the U.S. would supply economic aid for irrigation, education, health, infrastructure projects, military funds, and emergency food supplies (Hall, 1981). Sihanouk was especially assertive in his attempts to collect aid from the U.S., for example, when the U.S. refused to dispense more aid in 1957, Sihanouk responded with “we might go Communist if you stop the aid” (Leonhardt, 2013, p. 100). Despite Sihanouk’s ability to help his country thanks to these resources, his reliance on foreign aid made it difficult for Cambodia to continue to govern itself.
Even with such assistance, as the leader of Cambodia, Sihanouk could not ignore the issue in neighboring Vietnam as somewhere around 300,000 Vietnamese were living in Cambodia and 400,000 Cambodians were living in Vietnam (Hall, 1981). Cambodia and North Vietnam’s inability to cooperate manifested during the Bandung Conference of 1955 as Cambodia made the point that it could not get past the long aggressive history with Vietnam (Hall, 1981). Even so, as a weak country stuck in the middle of warring powers, Sihanouk did his best to maintain neutrality during the beginnings of Vietnam’s communist conflict. One of Sihanouk’s most significant decisions that led to great backlash was his laissez-faire approach on North Vietnamese’s use of the Ho Chi Minh Trail (Omar, 2016).

The guiding moral that pushed the U.S. to continue its crusade in Vietnam was their domino theory that assumed that if one country was allowed to become Communist, the rest of Southeast Asia would fall into communism (Fukoka, 2012). Thus, in order to combat the spread of communism, the U.S. formed SEATO in 1954 which was meant to strengthen military and economic alliances between Southeast Asia and the U.S. (Cho & Park, 2013). Before Cambodia was subsequently dragged into the Vietnam War, the U.S. provided Cambodia an enormous amount of aid in hopes that Cambodia would join SEATO and remain neutral (Carlton, 1996). However, in 1963, Sihanouk discovered that the U.S. had betrayed him by covertly supporting the Khmer Serei, a republican nationalist force whose leader rivaled his authority (Turkoly-Joczik, 1988; Omar, 2016). Soon after, Sihanouk renounced all U.S. aid and as a diplomatic courtesy, instructed his Minister of Defence, Lon Nol, to
meet with Head of the U.S. Mission, General Taber. This is believed to be the origins of the Lon Nol-Nixon alliance (Omar, 2016).

Just 2 years later, Sihanouk also ended diplomatic relations with the U.S. Not only did this resolution prove to be economically disastrous for Cambodia as U.S. trade had made up 16% of Cambodia’s GNP at the time, it also threw Cambodia into the hands of the PRC and the USSR as they used this opportunity to consolidate an economic partnership (Carlton, 1996; Leonhardt, 2013). Though Sihanouk had broken off ties with the U.S., the U.S. still had a plan B: In March 1970, Sihanouk left Cambodia to seek medical treatment in France and during his absence, Lon Nol, covertly backed by the U.S. via the C.I.A., staged a coup d'etat and overthrew Sihanouk, renaming the Kingdom of Cambodia as the “Khmer Republic” (Jeldres, 2012; Omar, 2016).

**LON NOL X UNITED STATES**

During Sihanouk’s leadership, Nixon and his administration had reason to believe that Eastern Cambodia was housing North Vietnamese sanctuaries along the Ho Chi Minh trail, and they weren’t wrong (Omar, 2016). As mentioned before, North Vietnamese were able to access this trail due to Sihanouk’s laissez-faire policy. Not only was this policy helpful to the enemy, Sihanouk had forced the U.S. to fight a popularity contest with the PRC and the USSR in terms of foreign aid. These factors generated doubt in Sihanouk’s abilities to refrain from the communist agenda and uphold the U.S. moral of anti-communism. Thus, after a meeting with the National Security Council (NSC) in March of 1969, Nixon commenced Operation Menu; from
1969-1975, the U.S. bombed Cambodia with 3 times the amount dropped on Japan at the closing of WWII (Omar, 2016).

When the first wave, known as Operation Breakfast, went undetected by the media, Nixon directed attack after attack (Omar, 2016). This string of secret bombings on Cambodia went largely unnoticed due to Nixon’s meddling with official records; the Nixon administration did more than conceal the bombings, they refused to report that they happened at all (Omar, 2016). For Nixon, it was extremely important to keep this secret because of widespread American demand for withdrawal from the Vietnamese conflict (Omar, 2016). Ultimately, though, this bombing campaign had little impact on the Vietnamese crisis as a majority of North Vietnamese troops had already pulled out of Cambodia. Still, the constant bombing gave rise to anti-U.S. feelings which translated into an anti-Lon Nol movement in Cambodia (Omar, 2016).

Anti-Lon Nol feelings were prominent in the Chinese community, but, were generally reserved. As Head of State, Lon Nol began issuing directives for Chinese markets and shops that had traditionally advertised their merchandise in Chinese characters to convert to the Khmer language, to which the U.S. described as “some ill-advised economically motivated demonstrations [that] have been mounted against the Chinese...” (Chan, 2005; Green, 1972, p.9). Furthermore, Lon Nol began closing the Chinese schools as well as Chinese places of worship (Chan).

While his parents worked in Phnom Penh, Chhong and the rest of his siblings attended a Teochew
Chinese school; Chhong distinctly remembers Lon Nol overthrowing Prince Sihanouk during his first few weeks in school. Before Lon Nol ordered the closing of Chinese schools, his family had already left for Pailin.

A government wide anti-Chinese sentiment was apparent at this point, and government officials were made aware of potential consequences for interacting with Sino-Khmers (Chan, 2005). The government’s anti-Chinese sentiment spread to the military and prohibited citizens of Chinese descent from enlisting (Chan, 2005). Due to exclusion from civil and military service, most Sino-Khmer’s turned to the business sector of urban areas to earn income (Chan, 2005). By doing this, Lon Nol was able to shift the power dynamics of Cambodia, creating a three-layer hierarchical pyramid with Khmer governmental elites on top, followed by the Chinese economic class, and the majority Khmer peasantry at the bottom (Chen, 2015). As a result of these mandates, Lon Nol’s administration has since been marked as the beginning of Cambodia’s anti-Chinese era, a period that expanded beyond his control.

The fact that the U.S. did not have any diplomatic or consular representation in Cambodia until 1950 explains the limited concern for Cambodian affairs (Omar, 2016). Shortly after installing Lon Nol as new Head of State in 1970, he had a stroke in February 1971 which resulted in an immensely deteriorated mental health fluster (Green, 1972). His closing of Chinese schools, Cambodia’s main education system “squandered some of [Lon Nol’s] political support among the students and the [B]uddhists [due to his] authoritarian actions…” (Green, 1972, p. 1). Furthermore, the U.S. noted that Lon Nol continued to “alienate [himself] among the elite by his erratic
behavior” (Green, 1972, p. 8). Though, it was apparent that Lon Nol’s policies had been creating instability, the U.S. believed that the loss of his leadership would create even more instability in the sense of a communist takeover; to the U.S., Lon Nol’s unwavering resistance against North Vietnam was invaluable – perhaps this is why the U.S. continuously overlooked Lon Nol’s flawed leadership (Green, 1972; Omar, 2016).

In another one of Nixon’s bombing campaigns, Operation Freedom Deal (1970-1973), the U.S. bombed areas from the Mekong River in Southeast Cambodia to the Vietnamese border (Omar, 2016). Additionally, the U.S. provided arms and ammunition to Lon Nol’s Khmer National Armed Forces (FANK) as well as $1.8 million (Omar, 2016). The purpose of Operation Freedom Deal was to defend Lon Nol from both the North Vietnamese and the domestic opposition, the Communist Party of Kampuchea, better known as the Khmer Rouge (Omar, 2016). However, Lon Nol’s government was extremely corrupt, so much that FANK field commanders, who operated almost entirely autonomous from the national government, sold their weapons to enemies in order to grow their own personal assets (Omar, 2016). Additionally, Lon Nol was known to allocate humanitarian aid meant for the peasantry to elites in his government cohorts (Leonhardt, 2013).

Furthermore, U.S. operations failed in Cambodia because they failed to consider ancient Southeast Asian history and put heavy reliance on Cambodian-South Vietnamese-Thai cooperation (Omar, 2016). As covered before, these countries have had unfavorable suspicions of each other due to ancient and modern conflicts. Disregarding this, the U.S. continued to assign South Vietnam and Thailand to defend
their new fellow pro-U.S. neighbor. Almost expectedly, South Vietnam and Thailand only agreed to help in exchange for border adjustments at Cambodia’s expense (Omar, 2016). Nixon denied their request, and as a result, held the U.S. responsible for handling the brunt of Lon Nol’s defense force.

**SINO-VIETNAMESE SPLIT**

Since 1960, the NSC was receiving intel from the CIA that there was a growing discord between Sino-Soviet relations (Ford, 1999). Motivated by hopes to draw the Vietnam conflict to a close, this information eventually led Nixon to take action and generate positive relations with the PRC in his infamous visit to China in 1972. The PRC, then looked to the U.S. as a temporary ally as they now shared a common enemy, the USSR. U.S. officials were delighted about the major diplomatic break-through with the PRC and believed this would lead to some kind of stability in Asia (Simon, 1979). As expected, President Nixon’s efforts to meet with Chairman Mao were not for naught; the U.S.-PRC friendship led to a more relaxed PRC in terms of the spread of communism in Southeast Asia (Cho & Park, 2013).

Still, however, the PRC was not particularly fond of the military unification of Vietnam in 1975 due to its favor for Soviet assistance (Simon, 1979). Like the Sino-Soviet rift, Sino-Vietnamese relations had a drawn-out disaffiliation. During the border wars of 1979, both China and Vietnam admitted to trouble relations dating back to the 1960s, a time in which a close alliance was greatly feigned (Simon, 1979). Such complaints cited that the PRC insisted North Vietnamese troops conduct guerilla warfare indefinitely —which they did so as the Viet Cong— however,
guerrilla tactics dwindled once regular troops joined in the mid-1960s (Simon, 1979). In response, the PRC threatened to cut off its assistance if North Vietnamese troops did not return to its guerrilla-type tactics (Simon, 1979). Furthermore, Vietnam grew suspicious of the PRC’s attempts to increase influence in the Vietnamese territory, the Spratly and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea (Simon, 1979). In the end, the Vietnam War proved to be the catalyst for the final collapse of the Sino-Soviet military partnership as the PRC and the USSR competed for Vietnamese favor (Lüthi, 2010).

After accumulating negative correspondence with North Vietnam, it became clear that the Vietnamese communists had decided to collaborate with the USSR rather than the PRC. In 1975, Vietnam had refused the PRC’s plans to disassociate from the USSR which fully terminated Chinese aid—the Sino-Vietnamese alliance—and cemented Soviet-Vietnamese alliances (Simon, 1979). This alliance created a fear that if the Vietnamese agenda was successful, Indochina would fall to Vietnamese leadership and consequently, Soviet jurisdiction. Vietnam’s control of Indochina in alliance with the USSR would then trap the PRC in a threatening security arrangement where its border countries would be occupied by hostile states (Simon, 1979). Thus, in a matter of time, the PRC developed from a Soviet junior to a full-fledged enemy, desperately supporting an anti-Vietnamese military party, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.
RISE OF THE KHMER ROUGE

In the early anti-imperialist/anti-colonial movements of 1930, Vietnam controlled a small operating cell of Khmers—a unit that would eventually morph into the notorious Khmer Rouge—in the Indochina Communist Party (ICP). Through the 1940s and early 1950s, their campaign was focused on independence from France and was extremely popular among Khmer radicals, however, after France granted Cambodia independence in 1953, their recruitment momentum was briskly suspended (Carlton, 1996). After the 1954 Geneva Agreements, when the communist Vietnamese agreed to withdraw from Cambodia, Sihanouk’s Royal Forces captured the communist bases and forced the communist Khmer movement underground (Mosyakov, 2004).

Ultimately, Vietnamese communists chose to ally with Sihanouk rather than the juvenile communist party due to his ability to grant access to the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville via the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which was essential for delivering ammunition and arms to South Vietnam (Mosyakov, 2004). Though the Khmer communists saw this as an apparent betrayal, they inevitably agreed to compromise with the Vietnamese and accepted Vietnam-trusted personnel, such as Nuon Chea, due to the fact that they were in need of Vietnamese aid for the armed struggle in Cambodia (Mosyakov, 2004). North-Vietnamese support proved to be worthwhile during the Khmer Rouge’s multiple skirmishes in the countryside of 1970, when North-Vietnam responded to Nuon Chea’s call for help; such intervention led to extreme growth of Khmer Rouge influence as Vietnamese forces captured almost a quarter of Cambodian territory in their stead (Mosyakov, 2004). In addition to
warring chaos in the countryside, Khmer Rouge destruction of trade markets in villages—many of which were owned by Sino-Khmer—forced families like mine to migrate to larger cities like Phnom Penh where city dwellers were forced to absorb their refugee relatives and friends from other provinces (Green, 1972).

Chhong told me that after multiple news reports and explosive gunfire in the distant countryside, the citizens of Kampon Thom City began to evacuate. While Betsy’s family left for Battambang, Chhong’s family left for Cambodia’s capital, Phnom Penh. Before taking the whole family to Phnom Penh, Kong went alone to meet with relatives and secure a home. Afterwards, he sent word to Khouv who brought half of the children, while Lao Lai Ma and Lao Lai Gong, later, brought the rest.

As this militia recruited thousands from rural villages and came to power as the Khmer People’s Revolutionary Party—popularly known as the Khmer Rouge—they became warier of foreign interference with their communist movement. Ideally, the ICP had planned for Vietnam to consolidate with Laos and Cambodia under Vietnamese direction (Mosyakov, 2004). However, such intentions failed to evade Khmer Rouge intelligence and combined with fossilized distrust of Vietnam due to ancient relations, the Khmer Rouge was in constant doubt of their alliance with Vietnam. Still, the Khmer Rouge continued to cooperate since their casualties in their 1973 military campaign proved that they were in need of a tremendous amount of aid in order to take over Phnom Penh (Mosyakov, 2004).
After learning of the coup set by his trusted general, Sihanouk went to the PRC to request aid in his endeavor to reclaim power in Cambodia (Carlton, 1996). Previously, since the PRC had been supporting the North Vietnamese cause, they originally made efforts to gain Lon Nol’s support, however, the U.S.’s anti-communist grip made Lon Nol an unhelpful hindrance; he prohibited the passage of arms through Cambodia and ordered Vietnamese troops to vacate the country (Carlton, 1996). With all these obstructions by Lon Nol, Sihanouk became more appealing as a Chinese ally. Furthermore, with anticipation for the Sino-Vietnamese split, Sihanouk’s anti-Vietnamese resolution demonstrated during the Bandung Conference of 1955—where he refused to cooperate with North Vietnam—proved to help his case, not to mention his subsequent peace agreement with the PRC in the very same conference (Hood, 1990). This led China to re-strategize in support for Sihanouk, who they introduced to the gradually forming Khmer Rouge and together, formed the National United Front of Kampuchea (NUFK) 1970 (Carlton, 1996).

Lon Nol and the U.S.’s coup created the perfect opportunity for the PRC to bring together the two groups; Sihanouk who had national and international recognition as the true leader of Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge who were militarily capable of overthrowing Lon Nol (Hood, 1990). Ultimately, the two were extremely successful in burgeoning widespread support as Sihanouk’s presence associated the movement with Cambodian nationalism along with the Khmer Rouge’s communism and anti-U.S. rhetoric (Omar, 2016). With its ever-increasing momentum, the Khmer Rouge soon became an influential force in Cambodia.
SUMMARY

Due to the end of WWII and subsequently, French colonialism of Indochina, anti-colonial sentiment was sowed into the hearts of general Southeast Asian populations. Though overseas Chinese endured European colonialism under different circumstances as discussed in the previous chapter, they were inevitably lumped into the colonial enemy. This may be due to the fact that for centuries, China simultaneously collected tribute and information from the Southeast Asian kingdoms. This leads us to believe that China has had a long hold on Southeast Asia since ancient times. It is no wonder that it was common for Southeast Asian rulers to cement their claim to power by igniting an anti-Chinese fire within the common people.

Even more frightening for Southeast Asian nations was the impending Cold War between the USSR and U.S. as they withheld fire between their homes and instead, utilized the Asian front to wring out their political disagreements. As the conflict in Vietnam became the main theater, the PRC and USSR combined forces to advance the communist agenda, however, they ultimately found themselves in constant disagreements. Such inner strife caused the Sino-Soviet alliance to erupt and spill into the Sino-Vietnamese alliance.

In anticipation that the Sino-Vietnamese alliance would follow suit and become the Vietnamese-Soviet alliance, the PRC felt forsaken to enemies and potential enemies all around its borders. Desperately scheming, the PRC found allegiance with an ousted yet rightful King, Norodom Sihanouk, and a rising peasant army, the Khmer Rouge. As the U.S. and its newly instated puppet ruler, Lon Nol
began an anti-Chinese era and severely bombed the country, Cambodia fell to shambles and looked to the anti-U.S. and anti-Vietnamese alliance, FUNK, to restore balance.
CHAPTER 4: YEAR ZERO AND THE AFTERMATH

Rising to power as the Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot began his regime in hopes of a clean slate and named it Year Zero—a program meant to erase old, corrupted Cambodia and formulate a self-sustaining agrarian society. The leaders of this movement—the Khmer Rouge—referred to themselves as “Angkar,” renamed the country as “Democratic Kampuchea,” and took extensive measures to “purify” the population. By this, they meant to destroy socio-economic classes and dispose of the elite members of society—many of which, were Sino-Khmer.

In full irony, this democratic revolution meant to equalize Cambodia was orchestrated by an elite of 20 individuals who were led by 8 elites-within-elites; 5 were teachers, an economist, a professor, and a bureaucrat who were all educated in France in the 1950s (Carlton, 1996). Still, it is generally argued that the reduction of a Chinese minority in Cambodia was due to policies directed against elite classes by the Khmer Rouge rather than a racial persecution (Willmott, 1981). However, I believe that notions of socio-economic class went over the heads of the uneducated Khmer Rouge forces and instead, these soldiers focused on racial prejudices against the minority Chinese in order to identify these supposed elite members of the old society.

Later, when Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge followers were driven off by the Vietnamese invasion, Cambodia was occupied by Vietnam and its puppet government, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). This era was characterized by a massive refugee movement and explicit anti-Chinese sentiments. It is because of this endless persecution of Sino-Khmer that my family risked their lives to reach the
borders of Thailand. After years there, they were finally sponsored to resettle in “the
land of the free.”

This chapter will cover the geopolitical activities that resulted in the
Cambodian Genocide, its downfalls, and the ruin of a nation. While accounting these
historic events, I will share my family’s story as they survived and eventually,
permanently escaped.

**CHINA X KHMER ROUGE**

China had good reason to be interested in Southeast Asia as a possible source
of vassalage; considering the break with the USSR in the Northwest and post-war
relations with Japan in the Northeast, Southeast Asia was the only region the PRC
had chances of digesting, not to mention it had already been supporting the
communist effort in the region. Furthermore, since Cambodia was and continues to be
proportionally unbalanced in terms of its peasant to elite ratio, there was much less
risk while simultaneously making significant gains.

On the eve of Mao’s Cultural Revolution in 1965, Pol Pot visited China and
admired the systems that he would later institute in Year Zero; this is supposedly
when he gained support for his Cambodian Revolution (Mosyakov, 2004; Mydans,
1998). China and Pol Pot’s relationship consisted of several economic, diplomatic,
and military factors, but, the most crucial —and eventually, destructive— were the
trade agreements; in exchange for arms and ammunition from the PRC, Pol Pot
exported millions of tons of rice to China (Leonhardt, 2013). According to their Four-
Year Plan, about 93% of Cambodia’s capital was to come from rice exports to the
PRC (Leonhardt, 2013). However, in reality, the PRC continuously pushed for more rice exports than Pol Pot expected as they too were dealing with famines due to the mother of Year Zero, the Cultural Revolution. In 1977 Pol Pot planned to export 400,000 tons of rice, but the PRC demanded no less than 625,000 tons which only left about 1 ton of rice portioned to 10 people a year (Leonhardt, 2013). Later, this would prove to be one of many factors that led to the collapse of Pol Pot’s self-destructive regime.

Overall, the Khmer Rouge was more passionate, disciplined, and brutal than the U.S-backed Lon Nol forces—not to mention they received a large amount of Vietnamese aid that they failed to recognize until 1976—which enabled them to capture Phnom Penh just 5 days after the U.S. pulled out of Cambodia (Mosyakov, 2004; Mydans, 1998). After Pol Pot’s takeover of Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge evacuated every city and moved the population into the countryside to begin plans for Year Zero.

**YEAR ZERO**

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge marched onto the capital city of Phnom Penh and ousted Lon Nol from power. Immediately after taking hold of the city, Khmer Rouge soldiers ravaged every street and alley to both evacuate all of its residents and “cleanse” the population of old corrupted Cambodia. By this, they meant to execute all those loyal to the Lon Nol regime, intellectuals such as students and teachers, and the bourgeois who were generally ethnically Chinese.
When Cherry and her family left Chhong’s noodle factory in Kampong Thom, they headed to Battambang. Here, they resettled and began a butcher business. It did not take long for Boukim and Cherry to run into each other through the meat distributing business. After six months of dating, Lao Ghua Gong and Lao Ghua Ma approved their marriage in 1970 and just one year later, they had their first child, Cheng (Pauline); though Boukim was dark skinned, he was ethnically Teowchew, so they approved. My mother, Tieng (Betsy) was born two years later in 1973.

Boukim and Cherry lived a comfortable life by running their butcher shop until the Khmer Rouge came to “purify” the city and move city dwellers out into the countryside. When they found my maternal grandfather, Boukim, they suspected him to be a Lon Nol cadre – how else would he be able to Cherry, a fair-skinned woman? He swore to the Khmer Rouge soldiers that he was a simple butcher, his neighbors vouched for him as well. It wasn’t until another soldier
approached the crowd and said that Boukim was, in fact, a butcher—he remembers buying meat from the peculiar couple earlier in the week. Cherry told me that they were killing the ethnic Chinese, but not them. They were able to hide by solely speaking Khmer. Her father, though, had refused to learn the language since moving to Cambodia and pretended to be deaf in order to survive.

A couple years before the Khmer Rouge takeover, Chhong and his family left Bung, Chhong’s oldest brother, and Lao Lai Gong behind in order to further Bung’s education since Phnom Penh was the only city to offer a college education. That was the last time they saw Bung and Lao Lai Gong as they we suspect that they were killed during the Khmer Rouge’s purge in 1975.

This evacuation of cities forced migrations to the countryside and eliminated the power within the city, which consequently removed any possibility of Sihanouk breaking off from the Khmer Rouge and forming a rival corps to challenge the Khmer Rouge authority (Hood, 1990). Instead, Sihanouk was held prisoner within his home—the royal palace—while his identified family members and followers were killed (Hood, 1990; Mydans, 1998). Meanwhile, Phnom Penh, as well as all the major cities, were ordered to leave city grounds—many on foot—without any proper information of where they were going.
Chhong describes the journey to the countryside as the most massive migration he has ever seen. He remembers that Khmer Rouge soldiers had taken their shoes so they had to walk barefoot for miles, exhausted, and famished. He told me about his first meal since leaving Pailin: they stopped on the side of the road and cooked rice using water from the nearby river. As they were eating, they saw a bloody body floating downstream, but the contaminated water or gruesome
sight did not stop them; they were so hungry they kept on eating.

The Khmer Rouge ruled out of constructed settlements called “rural cooperatives” that closely resembled Soviet gulags in that they were crowded, heavily guarded, and constantly surveilled (Mydans, 1998).

While some families had to build their new homes from scratch, Boukim and Cherry were one of the first people to arrive to their camp and were able to find an abandoned pig pen to convert. Later, in 1976, my uncle Leng (Steven), was born in the pig pen.

In these camps, the Khmer Rouge psychologically worked to erase Cambodia’s collective memory and separate their new civilians from the former Cambodia. As mentioned before, one of the many things the Khmer Rouge forbade was the speaking of any foreign language, meaning that Sino-Khmers could no longer communicate in their native language and could even be executed for doing so (Chan, 2005). Furthermore, speaking Chinese during the Pol Pot era opened suspicions to middle-class and/or capitalist origins, an executable crime in communist Cambodia (Willmott, 1981). In addition to banning the speaking of foreign languages, the Khmer Rouge forbade the practice of Buddhism –a religion practiced by 80% of the country– as well as Christianity and Islam (Purdy, 2012). Aside from banning religion, education, language, and so on, the Khmer Rouge utilized rote learning to drill “sayings of Angkar” into the entire population from April 1975 to January 1979;
25 years later, survivors can still recite 20-30 of the Angkar sayings (Locard, 2004). These sayings were either political or societal and generally meant to either scare or motivate these captive workers. Some sayings were:

“Long live the revolutionary Angkar, utterly wise and clear-sighted and ever glorious!” (Locard, 2004, p. 45)

“Sow and grow in order to raise the people’s living standards” (Locard, 2004, p. 237)

“He who does not move forward fast enough will be crushed by the wheel of history” (Locard, 2004, p. 213)

“Better to kill an innocent by mistake than spare an enemy by mistake!” (Locard, 2004, p. 209)

"He who protests is an enemy; he who opposes is a corpse" (Locard, 2004, p. 204).

“Those who boil rice in secret or in private are enemies” (Locard, 2004, p. 183)

“The new people bring nothing but stomachs full of shit, and bladders bursting with urine,” was the kind of slogans they used to target the rural Cambodians upon the arrival of the urban dwellers –much of which was true as many were covered in blood, sweat, tears, dirt, and human waste (Locard, 2004, p. 185). The Khmer Rouge went on to develop two castes among their “equal” society: mulethans which meant “base people” referred to the peasant class while the “17 April People” or “new people” referred to the city dwellers who were often Sino-Khmer (Locard, 2004). The new people were forever marked as untrustworthy as they were guilty of treason since they had previously refused Sihanouk’s constant urges to join their revolution between 1970-1975 (Locard, 2004). Many of the new people paid the price for being newcomers in the early years of Year Zero; since the old farms were already largely populated, the new people needed to create their own farmland and start with nothing but seedlings.
Once Chhong’s family arrived at the edge of the jungle, they were told to clear the trees in order to collect materials to build their own shelters as well as create space for farmland. After making room for rice paddies, people were put to work. People died every day from illnesses like pneumonia, malaria, and malnutrition. Once Chhong developed pneumonia and Lao Lai Ma died from malnutrition, Kong decided to take the risk and move the family to a different farm, one that had older crops, which meant they had more food. They left at night, eight bodies bobbing through the paddy water, using a guess-and-check method of herb medication to prolong Chhong’s life.

A Khmer Rouge tactic to exercise control over the entire population was separating families: as this effected individual identity while also eliminating the family as a social unit. Those that were too young to leave their parents—like Betsy who was about four years old—were allowed to stay with their parents within the same camp, while those who were older—like my father and his older brother, Barry—were separated into labor units.

Shortly after arriving at the new camp, Chhong’s family was immediately put to work on the farm. They stayed and worked together for a couple of months, until the Khmer Rouge began splitting the labor force into
three groups based on age and marital status – groups 2 and 3 were separated by gender: (1) married with young children, co-ed (2) age 8 to age 16 (3) age 16 and up, unmarried. Kong, Khouv, Jonie, Lena, and Stacy were sorted into group 1. Cherry, Boukim, Pauline, and Betsy were sorted into group 1 as well. Because the kids were too young to work the fields, their parents dropped them off with the camp cook in order to learn how to prepare meals. Meanwhile, their parents did various labor work such as cutting down bamboo and forests, or farming.

Chhong and his brother, Barry, were moved into group 2 where they were to build dams for the rice paddies. Thus, Chhong’s family were still able to see each other as their work sites were still within the same camp. However, the State soon came to the camp to look for more workers; the “State” was Khmer Rouge commanders that worked on large projects as opposed to the Khmer Rouge cadres who ran the farms. In their first wave, the State took Barry. When they came a second time, Khouv knew they would take Chhong. The farm camps’ leaders did not like giving up workers, thus, they gave away their weakest ones; Chhong was weak, his hair was falling out, and he was still suffering from
pneumonia. They lined him up with the other sick boys and shuffled them through the line of weeping mothers, Khouv included, until they vanished into the forests.

Chhong says he was lucky that the State took him; they had far more resources than the farm camps and were able to nurse his pneumonia with modern medication while feeding him plenty so he could regain his strength. Once he recovered, he was placed into a small group of boys tasked with clearing the rainforest. He says that since they were well fed, this work was sometimes fun—he goes on to tell me of a time they found and raised a sick hornbill. The deeper they went into the rainforest, however, the more vulnerable they became to malaria carrying mosquitoes. Once people began contracting malaria, the number of workers quickly dropped and work stopped being fun. With an original work force of about 300 dwindling, Chhong’s job shifted from tree cutter to corpse remover. When his unit collapsed to its final 3—all infected with malaria, himself included—the Khmer Rouge moved them to another rainforest labor camp that had Chinese medication for malaria; Chhong specifically remembers
the Chinese characters on the medicine bottles and other surrounding equipment.

According to survivors, China was heavily involved in activities under the Pol Pot regime; China sent advisors to Cambodia and upon their arrivals, were given housing on former properties of plantation owners and tours of the massive grave sites (Leonhardt, 2013). Survivors also claimed that these visitors were known to instruct Pol Pot agents for tasks (Leonhardt, 2013). Aside from these allegations made by survivors, flight records provide evidence that the PRC colluded with the Khmer Rouge in their brutal erasure of Cambodian elites; the Khmer Rouge encouraged Cambodian students studying abroad in Paris to return home and flew them via China Airlines and Chinese Boeing 707s to Peking, China and then to Phnom Penh for their executions (Leonhardt, 2013).

By 1978, rumors of the Cambodian Genocide spread globally and political activity began growing among Chinese communities in France, Thailand, and elsewhere in attempts to aid the Chinese still in Cambodia or the bordering refugee camps (Willmott, 1981). A letter written by a "Pro-temp Committee for the Relief of Overseas Chinese in Kampuchea" was submitted on February 6th, 1978 to the Chinese ambassador in France for transmission to China:

“*When the Khmer Rouge "liberated" Phnom-Penh, they immediately forced all the people into the jungle by using the most barbarous revolutionary measures. The people were left to lead a miserable life. Among them, our 600,000 overseas Chinese were brutally persecuted, families being destroyed. A large number of us here have experienced these sufferings and have fled at great risk. We have at our fingertips the details of the inhuman crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge...”* (Willmott, 1981, p. 44).
Another statement by Chinese in Thai refugee camps was submitted on April 18th, 1978 as an open letter to the PRC’s Chairman of the Overseas Chinese Affairs, Liao Ch’eng-chih; it pointed out that many of the refugees had to renounce their Chinese routes and pretend to be solely Khmer for fear that the camps would not accept them and/or deny them U.N. aid (Willmott, 1981). During this time, the U.S.—like many outsiders—had hunches of the cruelty taking place in Cambodia, but turned a blind eye as it would “seriously complicate [the normalization process with China] without significant positive impact on the situation in Cambodia” (Leonhardt, 2013, p. 105).

Like Mao’s Cultural Revolution, Pol Pot’s Year Zero was meant to destroy institutional and economical corruption and influences of foreign powers while also re-educating the Cambodian people of this new way of life. In an attempt to do this, these revolutions resulted in innumerable death, torture, erasure of cultural treasures, and a crumbled society. As a result, both leaders shared intense feelings of suspicion within their own committees which grew stronger as their programs continued to fail (Walsh, 2012). Mao’s death in September 1976 led to disorder in the PRC and Cambodia, as pro-Vietnam opponents within Pol Pot’s regime nearly ousted him in a coup (Mosyakov, 2004). In a letter to its Soviet ally, Vietnam insisted that Cambodia leadership was unclear and working with their double agent, Nuon Chea, would be easier (Mosyakov, 2004). Instead, when Pol Pot declared temporary resignation due to “health reasons,” his deputy, now known to be triple agent and devout Pol Pot supporter, Nuon Chea, took his place as acting prime minister (Mosyakov, 2004). As a result, Pol Pot famously led the persecution of his own team in search of pro-
Vietnamese insurgents; he had members ranging from his inner circle to regular cadres arrested and tortured in the Security Prison 21 (S-21) in Phnom Penh until they confessed to imagined crimes and were consequently executed (Mydans, 1998).

Tired of Pol Pot’s crusade against his own followers, many pro-Vietnamese communists, under Vietnam’s instruction, attempted to overthrow Pol Pot’s regime in June 1978, however, failed and fled to Vietnam during the Khmer Rouge-initiated border war to join forces with the Vietnamese (Hood, 1990; Mosyakov, 2004). These defectors included mid-level administrators like Heng Samrin, who had extreme disagreements on how to lead the revolution (Mosyakov, 2004).

Vietnam was able to achieve communist victory in 1975 thanks to their combat-hardened, discipline, and structured fighting force—not to mention they were fully equipped with Soviet military arms (McGregor, 1990). Afterward, the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance was secured in 1978 with the Friendship Treaty that assured mutual military alliance in the event of a threat (Simon, 1979). Furthermore, Vietnamese victory during the Khmer Rouge-Vietnamese border war allowed Vietnam to assess the local Cambodian population’s response to an invasion; thousands followed Vietnamese troops as they strategically retreated from Cambodian territory (Mosyakov, 2004). With such assurance, Vietnam formed the United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea (UFNSK)–a Cambodian power built on Khmer Rouge defectors and headed by Heng Samrin—and together, had the confidence to eliminate the Khmer Rouge on its Southwestern frontier and subsequently take hold of Indochina (Mosyakov, 2004; Simon, 1979). Thus, when united Vietnam launched their full-scale invasion in December 1978, they were able
to overthrow the Khmer Rouge within weeks and entered Phnom Penh in January 1979 (Carlton, 1996).

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**A COUNTRY DISPERSED**

Once the Vietnamese invaded, Cambodians fled their labor camps and scattered across the country in search for their relatives, food, and refuge. Unspoken meeting points for families, more often than not, were old homes prior to Pol Pot’s forced migrations. This was how my father’s family was able to reunite.

Each member of Chhong’s family slowly trickled back to their old home in Pailin. After a brief relief, they left for Battambang in search for food as their city had already been emptied out by other refugees. As they made their way to Battambang, Chhong saw Cambodian citizens killing and torturing former Khmer Rouge cadres; they had attempted to hide among the fleeing refugees, however, former laborers recognized their Khmer Rouge overseers, identified them, and killed them.

They reached Battambang prior to Vietnamese victory in Phnom Penh. At this time, Vietnamese troops were still warring with Khmer Rouge troops within the city. Many civilians surrounded them as they attempted to gather items for survival. Chhong notes that any items behind the Vietnamese troops were already taken, so he and Barry
risked their lives between the Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge gunfire in order to gather food for their family.

Immediately after Vietnamese victory in 1979, Chhong and his family left the country to seek shelter in the Thailand refugee camps. He told me that a major factor as to why they left immediately was the growing anti-Chinese sentiment among the Khmer people; many of them witnessed Chinese nationalists assisting the Pol Pot regime and associated Sino-Khmer with China who helped the Khmer Rouge. In about a year, they were
sponsored by the U.S. to immigrate as refugees, however, they needed to be transferred to the Philippines for screenings first. Here, they were required to attend education courses, health screenings, and more for 9-10 months – some people had to stay longer. After passing all of these exams, they were finally shipped to America.

Local Chinese media had existed since the early 20th century, however, due to the anti-Chinese policies of 1970-1990, official communication was interrupted and the Chinese community, as well as other Cambodians, resorted to word-of-mouth communication to find family and friends during the scramble post-Pol Pot (Pal, 2016). Thus, as Cambodians often crossed paths with people they had met in their old
cooperatives, they were able to exchange news, and move on. This was how Betsy’s family were able to reunite with their extended families.

With the termination of their camp, Boukim and Cherry, along with Cherry’s extended family, returned to their old home in Battambang. They stayed there for about 2-3 months while the Vietnamese troops and Khmer Rouge soldiers battled. This house was their place of meeting. Cherry’s family was all there and eventually, Boukim would bring his family too; through word-of-mouth, Boukim had heard that his family had been seen living on the streets of Battambang. When he found them, he learned that they had lost his father and sister to the deadly camps.

After some time, Boukim’s mother asked him to go back to their home in Phnom Penh. Thus, Cherry separated from her family to join Boukim’s family in Phnom Penh. Once in Phnom Penh, she heard about her family that she had left behind in Battambang: Shortly after Cherry left, they decided to make the journey to Thailand. After months of dangerous walking and tricky border crossings, they arrived at a refugee camp in Thailand and waited for sponsorship. At the early stages of the Khmer Rouge regime, one of Cherry’s brother
joined the Khmer Rouge in their communist conquest. After 2-3 months of membership, he decided that the Khmer Rouge was morally wrong as well as unsafe for Sino-Khmer and chose to escape through Thailand. After months of living in a refugee camp, he was sponsored to leave for Paris in 1978. Later, when he received news of his parents and siblings in the refugee camps of Thailand, he applied for sponsorship of the whole family in Paris, unfortunately, the papers arrived too late. Thailand’s government funding for refugees were dwindling so some camps had to be closed, these camps included the camp Cherry’s parents were in. There was no room in the camps that stayed open, so the Thai government refused refugees and dumped them in the Cambodian mountains by the border of Thailand. These mountains were littered with landmines and as Cherry’s family journeyed to find her in Phnom Penh, they feared death with every step they took. Their paths were scattered with eruptions and bloody limbs, but they persevered. For 2-3 months, they survived on dogs and rats until finally making it to Phnom Penh.
In Phnom Penh, Cherry hustled and somehow, through multiple trade transactions, she accumulated gold and wealth of knowledge through trade chatter. She learned of her family’s suffering and the places where they were last seen through word-of-mouth and scoured the city to find them. After they reunited, Cherry and Boukim decided to flee Cambodia. They were worried that the increasing anti-Chinese sentiment and Vietnamese rule would force them into working the farmlands again. It was also known that all of the international aid, from the U.N. and Red Cross were going to Thailand. Additionally, Cherry was pregnant again in 1979 and they felt that a shot for a different future was worth the risk.

They left at night to avoid conflict with Vietnamese troops who were checking identification forms and treded through the rice paddy waters. Some of the children were so young and small that they could not make it through the water alone, so they needed to be carried. Once they left the populated areas, they traveled tirelessly all day until the sky went black. At the crack of dawn, they rallied and began again. They reached the first camp by boat. It was called 007 and
was meant to be a distributing camp where people would disperse into larger camps. It was there that one of Boukim’s brothers had found them and together, headed to a bigger camp. Before they reached a camp, Thai civilians recognized them as Cambodian refugees and notified the police. Once the police arrested them, they were transported to camp Sakeo.

It was apparent that camp Sakeo was largely Khmer, thus, Boukim and Cherry solely spoke Khmer while there. The camp collected about twenty corpses a day. Cherry told me that the Sino-Thai were unhappy about the living conditions for the Sino-Khmer, and made an effort to speak to the Thai Government about creating a new camp for the Sino-Khmer – I have been unable to confirm this, but Cherry recalls Sino-Thai representatives visiting them in the new camp. Once this camp opened in Mairut, Boukim, Cherry, and their families were collected and transported by truck. As refugees unable to speak Thai, they received very little information about the transfer and were fearful that they were going to be dumped in the mountains. When they finally saw the twinkle of the ocean, they calmed.
At this new camp, they built their new homes and lived sustainably. Unlike the other camp, there was slightly more supplies from the United Nations and Red Cross. They received new clothes on arrival and 2-4 pounds of food per week. While in the camp, my Soi I (Susan) was born October 4, 1980. In that same year, Lao Ghua Gong, Lao Ghua Ma, and all of Cherry’s siblings were sponsored to immigrate to Paris. Cherry, Boukim, and their children, however, were not. So Boukim applied for the U.S. while Cherry’s brother made another attempt to sponsor them to Paris.
Ultimately, they decided to go to wherever sponsored them first, as they heard rumors that the camp was closing soon. Boukim was hired as the camp’s mailman as he was able to understand French. As the mailman, he was regularly able see the books of family names and their sponsorship interview dates. It wasn’t until Susan was 7 months old that he saw his family’s name for U.S. interviews. Sponsorship approval was based on refugees’ relations to the sponsor and the sponsor’s ability to provide shelter for the refugees.
Thus, the interviews were meant to clarify and prove the validity of the relationship between sponsor and refugees. The Taing family’s sponsor was Cherry’s cousin who had been sponsored about a year ago. He had joined a Chinese association in Philadelphia and made friends with Dr. Yee who, as a pastor, could easily sponsor the entire family. After passing the interview, Boukim received a call from Paris to make arrangements for an interview, but he declined, they were going to America.

**VIETNAMESE OCCUPATION**

The new governing body of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), a puppet Cambodia, included the Khmer Rouge defectors who had originally fled Pol Pot’s and survivors who were appointed upon entering cities (Jeldres, 2012). Still, the resulting party in power during the Vietnamese occupation were the Soviets and Vietnamese. Heng Samrin, a former Khmer Rouge Commander and Pol Pot’s right hand, was chosen by the Vietnamese to be president and head of state in the new PRK (Gottesman, 2003). While the PRK allowed farmers to return to their villages and city dwellers to return to cities or seek refuge abroad, movement was restricted so that the PRK could exercise complete control over the populations; without official authorization or proper identification, people were not allowed to leave the country (Locard, 2004). In most cases, survivors had lost all forms of identification during the Genocide and were left to seek refuge in secret.
As mentioned before, due to seeing China’s support of the demonic Khmer Rouge, the Vietnamese invaders and Khmer citizens projected their hatred for the Khmer Rouge onto the Sino-Khmer. A good example of this is a Vietnamese report in June 1980 that said “In General, the attitude of young people and intellectuals is that they hate [Sino-Khmer]” (Gottesman, 2003, p. 174). Ironically, though it was the PRC who had supported Pol Pot’s regime, it had been peasant Khmers who had carried out the brutal policies, not the ethnic Chinese (Gottesman, 2003). This led to the PRK’s continued kindling of anti-Chinese sentiment which pervaded through all strokes of daily life; general schools were banned from displaying ethnicity in celebrations and Chinese schools remained closed until Vietnamese troops withdrew in 1990 (Pal, 2016). They even took measures to racially organize the numerous amounts of orphans; in orphanages ran by Khmer managers, Sino-Khmer children were separated from all of the other children (Chan, 2005).

In June 1981, the PRK had successfully created the Committee for the Establishment of Social Order and Security for the Capital of Phnom Penh (CESO) which was meant to construct a state-run urban economy and ultimately, discontinue the private sector (Gottesman, 2003). Though the CESO allowed the Chinese service sector to continue under state supervision, Chinese traders were directed to change professions or go to the countryside increase food production (Gottesman, 2003).

CIRCULAR 351

The PRK’s explicit persecution of the Sino Khmer was explained by Deputy Prime Minister Chea Soth in his speech on October 24, 1982:
“...After the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime, because of their own character, the Chinese began to conduct business, to buy and sell, and to open stores and work as small merchants. They have avoided working in the rice fields...This has confused our national economy and created insecurity and chaos...Throughout the world, countries are extremely concerned about the Chinese. There are so many Chinese living in Singapore that now the country has lost its nationality...In Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam...They conduct business and control the economy...as well as state officials at every level, whom they are always trying to buy off...In general, the Chinese are still poisonous...At first, these Chinese arrived [in Cambodia] with empty hands, but then [they revealed their] capacity to commandeer our workers and our nationals and take steps toward engaging in pure capitalism...In Cambodia the Chinese are creating insecurity and destroying the national economy.” (Gottesman, 2003, p. 170-171).

Following his speech, Circular 351 was introduced and called for state officials to inquire into Chinese people’s citizenship status, geographic origins, the amount of time lived in Cambodia, their families, overseas networks, language abilities, political leanings, and past affiliations with any of the former regimes (Chan, 2005; Gottesman, 2003; Pal, 2016). Thereafter, the PRK began conducting door-to-door investigations to look for people with Chinese backgrounds; consequences of being identified as Chinese ranged from fines to discrimination in allocation of jobs, land, housing, imprisonment, or death (Chan, 2005). Most of the Chinese questioned expected prejudice and hid their Chinese backgrounds (Gottesman, 2003). This ultimately cemented uncertainty within the Sino-Khmer community today due to repeated circumstances that forced them to refuse recognition of their Chinese origins in order to survive; throughout Sambath Chan’s research, his interviews with Sino-Khmers almost always began with interviewees questioning whether or not he had been sent by the government (2005).

Aside from their discrimination policies, the Vietnamese were also encouraging Chinese to leave Cambodia as they gathered some 20,000 Sino-Khmer
from Battambang in March 1979 and urged them to cross the border into Thailand (Willmott, 1981).

Despite heavy losses in the border regions, the Khmer Rouge survived the Vietnamese invasion with a steady fighting force of about 30,000; they retreated to the dense forests and mountain regions along the Cambodia-Thai border in order to formulate a counter plan for power reclamation (Slocomb, 2001). Thus, throughout the PRK’s existence, Cambodia was forced to deal with another civil war between the remnants of the Khmer Rouge, Sihanouk’s nationalist/loyalist forces, and the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAV); this continued until a peace agreement was signed in Paris 1991 (Jeldres, 2012).

Though Thailand and the PRC had made diplomatic relations in 1975, the Sino-Thai friendship substantially improved after Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia in 1978. This was due to the fact that the PRC made a point to provide support for Vietnam’s neighbors (Cho & Park, 2013). Because of such relations, Thailand provided refuge for Khmer Rouge soldiers while the U.S. continued to fund Pol Pot a decent $85 million from 1980-1986 (Carlton, 1996).

Furthermore, on February 18, 1979, the PRC began a 33-day invasion into 5 of northern Vietnam’s border provinces. They emphasized that this was a punitive reaction to Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia rather than an imperialistic intent (Carlton, 1996; Simon, 1979). This stretched the PAV pretty thin as they simultaneously protected Cambodia’s borders from the Khmer Rouge in Thailand as
well as Vietnam’s border from Chinese invasions. Naturally, the prolonged
Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia was just as unpopular in Vietnam as it was in
Cambodia; this conflict littered time had been going on for decades now. Thus, after 5
years of Vietnamese assistance, Cambodia was expected to shoulder the brunt of their
border burden (Slocomb, 2001). In attempts to definitively establish peace, the PRK
formulated the K5 Plan which first began with Vietnamese military authorities
constructing roads to consolidate the newly acquired territory from Cambodia from
1982-1983 (Chan, 2005). Later, the real intentions for K5 was initiated in 1984 where
blueprints to build a border wall were set to deal with the Khmer Rouge threat
emanating from the Thai-Cambodian border and (Slocomb, 2001).

The K5 border barrier consisted of the construction of a barricade structure
composed of a 700-km canal, a wall, minefields, and regular intervals of small
manned forts –similar to that of the Great Wall of China (Gottesman, 2003; Slocomb,
2001). The PRK was able to collect laborers by making civilian participation law; the
PRK Constitution states that the people as a whole will participate in the country’s
national defense (Slocomb, 2001).

Conditions while building K5’s wall were unfortunate as necessary goods
tended to disappear on their way to the border, leading to malnourishment along with
other production and health problems (Gottesman, 2003). In response, the K5
workforce quickly defected en mass as a lack of food, dangerous landmines, and
malaria outbreaks were too reminiscent of the brutal Khmer Rouge; at any given
opportunity, workers escaped while those who stayed died of starvation or other
maladies (Chan, 2005; Gottesman, 2003). Though not explicitly highlighted, the K5
border barricade was not only meant to keep the enemy out, but to also keep the citizens of the PRK in; on November 12th, 1984, Prime Minister Chan Si issued an order that further forbade crossing the Thailand border without official permission and/or passes (Slocomb, 2001). Ironically, the K5 plan resulted in an increased number of refugee movement as Cambodian’s continued to covertly make their way to Thai border camps in order to avoid another era of forced labor (Slocomb, 2001).

Though Vietnam had pursued a communist agenda like Pol Pot, Vietnamese leaders refused to recognize the Khmer Rouge’s barbaric communist movement for fear of international guilt by association (Simon, 1979). Still, the PRK leaders refused to acknowledge the similarities between the laborious K5 and life under Pol Pot, which led to over 30,000 workers dying by the end of the project in 1986 (Chan, 2005; Gottesman, 2003).

INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

Vietnam’s invasion and capture of the Phnom Penh removed the Khmer Rouge from power and set the stage for Sihanouk’s international recognition as the true Cambodian leader in opposition to the Vietnamese occupants (Hood, 1990). Nonetheless, the PRC continued to back Khmer Rouge resistance in hopes that they would limit Vietnam’s ability to exercise power in Cambodia and ultimately run them out of the country (McGregor, 1990). Just the same, Sihanouk distanced himself between the PRC’s leadership in order to rebuild his credibility as a Cambodian leader (Simon, 1979).
After his ousting, Pol Pot cleverly manipulated the geopolitics of the continued Cold War to convince most of Asia and the anti-Communist world that the Khmer Rouge government was unlawfully invaded by Vietnam (Mydans, 1998). Pol Pot succeeded in this endeavor and the exiled Khmer Rouge retained political recognition from the U.S. and much of the world throughout Vietnamese occupation as well as Cambodia’s seat at the United Nations, until Cambodia’s internationally supervised elections in 1992 (Mydans, 1998). Occasionally, they ran into obstacles and in an effort to retain their seat in the United Nations, the Khmer Rouge renounced their communist ties in 1980 (Mydans, 1998). Along with their official seat in the U.N., the Khmer Rouge received economic, military, and logistical support from the PRC, the U.S., and other Western powers, as well as some ASEAN member states (Slocomb, 2001).

Overall, the PRC’s Cambodia policy post-Pol Pot suggests that they were more concerned about ensuring Vietnam’s inability to dominate Indochina rather than Cambodia’s recovery (McGregor, 1990). Furthermore, the PRC was worried that due to the large number of ethnic Chinese refugees in Thailand who had previously formed the elite commercial and administrative classes of Cambodia, new Vietnamese settlers would move into these positions and takeover the Cambodian government (Simon, 1979). The PRC’s self-interest was exemplified in the UN peace talks where they negotiated Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia as 1 of 3 preconditions for stabilizing Sino-Soviet ties; the others included Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and a reduction of troops from the Sino-Soviet border (McGregor, 1990). Afterwards, the United Nations took over Cambodia during its transitional
period of 1991-1993—the country was renamed as the “State of Cambodia”—and organized elections in May 1993; the monarchy was re-established, the country reverted back to the Kingdom of Cambodia, and Sihanouk reclaimed the throne only to abdicate to his son in 2005 who was elected as the new king (Jeldres, 2012).

**SUMMARY**

From 1970-1990, being of Chinese descent in Cambodia was a private and dangerous matter (Pal, 2016). Once Vietnam pulled out of Cambodia, Circular 351 was rescinded and private businesses were re-permitted and dialect associations were reopened (Pal, 2016). This, however, never brought serious relief to Sino-Khmers and nowadays, Sino-Khmers avoid being questioned about their ethnic origin as there have been little instances where such questioning resulted in anything positive since these anti-Chinese times in Cambodia (Chan, 2005).

In 1990, one of the newly formed Cambodian People’s Party leaders, Chea Sim—a Sino-Khmer—invited 11 other Sino-Khmers to establish the Association of Chinese in Cambodia (ACC); this acted as an umbrella association of the 5 major dialects in Cambodia (Pal, 2016). Acting as the head association with government recognition, the ACC absorbed all other Chinese associations and labeled them as local chapters (Pal, 2016).

Historical Chinese communities like Boh Bi Commune in Krouch Chhmar District, where there was once a flourishing Teochew community of 100-200 families, fell victim to Pol Pot’s anti-Chinese regime since many of these families worked in retail trade and were thus, middle-class (Chan, 2002). Furthermore, aside
from those in Phnom Penh, the Hokkien community was concentrated in Kompong Thom where they specialized in distilling rice-wine; there was an estimated 10,000 Hokkien in Kompong Thom before Pol Pot’s regime, however, the population was estimated as half that in 2002 (Chan, 2002). Furthermore, though Hokkien survivors were adamant that the Khmer Rouge did not single out Hokkiens as a dialect group, a senior member of the ACC insists that the Hokkien population suffered the greatest number of casualties under Pol Pot compared to other dialects; this may be due to the traditional Hokkien emphasis on political careers (Chan, 2002). As the Pol Pot regime was known to eliminate the old government of Cambodia, it is likely that the number of politically active Hokkien were executed indiscriminately, for no other reason than working in the government. Another possible reason for this massive decrease of the Hokkien population is the tendency to hide Chinese origins due to the purging of Sino-Khmers in the PRK government; as of 2002, the Hokkien Association in Phnom Penh was well aware of many Hokkien civil servants who had cut off contact with the Association in order to maintain their job positions (Chan, 2002).

Generally, due to the dangers of a Chinese identity, the distinction between ethnic Chinese and Khmer have become more and more invisible due to tendencies to masquerade as Khmer, forced interracial marriages, and abandonment of Chinese cultural identities. This has led to misinformation for forthcoming generations of Sino-Khmer; newer generations are able to acknowledge some Chinese heritage, however, are disconnected from their family history or origins in China (Chen, 2015). With such misidentification or lack of identification due to Chinese persecution, Pol Pot and the PRK did—in some ways—succeed in undermining Chinese networks.
Because of China’s assistance to the Khmer Rouge, Khmer and Sino-Khmer were generally distrustful and antagonistic of visiting China officials in the early 1990’s (Pal, 2016). Such strong anti-Chinese sentiment continues to prevail.

Though this chapter focuses on the suffering of Sino-Khmer under the Khmer Rouge and the PRK, I would like to clarify that many groups were targeted as well. For example, the Vietnamese under Lon Nol and the Khmer Rouge. Many suffered under these horrifying regimes, but none as much as Cambodia as a country and people. Throughout the Khmer Rouge regime, about 2 million – 1/4th of the country’s population—men, women, and children died from starvation, disease, and murder (Needham & Quintiliani, 2007). Not only did Cambodia lose a massive portion of its population, it lost its thought leaders, cultural bearings, and sense of hope. This loss is what motivated many to flee the crumbling country.
Like my family, many refugees spent years in the camps of Thailand and the Philippines awaiting sponsorship to a new home. Many of these camps were overpopulated and at times, rejected incoming refugees. Those who were able to stay lived in terrible and sometimes horrifying conditions; Betsy has told me stories of people who were suffering from severe starvation and resorted to digging up graves to feed on the flesh of the fallen. Nonetheless, people hung on and eventually, many were adopted by foreign countries like Australia, France, and the U.S.

My family ended up on opposite coasts of the U.S.; Chhong in San Diego, California and Betsy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Thanks to the Refugee Act of 1980, they were allowed to enter the country as a family and benefited from minor aid programs that helped them get on their feet. Still, they had to falsify some parts of their identity to reap the benefits of a newfound American citizenship; both Betsy and
Chhong—and some of their siblings—had to lie about their ages in order to enter America’s high schools. For Betsy, this matter was for naught as she was eventually forced to drop out to help the family take-out business.

In a matter of time, the Sino-Khmer climbed back into a role of commerce in the U.S. Some, like my father Chhong, have shed their Khmer ties, while others, like my mother Betsy, often find themselves intertwined with the Khmer community. Interestingly, Khmer refugees were new immigrants in an unfamiliar country, just as the Chinese were when they migrated to Cambodia. Like the Chinese, Cambodians, too, gathered into communities with mutual reliance to lift each other up. In this chapter, I will cover how the Refugee Act of 1980 ultimately created ghettos with the wave of Cambodian refugees, contrast the Sino-Khmer and Khmer immigrant experience, and discuss the harms of the model minority myth. My goal of this chapter is to highlight the importance of networks in reviving a fallen community.

**THE REFUGEE ACT OF 1980**

The U.S. resettlement policy in the early years of the Southeast Asian refugee migration was meant to disperse refugees throughout the U.S. and prevent their concentration in any single region; the purpose of this was to prevent overburdening a state’s government where the refugees settled (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). Nevertheless, this dispersion policy was quickly disregarded once large waves of refugees flooded the U.S. in the late 1970s, and people moved to communities where they had family or friends (Taing, 2005). Historically, migratory influxes of a particular ethnic group within the U.S. have naturally consolidated into their own
community e.g. the Irish in The Five Points of Manhattan, the Italians in South Philadelphia, Koreatown in San Francisco, and/or any Chinatown anywhere.

The Refugee Act of 1980 amended the Immigration and Nationality Act as well as the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 in order to revise the procedures for admitting refugees and establish a more uniform provision of assistance to refugees (U.S. Cong, 1980). As a result, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) was founded and spearheaded a majority of the Southeast Asian refugee crisis. Since concentrated ethnic communities provided familiarity in an unfamiliar world, the ORR acknowledged such benefits in aiding refugees to adapt socially and psychologically and as a result, designated twelve clustered communities for the wave of Cambodian refugees in the 1980s (Taing, 2005).

Though the ORR was meant to aid refugees by allocating funds to states, Cambodian refugees’ tendency to relocate to neighborhoods with more familiar faces interfered with the funding process. Before the ORR was created under the Refugee Act of 1980, states received unlimited Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA). After 1980, the ORR limited access to RCA/RMA to the first 36 months of resettlement; soon after it was limited to the first 18 months (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). Furthermore, these funds did not follow refugees when they moved to other parts of the U.S., such as Long Beach, California.

After Immigration and Naturalization Services conducted their interviews and health screenings, they granted refugees and their families admission into the U.S. under the guidance of various civic organizations and agencies who obtained
sponsors across the country (Taing, 2005). These sponsors varied from individual families, churches, and organizations that were meant to provide aid to these refugees who lost everything; churches sponsored both my parents’ families.

**BENEFITS OF CHINATOWN**

The U.S. has had a long history of Chinese immigration; dating back to the 1840s, when an American policymaker began demanding the importation of Chinese laborers for the transcontinental railroad and farm labor in California, not to mention the self-administered journeys for the California Gold Rush of 1849 (Takaki, 1998). In no time, these large numbers of Chinese laborers crowded into what is known today as Chinatowns; many of these communities began in railroad cities such as Chicago, New York, and Boston. These communities were more than a town of familiar faces and language, they were a safe haven from white mobs who despised and tormented the Chinese for their competition in the cheap labor market (Than, 2012).

Eventually, Chinese laborers left the hard labor market and moved into the service market where they work in restaurants, laundromats, etc. within their own neighborhoods. With these jobs in their own communities, the Chinese crowded into their own ethnic Chinese economy which simultaneously made them self-sufficient and isolated from American society. Soon, however, the isolated communities became places of curiosity for white tourists; while tourism helped these communities by generating income, they ultimately harmed them by socially enforcing the image of Chinese citizens as “strangers” in America (Takaki, 1998).
With such a long history of Chinese immigration into the U.S., many Sino-Khmers who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s were able to embrace both new and familiar faces. Meanwhile, Khmer immigration to the U.S. was almost entirely new; when Phnom Penh fell in 1975, an estimated 4,600 Cambodians came to the U.S., 10,000 more immigrated in 1978, and after the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, Cambodia’s large influx began with an estimated total of 152,000 resettled in the U.S. by 1993 (Taing, 2005). Though this data fails to distinguish how many of these resettled refugees were Sino-Khmer, it is clear that the number of Chinese immigrants and Khmer immigrants are incomparable in number and cultural establishment in the U.S.

Another establishment that Sino-Khmers benefited from, just as they had in Cambodia, were Chinese associations. Like the Chinese in Cambodia, Chinese Americans established their own associations with headquarters in Chinatowns to fund and organize projects for their community.

For a time, Cherry was Vice President of the Teochew Associations of Philadelphia’s Chinatown. Another time, she was the Treasurer and managed funding events and membership fees. Membership was $60 a year and was used to sponsor events such as the annual Chinese New Year celebration, a Chinese music class, as well as city-wide events such as the 4th of July parade.
Just as there are dialect-based associations, there are occupational-based associations as well; though these occupational associations are open to all who participate in the specified type of trade, it is common for a particular dialect/ethnic group to dominate an area of trade. For example, Pauline, Steven, and Cherry sit on the board of the Asian American Licensed Beverage Association in Philadelphia (AALBA); AALBA is trade-based association and is dominated by the Teochew community --specifically Sino-Khmer Teochew.

In 1991, Kong and Khouv moved from San Diego to Philadelphia and begged Chhong, who was living along in Los Angeles, to join them. They claimed that they needed assistance at the new family take-out business, so, he put a pause on his leisure life and traveled East to support them. Little did he know, Kong and Khouv had cried wolf to lure his son into the bachelor life.

Chhong hated it in Philadelphia; not only were all of his friends in LA, he also had a great and stable career there. Instead, he was in Philadelphia, working in Chinese take-out and forced to hunt for a wife. Kong took him to visit potential brides every weekend. All Chhong needed to do was pick one. Kong and Khouv utilized their informal associations to find these potential brides, most of which came from old family friends from
Cambodia, while others were introduced by networking with these very friends. All of the potential brides were Chinese, but most importantly, they were all Teochew from Cambodia.

After meeting dozens of potential brides and their families, Chhong eventually gave in and agreed to marry Betsy after seeing her at a Chinese Association party. When I asked Chhong how the proposal went, he explained that it was more of a business transaction where he played no part; there was a mutual agreement by the parents, a dowry request, a dowry payment, and finally, a wedding on May 17th, 1992.

Furthermore, some families and/or clans, are able to raise capital from the woi—meaning “get together” or “put together”—a collective loan fund organized and composed of 15-30 members to finance enterprises (Takaki, 1998). These loans included family-friendly interest rates. Many members of my immediate and distant family participate in such financial organizations, though they are generally informal. With networks such associations and extensive family trees, Sino-Khmer refugees have better—immediate—access to resources to support their recovery as a working—in some cases, elite—class in America, unlike their fellow Khmer refugees.
As mentioned before, Khmer refugees came under very different circumstances compared to the Sino-Khmer. Though they did not have a stable community to receive them, Cambodians eventually banded together to form powerful, nationally recognized Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA) – MAAs are government organizations led by community leaders. In the 1950s and 1960s, before Cambodia was deep in conflict, Cambodian students attended universities in countries such as the USSR, PRC, Japan, France, etc. 140 of those students attended California State Universities (CSU) (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). In 1975, there was, at most, 1,000 Cambodian students and professionals scattered throughout the U.S. (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). Until the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975, these Cambodians were loosely connected with no sense of “community,” but mobilized collectively when news of incoming Cambodian refugees was announced.

The first wave of Cambodian refugees came in April 1975, since the Khmer Rouge takeover cut Cambodian sojourners off from their home country and left them with nowhere to return. Thus, while some of the refugees came to the U.S. directly from Cambodia, the majority came from other countries where they had been studying, conducting business, serving the military, or in embassies (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). Although Cambodians throughout the U.S. aided these incoming refugees, I will specifically focus on the Long Beach community.

The pre-1975 Cambodians rushed to Camp Pendleton, a California refugee camp, in order to help with translation, orientation, clothing drives, and sponsor as many Cambodians as they could – they also looked for American sponsors (Needham
& Quintilani, 2007). By the end of that year, the pre-1975 Cambodians formed the first Cambodian-led MAA in the U.S., the Cambodian Association of America (CAA). The Association soon broke into two separate groups as some members wanted to use the network to form an anti-communist political party while the original founders wanted to focus their efforts on addressing the needs of the refugees. Thus, a second MAA called the United Cambodian Community (UCC) was formed and went on to become one of the most successful MAAs in the U.S. (Needham & Quintilani, 2007).

These Cambodian MAAs were able to help refugees by helping them find jobs that required no English or basic English. In 1979, the UCC sponsored a Cambodian Buddhist monk who had been studying in India; his presence restored religious hope and the UCC began raising funds for the first Cambodian Buddhist temple in the area (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). With such a booming support system, Long Beach quickly became the most concentrate Cambodian community followed by Lowell, Massachusetts as a close second.

Even with such powerful MAAs, it was clear that welfare benefits would not enough to survive in California. Unlike the pre-1980 refugees (referred to as “the 75 people”) who were a small educated and occupation experienced group, the post-1980 refugees (referred to as the “after 80 people”) were substantially less educated, came from agricultural backgrounds, and were much more psychologically distressed (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). Unable to find jobs due to lack of English or certified skills, many turned to the informal economy where they supplied home-baked goods to local Cambodian restaurants, at-home sewing, and anything else that could earn
income (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). Still, small successes like Sann Chhann’s victory in the 4th grade national essay contest—which was publicized in the media—made Long Beach an appealing destination for the Cambodian diaspora (Needham & Quintilani, 2007).

The air in Long Beach, however, grew tense around 1987 as gang violence began dominating the area. It is commonly believed that Cambodian gangs are an imported issue, however, these gangs were originally formed in order to protect themselves and acquire respect among other minorities in the Long Beach area (Needham & Quintilani, 2007; Taing, 2005). Furthermore, these gangs were a source of support for younger, Americanized-Cambodians, who had trouble dealing with their traditional parents; these parent-child relationships were very strained as parents who did not speak English often relied on their children to function as translators legally and menially while simultaneously demanding unquestionable dominance (Taing, 2005). These gangs eventually corrupted into power gangs and forced their protection onto Cambodian store owners, making the neighborhoods unsafe. In a cry for peace, community members protested, some holding signs that said, “From one killing field to another killing field” (Needham & Quintilani, 2007, p. 46).

After the free elections in Cambodia in 1992, many of the Cambodian community leaders were inspired to help rebuild their home country and/or left in order to retire (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). Not only did the sudden exodus of leadership leave the Cambodian community directionless, the directors left the UCC behind with enormous debt (Needham & Quintilani, 2007). The UCC was not only
unable to sustain their programs, but also had to sell their community center in 1996 (Needham & Quintilani, 2007).

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**THE MODEL MINORITY**

As China began its rise in the world economy, many Western commentators criticized east Asia’s general economic success as a result of unfair trade practices, domestic market protectionism, and human rights restrictions (Sheftall, 2012). East Asian opinion leaders responded to this criticism by highlighting cultural differences, arguing that their economic success was a result of their countries’ value for Chinese Confucianism as part of their cultural heritage (Sheftall, 2012). These culturally specific values supposedly shape basic social morals and governance preferences that prioritize civic duty, discipline, self-sacrificial work ethic, and group harmony over individualism, personal freedom, and civil rights which are prioritized in the West (Sheftall, 2012). Unsurprisingly, this rejection of Western influence in political, cultural, and economic discourse derives from the anti-colonial sentiment that continues to dominate Asia. Asian values specifically reject the notion of so-called “universal values” that originate from the West and view them as a Eurocentric vision being imposed on Asian societies (Cao, 2012).

These arguments were made by East Asian opinion leaders who claimed that Western countries’ economic decline was due to their disorderly and disharmonious societies (Sheftall, 2012). Such influential opinions penetrated the East Asians of Asian America; I have heard from my own family and countless Asian American friends that since we come from a different culture, we must practice a different work
This notion of a unified Asian culture, however, fails to recognize the diversity of Asia and Asian America. Instead, both Asia and America practice this social stigma of a “model minority.”

Though the nuances of the term “model minority” exists throughout the world, I will be focusing on its impact on the Asian minority in the United States. The model minority myth was born during the Civil Rights era as a means to use Asian Americans in contrast to America’s “problem minorities” (Taing, 2005). Using racist love and racist hate to drown out protests, the model minority myth praised Asian Americans for succeeding without aid while simultaneously blaming other minorities’ hardships on their lack of work ethics. This argument of a model minority was meant to reject American racism and uphold the belief that the U.S. was a land of opportunity where success is achieved through merit (Taing, 2005).

Nevertheless, government, education, and employment institutions often make this mistake where they group all Asians together under the term “Asian American”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Background</th>
<th>Average of those with a bachelor's degree or higher as of April 2015</th>
<th>Average median 12-month household income as of April 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian Americans altogether</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>$71,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodians</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>$53,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>$71,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipinos</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>$80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>$52,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>$58,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>$58,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>$78,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This table does not contain all ethnic backgrounds and is just a sample.

Data retrieved from: Center for American Progress
in large data sets such as the U.S. census. Not only does this inaccurately cluster a diverse population into a uniform group, but this umbrella term also promotes the model minority stereotype without consideration of complex ethnic backgrounds. By this, I mean to refer to the contrasting statistics of higher education attainment and median incomes by Asian Americans vs specific ethnic backgrounds:

Once the statistics on Asian Americans are disaggregated, these disparities in higher education attainment and household income illustrate significant distinctions between Asian ethnic groups. In this table of April 2015 education attainment rates, it is apparent that the educational success of Cambodians is not in line with the Asian American average and subsequently, the model minority myth. With such varying data, racial lumping via the model minority stereotype can be harmful as it ignores underperforming groups like Cambodians as a racially oppressed group.

Compared to the U.S., formal education in Cambodia was very different in that universities were only located in one area of the country, Phnom Penh. The centralization of education in this city limited education, making it only for city dwellers, while literacy remained rare in the countryside. Furthermore, education beyond primary lessons held in temples was not encouraged by parents in the countryside as the farming population had little need for literacy. In general, schooling was respected in the countryside due to its affiliation with Buddhist temples. Simultaneously, the Western style of education in the capital was polluted by imperialized elites and was therefore discouraged (Taing, 2005). Furthermore, keeping in mind that the Khmer Rouge aimed to eliminate the elite class, a majority of the refugees entering America—as mentioned before—were these illiterate rural
farmers. Therefore, it is easy to imagine the difficulties of navigating the literacy demands of America when most of these survivors had low literacy rates in their own language.

In contrast, peasants in China were too poor to send their children to school, which is why in America –where formal education is free to the public– young Chinese were taught to see education as the ladder to success (Takaki, 1998). Such notions apply to Sino-Khmer as well, considering that many of these families originally emigrated from China to Cambodia due to poor circumstances in China. Furthermore, Chinese culture is known to instill a system of mutual obligation where parents commit to extraordinary self-sacrifice in order to give their children the opportunity to pursue success and ultimately return the favor by supporting their parents in the future –this self-sacrificial nature is probably why Mahayana Buddhism is popular among Chinese. This method of familial debt generates pressures that result in disciplined and motivated effort to obtain higher levels of academic achievement (Taing, 2005). In contrast, Cambodian culture has been heavily influenced by Theravada Buddhism. Which, as mentioned in Chapter 1, emphasizes personhood and eternal merit collected through past lives. Such belief discourages parents from pushing their children to achieve greater success. Instead, they leave their children’s fates in their own hands. Thus, when students are unsuccessful in school, entering the workforce becomes a more realistic option as the child has demonstrated a lack of innate talent for education (Taing, 2005). The Chinese and Cambodian model of motivation clash as one utilizes pressures to change a family’s circumstances, while the other observes and leaves the future to nature.
When Chhong arrived in the United States with his family sometime in September of 1980, he was aged 17. Once he arrived, his family altered his age to 16 in order to sneak him into the freshman class of a public American high school within their neighborhood. He grew up in San Diego and as a star student and was able to graduate high school within three years. Upon his completion, one of his teachers set up an interview with a University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) admissions counselor. After hearing his survival story
and reviewing his academic record, UCLA awarded Chhong with a full scholarship. Later, he moved to Los Angeles and obtained his associates degree in mechanical engineering. Immediately after his college graduation, he was hired by the National Truck Service in Torrance, CA.

Since Asian Americans as a consolidated group are attaining higher education in high numbers, groups like the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC) argue that Asian Pacific Americans are not harmed by affirmative action (Taing, 2005). In spite of high Asian American attainment rates, the NAPALC and other organizations make the same mistake of ethnic lumping, when in reality, many Asian American ethnic groups struggle with education and changing their socioeconomic status. Furthermore, because of the flawed statistics from racial lumping, these Asian American ethnic groups are excluded from race-conscious programs that some institutions provide.
SUMMARY

With a long established Chinese immigrant community in the U.S., Sino-Khmer refugees arrived with many advantages compared to Khmer refugees whose immigrant population was generally new. Sino-Khmer had access to Chinatowns where Chinese communities flourished by building and hoarding their own economies, as well as dialect and trade associations that provided mutual aid, just as they had in Cambodia. Though not every Chinese lived in Chinatowns, Chinatowns acted as a meeting point. With a niche community and financial network, Sino-Khmer refugees had better access to support their recovery as an elite/working class.

As immigrants in a new country, the Khmer, too, had the opportunity to consolidate as a community and offer mutual support. With educated leaders and governmental aid, the largest Cambodian community, Long Beach, California, was able to flourish with culture and financial/psychological assistance programs. Though gang violence and the temporary loss of leadership set the UCC back, the UCC is still running today and providing aid and cultural memory.

Contrasting circumstances between Chinese-Americans and Cambodian-Americans have become apparent in disaggregated Asian American data as Cambodian higher education attainment rates and median household incomes are inconsistent with the Asian American average. This variation of data accents the hazards of racial lumping and the subsequent stigma of the model minority stereotype as they conceal certain ethnic cultures, like Cambodians, from being recognized as a racially oppressed group. I would like to note that though the data provided on Chinese-Americans and Cambodian-Americans fail to identify where the Sino-Khmer
are clustered, I believe that because of Chinese’s strong sense of Chinese identification, they self-identify as Chinese in survey data collection. As for the information on Long Beach, the community is composed of Cambodians in general, that is, Khmer, Sino-Khmer, Indo-Khmer, Viet-Khmer, and so on.

Though it can be argued that these data variations stem from differing work ethic and moral value based on culture, I would like mention that these modes of motivation are not the sole determinants of any individual’s abilities or future. Such distinctions have been documented in an effort to make sense of the varying achievement levels and apply generally without absoluteness.
CONCLUSION

The formal and informal formation of Chinese networks throughout the world has been able to provide huiqiao, overseas Chinese, a plentitude of resources no matter which corner of the world they explore. In this thesis, we looked to Cambodia as a specific example where at first these networks began informally, then as governing bodies, and finally, as voluntary units. Their existence has proven to assist the Chinese minority to excel both economically and socially in Cambodia but have also proven to generate distrust and hatred from outsiders, otherwise known as the native population of Khmer. Though such complications have existed throughout the world –essentially, wherever these networks existed– I decided to focus on Cambodia and my family as specific examples of these affairs.

While these networks provide overseas Chinese with unfathomable benefits, their very existence is based on the Chinese tendency to mark themselves as outsiders in foreign communities –the self-reference to overseas Chinese as huaqiao, itself follows this tendency to self-ostracize as it refers to them as sojourners rather than immigrants. Chinese Associations, Chinese schools, and Chinatowns are all establishments meant to house Chinese minorities and create an ethnically specific community. These communities then proceed to hoard trade, businesses, and other resources that allow Chinese minorities to rise as elites. Such hoarding can also be seen in a smaller scale via the Cambodian community in Long Beach, California. In the case of Cambodia, this elitism further ostracized the Chinese community due to the fact that a majority of the Khmer population was of agricultural peasant classes.
With class distinctions and race almost explicitly intertwined, the Southeast Asian communist movements during the Cold War era fixated on racial divergences to identify and eradicate economic imbalances. As mentioned before, these racial characteristics were not meant to be the sole indicators of economic status, however, due to certain prejudices, middle-class and elitism was almost always based on race. Because of this, the Chinese minority in Cambodia, the Sino-Khmer, were constantly targeted during Cambodia’s political, economic, and social unrest.

Once these Chinese refugees relocated to other countries like the U.S., they were able to rebuild again, just as they had when they migrated from China to Cambodia. The purpose of this thesis was to emphasize the significant role of networks in building, maintaining, and elevating a community. In many cases, issues are categorical, meaning that they apply to and effect certain groups and communities. Chinese networks exhibit the power of a community, emphasizing the driving force of collaboration and mutual support, e.g. the Sino-Khmer communities noticed a lack of formal education for their youth and took the initiative of opening their own schools—available to those who could afford them in the public—and taught what they felt was important, their accompanying dialectic heritage. I wanted to use my family’s story as just one of the many Sino-Khmer stories as it illustrated the migratory behavior of ethnic Chinese, their access to networks both formal and informal, and experience of racial persecution.

I feel that since coming to America, the Chinese’s stronghold on culture has become more relaxed. Here, where divorce is common, couples like my mother and father were able to split, which is usually frowned upon and thought to bring shame to
the entire family. American divorce helps traditional Chinese like Boukim and Cherry or Kong and Khouv to see that traditional arranged marriages may not always be definite and that new happiness can be found. Furthermore, it helps them see that tradition and culture is not omnipotent. When Betsy remarried Sina, Chhong told me that there had been gossip within the Teochew community about a Teochew woman with three kids marrying a Khmer man. Meanwhile, Cherry and Boukim accepted this marriage happily because their family still recognizes their Cambodian background and are increasingly becoming open to other cultures. Betsy’s remarriage has brought us to closer to our Cambodian history as a family and as the years pass, I find myself and my family more and more encompassed into the Khmer community.

Though I am proud to come from a culture of mutual support, I recognize Chinese’s self-absorbed proclivity while also recognizing the ostracizing nature of outside forces. I hope that instead of focusing on defining our identities based on class, statistics, or geographical origins, migrants—like the overseas Chinese—can recognize a fluidity in the unfamiliar to both accept and be accepted in foreign communities.


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*E-international Relations Students*


