



CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAMBODIAN-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam from the seventeenth century to the end of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia in the early 1990s. Four periods in the history of Cambodia to be examined including the pre-colonial era (seventeenth to nineteenth centuries), the colonial era (1863-1954), the post-independence era (1954-1975) and the Communist era (1975-1993).

1. The pre-colonial era (17th-19th century)

Cambodia and Vietnam started their relationship in the seventeenth century after both countries had moved their political centers to the lower part of the Indochinese peninsula. Before this period, the Khmer kingdom of Angkor was able to maintain its fame as one of the greatest Indianized Kingdoms in Southeast Asia for more than six centuries from the ninth to the fifteenth century. After the Thai invasion of Angkor in 1431, the Cambodian capital shifted southward to the vicinity of present-day Phnom Penh.

As for Vietnam, after a thousand years under direct Chinese rule, the Vietnamese were able to push the Chinese out in 939 A.D. and established the kingdom of Dai Viet with its territory in the northern part of Vietnam today.¹ After independence, the

¹ Mary Somers Heidhues, Southeast Asia: A Concise History. (London: Thames &Hudson, 2000), p. 90

Vietnamese started to extend their control southwards. The major defeat of the kingdom of Champa in 1471 opened the Khmer land of the Mekong delta to steady Vietnamese expansion. By the end of the seventeenth century, Vietnam was able to take control over most of the Champa Kingdom.² The disappearance of Champa made both kingdoms very close neighbors.

The loss of Cambodian territory to Vietnam in the seventeenth century

It could be said that between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century, Cambodia was a weak Kingdom. The country became a pawn in power struggles between its two increasingly powerful neighbors. The Cambodian history of this period was made up of repeated invasions from Vietnam and Thailand, preceded and followed by ruinous civil wars. These were conducted against a background of court intrigue, violence and uncertainty. Most of these conflicts ignited when rival princes sought foreign help to press their claims to power. For example, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, Cambodia had become a tributary kingdom of Thailand and the Khmer kings sometimes sought alliances with the Vietnamese in order to lessen Thai influence.

The reign of King Jay Jetha II (1618-1628) marked the beginning of a significant relationship between Vietnam and Cambodia when the Cambodian king proposed the marriage between a Cambodian Prince and a Vietnamese Princess of the Nguyen dynasty.³ Moreover, the king had allowed the Vietnamese to use Cambodian territory in the Mekong delta as the base for military training and troops to fight with the Trinh Dynasty in the north.⁴

The settlement of the Vietnamese in the Cambodian territory of the Mekong Delta continued and even increased after the Nguyen gained victory over the Trinh. The

² Ibid, p. 92

³ Eng Soth, ឯកសារមហាបុរសខ្មែរ (Great Cambodian Chronicle), Vol. 3, p, 56

⁴ Ibid

Vietnamese rulers of the South obtained administrative control over many of these areas. In the 1620s, the Cambodian port of Prey Nokor at the mouth of Mekong was taken over and renamed Saigon after the Cambodian king allowed the Vietnamese to establish a custom house there. Soon afterward, smaller ports along the Gulf of Thailand were occupied by Chinese traders and Vietnamese troops. By the end of the seventeenth century, the region was under Vietnamese administrative control and Cambodia was cut off from access to the sea. This isolation continued until the nineteenth century.⁵

The second half of the eighteenth century was a period of political crisis both for Cambodia and Vietnam. In Cambodia, the internal struggles for the throne continually occurred and caused several bloody battles and revenge from those competitors.⁶ In Vietnam, three brothers from the district of Tay Son instigated a revolt and obtained control of all of Vietnam. A Nguyen prince escaped to Thailand and later returned to Vietnam to fight back under the support of the Thai at the early stages of struggle. The prince later took complete control over Vietnam in 1802 by himself and was proclaimed as emperor, with the title of Gia Long.⁷ The Cambodian prince Ang Eng, was crowned in Thailand and sent back to rule Cambodia at the end of the eighteenth century.⁸

The Vietnamization of Cambodia in the nineteenth century

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Ang Eng's son, King Ang Chan, was not happy to rule under Thai control. He then made secret negotiations with the Vietnamese, seeking their protection while groups of high ranking officials still maintained their loyalty towards the Thai. Therefore, Thai, Cambodian and Vietnamese forces skirmished in Cambodia since 1811 and continued to do so for almost 20 years.⁹

⁵ David Chandler, *The Cambodian History*, (Phnom Penh: JRSC, 2005), translated in to Khmer by Center for Khmer Studies, p. 100

⁶ Ibid, p. 101

⁷ Ibid, p. 102

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid, p. 128

King Ang Chan, who was watched over by Vietnamese counselors became the first Khmer King under the Vietnamization process launched by Emperor Minh Mang. Under their protection, the Cambodian King had to send tribute to Vietnam twice a month, to dress like the Vietnamese officials and to pay respect to the Vietnamese king in a Vietnamese temple in Cambodia.¹⁰

The Vietnamization of Cambodia became stronger and stronger after the death of Ang Chan. With an aim to make Cambodia a province of Vietnam, the Vietnamese started to eliminate the members of the royal family, reformed the administration by replacing it with a Vietnamese administrative style and changed the people's habits, culture and ways of living. Many Khmer princes and princesses who were suspicious of having connections with the Thai court had been arrested and brought to Vietnam. There were attempts to replace Cambodian officials with Vietnamese officials and they were forced to use titles given in Vietnamese language instead of Cambodian titles. Later, the Vietnamese officials in charge of Cambodia started to destroy Buddhist Pagodas, replacing them with Vietnamese temples.¹¹ The Cambodian people were forced to wear trousers instead of tucked skirts, to wear long hair instead of short hair and to learn to speak the Vietnamese language.¹²

During this reform, the Khmers also suffered greatly from hard work imposed by the Vietnamese king. An important event often mentioned was the building of irrigation system where many Khmer labors died and suffered from the cruel treatment of the Vietnamese officials.¹³ When revolts against the Vietnamese started, the Vietnamese then cut the heads off three revolt leaders and used them as a stand to boil tea for Vietnamese officials. As a warning to anyone who wanted to make an uprising, this action caused more

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Eng Soth, ឯកសារមហាបុរសខ្មែរ (Great Cambodian Chronical), Vol. 3, p, 90-91

¹² David Chandler, The Cambodian History. (Phnom Penh: JRSC, 2005), translated in to Khmer by Center for Khmer Studies, p. 136-137

¹³ You Feng (ed.), L'Annexion du Cambodge parr les Vietnamiens au XIX Siécle: D'après les Deux Poèmes du Vénéralbe Batum Baramey Pich (ប្រឹមត៍ប្រឹត៍អង្គ). (Paris, 2002), p. 116-119

hatred toward the Vietnamese and the revolt continued to take place. It was led by Cambodian officials (Okya) with support from the Thai court.

The Vietnamization of Cambodia took place during the whole reign of Minh Mang. After his death, the new king of Vietnam started to settle the matter with the Thai and reach a solution. Ang Chan's youngest brother, Ang Duang, was crowned king of Cambodia by the Thai in order to motivate the Okya to stop revolting. Before and at the beginning of his reign, some parts of Cambodia were still under Vietnamese influence as the powerless Cambodian Queen who was installed by the Vietnamese was still reigning in Phnom Penh. King Ang Duang started to find a way to maintain Cambodia between these two masters. He later made a secret pact with the French in 1853 by sending gifts and offering his homage to the emperor of France.¹⁴ Although Ang Duang was not successful in seeking protection from the French, France concluded a treaty with his son after Ang Duang died.

2. The colonial era (1863- 1953)

France's interest in Indochina grew out of its wish to secure economic benefits. The year 1862 saw the establishment of French dominion over Cochinchina.¹⁵ In 1863, King Norodom of Cambodia signed an agreement with the French to establish a protectorate over his kingdom.¹⁶ Later in 1883, France was able to take control over the rest of Vietnam and divided it into three parts, namely Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina.¹⁷ When France established a protectorate over Laos in 1893, five French territories in Indochina were formed.¹⁸ Vietnam and Cambodia were under the central power of French about a century and the two countries seemed to have no direct state relations with each other.

¹⁴ David Chandler, The Cambodian History. (Phnom Penh: JRSC, 2005), translated in to Khmer by Center for Khmer Studies, p. 147

¹⁵ Mary Somers Heidhues, Southeast Asia: A Concise History. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), p. 106

¹⁶ David Chandler, The Cambodian History. (Phnom Penh: JRSC, 2005), translated in to Khmer by Center for Khmer Studies, p. 149

¹⁷ Chakrabartty, Vietnam, Kampuchea, Laos: Bound in Comradeship, Panoramic Study of Indochina from Ancient to Modern Times. (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1988), p. 143

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 634

Among the five territories, Annam was recognized by the French as the central component in the construction of French Indochina.¹⁹ There seemed to be many reasons behind this. One reason was that the French wanted to use the pre-colonial patterns of the Vietnamese movements towards the south by channeling this current towards the west in order to build up French Indochina.²⁰ On the other hand, the French saw the Vietnamese as an historical competitor with the Thai and saw that the Vietnamese were even able to colonize the region before French arrival. At the same time, Cambodia and Laos were recognized as weak and incapable of taking on the "Thai" threat.²¹ Therefore, the French could assure the future of Indochina by giving priority to the Vietnamese.

Moreover, the Vietnamese were given priority of employment opportunity in the modernization process because the French perceived them as tricky but clever and hard-working whilst the Khmers and Laotians were polite and honest but lazy.²² Thus, the French imported a lot of Vietnamese laborers from Tonkin into Cambodia and Laos to clear jungle and to work in rubber plantations. In low level administration positions, the opportunities of the Vietnamese were much higher than those of the Laotians and Cambodians.²³ After their French Masters, Cambodia and Lao thus had another master who was the Vietnamese and this caused deep hatred towards the Vietnamese in Cambodia.

Cambodian-Vietnamese Relationship in the Nationalist Movements

Under French rule, nationalism in Vietnam and Cambodia emerged partly as a result of political and economic exploitation but also as a result of western education imposed by

¹⁹ Christopher E. Gosha, Vietnam or Indochina?: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954. (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995), p. 19

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid, p.18

²² John F. Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p.551

²³ Christopher E. Gosha, Vietnam or Indochina?: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954. (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995), p.24-26

the French.²⁴ Moreover, events in other countries such as Japan's victory over Russia, Sun Yat-sen's revolution in China, and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia encouraged the growth of nationalist and communist groups in this region.²⁵

The Vietnamese were the most active in nationalist movements while anti-imperialist reaction was very slow to emerge in Cambodia and Laos. Under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam adopted communism as a tool for their nationalist movement.²⁶ Support was also sought from the international communist community such as Communist International (Comintern) to organize their movements.²⁷ In 1930, Ho fused three prominent communist groups into a single party and significantly named it the Indochina Communist Part (ICP), although they were few communists then in Cambodia and Laos. For Cambodia, the activities against French domination of a small nationalist group called the Khmer Issarak under the leadership of Son Ngoc Thanh were in its early phase, not related to Communism at all.²⁸ The Khmer Issarak, however, were divided into left wing and right wing groups and its left wing soon joined with the ICP, dominated by the Vietnamese.²⁹ The ICP lasted until 1951 when it was dissolved into three communist parties of the three countries in Indochina. The Khmer People's Revolution Party (KPRP) was founded in Cambodia but still under the control of the Vietnamese communist party.³⁰ There were many reasons behind these Vietnamese communist strategies. First, Vietnam wanted to please its ally Comintern after failing to incorporate many other existing communist groups in the country.³¹ It was also an experience of the communists to use the

²⁴ D.R. SarDesai, Southeast Asia: Past & Present, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p.189

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ William J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), p.7

²⁷ Melanie Beresford. Vietnam: Politics, Economics and Society. (London: Pinter Publishers, 1988), p.16

²⁸ Michael Vickery, Kampuchea: Politics, Economics and Society. (London: Pinter Publishers, 1986), p. 10

²⁹ Thu Houng and Nguyen Vo, Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict (North Carolina: Mcfarland, 1992), p.29

³⁰ Evan Gottesman, Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p.16

³¹ William J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), p.31

tactic of cooperating with other communist parties to fight against the imperialism. Advice from the Comintern was probably the reason for Vietnam to combine three communist parties in Indochina into one party to form a strong resistance against the French.

However, the recommendation from the Comintern would have no meaning if Vietnam gained no benefit from this cooperation. Vietnam might know already that in order to get independence, it was necessary to combine all the forces in the region. The French policy of 'divide and rule' was a good lesson. Vietnamese leaders sincerely believed that Vietnam's destiny could not be separated from that of Laos and Cambodia³². As the party's strategies assessment reflected "If the Vietnamese revolution succeeds but French imperialism is lurking in Laos and Cambodia, revolutionary power in Vietnam will be shaky"³³. Thus, after the creation of the Vietminh, Vietnam tried to step up activities in Lao and Cambodia toward the establishment of a league of independence for Indochina³⁴. This strategy aimed at seeking for the Vietnamese security and success. It was also mentioned that Vietnam always had a dream to make Indochina one single state under her own control.³⁵

Even though Laos and Cambodia were allies of the Vietnamese communist party and received support from it, they had never agreed with the project for a single state of Indochina. The national identities of Laos and Cambodia emerged as a result of the dominant role of the Vietnamese given by the French. The ethno-cultural difference of the three groups of people enabled Laos and Cambodia to negotiate with the French to accept that they also existed in Indochina.³⁶ Moreover, national consciousness became stronger after the arrival of Japanese troops during World War II, and the Japanese urged Cambodia

³² Phillippe Devillers, An Analysis of the Vietnamese Objectives in Indochina. In international conference on Indochina and Problems of Security and Stability in Southeast Asia, (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, 1980), p.4

³³ Thu Houng and Nguyen Vo, Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict (North Carolina: Mcfarland, 1992), p.27

³⁴ Ibid, p.29

³⁵ Christopher E. Gosha, Vietnam or Indochina?: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954. (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995), p. 73

³⁶ Ibid, p. 46, 58, 62

and Laos to declare their independence. Thus, the struggle for independence by the communist groups in Indochina was for the independence of the three states, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Independence of Cambodia and Vietnam and the boundary problems

After a long history of struggle of the communist party led by Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam gained her independence in 1945. However, in Cambodia, the communist party which was the ally of the Vietnamese did not receive the same honor in the struggle for independence. King Sihanouk, who suddenly declared his "Crusade for independence" was successful in demanding independence from France in 1953 and left the communist party unknown and weak.³⁷ However, the communist group still existed in Cambodia under the support of the Vietnamese. In 1954, 1040 Cambodians had been sent to take a military, political and technical training in North Vietnam.³⁸ The communist party became known again after Sihanouk was overthrown by Lon Nol and received support from this communist force.

After independence, border problems between the three former Indochinese states emerged. The French used the 'L'uti possidetis', the principle which vests in either of the belligerents at the end of a war all territory actually occupied and controlled by the Vietnamese or the Khmer, to define the boundary for these states.³⁹ The use of this principle caused dissatisfaction among these states who claimed they were losing their territory since they referred to the pre-colonial domain, history, and ethnicity.

³⁷ D.R. SarDesai, *Southeast Asia: Past & Present*, (Boulder: West view Press, 1994), p.187

³⁸ Pen Sovann, ជីវប្រវត្តិសង្ខេប និងបុព្វហេតុជាតិមាតុភូមិកម្ពុជា (Bibliography and the Causes of Serving the Nation), (Seattle: Khmer Vision Publishing Company , 2002), p.115

³⁹ Saren Chhak, ព្រំដែននៃប្រទេសកម្ពុជា ជាមួយបណ្តាប្រទេសនៃអតីតសហព័ន្ធលាវ-ចិន- ឡាវ-វៀតណាម (Cambodian Border with Other Former Indochina Federation, Lao-Vietnam (Cochin China- Anam)), Translated from French in to Khmer by Kim Yan, (Phnom Penh: Indratevi Publishing, 2004), p. 27

Defining Cambodia and Vietnam's international boundary was a very controversial issue, especially in the case of Cochinchina which was completely given to Vietnam after the French needed this territory to support Bao Dai in fighting with the independence movement in North Vietnam. Cambodia claimed that this territory belonged to her for a long time before the colonial arrival and even during the colonial period. The French accepted that it belonged to Cambodia and the border drawn between Cambodia and Chochinchina during the colonial period was a temporary one to facilitate tax collection.⁴⁰ Demand of Cochinchina was made by Cambodia many times during the Geneva Conference but it was not accomplished. Another controversial issue in terms of the border between Cambodia and Vietnam was the islands, namely Vai and Phu Quok islands, in the Gulf of Siam. Both countries claimed that these islands belonged to them.

The problem of defining the borders which emerged after independence has continued until today and caused many conflicts and confrontations between the people of the two countries.

3. The post-independence era (1954- 1975)

In 1954, the Geneva Accord temporarily split Vietnam into two parts, waiting for nationwide elections in 1956 to reunify the country.⁴¹ The conflict occurred after the United States made an alliance with South Vietnam and broke the accord, in the prediction that Vietnam would be under popular communist leadership after the election.⁴² The war between the two Vietnams occurred inside the country but it grew gradually after a US military solution had been imposed in Vietnam in the 1960s.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.92-93

⁴¹ Joseph R. Pouvatchy, "Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations." *Journal of Asian Survey*. (Vol. xxvi, No. 4), p. 441

⁴² Mary Somers Heidhues, *Southeast Asia: A Concise History*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), p. 142

⁴³ Robert Archer, *Vietnam: The Habit of War*. (London: CIIR, 1983), p.15

The Sihanouk years (1955-1970)

As the war in Vietnam escalated and countries in Southeast Asia were dragged into getting involved, Cambodia was able to preserve its independence as its head of state, Prince Sihanouk, tried to maintain neutrality in foreign policy. However, the Prince's stand tended substantially toward the communist alliance rather than the U.S. From the mid-1960s, Sihanouk secretly allowed North Vietnamese troops to enter Cambodia and use the areas along the eastern border as sanctuaries for fighting with the U.S.⁴⁴ Moreover, the Vietnamese also used Cambodian ports to bring in supplies and equipment from North Vietnam and China and transported them to underground storage facilities in eastern Cambodia.⁴⁵ Some Cambodian high ranking officials and royal family members were also charged with trafficking food and other supplies for the North Vietnamese troops in the country.⁴⁶

The spread of the Vietnam War into Cambodian territory resulted in instability in the country. The Cambodian people living along the border complained about their suffering brought about by the North Vietnamese troops who established boundaries outside of which they could not travel, arrested people and seized their belongings to use in transporting military supplies.⁴⁷ As a result, a lot of demonstrations against the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia took place during the late 1960s in the provinces near the Vietnamese border as well as in Phnom Penh. Two Vietnamese embassies were burnt down by the demonstrators.

⁴⁴ Marie Alexandrine Martin, *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), translated into English by Mark W. McLeod, p.93

⁴⁵ D.R. SarDesai, *Southeast Asia: Past & Present*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p.124

⁴⁶ Ros Chantrabot, *La République Khmère*. Translated from French to Khmer by Ti Kheayu, p. 8

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5

The Republican Period (1970- 1975)

In March 1970, Sihanouk was ousted from power by a pro-American and anti-Vietnamese group led by General Lon Nol⁴⁸. Between 1970 and 1975, Cambodia under the presidency of General Lon Nol supported the United States to fight with North Vietnam. During this period, a strong anti-Vietnamese sentiment had been provoked, especially at the beginning of the 1970s.

Before the overthrow of Sihanouk, the anti-Sihanouk and anti-North Vietnamese demonstrations had been held together. The student protesters had been requisitioned to protest against the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia and to bring down the Prince who backed the North Vietnamese from power at the same time. During the Lon Nol period, anti-Vietnamese propaganda encouraged by the government spread through many means, such newspapers and novels, for the benefit of Lon Nol's political legitimacy.⁴⁹ All of these provoked feelings of hatred on the part of the Khmer toward the Vietnamese. Somehow there seemed to be a confused use of violence toward the Vietnamese people who had been living in Cambodia. Many Vietnamese civilians including children, pregnant women and elderly people were cruelly killed by Cambodian soldiers only because they were Vietnamese. Vietnamese fishermen had been tied and thrown into the rivers. The Lon Nol military also arrested North Vietnamese soldiers and hanged them upside down until they died.⁵⁰ To sum up, a lot of Vietnamese were the victims of brutal acts during the Lon Nol regime.

As for Sihanouk, after losing his power, he immediately set up a government-in-exile in China and made an alliance with the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) or the Khmer Rouge. It must be mentioned here that the Khmer Rouge was developed from the

⁴⁸ Nayan Chanda, Brother Enemy: the War after the War, a History of Indochina since the Fall of Saigon, (Singapore: Macmillan, 1986), p.64

⁴⁹ Klairung Amratisha, The Cambodian Novel: A study of its emergence and development, A Phd. dissertation, (London: SOAS, 1998), p. 185-186

⁵⁰ Norodom Sihanouk, Prisonnier des Khmers Rouges. Translate from French to Khmer by Ti Kheayu. p. 420- 421

KPRP which owed its origin to the Vietnamese communists and had continually been supported by the Vietnamese. In the 1950s, the old KPRP were joined by Paris student communists led by Pol Pot and Ieng Sary. After the total failure of the KPRP in the general election in 1955 and 1958, a new party, the Workers' Party of Kampuchea (WPK) was formed in 1960. The WPK worked closely with North Vietnam and was renamed in 1966 to the CPK. The Khmer Rouge became strong after Sihanouk was overthrown and he needed their forces to fight with Lon Nol's troops.

Apart from the Khmer Rouge, the Prince also got support from North Vietnam in training the Khmer resistance forces called Khmer Rumdo.⁵¹ The Khmer Rumdo and the Khmer Rouge operated on their own for the fall of Lon Nol regime. The success of the Khmer Rouge came in 1975, the same year North Vietnam won the war with the US and reunited the whole of Vietnam.

4. The Communist era (1975- 1993)

After winning the war with U.S and Lon Nol, the relationship between the communist parties of Cambodia and Vietnam became a fragile alliance. As the Khmer Rouge had its origin in the Vietnamese communist and got support from the Vietnamese, the relationship between the two communists was at first quite good. Internally, the Cambodian communist members worked well with each other even though there was the mixture between the old KPRP members and the new Paris communist students. However, problems started in the late 1960s when the Khmer rouge leader, Pol Pot, felt disappointed with the Vietnamese who put the benefit of the Cambodian communists after the Vietnamese during the war with the U.S. The Vietnamese communist repeatedly rejected much military aid to its Khmer Rouge ally and let them be casually attacked by the Cambodian government.⁵² Vietnam and China argued that Cambodian Communists should

⁵¹ Nayan Chanda, Brother enemy: the War after the War, a History of Indochina since the Fall of Saigon, (Singapore: Macmillan, 1986), p.66

⁵² Steve Heder, Cambodian Communism and the Vietnamese Model: Imitation and Independence, 1930-1975, (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2004), p.140-141

not make any armed struggle or revolution before their victory over the U.S, which meant before the success of the North Vietnam to take over the south. Thus, they did not provide support, especially weapons, to the Cambodian communist. This disappointment and the aim to separate Cambodian communist from Vietnam grew up, but it was quietly kept in Pol Pot's mind.

Later, his attitude towards the Vietnamese became obvious when he refused to set up a mixed military command and accused without evidence that Vietnam attempted to kill him by poisoning.⁵³ Pol Pot totally lost his trust in Vietnam after Vietnam signed a separate treaty with the United States in 1973 which enabled the US to fully direct fury at Cambodia.⁵⁴ At that time, internal fragility in the Cambodian communist was also indicated. It was the problem between the old KPRP members and the Paris students. The main difference between them was the former would like to keep the policy of alliance and cooperation with Vietnam with an attempt to make change the regime's leadership and modify its direction, but the latter would like to separate and to be enemies.⁵⁵

When the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975, the conflict between the two communist groups became clear. Vietnamese announced its special relationship with Laos in 1976. This was interpreted by Pol Pot as part of Vietnam's plan to encircle Cambodia and to reconstitute and control what had once been French Indochina.⁵⁶ More importantly, it was the border problems between Cambodia and Vietnam that pushed the situation to a very bad point. Vietnam claimed that Cambodia attacked the Vietnamese-held island of Phu Quoc and took more than 500 Vietnamese prisoners.⁵⁷ Cambodia also accused the Vietnamese of attacking the Kampuchea-held Vai Island and said that they took around 600

⁵³Nayan Chanda, Brother Enemy: the War after the War, a History of Indochina since the Fall of Saigon, (Singapore: Macmillan, 1986), p.67

⁵⁴ Ibid, P.68

⁵⁵ Micheal Vickery, Kampuchea: Politics, Economics and Society, (London: Pinter Publisher, 1986), p.33-34

⁵⁶ Nayan Chanda, Brother Enemy: the War after the War, a History of Indochina since the Fall of Saigon, (Singapore: Macmillan, 1986), p.85

⁵⁷Thu Houng and Nguyen Vo, Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict, (North Carolina: McFarland, 1992), p.78

Cambodian military prisoners.⁵⁸ All these problems were brought to negotiations many times, but these never reached a good outcome.⁵⁹ Nayan Chanda pointed out that:

“The Pol Pot regime had also come to the conclusion that a negotiated settlement of the territorial dispute with Vietnam was not feasible. Only by a show of force along the border and public assertion of its claims of territorial waters could Cambodia maintain its independence and territorial integrity.”⁶⁰

It was clear that Pol Pot’s attitude toward his Vietnamese allies concerned the traditional fear and suspicions that Vietnam wanted to swallow Cambodian territory.

The broken relationship between the Cambodian and Vietnamese communist parties was also the result of conflicts between the two main communist leaders, China and the Soviet Union. While Pol Pot gained strong support from China, Vietnam was backed by the Soviet Union. Thus, with enough confidence, Pol Pot wanted in 1975 to cut the Cambodian communist party loose from the perception that the Cambodian party owed its origins to the Vietnamese or that the only community of interest it shared was with the Vietnamese party.⁶¹ The Khmer Rouge leaders believed and publicly reiterated many times that, in 1975, the Kampuchean revolutionary army alone had “defeated the American imperialists.”⁶²

Therefore, the Khmer Rouge started to execute the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia.⁶³ According to Nayan Chanda, who conducted an interview with a survivor, this massacre seemed to be a racist elimination policy directed at the Vietnamese nationals in Cambodia.

⁶⁴ Pro-Vietnamese Khmer opponents were also arrested and executed. This led to fear of

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.79

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.80

⁶⁰ Nayan, Chanda, Brother Enemy: the war after the war. a history of Indochina since the fall of Saigon. (Singapore: Macmillan, 1986), p.97

⁶¹ Ibid, p82

⁶² Stephen J. Morris J, Why Vietnam invaded Cambodia? Political culture and the causes of the war. (Stanford: Stanford university press, 1999), p.98

⁶³ Ibid, p.86

⁶⁴ Ibid

the part of the rest, so they ran to seek support from Vietnam to fight back. Moreover, Pol Pot had prepared a plan to make war with Vietnam.⁶⁵ The victory over the American imperialists made the Khmer Rouge think that it was possible for them to defeat their current enemy. As Chanda stated, Pol Pot started to attack along the border and destroyed Vietnamese villages and massacred civilians in surprise raids. The successes achieved by his men and the lack of Vietnamese response boosted Pol Pot's confidence.⁶⁶ Battles between Cambodian and Vietnamese troops took place several times along the border after negotiations were unsuccessful.

In 1977, Cambodia launched military activities in form of raids and artillery fire not only in disputed areas but also in Vietnamese territory.⁶⁷ There was no public announcement about the purpose of the Khmer Rouge in launching a war against Vietnam but the Khmer Rouge authority claimed that the attacks were to forestall the plan to include Cambodia into the Indochinese Federation.⁶⁸ The Khmer Rouge low-ranking cadre also mentioned a plan to conquer Kampuchea Krom (in South Vietnam) and Saigon which used to be Cambodian territories in the past.⁶⁹

In late 1977, Vietnamese forces began attacking Cambodia. The final year of the Khmer Rouge was marked by continuous warfare. In April 1978, Vietnamese troops massed along the Cambodian border. In early December of the same year, the formation of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KNUFNS) was announced. This was a group of people in exile who shared an antipathy to the Pol Pot regime. The important members of the KNUFNS consisted of former Khmer Rouge soldiers such as Hun Sen, Heng Samrin, Chea Sim and the others including other old KPRP members who ran to or already lived in Vietnam. The KNUFNS had as its main objective the destruction of the

⁶⁵ Stephen J. Morris J, Why Vietnam invaded Cambodia? Political Culture and the Causes of the War. (Stanford: Stanford university press, 1999), p.98

⁶⁶ Nayan Chanda, Brother Enemy: the War after the War, a History of Indochina since the Fall of Saigon. (Singapore: Macmillan, 1986), p.97

⁶⁷ Michael Vickery, Cambodia 1975-1982. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1984), p.208

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.204

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.203

Khmer Rouge and the creation of broad national unity.⁷⁰ To reach its goal, the Front sought support from Vietnam. On 22 December 1979, a large Vietnamese army accompanied by the KNUFNS swept into Cambodia with the intent of overthrowing the Khmer Rouge. They were able to occupy Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979.

Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations After 1979

After chasing the Khmer Rouge to the Thai border, the Vietnamese immediately announced the Khmer Rouge genocidal regime to the world and declared itself and the KNUFNS as the rescuers of the Cambodian people. The Vietnamese authorities swiftly established a new government and the country was renamed the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). The PRK government candidates were selected from KNUFNS members such as Pen Sovan, Hun Sen, Heng Samrin, Chea Sim and many others. The Vietnamese also maintained tens of thousands of its troops in Cambodia throughout the 1980s. The PRK trace their origin to the KPRP which mean their relationship with the Vietnam still remained the same.

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia shocked the international community. Most western countries, the ASEAN and China regarded this invasion as unprovoked aggression and interference in the internal affairs of Cambodia. Even though they had learned about the Khmer Rouge genocidal regime, the international community still supported the Khmer Rouge instead of the PRK whom they regarded as a Vietnamese puppet. Political and economic sanctions were imposed on Vietnam and the PRK and Vietnam was forced to withdraw all their military troops from Cambodian territory as soon as possible. However, the PRK could still survive by support from the Soviet Union.

On the other side of the country, the Khmer Rouge, who had nearly died from the attacks of the Vietnamese and PRK troops and the lack of every type of supplies, was still recognized as the legal government of Cambodia by the international community,

⁷⁰Ibid

especially the United Nations.⁷¹ Moreover, China and ASEAN initiated in the early 1980s the idea to combine all the resistance factions into a group called the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). These resistance factions included the Khmer Rouge, Le Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifiques et Coopératif (FUNCINPEC) formed by Prince Sihanouk in 1981, and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) founded by Son Sann in 1979.⁷² The coalition government had Prince Sihanouk as its President and was recognized by the international community as the legal government of Cambodia.

The political situation in Cambodia in the 1980s was therefore divided into two factions. This confrontation was not only about the conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam but also about the effect of the cold war between the Soviet bloc and the U.S.-China block and UN arena. While Vietnam and the PRK were backed by the former, the CGDK received strong support from the latter. The fighting between these two factions continued until the end of the 1980s.

In 1989, Vietnam finally agreed to withdraw all its troops from Cambodia. This probably resulted from the fall of the communist regime in the Soviet Union, the strong backing of Vietnam and the PRK. On the other hand, it was obviously the initiative to end the cold war by settling the Cambodian problem. All factions reached the Paris Peace agreement in 1991 to end the conflict in Cambodia and agreed to set up national elections which could bring Cambodia to be a democratic state in 1993.

There have been many interpretations of the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia. As for Vietnam and the pro-Vietnamese PRK, the invasion was considered as the liberation of Cambodia from a genocidal regime, and the occupation was the protection

⁷¹ Norodom Sihanouk, Prisonnier des Khmers Rouges, Translated from French into Khmer by Ti Kheayu, p. 404

⁷² Ibid, p. 439-440

of Cambodia from the return of the Khmer Rouge. Moreover, the Vietnamese claimed that they were invited to join the KNUFNS to overthrow the Khmer Rouge.⁷³

Nevertheless, some scholars pointed out that the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia in 1980s showed the political ambition of Vietnam in following its French Indochina project.⁷⁴ The occupation was another Vietnamization process imposed on Cambodia as the Vietnamese government had put Vietnamese advisors in all ministries in order to control the Cambodian government officials in the decision making and approval process.⁷⁵ Cambodian administrative work was under firm Vietnamese control. More importantly, Vietnam exploited Cambodia during their occupation by moving border markers into Cambodian territory, taking food stuffs which were part of humanitarian aid for Cambodian people to Vietnam, and legalizing the settlement of Vietnamese civilians in Cambodia.⁷⁶ Education was geared to recognize the boundary of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos which seemed to be an Indochinese state. Cambodian students were taught to hate the Khmer Rouge and to respect Vietnam. Some school names was changed to Vietnamese names. Cambodian people suffered greatly during the Vietnamese occupation from various policies which brought the people to die in order to protect the country from the Khmer Rouge. Hence all the activities seemed to be a Vietnamization project in Cambodia and the PRK regime was really a Vietnamese puppet.

Some scholars, on the other hand, interpreted this act as being part of internal and external problems in Vietnam itself. The Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in order to protect its own security from internal and external threats. As Philippe Devillers stated:

⁷³ The Kampuchea Problem in Thai Perspective. (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1983) p.9

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.1

⁷⁵ Marie Alexandrine Martin, Cambodia: A Shattered Society. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 217-218

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p218-232

“To understand a country’s actions, motivations and intentions, it is important to know how the country feels about its environment, about its security and the threats it faces. Vietnam undoubtedly feels insecure, both inside and outside. Inside, because in the South a part of the population remains hostile to the communist regime and could again support anti- Hanoi action coming from the outside. Outside, because foreign countries are not yet reconciled with the emergence of the new Vietnamese State and would like to limit its independence and freedom of action.”⁷⁷

To him, the Vietnamese felt threatened by the outside threat that could increase the internal threat and this could seriously harm the security of Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge launched attacks along its border. More importantly, the alliance between the Khmer Rouge and China who were both its neighbors sandwiched Vietnam among enemies. All of these factors led Vietnam to invade Cambodia in order to escape from any dangerous threat. The maintenance of its troops in Cambodia was to assure that Vietnamese security would not be violated again by the return of the Khmer Rouge.

Likewise, the PRK was not really a puppet government of Vietnam. According to Clayton, Cambodian officials, besides the ones who worked for power and wealth, had never thought they were Vietnamese puppets.

“The Cambodians followed the Vietnamese willingly out of a sense of ideological fraternity and a commitment to Soviet international socialism. Yet other Cambodians accepted Vietnamese leadership pragmatically. Feeling responsible for the future of their country, these Cambodians were dedicated to re-establishing government structures and programs, but they were hampered by human resource limitations stemming from the

⁷⁷ Phillippe Devillers, *An Analysis of the Vietnamese Objectives in Indochina*. In international conference on Indochina and Problems of Security and Stability in Southeast Asia, (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, 1980), p.3

Khmer Rouge genocide, by their own experience, by the United Nations embargo and by the possibility of Vietnamese coercion."⁷⁸

Hence, the situation in Cambodia in the 1980s has been viewed differently. Vietnam and PRK, on the one hand, were perceived as the invader and a puppet, the invasion being the ambitious expansion of the Vietnamese to gain control over the whole of Indochina. On the other hand, Vietnam and PRK had closely cooperated to keep the security of their individual countries and to construct Cambodia with national wills and duty.

The history of the relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam has been very complicated and controversial. Mostly it reflected problems and conflicts between them from before the colonial arrival to the recent time. Some conflicts were internal while other conflicts were influenced by outsiders and made the situation become very bad, especially during the cold war period. The conflicts mostly left great sufferings to the people of the two countries. Although there seem to be many different interpretations of history, the historical relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam could somehow be seen in the way of the continuity of the Vietnamese ambition toward Cambodia. This led to fearful and suspicious attitudes towards the Vietnamese. Both the Cambodian leaders in the past, such as the Khmer Rouge leaders, and the people shared the fear of losing Cambodia to Vietnam. This view from history is very important for the Cambodian people. If they study history clearly enough, they can be able to understand and avoid the future confrontations. If not, they can take history as a reason for revenge and this can cause more problems in the future.

⁷⁸ Thomas Clayton, "Cambodians and the Occupation Responses to and Perceptions of the Vietnamese Occupation" *South East Asian Research*, Vol.7, No. 3, p.362