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From Revolutionary Culture to Original Culture and Back: “On New Democracy” and the Kampucheanization of Marxism-Leninism, 1940–1965

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ABSTRACT

In Mao Zedong’s 1940 essay “On New Democracy,” he states that the Chinese Communists fought to build a new China with new politics, a new economy, and, most crucially, a *new culture*. Decades later, Saloth Sar (Pol Pot, nom de guerre) read French translations of Mao’s works in Paris, and drew from the Khmer past and Buddhism to call for democratic reform of a Khmer cultural type. While he had read and appreciated Mao Zedong Thought before, it was not until he visited Beijing in 1965–1966 that Sar awoke fully to Mao’s ideas, returning to Cambodia a Maoist convert. In Democratic Kampuchea (DK, 1975–1979), Sar, like Mao, sought to create a new culture, but this time through the lens of Maoism (exported Mao Zedong Thought). Party documents and speeches show how he sought to create a “Kampucheanized” Marxism-Leninism along the lines of Mao’s “Sinified” Marxism and with a “clean” revolutionary culture. This article argues that by tracking Pol Pot’s approaches to rebranding Cambodia, from his earliest political writing to his experiences abroad to the grotesque human experiment of DK, we can uncover the underlying problems of “Kampucheanizing” ideas from Maoist China. As the article shows, despite some similarities, Mao’s application of Marxism to the Chinese case—as he outlined in “One New Democracy”—and his vision for a new revolutionary culture were vastly different from Pol Pot’s efforts in Kampuchea.

KEYWORDS: intellectual history, Mao Zedong, Maoism, Pol Pot, Democratic Kampuchea, Cambodia, communism

The ideas that Mao Zedong developed in his early writings as a Communist, and in his Yan'an Canon (1937–1945) in particular, reveal his adaptation of Marxism-Leninism to suit China's particular conditions—or “peculiarities,” as he described them in “On New Democracy” (Takeuchi 1972, 148). First published in the little-known *Zhōngguó wénhuà* 中國文化 (Chinese culture) journal in its obscure first issue in January 1940, “On New Democracy” contains Mao's greatest theoretical achievements: an outlining of China's new revolutionary culture and the “Sinification of Marxism.” Mao had discussed the latter previously, yet his proposal in “On New Democracy,” whereby “national distinctiveness became embodied in the particular model of class struggle pioneered by the Chinese,” positioned him as the principal theorist of Chinese Communism.

“Sinification” represents an example of rebranding, of applying exogenous ideas to concrete realities, which other radicals emulated elsewhere. By synthesizing Marxist-Leninist features with Chinese realities without abandoning the original theory's universality, Mao produced a new ideology to guide his revolutionary movement (Dirlik 2005, 97–100; Knight 2007, 199). Mao Zedong Thought (Máo Zédōng Sīxiǎng 毛澤東思想) was born of this effort, and by the 1960s, Mao sought to export this new ideology outside China to inspire others, including the future head of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), Saloth Sar (nom de guerre, Pol Pot) (1925–1998). Sar had read a 1951 translation of “On New Democracy” in *Éditions Sociales* while he was studying in Paris (1949–1952) and participating in reading groups organized by the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) (Chandler 1999, 26, 33; Kiernan 1985a, 120; Sher 2003, 78, 121; Short 2005, 64–65). His exposure to Mao's thought led him to “Kampucheanize” foreign concepts in his first political writing, and again years later in a confidential 1977 CPK Party Center document that reveals the extent to which Mao's rebranding of Marxism-Leninism influenced his engagement with Maoism.

This article uncovers how Mao, and later Pol Pot, envisioned rebranding their respective nations, cultures, and thoughts in ways that spoke to concrete realities. The article begins with Mao's “On New Democracy” and then shifts to Sar's 1952 “Monarchy or Democracy?,” which criticized Cambodian head of state Norodom Sihanouk, leader of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (Popular Socialist Community), on Buddhist-moralist grounds in advocating for democratic reform. While not a Maoist text, its effort to draw from

Khmer Buddhism—itself a form of localized Buddhism from India (Wolters 1999, 56)—and Khmer and French history represents the first attempt by a CPK founder to rebrand Cambodia. Next, we explore Sar’s encounter with Maoism on a 1965–1966 visit to Beijing. Finally, we examine Sar’s vision for and implementation of a “Kampucheanized” Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, in which a “clean” revolutionary culture was paramount. Three key features, or specters, of Sar’s “Kampucheanization” are noteworthy: (1) Mao’s “On New Democracy” and its message; (2) Sar’s personal witness of Maoism in action in Communist China; and (3) Sar’s domestication of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism in Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Importantly, we examine the meaning under the conditions of “Kampucheanizing” an idea from China, which emerged as both a model country and counterexample to the Soviet-influenced Vietnamese Communist model (though Sar also drew from Vietnamese organizational tactics, as historian of Cambodia Stephen Heder [2004] makes clear). Ideas from Communist China made sense to Pol Pot to fill what Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre calls a “void,” as a lapse of extant theory and practice prompted him to recognize that extant theory/practice failed “by its own standard of achievement” (MacIntyre 1989, 110). Pol Pot’s implementation of his Maoist vision, however, entailed surpassing all ideas and programs—including those of China, Vietnam, and North Korea—which he believed had not gone far enough in achieving pure socialism. Also, as part of Kampucheanization, Pol Pot emphasized landlordism, as if the Cambodian agrarian situation were commensurable with that of China. But in adapting Maoist doctrine to Cambodian conditions, he ignored that the situation in Cambodia’s rural sector lacked the same degrees of destitution and concentration of rice lands in the hands of big landlords that had characterized the Chinese situation (Willmott 1981, 215–216; Frieson 1988, 424).

Other articles in this special issue of *Cross-Currents* offer fruitful ways of thinking about this appropriation and reinvention process. David Ownby examines redemptive societies’ rebranding of the “White Lotus sectarian tradition” of the Ming and Qing dynasties for contemporary audiences, which is not unlike Sar’s effort to ground a Cambodian democracy in Buddhist tradition. Tatiana Linkhoeva explores Japanese Communists’ strategy to rebrand themselves with China and the Chinese Revolution as guideposts for liberation in Asia, which mirrors Sar’s shift of attention toward

Communist China after his 1965–1966 visit and meetings with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials. Craig Smith, meanwhile, analyzes Chinese intellectuals who revisited Sun Yat-sen’s Three Principles of the People 三民主義 (*sān mínzhǔyì*) to promote a nationalism of Third World nations 弱小民族 (*ruòxiǎo mínzú*) as part of a vision of liberating all peoples from imperialism. This is not unlike Pol Pot’s domestication of Maoism (“Kampucheanization”), as he sought to destroy imperialism in his country through radical social transformation that he viewed as part of a greater Third World trend. In all of these cases, we find intellectuals responding to crises by taking a radical turn toward practical guides to action, and shared identification as nations and peoples who endured similar effects of global capitalist imperialism (what we now call globalization). For Sar, Maoism arose as such a guide and unifying alternative modernity (Liu 2015); it resonated with him as he sought methods to rectify post-independence Cambodia’s crises of underdevelopment, capitalist exploitation, and political corruption. Such a position, of course, challenges arguments that the CPK’s implementation of its millenarian program reflects Stalinist dialectical materialism, however misunderstood, and Vietnamese Communist Party organizational and tactical approaches, respectively (Kiernan 1985b, 235; Heder 2004, 3). While this article does not deny these influences on Sar during his time in France as a French Communist Party (PCF) member and, later, as a Communist in the Hanoi-directed Worker’s Party of Kampuchea (WPK), here this article foregrounds the influence of Maoism in action, which Sar witnessed in Beijing in 1965–1966. Indeed, as political scientist Kate Frieson has noted, the “ideological influence of Mao and the Gang of Four became manifest in Cambodia after 1975” (Frieson 1988, 420). And, as the article’s final section shows, Sar (as Pol Pot) sought to change culture and society in toto under his watch, with elements that he drew from Maoism guiding the way.

ON NEW DEMOCRACY AND NEW CULTURE

Mao’s early encounters with Marxism-Leninism amid the maelstrom of New Culture and May Fourth iconoclasm (1915–1921), during which he and other Chinese intellectuals called for drastic reform of Chinese society, represents his initial reception of ideas from outside China. The conditions of his reception of Marxism in the late 1910s, namely during his early years as a student,

tell us of his exposure to a plenitude of intellectual resources, both domestic and foreign, with Western philosophical works joining his early exposure to the Confucian classics (Scalapino 1982). This immersion, which was reflective of China's own confrontation with its changing situation, led Mao to find value in both Chinese philosophy *and* foreign thought. His conversion to Marxism in 1920 presented him with a lens through which to interpret a host of social problems that permeated China, specifically in terms of "class" and "class conflict" (Dirlik 1989, 113–114). Mao's classification of China's classes to determine which among them could serve as leading forces in China's revolution, and his lauding of the revolutionary peasantry as a motive force, were achievements in his application of Marxism-Leninism to Chinese conditions. His time as a revolutionary, too, was a revelation, as he reported in 1927 in Hunan on the untapped potential of China's largest yet socioeconomically poorest demographic for effecting change in the failed republic. This arrow in his intellectual quiver thus led Mao to develop a Marxism that "fit" these concrete realities, most famously in "On New Democracy," in which he argued that democracy would occur in China under conditions that differed from those in the "Two Worlds" of the West and the Soviet Union (Takeuchi 1972, 166–167; Schram 2004, 340–341).

Mao went on to explain how revolutionary movements could form in colonial and semicolonial countries and identified what role such countries, under the stewardship of the "joint revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of revolutionary classes," could play in the global anti-imperialist movement (Takeuchi 1972, 159, 166–167). He also explored the complex relationship between economics, politics, and culture, which for him represented the three levels of society, rather than the existing paradigm of base-superstructure (Takeuchi 1972, 148; Schram 2004, 331; Knight 2007, 166–168). His classificatory approach to the world and society thus constituted his problematization of existing transcendental political economy approaches to addressing issues in particular milieus. Mao also contextualized China's historical environment and culture as "colonial, semicolonial, and semifeudal," thereby situating China's struggle against imperialism within the broader worldwide movement against imperial subjugation that later gained headway in Third World movements (Schram 2004, 332; Takeuchi 1972, 151). A "new nation" and "new culture" were prerequisites for national liberation, and Mao's placement of China within a long history of feudal/semifeudal,

colonial/semicolonial, and, later, Western and Japanese victimization throws light on this fact. His solution was democratic centralism, inclusionary participation, and a development of China's economy "along the path of the 'regulation of capital' and the 'equalization of landownership'" (Takeuchi 1972, 167; Schram 2004, 344). Only then could China transcend its current historical situation into something at once "new" and "democratic."

Indeed, the problem of landlordism in China was an important point of Mao's essay, and it served as a locus of comparison to Cambodia, despite the fact that landlordism was nowhere near as widespread there as in China. Mao explains his solution to landlordism in a new democratic republic in the following excerpt from "On New Democracy":

The [New Democratic] republic will take certain necessary steps to confiscate the land of the big landlords and distribute it to those peasants having little or no land, carry out Mr. Sun Yat-sen's slogan of "land to the tiller," abolish feudal relations in the rural areas, and turn the land over to the private ownership of the peasants without establishing a socialist agriculture. A rich peasant economy will be allowed in the rural areas. Such is the policy of "equalization of landownership." . . . China's economy must develop along the path of the "regulation of capital" and the "equalization of landownership," and must never be "privately owned by the few"; we must never permit the few capitalists and landlords to "dominate the livelihood of the people"; we must never establish a capitalist society of the European-American type or allow the old semifeudal society to survive. (Takeuchi 1972, 167; Schram 2004, 341–342)

Evidently, Mao's diagnosis was not to make a sudden, singular step into socialist agriculture of the type that the CPK implemented in DK. Instead, Mao's approach permitted—at least at this stage—wealthy peasant landownership in the rural sector as part of a greater design on equalization of capital and landownership, though property was not to concentrate in the hands of the few (Takeuchi 1972, 167; Schram 2004 342). Later, however, Pol Pot emphasized landlordism as if the Cambodian agrarian situation resembled that of China, despite the fact that the "rural merchant was the major exploiter of the Khmer peasantry" through usury and inequitable pricing systems that prevented peasants from maximizing agricultural surpluses (Willmott 1981, 220). As we will see, Pol Pot's analysis of the classes in

Cambodia's rural sector reflected his "Kampucheanization": applying Mao's class categories to the Cambodian situation.

One theory is that future DK prime minister Khieu Samphan's (1931–) 1959 economics dissertation, which he wrote at l'École Supérieure de Commerce de Montpellier (defended to the Faculty of Law at the University of Paris), influenced Pol Pot's class analysis and provided the basis for his economic policy. As historian of Cambodia William Willmott contends, the "parallel between [Samphan's] analysis and that of Mao Zedong is obvious" in their shared use of three main categories—smallholders, middle peasants, and rich peasants/landlords—though China's largest grouping was poor peasants (70 percent) while Cambodia's was middle peasants (60 percent) (Willmott 1981, 214–215; Frieson 1988, 422).

Although Mao's 1940 essay did not receive widespread acceptance at first, it represents the point of departure for Mao Thought as an ideology with global applicability—"Maoism." Here lies the achievement of Mao's practical application of Marxism to China into a coherent program, and one that was both nationalist *and* Marxist-Leninist. The Chinese revolution, he urged, comprises a democratic and a socialist revolution, with the former belonging to a new category—*xinminzhǔ* 新民主主義 ("New Democracy")—rather than an old one (Takeuchi 1972, 202–203; Schram 2004, 368–369). But what allowed this work to carve such a legacy was that Mao's discussion of China's plight at the hands of European and Japanese imperialism "made sense of China's history and, more important, gave Chinese readers a sense of purpose, hope, and meaning," all of which emerged during the intense study of Mao's Yan'an texts during Rectification (1941–1944) (Cheek 2010, 10). Essential components that inspired such feelings of optimism included a belief that all classes must play a role (inclusionary vs. exclusionary politics) in China's future (though Mao called for the exclusion of the comprador bourgeoisie because it depended on the international bourgeoisie and imperialism for survival); democratic centralism irrespective of sex, creed, property, or education; and a hard stance against "single step socialism" (Takeuchi 1972, 151–166; Schram 2004, 333–343). Such positions characterized Mao's thinking at this time and led him to develop "Sinification," which "represent[ed] a local or vernacular version of a universal Marxism [that] was very much a product of the globalization of Marxism outside Europe" (Dirlik 2005, 78–79). "On New Democracy" was ultimately, as

historian of China Arif Dirlik describes it, the “classic formulation of the premises of Chinese Marxism” (Dirlik 2005, 79).

Mao had proposed “Sinifying” Marxism in 1938 and elaborated on this process in “On New Democracy.” “Sinification” consisted of three steps: (1) taking the theory of Marxism-Leninism; (2) putting it into practice in the Chinese Revolution; and (3) using that revolutionary experience to create a new theory (Knight 2007, 197–216). But Mao sought to maintain the central features of Marxism through the synthesis of universal and particular laws; he believed that there was “only concrete Marxism,” which he defined as Marxism that had “taken a national form and . . . applied to the concrete struggle in the concrete conditions prevailing in China” (Schram 1969, 172). By making a new ideology (Sinified Marxism, the theoretical dimension) that spoke at once in a political language of traditional society and in a rational-bureaucratic language of modernizing states, “Sinification” signaled a shift, or evolutionary step, in Mao Zedong Thought, pursuing a “third way” for the Chinese revolution that was neither Soviet socialist nor Euro-American capitalist (Liu 2015, 15). It was then a useful tool to use against Wang Ming, who was the future chairman’s principal rival within the CCP by 1938, and again during the 1941–1944 Yan’an Rectification Campaign to convert CCP recruits into dedicated Maoists through mastery of Mao’s Yan’an Canon.

Mao’s establishment of a new culture through New Democracy, and his rendering of Marxism-Leninism into an ideology that was “relevant to China as a nation with a problematic identity in a new historical situation” and in the “language of the masses” (Dirlik 2005, 96), stand as theoretical triumphs in rebranding. “On New Democracy” signaled Mao’s rethinking and reworking of Chinese Marxism after his experiences during the ongoing struggle against the Guomindang and Japanese forces. It also “represented a new stage in historical progress appropriate to all societies placed similarly to China in the world” (Dirlik 2005, 81). Decades later, Cambodian Communists sought to do the same, with Pol Pot echoing Mao almost verbatim: “In light of [our] experiences, the [CPK Central Committee] worked out a draft proposal for the party’s political line, based upon Marxism-Leninism . . . applying Marxism-Leninism to the concrete realities of Kampuchea and Kampuchean society” (Pol Pot 1977a, 21–22). But long before Pol Pot uttered Mao’s words in his call to apply Marxism-Leninism to Cambodia, he had

taken a similar approach to democracy in the fledgling years of independent Cambodia. We now turn to Pol Pot's first writing.

SALOTH SAR REBRANDS KHMER POLITICAL CULTURE, 1952

By the time of his 1949 arrival in Paris to begin his postsecondary studies, Saloth Sar was hardly the millenarian Communist he would become later in his career. His 1953 departure from France also meant that he was long gone by the time his future CPK co-founders had finished their Maoist-influenced doctoral dissertations on Cambodia's socioeconomic problems (Kiernan 1985a, 122; Sher 2003, 64–88). But before Sar left, he wrote his first political essay, “Monarchy or Democracy?,” which the Association des Etudiants Khmers (AEK, Khmer Students Association) included in *Khemara Nisit* (Khmer student) in mid-August 1952. Sar wrote the article by hand—no Khmer typewriter existed yet—under the pseudonym Khmaer Da'em (Original Khmer), a name that betrays a “racial-historical preoccupation” that traces its origins to French constructs of the Cambodian past (Kiernan 1985a, 121; Chandler 1997). It also reflects the notion of “Original Culture,” which Sar endorsed and tried to implement in DK, and which originated in his mentor Keng Vannsak's (1925–2008) thesis on the importance of restoring Khmer cultural purity (Kiernan 2007, 28, 543–544). Though less of an influence on Sar's reading of Mao's text, Keng's stress on a pure Khmerness that was corrupted by foreign contaminants of Hinduism and Buddhism became a central feature of Sar's Kampucheanization (Kiernan 2007, 29, 543–544).

This section focuses on three components, taking note of the ways in which Sar attempted to rebrand Cambodia and Khmer political culture: (1) the relation between Sar's immersion in French classics and status as a student in Paris; (2) his use of Buddhism to critique Cambodian politics; and (3) his synthesis of foreign and endogenous ideas to propose novel solutions to Cambodian political ills. Although Sar's article hardly compares to the intellectual insight of Mao's writings, it shares similar pre-Marxist ideological leanings, which for Sar comprised Buddhism and democracy. There is therefore a parallel role in the reception of traveling theory in Sar's “Monarchy or Democracy?” and Mao's “Great Union of the Popular Masses” ([1919] 1955), for instance, with hints of Mao's later attempt in “On New Democracy” to

make the foreign familiar. As Mao had urged collective action against the dominant aristocracy and landowning elite for a more prosperous nation, so too did Sar, who criticized the ruling Prince Sihanouk for his corruption and self-interested reforms. Sar's piece mirrors "On New Democracy," meanwhile, in its attempt to produce a new idea by rendering a foreign concept (democracy) congruent with a local one (Buddhism), which for him contained inherent democratic elements in the life of the Buddha and in exemplars such as Cambodian prince Sisowath Youthevong (1913–1947).

First, "the foreign intellectual legacy" behind the Cambodian revolution was French, while politics in Phnom Penh pushed to the foreground alternatives to the authoritarian nature of Prince Sihanouk's governance (Short 2005, 47). Sar and his colleagues had studied in French *collèges* in Cambodia, and French was the prism through which they interpreted their world. They developed anti-monarchist viewpoints in Paris, especially within the AEK, whose members' "political views probably mingled hero worship for Son Ngoc Thanh [a Cambodian republican politician] with vague hopes for Cambodia's independence" (Chandler 1999, 25). Accordingly, Sar's article betrays "Thanhist-Democrat" influences, "attack[ing] royalty vigorously and not[ing] that 'royal edicts will not affect the solidarity of students, which is growing daily'" (Chandler 1993, 64; Kiernan 1985a, 121–122). Sar, in fact, commented in his 1952 piece that Sihanouk's coup laid bare that Sihanouk's government was no constitutional monarchy, but instead an absolute monarchy (Sar 1952, 41, 42). Democracy, he believed, was the growing trend; it was "as precious as a diamond and cannot be compared to any other form of government" (Sar 1952, 43–44). Monarchy, by contrast, was a *doctrine injuste*, as "infected as a putrid wound," and a system that "humanity must abolish . . . an absolute doctrine that exists only because of nepotism" (Sar 1952, 39, 41).

Second, Sar criticized Cambodian kings, who deceive the people through "demagoguery" and charismatic means, and "lower the people's standards of living to that of an animal; the people are kept as soldiers or a herd of slaves, made to work night and day to feed the king and his *seraglio* of courtesans" (Sar 1952, 41; Thion and Kiernan 1981, 357–358). Sihanouk, in particular, received scathing criticism for dancing to the French colonialist tune instead of choosing the path of Cambodian independence, and for "erod[ing] Buddhism's respected position in the country by introducing ranks into the *sangha* [Buddhist community], namely the high rank of Sam-

dech” (Sar 1952, 40). Since Sihanouk befriended imperialists instead of protecting Khmer people, religion, and knowledge, the only moral solution was to espouse a democratic system with strong Buddhist overtones (Sar 1952, 41–42). For example, Sar referred to monarchy as “the enemy of religion,” since it sought to exploit the people, with only monks “truly understanding the real nature of monarchy and finding means to explain to the people that they should not obey it” (Sar 1952, 41–42). Accordingly, Sar drew from Buddhism and, as we see, the anti-monarchist current underpinning the French revolution to call for political reform of Sihanouk’s corrupt governance.

Third, Sar’s viewpoints on Buddhism and democracy formed the crux of “Monarchy or Democracy?,” placing the democratic movement alongside the world’s great revolutions. The Robespierre- and Danton-led French Revolution (both names appear in French in the original issue, though Sar wrote “DATON”) was Sar’s main historical reference, which reveals that his French education in the classics, at this time, was not yet *passé* in his thinking (Sar 1952, 43). He praised the French revolutionaries for “dissolv[ing] the monarchy and execut[ing] King Louis XVI,” though he did not take a radical stand against Sihanouk (Sar 1952, 43). He also credited the Russian and Chinese revolutions for “abolishing monarchy completely” (Sar 1952, 43–44). In place of monarchy, democracy was the only worthy political system, since “the peoples of all countries are adopting it . . . [it] is like an unstoppable river down the mountain slopes” (Sar 1952, 43–44). Cambodia, he contended, ought to embrace democracy on moral grounds, with Buddha and former Cambodian prince Youthevong, who “abandon[ed] the monarchists to inculcate democracy for the Khmer people” as historical precedents (Sar 1952, 41–42; Thion 1981, 357–358). Intriguingly, Sar positioned himself as the mouthpiece of an authentically Khmer perspective, with Buddhism as the lens through which to view his country’s moral and political decay and past history as the material to situate democracy in Khmer political culture (Short 2005, 80). He highlighted moralistic grounds for his case for democratic reform, noting that the “Great Master Buddha had abandoned the monarchy to become a friend of the people,” and that a democratic regime was the only way to “restore Buddhist moralism because our great leader Buddha was the first to have taught [democracy]” (Sar 1952, 41–42). As Sar recounted: “Buddha was very well informed; he soon discovered that his father [*Suddhōdana*] was enriching himself unjustly, leaving the people

languishing in ignorance, sickness, famine, and homelessness, and without schools or hospitals. Buddha decided to abandon the monarchy to become a friend of man and the people by teaching men to love each other” (Sar 1952, 41; Thion 1981, 358). Sar concluded with a proposal for independence and democratic reform, expressing that Sihanouk’s corrupt politics and reliance on France to legitimize his position would force Cambodia to remain subservient (Sar 1952, 45–46; Thion 1981, 360).

Importantly, Sar’s first political writing is a hallmark example of the Paris-trained Cambodian intellectuals’ position at the time—anti-monarchist, deeply nationalist, and holding Buddhism as inseparable from national identity. Sar, like his cohort, eventually took anti-monarchist fervor to new heights upon realizing the limitations of privileged settings in Paris. This piece reveals that Sar admired anti-monarchist revolutions, including the Marxist-inspired Russian Revolution of 1917, and held Buddhism as the foundation for any democratic reform in Cambodia. The essay also presents us with an intriguing sign of things to come, with Sar’s sign-off under the pseudonym Original Khmer hinting at the racial historical element that would temper his Kampucheanization two decades later. After joining the PCF, he and his peers “distanced themselves from Buddhism, and were aware of the obstacle that remained if they wanted to initiate major changes. They saw already that the organization of collective work on a unified basis was contingent on the political education of the peasants” (Sher 2003, 87). Sar returned to Phnom Penh to join the Communist movement while working simultaneously as a schoolteacher. Decades later, he put theory into practice by “Kampucheanizing” ideas that he had encountered in Paris, specifically Maoism, as leader of the CPK. Thus, the article turns now to Pol Pot’s “awakening” to Maoism in Beijing, for it was his “personal witness” of Maoism in practice that threw into sharp relief for him what the Cambodian revolutionaries ought to be doing in their movement for state power.

POL POT VISITS RED CHINA, 1965–1966

China’s hosting of foreign representatives and revolutionaries during the Seventeen Years Period (1949–1965) had domestic and international designs, with the CCP promoting its hosting duties to emphasize China’s revolutionary victory to a global audience (Lovell 2015, 135; Brady 2003, 105, 127).

One such visit, Saloth Sar's trip to Beijing in December 1965 as a Vietnamese ally, awakened him to a foreign idea (Maoism) that he had toyed with yet not espoused. Sar's experiences there, when Communist China was on the brink of the cataclysmic Cultural Revolution, shaped how he confronted the dilemmas that his fledgling Communist movement faced. His visit initiated an infatuation with the "faith Maoism" that had risen meteorically within the CCP and later characterized the widespread zealotry of the Cultural Revolution (Cheek 1997, 12, 219–220). Such visits by foreign representatives were, however, not always a first resort; rather, in some instances China was a second or third option, as in the case of Sar. Indeed, Sar's Cambodia program was dismissed by General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) Le Duan in Hanoi before his Beijing sojourn (Kiernan 1985a, 220; Chandler 1999, 70–71; Engelbert and Goscha 1995, v–vi). As the Vietnamese Worker's Party (VWP, predecessor to the Vietnamese Communist Party) prioritized its own struggle against U.S. imperialism over Cambodian Communist interests, China became a beacon of light guiding Sar's fledgling movement out of the darkness (Chandler 1999, 66–70; Kiernan 1985a, 126–127).

Sar arrived in Beijing and stayed at the Asian, African, and Latin America Training Center (Yà fēi lā péixùn zhōngxīn 亞非拉培訓中心) just outside of the city (Short 2005, 159, 484n159). The precise dates of his 1965–1966 visit are unknown (Pol Pot 1984; Zhang 1996, 154). In accordance with the CCP's adherence to the Five Peaceful Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and its existing treaty with Cambodia, the official Chinese line was that Sar ought to support Sihanouk, an important strategic ally to the People's Republic of China (PRC). The CCP thus did not publicize Sar's visit, and the Chinese officials who met with him (CCP general secretary Deng Xiaoping, head of state Liu Shaoqi, and alternate member of the CCP Politburo Kang Sheng) could not endorse his movement outright (Chandler 1999, 73–75). Regardless of the secrecy that surrounded the trip, the CCP viewed it as within the bounds of its existing treaty with Sihanouk so long as any encouragement that they voiced for Sar was *sub rosa* (Kiernan 1985a, 210). The Cambodian movement's inability to reciprocate any aid to China meant that any Chinese offer of material support would not violate its existing deal—the Cambodian Communists still responded to Hanoi and were not yet in a position to offer fair exchange due to limited base areas and small membership.

Sar's visit coincided with events in the PRC that left a lasting impression on him, for he experienced to some degree the rising tide of Maoist revival that came with the Socialist Education Movement (SEM) (Kiernan 1996, 126), which curbed cadre corruption in rural areas and broadened previous campaigns to include peasants (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 9, 40). Then there was Lin Biao, the champion of faith Maoist zealotry, who had released his seminal pamphlet "Long Live the Victory of People's War!" (Lin 1965) only months before Sar's arrival. While Vietnam was preoccupied with the war against American imperialism, Lin's lauding of the universal applicability of Mao's military strategy cast light on a tried and true method to defeat more powerful adversaries. His emphasis on indigenous self-sustaining revolutions "struck a sympathetic chord with Sar," as did Mao's emphases on permanent revolution, the role of subjective forces in waging struggle, and the inclusion of peasants in the revolutionary vanguard under proletarian directorship (Chandler 1999, 73). Lin also applied people's war macrocosmically to the entire world, wherein the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America would "encircle the cities"—the First and Second Worlds—much like China had done by 1949 (Cheek 2010, 290–291). This application served to recognize smaller, underdeveloped countries like Cambodia as valuable actors in a global struggle against superpower domination. Cambodia thus had incredible potential if its movement could just get off the ground.

CCP members Deng Xiaoping, Mayor and First Secretary of the Beijing Committee of the CCP Peng Zhen, and Liu Shaoqi welcomed Sar warmly. Sar likely spoke to his hosts through an interpreter since he did not speak Chinese. Mao apparently read a translated version of Sar's program and lauded it overall, calling Sar's class analysis and assessment of Cambodian realities correct by and large (Kiernan 1981, 178). Head of CCP security and intelligence Kang Sheng even touted Sar as the "true voice of the Cambodian revolution," implying that the Chinese Foreign Ministry supported "a reactionary prince" by keeping its ties with Sihanouk intact (Byron and Pack 1992, 356–357). A Vietnamese source stated that Chinese officials supported his program: "The Cambodian Party . . . must deal with American imperialism immediately as well as when they widen the war in Indochina . . . And if one desires to oppose the plots of American imperialists, including their plot to escalate [the war], then one must take hold of the peasantry" (Engelbert and Goscha 1995, 79–80n2). Sar (as Pol Pot) recalled this vote of confidence

in a 1977 interview: “Our Chinese friends whole-heartedly supported our political line, for they were then battling revisionism at a time when classes were struggling with each other at the international level . . . It was only when we went abroad that we realized that our movement was quite correct and that our political line was also fundamentally correct” (Engelbert 1977, 23). CCP approval of Sar’s program reinvigorated his sense of revolutionary worth, and he pinned the Cambodian Communists’ star to Maoist China instead of VWP’s course, returning to Cambodia in 1966 with “a few pieces of French translations of *Selected Works of Mao*” with the intent to plot his movement against Sihanouk’s government (Sher 2003, 121; Engelbert 1977, 23; Short 2005, 160).

In September 1966, Sar’s Maoist ideology began to take shape in the form of some important changes that he put into effect. He officially changed the name of the Worker’s Party of Kampuchea to the Chinese-influenced “Communist Party of Kampuchea” (CPK), a name that remained until the party’s dissolution in 1981 (Kiernan 1985a, 190). Sar also established two new journals that reflected his adherence to Maoism: (1) “Red Flag,” which was a Cambodian equivalent of the Great Leap Forward-era Chinese journal 紅旗 (Red Flag, *Hóngqí*); and (2) “Red Light,” which borrowed its name from 赤光 (*Chiguāng*), a Chinese student newspaper that emerged in France in the 1920s on which Deng Xiaoping had once worked as a roneographer (Kiernan 1985a, 219–224; Wang 1982, 698). Perhaps the best indicator of his shift is a letter that he penned (likely translated from French into Chinese by an interpreter, as Sihanouk had used in meetings with Chairman Mao) and sent to Beijing in 1967:

Comrades, we are extremely pleased to report that in terms of ideological outlook, as well as our revolutionary line, we are preparing the implementation of a people’s war which has been moved towards an unstoppable point. . . . [A]lthough there are obstacles ahead, we will still continue to put into effect the revolutionary work according to the line of the people’s war which Chairman Mao Zedong has pointed out in terms of its independence, sovereignty, and self-reliance. (Engelbert and Goscha 1995, 80–81)

In this letter, Sar made several Maoist precepts central to the Cambodian revolution, many of which he had read about while in Paris (namely the

French-language edition of Mao's "On New Democracy") (Martin 1989, 105). His experiences in Beijing showed him firsthand the rewards of such theories if followed. As he recalled in a 1984 *Cai Ximei* interview, "When I read Chairman Mao's books, I felt that they were easy to understand" (Pol Pot 1984; Short 2005, 447n70). Sar seldom shied away from boasting of Democratic Kampuchea's Chinese friends, who had given the CPK a significant boost in its struggle against imperialism. He valued Mao Zedong Thought above all else, claiming that it "is the most precious aid. . . . Comrade President Mao never ceased to support our efforts [and] we express with deep emotion our respect for his and the CCP's heroic and unswerving commitment to the international Communist movement" (Pol Pot 1977b, 8). The suppression of high-ranking left-minded government ministers in Cambodia by 1967 notwithstanding, the CPK, now equipped with Maoism as its principal weapon, grew to become the preeminent revolutionary party in Cambodia (Mertha 2014, 22).

In sum, Sar's Beijing visit was an intellectual awakening, and his experiences there convinced him that Maoism could reverse the Cambodian Communist movement's stagnation. Although he sought help from China initially as a reaction to Vietnamese paternalism, the visit to Beijing convinced him that China was *the* leading force of a worldwide anti-imperialist movement. Cambodia became an epicenter for China's Third World outreach, as the hosting of foreign revolutionaries, regardless of ideological affiliation, lent revolutionary credence to their just struggles against imperialism. In a 1977 issue of *Rénmín ribào* 人民日報 (People's daily), the resonating force of Sar's visit and conversion to Maoism was loud and clear:

For us, the parliamentary road is not feasible. We have studied the experience of world revolution, especially the works of Comrade Mao Zedong and the experience of the Chinese revolution of the period that has an important impact for us. After assessing the specific experience of Kampuchea and studying a number of instances of world revolution, and particularly under the guidance of the works of Comrade Mao Zedong, we have found an appropriate line with China's specific conditions and social situation for the realities of Kampuchea. (*Rénmín ribào* 1977)

Here, Sar noted that he had read Mao's works (Mao 1951) before his turn to Communism. Though antedating his 1965–1966 visit, Pol Pot's interest

in China and Maoism, which began in Paris, came together as he realized the stagnation of the Vietnamese-led Cambodian movement. Although he wanted revolution against Sihanouk, he had to obey his VWP superiors, who wanted the prince's favor so that they could access the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which ran through Khmer lands. Thus, Sar's Beijing trip was the vision, or awakening, that made Mao's ideas (as he read in Paris) important to him. The difference between him and Mao, however, was that whereas Sar (as Pol Pot) targeted Buddhism and Islam once in power, Mao's writings do not give any indication of extreme anti-religious measures. Evidently, the 1965–1966 visit to the PRC, where Mao and his thought were, in effect, the new state religion in the prelude to the Cultural Revolution, paired with Sar's existing view of original Khmerness. Even Sar fell prey to the Mao cult, viewing the chairman until the demise of DK in 1979 as the brilliant beacon of world revolution (Pol Pot 1977a, 1–18).

POL POT AND THE REBRANDING OF ORIGINAL CULTURE INTO REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL CULTURE, 1975–1979

This section examines Sar's (now Pol Pot) take on rebranding culture and Marxism-Leninism in Communist Cambodia through a 1977 speech, which revealed for the first time that the CPK ruled DK with Pol Pot as its leader. A secret, unpublished Party Center document, "The Party's Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977–1980" (Party Center [1976] 1988) provides a useful documentary source on CPK designs for developing a revolutionary culture. Our goal is to capture Pol Pot's rebranding of culture to replace the "olds" that it, like the CCP before it, viewed as a hindrance to revolutionary progress. We find in it the confluence of Pol Pot's Maoist influence and his effort to combine it with his earlier nativist leanings in a rebranded "Kampucheanized" thought, wherein a "new" and "clean" revolutionary culture that was absent of foreign contaminants—despite the significant influence of foreign ideas—was the foundation. As Pol Pot, echoing Mao, once said, "Our Party's aim is to learn through practice of serving the movement to defend and build the country. *Theory goes with actual practice*, study with the actual serving of the production movement. . . . We learn through experimentation and work at the same time, and through summing up our experiences" (Pol Pot 1977a, 72–73). In so doing, the CPK would realize its "clean" revolution-

ary culture in which those in DK “must be clean, particularly in the various leadership level ministries and offices. . . . [P]olitical and ideological cleanliness is a prerogative” (*Revolutionary Flag* 1977–1978, 11).

At the core of “cleanliness” was the elimination of “old roots,” which the CPK sought to remove from society entirely. The goal was to “abolish, uproot, and disperse the cultural, literary, and artistic remnants of the imperialists, colonialists, and all of the other oppressor classes” that Pol Pot and his loyalists (Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan, and Vorn Vet, among others) viewed as “olds” in DK that could derail the CPK’s quest for pure socialism (Party Center [1976] 1988, 113). The party also sought to “strengthen and expand the building of revolutionary culture, literature, and art of the worker-peasant class in accordance with the party’s proletarian standpoint,” an homage to Mao’s emphasis on new culture (Party Center [1976] 1988, 113). How did the party nurture revolutionary culture, political awareness, and consciousness among the workers and peasants? By educating and nurturing the people in “politics and consciousness for them to grasp and submerge themselves in the task of building socialism to a concrete plan, for them to see the possibility of a bright future in terms of their living standards and those of the country” (Party Center [1976] 1988, 114). The “worker-peasant masses” would also hear only revolutionary songs and poems that “reflect good models in the period of political/armed struggle and in the revolutionary war for national and people’s liberation, in the period of national-democratic revolution, and . . . describe good models in the period of socialist revolution and the building of socialism” (Party Center [1976] 1988, 113). Cooperatives therefore became “collectivist units” that were “rid of corrupt and depraved culture and morals, a new healthy society that consolidates and develops constantly and reigns equality, harmony, and sufficient living conditions” (Pol Pot 1977a, 64). The CPK’s goal, ultimately, was to immerse DK’s populace in a revolutionary culture that held the party and nation as the pinnacles of revolution and socialist edification as the goal that it was working to achieve through mass collective labor.

Pol Pot’s design for the total restructuring of rural life, which French Catholic missionary to Cambodia and genocide documentarian François Ponchaud coined as “Year Zero” (Ponchaud 1978)—outdoing the French Revolution’s *An 1* of the *calendrier révolutionnaire*, an early influence on Pol Pot—was to strive for pure socialism with Khmer characteristics. Pol

Pot drew from Mao's Socialist Education Movement 社會主義教育運動 (SEM, 1963–1966) and Cultural Revolution in seeking to penetrate all levels of society. Mao had sought to crush corruption and “capitalist tendencies” in rural communes with the SEM rectification movement, and it extended to the CCP ranks. It soon became a full-fledged campaign to “Pò Sìjiù Lì Sìxī” 破四舊立四新 (“Destroy the Four Olds and Cultivate the Four News”)—old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas—with the CCP seeking to instate a new culture (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 93, 113–114). The CPK's quest to “abolish, uproot, and disperse the cultural, literary, and artistic remnants of the imperialists, colonialists, and all of the other oppressor classes” mirrored Mao's campaign, though *all* pre-revolutionary institutions became targets for erasure (Party Center [1976] 1988, 113). “To overturn the basket,” as a Thai magazine commentary quoted by Ponchaud phrased it, the CPK chose “only the fruit that suited them perfectly” (Ponchaud 1978, 70). “Olds” included authority figures, cultural symbols, the “17 April Group” (city dwellers, intellectuals, and professionals) whom the party deemed unfit for reform, and others (notably the Vietnamese), and were, in the CPK's view, “*nul profit*” and “*nulle perte*” (no profit, no loss) (Locard 2004, 11; Hinton 2005, 154).

One crucial problem with Kampucheanizing ideas such as Maoism from China, however, was that the rural situation in China that Mao assessed in his writings was vastly different from the rural problem in Cambodia of Pol Pot's time. Some scholars have provided detailed analyses of the Cambodian countryside (Delvert 1961). Others note that Cambodian peasants simply did not endure nearly as much hardship from landlordism as did peasants in China or Vietnam (Frieson 1988, 424; Willmott 1981, 222). Pol Pot, they argue, misapplied and misdiagnosed the rural question, using Maoist class categories to describe Cambodia's rural strata and identifying landlords as the principal exploitative force (Willmott 1981; Frieson 1988). As both Willmott and Khieu Samphan, whom Willmott credits as a major influence on Pol Pot, point out:

Mao's research led him to categorize the peasants of Hunan (and by inference the peasantry of all China) into three classes: poor, middle, and rich peasants. Seventy per cent [sic] of the peasants were poor, according to Mao, [and] forced to supplement their farming income by working for

wages from rich peasants and others. Twenty per cent fell into the category of middle peasants—those with access to sufficient land to subsist by farming. The remaining ten per cent were “rich peasants and landlords.” . . . Clearly, the situation in Kampuchea was different [from that in China]. (Willmott 1981, 215)

In Cambodia, *propriétaires moyens* [middle landowners] (2 to 7 hectares) are the most numerous, own the majority of cultivable land . . . [and] own their own agricultural implements as well as their own work animals. But as working capital, more often than not, they possess nothing. They obtain it from village usurers, who are also large owners or merchants. They are unable to escape the grasp of these people. Many middle landowners’ property is no more than the appearance of ownership. Usurious interest rates of 200–300 per cent per annum result, essentially, in dispossessing them of the products of their labor, as if they were working on the usurers’ land. Belief in this “property ownership” makes them cling to their lands in the most difficult situations, holding on for “better days.” Mortgage lenders, landlords, and traders/merchants do not feel the need to expropriate land for reasons of insolvency. (Khieu Samphan 1959, 48)

Usury, Khieu Samphan elaborates, locked Cambodia’s rural sector in a semi-feudal mode of production, wherein middle landowner families grew rice to pay off property charges and debt, with surpluses addressing direct subsistence needs and not for profit (Khieu Samphan 1959, 8). This differed significantly from China, where wage labor was the principal means of exploitation in the rural sector. Thus, Pol Pot and his CPK loyalists ultimately fit Mao’s class categories and assessment of China’s peasant question to the Procrustean bed of the Cambodian situation.

As for “Kampucheanizing” Marxism-Leninism, Pol Pot aimed to push Mao’s ideas to new and grotesque extremes. Whereas Mao displaced urban youths as part of the *Shàngshān xiàxiāng yùndòng* 上山下鄉運動 (Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement) and had dissidents *Láodòng gǎizào/láodòng gǎizàohe* 勞動改造/劳动改造 (Reform through Labor), the CPK evacuated *every* urban center in Cambodia. Its goal was to confront the problem of identifying potential “enemies” who were hidden from party view in the swollen cities. Transforming Cambodian society in accordance with the party’s Maoist vision was central to the evacuation’s greater design. The CPK aggrandized itself as an omnipresent and omniscient entity that “revamp[ed] Communist ideology in terms of

local idioms that ideally would be more meaningful to the population” (Hinton 2005, 29). While no CPK text discusses the “Kampucheanization” of Maoism using such terms, party slogans that French scholar of Cambodia Henri Locard studied extensively (Locard 2004) and propaganda (possibly authored by Pol Pot) reflect an attempt to wed local with foreign. CPK ideology was significantly “less appealing to most wealthy, educated urbanites,” whom the party labeled uniformly as “oppressors” and whose comparatively comfortable living and disregard for the struggles of the Cambodian peasant made their compassion for rural suffering virtually nonexistent in the party leaders’ view (Hinton 2005, 76). As for the CPK positing itself as omnipresent, slogans that describe the organization as having “the many eyes of a pineapple” are telling, and enforced a culture of “hypervigilance” and strict obedience to party-designated behavioral norms (Locard 2004 114). Pol Pot also drew from Mao’s “blank page” metaphor, referring to young cadres as “soft clay” that was ready to be molded into whatever the party apparatus required, or as “newborns” that were bereft of filth and want (Locard 2004, 143–144). *Year Zero*, as it turns out, was for DK’s young and for the *old people*, whose minds were not stained by the corruption, consumerism, and comfortable dalliances of pre-revolutionary Cambodia. To “Kampucheanize” Marxism-Leninism was thus to devote all manpower to the edification of the party’s chiliarstic vision of pure socialism.

As for new culture, initially the CPK preferred, at least rhetorically, reforming *new people* through labor to become “comrade ox” and think only of working and following party instructions without hesitation (Hinton 2005, 222). CPK propagandists declared individualism a disease, while undertaking strenuous efforts to emphasize the collective. The CPK attacked the “chronic diseases of Khmer bureaucrats,” notably “officiousness, authoritarianism, and affecting the lifestyle different from that of the peasant” (Carney 1977, 11). As one CPK cadre recalled,

All personnel of the “Angkar” [Organization; also, Revolutionary Organization] including military and ordinary peasants, engage in weekly criticism and self-criticism sessions aimed to root out “individualistic, personal” character traits. . . . This combination of criticism/self-criticism . . . aims to build proper socialists and prepares the cadre to endure future hardships. . . . Cadre-building concentrated on forcing “Angkar” officials to “study from the people to become like the people.” (Ith 1973, 48)

The model of behavior and action that the CPK leaders admired, though Pol Pot had never experienced an inkling of it, was the way of the *old people* (or “base people”), the rural workers who had lived in the CPK liberated zones during the movement. They were the target audience for many of the party’s millenarian promises for upward social mobility, improved living standards, and national redemption, yet as the CPK grew increasingly suspicious of internal “enemies,” virtually everyone became expendable and, indeed, suffered mightily throughout the DK era. *New people* often received considerably less food than base people, while CPK cadres were more willing to execute them for misdoings and often reminded them that the old society, which had afforded them a carefree and easy life, was long gone. This was Democratic Kampuchea, and no longer would the sufferings of the rural poor at the hands of consumerism and the nation’s capitalist exploitation go unchecked.

In education, Pol Pot tried to implement a program that a Party Center document described as “half study, half work for material production,” which omitted examinations and certificates” and enforced collective learning in the “concrete movement of the socialist revolution and the building of socialism in the specific bases, especially the cooperatives, factories, and military units” (Party Center [1976] 1988, 113–114). The party pledged that only people with “clean backgrounds,” which meant party-approved class origins, could serve as instructors of the CPK’s messianic message and revolutionary goals of independence mastery, pure socialism, and national sovereignty (Party Center [1976] 1988, 117–118; Pol Pot 1977a, 72–73). Instruction in DK entailed organizing “listening sessions” wherein cadres and workers would listen to state-controlled Radio Phnom Penh broadcasts via “loud speakers for all important places and mobile work brigades,” and would watch “[f]ilms of the revolutionary movement’s present and past, especially the present” (Party Center [1976] 1988, 114). The issue, however, was that the traditional educators of the country—Buddhist monks—were “olds” in DK and, thus, of no further use to the CPK in realizing its vision.

Ironically, many of the CPK’s policies are identical to and possibly informed by Buddhist practices, and the party had once politicized monks (Harris 2013, 43–44, 63). Pol Pot even acknowledged that monks were “the prominent people from the feudal aristocracy, the comprador capitalist class or the landlord class, who are willing to struggle to some extent against the

enemy. . . . Samdech supreme Patriarch Choun Nath of the Mohanikay Buddhist Order and the Samdech Supreme Patriarch of the Thumayuth Buddhist Order are prominent people whom we strove to rally” (Pol Pot 1977a, 31). Yet “Kampucheanized” Marxism-Leninism, though partly influenced by Buddhism, immediately entailed total cultural erasure in 1975 when the CPK abolished Buddhism along with Islam. Soldiers ransacked and razed Buddhist temples—estimates state that more than one-third of Cambodia’s 3,300 *wats* were destroyed—defiled Buddha statues, and burned sacred Buddhist relics (Banchoff 2008, 131). Cadres also pushed monks away from their usual study of classical scriptures and practices of meditation and toward “productive” labor, defrocking and murdering thousands of monks between 1975 and 1979 (Banchoff 2008, 131; Kiernan 1996, xii). Cadres also murdered monks who refused to disrobe and relocate to the fields, and all head ecclesiastics were dead within the first few years of party rule. “At one point, CPK propagandists boasted that ‘90 to 95 percent’ of monks were dead, Cambodia’s monasteries were now ‘largely abandoned,’ and the ‘foundation pillars of Buddhism . . . have disintegrated . . . [and] will dissolve further’” (Chanthou 1991, 236). By the CPK’s 1979 overthrow, 63 percent of the country’s Buddhist community had died, and 90 percent of Cambodia’s Buddhist literary history had vanished (Harris 2005, 179).

Ultimately, the CPK left nothing in place of the now-eliminated Khmer cultural nexus. While Mao’s CCP had used the Cultural Revolution to “sell” proletarian culture to the masses, Pol Pot never followed through on a cult of personality or his greater designs for a revolutionary culture. By 1978, Pol Pot was leaning toward a personality cult, with “concrete evidence for a cult of personality [in the form of] oil portraits of Pol Pot found at S-21 in early 1979” and “molds for concrete busts of Pol Pot” (Chandler 1999, 149). The brutal regime’s overthrow at the hands of invading Vietnamese forces meant that no such plans would ever be realized by the CPK or its followers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mao’s “On New Democracy” reflects the genius of Mao’s adaptation, wherein we see his efforts to address the various endemic contradictions in Chinese society and his emphasis on the importance of practice over abstraction. Practice, Mao contended, allowed one to take a theory and use it actively,

and then to take that experience and use it to inform a new theory that was congruent with the norms, values, and realities that practical application brought into sharp focus. This was the essence of his “Sinification,” which completed Marxism-Leninism not just as an ideology, but as an ideological system with a built-in plan for socialist transition—and invested it with his own personal charisma. If Sinification represented Mao’s creativity in adapting an outside idea to contemporary norms, a triumph in his career as a Marxist theorist, then the Yan’an Rectification Campaigns that followed elevated the notion of Mao as the exemplar and, later, paterfamilias, of a party that needed a counterpunch to Jiang Jieshi’s own 1943 overtures. Through exegetical bonding in Yan’an (1941–1944), Mao’s greatest essays and pronouncements became religious scripture, in a sense, as green recruits transformed into revolutionaries who were imbued with an invigorated sense of revolutionary will and purpose. His message also made headway into progressive circles outside China, where intellectuals such as Saloth Sar read translations of his texts. The spirit of Mao’s wedding the foreign with the particular underwrote Sar’s own approach in his 1952 essay, and pushed him to look to China as a wellspring of revolutionary potential.

By 1965, Mao’s works had instilled in Sar/Pol Pot a sense of purpose, but the hardened revolutionary had yet to develop the “vision” that would make those texts all-important for him. China’s outreach to revolutionaries to visit Beijing provided such an opportunity, with Sar/Pol Pot visiting and receiving encouragement from major CCP figures, including Mao. Such visits had the desired effect of inspiring Pol Pot to espouse Maoism as a guiding ideology for his Cambodian movement and solidifying the PRC as an important strategic ally. After waging his struggle in the Cambodian countryside for nearly a decade, the CPK took Phnom Penh and installed a new regime. Mao’s writings clearly tempered Pol Pot’s forays into reforming Cambodian culture, society, and ideology, but the result was the erasure of the Khmer cultural nexus and designs to replace it with a “clean” revolutionary culture that was equal parts nebulous and incendiary. To “Kampucheanize” Marxism-Leninism, too, lacked the concrete synthesis of local and foreign ideas, though Pol Pot and CPK propagandists used rhetorical homages to great and destructive effect. The “fit” in Mao’s case ultimately did not make the transition in toto to the Cambodian case, though, in the end, it does reflect similar processes, phases, and *problématiques* that are worthy of fur-

ther exploration in uncovering the intellectual origins—and mania—of the Cambodian Maoist vision.

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