

“Overturning the Basket”: Nostalgia, Maoism, and the Roots of the Communist Party of Kampuchea’s Ideology

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Abstract

This paper distinguishes between Mao Zedong’s nationalism, which was preoccupied with the future, and the Communist Party of Kampuchea’s (CPK) past-oriented nostalgia. It shows through textual comparison that Maoism served only as a rhetorical – rather than practical – influence on the doctoral dissertations of Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan, who became leading figures in the CPK. An analysis of the scholarly definition of “nationalism” demonstrates that nostalgia plays a far more significant role in nationalist ideologies than scholars have recognized. By applying Roxanne Panchasi’s concept of the “culture of anticipation” and Ben Kiernan’s theory of the “cult of antiquity” to the foundational national texts written by Chinese leader Mao Zedong and the Khmer intellectuals, respectively, the central role played by nostalgia in their ideological formations becomes vividly apparent. The paper concludes that the Khmer intellectuals inverted the core precepts of Maoism, pursuing instead an *imaginaire* of an undisturbed, agrarian, and economically self-sufficient country dependent exclusively on peasant cultivation of the Cambodian countryside.

“Born of tears, raised on hunger possessing only poverty/
Waited on by suffering, through till death, destiny begins
again/ A life as a slave of the leisure class, because of the
royalist system/ And the selfish class that bloodily exploits the
subject people who love their country.”—Keng Vannsak,
1952¹

In 1977, Cambodian leader Pol Pot declared in his speech entitled *Long Live the 17th Anniversary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea* that a “line

¹ Keng Vannsak, “Untitled,” *Kmae Nisut* [Khmer Student], No. 14 (August 1952).

copied from others will not work. We must have a line coming from a position of independence and initiative, of deciding our own destiny.”² Only two years later, following their takeover of Cambodia in 1979, the new pro-Soviet Vietnamese occupiers declared that the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) was a Maoist Party “plus muscle,” and many Khmers believed that the Chinese were to blame for the genocide that followed.³ More recently, analyses of the CPK’s ideology have tended to cluster around three major lines of interpretation. The first, supported by Cold War-era historians Karl Jackson and Kenneth Quinn and recent scholars Stephen Morris and Henri Locard, repeats the “anti-China” rhetoric of the former Heng Samrin regime⁴ (1979-1989) by arguing that the CPK was Maoist and/or “hyper-Maoist.”⁵ The second, argued by recent scholars Ben Kiernan and David Chandler, suggests that while the CPK initially borrowed from Mao’s ideas, its desire for national-revivalism and its impulse to pre-empt an annexation by Vietnam (by invading Southern Vietnam instead) trumped any class-based

² Pol Pot, *Long Live the 17th Anniversary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea: Speech by Pol Pot, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Kampuchean Communist Party, 29 September 1977* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1977), 12.

³ Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 288-296, 347, 424, 429, 431-433. The pro-Soviet Vietnamese occupied Cambodia, set up the Heng Samrin regime, and blamed “Chinese lackeys” for using the CPK as a puppet regime. See Democratic People’s Republic of Kampuchea, *The Chinese Ruler’s Crimes Against Kampuchea* (Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Department of Press and Information, April 1984); Than Tin, “Notes of Discussion with Than Tin, Deputy Editor of Nhan Dan, Former Editor of Quan Doi Nhan Dan, War Correspondent, Colonel in the Vietnamese People’s Army, Two Talks” (Phnom Penh, Cambodia: 1 June 1983), 28; Kathleen Gough, “Interviews in Kampuchea,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 14, No. 4 (1982): 60, in Kathleen Gough, “Roots of the Pol Pot Regime in Kampuchea,” *Contemporary Marxism*, No. 12/13, Southeast Asia (Spring 1986): 15.

⁴ See, for instance, Democratic People’s Republic of Kampuchea, *The Chinese Ruler’s Crimes Against Kampuchea* (Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Department of Press and Information, April 1984).

⁵ Haing S. Ngor, *A Cambodian Odyssey* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 201, 364; Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 13, 17, 39, 229; Henri Locard, *Pol Pot’s Little Red Book: The Sayings of Angkar* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004), 5, 21, 185, 216, 340; Karl D. Jackson, “Ideology of Total Revolution,” in *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendez-Vous with Death*. Karl D. Jackson, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 38, 74; Jackson, “Intellectual Origins,” in *Cambodia 1975-1978*, Jackson, ed., 241, 243-244; Kenneth Quinn, “Explaining the Terror,” in *Cambodia 1975-1978*, Jackson ed., 219-231.

revolutionary program.⁶ The third view, which journalist Elizabeth Becker and historian Penny Edwards support, argues that the CPK's idealization of pre-colonial Khmer society—exemplified by its obsession with Angkor Wat—formed the Party's *Weltanschauung* and its developmental model for Democratic Kampuchea between 1975 and 1979.⁷ In this semantic debate, however, none of the scholars ties the CPK's "nationalism" to nostalgia as a theoretical framework or compares the "foundational national texts"—Mao Zedong's most influential works and the doctoral dissertations written by Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan—to explain the political nature of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) between 1975 and 1979.

This essay argues that incorporating twin theoretical foci – Ben Kiernan's "cult of antiquity" and Roxanne Panchasi's "culture of anticipation" – into the scholarly definition of "nationalism" demonstrates the role that nostalgia plays in nationalist ideologies. Applying Panchasi's theory to Mao's Marxist literature and Kieran's theory to CPK ideology illuminates some critical differences between Mao Zedong's nationalism, which was preoccupied with the future, and the CPK's past-oriented nostalgia. At the same time, textual comparison shows that Mao's ideology – as outlined in "On New Democracy"⁸ (新民主主义) – served only as a rhetorical influence

⁶ Referred to by Pol Pot as *Kampuchea Krom* in his "Black Book" to evoke the memory of territorial loss to "Vietnamese treachery." See also Democratic Kampuchea, *Livre Noir: Faits et Preuves des Actes D'Aggression et D'Annexion du Vietnam Contre le Kampuchea* [Evidences on the Vietnamese Aggression against Democratic Kampuchea] (Paris: Les Editions de L'Encre, 1979); Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 219-224, 259-268; Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 25-27; Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007), 545-554; David Chandler, *Brother Number One* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 3-4, 6, 65-86. On the CPK's policies toward Vietnam, the perceived impending threat of invasion, and the history of Cambodia's territorial loss (from the CPK perspective), see Democratic Kampuchea, *Livre Noir*.

⁷ Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and its People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 185-188, 200-202; Gough "Roots," 16-17; Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 1-5. See also Gough, "Roots," 16, 24-25; Kate Frieson, "The Political Nature of Democratic Kampuchea," *Pacific Affairs* 61, No. 3 (Autumn 1988): 405.

⁸ Mao Zedong, "On New Democracy," in *Selected Works, Volume IV* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 339-384. See also Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution* (Lanham, Maryland:

in the doctoral dissertations written by future CPK leaders Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan.⁹ In fact, a close textual comparison reveals that the Khmer intellectuals' nostalgic nationalism was actually the antithesis to Mao's Marxism, since it "overturned the basket"¹⁰, meaning that Hou and Khieu *inverted* Mao's future-centric thought by proposing an insular course framed around a nostalgic vision of "pure" pre-colonial Khmer life and rural society.¹¹

Nationalism and Nostalgia: Cult of Antiquity or Culture of Anticipation?

Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 79; Nick Knight, *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 44-47.

⁹ Hou Yuon, *La paysannerie du Cambodge et ses projets de modernization [The Cambodian Peasants and their Prospects for Modernization]*, Ben Kiernan trans. (PhD Dissertation, Paris: The Sorbonne, 1955); Khieu Samphan, *L'economie du Cambodge et ses problemes d'industrialisation [Cambodia's Economy and Problems of Industrialization]* US State Department trans. (PhD Dissertation, Paris: The Sorbonne, 1959). See also Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy and Problems of Industrialization*, Laura Summers trans. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 111, 1979). This paper uses both the US State Department's and Laura Summers' translations of Khieu Samphan's dissertation. Historians William Willmott, Kate Frierson, and Karl D. Jackson consider these translations to be accurate.

¹⁰ Khmer Rouge official, *Prachachat* [Thailand] (10 June 1976), quoted in Francois Ponchaud, *Cambodia: Year Zero* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1978), 51. The Thai reporter quotes the official as saying: "The Khmer[s]... have adopted the method which consists in *overturning the basket with the fruit inside; then, choosing only the article that satisfy them completely, they put them back in the basket*. The Vietnamese did not tip over the basket, they picked out the rotten fruit. The latter method involves a much greater loss of time than that employed by the Khmers."

¹¹ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 170-171, 209; David Chandler, "Hou Yuon," in *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence* [<http://www.massviolence.org>] (accessed 29 January 2012). See also Dawne Adam, "The Tuol Sleng Archives and the Cambodian Genocide," *Archivaria* 45 (February 1998): 15.

[<http://journals.sfu.ca/archivar/index.php/archivaria/issue/view/404/showToc>] (accessed 15 April 2012); Pol Pot, "The Party's Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980," in *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977*," David Chandler, Ben Kiernan, and Chanthou Boua eds., (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988) 49-50. Of the two Khmer intellectuals, Hou Yuon was a moderate, worked diligently as a junior minister for Sihanouk's government in the 1960s, and encouraged a national united front, but ultimately was purged by the Pol Pot group in 1975. Originally thought to be the "insane architect" of the CPK's policies, Khieu Samphan remained loyal to Pol Pot and served as the intellectual thrust behind the Party until his incarceration in the 1990s.

“If nation-states were widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical’, the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.”—Benedict Anderson¹²

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson notes that “[s]ince World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in *national terms*—the People’s Republic of China, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and so forth—and, in so doing, has grounded itself firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the pre-revolutionary past.”¹³ Anderson’s argument is compelling, but it does not address what creates this attachment to national space. In fact, the concept of nationalism – an essential part of the ideologies presented in this paper – is vague and seemingly indefinable. Many criteria exist to explain it, ranging from shared history and language to common culture and ethnicity. Recent approaches taken by twentieth century scholars, most famously Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson, propose a less general definition. These scholars describe nations (which did not exist naturally) as *a priori* constructions since they were borne out of modern ideological formations forged in industrialized, mass conscious, and literate societies.¹⁴ Subsequent socio-economic changes, namely capitalism and “print capitalism,” facilitated cultural shifts that paved the way for the spread of the “opaque myth” that inspired the “nation.”¹⁵ Anderson, by contrast, challenges Gellner and Hobsbawm by asserting that nationalism “invents

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1983), 19.

¹³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12. Emphasis included in the original.

¹⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 48-49; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 44; John Brannigan, “Nation,” in *Glossolalia: An Alphabet of Critical Keywords*, Julian Wolfreys, Harun Karim Thomas, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2003), 204.

¹⁵ Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Sage, 2002), 37; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15, 18, 32-50, 54, 60-61, 67, 70-74; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1, 48-49, 119-120; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 5-10, 38, 44.

nations where they did not previously exist, and suggests instead that communities are differentiated by the “style in which they are imagined” in which print and the modes of production play an integral role in the spread of the national myth.¹⁶ The nation is, thus, an “imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign... because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives an image of their community.”¹⁷

Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson emphasize the origins of nationalism, which in their view stems from the forces of material production. In so doing, these materialist scholars overlook the emergence of the nation as an “imaginative force” borne out of popular emotional appeal, which is a role played by nostalgia.¹⁸ The imaginative force of nostalgia—whether for something lost in the past or for something in an anticipated future that has yet to be lost—is thus a possible missing link in explaining the rise of nationalist movements. Nostalgia, defined by Svetlana Boym as “a sentiment of loss and displacement, but...also a romance with one's own fantasy,”¹⁹ provides a particularly useful framework for distinguishing the contents of Mao's thought from the core of the CPK's ideology.²⁰ Both Mao and the Khmer intellectuals imagined the nation, but their different senses of nostalgia made their ideologies distinct from each other. The Chinese and Cambodian texts imagined “the nation” as either something that was yet to be lost in an anticipated future or something that had already been lost in the past as a result of an intrusive “Other”— whether as a foreign invader or an invisible force (capitalism). A close examination of their respective “foundational national texts” reveals the way in which the Cambodian variant was, in fact, an inverted version of Maoism.

¹⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 19; Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971), 169.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15-16.

¹⁸ Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 29; Brannigan, “Nation,” 204-205.

¹⁹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (London: Basic Books, 2001), xiii.

²⁰ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 380.

Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson concede that nationalist ideology—formulated and spread by the state—is still understood from below in terms of “assumptions, hopes, needs, *longings*, and interests of ordinary people,” but noted that the people, or *volk*, are not merely passive recipients to ideas of the *volkerschaft*.²¹ As Alastair Bonnett’s study shows, radical leftist groups such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and CPK recognized the strong presence of nostalgia and integrated it into their nationalist programs.²² In particular, the Khmer intellectuals based their nationalism on a construct, or imagined history, created by external agents who claimed authority over the national narrative.²³ The French colonizers had expressed the nation of Cambodia in terms of polarization: Cambodia’s zenith measured against its nadir.²⁴ As historian Penny Edwards states, the

colonial injunction to contemporary Cambodians was to detach themselves from the past and to live in the modern in a way that would allow presentation of Angkor and other monuments as antiquity. This was linear identity without linear progression. There was only an Angkorean ancestral then and a colonial now, with a yawning abyss in between.²⁵

But the nationalist movement that rose against French colonial hegemony added new dimensions to this myth-making, ranging from an idolization of Angkor to territorial integrity and racial purity.²⁶ Therefore, the nation is not

²¹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 10.

²² Bonnett, *Left in the Past*, 10. Bonnett calls “modernity” the era of “alienation, revolution, and rapid social change.”

²³ David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 6-7; John Tully, *Cambodia Under the Tricolour: King Sisowath and the ‘Mission Civilisatrice’, 1904-1927* (Clayton, Australia: Monash University Asia Institute, 1996), 221.

²⁴ David Chandler, *Brother Number One* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 12-13; David Chandler, “From ‘Cambodge’ to ‘Kampuchea’: State and Revolution in Cambodia, 1863,” *Thesis Eleven* 50, No. 35 (1997): 35-49; David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 6-9.

²⁵ Penny Edwards, *Cambodge*, 144. See also Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, 12-13; Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 21-23; Michael Vickery, *Cambodia: 1975-1982* (Chiang Mai: Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2000), 8.

²⁶ Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 26-27, 251-312; Chandler, *The Tragedy*, 7.

just an arbitrary *imaginaire*, since nationalism also operates as an imaginative force that generates a sense of objective human passion for the “nation,”²⁷ while nostalgia represents the objective passion that the *volk* attach to the imagined *Volkerschaft*.

First used in a 1688 Swiss medical dissertation, *nostalgia* was originally a medical condition and has since come to represent a sense of “yearning for the past, a sense of loss in the face of change.”²⁸ Svetlana Boym identifies two main tropes of the modern condition: “restorative nostalgia” and “reflective nostalgia.”²⁹ Restorative nostalgia provides a basis for the “antimodern myth-making of history,” while reflective nostalgia creates an *ethos* that divides the world into Manichean categories of “good” *us* (patriots) and “evil” *them* (outsiders).³⁰ Nostalgia thus also has twin scopes: one preoccupied with an idyllic *imaginaire* of a pure and undisturbed past society (Ben Kiernan’s cult of antiquity) and the other formed around an anticipated future yet to disappear (Roxanne Panchasi’s culture of anticipation).³¹ Kiernan’s “cult of antiquity” is characteristic of genocidal regimes, including the CPK, because its nostalgia centers on a “return to an imagined pure origin” whereby outsiders are removed and cultivation becomes “a symbol or modern incarnation of lost ancient power.”³² Kiernan notes that while cults of antiquity have existed for millennia, the “revival of antiquity” came with Renaissance Italy’s urbanization when people began to idealize the countryside, and with Niccolo Machiavelli’s political works, which state that “unhealthy countries can become healthy if a vast number of men occupies them suddenly, cultivating the soil to improve

²⁷ Brannigan, “Nation,” 203-204.

²⁸ Bonnett, *Left in the Past*, 3-4.

²⁹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xviii, 7, 41.

³⁰ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiii, 41, 43-44. Restorative nostalgia emphasizes *nostos*—the Greek word for homecoming—and attempts to reconstruct a trans-historical version of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia, however, “dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance,” and here the homeland survives in fragments of memory. Nostalgia is, thus, a strong sentiment of longing for an imagined past that no longer exists or may be completely conjured up in the mind’s eye.

³¹ Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 27-28; Roxanne Panchasi, *Future Tense: The Culture of Anticipation in France Between the Wars* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 6.

³² Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 28-29.

it.”³³ Other cults of antiquity include seventeenth century English Garden of Eden restoration cults, French revolutionaries who revered ancient Greek and Roman republican ideals, and Adolph Hitler’s approbation of Sparta as the quintessential example of a racist state.³⁴

Kiernan agrees with French colonial official Paul Mus’s argument that many mid-twentieth century Cambodian intellectuals, including Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan, came to idealize the countryside since they made a spiritual and cultural link between themselves and the land of their deceased ancestors: between “*l’habitat et l’habitant*.”³⁵ By the 1960s, the CPK used similar justifications for its nationalist agenda, such as the need to cultivate “our” land to “surpass Angkor”³⁶ by relocating populations from the cities to work on collective farms and to restore Cambodia’s territorial integrity by invading Vietnam in 1978.³⁷ Cults of antiquity, therefore, attempt to satisfy the feeling of loss by restoring that which is perceived to have been lost in the present. But nostalgia does not exist solely as a form of longing for the imagined past or for something lost that may have never existed.

Panchasi’s theory of the “culture of anticipation” posits nostalgia as a yearning for an expected future, for something that has yet to disappear. This contrasts with Boym’s formulation that nostalgia operates as a “hypochondria” because of its preoccupation with things imagined to be lost in the past that may have never existed in the first place.³⁸ In her study of nostalgia in Interwar France, Panchasi argues that nostalgia finds its origins in the ways in which people in societies anticipate and plan their lives around an

³³ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The History of Florence [1525]* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), vii, 56; Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 28.

³⁴ Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 27-29; Harold T. Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries: A Study in the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 1-3.

³⁵ Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 540-543; Susan Bayly, “French Anthropology and the Durkheimians in Colonial Indochina,” *Modern Asian Studies* 34, No. 3 (2000): 602, 608-610.

³⁶ Locard, *Pol Pot’s Little Red Book*, 73; James A. Tyner, *The Killing of Cambodia* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishers, 2008), 31.

³⁷ Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 9.

³⁸ Panchasi, *Future Tense*, 1, 5-6; Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiii, 1, 5, 7.

expected future.³⁹ This anticipated future “can tell us a great deal about the cultural preoccupations and political perspectives of the present doing the anticipating.”⁴⁰ In Marxist movements, leaders such as Mao followed Marx’s axiom that the social revolution “can only create its poetry from the future, not from the past... [it] must let the dead bury their dead.”⁴¹ Mao and the Khmer intellectuals that he (somewhat) influenced made grandiose promises for prosperous futures during unstable and arduous present contexts. In particular, Mao promised to make the world anew—to abolish the old and to build an entirely different kind of society.⁴² This line of thinking became a central claim and core belief of his radical imagination, particularly in his essay “On New Democracy,”⁴³ in which nostalgia is “generated in advance of loss as well as its wake.”⁴⁴ A more detailed exploration of the distinctions between Mao’s Marxist forward-looking nostalgia and the CPK’s backward-looking nostalgia highlights the fact that the two nationalisms, although related, were in fact fundamentally different.

“We Want to Build a New China”: The Culture of Anticipation and Mao’s Marxism

“What we want to get rid of is the old colonial, semi-feudal and semi-feudal politics and economy and the old culture in their service. And what we want to build up is their *direct opposite*, i.e., the new politics, the new economy and the new culture of the Chinese nation.—Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy” (1940)⁴⁵

³⁹ Panchasi, *Future Tense*, 162.

⁴⁰ Panchasi, *Future Tense*, 4.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Karl Marx: Surveys from Exile: Political Writings, Volume 2*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 149. Marx states that the nineteenth century revolution “cannot begin its own work until it has sloughed off all its superstitious regard for the past.”

⁴² Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 340.

⁴³ Bonnett, *Left in the Past*, 22.

⁴⁴ Panchasi, *Future Tense*, 162.

⁴⁵ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 340. Emphasis added.

In 1920, Mao Zedong declared himself to be “in theory and to some extent in action, a Marxist.” He drew his concepts of history and will from Marx’s writings to formulate his “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society” (1926) and “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan” (1927).⁴⁶ In these essays, Mao assessed the status of China’s various classes and concluded that the proletariat and peasantry possessed the greatest revolutionary potential to reverse China’s negative historical trends.⁴⁷ Mao’s appraisal of China’s classes inspired his most influential works ten years later during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), a period many scholars of China refer to as the “Yenan Period” (1936-1948).⁴⁸

The Japanese intrusion and subsequent victories in Northern China signaled to Mao Zedong the ultimate failure of China’s old culture and society. The Chinese leader advocated in his infamous essay “On New Democracy” (1940) that China needed to make drastic socio-cultural changes to reverse its prostrate situation. In the highly influential paper, Mao developed many of the ideas that he had proposed in earlier essays such as “On Practice”⁴⁹ (July 1937) and “On Contradiction”⁵⁰ (August 1937), making “On New

⁴⁶ Maurice Meisner, *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 25; Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of the Chinese Communist Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 209-212.

⁴⁷ Mao Zedong, “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society,” in *Selected Works Vol. I*, 13-22; Mao Zedong, “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan,” in *Selected Works Vol. I*, 25-62. See also Nick Knight, *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 44-47; Mark Selden, *The Yenan Way* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), 121-136.

⁴⁸ Yenan Period (1936-1948): The period between the Chinese Civil War (1927-1950) and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1948) when Mao Zedong consolidated his ideology as the Party’s guide to action. See Selden, *The Yenan Way*, 79-94, 121-136 (New Democracy), 177; Dirlik, *Marxism*, 78-86; Raymond F. Wylie, “Mao Zedong, Chen Po-ta and the ‘Sinification of Marxism,’” *The China Quarterly* 79, No.1, (September 1979): 447-480.

⁴⁹ Mao Zedong, “On Practice,” in *Selected Works Vol. I*, 295-310. See also Nick Knight, *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 44-47. As Knight argues, Mao regarded Marxism as more than an “abstract body of principles, and *On Contradiction* and *On Practice* provide plentiful evidence of his attempt to integrate these [Marxian] principles with the concrete realities of the Chinese Revolution.” Quote from page 44.

⁵⁰ Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction,” in *Selected Works Vol. I*, 311-345. See also Nick Knight, *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, 44-47; Dirlik, *Marxism*, 77. Dirlik states that “On Practice”

Democracy” the culmination of his careful assessment of China’s historical situation. As historian Arif Dirlik states, “On New Democracy” represents the “classic formulation of the premises of Chinese Marxism”⁵¹ and, therefore, is a “foundational national text” since it formed the very foundation of Mao Zedong’s thought (Sinified Marxism, or Maoism). By applying Roxanne Panchasi’s “culture of anticipation” theory to Mao’s Marxism – particularly to “On New Democracy” since it encapsulates the nationalist vision that Mao set forth in his speech at the Sixth Plenum in 1938 (the “Sinification of Marxism”) – the Chinese leader’s nationalist vision based on a nostalgic, anticipated future for China that necessitated a complete break from its past culture and society becomes apparent.

Panchasi argues that societies often “engaged in radical social and political experiments...[which] drew on national histories while planning revolutionary futures.”⁵² Mao Zedong’s “Sinification of Marxism” provides an example of a radical social and political experiment that drew on China’s historical situation to plan its anticipated prosperous future. According to Dirlik, Sinification was politically successful since it “articulated in its structure the problematic of this historical situation, which was to recast Marxism in a global perspective with consequences that were not just political but theoretical as well.”⁵³ Sinification, the Chinese Chairman announced, was the blending of Marxian universals with the “concrete historical practice of the Chinese revolution” to suit the country’s unique historical experience, struggle, and culture (termed by Mao as its “peculiarities”).⁵⁴ He explains the process of Sinification in “On New Democracy”:

and “On Contradiction” are “commonly recognized as the most important efforts on Mao’s part to formulate systematically the abstract principles underlying his revolutionary practice; and an evaluation of these principles with reference to Marxist theory, with particular attention to the contradictions they were to bequeath to revolutionary China—and to the unfolding of Marxism.” Quote from Dirlik, *Marxism*, 77.

⁵¹ Dirlik, *Marxism*, 79.

⁵² Panchasi, *Future Tense*, 8.

⁵³ Dirlik, *Marxism*, 78.

⁵⁴ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 380-381, Knight, *Mao Zedong*, 44-47. For example, Mao used the traditional Chinese saying “相反相成” (*xiangfan xiangcheng*

in applying Marxism to China, Chinese Communists must fully and properly integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution, or in other words, the universal truth of Marxism must be combined with specific national characteristics and acquire a definite national form if it is to be useful, and in no circumstances can it be applied subjectively as a mere formula.⁵⁵

Mao thus wanted to maintain the central Marxist features⁵⁶ and combine them with Chinese national forms.⁵⁷ He believed that there was “only concrete Marxism,”⁵⁸ which he defined as Marxism that has “taken a national form and... applied to the concrete struggle in the concrete conditions prevailing in China.”⁵⁹ However, Mao made it clear that China’s struggle was part of a worldwide revolution against capitalism in which national liberation was the primary goal for the revolution. The concepts of “new nation” and “new culture” were necessary means to achieve this end.⁶⁰ The ideas Mao Zedong put forward in “On New Democracy” provided the “the spark that started a prairie fire”⁶¹ of anti-colonial movements throughout the Third World and

things that oppose each other also complement each other), which shows an effort to blend China’s particularities with Marx’s universality.

⁵⁵ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works, Volume II*. 380-381.

⁵⁶ Marxist features: the materialist concept of history (conflict between social classes), critique of capitalism’s exploitation of the urban proletariat, and the theory of a proletarian revolution.

⁵⁷ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: questioning Narratives of Modern China*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 190-192; Hans Van de Ven, “War, Cosmopolitanism, and Authority: Mao from 1937 to 1956,” in *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, Tim Cheek ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 96.

⁵⁸ Stuart Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Zedong* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 172. See also Raymond F., “Mao Zedong, Chen Po-ta and the ‘Sinification of Marxism,’” *The China Quarterly* 79, No.1, (September 1979): 471.

⁵⁹ Schram, *The Political*, 172.

⁶⁰ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 340-347, 369-370, 380-382.

⁶¹ Mao Zedong, “A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire,” (5 January 1930) [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_6.htm] (Accessed 10 March 2012).

“represented a new stage in historical progress appropriate to all societies placed similarly to China in the world.”⁶²

Regardless of Mao Zedong’s claims in “On New Democracy,” there is much debate surrounding his brand of Marxism. Three major Western academic critiques of Mao Zedong’s Sinification of Marxism propose different ways of understanding it. The first school – comprised of the first wave of historians of Mao Zedong such as Stuart Schram, Jack Gray, Mark Selden, and Frederic Wakeman – argues that Mao’s Sinification placed a strong nationalistic emphasis on China’s revolutionary experience. His nationalism was, thus, antithetical to Marxism since it stressed the national over the international.⁶³ The second school, led by early Cold War-era historians Karl Wittfogel and Robert North and Schram’s former student Raymond Wylie, contends that Mao Zedong was primarily interested in adapting a Soviet model to China’s unique historical context, and that his ultimate goal with Sinification was to assert his power atop the CCP hierarchy.⁶⁴ The first school is correct to address Mao’s nationalism, but a closer reading of his works shows that he certainly did not raise China above the internationalist struggle against capitalism and imperialism.⁶⁵ The second school’s assertion that Mao’s “Sinification” was an adapted Soviet model appears tenable given the CCP’s close relationship with the Soviets and its participation in the Comintern.⁶⁶ As Meisner states, however, the relationship between Stalin and Mao was very heated from as early as 1927, as Mao’s meteoric rise to the top of the

⁶² Dirlik, *Marxism*, 118.

⁶³ Stuart Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Zedong* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 112-116; Jack Gray, *Mao Tse-tung* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1973), 41; Selden, *The Yenan Way*, 119-120, 191. Wakeman and Gray suggest that Mao “wished to temper the universal theory of Marxism” to fit the “very different circumstances of China.” See Jack Gray, “Mao in Perspective,” *China Quarterly* 187 (September 2006): 669-673; Frederic E. Wakeman, *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives on Mao Zedong Thought* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1973) 195-205, 291.

⁶⁴ Robert C. North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 193; Karl A. Wittfogel, “The Influence of Leninism-Stalinism on China,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 277, Report on China (September 1951): 22-34; Wylie, “Mao Zedong,” 463.

⁶⁵ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works Vol. II*, 342-347, 351-352.

⁶⁶ Meisner, *Mao Zedong...*, 52-54.

Communist Party hierarchy came “in direct conflict with CCP factions backed by Stalin.”⁶⁷ Lee Feigon supports this claim, stating that Mao realized that “he had made a mistake in trying to follow a Soviet model for China” and spent “two decades of his life trying to tear China away from the Soviet road.”⁶⁸ Mao broke with the “consensus politics of the Stalinists” to weaken the heavily bureaucratic Party, which the pro-Russian Returned Scholars used as a device to dictate the CCP’s direction.⁶⁹

If Mao’s Sinification was neither a nationalistic deviation from Marxism nor an adapted Soviet model, what was Mao’s version of Marxism? A third perspective, which Nick Knight and Dirlik support—and which this paper holds as the most accurate assessment—asserts that Mao attempted to “establish a formula by which a universal theory such as Marxism could be utilized in a particular national context and culture *without abandoning the universality of that theory*.”⁷⁰ Dirlik asserts that of “all the innovations that have been claimed for Mao’s Marxism, none is as fundamental, or as far-reaching in its applications, as its ‘Sinification of Marxism,’ [which]... represents a local or vernacular version of a universal Marxism [that] was very much a product of the globalization of Marxism outside Europe.”⁷¹ Some essential components of his ideology that Mao described in “On New Democracy” include a hard stance against “single step socialism,” a belief that all classes must play a role (inclusionary vs. exclusionary politics) in China’s future, and the promotion of democratic centralism irrespective of sex, creed, property or education.⁷² Mao’s Sinification was thus not a question of elevating Chinese peculiarities above Marxian universals, although Mao’s nationalism is certainly apparent in

⁶⁷ Meisner, *Mao Zedong*..., 52-54, 82, 100.

⁶⁸ Lee Feigon, *Mao: A Reinterpretation* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 11.

⁶⁹ Feigon, *Mao*, 182-183.

⁷⁰ Knight, *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism*, 44-47; Nick Knight, *Marxist Philosophy in China: From Qu Qiubai to Mao Zedong, 1923-1945* (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer, 2005), 102-109, 165-169; Nick Knight, *Re-thinking Mao: Explorations in Mao Zedong’s Thought* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 197-216; Nick Knight, “The Form of Mao Zedong’s ‘Sinification of Marxism,’” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 9 (January 1983):18.

⁷¹ Dirlik, *Marxism*, 79. See also Knight, “The Form,” 20; Knight, “Mao Zedong and the ‘Sinification of Marxism,’” 85.

⁷² Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 342-352.

“On New Democracy.” Rather, Mao’s variant was Marxism’s ideological endpoint: it was the step toward becoming a complete ideology whereby the particular (China) worked in concert with the universal (Marxism).⁷³

A central feature of Panchasi’s theory of the “culture of anticipation” is that the “cultural imaginary of ‘the future’ was linked to past experience and to the traces of that experience in the present.”⁷⁴ Mao asserted in “On New Democracy” that he wanted to “change a China that is politically oppressed and economically exploited into a China that is politically free and economically prosperous.”⁷⁵ His vision for China first took shape in his essay “On Contradiction,” in which he states that the “old process”—with its constituent opposites—must give way to the new process, which “begins its own history of the development of contradictions.”⁷⁶ By the time Mao penned “On New Democracy,” he had further developed what he meant by “the old,” which he felt hindered various aspects of Chinese society. Mao stated that China’s

new political, economic and cultural forces are all revolutionary forces which are opposed to the old politics... [which] are composed of two parts, one being China’s own semi-feudal politics, economy and culture, and the other, the politics, economy and culture of imperialism, with the latter heading the alliance...[b]oth are bad and should be *completely destroyed*... [since] the struggle between the new and old in Chinese society is a struggle between the new forces of the people (the various revolutionary classes) and the old forces of imperialism and the feudal class... between revolution and counter-revolution.⁷⁷

Mao thus decries the “olds” still present in society; his hatred of China’s backward past and the vestiges of feudalism and “old culture”

⁷³ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 380-381; Knight, “Mao Zedong and the ‘Sinification of Marxism,’” 86.

⁷⁴ Panchasi, *Future Tense*, 6.

⁷⁵ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 340.

⁷⁶ Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction,” in *Selected Works Vol. I*, 318.

⁷⁷ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 370.

that were the primary targets of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s. Mao's future communist state was "a modern nation-state [that] was far more powerful than its traditional counterpart."⁷⁸ It needed to be an industrialized country guided by the leadership of the proletariat, and an active member of the international fight against the oppressive forces of capitalism, instead of the isolated, insular politics of old China.⁷⁹ For the Chinese Chairman, the new democratic culture he intended to cultivate for his anticipated China required an absolute break from the old "imperialist and semi-feudal culture" of China's past.⁸⁰

Another major aspect of Panchasi's "culture of anticipation" concerns the "strictest opposition between past and future, backward and forward."⁸¹ For Mao, China could not move forward if its culture was stuck in the backward society and culture of the past. He believed that China's past and present culture, which was kept alive "by a number of Chinese who have lost all sense of shame" and by "those who advocate the worship of Confucius," presented a major obstacle for his vision. The Chairman stated his interest in fostering a "new culture" in China in the following passage:

China also has a semi-feudal culture which reflects her semi-feudal politics and economy, and whose exponents include all those who advocate the worship of Confucius, the study of the Confucian canon, the old ethical code and the old ideas in opposition to the *new* culture and *new* ideas. Imperialist culture and semi-feudal culture are devoted brothers and have formed a reactionary cultural alliance against China's *new* culture. This kind of reactionary culture... must be swept away. Unless it is swept away, no *new* culture of any kind can

⁷⁸ Meisner, *Mao Zedong*, 110; Mao Zedong, "On New Democracy," in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, 371-378.

⁷⁹ Mao Zedong, "On New Democracy," in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, 340-342, 344, 353, 367. On Mao's position on self-reliance, see Mao Zedong, "We Must Learn to Do Economic Work (1945)," in *Selected Works*, Vol. III, 241.

⁸⁰ Mao Zedong, "On New Democracy," in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, 369-70.

⁸¹ Panchasi, *Future Tense*, 8.

be built up. There is no construction without destruction, no flowing without damming, and no motion without rest; the two are locked in a life-and-death struggle.⁸²

Mao therefore believed that China's "fine old culture" was a major impediment to his anticipated "enlightened and progressive China under the sway of a *new culture*."⁸³ His desire was to "build a *new China*...in the cultural sphere [and] to build a *new* Chinese national culture."⁸⁴ China's future, thus, had to make a clean break from the society, politics, and culture of the country's past. In the Khmer intellectuals' "foundational national texts," Mao Zedong's rhetorical influence is evident, but the content reflects a much-inverted version of his ideology.

"We Were Already Advanced": The Cult of Antiquity and Democratic Kampuchea's Foundational National Documents

As we study Cambodian civilization, art and architecture, we realize that the Cambodian people have always been hard-working, active, creative, and skilled. As we look to Angkor, the Angkor Thom temple and the surrounding areas, we are struck by the fact that the whole area was a large city crisscrossed with straight roads and canals in a magnificent system... flawlessly planned and built with great precision and care... However, since our Cambodian nation and people have been regularly subject to imperialist aggression, the civilization, culture, art and architecture faded out... [Now] on the basis of our traditions, we are again blending tradition with science... matching the nation's traditions with modern science. Our people are now in the process of

⁸² Mao Zedong, "On New Democracy," in *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 369.

⁸³ Mao Zedong, "On New Democracy," in *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 381.

⁸⁴ Mao Zedong, "On New Democracy," in *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 340.

building a new Cambodia. – Pol Pot, *Radio Phnom Penh Broadcast, 1978*⁸⁵

On 17 April 1975, the Cambodian communist guerrillas marched victoriously into Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, where they celebrated the end of the oppressive US-backed Lon Nol regime.⁸⁶ After fifteen years of civil war, the CPK seized power and immediately put its policies of social change into action. The radical regime forcefully evacuated all cities, repatriated the entire population to the countryside, and began the implementation of its radical development model: year-round rice cultivation, diplomatic isolation, and autarkical development based on pre-colonial modes of production.⁸⁷ In recent scholarship, historians of Cambodia focus on Pol Pot's later writings, namely his *Long Live the 17th Anniversary* speech, as the standard representation of CPK thought; in doing so, they conveniently describe the millenarian Khmer group as a Maoist Party.⁸⁸ But Pol Pot does not mention Mao's name or ideology once beyond a single post-mortem speech in 1977, and his *Long*

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and its People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 201.

⁸⁶ Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime*, 15-31; Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 546-548.

⁸⁷ Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime*, 57. For evidence of US involvement in the 1970 coup that overthrew Prince Sihanouk (who led from 1953-1970) from power, see Ben Kiernan, "The Impact on Cambodia of the US Intervention in Vietnam," in *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*. Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh, eds. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 219-21.

⁸⁸ Pol Pot, *Long Live the 17th Anniversary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea: Speech by Pol Pot, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Kampuchean Communist Party, 29 September 1977*. (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1977); Pol Pot, "Learning from the Political, Ideological and Organizational Experiences in Fulfilling the Party's 1977 Revolutionary Duties in Order to Impel Forward Victoriously the Implementation of 1978 Duties," *Revolutionary Flag*, Special Number, (December-January, 1977-1978), 1-63; Pol Pot, "Learning in Abbreviated Form from the History of the Kampuchean Revolutionary Movement under the Leadership of the Communist Party of Kampuchea," *Revolutionary Flag*, Special Number, (October-November, 1977), 93-112; Pol Pot, *Interview du Camarade Pol Pot a la Delegation des Journalistes Yougoslaves en Visite au Kampuchea Democratique, 17 Mars 1978* (Phnom Penh: Departement de la Presse et de l'Information du Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres du Kampuchea Democratique, 1978). For Pol Pot's racialist stance towards the Vietnamese as Cambodia's "hereditary enemy," see Democratic Kampuchea, *Livre Noir: Faits et Preuves des Actes D'Agression et D'Annexion du Vietnam Contre le Kampuchea [Evidences on the Vietnamese Aggression against Democratic Kampuchea]* (Paris: Les Editions de L'Encre, 1979); Pol Pot, "The National Duties of All of Us," *Revolutionary Flag*, No. 7 (July 1978), 1-3, Pol Pot, "Pay Attention to Sweeping Out the Concealed Enemy..." *Revolutionary Flag*, No. 7, (July 1978), 1-6.

Live speech came three years after he took power and only at the conclusion of the intra-Party struggle between the hardliners (Pol Pot group) and the moderates (ex-Khmer Issarak nationalists and Sihanouk supporters).⁸⁹ Where did this radical *Weltanschauung* originate, if Pol Pot's later writings do not adequately represent the inspiration for the Cambodian Party's radical ideology?

The ideas that the Khmer intellectuals Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan proposed in their doctoral dissertations provided the "theoretical rationale for some of Pol Pot's actions."⁹⁰ Among the ideas that Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan presented that inspired CPK policies include isolationism, the evacuation of Cambodia's cities, the abolition of currency, the deference to agricultural production instead of developing Cambodia's industries, and the expulsion of foreigners.⁹¹ Hou Yuon's 1955 *La paysannerie du Cambodge et ses projets de modernization* (The Cambodian Peasants and their Prospects for Modernization, 1955) first proposed these ideas, and a few years later served as a major inspiration for his protégé Khieu Samphan. Khieu also

⁸⁹ Pol Pot, "Excerpt from Pol Pot's Speech to a Press Conference in Beijing, September 29, 1977, During his Visit to China," *People's Daily*, (3 October 1977).

⁹⁰ Sacha Sher, *Le Kampuchéa des "Khmers rouges": essai de compréhension d'une tentative de révolution* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 207; Gough, "Roots," 16-17. On Khieu's impact, see Jackson, "Intellectual Origins," 245-246, 216, 221; Stephen Heder, "Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan," (Working Paper, Clayton, Australia: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991), 2; Jackson, "Intellectual Origins," 245-246; William Willmott, "Analytical Errors of the Kampuchean Communist Movement," *Pacific Affairs* (Summer 1981): 212, 216, 221; Frieson, "The Political Nature of Democratic Kampuchea," 422-423; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 198; Tyner, *The Killing of Cambodia*, 113. Skeptics of this view include early post-CPK historians of Cambodia, namely Michael Vickery and Laura Summers, who assert that Khieu's alternative path to development was "specifically not revolutionary" and his solutions were reformist yet relatively un-radical. Ben Kiernan, meanwhile, argues that Khieu's dissertation was "something of a blueprint for the new [Sihanouk] government" in the 1960s, which explains why Summers believes that Khieu attempted to apply some of the solutions he proposed while he Secretary of State for Commerce under the Sihanouk government. See Michael Vickery, *Cambodia: 1975-1978* (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1984), 266-267; Laura Summers' Introduction to Khieu Samphan, 1-3; Laura Summers, "Democratic Kampuchea," in *Marxist Governments: A World Survey*, Bogdan Szajkowski, ed. (London: MacMillan, 1982), 12.

⁹¹ Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime...*, 391, 443-444, Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 416-417. See also Hu Nim, *Chamlaj Hu Nim* [Confession of Hu Nim], confession in Tuol Sleng prison, 28 May and 16 June, 1977.

wrote a highly influential dissertation (1959 *L'économie du Cambodge et ses problèmes d'industrialisation*—Cambodia's Economy and Problems of Industrialization) and drew many of his ideas from Hou's earlier work to propose an even more radical development course for Cambodia.⁹² A close examination of these “foundational national texts” reveals that the Khmer intellectuals' ideas, which betray a longing for an imagined pre-colonial rural life, are more in line with Kiernan's “cult of antiquity” than with the future-obsessed nature of Maoism.⁹³ At first glance, the dissertations by Hou and Khieu present very fair and Maoist-influenced assessments of Cambodia's economic problems and the difficulties that the country faced in its postcolonial aftermath.⁹⁴ Khieu's dissertation particularly echoes Maoist ideas, especially due in large part to *dependencia* theorist Samir Amin's influence.⁹⁵ The Cambodian students' linguistic homages to Mao's works, however, did not equal mimicry of content. The Khmer intellectuals did not propose a total break from the past and instead called for the restoration of old, pre-colonial socioeconomic modes of development. Their preoccupation with restoring a lost utopia that they imagined had existed in pre-colonial Cambodia reveals an inversion of Mao's ideas. By focusing on three central themes of Kiernan's “cult of antiquity” theory—the removal of outsiders, the restoration of a “lost utopia” in the present, and the rise of a “cult of cultivation” mentality where agricultural work represents a symbol of lost power—one can see that Mao's ideas provided little more than a rhetorical influence on the Cambodians' theses.

⁹² Khieu Samphan references Hou Yuon's dissertation on numerous occasion in his own doctoral thesis, and lists Hou's work in his bibliography.

⁹³ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 119; Penny Edwards, *Cambodge*, 251; Philip Short, *Pol Pot: The History of a Nightmare* (London: John Murray, 2004), 64, 70-72. See also Serge Thion, “The Cambodian Idea of Revolution,” in *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, David Chandler and Ben Kiernan eds., (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983), 21; Sher, *Le Kampuchéa des “Kmers rouges”*, 207.

⁹⁴ Mao Zedong, “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society,” in *Selected Works Vol. I*, 13-22.

⁹⁵ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy*, 11; Karl D. Jackson, “Intellectual Origins,” 245; Short, *Pol Pot*, 64, 70-72. Samir Amin is an Egyptian economist, Maoist, and author of *L'avenir du Maoïsme*. See Karl D. Jackson, “Intellectual Origins,” 241, 244-246; Gough, “Roots,” 16-19. For instance, both Hou and Khieu describe Cambodia as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country.

The first aspect of Kiernan's "cult of antiquity" that is evident in the Khmer intellectuals' dissertations is their inherent desire to remove a "foreign contamination."⁹⁶ Whereas Mao encouraged inclusionary measures⁹⁷ to help move China forward, the Khmer intellectuals stressed that in order to escape its existing economic situation, Cambodia needed to oust the "French and foreign businessmen" and the urban-dwelling Vietnamese and Chinese compradors.⁹⁸ They charged that the French and Chinese worked cohesively to "swindle" the peasants externally through the sale of cheap foreign goods and domestically through the Chinese compradors' usury and manipulation of weights and measures.⁹⁹ Hou Yuon, for instance, argued that the "industrialists, the merchants and the French and foreign businessmen make wide use of this 'Chinese organization,' finding that the tendency of the Chinese 'to mingle with the natives' make them an indispensable intermediary."¹⁰⁰ He added that the Chinese of Cambodia were "formidable competitors, thus causing the peasant to become "totally disarmed because he does not decide the prices, which are fixed in Cholon [Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam] by the big businessmen, the capitalists of industry and trade."¹⁰¹ Hou thus deplored those activities that serviced outsiders and Khieu supported this claim by declaring in his own thesis (and makes reference to Hou's dissertation to make his point)¹⁰² that these agents were largely responsible for "perpetuat[ing] the system that deprived the peasants of

⁹⁶ Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 27-29.

⁹⁷ Mao Zedong, "On New Democracy," in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, 352-353.

⁹⁸ Hou Yuon, *The Cambodian Peasants*, 60-61, 63-67; Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy*, 9, 17-18.

⁹⁹ Hou Yuon, *The Cambodian Peasants*, 60-61, 63-67; Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy*, 9, 17-18. On issues of anti-Chinese discrimination in Southeast Asia, see Micheline Lessard, "'Organisations-Nous!' Racial Antagonism and Vietnamese Economic Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century," *French Colonial History* 8 (2007): 171-201.

¹⁰⁰ Hou Yuon, *The Cambodian Peasants*, 60.

¹⁰¹ Hou Yuon, *The Cambodian Peasants*, 60-61. Hou argues further: "The Chinese permeates the economic and social life of the country. He is the grocer, the retailer, the agent or the informer who penetrates the smallest hamlet. He is the collector, the pedlar... The heart of [his] organization of trade and credit is Cholon, where the big buyers, the millers, the exporters and importers co-operate directly, their interests inextricably intertwined." Quote from page 61.

¹⁰² Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy*, 17.

considerable wealth.”¹⁰³ Indeed, as Chandler states, a “corollary of the idea of Angkor [pre-colonial Cambodia] was that anything that went wrong in Cambodia could be blamed on foreigners.”¹⁰⁴ Although Hou and Khieu justly identified the disequilibrium of Cambodia’s existing economic situation, their notion that the Cambodian people were passive agents—Chandler notes that this was a byproduct of the French construction of *Cambodge*—reveals that their line of thinking was selective.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, their nostalgia for a return to something that had been lost by virtue of the years of French colonialism and Cambodia’s post-colonial integration into the international market guided their accusations against some of Cambodia’s minority groups—a possible precursor to the CPK’s later anti-Chinese policies.¹⁰⁶

The second theme centers on a “return to an imagined pure origin.”¹⁰⁷ For Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan, the perceived “pure origin” was the Cambodian agrarian periphery and not the urban cores—a line of thinking that resonated very well with the Pol Pot faction in the 1970s.¹⁰⁸ Both asserted that Cambodia “would only become truly independent when it had cast off all foreign influences and assumed total control of its own affairs.”¹⁰⁹ In the section of his dissertation entitled “The Great Corvee,” Hou Yuon proposed that Cambodia must rely solely on agricultural production (a cult of cultivation led by the “agricultural proletariat”) as Cambodians had done before the French arrived. He claimed that urban developments, such as roads, bridges and railways that were built with

the interests of consolidating ‘Indochinese Unity’,
administrative centralization, and ‘opening up’ of the country,
demanded a lot of labor...[and] the poor peasants—it is

¹⁰³ Thanh, “Notes of Discussion,” 28-29; Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia’s Economy*, 9, 11-14.

¹⁰⁴ Chandler, *The Tragedy*, 7. The Heng Samrin regime-era perspective that accuses the Chinese for their “crimes against Kampuchea” relies on the same uninformed argument.

¹⁰⁵ David Chandler, “From ‘Cambodge’ to ‘Kampuchea’: State and Revolution in Cambodia, 1863,” *Thesis Eleven* 50, No. 35 (1997): 35-49; Chandler, *The Tragedy*, 7.

¹⁰⁶ Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 288-296.

¹⁰⁷ Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 28.

¹⁰⁸ Tyner, *The Killing of Cambodia*, 113.

¹⁰⁹ Jackson, “Ideology of Total Revolution,” 39.

always them—are torn from their rice fields and paddocks, abandoning their animals and their ploughs...and sent to labor camps in the unhealthy swamp and bush regions.¹¹⁰

Such an anti-urban stance influenced Khieu Samphan's thesis, which suggested that Cambodia's historic decline could only be halted by a withdrawal from the international market and the enactment of pre-capitalist autarky as the country's developmental model.¹¹¹

In chapter one of his thesis, Khieu Samphan proposed that Cambodia develop via "conscious, autonomous development."¹¹² He traced Cambodia's economic ills to the "rigid restrictions" of international integration on the country's economic development.¹¹³ In Khieu's view,

[u]nder the circumstances, electing to continue development within the framework of international integration means submitting to the mechanism whereby handicrafts withered away, pre-capitalist structure was strengthened and economic life was geared in one-sided fashion to export production and hyperactive intermediary trade.¹¹⁴

Only through "[s]elf-conscious, autonomous development" could Cambodia reverse its prostrate economic situation.¹¹⁵

Khieu's thesis, however, idealized the level of productivity found in Cambodia's countryside by encouraging the idea that regressing to a state of total self-dependency *vis-à-vis* pre-capitalist, pre-colonial modes of autarkical development would inevitably cure all of Cambodia's developmental ills. He urged that "the existence of some specialized villages (silk, cotton, weaving, and pottery villages)...demonstrates that the social division of labor *was already*

¹¹⁰ Hou Yuon, *The Cambodian Peasants*, 37, 55.

¹¹¹ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy*, US State Department trans., 55, 76; Karl D. Jackson, "Ideology of Total Revolution," 43.

¹¹² Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy*, 5, 25. Vietnamese War Correspondent Thanh Tin argues that Khieu's concept of isolation was ultimately a major influence on the CPK's future *Weltanschauung*, which held the belief that foreign forces and international integration were solely responsible for Cambodia's problems, and identifies with the "cult of antiquity."

¹¹³ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy*, 25.

¹¹⁴ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy*, 25.

¹¹⁵ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy*, 25.

relatively advanced and that merchant economy had already made certain progress” before colonization.¹¹⁶ Moreover, he stated that the Cambodian who lived under the conditions of feudal society was not more apathetic than the French serf in the Middle Ages, and that the “economic and social structure...forbade Khmer peasants and craftsmen from developing their full potential.”¹¹⁷ Cambodia’s gradual integration into the international market, therefore, “sidetracked [Cambodia’s] development onto its contemporary semi-colonial and semi-feudal path.”¹¹⁸

Yet this development model is antithetical to anything that Mao had ever proposed. While the Chinese leader certainly encouraged self-reliance, he had stressed that “We [the Chinese] hope for foreign aid but cannot be dependent on it; we depend on our own efforts, on the creative power of the whole army and the entire people.”¹¹⁹ He stated that China was not alone since “all the countries and people in the world opposed to imperialism are our friends.”¹²⁰ The Khmer intellectuals’ focus on “inscribing a purportedly ancient model” on the country in order to achieve true independence contrasted directly with the future-centric nostalgia that is inherent in Mao Zedong’s “On New Democracy.”¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia’s Economy*, 11, 13. Khieu’s choice of these two terms to describe Cambodia’s present state reflects an obvious rhetorical homage to Mao Zedong. He also uses the Japanese occupation in World War II as a more recent example of “[handicraft] industries...emerg[ing] when forced autarky reduced foreign competition,” but he does not provide evidence to support his claim. Khieu states that “[n]o country can industrialize, however, within a system of free trade. The only periods of serious industrialization in underdeveloped countries arose during periods of world war, a time when forced autarky reduced foreign competition and cut off from foreign capital.”

¹¹⁷ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia’s Economy*, 11.

¹¹⁸ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia’s...*, US State Department trans., 11-12, 34. Willmott states that the “parallel between this [Khieu Samphan’s] analysis and that of Mao Zedong is obvious, although not made explicit by Khieu Samphan.” See Willmott, “Analytical Errors of the Kampuchean Communist Movement,” 214; Mao Zedong, “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan,” in *Selected Works Vol. I*, 25-62.

¹¹⁹ Mao Zedong, “We Must Learn to Do Economic Work (1945),” in *Selected Works, Vol. III*, 241.

¹²⁰ Mao Zedong, “The Situation and Our Policy After the Victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan (1945),” *Selected Works, Vol. IV*, 20.

¹²¹ Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 29.

The third theme of Kiernan’s “cult of antiquity” theory centers on the idealization of rural life and the importance of cultivating of the soil. Much like the English Garden of Eden restoration cults, Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan wanted to confront the existing structural inequity between the productive countryside and the unproductive city by “reestablishing [a] mythical past of rural harmony.”¹²² Mao explicitly stated in “On New Democracy” that China’s revolution “belongs to the new type of revolution led by the proletariat with the aim, in the first stage, of establishing a new-democratic society and a state under the joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes.”¹²³ Mao stated that in China

there are several million industrial workers in China and several tens of millions of handicraft workers and agricultural laborers. China cannot live without her workers in the various industries, because they are the producers in the industrial sector of the economy. And the revolution cannot succeed without the modern industrial working class, because it is the leader of the Chinese revolution and is the most revolutionary class.¹²⁴

However, Hou stated that because Cambodia’s proletariat was only a “semi-proletariat” and its “industry is relatively weak [and] cannot absorb the ‘excess’ population which is driven out of agriculture,” Cambodia had to rely solely on the peasants and their agricultural work.¹²⁵ Hou Yuon thus concluded that instead of developing Cambodia’s currently weak industries, it had to rely on a “rational system of agrarian relations [to] pave the way for the development of capitalism and create the necessary foundations for the industrialization of our country.”¹²⁶

Hou also stated in Part Two of his dissertation that numerous classes—rich and poor—oppressed the poor peasants (a class Yuon called the

¹²² Tyner, *The Killing of Cambodia*, 113; Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 28.

¹²³ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, 344.

¹²⁴ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works*, Volume IV, 367.

¹²⁵ Hou Yuon, *The Cambodian Peasants*, 48-49.

¹²⁶ Hou Yuon, *The Cambodian Peasants*, 63.

“most numerous and complex and includes about 80% of the rural population) and did not contribute to Cambodian society.¹²⁷ Khieu, meanwhile, claimed that as much as “94 percent of workers in Phnom Penh and 96 percent of workers in Kompong Cham City were engaged in unproductive activities”¹²⁸ due in large part to international integration of the economy being “ultimately responsible for the overdevelopment of ‘tertiary’ and other unproductive activities.”¹²⁹ Hou and Khieu described this disequilibrium between rural-urban exchanges in the following statements:

Those who work the land, ploughing, harvesting, enduring the entire burden of nature, under the sun and in the rain, getting gnarled fingers and cracked skin on their hands, and feet, receive only 26% as their share, that is, about one quarter. Whereas the others, who work in the shade, using nothing but their money, receive a share of up to 74%, that is, three-quarters... The rural areas are poor, skinny and miserable because of the activities of the commercial system which oppresses them. The tree grows in the rural areas, but the fruit goes to the towns.¹³⁰

Life in the countryside is hard for impoverished peasants, but towns offer only a mediocre alternative. The majority of them are thus obliged to cling to the land, divide family holdings into infinite places, submit to heavy rents and other sorts of painful exploitation...¹³¹

Here, the Khmer intellectuals fairly identify the major problem with Cambodia’s current economic system and the ways in which it was extremely difficult for rural peasants to ameliorate their standard of living. But Hou and Khieu merely theorized the Khmer peasant’s historic disdain for the cities,

¹²⁷ Hou Yuon, *The Cambodian Peasants*, 39, 46-47, 52, 56-57.

¹²⁸ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia’s Economy*, 11.

¹²⁹ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia’s Economy*, US State Department trans., 55; Tyner, *The Killing of Cambodia*, 113.

¹³⁰ Hou Yuon quoted in Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, eds., *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981* (London: Zed Press, 1982), 13.

¹³¹ Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia’s Economy*, 16.

based on an antiquated perception that cities were “rabbit-warrens of vice, filth, corruption, and disease [and] symbolized all that was wrong with Cambodia and its rightful place in the universe.”¹³² This perspective is simply not representative of the whole country, and studies by Willmott, Frieson, and Kiernan have proven that Khieu’s claims are highly selective and unrepresentative of Cambodian peasant society until the late 1960s-early 1970s.¹³³ Thus, Hou Yuon’s and Khieu Samphan’s selectivity reflect their idealization of peasant suffering—which in this case did not exist to the degree to which they described it—to encourage policies of anti-urbanization and agrarian, rather than industrial, development.

Hou Yuon’s and Khieu Samphan’s solutions, which ranged from anti-urbanization to xenophobia to autarky, reflected a preoccupation with an imagined, pre-colonial, and agrarian past—all of which identify with Kiernan’s “cult of antiquity” theory. Neither Khmer intellectual made any promise of an anticipated future and instead promoted a platform based entirely on an imagined pre-colonial model. For them, the remaining vestiges of “news,” most notably France’s colonial capitalism and economic relations, disrupted the pure and “already advanced” olds in Cambodia’s pre-capitalist past. As

¹³² Tyner, *The Killing of Cambodia*, 113; Kenneth Quinn, “Explaining the Terror,” 218-219; Thanh Tin, “Notes of Discussion with Than Tin, Deputy Editor of Nhan Dan, Former Editor of Quan Doi Nhan Dan, War Correspondent, Colonel in the Vietnamese People’s Army, Two Talks,” (Phnom Penh, Cambodia: 1 June 1983), 28-30. See also Hou Yuon, *The Cambodian Peasants*, 38-39, 46-47. In Hou Yuon’s view, the peasant “pays the taxes, provides the cheap labor, becomes a soldier organizes welcomes for official personalities... pays a contribution in money, in kind, or in labor... [and] takes pains for others and he continues to live and grovel in misery.”

¹³³ Willmott, “Analytical Errors of the Kampuchean Communist Movement,” 224; Ben Kiernan, “The 1970 Peasant Uprising in Kampuchea,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 9, No.3 (1979): 310-324; Chandler, *The Tragedy*, 163-167. Hou’s argument, however, is inaccurate and largely based on selective analysis (See chart on page 35 of his first section). As Ben Kiernan states, the landless and oppressed peasants did not form anywhere near the majority of the rural population, and it was not until the 1960s when their “position was desperate enough for them to have nothing at all to lose in any kind of social revolution.” See Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea*, 6-7; Furthermore, Willmott and Frieson show that the Cambodian peasants simply “did not suffer from population pressure on land or from landlordism as did those in China or Vietnam.” See Willmott, “Analytical Errors of the Kampuchean Communist Movement,” 224; Frieson, “The Political Nature of Democratic Kampuchea,” 424.

Becker, Edwards, and Kiernan note, the Khmer Rouge expediently modeled its authoritarian government on Cambodia's past. Therefore, the Khmer intellectuals' inversion of Mao's ideas by virtue of an idealization of Cambodia's past economy and society identifies more with Kiernan's "cult of antiquity" theory" than with Maoism itself. This sheds new insight into the ways in which local formulations for development – rather than a pervasive foreign scapegoat – influenced the CPK's radical thought during the DK years.

Conclusion

This article has made the case that nostalgia can operate as an imaginative force behind new political ideologies and cultures; it can be used to develop strong attachments to a country's past or to its anticipated future.¹³⁴ It can take the form of a cult of antiquity, which aims to re-establish past greatness in the present as part of a new and nativist-nationalist *Weltanschauung*, or take the form of a nostalgia of the future where what has yet to be lost forever becomes an imagined haven of limitless opportunity and potential salvation. The respective nostalgias of Mao Zedong and the Khmer intellectuals were polar opposites. Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan were not fixated on creating a "new culture" or "new society" in Cambodia that involved the severing of ties to that which was old and feudal," as Mao had urged fervently in his influential "On New Democracy" and other works. Instead, the future CPK leaders' longing for the way things they imagined to have been before the French disruption guided their formulations for developing Cambodia in the postcolonial era

By nuancing the existing assumptions of historians of Cambodia about the foreign ideological influences on the CPK's political principles, Mao Zedong's ideas appear to have acted as an influence on the Khmer intellectuals' dissertations. But the solutions proposed by Hou and Khieu reveal an inversion of many of the Chinese leader's core precepts. Some of the proposals made by Hou and Khieu range from ridding the country of

¹³⁴ Bonnett, *Left in the Past*, 3-4.

problematic outsiders to abandoning industry to regressive autarkical development—all three of which stand in stark contrast to Mao’s internationalist, pro-industrial, and pro-proletarian stances. Instead of proposing a disconnect from Cambodia’s pre-colonial and pre-capitalist past, the Khmer authors’ longing for what they perceived to have been lost—an *imaginaire* of an undisturbed, agrarian, and economically self-sufficient country dependent exclusively on peasant cultivation of the Cambodian countryside—fits more comfortably with Kiernan’s “cult of antiquity.” The CPK did indeed “overturn the basket” and chose “only the fruits that suited them,” but the basket was Maoism and the fruits were nostalgic figments of an idyllic imagination.

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