



មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលខេមរសិក្សា  
The Center for Khmer Studies

បឋមកថាវិទ្យាស្ថាន ភ្នំពេញ  
Lecture Series Phnom Penh

**Nationalism and Mass Killing: The Khmer Rouge Extreme  
Nationalism Against Vietnam**

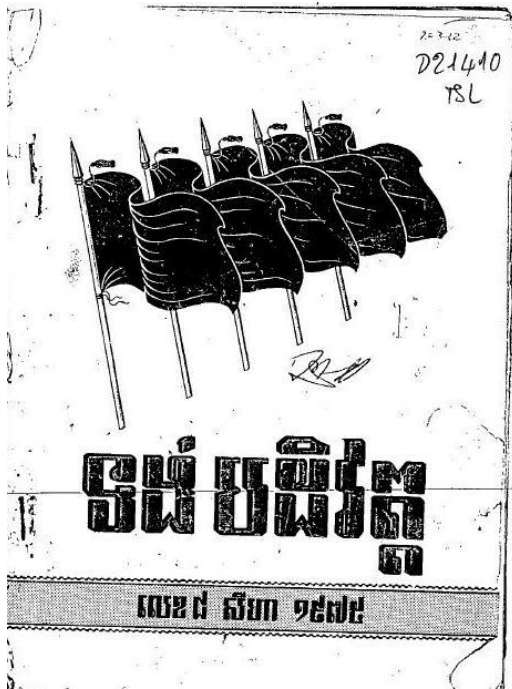
*Keo Duong*

# Introduction



- Living with victims of Pol Pot regime; reading state publications and state media
- Interviewing former Khmer Rouge cadres
- Factor of mass killing; limitation of the study of role of nationalism in mass killing

# Introduction



- Interview with former Khmer Rouge cadres
- Party documents (Revolutionary Flag)
- Radio broadcast (The Voice of Democratic Kampuchea)
- Books and articles

# Nationalism Background

**Nationalism background during the first half of the 1970s.**



- Anti-Vietnamese Sentiment
  - Massacre of Vietnamese civilian in Cambodia.
  - Reflected through publications



- “Yuon supported Sihanouk in order to conquer the remaining Cambodian territory and destroy the Khmer race”

Bun chanmol,

- *“Those Yuons are hardly assimilated into other nations. [...] always keep their political relations with their native country. According to this reason, we have to regard Yuon as a huge danger in our politics today and in the future.”*

*Noun Khheoun*

# Nationalism Background

**Nationalism background during the first half of the 1970s.**



- Khmer Rouge and the Communist VN
  - The KR put anti-VN aside during the struggle
  - But, the KR educated their internal cadres to be careful about communist VN.
  - KR kicked VN away.



- *They told us many years ago that they were going to liberate Kampuchea too. They wanted to occupy Kampuchea”*

*Pol Pot in 1998*

- *“They do not give up their ambition of swallowing us.”*

*Thiounn Prasith’s autobiography*

# Pol Pot: In the Eyes of His Supporters



What did they say about Pol Pot?

- Pol Pot behaviour

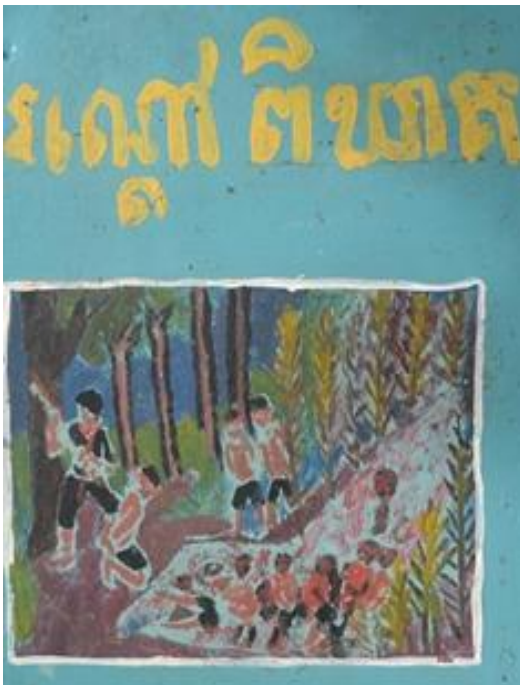
*“He normally really pleased people and people also loved him because he wanted people to be more prosperous. [...] I think he always cared about people” Pol Pot’s bodyguard*

- “Clean” (no corruption) and helpful leader



# Pol Pot: In the Eyes of His Supporters

What did they say about Pol Pot?



- Disciplinary and Independency

*“He never wanted to be under anyone or country even China. [...] Once the Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, criticized him [...]. In reality, I think he did not follow those criticisms”*

# Pol Pot: In the Eyes of His Supporters

What did they say about Pol Pot?

- ANTI-VIETNAMESE (Anti-Yuon)

*“Without the regime led by Pol Pot, Cambodia would be a Vietnamese nation”*

*“The biggest mistake is that we lost to Vietnam.”*

*“It is not good to kill people, [...] but I still respected Pol Pot for having a strong nationalist idea against Yuon” (14MSSH).*

*“Cambodian territory was fully protected until the fall of democratic Kampuchea.” (11MOS)*



# Yuon Invader Discourse



Term “YUON”?

*“At the beginning, the word, “Yuon” was not publicly written in the public newspapers or announced in official speech. [...] Officially, “Yuon” was used only from the end of 1977; internally; the word had been used since the beginning.”*

Man work at ministry of propaganda

# Yuon Invader Discourse



- “Comrade 07” = “Y Enemy” = “Invading Enemy”  
= East Enemy = **“Yuon Invader”** = VN
- West Enemy = Thailand,
- North Victim = Laos, (A victim of Indochinese Communist Party)

# Yuon Invader Discourse

## What the doc says?



- Chay Jetha II (1620) who **was** known to be the King with Vietnamese princes (VN way)
- **Indochinese Communist Party (1930), as an attempt to conquer Cambodia**
- VN attempted to control Cambodia in 1975 by using the name of helping to liberate Cambodia.

# Yuon Invader Discourse



- “It was the plan of Yuon to put Cambodia into the Indochinese federation. Shall we give our Cambodia to the Indochinese federation as another Yuon country? The Indochinese federation is just only fake name, but the real name is Yuon”.

Pol Pot, 1977

## Yuon Invader Discourse



“Yuon wanted our Cambodia to be their buffer state since the year 1930.”

Revolutionary Flag

- Use myth “Don’t Spill the Master’s Tea” to pain the image of cruelty of VN.

## Yuon Invader Discourse



Do the confession at S-21 prove the Vietnamese as “Yuon Invader”?

“No” but “Why”?

- Force confession
- Interrogator claim



## Yuon Invader Discourse



*“There was a translator who was arrested long before and he could speak Khmer. The Khmer Rouge [at S-21] did not kill that person, but they kept him as an interpreter/translator. But he did not asked to interpret what the Vietnamese prisoner talked; he just read the party policy. He interpreted correctly only names of the prisoners and where they were from. But the content was from the party [the interrogator] asked him to say.”*

***Former S-21 interrogator***



How the “Yuon Invader” discourse lead to mass killing?

It is the job of nationalists who imagine the national danger as collective threat and they prepared to do everything including sacrificing their lives for their limited community. (Anderson)

# Elimination of Vietnamese Civilians



- Sending those Vietnamese back and *cleaning* (killing) the remaining was believed as the preventive measure
- Killing Vietnamese civilian to fulfill the duty (No regret)

# Elimination of Vietnamese Civilians



## Why?

- *“Because they were enemy. If we kept them, they would endanger us.”* (12MSB).
- “Something during 1976-77, when I saw Vietnamese soldiers in their truck near the border, I killed them because I hate them. They swallowed our country”

a former battalion army chief (11MOS)

# Chauvinistic National Sentiment against VN

Military strength

## Khmer Rouge

230 battalions, mostly under-strength  
with the main force between 55,000 and  
60,000 troops

## Vietnam

685,000 troops
3,000-strong naval forces
12,000-strong air force

Morris

Why?

■ 1 = 30

“In Svay Rieng battle, the result of the battle in March was one Cambodian soldier against 90 Yuon soldiers.” (the Revolutionary Flag)



# Associated Enemies in East Zone

## Lost War Because of Enemies



- KR attacked VN in late April 1977 killing Vietnamese civilian.
- Vietnamese entered Cambodian territory in Oct 1977 became the justification of enemies involvement. (*Chauvinism*)

# Chauvinistic National Sentiment against VN



- Any loss was because of the enemy inside.

*“This time we have to eliminate the head of the enemy within us. If the enemy wins, our Cambodian nation will disappear. Our way is to be careful about the enemy from within. [...] Even if we don’t have any evidence, we need to withdraw them first”.*

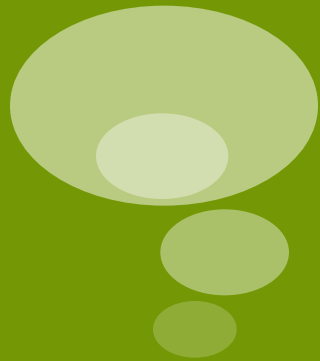
(Revolutionary Flag)

# Conclusion



- Even though the Lon Nol regime and the Khmer Rouge were enemies and ideologically different, they shared the same belief against Vietnamese Communist Party as the threat to the Cambodian sovereignty naming the Vietnamese as the invader
- Perceiving the Vietnamese as “Yuon Invader” was also a product of history. It was not exclusively happen during DK.
- Kill to protect
- the imagined perception of having “*Yuon head, Khmer body*” enemies that limited the duration of the short-lived Khmer Rouge regime.





**Thank you for  
your attention!**