

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE ANTI-THAI VIOLENCE IN CAMBODIA ON 29 JANUARY 2003**

Many parts of the world including all Thais were shocked when they heard the news on the night of 29 January 2003 that the Royal Thai Embassy and properties of Thai nationals living and investing in Phnom Penh and adjacent areas were set aflame and destroyed. The outbreak of this unexpected violence in Phnom Penh on that day was taken as the intermission of an excellent development of the relations and cooperation between Thailand and Cambodia after it had reached the zenith in 2002 when the Fourth Joint Commission Meeting between Thailand and Cambodia was held in Chiang Mai Province in late December 2002.

Most Thai citizens were evacuated immediately from Phnom Penh to Bangkok on the following day by special aircraft from the Royal Thai Air Force. While the Cambodian Government could not identify the masterminds of this raging incident, the Thai Government, on 31 January 2003, was not reluctant to declare the downgrade of her diplomatic relations with Cambodia, from the ambassadorial level to the level of Chargé d'Affaires and requested the Cambodian Government recall its ambassador back to Phnom Penh. Thailand also suspended all cooperation projects and assistance rendered to Cambodia and prohibited the travel of Thai officials to Cambodia for safety reasons.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we shall explore in detail this incident which had significant impact on the relations between the two countries.

#### **I. Causes of the violence and its effect**

##### **1. How did the violence occur?**

On 18 January 2003, Rasmey Angkor (Light of Angkor), a small and pro-Cambodian Government newspaper, published a front-page article which sent shock waves throughout the country and was circulated widely by the local media by

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release, February 3, 2003.

picking up on a rumor alleging Miss Suwanan Kongying (Nong Kob in Thai nickname or widely known as Neang Phkay Proek (นางประกายพริ้ง) among the Cambodians), a 24-year-old Thai soap opera pop star, had claimed that the temple of Angkor Wat, Cambodia's national treasure, rightfully belonged to Thailand. The newspaper reported as follows:

*Phkay Proek said that if any Cambodian officials or directors invited her to perform in Cambodia, she would do so only if they first agreed to give Angkor Wat to Thailand.... Phkay Proek said that she hates Cambodians because Cambodians stole my Angkor Wat. If I will be reincarnated in next life, I prefer to be a dog rather than to be a Cambodian national.*

While recognizing that Kongying's statement might have been misinterpreted, the article continued:

*If this Thai actress said that she hates Cambodians like dogs, we would like to tell her that Cambodians throughout the country hate Thais like leeches that suck other nations' blood.... If it is true, Kongying must lower her head to the ground and salute by placing palm to palm in order to apologize to Cambodians, who are a gentle and polite race and have never encroached on other countries' land. It is insulting enough for Cambodians to hear Thais wickedly saying to their children, 'You must not be born a Khmer in your next life and so on.'*<sup>2</sup>

The said article and opinion invoked the outrage and nationalistic sentiments among Cambodian people, especially students and intellectuals. After the anti-Thai incident on 29 January 2003, Miss Suwanan, shocked by the story, gave an interview to reporters on 30 January 2003 at the Star Video Co., Ltd. affirming her innocence and by all accounts denying that she had made such disparaging statements against Cambodians, unlike some groups in Cambodia that had tried to implicate her for some purpose. The Cambodian newspaper also reported that the incident made direct impact on a cosmetic company, Missteen, since Miss Suwanan just accepted to work for the company as a presenter and had planned to visit Cambodia soon for the

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<sup>2</sup> Rachel S. Taylor, "Cambodia - Thailand: Reacting to Rumors," *World Press Review* 50, no. 4 (April 2003), [http://www.worldpress.org/print\\_article.cfm?article\\_id=1119&dont=yes](http://www.worldpress.org/print_article.cfm?article_id=1119&dont=yes).

products' promotion.<sup>3</sup> According to newspapers' observations, some felt that the emerging incident was directly the result of war on marketing between cosmetic companies that tried to penetrate the Cambodian market and Miss Suwanan became a scapegoat of an unpronounced war.

It was unfortunate for the Thai - Cambodian relations since Cambodia was at that time preparing for the general elections to be held nationwide on 27 July 2003 and most Cambodians were preoccupied with political moods. Cambodia's most influential politician finally made use of the Rasmei Angkor's article about Miss Suwanan Kongying's insulting words as a tool for their political campaign. The incident was triggered when Samdech Hun Sen, Cambodian Prime Minister, on 27 January 2003, two days prior to the violence, forced his own sharp and bold comments onto Miss Khongying which consequently accelerated the outrageous and nationalistic feelings among the Cambodians. The Cambodian Prime Minister was quoted as saying that: *"The value of Phkay Proek is cheaper than several bushes of the grass at Angkor Wat. Phkay Proek is now losing customers in Cambodia"*.

He also suggested all six TV channels in Cambodia reduce or stop showing Thai movies, especially movies starring by Phkay Proek<sup>4</sup> including "Fallen, Blown Away Leaves" (ลูกไม้ไกลต้น).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, on 29 January 2003, a large number of people gathered outside the iron fence in front of the Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh to demonstrate their sentiment against Thailand. Around 5 p.m., the situation reached a boiling point. At that time, a group of Cambodians demonstrating outside the Royal Thai Embassy received the unverified news that Cambodians were killed in the Thai capital, Bangkok. It was reported that during the demonstration, a live talk show at Sombok Khmum radio<sup>6</sup> belonging to Mr. Mam Sonando, had broadcast a call-in statement

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<sup>3</sup> *Thai Post Excite*, "กบร้าให้เปิดใจสลดเขมรคั้ง สงเทบแจง 'ฮุนเซน'" January 31 - February 1, 2003, pp. 1 and 3.

<sup>4</sup> Kyodo News International Inc., January 31, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> *Khom Chad Leuk*, January 28, 2003, pp. 1 and 16 and *Daily News*, January 29, 2003, pp. 1 and 13.

<sup>6</sup> Sombok Khmum (Beehive Radio FM 105) was only an independent radio station in Cambodia at that time. Sonando, an owner and manager of the station, was a former head of the opposition Sombok Khmum Party that collapsed after losing in the general elections in 1998.

that several Cambodian Embassy officials had been killed in Thailand in retaliation against the protests in Phnom Penh. Samdech Hun Sen stated that the broadcast, which he said aired at about 2:30 p.m. before the violence erupted, directly incited the riots. However, the station employees said the phone call was broadcast at night, after the fury had died down.

“Furious violence” ensued, according to Udom Katté Khmer (30 January 2003), protesters broke through the Thai Embassy’s fence, entered the building, destroyed documents inside, and set fire to the structure and to nearby cars. The Thai Ambassador was forced to flee; Reaksmei Kampuchea (1 February 2003)<sup>7</sup> quoted him as saying, *“I had to jump over the fence of the Embassy in order to escape from the crowd of Cambodians and it was a really bad situation”*. He later had to leave the area by crossing the river behind the Embassy by boat.

As the situation became out of control, Prime Minister Thaksin made a phone call to Samdech Hun Sen informing him that the Thai commandos would be sent in if the situation were not brought under control within 90 minutes. However, Cambodian police ultimately arrived on the scene, making arrests and firing shots in the air to disperse the crowd, but this official response came too late. Before the night was over, the angry Cambodian crowd had destroyed several Thai-owned businesses, including Cambodia Shinawatra, the telecommunications company belonged to the Thai Prime Minister, and the well-known Royal Phnom Penh Hotel.

The next day, Thailand sent military planes to Cambodia to evacuate its embassy’s staff and several hundred Thai civilians. Thai Airways suspended its flights to Cambodia. And, as Reaksmei Kampuchea (5 February 2003)<sup>8</sup> explained, *“Thai Prime Minister Thaksin decided to reduce diplomatic relations with Cambodia to the level of Chargé d’Affaires, return Cambodian workers from Thailand to Cambodia, prohibit Cambodian nationals from entering Thailand, close Thai - Cambodian border crossings, and stop economic cooperation. The decision affects more than 50,000 Cambodians working in Thailand”*.

Samdech Hun Sen who later went to preside over the inauguration of a new temple in Kampot Province, 150 km from Phnom Penh, gave an interview affirming

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<sup>7</sup> *Reaksmei Kampuchea*, February 1, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> *Reaksmei Kampuchea*, February 5, 2003.

that he did not provoke the violence which led to the burning of the Royal Thai Embassy and properties of Thai businesspersons in Phnom Penh. He tried his utmost to control the situation that prevented him from eating for 26 hours.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Sam Rainsy, leader of the opposition Sam Rainsy Party, sent a message from Singapore to the Thai people and government via media on 1 February 2003 clarifying that he denied having anything to do with the demonstrations on 29 January 2003 and challenging any self-proclaimed eye-witnesses to bring concrete and precise evidence proving his presence in front of the Royal Thai Embassy on that day. He further mentioned that the incident did not reflect the feelings of the Cambodian people towards the Thai people and accused Samdech Hun Sen as the person who stirred up the anti-Thai feelings in order to divert attention from increasingly serious internal problems he could not solve. On 27 January 2003, he made an inflammatory speech broadcast on the national radio, which was an incitement to racism, hatred and violence. Subsequently, Samdech Hun Sen's supporters meticulously organized the violent and destructive January 29 demonstrations, during which the police stood idle until the Royal Thai Embassy was completely burnt down.<sup>10</sup>

In the interview with Mr. Pisanu Suvanajata, Deputy Director-General, Department of East Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, with regard to the anti-Thai violence in 2003, he was of the view that the incident on 29 January 2003 was in fact only an "unfortunate hiccup" in Thai - Cambodian relations. This was conspicuous because there was no real change on any policy guidelines despite this serious deplorable incident. The bond of friendship was instead fully remedied in less than 150 days. Bilateral ties reached a peak again after the historic Joint Cabinet Retreat between the two governments in mid-2003 which produced more than 50 new initiatives. Left behind was only a "memory wound" as far as Thailand was concerned.

He felt that historical background plays an important role in causing mistrust, misunderstanding, discord, and prejudice between the Thai and Cambodian people. Moreover, the nature of Cambodia to "internationalize the domestic issue" in time of

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<sup>9</sup> *Thai Rat*, February 6, 2003. p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> 2bangkok.com, "The Burning of the Thai Embassy in Cambodia," <http://2bangkok.com/burning.shtml> (Accessed January 31, 2007).

crisis always plays a crucial role. In time of turbulence during the political turmoil, this technique was always opted as the “exit” for the benefit of domestic politics. In the case of the incident of 29 January 2003, Thailand was the victim and somehow there was an “invisible hand” involved in the case.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Responses from the media

After the incident, all Thai and Cambodian media gave a series of reports on and criticisms of the incident. Most of them largely reflected the on-going situation and effects in a negative way, some of which are as follows:<sup>12</sup>

2.1 Many Thai media have tried to determine the cause of the violence, i.e.

- Mathichon Daily (4 February 2003)<sup>13</sup> provided a more cunning and forward-looking analysis which laid the blame squarely on both countries by charging:

*“The biggest mistake of the Thai - Cambodian misunderstanding, mistrust, discord, and prejudice is the fanning of nationalism on both sides”, then offering a suggestion “Thailand should learn from this incident and urge both the government and private sectors to find ways to ameliorate the feelings of Cambodians.”*

- Khao Sod (5 February 2003)<sup>14</sup> speculated:

*“The root cause was due to the long-held dislike of Thailand’s role in Cambodia’s history. In the past, U.S. planes took off from Thai air bases and bombed Cambodia into pieces. That is why the Cambodian people have never remembered that Thailand helped to build their roads and rehabilitate their war-torn economy in the past two decades.”*

- Kom Chad Leuk (5 February 2003)<sup>15</sup> was of view that:

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<sup>11</sup> Pisanu Suvanajata, Deputy Director-General, Department of East Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, interview by author, Bangkok, March 3, 2008. Mr. Pisanu served as First Secretary at the Royal Thai Embassies in Phnom Penh and Canberra before taking a position of Counsellor, Division II, Department of East Asian Affairs at the time when the anti-Thai incident broke out in 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor, “Cambodia - Thailand: Reacting to Rumors.”

<sup>13</sup> *Matichon*, February 4, 2003, pp. 1 and 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Khao Sod*, February 5, 2003.

*“The deep resentment of young Cambodians, who were born after the genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge in 1978, was the main cause. They have not received any benefits from peace dividends in the past 10 years. While they are proud of their country’s newfound stability, they are very bitter with the lack of governance and corruption problems in their country. Any news especially that related to neighboring countries can trigger outrage. The burning of the Thai Embassy was the outcome of this madness.”*

2.2 On the other hand, most of the Cambodian newspapers were less concerned with the causes of the violence than with its effects, particularly on Cambodians and the country as a whole such as:

- Kampuchea Thmey (4 February 2003) <sup>16</sup> noted: *“Most investors come from Thailand. The garment sector alone provided jobs to more than 200,000 workers. But now, Cambodian unemployment will increase more and more”*.

- Koh Santepheap (6 February 2003) <sup>17</sup> pointed out:

*“If the Thai investors return, then hundreds of Cambodians who are currently unemployed because of Thai business closures will feel relieved. These Cambodians are worried that they may not be able to get their January’s salaries.... Who will pay Cambodians if the Thai investors leave the country?”*

- Kampuchea Thmey (16 February 2003) <sup>18</sup> pointed to Thailand’s arrogance as a cause of the crisis by saying: *“According to history, Cambodians, who are an older race in Southeast Asia, had a prosperous culture and civilization. But Thailand, the near-neighbor, seems not to understand this.”*

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<sup>15</sup> *Khom Chad Leuk*, February 5, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> *Kampuchea Thmey*, February 4, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> *Koh Santepheap*, February 6, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> *Kampuchea Thmey*, February 16, 2003.

### 3. Damages incurred on the Thai private sector in Cambodia

Mr. Somsak Rinruengsin, owner of Modern Plastic & Packaging Co., Ltd. based in Phnom Penh and the Chairman of the Thai Business Council in Cambodia (TBCC), disclosed that damage occurred to the Thai private sector approximately amounted to 3,000 million baht. For his own part, he suffered a loss of 500 million baht in his business in the plastic industry, making him nearly bankrupt. The other was the case of Mr. Suphachai Virapuchong, Deputy Managing Director, Thai Nakhon Pattana Co., Ltd., and Managing Director of the Royal Phnom Penh Hotel, who revealed that, for his own part, damage to his hotel was 200 - 300 million baht and 30,000 cases of medicine worth ten million baht were lost. On the other hand, Miss Pojanee Thanawa-ranit, Director-General of the Department of Insurance, Ministry of Commerce revealed that a small number of Thai businessmen in Cambodia took out insurance policies and most of them had insured against fire instead of violence or war.<sup>19</sup>

However, after the investigation, the Thai authorities concluded that there were 17 Thai companies evidently affected by the violence and they filed requests to the Cambodian Government for compensation. The said companies were (1) Cambodia Samart Communication (2) CPAC Monier (3) Royal Phnom Penh Hotel (4) Mica Media (TV5) (5) The Seaboard Cambodian Development (6) Modern & Packaging Cambodia (7) Cambodia Shinawatra (8) Isuzu Sales Cambodia (9) Sayam International (10) CPAC Cambodia (11) Cement Thai SCT (Cambodia) (12) Juliana Hotel (13) Bangkok Airways (14) Distar Cambodia (15) TNP Health Care (16) Bangkok Hospital (17) Orchid Mccann. After a long process, most of them could finalize the negotiations with the Cambodian authorities and were awarded compensation in various forms including concession fees equivalent to their losses and damages.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Thai Rat*, February 6, 2003. p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Workgroup for Senate's Committee on Foreign Affairs, "Burning of the Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh Case," Senate's Committee on Foreign Affairs Reports to People, (Bangkok, Secretariat to the Sanate, 2005), p. 158.

#### 4. Reaction taken by the Cambodian Government

After the violence, the Center for Human Rights based in Phnom Penh reported that on 30 January 2003, two men went to the home of Sonando, operator of Sombok Khmum (Beehive Radio FM 105) who allegedly allowed live phone-ins to his radio program during the demonstration, and asked him to accompany them to meet with government officials. Instead, Mr. Sonando was driven to the local police station where he was arrested and formally charged on 31 January 2003. Later, on 1 February 2003, In Chan Sivutha, editor of Rasmei Angkor (Light of Angkor) was also arrested and formally charged with inciting crimes, discrimination and disseminating false information in connection with the anti-Thai riot that engulfed Phnom Penh.<sup>21</sup>

The incident developed. On 6 February 2003, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)<sup>22</sup> sent a letter of inquiry to Samdech Hun Sen arguing that the journalists were singled out unfairly. There was no comparable effort under way to prosecute government officials who made inflammatory statements during the protests and who did little to discourage the rioting. The Cambodian Government's selective prosecution appeared to be an attempt to use the journalists as scapegoats for an incident that became a major diplomatic fiasco, badly damaging relations between Cambodia and Thailand. Following pressures from many sides, both journalists were released on bail on 11 February 2003. In Chan Sivutha later conceded that Rasmei Angkor failed to verify the accuracy of its news before reporting to the public.<sup>23</sup>

For other people, the Cambodian Government took action by ordering the arrest of people who had been involved in the anti-Thai violence. As a result, 58 people were captured and detained for further investigation on charges ranging from banditry, taking part in an illegal demonstration and being involved in violent protest. They were found guilty of the lesser charges of theft or attempted theft and sentenced

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<sup>21</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, "30 January 2003, Mam Sonando, Sombok Khmum, Imprisoned" and "1 February 2003, Chan Sivutha, Light of Ankor, Imprisoned," in Cases 2003: Asia, Cambodia, [http://www.cpj.org/cases03/asia\\_cases03/cambodia.html](http://www.cpj.org/cases03/asia_cases03/cambodia.html). (Accessed December 15, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to defending press freedom worldwide. More details, please visit its website at <http://www.cpj.org>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

to time served. However, on 15 September 2003, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court made the decision to free 56 of them except Mr. Ken Sara and Mr. Thorn Veasna.<sup>24</sup> Mr. Ken Sara, 24 years old, was convicted of inciting racial hatred and criminal acts, organizing an illegal demonstration and taking part in a violent protest, and sentenced to nine months in jail while Mr. Thorn Veasna, 19 years old, was convicted of inciting racial hatred and sentenced to eight months in jail.<sup>25</sup> According to the court's decision, Prime Minister Thaksin was quoted as saying that this was not the matter of satisfaction but it was about the court authority and Thailand could not interfere in the decision. Moreover, Thailand's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sihasak Phuangketkeow said Thailand respected the court decision, but noted that it contradicted previous statements by Cambodian judges that only five defendants were not guilty. The chief of a radio station in Phnom Penh and the editor of *Rassami Ankor* were not even among the defendants.<sup>26</sup>

The incident came to an end when King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, who was doubtful about their guilt, signed a decree on 18 September 2003 giving royal pardons to Mr. Ken Sara and Mr. Thorn Veasna as requested.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, both of them were released from the prison by the royal command, resulting in the closure of the case at that stage.

## **5. Reaction taken by the Thai Government**

5.1 Mr. Sihasak Phuangketkeow, Director-General, Department of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, in his capacity as the Ministry's spokesperson, told reporters at the press conference on 30 January 2003 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, about actions taken by the Thai Government vis-à-vis the incident as follows:

(1) On 30 January 2003 at 09.00 a.m., Mr. Ung Sean, Cambodian Ambassador to Thailand, was summoned to the Ministry. The Cambodian Government was protested "in the strongest terms against the failure on the part of the

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<sup>24</sup> *Bangkok Post*, September 16, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Bangkok Post*, September 20, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Khao Sod*, September 16, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> *Bangkok Post*, September 20, 2003, p. 1.

Royal Government of Cambodia to discharge its obligation under the international law”.<sup>28</sup> The Thai Government asked the Cambodian Ambassador Ung Sean to leave the Kingdom as soon as possible;

(2) The Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh was seriously damaged during an angry demonstration, which took place on 29 January 2003. In the protest given to Cambodian Ambassador Ung Sean, the Thai Government declared “all on-going government projects on technique and economic cooperation between the two countries are henceforth suspended”;

(3) 500 Thai people returned from Phnom Penh to Bangkok on 30 January morning. Among them, 7 were wounded and one had died;

(4) Cambodian Ambassador Ung Sean expressed his regret over the incident, and sincerely hoped to resolve the problem and pull back the bilateral relations to the normal track. He said that the violence that had taken place in Phnom Penh was backed by only a small group of Cambodians and was directly related to the country’s internal politics.<sup>29</sup>

5.2 For the Thai parliamentarian side, Mr. Kraisak Choonhavan, Chairman of the Thai Senate’s Foreign Committee on International Relations on 30 January 2003 also urgently convened its committee members to follow up and analyze the situation and expressed the committee’s positions pertaining to the violence on 29 January 2003 that the committee:

(1) Condemned groups of people involved in the violence, directly and indirectly, as well as the failure of the Cambodian Government to protect the lives and properties of the Thai people;

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<sup>28</sup> The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961 to which Thailand and Cambodia are signatory parties indicates in the Article 22 that:

1. The premises of the mission shall be inviolable. The agents of the receiving State may not enter them, except with the consent of the head of the mission;

2. The receiving State is under a special duty to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission against any intrusion or damage and to prevent any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity;

3. The premises of the mission, their furnishings and other property thereon and the means of transport of the mission shall be immune from search, requisition, attachment or execution.

<sup>29</sup> People’s Daily On-line, “Thai Government Asks Cambodian Ambassador to Leave,” [http://english.people.com.cn/200301/30print20030130\\_110983.htm](http://english.people.com.cn/200301/30print20030130_110983.htm). (Accessed April 4, 2006).

(2) Supported measures taken by the Thai Government with regard to the downgrade of diplomatic relations;

(3) Called for action from the Cambodian Government to curb the situation and prevent it from spreading to other provinces;

(4) Called for all sides concerned to be more vigilant in the expression of views in the public at all stages.<sup>30</sup>

5.3 Nearly two months later, the situation improved after the Cambodian Government paid compensation money with full amount of 5,923,633.70 USD or equivalent to 251,754,432.40 baht to cover damages to state properties and Thai officials on 17 March 2003. Later on 25 March 2003, the Thai Cabinet passed a solution revoking the measure prohibiting the Thai authorities from attending any meetings or activities organized in Cambodia for safety reasons in conformity with the Cabinet's solution dated 4 February 2003. For the opening and development of points of entry between Thailand and Cambodia for the promotion of trade and tourism, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was requested to undertake the said measure as well as the extension of assistance to the Cambodian Government in accordance with the existing agreements or commitments on a step-by-step basis.<sup>31</sup>

## **II. Possible root-causes of the anti-Thai sentiment among the Cambodians**

The anti-Thai violence on 29 January 2003 reflected the deep resentments felt by many Cambodians towards Thai domination. However, it would be more beneficial to all concerned to examine the anti-Thai violence of 29 January 2003 as a learned lesson for finding the appropriate solutions to the problems that continue to affect the relations between Thailand and Cambodia up to the present day.

The history of the relations between Thailand and her immediate neighbors, particularly Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar (Burma), comprises both positive

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<sup>30</sup> Workgroup for Senate's Committee on Foreign Affairs, p. 158.

<sup>31</sup> The Secretariat of the Cabinet, "Renunciation of measures prohibiting Thai agencies to undertake activities in Cambodia," [http://www.cabinet.soc.go.th/soc/Program2-3.jsp?top\\_serl=191225&key\\_word=เผด็จการเอกอัครราชทูต&owner\\_dep=&meet\\_date\\_dd=&meet\\_date\\_mm=&meet\\_date\\_yyyy=&doc\\_id1=&doc\\_id2=&meet\\_date\\_dd2=&meet\\_date\\_mm2=&meet\\_date\\_yyyy2=](http://www.cabinet.soc.go.th/soc/Program2-3.jsp?top_serl=191225&key_word=เผด็จการเอกอัครราชทูต&owner_dep=&meet_date_dd=&meet_date_mm=&meet_date_yyyy=&doc_id1=&doc_id2=&meet_date_dd2=&meet_date_mm2=&meet_date_yyyy2=) (Accessed January 31, 2007).

and negative elements. Some events have bred hatred, for instance between Thais and Myanmar; others have generated contempt and feelings of superiority or inferiority, as in the case of Thailand's relations with Cambodia and Lao PDR. These feelings finally have led to misunderstanding, mistrust, discord, prejudices and a lack of mutual confidence between them at significant level. Therefore, there is a need for an earnest and systematic study of the history of the relations between Thailand and her neighbors. Specifically, this effort should gain support at national and regional levels.

In fact, there is a variety of circumstances and factors that play important parts in the deep-rooted causes that provoke anti-Thai sentiment among Cambodians in recent years, and these may become potential factors that cause negative effects to the blossoming relations and mutual understanding between peoples of the two countries. Cambodians' negative feelings towards Thais may in part stem from various factors originating in the long history up to the present, which could be raised as a valuable lesson for all of us to have better understanding and to avoid the re-occurrence of such horrific situations in the future. This includes serious consideration of in which direction and which concrete steps should be taken in order to improve the bilateral relations. The energetic effort might help achieve what was once said: "Just as the two banks of the Mekong River are not able to separate the Thais from their Lao brothers and sisters, the Dangrek Mountain thus fails to separate the Thais from their Khmer kin".<sup>32</sup>

At the meeting at the Thai Parliament on 30 January 2003, Prof. Charnvit Kasetsiri, a senior advisor to the Southeast Asia Studies Program at Thammasat University who is also the Director of Areas Studies in the Five Regions Project and one of Thailand's leading experts on Indochina affairs, gave his comments that best reflected the causes of the 29 January anti-Thai riot as follows:

*Thailand ever had problem with Cambodia particularly the case of Preah Vihear Temple but the incident was not as severe as this violence. The occurred situation on one hand was the result of domestic politics and Thailand was used as political tool whereas the cause was stemmed from*

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<sup>32</sup> Nikhom Musikakhama, *Historical Archeology of Cambodia*, (Bangkok, Fine Arts Department, 1993). A text published to mark the official opening of the National Museum in Phimai District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn in 1993.

*deep-rooted history of the relations between Thailand and Cambodia. When being roused by somethings, the temper thus easily burst. On the other hand, Thailand's economic influence in trade and investment overshadowing Cambodia reflected that we have gone so far and it caused dissatisfaction among the Cambodians. Huge investment in hotel, telecommunication and so on turned into hatred in the same manner that Thai people ever hated the Japanese economic domination which caused imbalance in trade between the two countries. Eventually, it was not surprising that nationalism was ignited and opened opportunity for the third hand to set the fire.*

What Prof. Charnvit had commented, the anti-Thai sentiment among the Cambodians was not only the cases of Preah Vihear Temple or just the violence in Phnom Penh on 29 January 2003. In fact, there were anti-Thai incidents taking place in Cambodia many times. Formerly, the Cambodian mob protested Thailand against the purchase of a big plot of land to build its embassy, the same embassy that was burnt in 2003 and many times that Cambodians in Phnom Penh rose up in the protest against the expulsion of slum residents located on the bank of river behind the premise of the Royal Thai Embassy. Moreover, the Cambodians in Siem Reap Province lodged a protest against Thai visitors expressing their discontent that Thai tourists strewed money to Cambodian children as if they were not human beings. There were many criticisms that many incidents may come to the scene in the near future, if Thailand does not learn to understand and honor Cambodia as neighbor. The thing that Thailand has to learn and understand well from those lessons was that Thailand's image in the eye of the Cambodians is negative.<sup>33</sup>

Another interesting case was a small piece of news report regarding the protest on 6 May 2004 by the Cambodian workers at a Singaporean textile factory, Suntex, located in a suburb of Phnom Penh. They expressed dissatisfaction over a Thai woman who tore picture of Angkor Wat. General Tea Banh, Deputy Prime Minister and Co-Minister of Defence of Cambodia, and Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, cooperated to clarify a fact through the Thai

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<sup>33</sup> Thanapon Chaiphasri, Comment on "From Suwanun Kongying to Burning Thai Embassy-Cambodian Mob: Do Thais and Cambodians still love each other?" <http://www.lawonline.co.th/html/columnist020.html> (Accessed December 15, 2006).

and Cambodian media that a Thai woman from Bangkok who had come to the factory on that day for the quality control (Q.C.) saw a picture of Angkor Wat hanging on a wall with writings read “Everybody knows that Angkor Wat belongs to Cambodia, except the Thais”. She was afraid that the poster shall provoke misunderstanding among the workers and therefore decided to ask the owner of the factory to remove the picture. Meanwhile, some Cambodian workers heard the matter and told their friends, but finally “remove a picture” was distorted to “tear a picture” and a number of dissidents were being expanded and they blocked the factory entrance to lodge a protest against her. The protest ended peacefully within hours as a result of serious pressure from the Cambodian authorities and after the Thai lady voluntarily made an apology.<sup>34</sup>

## **1. Historical factors**

### **1.1 Relations in an ancient time**

In theory, it is said that the attitude of the population of one country towards another is also an important basis for its foreign policy. In Thailand’s standard history textbooks, they usually begin with the migration of the Thai race from the southern part of China downwards to the Chaophraya River basin. Then the Thais, during the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods, were strong enough to compete with the Angkor’s Empire located on the eastern part and expanded their influence into the Khmer Kingdom by the use of force. Sri Sothonpura, seat of the Khmer Kingdom, fell many times to the invading armies. The attack of Sri Sothonpura can be compared to the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, but the Thai historians are reluctant to make this analogy as it casts Thais in the role of “villains”, a role more comfortably attributed to the Burmese. In the Rattanakosin period, the Thai Kingdom also cast her influence over the Khmer Kingdom which forced the latter to move its capitals southwards, from Lovek, to Udong and Phnom Penh respectively. The expansion of Siam’s influence into the Khmer Empire in former days is somehow regarded as aggression in the eye of Cambodians in the present time.

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<sup>34</sup> *Kom Chad Leuk*, May 12, 2004, p. 2.

A new interpretation proposed by western scholars arguing that the southwards movement of the Cambodian capitals tended to be influenced by the changing economic environment as the maritime trade in the region became increasingly important to the post-Angkorean statecraft. This observation has not been welcomed by most Thai scholars. Perhaps, such interpretation does not go well with the notion of the greatest Thai Kingdom, successfully bringing down the glorious Angkor's Empire.<sup>35</sup> Keith W. Taylor of Cornell University (1999) interestingly explained about the rise and fall of the Angkor that during the earliest, or pre-Angkorean, centuries of Khmer history, there was no fixed centre, nor can it even be said that there was a single Khmer polity. Khmer leaders exercised their authorities by demonstrations of battlefield and devotional heroism. However, in the ninth century, Khmer political life set foot at Angkor, a place located near the northwest shore of the Tonle Sap, with good water transport from all the rice fields in the drainage basin of that lake as well as the lower Mekong plain. Once Khmer settlement had exploited the rice-growing potential of this region to a minimally- necessary level, and once Khmer leaders found ways of organizing their authority over much of this region, Angkor was the favorite site as long as agriculture remained the primary source of wealth.

Starting in the late thirteenth century, the Thai military pressure posed serious problems and by the late fourteenth century, the site of Angkor was difficult to guard against Ayutthaya. Paddy fields were neglected as trade and commerce grew in importance as a source of wealth. During the first half of the fifteenth century, Khmer Kings abandoned Angkor in favor of sites further east and south, in the vicinity of modern Phnom Penh, with greater access to the maritime trade routes that were being invigorated at that time in response to new commercial initiatives from China. The end of Angkorean history came not with a dramatic collapse but rather as a re-orientation of the Khmer polity, from dependence on rice-fields to greater reliance upon wealth generated by trade and commerce, from continental empire to maritime

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<sup>35</sup> Puangthong Rungwasdisab, "Thailand's Response to the Cambodian Genocide," Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University, [http://www.yale.edu/cgp/thailand\\_response.html](http://www.yale.edu/cgp/thailand_response.html).

entrepôt. For this reason, it is incorrect to attribute the abandonment of Angkor simply to Thai pressure and aggression.<sup>36</sup>

Prof. Charnvit Kasetsiri also provided in-depth analysis of the root-causes of hatred and discord among Thais and Cambodians in his article entitled “A Love-Hate Relationship”.<sup>37</sup> Interesting points from the article are that Thailand and Cambodia share similar customs, traditions, beliefs, and ways of life. This is especially true of royal customs, language, writing systems, vocabulary, literature, and the dramatic arts. Elements of Thai culture which are generally considered to have originated in India, such as Buddhism, architecture, artistic designs, and even a significant portion of the Thai lexicon, in fact did not enter Thailand directly from India. Rather, they were all second-hand transmissions, so to speak, having first passed through the Sri Lankans (including the Tamil), the Mon, or the Khmer. Even the concept of divine kingship (Devaraja) and much of the special vocabulary associated with the royal court were, as M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, a noted intellectual and former Thai prime minister, said, “derived from Cambodia”.

On the other hand, the admiration of the Thai ruling classes for things Khom-Khmer remained in evidence even in the Rattanakosin (Bangkok) period. The account of this event, which appears in “The Royal Chronicles of King Rama IV” by Chao Phraya Thipakorawong, took place in 1860, before the Siamese ceded “sovereignty” over Cambodia to the French in 1867. King Rama IV, or King Mongkut (r. 1851 - 1868), for instance, ordered a Khmer stone temple disassembled and reconstructed on the Thai soil, but Phra Suphanphisan, after a trip to the ancient Khmer capital at Angkor, informed the King that all the stone temples were too enormous to be taken apart and transported to Siam. Hearing this, the King ordered that Prasat Ta Prohm, a relatively smaller temple, be relocated instead. Therefore, 4 groups of 500 men each were dispatched to deconstruct the prasat on the ninth day of the sixth lunar month. But the attempt to move the temple structure failed when “some 300 Khmers came

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<sup>36</sup> Keith W. Taylor, “The Early Kingdoms,” in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia Volume 1*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 157 - 168.

<sup>37</sup> Charnvit Kasetsiri, “Thailand - Cambodia: A Love - Hate Relationship,” trans. Michael Crabtree, [http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/issue/issue2/article\\_242.html](http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/issue/issue2/article_242.html) (Accessed September 22, 2005).

out of the forest and attacked the men who had come to disassemble the temple, killing Phra Suphanphisan, Phra Wang and one of Phra Suphanphisan's sons. Phra Mahatthai was stabbed, and Phra Yokkrabat was injured. The phrai commoners or barbarians escaped injury by fleeing into the forest.

It is unclear to us precisely why King Mongkut wished to have an enormous Khmer temple reconstructed in Siam at a time when the French were gradually extending their control over much of Indochina. It was obvious that the Khmer were angered by the theft of their property and responded violently. The incident convinced King Mongkut to abandon the plan to “disassemble” the prasat, but the beauty of the prasat was still in his mind. In 1867, or 7 years later, the King instructed Phra Samphobphai to go to Angkor and model after the Angkor in order to construct and install a model of Angkor Wat temple complex at Wat Phra Sri Ratanasasadaram (the Temple of the Emerald Buddha) to show people that Angkor Wat is a miracle structure totally built with stone.<sup>38</sup> The model of Angkor Wat remains at Wat Phra Sri Ratanasasadaram up to the present<sup>39</sup> and Samdech Hun Sen once visited the said mini-structure in early 1990s during an official visit to Thailand for discussions with then-Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan. Moreover, the King also ordered the construction of a model of Prasat Ta Prohm to be erected adjacent to Wat Phra Keo at Phra Nakhon Kiri or Khao Wang in Phetchaburi Province which is called “Phra Prang Daeng”.<sup>40</sup>

## 1.2 Occupation of Cambodian lands

Following the fall of the Angkor empire, the land that encompasses what are now Siem Reap, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, and Oddar Meanchey Provinces was once under Thai control. During the French protectorate, this land was returned to Cambodia as part of a series of treaties and agreements that kept French colonial rule out of Thailand. This is a sore point for Thais and it is usually directed at the west for forcing them to make these unfair treatments. The land was briefly returned to the

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<sup>38</sup> Theeraphab Lohitkul, “Old Man and Loop of Karma and Curse of Angkor Wat Angkor Thom” (ชายชรากับปวงกรรม และคำสาป นครวัด นครธม) 5th ed. (Bangkok: Praew Printing House, 2003), pp. 60 - 61. (in Thai)

<sup>39</sup> Saisunee Singhathasana, “Model of Angkor Wat at Wat Phra Kaeo,” *Orsorthor* (อ.ส.ท.) *Journal* 45, no. 10 (May 2005). (in Thai)

<sup>40</sup> Theeraphab Lohitkul, “Old Man and Loop of Karma,” p. 61.

Thai control during World War II as a deal between France and the occupying Japanese forces. In 1945, the land was once again returned to Cambodia and the borders have been set ever since. Given the circumstances that Thailand lost dominion over this land, there are some Thais who do feel that this land ought still to be part of Thailand. Nonetheless, this is not a majority-held opinion on the part of the Thais, which is due to the fact that history is full of border shifts and land swaps, empires expand and empires contract.

Other than the lands that belonged to Cambodia as mentioned above, there is another case of the right over Preah Vihear Temple which sits atop the Dangrek mountain straddling the border between the two countries. Following the seizure of this temple by the Thai military in 1954, Cambodia took the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Hague in 1959. In 1962, the Court ruled out that the temple belonged to Cambodia.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, many Cambodians, particularly those among scholars and students, feel that most Thais still want to take the Temple back from Cambodia although the ICJ had already made the decision in 1962 that the sovereign rights over the Temple belongs to Cambodia.

### **1.3 Name of Siem Reap and tug-of-war for Siem Reap**

Another example that best reflects the antagonism between Thailand and Cambodia is the name of Siem Reap Province, the location of Angkor Wat and other renowned Khmer ancient temples. In Khmer, ‘Siem’ specifically refers to ‘Siamese’ (Thai people) and ‘Reap’ means ‘flat area.’

At the time when the King of Hongsawadi brought his army to Ayutthaya in 1549 in the reign of King Maha Chakkraphat, King Srey of Lovek, by knowing that a change of reign was taking place in Ayutthaya, moved swiftly with his army to Prachinburi and attacked it. He rounded up, forcibly removed the inhabitants of Prachinburi, and took them to Lovek. After King Maha Chakkraphat heard reports that Hongsawadi was at peace, he then conscripted an army and a naval force to attack Lovek. The King of Lovek saw that he would be unable to defend the city, so he surrendered to the Thai king by showing acts of respect and rendering the royal tribute

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<sup>41</sup> Gordon Sharpless, “Cambodia and Thailand: One Year Later,” *Tales of Asia*, <http://www.talesofasia.com/cambodia-update-feb04.htm#riots> (Accessed February 2, 2007).

articles in homage together with his sons, Prince Sutho and Prince Suthan. Then the Siamese King sent Prince Suthan (Prince Ong) up to rule Sawankhalok.

Years passed, Lovek had been lost to the Vietnamese. King Maha Chakkraphat was informed that Prince Sattha (Ang Chan) had gone to get the Vietnamese army and attacked Lovek and that King Srey, father of Prince Suthan and Prince Sutho, had been lost to the Vietnamese. Then the King asked Prince Suthan, ruler of Sawankhalok, to lead an army to retake Lovek. When the army neared Lovek, Phraya Rammalak, who had conscripted the army, penetrated the enemy forces in the middle of the night. The Vietnamese and Khmer armies split up and resisted him capably and Phraya Rammalak's army was routed and collided with the main army. At that time, the Prince of Sawankhalok was killed on the neck of his elephant and many elephants, horses and troops were lost.<sup>42</sup> It was because of this victory over the Thais that Ang Chan baptized one of the towns “Siem Reap”, meaning “the flat defeat of Siam”.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, Siem Reap was later under the Thai control for some time since 1794 in the reign of King Rama I and the city was renamed by the Thais as ‘Siem Rat’ or ‘City of Siam’. Thailand lost Siem Reap to France in 1907 in the reign of King Rama V and Thailand was able to take it back from France again in 1941 and renamed it as ‘Phiboonsongkram Province’. At last, Thailand definitely lost Siem Reap to France in 1945 as the defeated nation in the World War II.<sup>44</sup>

#### **1.4 What are the differences between Khmer, Khom, Khmen and Cambodian?**

The word “Khmer” refers to the major ethnic group in Cambodia, comprising perhaps 90 % of the population, and also to the language spoken throughout the country. The etymology of the word is obscure, but it has been in use to describe the inhabitants of the region for over a thousand years. In general, the terms “Khmer” and

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<sup>42</sup> “Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya (1424 - 1555),” Cornell University, <http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/hist244/TRCOA012.html> (Accessed February 7, 2007). See a full version in Richard D. Cushman, Trans., *Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, ed. David K. Wyatt (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> M.L. Manich Jumsai, *History of Thailand and Cambodia*, Seventh Revised Edition, (Bangkok, Chalermnit, 2001), p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38 - 42. Also see Theeraphab Lohitkul “Old Man and Loop of Karma,” pp. 50 - 53 and 231 - 234.

“Cambodian” are interchangeable, and in the conversation, Cambodians refer to their country as “Sruk Khmer” (Khmer-land).<sup>45</sup>

Professor Dr. Charnvit Kasetsiri asserted that some Thais still lack correct understanding vis-à-vis the origin of Khmers and the relations between the history of Angkor Wat and modern Khmers. This is reflected in the way of thinking of a considerable number of educated Thais and members of the ruling class, who distinguish between “Khom” and “Khmer”, by considering them two separate ethnic groups. They assert that it was the Khom, not the Khmer, who built the majestic temple complexes at Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom and who founded one of the world’s truly magnificent ancient empires. They further claim that Khmer culture, for instance in its various forms of masked dance drama, is merely a “derivative” of Thai culture. This is despite the fact that the word “Khom” is derived from the old Thai word “Khmer krom”, meaning “lowland Khmer”. In spoken Thai, “Khmer” was gradually dropped, leaving only “krom”, which over time became, first, “klom” or “kalom”, and then eventually “Khom”.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, when we talk about the Khom and the Khmer, we are talking the same thing.

However, most Cambodians want Thais to call them “Khmer” (แคะมรุ) rather than “Khmen” (แคะมรุ). Mr. Srirat Nuchniyom, Managing Director of MICA Media Co., Ltd., an operator of TV 5 of Cambodia from January 1999 to 2001, gave an interview to Matichon Daily that normally the Cambodians like Thainess, Thai people and Thai products but do not like anybody call them “Khmen” (แคะมรุ) since it is regarded as insulting words just the same as Jek (แคะก) which refer to people of Chinese origin, Yuan (แคะวน) for Vietnamese and Seiu (แคะยิว) for Lao. Most of the Cambodians want others to call them “Khmer” (แคะมรุ). This is a small black spot on the white cloth which is similar to misunderstanding, mistrust, discord, and prejudice that prevails among the relations between the two countries and should be wiped out, otherwise the spot

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<sup>45</sup> David Chandler, et al., *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), xvii - xviii.

<sup>46</sup> Charnvit Kasetsiri, “Thailand – Cambodia.”

shall be getting expanded and exist permanently.<sup>47</sup>

With regard to the correct name of the Cambodians, Archarn Santi Pakdeekham, instructor at the Thai and Oriental Linguistic Department, Faculty of Humanities, Srinakarintrawiroth University, an expert on Khmer studies and member of Thailand - Cambodia Joint Commission on the Promotion of Cultural Cooperation,<sup>48</sup> gave an explanation in his non-paper of the reason Thais do not call the Cambodians as “Khmer” (เขมរ) as most of the Cambodians wish that it was found in the stone inscription made before the Angkorean period (B.E. 1200 - 1400) that Cambodians called themselves “Ka-men” (កាមេន), thus it should be supposedly read “Ka-men”. Later, evidence was discovered in the stone inscription belonged to Jayavarman VII in the Angkor period (B.E. 1500 - 1800), found at Banteay Chmar, which indicated that Cambodians called themselves “Khmenr” (ខ្មែន), therefore it should be supposedly read “Kha-menr”.

At the end of Angkorean period, Sukhothai and Ayutthaya were respectively founded in the Chao Phraya basin. At that time, Ayutthaya had long relationship with the Cambodian Court, then people of Ayutthaya called the right name of Cambodians as “Khmenr” and “r” was trilled (ខ្មែនរ). The oldest evidence was discovered in the Phraratchaphongsawadan (royal chronicles) Krung Si Ayutthaya, Horprasamudvachirayarn Edition as it appeared “Khmen” (ខ្មែន). That is why the Thais in the following periods call the Cambodians “Khmen” by keeping the same pronunciation as it used to be in the Angkorean period. On the other hand, Cambodians at the end of Angkorean period moved their capital down south, it was therefore the Angkorean Khmer language evolved into the Middle Khmer language which affected the pronunciation of “Khmen” by changing the sound “e” (េ) to “er” (ែ). As a result, Cambodian call themselves “Khmer” (ខ្មែរ) and “r” is silent which read “Kha-mer” (ខ្មែរ) while the Thais still call them “Khmen”.

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<sup>47</sup> Opart Pengchareoun, “Khmer Entertainment: Thai Businessman and Television Station in Cambodia,” *Matichon*, January 25, 2006, p. 33. (in Thai)

<sup>48</sup> Thailand - Cambodia Joint Commission on the Promotion of Cultural Cooperation was established as a result of the incident on 29 January 2003 as the core mechanism that uses culture as tool to promote mutual understanding between peoples of the two countries.

## 2. Perceptions of Cambodians towards Thais

The incident occurring within a night on 29 January 2003 totally destroyed the confidence and positive gesture of the good relations and cooperation between the two countries and their peoples which had been carefully nurtured for many years after peace and stability took a firm root in Cambodia in early 1990s. The effects arising from the incident may force us to assume that a wound on face, which developed into a deep scar, always reminds us of the story that is very difficult to forget. Mr. Santi Pakdeekam was of view that *“prejudices or hatred existing between the Thais and Cambodians have never died out. They remain deep in our hearts and once provoked, it could be easily inflamed”*.<sup>49</sup>

### 2.1 How do the Cambodians look on the Thais?

#### 2.1.1 Son Soubert's view

Mr. Son Soubert,<sup>50</sup> a son of Samdech Son Sann, former Cambodian Prime Minister in 1967 - 68 and founder of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) which cooperated with Prince Norodom Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge in the war against Heng Samrin regime in 1980s, has voiced his interesting viewpoints which best reflect how the Cambodians look on the Thais as follows:

*.....Sometimes history is made of misunderstanding, mistrust, discord, prejudices. As history starts from me too, I wish to share some of my own experiences in this regard about Cambodia's neighbors. After severing diplomatic ties for over the years, Cambodia and Thailand resumed their relationship in 1970. By that time, I had already visited Bangkok with my youngest brother, who was in his 20s, with a fair complexion and rather handsome. At the gate of the Grand Palace, where the visit was there not so well organized and the flux of tourists*

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<sup>49</sup> Bhanravee Tansubhapol and Achara Ashayagachat, “One Year Gone but the Wound still Unhealed,” *Bangkok Post*, January 29, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Son Soubert is son of Samdech Son Sann. He graduated from France in history and archeology and serves as president of the Permanent Committee of the Son Sann Foundation and member of the Cambodian Constitutional Council. For many occasions, he made strong criticisms against the Cambodian People's Party and Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister. Samdech Son Sann lived in exile in France and later died of heart failure in Paris on 19 December 2000 at the age of 89.

*was not so stressful, two young Thai women asked my brother where he came from in their broken English. They would not believe that he was Khmer or Khmen, because for them, Khmers were dark skinned and ugly: “mai suai, mai lor (not beautiful, not handsome)”. This was the first bias, and was from our part, a misunderstanding, mistrust, discord and prejudice: “How dare they call us Khmen. That sounds like “Khmeng” in Khmer, which means “young child”?.....<sup>51</sup>*

### **2.1.2 Attitudes of Cambodians towards Thai people and Thailand**

Following the anti-Thai violence in Phnom Penh on 29 January 2003, a small group of Thai and Cambodian scholars, led by Professor Dr. Supang Chantavanich from the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University in cooperation with the Mekong Sub-region Social Research Center (MSSRC), Ubon Ratchathani University and Psychology Department, the Royal University of Phnom Penh, joined their hands to conduct a research on the attitudes of the Cambodians towards the Thais. The objective of this research was to measure emotions and feelings of Cambodians towards Thais after the anti-Thai violence on 29 January 2003. Although this research needs improvement but it would be beneficial for governmental agencies and private firms to take its outcomes and observations as recommendation to their policy formulations.<sup>52</sup>

The research was conducted from March - April 2004 by interviewing Cambodians between 15 - 64 years old living in 7 districts of Phnom Penh (Chamkar Mom, Russeikeo, Dong Kor, Don Penh, Meanchey, Toul Kork, Makara) as sample groups. Briefed results are as follows:

(1) It was found that about one-third of the sample did not like Thai people, and they were employees and workers in tourism business, restaurants, and

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<sup>51</sup> Son Soubert, “Thai - Cambodian Relations with a Potential Outlook at Thai - Relations with Laos and Burma/Myanmar” (paper presented at the “Identities versus Globalization” conference, a conference cum art exhibition organized by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Chiang Mai, Amari Rincome Hotel, February, 6-8, 2004), [http://www.hbfasia.org/southeastasia/thailand/exhibitions/identitiesversusglobalisation/ivgdebates/nation\\_building/son\\_soubert.htm](http://www.hbfasia.org/southeastasia/thailand/exhibitions/identitiesversusglobalisation/ivgdebates/nation_building/son_soubert.htm) (Accessed February 2, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> Supang Chantavanich, et al., “Research on the Attitude of Cambodians in Phnom Penh towards Thai People and Thailand,” (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2004).

motorbike taxis. These sampling groups had opportunities to work in close contact with the Thai tourists and businesspersons more than other occupation. It is possible that they did not have a good impression or they were ill-informed or wrongly convinced, and therefore, they had bias against Thai people due to their poor educational background and career as workers. However, over two-thirds of the sample identified that the Thai people look down on them.

(2) It was learnt that there was a hidden violence in the relationship. The statistics showed that about two-fifths of the sample in service business identified that the incident on 29 January 2003 worth occurring. Nearly one-fourths of them thought that the similar event of the 29 January 2003 shall re-occur, although about half of the sample believed that it would not happen again. However, it showed that the riot that was caused by the negative attitude towards Thai people had a possible chance to take place again.

(3) The result of the first five opinions on how to improve the relationship between the two countries were as follows: (1) Thai people are more sincere with Cambodian people, (2) Thai businesspersons should not exploit Cambodian people (3) Thai media deliver positive news about Cambodia, (4) More cultural and people-to-people exchange programs between the two countries, (5) Thai officials are more friendly and helpful to Cambodians.

(a) The first, the fourth, and the fifth ways to improve the relationship implied that Cambodian people think that Thai people and officers lack sincerity, look down on Cambodian people, and show unfriendly and unhelpful gestures towards Cambodian people. Therefore, the Thai Government should improve and develop the relationship between the Thai and Cambodian people and give more chance for both people to build up a more sincere relationship. However, cultural exchange program or dissemination of Thai culture to Cambodia should be carefully carried out since the research result has found that the cultural exchange was a sensitive issue for the emotion of Cambodian people. Over half of the sample identified that Thailand and Thai people tried to disseminate Thai cultural influence.

(b) The second issue indicated that Cambodian people believed that Thai businesspersons exploit Cambodian people, the result showed that over half of the sample identified that the first three exploiting business are tourism-tourist,

factories, and telecommunication sectors. For this issue, the Thai Government should undertake an investigation or in-depth study in order to improve the interrelations and attitude towards Thai businesspersons and Thai people.

(c) The last issue involved with Thai media, and it can be implied that the sample believed that Thai media report negative news about Cambodia. However, as reason of the riot of the 29 January 2003 has been identified that it was the internal political conflict, Thai movie star and media were used as the political tool and propaganda. However, the Thai Government and the Thai media had to carefully avoid broadcasting the biased information.

## **2.2 Cambodian historical lessons relating to Thailand** <sup>53</sup>

Following the anti-Thai violence in Phnom Penh on 29 January 2003, it raised interesting point of views regarding the root-causes of the incident which partly implicated the history between Thailand and Cambodia since the two countries have different interpretations and perceptions. One way to learn how the Cambodians look on Thais is to find out from the Cambodian historical lessons since they have largely influenced attitudes and beliefs of Cambodians. In return, knowing the attitudes of the Cambodians may help the Thais to look back at themselves and find ways and means to practice properly for the sake of the promotion of the cordial relations between the two nations.

### **2.2.1 Nationalism in the Cambodian historical lessons**

Sentiment of nationalism in the Cambodian historical lessons could be felt through both the prefaces and objectives of the publications which indicate that historical lessons used for more than 30 years still emphasize nationalism and patriotism rather than neutrality in the study of history. Therefore, using lessons written in the nationalistic style as school materials has resulted in the instillation of nationalism and led to the distorted vision and understanding of history.

### **2.2.2 Thailand in the Cambodian historical lessons**

Cambodian historical lessons were mostly written in the past 30 years. Nonetheless, they have been used in schools up to the present and put on sale in the market. Most of them are copied or reproduced from the original ones without any

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<sup>53</sup> Santi Pakdeekham, *Cambodian History: Khmer Lessons in connection with Thailand* (Bangkok: Matichon, 2003), pp. 151 - 174. (in Thai)

corrections. In the “History of Cambodia” by Cha Orm, Pai Peng and Som In, it mentioned the origin of Thais and theoretically believed that the Thais migrated from Nanchao and then moved down to settle down in the territory belonging to the Northern Khmer and founded their kingdom at Sukhothai. Another textbook entitled “Brief History related to the Khmer - Siem Relations”, written by Ban Nuth (Phnom Penh, Bannalai Apsara, 2001), states in the similar ways but gives more details that when the Thais migrated from Yunnan, they raided and expelled Khmers from Sukhothai which belonged to Khmer. This indicated that the Cambodian historical lessons still exhibit Thai image as the aggressor against the Khmer integral territory.

### **2.2.3 Historical events affecting the emotion of Cambodians**

Other than mentioning the origin of the Thais, the Cambodian historical lessons also underline the relations between Siam and Cambodia, particularly wars between the two countries. Obvious example on this matter appeared in the “History of Cambodia” by Cha Orm, Pai Peng and Som In which often cited wars between the Cambodians and Thais and ended with allegation that the Thais seized the Khmer territory. After defeating the Khmers, the Thais forcibly moved Khmers back to their countries. Sometimes, it is mentioned in the way that the Thais robbed the nation such as “*Siam sacked Angkor again*” or stated that the Thais captured Khmer King and detained him in Thailand. It is clear that the clause in the Cambodian history textbooks composing the negative image of Thailand shall create negative sentiments towards Thais among the Cambodians at some level.

Although some Cambodian historical lessons sometimes quoted Thai documents but they are misrepresented such as the incident of the attack of Lovek by Phra Naresuan in the “Khmer History Part II” by Trung Ngia or Trung Nga (Phnom Penh, Mahalat, 1973) that

*These days at Wat Yai Chaimongkol in Ayutthaya Province, there are two paintings that touched the feelings, the first one is the Khmer King sitting on a chair, his legs and eyes are tied whereas the second one portraying a man in a white dress kneels and washes feet of the Siamese king with blood of the Khmer King. The story is misleading or just a story composed to praise the Thai King in the ancient time, which is due to the*

*fact that there were no Cambodian Royal Chronicles mentioned about that incident!.....*

In fact, the said paintings mentioned in the history book are a mural at Wat Suwandararam (วัดสุวรรณดาราราม) in Ayutthaya Province, not Wat Yai Chaimongkol. Moreover, Cambodia dissatisfied with Siam's royal chronicles mentioning that Phra Naksattha, the Khmer King at Lovek, was punished in an unusual ritual, called the Ritualized Capitation or Pathommakam (ประมุขกรรม) ceremony, in which the blood of the Khmer King from his execution was taken away in a tray to wash King Naresuan's feet. On the contrary, the Cambodian evidence noted that Phra Naksattha fled and passed away in Laos. Their dissident sentiment against the fall of Lovek was also exhibiting in the form of legend entitled Pheah Ko Preah Keo.

The legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo had become well-known among the Cambodians for long time until it was published by Reyem Press in 2001. This book presents a richly illustrated Khmer and English language version of the famous Cambodian legend, Preah Ko Preah Keo, which tells the adventures of a magical cow and his younger human brother. Even today, the pair is believed to bring great luck to the country in which they reside. The book told, “.....*Siamese learns that wherever Preah Ko is there, happiness shall prevail. Siamese has therefore tried to vigorously take care of Preah Ko Preah Keo. Since then, Preah Ko Preah Keo do not return to Cambodia....*”<sup>54</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Influential factors to Cambodia's historical studies**

Prof. Ben Kiernan, lecturer at the History Department of Yale University and one of the experts in Cambodian studies, voiced his stunning comments in the “History Today” (London, September 2004, pp. 16 - 19)<sup>55</sup> on the problem of studying Cambodian history that half a millennium of intermittent civil conflict, foreign invasions, and even genocide not only devastated Cambodia, but also prevented the

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<sup>54</sup> Excerpt of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo can be read at the website of the Cambodian Student Association in Japan at <http://www.csaj-khmer.org>.

<sup>55</sup> Ben Kiernan, “Recovering History and Justice in Cambodia,” *History Today* (September 2004): pp. 16-19, <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/Cambodia11.pdf> (Accessed February 5, 2007). Prof. Kiernan is a director of Genocides Study Program at the History Department of Yale University. He taught and produced a lot of books and articles relating the genocides and history in Indochina. See [www.yale.edu/gsp/GSP\\_AnnualReport2005.doc](http://www.yale.edu/gsp/GSP_AnnualReport2005.doc).

Cambodian people from weighing their experiences in historical perspective. Hindu, Buddhist, royalist, republican, colonial and communist regimes came and went. Five relocations of the Khmer capital <sup>56</sup> in as many centuries preceded the three foreign occupations and seven regime changes of the past sixty years alone. Repeatedly, officials abandoned archives. Rulers erased rivals from the record. International leaders denied Cambodia's history or blocked its documentation. Moreover, during the colonial period, the colonialists neglected Khmer education. Pagoda schools declined; literacy rates fell. Ninety years of colonial rule produced only 144 Khmer Baccalauréats. Moreover, it appeared that none of Cambodia's pre-1975 professors or lecturers who had remained in the country survived the Khmer Rouge genocide.<sup>57</sup> These terrible facts help us understand the difficulty in the development of history education in Cambodia and the reason why the history lessons of Cambodia should be reformed.

### **2.2.5 Nationalism among Cambodian politicians and students**

There is a Khmer popular saying, *srok khmer men dael son*, “the Khmer country will never disappear”. As Anthony Barnett has pointed out, it seems to represent a commonsense understanding that empires rise and fall but people are generally resilient.<sup>58</sup> That is why the loss and gain of territories throughout the history had developed nationalistic sentiments among the Cambodians in an effort to fight for national independence and integrity. The modern Cambodia's territory was consolidated as recently as the pre-World War I period. Cambodian people in 1907 saw the “return” to their motherland, then under the French protectorate, of her entire northwestern provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap, which had been under the Thai rule since 1794. In 1914, the French restored more territory to Cambodia. The recent controversial territorial dispute between Siam and Cambodia occurred when the latter, with the strong support of all Cambodians, brought the case of Preah Vihear Temple to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In 1962, by nine votes to three, the

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<sup>56</sup> Cambodia's Capital Phnom Penh is the sixth after Nokor Phnom, Angkor, Longvek or Lovek, Srey Sunthor, and Oudong.

<sup>57</sup> Ben Kiernan, Introduction to *How Pol Pot Came to Power: A History of Communism in Cambodia, 1930 - 1975*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. xii-xiv.

<sup>58</sup> Ben Kiernan, “Myth, Nationalism and Genocide,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 3, no. 2 (2001): 190, <http://www.yale.edu/gsp/publications/Myth.pdf> (Accessed February 20, 2007).

Court made a decision that sovereign rights over the Temple of Preah Vihear belong to Cambodia.<sup>59</sup> This is one tangible proof that nationalism in Cambodia is much related to international affairs and somehow dealt with territory.

On 15 January 2004, Kay Kimsong, Daily Business Editor, Daniel Ten Kate, Associate Editor, and Matt Reed, Editor-in-Chief of the Cambodia Daily interviewed Mr. Piyawat Niyomrerks, newly appointed Ambassador of Thailand to Cambodia, who just presented his credentials to King Norodom Sihanouk on 12 January 2004 and had been in Cambodia for ten days, about his views on the relations and attitudes between people of the two countries. Ambassador Piyawat opined that there were Cambodian students who played a large role in the 2003 violence and many continue to have a negative impression of Thailand, this was very important, because the misunderstanding, mistrust, discord, and prejudices came from misperceptions. He was of the view that history textbooks of both sides should be responsible for this misunderstanding, mistrust, discord, and prejudice. And therefore a joint textbook committee to review the history of the two countries has been formed so that both sides can work together and make things clearer and make history written in a factual way, and not with value judgments or through emotions. This could make people friendly to each other, and not wider apart. This is important but it will take some time. It could take ten years to make the new generation perceive this new concept. Moreover, it has to be neutral, it has to be done both ways, with both Cambodia and Thailand. It cannot be done only one way.<sup>60</sup>

### **3. Perceptions of the Thais towards the Cambodians**

There are many factors that might affect the good perceptions among the Thais towards the Cambodians as follows:

#### **3.1 Insufficient knowledge about neighboring countries**

In the production of knowledge of the Thai side relating to the relations between Thailand and her neighboring countries, it seems that there are shortcomings

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<sup>59</sup> International Court of Justice.

<sup>60</sup> Kay Kimsong, Daniel Ten Kate and Matt Reed, "More Than Just Neighbors," *The Cambodia Daily*, January 31 – February 1, 2004, pp. 10-11.

in the Thai works as it appears that most of them focus on a narrow range of subjects, namely security, diplomacy, economic or trade relations. Moreover, these studies are very nationalistic, looking more like the bureaucratic reports for Thai policy makers than scholarly research and lacking of considering historical and cultural factors.<sup>61</sup> This factor makes us understand that the Thai people still have little knowledge of their neighboring countries which is not beneficial for the promotion of good understanding and mutual confidence among them.

Moreover, for the last three decades, Indochina is much less attractive to Thai academics as a field of study. Therefore, the situation of Indochinese studies in Thailand is not much different from what Professor Charnvit Kasetsiri described in 1991 when he asserted that Thai academic institutions so far have not yet paid enough attention to Southeast Asia as a study area. He wrote that “despite the fact that Thailand belongs to the area, there is no serious attempt to pursue such study. The Thai Government, elite and academic specialists, know very little of the economies, politics, society and culture of its neighbors, without mentioning further away Southeast Asian countries”.<sup>62</sup> Professor Charnvit Kasetsiri made his interesting observation which is relevant to the afore-mentioned situation by citing a Thai proverb “Klai klua kin dang” (ใกล้เกลือกินต่าง or close to the salt, but take in the lime).<sup>63</sup>

### 3.2 Cambodians in the perception of the Thais

Thailand's views and relations with her neighbors are based on the perspective of ego-centric. As one of supremacy in the region over several centuries, the Siamese Kingdoms from Ayutthaya to Bangkok occupied a position from which their neighbors were seen as either rivals or competitors for supremacy, or as inferior vassals, dependencies and lesser kingdoms. Sense of superior-inferior and untrustworthiness, discord, and prejudice towards Cambodians has featured in a number of Thai catch-phrases that signify against whom Thailand must always be on guard. Among the well known one is “Khamen praephak” (เขมรแปรพักตร์ or the

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<sup>61</sup> Thongchai Winichakul, “Trying to Locate Southeast Asia from Its Navel: Where is Southeast Asian Studies in Thailand?,” *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt, Paul Kratoska and Remco Ruben, (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2005) pp. 114 - 115.

<sup>62</sup> Puangthong Rungwasdisab, “Thailand's Response to the Cambodian.”

<sup>63</sup> Thongchai Winichakul, “Trying to Locate Southeast Asia,” pp. 113 - 114.

betraying Khmer). It is associated with several episodes of strained relations between Cambodia and Ayutthaya after the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In views of modern nationalist historians, the kings of Cambodia often switched sides or attacked Siam when the country was in trouble as it clearly appears in the story of the Khmer King at Lovek.<sup>64</sup>

Similar to the afore-mentioned Thai catch-phrase, there are recently other catchwords like “Yuan cannot be friend” (ญวนคบไม่ได้), “Untamed Khmer” (เขมรเลี้ยงไม่เชื่อง), “Younger Brother Lao” (น้องลาว). These catchwords enable us to understand well how the Thais look on their neighbors. Fairly speaking, how many Thais who used to admire the fight for independence of motherland of the Vietnamese, speak by heart and entirely that in the past the Khmer civilization was greater than that of the Thai’s (particularly Cambodia under the reign of King Jayavoraman VII) and never think of looking down Lao people. On the contrary, the Thais use material development as norm to measure the prosperity between Thailand and neighbors. As a result, Thais are more developed whereas people of neighbors become barbarians, uneducated and underdeveloped.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.3 The Thais’ habits

The Thai people are considered as those who are easy to forget and always forgive as saying “mai pen rai” (ไม่เป็นไร or it is not the matter). In early February 2003, RU Poll of the Institute of Research and Development of Ramkhamhaeng University conducted an interesting poll entitled “Lesson of Thais from Kob’s Tears after the Burning of Thai Embassy” by asking opinions of the sample group in Bangkok. The result came out that most of the Thais dislike Cambodians since the Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh was burnt but, on the other hand, Cambodians are still pitiful in the eyes of most of the Thais since they are victims of wars and poverty.<sup>66</sup> Examples of the outcome of the poll are as follows:

(1) Opinions towards Cambodian migrant workers: 28.6 % did not want the Cambodian workers anymore since burning of the Royal Thai Embassy extremely

<sup>64</sup> Thongchai Winichakul, “Trying to Locate Southeast Asia,” pp. 117, 120 - 121.

<sup>65</sup> Thanapon Chaiphasri, “From Suwanun Kongying to Burning Thai Embassy-Cambodian Mob: Do Thais and Cambodians still love each other?,” <http://www.lawonline.co.th/html/columnist020.html> (Accessed December 15, 2006). (in Thai)

<sup>66</sup> *Khao Sod*, February 6, 2003, p. 8. (in Thai)

hurt the Thais whereas 28.4 % agreed that the Cambodian workers could continue their works in Thailand since they did not take part in the riot;

(2) Most Thais felt pity towards the Cambodians for the following results: 33.4 % took a pity on the Cambodians since they faced malnutrition and fled the war into Thailand, 28.0 % felt pity because of their poverty as a result of being an underdeveloped nation and 28.0 % felt pity for their under-educated level;

(3) Lessons to be learnt from the incident: 30.4 % were of views that consciousness and wit should be used when violence occurs, 28.1 % saw that mass media is influential to national security and 26.3 % felt that a leader should be incredulous, prudent and far-sighted;

#### **4. Cultural factors**

Ambassador Piyawat Niyomrerks expressed his view that Cambodia and Thailand have much shared history. In fact, Cambodia has an even longer history than Thailand. The Khmer lived here (present Cambodia) before others. Then others came from other parts, like South China, and formed a new race, or a new ethnic group. He found that Cambodians have the closest culture with the Thais, and vice versa. That includes language, cultural performances, classical dancing and musical instruments, even proverbs. Even though the two people do not have identical spoken languages, but even when they speak two or three words, they understand what they mean.<sup>67</sup> However, it seems that sentiment of discord and disharmony between the two countries, or even between Thailand and other neighbors, is difficult to remove and there are many cases worth raising as examples.

##### **4.1 Side-effects of Thai films**

Similar to the case of the controversy over the film “Mak Te” (Lucky Loser or หมากเตะ) which was a reflection of the resentment of Lao people, adding that the conflict would be endless because the Thai media loved making jokes about human weaknesses. In 2003 - 2004, a Thai film entitled “Ong Bak” (องค์บาก) or Muay Thai Warrior, produced by Sahamongkol Film of Thailand, rocked the film market in many

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<sup>67</sup> Kimsong, Kate and Reed, “More Than Just Neighbors.”

countries including Phnom Penh. For the Cambodians, the Khmer people are proud of their martial art called “Padal Serei” or free-style fighting which has been handed down from the past as it partly appears on the sandstone carvings on the walls of famed Angkor Wat and they are convinced that the Thais stole and copied this classic art as their own. There were criticisms by the media questioning the right of the martial art displayed by the film’s leading star, Phanom Yeerum or Tony Jaa who is a Thai national and capable of speaking Khmer since he lives in the lower Esarn Province of Surin, just opposite Odder Meanchey Province of Cambodia.<sup>68</sup> The film was successful and warmly welcomed by the Cambodians in Phnom Penh and abroad.

Other than Ong Bak, one more story affecting the Thai - Cambodian relations took place in mid-2006 when a Thai horror film entitled “Ghost Game” was released into the film market amidst the protests of Cambodian scholars and students about the appropriateness of its content. The arguments over the film were based on a notorious Khmer Rouge death camp, Tuol Sleng torture centre in Phnom Penh or widely known as S-21, and most people flocked to see this movie. This was under fierce criticism by some Cambodian scholars and media that it was because most Thais now either have forgotten or were still ignorant about what happened just across the border in the neighboring country to the east during those terrible years, when the worst kinds of crime against humanity were committed during the Khmer Rouge regime.<sup>69</sup> However, the producers of the “Ghost Game” offered an apology to the Cambodian people following the severe protests and criticisms from Cambodian authorities about the glaring insensitivity of the movie’s theme and settings and the lack of respect shown to the memory of genocide victims and their surviving families. There was another comment worth pondering that if the producers of other nationalities other than Thais produced this film, the question of the film’s merit would not take place.

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<sup>68</sup> Personal website of Phanom Yeerum, <http://www.tonyjaa.org/facts.shtml> (Accessed February 7, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> Ethan Piaut and Thet Sambath, “Setting of Thai Horror Film: A Fictional S-21,” *The Cambodia Daily*, April 26, 2006.

#### **4.2 Popularity of Thai pop culture**

Another chapter of cultural issue is that a great deal of Cambodians consider the dominance of Thai pop culture as yet another form of cultural imperialism being unleashed by the Thais. Some young people want Cambodia to develop more of its own arts and entertainment instead of coming only from Thailand. This phenomenon is crystallized by Charles F. Keyes, a professor of international relations at the University of Washington in Seattle, that “the Thais have a long history of looking down on the Cambodians, but the Thais have also borrowed a lot from Khmer culture and the Cambodians are resentful of the Thais for not acknowledging what they owe to the Khmer heritage”. This was one of important factors that triggered the violence in Phnom Penh on 29 January 2003. After the violence, billboards featuring Thai products and starring actors had been plastered over. The Cine Lux movie house, sole importer of Thai film in Cambodia, has canceled all Thai movies. Even the Phnom Penh radio station Love FM 97.5, which was backed by Thai investors, dropped Thai music from its playlist after the anti-Thai riot. The Thai companies also withdrew some of their advertising.<sup>70</sup> Up to February 2007, it seemed that none of ordinary television dared to air the Thai programs pending permission from the Cambodian Government. However, those who own the satellite receiver or subscribe to on-line television programs from private companies are still able to enjoy themselves with the Thai programs.

#### **5. Politicization of the relations**

As mentioned earlier, there are various causes that become sources of hatred and dislike between Thai and Cambodian peoples, such as the contending for sovereign right over the Temple of Preah Vihear, the demarcation of ambiguous land boundary that might affect the private ownership of land, the feelings of being dominated by the Thai influences in terms of culture, life-style and severely imbalanced trade. On the other hand, it is apparent that the nature of Cambodian politics always involves international affairs, particularly the relations between

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<sup>70</sup> David Barboza, “In Cambodia, years of anti-Thai feeling turn into a boycott,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2003, p A-17.

Cambodia and her more powerful neighbors, namely Thailand or Vietnam, which is used as political agenda by the oppositions or dissidents to destabilize and destroy the credibility of the Cambodian Government. Moreover, some mass media also distort the truth just to keep their discoveries and criticisms from becoming the talk of the town and debatable stories that might help increase their circulation and popularity. With those reasons, the relations between Thailand and Cambodia is certainly prone to tension and might be in danger if the opposition parties or dissident organizations, groups, and individuals use the bilateral relations to fulfill their ill-wished purposes.

A story that is worth raising as a substantive example of Thai - Cambodian controversy over the right of Preah Vihear Temple which took place in the period of Sangkum Reastr Niyum (สังคมนานาชาตินิยม) under the leadership of Prince Norodom Sihanouk who abdicated the throne and played role as prime minister. The case of Preah Vihear Temple was used as political tool and the building up of nationalism and patriotism among the Cambodians against Thailand. The incident led to the unilateral termination of diplomatic relations between the two countries, effective from 1 December 1958 and the Thai - Cambodian frontier was ordered closed starting from 25 November 1958. The reason officially given by Cambodia to justify the rupture of diplomatic relations between the two countries had been the campaign by the press against each other, and then Cambodia alleged that Thailand concentrated troops and military equipment on a war footing along the Thai - Cambodian border.<sup>71</sup>

Prince Sihanouk made some statements and wrote a lot of articles, both in English and French, that helped him gain popularity and win a lot of support from Cambodian people in opposition against Thailand which helps us understand of how international affairs, particularly the relations between Cambodia and her neighbors, have been utilized as political tool for the benefit of the promotion of nationalism and political campaign in Cambodia for specific purposes.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, *Facts about the Relations between Thailand and Cambodia*, (Bangkok: Prachandra Press, 1959), pp. 1 - 10.

<sup>72</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, *Facts about the Relations between Thailand and Cambodia* (Bangkok: Prachandra Press, 1961), pp. 18 - 19.

## 6. Economic factors

As the Cold War in the Southeast region gradually died out in the 1980s, economic cooperation was remarkably placed high on the agenda. Thailand began to view neighboring countries as lands of economic opportunity for Thai capitalism. Former battlefields, namely Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, were transformed into the marketplaces by the policy of the Thai Prime Minister, General Chatchai Choonhavan. On the other hand, the role of economics in the Thai foreign policy vis-à-vis neighboring countries stemmed from Thailand's depletion of its natural resources, namely fisheries, forestry, minerals, petroleum and natural gas. Thailand has virtually exhausted its reserves, or been constrained from their further development by environmental concerns. Thailand faces the following predicament: "Vital raw materials that are readily available in Indochina and Myanmar, such as timber, marine products, gemstones, minerals, and hydro-power, are badly needed by Thailand to support its next stage of industrial development". After peace had been prevailing in the Indochinese countries in early 1990s, Thailand's economic and political boycott against these countries, which was stemming from ideological and military-security concerns, was therefore dropped in order that Thailand be in a better position to gain an access to variety of resources in those countries.

The spectacle of Thailand's economic and cultural influence rising in Cambodia is another factor leading to the emergence of fears among Cambodians who are afraid that the Thai economy and culture would dominate that of Cambodia. Such fears still exist due to the fact that the heavy trade deficits between the two countries have been enlarged every year and Thailand's brand is very popular among the Cambodian consumers. To mitigate such situation, the Cambodian Government has diversified its trade and investment relations with other countries, particularly Vietnam and China. The statement of Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai who had declared that Thailand's foreign policy would not be a kind of "ideology driven but business driven" reflects the said phenomenon. He also declared adherence to the "Asian way", which was defined as non-interference, especially in the relations with neighboring countries. Another reality check could be the efficacy of a "business

driven” policy, particularly as a panacea that will take care of all bilateral problems with neighboring countries.<sup>73</sup>

On 5 February 2003, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate of Thailand organized a seminar with a view to brainstorming opinions from the senators, members of the parliament, intellectuals, media representatives, officials and interested people on the topic of “Thailand - Cambodia: Problems and Solutions”. Gists of the results of the said seminar are of the followings:

(1) Violence and the burning of the Royal Thai Embassy and Thai private businesses in Phnom Penh reflected the negative attitude of Cambodians towards Thais. Although Thailand has invested in Cambodia with significant volume but the Thai investment cast much influence over the Cambodians, namely telecommunication, hotel and tourism including cultural domination through television. Thailand therefore fell as the victim of nationalism, which was used by Cambodian politicians for the benefit of general elections campaign;

(2) Although the relations between Thailand and Cambodia at governmental level were smooth, the relations at people-to-people level has never been vitally recognized or received importance. Moreover, some businesses may create a negative effect, particularly casinos which are not beneficial to Cambodians in general, both in terms of revenue from tax and employment. Thai businesspersons should take this matter into serious consideration and think of social investment to pay benefit back to the Cambodian community;

(3) For part of the sufferers from the violence on 29 January 2003, they could not identify who played behind the riot scene. Mobs engaging in the anti-Thai violence could be divided into 3 categories, namely established mob, student mob and plundering mob. For other areas out of Phnom Penh such as Siem Reap Province where there is a major tourist destination, the Cambodian people there did not agree with the anti-Thai riot that took place in the capital. In view of the investors, they saw

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<sup>73</sup> Kusuma Snitwongse, “Thai Foreign Policy in the Global Age: Principle or Profit?,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Volume 23, Number 2, August 2001, (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001), p. 210.

that the violence made a strong impact and became a learned lesson to the Cambodian Government.<sup>74</sup>

More insightful analysts suggested that the Cambodian unrest had been brewing for some time. Thailand and Cambodia have been exchanging salvos for years over the dispute on the undemarcated land boundary. More of a factor may have been Cambodians' increasing resentment over what they see as Thailand's economic colonization of their country. There are imbalances and big gaps in the socio-economic development between them. In 2002 alone, before the anti-Thai violence in Cambodia in early 2003, bilateral trade between the two countries reached 22,622.30 million baht in which Thailand gained trade surplus in the amount of 21,659.30 million baht while border trade between the two countries was 18,850 million baht in which Thailand gained trade surplus about 17,917.52 million baht.<sup>75</sup> The imbalance of trade between the two countries has been being expanded and may lead to dissatisfaction and mistrust among the Cambodians towards Thais in the same manner that Thais had done with Japan a few years ago.

Moreover, in terms of the investment from Thailand, much of Cambodia's nascent infrastructure, including its mobile phone network, is wholly or partially owned by Thai firms. Even tourism, which the Cambodian Government has upheld as a key engine to the country's economic growth, has grown under the Thai auspices; three of the largest hotels in Phnom Penh are Thai-owned and Bangkok Airways enjoys a virtual monopoly on the lucrative route from Bangkok to Siem Reap Province, home of the renowned Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom. The aftermath of the riot only highlighted to many Cambodians the extent to which they are dependent on their wealthier neighbor. Once the border points of entry in the border areas are closed, the economies of towns in Cambodia that rely heavily on the cross-border trade such as Poi Pet Town shall be badly affected.

On 21 March 2003 after the Cambodian Government had paid 252 million baht (5.9 million USD) in compensation to Thailand for the destruction of the Royal

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<sup>74</sup> Foreign Committee Work Force, Secretariate to the Foreign Committee, Senate Secretariate, "Burning of the Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh," (Bangkok, Senate Secretariate, 2005), pp. 155 - 158. (in Thai)

<sup>75</sup> Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, "Trade Statistics between Thailand and Neighbors," <http://www.moc.go.th> (Accessed November 15, 2006).

Thai Embassy, the relations between the two countries has little by little improved and the situation in the border areas returned to normalcy. However, several thorny issues remain unresolved. Though the Cambodian Government has agreed in principle to pay an additional 2 billion baht (46.6 million USD) to Thai businesses affected by the incident, trust between the two countries remained at an all-time low. Prime Minister Hun Sen may also have some difficulty persuading his largely impoverished people, many of whom, correctly or not, believe that Cambodian money already ends up in the Thai coffers, that settling the outstanding bill is in the nation's best interests.<sup>76</sup>

In Cambodia, foreign businesses are fighting among themselves to dominate the Cambodian market, particularly in the growing telecommunications field and all other kinds of consumer products. This leaves less opportunity for local businesses to thrive. It is therefore easy to see how those who failed to secure business relationships with the Thai businesspersons could manipulate a small demonstration for their own gain. Mr. Kraissak Choonhavan, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs of the Senate of Thailand opined that in the relations with neighbors, Thailand emphasized economic cooperation and doing business in neighboring countries which would engage with persons who had close connection with the governments of neighboring countries. It was not different from that of Chartichai Choonhavan's administration or other governments. The difference by far from the previous governments was that the family of Prime Minister Thaksin possessed the biggest telecommunication business in the country that created bias among business circles. Bypassing other dimensions of the relations such as culture and exchange programs, politics and promotion of human rights, Thaksin's administration therefore exhibited the picture of paying attention only on economic development with neighboring countries.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Hopfiner, "Ancient History: Thailand and Cambodia make peace - but for how long?," [http://www.kwrintl.com/library/2003/Advisor\\_17/ancient.html](http://www.kwrintl.com/library/2003/Advisor_17/ancient.html) (Accessed December 15, 2006). KWR International, Inc. is a consulting firm specializing in research and advisory services.

<sup>77</sup> Foreign Committee of the Senate, "Foreign Policy Remarks no. 3" (Bangkok: Secretariate of the Senate of Thailand, 2546), p. 84. (in Thai)

## 7. Mass media factor

It is evident that in Cambodia, media of all kinds are politically controlled. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are guaranteed under the constitution yet are confused by the ambiguity of Article 12 of the 1995 Press Law, which states that “the press shall not publish or reproduce any information that may cause harm to national security and political stability”. As no definition of “national security” and “political stability” is provided, the law is therefore left open to subjective interpretation. While foreign media are generally able to operate freely, Cambodian media are almost entirely politically controlled and may be used as political tools to destroy the credibility of the opposite sides for certain purposes or to seek political support among Cambodian people as it once caused and stimulated the anti-Thai violence in Phnom Penh on 29 January 2003. A recent study alleged that ‘the two most popular TV stations, most radio stations and the largest-circulation Cambodian newspapers are owned or controlled by the Cambodian People’s Party. One foreign journalist operating in Cambodia suggested that many Cambodian news reporters tailor their coverage according to whomever they are being paid by, be it their employer or powerful individuals, not on principles of exposing and disseminating the truth.’<sup>78</sup>

In Cambodia, there are more than 100 newspapers printed in various forms in Khmer, English, French, Chinese and Vietnamese. The most popular and having high circulation are (1) Rasmei Kampuchea Daily (2) Koh Santepheap Daily (3) Kampuchea Thmey (4) Manasikara Khmer (5) Voice of the Khmer Youth (6) Uddom Kate Khmer. The first three newspapers are the supporters of the government while the rest cling to the opposition side. Cambodia Daily and Cambodge Soir are printed in English and French respectively and become useful source of information among foreigners both in Cambodia and abroad.

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<sup>78</sup> Lindsay MacLean, “National Integrity System, Transparency International Country Study Report: Cambodia 2006” (Berlin: Transparency International Secretariat, 2006), pp. 27-28. This Report in details can be downloaded at [http://www.transparency.org/content/download/12694/125511/file/Cambodia\\_NIS\\_2006.pdf](http://www.transparency.org/content/download/12694/125511/file/Cambodia_NIS_2006.pdf) (Accessed January 30, 2007).

For Cambodian television, there are many channels such as National Television Kampuchea - TVK7 which is a state television and the most influential among the Cambodians due to its long-range signal capacity and a number of its relay stations scattering in important provinces nationwide, TV 9 and TV Apsara (TV11) which are state-run televisions, TV 3 which is a joint venture between Thailand and Cambodia, TV Khemerak Phomin (TV 5) which belongs to the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, etc.

Moreover, there are a number of radio stations mostly transmitting in FM frequency. Some of them belong to political party and, of course, they are used as tool for political campaign and public relations to disseminate the matters that are the interest of their own political parties or politically attack the opposite sides.

### **III. Conclusion**

The anti-Thai violence that took place in Phnom Penh in the night of 29 January 2003 was obviously a product of politics in Cambodia as it appeared that a piece of an article printed in Rasmei Angkor newspaper on 18 January 2003 was picked up by the most influential Cambodian politician, Prime Minister of Cambodia, for the interest of his political campaign ahead of the forth-coming general elections scheduled on 27 July 2003. At that time, most of the Cambodians, from all sides and all walks of life, were filled with political moods and were easily induced to believe in things.

However, the anti-Thai violence was not provoked by political factors alone, in fact there were a lot of factors that became root-causes of the incident ranging from contempt and attitude of superiority and inferiority among the Cambodians, historical factors, gap of socio-economic development, Thailand's economic and cultural domination, roles of media, etc. The violence had wounded and left a big scar in the relations and good understanding between Thailand and Cambodia. It also cost a lot of money and energy to remedy the situation. That is why it is necessary for the two Governments and all of us to take it as a learned lesson and to help prevent the reoccurrence of such an incident in the future, as well as find concrete steps to promote good understanding between the peoples of the two countries.