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WORKING PAPER #88

# **The Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s**

## **An Ideological Victory and a Strategic Failure**

By Wang Chenyi





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**Christian F. Ostermann and Charles Kraus, Series Editors**

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# The Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s: An Ideological Victory and a Strategic Failure

Wang Chenyi

The Chinese Communist Party's relationship with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s has long been shrouded in mystery.

The two most recent studies on this subject, one by Andrew Mertha and the other by John D. Ciorciari, both argue that the CCP was unable to influence the Khmer Rouge, despite providing massive assistance to its protégé. In this bilateral relationship, China “ended up as the subordinate party,” while the Khmer Rouge was able to “exercise considerable autonomy.”<sup>1</sup> Mertha notes that China “justifiably received international condemnation for maintaining the viability of the CPK [Khmer Communist Party, or the Khmer Rouge] regime while receiving precious little tangible benefit from its Cambodian allies.” He further raises the question, “exactly what did Chinese development aid buy?”<sup>2</sup> This question, however, is left unanswered in his book *Brothers in Arms*. So why did the CCP provide massive amounts of aid to the Khmer Rouge since 1970, in particular after the CPK's victory in 1975?

The conventional wisdom offers two approaches for answering this question. The first approach, based on geopolitical and strategic analysis, suggests that China's Cambodian policy was a byproduct of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict and was intended to counter the closer ties between Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Historian Zhai Qiang argues “China's handling of the Cambodian conflict from 1970 to 1975 was conditioned primarily by its competition with the

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Ciorciari, “China and the Pol Pot regime,” *Cold War History*, 2014, 14:2, 215–217; Andrew Mertha, *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 3–4.

<sup>2</sup> Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, 3.

Soviet Union and North Vietnam in Indochina.”<sup>3</sup> However, this approach overstates the influence of the Sino-Vietnamese geopolitical and strategic conflicts in shaping the pro-Cambodian policies of Mao Zedong’s China. If the security concerns of the CCP leaders, especially Mao, had been the decisive and consistent factor in shaping China’s Cambodian policies since 1970, then why were China’s own geopolitical and strategic interests severely jeopardized in the end?

The second approach suggests that the bilateral relationship between the CCP and the CPK was a function of ideological affinity. Many studies have shown that the Khmer Rouge borrowed radical ideas from China and learned from Mao’s revolutions, especially the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, to launch its own disastrous revolutions in Cambodia.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, these studies have not demonstrated the ideological value or the “intangible benefits” of the Khmer Rouge to Mao’s China. In other words, why, ideologically, did Mao’s China need Cambodia under the CPK?

Both these approaches fail to address Mao’s paramount role in deciding China’s Cambodian policies. In *We Now Know*, John Lewis Gaddis writes that “the more we learn, the less sense it makes to distinguish Stalin’s foreign policies from his domestic practices or even his personal behavior.”<sup>5</sup> It is the same case when analyzing the foreign policies of China during the Mao era. Chinese scholar He Fang writes that “in the political struggles staged by Mao, China’s domestic politics and external relations were directly connected.”<sup>6</sup> Any examination of the CCP’s relationship with its Khmer Rouge ally under Mao has to center round the Chairman himself. China’s Cambodian policies were indistinguishable from Mao’s domestic policies and his political needs. In this sense, the distinction between radicals and moderates disguises Mao’s

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<sup>3</sup> Zhai Qiang, “China and the Cambodian Conflict, 1970–1975,” in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, ed. Priscilla Roberts (Stanford University Press, 2006), 394; also see Robert S. Ross, *The Indochina Tangle: China’s Vietnam Policy, 1975–1979* (Columbia University Press, 1988), 73–74, 79–80.

<sup>4</sup> See Kenneth Quinn, “Explaining the Terror,” in *Cambodia, 1975–1978: Rendezvous with Death*, ed. Karl D. Jackson (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1989), 219–231; Ben Kiernan, “External and indigenous sources of Khmer Rouge ideology, in *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972–1979*, ed. Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn–Judge (New York: Routledge, 2006), 187–206; Yinghong Cheng, *Creating the New Man: From Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 192–194.

<sup>5</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 293.

<sup>6</sup> He Fang, *He Fang tan Mao Zedong Waijiao* [Foreign Policy Under Mao Zedong] (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2018), 126. Also see Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 10.

central role.<sup>7</sup> When Mao was alive, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, or the Gang of Four were simply implementing his policies. Failing to do so, they would either be criticized or purged.<sup>8</sup>

By utilizing untapped Chinese primary sources, including official documents, the biographies and memoirs of the CCP cadres involved in managing the relationship with the Khmer Rouge, and in particular the memoirs of former *Huayun* (*Huaren Huaqiao Gemingyundong*, or ethnic Chinese revolutionary movements) members in Cambodia, this paper argues that, under Mao, the CCP's policies towards the Khmer Rouge were subordinate to Mao's political needs and shaped primarily by his efforts to safeguard the Cultural Revolution. But in the end, Mao's "ideological victory" translated into a strategic failure for China's post-Mao leadership.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first discusses why the Khmer Rouge's victory was ideologically important to Mao's China. This section argues that the Khmer Rouge's victory and revolutionary struggles were ideologically significant for the CCP, particularly because of the decline of Mao's revolutions both at home and abroad. This is the key to understanding the relationship between the CCP and the Khmer Rouge in the Mao era. The second section examines how the cadres of the ILD (*Zhonglianbu*, the International Liaison Department of the CCP) managed the CCP-Khmer Rouge relationship. While Mertha's study examines the ministries and departments involved in the "three dimensions" of Chinese assistance to Cambodia ("military, trade, and infrastructure"), these actors, including the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, dealt with functional rather than political matters.<sup>9</sup> The ILD, in contrast, played a central role in managing the bilateral relationship. An examination of the ILD cadres who managed the CCP-Khmer Rouge relations sheds new light on how political relationship between the CCP and the CPK. The third section investigates developments in Cambodia,

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<sup>7</sup> On the division of radical and moderates within the CCP leadership and their difference on China's Cambodian policy, see Anne Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance: 1970–1979* (University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992), 81, 163–164; Sophie Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 76–78.

<sup>8</sup> On the criticism of Zhou Enlai in 1972, 1973, and 1974, see Gao Wenqian, *Wannian Zhou Enlai* [Later Years of Zhou Enlai] (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2003), 368–379, 450–478; On the criticism of the Gang of Four and the purge of Deng Xiaoping in 1975, see Shi Yun and Li Danhui, *Nanyijixu de "Jixugeming"—cong Pilin dao Pideng* [When the "Continuous Revolution" Goes Awry: From the Anti-Lin Biao Campaign to the Anti-Deng Xiaoping Campaign (1972–1976)] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2008), 519–526, 589–600, 635–640.

<sup>9</sup> Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, 9.

focusing on the stories of the *Huayun* members and the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia and how such individuals affected the relationship between the CCP and the Khmer Rouge. The conclusion of the paper points out that Mao's ideological victory translated into a strategic failure for China's post-Mao leadership.

## Mao's Cultural Revolution vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge's Revolutions

On the night of September 13, 1971, Marshal Lin Biao, Mao Zedong's handpicked heir and *Qinmizhanyou* (close brother-in-arms), fled from China in an airplane. The aircraft, however, crashed in Mongolia and killed Lin and his family.<sup>10</sup> The Lin Biao Incident dealt Mao a severe blow and undermined his prestige. It also undermined his physical and mental well-being. Mao's health, in fact, never recovered from the blow.<sup>11</sup> The official history of the CCP claims that the Lin Biao Incident "pushed more cadres and common people to wake up from the fanaticism of personality cult. It declared in an objective sense the bankruptcy of the theory and practice of the 'Cultural Revolution'."<sup>12</sup> The Project 571, a coup d'état plotted by Marshal Lin's son, Lin Liguo, and later made known to the CCP cadres as the proof of Lin Biao's crimes, stated that:

In fact he (Mao) has become *Qin Shi Huang* (China's first emperor) in the contemporary times...He is not a true Marxist-Leninist. He is the biggest feudal despot in the history of China that practices the Confucianism and implements the laws of *Qin Shi Huang*.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Mao refused to yield or admit that the Cultural Revolution had failed. Rather, as Mao's official biography observes, Mao "was extremely concerned about how people

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<sup>10</sup> On the Lin Biao Incident, see Gao Hua, "Geming zhengzhi de bianyi he tuihua—"Lin Biao shijian" de zaikaocha" [The variation and degeneration of the revolutionary politics—a reexamination of the Lin Biao Incident], *Twenty-First Century*, Issue October, 2006, 69–87; Shu Yun, *Lin Biao Shijian wangzheng diaocha* [The Complete Investigation of Lin Biao's Incident] (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> *Mao Zedong Zhuan* [Biography of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Central Literature Publishing House, 2003), Volume 2, 1610–1617; Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (New York: Random House, 1994), 542–543; Shi and Li, *Nanyijixu de "Jixugeming"*, 695–716.

<sup>12</sup> Hu Sheng, *Zhongguo Gongchandang de qishinian* [Seventy Years of the CCP] (Beijing: CCP Party History Publishing House, 1991), 451. After the shock of the Lin Biao Incident, the various trends of thoughts suspecting Mao and the Cultural Revolution, see Shi and Li, *Nanyijixu de "Jixugeming"*, 49–62.

<sup>13</sup> *Wenhua Dageming Yanjiuziliao* [Research materials of the Cultural Revolution] (Beijing: PLA National Defence University, Volume 2, 650–657).



would view the Cultural Revolution in the future.” The biography, or *zhuan*, adds that “on some specific issues Mao could rectify the mistakes that produced serious consequences, including the adjustment of some important policies. But he will never permit the criticism and rectification of the guiding thoughts of the Cultural Revolution...In the next few years the vicissitudes of China’s political situations were closely connected with these thoughts of Mao.”<sup>14</sup> In June 1976, three months before his death, Mao told his apparatchiks Hua Guofeng, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, and Wang Dongxing that:

I have done two things in my life. One is defeating Chiang Kai-shek and driving him to Taiwan, and defeating the Japanese imperialists and driving them out of China; the other is successfully conducting the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.<sup>15</sup>

Viewing the Cultural Revolution as one of the “two things” in his lifelong struggles, Mao spent the last years of his life trying to safeguard it. He opposed the moderate measures adopted by Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. The major political struggles and campaigns launched from the Lin Biao Incident to Mao’s death, ranging from the “Criticize Zhou Enlai” sessions in late 1973, the “Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius” movements launched in January 1974 to the “Criticize Deng, Counterattack the Right-Deviationist Reversal-of-Verdicts Trend” launched in late 1975, all served this purpose.

At this stage, Mao’s China was increasingly isolated by the so-called “revisionist camp” dominated and influenced by the Soviet Union. The Sino-American rapprochement and the “Three Worlds” theory received bitter criticism from the “revisionist camp.”<sup>16</sup> *Pravda*, the official Soviet newspaper, in February 1972 accused China of “courting Washington,” “colluding with the American imperialists of obstructing the settlement of important international issues,” “sabotaging the unity between the socialist countries,” and “sacrificing the interests of the Indochinese people.”<sup>17</sup> And the Cuban newspaper reported that “the paper tiger received a

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<sup>14</sup> *Mao Zedong Zhuan*, Volume 2, 1644, 1648–1649, 1657.

<sup>15</sup> *Mao Zedong Nianpu* [Chronicle of Mao Zedong], 1949–1976 (Beijing: Central Literature Press, 2013), Volume 6, 649.

<sup>16</sup> Vitaly Kozyrev, “Soviet Policy toward the United States and China,” in *Normalization of U.S.–China Relations: An international History*, ed. William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li (Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 260–261.

<sup>17</sup> *Qishiniandai Sulian duiwaikuozhang dashiji* [Major events of the Soviet expansion in the 1970s] (Beijing: Party School of the CCP Central Committee, 1984), 84–85.

warm welcome in Beijing.”<sup>18</sup> The CPUSA (Communist Party of the United States of America) criticized the “Three Worlds” theory as “unscientific.” It accused China of building a “military alliance” with the Pentagon and serving as its “Filth Column” to oppose the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, cracks had emerged even in the “revolutionary camp” led by China. The CCP had been sponsoring the VWP (Vietnamese Workers Party) since the first Indochina War. But the bilateral relations had cooled since the Soviet Union became involved in the Vietnam War and began sending substantial aid to North Vietnam in 1965.<sup>20</sup> The relationship was further undermined by the Sino-American rapprochement.<sup>21</sup> The Sino-American rapprochement also exacerbated the tensions between the CCP and the other communist parties that followed the CCP since the Sino-Soviet split. The Party of Labour of Albania had enjoyed a honeymoon with the CCP and had been an ardent partner in countering Soviet revisionism. In 1970, its supreme leader Enver Hoxha flattered the Chinese, saying that “Mao Zedong Thought has become the beacon of Marxism-Leninism, socialism, and communism in the contemporary world.” Nonetheless, Hoxha expressed great displeasure with the Sino-American rapprochement and Mao’s “Three Worlds” theory. In August 1971 Hoxha sent a 10,000–word letter to Mao Zedong that criticized the CCP for the decision to invite Nixon to Beijing.<sup>22</sup> The letter stated:

We inform you that we deem your decision to host Nixon in Beijing to be incorrect, undesirable. We do not approve it and we do not support it. We believe, moreover, that Nixon's announced visit to China will not be understood and approved by the people, the revolutionaries, and the communists of different countries.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Zhang Dequn, *Wo de qishinian* [My Seventy Years], 134–135. Zhou served as the PRC ambassador to Cuba from 1970 to 1975.

<sup>19</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang duiwai lianluobu [The International Liaison Department of the CCP], *Geguo gongchandang gaikuang* [A brief introduction of the communist parties in different countries] (Beijing: 1980), 965.

<sup>20</sup> On the transformation of the Soviet policy from non-involvement in the Vietnam War to provision of massive assistance to North Vietnam, see Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 1–34.

<sup>21</sup> See Zhai Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (The University of North Carolina, 2000), 193–216; Li Danhui, “the Sino–Soviet Dispute over Assistance for Vietnam’s Anti–American War, 1965–1967” and Shen Zhihua, “Sino–U.S. Reconciliation and China’s Vietnam Policy,” in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, ed. Priscilla Roberts, 289–318, 349–368; Lien-Hang, Nguyen, “The Sino–Vietnamese split and the Indochina War, 1968–1975,” in *The Third Indochina War*, ed. Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, 12–32.

<sup>22</sup> See Wang Taiping, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiaoshi* [Diplomatic History of the PRC], (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 1999), Volume 3, 259–260; Fan Chengzuo, *Wangshirushi: Fan Chengzuo huiyilu* [A recollection by Fan Chengzuo] (Nanjing: Nanjing Publishing House, 2008), 284–286; Wang Hongqi, *Shanying zhi zuo qinli* [An experience in the country of mountain eagles] (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, 2007), 32–34.

<sup>23</sup> “Letter of Enver Hoxha, Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania, to Mao Zedong, Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party,” August 06, 1971, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AQSH, F.

In the political report delivered to Sixth Congress in November 1971, Hoxha insinuated that China “relies on one imperialist power to oppose another imperialist power.”<sup>24</sup> Mao seethed with rage over Hoxha’s accusations even two years later. In July 1973 he told Zhang Chunqiao and Wang Hongwen that:

The Albanians were determined not to allow the American withdrawal from Vietnam because they believed that “the tempest of world revolution is in Asia. The storm of Asian revolution is in Vietnam. If war ends, it is terrible. That is opportunism—right opportunism.” It was collusion with the U.S. imperialists. The one who purposefully colluded with U.S. imperialists, Japan, Western Germany, and Great Britain is me. What could you do to me?<sup>25</sup>

Mao was fully aware of the accusations made by the Vietnamese, Albanians, and other “leftist parties” that his policies were not appropriate for advancing the communist cause. In April, he complained to his guest, Echeverría, president of Mexico:

Now the situation compelled me to take the “rightist opportunism” path. I invited Nixon here. I also invited Kakuei Tanaka (the Japanese Prime Minister) here. So I get a bad name.<sup>26</sup>

For those communist parties that had not seized political power in their own countries, many of them split into two or more factions when the Sino-Soviet split came out into the open. These new factions further splintered during the Cultural Revolution, when the CCP called on the “Marx-Leninists” to draw a line separating themselves from the “revisionists.” For example, one faction supporting the “anti-revisionism” of the CCP seceded from the French Communist Party and formed the French Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) in 1967. Another faction seceded from the French Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) and formed the French Revolutionary Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) in 1974.<sup>27</sup> With each division, the newly formed parties were ideologically more radicalized than their mother party

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14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1971, Dos. 3, Fl. 48-66. Translated by Elidor Mëhilli.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117306>

<sup>24</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang duiwai lianluobu, *Geguo gongchandang gaikuang*, 163.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Yang Kuisong and Xia Yafeng (2010), “Vacillating between Revolution and Détente: Mao’s Changing Psyche and Policy toward the United States,” 1969–1976. *Diplomatic History*, 34: 411.

<sup>26</sup> *Mao Zedong Nianpu*, Volume 6, 1949-1976, 475.

<sup>27</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang duiwai lianluobu, *Geguo gongchandang gaikuang*, 823–831.

In Chinese, the parties that followed the ideological guidance of the CCP and upheld Maoism were called *Maliedang* (the Marx-Leninist parties) or *Xindang* (the new parties), while those following the CPSU were called *Xiuzhengdang* (the revisionist parties) or *Jiudang* (the old parties). Since the Sino-Soviet split, approximately one hundred “leftist” parties and organizations had come into being.<sup>28</sup> However, with the Sino-American rapprochement and the proclamation of the “Three Worlds” Theory, the CCP was not immune from the criticism of its followers. A number of *Xindang* chose to follow the Party of Labour of Albania and criticized the CCP for its collusion with the American imperialists. For example, the Communist Party of Britain (Marist-Leninist), which was established in 1968, praised Hoxha as “the only communist leader alive” and the Party of Labour of Albania as “the banner of socialism and Marxism-Leninism.” It criticized the “Three World Theory” for being “a new version of revisionism” that “counteracted revolutions and liberation struggles.” Its leader, Reg Birch, visited Beijing in October-November 1975. In his talk with Geng Biao, Birch made it clear his disagreement with the “Three Worlds Theory” and advocated that the world should be classified by “classes.”<sup>29</sup> It was ironic the Chinese would later regard the Party of Labour of Albania and the communist parties criticizing China for the rapprochement with the United States and the “Three Worlds Theory” as “the ultra-leftist parties” just as the CPSU had labelled the CCP.

In addition, for the communist parties that had been conducting armed struggles against their governments or the colonial powers by heavily depending on Chinese material assistance since early 1960s, they remained unable to seize power by the 1970s.<sup>30</sup> Some of them, like the Communist Party of Malaya and the Communist Party of Burma, were even deeply mired in internal struggles and purges.<sup>31</sup> In July 1973, in a conversation with Marien Ngouabi, the

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<sup>28</sup> Zhang Xiangshan, “Sishinian de Licheng” [A journey of Forty Years], in *Zhonglianbu Sishinian* [Forty Years of the International Liaison Department] (Beijing: China Pictorial, 1992), 24–25.

<sup>29</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang duiwai lianluobu, *Geguo gongchandang gaikuang*, 806–807; Kong, Kong Xiangxiu, *Geng Biao Zhuan* [Biography of Geng Biao] (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2009), Volume 2, 214–215.

<sup>30</sup> Zhong Yenlin, *Wengeqian de Deng Xiaoping: Mao Zedong de “fushuai”* [Deng Xiaoping before the Cultural Revolution: Mao’s “Vice Marshal” (1956–1966)] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2013), 392–403. Zhong presented a brief summary of how the CCP encouraged and aided the communist parties in the Southeast Asia to conduct armed struggles in the early 1960s.

<sup>31</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang duiwai lianluobu, *Geguo gongchandang gaikuang*, 215–223, 246–258.

president of the Republic of the Congo, Mao indicated his disappointment with the CCP-aided armed struggles:

We really wanted to overthrow you all because we supported revolutions and revolutionary people [in those years]. But those people (referring to the communist parties or factions supported by China) couldn't overthrow you and failed to live up to our expectations. We have no other alternative but to deal with you.<sup>32</sup>

If the Chinese were disappointed with these revolutionaries, they were undoubtedly pleased with developments in Cambodia. The CCP leaders had long noticed that in comparison to the VWP, the Khmer Rouge was uncompromising in its opposition to revisionism. On March 20, 1970, two days after Lon Nol staged the coup to oust Sihanouk, Zhou Enlai wrote a letter to Mao. He criticized the VWP for its "pragmatism." Zhou had more positive things to say about the Khmer Rouge:

Now that Lon Nol and Sirik Matak have come to power, we no longer have the concern (about providing aid to the Khmer Rouge), though. Now *Liangyue* (the two Vietnams, referring to the VWP and the NLF) are the most disappointing. Everything proceeds from pragmatism.<sup>33</sup> Only the Cambodian Communist Party is resolved to take the path of armed struggle. But their strength is small and experience is little. We need to boost their resolution and build up their confidence. In the end a new prospect will be opened up in the Southeast Asia.<sup>34</sup>

However, the CCP leaders' favor for the Khmer Rouge did not immediately translate into all-out support for their protégé. After the coup, they brokered the united front between Pol Pot and Sihanouk.<sup>35</sup> In the next three years, the CCP attempted to maintain the façade of unity. The Chinese strategy was to provide aid for Pol Pot's armed struggles while attempting to restore Sihanouk to power in Phnom Penh through negotiations with the American policymakers.<sup>36</sup> There were two reasons behind their considerations. On the one hand, the

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Yang and Xia, "Vacillating between Revolution and Détente," 421.

<sup>33</sup> NLF is short for National Front for the Liberation of the South (Vietnam).

<sup>34</sup> Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, 419.

<sup>35</sup> Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*, 66–73.

<sup>36</sup> On how Zhou Enlai attempted to persuade Kissinger to negotiate directly with Sihanouk and restore him to power while Kissinger was reluctant to do so and would rather let the representatives from Lon Nol and Sihanouk negotiate with each other, see *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1969–1976, Volume XVIII, China, 1973–1976, ed. David P. Nickles (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2007), Documents 9, 10, 18, and 19.

Khmer Rouge forces were still very weak.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, and more importantly, the CCP leaders did not want Cambodia to develop into another South Vietnam. They had no intention to embroil China and the United States in this new battlefield due to their respective support for the Khmer Rouge and the Lon Nol government. This would lead to the demise of the Sino-American rapprochement and work only to the advantage of the Soviet Union, China's major enemy at this time.

In other words, Mao's revolutionary zeal was temporarily dampened by concerns for China's strategic interests. As Zhou told Kissinger in February 1973, "if we wish to see Southeast Asia develop along the lines of peace and neutrality and not enter a Soviet Asian security system, then Cambodia would be an exemplar country." Zhou continued: "it is impossible for Cambodia to become completely red now. If that were attempted, it would result in even greater problems."<sup>38</sup> But China's stance abruptly swerved a few months later. In late May 1973 Kissinger made a proposal to the Chinese of restoring Sihanouk to power in Phnom Penh. This was exactly what the CCP leaders had desired. Sino-American cooperation would stabilize the Cambodian situation and preclude the Soviet influence. On June 4, Huang Hua, chief of the Chinese Liaison Office, replied to Kissinger that China would "communicate the U.S. tentative thinking to the Cambodian side." However, on July 18, the American side was told that "China was no longer willing even to communicate the American negotiating proposal to Sihanouk."<sup>39</sup>

What was the cause of China's sudden change in policy? In his memoirs, Kissinger claims that it was because of the bombing halt legislated by the US congress in June 1973. "Congress gave away the American side of the bargain unilaterally" and as a result, "Zhou lost the ability to shape events."<sup>40</sup> In comparison, Zhai Qiang's explanation of why China became more eager to support Pol Pot than Sihanouk between late 1973 and early 1974 is that the increasing skirmishes between the Khmer Rouge and the VWP assuaged the Chinese policymakers' fear

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<sup>37</sup> Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975*, 2nd ed. (Yale University Press, 2004), 321–322; David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution since 1945* (Yale University Press, 1993), 210.

<sup>38</sup> *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Volume XVIII, China, 1973–1976, Document 13.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 351–352, 361–364; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 507. Also see Kenton Clymer, *Troubled Relations: The United States and Cambodia since 1870* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 140–143.

<sup>40</sup> Quotes, respectively, from Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 507, 364.

that a Khmer Rouge–controlled Cambodia would align with Hanoi in the future.<sup>41</sup> To be sure, the US bombing halt and decrease in aid to the Lon Nol government reduced the CCP leaders’ fears that the two countries would be locked in the entanglements over Cambodia which would derail cooperation against the Soviet Union. The Khmer Rouge’s clashes with the VWP meant that it would lean toward China—however, it should be noted that the CCP leaders noticed the differences between these two parties much earlier than Zhai notes.

The most important reason for the change in China’s policy was Mao’s desire to safeguard the Cultural Revolution and reconsolidate his reputation and authority. Mao’s concern for China’s geopolitical interests gave way to his rekindled revolutionary zeal. The real cause of China’s sudden turn of policy on Cambodia in June-July 1973 was Mao’s dissatisfaction with Zhou Enlai’s efforts to rectify the leftist policies and he was alert to Zhou’s rise of power after the Lin Biao Incident.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Mao was frustrated with the setbacks of his strategy of “alliance with the U.S. to deter the Soviet Union.”<sup>43</sup>

Mao’s solution was to censure Zhou, China’s principal negotiator in the Sino-American talks, and harden China’s stance towards the United States. The opportunity came in June 1973. Mao criticized Zhou for being soft in the negotiations with the Americans. On June 24, Mao remarked on Zhou’s report of a talk with David Bruce, chief of the American Liaison Office, that “[the MFA] often forgets struggles in the cooperation with the bourgeoisie [referring to the Americans].”<sup>44</sup> Following Mao’s instruction, the next day Zhou took a tougher stance in the talks with Bruce.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, in early July, Zhou was forced to do self-criticism because Mao was irritated by the MFA’s analysis of the Soviet-American talks.<sup>46</sup> As a result, Kissinger’s proposal on Cambodia was brushed aside. Nonetheless, whether the CCP leaders were able to pressurize their Khmer Rouge comrades into complying with this proposal is questionable. Even if they had succeeded, they would have surely antagonized the Khmer Rouge and been accused

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<sup>41</sup> Zhai, “China and the Cambodian Conflict, 1970–1975,” 391–392.

<sup>42</sup> Mao had been seeking opportunities to sideline Zhou and pave way for the promotion of his new successor Wang Hongwen the eve of the Tenth Congress in August 1973. See Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, 450–458.

<sup>43</sup> Yang and Xia, “Vacillating between Revolution and Détente,” 408–415.

<sup>44</sup> Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, 452; *Mao Zedong Nianpu*, 1949–1976, Volume 6, 483–484.

<sup>45</sup> *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Volume XVIII, China, 1973–1976, Document 39.

<sup>46</sup> Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, 453–457.

of “betrayal,” just as the Vietnamese leaders charged China with “betrayal” at the General Conference in 1954 and during Sino–American rapprochement.<sup>47</sup>

In November 1974, Kissinger, in his talk with the rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping, once again proposed a settlement to remove Lon Nol, restore Sihanouk to real power in Phnom Penh over a coalition government, and let Sihanouk “emerge as the dominant force.” It was almost the same proposal as made in 1973. Kissinger made it clear that “if Sihanouk comes back as the head of the insurgent forces [referring to the Khmer Rouge forces], he will not last long. He will just be a figurehead.” In response Deng disagreed with US involvement and said “let them solve their problem.”<sup>48</sup> Deng’s words indicated clearly that the CCP leaders now preferred a “red Cambodia” dominated by the Khmer Rouge, rather than the old regime under Sihanouk. By the end of 1974 the Khmer Rouge’s victory was clearly in sight.<sup>49</sup> Having much less reason to endorse the US proposal, the Chinese leaders rejected it more resolutely than they did during the previous year. Ironically, after the Khmer Rouge’s collapse in January 1979, it would be Deng Xiaoping’s turn to urge the Americans and Sihanouk not to “exclude Pol Pot and his forces” in the new coalition against Vietnam.<sup>50</sup>

The Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh and succeeded in seizing power in April 1975. For the CCP leaders, the Khmer Rouge victory was truly purchased at a cheap price. The amount of Chinese assistance to the Khmer Rouge before 1975 was minimal compared to that furnished to the VWP. From 1970 to 1974, Chinese assistance rendered to the Khmer Rouge was valued at 316 million *yuan*.<sup>51</sup> In the same period, the value of Chinese assistance to North Vietnam was 5,041 million *yuan*.<sup>52</sup> From 1971 to 1975, the assistance to North Vietnam alone constituted 93.1-percent of the assistance to the three Indochina countries (North Vietnam, Laos, and

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<sup>47</sup> Christopher E. Goscha and Stein Tønnesson, “Le Duan and the Break with China,” in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, ed. Priscilla Roberts (Stanford University Press, 2006), 468, 471.

<sup>48</sup> *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Volume XVIII, China, 1973–1976, Documents 93 and 97. Also see Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 511–512.

<sup>49</sup> Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, 230–232.

<sup>50</sup> *FRUS*, 1977–1980, Volume XIII, China, ed. David P. Nickles (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2013), Document 265.

<sup>51</sup> Zhang Qing, “Huiyi xinzhongguo diyidai lingdaoren dui jianpuzhai de bangzhu” [Recollection of the help by PRC’s first-generation Leaders to Cambodia], *Around Southeast Asia*, Issue 2, 2003, 21–26. Zhang was serving at the Department of Asian Affairs of the MPA.

<sup>52</sup> *Fang Yi Zhuan* [Biography of Fang Yi] (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2008), 407.



Cambodia).<sup>53</sup> Considering that the CCP had been aiding the VWP since 1950, but its assistance to the Khmer Rouge started only from August 1970, it was ironic that by April 1975, when the Vietnam War finally ended, the CCP's massive investment in the VWP produced a troublesome ally that was more closely aligned with its principal enemy, the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the relatively small assistance that China offered to the Khmer Rouge produced a close ally in Cambodia.

Thus the Khmer Rouge's victory on April 17, 1975, came at a time when Mao's Cultural Revolution was bankrupt at home, the CCP-backed revolutionary struggles receded abroad, and the conflicts between the CCP and the VWP, the Party of Labour of Albania, and other "Marx-Leninist parties" had emerged. Mao and the CCP were thirsty for new momentum and stimulation more than ever, while the Khmer Rouge's seizure of power and the following revolutions in Cambodia exactly provided the boost. These developments shed light on Mao's favorable view of the Khmer Rouge. On June 21, 1975 Mao had a talk with Pol Pot in Beijing. Mao said,

We agree with you! Much of your experience is better than ours. China is not qualified to criticize you. We committed errors of the political routes for ten times in fifty years—some are national, some are local...Thus I say China has no qualification to criticize you but have to applaud you. You are basically correct...  
... In fifty years, or one hundred years, or even ten thousand years there will be the struggles of the two lines. There will be the struggles of two lines when communism arrives. If not, they are not Marxists.<sup>54</sup>

In his talk, Mao said that China was still struggling between the "two lines." He praised the leaders of the Khmer Rouge for their victory and also stressed the importance of class struggle. The CCP and the Khmer Rouge shared the same mission of continuing the revolution and preventing the restoration of capitalism in their own countries. The discredited Mao, under increasing suspicion and criticism in and outside China, rejoiced over the Khmer Rouge's fresh victory in Cambodia. This laid the foundation for the establishment of friendly and supportive Sino-Cambodian relations in late 1970s.

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<sup>53</sup> *Dangdai zhongguo de duiwaijingjihezuo* [Contemporary China: economic cooperation with foreign countries] (Beijing: China social sciences publishing house, 1989), 57.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Li Danhui, "Xihanuke, Boerbute, yu shangshiji liuqishi niandai de zhongguo" [Sihanouk, Pol Pot and China in the 1960s and 1970s], *Guojia renwen lishi* [National Humanity History], Issue 11, 2013, 50.

The symbolic meaning of the Khmer Rouge's victory and revolutions was significant for Mao's China. The Khmer Rouge revolutions showed not only to the Chinese people, but also to people throughout the world, that Mao's revolutionary path, which combined armed struggle, anti-revisionism, and continuous revolution, was tenable. Thus by supporting the Khmer Rouge and its revolutions, Mao could demonstrate that China was still revolutionary. In contrast to Andrew Mertha's argument, the analysis here shows that Mao's China, while receiving "little tangible benefits," nevertheless reaped intangible and symbolic benefits from the Khmer Rouge's policies and successes.<sup>55</sup> In Mao's mind, these intangible benefits were more significant than anything tangible.

It was true that in 1975 Mao and Deng had urged the Khmer Rouge leaders to bring Sihanouk home.<sup>56</sup> But they clearly knew that Sihanouk would stay a figurehead in the transitional period. With his power base already wiped out, Sihanouk posed no threat to the Pol Pot regime in the new Cambodia, just as many democratic figureheads assumed high but powerless positions in the CCP regime after 1949. The CCP leaders stood by when Sihanouk announced his retirement from the office of "head of state" in April 1976. In Mao's mind, the Khmer Rouge leaders were authentic revolutionary comrades while Sihanouk, after all, was just an old friend and an outdated dynastic ruler.<sup>57</sup> Most importantly, a China struggling in the "continuous revolutions" was not in the position to criticize or moderate a Cambodia on the threshold of launching new revolutions.

### [Zhonglianbu: Managing the CCP-Khmer Rouge Relationship](#)

During the Mao era, the International Liaison Department was the second most mysterious CCP department after *Zhongdiaobu* (the Investigation Department of the Central Committee). Its real identity and site of its headquarters were even shrouded in secrecy until

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<sup>55</sup> Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Mao's talk with Khieu Samphan and Sihanouk on August 27, 1975, see *Mao Zedong Nianpu, 1949-1976*, Volume 6, 605; Deng Xiaoping's talk with Pol Pot in June 1975, see Wang, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiaoshi*, Volume 3, 78. Also see Zhai Qiang, "China and the Cambodian Conflict, 1970-1975," 393.

<sup>57</sup> On Mao's attempt to persuade Sihanouk to read Friedrich Engels' book and *The Communist Manifest*, and the CCP leaders' distrust of Sihanouk, see Odd Arne Westad, et al., eds., *77 conversations between Chinese and foreign leaders on the wars in Indochina, 1964-1977*, CWIHP Working Paper, no. 22 (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project at the Wilson Center, 1998), 70-71, 99-100, 158.

1971.<sup>58</sup> So what did the *Zhonglianbu* do? The ILD was originally part of the CCP's United Front Work Department. In 1951, it seceded and became an independent department. The mission of the ILD was to handle the relations between the CCP and the communist parties of other countries.<sup>59</sup> The bilateral relations between the PRC and other socialist countries were managed through double channels: party-to-party relations handled by the ILD, and state-to-state relations overseen by the MFA. Both channels operated when bilateral relations worked well. But once the bilateral relations cooled or deteriorated, the party-to-party channels would be closed off, while the state-to-state channel was retained. For example, due to the Sino-Soviet split, the party-to-party relations between China and the Soviet Union and the other Eastern European countries (East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria) were all terminated from the mid-1960s onward. In the eyes of the CCP leaders, the communist parties of these countries had turned revisionist. The ILD therefore refused to have any exchange with the communist parties of these countries.<sup>60</sup> The CCP even refused to acknowledge that Romania, fairly independent from Moscow, was a communist country. It was not until 1971, when Ceaușescu visited Beijing, that the CCP restored the party-to-party relationship with the Romanian Communist Party.<sup>61</sup>

After the establishment of the Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea (GRUNK) and the Khmer United National Front (FUNK) in 1970, the ILD was instructed by the CCP Central Committee to spearhead the mission of sending Chinese assistance to Cambodia. The ILD would continue to do this job after the Khmer Rouge seized power in 1975. Wang Jiaxiang, the first director of the ILD, had been suspended in 1962 for his moderate views on the international situations. (Wang proposed the reduction of China's foreign assistance and suggested the easing off of the tensions in China's diplomatic relations, which ran contrary to Mao's views.)<sup>62</sup> The second director, Liu Ningyi, and many other senior cadres were deposed

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<sup>58</sup> Kong, *Geng Biao Zhuan*, Volume 2, 236.

<sup>59</sup> Xu Zehao, *Wang Jiaxiang Zhuan* [Biography of Wang Jiaxiang] (Beijing: Contemporary China Publishing House, 1996), 505.

<sup>60</sup> Wang, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiaoshi*, Volume 2, 315–317.

<sup>61</sup> Wang, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiaoshi*, Volume 3, 237–243.

<sup>62</sup> Xu, *Wang Jiaxiang Zhuan*, 558–568.

during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>63</sup> Shen Jian, who was a vice secretary-general and later vice director of the ILD and survived the purges, had been the key figure coordinating the different organs involved in the Chinese assistance programs. These organs included the Combat Department of the PLA General Staff, the Armaments Department of the General Logistics, and the MFA. Moreover, Shen was the designated person for Ieng Sary to liaise with in Beijing. Given the interactions, the ILD was soon regarded as “the logistics department for the Cambodian Communist Party.”<sup>64</sup> In contrast, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs relegated to a secondary role. The ILD’s director Geng Biao and vice director Shen Jian had been frequently involved in the high-level delegations to Cambodia and the reception of the Khmer Rouge leaders to China in the 1970s.<sup>65</sup>

Like all the other departments subsidiary to the CCP Central Committee and ministries to the PRC State Council, the ILD was normally supervised by one politburo-level leader, called *Zhuguan Lingdao* or *Fenguang Lingdao* (leader in charge). The *Zhuguan Lingdao* served as one loop of the power chain linking the department on the one end and Mao Zedong and other top leaders at the other end. Since the Eighth Congress of the CCP in 1956, the *Zhuguan Lingdao* for the ILD had been Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping.<sup>66</sup> The CCP power structure was reconfigured by the Eleventh Plenum of the Eighth Congress in August 1966. Both Liu and Deng were sidelined, and Kang Sheng took over the supervision of the ILD.<sup>67</sup> Kang, well-known as the CCP’s Dzerzhinsky-Beria, had been Mao Zedong’s henchman since the Yan’an period. In Yan’an, Kang played an important role in helping Mao build up his power, purge the dissidents, and prevail over the intra-party rivals.<sup>68</sup> In compliance with Mao’s radical policies during the Cultural

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<sup>63</sup> Kong, *Geng Biao Zhuan*, Volume 2, 198.

<sup>64</sup> Xiong Zhen, *Yidui Waijiaoguan Fufu de Zuji* [the Footprints of a couple of diplomats] (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, 1995), 166. On the roles of the ILD and Shen Jian, also see Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, 61.

<sup>65</sup> Huang Qun, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng* [Sixty years’ Witness of the Sino-Vietnamese relations] (Hong Kong: Cosmosbooks, 2014), 128, 133, 288.

<sup>66</sup> Zhong, *Wengeqian de Deng Xiaoping*, 350.

<sup>67</sup> *Dengxiaoping Nianpu* [Chronicle of Deng Xiaoping], 1904–1974 (Beijing: Central Literature Press, 2009), Volume 2, 1930.

<sup>68</sup> See Gao Hua, *Hongtaiyang shi zenyang shengqilaide—Yan’an zhengfengyundong de lailongqumai* [How Did the ‘Red Sun’ Rise over Yan’an—A History of the Rectification Movement] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000). Kang had been the politburo member since 1934. He was promoted to standing member of the Politburo during the CCP Ninth Congress in 1969 and was promoted to Vice Chairman of the CCP during the Tenth Congress in 1973. Zhong Kan, *Kang Sheng Pingzhuan* [A Critical Review of Kang Sheng] (Beijing: Red flag Publishing House, 1982), 344, 429, 435.

Revolution, Kang laid down the mission of the ILD: *Zhizuo Fanxiu*, or “to support the leftists and combat the revisionists.” The standard of a leftist party was “whether to embrace Mao Zedong’s thoughts, support the Cultural Revolution, oppose the Soviet modern revisionism and insist on the path of seizing power by armed force.” Otherwise, the party would be regarded by the Chinese as revisionist alongside the Soviets.<sup>69</sup> Needless to say, the Khmer Rouge perfectly met the standards of what constituted an orthodox communist party.

The next person to supervise the ILD in the ailing Kang Sheng’s stead was Zhang Chunqiao.<sup>70</sup> Zhang had caught the attention of Mao Zedong as early as 1958 for his article titled *Pochu Zichanjieji de faquansixiang* (“Eradicate the ideas of the bourgeois rightists”) during the Great Leap Forward. He was favored by Mao for his ability to theorize and was instrumental in staging the Cultural Revolution as a member of Mao’s small cohort. He joined the *Zhongyang wenge xiaozu* (the Cultural Revolution Group) in 1966, played a crucial role in Shanghai’s “January Storm” in 1967, and entered the politburo in 1969. Until his arrest with Madam Jiang Qing in 1976, he was an important supporter of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>71</sup> From December 22–26, 1975, Zhang and the director of the ILD, Geng Biao, led the CCP delegation for an official visit to Cambodia. Before his visit, he had published his famous article titled *Lun Dui Zichanjiejide Quanmianzhuanzheng* (“On Exercising the comprehensive dictatorship over the Bourgeoisie”), which warned the Chinese people of the revisionist restoration and sought to justify the Cultural Revolution theoretically.<sup>72</sup> The focus of Zhang’s talk with the Khmer Rouge leaders was to introduce the theory of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>73</sup>

Within the ILD, it was Division II (renamed Bureau II in the late 1970s) which took specific charge of the Indochina affairs. Huang Qun, a senior cadre in the Division II, worked in this division from 1963 to 1987. He was promoted to first vice head in 1977 and head of the

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<sup>69</sup> Zhang, “Sishinian de Licheng,” 24–25.

<sup>70</sup> Kong, *Geng Biao Zhuan*, Volume 2, 254.

<sup>71</sup> Shi Yun, *Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan Shizhuan—Zizhuan, riji, Gongci* [Biographies of Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan—autobiography, diaries and confessions] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2012), 139–150, 277–380, 449–502; Zheng Zhong, *Zhang Chunqiao: 1949 ji yihou* [Zhang Chunqiao in PRC China] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2017).

<sup>72</sup> See *Mao Zedong Nianpu*, 1949–1976, Volume 6, 577.

<sup>73</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 128.

Bureau in 1980. Throughout the two dozen years of his service in the division, Huang was deeply involved in managing the relations between China and the Indochina countries. He met Pol Pot during the latter's first visit to China in 1965. In 1974, he proposed to make a visit to the Cambodian territory controlled by the Khmer Rouge in order to obtain first-hand information from the Cambodian battlefield. On December 5, 1974, Zhou Enlai met Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy on their way back from Paris. Tho agreed to help escort the Chinese delegation into Cambodia.<sup>74</sup>

Formed in January 1975, the first official delegation from China to the “liberated zones” in Cambodia—the territory controlled by the Khmer Rouge—was titled the Chinese Press Delegation. Its head was Xie Wenqing from Xinhua News Agency and the vice head was Huang Qun. The nine-member delegation included journalists from the *People's Daily* and the Xinhua News Agency, one staff officer from the General Staff, and two photographers. They flew to Hanoi, then travelled through the Ho Chi Minh trail under North Vietnamese escort, and finally were picked up by Khmer Rouge cadres on the Laotian-Cambodian border. It is interesting to note that their Cambodian hosts denied the North Vietnamese escorts entry into Cambodia.<sup>75</sup>

During their one-month stay in Cambodia from March 1 to April 3, they travelled across the country and were received by almost all the top Khmer Rouge leaders. The Khmer Rouge left the Chinese delegation with a generally positive impression, although some delegation members sensed that some of the Khmer Rouge's actions in Cambodia were “ultra-leftist.” In the meeting with Pol Pot, they were curious about when the Khmer Rouge would put the China-printed notes into use. As Ieng Sary requested during his visit in April 1974, the Chinese had printed Cambodian notes and delivered them to the Khmer Rouge in November 1974.<sup>76</sup> Pol Pot replied that the barter worked well in the “liberated zones” and also worked with trade

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<sup>74</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 94–98, 105, 394. Zhou met Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1974. Also see *Zhou Enlai Nianpu, 1949–1976*, Volume 3, 684.

<sup>75</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 107.

<sup>76</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 104–105.

with the outside world. Thus Phnom Penh's use of the currency would be decided in the future and would depend on the economic situation.<sup>77</sup>

The Khmer Rouge's land policies were also more radical than the CCP's. The CCP's land policy was normally implemented in stages. First, the CCP officials reduce land rents and loan interests by winning over both the landlords and the peasants in order to build a united front against a major enemy. After seizing power, the CCP confiscated the lands from the landlords and redistributed them to the peasants. Finally all the lands were collectivized into the communes. However, the Khmer Rouge skipped the first two stages and moved to build the cooperatives in the "liberated zones."<sup>78</sup>

Besides discovering that the Cambodians held radical ideas about land redistribution policies, the Chinese also learned about their viciousness. The Khmer Rouge forces would execute captured officers immediately and disband the units of the common soldiers instead of allowing them to join the communist ranks. The head of the Chinese delegation, Xie Wenqing, expressed his disagreement with the Khmer Rouge's brutality and shared with his hosts the Chinese way: the PLA in the civil war would offer good treatment to enemies who had laid down their weapons and use the captured soldiers to supplement its own force. The delegation also encountered some unpleasant episodes. One episode was that the delegation members were told not to interview any person without the arrangement of his or her superiors. They also noticed the cautiousness of the ethnic Chinese when they had contact with them.<sup>79</sup>

A large portion of Pol Pot's talk to the Chinese delegation was on the Cambodian-Vietnamese relationship. He commented how the Vietnamese attempted to dominate and invade Cambodia, and how they encroached upon and occupied the Cambodian territory with the Vietnamese settlers. Pol Pot clearly knew that his words of discrediting the Vietnamese would be communicated to the CCP leaders when the delegation returned to Beijing. Later the Chinese delegation's visit was made into a film widely shown in China. Its title was *Yingxiong De Renmin—Fangwen Jianpuzhai Jiefangqu* ("Heroic People—a visit to the Cambodian liberated

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<sup>77</sup> Xu Ran, "Boer Bute ji Hongsegaomian de lishibeiju" [The historical tragedy of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge], *Jizhe Guancha*[Reporters' Notes], Issue 3, 2000, 38–42. Xu was a member of the delegation and a war correspondent from the Xinhua News Agency.

<sup>78</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 413–414.

<sup>79</sup> Xie Wenqing, "Wo caifangle Boer Bute" [I interviewed Pol Pot], *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, Issue 4, 2011, 31.

zones"). When Pol Pot visited China in June 1975, he was asked to review the film. Pol Pot stated that Sihanouk should not appear in the film because he was the king of a dynasty and the Cambodian people opposed him.<sup>80</sup>

Huang Qun's next visit occurred in the wake of the Khmer Rouge's seizure of Phnom Penh. At this moment, the Khmer Rouge's representative in Beijing, Ieng Sary, was in Hanoi, on his way back to Cambodia. He was instructed to return to Beijing immediately to request that China help to restore the sea and airspace lines, and ship emergency assistance to Cambodia.<sup>81</sup> On April 24, 1975, Marshal Ye Jianying chaired a Central Military Commission (CMC) meeting to discuss the shipment of emergency assistance to Cambodia.<sup>82</sup> On the same day, an advance group consisting of forty people from the General Staff, the ILD, the PLA Air Force, and Navy, departed from Guangzhou and arrived in Kampong Som on May 31. The officers from the PLA Air Force were deployed to help restore Cambodia's airlines and officers from the PLA navy were dispatched to help clear the mines which were sent from China and laid by the Khmer Rouge to block the Mekong River.<sup>83</sup>

The next mission of the advance group was to re-establish the Chinese embassy in Phnom Penh. Their ship Hongqi-153 (*Red Flag-153*), which carried more than 2,000 tons of food and medicine, finally arrived in Kampong Som on May 31. The Chinese advance group was headed by Deng Kunshan, who later became the military attaché of the Chinese embassy. Huang Qun, representing the ILD, was the vice head of the advance group. When the group members arrived in Phnom Penh in early May 1975 they discovered that the whole city was being evacuated.<sup>84</sup> The Khmer Rouge told the Cambodian people that the evacuation was due to the imminent American bombing.<sup>85</sup> But the real reasons, as Ieng Sary explained to the Chinese guests, were to transform the old city completely into a brand-new one and neutralize the scheme of enemy who let many military and political personnel masquerade as ordinary

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<sup>80</sup> Xu Ran, "Boer Bute ji Hongsegaomian de lishibeiju," 39.

<sup>81</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 115.

<sup>82</sup> *Xu Xiangqian Nianpu* [Chronicles of Xu Xiangqian] (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2012), 314–315.

<sup>83</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 115; *Dangdai Zhongguo Haijun*, 429–430.

<sup>84</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 115–117.

<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1998), 22–23.



people; to root out Sihanouk's social foundation and prevent any future opposition, just in case these forces gather around him and oppose the Khmer Rouge when he returns; to lessen the pressure of the supplies to the city. Ieng Sary then listed the three major tasks for the Khmer Rouge: suppression of the counter-revolutionaries, restoration of the railway from Kampong Som to Phnom Penh, and devotion to food production.<sup>86</sup>

After returning to Beijing, Huang Qun submitted a report to the Central Committee. The report again gave a positive view of the evacuation of the Cambodian cities by the Khmer Rouge. Huang in his memoirs recalled that Chairman Mao not only favored these measures taken by the Khmer Rouge but also recommended to the other communist parties.<sup>87</sup> In other words, in Mao's mind the Khmer Rouge had become a "model" for the other communist parties to follow.

Huang Qun joined more Chinese delegations to Cambodia from 1975 to 1978—led by Zhang Chunqiao and Geng Biao in December 1975, Chen Yonggui in December 1977, and Wang Dongxing in November 1978. Huang presents detailed records of Chen Yonggui's visit in his memoirs. Chen was a household name in Cambodia which was popularized by a film introducing how he led the villagers heroically to struggle in building "Dazhai." His visit to Cambodia was a return visit hosted by Pol Pot who visited *Dazhai* in October 1977. Chen was strongly impressed by what he saw in Cambodia. All the cadres appeared to be striving to work and nobody received special treatment. In his view, the Khmer Rouge was advancing "a true and profound revolution." He also thought Cambodian communists produced outstanding achievements in the economic reconstruction of the country.<sup>88</sup>

The examination of the ILD's work shows that the CCP cadres had generally held a positive view of the Khmer Rouge's policies. From the powerful politburo members Kang Sheng and Zhang Chunqiao to the vice director Shen Jian, then to the low-level cadres such as Huang Qun, all held a generally favorable view of the revolutionary campaigns launched by the Khmer

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<sup>86</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 119–120. Also see Karl D. Jackson, "The Ideology of Total Revolution," in *Cambodia, 1975–1978: Rendezvous with Death*, ed. Jackson, 46–47.

<sup>87</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 120–121.

<sup>88</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 128–131.

Rouge in Cambodia. The available sources reveal these cadres had raised no formal criticism of the Khmer Rouge policies from 1970 to 1978.

It is understandable that Mao's henchmen and staunch supporters like Kang Sheng or Zhang Chunqiao would not discredit the radical policies pursued by the Khmer Rouge. But why did the moderate figures like Geng Biao and Huang Qun maintain their silence or conceal their reservations?<sup>89</sup> Their behavior could be explained in the following manner.

First, Mao's China had went through the Great Leap Forward and established the People's Communes, and now was undergoing the Cultural Revolution, all of which were surely no less radical than the revolutions waged by the Khmer Rouge. Thus, those CCP cadres in the 1970s who survived the endless political campaigns since 1949—this reality at least demonstrates that they were not the “rightists,” and at most proves that they had embraced the “leftist” policies—were in no position to question the radical measures adopted by the Khmer Rouge. Huang Qun notably admitted that he was affected by the “leftist atmosphere” of the Cultural Revolution when he assessed the Cambodian revolution.<sup>90</sup> The second reason was more personal. Because the CCP leadership, especially Mao, held a positive view of the Cambodian revolution, and because the *Zhizuo Fanxiu* guideline had been established, to criticize the Khmer Rouge was tantamount to questioning and denying the policies willed by Mao. Wang Jiaxiang, the ILD's first director, had been punished and purged for holding moderate views. His fate had set an example of what awaited anyone else who championed moderation. On the contrary, the more radicalized, the safer. Thus the CCP cadres were cognizant of the political dangers of being a moderate and of questioning Mao's policies. They consequently withheld their criticisms, if they had any, of the Khmer Rouge.<sup>91</sup>

Therefore the CCP's changing view of the Khmer Rouge's revolutions would require the party itself to change from radical to moderate, which would only happen after Mao died in October 1976. In this sense, the CCP cadres in the Mao era, whether they were radicals or

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<sup>89</sup> Geng had been criticized by Madam Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao for his conservative views. On the criticism of Geng by Jiang and Zhang, see Kong, *Geng Biao Zhuan*, Volume 2, 249–253.

<sup>90</sup> Huang, *Liushinian Zhongyueguanxi Zhijianzheng*, 122.

<sup>91</sup> The interviews conducted by Sophie Richardson of another group of people managing the bilateral relations—officials from the Chinese Foreign Ministry—confirm that Chinese officials entertained those fears when they dealt with the Cambodia affairs. Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*, 92.

moderates, all had to act in accordance with Mao's policies in order to survive, similar to Hannah Arendt's description of how the "banality of evil" guided an average person to act.<sup>92</sup> The available Chinese sources show that the criticism of the Khmer Rouge policies from the CCP cadres came as early as January 7, 1979. According to the recollection of Zuo Yi, the chief correspondent of the Xinhua News Agency at Phnom Penh, he was instructed by Sun Hao, the PRC ambassador to Cambodia, to draft a telegraph on January 7, 1979. On that day the Chinese embassy had retreated to the town of Sisophon, Battambang Province, under the Vietnamese offensive. The telegraph was sent to Beijing with ambassador Sun's approval. Its main points were:

The scope of the Khmer Rouge's suppression was too broad after they seized national victory. They had lost the hearts and minds of the Cambodia people. They would stand no chance to win if they did not change over to new ways.<sup>93</sup>

Sun Hao's suggestion was critical, but it came too late. On the same day Phnom Penh fell into the hands of the Vietnamese and soon the remnants of the Khmer Rouge forces were driven into the jungles on the Cambodian-Thai border. On January 8, the Chinese embassy staff and thousands of experts all retreated to Aranyaprathet, a small Thai town on the border.<sup>94</sup>

With *Jiefang Sixiang* ("liberate one's thoughts") and *Boluan Fanzheng* ("rectify past mistakes") of the post-Mao era, the ILD itself began to rectify and rethink the mistakes it had made in the past. In October-November 1980, the CCP convened conferences to discuss the drafts of *Guanyu Jianguo yilai ruogan lishiwenti de jueyi* ("The Resolution on Certain Historical Questions since the Founding of the PRC"). Over 4,000 middle and high-ranking cadres, most of whom recently rehabilitated, participated in the discussions. The most controversial issue was how to evaluate Mao's mistakes.<sup>95</sup> Zhu Liang, who was the head of the Bureau VIII of the ILD and promoted to the director of the ILD in 1985, criticized Mao's radical policy of channeling

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<sup>92</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin Classics, 2006).

<sup>93</sup> Zuo Yi, "Wo Sui Jiangong Shangshan Dayouji" [I followed the Khmer Rouge into the jungles to conduct guerilla war], *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, 2007, Issue 7, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Zuo, "Wo Sui Jiangong Shangshan Dayouji", 18.

<sup>95</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de zhuangui—cong Bolunfanzheng dao GaigeKaifang* (1979–1981) [Turning Point in History: Re-examination of the Cultural Revolution and the Policy of Reform and Opening (1979–1981)] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2008), 284–289.

China's limited resources into foreign assistance. On the CCP's policy with the Khmer Rouge, Zhu said:

On the eve of the liberation of Phnom Penh, Ji Dengkui<sup>96</sup> talked with Ieng Sary on March 15, 1975. Ji elaborated on Chairman Mao's instructions on theoretical issues and said "now you will enter the cities and (we) hope that after entering the cities you will not learn what we did after entering the cities."<sup>97</sup> Zhang Chunqiao propagandized the same (to the Khmer Rouge leaders) in the same year when he visited Cambodia. Until 1977 our leaders still told the Khmer Rouge that it was "well-done" and "right" to drive the people of Phnom Penh to the countryside. Thus we have some responsibility in that the Khmer Rouge and other "leftist parties" practiced the ultra-leftist policies. They were also the victims of the "Cultural Revolution."<sup>98</sup>

On October 9, 1980 the ILD submitted a report titled *Gongzuo huibao Tigang* ("Outline of the Working Report") to the Central Committee. The ILD finally admitted the mistakes in the CCP's policies toward the Khmer Rouge and other communist parties. The report also criticized the *Zhizuo Fanxiu* guideline:

*We (at that time) detected the "leftist" policies by the Khmer Rouge to certain extent and had some discussions about it. However, we had not investigated this issue seriously and had not brought it to the attention of the Central Committee. We even gave some improper applause to the Khmer Rouge. For the other communist parties, we also gave support to the "leftist" tendencies (emphasis added).*

The *Zhizuo Fanxiu* laid down by Kang Sheng, is in fact proclaiming us as "the center of the world revolution" and taking a chauvinistic attitude towards to the foreign parties. The most prominent point is to take whether the foreign party agreed or disagreed with Maoism and the "Cultural Revolution" as the "watershed" and "touchstone" between Marxism and revisionism. As long as the party followed us closely, it would be regarded as "true Marxist-Leninist."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ji was the politburo member from 1973 to 1980.

<sup>97</sup> Ji was implying that China's transformations since the 1949 was too moderate and overlooked class struggle. This was why revisionism had the potential to rise in China and why Mao launched the Cultural Revolution to prevent its rise. Thus Ji was cautioning the Ieng Sary against revisionism and stressing the importance of class struggle.

<sup>98</sup> "Zhongzhi jiguan taolun lishijueyi (caoan) jianbao" [Brief reports of the discussions on the historical resolutions (drafts) by the departments directly under the Central Committee] in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, ed. Song Yongyi, CD-ROM.

<sup>99</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang duiwailianluobu [The ILD of the CCP], *Gongzuo huibao Tigang* [Outline of the working report], Hubei Provincial Archives, Document SZ1-8-185-012.

As the department that played a central role in managing the CCP–Khmer Rouge relationship, the ILD had acted faithfully in accordance with the *Zhizuo Fanxiu* guideline and Mao’s grand deployment. The analysis here indicates that the CCP had not intended or attempted to moderate the Khmer Rouge even though some cadres found the policies to be overly “radical.” All had to toe the line. If they did not, they would likely be purged.

### The *Huayun* and the Cambodian Chinese: Perishing between the CCP and the Khmer Rouge

One mystery in the CCP-Khmer Rouge relationship is why the CCP failed to lend a hand to the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia, even to the *Huayun* members who had been in service to the cause of the CCP. A significant number perished as a result of the Khmer Rouge’s radical policies. Nicholas Khoo argues “the reason for China’s decision to ignore the ethnic Chinese factor in Sino-Cambodian relations, but to emphasize it in Sino-Vietnamese relations, is geopolitical in nature.”<sup>100</sup> Khoo’s argument sheds light on the events in 1978. To explain why the CCP chose to ignore the issue of the ethnic Chinese in earlier years, this section argues that the fundamental reason for this attitude was the ideological affinity between the CCP and the Khmer Rouge. The racial bonds were outweighed by the shared revolutionary zeal between these two parties. Before and during the Cultural Revolution, the overseas Chinese who had returned to China were grouped together with the “landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad guys.”<sup>101</sup> Tagged as the “class enemies,” many overseas Chinese and people who had *Haiwai guanxi* (overseas connections) in China were persecuted. Thus the CCP was not in a position to criticize the Khmer Rouge for its radical policies towards the Cambodian Chinese. The overseas Chinese fell victim to the radical policies of both regimes.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the CCP developed wide networks in the Cambodian Chinese communities. The number of schools using and teaching Chinese increased from 173 in mid-1950s to 231, after China and Cambodia established diplomatic relations in 1958. One Chinese

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<sup>100</sup> Nicolas Khoo, *Collateral damage: Sino–Soviet rivalry and the termination of the Sino–Soviet alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5–6.

<sup>101</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Lun Qiaowugongzuo* [Deng Xiaoping’s talk on the work of the overseas Chinese affairs] (Beijing: Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, 1998), 6.

middle school, known as *Duanhua Zhongxue*, had more than 4,000 students. Many of its students and teachers were closely associated with *Huayun*. *Huayun* was a loosely formed organization. Its core was *Qiaodang*, or the Overseas Branch of the CCP. The *Huayun* members had infiltrated many Chinese newspapers and communities in Cambodia. For example, the leading Chinese newspaper in Cambodia, *Mianhua Ribao* (Khmer-Chinese Daily), was created in 1956 by some *Huayun* members and the local pro-PRC leaders of various Chinese associations.<sup>102</sup> A large amount of its profit was transferred to and deposited in Bank of China (Hong Kong).<sup>103</sup>

As for the leadership and organization of the *Huayun*, Guo Ming was in charge of the *Huayun* in Cambodia. Guo Ming's real name was Wu Kunxi. He had been a *Qiaodang* member in South Vietnam and was assigned to operate in Cambodia in 1950. As the communist parties of the three Indochinese countries were dominated by the Vietnamese from the beginning, the *Qiaodang* in Indochina was, in a similar way, mostly made up of the ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, especially those from Cholon, Saigon. Pan Bing, another senior leader of the *Huayun*, was the editor-in-chief of the *Mianhua Ribao* (Khmer-Chinese Daily).<sup>104</sup> According to Guo Ming's recollection, the activities of the Chinese newspapers, schools, and associations were under the direct oversight of the Chinese embassy.<sup>105</sup>

There were three layers within the organization of the *Huayun* in Cambodia. The first layer was the open activities headed by Pan Bing; the second layer was the semi-open activities headed by Tang Bingming, a teacher at *Duanhua Zhongxue*; the third layer was the clandestine activities headed by Guo Ming. The *Huayun* networks were extremely well-informed. According to one *Huayun* member Zhou Degao, the networks even detected the assassination attempt by the Kuomintang agents against Liu Shaoqi, who visited Cambodia in 1963. Zhou also claimed that the *Huayun* obtained advance information that Khieu Samphan and Hou Yuon were to be

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<sup>102</sup> Guo Ming, *Guo Ming Wangshi yishu—Jianpuzhai Huayun* [Guo Ming's recollection of the *Huayun* in Cambodia].

<sup>103</sup> "Jianpuzhai *Mianhua Ribao* cunkuan shijian shoudu baoguang" [The First exposure of the deposits of the Cambodian Khmer-Chinese Daily], in *Yinzhi huaren cangsangsuoyue* [Les vicissitudes des Chinois en Indochine], ed. Jean-Paul Lai (Paris: édition Pacifica, 2014), 217–225.

<sup>104</sup> Zhou Degao, *Woyu Zhonggong he Jiangong* [My story with the CCP and the Khmer Rouge] (Hong Kong: Greenfield Bookstore, 2007), 110–111. Zhou was born in Cambodia. In the 1950s he became a *Huayun* member and his open identity was a journalist of the *Mianhua Ribao*.

<sup>105</sup> Guo, *Guo Ming Wangshi yishu*.

arrested after the rebellion broke in Samlaut in 1967. Under the Chinese embassy's directive, this piece of information was sent to Khieu Samphan and Hou Yuon, who soon fled to the Khmer Rouge bases in the jungle.<sup>106</sup>

From 1955 to 1970, despite the rapid development of the *Huayun* in Cambodia and Pol Pot's visit to Beijing in 1965, the *Huayun* members maintained scarce contact with the Khmer Rouge. They stood aloof from the armed struggles started by the Khmer Rouge in Samlaut from 1967.<sup>107</sup> This stand derived from the CCP's policy of keeping Sihanouk neutral in the Vietnam War and winning over his acquiescence to the Vietnamese communist's use of Cambodian territory to hide and transport supplies to insurgents in South Vietnam.<sup>108</sup> The aggressive actions taken by the *Huayun* members in Cambodia such as their pro-Mao rhetoric and criticism of Sihanouk at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, sufficed to push him to close all the Chinese newspapers and entertain the idea of recalling to Phnom Penh the Cambodian ambassador in Beijing.<sup>109</sup> Thus there was no question that the Sino-Cambodian relationship would have been completely destabilized if the *Huayun* members had ever gotten involved in the rebellions initiated by the Khmer Rouge. It was only under the Khmer Rouge's request in 1966 that these two sides finally established a direct relationship. The *Huayun* submitted the request from the Khmer Rouge to the CCP, which in response appointed one *Huayun* member Chen Sheng to liaise with the Khmer Rouge leader Nuon Chea.<sup>110</sup>

Nonetheless, the *Huayun* members would have to pay a dear price for their estrangement from the Khmer Rouge's armed struggles. The turning point came with the Lon Nol coup d'état in March 1970. The new regime closed all the Chinese schools and dismissed all the Chinese associations. Under the instruction of the Chinese embassy that later withdrew its staff after China terminated relations with the Lon Nol regime, any *Huayun* member whose identity had been exposed should withdraw into the countryside and join the struggle. They

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<sup>106</sup> Zhou, *Woyu Zhonggong he Jiangong*, 70–72, 81–83, 108–110.

<sup>107</sup> On the Samlaut rebellion, see David P. Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, rev. ed. (Westview Press, 1999), 77–81.

<sup>108</sup> See Zhai Qiang, "China and the Cambodian Conflict, 1970–1975," in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, ed. Priscilla Roberts, 375–387.

<sup>109</sup> Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*, 59–60.

<sup>110</sup> Zhou, *Woyu Zhonggong he Jiangong*, 109. Guo, *Guo Ming Wangshi yishu*. Chen Sheng was a pseudonym. From the available sources we only know that his real family name was Zhang.

could either join the Khmer Rouge or Vietnamese forces. In the end, hundreds of *Huayun* members entered the liberated zones controlled by the Khmer Rouge. But they received a lukewarm welcome from their haughty Khmer Rouge comrades.<sup>111</sup> In April 1970, Guo Ming had a meeting with the Khmer Rouge leaders Vorn Vet, who was then the secretary of the Southwest Zone and also secretary of Phnom Penh, and Zhang Donghai who was a Cambodian-born Chinese.<sup>112</sup> Zhang unleashed a few sharp questions in their meeting:

Why did you refuse the requests of establishing contact which had been made several times by the CPK (Communist Party of Kampuchea) two or three years ago? As Cambodian Chinese, why did you join the anti-American struggles in the South Vietnam but not the Cambodian revolution?

Because of your attitude like this, we could not understand. Thus we believe you are carrying out Liu Shaoqi's revisionist route. You are Liu Shao's revisionist faction and pro-Vietnamese faction at the same time. After the coup on 18 March 1970, many of you entered the guerrilla zones in the countryside, what is your purpose—to take shelter or to join the anti-American struggles led by the CPK?<sup>113</sup>

Guo Ming, the head of the *Huayun*, replied by invoking the instructions from the CCP. Guo said that he was recalled to Beijing in 1966 and was instructed by the *Zhongqiaowei* (Overseas Chinese Affairs committee of the PRC) that the *Huayun* in Cambodia should be developed in an inconspicuous manner and not be publicized. They should try to let Sihanouk hold power in order to assist the anti-American struggles in South Vietnam. This conversation disclosed the deep-rooted displeasure and suspicion of the Khmer Rouge towards the *Huayun* members, whose fate was foreshadowed. Guo Ming's efforts to assuage the suspicion of the Khmer Rouge obviously went to no avail. Dozens of people entered into the Southwest Zone and one third died of malaria within one month. Zhang Donghai insisted that they should stay in the jungle, in the malaria-infested area. He claimed that the members had to undertake political study, thought reform, and labor work.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Guo, *Guo Ming Wangshi yishu*.

<sup>112</sup> Zhang had once been a leader of the *Huayun* in Battambang and transferred to the Khmer Rouge in the 1950s. He was the cadre appointed by the Khmer Rouge to take charge of ethnic Chinese affairs. Vorn Vet and Zhang were both purged and killed in December 1978. See Zhou, *Woyu Zhonggong he Jiangong*, 112, 123; Timothy Carney, "The Organization of Power," in *Cambodia, 1975–1978: Rendezvous with Death*, ed. Jackson, 92.

<sup>113</sup> Guo, *Guo Ming Wangshi yishu*.

<sup>114</sup> Guo, *Guo Ming Wangshi yishu*.



Altogether more than one thousand *Huayun* members and *Jinbu Qingnian* (progressive youth) entered the liberated zone. In January 1971 in Kratie, they formed the *Tewehui* (the Special Committee), which consisted of nine members as the core of leadership. Three of them were ethnic Chinese who came from South Vietnam in the 1950s. The committee was headed by Pan Bing, the former editor-in-chief of the *Mianhua Ribao*. Zhou Degao was in charge of the liaison with the Khmer Rouge. The primary leader Guo Ming was not in the committee. He would take overall charge of the liberated and the “white zones”—the un-liberated zones, and his focus would be on the underground work in the un-liberated zone. Under Guo’s leadership the underground networks, “small groups of learning Mao Zedong thoughts,” absorbed almost three hundred members in the next three years.<sup>115</sup>

However, the *Huayun* members were rejected by the Khmer Rouge as soon as they arrived in the jungle, not only because of their disengagement from the Khmer Rouge struggles in the 1960s but also due to the increasing hostilities of the Khmer Rouge toward the VWP since 1970 when the Khmer Rouge started to purge those VWP-trained Khmer communists.<sup>116</sup> The hostilities toward the VWP extended to the *Huayun* members because some of their key leaders were ethnic Chinese from South Vietnam, though this did not mean that the Khmer Rouge trusted those originating in Cambodia. In mid-1971, the *Huayun* in the Southwest Zone were asked by Zhang Donghai to terminate the work of 42 *Huayun* members because they came from the *Huayun* organizations Vietnam. In December 1971 in the same zone, Zhang asked the *Huayun* to transfer their leadership to the Khmer Rouge. After receiving a reply that they would wait for the instruction from the CCP, Zhang simply ordered the detention of their leaders, including two from the nine-member special committee. Finally they were released on the condition that they would be withdrawn to the Northeast Zone. Zhang later told the *Huayun* leader that the authentic reason was that they were creating a state within a state and a party within a party (*Guozhongzhiguo, Dangzhongzhidang* in Chinese) and the CPK would not tolerate such developments. Zhang said they should join the ranks of the Khmer Rouge if they wanted to pursue revolutionary struggles in the country. In Cambodia no foreigners were

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<sup>115</sup> Zhou, *Woyu Zhonggong he Jiangong*, 108–110. Guo, *Guo Ming Wangshi yishu*.

<sup>116</sup> See Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, 179–180.

allowed to conduct their own revolution. The *Huayun* leaders finally realized that the Khmer Rouge had determined not to allow the existence of the *Huayun* and in particular its connections with the CCP.<sup>117</sup>

Facing rejection from the Khmer Rouge, in October 1972 the *Huayun* leaders convened in the Northeast Zone. This conference was chaired by Guo Ming and all the nine special committee members attended. They decided all the organizations established by the *Huayun* since they entered the liberated zones should be dismantled. The future of the *Huayun* members would be decided by the CCP. In November 1972, they sent two representatives—the heads of the *Huayun* in the Northeast Zone and the Southwest Zone—to Beijing to consult the CCP leaders. After travelling through the Ho Chi Minh Trail and taking a stopover in Hanoi, they finally arrived in Beijing in February 1973. Before returning to Cambodia in April, they were received and instructed by a CCP cadre surnamed Tian. Below are Tian's instructions:

The CCP and the Khmer Rouge have reached the agreement of transferring all the core leaders and members of the *Huayun* to the Khmer Rouge.

The *Huayun* members should wait patiently even if they were still excluded by the Khmer Rouge.<sup>118</sup>

The astounded *Huayun* representatives tried to convince comrade Tian that the CPK would not accept them. They highlighted the developments that eventuated in the Southwest Zone and expressed their concerns. Tian answered:

This is the great deployment of the CCP and Chairman Mao. You have to accept this decision and report faithfully to the Khmer Rouge when you returned. You shall not get dismissed without instruction. If so, you will be disciplined.<sup>119</sup>

In all disappointment the representatives further asked if all the *Huayun* members could return to China if the CPK finally decided not to accept them. Tian replied:

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<sup>117</sup> Lan Tian, *Jianpuzhai Huayun lishi* [History of the *Huayun* in Cambodia], in *Yinzhi huaren cangsangsuivyue*, ed. Lai, 257–261. The author Lan Tian's real name is unknown but he must be one of the nice special committee members and one the two representatives sent to Beijing in 1972. This chapter is an excerpt from Lan Tian's self-printed recollection *Huan Lishi Zhenmianmu* [Tell the real truth of history].

<sup>118</sup> Lan Tian, "Jian Huayun daibiao shangjing chengqingji" [A record of the *Huayun* representatives' report in Beijing], in *Yinzhi huaren cangsangsuivyue*, ed. Lai, 60–61. This chapter is also an excerpt from *Huan Lishi Zhenzhengmianmu* [Tell the real truth of history].

<sup>119</sup> Lan, "Jian Huayun daibiao shangjing chengqingji," 61.

The *Huayun* members could not enter China if the Khmer Rouge excluded you in the end. Only a few members would be allowed to return to China at most.<sup>120</sup>

After returning to Cambodia, they reported the CCP's decision to Nuon Chea.<sup>121</sup> In the end, around one-hundred *Huayun* members moved back to Vietnam from late 1974. However, a few years later with the deterioration of the Sino–Vietnamese relationship almost all of them were arrested by the Vietnamese government on a charge of China's fifth column. Some of them were not released until the normalization of the Sino–Vietnamese relationship in 1990. Only a few key leaders were permitted to travel to China. In 1977, the Chinese embassy shortlisted four key members and requested the Khmer Rouge to approve their return to China. But most *Huayun* members were neither accepted by the Khmer Rouge nor allowed to return to China.<sup>122</sup> The *Huayun* turned out to be the CCP's expendable tool. In the eyes of the CCP leaders, the treatment of the majority of the *Huayun* members did not deserve to be raised with the Khmer Rouge and risk the bilateral relationship.

The *Huayun* members were left by the Khmer Rouge to stew in their own juice and forbidden to return to Phnom Penh when it was liberated. They were excluded from the communes, and had to reclaim the jungle lands and raise their own crops for food. This proved to be a better fate than the majority of the Cambodian people. These abandoned *Huayun* members were at least not specifically targeted at and sent to the starving communes. According to Zhou Degao, there were 780 members in 1973 and over 100 had perished in the jungles when the Khmer Rouge collapsed in 1979.<sup>123</sup> Under the Khmer Rouge's rule most ethnic Chinese in Cambodia were driven into the stringently controlled communes and perished under hard labor. According to Ben Kiernan's estimation, half of the 430,000 ethnic Chinese in 1975 died in the next four years after the Khmer Rouge occupied Phnom Penh.<sup>124</sup> In comparison, the *Huayun* members' exile into the jungles turned out to be less miserable than the violence

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<sup>120</sup> Lan, "Jian Huayun daibiao shangjing chengqingji," 61.

<sup>121</sup> Zhou, *Woyu Zhonggong he Jiangong*, 125–127.

<sup>122</sup> Zhou, *Woyu Zhonggong he Jiangong*, 139–142; Lan Tian's reply to Ma Ding's newspaper article, March 10, 2002.

<sup>123</sup> Zhou, *Woyu Zhonggong he Jiangong*, 127.

<sup>124</sup> Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79* (Yale University Press, 2008), 291–292.

inflicted on other Cambodians and the Vietnamese by the Khmer Rouge—their connections with the CCP at last did some help to alleviate their misery. The *Huayun* members became refugees when the PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam) forces brought down the Pol Pot regime in 1979.

Threatened with deaths many ethnic Chinese in Cambodia pinned their hopes on the intervention of the CCP. They blamed the CCP when it failed to do so. For example, the *Mingbao Monthly* in Hong Kong published two open letters in May 1978 by the Chinese refugees from Cambodia. One was an open letter to Liao Chengzhi, who was recently rehabilitated and director of the newly established Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. Written in April 1978 by the Chinese in the refugee camps in Thailand, the letter questioned why the Chinese embassies refused to offer help and why China still supported the Khmer Rouge while the ethnic Chinese were being maltreated. Even the Chinese specialists in Cambodia had turned down their requests for help. In the end the letter raised the question “supposed the motherland neglected the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia, what is the use of talking about the policies of overseas Chinese and that the Chinese government protects the legitimate rights of the overseas Chinese?” The other letter was written by the Chinese refugees in Paris in February 1978 and sent to the Chinese embassy. The refugees accused the Chinese embassy in Phnom Penh of ignoring their sufferings. They also questioned why China's newly restored policies regarding overseas Chinese had not extended to the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia. The letter called on the Chinese government to intervene.<sup>125</sup>

The chapter titles of one book published in 1982 that compiled the letters written by the Chinese refugees from Cambodia aptly reflected their feelings about the CCP. Their sentiments are revealing:

Why the motherland was indifferent to the overseas Chinese?  
We hate the CCP and the Khmer Rouge.  
We have a powerful “socialist motherland” but it is of no avail.

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<sup>125</sup> “Zhi Liao Chengzhi Xiansheng de yifeng gongkaixin” [A open letter to Mr. Liao Chengzhi]; “Shensushu—Gaomian Huaqiao xiang zhengyihuyu” [A letter of appeal—the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia appeal to justice], *Mingbao Monthly*, Issue 5, 1978, 105–106.

We were drained to death by the Cultural Revolution.<sup>126</sup>

One author expressed that when the refugees resorted to the Chinese specialists for help, they were either told to “consider the general interests—the interests between the two countries and the two parties and be patient,” or “that you were the exploiting classes in the past, and most of you are capitalists. Now you need to accept the labor education of the Cambodian government and be transformed into self-reliant laborers.” Otherwise, the Chinese specialists just walked away.<sup>127</sup>

An examination of the available sources, then, suggests that the CCP did not raise with the Khmer Rouge, whether officially or privately, the issue of the ethnic Chinese and the *Huayun* members, who had served the CCP’s cause for many years. When Zbigniew Brzezinski visited Beijing on May 21, 1978, the Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua defended the Khmer Rouge against accusations of human rights atrocities. Huang said, “at the time of the conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia in which the Soviets supported the Vietnamese in its invasion against Cambodia, we were surprised to see that the U.S. was creating out of thin air and making a big issue of human rights in Cambodia.”<sup>128</sup>

It is ironic that the departure and ill-treatment of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam turned out to be a much bigger issue than the developments in Cambodia. The ethnic Chinese issue in Vietnam notably generated tensions and undermined the Sino-Vietnamese relationship while the CCP turned a blind eye to the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge against the *Huayun*. The Chinese government was put in an awkward position. The Vietnamese had good reasons to ridicule the Chinese government by highlighting its indifference to the suffering and deaths of the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia.<sup>129</sup> Moreover they accused the Chinese government of “inciting the overseas Chinese in Vietnam” and “fabricating the Chinese exodus issue in Vietnam.”<sup>130</sup> The

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<sup>126</sup> *Yuenan Jianpuzhai Huaqiao de beicanzibai* [The miserable confessions of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and Cambodia], Volume 2 (Hong Kong: Forward Book Company, 1982). This book is the second volume of a three-volume compilation that collected the letters written by the Chinese refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia.

<sup>127</sup> *Yuenan Jianpuzhai Huaqiao de beicanzibai*, Volume 2165–166.

<sup>128</sup> *FRUS*, 1977–1980, Volume XIII, China, Document 214.

<sup>129</sup> Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: the War after the War* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 245.

<sup>130</sup> “Fan Wentong zai Henei qintzhu Yue guoqing sanshisan zhounian jihui shangde jianghua (zhailu)” [Excerpt of Pham Van Dong’s talk at the assembly in Hanoi to celebrate the Thirtieth anniversary of the Vietnamese National Day], in *Yuenan wenti ziliaoxuanbian* [Compilation of documents on the issue of Vietnam] (Liaison section of the

Vietnamese move effectively undercut the CCP's propaganda efforts to cultivate favor with the overseas Chinese in order to channel badly needed capital and investment to China.

There is no doubt that the ethnic Chinese regarded the PAVN as their liberators as most Cambodians did when the PAVN invaded Cambodia in 1979. The outcome was the product of China's policies toward the *Huayun* between 1975 and 1978. Sophie Richardson's study cites the "mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs" of the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* in analyzing the relations between China and Cambodia.<sup>131</sup> But this approach evades the concealed parts of history, in particular the CCP's underground relationship with the *Huayun* in Cambodia and its party-to-party relationship with the Khmer Rouge. It is also unable to explain why China made a big issue of the Chinese exodus in Vietnam while turning a blind eye to the welfare of the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia.

## Conclusion: From an Ideological Victory to a Strategic Failure

With Mao's death, the arrest of the Gang of Four, and the rehabilitation of the old guards purged during the Cultural Revolution, the post-Mao leadership began to water down the influence of ideology in China's diplomacy. In comparison with Mao, they had far fewer political and ideological needs to support the Khmer Rouge. This was why the Khmer Rouge leaders, sharing the ideological affinity with Mao and the Gang of Four, became so deeply afraid of losing China's support.<sup>132</sup> In October 1976, within only two weeks of the arrest of the Gang of Four, Pol Pot, Vorn Vet, and Ieng Sary made a secret visit to China. They held talks with Hua Guofeng and Li Xiannian from October 19-23.<sup>133</sup> The purpose of the visit was obvious: after the coup d'état, they were eager to be reassured of China's continued support for the Khmer Rouge regime. In comparison, both the Soviet and Vietnamese leaders had placed their hopes

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Political Department of the Chengdu Military Region, Institute of the Southeast Asia Studies of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, 1987), 135–136.

<sup>131</sup> Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*, 1–25.

<sup>132</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 74–80.

<sup>133</sup> *Li Xiannian Nianpu*, Volume 5, 452; also see Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 362–363. Short's study shows that Pol Pot made the visit in November 1976 but according to the Chinese official source Pol Pot's visit occurred in October 1976.

on China's less radical leaders, especially Deng Xiaoping, and expected an improvement in their bilateral relations with China. But the Soviets and the Vietnamese were soon disappointed.<sup>134</sup>

Why did the expected rapprochement between the CCP and the Soviet and Vietnamese communist parties fail to come to fruition? And why did the CCP continue, rather than cut off, its massive aid to its Khmer Rouge ally? On the one hand, like the "thaw" of the domestic reforms, it took time for the post-Mao leaders to adjust the PRC's policies regarding Cambodia. On the other hand, as Nayan Chanda notes, despite the "moral repugnance" and "ideological disapproval," the post-Mao leadership's support for the Khmer Rouge was based "on the solid grounds of realpolitik."<sup>135</sup> Realpolitik replaced ideology in shaping the CCP's relationship with the Khmer Rouge. If not for their common enemies—the Soviet Union and Vietnam—the Sino-Cambodian alliance probably would have broken down. However, due to the dearth of sources, it is difficult to discern the turning point when the post-Mao leadership, for geopolitical reasons, swallowed their "moral repugnance" and continued China's support for the Khmer Rouge.

When China cut off its assistance to Albania in July 1978, Deng Xiaoping instructed the MFA to "stop the assistance (to Albania), cancel the projects and throw off the burden."<sup>136</sup> However, Deng and the other leaders could not afford to "throw off" the Cambodian burden. Mao's favoritism for the Pol Pot regime had bonded the CCP with this regime too tightly for the post-Mao leadership to quickly disengage China from Cambodia. For Mao, the Khmer Rouge revolutions represented a personal ideological victory. But for the post-Mao leaders, the Khmer Rouge proved to be a heavy strategic burden for China to carry, not only in late 1970s but also in the next decade. The CCP's failure from 1975 to 1978 was that it tied itself to a regime whose radical domestic and foreign policies not only fatally impaired its own viability but also jeopardized China's strategic interests. The Khmer Rouge's incessant provocations along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border not only exacerbated the Vietnamese-Cambodian relationship

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<sup>134</sup> On the Soviet response to the arrest of the Gang of Four, see Khoo, *Collateral damage*, 109–111; on the Vietnamese response, see Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 87–88; Stephen J. Morris, "The Soviet–Chinese–Vietnamese Triangle in the 1970s," in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, ed. Priscilla Roberts, 422–423.

<sup>135</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 80.

<sup>136</sup> Wang, *Shanying zhi zuo qinli*, 38.

and provoked the Vietnamese invasion. Cambodian actions also contributed to the deterioration of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship.<sup>137</sup>

The existing scholarship shows that it was not until mid-1978, as Sino-Vietnamese relations entered a very tense period, that the CCP leaders attempted to moderate their Khmer Rouge comrades.<sup>138</sup> When Son Sen, the Chief of the General Staff of the Khmer Rouge forces visited Beijing in July 1978, Deng Xiaoping advised him to “abandon its ‘sectarian’ policies and form a united front against the enemy.”<sup>139</sup> In September 1978, Deng criticized Pol Pot for the Khmer Rouge’s “excessive radicalism,” and “the lack of discipline and ‘putschist, anarchic behavior’ of their troops on the Vietnamese border.”<sup>140</sup> Deng’s starting point was that the “leftist” tendencies of the Khmer Rouge, in particular the purges, had compromised its ability to repel the Vietnamese military attacks. The military impotency of the Khmer Rouge forces had been demonstrated by the defeats incurred since late 1977.<sup>141</sup> Thus the reason that Deng raised this issue with Son Sen and Pol Pot in July and September 1978 was due more to his strategic and realpolitik concerns than the Khmer Rouge’s radical domestic policies per se.

When Deng talked with Son Sen and Pol Pot, he undoubtedly entertained the thought that the Khmer Rouge forces would be overwhelmed by the PAVN if the Khmer Rouge still proceeded with their radical policies. For Deng, it was time for the Khmer Rouge to rebuild the united front under such unfavorable circumstances, like they did before entering Phnom Penh. As Chairman Mao stated in 1939, the united front was one of three “magic weapons” that “enabled the CCP to overcome its enemies in the Chinese revolutions.”<sup>142</sup> Deng wanted the Khmer Rouge to restore their “magic weapon.”

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<sup>137</sup> See Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, 173–191; Stephen P. Heder, “The Kampuchean–Vietnamese Conflict,” in *The Third Indochina Conflict*, ed. David W.P. Elliot (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 43–62.

<sup>138</sup> On the deterioration and breakdown of the Sino–Vietnamese relations in mid-1978, see Robert S. Ross, *The Indochina Tangle: China's Vietnam Policy, 1975–1979* (Columbia University Press, 1988), 176–189; Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, 192–199, 202–211.

<sup>139</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 261–262.

<sup>140</sup> Short, *Pol Pot*, 388–389.

<sup>141</sup> See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 204–207; Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 138–144.

<sup>142</sup> *Mao Zedong Xuanji* [Selected works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1991), Volume 2, 605–606.



However, Deng's exhortation came too late. The Sino-Vietnamese relationship had broken down, and the most urgent issue was to strengthen and fortify the Pol Pot regime against the Vietnamese invasion. The Khmer Rouge leaders and their hosts in Beijing knew that China would not use the threat of reducing or cutting off assistance as a lever. Instead China would increase the amount of aid in order to shore the Khmer Rouge up. In Beijing, Son Sen not only had his request for various military materials "granted as it was," but also was assured by Deng Xiaoping and Hua Guofeng that "now it is clear that the Vietnamese invasion into Cambodia is not only border clashes but in fact is aimed for 'the Indochina Federation' backed by the Soviet Union. Your struggle is righteous and Vietnam's is unrighteous. China supports the righteous struggle of the Cambodian people."<sup>143</sup>

As a result, contrary to the CCP leaders' exhortations, in the remaining time of their rule over Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge leaders never relented but intensified the purges.<sup>144</sup> The social and political upheavals in Cambodia severely compromised the fighting capacities of the Khmer Rouge forces and ultimately contributed to the rapid collapse of the Pol Pot regime when the Vietnamese launched their invasion. But this is not to argue that had the CCP utilized the lever of assistance to restrain the Khmer Rouge before 1978, the Khmer Rouge would be less radical. Even if the CCP had threatened to cut off assistance if the ethnic Chinese were driven into the communes, it was unlikely that the Khmer Rouge would comply. The stories of the *Huayun* demonstrate that the Khmer Rouge had been highly sensitive about their political independence from the CCP although they were heavily reliant on the Chinese assistance.

The post-Mao leaders' assessment of the Khmer Rouge was mirrored in their evaluation of Mao Zedong. During the conference of the 4,000 middle and high-ranking cadres, they expressed plenty of sharp criticism against Mao. But most of the criticism was overruled by the old guards at the top, especially Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun, who attempted to highlight Mao's achievements while playing down his mistakes.<sup>145</sup> Deng and Chen and the other guards, as the new rulers succeeding to Mao, set the tone of the Resolution: "to establish the historical

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<sup>143</sup> Wang, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Wajijiaoshi*, Volume 3, 80.

<sup>144</sup> Short, *Pol Pot*, 392.

<sup>145</sup> Xiao, *Lishi de zhuangui*, 284–294; Guo Daohui, "Siqian laoganbu dui dangshi de yici minzhupingyi" [A democratic discussion of the four thousand old cadres on the party history] *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, Issue 4, 2010, 1–7; Deng liqun, *Shier ge Chunqiu* [Twelve Years] (1975–1987) (Hong Kong: Bozhi Publishing House, 2006), 159–172.

status of comrade Mao Zedong, uphold and develop the thoughts of Mao.”<sup>146</sup> In June 1981, the Sixth Plenum of the CCP Central Committee passed the “the Resolution on certain historical issues since the PRC was founded.” The Resolution stated:

Although comrade Mao Zedong committed serious mistakes during the Cultural Revolution, but taking his whole life into consideration, (we will find that) his achievements for the Chinese revolutions are far greater than his mistakes. His achievements are primary and his mistakes are secondary.<sup>147</sup>

Chinese scholar Yang Jisheng notes that the Resolution was a product of pragmatism and it was based on the “political needs in 1981” and the “political circumstances at that time.”<sup>148</sup> In the same manner, the post-Mao leaders’ assessment of the Khmer Rouge was conditioned by their strategic and geopolitical concerns. In the minds of the CCP leaders, it was true that the Khmer Rouge had committed mistakes by its “leftist” policies. It should be condemned but these mistakes only took the “secondary” place in comparison with its “primary” achievements: it seized national victory in 1975 and now put up resistance against the Vietnamese pressure. As Deng Xiaoping told US Vice President Vice President Walter Mondale in August 1979 and Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew in November 1980, the Khmer Rouge was “almost the sole force in resisting Vietnam’s position” and “the only effective anti-Vietnamese fighting force and China’s primary ally in Indochina.”<sup>149</sup>

In August 1980 Deng Xiaoping was interviewed by the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci. Deng was questioned subsequently about how he evaluated Mao and Pol Pot. Unsurprisingly, Deng’s evaluations of Mao and Pol Pot were very similar:

Deng: ...Mao devoted most of his life to China and saved the party and the revolution in the most critical moments. In other words, he gave such a contribution that, without him, in the least the Chinese would have spent much more time in groping their way in the darkness...<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan* [Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping] (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1994), Volume 2, 291–296; *Chen Yun Wenxuan* [Selected Works of Chen Yun] (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1995), Volume 3, 283–286.

<sup>147</sup> *Sanzhongquanhuai yilai zhongyaowenxian xuanbian*, Volume 2, 738–795.

<sup>148</sup> Yang Jisheng, *Tianfang difu—Zhongguo wenhuadagemingshi* [A world turned upside down—A history of the Cultural Revolution] (Hong Kong: Cosmosbooks, 2016), 12.

<sup>149</sup> See, respectively, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, Volume XIII, China, Document 265, and Ang Cheng Guan, *Singapore, ASEAN and the Cambodia Conflict, 1979-1991* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), 36–37.

<sup>150</sup> Oriana Fallaci’s Interview with Deng Xiaoping, “Deng: Cleaning Up Mao’s ‘Feudal Mistakes’” *The Washington Post*, September 1, 1980, accessed May 14, 2018,

Deng: ...Who liberated Cambodia? Who drove the Americans as well as the Lon Nol regime away from Cambodia? Wasn't it the Cambodian Communist Party led by Pol Pot?...

Deng: ...Anyhow, today the question to put is the following one: Who fights the Vietnamese? Prince Sihanouk has no force at all, the small groups like the groups of Son Sann are too small and so they cannot carry out any serious resistance. The only force which really fights is the one of Pol Pot and in fact it is Pol Pot that the people follow.<sup>151</sup>

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[https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1980/08/31/deng-cleaning-up-maos-feudal-mistakes/4e684a74-8083-4e43-80e4-c8d519d8b772/?utm\\_term=.9645e7e0895d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1980/08/31/deng-cleaning-up-maos-feudal-mistakes/4e684a74-8083-4e43-80e4-c8d519d8b772/?utm_term=.9645e7e0895d).

<sup>151</sup> Oriana Fallaci's Interview with Deng Xiaoping, "Deng: A Third World War Is Inevitable," *The Washington Post*, September 1, 1980, accessed May 14, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/09/01/deng-a-third-world-war-is-inevitable/a7222afa-3dfd-4169-b288-bdf34f942bfe/?utm\\_term=.d225414e087d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/09/01/deng-a-third-world-war-is-inevitable/a7222afa-3dfd-4169-b288-bdf34f942bfe/?utm_term=.d225414e087d).