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International Disorganization: Fragmentation and Foreign Policy in Sino-Cambodian Relations, 1975-1979*

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Observers of China take for granted that Chinese domestic politics are highly fragmented. At the same time, they tend to relax these assumptions when analyzing China as an international actor. The thesis of this article is that domestic institutional fragmentation in Chinese bureaucratic politics carries over into its international behavior. Using the historical case of Chinese foreign assistance to Democratic Kampuchea, this article demonstrates that the effectiveness of Chinese foreign aid—and the influence that comes with it—is only as good as the domestic institutions that manage the bilateral relationship. This has implications for understanding the veracity of Chinese global influence today as well as refocusing attention to the domestic constraints on Beijing's international behavior.

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It is accepted wisdom among scholars of Chinese bureaucratic politics and institutional development that the Chinese domestic policy process is defined by fragmentation and dominated by a bargaining approach to policy making and implementation. Beginning with the seminal article Lampton (1987a) in *Issues & Studies*, there has been a steady drumbeat of scholarship looking at China's domestic policy-making and implementation apparatus (Lampton, 1987b; Lieberthal & Lampton 1992; Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988). This policy infrastructure is characterized by what has become known as "fragmented authoritarianism," in which policy-making requires taking into account the variegated interests of the various actors critical at the implementation stage, with the result that policy outcomes—if they are expected to succeed—have so many "earmarks" and "pork" attached to them that they bear little resemblance to the initial logic, incentives, and goals of the original policy-makers.

In this view, the contours of policy are not an outcome of rational problem-solving, nor are they an outcome of power politics; they are the result of multilevel bargaining involving incorporating the minimum set of demands of a wide array of interested parties in order to craft and implement successfully the policy in question. Although the specific institutions and the particulars of China's institutional network have evolved over time, the insights derived by earlier works by Lampton, Lieberthal and Oksenberg in the 1980s (who, in turn, built upon the foundation established by Barnett (1967), and more recent scholarship (Mertha, 2008, 2009) have demonstrated an extraordinary degree of durability in explaining the policy process in China today. Moreover, as Barry Naughton argues in this volume, the dramatic changes wrought by Xi Jinping (習近平) are undergirded by ambitious reorganization of the institutional apparatus from the more routinized structure and process of policy under the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao (胡錦濤–溫家寶) Administration, suggesting that

institutional fragmentation, rather than receding, will again be central to understanding the policy process in China.

Thus, the claim that Chinese domestic politics is the result of fragmented institutions is nothing new. What is surprising is that while assumptions of institutional fragmentation define our understanding of domestic Chinese politics, they are often switched out when analyzing Chinese foreign policy, for example, as Shirk (2007) asserts: "China is strong abroad but fragile at home." This is reflected, in turn, by the IR literature in which systemic or state-level factors explain international behavior, in part because foreign policy (1) is too important to subject to domestic politics and that decision-making is (2) far more concentrated when making foreign policy decisions, thereby providing a rational response to international challenges (to be sure, there is a substantial literature on the domestic sources of foreign policy, but decision-making remains ultimately in the hands of a concentrated set of actors). I find that both of these assumptions risk ignoring a big part of the story: foreign policy outputs are only as effective as the institutional integrity of the domestic bureaucracies charged with providing them.[1]

What are the policy implications of this? Consistent with Shambaugh (2013) this argument—and the case below—speaks to a larger issue: while others focus on what they see as the inexorably rising power of Chinese foreign policy, I am arguing here that domestic institutional fragmentation reduces China's capacity to influence its neighbors—that China is not necessarily as strong abroad as we often assume it is—and that those tasked with working with China should consider calibrating their own policy recommendations and decisions accordingly.

In this paper, I make these claims explicit by drawing from China's relations with Democratic Kampuchea from 1975 to 1979. On April 17, 1975, when victorious CPK soldiers marched into Phnom Penh, Beijing

[1]Indeed, prior to Xi Jinping's establishment of the Central National Security Council (國家安全委員會), there was nothing akin to a national security council in China; rather, there were multiple nodes of information gathering and processing that were not managed in any sort of systematic way.

was finally able to extend its influence into Southeast Asia, without being encumbered by its complicated relationship with Hanoi. It did so by adopting the new regime in Cambodia as the PRC's first-ever *bone fide* client state, in which competition with Soviet influence was absent. With the exception of placing Chinese troops on Cambodian soil in the case of hostilities with Vietnam, no expense or consideration was spared by Beijing. In supporting the Pol Pot regime, however, China found itself engaged in what I have called elsewhere (Mertha, 2014, p. 3) a Faustian bargain with a sucker's payoff: justifiably receiving international condemnation for maintaining the viability of the CPK regime while receiving precious little tangible benefit from its Cambodian allies, as will be demonstrated below. Why was a powerful state like China unable to effectively influence an exponentially weaker and ostensibly dependent client state? The answer, I believe, is to be found in the dynamic interaction of Chinese and Cambodian domestic institutions.[2]

Some might ask what is the relevance of a case that harkens back to a different time and place, to a backwater of the Cold War era to explain the contemporary dynamics of Chinese foreign policy. But it is important to note that this relationship's relevance with respect to theory far outweighs its historical idiosyncrasies because of its utility as a crucial case. Crucial cases

> are based on the assumption that some cases are more important than others for the purposes of testing a theory…If one's theoretical priors suggest that a particular case is unlikely to be consistent with a theory's predictions—either because the theory's assumptions and scope conditions are not fully satisfied or because the values of many of the theory's key variables point in the other direction—and if the data supports the theory, then the evidence from the case provides a great deal of leverage for increasing our confidence in the validity of the theory. . . . The inferential logic of least likely case design is based on the "Sinatra inference"—if I can make it there I can make it anywhere (Levy, 2008, p. 12).

This is a crucial case for several reasons. First, as noted, the Sino-

[2]This diverges from the more elite- and state-centric analyses of the conflict. See, *inter alia*, Chanda (1988); Ross (1988); Westad and Quinn-Judge (2009).

DK relationship represented a long-sought-after goal for Beijing: a client state that would represent a step towards elevating China's international status in the direction of the US or the Soviet Union as a great power, something that China had sought to do for a decade or longer with little to show for it.[3] According to this logic, Beijing would spare no expense, seeking to ensure that nothing would jeopardize this relationship, regardless of the ghastliness of the CPK regime: as articulated by minister of foreign economic relations Chen Muhua on June 22, 1979 to visiting US cabinet secretary Joseph Califano, "If the Cambodian people have to pay for China's interests, so be it" (Lampton, 2013, p. 129).

Second, the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee was still several years away, and China remained a planned economy. Given the structural scope conditions that allowed the state to manage processes and outcomes by threatening to withhold key inputs, Beijing was in a strong position to ensure that its assistance projects would proceed smoothly. This, of course, is mitigated by the pervasive institutional fallout left in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, so one must tread carefully here. It is arguably the case, however, that although the causes of institutional fragmentation might be different today than in the mid-1970s, the degree of dissolution seems to have some degree of parity, even if the configuration sources of such disorganization may have changed. Nevertheless, the state had the planning apparatus as its "big stick" potentially to bring errant ministries and enterprises into line, a resource it lacks today.

Third, given the asymmetrical relationship between Beijing and Phnom Penh in 1975—China was a nuclear power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, while Cambodia was a bombed-out, war-town country with a medieval agrarian economic system—a strong China could influence its client state's policies with relative ease. As this

[3]Chinese attempts to exploit the Sino-Soviet split by advocating "a vast intermediate zone" resulted in increased diplomatic recognition but, at best, ambivalence from African countries' "unwillingness to take sides in the Sino-Soviet dispute and disillusionment over China's attempts to manipulate AAPSO toward this end" (Whiting, 1987, p. 531) and Asian ones in the wake of deteriorating relations with India, uncertainty with US intentions in Vietnam, and developments in Indonesia (see Whiting, 1987, pp. 531-538).

paper will demonstrate, none of these things came to pass.

And this has resonance today. Given the breathtaking coverage of China's engagement with the developing world over the past decade, in which China has shaped agricultural and commodity markets in Africa, export markets for Brazilian agricultural products and Australian minerals, and has thrown its hat into the global competition over oil, a sort of conventional wisdom has emerged in which the Chinese juggernaut seems unstoppable as it moves forward, unencumbered by domestic constraints. This paper seeks to puncture this myth by showing how fragmented domestic institutions constrain Chinese foreign policy behavior.

China and Democratic Kampuchea

Cambodia was ruled from April 1975 until January 1979 by a utopian Marxist movement collectively referred to as the "Khmer Rouge," but officially (and secretly) called the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), which eventually renamed the country Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Although China was the best friend that Democratic Kampuchea had during its brief period of existence from April 1975 until the first week of 1979, Beijing's provision of vast quantities of aid and assistance bought precious little from its DK allies. The reason for this was variation in China's bureaucratic fragmentation which, in turn, was grafted onto an institutional matrix in Cambodia that was able to resist or obviate Chinese influence.

Along the three main dimensions of foreign aid—military, trade, and infrastructure—Chinese assistance was able to shape DK policy only in trade and commerce. Military and infrastructure aid brought with it very little influence for China onto Cambodian politics. What is interesting is that each of these two dimensions of foreign aid witnessed strikingly different institutional dynamics, even if the result was the same, that is, an overall flatlining of Chinese influence. In the case of military assistance, Chinese preferences were curtailed in large part because of the strength of DK military institutions, despite the asymmetries of power between the

two countries. In the case of infrastructure development, Chinese investment had even less effect because of the weaknesses of Chinese bureaucracies (and their inability to engage their Cambodian counterparts). The result was complete project failure. Thus, the variation of Chinese influence across foreign assistance projects was a result of variation within both Chinese and Cambodian bureaucratic-institutional integrity. As we will see, the exception is commerce, which remained largely separate from DK domestic politics and was shaped by China into an institution that behaved more like a Chinese than a DK organization.

There are at least two alternative explanations that should be engaged here. The first has to do with the idea of nonconditionality of Chinese aid, the absence of any (apparent) strings attached. According to such an argument, Chinese assistance remains subject to the more general sets of norms that Beijing ascribes to, most notably the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence), and particularly those that pertain to noninterference with other countries' domestic affairs. Thus, according to this argument, it should not be surprising that Chinese aid did not bring with it a commensurate degree of influence. However, as ideationally powerful as these ideas may be, in practice they are best observed in the breach: Chinese conditionality conditions tend not to be frontloaded but are rather weaved onto the back end of such assistance schemes, locking in the recipient country to Chinese "servicing" or other long-term management of the project in question. To deny that influence is a key goal of Beijing is to be unduly credulous.

The other possible alternative explanation is the geopolitical issue of Chinese concern over Vietnamese hegemony in mainland Southeast Asia which forced Beijing to allow Cambodian intransigence lest it fall out of Beijing's orbit. As far as this explanation goes, it would be naïve to think that Cambodia, especially under the virulently anti-Vietnamese Khmer Rouge would cozy up to Hanoi. Similarly, one can argue that Phnom Penh blackmailed China into supporting DK policies, whatever

they might be, because Beijing's failure to do so could lead to greater autarky in Cambodia as well as an unsustainable degree of weakness and the ultimate specter of regime collapse. Such an interpretation is inconsistent with the public and (mostly) private rhetoric of the KR leadership, as CPK Standing Committee meeting minutes make abundantly clear: the Khmer Rouge leadership seemed constitutionally unwilling to accept the possibility of weakness or subordination, even so far as to reject utilizing such an external perception for strategic purposes. More to the point, such an interpretation does not explain how foreign aid projects that were largely under Chinese control and management could be undermined by domestic Chinese bureaucratic dynamics, let alone account for variation along such a dimension. This point is illustrated in the case of the oil refinery at Kampong Som.

Case #1: Military Aid

The first of the three cases examined here has to do with military aid and assistance. Beijing provided weapons, training, and communication and surveillance systems to the Cambodians, assisting the Center's ability to transmit information or directives to other parts of the country (Blueprint for the Buguoshan Radar Site, 1976). The Chinese helped with the construction of several broadcasting stations as well as providing DK with teleprinter machines and related training. By the end of 1975, the Chinese proposed building power generators to boost radio communication ability within DK and waited patiently while the Khmer Rouge (KR) decided which roads to repair and expand so that China could arrange the network of cables (Meeting minutes on propaganda work, June 1, 1976; see also The Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, 1975). And China built what was the jewel in the crown of military assistance to DK: the Krang Leav airfield in Kampong Chhnang province.

In the case of providing ships, tanks, airplanes, weapons and munitions manufacturing facilities, as well as storage (for bombs, napalm, and small arms ammunition), Beijing largely gave DK a blank check and asked the CPK leadership to let China know what it needed. There was

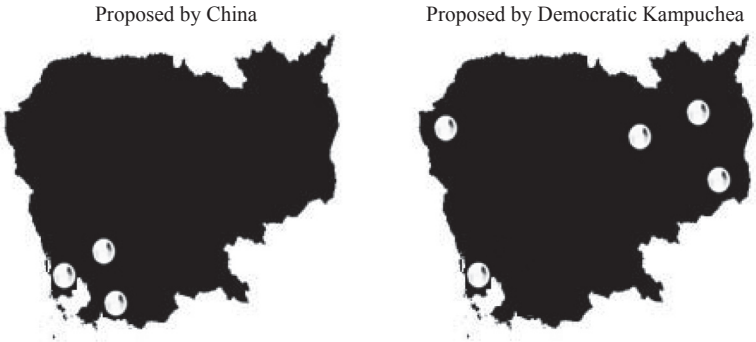

Figure 1. Proposed radar sites. Adapted from *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979*, by A. Mertha, 2014, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Copyright 2014 by Cornell University Press.

little micromanagement from Beijing on this dimension. However, it was in the area of surveillance systems and the Krang Leav airfield—rather big-ticket items—that Beijing's preferences were pushed back and allowed to fall by the wayside.

On the subject of the radar installations, Beijing's desires were made known early on in the negotiations with the CPK leadership and are clearly demonstrated in Figure 1.

China's preferences were clear: Beijing wanted these surveillance sites to serve naval, commercial, and outward force projection needs. They reflected both China's priorities as well as what Beijing thought that DK should be doing in terms of shoring up its defense capabilities. By the time the CPK Standing Committee met on October 9, 1975, Chinese advisors had already conducted an inspection of Chkê Pruh as a possible site to build a naval port and were continuing to scout locations throughout the country to build radar facilities. The Chinese recommendations were Bokor, Koh Rung Saloem, and Koh Kong as desirable sites, as well as Khmera-phoumin City, Anduang Teuk, and Trapaing Run. These were concentrated along the coast, particularly in the Southwest corner of the country, facing the Gulf of Thailand but far away from the Thai-Cambodian border and somewhat removed from Cambodia's land border with Vietnam.

The Chinese suggestions were shot down during this meeting by Minister of Defense Son Sen, who advocated a set of sites for the radar installations that reflected a completely different strategic logic than that being advocated by Beijing. He argued that Tmat Porng, Battambang, and Phnom Traom were more appropriate radar sites. Where China had proposed setting up a station at Kampong Som first, and (then) setting up telephone and telegram links (wired and wireless for both) along Highway 3, Son Sen stated that he wanted them to be built on the coast and in Ratanakiri (The Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, 1975).

Pol Pot agreed, adding that the Cambodians should learn from the Chinese in terms of building and repairing radio installations, but only insofar as this would contribute ultimately to Cambodian self-sufficiency.[4] He proposed ten radio installations: three or four sites along land borders—"we should see where the principal nodes of information/communication are and then build them in those sites"—along the border between Ratanakiri and Kratie or between Steung Treng and La Ban Siek. He also said that there should be one or two in the east, as well as one reporting from the bases on the Coastal Zone, in Koh Kong. Finally, he proposed that there be a station in the Northwest for reporting on the military situation along the border, one at Siem Reap, and ("absolutely") one for the disputed border area of Preah Vihear.

In sum, while the Chinese wanted to set up these stations based on their own (international) interests and needs, projecting outward in the Gulf of Thailand (and, significantly, not along the land border with Vietnam), Pol Pot and Son Sen advocated placement of these stations within Cambodia's interior, near its borders with Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, reflecting CPK concerns over current and likely future border skirmishes

[4]Further extending this into military shipyard construction, Pol Pot said that DK should send people to learn every aspect of port construction and maintenance (giving them between four and five months to do so), but that they should quietly pilot back boats from China without bringing any (Chinese) technicians with them, once again invoking Cambodian self-sufficiency.

Figure 2. The placement of the Krang Leav airbase.

with Vietnam, Thailand, and possibly even Laos, and to establish a "Fortress Cambodia" (The Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, 1975).

The same tug-of-war took place with the location of a Chinese-built airfield. Pol Pot himself put it bluntly that the Chinese and CPK "goals are different." Beijing had identified Uddor Meanchey, deeply inland and far from the border with Vietnam, as its preferred site. The Cambodian leadership responded that China should go ahead and enlarge Phnom Penh's Pochentong airport (which had been all but destroyed during the final Khmer Rouge offensive in April 1975), but rejected the Uddor Meanchey site for a new military airfield. Instead, Pol Pot asserted that the airfield should be built in Kampong Chhnang (The Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, 1975).

At 104 40' 0", 12 14' 0" the 2,400-meter long Krang Leav airfield is right in the middle of Cambodia, which, in turn, is in the exact center of Southeast Asia and which is, ultimately, the center of Asia itself (if we include South Asia, which Beijing certainly would, given its uneasy relationship with India). Given the relatively small size of Cambodia, from a strategic standpoint, locating the base in Uddor Meanchey or in Kampong Chhnang would make little difference as a forward base of operations for

military activity. The advantage of Kampong Chhnang, for the DK leadership, had to do with two concerns. First, early on in the regime, there was a growing sense of suspicion of the zone leaders in the northern part of the country, which discouraged the perennially-suspicious leaders in Phnom Penh from delegating such a degree of responsibility to these local leaders. Second, it was close to Vietnam. Of course, it was this latter issue that made Krang Leav a less-than-ideal site from Beijing's perspective: situating the airfield there could provoke Vietnam and would be vulnerable to attack if such a provocation led to military conflict. Although it is impossible to know what Chinese leaders were thinking, internal DK SC meeting minutes summarizing Sino-DK talks over the matter suggest that Beijing sought to avoid an airfield that was too close to Cambodia-Vietnam border.

The CPK Standing Committee made the decision during a series of meetings on April 19-21, 1976 to select Kampong Chhnang as the site of a major military airfield (Summary of DK Standing Committee Decisions, 1976). According to some reports "the airstrip would have allowed the Chinese to stage short-range bombing raids over southern Vietnam and its near-completed status, some military analysts have argued that this was what Hanoi's leaders feared as well, and was thus likely in Hanoi's thinking and partially responsible for its invasion of Cambodia" (Hunt, 2011). And Chinese fears were borne out: Vietnamese artillery had no trouble targeting Krang Leav, once the Vietnamese did invade Cambodia.

Why did the Chinese not get what they wanted when it came to these expensive and strategically important investments? In this, it was the juxtaposition of two strong bureaucracies—the PRC and DK militaries—that held China's ability or willingness to influence DK military policy at bay.[5] The two sides were evenly matched with regard to their institutions

[5]Of course, one can argue that DK policy privileged the military, and that Pol Pot's strong negotiating position reflected that, thereby explaining part of this variation. But, as will become clear later on, the Kampong Som refinery was the keystone of Sino-DK projects, reflecting Pol Pot's (and China's) goals for the country, and it was allowed to atrophy. Thus, elite interest alone does not provide a persuasive explanation.

involved in planning and managing the project, and a pattern quickly took shape in which Chinese proposals were adopted if they served DK interests but which were politely but firmly brushed aside by DK counter-proposals that ultimately carried the day. As far as the two sets of institutions were concerned, they represented the most centralized and streamlined of the two countries' respective bureaucracies. On the Chinese side, on the official organization chart, China's Ministry of Defense appears as one of the principal bureaucracies in the foreign assistance *xitong* (系統). But this is misleading, as the MoD is a *government* bureaucracy, and China's military reports to the Chinese Communist Party, and not to the government, through the Central Military Committee. Thus, the actual dynamics of military assistance are murky at best. Shambaugh (2002) describes the Ministry of Defense as "a relatively hollow shell," with its main functions since the 1950s focusing on matters of protocol, specifically to carry out foreign military exchanges. Although the MoD has a Military Attaché Bureau, Shambaugh cautions that "there should be no misunderstanding about the [MoD] having principal authority over its military attachés abroad. The attaché offices, their personnel, and funding all come directly from the Second Department of the General Staff Department (GSD), because their principal job overseas is to collect intelligence" (Shambaugh, 2002, pp. 125-126). The military attaché department (軍參處) at Chinese embassies probably also provided the main node of contact on military aid and assistance, including engineering.

Classified military volumes on China's air force and missile program describe several examples of Chinese military engineering corps that were quite likely to be similar to those at Krang Leav. Although there is some variation among them because of specialization, one common thread is their direct, centralized reporting relationship to the 司令員, or unit commander (Guofang kexue jishu gongye weiyuanhui lishi ziliao bianshen weiyuanhui [國防科學技術工業委員會歷史資料編審委員會], 1995).

The principal bureaucracy on the Cambodian side was the military/security apparatus headed by third-ranking leading CPK leader Son Sen. The airfield itself was solely under the jurisdiction of the centralized

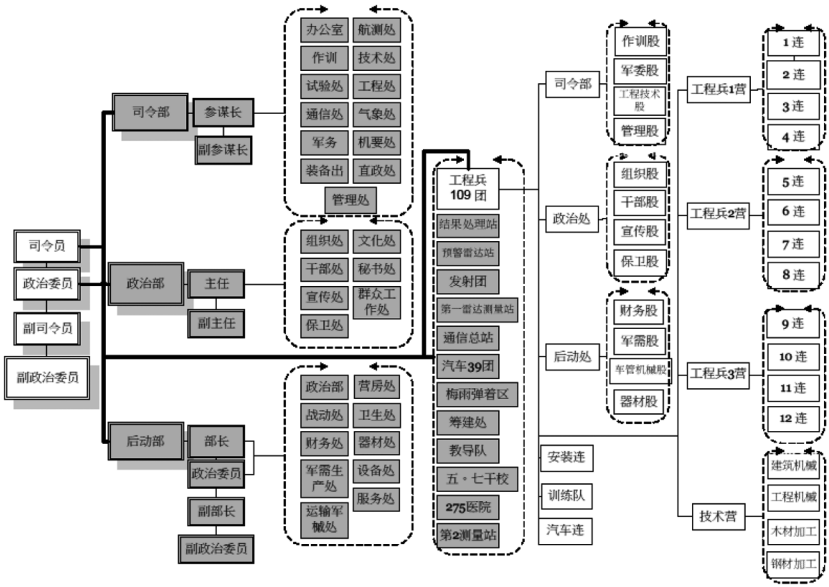

Figure 3. Organizational structure of the 24th air force training base, January 1976-May 1978 (engineering units in white). Adapted from *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun Guofang kexue jishu gongye weiyuanhui lishi zike congshu: Xunlian jidi* [中國人民解放軍國防科學技術工業委員會歷史資料叢書：訓練基地, Historical documents of Chinese People's Liberation Army, Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense: Training base], by Guofang kexue jishu gongye weiyuanhui lishi ziliao bianshen weiyuanhui [國防科學技術工業委員會歷史資料編審委員會, The Reading and Editing Committee of the Collection of the History of Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense], 1995, Beijing, China: National Defense Industry Press [國防工業出版社].

DK military apparatus and thus did not suffer from the unclear lines of authority that plagued other DK bureaucracies discussed in subsequent sections. The airfield was the responsibility of Division 502, the DK air force, under the command of Sou Met, and under the direct supervision of Lvey, the third-ranking cadre in Division 502, a Comrade Thuok (Lvey's personal secretary) and a group chairman Yerng. Division 502 was established not long after the fall of Phnom Penh and was responsible for radar

installations in locales like Bokor and Pochentong; anti-aircraft batteries (it operated an anti-aircraft technical school at Pochentong and a related detachment nearby at Wat Chom Chao and Wat Kok Anhchanh); as well as responsibilities for air traffic monitoring over Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand; and it also provided security in areas of Phnom Penh (its areas of operations in the city were within sight of Tuol Sleng, the notorious torture and "processing" center (see Chandler, 1999).

Division 502 reported directly to the General Staff. Sou Met was regarded as defense minister Son Sen's *de facto* "number two." While most divisions were made up of three regiments each containing three battalions, 502 appears to have been comprised of "at least" fifteen battalions organized around two regiments. Estimates of 502 range from 5,500 to 6,400 personnel. The ranks of Division 502 were filled by soldiers from other units who were distinguished by their "good" backgrounds, while RAK members with "questionable" backgrounds were identified, arrested, and purged as "traitors."[6] In practice, it appears that even if China wanted to, it was unable to influence DK in the implementation of policy—except in the narrowest, most technical of senses—because the bureaucracy in charge of the airfield, the RAK's Division 502, was among the strongest and most centralized in the country.

It should be noted that a conceptual distinction exists between a strong military bureaucracy autonomous from the top leadership vs. the very active role that Pol Pot and Son Sen played in military affairs, that is, the structural integrity of the DK military as analytically distinct from the power base of two of DK's top leaders. Theoretically, such a distinction matters; in this case, however, they are empirically and historically conflated. We should, nevertheless, be careful about uncritically labeling the

[6]They were accused of "theft, sabotage, attempting to evade military duties, not following orders, or having liberal tendencies . . . [engaging in] activities that challenged CPK ideologies and policies such as questioning authority, not complying with ideals of revolution, and spreading discontent" as well as guilt-by-association with others—whether relatives or unit commanders—who had already been purged. Ironically, these purged soldiers made up the workforce that did much of the construction work on the Krang Leav airfield (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

military command-and-control structure of a larger set of "strong bureaucracies."

Finally, it should be noted that this first case is perhaps the least interesting as far as the argument in this paper is concerned, because the two sets of institutions were largely intact and could both bargain from positions of strength, relative to the bureaucracies described below. But if it is the least interesting theoretically, this case is also the least representative empirically, as the rest of the paper makes clear. In the next section, we will see China's inability to influence DK policy play out in a completely different way, but which is captured by a bureaucratic politics framework. Unlike Krang Leav, where stalemate was the result of two strong bureaucracies going up against each other, China was unable to shape the processes and outcomes at the petroleum refinery at Kampong Som because of the degree of fragmentation of both the Chinese and the DK bureaucracies in charge.

Case #2: Technology Transfers

Although technology transfers can refer to projects as diverse as repairing and expanding Phnom Penh's electricity grid, building and managing military and civilian factories, expanding Cambodia's natural rubber production, and the construction/repair of roads and railways, by far the most important project from an economic and strategic standpoint was the retrofitting of the Kampong Som oil refinery, originally built by the French in 1968, in order to process crude oil from China's Daqing oil fields.

From the very beginning, the project was plagued with problems, as summarized by a Chinese worker whose comments reflected the general mood of the Chinese expatriates working on-site.

> It has been three years since we have been working on this refinery. We have to recover the operating room, but there have been so many problems, especially with electricity. Also, the supply chain from China to here has simply been disconnected. The Cambodian side seems to refuse to learn about what we are doing. We also need to train translators. The Cambodians who should be in charge of production are poorly educated, and too young. The tech-

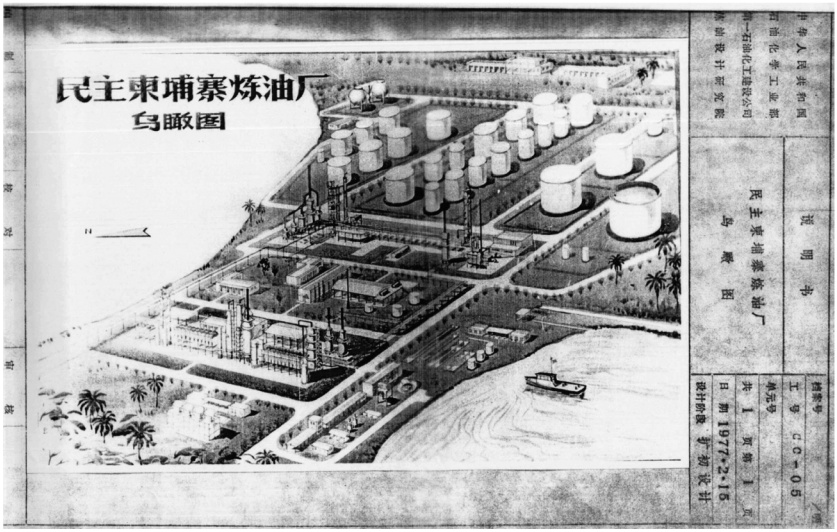

Figure 4. Chinese schematic for the Kampong Som refinery. Adapted from National Archives of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 1977.

> niques and methods of operation for an oil refinery are unique, and workers need a basic industrial knowledge base (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

As this quote suggests, one part of the problems faced by the Chinese was the quantity and quality of the Cambodian workers. As far as quantity was concerned, the number of Cambodians assigned to the project was so small that China ended up having to import skilled workers as well as managers to Kampong Som. The Cambodian workers that did show up for work did not inspire confidence. According to one of the Chinese workers:

> First, the Cambodian workforce may have 400 people. However, they do not have strength, they are mainly girls, and do not have equipment or labor insurance. The labor force is not stable and often fluctuates. Our people often have to do all the work. The Cambodians must also have a leadership, organizational hierarchy for the installation work. They need a person to be the leader, and we can be the advisors. There has to be planning and management. Without a strict organization, we cannot complete this project. In order to learn techniques and management skills, we also need translators. We are also worried about whether or not the Cambodians can guarantee the provi-

> sion of local materials for construction. Next year is the peak of construction, so they need to make sure they supply enough materials (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

An endemic problem throughout the country was that Cambodian workers were extremely young, many of them in (or just barely out of) their teens. A second, and not unrelated problem was that these laborers could not keep up with the Chinese on technical matters. This was due to any number of factors: the widespread killing of any Cambodians with the requisite technical expertise (and some targeted killings of ethnic Chinese, which thinned out the pool of interpreters/translators), the starvation wages that led to disease and lethargy among the ranks of the Cambodian labor pool.

On December 12, 1978, there was meeting at Kampong Som, during which the Chinese could no longer hide its frustration: "we are not sure who is in charge [of operating the refinery], is it the industry committee or is it the energy committee (是工業委員會還是動力委員會管理)?" That is, three years after the project began breaking ground, the Chinese embassy was unclear about whether it was the DK industrial committee [Ministry of Industry] or the DK power committee [Ministry of Energy] which had jurisdiction over the oil refinery (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978). At a meeting the next day, Chinese technicians further underscored this point:

> We are currently only training a few individuals. This is not working out. Without a proper mechanism, we don't have a permanent set of workers to train, and linguistic differences make training difficult. This would make future production even more complicated. Oil refining techniques, tests, equipment and meters are all complicated. The Cambodian side needs to come up with a leadership system, and we would be happy to assist and act as consultants. Next year, according to the [1976] agreement, work on the refinery will reach its peak. The Cambodian side needs to invest more people in this operation (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

Specifically, the problem was how to link these individuals to the leadership structure in Phnom Penh. Deputy Prime Minister Vorn Vet sat atop a bewildering array of shifting units that held a number of different official designations ("ministries", "committees", "sections") that changed over time, merging and decoupling seemingly at random. The units more

clearly designated as "ministries" were Industry, Commerce, and Public Works. These units were not of a piece; some were more centralized and under the day-to-day control of their superior ministries and the Standing Committee, while others were decentralized and responsibility for them was placed on the zone commanders and other local leaders. In general, commerce functions were centralized, agriculture and public works were decentralized, and industry was both.

The Kampong Som project fell under the jurisdiction of public works and energy. The public works committee (also called "S-8") was in charge of overseeing bridge construction, dam building, roads, transport, and water. The first three of these were largely the responsibility of the local leaders within whose jurisdictions these projects were being undertaken. Energy was also a key part of the economy. The energy ministry supervised the three power plants in the country, Plant Number 1 (at Phsar Touch), Plant Number 2 (at Chang Angre), and the never-fully-completed Plant Number 3 (at Kirirom). Although energy also included the oil refinery at Kampong Som, the actual port—as distinct from the petroleum refinery itself—"was a separately organized unit unto itself, controlled from Phnom Penh and overseen locally by Meas Mut, the Division 164 Secretary who ran the DK navy" (Craig Etcheson, personal communication, September 21, 2012).

Given these bureaucratic complexities, it is not surprising that the Chinese were out at sea, or, to use an actual metaphor of a Chinese technician: "working here seems like fighting a war on the bottom of the ocean." In the past, the DK energy committee would send representatives to survey the site every month, but by late 1978, they no longer "have translators, and we don't know what attitudes they have towards the refinery. There is also a big problem with labor. There are ten people who are supposed to grind the dirt, but they just sit there." This was echoed by another Chinese colleague: "The Cambodian side [has] no command system . . . equipment or materials would arrive at the port but wouldn't get to the refinery until a month later due to ground transportation issues" (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

But these problems could arguably have been sorted out if there had

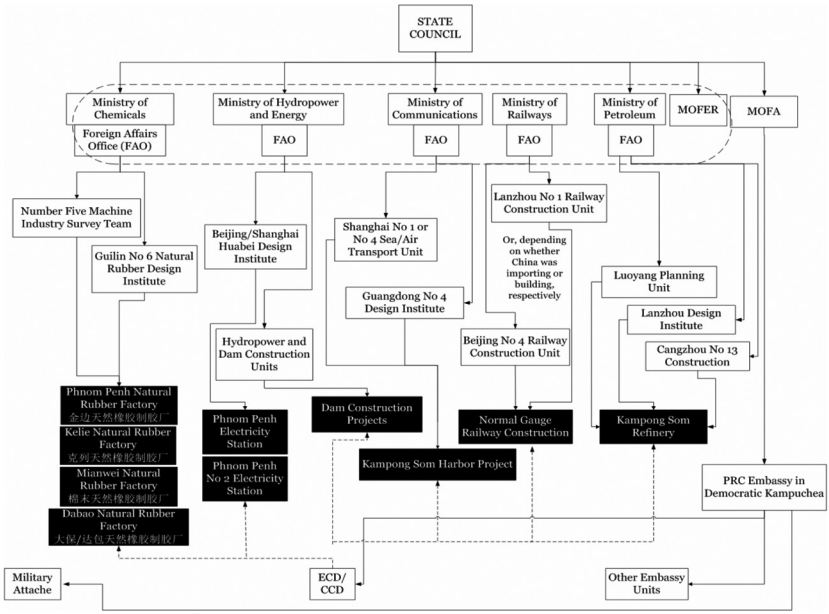

Figure 5. Schematic of Chinese bureaucracies involved in the Kampong Som Project. Adapted from *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979*, by A. Merhta, 2014, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Copyright 2014 by Cornell University Press.

been an effective system of management and authority relations on the Chinese side that could leverage the DK leadership. After all, the two sides were in complete agreement over the importance and the specific goals of the project. As it turns out, however, there was no such system in place. Indeed, the problems also extended deeply into the Chinese end of the project, particularly on the subject of bureaucratic coordination among a wide array of ministries and other institutions in China, whose often conflicting mandates and goals were stovepiped through the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh by which time they had lost much of their coherence.

On December 22, 1978, three days before the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, a group of Chinese technical leaders presented a report based on more than a month of survey work at the refinery site. The report

noted that

> When it comes to the supply of materials, it has been lax. The work that needs to be done now needs to be done mostly by China. Therefore, when the supplies do not arrive on time, or if they are incompatible, we cannot do our job properly. . . . Please tell the superiors back home. . . . The commerce unit has already stamped this request, and the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations wrote back and said that the embassy needed to send a full request. Now we only have a small jeep and it is not going to do the trip. In addition, there is the problem of lacking water bottles. Please try and solve these problems for us (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

Arguments over the scarcity and seemingly unequal distribution of resources dominated the conversation, as did complaints about the lack of coordination in China:

> The companies that send people have no idea how to organize and manage these people. The Cangzhou Thirteen Huajian Company certainly has no clue. So much has been invested that this is clearly not a joke. It seems more like a war, but a war that we're losing. The mission is simply not clear . . . we have no clue what is going on and what we have to do (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

This worker also underscored the problem with the quality of the technicians and skilled workers sent from China, suggesting that they were not among the best and the brightest, something that was not specific to Chinese operations in DK.

> Those sent from the Mainland were not sent according to national standards, and therefore the quality of people is quite low. We're not going to give specific examples, but the company and everyone knows this is the case too . . . now, even those who are in charge of the project have no idea how to fight this war (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

As a result, the Chinese felt as if they were sleepwalking through an environment in which there was no clear line of responsibility and where nothing seemed to function properly, if at all.

> People come but don't have critical equipment like a water pump. The cars come and break down after a month. When we work, we just surround the bulldozer, clueless as to what to do. We can't construct this way or that because the responsibilities are not clearly delineated, whether from within or from the outside. There are so many difficulties in building this refinery. There are 200 some people from Thirteen Huajian, but the work is not coordinated at all. . . . We need to be clear about who needs to do what, and when

> the equipment comes, we need to get our act together (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

Another worker was more to the point:

> Machines, equipment and small tools should have arrived, like rulers and pencils. When we have no pencils, we just have to use nails instead. Even during the high tide when the equipment was coming in, we didn't even have an oil pump. We should really work on finishing this properly. Otherwise, we are not going to get a return on our investment. As far as bread-and-butter issues of daily living, the design people (Luoyang) requested that the Mainland send some pickled vegetables. No more fish, please! They want vegetables (Diary of Chinese technician, 1978).

In sum, at Kampong Som DK institutions were simply incapable of managing the complex tasks which were assigned to them, particularly once the internal political purges began. Skilled Cambodians had either been killed during the early stages of the revolution or were hiding their identities in order to avoid such a fate. These challenges presented by the Cambodian site conditions were substantial, but not insurmountable.

The reason why the Chinese were unable to manage the situation and influence the outcomes has to do with the fact that the Chinese institutions were themselves fragmented and incapable of effectively planning and coordinating the various technical and managerial dimensions of the project, let alone exploiting DK institutional weakness, however modestly, to influence DK policy. The sheer number of contracting and subcontracting parties soon became unmanageable and—when combined with the similarly chaotic DK workforce—by 1978 it became clear that only a miracle would result in the completion of the project at all, let alone by the scheduled date of 1980.

Case #3: Foreign Trade

The area of trade and commerce[7] is the only one in which China was able to significantly shape DK practices—as well as the institutions in-

[7]On DK's trade relations with China, see also Kiernan, 1996, Chapter 9.

volved. This was because Chinese commercial institutions did not suffer from the types of fragmentation and lack of coordination documented in case #2, which speaks to commerce as a comparatively easy channel for building influence; and because DK's Ministry of Commerce, although by no means a weak institution nonetheless was institutionally complicated and fragmented, and this allowed for China to colonize the institution structurally and especially procedurally in ways unimaginable in the previous two cases. This was, in turn, the case because it was an area that held little interest for the top leadership, except perhaps Foreign Minister Ieng Sary and economics czar Vorn Vet.

Like much that was being constructed and initiated at the time, this commercial infrastructure was modest in scale, and it was cut short by the Vietnamese invasion of 1979. Yet it appears to have been a viable forum for the exchange of ideas and expertise, and one that could have been developed into an important asset in terms of creating revenue, maintaining informal contacts with a wider range of international actors that was willing to publicly admit dealings with the Phnom Penh regime, and—most important for this paper—it was the single policy area where China was able to obtain some return on its considerable investment in the DK regime.

The DK Ministry of Commerce (DK MoC) was one of the more expansive DK ministries, along with foreign affairs and defense, but was the most complicated and fragmented of them. It was unique in that it housed a growing number of other "ministries"/"committees," some of which—like rubber plantations and water transport—appeared to have been fairly competent in executing their responsibilities, while others were barely functional. The DK MoC was the node through which scarce resources in the form of imports were distributed among the other ministries (and regional governments). This was a source of power, but it was also symptomatic of its overwrought nature, which provided the "policy spaces" necessary for China to shape outcomes (Kingdon, 1995; Mertha, 2008).

At the top of this bureaucracy was Vorn Vet, deputy prime minister with a portfolio for the economy (appointed in March 1976). Below him was Koy Thuon, who was transferred from his former position of Northern

Zone Secretary to Minister of Commerce. After Koy Thuon's arrest and execution the following year for demonstrating an unacceptable degree of autonomy from Phnom Penh during his tenure as zone secretary, he was succeeded by commerce committee chairman Soeu Vasy (aka Doeun) as commerce minister. After Doeun himself was arrested, the position was administered instead by the chairman of the commerce *committee*, Van Rith. Although Van Rith was not even on the Central Committee, he appears to have been quite instrumental in working with the Chinese to shape the institution, as well as to have escaped the political suspicion that killed his predecessors, dying of natural causes in 2008.

In 1976, China and DK started to deepen and extend the contours of bilateral trade. In early 1976 foreign trade minister Li Qiang led a Chinese trade delegation to DK to forge a set of bilateral aid and commercial agreements. The DK side requested a loan of 140 million RMB and 20 million USD. Van Rith, who was later to head the DK shelf company in Hong Kong, was responsible for the spending of these funds (Rith, 2003). It was at this point that aid was combined with trade and commerce between the two countries and third parties (under Chinese tutelage).

The ongoing trade talks between the two countries created a *modus operandi* in which the CPK (through the DK MoC) would take on and build into its very organizational structure specific Chinese suggestions (and which ran counter to Pol Pot's very literal interpretation of Marxist political economy). The main Chinese units that were involved were the Ministry of Foreign Trade (對外貿易部); the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations (對外經濟聯絡部), for foreign assistance and aid; and the Ministry of Communications (交通部), for infrastructure and shipping. They negotiated with their DK counterparts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in the person of Ieng Sary) and the Ministry of Commerce (often directly with Vorn Vet). Furthermore, it was the DK Ministry of Commerce that was the principal node of the relationship. Although the DK MoC was a complex bureaucracy because of the multiple committees/"ministries" within the DK MoC, the commerce ministry itself had enough institutional integrity (and representation among the top leadership, despite the liquidation of a steady stream of commerce minis-

ters) that it could function as a trading unit.

For their part, the Chinese bureaucracies had clear functional delineations of responsibility, relative to the chaos described in case #2 above; they were able to handle disputes within China (that is, they were not played out on Cambodian soil) and they did not have to rely on technical institutes or a constellation of subordinate units. Thus, there was a relatively coherent Chinese partner that worked together with a somewhat viable DK institution that—uncharacteristically for the regime—was not averse to learning how to undertake a new set of state functions, even as these very functions aroused suspicions among the more hardline of the top leaders. As a result, China was able to make significant headway in shaping the process—and even some of the structure—of DK trade and commerce.

For example, in October 1976, to facilitate trade with a growing number of potential trading partners—which grew to North Korea, Japan, Singapore, and Yugoslavia—DK established with direct Chinese assistance the *Ren Fung* (英豐) Company Limited, with its office in the Central District of Hong Kong. As noted above, the director, Van Rith, was a veteran of the Cambodian leftist struggle (Rith, 2003). After the CPK victory, Van Rith worked in the commerce sector, visiting Vietnam on a commercial delegation that year, as well as helping establish warehouses for state commodities. On April 4, 1976, he embarked on a week-long trip to China and Hong Kong to discuss Cambodia's needs with Chinese leaders, as well as to explore the possibility of opening an office in Hong Kong. While in the territory, a Chinese company helped introduce Van Rith to local businessmen (Rith, 2003). In May 1976, the CPK Standing Committee decided to send Van Rith to Hong Kong in order to set up the framework for operations there (The Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, 1976). *Ren Fung* was incorporated on October 19, 1976 with the legal representation of Ford, Kwan & Company.[8] Capitalized at 1.5 million Hong Kong Dollars divided into 15,000 shares, these were divided

[8]Ford, Kwan & Company, 6th Floor, Chiu Lung Building, Nos. 15-23, Chiu Lung Street, Victoria, Hong Kong.

among the staff: Van Rith, General Manager So Chea, and Deputy General Manager San Sok[9] (4,000 shares) and First Secretary Honat[10] (3,000 shares).[11]

The purpose of *Ren Fung* was to facilitate imports into and exports from DK with countries who did not wish to be associated with DK or which had trade restrictions leveled at Phnom Penh. Start-up funds provided by China were in the form of loans, with the accounts held in Chinese banks. The 140 million RMB negotiated with Li Qiang earlier that year was split between A and B accounts. The A account was reserved for purchasing Chinese goods to be imported to Cambodia ("with all the paperwork done by the Chinese"). The B funds were credits for Cambodian exports to China at that time (i.e., timber, coconuts, etc.). Van Rith maintained that funds that were set aside for commerce were not used for the purchase of weapons; arms and military equipment were negotiated in separate agreements with the Chinese (Rith, 2003).

With Van Rith at the helm, *Ren Fung* appeared to be thriving, as trade continued to expand. By 1978, DK's trading partners included Singapore, Japan, Bangladesh, Madagascar, North Korea, and Yugoslavia, and even France, in addition to the considerable trade with China. By 1978, plans were afoot to establish another import/export company in Singapore (Martin, 1983). It is important to underscore, once again, how alien this was to the top leadership (with the possible exception of Ieng Sary), and the considerable role China played in establishing the commercial infrastructure—from the bank to *Ren Fung*—necessary for trade to be possible. In addition to these more "macro" level institutions, China was also critical in providing "micro" level assistance.

By the end of 1978, DK imports and exports had been increas-

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[9]San Sok was eventually recalled to Phnom Penh and executed (he is listed as having resigned from *Ren Fung* on July 5, 1978). He was replaced by the head of the ports committee at Kampong Som, Yim Krinn.

[10]"Resigned" November 13, 1978.

[11]The 7,000 shares from San Sok and Honat were transferred to Yim Krinn on November 27, 1978.

ing annually; transportation doubled from the year before; and the connection of international telecommunications between Cambodia and China in 1978 had enhanced trade activities, and the DK and Chinese banks were now able to work together smoothly. Although there were still hiccups, especially with regard to the quality of some DK exports, China had been largely forgiving about this (Democratic Kampuchea Ministry of Commerce, 1977). China had provided machinery and mechanical equipment as well as dispatched Chinese technicians, and had even set the prices of Cambodia's exported products in conformance with international market prices (Democratic Kampuchea Ministry of Commerce, 1977). In this context—blissfully ignorant of the Vietnamese plans to invade only weeks away—the two sides sat down to discuss commerce and trade for 1979.

At 5:00 PM on December 2, 1978, DK Minister of Foreign Affairs Ieng Sary, accompanied by Van Rith, Sar Kimlomouth and others from the DK MoC (Vorn Vet had already been arrested and executed), met with the Chinese Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Trade together with Chinese Ambassador Sun Hao and other commercial delegates and embassy personnel. The hour-long meeting opened with a standard exchange of well wishes between the two sides; both parties concurred that the previous Chinese delegation led by the vice chairman of the CCP Wang Dongxing had strengthened their fraternal revolutionary friendship and strategic solidarity.

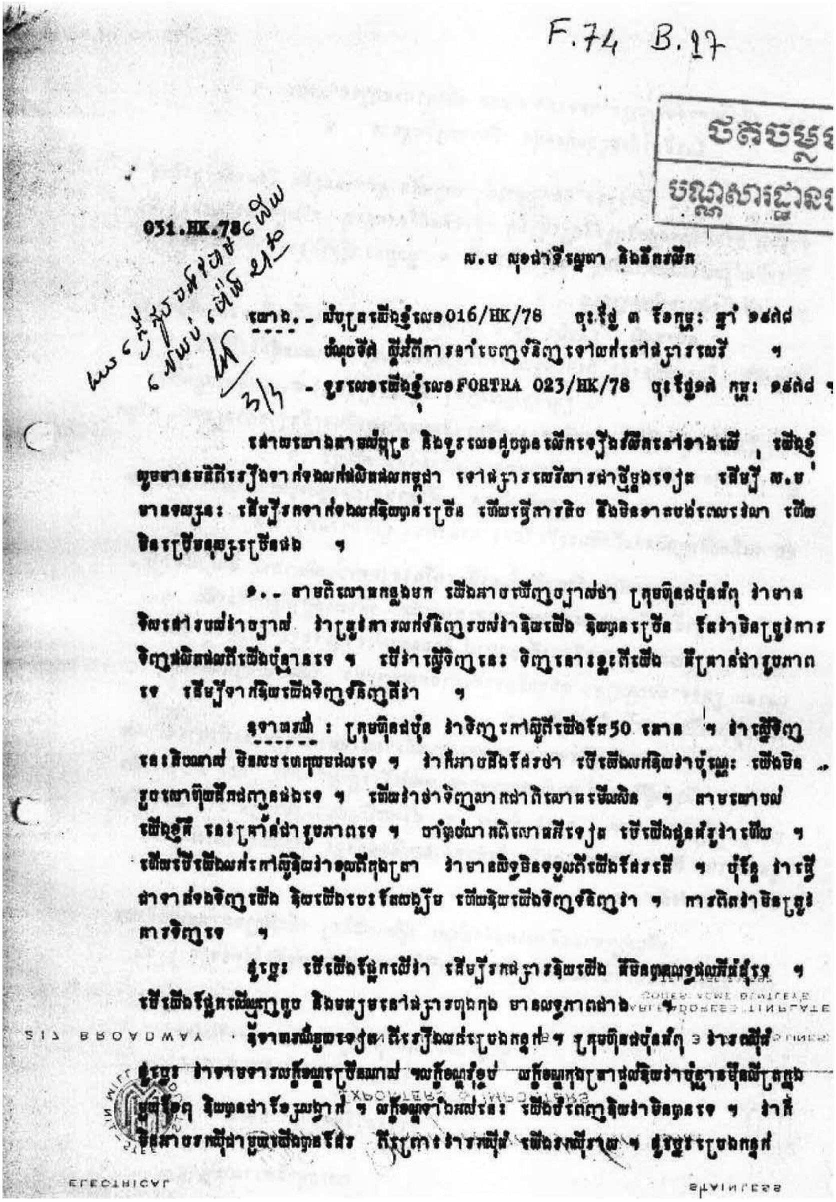
Ieng Sary stressed that Cambodia and China approached the trade tasks at hand on the basis of friendship: "We trust China. Only China understands us in the present situation. These discussions will set the agenda for the following years" (Democratic Kampuchea Ministry of Commerce, 1977). He noted that DK officials had previously met with Chinese Deputy Prime Minister Li Xiannian to discuss the implementation of Cambodia's commercial contracts with China following two of the most devastating floods in the past 70 years. The Chinese were sympathetic: "Kampuchea is defending itself against the invasion of Vietnam, and yet it was devastated by two destructive floods. Should there be changes in the contracts, it would only be natural" (Democratic Kampuchea Ministry of Commerce, 1977).

The DK foreign minister next struck a pragmatic note, noting that Cambodia assumed that the signing of the bilateral trade agreement was about both politics as well as technology, but that Cambodia was happy to have it nonetheless. "We are pleased to have the commercial agreement," he said, because: "We cannot be in debt to the equipment manufacturers, but we can do so with the banks" (Democratic Kampuchea Ministry of Commerce, 1977). The agreement would help Cambodia to learn more about trade, he added (Democratic Kampuchea Ministry of Commerce, 1977). Toward that end, the Chinese delegation called upon Cambodia to set its own prices for its exported products in future contracts. China also pledged to assist Cambodia with any problems with quality control and the packaging of exports.

Once talks like the above were concluded and the negotiated project list was complete, Beijing assigned the appropriate coordinating institutions to the projects. They would manage the functional line ministries, which, in turn, would mobilize the relevant design, planning, and production institutes and state-owned enterprises to come up with actual, concrete plans to be constructed on Cambodian soil. Of course, because of the Vietnamese invasion, none of this was to be.

Few CPK cadres ever knew much about the technical aspects of applied economics in the real world. None had the experience of individuals like Van Rith or even Sar Kimlomouth, who were spared liquidation during the initial purges and put to work in the service of the regime. But even they—particularly Sar Kimlomouth—were constrained in their ability to take the initiative and put their knowledge into practice. The Chinese filled this void, essentially teaching DK—from the top CPK cadres down to the actual trainees—how to engage in viable, albeit elementary commercial activity. The degree to which these things became internalized within the DK government is apparent as evidenced in a telegram (Figure 6) to *Ren Fung* from the DK Commerce Committee, which is worth quoting at length:

> Dear Comrade Sok;
>
> Regarding our letter No.016/HK/78 February 3, 1978, point number 7 on exporting goods to sell on the free market. . .


F.74 B.17

031.HK.78

016/HK/78

FORTRA 023/HK/78

Figure 6. DK Commerce Committee telegram to Ren Fung (File F 74, B-17). Adapted from National Archives of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 1978.

> It is clear to us that large Japanese companies are trying to sell as much as possible to us, without buying our goods…perhaps we should look into using Hong Kong trading companies rather than shipping directly to Japan. . .
>
> As far as the Hong Kong market is concerned, large, medium and small trading companies have been inundating us with requests to sell our agriculture and forest products to them along with paying commissions to them. For instance, the Chung Ji Company has made a number of contacts with us and they want to sell our rubber exports on our behalf (for a commission). . . . The Union Company (William Leon) wants to buy a lot of our agricultural products (red corn, beans, dried fish, etc.) for the Singapore market. . . . Yat To Company, with whom we discussed leasing shipping vessels, wants to buy products from us as well (cows, water buffalos, etc.). . .
>
> These and other Hong Kong traders not mentioned above have enjoyed a long relationship with us, and we should build up our relationships with them rather than with the Japanese. . .
>
> Wishing you health and success
>
> Highest warm revolutionary respects,
>
> March 13, 1978
>
> [DK] Commerce Committee

Were it not for the Vietnamese invasion at the end of 1978, all indications point to the notion that DK was on an upward trajectory with regard to international trade and commerce, which would have continued to grow into the future, thanks to China.

Conclusion

The conventional wisdom holds that a rapidly-developing China is currently behind a "third wave" of economic colonialization, facilitated and nurtured by Chinese foreign aid and assistance (French, 2014). This has raised alarm bells in both these "colonies" themselves as well as in policy circles in, among other places, Washington, DC, with an emerging consensus that such foreign policy behavior is a manifestation of China's inevitable rise as a great power on the international stage. This anxiety is premised in large part on the assumption of a unitary Chinese state that

can make bold, strategic decisions and follow through on them. But this is at such a degree of variance with our understanding of how the state actually functions along domestic policy lines that that the two sets of assumptions are virtually irreconcilable. What often happens, as a result, is that the two policy arenas—domestic and international—are consciously or unconsciously accorded different assumptions, while other, less-seasoned observers of China disregard the conceptualization of China as a fragmented state altogether.

One of the fundamental tensions of China's reform era has to do with the juxtaposition of an increasingly complex set of demands on the state with a slowly-evolving state apparatus constructed during the high tide of Soviet influence and central planning. Of course, these institutions have changed, morphed, and evolved in some important ways over time. Thus, it is important to address the question of how representative this period is; to what degree can it represent or speak to Chinese actions today? After all, one can easily argue that China in 1975 was still in the throes of the last days of the Cultural Revolution and that Chinese institutional integrity today must be better than it was back then. Using the contemporary variant of the same *xitong* as case #2 above, we see similar levels of institutional fragmentation, albeit as a result of constant bureaucratic wrangling and restructuring rather than arising out of political struggle:

> After the abolishing of the Ministries of Energy (1993), Coal, and Electric Power (1997), the State Power Corporation was formed in 1997 as a ministry-level organization in charge of overseeing electricity generation and grid operation. This professionalization of energy industries away from industrial ministries was already initiated in the oil sector in 1982, with the creation of China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), and one year later China Petro-Chemical Corporation (restructured in 1998 to form the present day China Petrochemical Corporation, or Sinopec Group; parent of the Sinopec Corporation established in 2000). The third "oil champion" China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) was established in 1988, with its main subsidiary PetroChina carved out in late 1999 . . . [But the restructuring of the] comprehensive organs in the energy sector, such as the 1980 NEC and the 1988 MoE, and even the Energy Leading Group under (then) Premier Wen, failed to assume authority against their competitors in bureaucracy and industry, especially against the high-ranking commissions and administrative organs. . . . In the light of this, the more recent intentions to push for a "super

> ministry reform" (*da bu zhi gaige*), with ministries powerful enough to overcome the current fragmentation of authorit[y], seems to be a strategic path of reform chosen by the central administration. Even so, after three rounds of reforms to form "super ministries" there still remains a significant degree of fragmentation of authority in the system, and the NEC was prone to fall short in influence against the other players in energy governance from the start. So far, path-dependence and the resulting difficulty to reassign real authority to new, less integrated and less established institutions has reinforced the static nature of bureaucratic authority (Grünberg, 2013, pp. 4-5).

It is true that China's contemporary policy making structure and process remains opaque at best. But as Allison (1969) noted more than forty years ago, we can leverage our knowledge of structure and process—and even mitigate the "blackness" of China's "black box"—by looking at bureaucratic politics and organizational process, as opposed to simply working inductively backwards from outcomes. Am I arguing that outcomes are likely to be completely undermined by the configuration or interested institutional actors that are embedded within a particular policy area? Not necessarily: by juxtaposing cases #1 and #2 above, institutional integrity and manageability can make a huge difference in terms of the viability of a proposed policy project, even if it is the case here that it did not result in actual foreign policy influence. But this point should not obscure the more important one: that Chinese institutional configurations matter in policy outcomes, for foreign policy as much as for domestic policy. We should operate under the same assumptions, scope conditions, and understandings of how Chinese domestic policies are crafted and implemented if we are to genuinely understand how and why Chinese foreign policy behavior takes the shape it does.

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