

CHAPTER 2

History of Phnom Penh

This study focuses on the modern private houses of the post-independence period that are found in the Boeung Keng Kang area. In order to understand why these houses were mostly in this area, this chapter will examine the history of urban development of Phnom Penh city and urban settlement. Therefore, this chapter highlights the development of the city from its first settlement during the ancient times, and how the city developed during the French Protectorate and the post-independence period, and finally identifies the significance of urban space in Boeung Keng Kang.

2.1 Choosing a Capital

During the 8th century until the 14th century, Angkor was center of civilization in Cambodia, dominated by architecture, sophisticated urban planning and hydraulic systems. Large and small stone temples scattered in the Angkor area are typical evidence of the triumph of technological development and state wealth during the era. Also, complex irrigation systems with large reservoirs remain in the area, indicating the advanced use of irrigation systems for agricultural production. Recent archeological surveys using airborne laser scanning (LiDAR) conducted at the Angkor Archaeological Park confirmed this fact. The scanning revealed topographic data which showed a series of intricate hidden water channels and ponds.⁵

However, the gradual decline of Angkor since the 14th century led to the movement of the capital from Angkor to Phnom Penh. New studies have shown that there were a number of factors that contributed to the decline of Angkor. First, it is believed that the growth of Siam and their attacks on Angkor were one of the major reasons. The rise of the Theravada kingdom of Ayudhya (Siam) which made repeated attacks on Angkor caused the loss of population and knowledgeable men. Upon each

⁵ Evans, D et al. "Uncovering Archaeological Landscapes at Angkor Using LiDAR." (proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, vol. 110 no. 31, 13 June 2013).

victory, people and treasure were brought from Angkor to Ayudhaya.⁶ However, new revisions of the history of the region have provided new perspectives on the decision to change the capital to Phnom Penh by King Ponhea Yat (1396-1466), who took the last reign in Angkor. The shift in regional trade routes and the effects of the power of the Mongol empire in Southeast Asia, as convincingly argued by Micheal Vickery and Oliver Wolters, have been considered reasons that inspired the King Ponhea Yat to move from Angkor to the Mekong plain area of Phnom Penh. By looking into Chinese evidence, studies have shown that “rapid expansion of Chinese maritime trade with Southeast Asia under the Mongols and early Ming had hugely impacted on the southward shifts in Cambodia’s geographical and administrative center of gravity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.”⁷ On the other hand, Bernard P. Groslier, French scholar and former conservator of the temples of Angkor and was a member of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO), argued that the extent and breakdown of the network caused the degradation of Angkor.⁸ Groslier’s claim was further confirmed by recent findings which have shown that climate change played an important role in the degradation of the agricultural production during the Angkor period. Prolonged drought resulted in serious water shortages, and later disastrous flooding severely damaged the irrigation systems that had been built for generations.⁹

Departing from Angkor, King Ponhea Yat settled the capital at Toul Basan in Srey Sonthor of Kampong Cham province, but the king managed to stay there for only about a year only because the area was regularly flooded by the Mekong River. King Ponhea Yat then moved the capital to Chaktomuk, which is known as Phnom Penh today. Chaktomuk literally means “four faces,” which refers to the confluence of the four rivers: the Mekong River, Tonle Sap River, Bassac River and Lower Mekong River. As argued by Chandler, the meeting of the rivers was crucial to the economy and power of the capital. A fortified city at this point, the “four faces,” could control the riverine trade coming down from Laos such as trade in pottery, dried fish, and fish from the Tonle Sap

⁶ David Chandler, *History of Cambodia* (Sydney: Westview Press; Allen & Unwin, Boulder, 2008). p. 93.

⁷ As cited in David Chandler, p. 92.

⁸ Bernard P. Groslier. *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVIe Sie`cle d’Après les Sources Portugaises et Espagnoles* (Paris: Press Univ France, 1958).

⁹ Bren M. Buckley et al, “Climate as a contributing factor in the demise of Angkor, Cambodia”, vol. 107, 13 April 2010.

Lake. The city could also control trade in incoming goods, primarily Chinese in origin, approaching Cambodia via the Mekong Delta.¹⁰

The decision to choose Chaktomuk for the location of the capital was also coined with the founding myth of the city. Legend has it that there was an old lady named Penh, commonly referred to as Daun Penh in the Khmer language, who lived at Chaktomuk. One day, old lady Penh saw a tree floating and getting stuck in the river in front of her house. She then asked people to help her bring the tree in from the water. When she cut the tree for fire wood, she surprisingly found four Buddha statues and one Vishnu statue inside the tree. In order to worship the statues, old lady Penh gathered people to mound the earth to be a hill, and built a monastery on top of it. The hill and the monastery were then named as Phnom Daun Penh or Wat Phnom Daun Penh. Later, the name was called Phnom Penh only.¹¹

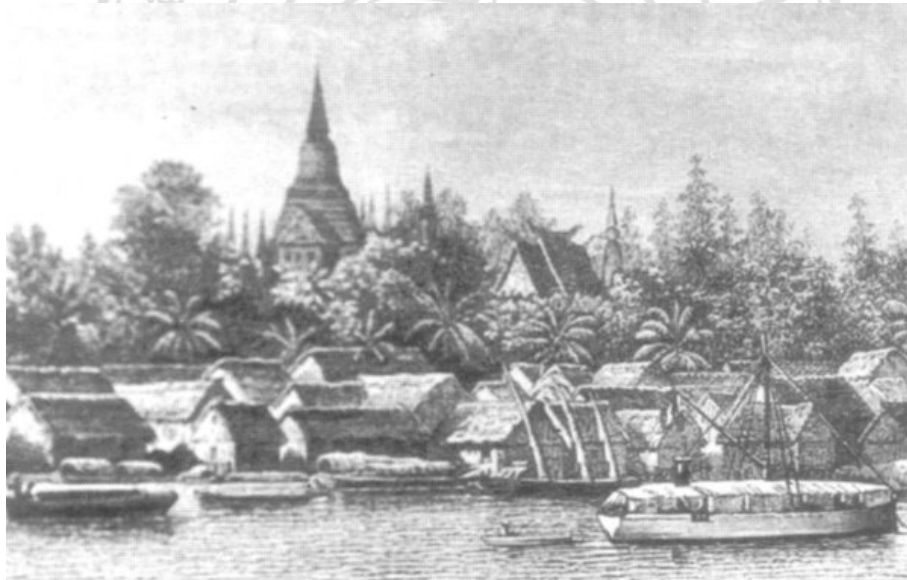


Figure 2.1 Sketch of Phnom Penh by Hanri Mouhot in 1887

The location of Chaktomuk or Phnom Penh, however, could be dated back beyond the arrival of King Ponhea Yat and even to prehistoric times. Wat Unalom, located on the north of what is today the Royal Palace, was one of the Buddhist monasteries constructed during the reign of King Ponhea Yat, but was constructed on stone foundations which dated back to the Angkor era.¹² Furthermore, recent archeological

¹⁰ David Chandler, p.102.

¹¹ Ibid, p.103.

¹² Milton Osborne, *Phnom Penh: A Cultural Literary and history* (Oxford: Single book limited, 2006), p. 21.

studies have also found traces and remains of prehistoric settlements in the form of a circular village which was located at Cheung Ek village, situated five kilometers south of Phnom Penh. This circular form village at the Cheung Ek site is similar to the prehistoric circular mound cities found at Memot (in Kampong Cham Province) in the era of Oc-Eo. Another site, Funan site, has been found at Prek Takong, located seven kilometers north of Phnom Penh, along the eastern bank of the Tonle Sap River.¹³

After settlement by King Ponhea Yat, Phnom Penh had been the royal capital for 73 years (1432 to 1505). The subsequent kings moved the capital to other places such as Longvek, Lavear Em and finally Udong, which is located around 30 km north of today's capital city, mainly because of the fight for power within the royal family, and threats from the neighboring countries, namely Siam and Vietnam.

During the mid-18th century, French (who had been present in Southeast Asia since the 16th century through European missionaries and trade expansion) confronted the increasing dominance of the British over trade to China. Learning that the Mekong River ran down from Western China through the area of Indochina to the South China Sea excited France's interest in colonizing Indochina, as the riverine route could help the French to challenge the growing British influence in Canton of China.¹⁴

Almost at the same time, the Cambodian royal court was under suppression from Siam and Vietnam. In a last resort to rescue Cambodia, King Ang Duong of Cambodia sent a letter to the French Napoleon III to help intervene.¹⁵ According to Jumsai Manich, King Ang Duong learnt about the present of French emperor in the region through the word of a French bishop who worked as Vicariat Apostolique of Cambodia from 1848 to 1857.¹⁶ In 1864, France's commander de la Grandière traveled to Udong to persuade King Norodom, who was the successor of King Ang Doung, to sign a protectorate treaty, stating the role of Cambodia to oblige to offer a number of its sovereignties to French rule, whereas France was obliged to protect the territory of Cambodia from the invasion of its neighbors.¹⁷

¹³ Vann Molyvann, *Modern Khmer city* (Phnom Penh: Reyum, 2003), p. 132.

¹⁴ D. G. E. Hall, *A History of South-east Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 616.

¹⁵ Vandy Kaonn, *Camdodge: rêves et réalités* (2012), p. 93.

¹⁶ Jumsai Manich, *History of Thailand & Cambodia: From the Days of Angkor to the Present* (Thailand: Chalermnit Press, 1987), p. 98.

¹⁷ Vandy Kaonn, pp. 93-94.

Upon placing Cambodia under its control, France had proposed to the king to move the capital from Udong to Phnom Penh or Chaktomuk because, strategically, Phnom Penh was a much better location than Udong considering the expectation that the Mekong would be an alternative trade route to China. Phnom Penh could be an economic center of the trade route, as the French could control over all ships that travelled on this great river. To legitimize the location as the center of power and administration of the country, the French also invited the king and his royal court to move to Phnom Penh. In addition to the economic benefit, the new administration center at Phnom Penh could also save traveling expenses, as Phnom Penh was located closer to French Indochina's administrative center in Saigon.¹⁸

Unfortunately, the Mekong River could not offer a riverine route into China as expected, and the location of Phnom Penh could not benefit the French by taxing the travel on the river. Thus, potential of the city was reduced to being a French administrative station and the new capital of Cambodia, since the French viewed Cambodia only as a region of its control for the benefit of protecting its developing economic colony from British encroachment.¹⁹

2.2 Phnom Penh Urbanization

Since its inception, the city has undergone constant changes. The development of the city could be put into five main stages. Each change was influenced by the changes in politics and economic development.

2.2.1 During the Reign of King Ponhea Yat (1396–1466)

When King Ponhea Yat moved capital to Chaktomuk, the area was a flat land which flooded during the flood season of the Mekong River. The king ordered his officers to bring people to dig the earth to build canals in order to save the land from runoff flooding, and use the earth to fill low lying areas, ponds and lakes to make space for housing. The work resulted in improving people's health, because the land filling helped diminish bad smells from rotten plants, and reduced mosquitos.²⁰

¹⁸ Margaret Slocomb, *Economic History of Cambodia in the Twenty centuries* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), p. 56.

¹⁹ William E. Willmott, *The Chinese in Cambodia* (Vancouver: The University of Colombia, 1967), p. 8; William highlighted the prediction of Vignon written in 1884 on the fate the economic fate of Cambodia following French intervention.

²⁰

Based on the map of Phnom Penh produced by George Coedès, a well-known French archaeologist and historian who studied the history of Southeast Asia, Vann Molyvann suggested that the city of King Ponhea Yat was supposedly located along the Tonle Sap River, on the east of present-day Monivong Boulevard. This early city of King Ponhea Yat included a palace and royal apartments which surrounded by city wall. There was a canal, called Prek Oknha Plon, which was dug to direct water to a basin in the royal residence. This canal perhaps lay under the street in front of the present-day railway station. Encircling canals were also dug around the city. The southern canal was called Prek Ta Keo. A part of this canal existed until it was filled during the building of the Independence Monument. The western canal, called Prek O Kor, was probably located on west of the present-day Monivong Boulevard. And the northern canal, called Prek Pum Peay, ran along the southern enclosure of the Soeurs de la Province, just south of the Chruai Changvar Bridge. Because there were Chinese metal workshops that made forges for weapons along this canal, this canal was also known as “Prek Chen Dam Dek” (or “the canal where the Chinese beat metal”).²¹

As Molyvann put it, during the early settlement people built their houses within the city wall and used the southern area of the city for rice plantation. The king restored the elevated hill and the monastery that was built by the old lady Penh and constructed a large stupa (*chedei*). In addition to the monastery on the hill, there were six other monasteries (Wats) in the city. Three monasteries were located based on Buddhist myth regarding the travel of the Buddha, following a book from Sri Lanka. The first monastery, Wat Koh, was located to the east-southeast of Phnom Daun Penh. The second, Wat Lan Ka, was located to the east-northeast of Phnom Daun Penh. The third, Wat Preah Puth Kosna, was located to the north of Phnom Daun Penh. Wat Unalom was an existing Buddhist monastery. The other two monasteries were Wat Oknha Plong, located to the southeast of the Phnom Daun Penh, and Wat Khpork Tayorng, in the present day named the Wat Botomvatey, which is located to the south, and close to the present-day Royal Palace. Some of the monasteries were relocated and rebuilt during the period of the French Protectorate.²²

²¹ Vann Molyvann, pp. 150-151.

²² Molyvann, pp. 151.

taxes. Prior to this, it was noteworthy that under the royalist regime, all lands had belonged to the king.²³

Although the reform may be justified since the money would be used for funding construction of infrastructure, some Cambodian people thought that the French were exploiting them and their king. Since then, there were ongoing movements against the French in the Cambodia, such as the fight by King Ang Vutha, who was the brother of King Norodom. During 1864 and 1867, the movement led by Aja Potkombor and Aja Sur caused fear and chaos for the French, and social insecurity in the country. In 1895, because of such protests against the French, King Norodom had suspended cooperation with France.

In the third stage, King Sisowath, the successor of King Norodom, worked cooperatively with the French to ensure Cambodia would gradually progress toward modernization. But because of the differences in culture between Cambodians and the French, continuous movements against France had spread out across almost half of the country.

Similar to Vandy Kaonn, Milton Osborne argues that King Norodom was conservative and traditional. Osborne maintains that King Norodom seemed to feel guilty for his decision to sign the agreement with French; however, King Sisowath seemed favor the French and their modernization. “Certainly, Sisowath was a classic Herodian, a man and king ready to cooperate with the colonial power in a relationship to what he regarded as suiting his interests”, Osborne writes. The stability had been restored as there were less protests against the French. Favoring the modernization of education implemented by the French, the king also sent his two sons to study at military academies in France. In 1906, King Sisowath even made a royal visit to France to join the Colonial Exposition where Angkor Wat temple was replicated to exhibit the hidden glorious past of the kingdom.²⁴ The next enthroned king, King Monivong, who was a son of King Sisowath and who had received training at a military academy in France, appeared less interested in state affairs.²⁵

²³ Vandy Kaonn, pp. 93-98.

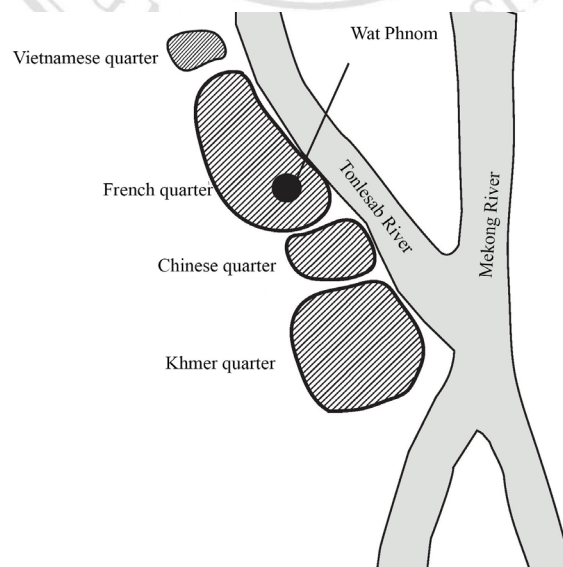
²⁴ Milton Osborne, p. 81.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 87.

1) City Planning

The review of political developments above highlights the contestation and relationship between the kings as the royal power, and the French as the executive rulers. During the reign of King Norodom, France was mainly involved in stabilizing the chaos within the royalty. Later, in the reigns of King Sisowath (1904-27) and King Monivong (1927-41), the resistance to the control of the French subsided and there was a mutual understanding between the king and the French administration. In the meantime, there was regional economic growth that helped spur the protectorate government to make significant improvements in social and city modernization.

As early as the 1900s, Ernest Hebrard, who was the first director of the Service d'Urbanisme de l'Indochine, was sent to Indochina. Upon arrival, Ernest Hebrard started developing a master plan for the cities in Indochina, including Phnom Penh.²⁶ Viewing the traditional city planning of Phnom Penh as disorganized, Hebrard employed a grid pattern approach for the master plan of Phnom Penh, so as to gain control and order. In his planning, the urban space of the city was divided according to ethnicities and their role in the city. Ethnically, Phnom Penh consisted of four main quarters: the French quarter, Chinese quarter, Khmer quarter and a quarter for Vietnamese and other ethnicities.²⁷



²⁶ D.M. Br  elle, "The Regional Discourse of French Geography in the Context of Indochina: The Theses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou", Ph.D. diss. (South Australia: Flinders University, 2002), p. 128.

²⁷ Michel Igout, *Phnom Penh then and now* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993), pp. 12-85.

Figure 2.3 Zoning of Phnom Penh according to ethnicity

- French quarter

The French quarter was located around Wat Phnom, the historic city landmark which was considered the center of the city. The quarter was encircled by a canal to protect the location from runoff water, as well as to isolate the land. Important buildings of colonial style were built within this quarter. These included the administration office, post office, trade houses, loan office, the shop houses taxation department, the residential house of the French R sident, the police office, court department, hospital, workshops and and orphanage center for the French. On the south side, there was a monetary warehouse, the office of the French Commander, and his residence. On the river side, there was a river port

- Chinese quarter

Chinese people were well known for their active role in economic activities. So, the Chinese quarter was located on the south of the French quarter, on the south side of the canal that enclosed French quarter. It was the location that could provide access to a market situated in the quarter, by trade boats coming from the Tonle Sap River. Around the market there were rows of shop houses where the Chinese ran jewelry shops, hair salons, and Chinese restaurants. Also, along the river, there existed many docking areas, as river transportation were mostly run by Chinese because at that time the river route played an important role in transportation. The Chinese agents imported and exported products between Phnom Penh and cities of the Mekong Delta, and also to provincial areas. The Chinese were also active in land transportation. Kampot, which was a colonial seaport, was populated by a Chinese minority, and connected to Phnom Penh by an ancient road which was upgraded by the French. Transportation services between the two cities was serviced by the Chinese.

- Khmer Quarter

The Khmer quarter was situated to the south of the Chinese quarter. The Khmer quarter featured importance architecture, such as the Royal Palace, National Museum, Buddhist monasteries (Wats), departments and education centers that were built in a traditional architectural style. The Royal Palace was located on the riverside faced to the east and the confluence of the four rivers. On the southeast of the Royal

Palace there was the Supreme Court and other courthouses, while on the north side of the Royal Palace, there was an open space, a Museum, and a royal dancing school. The open space was for celebrating certain royal ceremonies, such the Royal Ploughing ceremony and Royal cremations. The royal dancing school offered the teaching of royal dance and traditional arts such as sculpture, painting, and embroidering. There were also schools located along the main road running from the north to south of the city connecting the French, Chinese and Cambodian quarters. Other educational institutes included the Royal Library, Khmer administration school, and the Buddhist Library. Khmer people, particularly government officials, resided on the southern and western part of the quarter.

- Vietnamese and Other Ethnicities

Vietnamese and Malay or Cham people constituted a large part of Phnom Penh's population. A large number of Vietnamese were brought into Cambodia by the French to work in rubber plantations, and some Vietnamese immigrated into the city a long time earlier. The Vietnamese lived to the north of French quarter, along the Tonle Sap River. A few Vietnamese worked as secretaries in the French administration, while others worked as skilled workers, food sellers, fishermen, and worked for the port.

Other ethnicities included the Malay or Cham, who followed Islam. Most of them lived on the water and along the banks of the Chroi Changva peninsula, opposite the city. Most of them were fishermen and ran businesses doing cattle trade with Indonesia. Some owned boats for transportation businesses, operating between Phnom Penh and parts of the Upper Mekong River and Lower Mekong River.

2) City Modernization

It was during the 1920s and 1930s that there were significant improvements involving city beautification, making public space, city expansion and construction which substantially transformed the urban landscape of Phnom Penh. Public spaces were of different types, such as gardens, parks and avenues. Buildings that were added to the city comprised of Hotel Le Royal, the National Library, the sports center, and later the cathedral and the French school and museum. Most of these buildings were located along the central garden on the west of the hill of Wat Phnom, in

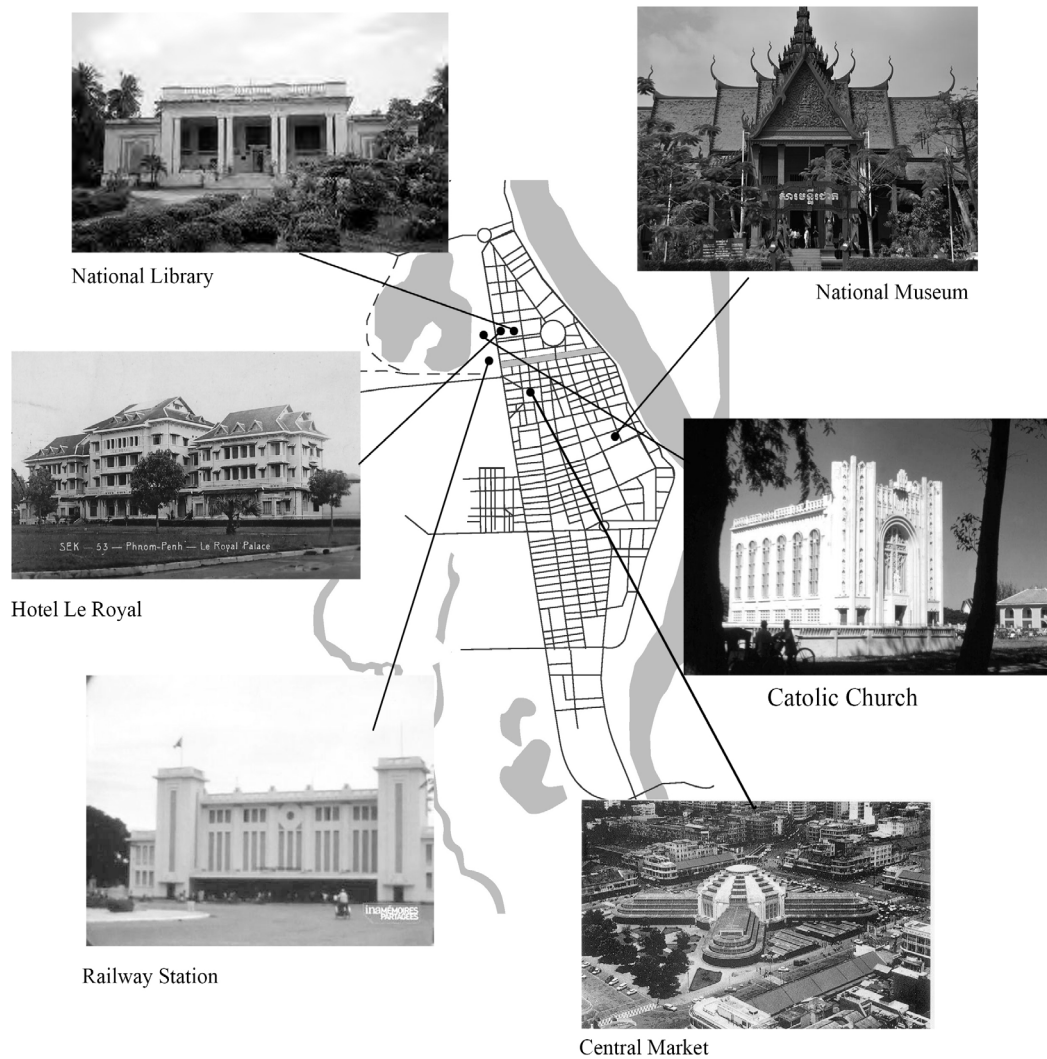
the French quarter. A museum dedicated to exhibitions and education on the early history of Cambodia was constructed on the north of the Royal Palace. On the west of the Chinese quarter, a new urban extension which included the construction of a central market and shop houses, was implemented in the mid-1930s. The most important infrastructure project during the Protectorate was the construction of a railway that connected Phnom Penh to Battambang and then to the Cambodia-Thailand border. Battambang was a province located on the west of Cambodia, closed to the Cambodia-Thailand border, and the large plains and fertile soil supplied by the Tonle Sap Lake in this area made this province abundant in agricultural products. This offered the train an important role in transporting agricultural harvests to support the people in Phnom Penh. The train station was located within walking distance from the central market.²⁸

- Major public projects of Protectorate

There were a number of buildings constructed during the Protectorate era, but a few buildings highlighted below could be used to represent the era, given they were public buildings and were the majors building of that time.

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่
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²⁸ Rapport Final Bureau des Affaires urbaines, Livre blanc du developpement et de l'amenagement de Phnom Penh: diagnostic du developpement economique, social et environnemental orientations et prospective avant-projet de schema directeur d'urbanisme de phnom penh 2020 (2007), p. 103.



- Museum (1920): The museum was designed by George Groslier (1887–1945). The design was inspired by traditional Cambodian temples.
- Railway Station (1932): Located close to the central market, and also in a similar style.
- Central Market (1934-1937): designed by Jean Debois and with Louis Chauchon, the market building has been categorized as an example of art deco.
- Phnom Penh Cathedral: located opposite Wat Phnom Daun Penh in the French quarter. In 1952, Masuice Masson was commissioned to build this ambitious edifice to replace the previous church; however, the building was destroyed by the Khmer Rouge in 1975. Maurice Massan was a well-established architect in French Indochina, with his

main office in Saigon and another in Phnom Penh run by Henri Chatel.

- National Library: opened in 1924.
- Hotel Le Royal: The first hotel opened in 1929.

2.2.3 Post-independence Period

In the aftermath of the Second World War, colonial countries began to demand independence from their rulers. In Cambodia, King Norodom Sihanouk, the successor of King Sisowath, tried politically and militarily to seek independence from the French. Through these efforts, Cambodia successfully gained independence in 1953. The stable political climate during the early period of post-independence significantly contributed to the development of the economy, urban landscape, infrastructure, and other sectors of Cambodia.

The new nation had established its first constitution just before it received independence from the French. But, one article of this constitution restricted the king of the nation from running a political party to compete in the national elections. Therefore, King Sihanouk decided to abandon his throne so as he was eligible to participate in the upcoming national election. He then formed a political party called “Sangkum Reastr Niyum”, literally meant "community of the common people", and won the national election in 1955.

Adopting the concept of socialism, the new government aimed to establish social equality and foster national cohesion within Cambodia. Also, in order to save Cambodia from becoming a battlefield in the confrontation between the communists and non-communists, as exemplified in the neighboring country, in the Vietnam War or Indochina War, the government adopted a political stance of non-alignment, which allowed Cambodia to make friends with many countries, from both the communist and non-communist side. This benefited Cambodia not only in terms of political stability, but also through economic and financial aid for national development.

Through this national and international policy, Cambodia enjoyed peace and social development. It was nicknamed the "Southeast Asian Camelot", an oasis of peace and social order amidst the conflict afflicting in the region.²⁹ The country enjoyed five

²⁹ David Chandler, p. 200.

percent annual economic growth until 1965.³⁰ The benefits of peace, economic growth and development aid from foreign countries helped Cambodia to be capable of financing the construction of a number of public institutions and infrastructural projects to accommodate the needs of the newly independent country and its growing population. The following highlight the process of growing Phnom Penh during the post-independence period, through a number of important urban development projects and new government institutions, population growth, and urban infrastructure. These institutions defined the development of the city.

- Major public projects of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum



Figure 2.4 Key map of major projects developed in 1960s

○ Government office and Chamkarmon Compound

There were two government compounds in the city. The first compound was constructed during the early 1950s to house ministries and a number of non-government organizations such as Council of Ministers, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Finance and international aid agencies. Buildings in the compound were designed by a number of architects, such as Vann Molyvann, Seng Sunfung, Grimeret, and Henry Chatel. The compound was situated along a major boulevard that connected the city to the airport, which was regarded as the first major urban development project

³⁰ Margaret Slocomb, p. 92.

of the city. Located in the Chamkarmon district, the second compound was named Chamkarmon State Palace, and was inaugurated in 1966. The compound was designed for providing state hospitality, the office of Prince Sihanouk, and state guest accommodation. The compound consisted of State Palace, offices and houses.

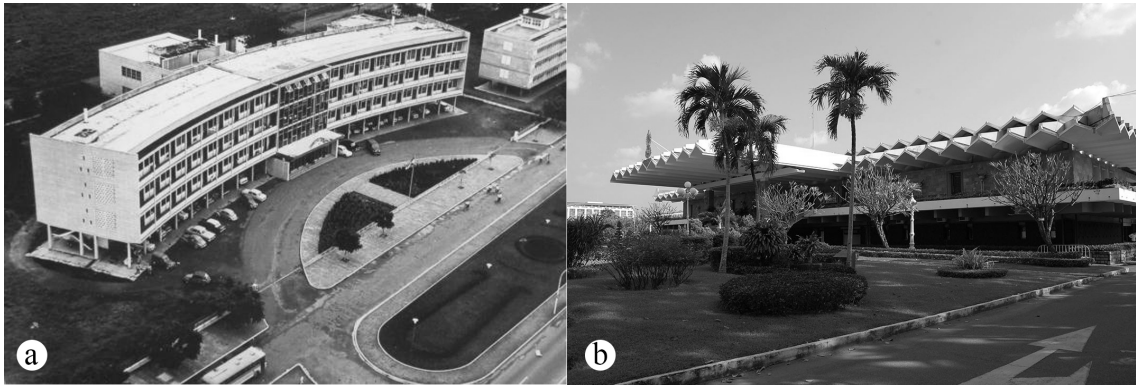


Figure 2.5(a) Council of ministers (demolished), (b) Chamkarmon State Place

○ Royal University of Phnom Penh



Figure 2.6 Royal University of Phnom Penh

The French Protectorate had severely ignored education for Cambodians, thus prompting the new Cambodian government of the post-independence period to develop education through building of education institutions and modernizing education system. The biggest education complex was located along the Russian Boulevard, and consisted of three separate educational institutes which were constructed stage by stage. The first was the Institute of Technology, which was financed and constructed by the Soviet Union in 1961. It was designed for up to 1000 students. The

second was the Khmer University, which was later named Phnom Penh University. The university provided several subjects such as arts, science, and pharmacy. It was a group of buildings including a main building for classrooms, a library, laboratories, sport facilities and a conference hall. The last was the Teacher Training College which was completed in 1972. This group of buildings included a main building, a library and a building for classrooms.

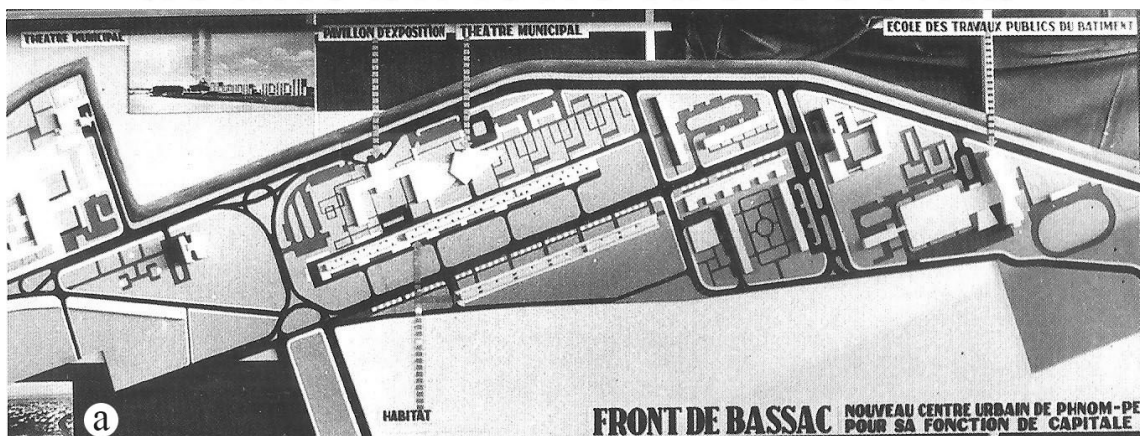
- The hospital

One of the biggest health care projects was the construction of the Russian Hospital. The hospital was the donation from Soviet Union as part of its development aid.



Figure 2.7 Khmer-Soviet Hospital

- Bassac River Front Project



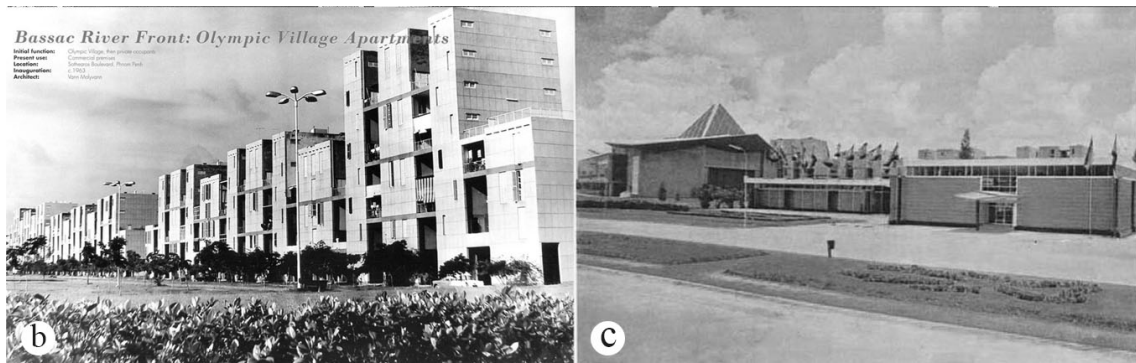


Figure 2.8 (a) Master Plan of the Bassac River Front Project; (b) Olympic Apartments; (c) Exhibition Hall and Preah Suramarit National Theater

This project was part of an ambitious scheme that could potentially transform the colonial city into a modern one. Located on the forefront of Phnom Penh, along the river, the 24 hectares area of reclaimed land was planned for public buildings, exhibition halls, a national theater, parliamentary house, schools and other facilities. Most of these planned projects were realized during the post-independence period, except for the school and national parliamentary house.

- National Sports Stadium

Shortly after Cambodia was authorized to host the Southeast Asian Games in 1963, the government had urgently ordered architects to construct sport facilities and other supporting facilities for the games. The plan of construction for the games included the construction of the National Sports Stadium, the athletes' village, and the water sports facility. The National Sports Stadium and athletes' village would be located on the west of the city, whereas the water sports complex and athletes' apartments would be located on land newly reclaimed from the river. Although the games were eventually cancelled, the sports facilities were later used to host another game, the GANEFO of non-aligned countries. The magnitude of the architecture of the project substantially promoted the prestige of the city.

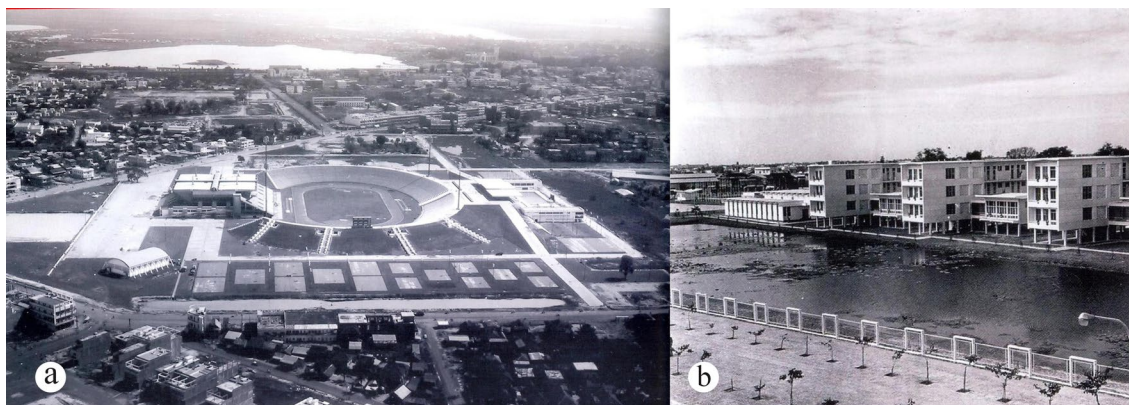


Figure 2.9 (a) National Sports Stadium; (b) Athlete Olympic Village

- Urban extension

Apart from the development of major public projects, the urban space exponentially grew to accommodate the growing population. The increase in government offices and economic growth meant more jobs in the city. Education and opportunity also attracted more people to migrate into the city. Yet the increased violence caused by insurgents on the borders and remote areas also cause people to mobilize in the cities. The population reached an estimated 900,000 people in 1970. .

In the process of expanding the city, a new concentric dike was built around the city. The dike then became a boulevard for the city. The interior of the enclosed area was filled with sand, and the space was divided in a grid pattern. The land was then sold to citizens for housing construction.

Similar to the way the Chinese quarter had been designed by the French, the new urban districts in the post-independence era centered on a market place which was surrounded by shop houses. For instance, the Phsar Oreusey sub-district, which was a further extension of the Chinese quarter to the west of the Monivong Boulevard, which ran parallel with Norodom Boulevard but on the west of Central Market, was centered by Oreusey Market and surrounded by rows of shop houses. The same design principle could be seen in the design of Olympic Market, Toul Tom Pong Market, Toul Kork Market, Samakey Market, etc.

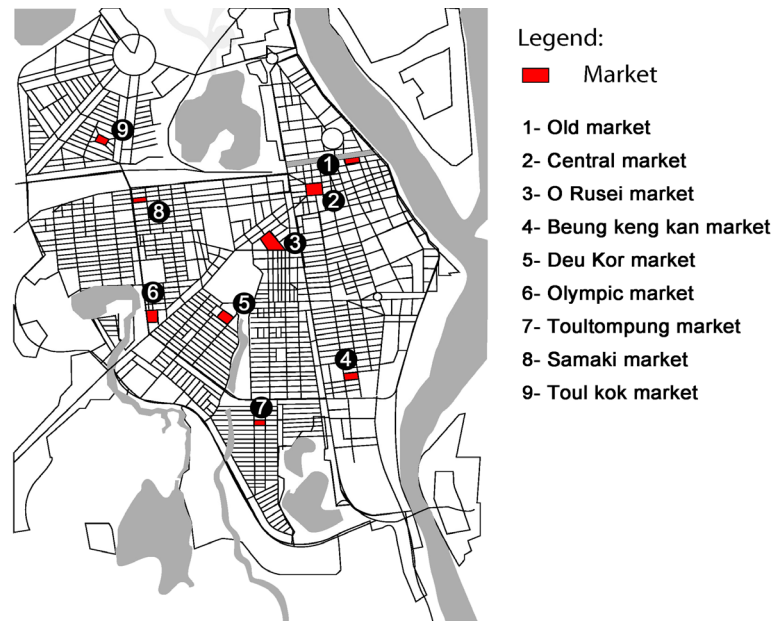


Figure 2.10 Location of important Markets in Phnom Penh

In 1962, the government implemented a new urban expansion project located on the west of the city. The new district was called “Phnom Penh Thmei” meaning “New Phnom Penh”. The new design was regarded as following the principle of a garden city.³¹ The plan proposed the extension of the existing city to the northwest along radial arches that radiated around a circle. The urban space was characterized by roads and pedestrian walkways, radiated out from the center of the zone and comprise of residential, commercial, industrial, and an urban center.³²

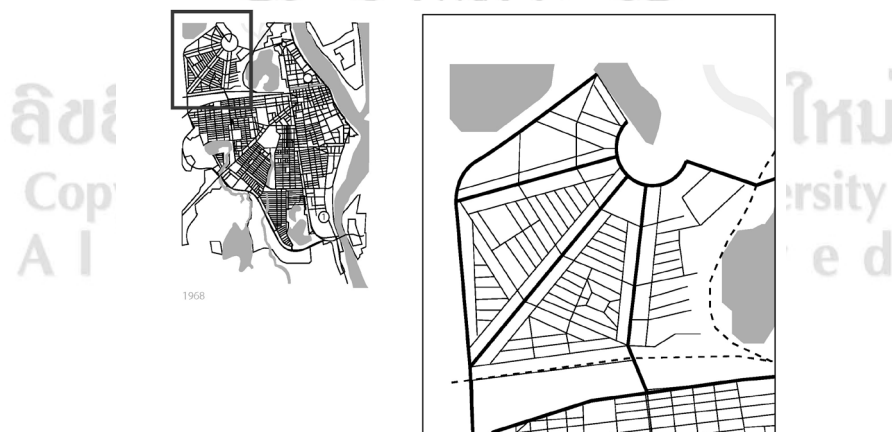


Figure 2.11 Phnom Penh Tmei or New Phnom Penh

³¹ Initiated by Ebenezer Howard in 1899, garden city was mode of city planning that aimed for self-contained urban planning. The design favors the radiated ring of industry zone, residential area, green belt and agriculture.

³² Vann Molyvann, p. 165.

- Infrastructure

Between 1955 and 1970, a number of infrastructure projects had been realized to enhance the connection between the city and provinces of the country. Major infrastructures that were constructed included:

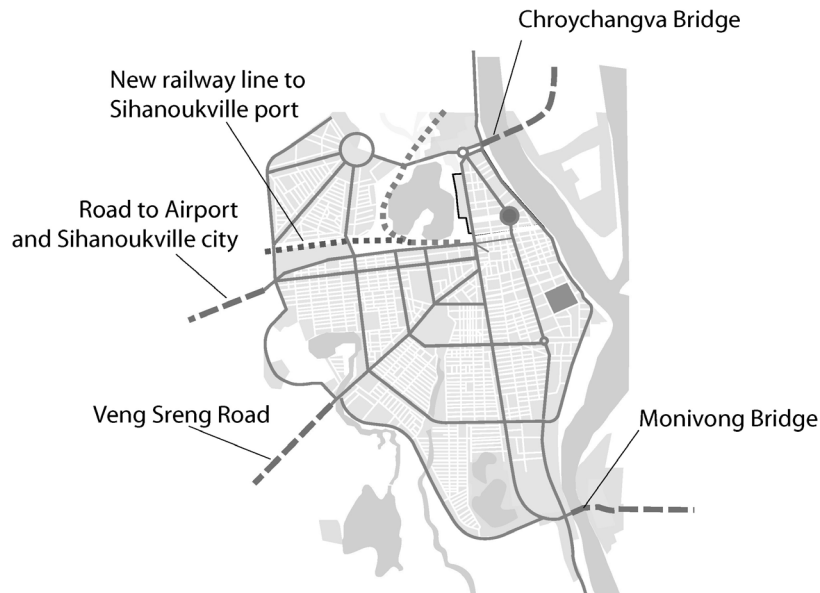


Figure 2.12 Major infrastructure construction

- The reconstruction of the bridge over the Tonle Bassac River, which had collapsed in 1964 following the erosive action of the Bassac. The original Chbar Ampov Bridge was constructed in 1929 to develop a suburb on the left bank at the end of the road from Saigon.
- The Veng Sreng Road connected to National Road 4. The road linked Phnom Penh with southeastern part of Cambodia.
- Chroi Changvar Bridge (Bridge Sangkum Reastr Niyum) on the Tonle Sap River connected to National Roads 6 and 7. The roads linked Phnom Penh to the western and northern parts of the country.
- Pochentong International Airport was constructed in 1959. A wide avenue ran directly from the airport to the Central Market.
- The Khmer-American Highway, and a railway that linked Phnom Penh with the newly built seaport in Sihanoukville city, located in the southern part of the country.

- A hydroelectric dam was built at Kirirom in Kampong Speu province, and another commenced construction at Kamchay in Kampot province.

2.2.4 During 1970s and Khmer Rouge

From 1963 onwards, Sihanouk's control began to slip. Osborne has argued that this was largely because Sihanouk lacked an understanding of economic issues and also because the economy was subjected to what he called political "maneuvering." In 1963, Sihanouk rejected financial aid from the United States and nationalized the import-export business, banks and insurance companies, and bought back some big industries. Furthermore, the notoriously corrupt government could not deal with such urgent reforms, making such a decision became a serious failure.³³

The economy continued to collapse and the war in South Vietnam spilled across the border. Accusing Prince Sihanouk of incompetence in leading the country and of having involvement in helping North Vietnam, Prime Minister General Lon Nol and Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak successfully led a military coup while Prince Sihanouk was visiting Beijing. After forming a new government, they allied Cambodia with the United States. The new government ended the monarchy and made the country as a republic state.

In revenge for the coup, Sihanouk joined with Khmer Rouge, a rebel group supported by the communist Chinese and North Vietnam. He also appealed to his followers to join the rebel group. Shortly after, the Khmer Rouge insurgency exponentially grew. In 1975, communist Khmer Rouge troops launched an offensive attack and took victory over the Khmer Republic of Lon Nol.

³³ Margaret Slocomb, p. 82.



Figure 2.13 Image of victory of Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh

Shortly after victory, the Khmer Rouge ordered the evacuation of the city population, with the excuse that the city was to be targeted for bombing by the United States. The entire urban population was ordered to head to the countryside to work in agricultural production. In fact, the Khmer Rouge was trying to reshape and restructure Cambodian society. The majority of the old society were considered impure and were subjected to eradication. The whole economic system collapsed. There was no currency, nor a banking system. Phnom Penh was abandoned and left to ruin.

In 1979, in collaboration with the Vietnamese army, the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation fought against the Khmer Rouge and took control of most parts of the country, and also Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge was forced to retreat to the region along the Cambodian-Thai border. Fights and disagreements among the rebel groups and continuous civil war caused the death of over a million people who were murdered or died because starvation and torture under Khmer Rouge regime. In 1989, peace efforts began in Paris and two years later a comprehensive peace settlement was reached in which the United Nations would administer a ceasefire and restore peace in Cambodia.

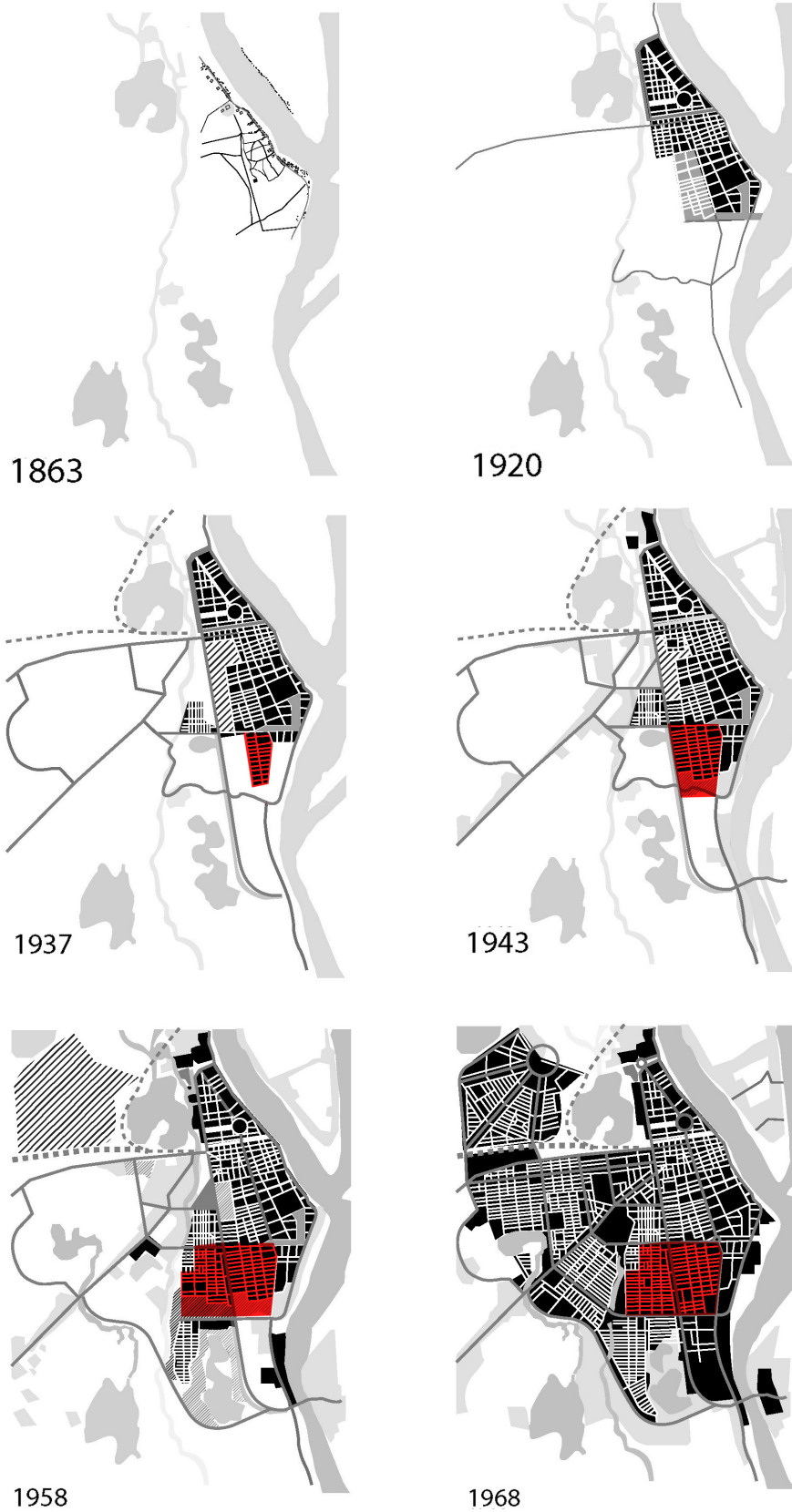


Figure 2.14 Map showing the timeline expansion of Phnom Penh and, particularly, Boeung Keng Kang

2.3 Boeung Keng Kang

During the 1930s, with the benefit of regional economic gains and population increases, there was significant expansion of the city, and urban modernization. The city municipality executed the city's expansion in two quarters, the Chinese quarter and the Khmer quarter. On the south of the Khmer quarter, a low-lying area called Boeung Keng Kang, or Hornbill Lake, was filled and urbanized into new urban space for residents. Similar to existing Khmer quarter planning, this new area was urbanized in a grid pattern, in which land divided into blocks to be further divided into plots.

Upon the independence of Cambodia from France, there were tremendous changes in many aspects of life, such as economics, social culture, and city development. For the city, there was further expansion, and construction of major projects. Many major projects, such as Chamkarmon Compound, Bassac River Front Project, and the National Sport Stadium, were constructed around the area of Boeung Keng Kang. Therefore, Boeung Keng Kang became a potential location for wealthy or upper-class families.

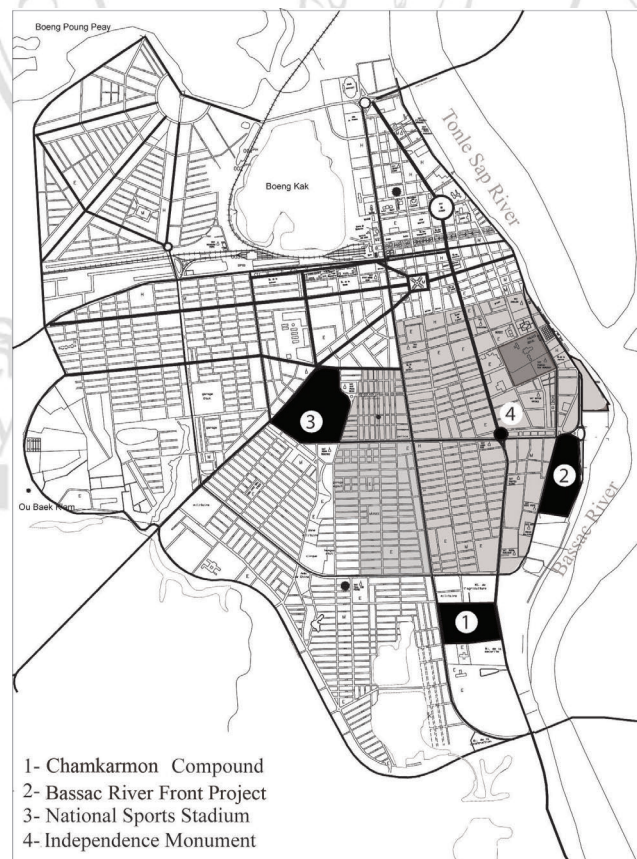


Figure 2.15 Major development projects around Boeung Keng Kang

- Chamkarmon Compound

The first important project was the construction of a new government compound at Chamkarmon, situated on the south of the Cambodian quarter. The State Place was a new center of power, representing the shift of power from the Royalty. In order to fully participate in the new political process in which governments were formed through national elections, King Norodom Sihanouk abdicated the throne in 1955. This distanced him from the Royal Palace. The Chamkarmon compound was then ordered to be constructed to become the new center of power. In addition to the State Palace, the compound included a reception hall, offices, a guest house, a cinema, and a residence for Norodom Sihanouk. The site was located five kilometers from the center of town, when Norodom Boulevard was extended south in the early sixties. Until then, the area was a marshy wetland with a few traditional houses.



Figure 2.16 Sketch of master plan of Chamkarmon Compound

- Bassac River Front Project

In the early 1960s, development focused on the riverfront south of the Royal Place. This development included the construction of Chaktomuk conference hall and a grand hotel stretching along the river. Completed in 1962, the conference hall was designed by Cambodian modernist architect Vann Molyvann. Vann Molyvann exploited forms from the traditional hand-fan made from palm leaves, and combined these with features of traditional roofing style from the adjacent royal place and other buildings. Given that palm trees were considered a symbol of the Cambodian rural landscape, the palm tree motif represented sovereignty and the identity of Cambodians. Thus, to some

extent, national identity was incorporated into the design of the new building. South of the conference hall, land was reclaimed from the river for a grand hotel project called Cambodiana Hotel. The hotel was designed by architect Lu Ban Hap and was completed in around 1969. Lu Ban Hap was a Cambodian modernist architect who went to study architecture in France after Vann Molyvann. Learning from hotels in France where he made a short trip to study whether the design should include air-conditioning, he designed this hotel that stretched along the river for fresh natural air and natural scenery of the confluence of rivers. The hotel completely changed the landscape of the area, because of its mixture of modern forms and a traditional roof style. Yet the design was very well addressed to the traditional landscape in the area.

Around 1961, a new urban extension along the bank of the Bassac River in the Cambodian quarter was proposed. Land and the bank along the river were reclaimed by filling with sand and soil dredged from the river, making a land area of 24 hectares. The project was called “Front de Bassac”. It included a number of buildings, such as exhibition centers, a cultural center, modern public housing apartments, a Buddhist Institute, parliament buildings, and others. In the meantime, in 1963, Cambodia was selected to host the South East Asian Games. A national sport facility was constructed on the existing horse racing field, on the west of Phnom Penh. A water sport facility was constructed on the riverfront area next to the location of the Cambodiana Hotel. The government also prepared an apartment building of 164 units for athletes, which was included in the Front de Bassac development project. However, the Games were cancelled due to unsettlement between the games committee and the government of Cambodia. The apartments that were constructed for the Games, then, were diverted to be social housing for government staff.

The most noticeable development area was the social housing apartments which consisted of three long buildings designed by different architects. One of the buildings, which originally would serve for accommodation of South East Asian Game’s athletes, was named “Gray Building”. This apartment was designed by Vann Molyvann. Stretching over 100 meters long, the building, the length and its design define the grand scale and modern aesthetic and modern way of living. Vann Molyvann claimed that the design was inspired by the traditional way of living of Cambodian people, rather than the shophouse of the Chinese, because Cambodians were not used to living in houses of

multi-storeys. Traditionally, Cambodians lived in detached houses, with space for crops around the house. And traditional houses very well adapted to the local climate. Under the house, the space was used for carts and cattle, and daytime activities such as agricultural tool or fishing tool repair, and preparing agricultural crops. Therefore, drawing from this understanding, Vann Molyvann designed each unit in the Gray Building with a large balcony braced for river wind, and conforming to vernacular house plans. The ground floor was used for vehicles parking and social activities. Avoiding direct sunlight penetration, the large windows were directed to the north and south, while the walls facing west and east were intended to have small windows. In addition, the apartments were composed of several individual buildings combined together. Vann Molyvann said, its long length would make the building look boring, so he varied the high of each unit, making it appear more random, while still connected. The other two apartment buildings were of similar scale, long, stretching and multi-storied. Around the buildings, large public spaces with gardens and trees were allowed for the best flow of air and a good landscape view.



Figure 2.17 Bird eye view of Bassac River Front Project

Another important building in the Front de Bassac was the Preah Suramarit Theater. The purpose of the building was to provide a platform for performing arts. The building was built to have the capacity to accommodate more people than the existing Chaktomuk Conference Hall. After its completion, the building became an important space for the department of folk arts, which aimed to institutionalize and nationalize the traditional performance arts of local people in the countryside. The building hosted, for example, the troupes of performance art which were associated with the department of

folk art.³⁴ In September 1969, the first National Film Festival was held at the Preah Suramarit National Theater.³⁵ Next to the theater, there was a Sangkum Reastr Niyum Exhibition Hall, which was used for exhibiting a wide range of activities from urban development and industrial production to arts and crafts. There were plans for the construction of a parliamentary building, and an art college as well. However, because of the political turmoil, the plan was not fully completed.

○ National Sports Stadium

As mentioned earlier, the National Sports Stadium was in progress. It was built on the existing horse racefield on the west of Phnom Penh. The plan to host the South East Asian Games never happened. Yet, the Stadium hosted the first regional Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO) in 1966.³⁶ The stadium complex consisted of an indoor stadium for indoor sports such volleyball and basketball, an outdoor stadium (for football and running, etc.), and a swimming pool.

Although the South East Asian Games were cancelled, the project clearly represented the aim of the government to show the prestige and development of the city and the country, which had just received independence. In addressing the crowd during the inauguration ceremony, Prince Norodom Sihanouk said that the new complex was “an impressive achievement.”³⁷



Figure 2.18 Bird eyes view of National Sports Stadium

³⁴ Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth, eds, *Cultures of Independence: An Introduction to Cambodian Arts and Culture in the 1950's and 1960's* (Phnom Penh: Reyum, 2001), p. 66.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 154.

³⁶ Helen Grant Ross and Darryl Leon Collins, p. 28.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 213.

During the post-independence period, there were some revisions to the urban space of Beoung Keng Kang, such as the commissioning of roads, the inclusion of new high schools, and a market. The changes are clearly seen when making a comparison between the map of 1948 and map of 1968. These inclusions were clearly a response to the growing population, the necessity to offer education institutions nearby to living areas, and corresponding with the government policy in promoting education.

- Independence Monument

Upon receiving independence from the French, the Cambodian government had conceived a plan to build an Independence Monument as a celebration. The building would be located on the intersection of the Norodom Boulevard and Sihanouk Boulevard. The design of the building involved many architects, engineers as well sculptors. But it wasn't until 1962 that the construction of the building was completed and was officially inaugurated. The design was inspired by ancient Khmer architecture, as requested by Prince Sihanouk. The plan for the monument also included the making of a public space on the side, which featured gardens and a fountain.



Figure 1.9 Independence Monument

Beoung Keng Kang today

As soon as the Khmer Rouge regime finished, the suffering people returned home. Because of the sudden evacuation and the death of people during Khmer Rouge, the society faced social chaos, because property rights were invalidated. Those who arrived in Phnom Penh first could stay in any house they thought secure for them.

Subsequent improvements of political tension, the peace negotiations, and political and economic reform made the country return back to the prospect of socioeconomic development. Boeung Keng Kang underwent subsequent changes again. New materials, design trends, and a growing demand for working and business spaces led to the modification and demolition of buildings, to make room for high rises.

Looking through the economic development of Cambodia after the fall of the Khmer Rouge until today, the process of development could be put into three phases. The first phase began with the arrival of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to facilitate the political transition and organize national elections between 1991 and 1993. The second phase was the result of political change, namely the free market policy and democratic policy. This led to economic improvements and the arrival of new construction materials and design trends, which impacted the urban landscape in Boeung Keng Kang. The last phase was the recent economic growth, particularly the growth in investment in the construction and real estate sectors. Such political and economic changes greatly influenced the development of Phnom Penh, particularly in Boueng Keng Kang. So, the process of changes of Boeung Keng Kang could also put into three phases.

- First Phase

The coming of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in order to intervene in the process of political change had significant impacts on the property sector in Phnom Penh during the early 1990s.³⁸ The influx of 20,000 foreign workers created a huge demand for temporary accommodation, thus promoting and contributing to the restoration and construction of villas, and caused property speculation. Furthermore, the huge amount of budget, estimated at nearly two billion dollars, required for the operation enabled the creation of thousands of temporary jobs. This probably also favored strong internal immigration to Phnom Penh.³⁹

In addition, the formation of a range of non-government organizations (NGOs) also contributed to the growing demand for offices and accommodation for international staff. A number of international NGOs came to Cambodia to provide relief and other humanitarian services during the emergency following the 1979 ousting

³⁸ Margaret Slocomb, p. 232.

³⁹ Rapport Final Bureau des Affaires urbaines, p. 106.

of the Khmer Rouge. Many more local NGOs were then established during the early 1990s.⁴⁰

The effect of this phenomenon significantly impacted the property market in Boeung Keng Kang. Owners of land plots in Boeung Keng Kang rushed to build houses to rent to foreign officials who came to fulfill their mission. In an interview with a number of owners of these houses, it is interesting to note that their houses were just built during the 1990s, though the designs are similar to those of 1960s houses.

Mr. Nam Heak, aged around 60 years old, had worked as an engineer during the early 1970s, and after the Khmer Rouge, had served as a government official working in the public works and transportation department. He said that he was granted a plot of land in 1980s by the government. With the prospect of renting a house to UNTAC officials for accommodation, he and a number of other people in the area had rushed to build houses for rent. For the design, Mr Heak said that he did the design by himself. He combined some parts from this and that from houses in this area. He also complained about the poor quality of cement and steel imported from Vietnam.⁴¹ In an inquiry by telephone, Mr. Tea Sophea, who owned house number 142, and whose house was rented by a private company, said that his house was built in 1994. For the style of the house, he just followed the houses of the 1960s.

For the property market analysis, legitimatization of property ownership promulgated in 1989 also contributed to the development of the reconstruction of the sector in the early 1990s. Because, with property ownership, people could secure their investment in buildings they constructed.⁴²

- Second Phase

Through the national elections operated by UNTAC, the new government embraced a democratic policy and the adoption of market-based economics. After these reforms, it was possible to import new construction products into Cambodia. Along with the introduction of new imported material, there also came design inspirations. For instance, the imported roof tiles and construction materials, namely product of SCG

⁴⁰ Asian Development Bank, civil society brief: Cambodia; <https://www.adb.org/publications/overview-civil-society-cambodia>. Retrieved on 17 January 2017.

⁴¹ Interview on 18 January 2016 at Mr. Nam Heak's resident, # 601 E1, St: 128, Kampuchea Krom Blvd, Phnom Penh.

⁴² Margaret Slocomb, p. 256.

group from Thailand, influenced the design of private houses. When the products were advertised, there were examples of how the products were used, or how beautiful the products make the actual design. The inspiration for new house styles also came from the movies broadcasted on television. During the 1990s, Thai movies gained popularity among Cambodians, possibly because of the similarities in the cultures of the two nations. Ways of living in Thailand, particularly their houses as a material culture, were therefore included. By that time, TV was already one of the most popular public media and was available and affordable by most families. Other types of media should also be mentioned as well, such as house catalogs and magazines.

Some of the house in Boeung Keng Kang, for instance, had been built in the new style, whereas some existing houses were renovated in appearance to match to new trends. The new style consisted of the use of new roof tiles, cornices, and ornaments, and western classic columns. With colored roofs and white walls, the design appeared outstanding in the streetscape. The design somehow was a mix of western classical styles.

- Third Phase

It was until 2006 that Cambodia's economy gained exponential growth due to its ongoing economic reforms, particularly the economic policies adopted in 1994. According to World Bank calculations, the Cambodian economy achieved double-digit growth at a regional rate second only to that of China. The growth thus later attracted real estate development in Phnom Penh, which saw the growing construction of high-rises for apartments and offices. Seeing the potential of the real estate market, property laws were reformed to allow foreigners to own apartments or condominium units in the newly built buildings.⁴³

Reforms to property law contributed to the real estate market which affected the development in Boeung Keng Kang. In 2001, the new land law came into effect which further strengthened an individual's right to property ownership. In 2010, the Cambodian National Assembly passed the law of foreign property ownership, which effectively allowed for foreign ownership if the apartment or condominium was above the ground floor. Finally, Cambodia's new civil code came into effect in 2011, which

⁴³ Ibid, p. 236.

allowed co-ownership of buildings that were built after 2010. In this new law, up to 70% of all the units in the co-owned building are allowed to be owned by foreigners.

Therefore, the approval of new laws on ownership of buildings encouraged further contributions to the construction sector. The arrival of more expat residents and businesses, increased expenditure of the growing Khmer middle class, and a rising population are all contributing to attractive investment propositions. Aside from the rise of construction demand, the growing middle class, and their demand for luxurious ways of living, offered business opportunities in the Boeung Keng Kang area. Fashionable restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, bars, etc. transformed the urban space of Boeung Keng Kang. Houses, for instance, are rented or modified to function as shops or restaurants. Billboards are installed on the front of houses, obstructing house façades and blocking sunlight to the interior and verandah.

Considering the location for the development of high-rises, one of the most attractive locations in Phnom Penh city is Boeung Keng Kang. It is situated at the very center of the city. Secondly, the urban location of Boeung Keng Kang was efficiently designed in the form of an urban grid pattern. The land was divided into plots and owned by a single family, although later after reoccupying Phnom Penh after 1979, some of the properties are owned and shared by multiple families. Even though this may be the case, the plots are still attractive to developers, as it was easier to buy a piece of land from one or a few owners, since in the other areas in the middle of the city, multi-storey housing had already occupied the land.

Conclusion

Phnom Penh city has gone through different steps in its development process. The most important steps of the development were during French Protectorate and post-independence period. During the French Protectorate, the traditional city was urbanized in a modern grid pattern, so that the city would stay in order and people could enjoy living in the city. And during the post-independence period, the city grew exponentially over a short period of time. New educational institutions, arts and cultural centers, public service facilities, infrastructure developments, gardens, public spaces and sports facilities were constructed throughout the city. These developments profoundly enhanced the quality of living for people. Tragically, due to the raging of war and eventual takeover of the country by the Khmer Rouge, people were evacuated from

towns and cities in order to live as farmers. The city infrastructure was destroyed, or neglected to the point of ruin. The development after the fall of the Khmer Rouge was very slow until there were changes in political leadership and economic reforms, upon which the city seemed to enjoy the development again.

From this review of the development of Phnom Penh city, it can be seen that Boeung Keng Kang also developed accordingly. What made this location become a modern living ground that was filled with modern private houses is the urban spatial pattern of this area, which was developed during the French Protectorate. The grid system and the plots of land were designed for the Cambodian way of living. With the settlement of major state projects around the Boeung Keng Kang area, namely Bassac River Front Project, Chamkarmon state compound and the National Sports Stadium, the urban space of Boeung Keng Kang become the center of the city, and people who lived in the area could enjoy privileged urban living.