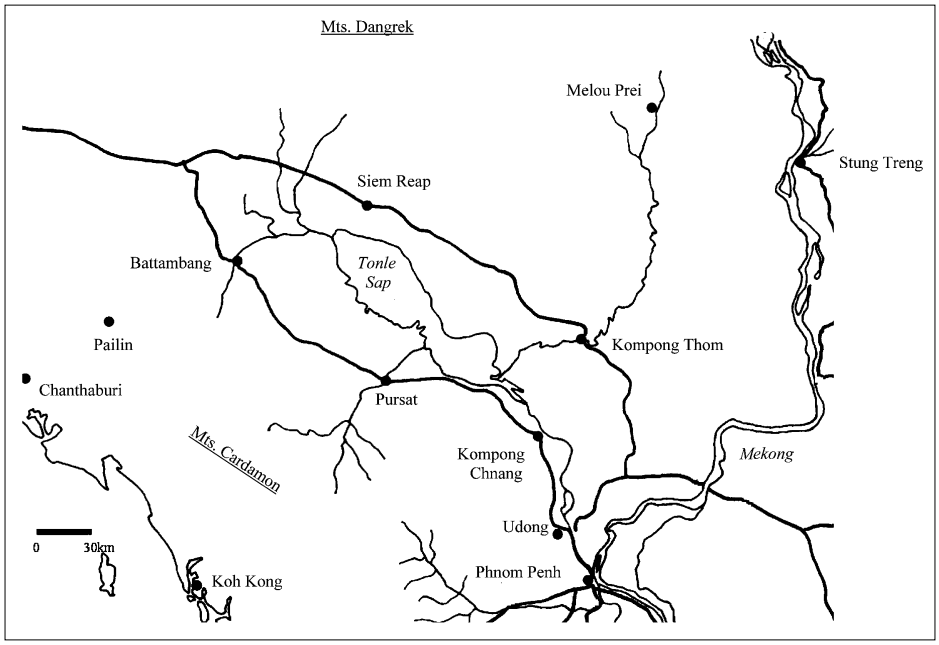
The Emergence of Pailin, The Land of Sapphires

KITAGAWA Takako

Introduction

Probably the most important theme in the historical study of Cambodia during the latter half of the 20th century is the civil war and its conclusion; then finally in the late 1990s, after about 30 years of disunity, a single political regime, which was recognized both nationally and internationally, was established to integrate the Cambodian nation. However, most of the research being done even today on the modern and contemporary periods still fails to address the question of why it was so difficult for post-independence Cambodia to achieve full national integration, and scholars still continue to work solely within the framework of the historical narration established under French colonialism, demarcating Cambodian history into the splendor of the Angkor period and decline during the post-Angkor period. Here the "land of Cambodia," which was established during the Angkor period, is described as first being nibbled away at by neighboring Siam and Vietnam, then on the verge of being almost completely destroyed, was saved by the advent of French colonialism. This kind of history explains and reproduces Cambodia's anti-Thai and anti-Vietnam nationalism, but gives no information about the country's regional history, which is necessary to understand the actual circumstances of the civil war.

This article will take up the region of Pailin, which is located in the far west on the border between the present day Kingdom of Cambodia and Thailand. Pailin is well-known as a producer of precious stones, including sapphires, and also for its existence as a stronghold for the Khmer Rouge between October 1989 and August 1996, while even today acting as a "safe haven" for its former leaders [Amakawa 2001:57]. In this sense, Pailin still has the potential of presenting problems for the present Phnom Penh regime as a region out of its effective control. The major focus here will be to clarify the historical circumstances surrounding the initial rise of Pailin and the regional character it displays today, especially how it has



managed to remain virtually independent from Phnom Penh since its first appearance on Cambodia's landscape.

1. Cambodian History and Its Periphery

On the eve of French colonization, during the mid-19th century, the monarchy of Cambodia set up its capital at Udong on the west bank of the Tonle Sap River. The monarchy integrated the Tonle Sap Lake area, the Gulf of Thailand, the commercial capital of Phnom Penh and the Mekong River into a political and economic network by establishing three routes: (1) the southwest bank route of the Tonle Sap River, (2) the Kampot (port on the Gulf of Thailand) route, and (3) the Kompong Luong (port on the Tonle Sap River) route. Udong, the capital, was pivotal for this political and economic network. The northwest end of the network connected to Siam via Battambang and the southeast end connected to Vietnam through the Mekong River. Upon French colonization and the introduction of steam powered riverboats, the economic linkage between Battambang, Tonle Sap, Phnom Penh, Mekong, and Saigon became closer. Then, as the result of negotiations between the French and Siamese, in 1907 Battambang was incorporated into the territory of Cambodia, which was extended to Koh Kong on the Gulf of Thailand [Forest 1980:177]. This

network, completed during the mid-19th century, was expanded throughout the colonial period and continues today as the nucleus of the Kingdom of Cambodia [Kitagawa 2001].

Cambodia's periphery, which includes Pailin, and stretches from the southern foot of the Dangrek Mountains on the Thai border all the way to the northeastern hill regions of border area with Laos and Vietnam, and from the Cardamon Mountains to the Gulf of Thailand, has almost managed to escape the historical record altogether, not being mentioned even once in the dynastic chronicles. This leads one to assume that the relationship between the peripheral areas and the nucleus was considerably weak.

On the southern foot of the Dangrek Mountains, there are the regions of Tonlé Ropou and Melou Préi, which were brought under Siamese control from around 1814. During the late 19th century, those regions were the locations of fairly large Cambodgien (Khmer) settlements, but the largest part of the region's sparse population was occupied by ethnic groups called Kouys and Pears, with some Laotien (Laotian) settlers as well. Livelihoods in the region ranged from paddy and swidden rice cultivation to gathering wild beeswax and hunting. These products were exchanged by barter and sometimes traded by using iron ingots founded by the Kouys as a currency. *Chefs de famille* (family heads) paid a tax of 3 *thang*s of rice (1 *thang* = 36 liters) and 3 lumps of beeswax to their *seigneurs* or local lords, who offered these goods, which were sometimes converted to cash, with such valuable items as elephant teeth and rhinoceros horns to the *chau*, the governor subject to Siam at Bassak [Aymonier 1900:177–179].

Stung Treng was located at the point where the Sekong, Sesane and Srepok Rivers flow into the Mekong; and Garnier, who participated in the De Lagrée Expedition from 1866 to 1868, reported that Stung Treng had another name, Sieng Teng, and that the governor was a Laotien subordinate to Siam. There were 800 inhabitants of the village, all Laotiens, with *tribus sauvages* populating the hinterlands. Stung Treng functioned as a trade entrepot between Phnom Penh and Attopoeu (in present day Laos), where trade was handled by merchants from Fukien. The local currency used in Stung Treng were "small flattened iron bars in the form of lozenges" imported from Tonlé Ropou, "3 cm long in the middle by less than 1 cm of thickness and by 14–15 cm in length," and weighing about 200 g. Ten of them were worth 1 *tical*, and "for 1 of these iron bars, the inhabitants usually give 2 chikens." The Siamese *tical* and the Mexican piaster were also in use but their quantities were very limited [Garnier

1873:163–166, 170, 172/1996:65–66].[1)]

In other words, during the 19th century, the areas from the Dangrek Mountains to the Northeast Mountain region across the Mekong were inside of the political sphere of Siam, not Cambodia. Although they were incorporated into the Kingdom of Cambodia in 1904 [Forest 1980:175], they continued to maintain contact with the northeastern part of Thailand and southern part of Laos. For example, even in the 1910s, every year between the months of March and May, Laotien cattle merchants would cross the Dangrek Range to buy steers from the villagers of Promtep in the northern part of Kompong Thom [Dufosse 1918:30–31]; and in the hinterland of Stung Treng, Birmans, Siamese and Laotiens would come from the north into Moulapoumok and Darlac to buy elephants [Monographie 1913:21–22].

Also during the latter half of the 19th century, the *aborigènes* of the Cardamon Mts. on the south side of Pursat, called the Pears, would have one of their chieftains selected by the king of Cambodia to bear the burden of the yearly tribute of 4,000 kg of cardamon seed. In addition to cardamon, rice and vegetables were cultivated there on a self-sufficiency basis. Further south from Pursat, the mountainous forests of the Thpong region produced gamboge, shellac and two kinds of cardamom (Krakor and Krevanh), which were inferior to Pursat cardamom. The cardamom of the Thpong region was designated as an item of tribute for the Cambodian chancellor. There were 870 *inscrits* scattered around Thpong who paid taxes in gamboge. From the southern range of the Cardamons, a group of *aborigènes* called the Samres sent small amounts of tribute to the king of Cambodia. The water, forest and mountains of the province were rumored to be unsanitary and its products were similar to those of Thpong [Aymonier 1900:228–230].

From the above information, one can assume that the central Cardamon Mts. and the Pursat River basin were under Cambodian royal sovereignty. Linking that region to the core of the kingdom of Cambodia was the settlement of Leach, located about 30 km from Pursat. According to an inspection report submitted by the *résident* of Pursat in January 1922, the Chinese merchants of Pursat would come upon the mountain people at Leach and sell them sundry commodities in exchange for cardamon, which gave rise to a marketplace there. The *résident*'s intent was to visit Leach in order to observe the transactions occurring there in the interest of protecting the mountain people from predatory merchants. In Leach at that time, there were four wooden, thatch-roofed *sala* (accommodations)

located on the road leading into the mountains [INDO-RSC-00388].

At the beginning of 1915, the *résident* of Pursat spent two weeks on an inspection tour through the Cardamons from Pursat to Koh Kong on the Gulf of Thailand. According to his report, there was no established route through the Cardamons linking Tonle Sap Lake with the Gulf, and it would be very difficult trying to construct one [INDO-RSC-00399]. Even today, the only link between Phnom Penh and the Gulf which runs through the southwestern mountains is Highway 4, terminating at Sihanoukville, meaning that the Cardamons continue to stand as a barrier between Cambodia's Gulf region and Tonle Sap, while Koh Kong remains isolated from the land transportation system centered around Phnom Penh.

Pailin, which is located on the western edge of the Cardamons near the present day Thai-Cambodian border, is accessible from both Battambang on the Tonle Sap side and Chanthaburi on the Gulf side. During the 19th century, Battambang and Chanthaburi belonged to the Siamese sphere of influence. In 1907, the former was annexed by the French, and from that time on, Pailin fell into the political sphere of Phnom Penh, but it took many years until Phnom Penh subjected the whole region. Even today, Pailin has strong ties to Thailand through its inland routes; its shop signs are printed in Thai, and it prefers the Thai *bat* to the Cambodian *riel* as its currency.[2)]

From the above discussion, we can conclude that it is unsuitable not only for the historical studies, but also for other fields of research, to recognize the southern foot of the Dangrek Mountains, the northwestern hill region and the western edge of the Cardamons simply as the periphery of Cambodia. In order to come to a better understanding Pailin itself, we free ourselves from the framework of Cambodian national history and reconstruct the history of Pailin independently. After we have achieved that, we will need to clarify what kind of relationships Pailin established with its neighboring powers, namely Siam and Cambodia.

2. The Rise of Pailin

It was from the early 19th century on that precious stones were recorded among the products traded at the port of Chanthaburi. According the English envoy John Crawfurd travelling in the Gulf of Thailand, the hills behind the port were producing such gems as sapphires, oriental rubies and oriental topaz, but their quality was inferior to that the rubies

and sapphires mined in Ava (Burma) [Crawfurd 1967:419]. As of 1855, Chinese merchants were selling good quality sapphires and garnets at the Chanthaburi market, from where they were exported to Java via Bangkok. At that time, production was declining in proportion to decreasing demand [Abstract 1858:176].

It was from the 1870s on that gem veins in the Chanthaburi hinterland began to be exploited on a large scale. According to the story regarding the discovery of the veins, the area was originally covered by deep forest, which provided hunting grounds for the indigenous peoples. Then around 1872, a group of Shans came to work at the ruby mine that had been discovered at Bo-Novong in Chathaburi Gorge.[3)] During the preparations for gem extraction, news arrived that another vein of rubies had been discovered at O Toung Hill, north of the village of Boyakar and that Shans and Siamese were working there. In 1875, a man by the name of Maung Visa set out with a group of miners for O Toung, passing through Phya Kampout, Phakat and Mogok[4)] on a ten-day journey through the thick, dark forest. When they arrived at O Toung, they found the local children playing with sapphires as toys. The local people told the Shans that while out hunting they had found a large amount of sapphires in a river bed. Based on this information, the Shans searched this area, visiting the village of Vong-sang-Vong and finally settling in the village of Khlong-Tavao. The place names O Toung, Boyakar and Khlong-Tavao still exist in present day Pailin.

In 1877, veins were discovered at Tongsou, Chang la Bok and Boyakar, and the villages that bear these names came into being, as both Laotiens and Shans thronged into them. Another mine was discovered at a mountain cardamom plantation, which was destroyed in favor of gem mining. It was called Bo Ha Bat ("Five Ticals Mine") from the fact that each miner working there was levied a tax of 5 ticals [Filleau 1920:425].

An 1879 report by the British Consulate confirms that the mid-1870s marked the discovery of veins in the region, followed by a gem rush beginning that same year. The report states that a sapphire mine was discovered "five years ago" by local hunters, and although its location was extremely remote, rumors of its discovery spread among Burmese and Indian gem merchants and miners, who were the first to reach the mine and obtain enough gems to earn a good living selling them in Rangoon and Calcutta. The news spread and the rush to the new gem fields was on.

In 1879, thousands of "British subjects" headed out for the mines from British and Independent Burma via Bangkok. Between May and Decem-

ber of that year, steamers owned by the Borneo Company, which was the sole British trading company at Chanthaburi, carried a total of 4,912 passengers from Bangkok, the majority of which were "British subjects" who had been issued "passports" by the Company. Since many of the prospectors were heavily armed, the residents of Chanthaburi and Battambang were at first alarmed, but the miners proved peaceful and trustworthy enough for the local people to profit greatly from the foodstuffs they sold them at highly inflated prices. Although many miners died of jungle fever, the Toung-thoo people of Pegu proved particularly acclimated to the surroundings. At the time the report was written, the area around the mines was inhabited by a large number of gem merchants, enabling the miners to sell their finds on the spot at reasonable prices. However, at the beginning of the rush, there was no market for gems around Chanthaburi, as exemplified by stones being offered in Chanthaburi for 1,000 rupees finding no buyers, but fetching 15,000 rupees in Rangoon and 30,000 rupees in Calcutta. Many wealthy miners took Siamese women as their wives, and the local shops kept large stocks of the miners' favorite foods, canned milk and British-made biscuits [c-2571 1880:2–3].

The residents of Pailin were reported to be of Birman (Burmese), Pégouan, Shan and Toung-thoo. They had been trading in the northern regions of Siam already during the reign of Rama III (1824–51), expanding into the northeast under Rama IV (1851–68). When the Bowring Treaty between Siam and England was ratified on 5 April 1856, these "British subjects" became more commercially active than ever before [Koizumi 1990], and the rise of Pailin during the latter part of the century can be placed within that context. It was after a series of disputes that occurred in 1881 "over the lack of clear legal statutes" were settled that Pailin began to develop in earnest. As the result of the establishment of markets in Bangkok and Calcutta and the export of precious stones to Europe through the intervention of banks, large amounts of silver began flowing into the Pailin economy. Even the heavy rain storms of 1884 that caused landslides and flooded the Boyakar River, destroying many residential areas and claiming numerous victims, could not stop the region's growing prosperity [Cheminais 1960:418/Filleau 1920:425–426/Pracum:66].

During the early 1880s, most of the miners working in Pailin were Birmans known as Koulahs (Kulas) and Pégouans, and there were a number of resident Chinese merchants, as well. The miners, who numbered between three and four thousand, were mostly short-term migrants away from their families, scattered about in small hamlets in the forests of the

mining region. Pailin at that time existed under very unhealthy conditions, which gave rise to many deaths by disease, but dreams of striking it rich kept migrants coming in to replace the fallen [Brien 1885–86:40–41]. According to an 1889 British Consulate report, Pailin boasted the largest scale mining operation around Chanthaburi, employing between four and five thousand miners [c-6205-2 1890:23].[5] At the time when Pailin was annexed by the French, there were 650 to 750 Birmans, and about 1,000 Laotiens, Cambodgiens, Chinese and Siamese residents. By the latter part of the 1910s, Pailin had grown into a town of 800 thatched wooden dwellings lining over 6 km of streets. The Pailin district consisted of the three villages of Bodineo, Bo Pohir and Bo Laphok. Bodineo functioned as the commercial neighborhood, where Chinese- and few Birman-run shops sold novelty items imported from Siam. To the south on foot of a hill overlooking the town, a number of new settlements rose up with names like Bo Banya, Bo Nambar and Bo Khlong Khlang. Bo Pohir, the northernmost village, was a quiet residential area, where the gem merchants selected and cut their sapphires. Its intertwining sandstone paved streets stretched all the way to the edge of the plateau, where the Laotien villages stood. To the west, Bo Laphok was a neighborhood of elegant homes separated by lush rose gardens.

Travellers entering Pailin from Battambang would first encounter a Burmese-style Buddhist temple.[6] On the streets one would observe small groups of Burmese women scurrying about dressed in tight wrap-around skirts and wide sleeve blouses, with roses, jasmine or *champa*s in their hair, shaded by umbrellas of decorated transparent cloth. The heavily built, thick boned men wore oriental turbans and had blue and red tattoos engraved on their legs and chests to ward off ill omens.

The Pailin of the late 1910s depicted in "Le district minier de Phailin" was everything one could expect of a festive, devil may care "El Dorado." The townsfolk awoke only after the sunlight was shining through their doors. Work began after breakfast at 8 AM,[7] and the sapphire brokers representing the merchant houses of Bangkok and Chanthaburi would not leave their houses until 9 AM. When they did, it was usually to visit the homes of the major merchants with their gem bags hanging from their necks close to their bodies. Negotiations would be leisurely transacted over tea. At noon, the gambling houses opened, attracting their regular players, while evening time would see crowds of more casual clientele. Dinner time was at 4 PM for most families, followed by the evening's festivities, including religious worship at the Buddhist temple, involving a

procession led by a group of musicians followed by the worshippers, the men first and then the women, carrying platters loaded with offerings, mainly flowers. There was also "Siamese theatre" performed out in the open or under the storehouses.[8)] Afterwards, everyone would sit down to table and converse over coffee with condensed milk and Huntley & Palmers biscuits. At midnight the moonlit streets would be filled with tired people on their way home after a night of rousing entertainment [Filleau 1920:52, 426–430].

Le Cambodge, a topography published in 1960 after independence, says that the prosperity of Pailin, the town of gems, continued till the 1940s, after which, law and order broke down and many of the residents left the town for northern Laos or Bokéo in the Stung Treng region. By 1960, just about all the dwellings in town had been boarded up and the shops and streets vacated. All of those who remained, men, women and children, would often be seen departing at daybreak with pickaxes draped over their shoulders, sifters and bamboo lunchboxes in their hands headed for the river to wade in the dark red water all day in search of even the tiniest gem of even the slightest value [Cheminais 1960:416–418].

3. Pailin in the International Trade Network

Pailin's contact with the outside world from its remote location at the western edge of the Cardamon Mts. took place on two fronts: through Battambang on the west shore of Tonle Sap Lake and through Chanthaburi on the Gulf of Thailand. Located almost equidistant from either point, Pailin could be reached in three days by elephant [Boulangier 1887:291/ Brien 1885–86:10/Filleau 1920:53]. Besides, until 1915, the Chanthaburi route was Pailin's only economic contact to the outside world, while the Battambang route functioned solely for administrative affairs [Filleau 1920:50].

According to an 1855 report on the foreign trade of Siam, Chanthaburi was one of the two largest ports active on the eastern coast of the Gulf along with Kampot in Cambodia. Cloth and opium were the main goods imported into Chanthaburi and were supplied entirely from Bangkok. Goods exported from Chanthaburi at that time included pepper, sugar, aquila wood, timber for shipbuilding, cardamoms, bastard cardamoms, sticklacs, hides, horns, fish, tobacco, gamboge, ivory, rhinoceros horns, wood oil, and coffee. They were exported only to Bangkok by small junks of from 80 to 150 ton capacities. Trade in

Chanthaburi was conducted in "hard cash" and its only coin currency was the Siamese *tical*. Dollars "would not be taken at any rate."

In 1851, when the British brig *Pantaloon* arrived at Chanthaburi, it was refused trade on the premise that Bangkok was the only open port in the region. In 1856, when the English lorcha, *Speed*, arrived, there were no longer restrictions on trade due to the provisions of the Bowring Treaty [Abstract 1858:174–176]. In 1879, at the start of the gem rush, the Borneo Company set up a scheduled steamship line connecting Bangkok and Chanthaburi [c-2571 1880:2]; and by 1889, the line consisted of three small vessels ferrying passengers back and forth between the two ports [c-6205-2 1890:22]. As was pointed out, most miners flowed into Pailin from British Burma via Chanthaburi, and at the very beginning of the rush, they carried their own gems to Rangoon or Calcutta for sale. However, by the end of that year, gem merchants had already settled around the mines and made it possible for the miners to sell their gems there. Until 1880s, Chanthaburi had become the central entrepot for the rough stones, most to be sold on the spot to buyers from Turkey and India. The remainder were either earmarked for direct export to Bangkok or India,[9] or cut and inlaid at Pailin for sale in Battambang[10] and Phnom Penh [Brien 1885–86:11–12].

The situation was the same at the turn of the century, given the description by "Le district minier de Phailin" of Chanthaburi as an importer of food and exporter of sapphires. Under such conditions of Pailin's complete dependency on Siam for everyday necessities, the cost of living there was very high, especially during the monsoon season, which flooded the transport routes and sent food prices to even higher levels [Filleau 1920:50–52].

It was during World War I that Pailin began to show clear signs of decline. According to a report dated 1914, the Birmans, fearing danger upon the seas, stopped transporting gems to Calcutta. Consequently, the wages of coolies hired to work the mines declined, and many workers left Pailin in search of higher pay. Another report from the second quarter of 1916 stated, "Industry has been dealt a mighty blow by the events in Europe. Especially in Pailin, mining has slowed down considerably, due to the inability of the Birmans to find sales routes to Bangkok, Rangoon and Calcutta. Everyone anxiously awaits the end to this trouble and a return to the region's former comfort and prosperity" [INDO-RSC-00355]. From this report, it is clear that life in Pailin was being directly affected by conditions as far away as Europe where was the main market for gems

was located.

Prior to its annexation by the French, Pailin was placed within the trade network linked to Siam through Chanthaburi, and was also connected to British ruled India through both the British subjects who immigrated there and the gems they extracted. France, which embarked on the conquest of Pailin from the latter 1910s on, tried to find ways to build a route between Pailin and Battambang, while at the same exploring the possibilities of developing the region in other areas besides precious stones; for example, animal husbandry, forest products (cardamom, rattan, lumber and incense), stone quarrying, vegetable and fruit growing, cane sugar, corn, kapok, rubber and coconut oil production, and brick and roof tile manufacture [Filleau 1920:46–50, 53]. Nevertheless, the fact that *Le Cambodge*, which was published after the independence, suggesting the possibility of developing Pailin through rubber plantation or fruit orchards [Cheminais 1960:418] shows that the French colonial regime had failed in freeing Pailin from its dependency of gem mining.

4. *un état dans l'État*

In 1907, when France annexed Pailin as one part of the Battambang district, the Birmans established "a kind of fief" there, where they elected "the chief of Birmans" for themselves, who was an absolute ruler and exercised power over all the mining area inhabitants, not just the Birmans. Moreover, since the Birmans were British subjects, they could claim extraterritoriality and answer only to the British Embassy in Bangkok or the British Consulate in Chanthaburi, while the Siam-appointed governor of Battambang paid absolutely no attention to affairs in Pailin [INDO-RSC-00355]. In the mid-1880s, the miners of Pailin armed themselves with guns and arrogantly claimed themselves to be members of the Farang (European) people, like the English and French, defiantly displaying "cards" they had been issued by the British authorities in Bangkok or Rangoon [Brien 1885–86:12].

On the other hand, Pailin itself was perceived as a part of the Siamese political sphere. In 1877, the vice-chieftain of the Shans went to Bangkok and was introduced to the royal court by the British Consulate. The Siamese Royal court appointed him "chief of the Birmans" and tax collector of the mines. In 1866, a Shan chieftain was called to the royal court at Bangkok and awarded the title and insignia of Luong Mani Yut Thana [Filleau 1920:425–426]. The most important duty that the Court

entrusted to the chief of the Birmans was to collect taxes from miners when they entered the mines. The British Consulate report of 1879 states that the local governor appointed a British subject by the name of Kam Sai as chief and ordered him to collect 2 and 1/4 *tical*s from everyone who worked at the mines. The Siamese Royal court did not tax the gems themselves, allowing the miners to sell the gems freely. The report goes on to explain that the reason for imposing a head tax was because it was so easy to smuggle gems out of the mines and thus difficult for the Siamese to tax the flow of gems themselves [c-2571 1880:3].

During the early 1880s, Pailin became "*un état dans l'État*" (a state within the State). While every miner owed the king of Siam a tax of 2 *tical*s, the tax collector levied 3 *tical*s per head and kept the extra *tical* for himself. While not imposing any strict control upon the number of miners who could work in Pailin, Bangkok did manage to collect around 4,000 *tical*s in tribute from them annually [Brien 1885–86:40–41].

It was in 1889 that the government of Siam granted the extraction rights related to the Pailin Mine to an Italian speculator and those related to the Müang Krung and Krat Mines to a group of Chinese British subjects and Englishmen. To work at the mines, one now had to pay his 3 *tical*s to the chief of the British subjects upon entering the mining region. It was the custom at that time for miners to work in groups of two or three and take their stones to Rangoon or Calcutta for sale [c-6205-2 1890:22–23]. In 1898, Siam Exploring Company, an affiliate of Siam Company, Limited, was managing the Pailin Mine operation and allowed the Shans and Laotiens working there to dispose of the gems they acquired at they saw fit [c-9496-24 1899:14].

At the time of the Pailin's annexation as a French protectorate in 1907, the British firm of Siam Syndicate, Ltd. was granted monopoly extraction rights to Pailin Mine and then sub-contracted those rights to a Birman by the name of Maung Soy. It was now required to purchase permits at 3 *tical*s (1$80) for single miners and 5 *tical*s (3$00) for families to work the mines, with no levies on the gems themselves. The sapphire brokers also had to purchase the permits, because no one entering the region was exempt, be they Asian, Chinese, Indian or Afghan merchants, cloth importers, or anyone else not directly engaged in the mining operation. Only Maung Soy himself could grant exemptions [Filleau 1920:37]. In other words, despite new management, the custom of a head tax imposed upon entry into the region and miners' free rights over gem disposal remained unchanged from the onset of the rush through French colonial

annexation.

Pailin, as a heavily forested no man's land prior to the gem rush, had drawn no attention from the outside world, and existed in a political vacuum. Then, with the rapid influx of great numbers of foreigners, Pailin became densely populated area that was different from neighboring regions in its ethnic, social and administrative structure. Both the safety in tramontane remoteness to obstruct aggressive interference by the existing powers and the advantage of immigrant status as British subjects were major factors in establishing and maintaining a unique regional polity in the Pailin mine area for about three decades.

Maung Soy, the Chief of Birmans who stood up to the French, functioned as the monarch of the quasi-principality there. He came from upper Burma and lived in Pailin for nearly thirty years. The Birmans of Pailin believed that he was the successor to the pioneer who had led the initial immigration. While Maung Soy was on the surface no more than the leader of a group of foreigners, in actuality, he became the absolute ruler of Pailin, whose presence was required at any festival that was held there and whose front door was lined with people seeking his audience [Filleau 1920:27–30].

It was Mong (or Maung) Khunti who had been granted the title Hluong Moni Yuttheanea (Luong Mani Yut Thana) by the Siamese Court and was spoken of as the legendary founder of Pailin. Maung Khunti was a Shan from upper Burma who hunted around Pailin and was said be feared by the spirits of the forest there [Filleau 1920:425]. The story of the rise of Pailin related to Maung Khunti was recorded in a collection of folktales compiled by the Kingdom of Cambodia government after independence. Here Mong Khunti is depicted as the chieftain of the Kola (Kula) people who discovered the first gem vein and as the patron of the many temples built in the region [Pracum:66–67].

The French colonial administration tried to restrict Maung Soy's power and authority to only the Birmans residing in the Pailin region; but Maung Soy resisted such attempts by contending the jurisdiction claimed by a Cambogien governor named Seng, who had been dispatched to Pailin. According a report submitted by the *résident* of Battambang for February and March of 1909, the "chief of the Birmans" had claimed in a letter dated 2 February that the governor had unlawfully protested and prevented 22 Cambogien natives of Kok-Khan carrying passports issued by the chief from returning home. The *résident* replied in a letter of 15 February that only the governor had the authority to issue passports to Cam-

bogiens. In a letter dated 21 February, the "chief of the Birmans" apologized for his misunderstanding, but concluded with the words, "Since up until now, the miners have answered only to me, I am worried that the situation dissatisfies the governor." The *résident* had ordered the governor to take steps to avoid any serious disputes with the miners. The governor then requested the *lieutenant* (commander) of the garrison at Tvéa-Ampil to act as intermediary in a meeting with Maung Soy and set out for Bo-Di-Nheo. It was Maung Soy's position that he had already apologized for his mistake, which was not committed out of malice, so the incident should have been considered over. He also ordered the residents of Pailin to hold their annual festival one month earlier than usual. According to the *lieutenant*'s report, it was Maung Soy's intent to raise revenues from gambling and opium taxes; and on 24 February the *résident* requested in a letter to Maung Soy an explanation of the festival, demanding that special measures be taken to see that no disturbances occur [INDO-RSC-00355].

Probably, the most outstanding characteristic attributed to the Birmans of Pailin in the descriptions of the above-mentioned source materials, was their custom of carrying firearms. According to a survey report submitted by Maung Soy at the end of January 1909, there were a total of 374 firearms in the mining region, including the 46 carbines owned by Maung Soy himself.[11)] Aware that the actual number of firearms was far greater than the number reported, the *résident* stated that no more permits to carry firearms would be issued above the number reported [INDO-RSC-00355].

The *résident* of Battambang suspected that Pailin was a harbor of bandits who were ravaging the broad area covering Siam, Laos, Battambang and Pursat. According to a report issued by his office, the bandits active in the area without a doubt included Birmans, and there were 30 them in the gang of Visès-Nhou at the battle that claimed the life of Lieutenant Thimonnier. Bandits were spending a great deal of the silver they had plundered in Pailin on weapons, ammunition, opium, liquor, food and clothing. To combat the banditry the French had set up garrisons at Treng and Tvéa-Ampil, but they did not obtain the desired result [INDO-RSC-00355].

The "chief of the Birmans" was also concerned that the annexation of Pailin by the French would result in the erosion of his own authority in the region. In a report dated 25 July 1910, we find Maung Soy confiding with nostalgia in a letter to the *résident* of Battambang that Siam Syndicate, Ltd. had "let me do anything I wanted." Ultimately the *résident* would have

to grant maximum autonomy to the Pailin mining district due to 1) the lack of any alternative on his part and 2) the lack of any intent on Maung Soy's part to extricate himself from French colonial rule. Consequently, the governor dispatched from Battambang did not take up residence in Pailin, but was rather located in nearby Kdol. It was only from the late 1910s on that the French authorities would make in earnest attempts to bring Pailin under their effective control [INDO-RSC-00355].

Summary

This article has dealt with the town of Pailin from the its rise as the center of a gem mining region until its annexation by the French colonial government. Its first topic was the ascension of Pailin itself, which was triggered by the gem rush of 1879 led by an onslaught of British subjects from Burma to mine the region's sapphire lodes. Initially, markets for the region's sole commodity, gems, were located far away west in India and Europe. Given these facts, we can conclude that the necessary condition of the rise of Pailin was the international expansion of the British trade network; and when it finally reached Chanthaburi, which had been a mere local port in the Gulf of Thailand trade sphere, Pailin gems encountered the outer world for the first time.

Secondly, during the following era of growth and prosperity, Pailin functioned as an autonomous regional polity within the overall Siamese political sphere. Given the fact that the majority of migrants to Pailin claimed to be British subjects, the Siamese royal authority chose nonintervention, except to bestow the title of "chief of Birmans" on the region's leader and order him to collect a fixed head tax on the miners. The most favorable condition for Pailin's independence was the difficulty for distant political powers to control the flow of the gems that were the essential measure of Pailin's value. Only at Chanthaburi, where most of the stones were collected before their diffusion to all parts of the globe, would there have been the possibility to exercise any control over Pailin's economy. Siamese royal authority never considered trying to monopolize the production of gems in the Pailin mines; and in 1889 they gave the mining rights to a British company.

Pailin came into existence as the result of the international recognition of the commercial value of its sapphires, and as such, remained independent of the political and economic spheres that existed in the inland regions surrounding it, choosing to grow and prosper as a small, remote

link in the international trade network originating out of the Gulf of Thailand at Chanthaburi.

The time of Pailin's ascension, however, coincided with time when a demarcation was made between the two territories of the Kingdom of Siam and the French Indochina. The day finally came in 1907 when Pailin, at the height of its prosperity, was annexed into French Indochina and made part of the territory that is now the Kingdom of Cambodia. The French would make efforts to end Pailin's independence and bring it under its effective control; but if we view Pailin from perspective of its present day independence from the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, it is not difficult to conclude that the French were no more successful than the efforts expended by Phnom Penh since national independence to integrate the region into the Cambodian state. The weakness inherent in Pailin was its existence as a mother lode of precious stones, totally dependent on their supply and the exigencies of markets for them thousands of miles away, and was thus dominated by a community of prospectors ready to leave at the slightest threat to its livelihood there, or news of better pickings elsewhere. This community, totally isolated from its neighbors and armed to the teeth, was not only subject to internal lapses of law and order, but also stood completely vulnerable to stagnation of demand due to international events like world wars, not to mention the depletion of the local gem lodes. Such conditions would eventually turn Pailin into a veritable ghost town as in the late 1940s.

What remains to be studied in the history of Pailin are the periods of French colonialism and independent Cambodia. It was during these periods that Phnom Penh attempted to control Pailin more effectively than ever. Important questions remain as to the methods of control how it developed.

Notes

1) At Bassak and Oubôn on the upper reaches of the Mekong, a small 6–7 cm salmon-shaped copper coin, called the *lat*, was in circulation at a rate of 24 to the *tical*.
2) Observed during a visit to Pailin in September 1998.
3) Bo-Novong was first worked by Siamese miners, before the arrival of the Shans. At the time of the compilation of the sources, the name of the mine still existed.
4) At the time of the compilation of the sources, the place name Mogok did not exist.
5) There were three mines located near Pailin.

Ban Kacha Mine, located three hours by foot from Chanthaburi, where rubies of inferior quality were extracted by Siamese and Chinese miners. No Toung-thoos or Birmans ventured there.

Müang Krung Mine, located 12 hours from Chanthaburi and worked by about 100 miners, most of whom were of Toung-thoo descent, with a few Siamese and Chinese.

Krat Mine, located 2 days from Chanthaburi, where mostly rubies and only a few sapphires were extracted by about 3,000 Toung-thoo miners.

6) This temple stands today.
7) The fourth quarter report of 1915 states,

> Pailin is without a doubt extremely cold in the whole district (of Battambang). The sun finally appears in the sky above the town at about 9 in the morning and disappears at about 3 in the afternoon. The virtually unprepared residents of the town light fires in their dwellings to keep warm. [INDO-RSC-00355]

8) In Pailin, there were no female Birman dancers. The Kulas were extremely fond of Siamese music and theatre. At festival time, a theatrical group would come from either Bangkok or Chanthaburi to perform [Filleau 1920:445].
9) An 1889 British Consulate report states that miners would personally carry their stones to Rangoon and Calcutta and sell them [c-6205-2 1890:23].
10) Pavie, who visited Battambang in the early 1880s, observed Birmans from the Pailin mines coming into Battambang to purchase supplies and vacation [Pavie 1884:110].
11) Details by Village:

Village Name	No. of Firearms
Bo-Di-Nheo	103
Bo-Tong-Sou	19
Tvéa-Ampil	21
Bo-San-Dong	7
Bo-Hoi-Kmen	12
Bo-Ban-Hai	14
Tavao	28
Bo-Yaka	25
Khouk-Tapeng	15
Bo-Pakhi	22
Kha-No-Phai	6
Chhra	19
Bo-Spouk	8
Kbal-Stung	14
Bo-Phloi-Deng-Noi	9
Pram-Dim	7

Bo-Hipoun	23
Bo-Loy-Khio	32

References

1. "Abstract of Reports on the Trade of Various Countries and Places, for the Year 1855–6–7, Received by the Board of Trade (Through the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office) from Her Majesty's Ministers, Consuls, and Colonial Authorities." 1858. British Parliamentary Papers.
2. Amakawa Naoko 天川直子, ed. 2001. *Kambojia no fukkō, kaihatsu* カンボジアの復興・開發 [The reconstruction and development of Cambodia]. IDE-JETRO kenkyū sōsho 研究雙書 518. Chiba: Ajia Keizai Kenkyūjo アジア經濟研究所.
3. Aymonier, Etienne. 1900. *Le Cambodge*. Vol. 1, *Le royaume actuel*. Paris: Ernest Leroux.
4. Boulangier, Edgar. 1887. *Un hiver au Cambodge: Chasses au tigre à l'éléphant et au buffle sauvage, souvenirs d'une mission officielle remplie en 1880–1881*. Tours: Alfred Mame.
5. Brien, M. 1885–86. "Aperçu sur la province de Battambang." *Excursions et reconnaissances* 10: 341–356; 11: 5–44.
6. c-2571. 1880. "Siam. No. 2 (1880). Commercial Report by the Acting British Consul-General in Siam for the Year 1879." British Parliamentary Papers.
7. c-5618-148. 1889. "Foreign Office. 1889. Annual Series. No. 595. Diplomatic and Consular Reports on Trade and Finance. Siam. Report for the Year 1888 on the Trade of Bangkok." British Parliamentary Papers.
8. c-6205-2. 1890. "Foreign Office. 1890. Annual Series. No. 771. Diplomatic and Consular Reports on Trade and Finance. Siam. Report for the Year 1889 on the Trade of Bangkok." British Parliamentary Papers.
9. c-6550. 1891. "Foreign Office. 1891. Annual Series. No. 938. Diplomatic and Consular Reports on Trade and Finance. Siam. Report for the Year 1890 on the Trade, &c., of Siam." British Parliamentary Papers.
10. c-7919-21. 1895. "Foreign Office. 1895. Annual Series. No. 1653. Diplomatic and Consular Reports on Trade and Finance. Siam. Report for the Year 1894 on the Trade of Siam." British Parliamentary Papers.
11. c-8277-5. 1896. "Foreign Office. 1896. Annual Series. No. 1787. Diplomatic and Consular Reports on Trade and Finance. Siam. Report for the Year 1895 on the Trade of the Bangkok Consular District." British Parliamentary Papers.
12. c-9496-24. 1899. "Annual Series. No. 2353. Diplomatic and Consular Reports. Siam. Report for the Year 1898 on the Trade of the Consular District of Bangkok." British Parliamentary Papers.
13. Cd.352-24. 1900. "Annual Series. No. 2528. Diplomatic and Consular Reports. Siam. Report for the Year 1899 on the Trade of the Consular District of Bangkok." British Parliamentary Papers.

14. Cd.2236-30. 1904. "Annual Series. No. 3286. Diplomatic and Consular Reports. Siam. Report for the Year 1903 on the Trade of Bangkok." British Parliamentary Papers.
15. Cheminais, L. 1960. *Le Cambodge*. Saigon: Impr. nouvelle d'Extrême-Orient.
16. Crawfurd, John. 1967. *Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China.* Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. (Orig. pub. 1828.) or A facsimile of the first ed. with an intro. by David K. Wyatt. London: H. Colburn.
17. Dufosse. 1918. *Monographie de la circonscription résidentielle de Kompong-Thom.* Saigon: Impr. de l'Union Nguyen-van-Cua.
18. Filleau-de-Saint-Hilaire Gilbert. 1920. "Le district minier de Phailin (Battambang-Cambodge) et l'exploitation de ses gisement de saphir 1915 à 1918." *Revue Indo-Chinoise* 5–6: 417–448; 7–8: 27–56.
19. Forest, Alain. 1980. *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française. Histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts (1897–1920).* Paris: L'Harmattan.
20. Garnier, Francis. 1873. *Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine effectué pendant les Années 1866, 1867 et 1868 par une commission française présidée par M. le captaine de frégate Doudart de Lagrée.* Paris: Librairie Hachette.
21. Garnier, Francis. Walter E. J. Tips, tr. 1996. *Travels in Cambodia and Part of Laos*. The Mekong Exploration Commission Report (1866–1868). Vol. 1. Bangkok: White Lotus.
22. INDO-RSC-00355. 1907–16. Rapports périodiques, économiques et politiques de la résidence de Battambang. (C.A.O.M./Aix-en-Provence).
23. INDO-RSC-00388. 1915, 1922. Tournée de résident de Pursat. (C.A.O.M./Aix-en-Provence).
24. INDO-RSC-00399. 1915. Rapport de tournée de résident aux monts des cardamones de l'est et au golfe du Siam. (C.A.O.M./Aix-en-Provence).
25. Kitagawa Takako 北川香子. 2001. "Posuto Ankōru" ポスト・アンコール [Post-Angkor]. In Sakurai Yumio 櫻井由躬雄, ed., *Tōnan Ajia kinsei kokkagun no tenkai* 東南アジア近世國家群の展開 [The development of early modern Southeast Asian state clusters], Iwanami kōza Tōnan Ajiashi 岩波講座東南アジア史 [Iwanami lecture series: The history of Southeast Asia], Vol. 4. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
26. Koizumi Junko. 1990. "Why the Kula Wept: A Report on the Trade Activities of the Kula in Isan at the End of the 19th Century." *Southeast Asian Studies* 28, no. 2: 131–153.
27. *Monographie de la province de Stung-Treng.* 1913. Saigon: C. Ardin.
28. Pavie, Auguste. 1884. *Excursion dans le Cambodge et le royaume de Siam.* Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement.
29. *Pracum Roeung Preng Khmaer* [Corpus of Khmer folktales]. Vol. 6. Phnom Penh: [s.n.].