



Royal University of Law and Economics

Final Report on

Lao and Cambodia Political, Economic and Cultural Relations: Challenges, Opportunities and Perspective

Name of students

Name of Academic Advisor

Ms. SOUKPASEUTH SUANTHAMMAVONG

Dr. KEM SAMBATH

Ms. THITISAGNA KHATTIGNALATH

International Program

Bachelor's Degree of International Relations

Cohort 12

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the intricate political, economic, and cultural relations between Laos and Cambodia, highlighting the multifaceted challenges, emerging opportunities, and evolving perspectives in their bilateral interactions. Politically, both nations navigate shared regional interests and historical ties while addressing issues of governance and territorial disputes. Economically, the collaboration is highlighted by cross-border trade, investment, and infrastructure development, although it faces challenges due to economic differences and resource management. Culturally, their historical connections and shared heritage foster mutual understanding, though differing traditions and languages occasionally pose challenges. This abstract aims to provide a comprehensive overview between Cambodia and Laos since normalization, offering insights into how Laos and Cambodia can enhance their partnership for sustained regional stability, growth and also identifying strategies to address challenges, emphasizing the importance of economic integration, cross-border connectivity, people-to-people exchanges, and regional or international cooperation.

Keywords: Cambodia, Laos, Challenges, Perspective and Opportunities

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ADB	:	Asian Development Bank
ADS	:	Agricultural Development Strategies
ASEAN	:	Association of Southeast Asia Nations
CMS	:	Currency Management System
GDP	:	Gross Domestic Product
GMS	:	Greater Mekong Subregion
Lao PDR	:	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LDC	:	The Least Developed Country
LNCCI	:	The Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
MSMEs	:	Micro Small Medium Sized
NGOs	:	Non- Governmental Organizations
SCCC	:	Save the Children and Care Cambodia
UN	:	The United Nations
UNICEF	:	The United Nations Children's Fund
USD	:	The United States Dollars
USAID	:	United States Agency for International Development

WFP : World Food Programme

UNTAC : United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

FUNCINPEC : National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful\

and Cooperative Cambodia

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this introductory chapter, there are six main parts. First, it provides the background information of the relationship between Cambodia and Laos before normalization. Secondly, it provides the statement of problems. Thirdly, it provides the research question. Fourth, it provides the research objective, and fifth, it provides the scope and limitation of the research. Lastly, it provides the structure of the thesis.

1.1. Background of Cambodia And Laos Relations Since Ancient Times

Laos and Cambodia, both located in Southeast Asia, have rich historical tapestries that reflect their intertwined destinies and cultural exchanges. From prehistoric times to the effects of colonialism to current issues, these countries have shared similar historical paths while simultaneously developing unique identities. Nonetheless, Cambodia and Laos had long had tenuous relations that were marked by geopolitical forces, regional wars and ideological differences before normalization occurred. Both nations once belonged to French Indochina before becoming independent in middle of the 20th century.

After that, Cambodia experienced an internal crisis during the 1960s and 1970s due to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge¹ administration, as their political beliefs diverged considerably, the fall of the Khmer Rouge led to a prolonged period of recovery and the eventual establishment of a constitutional monarchy and a more stable government structure in the 1990s. Meanwhile, Laos also faced a

¹ Britannica, T. "Khmer Rouge." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (18 July, 2024) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Khmer-Rouge>

different trajectory post-independence. After gaining independence in 1954², Laos was embroiled in the Laotian Civil War³, which was part of the larger conflict of the Vietnam War. The conflict ended with the victory of the communist Pathet Lao and the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975⁴. Due to this tension, diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Laos gradually declined during this era. Laos was closely tied with North Vietnam through supporting communist Pathet Lao movement⁵ while Cambodia under Pol Pot sought an extreme form of communism which left them regionally isolated. Conflicts in Indochina⁶, such as the Vietnam War and Cambodian Civil War, further damaged relations between Cambodia and Laos. Both nations experienced extensive bombing from the United States⁷ during these conflicts which caused immense destruction.

Given this historical background, Cambodia and Laos' process of normalization was an impressive development. It presented both countries with an opportunity to reconcile past differences and forge a path of cooperation, stability, and mutual benefit. Which was designed to create friendly relations, boost economic cooperation, and foster people-to-people exchanges between Cambodia and Laos. Reestablishing diplomatic ties, addressing shared challenges while

² Silverstein, J., Zasloff, J., Dolmen, J., Arthur J., Lafont, Pierre-Bernard and Osborne, Milton Edgeworth. "Laos." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. (27 July, 2024). <https://www.britannica.com/place/Laos>

³ Zasloff, J., Lafont, J., Pierre-Bernard and Osborne, J., Milton Edgeworth. "history of Laos." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (27 June, 2023). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Laos>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Joseph J. Zasloff, "THE PATHET LAO Leadership and Organization." *Archive.org*, (19 Jul, 2022). <https://web.archive.org/web/20220719084408/https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2007/R949.pdf>

⁶ "Indochina wars." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (28 February, 2020). <https://www.britannica.com/event/Indochina-wars>.

⁷ National Museum of The United State Air Force, "The Southeast Asia War: Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia." (12 May, 2023). <https://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/195959/the-southeast-asia-war-vietnam-laos-and-cambodia/>

building peace and understanding were among its many goals; increasing trade, investment, cultural exchanges between them also formed part of this plan⁸.

Nowadays, Laos and Cambodia, while maintaining distinct national identities, them continue to share cultural and historical ties. Hence, both nations are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)⁹ and collaborate on various regional issues. Their shared experiences of colonialism and conflict have shaped their respective paths to modernity and their approaches to regional cooperation. From the grandeur of ancient empires to the impacts of colonialism and the challenges of post-colonial development, both nations reflect a complex interplay of heritage and contemporary issues. Understanding their histories provides valuable insights into their current socio-political landscapes and regional roles.

1.2. Statement of Problems

The research problem addressed in this thesis is to examine the interplay of Cambodia-Laos relations from ancient times to the present. Laos and Cambodia face a range of challenges and opportunities in their political, economic, and cultural relations due to evolving regional dynamics, internal developments, and global pressures. Moreover, the relationship between Cambodia and Laos has changed dramatically since formal diplomatic contacts were established. There is a lack of comprehensive analysis on how these factors have shaped their bilateral interactions and what implications they hold for the future. In order to address these issues, this thesis will offer a

⁸ “Lao-Cambodia bilateral relations information.” Ministry of Foreign Affair of Lao P.D.R, (02 August, 2022). https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/files/uploads/GHEIQA4BTVFS/SEALED_With_Letterhead_250226_ENG_Press_Outcomes_of_STP_M's_OV_to.pdf

⁹ “What is ASEAN.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, (18 September, 2023). <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-asean>

comprehensive analysis of the current state of Laos-Cambodia relations through examination of the implications and potential results of this growing relationship by gathering secondary data and using literature reviews in other previous studies to ensure the research questions and leveraging opportunities to build a more robust bilateral partnership.

1.3. Research Question

1. How can diplomatic visits or exchanges between the leaders of Cambodia and Laos influenced their bilateral relations, border security, shaping their political ties in the context of regional and international dynamics?
2. How can the people-to-people exchange between Cambodia and Laos contribute to enhancing mutual understanding, fostering friendship, and further strengthening their bilateral ties in the context of regional and international dynamics?
3. How has the normalization of relations between Cambodia and Laos influenced their economic cooperation, trade relations, and overall bilateral relationship since the pandemic period?

1.4. Research Objective

This study aims to evaluate the opportunities, challenges, and prospects in the normalization of relations between Cambodia and Laos, focusing on trade, investment, cultural exchanges, and regional cooperation. It also examines the obstacles and disputes that have impacted the relationship, and provides a comprehensive perspective on the evolving dynamics and future prospects of the two countries. The research contributes to existing knowledge on international relations, and regional cooperation in the context of these two countries.

1.5. Scope and Limitation of The Research

The scope of the research in this thesis encompasses a comprehensive examination of Cambodia and Laos relations, mostly focusing on opportunities, challenges, and future prospects for cooperation, including economic collaboration, cultural exchanges, regional integration, security cooperation, and the impact of regional and international factors.

While Laos and Cambodia have made significant strides in fostering economic collaboration, cultural exchanges, regional integration, and security cooperation, they face notable limitations within these concepts, for economic collaboration, one significant limitation is the underdeveloped infrastructure and economic disparities. Poor transportation networks and border facilities can delay and can create imbalances in economic collaboration, affecting the overall benefits of joint initiatives and limiting economic growth.

Due to resource constraints, both financial and limited resources will restrict the effectiveness of joint security initiatives or cultural exchanges. Both countries will struggle to allocate sufficient resources to support extensive cultural initiatives and their ability to address transnational security threats effectively. Moreover, geopolitical influences from major powers like China and the United States can affect the bilateral relationship. Hence, both countries need to balance their relations with these powers while pursuing their own national interests.

1.6. The Structure of The Thesis

This thesis is divided into 4 chapters. The first chapter will briefly note down the historical background, state the research problem, questions, objectives, and scope of the research. The second chapter will fully illustrate and involve a comprehensive review of existing literature on

Cambodia and Laos relations, focusing on the post-normalization period. It will identify key theories, concepts, and debates relevant to the topic. The third chapter is providing an overview of the historical relationship between Cambodia and Laos and the politics between both countries. It will examine major historical events that have influenced their relations and discuss the factors that led to the relations between the two countries. The fourth chapter focuses opportunities, challenges and perspective about economic in Cambodia and Laos after pandemic. This central chapter explores the opportunities and challenges that have emerged after the pandemic between Cambodia and Laos. It covers a wide range of topics, from economic cooperation to diplomatic developments, challenges faced, and prospects for future cooperation. The last chapter will focus on cultural exchanges in Cambodia and Laos. It will examine and analyze the similarities and differences between both countries.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, there are 3 main parts. First, it provides the review of existing literature on Cambodia and Laos relations. Second, it provides the identification of key theories, concepts, and debates relevant to the topic. Third, the analysis of previous research findings and gaps in the literature.

2.1. Review of Existing Literature on Cambodia And Laos Relations

The Cambodia-Laos relationship has been the topic of much scholarly research. Multiple research projects have investigated its dynamics, prospects, and limitations, with numerous analyses diving into these topics in depth. The present research aims to provide an overview of the existing literature while also highlighting significant issues from various academic sources. Scholars have extensively researched economic cooperation between Cambodia and Laos in their studies¹⁰.

The cultural and social dimensions of post-normalization periods have not gone ignored. According to the research, Cambodia and Laos have explored their shared historical, linguistic, and cultural heritage, with a focus on cultural exchanges, tourism, and direct people-to-people encounters to promote mutual understanding and strengthen relations. The literature emphasizes the importance of cultural diplomacy in building bridges between both parties and improving

¹⁰ Kimkong Heng, “Academic Research in Cambodia: Progress, Challenges, and ways forward.” Cambodia Journal of Education Research Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 6 - 23. <https://cefcambodia.com/2021/12/30/academic-research-in-cambodia-progress-challenges-and-ways-forward/>

regional integration. While the current literature provides useful insights, there are still considerable gaps that may be addressed through further research¹¹.

Moreover, scholars have investigated trade relations, investment flows, and economic integration between the two nations, as well as infrastructure projects such as roads, railway and bridges which connect them to promote collaboration for sustainable economic development. For example, further investigation of the influence of non-state actors such as civil society organizations and business communities in shaping Cambodia-Laos relations could enhance our understanding of regional power factors, and external influences affecting their bilateral relationship¹².

More specifically, the research extensively considers the political components of Cambodia-Laos relationships. They have focused on high-level visits, diplomatic exchanges, and the role of political leaders in building bilateral ties. The literature also shows trust-building measures such as institutional frameworks and policy coordination that promote cooperation while addressing common challenges; regional organizations such as ASEAN or the Mekong River Commission play an important role in providing dialogue forums and mediating disputes¹³.

¹¹ Chheang Vannarith, “Angkor Heritage Tourism.” *Cambodia Institute for Cooperation and Peace*, (September, 2010). <https://cicp.org.kh/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/cicp-e-book-no-4.pdf>

¹² Naomi, H. “Will The Triangle Development Cooperation be Re-Active?: The Silent Scheme Between Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand.” *Institute of Developing Economics*, (June, 2000). https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Reports/Brc/pdf/11_02.pdf

¹³ Chum Sonya, “Regional integration and political rivalries among the east Asian states and their impacts on Mekong Sub-Regional Development.” *Cicp.org.kh*, (September, 2010). <https://cicp.org.kh/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/cicp-e-book-no-3.pdf>

2.2. Identification of Key Theories, Concepts, And Debates Relevant to The Topic

Understanding the dynamics of Cambodia-Laos relations requires researching the key theories, concepts, and debates that support this bilateral relationship. Various reports have provided significant insight into these issues, providing light on the opportunities, challenges and perspectives that have emerged over time. The first idea explored by the scholar is literature on Cambodia-Laos relations, including their historical, cultural, and linguistic linkages. The report investigated historical interactions, cultural exchanges, and linguistic similarities that form the basis for mutual understanding and cooperation; shared heritage may bring illumination on potential pathways for cooperation in numerous sectors such as tourism, education, or interactions among individuals. Discussions over economic interdependence and development cooperation are critical to understanding Cambodia-Lao relations¹⁴.

The concept of regionalism and regional integration are two theories that have been extensively studied in the literature. Scholars have investigated how regional frameworks such as ASEAN and the Greater Mekong Subregion have affected Cambodia and Laos, both neighboring countries in the Mekong subregion. These types of structures facilitate economic cooperation, trade liberalization, and infrastructure development between them, leading to closer ties between their nations¹⁵. Furthermore, scholars have investigated trade connections, investment flows, and regional connectivity initiatives that have started, as well as potential benefits such as disparate

¹⁴ “Cambodia, Laos Satisfied with Bilateral Relations and Cooperation”. Ministry of information, (12 April, 2021). <https://www.information.gov.kh/articles/39576>

¹⁵ Chum Sonya, “Regional integration and political rivalries among the east Asian states and their impacts on Mekong Sub-Regional Development.” Cicip.org.kh, (September, 2010). <https://cicip.org.kh/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/cicip-e-book-no-3.pdf>

development, socioeconomic gaps, and any effects on local communities that economic integration could have.

Furthermore, Territorial conflicts and shared borders are another significant concept relevant to this topic. The literature on this subject emphasizes historical issues with territorial claims between Cambodia and Laos, which continue to complicate relations, encouraging experts to investigate their consequences on trust-building, security concerns, and cross-border collaboration. Recognizing and managing complicated border management procedures as a means of resolving territorial disputes is an essential component of comprehending their bilateral interactions¹⁶.

2.3. Analysis of Previous Research Findings and Gaps in The Literature

This analysis emphasizes some essential factors and concepts from the literature on Cambodia-Laos relationships; nonetheless, several gaps might be discovered for further investigation. At first, the literature highlights the importance of historical, cultural, and linguistic connections in modern relationships; further research could assist provide their full scope. More emphasis could be placed on certain cultural and linguistic factors that promote collaboration, shared historical about the past, or how these components build national trust and bilateral ties.

Secondly, economic interdependence and development cooperation have been thoroughly explored; however, more research is required to understand their socioeconomic implications, potential issues, and strategies for sustainable and equitable growth in specific fields.

¹⁶ Angiandrakumar Gnanasagaran, "Behind the Cambodia-Laos PDR border dispute." *The ASEAN Post*, (23 May, 2018). <https://theaseanpost.com/article/behind-cambodia-lao-pdr-border-dispute>

Thirdly, while the literature points out the importance of regional frameworks such as GMS and ASEAN in establishing bilateral interactions between Cambodia and Laos, further research may be required to determine their actual impact and effectiveness. More particularly, research could focus on the implementation of regional initiatives, their effects, and their role in building cooperation and addressing difficulties between Cambodia and Laos.

Finally, even though the literature recognizes territorial disputes and border issues, further investigation into their historical context, evolution, potential resolution pathways, and contributing factors is needed to investigate potential border management and dispute resolution mechanisms. Further examination might investigate into the underlying causes of disputes, evaluate approaches taken for their resolution as well as possible mechanisms that facilitate effective border management and dispute resolution.

CHAPTER 3: POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN LAOS AND CAMBODIA

In this chapter, there are 3 main parts. First and Second it provides the political development and economic history in both nations between Cambodia and Laos. Third, it provides discussion of the similarities and differences between Laos and Cambodia.

3.1. Political development and Economic history of Cambodia

After Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953, the government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk pursued economic development in line with the policy of neutrality, a policy that allowed Cambodia to survive amidst tensions. However, the result of this policy¹⁷ was that Cambodia took a pro-communist stance, which resulted in the economic impact of Cambodia, which had to rely on aid from the United States and the Western world, being disrupted.

On March 18, 1970, the coup d'état overthrew the government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk by the coup d'état of Prince Sisavath Sirik Mathak. Later, the government of General Lon Nol pursued a policy of relying too much on aid from the United States in various areas. The economic deterioration was compounded by government spending that focused on military development rather than economic development. The Cambodian communist movement known as the "Khmer Rouge" used the situation to seize Phnom Penh in 1975 under the leader named Salot Char or Pol Pot. He led Cambodia into socialism, starting with the use of a self-reliant economic development approach, adhering to the principle that the people must live under the commune system and

¹⁷ Charoon Suphap, Sompong Kasemsin, "Comparative Politics and Economics", *oncebookk*. (1977), page 10.
<http://oncebookk.com/shop/oncebookk/default.aspx?page=pdttdetail&url=oncebookk&pdtid=019243&lang=TH>

destroying all symbols of capitalism. The failure of the socialist ideology during the Khmer Rouge's reign has had an impact on Cambodian society to the present day.¹⁸ That is, the loss of human resources necessary for national development by killing more than 3 million Cambodians.

In 1991, Samdech Hun Sen turned to focus on economic development as a factor to enhance political success,¹⁹ taking advantage of natural resources such as forests, gems and minerals, as well as freshwater fisheries, which are considered a source of food and can generate a huge income for Cambodia. He also received support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.²⁰ In addition, UNTAC came to create political stability and economic development for Cambodia. As a result, during that time, Cambodia had to rely heavily on foreign aid, leading to a change in the political regime from socialism to a constitutional monarchy with the King as head of state and using a market mechanism economic system, from Samdech Hun Sen's economic development policy since 1993.²¹

In 1999, Cambodia became a member of ASEAN. Although this decision by Prime Minister Hun Sen caused Cambodia to face both political and economic obstacles,²² it was not until 2004 that Cambodia became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and was classified as a Least Developed Country (LDC).²³ These forces led Cambodia to have the main goal of eliminating

¹⁸ Thiravit, Sunai Phasuk, "Cambodia: History, Social Economy, Security, Politics and Foreign Affairs", *Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University*, 2000, pp. 73-74 <http://www.ias.chula.ac.th/ias/th/Publishing-Books-Detail.php?id=28>

¹⁹ Wacharin Yongsiri, "Hun Sen's Far-reaching Vision: In the Changing Times", *Bangkok: Sribun Computer Printing*, 2005, page 60 [กัมพูชา วัฒนธรรมที่เปลี่ยนแปลง - Wacharin Yongsiri - Google Books](#)

²⁰ Chanto, C. Keat, C. "2012 Tokyo Annual Meeting: International Monetary Fund World Bank Group". *Governor Statement*. No. 28. (12 October, 2022). <https://www.imf.org/external/am/2012/speeches/pr28e.pdf>

²¹ UNITED NATIONS TRANSITIONAL AUTHORITY IN CAMBODIA (UNTAC) - [Background \(Summary\)](#)

²² Hun Sen, "The Future of Cambodia in ASEAN," in *Cambodia's Future in ASEAN: Dynamo or Dynamite?* Eds. Kao Kin Houn and Jeffrey A. Kapan (*Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace*, 1998), p. 213. [Cambodia's Future in ASEAN. Dynamo or Dynamite | KIM HOUN AND JEFFREY A. KAPLAN KAO \(asiabookroom.com\)](#)

²³ "UN list of Least Developed Country". United Nations. (22 October, 2022). <https://unctad.org/topic/least-developed-countries/list>

poverty and improving the quality of life of its people. The policy is the "Quadrilateral Strategy" which has the goals in line with economic development, namely poverty reduction and sustainable development, infrastructure development to promote trade, investment, promotion of agriculture, private sector development and human resource development, which has led to Cambodia's economic growth rate.

3.2 Political Development and Economic History of Laos

After Laos gained full independence from France on October 12, 1953 and became a member of the United Nations in 1955, during the initial period of independence, Laos still had internal political conflicts due to the establishment of a coalition government, even though Prince Souvanna Phouma²⁴ wanted Laos to become a democracy with the King as the head of state. When Laos faced the threat from the United States that was resisting the influence of communism, Laos had a movement called the Pathet Lao Movement supported by Prince Souphanouvong²⁵ and Kaysone Phomvihane and was able to seize power successfully on December 2, 1975, thus establishing the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which followed the socialist path. There was the Lao People's Revolutionary Party that had the power and duty to govern and administer the country. The power and duty were given to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, with the highest leader appointed as Prince Souphanouvong, who held the position of president of the country and president of the Supreme People's Council, but the real power was Kaysone Phomvihane. The real reason for Prince Souvanna Phouma's holding the position of president of the country was to maintain the image of

²⁴ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Souvanna Phouma". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 9, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Souvanna-Phouma>.

²⁵ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Souphanouvong." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (9 July, 2024). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Souphanouvong>.

the Lao People's Revolutionary Party that wanted to show that continue to support the monarchy, which is the center of the people's hearts, and also erase the accusations against the government for overthrowing the monarchy.

Considering the role of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, which is considered the only party with legislative, executive and judicial powers, the party's administrative structure consists of (1) the Politburo, which has the highest power in governing and deciding to select people to hold various positions; (2) the Secretariat of the Central Executive Committee of the Party, which consists of 9 members, is subordinate to the Politburo, and has the power to make decisions and determine the direction of the Party; (3) the members of the Central Executive Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party are party members who are not fixed in number, and are selected from the party's executives.

The main role of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party is to set policies for national development in line with the ideology of socialism, which uses the theories of Marx and Lenin²⁶ as a guideline for national development. Therefore, the government has set policies in line with the ideology. In the beginning, the government focused on instilling socialist ideology in the people, including overthrowing and destroying old ideas, controlling people's rights and freedoms in receiving information and dressing. These things should be strictly followed when the government has to carry out economic reforms into socialism, starting with the introduction of the cooperative system and the collective farming system, reducing the economic power of merchants, prohibiting inter-provincial trade, and seizing various businesses for the state. However, what followed was a

²⁶ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "How does Marxism differ from Leninism?." Encyclopedia Britannica, January 23, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/question/How-does-Marxism-differ-from-Leninism>.

decrease in income, causing the state to rely heavily on foreign aid. Most of Laos income comes from agricultural production, while the industrial sector is small and does not use new technologies in production, making it unable to develop as planned.

Although Laos has a strong point in natural resources, the government saw the potential for economic development. The result of using the collective farming system, which lacked motivation to work, resulted in low-quality products, people had lower incomes and no motivation to work when everyone received equal distribution. The advantage of the collective farming system, however, was not economic benefits, but rather it was good for the government to closely monitor people's way of life and control them more easily. The lack of knowledge about the collective farming system caused great damage to the Lao economy. What the Lao People's Revolutionary Party urgently needed to do was to review the mistakes made by implementing socialist policies, which could affect the party's stability. Until July 14, 1979, when the socialist economic reform failed, the government announced the cancellation of the cooperative system and the collective farming system. When Laos used the economic development plan with assistance from the Soviet Union in planning, it led to the 3-year economic development plan from 1978-1980, which was considered the first economic development plan of Laos. Later, in the first 5-year economic development plan from 1981-1985, after the government reviewed the past policies and turned to implement new economic matters. Starting with the slowdown of economic development by using the cooperative system and economic activities along socialist lines, the government has taken action to make it more along capitalist lines, starting with improving foreign relations by promoting foreign trade and relying on foreign aid, mostly from socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and Vietnam.

The overview of the first 5-year economic development plan of Laos found that Laos still had a low level of development. However, the government still wanted to move forward with the development of the country by setting economic development policies. Until 1986-1990, Laos entered the 2nd 5-year economic development plan and set a policy called "New Economic Mechanism" (NEM)²⁷ proposed by Mr. Kaysone Phomvihane. The principle was that Laos improve the legal system to facilitate economic development and be more open to capitalism. This was considered the foundation for Laos' economic development, which must develop from within the country and be open to development from outside the country. The important part is the relaxation of central control and the use of market mechanisms that create economic growth. It is open to other countries to lay the foundation for economic development by establishing financial institutions,²⁸ allowing state enterprises to play a role in their operations, and promoting private ownership of land and agricultural products. The results of implementing such policies led Laos to achieve some success. This policy is considered the starting point of the socialist economic transformation, but still emphasizes the socialist approach as a political ideology.

The announcement of the New Imagination Policy has given Laos an opportunity to build economic cooperation with neighboring countries, especially countries in the Mekong sub-region, which has had a positive effect on Laos in advancing its economic development, which has received assistance from infrastructure development, and increased cooperation in trade and investment with foreign countries. Laos has recognized its potential in terms of its abundant natural resources, especially electricity. As a result, the government has set an important goal: to become the Battery

²⁷ Dommen, A. J. , Zasloff, . Joseph J. , Osborne, . Milton Edgeworth , Lafont, . Pierre-Bernard and Silverstein, . Josef. "Laos." Encyclopedia Britannica, September 3, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Laos>.

²⁸ Supranee Kongnirandonsuk, "Laos Land Link, New Imagination." *Manager 2012*, page 22 [ลาว Land Link จินตนาการใหม่ - สำนักพิมพ์บ้านพระอาทิตย์ \(baanphraathit.com\)](#)

of Asia. Laos has the potential to produce electricity for neighboring countries, resulting in a large income from selling electricity.²⁹ This goal is a guideline to push Laos out of poverty by 2020, so Laos must prepare to produce electricity to meet its needs as much as possible. What followed was the construction of more dams in Laos, with important dams such as the Nam Theun 2 Dam, the Xayaburi Dam, and many other dams. Laos has received funding for infrastructure development from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the IMF, the World Bank, as well as from countries such as Japan, China, the United States, Australia, South Korea, and Vietnam.³⁰

In addition to its main income from electricity generation, Laos is also rich in minerals such as gold, copper, iron, tin and zinc. Laos is able to generate a large amount of income from these resources through concessions to foreign companies, which are supported and negotiated by the government to the government.³¹ so many parties are concerned about the decreasing amount of natural resources because the government has given too many concessions to foreigners, but the people's lives are not getting any better because the income they receive is not used to seriously develop the country and is not distributed to the people. This makes the problem of transparency of the Lao government still a problem, and they are keeping a close eye on the development of Laos, which is growing more amidst the destruction of natural resources and ecosystems from dam construction and the search for valuable resources.

The political development and economic development of Laos and Cambodia enable us to understand the historical background that determined Cambodia's ideology to be democratic after

²⁹ "Energy". *Opendevelopment laos*. <https://laos.opendevlopmentmekong.net/category/energy/>

³⁰ Carlyle A. Thayer, "Laos in 2002: Regime Maintaining Through Political Stability." *Asian Survey*, 431: pp. 120-126

³¹ Thiraphat Charoensuk, "Lava Mining: A Crossroads Between Wealth and the Environment." *Prachatai*, retrieved 24 May 2014 from <http://prachatai.com/journal/2012/10/42953>

the failure of the socialist ideology. Laos' ideology was socialist with the help of Vietnam, where the Lao leaders took Vietnam as a model. It can be seen that the ideologies of each country are different in terms of origin and ideological formation, as well as the principles and meanings of each ideology, resulting in different goals for national development. When the ideological differences between the two countries have caused each country to face various events, both in terms of political changes and economic changes, studying past developments has made it possible to understand why Cambodia is a democracy and Laos is a socialist. These diverse ideologies have also dictated different policies for each country. When both countries have to face the challenge of the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community, the clearest thing is how the political ideology that guides development in each country has set policies in order to create economic growth that must go hand in hand with politics.

It can be seen that Cambodia has a policy such as the government has also changed to a free-market economy system by preparing to reform both the structure and the macro-economy. Most of the economy is in the agricultural and industrial sectors. The Cambodian government has focused on expanding economic interactions between the agricultural and industrial sectors, including competitive advantages in both the ASEAN region and international levels. It also aims to adjust the investment environment, increase technology transfer, increase professional training, and create industrial zones and export zones with efficient infrastructure and services. It also emphasizes policies to promote foreign investment, along with receiving international assistance.

Laos has adopted a new imagination policy, focusing on promoting more economic relations with foreign countries. During 2011-2015, it was in the period of the 7th National Economic and Social Development Plan, which aimed to reduce the poverty rate, achieve the Millennium

Development Goals, and prepare for entering the AEC with the goal of exiting poverty by 2020. Myanmar has adopted an open country policy. It has appointed the Investment Promotion Commission of the Union of Myanmar to consider and approve foreign investment projects. The investment formats permitted by the government are divided into 2 types: (1) investment where foreigners hold 100 percent of the shares; (2) joint ventures, which are divided into joint ventures with the Myanmar government, where foreign investors can negotiate to invest more than 35 percent of the total investment value; and joint ventures with private Myanmar companies, where foreign investors can invest less than 35 percent. This can be invested in the hotel business, real estate, and natural resource exploration and drilling. However, Myanmar still has limitations in terms of regulations and policies.

Political ideology and economic development of these two countries When studying the historical background, it is possible to understand the origin of the different ideologies. Cambodia has a democratic political ideology and has developed its economy using the market capitalist system. Laos has a socialist communist political ideology and has developed its economy using the socialist system. Each ideology has set policies to be consistent with the political ideology. When the ideology has to face problems, each country has used ideology as a driver and set policies for economic development by using the existing potential, such as location and territory that can connect countries both within the region and outside the region, investment potential, and market potential.

3.3. The similarities and differences between Laos and Cambodia

Laos and Cambodia are neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, but they have several notable similarities and differences. Both countries are constitutional monarchies, with a king as the head of state and a prime minister as the head of government and have a history of being influenced by the French colonial era, which is reflected in their infrastructure, architecture, and cuisine.

After independence, both experienced the disruption and destruction of civil war and political revolution; In the case of Laos, Laos was heavily bombed during the Vietnam War, which left lasting scars on its society and infrastructure. The subsequent rise of the communist LPRP was a direct outcome of the war's disruptions and the imposed political institutions were Marxist-Leninist³², complete with Politburo, Central Committee with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party³³ (LPRP) maintaining a monopoly on political power since the 1975 revolution which controlling every aspect of society. In the case of Cambodia, once the Khmer Rouge had been overthrown and the People's Republic of Kampuchea replaced, a multi-party democracy was installed, one of those party is The Cambodian People's Party³⁴(CPP), led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, has mostly dominated the political arena for decades since 1985, complete with competing political parties, non-government associations and organizations, and a relatively free press.

On the other hand, one of the most differences between Laos and Cambodia is their political structures. Laos is a single-party state where the LPRP wields exclusive control over the government. The absence of political pluralism in Laos results in a highly centralized and uniform political system. The LPRP's authority is reinforced through its integration with the state apparatus,

³² Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Leninism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (20 July, 2024).

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Leninism>.

³³ Zasloff, J., Lafont, Pierre-Bernard and Osborne, Milton Edgeworth. "history of Laos." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (27 June, 2023). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Laos>

³⁴ Overton, Leonard C. and Chandler, David P.. "Cambodia." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (31 Aug. 2024), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cambodia>. Accessed 1 September 2024.

making political opposition virtually non-existent. In contrast, Cambodia's political system is characterized by its constitutional monarchy and multi-party framework. The King of Cambodia serves as the head of state with a largely ceremonial role, while political power is concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister³⁵.

Furthermore, the foreign policies of Laos and Cambodia reveal different strategic orientations. Laos has maintained close ties with its neighbors, particularly Vietnam and China. The historical relationship with Vietnam and the strategic partnerships with China plays a significant role in Laos' foreign policy. This alignment influences Laos' internal politics and economic development strategies. Meanwhile, Cambodia has pursued a more balanced foreign policy. While China is a significant ally and source of investment, Cambodia also engages with Western countries and international organizations. This diversified approach reflects Cambodia's efforts to balance its economic interests with political and diplomatic considerations on the global stage³⁶.

Additionally, on political cooperation between both countries, the two countries have engaged in a range of bilateral agreements that reflect their cooperative spirit such as the Action Plan for the Comprehensive and Long-Lasting Strategic Partnership between Cambodia and Laos (2023-2027) to increase exchanges of visits at all levels and convene the Meeting of the Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation in the near future.

Furthermore, this Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation³⁷ (1997) established a foundation for enhancing bilateral relations. It emphasizes mutual respect and support, which extends to security

³⁵ Martin, S. "The Persistence of Political Culture in Laos and Cambodia." *academia.edu*. (2008).
file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/The_Persistence_of_Political_Culture_in.pdf

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ "Cambodia, Laos Sign Security Cooperation Deal for 2024." *Xinhua*, (16 March, 2024).
<https://cambodianess.com/article/cambodia-laos-sign-security-cooperation-deal-for-2024>

and defense matters. This agreement underscores the bilateral cooperation and mutual support between Cambodia and Laos, fostering collaboration in various areas including economic development, trade, and regional stability which reflects their commitment to enhancing diplomatic, economic relations and boost investment in both countries.

In the realm of security cooperation between Cambodia and Laos has been one of an important aspect of their bilateral relations. Cambodia and Laos have signed a memorandum on security cooperation for 2024³⁸, with a focus on combating all kinds of cross-border crimes, which both sides agreed to continue exchanging information to prevent and suppress all kinds of trans-national crimes, especially to combat drug smuggling and human trafficking across the border of the two countries. Moreover, both authorities also made regular meetings between defense and security officials to help address shared concerns, such as border security and transnational crime. Both countries work together closely to maintain security, public order, and stability in order to turn the border into a region of peace, friendship, cooperation and development.

The two countries have engaged in a range of bilateral agreements that reflect their cooperative spirit. High-level visits by leaders from both nations play a crucial role in strengthening political ties. These visits often result in agreements on issues such as trade, border management, and joint development projects. The emphasis on high-level diplomacy ensures that political relations are continually nurtured and that collaborative efforts are aligned with the evolving needs of both nations.

³⁸ Jonathan, M. "Laos, Cambodia Further Enhance Collaboration at 3rd Border Peace and Friendship Conference." *Laotianetimes*, (5 October, 2023). <https://laotiantimes.com/2023/10/05/laos-cambodia-further-enhance-collaboration-at-3rd-border-peace-and-friendship-conference/>

Hence, Laos and Cambodia are active participants in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) program, which focuses on regional economic cooperation and development. The GMS initiative includes various projects related to infrastructure, trade facilitation, and environmental sustainability. Their involvement in the GMS underscores their commitment to regional integration and joint development efforts that benefit the broader Mekong region.

For Impact of International and Regional Factors, the political cooperation between Laos and Cambodia is influenced by broader international and regional factors. Geopolitical dynamics, such as the influence of major powers like China and the United States, impact their diplomatic strategies and alignments. Both countries navigate these influences while striving to maintain a balanced approach that serves their national interests and promotes regional stability that aims to enhance economic, political, and cultural connections and also involves their interactions on the global stage, as well as their engagement with international integration and foreign countries such as

Economic Growth: Enhanced regional integration facilitates economic growth by improving trade, investment, and infrastructure. Moreover, it also helps in diversifying economies and reducing poverty and it helps drive economic development by opening up trade opportunities, attracting foreign investment.

Political Stability: Regional cooperation contributes to political stability by fostering dialogue and cooperation on shared issues and improved infrastructure by enhances connectivity, making it easier for people and goods to move across borders, which supports regional economic integration. Hence, Participation in international organizations and diplomacy enhances their global presence and influence, which enabling them to advocate for their interests on the world stage. Both

countries can get the benefit such international integration such as participate in international organizations.

Both countries maintain diplomatic missions in each other's capitals, which facilitate diplomatic exchanges, trade relations, and cooperation on various issues. Moreover, Leaders from Laos and Cambodia frequently engage in high-level visits, which strengthen bilateral relations and result in agreements or memorandums of understanding³⁹ (MOUs) on various cooperation areas.

Due to both Laos and Cambodia are members of the United Nations, where they participate in global discussions on issues such as development, human rights, and international peace and security and They engage with various UN agencies, including the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to receive support and collaborate on development projects. As members of ASEAN, Laos and Cambodia collaborate on regional policies and initiatives. ASEAN provides a platform for them to address regional challenges collectively and benefit from regional integration efforts like the ASEAN Economic Community⁴⁰ (AEC) to promotes economic integration, political cooperation, and cultural exchange among its member states and both countries participate can create a single market and production base, which includes reducing tariffs, improving trade facilitation, and harmonizing regulations. Both countries participate in the GMS, a regional economic cooperation initiative involving several countries along the Mekong River. The GMS focuses on projects related to infrastructure, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

³⁹ Will, K. "Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): Definition, Contents, Pros/Cons, vs. MOA." *Investopedia*, (13 June, 2024). <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/mou.asp>

⁴⁰ "ASEAN Economic Community." *ASEAN*, (10 October, 2022). <https://asean.org/our-communities/economic-community/>

Laos and Cambodia have entered into bilateral trade agreements to enhance trade flows, reduce tariffs, and promote investment between the two countries. Which both nations genuinely got benefit from broader trade agreements, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership⁴¹ (RCEP), which includes ASEAN countries and other major economies and also receive international aid from various sources, including bilateral aid from countries like China and multilateral aid from institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

These Regional integration and international efforts, including participation in ASEAN and the GMS and other organizations provide a structured environment for political cooperation. These frameworks help Laos and Cambodia address regional issues collectively and leverage opportunities for economic and political collaboration.

In summary, political cooperation between Laos and Cambodia is marked by a strong bilateral relationship supported by formal agreements, high-level diplomacy, and active participation in regional initiatives. Their collaboration extends to addressing shared challenges and contributing to regional stability and development. By working together within the frameworks of ASEAN and the GMS, and navigating international influences, Laos and Cambodia continue to build a partnership that enhances their political and economic ties, benefiting both nations and the broader Southeast Asian region. Their efforts in these areas contribute to their development, enhance their global standing, and strengthen their bilateral and multilateral relationships.

⁴¹ Teekah, E. "ASEAN." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (August 28, 2024). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ASEAN>.

CHAPTER 4: ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN LAOS AND CAMBODIA AFTER THE PANDEMIC

In this introductory chapter, there are 4 main parts, such as: Overview, challenges, opportunities and perspective. Which will be explored, evaluated, and analyzed according to Cambodia and Laos challenges, opportunities since ancient time until nowadays.

4.1. Overview About Economic Relations Between Cambodia and Laos: From Ancient Times to the Present

In ancient times, Cambodia and Laos were part of the larger region of Indochina, a region that was tied with a trade connections and interactions. During the Angkor period (9th to 15th centuries)⁴², Cambodia, under the Khmer Empire⁴³ was a major economic and cultural power. The empire's extensive trade networks reached into Laos, particularly through the Mekong River, which was a crucial conduit for commerce. Meanwhile, Laos, within this time period of the 14th to the 18th centuries, Laos was also one of the major regional trading and diplomatic kingdoms, under the name of Lan Xang Kingdom. Therefore, both kingdoms engaged in trade of goods such as textiles, ceramics, and precious metals. This interaction was facilitated by the Mekong River, which served as a vital trade route linking these regions. It can be divided into the three eras, since ancient times, during which Cambodia and Laos interacted with each other, such as:

⁴² Britannica, T. "Angkor Wat." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (27 July, 2024). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Angkor-Wat>

⁴³Chandler, D. P. and Overton, Leonard C. "Cambodia." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (5 August, 2024). <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cambodia>

Colonial Era: From the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, Cambodia and Laos' economic relations shifted significantly. Both countries were under French colonial administration, which transformed traditional trade traditions and integrated them into the French colonial economic system. The French built infrastructure such as railways and roads to connect the two countries more effectively. This period also saw the exploitation of natural resources and the introduction of cash crops, which had an impact on local economies and traditional lives. Despite colonial integration, traditional trade persisted, albeit more restricted by colonial authorities. The French colonial administration's demands and policies influenced commercial exchanges throughout this period.

Post-Independence Era: After gaining independence from French colonial rule in the mid-twentieth century, Cambodia and Laos experienced a number of problems, including political instability, violence, and economic hardships. The Cambodian Civil War (1967-1975)⁴⁴ and the Laotian Civil War (1959-1975)⁴⁵ caused severe disruptions in commercial activity and trade exchanges. However, following the foundation of the People's Republic of Laos and the Khmer Rouge administration in Cambodia, both countries began to pursue economic recovery and development. In the late twentieth century, as both countries stabilized and shifted to market-oriented economies, they began to repair and deepen their economic ties.

Modern Era: Cambodia and Laos have placed a greater priority on establishing economic connections through regional cooperation. Both countries belong to the Association of Southeast

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Zasloff, J., Lafont, Pierre-Bernard and Osborne, Milton Edgeworth. "history of Laos." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (27 June, 2023). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Laos>

Asian Nations (ASEAN). which has facilitated trade agreements and economic integration within the region.

4.2. Analysis and Examination about Economic Between Cambodia and Laos Before and After Pandemic

Before the pandemic, Cambodia's Economic Structure mostly focus on Agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. Agricultural is significant sector, which is employing a large portion of the workforce. Rice is a staple crop, along with rubber, maize, and cassava and the garment and textile industry is a major contributor to exports and employment. Cambodia has become a key player in the global supply chain for apparel. Furthermore, tourism also a vital sector, which is attractions such as Angkor Wat that driving international tourism. Moreover, Cambodia also attracted significant foreign direct investment (FDI), particularly from China, in sectors like infrastructure, real estate, and manufacturing.

Similarly, to Laos economic structure mostly focus on Hydropower, Agriculture and mining. Laos also same as Cambodia Agriculture remains important, with rice, coffee, and maize as key products. However, the sector is less dominant than in Cambodia. As we know Laos is known as the "Battery of Southeast Asia" due to its hydropower potential. The government has invested heavily in hydroelectric projects for domestic use and export to neighboring countries. Furthermore, mining also an important sector for their economy such as gold, copper, minerals. and Laos also attracted FDI particularly in infrastructure, hydropower, and mining, with investments from China, Thailand, and Vietnam being prominent.

After the pandemic, Laos experienced its weakest GDP growth rate in 30 years ⁴⁶as a result of the pandemic. Tax revenue decreased 37.6 percent by November 2020⁴⁷, while public debt increased to 69 percent of GDP⁴⁸, due mainly to infrastructure investments. Both the rating agency and Fitch Ratings reduce the country's sovereign credit rating in August 2020 ⁴⁹, limiting its funding options. The country's key sectors such as tourism, handicrafts, and manufacturing, experienced significant economic losses, which were worsened by the fact that Laos is a landlocked country. Some tourist sites lost more than 70% of their revenue between March and June 2020 ⁵⁰; the handicrafts sector is predicted to collapse by 60%; and the industrial industry's growth rate fell from 6.7% in 2019 to 5.8% in 2020⁵¹. These sectors are primarily female; hence the epidemic has had a particularly harmful impact on Lao women. Furthermore, a large proportion of the Lao labor works in unregulated environments, making them more sensitive to economic shocks. According to a 2017 examination of the Lao labor force, around 1.5 million (83 percent) of the 1.8 million employed people work in unregulated environments⁵².

Agriculture was one of the industries least affected by the pandemic. In fact, it employed 10% of the workers that were laid off in manufacturing and trade and will be an essential component of Laos' economic recovery. Electricity, mining, and industrial exports have also begun to revive since last year's trade a decrease, with new mining licenses and electricity export revenues likely to

⁴⁶ “USAID/LAO PDR COVID-19 ASSESSMENT.” *USAID*, (August 2021). https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00XS7K.pdf

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ KENJI K. “Nikkei Asian Review chief business news correspondent.” *Asia Nikkei*, (September 24, 2020).

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Laos-credit-downgrade-signals-real-default-risk-as-China-looms>

⁵⁰ Supra note., 1.2

⁵¹ “UN Lao PDR Socio-Economic Response Framework to COVID-19.” *United Nations Sustainable Development Group*, (2020).

https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/LAO_Socioeconomic-Response-Plan_2020.pdf

⁵² Ibid

contribute to the recovery. The Lao economy is expected to grow 3.6 percent in 2021⁵³, which is lower than prior years but still higher than previous forecasts.

At the exact same time, more than half of all micro, small, and medium-sized firms (MSMEs), which account for nearly one-third of Lao family income, suffered a decrease in earnings. According to the United Nations, assuming economic conditions do not improve during the next six months, more than 70% of Lao MSMEs will collapse. Furthermore, the unemployment rate increased to 25% in July 2020, and over 200,000 migrant workers (mostly women) returned to Laos, resulting in a loss of \$125 to \$136 million in remittances⁵⁴. The Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) predicts that enterprises in Laos will need one and a half years to recover from the 2020 lockdown and two more years from the 2021 one⁵⁵.

During the pandemic, the lockdown, social distancing, supply chain disruptions, travel and shipping restrictions, and increased earnings and outputs could force a hundred million people out of the labor market. Cambodia's three industries most affected by this pandemic are tourism, manufacturing, and construction. Because of the suspension of foreign travel, the tourism industry was also severely damaged. Which made Cambodia's economy begin to freeze and the rate of inflation increase.

⁵³ "Lao PDR: Economy Recovers then Falts Again under COVID-19." *World Bank*. (August 20, 2021).

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/08/19/lao-pdr-economy-recovers-then-falters-again-under-covid-19>

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Daniel F. Runde, Romina Bandura, and Shannon McKeown. "Post-Covid-19 Economic and Health Recovery in Laos." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (January 19, 2022). <https://www.csis.org/analysis/post-covid-19-economic-and-health-recovery-laos>

In order to reduce the impact and maintain people's standard of living, the government has a responsibility to implement a variety of fiscal and monetary policies. The Cambodian government spent about USD 2,3 billion over two years in order to ease its financial challenges.

The amount of trade between Cambodia and Laos is still very low when compared to their trading with other nations. Nonetheless, both nations have attempted to improve their economic ties by signing of bilateral cooperation documents and the exchange of memoranda of understanding such as the ratification of Laos-Cambodia treaty on border demarcation, agreement on energy cooperation phase II between the governments of Laos and Cambodia, and the exchange of two memoranda of understanding on underground thermal energy, renewable energy and wind power projects, the Joint Action Plan and etc. which serves as a foundation for strengthening cooperation in various areas including defense, security, border affairs, economics, trade, investment, public works and transport, electricity, finance, culture, tourism, among others. Moreover, the two countries upgrading their bilateral relations to a comprehensive and long-lasting strategic partnership in 2019⁵⁶ such as

On energy cooperation, Cambodia expressed appreciation to Laos for supplying electricity to Cambodia ⁵⁷, contributing to its socio-economic development. The two sides encouraged Cambodian and Lao authorities to effectively implement agreements and memoranda of understanding related to energy cooperation including a new agreement on energy cooperation

⁵⁶ “Cambodia and Laos pledged to deepen the Comprehensive and Long-Lasting Strategic Partnership.” Ministry of foreign affair and international organization. (26 March, 2024).

https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/files/uploads/GHEIQA4BTVFS/SEALED_With_Letterhead_250226_ENG_Press_Outcomes_of_STP_M's_OV_to.pdf

⁵⁷ Ibid

between the two governments, memoranda of understanding on green power purchases and a feasibility study for a transmission line to Cambodia.

On Trade, Investment and Tourism, recently both governments agreed to convene the Cambodia-Laos Trade Committee Meeting in 2025⁵⁸, in order to enhance cooperation in the preparation of trade fairs, exhibitions, business and investment matching and tourism promotion. Both Leaders also agreed to encourage both relevant institutions to ensure tangible results of the tourism cooperation initiative “Three Countries, One Destination” between Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam. Both Cambodia and Laos work to increase bilateral trade and investment. This includes agreements to reduce trade barriers, both countries collaborate on managing their shared border to prevent illegal activities, improve infrastructure for cross-border trade, and promote investment in sectors such as agriculture, energy, and tourism and various joint projects that aimed at economic development, such as infrastructure projects that improve connectivity between the two countries.

Moreover, both governments also made some efforts to enhance transportation links, such as improving road and rail connectivity. The construction and upgrading of roads and border crossings facilitate smoother trade, movement of people, investment and tourism between the two countries. For instance, the two sides urged relevant authorities particularly border authorities or technical teams to select the site for a bridge between Tonle Ropov in Cambodia and Selam Pao in Laos as soon as possible⁵⁹.

⁵⁸ Teekah, E.. "ASEAN." Encyclopedia Britannica, (August 28, 2024). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ASEAN>.

⁵⁹ “Cambodia and Laos pledged to deepen the Comprehensive and Long-Lasting Strategic Partnership.” Ministry of foreign affair and international organization. (26 March, 2024). https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/files/uploads/GHEIQA4BTVFS/SEALED_With_Letterhead_250226_ENG_Press_Outcomes_of_STP_M's_OV_to.pdf

Because in large part to economic provides and regional collaboration, trade has grown positively in recent years. Both countries have abundant natural resources and developing agricultural sectors. Particularly in the field of agriculture, there is a lot of scope for collaborative efforts that involve strategies to improve transportation networks and increase methods of manufacturing both countries exporting and importing goods such as agricultural products, minerals, and manufactured items. Investment from both countries has also increased, with Cambodian businesses investing in sectors such as agriculture and tourism in Laos. Meanwhile, both nations have been working on improving infrastructure to enhance connectivity by projects such as road and rail links, including the ongoing development of the East-West Economic Corridor, aim to boost trade and facilitate economic growth. Moreover, Tourism is a growing sector in both countries, with efforts to attract visitors to heritage sites and natural attractions. Joint tourism initiatives have been promoted to capitalize on shared cultural and natural resources.

4.3. Challenges and Opportunities of Lao and Cambodia's Economic After Pandemic

While economic relations between Cambodia and Laos have seen positive developments but challenges remain. Both countries face issues such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for better governance. Addressing these challenges requires continued collaboration and investment in sustainable development. Opportunities for growth include expanding trade in agriculture and tourism, improving regional connectivity through infrastructure projects, and fostering greater investment in both countries.

The Lao PDR's economy has focused all its efforts to achieve the conditions of getting out of the Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2020. In 2017, per capita income reached USD

2,330. However, 23.2% of the population still live in poverty⁶⁰. Economic growth still depends on the heavy use of natural resources and various development projects have not been able to create jobs for the youth as much as they should and the government is trying to promote the economic structure to move towards growth that comes from various sectors⁶¹. Moreover, people need jobs to maintain their livelihoods, but the government's options for recovering the economy are still limited by the risk of a debt crisis, a weak currency, and poor government revenues.

According to the World Bank research ⁶², the decreasing worth of the kip has pushed up inflation, which has raised concerns about the accessibility of food and other necessities. For those with few resources living in towns and cities, this issue is especially important. The report's "Impacts of COVID-19 on Businesses and Households" theme section reveals that, since the epidemic began, over 30% of family businesses have closed and employment fell dramatically in May of this year. According to World Bank business surveys, monthly sales decreased by 48% during March and April of 2021⁶³. More than 25% of companies expect to get into debt during the next six months, and over half of all enterprises have reported cash flow problems⁶⁴.

Nowadays, Lao's economy is growing, but it does not mean that everyone gets the results of the country's economic growth equally, some people are still poor, basic services are not available in all cities and inequality is increasing within cities, between cities and rural areas, and between provinces. These factors continue to be important obstacles for the socio-economic development

⁶⁰ 2021 Economic Report." *Bank of Laos*, (2022, Aug 10). https://www.bol.gov.la/fileupload/10-08-2022_1660113692.pdf

⁶¹ Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Center. "Lao youth and adolescent development strategy 2021-2030." *The United Nations Fund for Population Activities*. (8 November, 2021). https://lao.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/lao_youth_and_adolescent_development_strategy_2021-2030_lao_8nov21_0.pdf

⁶² "Lao PDR: Economy Recovers then Falters Again under COVID-19". *World Bank*. (August 20, 2021).

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/08/19/lao-pdr-economy-recovers-then-falters-again-under-covid-19>

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

of the country and leading the country to escape from underdeveloped status. The economic growth rate is high, but the contribution to reducing people's poverty has not yet been at a high level. If compared to neighboring countries such as Cambodia and Vietnam, this disparity continues to increase because the level of poverty reduction of the people is still different, especially among the ethnic groups and among households where the head of the family's education is not high. which is a sign that economic growth will be delayed in the future⁶⁵. Another main challenges that relate to these economies is underdeveloped infrastructure. The infrastructure affects trade efficiency and the general attractiveness of investments. Transportation and logistics infrastructure require clear improvements in both countries.

While major challenges to economic recovery remain, Reforms that would increase trade, tax payments, and private investment would be beneficial in this situation. there have been some positive developments in recent months. The current government has stated that creating "quality and productive" jobs is a primary priority, particularly in agriculture and tourism. Laos also announced its 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025)⁶⁶ and a new Agricultural Development Strategy (ADS 2025)⁶⁷, which seeks to improve food security, economic growth, industrialization, and modernization through sustainable agriculture. The ADS 2025 has four primary goals⁶⁸: boosting agricultural production, enhancing quality to boost

⁶⁵ "National social protection strategy Vision to 2030 and the overall goal is to reach 2025." Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, (September, 2020). https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_757949.pdf

⁶⁶ "9TH FIVE-YEAR NATIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2021-2025)." *LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC NATIONAL ROUND TABLE PROCESS*, (26 March, 2021). https://rtm.org.la/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ENG-9th-NSEDP_FINAL_PRINT_21.Oct_21_V1_CLEAN.pdf

⁶⁷ "DEVELOPING AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH IN THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC." *Asian Development Bank*, (September, 2021). <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/732411/agriculture-tourism-inclusive-growth-lao-pdr.pdf>

⁶⁸ Ibid

agricultural competitiveness, enforcing standards and regulations, and ensuring food security. The strategy also includes a plan to stimulate domestic and foreign investment in large-scale projects.

Moreover, Campaigns to prevent human trafficking, e-commerce, green tourism, and agriculture are also getting financial and legal backing from development partners. In October 2021, the World Bank and the Lao government decided to expand a Competitiveness and Trade Project supported by USAID in order to aid businesses in recovering from the pandemic's effects. The World Bank will also contribute an extra \$6.5 million⁶⁹ to support the Lao government's efforts to assist vulnerable businesses. In order to aid in the country's economic recovery, the World Bank and ILO also started offering company loans and urged the Lao government to provide exemptions from taxes.

Meanwhile, Cambodia was one of the first nations in Asia to report a case of COVID-19, which also suffered severely from the pandemic. It is proceeding with the reopening two years after it closed. The nation is now more prepared for economic recovery due to a successful vaccination campaign and reasonable economic policies. For a successful recovery and sustainable growth, the risk still remains and three major issues must be addressed. Maintaining health security and the requirement to strengthen the healthcare system represent the first issue and increased healthcare resources would have facilitated a more focused epidemic management strategy, minimizing the impact on the economy and livelihoods. The second is encouraging fresh growth sources. Future growth must come from diversification within manufacturing and agriculture, with a shift towards higher value-added activities, as the real estate and building boom comes to an end. Reviving

⁶⁹ “More Funding for Business and Trade to Help Lao PDR Recover from Pandemic.” *World Bank*, (19 October, 2021). <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/10/19/more-funding-for-business-and-trade-to-help-lao-pdr-recover-from-pandemic>

tourism can help the economy recover, but it will also need catering to more affluent travelers. The last challenge has to do with controlling risks in the financial sector. Bank and consumer debt have increased as a result of the forbearance policies imposed in response to the epidemic and slowdown in GDP. Long-term financial sustainability requires more regulation and control, even while a slow winding back could prevent an economic collapse⁷⁰.

In order to reduce the impact and maintain people's standard of living, the government has a responsibility to implement a variety of fiscal and monetary policies. The Cambodian government spent about USD 2,3 billion over two years in order to ease its financial challenges. Cambodia Government also continue to provide financial support for garment and tourism sectors, agriculture sector, manufacturing and tax exemption for tourism and aviation sector, and cash relief program for poor and vulnerable families⁷¹. ADB further provides Cambodia \$1.45 billion in loans, grants, and technical assistance for the management of its natural resources and agriculture, better living conditions for both urban and rural residents, infrastructure for renewable energy, and the advancement of education and skill sets. These programs seek to enhance Cambodians' access to and quality of services as well as the business and investment climate⁷². Additionally, the World Food Programme (WFP) aided with nutrition and food security, especially for groups that were more at risk due to the pandemic's economic effects. Moreover, the United Nations Children's Fund

⁷⁰ “Cambodia’s Post-Pandemic Recovery and Future Growth: Key Challenges.” *ISEAS*, (20 April 2022). https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ISEAS_Perspective_2022_40.pdf

⁷¹ “Cambodia's Covid-19 Impacts and Economic Recovery Pathways: Aspects and Perspectives.” *ISEAS*, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ISEAS-Conference_Covid-19-in-SEA_Cambodia_Covid-19-impact--recovery.pdf

⁷² “Cambodia's Economic Growth to Slow in 2020”. *Asian Development Bank*, (2021). <https://www.adb.org/news/cambodias-economic-growth-slow-2020-rebound-expected-2021-adb>

(UNICEF) prioritizes meeting the needs of children and families, supplying essential supplies, and assisting the health and education sectors. Furthermore, several of national and local NGOs, including Save the Children and CARE Cambodia (SCCC), help in fields like economic relief, health care, and education. Also, other nations like the US, Japan, and Australia helped and support through various kinds of projects and programs.

4.4 Discussion and Perspective Toward the Relationship Between Laos And Cambodia About Economics in The Future and Fiscal Response Between Both Countries.

Based on the international environment, special points, reality and strategic direction of the development of Lao PDR. Lao PDR Directs Country of Development to the Year 2030, Green and Economic Instruction must be developed Strong for industrial and modern transformation, the socialist market economy must implement more systematically; The society is peaceful, fair, democratic and prosperous, the people of all ethnic groups should be united, the disparity in development between urban and rural areas, the various classes of people in the society need to be brought closer together.

At the same time, there must be economic development at the center by encouraging the economy to grow in a continuous, stable, green and sustainable manner; Change the structure of the economy in the direction of becoming industrialized and modern, focusing on agricultural production to guarantee food, developing sectors and production with higher value linked to industry and services, especially the electricity and processing industries, services that support tourism, and transform it into a social and intellectual economy; Encourage the development and use of advanced and environmentally friendly science and technology in production; Use the potential of the country, sector and region related to regional and international opportunities to be

most effective; Monitor and manage the macroeconomic stability, increase the competitiveness of small-medium enterprises and promote the creation and development of new entrepreneurs; Promoting the mobilization of funds from all sectors of the economy for the development of the environment is essential by focusing on preserving and restoring the natural environment to be sustainable and green, developing mechanisms to cope with climate change, ensuring the use of natural resources to be of maximum benefit, with stability and sustainability, increasing cooperation, integration and cooperation with the region and the international community, turning the country into a center of connection and service for the region to be the most effective, participating in the process of the international affairs in charge of the party's foreign policies and the government's policy, increasing the ability to be competitive, exploiting the opportunities of the market in the surrounding countries.⁷³

Moreover, to ease the effects of the economic slowdown both countries must increase the momentum on business reforms and trade facilitation so that it can properly benefit from new infrastructure and from trade agreements. This can be achieved by streamlining current investment regulations and procedures, increasing the ease of doing business, lowering transport and logistics costs, and supporting improved product quality, especially for agricultural exports. Expanding government support programs between both countries for businesses, along with better promotion of these assistance schemes, would help companies stay afloat and provide vital income and revenue, while measures to help more Lao firms invest in digital technologies or new delivery

⁷³ “Vision 2030 and 10-year Socioeconomic development strategy 2016-2025.” *LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC NATIONAL ROUND TABLE PROCESS*, (1 June, 2016). https://rtm.org.la/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Vision2030-and-10-Year-SocioEconomic-Dev-Strategy-2016_2025-LAO.pdf

methods could help companies turn crisis into opportunity and building MSMEs⁷⁴ capacity in digitalization, developing new agricultural value chains and diversifying the energy mix.

On the growth in trade and investment between Cambodia and Laos, there should be a Strengthened Regional Cooperation that further integration into ASEAN and other regional frameworks will pave the way for smoother trade and investment flows; development of infrastructure such as boosting trade and investment by ongoing and planned projects in both countries are expected to enhance connectivity and economic integration. Both governments should be interested in making an environment more hospitable to investors; in this case, they will certainly succeed in capturing more foreign direct investments and stimulating trade.

Meanwhile, both of the inflation rate between the Lao PDR and Cambodia in 2023 has increased to 31.23% from 22.96% in 2022. And Cambodia's price inflation jumped in February 2022 and peaked in June at 7.9% The main reason is the price of fuel and the price of domestic goods which is a consequence of the inflation in the past year, such as the price of rice, meat, poultry, food in restaurants and home decoration. In this category, the price of goods and services that has increased the most is food and non-alcoholic beverages at the level of 37.99%; followed by restaurants and hotels at 34.73%; The category of health and medicine is at the level of 30.42% and the category of home appliances is at the level of 28.50%. meanwhile, in Cambodia also got affected from rapidly rising prices of food and petroleum products resulting from the global food and oil price shock. The recent upticks in food prices, particularly of meat, fish, fresh fruits, and vegetables, pushed up inflation, given the fact that the food component captures a 43 percent weight

⁷⁴ “Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)”. *United Nations*, (November, 2023)
<https://sdgs.un.org/topics/capacity-development/msmes>

of the inflation basket. And recovery in real estate was softer than expected as construction lagged, as did sales of high-end properties, which go primarily to foreign buyers. Surging prices for agricultural inputs slowed sector growth. Growth in agriculture decelerated from 1.2% in 2021 to an estimated 0.7% in 2022 because higher prices for fuel and other agricultural inputs constrained growth in crop and livestock production. Agricultural exports grew by a marginal 1.2%.⁷⁵

Therefore, to solve the problem of inflation, the Lao government has focused on managing the amount of fiscal, managing the exchange rate and coordinated with the Ministry of Industry and Trade to review and research measures to manage product prices. And Cambodia also solve this inflation by maintained the exchange rate Cambodian riel compared to the U.S. dollar exchange rate by the central bank helps promote overall price stability⁷⁶.

Laos and Cambodia can address the root causes of inflation and set their economies on a path for sustainable growth by coordinated monetary and fiscal policies, investment in domestic production, and active participation in regional cooperation are key to ensuring that both countries can achieve economic stability and improve the living standards of their populations.

Monetary Policy Stabilization: Central banks in both countries need to implement an explicit inflation-targeting framework, setting a clear and achievable inflation rate target. This would guide monetary policy decisions and help anchor inflation expectations among businesses and consumers and given the openness of both economies, maintaining a stable exchange rate is vital. Central banks should consider managed floating exchange rates, where they intervene to prevent excessive volatility while allowing some flexibility to absorb external shocks.

⁷⁵ “Seize the Opportunity.” *KPMG*, (2023). <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/kh/pdf/publication/2023/kpmg-investing-in-cambodia-2023-and-beyond.pdf>

⁷⁶ “2021 Economic Report.” *Bank of Laos*, (2022, Aug 10). https://www.bol.gov.la/fileupload/10-08-2022_1660113692.pdf

Strengthening Domestic Production: As we know that agriculture plays a significant role in the economies of both Laos and Cambodia. Policies should focus on improving agricultural productivity through investment in technology, irrigation, and infrastructure, as well as providing training and support to farmers. This policy would help reduce reliance on food imports and both countries must introduce policies that provide easier access to credit, tax incentives, and technical assistance to SMEs. This would stimulate domestic production and reduce the reliance on imports, which can help control inflation.

Regional Cooperation and Integration: Both countries must actively participate in ASEAN initiatives aimed at economic integration, which can help stabilize prices by ensuring access to a larger, more diverse market. Regional cooperation would also facilitate knowledge sharing and joint development projects and streamlining customs procedures and reducing non-tariff barriers with neighboring countries, including between Laos and Cambodia which will lower the cost of trade, reduce inflationary pressures, and boost economic growth.

CHAPTER 5: CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN LAOS AND CAMBODIA SINCE ANCIENT TIMES AND AFTER NORMALIZATION

In this chapter, there are 3 main parts. First, it provides the overview of the culture relations between two countries. Which is Cambodia and Laos. Second and the last Chapter it provides the similarities and differences between two countries.

5.1. Overview of the cultural relationships between Laos and Cambodia

The relationship between Laos and Cambodia is deepened by common cultural and traditional elements that have been grown up in the course of centuries. The geographical connection, historic interaction, religious practice, and art influences, as well as the mutual influence of Buddhism, are some of the reasons that contribute to bond. These cultural and traditional linkages between these two countries provide an insight into their interwoven history, which reveals the depth of their historical linkage while highlighting the enduring impact of their common traditions. And cultural and traditional still define societies nowadays.

Lao PDR and was regarded as a country which was strongly in the relations towards culture and religion as yet. Since ancient time Buddhism reached to Lan Chang Kingdom in the middle of the fourteenth century, through a religious mission that travelled from Cambodia to Luang Prabang during the age of Queen YodFah, principal consort who used to respect Buddhism before. When in Khom she saw the population worshiped to Animism and sacrificed by killing animals, she asked the favor from King FahNgum⁷⁷ to bring Buddhism to propagate in Lan Chang Kingdom. Therefore, Buddhism was spread firstly in Lao PDR and got well-patronized from the King. Later

⁷⁷ “Fa Ngum.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (1 Mar. 2024). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fa-Ngum>

on, Buddhism was very prosperous in the reign of King Setthathirath according to build approximately 120 temples in the city and importantly Wat Phra Kaew where Emerald Buddha placed. In that era, many literatures were composed, for instance, Sung Sin Sai, Kareketh, and Phra Luck Phra Ram or Riemker in khmer and etc ⁷⁸. and Early Khmer remains found scattered around Luang Prabang appear to be singularly isolated, and their presence in upper Laos.

We have seen in a previous study that this region of the Nam Ngeum River had been very much steeped in the Mon and Khmer Buddhist cultures, the latter having undoubtedly supplanted the former to produce, by the turn of the second millennium, a synthetic regional art of which numerous testimonies remain. It is clearly distinguished from the imported traditions that dominated the Middle Mekong Valley under the reign of Jayavarman VII⁷⁹. To this regional art of the Vientiane plain belong other stone images of a standing buddha, stretching forward one or both forearms, in the gesture of abhaya (fearlessness) or vitarka (preaching). The large sandstone Mon buddha image from Ban Thalot, dated to the end of the first millennium, provides a good example of this type⁸⁰. Buddhism beliefs that got from Cambodia caused the unity in Lao as well as was the foundation of culture, tradition, thoughts, and belief towards Laos. In addition, monks were dependent to consult for people and the temple was the center meeting for villagers and official.

⁷⁸ Sophonphatthanabundit, P., & Woramethisrisakul, U. W. "Buddhism in Lao PDR: Historical, Cultural, and Social Relations. Journal of Buddhist Education and Research." 1(2), 34–40, (2015). <https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jber/article/view/242891/164669>

⁷⁹ Reynolds, F. E. "Jayavarman VII". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (2024, March 15). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jayavarman-VII>

⁸⁰ Lorrillard, M. "Reflections on Khmer Influence in Upper Laos." *CASE*, (2022). <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michel-Lorrillard->

5.2. Discussion of the similarities and differences in culture between Cambodia and Laos such as religion, literature and festivals.

When examining the cultural similarities between Laos and Cambodia, it is evident that both nations share a rich tapestry of traditions and practices influenced by their historical, religious, and social contexts. At the heart of these similarities is their deep-rooted adherence to Theravada Buddhism, which shapes many aspects of daily life, from festivals to social norms. Additionally, both cultures have a profound appreciation for traditional music and dance, which often feature intricate performances and are integral to ceremonial occasions. The architectural heritage in both countries also reveals shared elements, notably in their ancient temples and religious sites, reflecting a common cultural and religious legacy. By exploring these similarities, one can gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of Southeast Asian cultures and how historical and religious influences have forged common cultural expressions in Laos and Cambodia.

By comparing the two cultures of Cambodia and Laos, it can be seen that each has a varied array of traditions and beliefs which are influenced by their historical, religious and social backgrounds. Deep adherence to Theravada Buddhism, which impacts on many facets of daily life including festivals and social mores, forms the core of these similarities. Traditional dance and music are highly valued in both societies because they constitute intricate performances for special occasions. Many similarities can be drawn from these architectural pasts especially in ancient temples or other holy places indicating a common cultural as well as religious background. By contextualizing them within Southeast Asia's interwoven cultures we can gain insights into how closely related these analogies are.

Theravada Buddhism which was brought from India and is shared by Thailand, Cambodia, Burma and Laos are beliefs usually labelled animistic (common among the mountain people) and beliefs associated with shamanism that involve house spirits, village spirits, district spirits, city spirits, and spirits of the realm. At the higher levels these spirits overlap strongly with Buddhism and are embodied in stupas and temples. The majority of the population has various beliefs concerning sacred places and objects. Ancestor worship is also strong among lineally organized family groups ⁸¹.

For Traditional literature draws on Indian epics such as the Ramayana⁸². In Cambodia, the Ramayana has been a significant cultural touchstone for centuries. The epic has influenced various art forms, including traditional dance, sculpture, and architecture. The Cambodian version of the Ramayana, known as the Reamker, incorporates local beliefs and customs, making it a unique interpretation of the original Indian narrative. One of the most famous representations of the Ramayana in Cambodia is the exquisite bas-reliefs adorning the walls of Angkor Wat, the iconic temple complex dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu.

Similarly, in Laos, the Ramayana has left its mark on the cultural landscape. The enduring popularity of the Ramayana in Cambodia and Laos is a testament to the universal themes and timeless appeal of this ancient epic. Through the retelling of the adventures of Rama, Sita, and Hanuman, these cultures celebrate shared values of loyalty, heroism, and devotion. The Ramayana serves as a literary bridge that connects civilizations across time and geography, reinforcing the

⁸¹ Teleni, S. "Laos Cultural Profile." *Diversicare*, (2012). http://www.diversicare.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Profile_LaoSML.pdf

⁸² "Culture of Laos - history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family." *Countries and Their Culture*, (2019). <https://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Laos.html>

idea that great works of literature have the power to transcend boundaries and forge lasting bonds between diverse communities.

Moreover, Festivals (or “boun”) both in Laos and Cambodia tend to be linked to agricultural seasons or religious holidays and involves doing good things during the festivities in order to gain merit for subsequent lives. In addition to the many traditional festivals celebrated on a nationwide basis, there are also a number of important regional festivals linked mainly to religious ceremonies, often involving traditional performances, sports and games. For the Lao and Cambodia people, the Buddhist lunar calendar marks the major annual religious rituals. At the full moon every month there is a festival, the most important of the religious festivities is Boun Pimai Lao or ບຸນປີມາຍໂລ (Mid-April, three days) people taken out Buddha images or Buddha statue of the wats to be cleansed with scented water by devotees and placed on temporary altars within the wat compounds. Devotees gather the scented water falling off the images to take home and use it to pour on friends and relatives as an act of cleansing and purification before the New Year. On the evening of 15 April (every year on this date, or determined by the lunar calendar) the images are returned to their proper shrines within the wats. In Luang Prabang the festival also features a beauty contest with the crowning of Nang Sangkhan (Miss Pimai)⁸³. Another festival is Boun Visakhabousa or ບຸນວິສາຂບູຊາ (on Middle of May) which celebrates the day of Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing away. Held during the sixth full moon of the lunar calendar it involves chanting, sermons and a candlelit procession to the wats and Boun Ork Pansa and Boun Souang Heua or Boun omtouk (Boat Racing Festival) held to celebrate the end of Buddhist Lent starts at dawn on the first day

⁸³ Teleni, S. “Laos Cultural Profile.” *Diversicare*, (2012). http://www.diversicare.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Profile_LaoSML.pdf

with donations and offerings made at wats around the city. Then in the evening candlelight processions are held at wats, and in a ceremony hundreds of colorful paper boats decorated with flowers, incense and candles are set adrift on the Mekong River to pay respect to the river spirit and eradicate bad luck, bad deeds, and disease ⁸⁴.

5.3. Examination of Cultural, Linguistic, marriage differences between Lao and Cambodia Cultural

The relationship between Laos and Cambodia is shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, and historical factors. While both nations share some Southeast Asian characteristics, their distinct differences have significant implications for their bilateral interactions. This essay explores how these differences affect their relations, focusing on cultural practices, linguistic variations, and historical contexts.

While numerous elements of Laos' traditional culture such as literature, festivals, and religion have been influenced by Cambodia, there are crucial contrasts between the two countries' traditional cultures as well, including marriage, language, border disputes, and history.

Lao and Khmer languages belong to different linguistic families, which can impact communication and collaboration. Lao is part of the Tai-Kadai language family, characterized by tonal qualities and its own script. Khmer, on the other hand, belongs to the Austroasiatic language family and uses a script with significant Indian influence.

This divergence in linguistic heritage means that official documents, media, and educational materials are tailored to different language groups, potentially creating barriers in cross-cultural

⁸⁴ Ibid

communication. Moreover, enduring impact of language differences extend beyond mere communication, they affect how each country engages in diplomacy and trade. For instance, Laos may prioritize engagements in Thai or Chinese due to regional linguistic connections, while Cambodia might focus more on French or English. These linguistic orientations can shape each nation's foreign policy and international relations strategies, impacting their interactions with one another and with other global actors.

The colonial histories of Laos and Cambodia diverged significantly. Cambodia experienced direct French colonization, which left a lasting impact on its administrative systems, language, and cultural institutions. Laos, while also under French influence, experienced a different trajectory in its colonial administration, which affects its post-colonial development and international outlook. These differing colonial legacies contribute to distinct national identities and approaches to international relations, influencing how Laos and Cambodia negotiate and collaborate on regional issues.

For cultural and traditional Historical conflicts and border disputes have also played a role in shaping relations between Laos and Cambodia. For instance, territorial disputes and historical grievances can sometimes resurface, affecting diplomatic interactions. These historical factors contribute to national narratives and influence contemporary political relations, making it essential for both countries to address these issues thoughtfully to foster cooperative ties.

Moreover, the marital traditions of Laos and Cambodia are well able to show differences conditioned by historical, religious, and social factors, though being based upon the common

cultural traits of Southeast Asia. The marriage customs in Laos underscore the ritual of the Baci⁸⁵ ceremony and traditional attire that depicts both Buddhism and animism. Cambodian weddings, on the other hand, have highly elaborate multi-day ceremonies and intricate rituals where a high value is placed on their religious and cultural heritage. Marriage is a family-oriented institution in both cultures; however, how family roles are emphasized is very different. Cambodian weddings emphasize much ritualistic and religious elements, whereas the Laotian wedding merges ritual with a focus on communal and familial bonds. These differences act not just as a display of rich cultural tapestry for each nation but also serve as a showcase of the multiplicity of ways that Southeast Asian societies have celebrated the institution of marriage⁸⁶.

Although the dance and music between Cambodia and Laos are similar, both countries have their own uniqueness. In both countries, dance traditions are characterized by much stylization of movement and gesture, while music shows similar instrumentation and musical structures, all of which reflect deep cultural resonance. These art forms do not only celebrate individual cultural identity but put forth a larger Southeast Asian artistic heritage that binds these neighboring nations. Cambodia and Laos keep alive, through song and dance, a legacy of rich culture and spiritual expression.

For both Cambodians and Laotians, dance and music are a part of their culture and continuity, not necessarily for entertainment. They preserve historical narration, express religious devotion, and celebrate communal identity. For both cultures, song and dance together flow into the core of

⁸⁵ Chai, E. G. "OF SOUKHUAN AND LAOS." *UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SARAWAK*, (2013).
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236177240_Of_Soukhuan_and_Laos

⁸⁶ "Culture of Laos - history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family." *Countries and Their Culture*, (2019). <https://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Laos.html>

ceremonial practice. Cambodian dances were performed enacting royal ceremonies, religious festivals, and cultural celebrations; usually, narration of history and myths is elaborated by them. Similarly, Laotian dance is performed for major cultural and religious events and narrates historical and folk tales along with spiritual beliefs. Cambodian classical dance is sophisticated and intricate, an evolution from the Apsara Dance during the Angkor Empire⁸⁷.

It is characterized by graceful, stylized movements, elaborate costumes, and symbolic gestures. Stories from Hindu mythology, mainly those concerning the Ramayana and Mahabharata, are usually narrated through this dance. Similarly, the Laotian classical dance. It also draws elements of Hindu-Buddhist mythology and is performed at royal ceremonies and during religious festivals. Both Cambodian and Laotian dances encompass complex hand movements, intricate footwork, and a strong element of body posture. Many of the gestures used in the dance symbolize nature, gods, or morals. For the music or song both Cambodian and Laotian music makes use of modal scales and cyclic rhythms that evokes a similar sensual experience. The music has repetitive patterns that, in turn reinforces the meditative and ritualistic nature of the dance performance In Cambodian the traditional music is known to be performed on instruments such as the Roneat Ek (xylophone), the Khmer Drum, and the Tro, that is a stringed instrument. Music is mainly performed by ensembles accompanying dance performances and religious rites. Instruments in Laotian traditional music includes a Khaen⁸⁸ or the bamboo mouth organ, Ranat a type of xylophone, and several drums. Other instruments include assorted flutes, plucked and bowed lutes, drums, and cymbals. Laos also has a wealth of regional vocal music traditions—most of which are

⁸⁷ “The History of Apsara Dance.” *Global Children*, (1 June, 2015). <https://global-children.org/the-history-of-apsara-dance/>

⁸⁸ “Khaen Music of The Lao People.” *UNESCO*, (2024, Dec 15). <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/khaen-music-of-the-lao-people-01296>

designated by some form of the term khap or lam⁸⁹. Similar to Cambodian music, Laotian music is an integral part of dance performances and cultural rites.

In the other hands, through historical interactions, heavy exchange of culinary practices and ingredients has been greatly facilitated by trade and migration between Laos and Cambodia. This practice reflects a cultural value placed on social interaction and togetherness during meals. Indeed, there are many foods that share dishes and culinary traditions alike, such as Larb, On the other hand, Cambodian cuisine has Yam. Both dishes reflect a similar focus on freshness, sourness, and spiciness; Tam Mak Hoong is a Lao green papaya salad and in Cambodia, there is also a green papaya salad called Bok Lahong, both salads demonstrate a typical regional taste for fresh vegetables, strongly flavored. Thus, both cuisines have similarities due to the spread of Indian and Chinese culinary influences throughout Southeast Asia, which puts both Lao and Cambodian cuisines in a similar platform of emphasizing communal dining with multiple dishes served together and shared amongst family and friends.

Additionally, cultural exchanges between Laos and Cambodia are supported through a variety of government-led and collaborative initiatives, including festivals, educational programs, artistic performances, food fairs and diplomatic efforts. These activities enhance mutual understanding and strengthen the cultural ties between the two countries. These efforts reflect their commitment to enhancing mutual understanding, celebrating shared heritage, and building stronger bilateral relations such as

⁸⁹ Silverstein, J., Zasloff, Joseph J., Dolmen, Arthur J., Lafont, Pierre-Bernard and Osborne, Milton Edgeworth. "Laos." Encyclopedia Britannica. (27 July, 2024). <https://www.britannica.com/place/Laos>

Both countries have organized and participated in cultural festivals and special events that celebrate traditional music, dance, art, and cuisine. These festivals often feature performances and exhibitions from both Laos and Cambodia, providing opportunities for cultural exchange and showcasing each other's heritage. Furthermore, special events marking national holidays in either country sometimes include segments dedicated to showcasing the cultural traditions of the other country. For instance, cultural exhibitions and performances related to Cambodian festivals might be part of Lao national celebrations, and vice versa.

Governments and educational institutions from both countries often offer scholarships and study programs to students from the other country. These programs facilitate educational and cultural exchanges, allowing students to immerse themselves in the host country's culture and language and academic institutions in Laos and Cambodia sometimes collaborate on research projects related to cultural studies, history, and heritage. These efforts contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's cultural backgrounds. During high-level visits between leaders of Laos and Cambodia, cultural exchange is often a key component. Leaders may attend cultural events or participate in ceremonies that highlight the cultural connections between the two countries.

Furthermore, the government also put efforts to translate and publish literary works from one country into the language of the other promote literary and cultural exchange. This can include translating traditional stories, modern literature, or academic works and also promote cross-border tourism include joint marketing campaigns and the development of tourism routes that connect cultural and historical sites in both countries. These initiatives encourage tourists to explore cultural landmarks in both Laos and Cambodia.

In conclusion, the cultural, linguistic, and historical differences between Laos and Cambodia significantly impact their relations. While both nations share some commonalities, such as Theravada Buddhism and Southeast Asian traditions, their unique cultural practices, linguistic variations, and historical contexts create a complex landscape for bilateral interactions. Understanding these differences is crucial for navigating diplomatic relations, fostering mutual respect, and building stronger partnerships. By recognizing and addressing these factors, Laos and Cambodia can enhance their cooperation and contribute to a more harmonious regional environment by implementing these cultural promotion policies such as:

Bilateral Cultural Exchange Programs: by establish more programs that facilitate the exchange of students, artists, and scholars between Cambodian and Lao educational and cultural institutions. These programs would include scholarships, study tours, artist residencies, and joint research initiatives focusing on shared cultural heritage and promote the learning of Khmer and Lao languages in both countries by creating language immersion programs. Schools and universities could offer courses in each other's languages, paired with cultural education that includes traditional music, dance, and folklore.

Cultural Policy Coordination: establish bilateral cultural committees that regularly meet to coordinate cultural policies and initiatives. These committees could include representatives from government cultural ministries, educational institutions, and cultural organizations from both countries and develop shared cultural policies that focus on the protection and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional music, dance, rituals, and festivals. These policies could be harmonized to ensure that both countries support each other's cultural preservation efforts. Moreover, leverage ASEAN frameworks to promote joint cultural initiatives between Cambodia

and Laos. This could include participating in ASEAN cultural forums, exhibitions, and festivals, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of both nations on a regional stage. Thus, the two countries can create a vibrant cultural exchange that benefits their citizens and enhances their regional and global cultural presence.

CONCLUSION

Laos and Cambodia have a rich history of interactions influenced by ancient empires, colonial legacies, and modern challenges. While their current relationship includes economic, cultural, and diplomatic engagement, there are several opportunities to enhance cooperation. Laos and Cambodia can build a stronger, more resilient partnership that benefits both nations and contributes to regional stability and prosperity. By focusing on economic integration, regional connectivity, cultural collaboration, and diplomatic engagement,

The political relations between Laos and Cambodia, both nations also prioritize direct diplomatic engagement and high-level exchanges to build mutual trust and resolve outstanding issues. This includes enhancing communication channels for addressing border disputes and security concerns collaboratively or regional stability. Furthermore, both countries focus on formalizing agreements that foster economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and joint development projects. Given the changing regional interactions, Cambodia and Laos have recognized the significance of regional integration measures. Active involvement with the Greater Mekong Subregion and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has helped them to address regional issues while also building on regional opportunities. Additionally, effectively communicating the benefits of their cooperation to the public can bolster domestic support and solidify political ties between Laos and Cambodia.

Furthermore, political ideology and economic development of these two countries when studying the historical background, it is possible to understand the origin of the different ideologies. Cambodia has a democratic political ideology and has developed its economy using the market

capitalist system. Laos has a socialist communist political ideology and has developed its economy using the socialist system. Each ideology has set policies to be consistent with the political ideology. When the ideology has to face problems, each country has used ideology as a driver and set policies for economic development by using the existing potential, such as location and territory that can connect countries both within the region and outside the region, investment potential, and market potential.

The economic relationship between Cambodia and Laos has evolved significantly from ancient times to the present. From historical trade routes to modern regional cooperation, the ties between these two southeast Asian nations have been marked by a combination of cultural exchange and economic interaction. As both countries continue to develop and integrate into the global economy, their economic relationship is likely to strengthen, offering new opportunities for growth and collaboration in the years to come. Trade partnerships have grown as a result of using each other's resources and markets, resulting in greater regional competitiveness. Infrastructure development has evolved as another critical component of their economic cooperation. Joint efforts to create road networks, trains, and border facilities have facilitated cross-border trade and connectivity, promoting the free flow of goods and people. Investment in important sectors has enabled economic diversification and enhanced commercial prospects. Furthermore, investment in energy projects, such as hydropower, has enhanced energy security, sustainability, and economic resilience.

Meanwhile, Cultural exchanges have helped to bridge barriers and enhance mutual understanding between the two countries. People-to-people ties have expanded, resulting in friendships and cultural diplomacy. These exchanges have generated a respect for common heritage and traditions, as well as a sense of unity and solidarity among people. There are various chances,

nevertheless there are also several challenges. Their relationship has occasionally been tested by historical battles, territorial issues, language differences and economic disparities. However, both countries have demonstrated a commitment to peaceful dispute resolution procedures, preferring conversation over confrontation to settle their issues. Education and skill development initiatives have been pushed by enhance learning languages and close socioeconomic gaps with the goal of creating a skilled workforce capable to driving economic growth.

RECOMMENDATION

Cambodia and Laos should strengthen their economic ties by negotiating and implementing comprehensive trade agreements to open new markets for both nations. Simplifying trade regulations and improving customs procedures to facilitate smoother trade flows. Another recommendation is establishing special economic zones or industrial parks along the border, which can attract investment and create job opportunities. These zones can focus on sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism. And both countries should attempt to develop infrastructure by investing in cross-border infrastructure, such as highways, railways, and logistics hubs, because it will enhance trade efficiency and regional integration. Thus, improved connectivity can stimulate economic growth and strengthen bilateral relations. Moreover, Cambodia and Laos should launch joint initiatives to address shared challenges, such as environmental conservation and disaster management, to promote cooperation and build trust between the two countries.

Cambodia and Laos should prioritize cultural exchanges in order to advance mutual understanding, preserve heritage, and foster people-to-people connections. This could involve supporting cultural festivals, encouraging student exchange programs, and facilitating research collaborations between academic institutions. Emphasizing shared cultural heritages can foster closer ties while deepening mutual understanding between nations. And both countries should proactively take measures to address any challenges or disparities that impede their relationship, including historical disputes through diplomatic means, language learning services that bridge linguistic differences, and inclusive development policies that reduce socio-economic disparities.

Regular dialogue mechanisms should also be created in order to address emerging challenges and foster mutual understanding, and the government should expand scholarship programs, research collaborations, and academic exchanges to build a skilled workforce and foster long-term bilateral relationships. Letting civilians do joint academic research on regional issues can provide valuable insights and solutions.

Laos and Cambodia are members of ASEAN. Both countries should actively engage in regional cooperation frameworks like ASEAN, the Mekong subregion, or other relevant platforms, contributing to regional stability by engaging in initiatives designed to address common challenges while seizing opportunities for economic growth and sustainable development. Strengthening their partnership within this regional framework can enhance their collective influence and support broader regional initiatives. And both countries should set up regular meetings between leaders and diplomats from both countries to address bilateral issues, review progress, and set new objectives to help resolve conflicts, align strategies for cooperation, and explore ways of deepening economic integration, including expanding trade relations and investment flows while encouraging cross-border connectivity. This can be accomplished through existing agreements being implemented more rapidly or streamlining trade procedures and investing in infrastructure projects that improve transportation networks for ease of moving goods and services across borders.

By implementing these recommendations, Cambodia and Laos can forge a stronger and mutually beneficial partnership. Both nations must maintain an eye toward the future by seizing opportunities, meeting challenges head-on, and deepening cooperation between themselves. Through ongoing efforts and collaboration between them both, both nations may unlock the full potential of their relationship to foster shared prosperity in post-normalization times.

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