

Restoring Truth during Anlong Veng Peace Tour

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Day 1

Early morning around 7:30am we set out to Anlong Veng to explore new perspectives on the life during Democratic Kampuchea (DK). On this field trip, twelve students from both Phnom Penh and Anlong Veng high school joined the peace tour. Three students study Khmer literature as their major, seven study media and communication at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), and two local students from Anlong Veng. As the only international student present at this peace tour, I was fortunate to be part of the team along with the other Cambodian students. Dealing with the history of the region, the Anlong Veng Peace Center (AV-PC) program makes people look at the experiences of Khmer Rouge supporters and cadres during DK in a more rational way.

Another goal is searching for the truth of events during the Khmer Rouge time both for native Cambodians and foreigners around the globe. Mr. Sok-Kheang, Director of the Anlong Veng Peace Center, shortly introduced the purpose of the Peace Tour before handing out the book "A History of the Anlong Veng Community: The Final Stronghold of the Khmer Rouge Movement," which gives a comprehensive discussion about the time before, during and after the KR movement.

"Forgetting history means betrayal, and distorting history means the beginning of following the same disastrous road," an old saying in China states.



The black short gun (on top) was claimed to be used by Chhit Choeun alias Ta Mok since 1973. Ta Mok was the former chief of the Southwest Zone during the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979). He then became one of the top KR commanders after the collapse of the regime. After the Vietnamese withdrawal in 1989, he commanded his forces to occupy Anlong Veng, which was later known as the final stronghold of the KR movement. Ta Mok died in July 2006.

As soon as we arrived in Anlong Veng village, we headed to Ta Mok's lakeside house. Afterwards we went to the Anlong Veng Peace Center on top of Dangrek mountain. The building served as a meeting house of Khmer Rouge leaders and is situated next to the second house which Ta Mok once occupied. The reconstruction of the former meeting house into the Peace Center was financed by some organizations and agencies. The place is quite close to the Thailand border and there are some villagers living along the border line. Compared to the cement smooth road that leads up to a casino which is under construction, the road

leading further to the Peace Center is rather bumpy.

Day 2

On the second day the students learned about the history of Anlong Veng and the Khmer Rouge, as well as interview skills. After breakfast we went to a place called: "Learning Center For Sustainable Development", which was once a kindergarten aiming at teaching the local children. When the financial support by the Thai government was suspended, it gradually became a venue where local people hold meetings. The center is a traditional Khmer-style wooden hub. On the left side of the hub is a Cambodian national flag, while on the other side of hub is a Thailand national flag. It is said that after the Khmer Rouge fled to the east of Cambodia, they were mainly supported by the Thai government.

Mr. Kheang first showed us the trailer of the Anlong Veng Peace tour program. What did impress me the most in the clip was a message that a girl gave: "If we talk about their appearances, there's no difference between us and the Khmer Rouge." Afterwards Mr. Kheang introduced us to the early history of Anlong Veng.

Anlong Veng used to be a territory within the province of Siem Nakhon in Thailand, and then the Khmer remnants under Ta Mok's leadership went living on Dangrek isolated and the so-called the last Khmer Rouge stronghold.

Mr. Kheang then started a discussion about interviewing skills. He tried to explain the objectives of interviewing. And then Mr. Kheang asked all the students to join the discussion of how to engage and prepare an interview with a stranger. He first asked if it is necessary to prepare before interviewing, at which some of the students replied that it's necessary to introduce themselves and their purposes in a polite way.

This was followed by another speaker who shared his/her experience during the Khmer Rouge with us. For the rest of the day, we visited the cremation site of Pol Pot and went to the Phnom Dangrek around evening.



Students taking photo with their informant in O-Korki Krom village, Anlong Veng district.

Day 3

In the morning, we were divided into groups and dropped off by our driver in front of different places of the nearby villagers for a random interview. A thing which surprised me the most was the customs and genuine personalities here. When asked about to recall the time, the local villagers showed great enthusiasm, especially the first local old lady we interviewed impressed me the most. She introduced us to her family background after knowing our purposes for coming and shared with us a variety of information that she thought might be helpful for us. Most of the residents in Anlong Veng live in small thatched cottages or a typical

Cambodian high-legged house. Usually there's a farmland behind their houses, no fences between neighbors, and they live self-sufficient and almost isolated from the outside world without internet or communication means.

After lunch, we returned to the Peace Center to care for the trees that former participants had planted to contribute to the environmental development of the region.

Reflecting on today's activities I was surprised to see that the villagers confront the history with honesty, especially when asked to recall the terrifying time of the Khmer rouge and most of the local people showed active cooperation which I didn't expect before.

Day 4

On our last day of the Peace Tour we headed back to Siem Reap and paid a visit to the War Remnant Museum. We saw a lot of old war weapons, which were introduced to us by a guide who told us his personal story. We learned about the history of the Indochina war, the Cambodian Civil War and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

I not only made new friends, but had probably the most enjoyable experience of during the trip to Anlong Veng. I experienced something new and of course, it was an unforgettable memory for me with all the friendly Cambodians.

There's an old saying in China: "Forgetting history means betrayal, and distorting history means the beginning of following the same disastrous road". I believed that forgetting to pursue the truth of the history means betrayal. In the case of national memory, searching for the real history will protect the mutual benefits for the whole nation, which contains all the reaction of a nation to the invasion from which it suffered.

I hope that Cambodian people can find out and remember the truth of history. And then they can protect their own cultural and historical identity.



This anti-aircraft gun was brought from Anlong Veng to put on display at War Remnant Museum in Siem Reap province, bearing its sign: "Anti-Aircraft 37mm Destroyed by Ta Mok in Anlong Veng Battlefield."

TEAM: Ly Sok-Kheang, Tuon Layhul, Long Aun, and Wen Lin.

DONOR: Robert Bosch Stiftung

APPENDIX: List of students

No	Name	Age	Sex	School	Level
1	Koy Sao Soyan	23	F	Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP)	Year 3
2	Kang Thy	20	F		Year 3
3	Khann Mary	19	F	RUPP	Year 3
4	Tuon Serei Ratana	20	F	RUPP	Year 3
5	Heng Sorita	19	F	RUPP	Year 3
6	Chan Chan Bota	20	F	RUPP	Year 3
7	Bun Sreymom	22	F	RUPP	Year 3
8	Sorn Chorvy Vatey	20	F	RUPP	Year 3
9	Nay Theany	22	F	RUPP	Year 3
10	Proeun Panhary	20	F	RUPP	Year 3
11	Kung Sreyroath	20	F	Anlong Veng	Grade 12
12	Kiet Danith	20	M	Anlong Veng	Grade 12