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# Part I:

## Drivers of the new globally significant tourism markets

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# 2 Post-communist tourism in Cambodia

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**The objectives of this chapter are to:**

- Examine the effects of the collapse of communism in Europe on development of Cambodia;
- Discuss the recent development of tourism in Cambodia;
- Discuss the preconditions for tourism development in a developing country;
- Examine how the major barrier to development of tourism in post-communist Cambodia is the significant investment in infrastructure and training required.

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**Keywords:** communism, Cambodia, tourism, destination development

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## Introduction

One of the more significant trends in the 20th Century is the growth and subsequent decline of communism in the USSR. The growth of the USSR after WWII and the creation of the Eastern Bloc in Europe was opposed by the USA in an economic and political contest termed the 'Cold War' between 1947 and the collapse of the USSR in 1991. In Europe this proclaimed triumph of capitalism led to an expanded European Union, captained by a reunited Germany, and a restructured capitalist Russian Federation.

In Asia, the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, was followed by a civil war in China where the United States-backed Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalist Government against the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The PLA success 1949 created the People's Republic of China (PRC). While the USSR and China initially formed an alliance, this split in 1956 as the PRC and the USSR progressively diverged in their interpretations and applications of Marxism. The USSR and the PRC began to compete and established or supported communist parties in countries in their spheres of influence.

Most of the communist movements in South East Asia had little success prior to World War II, in part due to active repression by the colonial powers, as well as internal problems. However, World War II brought about the revival of the communist movements in Southeast Asia because, as part of the "united front" approach that supported the Allies, the colonial powers often allowed communist advocates to function and even legalized them.

The later decades of the 20th Century were also a time of great upheaval in parts of East and South East Asia that were exposed to war, civil disturbance, political dislocation and economic collapse. Communists became a powerful political presence and communist governments of differing complexions established. China, North Korea, Laos and Vietnam remain Communist today, although economic pragmatism has led to an expansion of market-driven business activity and except for North Korea, tourism.

How did events after WWII lead to this situation and what does it mean for tourism? In this chapter we look at the effects of a transition to capitalism with a focus on Cambodia and its recent rapid tourism development.

## Angkorian heritage and recent Cambodian history

Recent events and tourism development in Cambodia cannot be understood without understanding its political and religious history and the geographic environment in which the country exists. These have affected the polity and social norms of the country, as well as the focal tourist attractions of the nation and their associated management.

The Funan Hindu civilization developed in the southernmost part of the Indochinese peninsula, including Cambodia, around 2000 years ago. This civilization sat astride the trading route from China to India. While the Hindu caste system was not implemented, customs and values associated with hierarchy, patronage, patriarchy and collectivism were (Gourley, 2009). The more well known Angkor (Khmer) Kingdom flourished between 800-1400 CE and ruled over a large area of mainland South East Asia. The temples and structures of Angkor, near Siam Reap are a legacy of this Empire, as are those at Preah Vihear near the Thai border. Initially, Hinduism predominated, but with the rise of Jayavarman VII at the start of the 12th century, Mahayana Buddhism emerged with commitments to service and merit-making. His regime marked a clear departure from the Hindu past and Buddhist scenes and symbolism began to appear in temples. Resources were redirected to building libraries, monastic dwellings, public works, and projects accessible to the common people.

By the 13th century Khmer society rapidly transitioned to Theravada Buddhism, possibly because it was inclusive of peasants as well as the elite (Keyes, 1995). However, collectivism weakened centralized power and exposed Cambodian society to external influence. The Angkor Empire was eventually defeated in the 15th century by the Ayutthaya from what is now Thailand. This began what has been termed Cambodia's Dark Ages, from 1431–1863 (van der Kraan, 2009), when Cambodia was caught in a power struggle between its two increasingly powerful neighbors, Siam (Thailand) and Vietnam. The temples of Angkor Wat slowly fell into disrepair, along with most others scattered around the country. While the tangible heritage suffered, Buddhism thrived and supported social norms related to regional hierarchical governance, underpinned by patronage and patriarchal systems.

In 1863, King Norodom, who had been installed by Thailand, sought Cambodian protection from Thailand through French rule. In 1867, the Thai king signed a treaty with France, renouncing governance over Cambodia in exchange for the control of Battambang and Siem Reap Provinces, which officially became part of Thailand. The provinces were ceded back to Cambodia by a border treaty between France and Thailand in 1907. Cambodia continued as a protectorate of France from 1867 to 1953, administered as part of the colony of French Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). It was invaded and controlled by the Japanese between 1941 and 1945. After WWII, France sought to re-establish its control over French IndoChina. However, under the reign of King Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia gained independence from France on 9 November 1953.

The Khmer Rouge had its origins as the armed wing of the Communist