

Business Women in Cambodia: An Oral History



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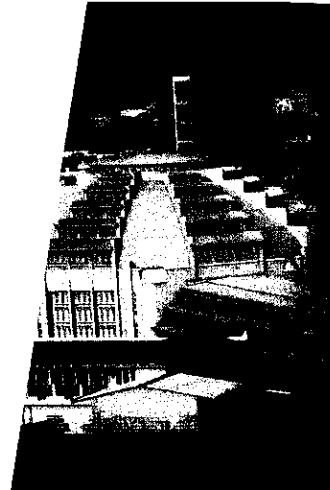


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Director of Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center



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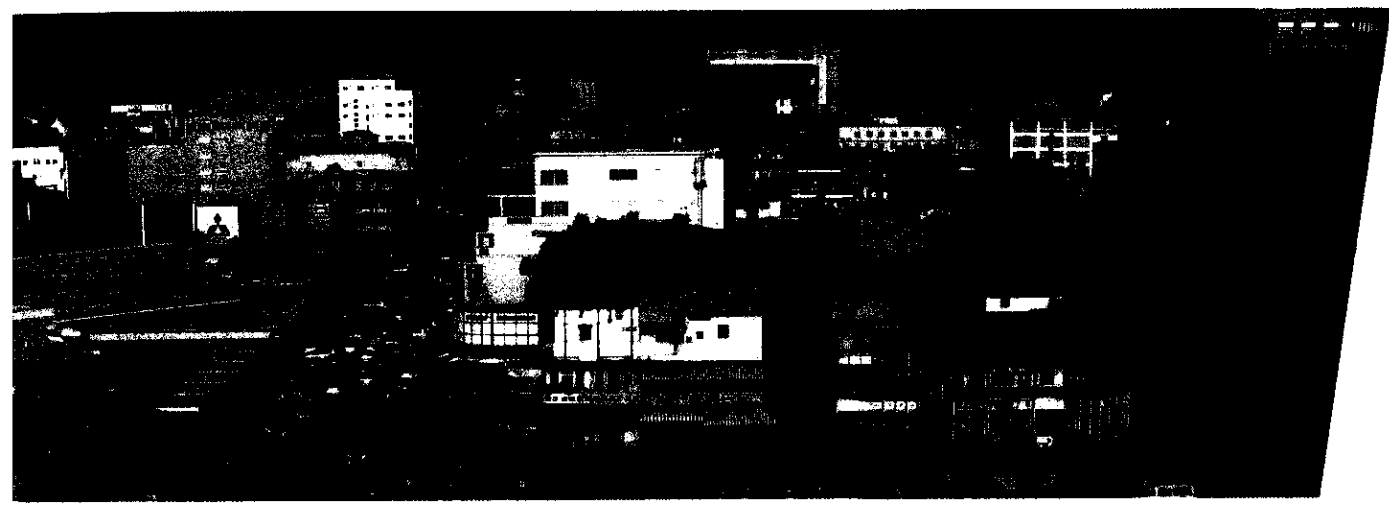
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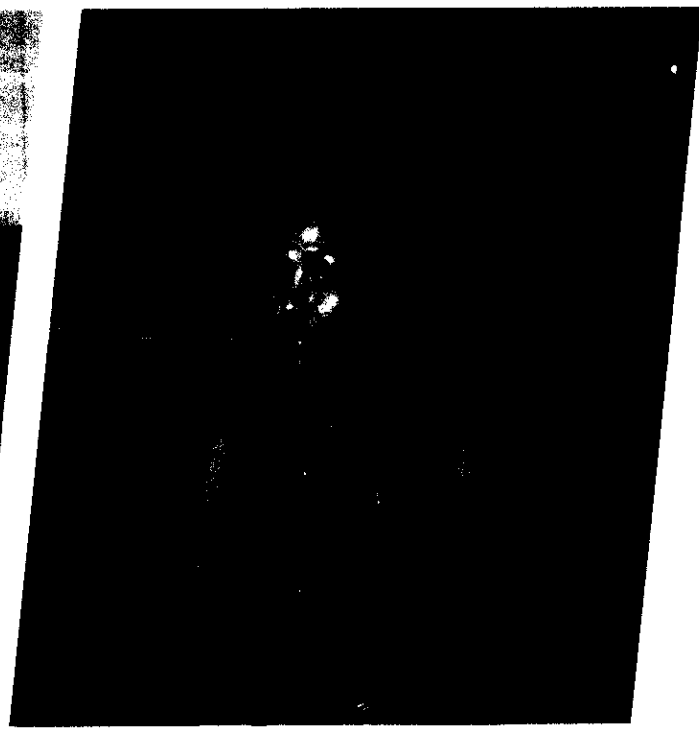
Proprietor, Bi Salon

Ms. Khemara Kem

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I. Overview

1. Geography

The Kingdom of Cambodia is located in the middle of Southeast Asia's Indochina Peninsula. It has a total landmass of 181,000 km², and the Mekong River flows north to south through the central part of the country. It has a typical tropical monsoon climate with high temperatures and humidity. The Mekong River rises during the rainy season and flooding occurs on a near-annual basis that impacts the lives of people in the area. The average temperature in Phnom Penh is 27.5 °C, and the hottest time of the year is generally March and April.

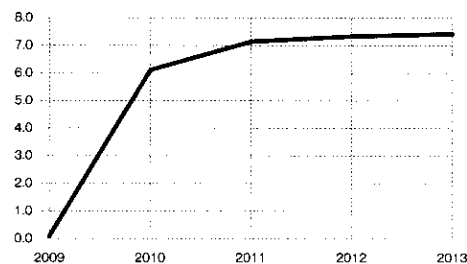


Picture of the King in front of the Royal Palace

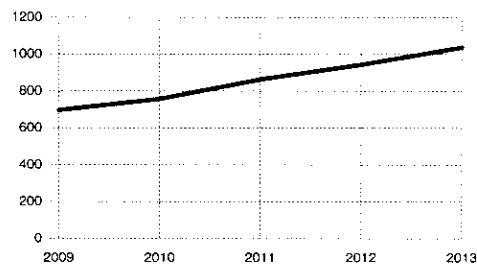
The Kingdom of Cambodia basic data

Indicator	Data	Year of Data
Population	14.7 million	2013
Ethnic Groups	Khmer 90%	2013
Language	Cambodian	2013
Religion	Buddhism, Islam	2013
Economic Growth Rate	7.4%	2013
GDP	US\$15.4 billion	2013
Per Capital GDP	US\$1,016	2013
Life Expectancy at Birth	71.9	2013
Main Industries	Agriculture 33.6%, Garment 9.9%, Construction 6.5%, Tourism 4.6%	2012(preliminary figure)
Adult Literacy Rate	73.9%	2005-2012
Infant Mortality Rate	34 per 1,000 live births	2012
Human Development Index (HDI)	0.584	2013

Real GDP Growth Rate over 5 Years Unit: %



GDP Per Capita over 5 Years Unit: USD



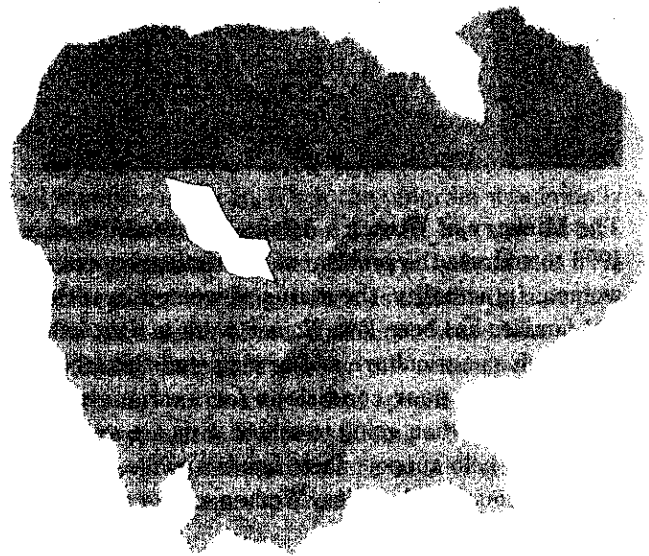
Phnom Penh



2 History, Politics, Economy

Cambodia suffered through an extremely difficult period of civil war for over 20 years beginning in the 1970's that devastated the land and caused great loss of human life. When the civil war ended in 1991 with the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements, the society's foundation was in an exceedingly vulnerable state. The country was reestablished as the "Kingdom of Cambodia" in 1993 after a general election administered by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). Initially the country was governed by two prime ministers, reflecting the realities of the recent civil war, and though there was a period of instability triggered by a coup d'etat in 1997, Cambodia has since travelled a path of reconstruction and recovery with assistance and support from the international community. As the country continued to rebuild, the fourth general election was held in July 2008. The ruling Cambodian People's Party scored a resounding victory, and the new government was formed on September 25 2008.

As post-war political stability has been achieved with the support of the international community, Cambodia's economy has been growing at a steady rate. Real GDP growth was 7.4% in 2012. The country's current economic growth is largely underpinned by increased exports of garment products and shoes, and in recent years, the tourism industry, which has been thriving as tourists from other parts of Asia and elsewhere have increased. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has also been steadily increasing in recent years, and the economy is expected to continue to grow at a stable rate into the foreseeable future.



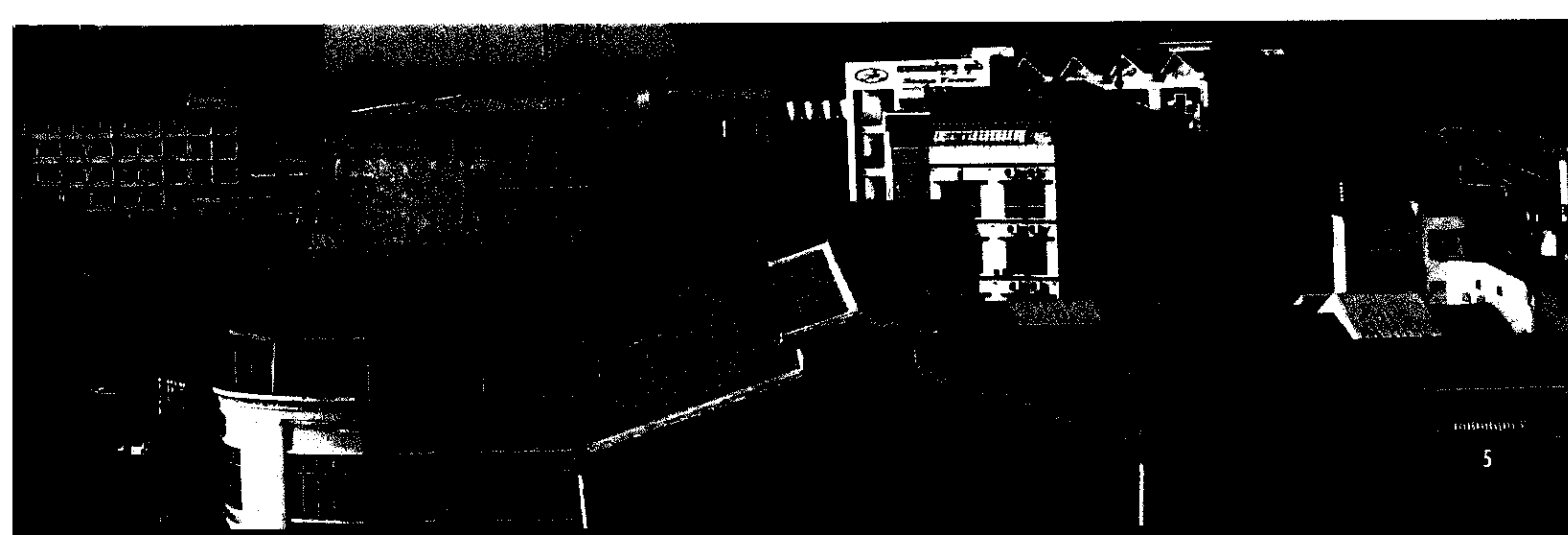
Sources:

Japan-Cambodia Relations (Basic Data), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

Human Development Report 2014, UNDP

Cambodia Macroeconomic Framework 2012 Preliminary Figures, Ministry of Economy and Finance of Cambodia

Basic Economic Indicators for Cambodia, JETRO website



③ Status of Women in Cambodia

In Cambodia, after the 25-year civil war in which many men lost their lives, women played an important role in the country's reconstruction and development, and women continue to be active in the working world today. Women age 25 and over make up approximately 55% of the population, and 90% of women between the ages of 25 and 54 are in the workforce. Under Cambodia's constitution, men and women are equal and their positions and rights are assured.

However, in the traditional values and common-law practices of Cambodian society, women are at a disadvantage in terms of income, employment opportunities and social empowerment. Around 30% of households are headed by women, which is high compared to other Asian countries, and according to reports most are impoverished. The Cambodian government is working to eliminate the gender gap and achieve a fair and equitable society.



Minister, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Kingdom of Cambodia

H.E. Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi

training are inadequate, so even if there is the possibility of some promising market in the future, they don't have any access to that information. The opportunities are extremely limited even to learn and understand what a business is. Our job at the Ministry of Women's Affairs is to improve this situation. We are also focused on assistance that will allow women to be the primary breadwinners for their households. We've recently created an association that supports women business owners and provides a place for working women to share information. We also hold a forum with the government and private-sector once a year.

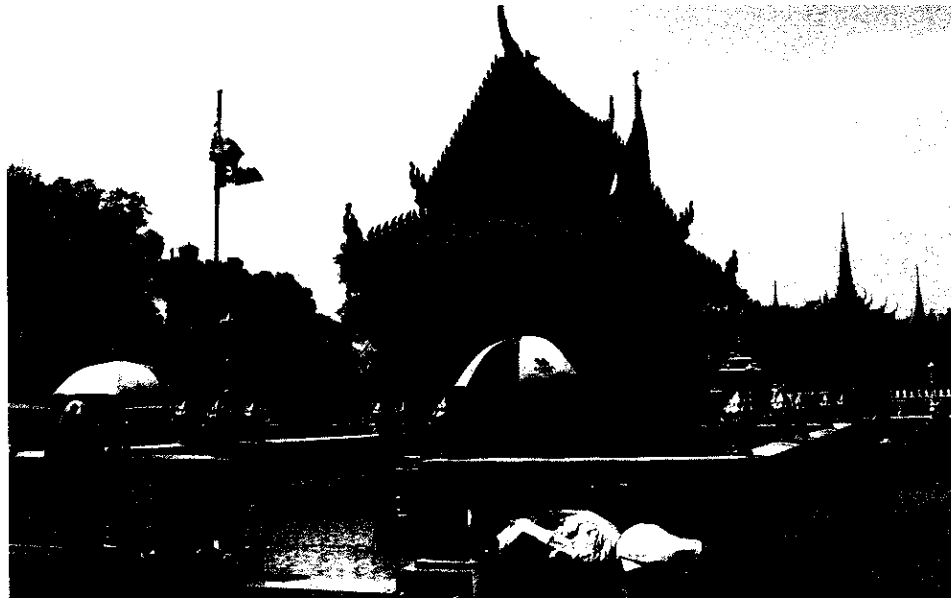
We have also received support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and programs in agricultural communities such as the Gender Mainstreaming Project* are starting to produce results.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs was established in 1996 to address the problem of discrimination against women. In actuality, the status of women in society and families has been low. Women work in light industries such as agriculture and sewing, and this labor is performed in poor conditions for extremely low wages. Rather than going to school, girls are expected to work to help support their families while also performing household duties. Women's education and

* Project on Gender Mainstreaming

Cambodia has an extremely high ratio of households headed by women due to the civil war that lasted over 25 years. However, socioeconomic status of women is low, and most of these households are impoverished. Based on a request from the Cambodian government, the JICA has conducted the Gender Mainstreaming Project since 2003 to help create systems that promote the economic empowerment of women, and this has included raising the organizational capacities of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and increasing the incomes of women-headed households.





Tourists near the Royal Palace



Director of Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center

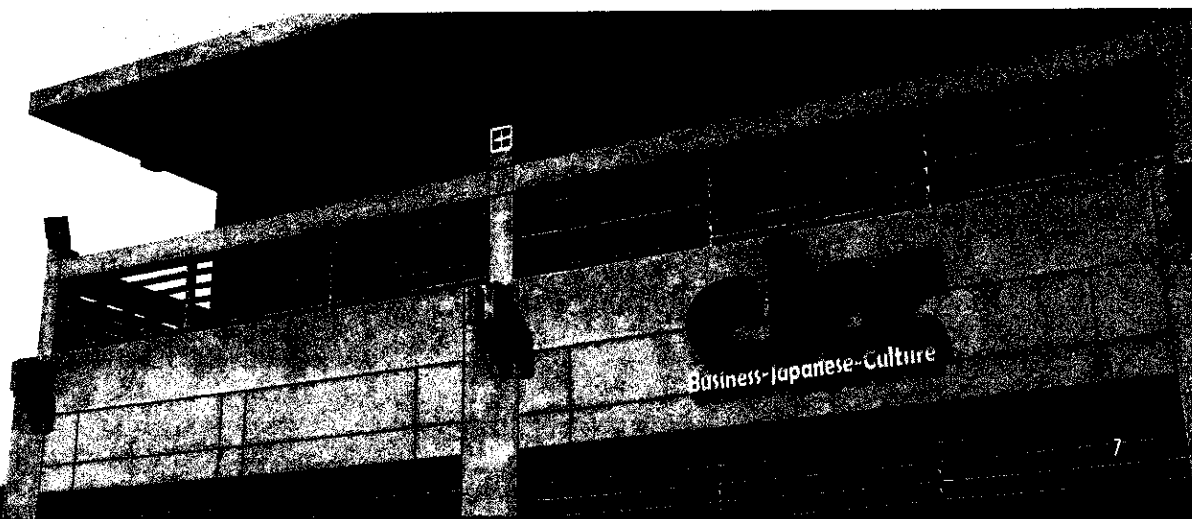
Mr. Koem Oeurn

The Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center (CJCC) was established in 2006 with the mission of helping develop the country's human resources while deepening understanding between Japan and Cambodia. The CJCC offers a number of business training courses. Especially our Entrepreneurship Course is popular. The course helps participants improve their knowl-

edge and know-how in marketing and business management and raise their skill levels in areas such as customer service and personnel, organization and financial management. Course curriculums emphasize practical training and we have successful business owners come serve as instructors. In this and other ways we really try to make the courses appealing to participants. Women participants have also been increasing each year. When the program was initially started, the ratio was about 1 in 10, but now 20-30% of participants are women. However, women also have health-related challenges such as childbirth, and they feel a great sense of responsibility toward housework and raising their children. For this reason, we need to develop various measures that specifically reflect the realities women face when starting a business. I hope that we will be able to continue to take part in JICA programs for women in Cambodia.

Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center
Established: 2006

Location: Phnom Penh
Implementing Institution: Royal University of Phnom Penh



Pushing Ahead, Never Losing Heart

Foreword

Ms. Sophea Kung lost her father to a landmine when she was still a child and has worked continuously since she was a high school student to help support her family. Having experienced a multitude of jobs, she currently works as an independent financial planner in Phnom Penh and is involved in a progressive initiative to make low-risk, low-cost investment possible while also working to increase access to financial markets online for a broad range of people.

Ms. Kung's resolute determination can be seen on her face, but having lost her father, dropped out of high school and failed at business as well, the road she has travelled has been anything but flat.

History 01

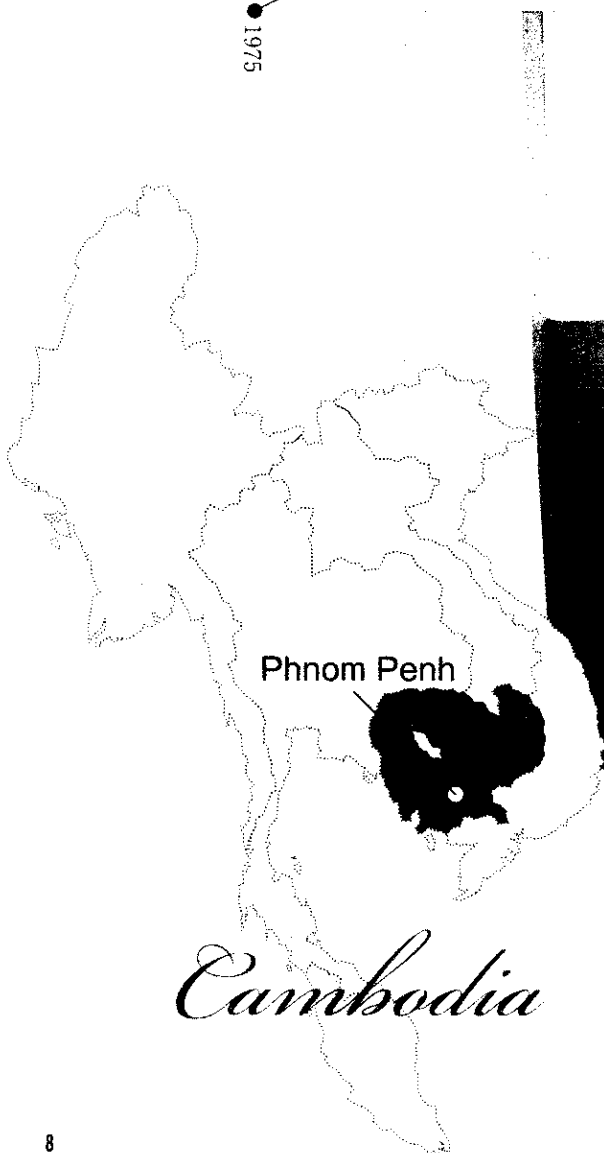
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Sharp Capital Consultancy



Ms. Sophea Kung
M.A. Management and Entrepreneurship
President, Sharp Capital Consultancy, Ltd.

Ms. Sophea Kung was born in Cambodian capital Phnom Penh in 1975. From a young age she pursued an education while working to support her family. After completing the Entrepreneurship Course offered by the Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center (CJCC) in 2007, she started a restaurant while also employed at an NGO, but it failed in 2011 after one year. In 2013, after intense preparation, she established a financial planning company and continues to operate it today.

Pushing Ahead, Never Losing Heart

mostly restored in the capital of Phnom Penh, but the presence of landmines buried throughout the country clouded the sense that the war had truly ended.

"My father was a train conductor. He left for work one day like he always did and then he never came back. His life was taken by a landmine that had been planted by the Khmer Rouge. From that day forward we were a single mother household. A part-time job in the garment business was not nearly enough to support a family. We lived on the small amount of inheritance my father was able to leave us and I was somehow able to attend school up to high school, but as the oldest daughter I felt strongly that I needed to get a job as soon as I could."


At the time there was no night courses for high school students, and as the family's finances grew tighter and tighter, Ms. Kung had no choice but to quit school.

— Education and Work and More Work

Ms. Kung left high school in 1991 and found work to help support her family, but she continued to have a strong desire to learn and study. One year after dropping out, a "night course" was established at the high school, and Ms. Kung was able to resume her studies as a high school student. While attending night courses she worked as an administrative assistant at a local NGO called Concern Worldwide.

"One of my jobs at the NGO was assisting in personnel management. It was a large organization with a staff of over 300 and my position involved organizing the staff, which meant my duties were both general and highly varied."

This experience in "organizing people" would be put to good use in various ways when she would later become president of her own company.



Looking out over the Mekong River


— A landmine took what mattered most

Ms. Sophea Kung was born in January 1975, the eldest daughter of a railroad conductor father and a kind, hard-working mother. The civil war that had begun just after Ms. Kung was born embroiled the entire country. A dark shadow had been cast and no one knew when it would ever end.

Ms. Kung was 12 years old when she lost her father. In 1987, an international effort to bring peace to Cambodia began bearing fruit and the civil war, the country's long nightmare, began moving toward a resolution. Peace had been



Ms. Kung's family (three weeks before the death of her father). Sophea is pictured on the far right.



Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center

Pointing at her resume, Ms. Kung says, “In Cambodia, very few people have just one job. People work two and three jobs as a way of dispersing risk and go to school at night, it’s really quite common here.”

After graduating from high school, Ms. Kung worked as an administrative assistant at the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh and was involved in personnel management for a staff of around 30 as well as IT network management.

While continuing to work at the embassy, Ms. Kung felt she needed to acquire more skills and in 1999, attended night school in the Department of English at the Royal University of Phnom Penh Institute of Foreign Languages. Then, in 2000 she majored in business administration through a correspondence-based program run by Malaysia’s UNITAR International University that was conducted at the time through Western University and Regent College in Phnom Penh.

In 2002, Ms. Kung began working at the Cambodia office of the global NGO Plan International, where she was involved in HR management. Over several years Ms. Kung gained experience in a number of positions at the organization, and she would continue to work with Plan International for many years after as well.

— Learning From Japan Business Philosophy

The six months that Ms. Kung attended the Entrepreneur Course run by the Cambodia-Japan

Cooperation Center (CJCC) on the campus of the Royal University of Phnom Penh marked a major turning point in her life, she says looking back.

“I got interested in this course in 2007 when a friend that had taken it recommended it to me.”

In Cambodia, which went through a long civil war and is still developing as an economy, there are still only a small number of companies, too few to employ all the country’s graduates, so more and more people are becoming interested in starting their own businesses. The CJCC holds the Entrepreneurship Course to address such needs.

The CJCC has many instructors with extensive knowledge and experience and an intensive curriculum that covers how to write a business plan, risk management and other business topics. Until taking the Entrepreneurship Course Ms. Kung had never really thought about business from the standpoint of management.

“I had a teacher that emphasized business theory, and there was a course that invited in people who had started their own businesses to serve as guest instructors and talk about their experiences. More than anything, for me, to learn business philosophy and approaches from the standpoint of business management was a new and eye-opening experience.”

During her six months at the CJCC, she became

increasingly fascinated with the idea of starting a business and steadily accelerated preparations to fulfill that dream.

— Giving Form to Passion

“I went back and forth about what type of business to start,” Ms. Kung remembers. She consulted with her friends as well and ultimately decided to open a restaurant in Phnom Penh because it wouldn’t require complex know-how and would be relatively easy to generate sales. While still working full-time at Plan International, she succeeded in opening a restaurant that served Khmer food.



Achieving the dream of opening a restaurant

— It Takes More Than Passion

About six months after the restaurant opened, Ms. Kung made the decision to resign from Plan International and devote herself completely to the restaurant’s management.

“My mother, however, was totally against the idea. She said basically, ‘Restaurant?! Are you kidding me?! You need to quit that right this minute!’ When I was still also working at Plan International, she had only mentioned some financial worries she had, so her total opposition when I said I was going to focus full-time on the restaurant was actually quite shocking,” Ms. Kung relates.

She had her mind set on the idea though and would not back down.

— Decision to Quit Also a Step Forward

It had cost about US\$30,000 to open the restaurant and Ms. Kung had taken money from her own savings, but as funds gradually ran out she was forced to go the bank for a loan. “It was not going well, and when I reflected later on what had happened, I realized I made several big mistakes. For one, I hadn’t thought much about location.”

She adds, “I was clearly not adequately prepared, including risk management. My desire to start a business, despite not having studied cooking at all myself, got out ahead of everything else. I took things too lightly, thinking I would absolutely succeed if I only worked hard enough.”

By the end the restaurant was mired in the red and partly due to her mother strongly persuading her, she shut it down after one year in the business.

Ms. Kung hates to lose, so giving up was not an option for her. She had learned for herself that passion alone was not enough; that it is also necessary to be thoroughly prepared.

She returned to Plan International and got a job as an event coordinator, but she also decided that she would begin preparing for her comeback. In the comfortable confines of her old employer, she performed flawlessly, administering workshops on women’s empowerment, children’s human rights and gender equality.

Ms. Kung still dreamed of starting another business. She entered a business plan contest run by a foreign consulting firm, placed and won a US\$2,000 prize. This provided the added motivation she needed and she began to get ready for her next attempt at starting a business.

—Before the Run-Up

Before starting her current financial planning firm, Ms. Kung prepared extensively, in part by visiting companies involved in the same business as a customer. Also, this time around, she began thinking not just on the dimension of making money, but also about the country's development as a whole.

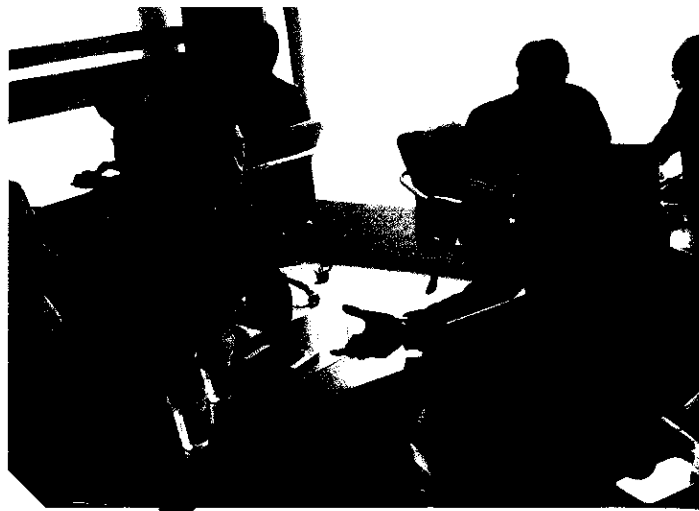
"Conventional financial businesses here generally only target the wealthy, but the middle class in Cambodia has been growing as the economy has developed, so my idea was to expand the target of the customer. There also were still only two companies going after this segment, which was another aspect I was focused on," Ms. Kung relates with rising enthusiasm.

Ms. Kung and two partners established the financial planning firm Sharp Capital Consultancy, Ltd. in October 2013.

The company currently has nine employees and focuses primarily on foreign currency, petroleum, gold and other commodities. Currency trading is the main service, but most people in Cambodia are not familiar with it.

—Middle Class to Create a New Cambodia

"The name says "Sharp Capital Consultancy."



Young people account for many of the company's customers.

but we are closer to financial planners than consultants.

"We analyze global trends in financial products and economic conditions in the U.S. and other advanced countries and then provide training so that customers are also to make trading decisions on the basis of the information. At present, we believe that it is important for as many clients as possible to learn about trading; clients themselves then conduct the actual transactions and we receive a portion of any gains, this is the system we operate on."

The company's clients run from students to business professionals, but our target is the middle class and young people. A majority of the major companies in the same business, which include investment consultants, require a minimum of US\$10,000 to open an account, but Ms. Kung's company allows clients to open an account even with around US\$300. As of the present, around 50 clients have opened accounts.



Phnom Penh city

On the day of this interview, a college student had come to consult with the company and talked of wanting to one day start a business: "Being able to start at low cost and low risk is most appealing. I definitely don't want to expose myself to high risk and then cause problems for my parents. This company teaches you in a great deal of detail about currency trends, etc., which is really helpful. I want to save my money and one day run my own online shop."

Ms. Kung: "This job I firmly believe will help in the overall development of Cambodia's economy. Just like the person that came in today, we have many clients we are trying to help start their own businesses in the future."

Ms. Kung speaks with a smile on her face, though currently almost 80% of the company's revenues go to covering expenses and there are many issues that have to be addressed, she says. Ms. Kung herself is currently not drawing a salary and her family keeps encouraging her to return to more stable office work, so day to day there are constant worries.

"It's certainly true that if I returned to an administrative position my income would be stable like before. But I can't stand to lose and I don't want to give myself the option of giving up. I don't want to be someone else's employee; "I have a very strong desire to continue being a business owner." she says resolutely.

—As a Woman Business Owner

While Ms. Kung says she hasn't struggled simply because she's a woman, she does acknowledge that it often seems unnecessarily difficult to do business with older men. "From the perspective of an older man, I think they must still feel some resistance to the company president being a woman, and I often think that if I were a man such conversations would certainly proceed more smoothly. "

"I have really learned a lot up to this point, but to end I wanted to share three things I've learned from my failures:

1. In doing business, you can't neglect preparing in advance location, prices, sales strategies and more.
2. Things get tight quick with only one year's worth of funds available. You need to have three years' worth.
3. Passion is important, but you can't be overconfident. You have to prepare for every conceivable risk."

The company still has a ways to go before it is stable, but the young staff members are all warm and friendly and project a sense of ease with their smiles. This may be said of Cambodian people in general. Whenever Ms. Kung talks with clients or with her own employees, she conveys warmth and kindness in her words and expressions. It almost seems that she shares much with her native land, in its overcoming of the tragedy of civil war, its development of a deep and transformative relationship with Japan, and its resolute drive to achieve economic growth.

Company: Sharp Capital Consultancy, Ltd.
 Established: October 2013
 Employees: 9
 Franchise of Russia-based InstaForex
 Shareholders: 3 (including herself)

History 02

1987



Kampong Thom Province

Ms. Khemara Kem
Proprietor, Bi Salon

Ms. Khemara Kem was born in Kampong Thom Province in 1987 and studied abroad at a Japanese high school for one year beginning in 2005. Her desire to open her own business developed out of a respect for her mother who had previously been a successful businesswoman. After applying her Japanese-language skills as an interpreter and in a variety of other jobs, she established a nail care salon, which she has since expanded into a full-service beauty salon that continues to attract attention.

Cambodia

For a New Cambodia

Foreword

What, for women, is beauty? It is a common question the world over, and at times for some a worry as well. There's a beauty salon in the capital Phnom Penh called Bi Salon that is drawing attention for its unique and highly customer-oriented services, and when you enter there is an air and quality that is reminiscent of Japan.

Ms. Kem's father was a public official and her mother has been a successful business person. But in the country's recent past, in the dark days of the civil war, people with knowledge and status were often targeted.

Having lived through such difficult times, Ms. Kem's parents watch over their young entrepreneur daughter's activities with a warm gaze.



— At Cambodia's Dawn

Ms. Kem was born in 1987 in Kampong Thom province, which is known as a stopover point between the capital Phnom Penh and famous tourist destination Siem Reap in Cambodia.

Ms. Kem's father was a public servant with the country's Ministry of Commerce and had been transferred to the regional office in Kampong Thom Province. The family moved to Phnom Penh in 1993 also in connection with her father's work. Ms. Kem was six years old at the time. During the civil war many intellectuals were persecuted, and as a public official Ms. Kem's father was also targeted by the Khmer Rouge.

"My father was able to protect all the members of our family and somehow survive, and after the civil war ended, he was able to continue his job as a public official," relates Ms. Kem in a few words before changing the topic to her mother's business.

"My mother started a distribution business, and it went fairly well I think. There was a time she had a number of trucks and containers and owned a lot of land. But the situation was high unstable of course during the civil war and after it as well she was betrayed by

people she trusted, there was fraud; it was a really difficult period."

Her mother eventually put an end to her business endeavors to focus on homemaking and put priority on looking after Ms. Kem and the other children.

Although Ms. Kem's father was a public servant, salaries are not high and it was not at all easy to pay for food and schooling for six children on his income alone.

"But it was never somber at home. True, we had our ups and downs financially, but the family never once sacrificed its cheerfulness."

— Coming to Japan

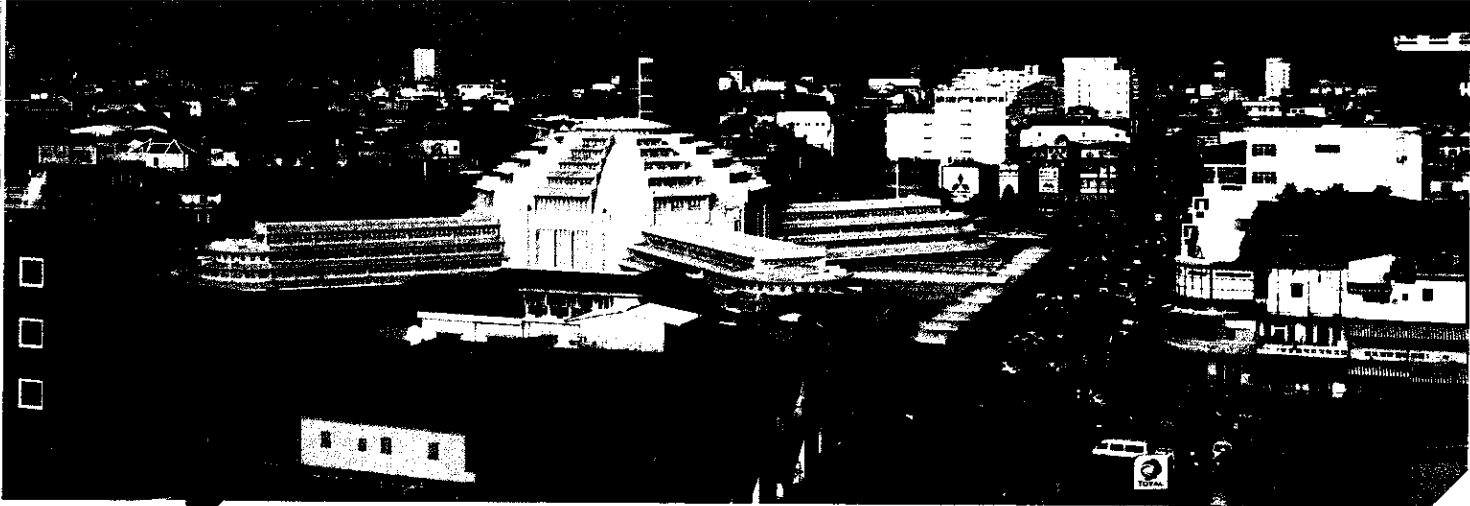
Ms. Kem's began studying Japanese at an international NGO school run by volunteers in 2002, which is where she first became acquainted with Japan. She participated in a Japanese speech contest held by the school and won first prize, which entitled her to a scholarship to study abroad in Japan. She would go study at a high school in Osaka while living with a Japanese family in a home-stay arrangement. The program lasted a year and her naturally cheerful disposition won her many friends. She gradually became more confident in Japanese and the next year passed Level 2 of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test.

Kem's parents



Studying abroad at a high school in Japan





Overlooking the Central Market

After returning to Cambodia, Ms. Kem entered the Department of Information Technology Engineering in the Faculty of Engineering at the Royal University of Phnom Penh and began a new life working full-time while attending college at night.

During the day she worked at Raffles Medical Center, a hospital used by many Japanese people living in Cambodia. "I worked as an interpreter in English, Japanese and Khmer. I was really proud of this job because I could use my language skills to help others." While working at the hospital, she also served as a Japanese interpreter for the country's Ministry of Public Works and Transport and held down a part-time job at a nail salon. It was a busy daily schedule with multiple jobs.

← When I Worry, I Really Worry

Despite her full and rewarding daily life, Ms. Kem would go back and forth with herself on whether to focus on work or school.

"Ultimately I realized that work was way more interesting."

She questioned whether she was even right in pitting work against education because she realized that through her job she was learning every day, which was exactly what she wanted.

For two years she continued working as an interpreter and local coordinator for a range of industries, providing support for Japanese com-

panies bidding on projects, administration for materials imports, and interpretation services for Japanese public officials and hospital staff.

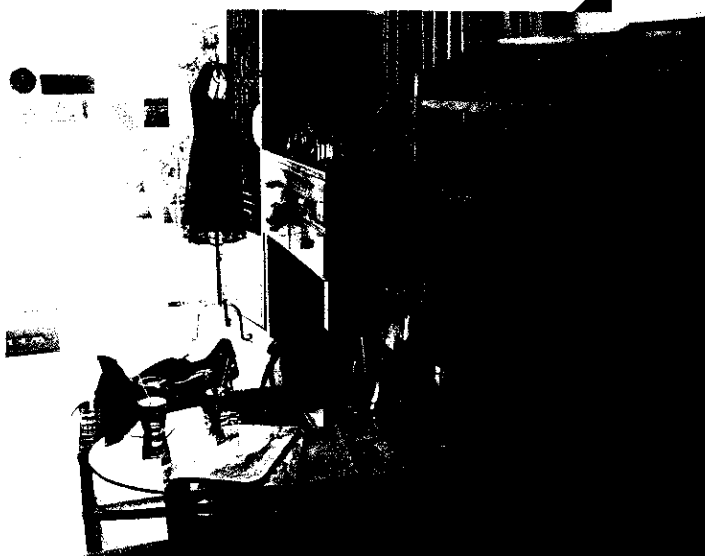
She met a wide variety of people in different fields of various nationalities, and her perspective on business steadily broadened as well.

← Reflecting on the 3/11 Earthquake

Ms. Kem had been to Japan a number of times for work, so the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011 irrevocably altered her own attitudes about life.

Japan was in chaos and work itself was no longer the main priority; even some of the contracts I had with clients were postponed," Ms. Kem says looking back. It was the first major earthquake she'd ever experienced firsthand and it burned itself into her mind in a way that would not easily go away. She saw the tragic

Inside Bi Salon



state of the affected region on daily news reports and it caused her to turn over and over in her mind the question of what life is really all about.

Ms. Kem sensed these somewhat vague thoughts about her own future gradually become more concrete, and she became determined to live her life without regrets whenever it might end. Through her efforts she gave form to these feelings and established a nail salon, Bi Nail, the predecessor of the current Bi Salon.

"I think women in developing countries are beautiful. What made me want to start a nail salon was the desire to help Cambodian women, if only a little, become more beautiful." Cambodia has always had a lot of nail salons, but their quality is not always high, and most use poor-quality nail polish and other such products.

—Quality as the Key to Success

Creating a nail sample is actually a highly detailed process, and Ms. Kem gives highly detailed advice to the salon's employees. She strives to provide thorough instruction on the fundamentals while also respecting her employees' ideas.

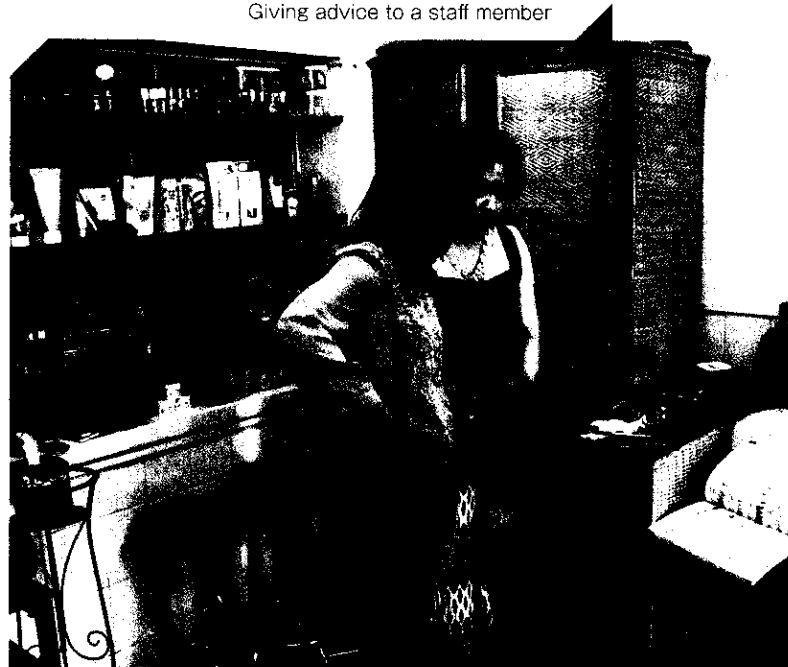
Quality tools and materials for utilizing various techniques are important. Ms. Kem spends a substantial amount of time selecting nail buffers for polishing rough spots and nippers for clipping cuticles. She spares no effort in sourcing, going directly to the factories in Korea and Vietnam to make purchases. Presently, in addition to nails, the salon has started offering eyelash extension services as well. And with these service enhancements, Ms. Kem changed the establishment's name to Bi Salon. Japanese products are extremely high quality, but they are also expensive. Transport costs must also be taken into account. "Unlike nails, eyes are extremely delicate, so we pay very careful attention to the quality of the materials," Ms.

Kem always explains to her customers. The adhesive used for attaching extensions to the eyelid is a Japanese product and for the extensions themselves she uses a combination of Vietnamese and Thai products.

When the salon first opened her customers were mostly foreigners, but her clientele is now around 80% local young people.

Business is going relatively well. Ms. Kem established the salon with her own money and still today operates debt-free.

Giving advice to a staff member



—Caught in Troubled Waters

Ms. Kem got a request from a Japanese person wanting administrative support for entering the Cambodian market, and the big-picture expectations were high the person said that if the industry developed it would mean a new source of employment for Cambodians.

"This person started to approach my staff personally on the pretense of giving them souvenirs, but he was actually head-hunting them and ended up getting some of them to come over to his company."

It goes without saying that for the service industry the employees who provide the services are invaluable. In the business world, if a person only acts out of goodwill they can sometimes lose things that are important. "I began to think that what I had to offer as a business owner was not enough," she says and then ends the discussion.

—Sticking to Business Regardless

"Cambodia has an overwhelming shortage of qualified workers," Ms. Kem emphasizes repeatedly. In Cambodia, many women work outside the home, but it is reported that education levels are the lowest in Southeast Asia. In the case of large families, the boys tend to be prioritized and the girls often have to quit elementary school about the time they have learned to read and write.

Commenting on this state of affairs, UN Women Cambodia explains; "The efforts of women themselves is not enough to end a negative cycle like this. There must be a change of awareness in the women's families and society as a whole. In order for this to happen, efforts also must be made to increase the number of women in parliament. It is important that legal infrastructure be established and welfare systems enhanced from the standpoint of women.



Nail samples on display in the salon

Ms. Kem herself has not ruled out some involvement in politics in the future, but for now she intends to focus on her business. She is sometimes asked by the Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center to give talks on her experience as a successful entrepreneur and readily accepts such assignments.

—Importance of Networking

After personnel training, Ms. Kem is most focused on networking.

"I have a business meeting at six in the morning," she says, and heads briskly to a conference room in a downtown hotel. There are very few people in the hotel lobby at this hour, but the first floor conference room is packed



A lot of traffic beauty salon around

—Not a Country of Landmines Anymore

Ms. Kem tries not to worry her family about anything. According to her mother, Ms. Cheim Sivath, "I have never talked with my daughter directly about business, but I did have the feeling that she would start her own at some point. She is a girl though," her mother adds, "so when I see her go out at night and run around all the time without taking a break, as her mother, I'm always worried."

Ms. Kem's father, Mr. Kem Sin, also had reservations: "When my daughter said she was going to study abroad at a high school in Japan and when she said she was going to start her own business, I was initially against it, because basically I worried about her, but I also didn't want to ruin her future, so it was complicated. Times though have changed."

"I want people to quit thinking that to start a business as a woman you have to be from a wealthy family," Ms. Kem says emphatically, "and, you have to make your own chances."

"I don't want people to think that Cambodia is landmines and old prison camps. I want people to see the new Cambodia," she says looking out the window. And these final words from Ms. Kem may well sum up the feelings of everyone in the new Cambodia.

with over 50 business people. The event is a meeting for young business owners being held by Business Network International (BNI) Cambodia and around 30% of the participants are women. BNI, headquartered in California in the U.S., is a multinational company involved in support for business networking and communications for business owners. The participants make full use of the short three-hour session.

"Here, whether you're a man or a woman doesn't matter. For a woman to succeed, you can't just congregate with other women, I think. And, networks that are built here I can trust." Ms. Kem also says that she receives advice from some of her more experienced peers. When the lively morning meeting comes to an end, the participants all head quickly to their respective workplaces.



The signboard outside Khemara's salon

