

THE LONG EXILE

At just thirty-four years of age, Her Majesty's life was altered suddenly and completely as she found herself in exile in China with His Majesty the King Father. In July 1972, during one of the few interviews ever granted by Her Majesty, she confided that she had changed.¹¹

*"In the past, I never had a political life. I never participated in politics. My sole concern was the Red Cross and my official duties as wife of the Head of State."*¹²

She added that since the coup d'état, she had been compelled to participate actively in political life, developing an awareness of international affairs and, of course, of circumstances within Cambodia.

*"My life before was very simple....but now, it is a bit more complicated. After the liberation (of Cambodia), I think it will continue to be so."*¹³

When that interview took place in the northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang in July 1972, it was unthinkable that Cambodia would be liberated from the pro-U.S. regime of Lon Nol only to fall prey to the whims of Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge, who placed the King Father, Queen Mother and their immediate family under house arrest.

In Peking, the Queen Mother assisted the King Father with secretarial work, including the classification of letters, news cables and press cuttings which contained news about events back home in Cambodia.

In the same interview, she confided that even though this kind of work was completely new to her, it was an important part of her dedication to the liberation of Cambodia. She also continued her activities as President of the Cambodian Red Cross under the



The Queen Mother during a visit to the Summer Palace outside Peking, 1970s.

尊敬的諾曼敦. 西哈努克國王閣下:
頃收到你親手做的三種名貴
菜, 特向你表示衷心地忠謝! 你
親手做的菜, 看起來很美好, 吃起來
一定更美味. 你對我們的非常
珍貴的友誼, 使我們非常感動!
現由複製, 專誠致謝. 請你
接收我們最誠摯的敬意和良好
的友誼和祝福. 同樣向你的夫
人致意!
鄧穎超 周恩來
一九七〇年七月

A handwritten message from Madame Deng Yingchao and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, 1970.

**Translation of Zhou Enlai's letter to Norodom Sihanouk
Dated 7 February 1972**

Respected Samdech Norodom Sihanouk

We have received the three dishes which you have cooked yourself for us. These dishes were beautiful to look at and certainly delicious. We were very touched by this extraordinary gesture of your precious friendship towards us. We would like to waste no time in sending you a few words to thank you.

Please accept the expression of our high esteem as well as friendship and best regards, which we also convey to Princess Monique.

**Deng Yingchao
Zhou Enlai**

7 February 1972

framework of the newly-established Royal Government of the National Union of Cambodia (GRUNC).

Immediately after the coup in March 1970, the Queen Mother felt betrayed and disillusioned by the actions of many persons in Phnom Penh whom she had considered to be good friends:

*“It was precisely these people whom I considered good friends who were the first to betray me.”*¹⁴

Indeed, soon after the 18 March 1970 coup, a well-orchestrated campaign began in earnest against Samdech Norodom Sihanouk and the Queen Mother’s immediate family, who were accused of gunrunning for the Vietcong.¹⁵ There was no evidence whatsoever for such allegations and in fact, in the early 1990s, declassified U.S. and Australian reports suggested that the arms, mostly Chinese, had been smuggled by a shadowy Chinese-Cambodian named Kuch An, who was operating while in exile in Hong Kong.¹⁶

Kuch An was an associate of Lon Nol who had been exiled from Cambodia in 1967 following a dispute with Cambodian officials over the extent of bribes paid for their cooperation in the smuggling activities.¹⁷ He had settled in Hong Kong and co-founded the Hak Ly Transport Company, based in Cambodia, as well as a Hong Kong shipping company whose ships were used to transport arms to the Vietcong.¹⁸

On 24 March 1970, the Queen Mother spoke at a press conference in Peking and stated that *“neither she nor her husband held large personal fortunes and that neither had bank accounts in Britain or Switzerland.”*¹⁹

The Queen Mother added, *“Our names are being dragged in the mud. Our enemies are pouring out an endless stream of lies about us.”*²⁰

When the above allegations, deemed by intelligence agencies to be *“presumptive evidence,”* failed to produce any positive outcome, the campaign changed tactics and the late monarch and the Queen Mother were alleged to have left Cambodia in January 1970 with cases of gold which were used to fund the construction of their residences in Peking and Pyongyang!

This allegation was also false. The residences in Peking and Pyongyang were placed at the disposal of the King Father and the Queen Mother by the governments of the People’s Republic of China and the D.P.R of Korea, respectively.

After the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia, a last attempt was made to denigrate the Queen Mother through the allegation that she felt so optimistic about her future that, in September 1975, she had ordered a crown for herself from Cartier in Paris, one of the world’s most expensive and fashionable jewelers.²¹

By the time this allegation was published by what was a reputable magazine in Hong Kong, the King Father, the Queen Mother and their two children were already prisoners of the Khmer Rouge in the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh, while many members of the immediate Royal Family of the King Father had disappeared at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, never to be seen alive again.

As King Sihamoni has recalled:

“Many people do not realize that we lost two sisters and three brothers during the war, as well as eleven



TOP: The King Father, the Queen Mother and members of their immediate family after a badminton game in Peking, 1970s. LEFT: The King Father and the Queen Mother during one of the tours of “liberated Cambodia” organized by the Khmer Rouge leadership, 1976.



TOP: The Queen Mother accompanied by Madame Kim Il Sung, visiting a factory in Pyongyang, 1970s. BOTTOM: Their Majesties visiting the tomb of the late President Josip Broz Tito of the former Yugoslavia, 1980s.





TOP: The Queen Mother and her elder sister, Princess Sisowath Anne-Marie (Nanette), taking care of Her Majesty Queen Sisowath Kossamak in Peking, 1974. BOTTOM: King Norodom Sihamoni, the Queen Mother, the King Father and Madame Deng Yingchao (wife of Zhou Enlai), 1979.







The Queen Mother in Paris after their liberation from the Khmer Rouge, 1979.

of their children. The four of us were imprisoned in the Palace, along with three women who were close friends of my mother.”²²

Exile life in Peking consisted of work in the Secretariat of Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, where the Queen Mother assisted with his correspondence as well as performed her own duties as President of the Cambodian Red Cross under the framework of the Royal Government of the National Union of Cambodia. The Queen Mother interrupted her duties only for a lunch break followed by a brief rest, after which she continued her work. In the evenings, they played badminton or watched movies.

Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and his wife, Deng Yingchao, were the perfect hosts and often visited or sent freshly-prepared dishes to the Royal couple, always accompanied by brief words of encouragement and friendship. The Chinese also scheduled visits to ancient sites and new developments around China, where the royal couple were always welcomed with great respect and camaraderie.

Samdech Norodom Sihanouk also prepared Cambodian or French dishes for the Chinese Prime Minister and his wife, who took such great care of them.

During March and April 1973, the Queen Mother was courageously at the side of the King Father as the late King undertook the long journey back to Cambodia via the Ho Chi Minh trail for a visit that lasted almost a month. In her diary, the Queen Mother noted that they were constantly in danger of being bombed by U.S. planes.

She was also at the side of the King Father when he paid State visits to Albania, Romania and the former Yugoslavia in July 1973, and then again in 1974 and 1975 on visits to

several African countries and on return visits to the above-named countries, which were strong supporters of the Royal Government of the National Union of Cambodia (GRUNC).

In November 1973, Her Majesty Queen Sisowath Kossamak was allowed to leave Cambodia to rejoin Samdech Norodom Sihanouk in China. The Queen Mother supervised all the arrangements to make Her Majesty's stay in China as comfortable as possible.



As President of the Cambodian Red Cross under the framework of GRUNC, the Queen Mother visited a hospital in Hanoi after a U.S. bombing, 1970s.