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The CAMBODIA DAILY

Man Finds Siblings Among Photos of KR Victims

Dene-Hern Chen

October 10, 2012

A Cambodian man now living in the U.S. has become the first person to successfully identify his family members among a selection of photographs of victims of the S-21 prison camp that was donated to the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) two months ago.

Bo Tep, who up until August 2011 was a professor at the Santa Clara University in California, started searching DC-Cam's online database for his brother and sister's names after he heard about the cache of photographs through the media, said Youk Chhang, DC-Cam's director.

"He heard about the new photos, and he went to our website and found the names of his brother and sister in our database, which means we also have their files already," said Mr. Chhang.

Mr. Chhang explained that after DC-Cam's staff found the biographies of Mr. Tep's sister, Tep Suong Bopha, and his brother, Tep Bun Mony, they cross-referenced them with the photographs in the recently donated collection, and found that they matched. Mr. Tep confirmed Friday in an email to Mr. Chhang that the photographs were of his long lost brother and sister.

"Thank you for your help in providing the enclosed information about my brother and sister. This enclosed information would provide some level of closure for my family regarding our brother and sister," Mr. Tep said.

Mr. Tep could not be reached for comment.

While many of the photographs of S-21 victims feature visibly terrified individuals clad in black, Mr. Tep's siblings are pictured dressed in casual clothing. Tep Bun Mony, who, according to DC-Cam, was a university student at the time the photo was taken, is seen grinning and wearing a light-colored shirt. And Tep Suong Bopha, who worked at the National Bank of Cambodia, is a short-haired woman in a casual T-shirt.

The biographies for the pair show that they were both arrested on September 1, 1976. Although prison records state that Tep Suong Bopha and Tep Bun Mony were in fact imprisoned at S-21, the only sign that the photographs were taken at the prison are the tags used to document Khmer Rouge prisoners that are pinned at their necks.

“When you think of Tuol Sleng, you think of black clothing and people looking horrible, but we researchers have seen photos of people in normal clothes. This is usually worn by people who return from abroad,” Mr. Chhang said.

Mr. Tep is the first person to have been successful in finding family members in the new cache of 1,427 photographs, which were donated anonymously in August, DC-Cam’s Deputy Director Eng Kok-Thay said.

“We are happy to find his family for him and provide him with some sort of closure,” he said.

He added that DC-Cam receives more than 100 requests each year from Cambodians looking for their missing family members, and only about 20 percent of them are successful in finding their loved ones.