

RCAPS Seminar

July 4th, 2012

The Establishment of the National
Language in 20th Century Cambodia:
Debates on Orthography and Coinage

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The term of ADL: Spring Semester AY2012

- ◇ Early April: Several libraries at Tokyo
- ◇ Late April – May: Cambodia
- ◇ June: Academic conferences in Japan
- ◇ July – Early Sept.: Cambodia
- ◇ Middle of Sept.: Some events of the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize

Research Topics

- ◇ Cambodian Buddhism from the colonial era
 - ◇ language policies
 - ◇ educational policies
 - ◇ politics concerned with national boundaries
- > All of them are interrelated.
- > Today's topic: language policies
- ◇ Japanese version -> published in June 2012
 - ◇ English version -> under peer review

0. Introduction

- ◇ Most of Cambodian constitutions has prescribed Khmer as the official language.
- ◇ The ethnic Khmers make up about 90% of the Cambodian nationals.
- ◇ Is it natural that the ethnic language of the majority became the national one?
- ◇ The establishment of a national language is quite a political issue.
e.g. Japanese case -> note 2, p.3
e.g. mainland Southeast Asia -> note 3, p.3

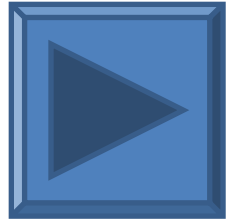
0. Introduction (cont.)

- ◇ few previous studies in Cambodian studies
- ◇ Penny Edwards -> the national language in the colonial period
- ◇ Khin Sok -> Khmerization movement from the late 1960s
- ◇ Coinage of socialist jargons
- ◇ My paper tackles issues of the establishment of orthography and the coinage of modern vocabulary.

1. Compilation of the Khmer Dictionary

- ◇ Indian scripts in mainland Southeast Asia
- ◇ Their orthography can select etymological and phonemic styles.
- ◇ Thai -> the former, Laos -> the latter
- ◇ Cambodia -> A Khmer dictionary published in 1938 decided to choose etymological style
- ◇ However, there had been serious disputes since the beginning of the 20th century.

1. Compilation of the Khmer Dictionary (cont.)



- ◇ [The fifth version of this dictionary](#)
- ◇ Its preface and book review by George Coedès
- ◇ [Chuon Nat & Huot Tat](#)
- ◇ They spearheaded a reform of the Mohanikay sect from the 1920s.
- ◇ They were deeply concerned with the language policies in independent Cambodia.
- ◇ Chuon Nat settled the dispute on orthography.

វចនានុក្រមខ្មែរ

DICTIONNAIRE CAMBODGIEN



ភ្នំពេញ

ការផ្សាយរបស់ពុទ្ធសាសនបណ្ឌិត្យ

គ.ស. ២៥១១

គ.ស. ១៩៦៧

The fifth version
of Chuon Nat's
dictionary (1967)



Choun Nat
(1883-1969)



Huot Tat
(1891-1975)

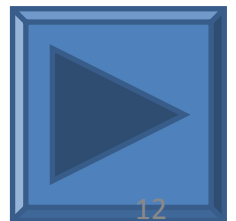


2. Loanwords between the Khmer and Thai languages

- ◇ Interaction between Khmer and Thai
- ◇ The old Khmer words -> Thai
esp. royal wording
- ◇ Still now, many borrowing words are used in the Thai language.
- ◇ Such a relation gradually reversed the flow.
- ◇ The Khmer syntax became influenced by Thai in the 18th century at the latest.

2. Loanwords between the Khmer and Thai languages (cont.)

- ◇ From the middle of the 19th century
- ◇ Cambodian royal culture and Buddhism were influenced by Siam.
- ◇ King Norodom (r. 1860-1904) and King Sisowath (r. 1904-1927) were raised at the royal palace in Bangkok.
- ◇ Cambodian Buddhist monks went to Siam to study the Pali language.





2. Loanwords between the Khmer and Thai languages (cont.)

- ◇ re-importation of the old Khmer words
- ◇ modern jargons made in Siam were imported to Cambodia

e.g. kingdom

e.g. state slogan “nation, religion, king”

- ◇ On the other hand, there are many Cambodian-made modern words.

e.g. month names on the Gregorian (solar) calendar -> table 1, p.31

3. The Establishment of the Cultural Committee

- ◇ During the WWII, French Indochina had been under the dual control of Vichy France and Japan.
- ◇ On March 12, 1945, Cambodia declared first independence under the Japanese military rule.
- ◇ On March 24, 1945, the Cultural Committee was founded to replace loanwords from French with Khmer.
- ◇ French return made independence withdrawn and the Committee dissolved.

3. The Establishment of the Cultural Committee (cont.)

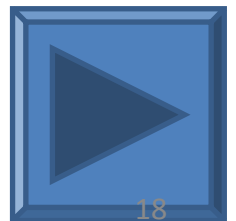
- ◇ After her return, France approved Cambodian partial autonomy.
- ◇ The Cultural Committee was re-established on Nov. 27, 1947.
- ◇ Chuon Nat and Huot Tat played vital roles as the vice president (table 2, pp.32-33).
- ◇ Nhok Thaem (Ex-monk who had studied in Siam, novelist and secretary general of the Buddhist Institute)

3. The Establishment of the Cultural Committee (cont.)

- ◇ These Buddhist monks were proficient in Sanskrit, Pali, old Khmer, Thai and French.
- ◇ Nhok Thaem had attainment of Pali and Thai.
- ◇ Their language ability contributed to differentiating Khmer modern vocabulary from Thai.

4. Coinage of the Cultural Committee

- ◇ [The *Kambuja Suriya*](#) by the Buddhist Institute
- ◇ This magazine carried two serials of the word lists presented by the Cultural Committee.
- ◇ Table 3, p.34 analyzes etymology of the words on the first serial, and Table 4, p.35 did the same for the second.





CAMPUCHEA SAURIYA

Revue Mensuelle

N° 7



*Éditée par le Bibliothèque Royale
du Cambodge*

PHNOM-PENH
IMPRIMERIE NOUVELLE ALBERT PORTAIL

1927



កម្ពុជាស្រុក

ទស្សនាវដ្តី ផ្សាយអក្សរសាស្ត្រសាសនា និង អក្សរសាស្ត្រទូទៅ



រូបចម្លាក់ គោ នន្ទិន យានជំនិះរបស់ព្រះសិវៈ (ភ្នំគូលែន)

ឆ្នាំទី ៦០ លេខ ១
ព.ស ២៤៤៨

ខែ មករា - កុម្ភៈ - មីនា
គ.ស. ២០០៦

គំរូពេញ



កម្ពុជាស្រុក

ទស្សនាវដ្តី ផ្សាយអក្សរសាស្ត្រសាសនា និង អក្សរសាស្ត្រទូទៅ



រូបស្តីសហស្រវត្តិ (ក្បាលស្ពាន ភ្នំព្រះពិល) ដើម ស.វ ទី ១១

ឆ្នាំទី ៦០ លេខ ២
ព.ស ២៤៤០

ខែ មេសា - ឧសភា - មិថុនា
គ.ស ២០០៦

គំរូពេញ

4. Coinage of the Cultural Committee (cont.)

- ◇ The early issues of the first serial shows that many Thai-made modern jargons were selected in the fields of law and administration.
- ◇ From the fourth issue (Aug. 1947) Khmer vocabulary diverged from the Thai equivalent.
- ◇ The Cultural Committee preferred Pali to Sanskrit which had been used in Siam to create modern jargons.

4. Coinage of the Cultural Committee (cont.)

- ◇ A similar tendency can be seen in the second serial.
- ◇ The Cultural Committee tried to differentiate Khmer from Thai by using Pali rather than Sanskrit.
- ◇ The Buddhist monks and ex-monks proficient in these Indian classical languages and Thai contributed to this task.

5. Responses to the Dictionary, Orthography and Coinage

- ◇ [leu Koeus](#) (pp.12-13)
- ◇ born at Battambang in 1905, where Siam had territorialized until 1907
- ◇ skilled at the Thai language
- ◇ the leader of the Democratic Party from 1947
- ◇ member of the Cultural Committee
- ◇ assassinated by a hand grenade in 1950





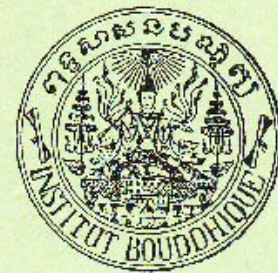
លោក អៀង ភីស

(១៩០៥ - ១៩៥០)

អៀង . ភីស

ភាសាខ្មែរ

ការពង្រឹងពិនិត្យដោយរកបេតុផល



ភ្នំពេញ

ការផ្សាយរបស់ពុទ្ធសាសនាមណ្ឌល

ព.ស. ២៥៣៩ (២២១)

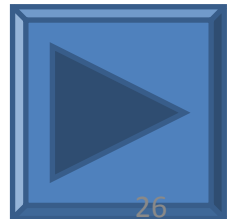
5. Responses to the Dictionary, Orthography and Coinage (cont.)

- ◇ his book, *the Khmer Language*
- ◇ different spelling from Chuon Nat's
- ◇ comparison of Thai and Khmer, without mentioning modern jargons
- ◇ comparison of Khmer and the Indian classical languages, without mentioning coinage of the modern vocabulary
- ◇ diversity of narratives on Cambodian culture
- ◇ His influence is limited.

5. Responses to the Dictionary, Orthography and Coinage (cont.)

◇ [Keng Vannsak](#)

- ◇ new generation educated only in French
- ◇ went to France to study
- ◇ one of the young leaders of the Democratic Party
- ◇ After independence, he taught at Royal University of Phnom Penh, etc.
- ◇ His students would carried out reforms of coinage and orthography.





កេង-វ៉ាន់សាក់

KENG-VANNSAK

មូលភាពនៃការបង្កើតពាក្យថ្មី

PRINCIPES DE CREATION DES MOTS NOUVEAUX

ភាគទី ១ - រូបវិស័យ

ជាមូលដ្ឋានឧត្តមសិក្សា
(វេយ្យាករណ៍ - អក្សរសិល្ប៍ - សម្បទាវិជ្ជា)

5. Responses to the Dictionary, Orthography and Coinage (cont.)

- ◇ his book, *Principes de création des mots nouveaux*
- ◇ new method of coinage “Khmerization”
- ◇ to supersede Sanskrit/Pali with contemporary Khmer
- ◇ without mentioning Thai influence, nor its elimination
- ◇ It is obvious Keng Vannsak criticized Chuon Nat and the Cultural Committee.

5. Responses to the Dictionary, Orthography and Coinage (cont.)

- ◇ Keng Vannsak's opinion influenced his friends and students, who became professors, teachers, and inspectors.
- ◇ They succeeded in changing the teaching language from French to Khmer in 1967.
- ◇ A new educational magazine entitled ***Khmerization*** was launched in order to fulfill their purpose.

6. The Educational Magazine

Khmerization

- ◇ This magazine did not merely aimed to change the teaching language, but also modify the Khmer modern vocabulary.
- ◇ Table 5, p.36 -> etymology of word lists presented in the ***Khmerization*** magazine
- ◇ They tried to reduce Sanskrit/Pali.
- ◇ Loanwords from French were not eliminated from their proposal.

7. A Reform of Orthography

- ◇ The members of the Khmerization movement stepped further to a reform of orthography.
- ◇ They tried to revise the spellings of diphthongs and to abolish a few independent vowel signs.
- ◇ Their reform lacked thoroughness, partly because etymological style was used for Sanskrit/Pali words, while phonemic one was applied only for loanwords from French.

7. A Reform of Orthography (cont.)

- ◇ The Lon Nol government, which had overthrown the Sihanouk regime in 1970, accepted this revised orthography in 1972.
- ◇ After the fall of the Pol Pot regime, the People's Revolutionary Party decided to use the 1972 orthography.
- ◇ In 2009, the incumbent government decided to revive Chuon Nat's spelling.

8. Conclusion

- ◇ From the early 20th century, Buddhist monks and ex-monks proficient in the Indian classical language, French and Thai played vital roles in language policies.
- ◇ They succeeded in establishing etymological style of orthography and coining Pali-originated modern vocabulary.
- ◇ They tried to differentiate Khmer from Thai.
- ◇ They found Otherness in Thai culture.

8. Conclusion (cont.)

- ◇ Nation and its culture are essentially heterogeneous.
- ◇ Nationalism usually requires the existence of “Other(s)”.
- ◇ In the case of Cambodia, Siam/Thailand and its culture were (and are) conspicuous “Other” for “us” or “we the Khmers”.
- ◇ Elimination and oblivion of Thai influence can often be seen in the formation of Cambodian national culture.

8. Conclusion (cont.)

- ◇ Later generation educated in French did not problematized Thai influence, but tried to “purify” and “simplify” Khmer by excluding influence of the Indian classical languages.
- ◇ Their reforms were halfway.
- ◇ Finally Cambodian national language returned to the achievements of Chuon Nat, who *inter alia* had constructed Cambodian national culture.