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# The Establishment of the National Language in Twentieth-Century Cambodia: Debates on Orthography and Coinage

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This paper explores the process in which an ethnic Khmer language became the national one in Cambodia, through a discussion of activities and debates concerned with orthography and coinage of the modern vocabulary.

The committee for editing a Khmer dictionary established in 1915 consisted of both members who insisted on an etymological style of orthography and those who favored a phonemic style. A Buddhist monk Chuon Nath took the initiative from 1926 on and published the first Khmer-language dictionary in 1938. After the perfection of orthography based on an etymological style in the dictionary, the “Cultural Committee” began to create new vocabularies in 1947. Here again Chuon Nath assumed leadership with his best friend Huot Tat. The Cultural Committee rejected Sanskrit-originated words created in Siam and preferred the Pali language as elements of the modern vocabulary.

Keng Vannsak objected strongly to these activities and claimed that the Khmer language had to exclude as many Sanskrit/Pali-originated words as possible in order to expand primary education. In 1967 the National Assembly recognized Khmer as the teaching language in schools, and a new educational magazine *Khemarayanakam* [Khmerization] was launched. In the process of editing this magazine, the followers of Keng Vannsak presented another way of coinage that they alleged was much easier, and advocated a new orthography. Even after the civil war, their new orthography continued to be used in education and media. In 2009, however, orthography recurred to the dictionary.

Through a study of the vicissitudes of language policies, we can understand the formation and development of Cambodian cultural nationalism. By the early 1960s, Buddhist monks were attempting to differentiate Cambodian modern vocabulary from Thai. Thereafter advocates of Khmerization, who no longer learned the Thai language, aimed at the “purification” and “simplification” of the Khmer language.

**Keywords:** national language, the Khmer language, orthography, coined words, loanwords, the Cultural Committee, Khmerization

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## Introduction

Article No. 2 of the first Cambodian Constitution promulgated by the Royal Government on May 6, 1947 provided that Cambodian was the official language (Jennar 1995, 37).<sup>1)</sup> The People's Republic of Kampuchea, which came into power after overthrowing the Pol Pot regime in 1979, amended the Constitution in order to abandon socialism in 1989 and stipulated that the official language and script was Khmer. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia in force, which was adopted on September 24, 1993 after the election supervised by UNTAC, prescribes Khmer as the official language and script (Huot Vutthy ca. 1998; Jennar 1995). Since ethnic Khmers allegedly make up about 90 percent of the Cambodian nationals,<sup>2)</sup> it seems natural that the Khmer language has been chosen as the official language and functions as the national one.

So political is the enactment of a national language, however, that many case studies have explored its significance for nation-building. For example, several languages in France regarded as “patois” or dialects have been oppressed since the French Revolution. Many books have also been published since the late 1990s addressing the relationship between the establishment of the national language and nationalism in modern Japan.<sup>3)</sup> In the same way, recent works on mainland Southeast Asia are searching for methods to combine sociolinguistic and nationalism studies.<sup>4)</sup>

Meanwhile, Cambodian studies have failed to amass knowledge on this issue. Scrutinizing magazines and newspapers in the 1930s and 1940s in her PhD dissertation and book, Penny Edwards (1999; 2007) refers to the first Khmer dictionary, mostly edited by a Buddhist monk named Chuon Nath (Edwards 2007, 249), and often mentions the establishment of the national language in colonial Cambodia. But the colonial period did not see the complete development of the national language, because the coinage of new

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1) Archives Nationales du Cambodge (hereafter ANC) DC 107 រដ្ឋធម្មនុញ្ញប្រទេសកម្ពុជា ca. 1947.

2) The national census of 2008 asked Cambodian residents about their mother tongues rather than their ethnicity, which was deemed too sensitive for some minority groups. Ninety six percent of the population declared that their native language was Khmer. The government and public media have appropriated this result to claim that a large portion of Cambodian nationals consists of ethnic Khmers (Schliesinger 2011, 183). This episode reveals that the perception of Cambodia as a multi-ethnic country is still weak. In the middle of the 1950s, ethnic minorities mostly living in the mountainous regions and Islamic Cham people were integrated into “we Khmer” and were called “Khmer *loe* (upper Khmer)” and “Khmer Islam” respectively, while Vietnamese and Chinese have been excluded as “outsiders” and “others” (Edwards 1996, 55; Mohamad Zain Bin Musa 2001, 2; Heder and Ledgerwood 1996, 19).

3) For instance, Kawamura (1994), Komori (2000), Koyasu (2003), Lee (1996), Mashiko (2003), Osa (1998), Sakai (1996), Shi (2005), and Yasuda (1997).

4) Imai (1997; 2001) and Iwatsuki (1995; 1999; 2005) on Vietnam; Driller (1991) and Tanaka (2003) on the Thai case; and Ivarsson (2008), Kikuchi (1997), and Yano (2008; 2013) on Laos, are examples.

vocabularies, which fill out a modern language, was carried out during the transition to and after the achievement of independence.

Khin Sok's works (1999a; 1999b) are one of the few studies on language policies in independent Cambodia. He mainly discusses Khmerization from the middle of the 1960s. His article (1999a) is noteworthy for its presentation of a memorandum written by a participant of the Khmerization movement. Although he refers to the activities of the Cultural Committee founded before the movement, he is not precise about the founding year of the Committee;<sup>5)</sup> nor does he fully analyze the Committee's coinage and its etymology.

While the papers concerned with socialist jargons after the Pol Pot regime can also be regarded as sociolinguistic studies on Cambodia (Mikami 1998; Picq 1984), coinage during the decisive period from the last years of colonization to the 1960s has to be revisited to elucidate the process by which an ethnic language became the Cambodian national one. In the first chapter, therefore, this paper traces the path to the publication of the first Khmer dictionary, which established an etymological style of orthography. Secondly, the membership and activities of the Cultural Committee are discussed to analyze coinage of modern vocabularies from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. Finally, introducing some opinions on and objections to the orthography and coinage accomplished chiefly by the Buddhist monks, we try to shed light on the meandering road the Cambodian national language has followed to date.

## I Compilation of the Khmer Dictionary

Mainland Southeast Asian languages, of which scripts are derived from Indian civilization, have two options of orthography: etymological style spelling the silent letter(s) at the end of a word, and phonemic style, which tries to conform the spelling of a word as closely as possible to its pronunciation. While Thailand selected the former and Laos the latter, Book One of the Khmer dictionary brought out in 1938 settled the dispute from the early twentieth century as to which style Cambodia would choose. The preface of the fifth version of the dictionary by Chuon Nath (1967) and its review in the *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* by George Coédès (1938) introduce the debates and disagreement among the members of the committee for editing the dictionary. This section refers as well to the primary sources preserved at the National Archives of Cambodia, and

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5) Khin Sok (1999a, 298; 1999b, 40–41) quotes François Martini's article in which the founding year of the Committee is stated as 1946, but as described below, the Committee was actually established in 1945 for the first time and became active after its reestablishment in 1947.

surveys the process of concluding orthography.

Although the spelling of the Khmer letters in the nineteenth century tended toward etymological style to a certain extent, Sanskrit- and Pali-originated words did not always follow etymology, and those from old Khmer sometimes had a few kinds of spelling. For instance, the entry words in the *Khmer-French Dictionary* edited by Etienne Aymonier (1878) show that plural possibilities were not considered as cacography in many cases. Under these circumstances, the *arrêté* No. 72 of the Résident Supérieur au Cambodge (hereafter, RSC) on November 23, 1904 created a committee for revising the Khmer script that included among its members, the chief of the educational bureau, Sangharaja of the Mohanikay sect.<sup>6)</sup> On September 12, 1911 the RSC proclaimed another decree for establishing orthography and developing a Khmer-language typewriter,<sup>7)</sup> but these decrees did not seem to have had much success. It was not until 1915 that the argument over the orthographic issue came to the foreground.

Royal Ordinance No. 67, September 4, 1915 inaugurated the committee for editing a Khmer dictionary, whose members were the War and Education Minister Ponn, Prince Pheanuvong, Prince Sothearos, a famous poet Oknha Sottan Preichea Inn (transcribed as Ukñā Suttantaprijā Ind), etc.<sup>8)</sup> Royal Ordinance No. 88 on November 15, 1919 added new members, and Huot Tat, who had spearheaded the reform of the Mohanikay, the largest sect of Cambodian Buddhism, in collaboration with Chuon Nath, participated in the committee.<sup>9)</sup> This gave rise to discord over etymological or phonemic style.<sup>10)</sup> There are no documents detailing the stances of the committee members, but it is inferred that Buddhist monks who thought it important to learn the Pali language took sides with etymological style. On the other hand, advocates of the phonemic style favored a spelling closer to pronunciation, even if it meant creating a new vowel sign. With confrontation aggravating, the committee reached a deadlock. The members turned to experts of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) such as Louis Finot, but he only gave an equivocal reply that even the phonemic style could express the origins of the words derived from Sanskrit/Pali (Cœdès 1938, 317).

6) *Bulletin Administratif du Cambodge*, 3(11), November 1904, p. 405.

7) *Bulletin Administratif du Cambodge*, 10(9), September 1911, pp. 473–474.

8) *Bulletin Administratif du Cambodge*, 14(9), September 1915, p. 482.

9) *Bulletin Administratif du Cambodge*, 18(11), November 1919, p. 904.

10) Edwards (2007, 192) relates that the adoption of the Battambang and Siemreap dialects was one of the causes of the conflict. Cœdès (1938, 317–318), however, explains in his book review of the dictionary that it was the selection of the etymological or phonemic style that was problematic. Speaking of the dialects in the northwestern part of Cambodia, as Oknha Inn, who was born in Battambang, where the final consonant /r/ was articulated in those days, participated in the committee, he was able to indicate which words had the final consonant /r/ dropped in the pronunciation of the central plain dialects (*ibid.*, 316).

To break the impasse, Royal Ordinance No. 53 on July 19, 1926 founded a new committee to reexamine orthographic styles proposed by the former committee; Chuon Nath joined this new committee.<sup>11)</sup> The members of this new committee assembled twice on August 24 and September 8 of the same year, and finally determined to adopt the etymological style (*ibid.*, 319–320). Though the minutes of the Council of the Ministers’ assembly indicate that those who preferred the phonemic style did not consent to the decision,<sup>12)</sup> compilation of the dictionary was launched again under the leadership of Chuon Nath. He and Suzanne Karplès, in charge of the Conservatory of the Royal Library and secretary-general of the Buddhist Institute, became members of the committee for editing the dictionary, thanks to Royal Ordinance No. 78 on November 30, 1927.<sup>13)</sup> The Royal Library issued Book One of the Khmer dictionary in July 1938,<sup>14)</sup> and the Buddhist Institute, which merged with the Library on February 8, 1943,<sup>15)</sup> published Book Two by December of the same year<sup>16)</sup> and distributed it from the following month.<sup>17)</sup>

According to the preface to the fifth version, Chuon Nath describes how the spelling of the words handed down from old Khmer were based on the Angkorian inscriptions, and states that Sanskrit- and Pali-originated words should observe etymology and that a new vowel sign suggested by supporters of the phonemic style was rejected (Chuon 1967, kh). This dictionary served as a model of the Khmer alphabet until the Khmerization movement modified orthography, as mentioned below. On July 1, 1970, the head of state issued Edict No. 413, naming it the “dictionary of Samdach Chuon Nath.”<sup>18)</sup>

## II Loanwords between the Khmer and Thai Languages

It is well known that the Khmer and Thai languages have a long history of interaction; the old Khmer vocabulary in the Angkorian period was transmitted to Ayutthaya, and even today the Thai language employs many words borrowed from Khmer. The Khmer

11) *Bulletin Administratif du Cambodge*, 25(7), July 1926, p. 889.

12) ANC RSC Box No. 2928 (File No. 25338), Extrait du procès-verbal de la 511ème séance plénière du Conseil des Ministres tenue le 28 Octobre 1926 sous la Présidence de Monsieur le Résident Supérieur BAUDOIN.

13) ANC RSC 2928(25338), Ordonnance Royale N° 78, November 30, 1927.

14) ANC RSC 2544(22324), Lettre N° 619 Br du Conservateur de la BR à RSC, July 25, 1938.

15) *Journal Officiel de l’Indochine Française*, 13, February 13, 1943, pp. 423–426.

16) ANC RSC 2552(22348), Activité de l’IB pendant le mois de Décembre 1943, Rapport à Monsieur le RSC (Cabinet), December 30, 1943 (N° 124lib).

17) *Bulletin Administratif du Cambodge*, 43(11), March 16, 1944, p. 512. In Cambodia today, this dictionary is bounded into one volume.

18) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 26(57), July 22, 1970, p. 3057.

language had a function lacking in the Thai language that allows nouns to be created by inserting infixes into verbs. It is without a doubt that Thai words such as /dǎən/ (to walk) and its noun form /damnǎən/ (royal visit) with an infix were derived from the Khmer words /daə/ (to walk) and /dǎmnaə/ (travel).

This flow was gradually reversed. The Khmer language began to borrow many Thai words, and even the Khmer syntax became influenced by Thai in the eighteenth century at the latest (Huffman 1973, 507; Jacob 1993, 42). There are interesting examples of Thai words derived from old Khmer being reimported by the Khmers. When an old Khmer word *trvāc* (to guard), which had been adopted as ตระวจ /truat/ in Thai, reverted to Khmer, it became spelled as ត្រួត /truot/, with the final consonant becoming “t” because “c” at the end of a word is read as /t/ in the Thai language. If this old Khmer word had been conveyed to modern Khmer directly, the spelling would have been ត្រួច /truoc/.<sup>19)</sup>

In addition, Khmer vocabularies representing modern concepts have come under Thai influence. The current letterhead of documents issued by the Royal Government carries these words “The Kingdom of Cambodia” ព្រះរាជាណាចក្រកម្ពុជា /prəəh riəciənaacak kampuciə/ in the first line, and “Nation, Religion, King” ជាតិ សាសនា ព្រះមហាក្សត្រ /ciət sasnaə prəəh mǎhaa ksat/ in the second. Since the “Kingdom of Cambodia” was written as ក្រុងកម្ពុជាធិបតី /kroŋ kampuciəthipadəi/ in the colonial period,<sup>20)</sup> it is apparent that the word រាជាណាចក្រ belongs to the modern vocabulary.<sup>21)</sup> This word came from a Thai term ราชอาณาจักร /raatcha ‘aanaacak/ coined by the Siamese king Rama VI when he wanted an equivalent for the English word “kingdom” (Tomita 1997, 1270). From the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, members of the royal family and Buddhist monks in Cambodia were influenced by Siamese culture and its language. When translating modern concepts brought by the French, it is conceivable that they referred to the Thai modern vocabulary.

Nevertheless, whether Cambodian people recognize the Thai origin of such words depends on their education and knowledge of the Thai language. As described below, many modern Cambodian vocabularies are derived mostly from Pali as a result of the Cultural Committee’s activity. One needs to be well versed in these four languages to

19) Its noun form “*tamrvāc*” is also spelled as ต้ารวจ /tamrūt/ in Thai and ធ្ម្រួត /dǎmruot/ in modern Khmer. Michel Antelme (1996) analyzes this mutual influence in detail.

20) Because orthography had not been established yet, an alternative spelling កម្ពុជា was also used.

21) This word had been spelled as រាជានាចក្រ /riəcəə’ ‘aanaacak/, just like in Thai, but it was altered into រាជាណាចក្រ from the late 1960s. In Sanskrit and Pali, the compound of *rāja* and *āṇā* has to be spelled as *rājāṇā*, so someone proficient in these classical languages probably altered the Khmer spelling. This new spelling was reflected on the cover of Vol. 22, No. 76 of the Cambodian official gazette in the Khmer language, published on October 1, 1966, but the old spelling was still used in the main body of this issue.



grasp the similarity and mutual influence between Thai and Khmer. Here it is interesting to point out the resemblance in the interaction between the classical languages in mainland Southeast Asia and (classical) Chinese in East Asia—the latter also served as the source of modern jargons. In South Korea, a committee to purify the national language was established in June 1946 in order to exclude loanwords from Japanese. The committee prohibited many terms of apparently Japanese origin, for example, words that could not be written in Chinese characters or words written in Chinese characters but pronounced in the Japanese way (*kun yomi*). It was, however, difficult to detect metropolitan influence on many modern vocabularies created in Japan because they seemed “Chinese,” and most of them are still used in South Korea (Chung 2003, 237–250). In both East and Southeast Asia, nationalism often causes opinions about cultural influence from neighboring countries to be silenced. The origin of modern words based on classical languages are also often ambiguous, for the classical languages themselves, as well as other cultural elements such as religion, have often spilled over borders. Thus countries that may not have an amicable rapport with each other still find themselves using the same or similar modern terms.

Besides the modern word “kingdom,” King Rama VI also propagated the slogan “Nation, Religion, King” for the purpose of nation-building and state formation in Siam. As far as I know, it first appears in Cambodia in the preface to the Cultural Committee’s serial of word lists carried in the Khmer-language journal *Kambuja Suriya* in 1949. The preface was written by a famous novelist Nhok Thaem (1949, 243), who also published a book entitled *Nation, Religion, King* (1950) one year later. From 1918–30, when he had been ordained as a monk, Nhok Thaem had gone to Siam under the reign of King Rama VI to study. Nevertheless his works mention nothing about Siamese influence concerning this slogan. Owing to the Franco-Thai war in the early 1940s, the more explicitly Cambodian publishing media began to emphasize the differences between Cambodian and Thai cultures, and Siamese cultural influence was played down (Sasagawa 2006, 195–198). Nhok Thaem’s tacitness can be understood in this regard.

The names of the months on the Gregorian calendar too can be regarded as examples of the modern vocabulary. Some months in Khmer are the same as or similar to Thai while others are not. In colonial Cambodia, the Khmer alphabets had been used to write the names of months based on a direct translation from French (*janvier, février, mars*, etc.); the current appellation based on the signs of the zodiac was introduced in the late 1940s. The magazine *Kambuja Suriya* changed the terms on the cover from Vol. 19, No. 5 in May 1947, and the third serial of the word lists by the Cultural Committee proposed the new spellings in Vol. 21, No. 7, July 1949. Table 1 compares them with Thai and shows their etymology.



**Table 1** Comparison of the Names of Months in Thai and Khmer, and Their Etymology

	Thai	Khmer	Comparison	Etymology
January	makkaraa	mɛəʔkaʔraa	T=K	S=P
February	kumphaa	kompheəʔ	T=K	S=P
March	miinaa	miinaa	T=K	S=P
April	meesaa	meesaa	T=K	S=P
May	phruitsaphaa	ʔuʔsaʔphiə	T≠K	T<S, K<P
June	mithunaa	miʔthonaa	T=K	S=P
July	karakkadaa	kakkaʔdaa	T≠K	T<S, K<P
August	sihhaa	səihaa	T≠K	T<S, K<P
September	kanyaa	kaɲnaa	T≠K	T<S, K<P
October	tulaa	toʔlaa	T=K	S=P
November	phruitsacikaa	viccheʔkaa	T≠K	T<S, K<P
December	thanwaa	thnuu	T≈K	S=P

In this table, we should pay attention to differences rather than similarities. Half of the months (January, February, March, April, and October) have the same spelling, and the month December is alike in both languages. However, it is impossible to know whether they are based on Sanskrit or Pali, because these months have the same form in either. On the other hand, May, July, August, September, and November are different in Thai and Khmer; the former is derived from Sanskrit and the latter from Pali. Taking into account the above-mentioned months with the same or similar forms, the Thai names en masse are derived from Sanskrit and Khmer from Pali.

All in all the modern Khmer vocabulary was sometimes affected by Thai, but did not necessarily borrow the Thai equivalents. There are many Cambodian-made modern terms, created by the Cultural Committee.

### III Establishment of the Cultural Committee

Political autonomy stirs up longing for linguistic independence; the Cultural Committee was established to replace loanwords from French with modern Khmer terms. After the metropolis surrendered to the Nazis, French Indochina was subjected to the dual rule of the Vichy government and Japan during World War II. No sooner had the Japanese Army disarmed the French troops did the Kingdom of Kampuchea declare nominal independence on March 12, 1945. The Cultural Committee was created by Royal Ordinance (*Kram*) No. 13, March 24, 1945, with two sections in the committee to deal with national and foreign cultures. This ordinance decreed that Khmer be used as the teaching language from the following academic year, Khmer vocabulary for science and technology

be created, textbooks be edited and published, classics be chosen, foreign master pieces be translated, and foreign culture be diffused.<sup>22)</sup> Simultaneously the Royal Decree (*Kret*) No. 24 appointed members of the Committee (see Table 2). Chap Pin of the Buddhist Institute was named as secretary-general of the first section, dealing with national culture, and Kim Hak, chief of the propaganda bureau in the Ministry of National Education, was installed as chief of the second section for foreign culture.<sup>23)</sup>

Historical upheavals buffeted the Cultural Committee. The short-lived independence of the Kingdom of Kampuchea ended on December 14, 1945 with the defeat of the Japanese and the return of the French. As a result, Royal Ordinance No. 212, August 19, 1946 was issued, retracting the former Ordinance that founded the Cultural Committee, but not before making known to the public the remarkable accomplishments of the Committee.<sup>24)</sup> Although France recovered her dominance in Indochina, a Franco-Cambodian *modus vivendi* allowing for partial autonomy for Cambodia was signed in January 1946. There arose room for the Royal Government of Cambodia to draft language policies. This paved the way for Royal Ordinance No. 383, November 27, 1947 for the establishment of a Commission of National Education, with the Cultural Committee as its first section and the Educational Committee as its second.<sup>25)</sup>

Decree No. 3235 on December 16, 1947 issued by the National Education Minister nominated new Cultural Committee members, different from those in 1945 (Table 2).<sup>26)</sup> The position of president was filled by successive Ministers of National Education, and authority to manage the Committee was seemingly vested to the vice-president. Chuon Nath became vice-president and Huot Tat became a member. Through the 1950s and 1960s, even as other members came and went, the position of vice-president was almost invariably filled by either one of them, presumably because of their language competence.

When Chuon Nath passed away on September 25, 1969, Huot Tat published a memoir entitled *My Best Friend*, which provides detailed information about their experiences studying languages in their adolescence (Huot Tat ca. 1970, 2). From 1911 or so, both of them started to sojourn at Vat Unnalom, the head temple of the Mohanikay sect, and became acquainted with each other. While most Buddhist monks studied the Thai language and went to Siam to study Pali, Chuon Nath and Huot Tat felt it was necessary to study French, given that several decades had elapsed since the beginning of French

22) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 1(2), March 29, 1945, p. 40.

23) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 1(2), March 29, 1945, pp. 47–48.

24) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 2(32), August 15, 1946, p. 783.

25) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 3(42), November 27, 1947, pp. 1228–1229.

26) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 3(44), December 18, 1947, pp. 1292–1293.



Table 2 Members of the Cultural Committee (continued)

Name	Affiliations	1945 0324	1945 0827	1947 1216	1956 0105	1957 0202	1958 0102	1961 0308	1962 0103	1963 0930	1964 0225	1964 0640	1965 0907	1966 0312	1968 0831	1968 0314
		Kret 24	Kret 221	Prakas 3235	Prakas 3	Prakas 368	Prakas 24	Prakas 659	Prakas 28	Prakas 2925	Prakas 640	Prakas 2980	Prakas 1078	Prakas 2460	Prakas 554	Prakas 554
Pen So	school inspector			○												
Chum Tuot	Department of Tourism			○		○										
Svay So	member of the National Assembly			○												
Chau Sau	National Bank				○											
Meas Yuth	Jayavarman VII Museum				○											
Tan Kim Yuon [Huon]	Department of Water Supply and Forests					○										
Chau Seng	teachers college				○											
Pheng Kanthel	Department of hygiene				○											
Ho Tong Lip	School of agriculture					○										
Ouch Venn	not available						○									
Sam Thang	government official						○									
Meas Saem	ex-justice at the Supreme Court							○								
Mau Say	audit						○									
Keng Van Sak	teacher						○									
Khieu Komar	teacher						○									
Thao Kun	teacher						○									
Tep Yok	audit						○									
Eng Soth	president of a court						○									
Ros Ho	teacher						○									
Hell Samphar	Association of Khmer Writers						○									
Meas Chheng	Ministry of Information						○									
Sien Khandy	<i>Neak Cheathnyom</i> newspaper						○									
Aum Leng Eang	teacher						○									
Khuon Chhieck	technocrat, food and agriculture						○									
Soeur Kean	president, national radio station						○									
Dy Rang	Ministry of Religions and school inspector						○									
Oeur Kim San	Royal University of Fine Arts						○									

Source: *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, various issues.

Note: A double circle ○: vice-president; single circle ○: members.

colonization. They secretly began to take lessons first from a Khmer teacher, then a French teacher (*ibid.*, 4). In order to understand not only Theravada but also Mahayana Buddhism, they decided to learn Sanskrit, and were taught by an Indian peanut peddler who had knowledge of the language and Devanagari letters and who had come to the temple by chance (*ibid.*, 5).

In 1922 the Pali school at Phnom Penh was reorganized as the Ecole Supérieure de Pali (hereafter, ESP), with the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient being involved in its operation.<sup>27)</sup> Louis Finot visited the capital and informed the authorities about a plan to enroll monks in the EFEO at Hanoi and entrust them with the instruction at the ESP. The National Archives of Cambodia possesses a letter from the RSC second bureau to the Minister of War and Education, requesting for the recommendation of two monks.<sup>28)</sup> According to Huot Tat's memoir, Finot asked the ESP director Thaong to select suitable monks, and the latter proposed Chuon Nath and Huot Tat (*ibid.*, 37–39). From 1922–23 they studied in Hanoi under the French Orientalists; beside Sanskrit and Pali, Victor Goloubew taught Indian Buddhist history, Leonard Arousseau gave lessons on Chinese history, and Finot tutored in old Khmer and the way of reading Angkorian inscriptions (*ibid.*, 47).

According to Chuon Nath and Huot Tat's biographies, in addition to Sanskrit, Pali, French, and old Khmer, they were also able to converse in the Thai and Lao languages.<sup>29)</sup> It is likely that they displayed their language proficiency to the hilt while performing their duties as vice-presidents of the Cultural Committee.

Nhok Thaem was also appointed as a member of the Committee in 1947. He was born on June 22, 1906 in the village of Svay Po in Sangkae district, Battambang province, which belonged then to Siamese territory. He stayed in Siam after his ordainment in 1918, taking and passing the state examinations of the Pali language a few times. After returning to Cambodia in 1930, he participated in the committee for editing the Cambodian version of *Tripitaka*. Eight years later, he renounced priesthood and became the chief editor of *Kambuja Suriya* magazine. His novel *The Rose of Pailin*, published in 1947 when he was secretary-general of the Buddhist Institute, was considered one of the finest works of Cambodian modern literature and was used as a textbook for secondary education from 1958 (Jacob 1996, 76–77; Khing 1993, 54–56). His language ability and literary talent earned him membership in the Cultural Committee.

27) For the establishment and reorganization of these schools, see Sasagawa (2009, 10–11).

28) ANC RSC 2527 (22262), Lettre N° 10 du [RSC] 2ème Bureau, au Ministre de l'Instruction Publique, February 11, 1922.

29) Anonymous (1966a), Pon (1966), Trinh (1970), etc. are examples of Chuon Nath's biographies, and Anonymous (1966b) and Chea (1966) constitute Huot Tat's biographies.

Besides monks and staff of the Buddhist Institute, a few politicians were also installed as Committee members. Among them, the most renowned is Ieu Koeus, who was well known as president of the National Assembly and a “linguist” due to his book on the Khmer language. Just like Nhok Thaem, he was born in 1905 in a village in Sangkae, Battambang province, that was under Siamese control until 1907. He thus acquired an aptitude for Thai but studied at Lycée Sisowath in Phnom Penh and the commercial school in Hanoi. From 1940, when he was nominated to the colonial Chamber of Representatives of the People, Ieu Koeus began to engage in politics. He became Vice-Minister of Economics in 1945, when Cambodia achieved ostensible “independence” under Japanese military rule. The following year he joined the Democratic Party formed by Prince Sisowath Yuttevong and became its head after the prince’s sudden death on July 17, 1947. In the same year, Ieu Koeus published a book entitled *The Khmer Language*, discussed below. He became President of the National Assembly between 1948 and 1949. On January 14, 1950, he was assassinated by a hand grenade during the party’s convention (Corfield and Summers 2003, 168–169; Ieu 1947, kh–ch). Although he died young, while only in his mid-forties, his book is still in circulation in Cambodia today and he is seen as a “linguist” representative of the transitional period to independence.

By virtue of their careers and/or birthplaces, all the figures described in this section were proficient in the Thai language as well as Sanskrit, Pali, and French. While it was considered as a matter of course for Buddhist monks to learn Thai in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Battambang, which Siam possessed till 1907, afforded opportunities to become familiar with the language, even for the laity. When the Cultural Committee began its work, the influence of and differentiation from the Thai language would become a matter of grave concern for some members.

#### IV Coinage of the Cultural Committee

The *Kambuja Suriya* magazine ran the serials of word lists presented by the Cultural Committee twice: the first from April 1949–May 1951<sup>30)</sup> and the second from January 1961–April 1963. This section analyzes the etymology of these words<sup>31)</sup> and measures the ratio of loanwords from Sanskrit, Pali, Thai, French, and English, in order to discuss the extent to which modern Thai vocabulary influenced Khmer and whether the Com-

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30) Vol. 22, No. 6, June 1951 carries an erratum.

31) The analysis of etymology is based on Sakamoto (2001) and Tomita (1997).

mittee itself tried to create modern terms. The first issue on April 1949 was devoted to a comparison between French and Khmer jargons in the constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia promulgated in 1947. Dates of the Committee's meetings to decide on modern Khmer words appeared from the next issue on. Thanks to this dating, it is certain that the word lists were not made by the first Committee established in 1945, but by the second one in 1947.

Tables 3 and 4 represent the etymology of the two serials, and abbreviations in the tables are as follows: K=T indicates that both the etymology and spelling of the Khmer terms adopted by the Committee are the same as their equivalent in Thai;  $K \approx T$  indicates that the spellings are similar to each other. Although these two languages are based on the etymological style of orthography, their spellings are sometimes a little different from the original in Sanskrit or Pali. In the subcategories, S represents Sanskrit, P represents Pali. S+P designates the compounds of these two languages (such as “kingdom” mentioned above).  $K > T > K$  indicates that Khmer reborrowed Thai words originated from old Khmer, and loanwords from Thai to Khmer are designated as  $T > K$ .<sup>32)</sup> When the Committee coined a word different from Thai, it is categorized as  $K \neq T$ , in which K indicates that an old Khmer word has been transmitted; K+S, P is a compound of Khmer and Sanskrit/Pali; F is derived from French; and E from English.

Along with the jargon found in the 1947 constitution, the early issues of the first serial presented vocabulary concerned with administration and law. Khmer modern terms in these domains had become necessary with the arrival of French colonization. Consequently, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the Thai language was a prerequisite among royal family members and Buddhist monks who aspired to be intellectuals, many modern words coined in Siam were borrowed and used. The Cultural Committee did not try to eliminate these Thai-made terms, and the ratio of commonality between the Thai and Khmer modern jargon is fairly high at the outset of the first serial.

From the fourth issue (August 1947), which was dedicated to military parlance, Khmer vocabulary diverged from the Thai equivalent. Just like the name of months in the solar calendar, the Committee preferred Pali to Sanskrit—the number of words derived from Pali in the category  $K \neq T$  are thrice as many as those derived from Sanskrit. While the compounds of Khmer and Sanskrit/Pali (K+S, P) make up the largest portion, Pali was usually chosen as non-Khmer elements of the compounds. These characteristics show a stark contrast to the category  $K = T$ , in which Sanskrit is utilized more frequently than Pali.

32) Though the verb ជួយ /cuoi/ (to help) derived from ជួយ /chùai/ is counted as  $T > K$ , its noun form ជំនួយ /comnuoi/ with an infix is considered to be an original word in Khmer and classified as  $K \neq T$ .



Table 3 Coinage of the Cultural Committee (1)

Vol. (No.)	Year/month	Pages	K=T				K≠T				K	K+S,P	S	P	S=P	T>K	K≠T				Realms
			S	P	S=P	S+P	S	P	S=P	P							S	S=P	S+P	F	
21(4)	1949/04	244-254	4	3	5	2	1	2	3	9	0	0	6	2	12	4	0	0	0	1947 constitution	
21(5)	1949/05	341-344	7	4	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	12	7	11	2	1	0	0	law, administration	
21(7)	1949/07	508-514	4	2	22	0	0	0	3	5	0	3	4	12	34	5	0	3	0	month names, administration	
21(8)	1949/08	582-588	6	2	4	0	1	4	2	1	0	0	16	24	7	13	8	1	0	military	
21(9)	1949/09	675-681	9	7	11	1	1	7	5	3	0	0	18	18	8	28	6	3	1	administration, industry	
21(10)	1949/10	735-744	4	6	4	3	0	4	4	5	0	0	24	48	8	24	6	10	8	education	
21(11)	1949/11	825-838	5	5	6	0	1	9	1	8	1	3	27	57	5	28	0	3	3	ethics, linguistics	
21(12)	1949/12	906-912	2	1	4	0	0	1	2	4	0	0	18	25	2	16	9	2	1	agriculture, commerce	
22(2)	1950/02	85-94	3	1	3	3	3	2	2	5	0	2	26	41	4	25	5	2	11	medical care, botany	
22(5)	1950/05	329-332	3	1	8	0	0	1	3	2	0	0	11	15	4	4	2	2	4	garments, literature, architecture	
22(6)	1950/06	412-416	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	18	31	1	13	2	1	5	politics, occupation	
22(7)	1950/07	493-499	2	3	8	2	4	2	7	5	1	0	20	37	8	25	7	4	0	weather, education	
22(8)	1950/08	581-584	2	4	1	0	1	5	1	3	0	0	15	21	3	6	2	1	4	education	
22(9)	1950/09	657-660	3	4	7	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	15	11	4	12	5	0	0	education	
22(10)	1950/10	731-735	4	3	0	0	1	2	2	6	0	0	28	13	2	12	4	1	1	education	
22(11)	1950/11	825-828	2	2	0	0	0	4	2	3	1	0	8	13	1	13	7	4	0	law, military	
22(12)	1950/12	901-904	2	2	3	1	0	2	7	4	2	0	7	17	6	7	2	3	0	language, culture	
23(1)	1951/01	10-13	0	1	1	1	0	6	1	1	0	0	9	19	6	14	1	4	0	politics, occupation	
23(2)	1951/02	91-94	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	2	0	3	9	14	2	5	3	0	2	administration	
23(3)	1951/03	193-197	2	1	2	3	1	6	1	0	1	0	10	15	6	17	3	2	3	mathematics, diplomacy, military	
23(5)	1951/05	368-372	3	0	8	3	0	4	0	3	0	0	15	6	2	14	6	8	8	domestic science, diplomacy	
Total			68	53	107	19	14	63	48	74	6	14	311	450	92	333	89	52	54	0	1,847

Source: *Kambuja Suriya* 21(4), April 1949-22(6), June 1951

Table 4 Coinage of the Cultural Committee (2)

Vol. (No.)	Year/ month	Pages	K=T			K>T>K T>K			K≈T			K≠T			Realms						
			S	P	S=P	S	P	S=P	S	P	S=P	S	P	S=P							
33(1)	1961/01	57-58	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	14	3	4	5	8	3	0	weather, botany	
33(2)	1961/02	204	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	6	1	5	0	2	1	0	botany, commerce	
33(3)	1961/03	290	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	6	8	1	0	1	0	botany	
33(4)	1961/04	416	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	5	2	4	3	1	0	0	weather, medical care	
33(5)	1961/05	529	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	2	6	5	3	0	0	0	medical care, botany	
33(6)	1961/06	666	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3	4	7	2	0	3	0	botany, petrology	
33(7)	1961/07	782	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	5	8	0	0	4	0	petrology	
33(8)	1961/08	897	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	3	4	3	0	2	0	commerce	
33(9)	1961/09	1019	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	5	2	1	2	0	arts, biology	
33(10)	1961/10	1124	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	3	1	5	1	0	3	0	biology, shipping	
33(11)	1961/11	1292	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	6	1	0	3	0	0	0	shipping, medical care	
34(1)	1962/01	47	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	6	3	0	2	2	2	0	0	medical care, human relations	
34(2)	1962/02	203	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	7	5	0	5	0	0	2	0	medical care, gem	
34(3)	1962/03	314	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	law	
34(4)	1962/04	437	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	4	1	3	0	0	0	0	law	
34(5)	1962/05	566	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6	0	2	0	1	0	0	law	
34(6)	1962/06	685	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	2	0	0	0	0	law	
34(7)	1962/07	791	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	law	
34(8)	1962/08	938	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	law	
34(9)	1962/09	1028-1029	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	4	17	1	2	0	0	0	0	law	
34(10)	1962/10	1143-1145	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	30	2	1	0	0	0	0	law	
34(11)	1962/11	1254-1257	0	1	3	0	0	1	2	2	1	7	34	2	4	0	2	0	0	law	
34(12)	1962/12	1384-1387	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	24	2	13	2	3	0	0	law	
35(1)	1963/01	55-58	1	0	1	0	0	3	2	0	0	7	35	4	4	0	2	0	0	law	
35(2)	1963/02	185-188	1	3	0	2	0	0	2	1	0	8	40	0	3	0	0	0	0	law	
35(3)	1963/03	284-285	1	1	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	12	0	3	0	0	0	0	law	
35(4)	1963/04	397-398	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	law	
Total			4	14	17	5	0	16	10	13	4	3	107	286	48	101	27	22	21	0	698

Source: *Kambuja Suriya* 33(1), January 1961-35(4), April 1963

This tendency continued in the second serial from January 1961. The proportion of terms same as or similar to Thai is much smaller than in the first serial, because the Committee proposed more original Khmer words, which were mostly derived from Pali, as can be seen in the first serial. Among the compounds of Khmer and Sanskrit/Pali, which again constitute the majority, esoteric Pali words are occasionally employed. This would later come under criticism by advocates of Khmerization.

Analyzing the first and second serials, we can conclude that the Cultural Committee tried to differentiate Khmer from Thai by making use of Pali rather than Sanskrit, which had been utilized in Siam, for the purpose of creating an original modern Cambodian vocabulary. The fact that the Committee's coinage propositions were accepted to a certain degree explains the existence of many Pali-derived words in contemporary Cambodia. This result can be attributed to the Buddhist monks and ex-monks who mastered Thai as well as the Indian classical languages and who played vital roles in the Committee.

## V Responses to the Dictionary, Orthography and Coinage

Compilation of the dictionary, the establishment of orthography and coinage of the modern vocabulary executed by Chuon Nath and his comrades provoked controversies and objections once in a while. Ieu Koeus' book *The Khmer Language* and Keng Vannsak's opinion, inter alia, are examined in this section.

As described above, because Ieu Koeus was born and raised in Battambang, which was Siamese territory in 1905, his mother tongue was the dialect of that region, and he was fluent in the Thai language. In the early twentieth century, that dialect had been characterized by the articulation of the final consonant /r/, and the fact that diphthongs ឃៀ /iə/ and ឃៀ /éə/ were distinct (Ieu 1947, 9–12). A famous literate Oknha Inn,<sup>33)</sup> who also came from Battambang, joined the committee for editing a Khmer dictionary in 1915. His knowledge proved useful when the committee had to deliberate on the existence of the final consonant /r/, which those from the central plain could not distinguish (Coedès 1938, 316). Ieu Koeus's work, therefore, reveals nothing about the final consonant /r/ and the distinction between /iə/ and /éə/ in Chuon Nath's dictionary. He does, however, point out several misspellings in the dictionary, without providing any concrete examples, and suggests different spellings from Chuon Nath's (Ieu 1947, 4). Nonetheless, he asserts that the dictionary sets the standard, and since a national language cannot be established

33) His career and works are discussed in Hansen (2007, 35–44, 71–76) and Sasagawa (2006, 59–62).

unless a certain standard is observed (*ibid.*, 18), he exhorts compliance with the dictionary, even if it contains errors (*ibid.*, 19).

Ieu Koeus devotes many pages to the commonality between Thai and Khmer in *The Khmer Language*. According to him, the reasons why these two languages are similar to each other are threefold: Siam borrowed from the Khmer vocabulary in the first place, both languages contain many terms derived from Pali through a common belief in Buddhism, and finally the Siamese “returned the words” to the Khmers since the fall of the former capital Longvek to Siam in the late sixteenth century (*ibid.*, 25–26). Ieu Koeus presents examples of the loanwords from Thai (*ibid.*, 270) and reimportation of the old Khmer terms via Siam (*ibid.*, 275). In spite of the widespread trend of downplaying Siamese cultural influence in the Cambodian media from the early 1940s, when the Franco-Siamese war broke out, his academic and objective analyses are noteworthy in revealing the existence of diverse narratives in Cambodia.

Ieu Koeus goes into detail about loanwords derived from Sanskrit and Pali as well (*ibid.*, 230–240), and draws out lists comparing these languages with Khmer (*ibid.*, 240–254). But most words in these lists cannot be considered as modern vocabulary. There is also no mention of the influx of vocabulary from Siam in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though he became a member of the Cultural Committee in 1947, we do not know his opinion on its activities because he was assassinated in 1950 and left no other work than *The Khmer Language*.

Keng Vannsak, who also took part in the Democratic Party just before independence, held quite a different opinion from Ieu Koeus. While most of the protagonists mentioned above were able to understand the Thai language, he belonged to a new generation of intellectuals educated only in French. After graduating from Lycée Sisowath in Phnom Penh, he went to Paris to study in August 1946 and taught Khmer at the SOAS in London University from 1948 to 1950. In 1952 he organized a circle to read Marxist literature at Paris, in which future Khmer Rouge cadres, such as Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Hou Youn, and Thiounn Mum, participated. Upon his return to Cambodia in the same year, his alma mater offered him a teaching position; he was also attracted by political activities in the Democratic Party. In 1955 he seized the leadership of the Party with other young members, but was temporarily detained for suspected assassination of Sam Sary and Sim Var. Soon after the Sangkum Reastr Niyum to support the Sihanouk regime was founded, he left the political arena. After he assumed professorship at the National Institute of Education in 1958 and the Royal University of Phnom Penh and Sihanoukraj Buddhist University in the following year, he was able to exert a strong influence in the fields of pedagogy and literary studies.

The establishment of the Lon Nol regime in 1970 brought Keng Vannsak back to

the political stage as director of the Khmer-Mon Institute,<sup>34)</sup> a think tank of the regime. On September 1971 he moved to Paris as a delegate to UNESCO and occupied the position of chargé d'affaires of the Khmer Republic in France from October 1974 to April 12, 1975. Five days into his term, the Republic was overthrown by the Khmer Rouge, and Keng Vannsak had no choice but to stay on in Paris, where he took a critical stance against Democratic Kampuchea and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (Corfield and Summers 2003, 197–198; Khing 1993, 71–72). When he passed away overseas in December 2008, Prime Minister Hun Sen offered his condolences in a speech (Anonymous 2008).

In the book *Principe de création des mots nouveaux* published in 1964, Keng Vannsak insists on a different method of coinage from the Cultural Committee. Pointing out the flaws in existing dictionaries and grammar books, he problematizes a reversion to the old Khmer language, an imitation of Sanskrit/Pali, and a risk of following India and “denationalizing” (Keng 1964, 1). For Keng Vannsak, the national language, or national culture in other words, had to be newly created. From such a standpoint, the main obstacle was not so much Thai influence as a resurgence of the Indian classical languages and old Khmer. To attain this new language, Keng Vannsak proposes a new coinage grounded on contemporary Khmer. Whereas Chuon Nath's name is not mentioned, it is obvious his preface is an attack on the prominent monk. On March 8, 1961 Keng Vannsak was nominated as a member of the Cultural Committee<sup>35)</sup> and was able to observe its method of coinage with his own eyes.

Keng Vannsak proposed a new method of coinage named “Khmerization” ខេមរនីយកម្ម /kheemaraniiyekam/ that would supersede Sanskrit/Pali with contemporary Khmer (*ibid.*, 433 ff.), but he did not advocate the complete exclusion of these classical languages, as even the word “Khmerization” itself originates from Pali. Nor did he try to eliminate Thai influence on Khmer, probably because he belonged to a new generation in which mastery of the Thai language was no longer regarded as a precondition for intellectuals.

Both Ieu Koeus and Keng Vannsak were the leading figures of the Democratic Party and linguists who raised doubts about Chuon Nath's dictionary and/or the coinage of the Cultural Committee, but their influence on language policies varied. Although Ieu Koeus's book was reprinted in 1967 and is available in Cambodia even now, it was Keng Vannsak's opinions that impacted the followers who would propose the Khmerization of the language of instruction in schools and universities, a new way of coinage, and a reform of orthography.

34) As its name indicates, this institute revolved around the “Khmer-Mon identity,” as declared in the manifesto of the Socio-Republican Party drafted by Keng Vannsak (Corfield 1994, 160).

35) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 17(50), March 8, 1961, pp. 671–672; *Reach Kech*, 17(50), March 8, 1961, pp. 1760–1761.

With regards to reforms in the language of instruction, the teachers and inspectors who played an important role were mostly Keng Vannsak's friends and former students (Khin 1999a, 302–303). From around 1957, when secondary education taught in French was expanded to the rural area, they shared a sense of impending crisis that there were insufficient numbers of teachers proficient in French and that the language ability of students would decline (*ibid.*, 294–295). Khin Sok's article introduces these central figures, including the president of the Royal University of Fine Arts, Hang Thun Hak;<sup>36)</sup> inspector of Khmer language and literature, Loch Phlaeng; inspector of history education, Tran Ngia;<sup>37)</sup> and inspector of English instruction, Kong Orn (*ibid.*, 300). In 1966 they held private meetings to discuss the Khmerization of the teaching language, and the fruits of their discussion were submitted to the National Education Minister Vann Molyvann through the chief of the secondary education bureau Kaev Chaem. At the 23rd session of the National Assembly from July 10–13, 1967, the Khmerization bill was put on the agenda and approved (*ibid.*, 301). Decree No. 2294 of the National Education Minister on September 18 declared that elementary education be Khmerized from the academic year 1967, secondary education by 1973, and tertiary education by 1974.<sup>38)</sup>

## VI The Educational Magazine *Khmerization*

Owing to the change in the language of instruction from 1967, a new educational magazine *Khmerization* (កេមរាយណ៍កម្ម /Kheemarayāṅṅakam/) was launched. Cambodia had followed a bilinear education system since the mid-1920s: while public schools employed French as the teaching language, even at the elementary level, to cultivate a small elite, the “*écoles de pagoda rénovées*” or temple schools, which had been sanctioned as official pedagogic institutions, provided three-year instruction in Khmer to ordinary pupils living in rural areas. In 1925, two educational magazines—in French and in Khmer—were inaugurated and distributed to teachers (Sasagawa 2006, 113–134). The new magazine *Khmerization* unified them, and the first issue, published in September 1967, informs that the standing committee for Khmerization has been founded by decree of the National Education Minister, with Hang Thun Hak as its president.<sup>39)</sup>

36) Hang Thun Hak was one of the young members of the Democratic Party who seized its leadership with Keng Vannsak in 1954. Later he held the premiership of the Khmer Republic from October 17, 1972 to April 17, 1973 (Corfield and Summers 2003, 137–139).

37) Tran Ngia is famous for his two-volume work entitled ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រខ្មែរ [A history of the Khmers], published in 1973.

38) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 23(3), January 11, 1967, pp. 3823–3824.

39) *Khemarayeaneakam*, 1(1), September 1967, p. 17.

The *Khmerization* magazine did not merely aim to change the teaching language, but also to modify the Khmer modern vocabulary. The National Archives of Cambodia and the National Library at Phnom Penh possess several issues of this magazine. Issues published in the first year carry the word lists proposed by those concerned with Khmerization. As well as the coinage of the Cultural Committee, Table 5 analyzes the etymology of the vocabulary listed in the magazine.

Although these lists were intended to replace Sanskrit/Pali and French with contemporary Khmer, many loanwords from French were retained in several realms. For instance, most of the jargon to do with weather in the “geography” section in Vol. 1, No. 1 is French.<sup>40</sup> Contrary to the Cultural Committee, the standing committee for Khmerization considered it helpful for instruction to preserve French loanwords rather than use the Indian classical languages. While the Cultural Committee spelled the silent consonant(s) at the end of the French word in order to keep to the etymological style of orthography, the Khmerization movement tried a partial adoption of the phonemic style by deleting the silent final consonant(s) for example, *franc* ប្រុង /frɔŋ/ (Khin 1999a, 308). As Keng Vannsak noted, however, they did not eliminate all the words derived from Sanskrit and/or Pali, and their spellings are still based on the etymological style.

The other aim of the Khmerization movement was to revive the function of infixes to create nouns, which had been suspended in contemporary Khmer. For instance, the noun form អំណាច /ʔəmnaa/, which inserts an infix into the verb ឃើញ /ʔaa/ (to see), was added to the list.<sup>41</sup> Most of the words newly created in this way were not widely diffused, but some of them, such as រូបិយ /səmnee/ (writing), composed of the shortened form រូបិ /see/ of the verb រូបិយ /sɔɔsee/ (to write), became more or less popular.

The Khmerization movement did not attempt to exclude the modern vocabulary derived from Siam. For the advocates of this movement, these words had become rooted in contemporary Khmer. In addition, since they had been educated only in French, it is conceivable they had no intention of differentiating Khmer from Thai.

Their opinion about the coinage of the modern vocabulary was unquestionably opposed to that of the Cultural Committee, which repelled some of its members. Those who had created the modern terms by employing mainly Pali succeeded in urging the National Education Minister to proclaim Decree No. 2460 on August 31, 1966 to appoint new members<sup>42</sup> and modify the lineup on March 14, 1968,<sup>43</sup> but Chuon Nath and Huot

40) *Khemarayeaneakam*, 1(1), September 1967, pp. 38–39.

41) *Khemarayeaneakam*, 1(1), September 1967, p. 54.

42) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 22(68), September 3, 1966, pp. 3945–3946; *Reach Kech*, 22(68), September 3, 1966, pp. 5608–5610.

43) *Journal Officiel du Cambodge*, 24(22), March 20, 1968, p. 1125; *Reach Kech*, 24(22), March 20, 1968, p. 2067.



Table 5 Word Lists of the *Khmerization* Magazine

Vol. (No.)	Year/month	Pages	K=T				K≠T				K	K+S,P	S	K+T>K	T>K	K≠T	S=P	S+P	F	E	Realms		
			S	P	S=P	S+P	S	P	S=P	P													
1 (1)	1967/09	25-27	0	1	4	0	0	3	0	70	32	2	10	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	mathematics		
		33-35	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	89	28	1	9	14	0	1	2	0	1	0	natural science		
		38-39	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	23	10	2	4	1	0	16	0	0	16	0	geography		
		49	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	16	8	0	4	6	0	7	0	0	7	0	chemistry		
		54-56	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	80	8	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5	0	woodwork		
		59-60	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	38	5	1	2	0	0	7	0	0	7	0	practical activities		
		63	3	0	3	1	0	3	1	0	3	12	2	4	4	5	2	0	5	2	0	gymnastics	
		64-65	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	65	11	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	sewing	
		66-67	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	63	9	1	2	1	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	agriculture	
		25	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	10	6	2	2	2	0	1	5	0	1	5	0	mathematics	
1 (3)	1967/11	26-27	0	0	1	0	0	0	32	6	1	9	3	0	13	0	0	0	13	0	physics, chemistry		
		30	0	1	0	0	0	0	27	12	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	natural science		
		31	2	0	0	0	0	0	6	5	3	3	3	0	1	19	0	1	19	0	history		
		32-34	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	78	25	1	2	0	0	10	0	0	10	0	0	geography	
		40-41	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	41	9	0	2	0	0	8	0	0	8	0	0	practical activities	
		42-43	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	agriculture	
		14-15	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	11	2	1	0	0	9	0	0	9	0	0	physics, chemistry	
		20	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	8	1	1	2	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	natural science	
		23	1	1	1	0	0	3	0	9	6	1	2	3	1	3	1	0	3	1	0	0	history
		32	0	0	2	0	0	2	1	1	8	2	1	0	1	0	8	0	1	0	8	0	mathematics
1 (4)	1967/12	38-39	2	0	1	0	0	0	59	7	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	6	0	0	geography	
		45	1	1	1	0	0	3	2	12	14	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	domestic science	
		15-16	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	18	16	2	4	3	1	9	0	0	9	0	0	geography	
		23-24	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	4	11	2	3	0	0	26	0	0	26	0	0	history	
		28	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	13	10	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	21	0	0	physics	
		33-35	1	0	2	0	0	2	1	27	39	4	12	5	1	3	0	0	3	0	0	fishery	
		48	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	10	1	3	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	domestic science	
		49-50	0	1	2	0	0	0	4	19	28	1	2	1	0	4	0	0	4	0	0	gymnastics	
		21	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	13	0	0	history	
		22	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	17	13	1	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	geography	
1 (5)	1968/01	28	0	1	1	0	0	0	16	5	0	3	1	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	natural science	
		29	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	8	4	1	3	1	0	13	0	0	13	0	0	mathematics	
		33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	12	0	3	2	0	8	0	0	8	0	0	physics, chemistry	
		37-38	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	34	15	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	0	3	0	practical activities	
		42	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	17	15	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	domestic science	
		43	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	fishery	
		Total			13	12	36	1	0	47	1,038	428	37	97	53	13	238	2	2,062				

Source: *Khmerayankam* 1(1), September 1967-1(6), February 1968

Tat came to terms with the Khmerization movement in the end (*ibid.*, 302–303). Each issue of the magazine declared that the vocabulary in the list had been approved by these famous Buddhist monks.

## VII A Reform of Orthography

Under the Lon Nol regime that began in 1970, the Khmerization movement extended its reform to orthography. At a meeting held on August 26, 1972, Loch Phlaeng proposed an orthographic reform to reduce the number of letters and boost the development of education (Khin 1999a, 305, note 48; Ly 2006, 47). In concrete terms, he advocated a revision of diphthongs (for example, តំលៃ for តៃល្លៃ /dɔmlai/, កំណើត for កំណើត /kɔmnæɔt/) (Ly 2006, 47–48) and an abolition of a few independent vowel signs (for example, អាច for ឲ្យ /ʔaoi/, អែណា for ឯណា /ʔae naa/) (Khin 1999a, 305, note 48). Because it is difficult to guess whether the newly proposed spelling កំណើត is pronounced /kɔmnæɔt/ or /kɔmnəɔt/, a half-way reduction of the letters would result in confusion. Besides, this reform did not alter the etymological style of orthography. This revised orthography was strongly opposed by novelist Vandy Kaonn, but the Lon Nol government accepted it for use in education and the media (Ly 2006, 48–49).

After the Pol Pot regime annulled public education and mass media, the People's Revolutionary Party, which came to power in 1979, faced the question of whether the orthography should be based on Chuon Nath's dictionary or the Khmerization movement. The Council of State discussed this issue on April 5, 1985 and selected the revised orthography of 1972. Once again Vandy Kaonn attacked the decision but in vain (*ibid.*, 49–56). According to Ly Sovir, who participated in this discussion, the Ministry of Education in the 1980s had no other choice but to follow the Khmerization movement's reforms due to limited human resources (*ibid.*, 60).

Since 1993, when Cambodia became a kingdom again, the 1972 orthography has been used in the spheres of education and media; yet the desire to resuscitate Chuon Nath's spellings persisted. In 2005, the Institute of National Language, set up on July 10, 1998 and integrated into the Royal Academy on December 27, 1999,<sup>44)</sup> published an orthographic dictionary based on Chuon Nath's spellings (Cambodia, Institute of National Language 2005). But these organizations have less influence on educational policies and media than one might imagine from their names.

44) Royal Academy of Cambodia, 2012, សង្ខេបន្តីតិ វ. ប. ស. ក. [Outline of the Royal Academy of Cambodia], <http://www.rac-academy.edu.kh/>, accessed August 12, 2013.

Finally, in March 2009, Chuon Nath's spelling was revived. At the National Institute of Education in Phnom Penh, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports called for a meeting to review pedagogic activities in the academic year 2008 and settle on a plan for 2009. In his closing address, Prime Minister Hen Sen declared that schools, newspapers, magazines, and official documents had to conform to Chuon Nath's dictionary.<sup>45)</sup> From the academic year 2009, textbooks of the Khmer language were revised, and independent vowel signs and the spellings of diphthongs reverted to the orthography before 1972, though no explanation for the modification was included in the textbooks. The actual situation in Cambodia is that most people consider it acceptable to write either ឿ or អោយ.

## Conclusion

From the latter half of the colonial period to the early 1960s, Buddhist monks and ex-monks were actively engaged in Cambodia's language policies. In trying to establish orthography, the two camps—etymological versus phonemic style—clashed and blocked the committee for editing a dictionary founded in 1915. The eminent monk Chuon Nath participated in the committee from the late 1920s, and Book One of *The Khmer Dictionary* was published under his direction in 1938.

Working closely with another prominent monk Huot Tat, Choun Nath exerted a great influence on the coinage of modern vocabulary as well. The Cultural Committee, which was set up during Japanese military rule in 1945 and reestablished in 1947, took on the task of substituting Khmer for French loanwords. Until the Committee was dissolved in the middle of the 1960s, the two monks almost invariably served as its vice-president. Nhok Thaem, who had also spent time studying in Siam, played a significant role too. The *Kambuja Suriya* magazine, issued by the Buddhist Institute at which he worked, ran serials of the word lists prepared by the Cultural Committee, and Nhok Thaem contributed the preface.

The Cultural Committee's main activity was the removal of modern Siamese vocabulary and a creation of original Khmer terms derived chiefly from Pali. As is often the case with Cambodian nationalistic discourse, however, both the legacy of loanwords from the Thai language and subsequent attempts to differentiate the Khmer language have seldom been mentioned in the media. In this regard, the situation in Cambodia is quite

45) Women Empowerment for Social Change Program, 2010, សម្តេចតេជោនាយករដ្ឋមន្ត្រីប្រកាសច្បាប់លាស់អក្ខរវិវឌ្ឍ-អក្សរសាស្ត្រជាតិ យកតាមវចនានុក្រម ជួន ណាត [The Prime Minister declared that orthography and national literature be based on Chuon Nath's dictionary], <http://women.open.org.kh/km/pm-declare-to-use-chounnath-dictionary-for-national-literature>, accessed August 12, 2013.

different from that in Laos, where ordinary words are also similar to their Thai equivalents because they belong to the same language family, but differentiation was actively debated (Yano 2008; 2013).

Ieu Koeus and Keng Vannsak presented counter-arguments vis-à-vis the orthography and coinage achieved by Chuon Nath and his comrades. Both of them took up politics as leaders of the Democratic Party, but their views were divergent. Though Ieu Koeus discussed the relationship between Khmer and Thai in detail, his viewpoint failed to become a dominant narrative on the Khmer language due to his premature death. On the other hand, Keng Vannsak, who belonged to the new generation educated in French, opposed esoteric, coined words originated from Sanskrit/Pali. He did not, however, dwell on the Thai influence and greatly influenced his friends and students.

Keng Vannsak's followers succeeded in changing the teaching language into Khmer from 1967. Next they embarked on the coinage of new words, which they announced in the educational magazine *Khmerization*. Although they tried in the process of coinage to abolish as many Sanskrit/Pali words as possible and to “purify” and “simplify” the Khmer language, they did not totally exclude these classical languages. Finally they achieved a revision of orthography in 1972, but their reform was far from thorough because they merely revised spellings of diphthongs and reduced independent vowel signs. As a result, most of the Pali words used in Cambodia today are based on the Cultural Committee's accomplishments; orthography based on Chuon Nath's dictionary was also officially revived in 2009.

The investigation of the way the Cambodian national language has evolved leads us to conclude that it has had a role to play in the formation of Cambodian national culture. It can be observed that since the Cambodian nation and culture are so heterogeneous, only a differentiation between “us” and “the other” could allow the existence and unity of “we Khmer (ខ្មែរ/ខ្មែរ /khmae yəəŋ/)” to be asserted. The subject of differentiation from the Vietnamese and the Chinese have often been discussed in Cambodian studies (Edwards 1996, 55; Heder and Ledgerwood 1996, 19), but in fact, the Thai have also been cast as “the others” since the early 1940s. In the tumult over the establishment of a Cambodian national language, those born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century expressed a sense of incongruity—explicitly, when it came to French and implicitly with Thai. The later generation, however, problematized the Indian classical languages and old Khmer, and Thailand became less a cultural than a physical menace, with the territorial dispute over the Preah Vihear monument marking the zenith of tensions in the late 1950s and early 1960s. For the French-educated intellectuals, a simplification of coinage and orthography were much more important than a distinction of Khmer from Thai and a reflection of old Khmer in the script.

As can be seen in Ieu Koeus and Keng Vannsak's works, narratives on the creation of the Cambodian national language present much diversity, but the dominant discourse on national culture has been the recurrent evocation of the "glorious past" of Angkor, when Sanskrit and old Khmer were inscribed on the stones of the monuments. Just like the process in which the court dance became regarded as a "tradition" handed down from the Angkorian era (Sasagawa 2005), the national language was also accomplished through the elimination and oblivion of Thai cultural influence. Partly because of the defective reform by the Khmerization movement, Chuon Nath's achievements are seen as the paragon of orthography and coinage till now.

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### Abbreviations

- ANC : Archives Nationales du Cambodge  
 BR : Bibliothèque Royale  
 DC : Documentations du Cambodge  
 EFEO: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient  
 ESP : Ecole Supérieure de Pali  
 IB : Institut Bouddhique  
 RSC : Résident Supérieur au Cambodge

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