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## **Restriction or Resistance? French Colonial Educational Development in Cambodia**

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### **Abstract:**

By 1944, after eight decades of French colonial control, only a small percentage of eligible students in Cambodia attended French schools. Several scholars argue on the basis of such evidence that the French purposefully restricted education for Cambodians in order first to achieve and then to maintain power in the colony. This article examines educational development in Cambodia during the French colonial period and concludes that the lack of Cambodian educational participation stemmed from Cambodian resistance, rather than French planning. French educational reforms sought to understand Cambodian resistance, to overcome it, and to draw Cambodians into schools dedicated to the training of colonial civil servants.

### **Introduction**

When the French arrived in Cambodia in 1863, they encountered an indigenous form of education which was dedicated to a Cambodian purpose. After first developing a small, separate system of French schools, the French took control of Cambodia's indigenous education and turned it toward a French purpose. In general, this paper traces this history of Cambodian educational development - or co-optation - from the establishment of the French protectorate through the height of French power in Cambodia in the years immediately before the Second World War.

Education in French colonial Cambodia was developed at a considerably slower pace than

in neighboring French colonial Vietnam, and several scholars argue on this basis that the French purposefully withheld education from Cambodians in order first to consolidate and then to maintain power in the protectorate. French schools did indeed fail to enroll significant numbers of Cambodians until late in the colonial period, and they were indeed closely linked with the colonial enterprise. I suggest in this article, however, that low educational participation was the result of Cambodian resistance, rather than French planning. In fact, French educational development in colonial Cambodia can be described as a series of attempts to understand Cambodian resistance, to overcome it, and to bring Cambodians into a "modern" educational system supportive of the colonial enterprise.

### **Traditional Cambodian Education**

Before the French arrived in Indochina, education in Cambodia was limited to boys and was carried out by Buddhist monks in wats, or temples (Ablin, 1991; Bilodeau, 1955; Gyallay-Pap, 1989; Kiernan, 1985; Quinlan, 1992; Ross, 1987; Torhorst, 1966). While not standard from one school to the next (Bilodeau, 1955), wat-school curriculum usually consisted of "reading and writing Khmer [the Cambodian language], principles of Buddhism, rules of propriety, [and] some arithmetic" (Gyallay-Pap, 1989, p. 258). Wat-school education also emphasized the importance of work, as students "work[ed] with the monks [to] buil[d] temples, dwellings, roads, bridges[,] and water reservoirs and [to] manufacture...furniture and other things" (Torhorst, 1966, p. 154).

In spite of the importance in the curriculum of the Khmer language, Bilodeau (1955) argues that most students left wat schools illiterate:

[Boys] learnt to read the [Buddhist] sacred texts...and copied out the written characters. In actual fact, the texts were learnt by heart, as a result of endless repetition, and the pupils were quite incapable of reading the words separately. A Cambodian boy leaving the [wat] school had his memory stocked with edifying passages, but could neither read [nor] write. (p. 21)

Né pote (1979) similarly concludes that skill in reading and writing "was only a dye that quickly washed off and that, in practice, illiteracy was widespread" (p. 770; all Né pote quotes are my translation).

Quinlan (1992) suggests, however, that wat-school education served a broader purpose than literacy. Beyond its curricular goals, education was intended to support social solidarity by "ensuring social cohesion and the maintenance of traditional values" (p. 8). Né pote (1979) agrees, arguing that wat-school education was fundamentally religious, moral, and oriented toward Cambodian "cultural values" (p. 769). An East German educational historian concludes on the same note but with a somewhat different emphasis that the education provided in wat schools was "in close agreement with the state power" (Torhorst, 1966, p. 154). Though they approach the subject from opposing ideological perspectives, these scholars agree that education in the precolonial era was a fundamentally Cambodian project, intended to serve and advance Cambodian goals.

### **Nineteenth Century French Colonial Cambodia**

Cambodia became a French protectorate in 1863, one year after France had established a colony in Cochinchina, or southern Vietnam (Osborne, 1969). Cambodia's King Norodom agreed to French protection as a means of escaping a subordinate relationship with Thailand, but soon found himself struggling to limit French involvement in Cambodian affairs. Throughout the 19th century, Norodom parried with the French, slowing but not stopping the establishment of French

ré sidences throughout the country and the assumption by ré sidents of control over Cambodia's administration (Chandler, 1993; Osborne, 1969; Thomson, 1945). In fact, it was only after Norodom's death in 1904 and the ascent to the throne of his brother Sisowath, a "fawning collaborator" (Chandler, 1993, p. 149), that the French truly gained control in Cambodia.

In the 19th century, the French were less interested economically in Cambodia than in Vietnam, and the country was valued primarily as a buffer for Vietnam against English colonial interests in Thailand (for discussion, see Osborne, 1969). Perhaps for these reasons, or perhaps because the French found most Cambodians to be as uncooperative as their king, the French did little to "develop" or otherwise change Cambodia during the first half of their colonial tenure (Chandler, 1993; Evans & Rowley, 1990; Osborne, 1969). In one departure from this laissez-faire approach to colonialism, the French encouraged the immigration to Cambodia of Vietnamese settlers and colonial civil servants, whom they found to be "better workers[,] more dynamic" (Chanda, 1986, p. 56), and more easily controlled (Haas, 1991) than Cambodians.

Nguyen-vo (1992) suggests that the disproportionate number of Vietnamese clerks in Cambodia's colonial civil service (Ablin, 1991; Chanda, 1986; Chandler, 1993; Osborne, 1969) was the result of greater educational development by the French in Vietnam than in Cambodia. The French did not develop an alternative to the traditional wat schools in Cambodia in the 19th century (Kiernan, 1985; Quinlan, 1992), for instance, though in Vietnam "between 1860 and the turn of the twentieth century a [colonial] school system emerged in areas under French occupation" (Kelly, 1978, p. 97). Neither did the French make attempts in Cambodia to romanize the indigenous writing system and, at least from the colonial point of view, facilitate education and communication (Osborne, 1969), as they had done in Vietnam (DeFrancis, 1977; Kelly, 1982). Very few Cambodian students were sent to the metropole to study in the 19th century (Morizon, 1931; Osborne, 1969), though 90 Vietnamese students were enrolled in educational programs France in 1870 alone (Osborne, 1969, p. 104). Nguyen-vo (1992) argues that this uneven and preferential educational development afforded Vietnamese graduates advantages in the Indochina-wide civil service examinations and explains their predominance in the French colonial administration in Cambodia.

It is possible to conclude from these comments that the Vietnamese were favored over Cambodians by the French in terms of education, and it is tempting to define this preference in terms of France's 19th century efforts to consolidate power in Cambodia. One could argue, for instance, that the comparative development of education in Vietnam and Cambodia served the purpose of subordinating the uncooperative Cambodians within their own country to the more-cooperative Vietnamese and, in the process, achieving for France a fuller control. In fact, Shawcross (1994) contends that the French actually "prevented the growth of a strong...administrative class in Cambodia [and instead] imported Vietnamese administrators" (pp. 5-6). As we shall see in the following section, however, the apparent goal of French educational development in Cambodia militates against this argument.

### **French Educational Development in the Nineteenth Century**

Most scholars state simply that France ignored or neglected education in Cambodia in the 19th century (Chandler, 1993; Gyallay-Pap, 1989; Smith, 1965, 1971). However, while leaving the wat schools to their own devices, the French did establish a small system of "modern" Franco-Cambodian schools in the decades following their arrival in Cambodia. The first of these was the French-language School of the Protectorate, opened by a French infantry officer, Ferry Rolles, in Phnom Penh in 1873 (Morizon, 1931, p. 178). The School was renamed the College of the Protectorate in 1893 (Bilodeau, 1955; Forest, 1980; Quinlan, 1992). In addition to the School-then-College of the Protectorate, in 1885 the French opened a college for interpreters in Phnom Penh and three French-language primary schools in provincial capitals (Morizon, 1931, p. 178). It is not clear what happened to these provincial schools. Kiernan (1985) comments that in

1900 "the only remaining primary school for [Cambodian] students was [the College of the Protectorate] in Phnom Penh" (p. xiii; also see Né pote, 1979). On the other hand, Forest (1980) states that there were four French- language schools in Cambodia in 1902, the College of the Protectorate in Phnom Penh, "which enrolled 250 students, and [three schools in provincial capitals] which each enrolled about 40 children" (p. 151; all Forest quotes are my translation).

Out of these Franco-Cambodian schools came educated men who "formed the nucleus of [Cambodia's] European-trained civil service" (Quinlan, 1992, p. 9) and who "assist[ed] the French authorities [in] their work of colonization" (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 16). Scholars frequently refer to these graduates as "'new men'" (Vickery, 1986, p. 5; quotes in the original; also see Osborne, 1969; Vickery, 1991), suggesting that through their interactions with the French, educational and otherwise, these men were fundamentally changed, discarding traditional values and ideologies for those things French. Morizon (1931), for example, describes the new French men as "Westernized Cambodians who, through their loyal service, advanced [the French] civilizing mission" (p. 178; all Morizon quotes are my translation).

Of central importance and value to the French was the ability of the new men to speak French and act as bilingual intermediaries in French-Cambodian interactions. Chandler (1993) comments that most French administrators in Cambodia could not speak Khmer, even after years in the country, and as a result "it [was] as if a great deal of Cambodian life...was carried out behind a screen, invisible and inaudible to the French" (p. 158). The bilingual new French men allowed the European administrators to pierce that screen and function in the colonial setting. It would not be overstating the case to suggest that French-Khmer bilingual ability was among the most important skills that the new French men brought to the colonial administration and among the most valuable skills for which the French employed them. In fact, Vickery (1991) mentions French language ability ahead of other "modern skills" (p. 93) as the key to success in the French administration.

French education in 19th century Cambodia was developed concurrently with significant immigration from other Asian countries, and many who availed themselves of Cambodia's limited French educational opportunities were sons of these recent immigrants (Osborne, 1969), particularly the Vietnamese (Forest, 1980). The immigrants saw in learning French and serving the colonial administration a means of social and financial advancement which would have been impossible to them in Cambodia's traditional, elite- controlled government structure (Vickery, 1991; for discussion of this structure, see Chandler, 1993). They did not seek to overturn the social system, but only to secure places for themselves at the top. Accepted for their ability by the French in a way they would not have been accepted previously [that is, in the traditional Cambodian administration], they served the new regime energetically while, incidentally, amassing considerable personal wealth. (Vickery, 1991, p. 5)

Most Cambodians, on the other hand, kept their children away from Franco-Cambodian schools, perhaps to minimize contact with the children of Vietnamese immigrants, whom they disliked and distrusted (Forest, 1980; Osborne, 1969), or perhaps simply out of resistance to French innovations. In this resistance, they may have been following the lead of Cambodia's King Norodom, who "displayed no interest in assisting the development of French-sponsored education" (Osborne, 1969, p. 255) and who, with the rest of the royal family, "looked down on all that was foreign" (Vickery, 1986, p. 5) and "resisted the French language" (Forest, 1980, p. 151). As a consequence of these different attitudes toward education, Cambodians continued to send their sons to wat schools, while Franco-Cambodian schools came to be dominated by Vietnamese immigrant children (Forest, 1980). In 1883, for example, only 8 of the 100-plus students at the School of the Protectorate were Cambodians (Forest, 1980, p. 150-151). As a subsequent consequence, Cambodians did not acquire the French language and other skills necessary for French service and, therefore, remained unrepresented in the colonial administration.

Far from celebrating this marginalization, the French lamented the lack of Cambodian participation, including that in education. A colonial-era document concerning the School for the Protectorate, for instance, reads, "sadly...the idea of creating a school for Cambodians has not been realized, since we have so few Cambodian students" (cited in Forest, 1980, p. 151). That the French were acutely aware of and unhappy with the degree of Cambodian educational participation indicates that their goal in education was not the ultimate subordination of Cambodians to Vietnamese, as Nguyen-vo (1993) and Shawcross (1994) suggested above. Rather, the French appear to have been genuinely concerned with increasing Cambodian educational participation and, remembering the purpose of French education, with producing new Cambodian French men willing to assist them in their work of colonization. As we shall see below, it was not until well into the 20th century that the French hit upon a broad system of education capable of achieving this goal.

## **Twentieth Century French Colonial Cambodia**

After King Norodom's death in 1904, royal resistance to the French presence in Cambodia ceased (Osborne, 1969). The new king, Sisowath, was content to have achieved the throne, and he allowed the French to assume control over all but ceremonial aspects of Cambodia's administration. Sisowath submitted even his own decisions for review to the French Resident Superieure who, "being assured of their conformity to the spirit of the protectorate, append[ed] his signature next to the king's" (Morizon, 1931, p. 43).

Cambodia continued to be strategically important to France as a buffer for Vietnam after the turn of the century, but the protectorate also assumed economic importance in its own right as a major exporter of rubber and rice (Chandler, 1993). Whitaker et al. (1973) describe Cambodia at this time as peripheral to the metropolitan industrial center in the French economic system, arguing that "[t]he French essentially developed Cambodia as a colonial extension of their own industrialized society, orienting the Cambodian economy principally toward the growing of primary products" (p. 43). The main consequence for Cambodians of increased agricultural production was a corresponding increase in colonial taxes, which went in large part to pay for French infrastructure developments designed to bring raw materials to market (Chandler, 1993).

Many scholars summarize French educational development during this period of increasing economic exploitation with a selective list of statistics and a recognizable tone of disgust. Kiernan (1985) provides a good example:

There were 160 modern [that is, controlled by the French] primary schools with 10,000 students by 1925....But even by 1944, when 80,000 [Cambodians] were attending [some sort of] modern primary schools, only about 500...students per year completed their primary education certificate. Those enrolled even now made up less than 20 per cent of the male school- age population (few females were enrolled). In the same year, 1944, there were only 1,000...secondary students. The first high school, the Lycee Sisowath in Phnom Penh, offered a full secondary education only after 1933. Even by 1953 there were still only 2,700...secondary students enrolled in eight high schools. (There were of course no universities.) Only 144 [Cambodians] had completed the full Baccalaureat by 1954. (p. xiii)

Such histories frequently support arguments that the French purposefully withheld education from Cambodians in order to restrict the development of an intellectual elite which might lead the country into rebellion. Smith (1971), for instance, comments the "French did little to train Cambodians to fill positions of responsibility and trust [because it] did not suit [their] purpose to have an educated elite which might demand government reform or, worse, independence" (p. 59). Whitaker et al. (1973) similarly state that "[t]here was no indication that [the French] wanted an

elite with modern education; such persons might have questioned French control of the country" (p. 42).

These arguments offer a tempting critical analysis of French colonial rule and education in Cambodia. However, a careful examination of Cambodia's educational history in the first half of the 20th century reveals a steady expansion of educational opportunity, not a restriction. Numerous educational reforms were initiated by the French in the 20th century expressly for the purpose of increasing Cambodian educational participation, not inhibiting it. Contextualizing these reforms, Né pote (1979), argues that the French recognized in the lack of significant Cambodian participation the failure of their educational effort and so several times "stopped the machine, corrected and modified their policies, and directed the modern educational system toward a point of balance and integration" (pp. 781-782).

### **French Educational Development in the Twentieth Century**

The French significantly expanded the system of Franco-Cambodian schools in the first few decades of the 20th century. Following the establishment of the Franco-Cambodian Norodom School in Phnom Penh in 1903 (Forest, 1980, p. 152), schools were opened in most provincial capitals. By 1907, there were 18 Franco-Cambodian schools in Cambodia; this number had risen to 29 in 1916 (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 17). The French encouraged participation in the modern educational system with a 1916 decree which required the attendance of all boys living within two kilometers of a French school (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 17). At least a few of these schools included sections for girls (Forest, 1980). A school for girls was opened within the Norodom School, for example, in 1911 (Morizon, 1931, p. 185).

French educational policies of 1918 and 1924 reorganized Franco-Cambodian schools into two types, *écoles élémentaires* or elementary schools, and *écoles de plein exercice* or full-course schools (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 18). Elementary schools offered a three-year elementary cycle of education which was "intended for the great majority of children" (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 18). Forty-three elementary schools had been opened by 1921 (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 19). There were 74 elementary schools in 1931 (Delvert, 1956, p. 310; Morizon, 1931, p. 183), and by 1939, 107 elementary schools were in operation in the country (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 23). Instruction in the first year of the elementary cycle was given in Khmer, and "French [was] introduced at the beginning of the second year" (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 23). Elementary school students were taught "the rudiments of mathematics, the metric system, and common knowledge" (Delvert, 1956, p. 310; all Delvert quotes are my translation).

Full-course schools, of which there were 14 in 1921 and 18 in 1939 (Bilodeau, 1955, pp. 19, 23), offered the three-year elementary cycle and a three-year complementary cycle. French was the language of education in the complementary cycle, and the curriculum included "writing, arithmetic, and reading in French,...some notions of local history and geography[,] and experimental geometry" (Forest, 1980, p. 153). The complementary cycle was "attended by the most promising...children" (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 18).

Graduates of the complementary cycle could enter *enseignement primaire supérieur* or higher primary schooling, offered exclusively at the College of the Protectorate in Phnom Penh, renamed the Collège Sisowath in 1905 (Forest, 1980, p. 152). As in the 19th century, the Collège prepared students for service in the French colonial administration. The Collège

prepared students for the judiciary and the indigenous administration, including the offices of the survey, public works, and post and telegraphs. [S]tudents were [also] introduced to mechanical engineering, physics, chemistry, and natural history. Cambodian law and accounting were also taught. (Morizon, 1931, p. 186)

As in the complementary cycle, education in higher primary schooling was given in French, and French language fluency remained an important educational objective.

In addition to training civil servants directly, the Collège also prepared students for French-language secondary or tertiary education in Vietnam or France; upon graduation from higher education, these students typically assumed senior positions in the French colonial administration in Cambodia. Chandler (1993) notes, however, that very few students matriculated to higher education. Only six Cambodians had graduated with baccalauréats from French lycées in Vietnam by 1930 (Chandler, 1993, p. 160), and "perhaps a dozen Cambodians had been trained in tertiary institutions abroad [by] 1939" (Chandler, 1993, p. 164). The Collège Sisowath became the Lycée Sisowath in 1933 and instituted an upgraded secondary curriculum in 1935 (Né pote, 1979, p. 775). The first Cambodian students graduated from the Lycée Sisowath with baccalauréats in 1939 (Smith, 1971, p. 59).

Né pote (1979) describes the system of French education in Cambodia as an "educational pyramid" (p. 775), heavily weighted toward elementary education, with only the most successful students graduating to complementary and secondary schooling. Ultimately, the "best of the best" were prepared for service in the French colonial administration. French education, then, "permitted the schooling of an increasing number of children and, at the same time, selected the better students for advanced education in order to equip the country with a large number of modern and competent civil servants" (Né pote, 1979, p. 775). In the early 20th century, however, this sorting machine did not operate at full efficiency because Franco-Cambodian schools were not accepted by all Cambodians. In spite of mandatory school attendance policies for those living near Franco-Cambodian schools and the availability of residential scholarships for those living farther away (Né pote, 1979), most Cambodians continued to send their sons to wat schools "as they had done traditionally" (Forest, 1980, p. 155).

### **Continued Resistance to French Education**

Scholars propose a number of reasons for Cambodian resistance to French education in the early 20th century. Center for Applied Linguistics (1978) suggests that educational opposition was rooted in resistance to the French language; Cambodians "were no [more] enthusiastic" (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1978, p. 13) about this unfamiliar foreign language, perhaps, than they had been in the 19th century.

Quinlan (1992) comments more generally that "the [French] education system was not 'legitimate' for Cambodian society" (p. 10). Bilodeau (1955) agrees, arguing somewhat patronizingly that the

sole ambition of the [Cambodian] peasant [was] to settle his son on his rice-field, which supplie[d] all his needs. He himself [had] never [gone] to school, and [was] quite happy. [It was] natural for [him] to think that [his] son [could] acquire little useful information at the state school, where much French [was] taught but no agriculture. (p. 18)

Rather, Bilodeau (1955) continues, wat-school education "suited the [traditional Buddhist] mentality of the country better...than [Franco-Cambodian] schools [and this suitability] account[ed] for the eagerness of young people to enter the [wat] schools and their comparative lack of interest in [Franco-Cambodian] schools" (p. 19). Forest (1980) indicates further that monks at wat schools, at least some of whom identified French education as "a peril for the Buddhist doctrine" (p. 155), may have incited resistance among Cambodian peasants toward Franco-Cambodian schools.

The lack of qualified and appropriate teachers in Franco-Cambodian schools also discouraged Cambodian educational participation. There were never more than a few French

teachers in Cambodia, and this number actually declined from 40 in 1912 (Delvert, 1956, p. 312) to 34 in 1931 and to 28 in 1939 (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 19). The bulk of instructional responsibilities was therefore given to Cambodian teachers who were underprepared and overworked. Morizon (1931) comments that teachers in elementary schools "possessed only a [complementary education] diploma and had neither sufficient general culture nor necessary pedagogical skills to perform their jobs well" (p. 183), and a 1921 colonial report describes Cambodian teachers as "poor creatures whose fund of knowledge inspires no great confidence among the local people" (cited in Bilodeau, 1995, p. 20).

In spite of this unpreparedness, teachers were often required to teach more than one class at the same time (Delvert, 1956). Even so, there were not enough Cambodian teachers to staff the Franco-Cambodian schools, and, on a number of occasions, the French imported Vietnamese teachers to fill teaching vacancies. The French recognized the undesirability of this decision. In 1920, for example, a French resident wrote, "I deplore the impossibility of finding Cambodian teachers because Cambodians do not like to entrust their children to Vietnamese teachers" (cited in Forest, 1980, p. 156). Nevertheless, some Vietnamese teachers, many of whom "were unable to speak the language of the country" (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 19), took up posts in Franco-Cambodian schools, and angry Cambodian parents and children immediately "deserted French schools" (Forest, 1980, p. 157).

As a result of Cambodian attachment to traditional education and resistance to Franco-Cambodian schools and their language and educational policies, in the first few decades of the 20th century Franco-Cambodian schools reached only a limited student population. While some traditional elites followed King Sisowath's lead in accepting the new French order and began sending their children to Franco-Cambodian schools (Né pote, 1979), the French schools continued to be dominated by the children of Cambodian immigrants (Forest, 1980). In a few cases, Cambodian students were completely absent and Vietnamese was established at the initial language of education. Forest (1980) states, for instance, that "at the Norodom School for Girls in 1912 and in the Norodom School for Boys in 1917, the choice of Vietnamese as the language of education was authorized" (p. 156). That the French were dissatisfied with the direction their education system had taken, and in particular with the lack of broad Cambodian participation, is evident in their significant reforms of the next few decades.

## **Overcoming Cambodian Resistance to French Education**

The first French attempt to bring large numbers of Cambodians into the French educational system came early in the 20th century. In 1907, the French became aware of a "modern" educational phenomenon in Cambodian provinces bordering Thailand (Delvert, 1956, p. 311; Forest, 1980, p. 158). Education in these provinces had been influenced by developments in Thailand, notably by the decision of Thai King Chulalongkorn to modernize temple schools in that country in 1884 (Kalab, 1976, p. 67), and, by the first decade of the 20th century, approximately 30 wat schools in these Cambodian provinces (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 16) had been similarly "modernized" (Kalab, 1976, p. 67). It is not clear how the curriculum in these schools differed from traditional schools; scholars merely comment that "primary education was dispensed...by monks...and other teachers...trained in Bangkok according to modern methods" (Forest, 1980, pp. 158- 159).

The French apparently recognized these Thai-oriented modernized wat schools as both a threat and an opportunity. They were a threat because they presaged a rise in Thai influence in western Cambodia (Delvert, 1956), and they were an opportunity because they awoke the French to a model for external, modern education which was not resisted by Cambodians (Forest, 1980). In order to "counterbalance the Thai influence" (Delvert 1956, p. 311) and exploit the Cambodian acceptance of this model of schooling, the French took over this system of education beginning in 1908 (Forest, 1980, p. 158). These schools were secularized in 1911 and came to be known as



khum or communal schools (Delvert, 1956, p. 313). The khum school model was extremely popular among Cambodians, especially in rural areas, and it spread rapidly across the country (Delvert, 1956). By 1931, there were 203 khum schools, at least one in every province (Morizon, 1931, p. 180); this number rose to 268 in 1939 (Delvert, 1956, p. 313). At some point after the Second World War, khum schools "were gradually transformed into [Franco-Cambodian] schools under state administration" (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 16).

Khum schools appear to have incorporated characteristics of both Franco-Cambodian schools and traditional wat schools. Like Franco-Cambodian schools, khum schools were secular and were staffed by Cambodian graduates of French education (Delvert, 1956; Morizon, 1931). As with wat schools, the local community was involved in the construction and maintenance of khum schools, and education in these schools appears to have been in Khmer (Delvert, 1956; Morizon, 1931). Scholars do not discuss the curriculum of khum schools in detail, but apparently these schools provided a bridge for rural students into Franco-Cambodian schools. Delvert (1956), for instance, comments that khum schools "offered the advantage of preparing students...from the countryside...for Franco-Cambodian schools" ( p. 311; also see Torhorst, 1966). As khum schools spread rapidly across the country, then, large numbers of rural Cambodian children were brought into the French educational machine, and the pool of candidates from which to select French colonial civil servants grew correspondingly.

French reforms to improve the quality of teaching and the appropriateness of teachers in Franco-Cambodian schools can also be seen as an effort to increase Cambodian participation in education. Before the 1920s, Cambodian teachers were graduates of complementary education who received in-service training from French educators during vacation periods (Delvert, 1956). As mentioned above, these teachers were poorly prepared and were insufficient in number to fill the staffing needs of Franco-Cambodian schools.

In order to address these problems, in 1923 the French opened a four-year training course for teachers or instituteurs at the Collège Sisowath, and in 1925, the French initiated at the Collège a shorter course for assistant teachers or instituteurs auxiliaires (Morizon, 1931, p. 187). For the most part, instituteurs were placed as teachers in full-course schools under the direction and supervision of French administrators and teachers, and instituteurs auxiliaires assumed positions as teachers in elementary schools and khum schools; khum schools were also staffed by moniteurs, graduates of the elementary cycle of education (Delvert, 1956; Forest, 1980; Morizon, 1931). After the inauguration of the teacher training section at the Collège, the need to import Vietnamese teachers for Franco-Cambodian schools apparently disappeared, as references to the presence of Vietnamese teachers in Cambodia cease after the early 1920s. It is reasonable to assume that with the disappearance of Vietnamese teachers and the "establishment...of a corp of excellent [Cambodian] teachers" (Delvert, 1956, p. 313), at least some Cambodian students who had previously rejected French education because of their teachers' ethnicity or qualifications enrolled or reenrolled in Franco-Cambodian schools.

Finally, the French asserted control over Cambodia's wat schools, "modify[ing] and plac[ing] them in harmony with [modern] times and [French] civilization" (Morizon, 1931, p. 181) and, in the process, increasing by many times the number of Cambodian children within the French educational system (Delvert, 1956). The French first tried in 1912 to bring the wat-school curriculum in line with that of Franco-Cambodian elementary schools (Delvert, 1956, p. 313), but this reform failed, largely because no program was initiated to train monk teachers in the new curriculum (Forest, 1980).

Another reform launched in 1924 recognized the fundamental importance of teacher training to the success of wat-school reform (Bilodeau, 1955). After negotiations which apparently overcame Buddhist resistance to French education, monks in the southern province of Kampot agreed in 1924 to send a few wat-school teachers for French-style training at a demonstration school (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 21). In this school, monks "receive[d] daily the

directives of a Cambodian instructor who initiate[d] them into the methods of Franco-Cambodian primary education" (Morizon, 1931, p. 181). During their nine-month training course, monks were trained by practical demonstration. In each subject, the principal [gave] standard lessons which students [had] to copy and whose structure [was] analyzed. At the end of the course, the students [sat] for a proficiency examination and, if they pass[ed] it, [were] sent back to their local [wats] as teachers. (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 21)

By 1930, 58 monks had successfully completed the teacher training course and had returned as teachers to their schools, which "were then known as 'modernized [wat] schools'" (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 21). Based on the "immediate success" (Whitaker et al. 1973, p. 110) of the Kampot experiment, after 1930 demonstration schools were opened in every province to train monk teachers, and traditional wat schools were modernized at a rapid pace (Bilodeau, 1955). By 1931, there were 101 modernized wat schools, and 908 such schools were in operation in cities, towns, villages, and rural areas throughout the country by 1939 (Bilodeau, 1955, pp. 21-22). A few years later, a higher demonstration school was established in Phnom Penh in which "former [monk] teachers [were trained] to be heads of provincial demonstration schools and inspectors of modernized [wat] schools" (Bilodeau, 1955, p. 24).

Modernized wat schools offered curriculum similar to that in Franco-Cambodian elementary schools, except that all courses were in Khmer (Bilodeau, 1955). Students learned reading, writing, and arithmetic (Delvert, 1956) sufficient to "manage [their] affairs [or] organize a business" (Morizon, 1931, p. 181). Like khum schools, modernized wat schools provided a bridge into Franco-Cambodian schools. If graduates of modernized wat schools were successful in the elementary school-leaving examination, they could enter Franco-Cambodian complementary schools, though they were first required to take a preparatory course in which they learned French (Bilodeau, 1955). Bilodeau (1955) comments that students in modernized wat schools were less frequently successful in the school-leaving examination than students in Franco-Cambodian elementary schools and that "very few" (p. 21) graduates of modernized wat schools matriculated to the complementary cycle. Nevertheless, it is safe to conclude that at least some students, after having been introduced to French-style education in modernized wat schools, succeeded to complementary schools and, further, into the French civil service.

By 1944, 15 to 20 percent of Cambodia's school-age boys attended some kind of French schooling, either Franco-Cambodian schools, khum schools, or modernized wat schools (Né pote, 1979, p. 776). Taking this figure in isolation, one could conclude that the French purposefully withheld education from Cambodians and, further, could critically analyze that restriction as a means of limiting the development of an intellectual elite which might compromise French power. Such arguments by Kiernan (1985), Smith (1971), Whitaker et al. (1973), above, introduced this discussion. However, when this educational statistic is considered within the context of the reforms preceding it, this conclusion and analysis are difficult to accept. Instead of denying education to Cambodians, the French dramatically expanded educational opportunities through teacher education reforms and the establishment of khum and modernized wat schools. Once again remembering the purpose of French education, these reforms appear to have been intended to broaden the base of the French educational pyramid, to increase the pool of candidates brought to the sorting machine and, ultimately, to improve the preparedness and the quantity of Cambodians promoted through education to positions in the colonial administration.

Indeed, the significant increase in Cambodian educational participation after the turn of the 20th century almost certainly contributed to the rise in Cambodian administrative participation relative to that of the Vietnamese by the late 1930s (Chandler, 1993). Though the reapportionment of the civil service in the 1930s reflected as well new French policies calling for greater local participation in government (Chandler, 1993; Né pote, 1979; Né pote & Khing, 1981) and may have been linked with French uncertainty about Vietnamese loyalty (Chandler, 1993), the rise of the Cambodian civil servant would have been impossible had not significant

numbers of Cambodians been prepared for service in the expanded French educational system.

## **Understanding Cambodian Resistance and French Educational Development**

In the 19th century, the French developed a small system of Franco-Cambodian schools. When by the turn of the 20th century it became clear that these schools were failing to attract Cambodians, the French embarked on a series of educational reforms intended to overcome Cambodian resistance and to increase Cambodian educational participation. By improving the quality of teaching in Franco-Cambodian schools and eliminating the need to import Vietnamese teachers, the French identified and countered two fundamental aspects of Cambodian resistance to colonial education.

In their other significant reforms of the 20th century, the French chose to circumvent Cambodian resistance, rather than to confront it. With both khum- and wat-school initiatives, the French worked from within extant educational systems which were contemporaneously accepted by Cambodians. In an attempt to explain why Cambodian monks, parents, and students accepted the French assumption of control over wat schools, Whitaker et al. (1973) argue that "[a]s an extension of the traditional system, the modernized [wat] school won the approval of many parents and students who had been reluctant to accept [Franco-Cambodian] schools" (p. 110). When the success of modernized wat schools is considered alongside that of khum schools, however, the emergent common denominator for Cambodian acceptance of French-controlled education appears to have been language, not tradition. Both the Buddhist-oriented, modernized wat schools with their roots in ancient Cambodian educational practice and the secular khum schools, based from their inception on non-Cambodian models, offered education in the Khmer language. It may be that, by allowing education to be offered in Khmer in khum and wat schools, the French were seeking to avoid one source of Cambodian resistance to Franco-Cambodian schools, that of the use of French in education.

As a result of French reforms which both confronted and circumvented Cambodian educational resistance, by the mid 20th century, large numbers of Cambodians had been drawn into the eclectic colonial educational system. Despite the arguments of some scholars, then, it seems clear that the French were interested in increasing Cambodian educational participation, rather than restricting it. As such, it should be possible to acquit the French of charges that they sought through education first to subordinate Cambodians to the Vietnamese and thus consolidate power in the protectorate and, second, to inhibit the growth of an intellectual elite which might challenge French colonial authority.

That the French did not use education to thus advance their purpose in Cambodia, however, does not mean that their educational vision was disassociated from the colonial enterprise. Throughout the colonial period, the system of Franco-Cambodian schools provided a means of producing civil servants willing and able to assist the French in the business of colonialism. As the French reached out into khum and wat schools, linking them with Franco-Cambodian schools and the preparation of colonial administrators, these indigenous forms of education were turned away from a Cambodian purpose and similarly redefined in terms of the colonial enterprise.

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