

## Post/colonial Discourses on the Cambodian Court Dance

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### Abstract

Under the reign of King Ang Duong in the middle of nineteenth century, Cambodia was under the influence of Siamese culture. Although Cambodia was colonized by France in 1863, the royal troupe of the dance still performed Siamese repertoires.

It was not until the cession of the Angkor monuments from Siam in 1907 that Angkor began to play a central role in French colonial discourse. George Groslier's works *inter alia* were instrumental in historicizing the court dance as a "tradition" handed down from the Angkorean era. Groslier appealed to the colonial authorities for the protection of this "tradition" which had allegedly been on the "decline" owing to the influence of French culture. In the latter half of the 1920s the Résident Supérieur au Cambodge temporarily succeeded in transferring the royal troupe to Groslier's control.

In the 1930s members of the royal family set out to reconstruct the troupe, and the Minister of Palace named Thiounn wrote a book in which he described the court dance as Angkorean "tradition." His book can be considered to be an attempt to appropriate colonial discourse and to construct a new narrative for the Khmers.

After independence in 1953 French colonial discourse on Angkor was incorporated into Cambodian nationalism. While new repertoires such as Apsara Dance, modeled on the relief of the monuments, were created, the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh reprinted Thiounn's book. Though the civil war was prolonged for 20 years and the Pol Pot regime rejected Cambodian culture with the exception of the Angkor monuments, French colonial discourse is still alive in Cambodia today. The dance has not ceased to be presented as "tradition" through the media.

**Keywords:** cultural politics, Cambodian court dance

### I Introduction

In Cambodia today, performances of court and folk dances are frequently shown to tourists and local people at hotels, restaurants, or temporary stages set up in the Angkor monuments. The costumes and choreography mimicking the bas-relief are a means for the audience to imagine that the dance is of the Angkorean "tradition." Needless to say, "traditions" have often been invented. In the case of Cambodia, the idealized Angkor has been the frame of reference for the invention of "tradition" ever since the French colonial period. The French writings glorified the Angkorean history and monuments, and this glorification affected the discourses on the dance.

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However, since the reign of King Ang Duong (r. 1847–59), the Cambodian court had been under the influence of Siamese culture. The Siamese influence is detectable in Khmer classical literature and temple murals too.<sup>1)</sup> When Ang Duong ascended the throne, the Siamese court backed him. King Norodom (r. 1860–1904) and King Sisowath (r. 1904–27), both of whom were Ang Duong’s sons, were raised at the royal palace in Bangkok. The cultural influence from Siam derived from these circumstances.

Nevertheless, most of the French works have regarded the court dance as belonging to the Angkorean “tradition.” In the following chapters, these works will be scrutinized not as “academic” writings, but as discursive formation which has had a relation to French colonialism, and even to Cambodian nationalism. On the other hand, the English handbooks on the dances in Southeast Asia described the Siamese influence from the middle of the nineteenth century. But these books did not discuss how the “tradition” had been invented in the colonial period<sup>2)</sup> [Foley 1993: 20–25; Miettinen 1992: 140–144].

Other than these handbooks, two Ph.D. dissertations on the Cambodian dances were written in English. One was written by Paul Cravath, who depicted Siamese influences such as the change in the costumes during the reign of King Ang Duong [Cravath 1985: 150–152], and mentioned that many Siamese dancers had belonged to the royal troupe of King Norodom [*ibid.*: 159]. But in his conclusion, he insisted upon the “continuity” of the ritual dance from the Angkorean period, and in an article issued in a magazine, he described only the “continuity” and paid no attention to the Siamese influence [Cravath 1986]. A powerful affinity for French colonial discourse on the “tradition” can be seen in Cravath’s descriptions.

The other dissertation was written by Toni Shapiro, who interviewed many dancers and teachers of the dance through participatory observation, and wrote an ethnography of good quality. In her dissertation, Shapiro described how well a teacher had been aware of the Siamese influence upon the court dance [Shapiro 1994: 105], but she did not discuss the reason why such an awareness had not been revealed in public, and her other articles mentioned nothing about the cultural influence from Siam [Shapiro 1995; 1999].

Thanks to Shapiro’s works we know what the dancers said about the dance, but then one begins to wonder as to why they spoke like that. In order to analyze the process of constructing narratives by the Khmers, it is necessary to discuss the kind of discourse which French colonialism created, and how colonial discourse influenced the colonized.

Angkor was politicized in the colonial period, and it has been incorporated into Cambodian nationalism. Since 1863 when Cambodia was colonized by France, the Angkor monuments had been explored by Henri Mohot, Doudart de Lagrée, and others. The stone inscriptions had

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1) The Siamese cultural influence reached Cambodia before the middle of the nineteenth century. It was pointed out that the Khmer syntax had been influenced from the Thai language until the eighteenth century [Huffman 1973: 507; Jacob 1993: 42]. But the Khmers has not been aware of this Siamese influence, because it had taken root in the Khmer language. The influence which this article will discuss is restricted to that from the middle of the nineteenth century.

2) Julie B. Mehta [2001: 44–61] cited the description of the Siamese influence from these handbooks, but she did not mention the process of inventing the Angkorean “tradition.”

been deciphered so as to describe and glorify the history of the Angkorean civilization. On the other hand, the post-Angkorean era was, and has been, considered as an age of “decline.”

Anthony Barnett remarked that these explorations and historiography had a close relationship to the justification of colonial rule, and that French-educated Cambodian elite such as Norodom Sihanouk and Pol Pot had accepted colonial historiography and a sense of “crisis” that the Khmers were to become extinct [Barnett 1990]. His article is a pioneering work criticizing the relationship between French colonialism and Cambodian nationalism. However Sihanouk and Pol Pot were not of the first generation of the Francophone elite, because the acceptance of French colonial discourse on Angkor can be traced back to the middle of the 1920s.

Penny Edwards’ Ph.D. dissertation, in which the activities of the Cambodian elite in the 1920s are mentioned, is the most comprehensive work on Cambodian nationalism [Edwards 1999]. According to her, the Angkorean studies, museums, and expositions contributed to constructing a colonial discourse on Angkor, and to justifying colonial rule. Edwards surveyed newspapers and magazines to see how the politicized Angkor influenced the Cambodian elite.

In this way, the connection between the French colonial discourse on Angkor and Cambodian nationalism was discussed in a few English articles, but these works did not mention the differences between colonial and postcolonial discourses on Angkor. Taking notice of the differences, it becomes obvious how consciously and selectively the Cambodian elite appropriated colonial discourse.

Among Cambodian culture, attention has been paid *par excellence* to the court dance. It was often depicted in French writings, and troupes were sent to the metropolis on the occasion of the Colonial Expositions. After independence, the court dance has been presented as the quintessence of Cambodian national culture. In order to discuss cultural politics in colonial and postcolonial Cambodia, and to historicize the Angkorean “tradition,” the dance plays quite an important role.

## II The Court Dance in the First Half of the Colonial Period

### 1. *Narratives of the French in the First Half of the Colonial Period*

From 1863 when France colonized Cambodia, the court dance became the subject of descriptions by the French. One of the earliest examples was Father Bouilleveux’s book, in which he reported the existence of the royal troupe, but he didn’t depict the court dance as the Angkorean “tradition” [Bouilleveux 1874: 95].

Jean Moura’s book followed Bouilleveux’s, and Moura insisted on the “similarity” between the costumes of the court dancers and the ancient bas-relief of the Angkor monuments [Moura 1883: 413]. A repertoire of the dance that Moura presented was, however, “Rama-kêan” or the Thai version of the story of Rama [*ibid.*: 414]. Because Moura introduced the contents of “Reamker” or the Khmer version of that story in his own book [*ibid.*: 444–458], the royal troupe undoubtedly performed the Thai version.

Except for the “Rama-kéan,” Moura mentioned the story of “Eynao” as a repertoire and presented a summary of the plot [*ibid.*: 416–444]. The Siamese court, where the Javanese story entitled “Panji” had been transmitted, adopted and adapted it as a repertoire of the dance by the name of “Inao” [Rutnin 1993: 11; Schweisguth 1951: 144]. As was the custom with regard to Khmer words borrowed from the Thai language, the Khmer title “Eynao” preserved only the spelling of the Thai name “Inao.” Though Moura tried to relate the court dance with the Angkor monuments, a further examination of his description reveals the Siamese influence on Cambodian court culture.

Among the works published at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, August Pavie’s book and Pierre Loti’s novel mentioned the court dance [Pavie 1898: xii–xvii; Loti 1912: 87–90]. They compared the costumes and choreography with the stone relief of the monuments as Moura did. These works which emphasized the “similarity” between the court dance and the Angkor monuments were written without any study of the dance. As noted above, the court dance in those days was deeply influenced by Siamese culture, and so the “similarity” mentioned was based on mere impressions.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Adémard Leclère too wrote an article on the Cambodian dance [Leclère 1910: 257–259]. Leclère alleged that the court dance dated back to the Angkorean period, but his argument was advanced in a roundabout way. Leclère asserted the Siamese influence on the Cambodian court. King Norodom who had been brought up at the royal palace in Bangkok had been fond of the Thai language, which therefore was used for the performances, and many Siamese dancers belonged to the troupe. Leclère, however, tried to connect the Cambodian court dance with Angkor. When the Siamese troops invaded the Angkor region in the fifteenth century, most of the Khmer dancers and musicians were forcefully taken away to Siam, where the Khmer repertoires were translated. Hence the origin of the Cambodian court dance was allegedly attributed to Angkor, even if Siamese court culture had exerted an influence upon Cambodia.

It is quite easy to point out the defects in Leclère’s argument. Even though the Angkorean dance had been brought into Siam, there must have been the possibility of acculturation. Because Leclère insisted upon the preservation of the Angkorean “tradition,” he was not able to tackle the issue of acculturation in Siam. Furthermore, Leclère could not explain the *raison d’être* of a repertoire such as “Eynao,” which had been brought from Java via Siam without any relation to Angkor.

## 2. *Marseille in 1906*

Although the Cambodian court dance had been subjected to (mis)interpretations by the French, it was not until 1906 when the Colonial Exposition was held in Marseille that the French people in the Métropole got an opportunity to see the dance. On the occasion of the Exposition to which the troupe was sent, Marseillais and Parisians paid much attention to the performances.

In December 1906, George Bois who took charge to organize the troupe and send it to France visited Phnom Penh. George Bois wrote a book in which the process of forming the

troupe was described in detail. He got permission to dispatch the troupe on the condition that the King and high officers would accompany to France. Finally, he succeeded in organizing the troupe, which consisted of the private troupe owned by the Minister of Marines named Col de Monteiro, the members of the royal troupe of the late King Norodom,<sup>3)</sup> and those of the troupe of King Sisowath [Bois 1913: 1–5].

The Cambodian court dance was welcomed with excitement in France. On March 6, 1906, King Sisowath, Col de Monteiro, the Minister of the Royal Palace named Thiunn, and the 80 members of the troupe embarked at Saigon. They arrived at Marseille on June 11, where the performances of the court dance were shown at the site of the Colonial Exposition, and more than 30,000 spectators thronged to watch it every night [*ibid.*: 6]. When they moved to Paris on June 19, their place of accommodation was surrounded by rubbernecks who wanted to get at least a glimpse of them. George Leygues, the Minister of the Colonies, planned an outdoor performance of the dance and sent five thousand letters of invitation, although the site of the performance was able to accommodate only 1,200 people. On the day of the performance the place fell into great disorder, because those who could not watch the show resorted to violence [*ibid.*: 7–8].

August Rodin, an eminent sculptor who watched the performance in Paris, joined the troupe on their way back to Marseille and sketched the dancers. George Bois got a chance to talk with Rodin, and an article written by Bois in the magazine *Illustration* carried Rodin's statement<sup>4)</sup> [Bois 1906]. Thus, we can understand the reason why Rodin was fascinated by the Cambodian dance. Rodin enthusiastically talked about the movements of the legs, arms, fingers and waists of the dancers, but he never mentioned the connection between the dance and Angkor.

For the audience, the rabble, and August Rodin, the Cambodian court dance *per se* was worth seeing. It was no matter whether the dance was related to Angkor. French colonialism certainly had a close relationship with the treatment of the dance. The Colonial Exposition, where the exoticism of the Orient stirred up the interest of the audience, was aimed at promulgating the cultural policies in the colonies and justifying colonial rule. But in 1906, the court dance was appreciated on its own merits.

A similar conclusion can be deduced from the documents preserved in the National Archives of Cambodia. Insisting on the display of the Angkor monuments at the Colonial Exposition, the executive committee in the metropolis and the Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine in Hanoi requested the Résident Supérieur au Cambodge many times to send some data on the monuments.<sup>5)</sup> But according to the minutes of the proceedings, when the president

3) AN RSC 31 (473) "Exposition de Marseille, 1905–1906," Lettre du Président du Comité local de l'Exposition de Marseille au RSC, 15 Juin 1905. Hereafter, the documents of the Résident Supérieur au Cambodge preserved in the National Archives of Cambodia will be put down as follows: AN RSC box number (file number).

4) Judrin and Laurent [1979: 67–99] compiled and published 36 pieces of Rodin's *dessins* and his statement.

5) AN RSC 23(419) "L'Exposition de Marseille, 1905–1908," Lettre du GGI à Delaporte, Conservateur du ↗

of the Cambodian domestic committee of the Exposition mentioned a model of the Angkor monuments, the members of the committee told him that the landscape of Phnom Penh city and the floating houses on Lake Tonle Sap should be modeled too. The topics that followed digressed from the monuments, and nobody took up Angkor as a topic again.<sup>6)</sup>

In 1907 when Siam ceded the northwestern part of Cambodia, France finally obtained the Angkor monuments, but before that the Angkor region was not under the control of the colonial authority in Phnom Penh. So the monuments were not in very important position for colonial administrators in Cambodia. The 1906 Colonial Exposition which was held just a year before the cession was the last opportunity to appreciate Cambodian culture, regardless of the connection with Angkor.

### III George Groslier's Discourse and Cultural Politics

#### 1. *George Groslier's Book*

The literature of the French in the first half of the colonial period tended to regard the Cambodian court dance as the Angkorean "tradition," but narratives in these works did not as yet affect the colonial policy. In order to consider the question how the discourse on "tradition" was concerned with the cultural policies and what influence the politicized Angkor exerted, it is necessary to examine the works of George Groslier whose articles and books often referred to the Cambodian dance, *and* who deeply committed himself to cultural politics in colonial Cambodia.

On February 4, 1887, Groslier was given birth at Phnom Penh as the first French citizen born in Cambodia. During his adolescence, he went to France to study and graduated from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Paris. In 1911<sup>7)</sup> and from 1913 to 1914, the Ministry of Public Education and the Société Asiatique asked him to go to Cambodia for the purpose of surveying the Angkor monuments [Anonymous 1946; Groslier, B.Ph. 1992: 59–60]. Groslier's return to his birthplace gave him an opportunity to explain his view on Cambodian culture as a whole.<sup>8)</sup>

Based on his research of three weeks in 1911<sup>9)</sup> Groslier wrote a book, the title of which was *Danseuses cambodgiennes anciennes & modernes (Ancient and Modern Cambodian Dancers)* [Groslier, G. 1913]. In this book, he insisted that not only spectators such as the King and

↘ Musée Khmer au Trocadéro, 2 Janvier 1906; Lettre du GGI à Baille, Commissaire Général de l'Indochine à l'Exposition de Marseille, 25 Janvier 1906.

6) AN RSC 206(2207) "Exposition Coloniale de Marseille, 1904–1905," Comité local de l'Exposition de Marseille, Séance du 26 Octobre 1905, 11e réunion.

7) AN RSC 191(2007) "Société d'Angkor pour la conservation des monuments anciens de l'Indochine. Correspondance avec George Groslier," Lettre du Président du Sous-Comité Cambodgien d'Angkor au RSC, 4 Novembre 1911.

8) Ingrid Muan's Ph.D. dissertation [Muan 2001] elaborately discussed the problems of Groslier's discourse on Cambodian arts *en bloc*.

9) Conservation du groupe d'Angkor, "Rapport sur les travaux exécutés dans les groupes d'Angkor, Année 1908–1912," (conservé au Musée National, Phnom Penh), Rapport sur les travaux exécutés à Angkor pendant les mois de Septembre et Octobre, 12 Novembre 1911, p.118.

noblemen but even the dancers themselves had become unable to understand the meanings of the gestures and choreography on account of the influence of Western culture, and so Cambodian dance was on the “decline.” Groslier added that this “crisis” of “decline” extended also to the paintings and sculptures [*ibid.*: 119–123]. Paul Cravath criticized Groslier that his opinion about the “crisis” in the dance was an exaggeration. Cravath confirmed the existence of a strong consciousness of the dance at court, because between 1913 and 1914, that is, almost the same time as the publication of Groslier’s book, the Chan Chhaya dance pavilion<sup>10)</sup> had been constructed at the royal palace [Cravath 1985: 173–178].

If Groslier’s book were regarded as a mere example of the studies undertaken on Cambodian dance, one could criticize his argument as a simple exaggeration. However, the question as to how Groslier’s discourse was incorporated into French colonialism, is of vital importance. Groslier deplored that the Western influence on the colonized caused a loss of “tradition.” It can be considered as a distinct example of what Renato Rosaldo called “imperialist nostalgia” [Rosaldo 1989: 68–87]. As will be discussed later, Groslier’s nostalgia became an excuse for colonial intervention with reference to the dance.

Deploing the “crisis,” Groslier devoted himself to relating the dance to Angkor. He underscored the “similarity” of the gestures of the hands between the contemporary dancers and the female figures presented in the sculptures, and asserted that the sculptured women had represented the dancers of those days [Groslier, G. 1913: 149–150]. Groslier’s book included a few illustrations of dancers wearing the same costumes as the sculptures in the Angkor monuments. It is certain that the stone inscriptions of the Angkorean era mentioned the dancers living in the temples. The sculptures of the monuments, however, depicted a divine world, nor is there any evidence to show the kind of costumes the ancient dancers put on.

While Groslier connected the contemporary dance with Angkor, he described the relationship with Siam. Though he affirmed that many dancers had been taken away to Ayutthaya since the fourteenth century when Siam began to invade the Angkor region, yet he alleged that the Angkorean “tradition” of the gestures and ritual characteristics of the dance was still preserved [*ibid.*: 149–150]. Groslier admitted that the royal troupe of the late King Norodom had included many Siamese dancers, and even under the reign of the then King Sisowath, two Siamese teachers belonged to the troupe. But according to Groslier, it was a “mistake” to consider that the Khmer dance was brought over from Siam. He presented several reasons for the “mistake.” The gestures of the Angkorean dance were detectable in the contemporary one; the accessories and costumes originated from Indian civilization which

10) When Chan Chhaya dance pavilion was built, the Résident Supérieur au Cambodge hired a French painter to design the murals on the inner walls. This episode reveals an early example of colonial intervention on the court dance. AN RSC 870 (9755) “Construction et décoration [*sic*] du Salle de Danse (Chan Chhaya) Palais Royal, 1913–1927,” Le procès-verbal de réception de maquettes devant servir à la décoration de la Salle des Danses du Palais Royal de Phnom-Penh, 18 Mars 1913; AN RSC 2805 (23706) “Dossier général concernant les constructions du Palais Royal - salle du trône - salle des danses, 1912–1921,” Marché de gré à gré relatif à la décoration de la Salle des Danses au Palais Royal de Phnom Penh, 4 Mars 1913.



spread to Cambodia during the Angkorean period; and a repertoire such as the *Ramayana* was not a Siamese work [*ibid.*: 152].

Groslier's discourse concurred with Leclère's argument in many points. Both of them regarded the court dance as an Angkorean "tradition," and insisted that the "tradition" was preserved even through Siam. Neither of them was able to explain the existence of a repertoire of non-Indian origin, nor was the acculturation in Siam explicable. But Groslier differed with Leclère on the issue as to whether their discourses on the "tradition" affected the cultural policies in colonial Cambodia. The following sections will discuss how deep an influence Groslier's discourse exerted upon the policies towards the court dance.

## 2. *Groslier and the Cultural Policies*

On December 14, 1917, an Imperial edict (Ordonnance royale) was issued to reorganize the Ecole royale des arts décoratifs (Royal School of the Decorative Arts) which was established in 1907, and to found the Ecole des arts cambodgiens (School of the Cambodian Arts)<sup>11)</sup> at Phnom Penh.<sup>12)</sup> On the occasion of the inauguration of this school in 1918, George Groslier, who was at the front in Europe during the First World War, returned to Phnom Penh and assumed the position of the principal of the Ecole by order of the Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine Albert Sarraut [Anonymous 1946; Groslier, B.Ph. 1992: 59–60]. Since then Groslier's remarks on the Cambodian arts had been influential among the colonial authorities.

In the same year, Groslier wrote articles on the Cambodian arts, in which he emphasized the "crisis" again. The "crisis," as described by Groslier, was caused by the "decline" of Cambodia for several centuries in the post-Angkorean era, and by the Western influence of 50 years. Groslier blamed the Europhilia prevalent among the King and noblemen who internalized French culture, so as to maintain their prestige [Groslier, G. 1918a: 459–460]. The members of the royal family who had been patrons of the arts and crafts had changed their tastes, and caused the "decline" of the Cambodian arts [*ibid.*: 468]. But he asserted that the true cause of, and the fundamental responsibility for, the "decline" should not be attributed to France. According to Groslier, when the French arrived Indochina the Cambodian arts had already been on the "decline" because of the Siamese influence since the fall of Angkor. As a conclusion, he appealed to the colonial authorities for an increase in the budget allotted to his school [Groslier, G. 1918b: 547]. While creating a discourse which put value only on the Angkorean "tradition," Groslier tried to evade responsibility for the French colonization.

Groslier's arguments in these articles were obviously inconsistent with his book published in 1913. When he connected the dance with the Angkorean "tradition," he regarded Siam as the protector of the "tradition." On the other hand, when he underlined the "decline" of the Cambodian arts, Siam was denounced as the destroyer of the "tradition." Groslier's ambivalence about Siam gave rise to an inconsistency in his arguments.

11) This school had been the forerunner of the Royal University of Fine Arts, which was founded in 1965.

12) AN RSC 476(4256) "Commission des antiquités historiques et archéologiques," Ordonnance royale, N° 94, 14 Décembre 1917.



In 1920 the Musée Khmer in Phnom Penh was reorganized, and the Musée Albert Sarraut (the National Museum today) was founded. The former had been established in 1905 under the formal name of the Section des Antiquités Khmères, Musée de l'Indo-Chine [Anonymous 1905: 508–509]. Though the display was exhibited at the royal palace in the beginning, an independent building was constructed on February 1909.<sup>13)</sup> But the museum fell into disrepute among the French administrators. One of whom was the chief of the conservation office of Angkor visited the place and complained about the lack of cleanliness.<sup>14)</sup> In 1911 when Groslier stayed in Cambodia to survey the Angkor monuments, he suggested that a new museum be founded.<sup>15)</sup> Since his appointment as the principal of the Ecole, Groslier kept on appealing for its foundation.<sup>16)</sup> On April 13, 1920, Groslier's suggestion was realized in the establishment of the Musée Albert Sarraut, situated to the north of the royal palace.<sup>17)</sup> What was more, the Service des arts cambodgiens which supervised both the museum and Ecole des arts cambodgiens was set up, and Groslier was promoted as the director of the Service. The foundation of the Musée Albert Sarraut shows that Groslier acquired a much more powerful voice among the colonial authorities.

In 1922 the Colonial Exposition was held in Marseille again, and Groslier participated in the executive committee as the delegate of Cambodia.<sup>18)</sup> At the Exposition a huge model of Angkor Wat was built as the pavilion of Indochina. Since 1878 when a building copying the Angkor monuments was constructed on the site of the world's fair in Paris, Angkor had been used as the leitmotif of the Indochinese pavilion. Angkor Wat provided a theme at the 1889 world's fair in Paris, and so did Bayon at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris and at the 1906 Colonial Exposition in Marseille. However, these pavilions did not reproduce the monuments faithfully,

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- 13) AEFEO Carton 11 dossier 12 “Musée: Musée Albert Sarraut à Phnom-Penh, 1905–1944,” Lettre du Conservateur-Adjoint du Musée Khmer de Phnom-Penh au Directeur de l'EFEO, 13 Février 1909.
- 14) Conservation du groupe d'Angkor, “Rapport sur les travaux exécutés dans les groupes d'Angkor, Année 1908–1912,” (conservé au Musée National, Phnom Penh), Rapport mensuel de 1er Février au 30 Avril 1909, 2 Mai 1909, p. 27.
- 15) AN RSC 191(2007) “Société d'Angkor pour la conservation des monuments anciens de l'Indochine. Correspondance avec George Groslier,” Lettre du Président du Sous-Comité Cambodgien d'Angkor au RSC, 4 Novembre 1911.
- 16) AN RSC 1658(17663) “Correspondances concernant la construction, le choix d'emplacement et l'organisation de la nouvelle Ecole des Beaux-Arts,” Rapport relatif à l'organisation du Musée du Cambodge à Phnom Penh, 7 Octobre 1918; AN RSC 171(1765) “Commission des antiquités historiques et archéologique du Cambodge—Programme des Travaux d'Angkor—Organisation du Service de Conservation des Ruines Cambodgiennes—Rapport au Ministre a.s. de la conservation des ruines cambodgiennes,” Lettre du RSC au GGI, 8 Décembre 1918.
- 17) AN RSC 569(5598) “Inauguration du Musée Albert Sarraut et l'Ecole de [sic] Arts,” Lettre du RSC aux tous Chefs des Services locaux et généraux, Phnom Penh, 10 Avril 1920.
- 18) AN RSC 846 (9532) “Exposition de Marseille 1922, correspondances entre les Résidences, 1920–1921,” Lettre du Délégué du Commissariat Général de l'Indochine à l'Exposition Coloniale de Marseille de 1922; AN RSC 2091 (20280) “Exposition Coloniale de Marseille,” Lettre de Rousseau, Résident de Kandal, Délégué du Cambodge à l'Exposition Coloniale de Marseille de 1922 au Directeur d'Instruction Publique en Indochine, Délégué du Commissaire Général de l'Exposition de Marseille, 20 Mars 1921.

because imaginary elements were partly included [Edwards 1999: 164, 189–193; Morton 2000: 234–243]. In the 1922 Colonial Exposition, the Indochinese pavilion was built as a somewhat accurate reproduction of Angkor Wat, and the performances of the Cambodian dance were shown in front of it during the nights. In an article of a magazine, the dance was mentioned only with relation to reproduced Angkor Wat [Vaillat 1922]. Although the dance as such was appreciated at the 1906 Exposition, Angkor was the focal point of finding value in it at the 1922 Exposition.

Five years later, Groslier reported the “status quo” of the court dance to the Résident Supérieur au Cambodge.<sup>19)</sup> In this report presented on April 15, 1927, he re-asserted the “decline” of the dance and appealed to the Résident Supérieur for the “protection” of the troupe. The report mentioned that three quarters of the members of the royal troupe had been the Siamese dancers in the beginning of the reign of the late King Norodom, and that the Thai language was still used for the texts and nomenclature of the choreography. Groslier, however, insisted as before that Siam had borrowed and translated the Khmer texts of the dance which were derived from Angkor, and thus Siam protected the “tradition.” This report vehemently demanded of the colonial authorities to intervene in the daily trainings and rehearsals in order that the King and France would shirk responsibility for a “crisis” of “decline.” Groslier concluded that the “reform” had to be carried out in 1928 or 1929, because the next Colonial Exposition would be held in Paris in 1931.

This report reveals the reason why Groslier insisted upon the “crisis.” The troupe ought to be “protected” and “reformed” only for achieving the French purpose of sending it to the Exposition. No sooner was the report submitted from him than the Résident Supérieur took an action, and the royal palace was deprived of the troupe in the same year.

### 3. *The French Control of the Troupe*

King Sisowath in his later years was pressured into parting with the royal troupe. Thanks to the Ordonnance royale No. 40 proclaimed on June 14, 1927, the Service des arts cambodgiens of which Groslier was the director, succeeded in the attempt to undertake the management of the troupe.<sup>20)</sup>

In the same year, Sappho Marchal wrote an article on the Cambodian dance, which was an example of the opinion that the French had about the appropriation of the troupe by Groslier. In her conclusion, Marchal stated as follows:

Mr. Groslier, who is the director of the Service des arts cambodgiens and a close friend of the Khmer country, was not able to let the dancers become as it were extinct. He set out to describe the traditions and to reorganize the dance under the auspices of King Sisowath and the protectorate. The

19) AN RSC 735 (8338) “Rapport sur le Théâtre cambodgien par Groslier, 1925–1927,” Rapport du Directeur des Arts cambodgiens au RSC, 15 Avril 1927.

20) AN RSC 3055 (27678) “O.R. N° 1 du 13 Janvier 1930 — Rapportant l’Ordonnance Royale N° 40 du 14 Juin 1927 chargeant le Directeur des Arts cambodgiens du contrôle artistique et technique de la troupe théâtrale du Palais royal, 1930,” Ordonnance Royale, N° 40, 14 Juin 1927.

cause is entrusted to a reliable person, and one might say that it has already been solved<sup>21)</sup> [Marchal 1927: 227].

In February 1929, Groslier gave a lecture on the Cambodian dance at Sorbonne. The “decline” was no longer mentioned in this lecture [Groslier, G. 1929].

But on January 13, 1930, the troupe was returned to the royal palace by the Ordonnance royale No. 1.<sup>22)</sup> Regrettably, no archival source preserved in Cambodia and France reveals the details of this return. On February 6, Groslier wrote a letter to the director of the Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, and he stated in this letter that the “reform” of the troupe was continuing, and that King Sisowath Monivong who had acceded to the throne in 1927 had tried to disturb the control of the troupe by the Service des arts cambodgiens.<sup>23)</sup> Groslier, however, did not mention any concrete example of disturbance by the King. Also, Charle Meyer, who was an adviser to the then Head of the State Norodom Sihanouk, wrote a book on the Cambodian dance in 1963. In this book, he said that the French control was unacceptable to the members of the troupe because they took pride in being bearers of court culture, and so their resistance and a shortage of talented people resulted in the French giving up control.<sup>24)</sup> But Meyer’s book is not very credible, because several mistakes such as the dates of the transfer and return of the troupe can be seen in it.<sup>25)</sup>

At any rate the French lost the troupe in early 1930, and it became impossible to send it to the Colonial Exposition which was scheduled in the next year. Then, Soy Sangvong, who was the wife of a member of the royal family but had organized a private troupe for tourists owing to antagonism at court, was singled out as a substitute. In 1931 when the Colonial Exposition was held at Vincennes in Paris, a huge model of Angkor Wat was built as the Indochinese pavilion once again. Because the inside ornaments and bas-relief were reproduced, this model became more an accurate reproduction than that of the 1922 Exposition in Marseille, and this model served as the stage for Soy Sangvong’s troupe. Although the French failed to control the royal troupe and nominated Soy Sangvong as an understudy, the dance of her troupe was introduced as the “court dance” in a French magazine [Cadilhac 1931: 564].

Soy Sangvong’s troupe was treated well at home as well as abroad. Masks and costumes made at Groslier’s school were given to the troupe. The Résident Supérieur au Cambodge

21) Hereafter, English translation of the French texts is mine.

22) AN RSC 3055 (27678) “O.R. N° 1 du 13 Janvier 1930 — Rapportant l’Ordonnance Royale N° 40 du 14 Juin 1927 chargeant le Directeur des Arts cambodgiens du contrôle artistique et technique de la troupe théâtrale du Palais royal, 1930,” Ordonnance Royale, N° 1, 13 Janvier 1930.

23) AEFEO Carton 11 dossier 12 “Musée: Musée Albert Sarraut à Phnom-Penh, 1905–1944,” Lettre du Directeur des Arts cambodgiens au Directeur de l’EFEO, 13 Février 1928.

24) Charles Meyer. 1963. *Royal Cambodian Ballet*. Phnom Penh: Information Department, pp. 18–19, cited in Cravath [1985: 191–194] and Shapiro [1994: 116–117].

25) As mentioned above, it was in the later years of King Sisowath that the troupe was transferred to the control of Groslier. But Meyer said that the transfer was carried out under the reign of King Monivong. Furthermore, Meyer told that the troupe returned about a year later, while the term of the French control actually lasted for two years and a half.

granted it a subsidy and a monopoly to perform the dance for tourists at Angkor Wat.<sup>26)</sup>

As discussed above, Groslier's discourse on the "tradition," "decline," "crisis," and "protection" affected the Résident Supérieur, which deprived the royal palace of its troupe. Discourse on the "protection" had a close relationship with French colonialism. Cambodia was "protected" by France from Siamese and Vietnamese encroachment on its "territory." Groslier's discourse had a strong resemblance to the French colonial discourse on the "protection" of the "territory." Influenced by Groslier, the French colonial authority tried to "protect" the Angkorean "tradition," but their effort were in vain. Therefore, Soy Sangvong's troupe was chosen and "protected" as a new maintainer of the "tradition." These "protections" meant nothing more than French colonial rule.

#### IV Narratives of the Cambodian Intellectuals in the Colonial Period

##### 1. *King Monivong and the Court Dance*

King Monivong who ascended the throne in 1927 received a different education from his uncle Norodom and his father Sisowath. While his predecessors had been brought up at the royal palace in Bangkok and understood the Thai language, King Monivong attended a military academy in France. A shift from the Thai-speaking Kings to the Francophone might possibly have affected the court dance.

As mentioned above, King Monivong performed an action which was considered a "disturbance" from Groslier's point of view. Norodom Sihanouk, who is a grandson of Monivong, spoke about Monivong's concern for the dance.

My grandfather on the mother's side, King Monivong, composed the words of the songs which accompanied the court dance, when he began to "re-Khmerize" that which had been "Siamized" for several decades. Our temporary conquerors from the East [*sic*] borrowed our arts as the Romans had done from the Greeks, and exerted influence upon them [Sihanouk 1972: 25].

Sihanouk admitted the Siamese influence on Cambodian dance, and it is possible to guess that the "Siamized" dance was far from valuable to the French-educated King. However, Sihanouk's statement is not a contemporary document, nor does any other document tell us what Monivong said about the dance. In the next section a book written by Thiounn, the Minister of the Royal Palace, will be scrutinized as an example of narratives by Cambodian Intellectuals of those days.

##### 2. *Thiounn's Book on the Cambodian Dance*

Thiounn was born in 1864 at Kompong Tralach, which is located in the Kompong Chhnang

26) AN RSC 140 (1429) "Requête formulée par Mme de Soysanvan [*sic*], directrice de la troupe des danseuses à l'Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris," Lettre de Soysangvan [*sic*], ex-Directrice de la Troupe des Danseuses à l'Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris, au RSC, 17 Janvier 1933. Harriet Ponder reported Soy Sangvong's troupe performing at the Angkor monuments [Ponder 1936: 235–253].

Province today. He found a job as an interpreter of French in 1883, and the turning point in his life was in 1892 when he got a position as secretary to the Conseil des Ministres (Council of the Ministers). Since then he was promoted rapidly, because his ability in the language was highly estimated by the French colonial administrators, and he was appointed as the Minister of the Royal Palace in 1902 [Forest 1980: 83]. When King Sisowath and the dance troupe visited France in 1906, Thiounn accompanied them.

Though Thiounn was promoted owing to his ability in French, his knowledge was not restricted to this alone. He was well-grounded in Siamese culture, and so he supervised a project of translating the *Ramakien* or the Thai version of the story of Rama into Khmer.<sup>27)</sup> Just as the court dance had shown, Cambodia had been under the influence of Siamese culture since the middle of the nineteenth century. For the Buddhist monks, to go to Siam to study the Pali language and texts was so common that the Thai language had become an essential condition to be numbered among the intelligentsia until the beginning of the twentieth century. Thiounn who knew both French and Thai appeared on the historical scene during the period of transition from the Thai-speaking intellectuals to the Francophones.

In 1930, Thiounn grasped an opportunity to write a book on the Cambodian dance in French, for sale at the Colonial Exposition in the following year.<sup>28)</sup> According to the colophon of this book which was published in Hanoi, 500 volumes were offered for sale at the Exposition in Paris, and another 500 were sold or distributed in French Indochina.

In this book, Thiounn insisted that the contemporary dancers faithfully followed the gestures and poses of the ancient bas-relief, and that Cambodia preserved the “purity” of the “tradition” [Thiounn 1930: 29–31]. Thiounn admitted the Siamese influence on the accessories, but asserted that the influence was not considered to be foreign because the accessories of the Siamese dancers had originated from Angkor [*ibid.*: 59]. The *Ramayana* and *Enao*, that is, what Moura transcribed as “Eynao,” were mentioned as the examples of the repertoires. Thiounn declared that *Enao* was bought from Java by way of Siam [*ibid.*: 89], but as for the *Ramayana*, he told nothing about the Siamese influence [*ibid.*: 87].

Thiounn’s argument was very similar to Groslier’s which insisted on the preservation of the “tradition” even though it was re-imported from Siam. The similarity was caused not only because of Thiounn’s ability in the French language but due to his position as the Minister of the Royal Palace, who was responsible for the affairs of the royal palace, the budget of the Kingdom of Cambodia, and the fine arts. Concerning the management of the Ecole des arts cambodgiens and Musée Albert Sarraut, Thiounn often exchanged letters with Groslier.<sup>29)</sup>

27) AN RSC 881 (9890) “Au sujet du manuscrit de “l’histoire du Ramayana” par S.E.M. Thiounn, 1923–1930.”

28) The annual report of the *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient* in 1928 listed the title of the books published by the Bibliothèque royale (Royal Library) in Phnom Penh. In this list, a book on the Cambodian dance written by Thiounn was put on [Anonymous 1928: 618]. But it is unclear whether the book published in 1928 was the same as that in 1930, because the former is not preserved at the National Archives and libraries in Cambodia.

29) For example, AN RSC 735(8339) “Budget de l’Ecole des Arts cambodgiens,” Lettre du directeur de ↗

Moreover, Thiounn's participation in the Commission des antiquités historiques et archéologiques du Cambodge established in 1905 gave him opportunities to obtain information regarding the French view concerning Angkor.<sup>30)</sup> This committee, which had been suspended in the early 1910s because the Cambodian domestic branch of the Société d'Angkor was founded in Phnom Penh, was reorganized in 1918. Groslier and Thiounn took part in it as permanent members.<sup>31)</sup> According to the minutes of the committee, the colonial administrators in charge of the cultural policies reported the French concern about Angkor such as the restoration of the monuments.<sup>32)</sup> Thus, Thiounn was in a position to know well about the French colonial discourse on Angkor. That Thiounn's book was written for French readers might be one of the reasons why Thiounn adopted the French discourse on the "tradition."

However, Thiounn's arguments can be differentiated from Groslier on several points. Thiounn identified the historical King Jayavarman II with the legendary King Preah Ket Mealea, who had been spoken of as the founder of Angkor Wat in Khmer oral literature and the royal chronicles of Cambodia [*ibid.*: 27]. This identification had nothing to do with the Angkorean studies by the French. The French literature written in the late nineteenth century introduced Khmer oral traditions, including the legend of Preah Ket Mealea. But since the 1920s, the important documents had been restricted to the stone inscriptions of the Angkorean era, because the studies by the French became exclusive to the Angkorean history and monuments. They neglected what the Khmers said about Angkor in their oral traditions. But for Thiounn who supervised the compilation of a new version of the royal chronicle completed in 1934, the folktale concerning Angkor Wat was worth handing down. He valued French discourse which professed to be "academic," and tried to integrate it with Khmer orality.

The attitude toward Siam was another example of the differences between Groslier and Thiounn. The latter adopted the description of Siam as a protector of the "tradition," but rejected that of a destroyer. What was more, Thiounn never mentioned that the "tradition" came to a "crisis" of "decline," and that the French had to "protect" it. Judging from these

↘ l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens à S.E. le Ministre des Beaux-arts, 7 Janvier 1918; AN RSC 735(8333) "De [*sic*] deux bandeaux-nagas, sculpture antique de la pagode de Phsar, Province de Babor que Sa Majesté fait reconstruire," Lettre du Directeur des Arts Cambodgiens, Conservateur du Musée du Cambodge à Son Excellence le Ministre du Palais, 8 Mars 1922.

30) AOM GGI 16916 "Commission des antiquités au Cambodge, 1905," Arrêté du GGI, 3 Octobre 1905.

31) AN RSC 476(4256) "Commission des antiquités historiques et archéologiques," Arrêté du GGI, 12 Août 1919.

32) AN RSC 171(1765) "Commission des antiquités historiques et archéologiques du Cambodge—Programme des Travaux d'Angkor—Organisation du Service de Conservation des Ruines Cambodgiennes—Rapport au Ministre a.s. de la conservation des ruines cambodgiennes," Commission des antiquités du Cambodge, 7 Novembre 1919; Procès-verbal de la séance du 26 Novembre 1920 de la Commission des antiquités du Cambodge; AN RSC 476(4256) "Commission des antiquités historiques et archéologiques," Procès-verbal de la séance de la commission des antiquités du 17 Février 1921; AN RSC 871(9769) "Commission des antiquités historiques et archéologiques du Cambodge—Règlementation, classement et protection des monuments historiques," Procès-verbal de la Commission des antiquités historiques et archéologiques du Cambodge, Séance du 17 Août 1925; AN RSC 736(8370) "Parc d'Angkor—Commission des Antiquités [*sic*] historiques et archéologiques," Procès-verbal de la séance de la commission des antiquités, Réunion du 13 Octobre 1926.



differences, Thiounn's book can be interpreted as an intellectual practice of appropriating French colonial discourse selectively, orchestrating it with the existing narratives, and constructing a new discursive formation.

Because Thiounn's post was that of the Minister of the Royal Palace, his book merits reading not as his personal opinion, but as a reflection of the way of thinking about Cambodian court culture. Thiounn who had been appointed as the Minister in the later years of King Norodom, was in a position to be acquainted with court culture under the reigns of Norodom and Sisowath. Thiounn's commitment to court culture was so deep that his translation of the *Ramakien* became a theme of the temple murals along the gallery of Voat Preah Kaev Morokât, situated to the south of the palace. His book in 1930, however, did not mention the Siamese influence on the story of Rama in Cambodia. Thus, this book can be considered as evidence that the Siamese influence upon Cambodian court culture was getting less and less valued.

Monivong's concern over the dance was called "re-Khmerization" by Sihanouk. This terminology might be based on the assumption that those who had lived in the Angkorean period had been the "true" Khmers with the "authentic" Khmer culture. But Thiounn's book reveals that selective adoptions of colonial discourse constructed the French-educated Khmers' perspective of Angkor. Therefore, the reality of the "re-Khmerization" was a transition from the "Siamized" Khmers to those *à la française*. Thiounn embodied this transition individually.

### 3. *Translation of the Thai Text*

In the 1930s when Thiounn's book was published, Groslieresque discourse did not completely expel narratives influenced by Siamese culture from media such as the magazine *Kambuja Suriya* issued by the Bibliothèque Royale (Royal Library) in Phnom Penh. This library, which had been founded in 1923 under the control of the royal palace [Cuisinier 1927: 105], was transferred to the direction of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient in 1925.<sup>33)</sup> On the occasion of the inauguration in August, Suzanne Karpelès who belonged to the Ecole was appointed the *conservateur* (chief librarian). Since then, the library had vigorously published many books and magazines.<sup>34)</sup> The *Kambuja Suriya*, the inaugural volume of which was issued in 1926, was an important part of the publishing business operated by the library.

In 1936, a Buddhist monk named Preah Moha Pitou Krasem translated the Thai text into

33) Most of the previous studies other than Penny Edwards' Ph.D. dissertation [Edwards 1999] neglected or looked down the existence of the Royal Library, and misunderstood the activities of the library as those of the Buddhist Institute founded in 1930. Until February 8, 1943 when the library was merged with the Institute, the former had issued magazines and books. The reason of the amalgamation was the arrest of the librarians on a charge of organizing a demonstration against the arrest of a Buddhist monk Hem Chieu. AEFEO carton 19 dossier 23-3 "Etudes Bouddhiques: Institut Bouddhique, 1928-1953," Rapport confidentiel du Secrétaire Général de l'Institut Bouddhique au Directeur de l'EFEO, 2 Juillet 1943.

34) The annual reports of the *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* in 1928 and 1930 listed the books published by the Royal Library, and the books were consigned for sale at several cities in Cambodia and Cochinchina from 1928 [Anonymous 1928: 616-618; Anonymous 1930: 526].



Khmer, and contributed to the *Kambuja Suriya* twice.<sup>35)</sup> Apart from the translation of the Thai text, Krasem re-translated the *Hitopadeśa* or the compilation of the Indian fables from the French translation, and sent it to the magazine [Jacob 1996: 51]. Thus, Krasem who was capable of understanding Thai and French was also a member of the intelligentsia in the period of the transition, aside from Thiounn.

The first serial declared that the dance was based on an expression of emotion, and that there were two kinds of the dances in Siam, namely the folk dances handed down from ancient times and the ritual dances brought in from India. This first installment introduced the contents of a book on the Siamese dances, and concluded that both the Siamese and Khmer dances had been transmitted from India [Krasem 1936a]. In this way, the Khmer dance was mentioned briefly but nothing was said about Angkor, nor was there any reference to the cultural relationship between Siam and Cambodia.

The second serial told that manuscripts on the dances had been brought over from India to Siam, that these had been translated into Thai, and that the Thai manuscripts on the dances had been written under the reigns of King Rama I (r. 1782–1809) and King Rama II (r. 1809–24) [Krasem 1936b]. Neither Khmer nor Angkor was mentioned in this second installment.

Krasem's translation shows a great difference from the discourse on the "tradition." While Thiounn's book accepted French discourse in 1930, this kind of the new discursive formation might have been prevalent only around the royal palace. It must have been obvious for those who understood the Thai language that the Cambodian dance had a relationship not with Angkor but with Siam, and that was the reason why Krasem found some significance in translating the Thai text and contributing it to the *Kambuja Suriya*.

Until the middle of the 1930s when Cambodian intellectuals who knew both the Thai and French languages played important roles, the new discursive formation adopted from the French and the old narrative influenced by Siam, coexisted. The next chapter will discuss the kind of narrative that became dominant in Cambodia after independence.

## V The Court Dance after Independence

### 1. *The Reform of the Troupe*

Along with constructing a new discursive formation, the 1930s saw an attempt to reconstruct the royal troupe. Because many of the members had withdrawn from it when King Sisowath had passed away, and the French control had also caused a shortage of talented people, the reconstruction started from the training. Khun Meak<sup>36)</sup> who had belonged to the troupe under

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35) The first serial did not mention that the text was translated from the Thai language. While the Khmer title was "the book on the dance written by Moha Pitou Krasem," the title was translated as "the Cambodian theatre by Moha Pitou Krasem" in the French table of contents. So it seemed for the French readers as if Krasem wrote this installment for himself, and discussed the Cambodian theatre. The second serial clarified that the text was translated from Thai, but did not refer to the original author and title.

36) Pol Pot's elder sister was taught the dance by Khun Meak, so the latter became acquainted with ↗

the reign of the late King gathered about 20 girls and taught them. A few years later, Sisowath Kossamak, Sihanouk's mother, took over the troupe [Cravath 1985: 204; Shapiro 1994: 115–116].

In November 1942, the Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai visited Phnom Penh, and a show of the Cambodian dance was planned for the reception. The French colonial authority recommended Soy Sangvong's troupe, but the royal palace declared that Kossamak's troupe would perform. Eventually, Kossamak succeeded in taking charge, because the reception fell on the birthday of King Sihanouk who had acceded to the throne the previous year [Cravath 1985: 214–215]. This first official performance was the starting point of the political role which the court dance would play in Cambodia after independence.

Around 1953 when Cambodia achieved independence, Kossamak modified the court dance in many points [Cravath 1985: 217–221]. Though the members of the troupe had been restricted to women since the reign of King Ang Duong, male dancers also participated in such repertoires as the story of Rama. All-night performances as court ritual were discontinued, and the performing hours became shortened. The dance was shown to foreign VIPs visiting Cambodia, and the troupe accompanied Sihanouk when he went abroad.

Among the reforms accomplished by Kossamak, the creation of new repertoires such as the Apsara dance, *inter alia*, is significant for the critical analysis of discourses on Angkor [Shapiro 1994: 125; Phim and Thompson 1999: 33–34]. That dance which imitated the bas-relief of the Angkor monuments became a *spécialité* of Princess Norodom Buppha Devi, Sihanouk's daughter. She was considered to be a reification of the Angkorean “tradition,” and her dance was frequently presented with photographs in magazines [Anonymous 1958: 17; Meyer 1964: 34–35].

Although new repertoires were created, those based on classical literature which had been influenced by Siamese culture were still performed. The National Archives in Phnom Penh preserve about 70 items of the programs for various ceremonies. *Eneo* was often selected to be performed for foreign guests.<sup>37)</sup>

## 2. Nationalistic Discourse on the “Tradition”

Among the diverse narratives in the 1930s, the French-influenced discourse became the official view on the dance and “tradition.” Thiounn's book [Thiounn 1930] became the protagonist of

↘ young Pol Pot and paid the school expenses for him [Shapiro 1994: 115–116]. Chea Samy, who was the main informant of Toni Shapiro, married with his elder brother. Pol Pot had a close connection with the royal troupe [Ghosh 1998: 12–14].

37) AN DC 311 “Danses khmères exécutées par la troupe royale, le 6 Mars 1958, à l'occasion de la fête du Tang Toc”; AN DC 311 “Cambodian Dances performed by the “Troupe Royale,” June 20th, 1959, in honour of the His Excellency Mr Soekarno, President of the Republic of Indonesia”; AN DC 311 “Cambodian Dances performed by the ‘troupe royale’, Monday, February 15th, 1960, in the honour of Commander-in-Chief of Far East, Land Force-General Sir Richard Hull”; AN DC 311 “Danses khmères exécutées par la troupe royale, Samedi 2 Avril 1960, en l'honneur de Monsieur Louis Jacquinet, Ministre d'Etat, Représentant de Monsieur le Président de la République Française à l'occasion de la cérémonie d'inauguration de l'appontement du Port Sihanouk Ville.”

the construction of postcolonial discourse on the court dance.

In 1956 this book was reprinted by the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh, and an extract from it was inserted in the French version of the educational magazine in 1964 [Thiounn 1964]. Even after independence, this version of the magazine was still distributed to the teachers, because the bi-linear educational system established in the colonial period was still existed. While the French education had been gradually expanded since colonization, the French administrators in the middle of the 1920s certified local schools attached to the Buddhist temples as official educational institutions, and named them the “*écoles de pagode rénovée*,” where the Khmer language was used for instruction [Bezançon 1992; 2002: 175–179; Sorn 1995: 186–232]. The French-education for the elite and the Khmer one for the ordinary people were separated. The bi-linear system lasted until 1967, when it was decided that the Khmer language had to be used in all the institutions, including secondary and tertiary education [Khin 1999]. Under these circumstances the French-educated Cambodian nationals became omnipresent, and they were regarded as potential readers for the reprint or insertion of Thiounn’s book. This book had been published for the French readers visiting the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris, but it had a circulation in postcolonial Cambodia because of the lasting colonial education system.

The governmental publications in those days carried almost the same discourse as Thiounn. In an article of a French-language magazine issued by the Ministry of Information, the court dance was presented as the “tradition” because of its “similarity” to the Angkorean relief. Although the cultural influence from Angkor to Siam was mentioned in this article, the Siamese influence was not referred to, and Cambodia was declared to preserve the “purity” of the dance [Anonymous 1958: 15]. Meanwhile the book which the same Ministry published in order to propagate Cambodian society and culture to the foreign countries stated that the Cambodian dance had been influenced by India, Java, Burma, and Siam, but the Cambodian court allegedly preserved the “tradition” because Angkorean culture had been transmitted to Siam before the Siamese influence. Adoption of the Indian *Ramayana* in the Angkorean era and its current performance were considered to be proofs of the lasting “tradition,” but nothing was said about the influence of the Siamese version of the *Ramakien* [Royaume du Cambodge Ministère de l’Information 1962: 266].

Even in the Khmer-language magazine appeared the similar discourse on the “tradition.” In the middle of the 1950s, boxed items in the *Kambuja Suriya* discussed the Khmer dance. These items described that the Khmers had played the dance since ancient times and won fame, and that the dance transmitted from then had to be protected, researched, and maintained [Chap 1954; 1956]. The expression “ancient times” here referred to the pre-Angkorean or Angkorean period. The Siamese influence after these periods was not mentioned in these items.

Both in the French and Khmer media, the official view in the Sihanouk era regarded the dance as the Angkorean “tradition.” Even if the Siamese influence was referred to, Siam was treated only as the protector of the “tradition.” Because of prevalence of this official view, there

was no room for the practice of translating the Thai text and contributing it to the magazine. As in the case of the national anthems which have been sung about the Angkor monuments, and the case of the national flags which have depicted Angkor Wat even under the socialist regimes, the idealized Angkor has been incorporated into Cambodian nationalism. Post/colonial discourses on the court dance too were utilized for the political purposes for which Angkor served the nation-state.<sup>38)</sup>

### 3. *Narratives of the French in the 1960s*

Though the independence of Cambodia put an end to colonial intervention, the French still wrote about the Cambodian dance in the 1960s. This section is devoted to a critique of two articles. One was written by Solange Thierry who has been majoring in Khmer folktales, and the other by Bernard Philippe Groslier, who was George Groslier's son and an expert on the Angkorean studies.

The same old discourse on the Angkorean "tradition" was repeated by Solange Thierry. She pointed out that depictions of the dance were to be seen on the Angkorean inscriptions and bas-relief, and argued that the movements of the dancers' bodies and fingers had preserved the "tradition" since the Angkorean era. The influence of the Indian dance upon Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Burma was mentioned in her article, but she did not refer to the Siamese influence on Cambodia, either [Thierry 1963].

While Thierry's argument was attuned to the French colonial discourse on Angkor, the most serious problem in her article is the arbitrary quotations from George Groslier's book written in 1913. She quoted the description of the dance in the Angkorean period, but the Siamese influence was excluded from her citations. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Leclère and Groslier constructed an argument that the Angkorean "tradition" had been preserved even through Siam. Nevertheless, a disregard for the Siamese influence made it easy to insist upon the direct transmission of the "tradition." Thus Thierry's article might omit a circuitous argument about the preservation of the "tradition" via Siam.

In 1965, Bernard Philippe Groslier wrote an article under the title "Danse et musique sous les rois d'Angkor (Dance and Music under the Kings of Angkor)." As might be expected from the title, this article examined only the Angkorean inscriptions, and mentioned nothing about the contemporary dance. But he pointed out that the vocabulary of the old Khmer language had been preserved in the modern one, and referred to a classical literary work named *Kakei*

38) Although nationalistic discourse was dominant in the Sihanouk period, folk dances were also appropriated by the state in order to create national culture. In the national conventions of the Jeunesse Socialiste Royale Khmère or the youth association of Sangkum which monopolized parliamentary seats, folk dances and songs were performed for the VIPs in the government. But such a repertoire as the Bassak theatre which adapted classical Chinese opera via Vietnam was not shown, probably because this theatre transgressed the national border. AN DC 310 "Programme de la soirée asiatique de la J.S.R.K., le 2 Mars 1959"; AN DC 345 "Programme des spectacles artistiques présentés par le mouvement de la Jeunesse Socialiste Royale Khmère du Royaume, placés sous la Très Haute Présidence de Leurs Majestés le Roi et la Reine et Samdech Sahachivin, au Terrain du Mén, à l'occasion du troisième rallye, le 2 Mars 1960."

which exemplified the nomenclature of the dance and music [Groslier, B.Ph. 1965].

Bernard Philippe Groslier might take up *Kakei* because this piece was thought to denote the “continuity” between Angkor and modernity. In order to claim the “continuity,” the French of the past made use of the costumes, accessories, and movements of the bodies or fingers. Groslier *films* tried to reinforce this claim by using linguistic knowledge. However, *Kakei* was written by King Ang Duong in 1815 as a translation of the Thai work entitled *Kaki* [Khing 1990: 188]. The Khmer version of *Kakei* is not so much an evidence of the “continuity,” as that of the cultural influence from Siam.

As discussed above, the articles written by the French after the independence of Cambodia still considered the dance as the Angkorean “tradition.” It is impossible to judge these articles to be academic. But the opinion by the French “specialists” guaranteed the Cambodian government to claim nationalistic discourse on Angkor from a quasi-academic point of view. Those who had once been the colonizer or the colonized, now chanted the “tradition” unambiguously.

#### 4. *The Court Dance after the 1970s*

The formation of the Lon Nol regime in March 18, 1970, and the establishment of the Khmer Republic on October 9 of the same year, scarcely modified the discursive formation of the dance. Many words related to the monarchy were eliminated from the official vocabulary, and so the court dance had its name changed into “classical dance.” The royal troupe was transferred to the control of the University of Fine Arts [Cravath 1985: 233–240; Shapiro 1994: 128–130; Phim and Thompson 1999: 42]. In spite of these alterations, the official view regarding the dance and “tradition” was nothing else than those of the colonial and Sihanouk periods. Anonymous articles serially appeared on a magazine, but the contents were actually the reissue of each of the chapters from Thiounn’s book [Anonymous 1972a; 1972b; 1972c; 1972d; 1972e].

On April 17, 1975 when the Pol Pot regime overthrew the Khmer Republic, the members of the troupe were ordered off the cities along with other dwellers, and the performances were prohibited. Since January 7, 1979, when the Heng Samrin regime was established, the survivors returned to Phnom Penh, and began to reconstruct the troupe and the University of Fine Arts. Aside from these efforts at home, the Cambodian refugees organized several troupes abroad.

Since the foundation of the new Kingdom in 1993, the Ramayana festivals have been held three times at Angkor Wat, where the troupe which belonged to the Department of Performing Arts in the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, performed the court dance. From December 30, 1999, to the first of January 2000, the ceremonies which celebrated the new millennium were held at Angkor Wat again. The stage in front of the monument served for the court and folk dances. These ceremonies were telecast as live programs, in which the announcers introduced the court dance as the Angkorean “tradition.”

In 2001 Pech Tum Kavel, undersecretary in the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts,

published a book entitled *Khmer Dances*. One chapter devoted to the court dance traced the origin of the dances back to the pre-Angkorean era [Pech 2001: 32–44]. This book pointed out the differences between the dances of that era and the contemporary ones, and such differences were attributed to the result that the Khmers had pursued their ethnic characteristics since the Angkorean era. Pech Tum Kravel suggested that the dance might have been popular under the reign of King Jayavarman II, because the Angkorean civilization had flowered in those days, and that the court dance might have been performed even in the post-Angkorean period. But he never revealed the documents his conviction was based on. Though the Angkorean influences to Siam and Laos were proudly mentioned in this book, the possibility of acculturation in Siam was not taken into account. He declared that Siamese culture had influenced Cambodia under the reign of King Ang Duong,<sup>39)</sup> but asserted that the origin was ascribable to Angkor, because Siamese culture had been affected by the Angkorean civilization. The flourishing national culture under the Sangkum regime was mentioned in this book, while nothing whatever was stated about the colonial period.

Pech Tum Kravel's argument is in harmony with the colonial and nationalistic discourses. Admitting the Siamese influence, he guessed that Siam had taken the role of protecting the "tradition." He did not adopt the posture of discussing the colonial period when the "tradition" had been invented. The printing and broadcasting media have not yet rung down the curtain on the postcolonial age in Cambodia.

## VI Conclusion

In *The Invention of Tradition*, a well known book discussing nationalism and modernity, Terence Ranger scrutinized a case of invented "tradition" during the English colonization of Africa. The "tradition" was invented by the English colonizers, for the purpose of differentiating themselves from the colonized, and it was imitated by the latter. Ranger concluded that a social fluctuation caused the invention of "tradition" [Ranger 1983]. Discourse which regarded the Cambodian court dance as the Angkorean "tradition" was also invented under such a fluctuation of colonial encounters.

Not only the court dance, but the discourse on Angkor as a whole was invented by the French so as to justify colonial rule. Historiography which glorified the Angkorean era and looked down on the post-Angkorean era was related to the French "protection," that is, the French discourse on colonization. Since 1907 when France obtained the Angkor monuments, the restoration had contributed to the propaganda for the renaissance of the "glory" under French rule. The more powerful the influence George Groslier exerted upon the cultural policies, the more prevalent his discourse on the "tradition" became. The "protection" of the "tradition" which had come to a "crisis" of "decline," resulted in the seizure of the royal troupe by Groslier.

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39) This book included English translation from the Khmer text, but the Siamese influence was omitted from the translated text [Pech 2001: 15].

The Colonial Expositions clearly show the process by which the court dance became the Angkorean “tradition.” Although the Cambodian dance as such had been appreciated during the 1906 Exposition, it was understood in connection with Angkor in 1922. Then, the colonial authority singled out a private troupe as the maintainer of the “tradition,” and sent it to the 1931 Exposition. The relationship between the Colonial Exposition and dance was illustrative of the colonial way of thinking.

However, Angkor had been a part of the Khmer past. Though they had to learn the history of Angkor from the French historians, Khmer folktales and the Cambodian royal chronicles had mentioned the monuments. In the 1930s, the Khmer intellectuals obtained opportunities to talk about the dance through the publishing media. Along with the translation of the Thai texts, an integration of French discourse on Angkor and the existing Khmer narratives was attempted.

After independence, the “tradition” which had been promulgated by Groslier and adopted by Thiounn became the official view towards the dance. Because colonial discourse on Angkor was incorporated into Cambodian nationalism, the court dance which had been connected with Angkor was utilized to serve the nation-state. Moreover, the French “academic” writings reinforced nationalistic discourse on the “tradition.”

Nationalism has been based on collective memories and oblivions. Since Angkor was appropriated by Cambodian nationalism, the “glorious” age of Angkor has been memorized as the “true” past of the nation. In order to share this kind of a historical view, the origin of adopting Angkor from the French colonial discourse had to be forgotten. In the case of the court dance, the Siamese influence too needed to be expelled from their remembrances. These double oblivions have been indispensable for inculcating the newly constructed “origin” of the Angkorean “tradition,” in the mind of the Cambodian nationals. Even after the civil war which was prolonged for 20 years and the tyranny under the Pol Pot regime, the national memories of this “origin” have been influential in Cambodia. Discourse on the “tradition” has been repeated and reproduced through books and TV shows.

### Abbreviations

AEFEO	Archives de l' Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris
AN	Archives Nationales, Phnom Penh
AOM	Archive d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence
BEFEO	<i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient</i>
BSEI	<i>Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises</i>
DC	Documentation du Cambodge
EFEO	Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient
GGI	Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
KS	<i>Kambuja Suriya</i>
RSC	Résident Supérieur au Cambodge



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