

NATION-BUILDING AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN KHMER LITERATURE TEXTBOOKS FOR GRADES 11–12: ANALYSIS OF FOUR KHMER HISTORICAL NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

This academic article aims to examine the key ideas presented in selected novels included in the Khmer Literature textbooks for Grades 11–12 of Cambodia, in order to understand the values and ideologies that these textbooks seek to instill in Cambodian youth, using Benedict Anderson's concept of using language and literature to build a nation. The study finds that four novels are included in the textbooks: (1) *Phum Tirachchan*, (2) *Phokambor*, (3) *Kuli Komnaen*, and (4) *The New Sun in Old Land*. All of the selected novels approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport are historical novels depicting significant events in three major historical periods. The first period portrays Cambodia under unjust French colonial rule, leading to the millenarian rebellion known as *Phokambor* in *Phokambor*, and the assassination of a French official named Bardez at Krang Lav village in *Phum Tirachchan*. The second period depicts Cambodia under Japanese occupation during World War II (1941–1945), as presented in *Kuli Komnaen*. The third period portrays Cambodia under the leadership of His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk after the country gained independence from France, as depicted in *The New Sun in Old Land*. The findings indicate that these textbooks aim to: (1) cultivate patriotism among Khmer youth by reinforcing the nation's traumatic historical experiences under foreign powers, namely France and Japan; (2) condemn Cambodians who collaborated with foreign rulers and betrayed their compatriots for personal gain; (3) glorify the monarchy, particularly King Norodom Sihanouk, as the Father of National Independence and a monarch who brought progress and prosperity to the nation; (4) instill democratic ideals emphasizing equality, rights, and freedom for all citizens; and (5) highlight the importance of agriculture and handicrafts as occupations that sustain people's livelihoods and well-being, without necessitating migration to urban areas for work.

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INTRODUCTION

Novels are a form of fiction that reflect ongoing cultural evolution. It serves as a record of events and an interpretation of various aspects of life, a record of values grounded in facts, a repository of information that can be put to use, and a record of the shared happiness of the people. Novels clearly reveal human characters and experiences and are filled with imaginative sparks that awaken the collective power of humanity. In addition, the novel is a form of prose fiction that is widely read and is not constrained by metrical or prosodic rules in narrating content (Anantasan, 2025).

During the early part of the twentieth century, changes in all aspect of Cambodian society under the French protectorate considerably influenced the cultural and literary life of the country. Traditional verse for the royal court was slowly replaced by a new form of narrative prose fiction, the novel, which portrayed the real lives of ordinary people. In the late 1930s, the first Khmer novel appeared as a result of Western literary influence and marked a new era in the history of Khmer literature. Not only was it a total break from classical poetic writing, its realistic presentation of human experiences also interested an emergent reading public. From then on, there was a steady production of novels of various types so that gradually it become one of the dominant literary genres in Cambodia (Amratisha, 2024).

In Khmer, the term “novel” is referred to as “Prolomloak” (ប្រឡូក). Amratisha (2024) explains that the word “Prolom” in Khmer means to persuade or to win one’s heart through coaxing, while the word “loak” refers to the world, nature, or the universe. Therefore, the term “Prolomloak” denotes a story written to captivate the human heart. The first writer to use this term to refer to the novel as a literary form was Kim Hak, the author of the novel *Tonle Sap Lake*, believed to be the first Khmer novel. This work functioned as a bridge between traditional narrative forms and modern storytelling and first appeared in the Khmer literary sphere in 1939. Moreover, a study of the development of Khmer novels across different periods reveals that those in positions of power in Cambodia have consistently used Prolomloak as a tool to communicate messages they wish the public to receive or to steer public thinking in desired directions (Hutintha, 2003).

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of Cambodia has included novels as reading passages in Khmer language textbooks in order to develop students’ reading skills, provide enjoyment, and instill certain political ideologies through what can be described as a hidden curriculum, aimed at producing desirable human resources. At the upper secondary level (Grades 11–12), the Ministry separates the textbooks into two volumes: one focusing on linguistic principles (Khmer literature) and the other focusing on literature (Khmer language). This structure is comparable to Thai language textbooks from Grade 1 through Grade 12. At the primary level, students use *Wannakhadi Lamnam* (Melodic Literary Works) alongside *Phasa Phathi* (Pathways of the Thai Language), which emphasizes linguistic principles, while at the secondary level, *Wannakhadi Wijak* (Literary Appreciation) is used alongside *Wiwit Phasa* (Varieties of Language).

The concept used in this article is the use of language as a tool for nation-building. The hypothesis is that Khmer Literature Textbooks, which represent a high level of culture level, not only enhance student’s knowledge but also contain hidden political ideologies that influence the nation-building. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* by Benedict Anderson explains that a nation is an imagined community that is sustained by language. Language fosters particular solidarities because it creates simultaneity experience. For example, the language in song or poems serves to connect people, creating a shared experience among those who express it together (Srisitanont Luangkrajang, 2022).

NOVELS INCLUDED IN THE KHMER LITERATURE TEXTBOOKS FOR GRADES 11–12

The Khmer Literature textbooks for Grades 11–12 comprise four novels:

1. *Phum Tirachchan* (ភូមិតិរាច្ចាន) by Deuk Keam (ឌឹក គាម) and Deak Om (ឌឿក អុំ);
2. *Phokambor* (ពោធិ៍កំបោរ) by Su Comroeun (ស៊ូ ចំរើន);
3. *Kuli Komnaen* (ក្លីកំណែន) by Qim Thok (គីម ថុក); and
4. *The New Sun in Old Land* (ព្រះអាទិត្យថ្មីលើផែនដីចាស់) by Suan Sorin (ស្នេ ឥស្សីន).

The author classifies the four novels included in the Khmer Literature textbooks for Grades 11–12 and finds that all of them are historical novels¹. These works depict significant events from the period when Cambodia was under French colonial rule (1863–1953) through the era of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People’s Socialist Community) period (1955–1970). The details are as follows.

***Phum Tirachchan* (ភូមិតិរាច្ចាន): A Novel Reflecting Khmer Society under French Rule**

Phum Tirachchan appears in the Grade 11 textbook, Chapter 3, in a section entitled “One Night in Krang Lav Village” (យប់មួយនៅភូមិក្រាំងលាវ)

¹ Chitjamnong (2018, pp. 185–186) refers to this type of novel as “*Wannakam Sang Reangbandancai*” [inspirational literature], which aims to generate social and political impact. Such works typically employ a strongly evocative style and often follow nationalist themes or emphasize patriotism. They may draw on history to varying degrees, depending on the case, but they interpret the behaviors and actions of characters in ways that align with the predetermined core message. In some instances, the narrative is constructed primarily around a historical setting, while the storyline itself is fictional. Literature of this kind is rarely criticized, as the thematic focus alone is sufficient to demonstrate its value in terms of national stability and the cultivation of civic attitudes. Consequently, it is often endorsed by state institutions related to art and education, and many such works have been selected as textbooks across multiple educational levels under the curriculum of the Ministry of Education.

The novel *Phum Tirachchan* is a historical novel written by Deuk Keam (ឌុក គាម) and Deak Om (ឌាក់ អុំ). It was composed around 1964–1965 and published in 1971. The novel depicts the villagers of Krang Lav Village (ក្រាំងលាវ) in Kampong Chhnang Province, who were oppressed and exploited by French colonial authorities. This oppression ultimately led the villagers to rise up and assassinate a French colonial official named “Bardez” (បារដេស) in 1925.

“The incident provoked strong dissatisfaction from the French authorities, who subsequently deployed troops to suppress those labeled as rebels and renamed the village “Phum Tirachchan” as a form of condemnation for the uprising”

(Sokheng, 2013, pp. 112–113)

Deuk Keam was born in 1936 in Kratie Province. He previously worked at the Buddhist Institute (ពុទ្ធសាសនបណ្ឌិត្យ) in the Research Division. Deak Om was born in 1934 in Battambang Province. He was ordained and studied at the Buddhist University (ពុទ្ធកមហាវិទ្យាល័យ) in Phnom Penh and also studied at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities. In addition to his knowledge of French, Deak Om was also proficient in English (Pisey, 2011).

The excerpt selected for students’ study consists of a dialogue among villagers who possess an intense sense of patriotism. They are engaged in a discussion about assassinating a French colonial official named “Bardez,” who exercised authority unjustly and oppressed the Khmer people, as follows:

បងប្អូនទាំងអស់គ្នា! ខាងខ្ញុំទាំងពីរនាក់ឯណោះ គឺជួននិងនេវបានស្រុះចិត្តធ្វើជាស្រេចថាសម្លាប់បារាំងកំណាចឈ្មោះបារដេសនេះឱ្យបាន បើសម្លាប់វាមិនបានទេ យើងខ្ញុំមិនខ្ចីឱ្យគេឈ្មោះខ្ញុំថាជាជួនអ្នកជើង ឯកព្រៃខ្មែរជាជាថ្ងៃខាត! ស្តាប់បានទេបងប្អូន! ពេលនោះអ្នកកសាងប្រាសាទបាវ៉ាងហាក់ដូចជាភ្ញាក់ខ្លួនព្រិត! ស្ទាង់ភ្នែកចែស! ទើបឈ្មោះមេស្រីមួយរំពេច:

- តើឈ្មោះឯងចង់សម្លាប់បារាំង ដើម្បីគ្រាន់តែឈ្មោះបញ្ចេញឈ្មោះទេឬ?

- ហាស!ហាស! ហាស!...ខ្ញុំសុំសរសើរម៉ោងចេះសួរគ្រាន់បើ! តែម៉ោងនោះកប់គំនិតបង្អិតត្រង់មិនចេះផ្ទុយឱ្យយោបល់គ្នាផង ។ ត្រូវសំហេង យល់ថាបើខ្មែរធ្លាប់ដឹងពីជំនុំផ្ទាល់ខ្លួន ។ ប៉ុន្តែគំនិតជួនដែលចង់សម្លាប់បារាំងកំណាចនេះ គឺក្នុងនាមខ្មែរអ្នកដែលមិនសុខចិត្តនឹងអំពើជិះជាន់យ៉ាងអមនុស្សធម៌ពីសំណាក់បារាំង... ។

- ពេលនោះស្រាបតែអ្នកស្តាប់ទាំងប្រាំនាក់ដូចជាណាត់គ្នាត្រូវ ក៏តាំងបញ្ចេញវាចាដូចគ្នាថា: ខ្ញុំសុំចូលរៀនផង...ទើបឈ្មោះនេវនិយាយបន្តពីមិត្តរបស់ខ្លួន

- រឿងនេះប៉ុន្មានជាក់ស្តែងទេ គឺមានស្តាប់ មានសរ មានស៊ី មានសង ព្រោះបារាំងមានអំណាចបើខ្មែរយើង បើយើងសម្លាប់គេបានមួយគេក៏បរិសុទ្ធសម្លាប់យើងបានដប់ប្រាំផងដែរ។ បើយើងត្រូវបងប្អូនជ្រាបឱ្យច្បាស់ថា ពួកខ្មែរចង់បារាំង វាចាំតែផ្ទុយចាប់យើងឱ្យបារាំងធ្វើទោស ដើម្បីបានបុណ្យបានសក្តិសិរីរុងរឿងខាងខាង។ ដូចនេះ បើបងប្អូនហ៊ានស្ម័គ្រចិត្តសម្លាប់បារាំងឈ្មោះបារដេសនេះបើយើង ត្រូវតែកាំងចិត្តជាមុនឱ្យស្រេចថា អញសម្លាប់បារាំងបារាំងនិងសម្លាប់អញវិញ។ ប្រសិនបើបងប្អូននៅអាឡោះអាល័យប្រពន្ធ សូមកុំចូលប្រឡូកក្នុងឈ្មោះនេះជាមួយខ្ញុំឱ្យសោះ។ ម៉េចយល់ហើយនោះ! ក្នុងចំណោមអ្នកក្រាំងលាវទាំងអស់ដែលស្តាប់នៅក្នុងទីនោះមានអ្នកឆ្លើយតបទៅឈ្មោះនេវវិញថា:

- ល្អឯក ល្អឯក! ចេះចង់សម្លាប់បារាំង ដើម្បីបុព្វហេតុដ៏ត្រឹមត្រូវនៃប្រជាជនខ្មែរ ចុះអ្នកក្រាំងលាវមិនមែនខ្មែរទេឬ? ចំពោះរូបខ្ញុំមួយខ្ញុំមិនស្មោះទឹកមាត់បើយល់បែបកវិញជាថ្ងៃខាត!

- ពេលនោះស្រាបតែអ្នកប្អូននាក់ទៀត ត្រូវចិត្តនិងសំដីមិត្តខ្លួនអ្នកនោះ ក៏ពោលព្រមគ្នាឡើងថា: ខ្ញុំក៏មិនដឹងដែរ...

(Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2011a, pp. 52–53)

Brothers and sisters, the two of us—Chuan and Nao—have already made our decision: we will kill the wicked Frenchman named ‘Bardez.’ If we cannot kill him, then let no one ever call me Chuan, the foremost fighter of the Khmer forests. Do you understand, brothers and sisters? At this moment, everyone listening becomes alert, with their eyes and ears wide open.

A man named Mao immediately asks,

“Leader, do you wish to kill the Frenchman merely to gain fame?”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! I commend you, Mao, you ask a good question. But you must change your way of thinking. You must understand this clearly, my friend. Killing fellow Khmers comes from personal vengeance. But my intention to kill this vicious Frenchman is in the name of a Khmer who can no longer tolerate the inhumane oppression imposed by the French rulers of our time.”

As if by prior agreement, everyone present speaks in unison:

"I will join you! I will join you!"

Nao then continues after his companion:

"This is no joke. There will be death, survival, sustenance, and revenge involved. The French hold power over our Khmer people. If we kill one of them, they will dare to kill ten or twenty of us in return. And you must know this clearly: there are Khmer collaborators, lice² of the French, who wait only to hand us over to the French for punishment, in exchange for rank, status, or bounty rewards. Therefore, if you willingly choose to kill the Frenchman named Bardez, you must first set your mind firmly: I kill the Frenchman, and the Frenchman will come back to kill me. If you still cling to your wife and family, do not step into this game with me. Do you understand?"

Among all the people of Krang Lav listening there, one man replies to Nao:

"Brother Chuan, Brother Nao, you wish to kill the Frenchman for the first and most righteous reason for the Khmer people. Are we people of Krang Lav not Khmer as well? As for me, I will never spit and then swallow it back again."

At the same moment, four others, satisfied with their companion's words, speak up together:

"So will I. So will I."

(Translated and compiled by the authors)

The passage above illustrates courage and a willingness to sacrifice for the homeland, even at the cost of one's own life or that of family members, without expecting any reward, whether fame or wealth. It also condemns the actions of the French, who governed Cambodia unjustly and oppressively, causing hardship and suffering among the Khmer people. In addition, it denounces Khmers who lacked patriotism, submitted themselves as servants to the French, and turned against their fellow compatriots.

Chandler (2007) recounts this historical episode by noting that Bardez was stationed in Prey Veng in 1923. Later, recognizing his ability in tax collection, the French promoted him to the position of provincial commissioner of Kampong Chhnang the following year. On 18 April 1925, Bardez traveled to collect taxes at Krang Lav Village, accompanied by an interpreter and a Cambodian soldier. He summoned villagers who had failed to pay taxes to gather at the village pavilion; several were handcuffed and threatened with imprisonment. When lunchtime arrived, Bardez sat down to eat comfortably, leaving the detainees and the villagers who had come to observe standing under the sun, hungry and exhausted. Approximately 10–20 villagers eventually lost patience and seized Bardez and his two companions, tying them up and beating them with chairs, wooden slats, axe handles, and rifle butts until Bardez and his associates died. Afterwards, the perpetrators danced around the scene. News of the killings enraged the French authorities, prompting them to issue a royal decree renaming the village from "Krang Lav" to "Tirachchan" (brute).

Phokambor (ពោធិកំបោរ): A Novel Portraying Patriotic Figures

The novel *Phokambor* appears in the Grade 11 textbook, Chapter 3, under the title "*The Spirit of Phokambor*" (ទឹកចិត្តពោធិកំបោរ). Although its content follows *Phum Tirachchan* in the textbook, the events depicted in this novel take place prior to the assassination of the French colonial official.

The novel *Phokambor* (ពោធិកំបោរ) was written by Su Comroeun (សូ គំរ៉ូន) in 1971. He was born on 5 January 1949 and became a member of the Khmer Writers' Association (សមាគមអ្នកនិពន្ធខ្មែរ) on 9 November 1970. In addition to *Phokambor*, he authored several other historical novels, such as *War Heroes of Victory* (វីរជនសង្គ្រាមជ័យ) in 1970, *Ajarn Sva The Struggle of a Khmer Hero in the 19th Century* (អាចារ្យស្វា ប្រជុំតួស្បៀងវិបល្លាសសង្គ្រាមសតវត្សទី ១៩) in 1971, and *Mao, the Khmer Dog: Authentic Documents of Khmer-Chinese History* (ម៉ៅត្រៃខ្មែរ ឯកសារពិតប្រាកដពីស្រុកខ្មែរ-ចិន), among others. He passed away in 1975 (Hoc Dy, 2007).

Phokambor was a spiritual healer who treated illnesses among the people of Kampong Svay Province. He was deeply revered by villagers, and his reputation spread widely. His original name was "Pau" (ពៅ—meaning "the youngest child"). However, when asked his name, he would say "Leak" (លាក់—meaning "to conceal" or "to hide"), as he did not wish others to know his real name. Listeners, however, understood this word as "Leak" (លក្ខណៈ—meaning "characteristics" or "auspicious

² In Khmer idiomatic usage, collaborators are referred to as "lice," while in English, comparable terms include "lackey," "lapdog," and "collaborator," depending on the level of rhetorical force intended.

qualities”). Later, he proclaimed himself a “man of merit”, attracting a large number of followers who sought to become his retainers. He trained these followers in combat skills, eventually forming a formidable fighting force.

Phokambor’s forces rose up to fight against the troops of the Khmer royal court and the French, achieving several victories. For example, they defeated Okya Orchun (ឧកញ៉ាអឺរឡុង) and Okya Kalahom Pan (ឧកញ៉ាត្រាហូមប៉ាណ៍), among others. Ultimately, however, Phokambor’s army was defeated by the French forces, which possessed more advanced weaponry. At the same time, King Norodom of Cambodia personally led royal troops to join in suppressing the rebellion. Phokambor was eventually captured and beheaded, his head displayed publicly as that of a rebel in 1867. In the present day, however, his name has been honored as that of a “patriot” (Khongphianthum & Wittayarat, 2013).

The excerpt selected for students to read depicts an episode in which Kromkar Sao, a Khmer official who served the French, travels to meet Phokambor in an attempt to persuade him to abandon his opposition to France. Phokambor, however, reaffirms his original stance, insisting that he and his followers will continue to resist the French in order to restore independence to the motherland, as illustrated in the following example.

“នែ ! ពោធិកំពោរ ! យើងសូមប្រាប់ឯងឱ្យក្លឹក្លឹកនៅខណ្ឌកំពង់ស្វាយនេះគ្មាននរណាដេញចូលជាមួយឯងជាមនុស្សឆ្លើយតបនេះទេ ។ បារាំងគេមកស្រុកខ្មែរ ដើម្បីជួយខ្មែរជួយកសាងការពារទឹកដីឱ្យខ្មែរ តែឯងបែរជាប្រឆាំងបោះបង្គោលទៅវិញ ។”

ឮសំដីថាការប្រកាសយ៉ាងដូចនេះសេនាធិនិតទាំងបួនរបស់ពោធិកំពោរស្ទុះចាកពីកន្លែងបំរុងទៅក្របួចក្រមការសៅ តែពោធិកំពោរឃាត់ ។ អត់ទ្រាំប៉ុន្មាន មេក្រុមឆនបន្តិវាចា :

“បើ ! អីក៏សំបើមម្ល៉េះ? ឯងចង់បំបែកបំបាក់អ្នកស្នេហាជាតិ ឱ្យចូលដៃនឹងបារាំងឬ?”

ឮស្ទុះទៅរកក្រមការសៅ តែពោធិកំពោរឃាត់ទៀត ។

ក្រមការសៅ: “នែ ! ពោធិកំពោរ ពួកឯងរាល់គ្នាមានកម្លាំងសិក្សាច្រើនយ៉ាងនេះ ប្រសិនបើចុះចូលនិងរាជការបារាំង ពេញឯងពិតជា បានទទួលបុណ្យសក្តិខ្ពង់ខ្ពស់មិនខានឡើយ” ។

ពោធិកំពោរសង្កេតឃើញរូបបាយ៉ាងខ្លាំងទេវី: “ហ៊ី: ! លោកបង! លោកបងយល់ខុសហើយ! បារាំងមិនមែនមកជួយខ្មែរទេ លោកបងឃើញជីវិតទាពន្ធដារសង្គ្រោះសង្គ្រោះស្របពេលវេលា ខ្ញុំមិនចង់បានបុណ្យសក្តិអ្វី ក្រៅពីចង់បានឯករាជ្យធម្មនុញ្ញមាតុភូមិនិងប្រជាជនខ្មែរនោះទេ ទោះជាមួយជំហានស្តាប់ ក៏ខ្ញុំនៅតែតស៊ូប្រឆាំងជាមួយបារាំងជាថ្ងៃទៀត ។ ព្រោះតែចង់បានបុណ្យសក្តិ លោកបងសុខចិត្តធ្វើបាបជនជាតិឯងមែនទេ?” ក្រមការសៅខឹងណាស់ក៏បញ្ជាឱ្យកាត់របស់ខ្លួនចូលប្រឡូកបម្រុងនិងចាប់ពោធិកំពោរតែឮឱ្យចង់សើច ត្រូវអង្គរក្សទាំងបួននិងមេម៉ឺនពលន បំប្លែងអ្នកលេង ២ នាក់ខ្លាចយ៉ាងឆ្ងាយ ។ ពេលនោះ គេឮសូរដាវ ដំបង លំពែង ប្រដែងគ្នាយកឈ្នះចាញ់តែរឿងខ្លួន ។ ការកាប់សម្លាប់ជនជាតិដូចគ្នាស្រែកឈឺចាប់ របស់គូប្រយុទ្ធទាំងសងខាងបានជំរុញឱ្យពោធិកំពោរខ្លាចផ្សាក្នុងចិត្តយ៉ាងខ្លាំង ។

គាត់ក៏ស្រែកយ៉ាងខ្លាំង ទៅក្រមការសៅ: “លោកបង! យើងយល់សម្លាប់គ្នាឯងទៅ លោកបងមិនអាណិតជនជាតិខ្មែរដូចគ្នាឬទេ?” មិនទាន់ទាំងចប់សំដីនិង ស្រាប់តែសូរកាំភ្លើងលាន់ឮផង ! ផង ! នៅក្បែរភូមិខាងកើត ។ មួយរំពេចនោះមេក្រុមម្នាក់រត់ត្រលប់ត្រលាប

ទាំងបួនឈាមសស្រាក់: “ជំរាបលោកអាចារ្យទ័ពបារាំងមកច្រើនណាស់” (តាមពិតមុនពេលដែលមកចូលរួមប្រជុំក្រមការសៅបានផ្តល់ដំណឹង ប្រាប់បារាំងរួចស្រេចទៅហើយ) ។

ពេលនោះ គេឃើញទ័ពខោអាវកាំភ្លើងប្រដាប់ដោយកាំភ្លើងវែង ខ្លះរត់ ខ្លះត្រូវ និងឆ្លុះ កាំបិត លំពែង ដេកជួលក្នុងផ្នែកឈាមរដូវក្តៅដែល... ។

(Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2011a, pp. 60–61)

“Hey! Phokambor! Let me open your eyes. In this whole Kampong Svay area, no one would ever join a madman like you. The French came to Khmer lands to help—help build the country and protect Khmer territory. Yet you choose to oppose them instead!”

Hearing such despicable words from Kromkar Sao, Phokambor’s four close guards immediately rose from their seats, preparing to deal with him. Phokambor stopped them. Unable to restrain himself, the leader of the Chhon group spoke up,

“Hey! What kind of slander is this? Do you want to destroy patriots by forcing them to collaborate with the French?”

He stood up and moved toward Kromkar Sao, but Phokambor stopped him again.

Kromkar Sao: “Hey! Phokambor! With such a large force under your command, if you cooperated with the French government, you would surely receive high rank and noble titles.”

Phokambor clenched his teeth and replied loudly,

“Hmph! Sir, you misunderstand. The French did not come to help the Khmers. You have seen how they collect taxes and oppress the Khmer people relentlessly. I seek no rank or title—only independence, to be returned to the motherland and the Khmer people. Even if it means stepping toward death, I will continue to fight and resist the French without hesitation. For the sake of rank and title alone, are you content to harm your own compatriots?” Enraged, Kromkar Sao ordered his men to attack and seize Phokambor. Ironically, Phokambor’s four bodyguards and General Chhon rushed in to block them, sending two thugs flying backward. At that moment, the sounds of glaives, clubs, and spears clashing filled the air as each side fought for victory. The violence between people of the same nation, the cries of pain from both sides, deeply tormented Phokambor’s heart. He shouted loudly toward Kromkar Sao,

“Sir! Let us stop this bloodshed. Do you not pity our Khmer brothers and sisters?”

Before his words had even faded, gunshots rang out—bang, bang—from near the village to the east. Moments later, a group leader came running, gasping for breath, badly wounded and bleeding profusely.

“Master, the French army has arrived in great numbers!”

(In fact, before attending the meeting, Kromkar Sao had already sent word to the French.) At that moment, Phokambor saw columns of khaki-uniformed troops armed with long rifles, some advancing, others struck down by arrows, knives, and spears, lying scattered in pools of blood.

(Translated and compiled by the authors)

The passage above illustrates Phokambor’s deep sense of patriotism. He was not tempted by the incentives offered by the French, whether material wealth or ranks and titles. He was willing to sacrifice his life to obtain independence rather than submit to French oppression and exploitative taxation. Phokambor’s defeat can be attributed to two main factors: (1) the inferiority of weaponry—while the French used firearms to pursue and shoot the population, villagers possessed only bows, swords, and spears; and (2) the presence of unpatriotic Khmers who submitted themselves as servants to the French and took up arms to kill their own compatriots.

The Grade 12 history textbook of Cambodia presents a similar critique of French rule, noting that the French imposed heavy taxation on the population, including taxes on rice, livestock, and other items, causing severe hardship among the Khmer people (Khongphianthum, 2024). Ultimately, the Cambodian people could no longer endure these conditions and rose up with arms to resist the French in many regions across the country.

***Kuli Komnaen* (ក្លិកុំណែន): A Reflection of Cambodia under Japanese Rule**

The novel *Kuli Komnaen* appears in the Khmer Literature textbook for Grade 11 in Chapter 8, in a reading passage entitled “Mobilizing Manpower” (ប្រមូលកម្លាំង). It also appears in the Khmer Literature textbook for Grade 12 in a reading section entitled “Khmer Traditions during the Colonial Period,” in Chapter 7, under the topic “Customs and Traditions.”

The novel *Kuli Komnaen* (ក្លិកុំណែន) was written in 1956 by Qim Thok (គីម ថុក), a writer who lived during the period 1920–1958. Khing Huk Di suggests that he was likely born in 1920, although the exact date and place of his birth remain

unknown. During the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era, he was regarded as a progressive journalist who critically examined society and the government. In 1956, he became an executive of the newspaper Wat Phnom (វត្តភ្នំ). In addition to his work in journalism, he also wrote novels that opposed social injustice, portraying conflicts between opposing groups within society, such as the feudal elite and ordinary villagers, the rich and the poor, and patriots versus those who collaborated with the enemies of the nation. His three most notable works are *Sim, the Driver* (ស៊ីមអ្នកបរិក្ខារ) in 1956, *Kuli Komnaen* (កូលីកុំណែន) in 1956, and *The Rural Teacher* (គ្រូបង្រៀនស្រុក) in 1957 (Hoc Dy, 2007).

The plot summary of the novel *Kuli Komnaen* is as follows. In 1935, in Kandal Province, Village Headman Kim (គីម) was removed from his position, and the authorities appointed Uncle Phan (ផាន) to take his place. Phan was chosen because he was wealthy, capable of collecting taxes, and adept at currying favor with his superiors. This was evident in the way he regularly took the district officer out to drink, seek entertainment, and visit prostitutes on Sundays. Each time Phan conscripted laborers for the Japanese army, he benefited both financially and through personal favors. For those who could not afford to pay or were unable to work for the authorities, Phan would pretend to offer assistance by advancing the required payment and then later forcing them to work for him to repay the debt. Phan often conscripted large numbers of people for the Japanese army, for which he was repeatedly praised by the Japanese forces.

Lim (លីម) was the son of Ngaet (ង៉ាត) and Muk (មុក). He was conscripted to help construct the Pochentong International Airport, even though only a little more than a month remained before his wedding ceremony. Lim had previously been ordained as a monk and had received instruction from the lay devotee Yim (យីម), which shaped him into a progressive thinker with knowledge of democratic governance.

Village headman Phan desired to take Heng (អេង), Lim's fiancée, as his wife. He therefore sent Chan (ចាន) to act as a matchmaker, but this attempt failed. Phan then resorted to intimidation and coercion by ordering the police to arrest Heng. As a result, Svay (ស្វាយ) and Pot (ពត) were forced to entrust their daughter to the care of Ngaet and Muk. Later, the couple decided to take their future daughter-in-law with them to sell rice in Phnom Penh, in order to buy time until the day Lim would be discharged from service and return home.

The United States sent aircraft to bomb Unalom Temple in Phnom Penh. In addition to causing damage to the religious site, the bombing claimed the lives of Ngaet, Muk, and Heng, who were staying in the area at the time. After Lim was discharged from service, he returned home and was devastated to learn that his father, mother, and fiancée had all died. Subsequently, the house and land that were inherited family property were seized by moneylenders to settle debts that his father had previously incurred.

Yim later sent a letter instructing Lim to meet him in Phnom Penh. Lim then took on the task of escorting Noudung (ណូឡុង), who had just been released after serving a sentence for a political offense, to Svay Dongkaev. Noudung had a younger brother named Mueng (ម៉ួង), who was working in Prey Veng Province. He invited his brother to go into the forest to join the struggle against France.

In 1954, France agreed to grant independence to the countries of Indochina (Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam). Lim, Noudung, and Mueng then emerged from the forest. Lim returned to his hometown, while Mueng became a disabled man, having lost one arm as a result of fighting against the French. Fortunately, his beloved remained faithful to him, and Mueng and his partner went on to live together happily (Sokheng, 2013).

The excerpt selected for students' study reflects the social conditions during the period of Japanese rule in Cambodia, when the Khmer people experienced oppression and severe hardship. In addition to being abused and exploited by foreign powers, some Khmer state officials adopted a submissive stance, seeking to gain favor with foreign authorities in order to obtain ranks, positions, and wealth, while causing harm to their fellow compatriots without compassion, as illustrated in the following example.

រឿងកំណែទេ ។ ឆ្នាំនេះរាជការបង្គាប់ពេញពូជប្រើ ១០០ នាក់មួយលើក ១ ក្នុងមួយប្រាំបីយើងមើលរឿងទាំងបង្គាប់នេះមេប្រាំមានអំណាចណាស់ ចាប់ដាក់ខ្មោះបញ្ជូនទៅសាលាស្រុកទៅសាលាខេត្ត ។ ផាន់បានចាត់ក្រុមប៉ូលីសឱ្យពេញលើសម្តែងកាត់ដាក់ទៅលើគ្រួសារណាដែលមានធុរៈធ្ងន់ ហើយបើគង់យកទៅបញ្ជូនចោលក៏អ្នកម្តែងកាន់នោះឃ្លាតពីផ្ទះមិនបានដែរ ។ ចំពោះអ្នកម្តែងកាន់ផ្ទះប្រើខ្មោចយកលើកជាចិត្តបន្តបន្ទុយមិនប្រើខ្លាំងក្លា ។ គាត់ធ្វើជាយោគយល់ដោយមានធុរៈធ្ងន់ ។ ផាន់បង្ខំឱ្យអ្នកម្តែងកាន់នោះបង់ប្រាក់វិញ ។ គាត់បានធានារកជួលក្នុងលើកស្រាយក្នុងមួយម្នាក់ ១ ៥០ រៀល ។ មេប្រាំផាន់ ធ្វើជាបន្តបន្ទាប់ទៅដល់អ្នកក្រវេទនា ។ គាត់មិនយកប្រាក់ឈ្នួលភ្លាមទេ គាត់ធ្វើជាចេញប្រាក់ឈ្នួលភ្លាមទេ គាត់ធ្វើជាចេញប្រាក់ផ្ទាល់ ខ្លួនគាត់ជួសមុនសិន ។ ដូចនេះ មេប្រាំផាន់ ក្នុងកំណែមួយលើក ១ បានធនធានបានអំណាចបានក្តីដឹងពុលខ្លះពីអ្នកក្រវេទនា ។ មេប្រាំផាន់ ក៏អ្នកដឹកនាំគាត់ ដល់ខែក្នុងរាស់ប្រាំខែ ត្រួត គាត់ទៅកាត់សំណងពីអ្នកក្រីក្រជាក់គាត់ទាំងនោះឱ្យមកក្នុងស្រែរាស់ ដកស្ទង់ ត្រួតឱ្យគាត់ ។ ធម្មតាប្រាក់បានដោយវិធីនេះ ផាន់ ចែកទៅអ្នកភ្នាក់ងារ គាត់ខ្លះទុកខ្លួន គាត់ខ្លះទិញដីវាន់ជួនលោកប្រុសលោកស្រីខ្លះ ។

(Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2011a, pp. 179–180)

Regarding conscription, in that year the authorities forcibly required each village to supply 100 laborers per round. Anyone who resisted this order would face the village headman's considerable power: they could be shackled and sent to the district office or the provincial hall. Phan organized groups of police to conscript people in batches of more than 20 at a time, deliberately selecting families burdened with heavy responsibilities, families who, even if all twenty were taken away or even killed, would still be unable to leave their homes. For all of these people, Phan devised a scheme, pretending to be kind-hearted, conciliatory, and not strict. He feigned sympathy for their hardships and allowed them to pay 50 riels per person in place of providing labor, claiming that he would use the money to hire substitute laborers. Phan also pretended to show great compassion toward the poor by not collecting the payment immediately, falsely presenting it as if he were advancing his own money on their behalf. As a result, each round of conscription brought Phan material wealth, power, and personal favors from the impoverished. He kept a record of those indebted to him, and when the plowing, planting, or harvesting seasons arrived, he demanded repayment by forcing these debtors to plow fields, transplant rice seedlings, and harvest crops for him. Typically, the money he gained through these methods was partly distributed to some of his subordinates, partly kept for himself, and partly used to purchase gifts for male and female superiors.

(Translated and compiled by the authors)

The passage above reveals the behavior of Khmers who oppressed and exploited their fellow Khmers, an experience even more painful than being abused by foreigners. Village headman Phan pretended to be a benevolent and compassionate figure in order to gain the trust of the villagers. In reality, however, his conduct was no less reprehensible than that of Kromkar Sao in the novel *Phokambor*. He continually flattered and aligned himself with the colonial authorities for personal gain, while oppressing, exploiting, and taking advantage of his own compatriots.

អាគោកចំបក់នៅឯណា? បានក្នុងប្រាប់ចំនួនទេ? ពូផាន់ភ័យញញឹមកាន់បញ្ជីទៅជូនលោកបាលីជួនយសៈព័រលើកដៃពីរថាទានប្រុសរកគ្រប់ចំនួនហើយ គ្រាន់បើល្អ បើឃើញអាក្បាលស្វាយហេតុអ្វីក៏តាប៉ិងមិនខំពេញឱ្យជូនអាគោកចំបក់ ។ ប្រយ័ត្នបូកងារចោល (លោកបាលីដ៏បានបង្គោលមេប្រាំស្វាយ) ។ ពូផាន់បានសំពះលាហោបាលីជួនយសៈព័រក្រោយមកវិញ ហើយមុខគាត់បានស្រស់ ។ បើឃើញជួននោះលីមលាន់មាត់សួររាមុយថា យី ពូផាន់បានកែ ជាមួយអ្នកតូចតាទេ នៅចំពោះមុខលោកបាលីជួនយសៈព័រនោះមិន... ហើយលោកបាលីជួនយសៈព័រក៏បកចោលសំបោរមេប្រាំសួរតែអាក្បាល... ។ ជាធម្មតាទៅដើម អ្នកចំព្រួញកាន់ប្រាប់ជួននេះ ហើយអ្នកតូចត្រូវតែសំពះត្រូវតែល្អ... ។

មិនធម្មតាទេ (លើសប្រកែក) តាមខ្ញុំដឹងថា មានតែក្នុងស្រុកខ្ញុំគេទេដែលនាម៉ឺនជិះផាន់វាស្រួលនៅប្រទេសប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ ប្រជាស្រុកមិនថោកដូចស្រុកយើងទេ ។ វាស្រួលមានសិទ្ធិសេរីភាពដ៏ជាក់លាក់ ហើយថាបបលុតក្រាបដើរទៅក៏មិនសូវមានដែរ... ។

តាមមិនសូវដឹងទេរឿងនេះ ឯងកុំនិយាយខ្លាំងពេក ពីមេប្រាំផាន់ ឬ... ។ និយាយអ្វី ១ ត្រូវងាកមើលឆ្វេងស្តាំ... ប្រយ័ត្ន ។ (តាមមុខបានទទួល)

(Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2011b, pp. 180–181)

“Where is that Kouk Krabok fellow? Have you gathered the full number of laborers?” Uncle Phan trembled with fear as he held the ledger and presented it to the deputy district officer, raising both hands in a respectful wai and replying, “Sir, we have met the required number.”

“That’s good then. You see, old Svay, why can’t you try to conscript people like Kouk Krabok? Be careful, or you’ll be removed from your post,” the deputy officer scolded the village headman of Svay.

Uncle Phan paid his respects and backed away, his face bright with satisfaction. Seeing this, Lim remarked to Muy, “Look at Uncle Phan, he’s only brave with the small and the powerless. When he stands before the deputy officer, he pulls a face like someone with a stomachache. And that deputy officer is ruthless too, calling the Svay subdistrict headman ‘old man’ like that...”

“That’s how it usually is, my boy,” Muy replied. “Important people tend to behave like this, and those below must keep bowing and crawling.”

“That’s not normal at all,” Lim argued. “As far as I know, it’s only in our country that officials oppress the people. In democratic countries, citizens are not treated as worthless like in ours. Their people have rights and freedoms, they can argue and object. Systems of groveling, prostration, and crawling on one’s knees hardly exist.”

“I don’t really know about such things,” Muy cautioned. “You’d better not talk too much. If Village Headman Phan hears you, you’ll be in trouble. Watch what you say, look left and right... be careful.”

(Translated and compiled by the authors)

The passage above demonstrates that some Khmers, once they acquire power, such as serving as village headmen, use that authority to oppress and exploit their fellow Khmers without compassion. Yet, when faced with the colonial authorities, they display obvious fear and submission. Such individuals are portrayed as deeply contemptible. Moreover, the passage highlights the importance of democratic principles, in which all members of society are equal, possess equal human dignity, and stand on the same footing. No one is inherently superior to others, nor does anyone have the right to exercise power in order to oppress or exploit another.

This novel addresses the enemies of the nation in a manner similar to the first two novels; however, instead of identifying France as the enemy, it portrays Japan as the national adversary. A study of Cambodian history during the period of Japanese occupation reveals another profoundly painful chapter for the Khmer people. In 1941, Japan forced France to cede the territories of Battambang, Siam Reap, and Sisophon to Thailand. This event deeply distressed King Monivong of Cambodia, to the extent that he refused to meet French officials or to speak French to anyone during the final two to three months before his death (Chandler, 2007).

***The New Sun in Old Land* (ព្រះអាទិត្យថ្មីលើផែនដីចាស់): A Novel Honoring His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk**

The novel *The New Sun in Old Land* is the work of the writer Suan Sorin (ស្នេហ៍ ស៊ីរិន). It appears in the Khmer Literature textbook for Grade 12 as a reading passage in Chapter 4, entitled “Art.”

Suan Sorin was born on 9 July 1930 in Songkhae District, Battambang Province. He served as a provincial secretary until 13 June 1961, when he became a member of the Khmer Writers’ Association. He submitted the novel *The New Sun in Old Land* (ព្រះអាទិត្យថ្មីលើផែនដីចាស់) to the Indradevi Literary Award competition in 1960–1961, where the work received first prize (Hoc Dy, 2007).

The novel *The New Sun in Old Land* is a historical novel that reflects Khmer society during the period of French colonial rule, when capitalists and those in power oppressed the population, causing widespread hardship. This situation continued until His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk established the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* system, through which he alleviated the people’s suffering and enabled them to live well, securely, and happily (Sokheng, 2013). The storyline is as follows.

Suan Som (ស្នេហ៍សុំ) was the son of Suan Suk (ស្នេហ៍សុក) and Son (សុំ). He lived in Songkhae District (ស្រុកសង្កែ), Battambang Province (ខេត្តបាត់ដំបង). His father was accused of being affiliated with the Khmer Issarak movement and was arrested and tortured to death by the French. Later, Son fell ill and died. Suan Som was then suspected by the Khmer Issarak of collaborating with the French, forcing him to flee to Phnom Penh. There, he lived with Phra Sao (ព្រះភិក្ខុសៅ) at Phra Mahamontrey Temple (វត្តព្រះមហាមន្ត្រី), earning a living as a laborer.

After Suan Som married Soi (ស៊ី), the couple moved out to rent a house, and he worked as a cycle-rickshaw driver. They lived in extreme hardship, as on some days he earned too little even to cover the rental fee for the rickshaw, and on other days he was extorted by the police. Eventually, the couple could no longer afford the rent and were evicted. Suan Som then took his wife to live at a Vietnamese temple.

Soi went to work as a domestic servant in the household of Boss Huk (ហ្គុក). However, she was unable to remain there for long, as she was sexually assaulted by her employer. She fled and temporarily took refuge with Mi (មី) and Mum (ម៉ម), a married couple who were friends of her husband, while waiting for Suan Som to return from his hometown. When Suan Som returned from Battambang Province and learned of everything that had happened, he was filled with rage toward Boss Huk. He broke into Huk's house to seek revenge, but was instead outmaneuvered: Boss Huk reported him to the authorities, resulting in Suan Som being imprisoned for three months.

During his imprisonment, Suan Som was repeatedly subjected to physical abuse by prison guards. After his release, he found work at a soap factory owned by a Chinese proprietor, but was dismissed after a short time. He then moved to another factory, only to be dismissed again, as he frequently emerged as a leader organizing workers to protest and demand their rights. Eventually, Suan Som returned to his former occupation as a cycle-rickshaw driver, having grown weary of constant exploitation by employers. He went on to establish a "Workers' Association" (សមាគមម្នាស់), receiving a small amount of financial support from a politician in exchange for delivering votes to that political figure.

After the politician won the election, he withdrew his support from the association, forcing it to shut down. Suan Som and Soi then moved to rent a house in a provincial area, with Suan Som continuing to work as a cycle-rickshaw driver as before. By this time, however, Suan Som was no longer able to work as hard as he once had, as his health had begun to deteriorate, while Soi was heavily pregnant and close to giving birth.

One day, Suan Som was deceived by criminals into taking them to a remote area, where they attempted to extort money from him. When he explained that he had no money, they left. Upon returning home, he found that his wife was about to go into labor. He went to beg Dr. Nara (នារ៉ា), a well-known physician, to assist with the delivery, but was refused because he could not afford the medical fee. As a result, Soi died in childbirth.

Devastated, Suan Som went to seek help from Yong (យ៉ុង), a politician for whom he had once served as a canvasser and who had since become a member of parliament, asking for assistance in obtaining a cycle-rickshaw. His request was rejected. Suan Som wandered aimlessly, without work or money, which led the police to suspect him of criminal activity and detain him for two days. After his release, driven by unbearable hunger, he decided to become a bag-snatcher. He used part of the stolen money to buy food and returned the remaining belongings to the bag's owner, attempting to apologize. Nevertheless, the outcome was that he was reported to the authorities and sentenced to six months in prison.

After his release from prison, Suan Som went in search of work. One day, while he was crossing the street absent-mindedly, he was violently struck by a car. The owner of the vehicle was a young minister who had just returned from France. Subsequently, the car owner employed Suan Som to work in his household.

After working at the minister's house for some time, Suan Som resigned in order to return to his hometown to become a farmer. At first, his agricultural yield was not very good. Later, when His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk ascended the throne, he developed irrigation systems that provided farmers with water for cultivation, leading to improved harvests.

One day, Suan Som traveled to Phnom Penh and discovered that the country had developed very rapidly. Schools, hospitals, and large buildings had been constructed. Moreover, during the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* era, civil servants no longer engaged in bribery or extortion of the people as they had in earlier times, resulting in a society marked by peace and well-being.

The excerpt selected for students' study is entitled "A New Reliance" (ទំនើប). In this context, the title refers to His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk, the former monarch (the current monarch being His Majesty Norodom Sihamoni). This is because he played a crucial role in reclaiming independence from France, for which he was honored as the "Father of National Independence." Moreover, the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* era under his leadership is portrayed as a period in which the people

lived well, were well nourished, and enjoyed happiness, markedly different from the time when Cambodia was under French colonial rule, during which the population universally suffered hardship and distress. An example is as follows.

ឥឡូវនេះ ព្រះអាទិត្យថ្មីបានរះនៅលើផែនដីចាស់ ហើយរះនៅលើផែនដីនៃអាណានិគមបារាំងនិងផែនដីនៃនយោបាយបោកប្រាស់។
 ព្រះអាទិត្យថ្មីបានយកនូវរស្មីនៃសន្តិភាពមកបាចជះនៅលើផែនដីចាស់។ សម្រាប់កាំងចិត្តយ៉ាងមាំមួន ព្រះអាទិត្យថ្មីបានបង្ហាញពីសេចក្តីសង្ឃឹម និង រសាសន៍ស្រុក
 កំណើតដូចជាពេលមុនវិញ...។ សមសម្បាយវិញរាយការណ៍សង្គ្រាមដែលនិកម្មប្រើប្រាស់ក្នុងការដឹកនាំនៃកសិកររបស់ខ្លួនពីអតីត ដែលពោរពេញទៅដោយ
 ឥស្សរភាពនិងសុខុមាលភាព។ សម័យកំណើតថ្មីនៃព្រះអាទិត្យថ្មីបានកាន់កាប់ដីវិវាទចាស់វិញ។ សម័យថ្មីបានបង្ហាញថា ក្នុងថ្ងៃនៃព្រះពុទ្ធសាសនា ព្រះមហា
 វិរាទព្រះព្រះបិតាឯករាជជាតិទ្រង់បានថ្លែង ព្រះរាជស្តេចនាថា កាន់កាប់ដីជាតិដើម្បីដាស់តឿនប្រជាពលរដ្ឋឱ្យនឹកលើកំណើតដល់វាលស្រែយើង ព្រោះវាលស្រែ
 នេះហើយជាបូជាសេចក្តី ឬជាមូលដ្ឋាននៃសេដ្ឋកិច្ចជាតិ...។

(Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2011b, p. 106)

At present, a new sun has risen over the old land—no longer the land of French colonial rule, nor the land of deceitful politicians. The new sun now radiates rays of peace, cleansing and illuminating the old land. Som resolves firmly in his heart that he must return to taking up the hoe, the plow, and the harrow in his hometown, just as he once did. He feels deeply refreshed and joyful at the thought of returning to the life of a farmer he had lived in the past, a life filled with freedom and happiness. Som decides that he must return to this former way of life. He also recalls that on one national holiday, the great heroic king, the Father of National Independence, delivered a royal address to his fellow citizens, urging the people to remember their rice fields, for it is these fields that constitute the roots and foundation of the nation's economy.

(Translated and compiled by the authors)

After Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953, His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk abdicated the throne in 1955 in favor of his father, King Suramarit, and established a national political party known as the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*. He dominated Cambodian political life for approximately fifteen years. Many have regarded the period during which he held power as a golden age of Cambodia's constitutional history, marked by peace and increasing prosperity, reminiscent of earlier times (Chandler, 2007). This historical perspective corresponds to the ideas reflected in the novel, as follows.

ចាប់តាំងពីសម័យដែលសង្គមរាស្ត្រនិយមកើតឡើងហើយការប្រទេសក្រោមការដឹកនាំក៏ក្លាយជាសង្គមសីហនុមុកប្រទេសបានឈានមួយ
 ជំហានយ៉ាងរឹងមាំទៅកាន់សម័យថ្មី គឺ “សម័យកសិករ” រាជរដ្ឋាភិបាលបានផ្តល់យោបល់លើកតម្កើងកម្រិតជីវភាពប្រជាពលរដ្ឋដោយគ្រប់វិធី ហើយ
 ជាពិសេសគឺផែនការប្រចាំឆ្នាំ ដែលនៅក្នុងនោះមាន “ហត្ថកម្ម” ដែលជាដួងព្រលឹងរបស់កសិករ...។

(Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2011b, p. 107)

From the emergence of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* and the enlightened leadership of His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk, the nation took long strides toward modernity—entering what was called the “era of construction.” The government employed every means to strengthen social cohesion and improve the quality of life of the people, most notably through annual plans (national development plans), within which “handicrafts” were promoted as a source of pride and prosperity for farmers.

(Translated and compiled by the authors)

The affection and deep attachment that the Cambodian people hold toward His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk are subtly conveyed through the perspective of the protagonist, Som. He reflects on the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* period under the leadership of His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk as follows.

សមស្របណាស់សង្គមរាស្ត្រនិយមស្ទើរជីវិត សព្វថ្ងៃនេះសេចក្តីស្មោះត្រង់ ដែលហូរចេញពីដួងចិត្តដ៏បរិសុទ្ធនោះសម្រាប់ប្រជាពលរដ្ឋរាស្ត្រនិយម
 ដោយសេចក្តីគោរព។ សម័យនេះបានបង្ហាញពីសេចក្តីសង្ឃឹម និង ព្រះបិតាឯករាជជាតិព្រះអង្គមិនទ្រង់មិនប្រកាន់ព្រះរាជប៉ាន់ឡើយ។ ព្រះអង្គតែងយាងទៅ
 ប្រតិបត្តិការលើហត្ថកម្មដោយផ្ទាល់ព្រះហស្តហើយចេះអោយពលរដ្ឋស្រឡាញ់រាស្ត្រ។ សម័យសង្គមរាស្ត្រនិយម មន្ត្រីរាជការគ្រប់រូបត្រូវ
 បោះបង់នូវឯកភាពចោលមួយពេលមួយគ្រា ដើម្បីទៅចាប់ផ្តើម ចាប់ បង្កើតឡើងវិញស្រែកស្ត្រីនិងដើម្បីបង្ហាត់បង្រៀនប្រជាពលរដ្ឋឱ្យដឹងពីសុខុមាលភាពរបស់ប្រជាពលរដ្ឋ។
 សម័យនិយាយថា ក្នុងទំព័រប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រខ្មែរនោះព្រះមហាក្សត្រអង្គរណា ឬវេជ្ជបណ្ឌិតដែលចេញទៅធ្វើហត្ថកម្មដោយព្រះហស្ត
 ឬដោយដៃដូចសម្តេចនរោត្តម សីហនុឡើយ។

(Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2011b, p. 108)

Som loves the Sangkum Reastr Niyum with his very life. Even today, loyalty flows from his pure heart. He venerates the Sangkum Reastr Niyum with deep respect. Som has seen with his own eyes that the Father of National Independence was utterly humble and never carried himself with arrogance. His Majesty often personally undertook royal duties related to handicrafts with his own hands and showed compassion and benevolence toward the people. During the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era, all civil servants would at times put down their pens to take up plows, harrows, hoes, and baskets, helping farmers cultivate their fields. This was done to train their minds and consciousness, so that they might understand the happiness and suffering of the people. Som dares to assert that, in the pages of Khmer history, there has never been a king or hero who personally engaged in handicrafts with his own hands as did His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk.

(Translated and compiled by the authors)

His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk's royal activities left a profound impression on the people, and he served as a role model for civil servants of all ranks, regarded as servants of the state, to follow the path he had established. This was so that the Khmer people might live well, be well nourished, and enjoy happiness. For this reason, Som holds the institutions of nation, religion, and monarchy in the highest reverence, as expressed in the following passage.

សម្តេចយកកម្លាំងកាយនិងកម្លាំងចិត្តបូជាចំពោះសង្គមរាស្ត្រនិយម ដោយពិតខ្លាចឆ្លើយហត់សោះឡើយ។ មិនយូរប៉ុន្មានប្រជារាស្ត្រក្នុងស្រុកភូមិ
 ក៏ស្រឡាញ់រាប់អានគោរពសម ហើយទុកសមជួតជាមេកាយរបស់ខ្លួន។ **ដោយសេចក្តីស្មោះត្រង់ចំពោះជាតិ សាសនា ព្រះមហាក្សត្រ** និង
 សេចក្តីប្រឹងប្រែងចំពោះការងារគ្រប់បែបមានជីកនាំប្រជារាស្ត្រឱ្យធ្វើហេតុអ្វីជាដើម ដែលជាការជួយឱ្យបានសម្រេចនូវគោលបំណងសង្គមរាស្ត្រនិយម
 នោះរាជរដ្ឋាភិបាលក៏ពេញចិត្តនិងអាកប្បកិរិយារបស់សមជាខ្លាំង ហើយបានសរសើរសមដោយរង្វាន់និង ពស្សនិយសផ្សេងៗ ដ៏គួរពេញចិត្ត។ មិនយូរ
 ប៉ុន្មាន សមត្រូវប្រជារាស្ត្រក្នុងស្រុកភូមិបោះឆ្នោតជ្រើសតាំងឱ្យធ្វើជាប្រធានគណៈកម្មការក្នុងឃុំនៃសង្គមរាស្ត្រនិយម។

(Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2011b, p. 109)

*Som devoted both his physical strength and his spirit to the Sangkum Reastr Niyum tirelessly, without the slightest sense of weariness. Before long, the villagers came to love and respect Som, regarding him as their leader because of **his loyalty to the nation, religion, and monarchy**, as well as his diligence and perseverance in all forms of work. He led villagers in engaging in handicrafts and similar activities, which helped achieve the objectives of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum.*

As a result, the government was greatly pleased with Som's actions and praised him by bestowing rewards and honorable titles. Not long afterward, Som was elected by the villagers to serve as a member of the village committee during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era.

(Translated and compiled by the authors)

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that this novel identifies the nation's second enemy as France (with the first being Thailand) and glorifies His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk, who is portrayed as a "new sun" illuminating the Khmer land that had once been shrouded in darkness. This representation aligns with content found in the Grade 9 social studies textbook, which states that His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk paid close attention to agriculture and sought to increase agricultural productivity, such as rice and rubber, while also promoting livestock farming. Furthermore, he advanced national development in all sectors: in transportation, he initiated the construction of commercial ports in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville; in industry, he encouraged the establishment of factories in various provinces, such as the cement factory in Kampot; in education, he founded the Royal University of Phnom Penh as the national university; and in public health, he promoted vaccination programs to prevent diseases and provided scholarships for outstanding students to pursue further studies abroad (Khongphanthum, 2024).

In addition, the selected excerpt seeks to instill in learners a sense of attachment to their homeland. It attempts to dispel the prevailing image or "myth" that migration to urban areas necessarily leads to a better and more comfortable life. A key message emphasized to Khmer youth is that the Khmer land is a heritage bequeathed by their ancestors, and that every generation bears the responsibility to ensure that this land remains fertile and abundant with crops, serving as a "rice bowl and water source" that sustains the entire nation.

CONCLUSION

The author finds that the novels included in the Khmer Literature textbooks for Grades 11–12 (the curriculum currently in use) are historical novels. This represents a shift from earlier periods, when the Ministry of National Education (formerly known as the Ministry of National Education, now the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport) assigned students to read melodramatic literature. For example, in 1956, the Ministry included the novel *Kulab Pailin* (កុលាបប៊ែលីន) by Juk Thaem (យុក ថាម) in the lower secondary curriculum. Later, in 1958, it included *Withered Flowers*, or *Phka Sropoun* (ផ្កាស្រពាទ), by Nou Hach (នូ ហាច) in the upper secondary curriculum.

The four novels included in the curriculum all present historical events spanning the period from French colonial rule in Cambodia through the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* era. This constitutes an integrated curriculum (The Integrated Curriculum), as the content corresponds with topics covered in Social Studies textbooks at the primary level (Grades 1–4) and History textbooks at the upper secondary level (Grades 11–12).

Accordingly, the novels incorporated into the textbooks serve not only to develop students' reading skills or to provide literary enjoyment, but also to instill political and ideological perspectives in the nation's youth. They encourage learners to recall the historical traumas experienced by the Khmer people under French and Japanese domination, both former colonial powers and perceived enemies of the nation. The texts teach Cambodians to cultivate love and unity among themselves, to reject betrayal of the nation for personal gain, and to refrain from harming their compatriots without compassion. Furthermore, they promote reverence for the monarchy as a central and vital national institution and emphasize collective responsibility in restoring the land to fertility and abundance, so that it may once again flourish as it did in the past.

When Cambodian students read these novels, it is believed that they will develop a sense of nationalism because they share the history, heroes and a national enemy. Educators call this a hidden curriculum.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE

Artificial intelligence tools were used in a limited capacity for language refinement, proofreading, and editorial clarity during the revision process. All conceptual development, ideas, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions are entirely the author's own.

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