

THE DELIBERATE USE OF FOREIGN VOCABULARY BY THE KHMER: CHANGING FASHIONS, METHODS AND SOURCES

In writing their own language Khmer sometimes choose for effect vocabulary which not only is foreign but is consciously felt to be foreign. For example, Thai terms for everyday objects are found in early Khmer poetry, and French words occur here and there in modern novels. In neither case is the use due to a lack of appropriate vocabulary in Khmer; the foreign vocabulary is deliberately chosen. This essay represents an attempt to gather the evidence of such conscious use of foreign words in the various genres of Khmer literature, and to consider the reasons for it. The relevant "contexts" range through the centuries, from 611 AD to modern times, wherever linguistic documentation in Cambodian is available (though emphasis is given to the modern period). Throughout, an interpretation of "meaning" is applied which refers less to the literal translation value of a term than to the effect which the deliberate use of a foreign term may have or have had, as Khmer attitudes to foreign language sources and to foreign powers have changed through the centuries.

The Khmer lexicon includes a large body of fully integrated loan words, principally from the Sanskrit and Pali languages of India, but also from Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese and from European languages (chiefly French but also Portuguese and English). Most of these borrowings, however, were probably absorbed into the language unconsciously, and over time, being gradually naturalized to fit as far as possible the native phonological system. They thereby acquired currency in both the spoken and written languages and were used by Khmer speakers without a thought for their origin. Such borrowings, to be referred to as "established loans", are not the primary concern of this essay. Here I am concerned with the question of why, at various points of history, words of one foreign language rather than another were cited or consciously borrowed. Such borrowings were often so short-lived that almost no attempt was made to modify the words to suit the Khmer phonological system. In other cases consciously borrowed vocabulary was used so much that it was Khmerified, yet its use was still deliberately reserved for a particular style of writing.

In the search for illustrative material the net has been cast quite widely; yet for reasons of space only a small selection of the examples found could be presented here. When consulting texts from the past, it was not always easy to be sure when a foreign form was used as a deliberate affectation (i.e., merely because it was a word from a particular high-prestige foreign language) and when it was used of necessity (i.e., because no Khmer term would have been satisfactory). Whatever the case, unless or until a word became an "established loan", a conscious use of a foreign word was

TABLE I

<i>Period</i>	<i>Genre</i>	<i>Language Source</i>
The Pre-Angkor and Angkor Periods (7th to 14th centuries AD)	Inscriptions on stone	Sanskrit Pali
The Middle Period (16th or 19th centuries AD)	Inscriptions on stone	Pali
	Verse-novels	Sanskrit + Pali, the High Language, including the Royal Vocabulary Pali Thai
	<i>Cbap</i>	Pali
The Early Modern Period (19th and early 20th centuries)	Prose* and Poetry**	Sanskrit + Pali, the High Language, including the Royal Vocabulary Pali French
The Modern Period (Mid-20th century)	Journals, conversation	French
	Journals and official circles	Sanskrit + Pali, the New Vocabulary
	Fiction	Sanskrit + Pali, the High Language Sanskrit + Pali, the New Vocabulary French Thai English
All periods	All genres	(Chinese) (Vietnamese)

*Works specially consulted: Chronicles, Folktales, *Gatilok*, *Kambujasuriyā* articles.

** Works specially consulted: 19th century lyric poetry, *Dum Dāv*, *Nirās Aᅅgar Vatt*, *Bimbābilāp*.

involved. Certain features of usage can help in general to distinguish self-conscious borrowing. I found that: (a) in deliberate borrowing, a whole phrase of the foreign language was often used rather than individual loan words arranged in Khmer syntactical order; (b) foreign terms used for effect often appeared only for a short historical period; and (c) in modern times, after the standardization of Khmer spelling, newly adopted foreign words were conspicuous by the variety of their "Khmer" spellings.

The results of my study are set out on p. 150 in five sections, each of which deals with a distinct epoch.¹ These sections are subdivided according to genre. For the sake of clarity the table lays out the categories of analysis.

THE PRE-ANGKOR AND ANGKOR PERIODS (7TH TO 14TH CENTURIES AD)

These centuries saw the establishment of Sanskrit as the supplier of new vocabulary in many fields, being the language of social prestige and of literature. Loan words relating to law, religion, and politics, and abstract ideas in general, were absorbed into Khmer and were naturalized both phonologically and grammatically.² Most of them were destined to remain as part of the Khmer lexicon, though sometimes with changed meaning, until modern times.³ At the same time, it became the practice to use Sanskrit for all elevated linguistic activities. The educated elite of Cambodia read and wrote Sanskrit; and it is clear that there must have been much self-conscious use of the language in their conversation and private writing. Our evidence of deliberate borrowing is, however, quite limited. It is certain that paens to the gods and kings were composed entirely in Sanskrit poetry, whereas native Khmer was reserved for practical matters. At a more everyday level, Sanskrit was frequently adopted in composing personal names, where Khmer would have done just as well. For examples of the latter practice we may go back as far as the seventh century (though the tradition continued for at least six more centuries), when dancers, singers, musicians and officials were given Sanskrit names to specify their calling. Artists typically obtained pretty names, such as "Spring Jasmine" (*Vasantamallikā*) for a dancer, "Slender-limbed" (*Taṅvangī*) for a singer and "Beloved lady-friend" (*Sakhipriya*) for a musician. Officials, on the other hand, received more dignified appellations, such as "Protector of the Law" (*Dharmaraksā*).⁴

With the establishment of Mahāyāna Buddhism in the 11th century, the Khmer language gained a new source of loans in Pali. Our early evidence of borrowing is slight, but there are a few extant inscriptions of the Angkor kingdom in which conspicuous Pali terms occur. One of these, K.144, an inscription of the 12th to 13th centuries, is lexically so much more Pali than Khmer that one has to grope for the Khmer syntax in the confusion of words. The inscription illustrates deliberate borrowing especially well, since much of the Pali occurs in whole phrases, such as *lokuttara dhamma* (the Law, which is transcendent).

THE MIDDLE PERIOD (16TH TO 19TH CENTURIES AD)

The stone inscriptions of this period have a totally different character from those of the ancient kingdom. As in the Angkorean epoch, most such inscriptions were created to record some act of merit: the freeing of slaves, the repairing of statues, or the offering of material goods to the local community of monks. But where the inscribers of Angkor distinguished sharply between texts in elaborate Sanskrit poetry and texts in terse Khmer prose, their Middle Period successors wrote in a uniform literary Khmer prose style which combined the expression of religious zeal with the provision of mundane information.⁵ Some of these later inscriptions were written in person by members of the royal family, some by less eminent officials; not a few contain details of the personal lives of the writer or of the historical events of his time.

In the language of these Middle Period inscriptions it is the Pali loan words, misspelled but clearly identifiable, which serve to underscore the religious fervour of the authors.⁶ Much of this Pali terminology, such as *upāsak* (layman) and *sāsana* ([Buddhist] teaching), was probably already entrenched in the everyday language of the household, and the misspellings in themselves indicate most interestingly the degree to which the borrowed words had been naturalized. In addition to this quotidian Buddhist vocabulary, however, the authors of the inscriptions seem to make deliberate use of religious vocabulary of an elevated and specialized kind, again often in whole phrases. Thus we read in *Inscriptions Modernes d'Angkor* (IMA) 2 of the Queen Mother's "righteous faith, threefold" (*tribidh sucarit saddhā*); of her "participating in a work of merit (*anumodanā*)"; of her meditation on "impermanence" (*aniccā*).⁷ She prays that the "benefit [arising out of] her merits" (*phalānisaṅ*) may achieve for her in a future life the greatest of all boons: to be born as a great man (*mahāpuris*) during the time when the Buddha will return to earth, and to hear him preach the "thirty-seven elements of supreme enlightenment" (*sattatiṃsavarabodhipakkhiyā[dhammā]*). Sometimes a Pali phrase familiar to the faithful is quoted; a reference to the ceremony at which a novice is ordained as a monk contains the words "with the *ehi bikkhu*" (which begins with the words "Come, monk").

The contemporary names also show the influence of the dominant source languages of the period. For example, eminent dignitaries of the Buddhist community are given appellations like Pavaradhammā (The Noble Law) and Mahāpalī (Great Pali [Scholar]).⁸ A servant offered for the care of statues is referred to as Mrs. Suddh (Pure) and a layman, who with his wife carries out an act of merit, as young Mr. Jet [for *jetthā*] (Best).⁹

It should be noted, however, that in general the language of the IMA, though very much influenced by Pali, is characterized by many features of native Khmer origin. The devices of reduplication, repetition and assonance now appear in the writing, giving the impression that the Khmer language is being consciously used as a means of elegant expression in prose.

It is in the Middle Period that we find the earliest extant non-