

Elective Monarchy: The Legacy of French Colonization in Cambodia

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ABSTRACT: The Cambodian monarchy has a long tradition as a symbol of the continuity of the nation. However, it was abolished in the 1970s due to a change in the form of government of the Republic country, and it was reestablished according to the 1993 constitution. The Cambodian monarchy stabilized under French rule. Initially, the French set up the elective monarchy system for Cambodia by colonial authority, in contrast to a hereditary monarchy, which was automatically passed down as a family inheritance. This pattern makes the power succession unusual from Cambodia's royal traditions. The research aims to study the factors and background events in the French colonization period that changed the monarchy system and the result to the Cambodian monarchy until the present day, using historical methods mainly based on primary and secondary documents. The results show that the idea of electing a king put in place by France was considered appropriate, partly because the selection of King Sihanouk to the throne ended quarrels within the royal family over his reign, and in the Constitution 1947 precisely specifies those who have the right to reign. It must be inherited from King Ang Doung, King Norodom, and King Sisowath, chosen by The Royal Council of The Throne, a nine-member council of Cambodia responsible for selecting the Cambodian monarch. When Cambodia became independent, every constitution with a constitutional monarchy regime stipulated the elective Monarchy by insisted on establishing the Royal Council of the Throne.

KEYWORDS: Elective Monarchy, French colonization, Cambodia

Introduction

In the 19th century, Cambodia experienced political interference from both Siam (modern Thailand) and Vietnam. From the perspective of Cambodia being threatened by Siam and Vietnam, King Ang Duang tried to contact France to free Cambodia from two neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, nothing changed because King Ang Duang died in 1860. Cambodia was under a French protectorate within French Indochina in 1863 when the new Cambodian King Norodom (1860-1904) requested the establishment of a French protectorate over his country

Meanwhile, Siam renounced suzerainty over Cambodia and officially recognized the French protectorate of Cambodia. Under French Colonization, Cambodia underwent political, economic, and social changes, especially with the strengthening of the Cambodian monarchy. However, French rule has changed the succession of kings from hereditary succession to elected monarchy. This pattern makes the power succession unusual from Cambodia's royal traditions but in some periods, there were changes in the political structure, such as establishing the country as a republic and communist government (Khmer Rouge). However, the current Cambodian constitution of 1993 still uses the elected monarchy system inherited from the French until the present. The research aims to study the factors and background events in the French colonization period that changed the monarchy system and the result to the Cambodian monarchy until the present day.

The Change of the Power and The Rule of Succession of Cambodia Monarchy under the French Colonization

Etienne Aymonier, a Frenchman living in Cambodia during his reign, describes the royal powers of the king before becoming a protectorate of France:

"King is the State. His power is limitless. He is the Head of the country, the army, all public affairs and administration. He had the power to appoint and dismiss nobles and governors in

all provinces. He set tax rates and limited the goods import and export in the kingdom. He was a supreme judge with absolute right to give a person life or death, grant a pardon, amend a decision, and be the sole lawgiver. The law is effective according to His command. Kings create and amend laws and promulgate them strictly. His words are sacred, and he places himself above the law" (Aymonier 1900, 55-56). The king owns everything." The king is the lord of the land, water, kingdom, life, or the lives of people." When Khmers refer to the king, it is called "the Lord of life above the head," they often use the word "enslaved person under his holy feet." (Aymonier 1900, 46)

King Ang Duong's eldest son, King Norodom (1860-1904), ascended the throne when the situation in Cambodia was unstable as the uprising in the eastern part of Cambodia. In addition, there were attempts to compete between those who had right to the throne. In 1862, Prince Norodom's younger brother, Sivotha, rebelled and marched his army to Phnom Penh. This caused King Norodom to take refuge in Battambang. Siam successfully put down the rebellion, allowing King Norodom to return and rule over Cambodia.

After that, Admiral Louis Adolphe Bonard, High Commissioner of Cochinchina, traveled to Cambodia and met His Royal Highness Prince Norodom, whom the Cambodian royal court gave a friendly welcome, Bonard saw that France had the right to reach out to Cambodia's internal affairs whereas France's necessary mission is to protect Cambodia Because this area is related to the serenity in Indochina. France convinced King Norodom that France wished to help Cambodia maintain its freedom by signing a treaty with France, which would be the only way of Cambodia to retain his independence and the throne. Therefore, January 1863, King Norodom signed treaty with France, making Cambodia as a French protectorate (Hall 1966, 792-793).

Since 1863, the role of the monarchy in Cambodia has changed radically. Article 2 of the treaty stated, "His Majesty the King of Cambodia accepts administrative, judicial, and administrative reforms. All financial and commercial matters which related to the French government will be instrumental in the future success of their protectorate" (Hall 1966, 792-793). Thus, under the history of that period, The establishment of Cambodia as a French protectorate led to the interpretation as the strengthening of the Cambodian monarchy.

Cambodia's established rules of succession need to be more detailed, and no written rules. However, in the end, the throne always went to the king's eldest son, who succeeded his father. The arrival of France can be considered. It changed Cambodia's succession rules forever because during the 19th century, Cambodia came under the influence of Siam and Vietnam. According to tradition, the royal courts of the two neighbouring countries jointly chose the King of Cambodia.

French documents often refer to the Cambodian succession's rule. Milton Osborne, an expert on the Cambodian monarchy, defined it as "The real interest of these foreign administrators gave more precedence to the politics of succession than the beauty of the wording of the law of succession" (Osborne 1973, 170). Many writings by French academics and colonial officials portray the legality of the succession solely based on the desires and interests of the Cambodian colonists. The most obvious case is the reign of King Sisowath (1840-1927), the half-brother of King Norodom whom France had always tried to support during the reign of King Norodom. In the 1870s, there was a rebellion against King Norodom's rule. Another half-brother, Prince Sivotha, joined the rebellion and protested against his acceptance of French authority. The rebels received great popular support and caused problems to the French to suppress. France blamed, it was King Norodom's fault and supported Prince Sisowath, who led the army put down the rebellion with France. This makes it an essential lesson for France to avoid such resistance in the future. Consequently, France thinks that from now on, the King of Cambodia should be the one who obeys French orders. After that, France established a council with the power to choose the king. There was a French Governor (Resident Superieur) as chairman. It was considered a model for setting up

the Royal Council of the Throne to choose the king in the later period. The enthronement of the Cambodian king became a constant issue during the period when Cambodia was under French rule.

After King Norodom passed away, France immediately intervened in Cambodia in the matter of appointing a successor. In 1904, France elected King Sisowath (1904-1927) to the throne. He was 64 years old and had signed a delegation of authority over all government administration to France. France has taken the opportunity to revise Cambodia's succession rules, stating that the succession to the throne is "The Cambodian king must be descended from King Ang Duong and alternation between the Norodom family and the Sisowath family line" (Decoux 1949, 47). Before his death, King Sisowath tried to convince the French that His successor was his eldest son. Prince Sisowath Monivong, who was Crown Prince since 1904, France views King Monivong not causing France any problems in governing. When King Sisowath Monivong (1927-1941) ascended the throne at 52, This time, though, France didn't do as stated. But this time, France did not do as stated. The line of succession must be an alternation between the two lineages like previous kings of Cambodia, he was a puppet of the French administration whereas the absolute power lay entirely in the hands of France.

The legacy of the elective monarchy until Cambodia's Independence

The Cambodian monarchy faced many events recently before another change occurred when King Sisowath Monivong passed away. France needed to find a suitable royal prince to ascend the throne under conditions that would benefit France as much as possible. At the same time, the international and domestic political situation has changed dramatically. However, France's decision to choose a new King of Cambodia forever had changed the future of Cambodia forever. The elective monarchy by France will be the most critical and influential in modern Cambodian history. The ascension to the throne of King Norodom Sihanouk is considered a transition period in Cambodian history. Therefore, the king's accession was necessary to avoid trouble with France's colonial policy. The issue was considered a turning point in Cambodia's political history regarding the monarchy. During the first four decades of the 20th century, the throne remained the primary aspiration among royal families, especially after the death of King Sisowath Monivong, although no one knew for sure. However, many royal family members still view the throne as an institution with "Mysterious charm, highest dignity, and honour," which many people desire (Osborne 1997, 181-182).

The choice of those to rule was always the French's discretion. The critical characteristics of selecting a king in the Indochina Union under French rule were humility and level-headedness. France believed such qualities would keep the king of that country under guidance and not act as an enemy, causing problems to French rule. Choosing King Norodom Sihanouk's is often given political reasons. It ended the conflict in the succession to the royal family of Cambodia between the Norodom and Sisowath families, which has had problems in this matter for many years. However, Jean Delvert, a French anthropologist, argued on this point. King Norodom Sihanouk's competitor is Prince Sisowath Monireth also has lineage from both the Norodom and Sisowath families (Delvert 1983, 47).

Sihanouk ascended when the Southeast Asian nation faced World War II under Japanese occupation—followed by conflicts with Thailand over territory. France was concerned about security, which directly affected French rule in Indochina, causing Jean Decoux, a Vichy French government representative, envisage new forms of cooperation between France and Indochina through the royal network to bring prestige and honour the monarchy in Cambodia (Decoux 1949, 270-274). The creation of King Sihanouk's prestige began in 1941 when grand coronation ceremonies were held at Angkor Wat and Phnom Penh to reinforce the issue of the righteousness of the reign. Since then, King Sihanouk was officially proclaimed King of Cambodia and began serving as a representative of French-Cambodian cooperation. In addition, after the reign, King Sihanouk appeared in various

ceremonies, presenting himself as the head of state and the patron of Buddhism. However, at that time King Sihanouk, a young king had behaved like a playboy and did not pay much attention to the country's administration yet his behaviour satisfied France, that the head of the country had shown no interest in French politics.

Sihanouk seized the opportunity to declare independence under Japanese occupation when Japan was about to be defeated before France returned to rule Cambodia again with distrustful of King Sihanouk, France intended to reduce the power of King and modernized Cambodia at the same time. When France ruled Cambodia again, the form of government was changed from the traditional monarchy to a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary system. As a result, the election law was promulgated on May 31, 1946, to bring about the election of members of the Constitutional Drafting Council. This council has to express opinions and is responsible for drafting the constitution and enacting essential laws related to the election.

The Election of the Constituent Assembly took place on September 1, 1946, and was the first election in Cambodian history. King Sihanouk signed the first constitution of Cambodia on May 6, 1947. The 1947 Constitution was influenced by the French Constitution of the Fourth Republic, which defined the form of state as a kingdom and a single state with a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary system. However, it still preserves its historical and cultural heritage. The highest power of the country belongs to the king. In addition, The Royal Council of the Throne was established and had the power to select the king. Although Article 25 of the 1947 constitution declares that the throne is the lineage of King Ang Doung. Article 26 gives the king the right to override such decisions. Articles 27 and 28 stipulate that the appointment of the king is subject to a majority vote of The Royal Council of the throne. So, the person who will be the king of Cambodia is the elected king, not a hereditary king. A descendant of a king may not automatically become king.

However, King Sihanouk announced the dissolution of parliament in 1949. Moreover, he was dissatisfied with the 1947 constitution, resulting in 9 amendments and the promulgation of new constitutions in 1956 and 1960. However, the details of the Elective Monarchy continued to be based on the 1947 Constitution, which was the fundamental law of Cambodia until 1970, without any amendments or changes.

The return of Elective Monarchy in 1993 Constitution: Sihanouk to Sihamoni

After the 1970 coup d'Etat by General Lon Nol that ended the monarchy system to republic, Cambodia faced with communist Regime (Khmer Rouge), followed by Civil War. The Cambodian monarchy was restored once again. By the Constitution of 1993, the provisions of Section 2 regarding the King, the principle of an elected monarchy is still preserved. Article 10 of the 1993 Constitution clearly states that the Cambodian monarchy is an elected monarchy. It is also stricter than the 1947, Constitution, especially prohibiting the King from appointing the heir to the throne strictly. The Royal Council of the Throne is the organization that has authority to select people to hold the position of King. The membership of the Royal Council of the Throne shall be composed of: -The President of the Senate -The President of the National Assembly -The Prime Minister -The Supreme Patriarchs of the two religious orders, Mahanikaya and Dhammayutikanikaya -The First and Second Vice-Presidents of the Senate -The First and Second Vice-Presidents of the National Assembly. These shows that political characteristics are above royal characteristics. This is because there are seven members of the committee from the political side and only the heads of 2 sangha orders that reflect traditional characteristics (Cambodia Constitution 1993).

When King Sihanouk's health weakened, He was expected to abdicate. In 2002, the leading opposition Sam Rangsi Party proposed a draft bill on the operations of the Royal Council of the Throne, which stipulated that the heir to the throne must be a person with an unblemished life—never been prosecuted in any way, not directly affiliated with any political

party. However, it must be accepted by all political groups in the National Assembly, and the king can appoint the heir to the throne. Hun Sen, prime minister, refused to support the draft bill. The expected successor to King Norodom Sihanouk is King Norodom Sihamoni, another member of the royal family who enjoys strong support from the political class. The constitution does not specify details regarding the conduct of meetings of the Royal Council of the Throne and the number of resolutions to choose the king. Therefore, a law must be enacted to set up the details. At the same time, they were determining the details of selecting the king of the Royal Council for the Throne. Many problems and arguments had arise; King Sihanouk feared that If the Royal Council of the Throne continued to be politically divided, there would be no way to reach a unanimous resolution and may result in no new king being found. In 2003, King Sihanouk publicly expressed his royal decision on the person who should succeed him as king because the constitution does not allow the appointment of an heir to the Throne. He, therefore, applied pressure by publicly proposing an heir to the Throne.

As a result of this action, Prince Norodom Sihamoni was nominated as the new king of Cambodia. The Royal Council unanimously approved it in an unprecedented meeting at the palace that lasted less than 40 minutes. Senate President and Acting Head of State Chea Sim addressed Parliament to announce that The Royal Council of the Throne has chosen Prince Norodom Sihamoni as the new king. Voting is conducted by secret ballot. Votes were counted by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, President of the National Assembly, and Prime Minister Hun Sen, a Parliament member. The coronation ceremony of Prince Norodom Sihamoni, who was 51 years old at the time, took place on October 29, 2004, and was broadcast live on television and radio stations in the country.

Conclusions

The Cambodian king has the status to demonstrate national sustainability. However, French rule in Cambodia changed the elective monarchy system. Originally a matter of succession, it was changed to an election for the interests of France. In the first constitution of Cambodia under French rule, it was established that the Royal Council of the Throne would be appointed to select the new king. This detail still appears in every constitution that has established a constitutional monarchy system and has been adhered to until the present day.

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