Tensions and Challenges of Promoting Citizenship Values in Cambodia Schools

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カンボジアの学校教育における市民的価値促進に伴う緊張と挑戦

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Abstract

The recently democratized state of Cambodia is using Moral and Civics Education to promote citizenship values among the students. This paper shows that such endeavour has largely been ineffective due to tensions and challenges that are associated not only with the conflicts between the traditional and modern views of education in Cambodia but also with its unfavourable socio-cultural and economic conditions as well as its conventional political culture. It is recommended that, to make this promotion process more effective, the existing mechanisms of dialogue and participation be further facilitated with more social accountability from the government, and policymakers extend these mechanisms and initiatives by adopting community-based approaches in collaboration with private religious institutions.

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1. Introduction

The year 1993 is considered a new page in Cambodian history in which a "democratic" government with a new Constitution was established. The deliberate attempt of the Cambodian government to promote citizenship values through formal education has, since then, been witnessed in the stated goals and objectives of its new national curriculum, more specifically, through a subject namely "Moral-Civics". However, this attempt is mostly unsuccessful. The failure has something to do with the country's gloomy period of civil strife and violence of the last several decades as well as its conventional socio-political culture. The widely-held perception that school seems to face grave tensions and challenges in its promotion of these values leads one to three interesting questions as to what the tension between the new ideas of promoting citizenship values for Cambodia's "new-born" democracy and its conventional view of education is, what challenges arise in the teaching and learning process of these values, and how political sensitivity and the conventional socio-cultural preference inherent among Cambodians hinder the achievement of the desired outcomes from this inculcation process. This paper will deal with these aspects.

Mainly, this paper is developed from part of the MA research topic, which focuses on the analysis of citizenship education and youth civic engagement in Cambodia. It explores dimensions beyond the matter of education itself. The evidence for this paper is obtained from examinations of official documents from the government, more specifically from the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS), and other stakeholders such as The World Bank (WB) and UNDP; a questionnaire survey conducted at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) in 2010 to 236 first-year students who had just graduated from different high school backgrounds; interviews conducted with a school principle, two school teachers and eight students at a high school in Phnom Penh in 2006 during a one-month teaching practicum performed by the author; and group discussions with three lecturers from RUPP during the author's two-year tenure as a lecturer of educational psychology and teaching methodology from 2006 to 2008.

2. The Political and Social Contexts of Cambodia

Cambodia had, for a large chunk of its history, been ruled by various kings, on whom all kinds of power and divine sources of authority were centered. The upholder of social order, the defender of faith and also the patron of myriad religious foundations, the kings were also social engineers who held absolute control over all social organizations and could appoint favoured individuals to particular privileged social ranks, and thus categorized the whole society into numerous classes and corporations. The social hierarchy was indicative of a fairly-centralized and well-organized

bureaucracy in the form of top-down approach and the outlying provinces were held by loose feudal ties, while members of the Royal family held important state offices. This reflects the Funan and Chenla Empires from the 2nd to the 8th centuries, followed by the Golden Age of the Khmer Empire from 802 to 1431 when the Khmer King decided to move the capital city to the Mekong area (Vickery, 2001).

The fall of the Khmer Empire was followed by bloody struggles for power among the Khmer rulers until the French imposed protectorate and colony in 1863, when Cambodia almost disappeared from the world map. An educational system based on the French model was established by the French administration in conjunction with the traditional system. In 1873, the French-language School of the Protectorate was established, followed by a college for interpreters and three French-language primary schools in 1885 (Clayton, 1995). The French seemed to neglect the educational processes and did not pursue this modern educational system with enthusiasm as they only wanted to make education accessible to only an elite group to serve their colonial purposes. Also, Cambodians had much preference for "*Wat*" schools (Buddhist temple schools) to modern schools, which resulted in the resistance from some Buddhist monks against the French attempt to modernize the wat schools and to romanize Khmer scripts (Osborne, 1969; Chandler 1991; Clayton, 1995; Shawcross, 1994; Dy, 2004).

After independence in 1953, King Sihanouk pursued a policy of mass education system operated on the French model, in which many schools and universities were built throughout the country. Then, a new historical turning point came when the monarchical rule was abolished and replaced by the Khmer Republic in a coup d'etate by General Lon Nol and Prince Siri Matak in 1970. The short-lived Khmer Republic was defeated by the Khmer Rouge, leading Cambodia into an era of "killing field" in which 1.7 million people (mainly educated) out of the small population of about 7 million were killed. The Khmer Rouge regime was considered a big blow to Cambodia's education system. Cambodians were programmed to learn the history of the revolutionary struggle led by Pol Pot, Khmer Rouge's politics and anti-CIA or anti-American ideology (Ayres, 1999). The regime did not last long and came to an end on January 07, 1979 after Vietnamese attacks (along with other socialist bloc nations) on a political "excuse" of liberating Cambodia, resulting in a new government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), led by Heng Samrin until 1989.

The Paris Peace Accords in 1991 led to the first-ever general election held and sponsored by the United Nations in 1993, putting an end to the civil conflicts and political upheaval of the last two decades. The early 1990s showed a growing emphasis on educational development in accordance with the government policy reforms along with tremendous aid from various international financial agencies and external donor agencies. But this was temporarily suspended in the wake of another bloody power

struggle within the polarized coalition government, and finally a coup organized by Hun Sen of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) forced Norodom Ranarith of the FUNCINPEC Party out of office in July 1997. Another election was held in 1998 in which Hun Sen's CPP won the majority votes and assumed the office of Prime Minister until today.

Article 68 of the 1993 Constitution (amended in 1999) stipulates that "the state shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public school. Citizens shall receive education for at least nine years." The education system was gradually upgraded and since 2001, MoEYS published many documents which outline the government's Education Strategic Plans (ESP). The first Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP I) 1996-2000 was constructed by the government to put forward broad educational development policies, strategies and targets, and the Education Investment Plan 1995-2000 was formulated by MoEYS, which detailed priority strategies, programs and investment requirements (UNESCO, 2006). A key milestone in the work of MoEYS to effectively reform the educational services was the Education Strategic Plan (ESP), first proposed for the period 2001-2005, revised for the period 2004-2008, and later extended for the period 2006-2010 (MoEYS, 2001, 2004a, 2005). From 2003 to 2008, 233 education projects at an estimated cost of US$ 225 million were sponsored by 113 organizations (MoEYS & UNICEF, 2005). Overall, MoEYS's overarching aim is to provide all Cambodian children and youth with equal opportunity and access to quality education by 2015 in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

3. Citizenship Education in Cambodia: Moral-Civics Education (MCE)

Traditionally, before the French colony, the responsibility to educate Khmer citizens was shouldered to the Buddhist pagodas. Boys either go to the *Wat* schools or become monks in the pagoda to learn different skills in the pagoda monasteries such as foundations of civility, ethics and morality in religion, basic literacy, and other skills including carpentry and handcraft relevant to rural life in Cambodia, while girls receive kind of home-based education or the so-called "Chol Mloub" in Khmer, literally meaning "enter the shadow". Similarly, they learned foundations of ethics and morality relevant to societal norms and expectation such as "Woman Law" and other household skills necessary for their preparation to become a good housewife and good citizen in their community and society. The Wat schools along with the pagoda monasteries are two main Buddhist institutions that not only play an educational role but also served to support social solidarity by ensuring social cohesion, community association, and maintenance of traditional values as they are usually supported and financed by the villagers (Clayton, 1995; Dy, 2004). Furthermore, Buddhism also had a political role to

play. While the Buddhist institution pledged its loyal support to the rulers and those in power and even legitimated them, the rulers in return maintain their support by observing the Buddhist teachings (Morris, 2000). An example is the 10 Noble Truths for the "Righteous King". The 90 years of French colony left Cambodia with an educational legacy of Western ideas of formal school system, although a formal civic education curriculum did not exist as the French did not pursue its educational policy with real enthusiasm and just created a few schools in Phnom Penh for French language translation trainings to meet their colonial purposes.

In retrospect, MCE in Cambodia was shaped according to the nature of each political system and was maneuvered to serve its different goals. Although the education system he established was French-based, King Sihanouk had an attempt to put off the colonial mentality and promote a sense of nationalism among Cambodians by emphasizing Khmer history, culture, literature, civics and moral instruction (Clayton, 2005). The Khmer Rouge of Pol Pot considered this formal education system an obstacle or a detriment to the revolution and thus schools were closed and MCE was maneuvered as "indoctrination" aimed at instilling in the young's mindset the twisted values of their revolution (Ross, 1990). The newly installed government of the 1980s, the PRK, made use of MCE to influence Cambodians to support the solidarity and harmony of the three communist countries in Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) as well as the Soviet Union (Neau, 2003).

MCE of the present day's system reflects the government's adoption of liberal democracy based on market economic practices (Clayton, 2005). Basic concepts of representative democracy, election, human rights, civic duties and responsibilities, freedom of expression and bureaucratic system of social institutions are incorporated into the new curriculum. Overall, MoEYS seeks to develop in Cambodians "a sense of national and civic pride, high standards of moral and ethics and a strong belief in being responsible for their own future" (MoEYS, 2004a, p. 11). MoEYS's philosophy and policy on MCE are set out in its document "Policy for Curriculum Development 2005-2009" (MoEYS, 2004b). This was reviewed in 2009, and MCE was aimed at producing students who should have "the capacity to exercise judgment and responsibility in matter of morality", possess "a public spirit characterized by equality and respect for others' rights, "be active citizens and be aware of social changes, understanding Cambodia's system of government and the rule of law, and demonstrating a spirit of national pride and love of their nation, religion and king" (MoEYS, 2004b, p. 5). Philosophy teaching in the general education system in Cambodia has been accorded in a main subject called "Social Studies". MCE has been used in Cambodia to refer to civic or citizenship education and is one of the subjects under the Social Studies, the other subjects being History, Geography, Home Economics, Art Education and Khmer

Language.

4. Tensions and Challenges in Promoting Citizenship Values in Cambodia Schools

4.1 The Conceptual and Methodological Issues

The French left Cambodia with a legacy of Western ideas of formal school system, and the modern education system today is seen as evolving from this root and currently propagated and planned by Western consultants from international organizations and external donor agencies. The modern conception of education advocated by MoEYS today, which is evident in its vision and mission: "The MoEYS vision is to establish and develop human resources of the very highest quality and ethics in order to develop a knowledge-based society within Cambodia" (MoEYS, 2005, p. 1), takes place against the backdrop of its traditional social and cultural view that takes civics and moral values as an end of education (Tan, 2008; UNDP & BBC, 2010). This inherited Westernized system tends to conform to the Modernization Theory advocated by the World Bank for Third-World countries—a theory which posits that in order for a country to achieve steady progress, human resources development, free trade and minimum state intervention are to be prioritized (Tan, 2008). This widespread ethos runs contradictory to Cambodia's traditional understanding of education in which morality and ethics tend to be central to education. Dy (2004) also noticed such fundamental conceptual difference in the framing of MoEYS vision and mission, putting that while the traditional socio-cultural view of education in Cambodia takes education as "an honest route to better the human condition, intentionally aimed at shaping individuals for a better lifestyle, knowledge and good manners for living in their respective societies", MoEYS's technocratic view of education is that education is "a process of training and instruction which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills" for economic development and human capital competitiveness that enables Cambodia to catch up with global changes in this information age (Dy, 2004, p. 93).

Furthermore, the above-mentioned vision set forth by MoEYS, in this sense, seems to be caught in two dilemmas or dimensions in its policy implementation: the aspiration for modernization in response to globalization and the inherent traditional and cultural institutions that also play important roles in promoting professional ethics and morality, discipline and responsibility necessary for Cambodians to be economically and politically competitive in the knowledge-based economy. This is clearly evidenced in MoEYS mission: "In order to achieve the above vision, MoEYS has the mission of leading, managing and developing the Education, Youth and Sport sector in Cambodia in responding to the socio-economic and cultural development needs and the reality of globalization" (MoEYS, 2005, p. 1). Ayres (2000) also noticed that "the

provision of formal education in Cambodia has been embraced to build a nation-state that looks modern, yet it is concerned almost exclusively with sustaining the key tenets of the traditional polity" (Ayres, 2000, p. 459). MoEYS has also acknowledged that "a shortage of civics/values education and life skills orientation in many current programmes" does exist within its efforts to modernize the education system (MoEYS, 2005, p. 5), and in response to this reality, definition and clarification for delivery of Life Skills education including the new Local Life Skill Program (LLSP)[2], which posits that "school, in partnership with parents, their local community, community organizations and NGOs, must develop and administer a Local Life Skills Program (LLSP) of between 2 to 5 lessons per week", has been one of the key reforms to the new curriculum since 1996 (MoEYS, 2004, p. 5). However, when asked whether there are programs for students to participate in community services and other kinds of civic engagement besides schooling, 77% of the respondents to the questionnaire survey said there are no such activities in their schools and 15% said there are few. This has also been pointed out in a report by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in 2009 which found out that "the lack of support and encouragement from schools, parents and communities for youth civic engagement also partly explains the absence of youth needs and perspectives in government policies and programs" (UNCT, 2009, p. 78).

On the same token, such traditional socio-cultural view of education also runs side by side with the traditional and conventional pedagogical techniques, with rote memorization and repetition being the main teaching methods, and a big discrepancy between the content of MCE and the methodology. The questionnaire survey and interviews with 8 school students in Grade 10 (aged from 14 to 17), when asked how they find MCE as a subject in school, show that they are interested in the subject because they can learn a lot about society and living a good life. One student said MCE is really "important to me" because "it enables me to live a good life and know the role of the citizens", while another student said "from this subject, I learn and gain more experiences in life". Some students, from the questionnaire on explaining such concepts as "democracy" and "human rights", shows a fair level of understanding. However, others find the concepts too difficult to understand. The MCE teachers that I interviewed also said that some students found such concepts "too abstract" and "philosophical". This corresponds to the report by MoEYS and UNICEF in 2005 which claims that the content is too heavy for students to grasp, given the short teaching

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[2] "The purpose of the LLSP is: 1. to provide schools, in partnership with parents, their local community, community organizations and NGOs, with the opportunity to provide training in specific life skills that have a particular relevance to local students; 2. to provide schools with time in the curriculum for extra-curricular activities such as social services or youth movement activities that will further develop students' habits of self-confidence and responsibility. These habits are formed most strongly in the primary school years, and this is reflected in the time made available for LLSP in these years." (MoEYS, 2004, p. 7)

and learning hours in Cambodia schools (MoEYS & UNICEF, 2005, p. 10).

Nevertheless, when it comes to how MCE is taught in classes, some students said it is "boring"; "we do the same boring things in every class". Interviews with 2 MCE teachers and discussions with 3 lecturers who were also doing teaching practicum at 3 different high schools show that school teachers, mainly on this subject, remain firmed with conventional teaching methods mainly based on prescribed textbook, teachers' guidebooks and timetables, worksheets with only multiple choice questions (MCQ) in which teachers leads the students to the answers directly without discussions and which demands mainly memorization from the students, reading and memorizing the passages. It is clear that such traditional method allows students less time and limited opportunities to go beyond textbooks to apply their critical thinking, to think for themselves and to debate moral dilemma and personalized real-life struggles and applications－which seems to run against MoEYS's stated goals and objectives to "produce students with the capacity to apply their critical thinking and judgment". In a broader sense, such oppressive and silencing way of teaching and learning tends to produce blind social obedience rather than encourage and develop critical thinking faculties in students, and it is bound to not only limit students' creative potentials but also affect inter-personal relationship and willingness to participate in social activities. UNDP & BBC (2010) also pointed out that "students gain much of their sense of civic engagement, although Cambodian schools tend to promote traditional Cambodian (and Buddhist) values, emphasizing social harmony and conformity, rather than training students to become 'active' citizen" (UNDP & BBC, 2010, p. 45). On the same token, the report by MoEYS and UNICEF (2005) also notes that the pedagogical technique applied in Cambodian schools is "often based on rote approach with very little opportunities for active learning by children" (MoEYS & UNICEF, 2005, p. 10).

4.2 The Socio-Cultural Impacts

Almost three decades of civil war and tragic social turmoil, genocide and dictatorial rules left Cambodia with a historical legacy－the tragic loss of 1.7 million human lives and the ruins of its economy, physical infrastructure, and political and social institutions. Although improvements in living standards and considerable progress in social institutions had been made since the Paris Peace Agreement, Cambodia still faces high levels of poverty, corruption and violence, human rights violation, and poor social and human development indicators (WB, 2009, p. 4). This historical catastrophe has far-reaching effects on Cambodian society in terms of weak trust and broken social cohesion, violence of any forms and the culture of impunity, very low levels of associational activity and a decline in the sense of solidarity and community spirit (ibid.; Seanglim B., 1991). Provided the impacts of this historical legacy, one might

question how schools in Cambodia can nurture in students "high standard of morals and ethics" and "a public spirit characterized by equality and respect for others' rights" as aimed by MoEYS (2004a, p. 11). It goes without saying that students need a favourable social and political culture that goes beyond schools if they are to be able to internalize and make use of the values they learned in class.

This socio-cultural reality has two dimensions of impacts on students' internalization and application of civics and moral values. First, there are issues of "wrongdoing" and "setting examples" for the young from parents, old people and their community alike. Apart from the cultural tendency in which the old tend to have "paternalistic" attitudes towards young people, it is difficult in one or another way for these old people, who survive the genocide and civil war and who have experienced such things as violence, stealing, killing and so forth, to tell the young what they should do. In another word, for instance, it might run counter to the promotion of civics and moral values for some parents, teachers and the community at large to tell their children that they had to "steal" food to eat in order to survive during the Khmer Rouge regime, and that students have to be moral while domestic violence, social distrust and injustice are in place.

Second, the breakdown of social solidarity and community is also evident in the relationship between teachers, students and their families due to teachers' "low salaries"[3], which leads to the prevalent practices of teachers openly and illegally charging "extra fees" and committing academic briberies. As set forth by MoEYS in its policy on LLSP program, it is vital for MCE teachers to be respected "role models" and to work in partnership with parents, their community, community organizations and the like, but what happens when the policy meets social reality? Many teachers in Cambodia resort to the widespread practices of not only charging money in every class session in public schools but also accepting briberies in exams, forcing their students to attend supplementary tutoring classes, buying extra teaching materials and even snacks. The minimum cost of schooling for Grade 9 students is estimated at about US$250 per year due mainly to "extra fees" and "opportunity costs" (WB, 2005), and this perennial demands for extra money has made the cost of schooling extremely high for the poorest 20% of the population (MoEYS & UNICEF, 2005). Therefore, while MoEYS declares that education is free for basic level education, many students cannot afford to pay these extra charges and thus risk failing exams, repeating classes or

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[3] According to the World Bank (2005), experienced primary school teachers are paid about US$29 per month and lower secondary school teachers US$37 per months in 2003. This has slowly increased up to US$60-70 per months in 2010, which is barely enough to support even the teachers themselves, let alone an additional person of their family. According to Rong Chhun, the President of the Cambodian Teacher's Association, teachers need at least US$150-200 for them to survive.

dropping out of school. Report by the National Democratic Institution for International Affairs (2009) shows that "a barrier to this education in civic participation is that access to school is often limited, either because of distance or 'extra fees'" (in UNDP & BBC, 2010, p. 45). Adding to this point, MoEYS also acknowledged 'the lack of cooperation and communication between teachers and pupils/parents" and that "the poor relationship between teachers and the community is partly due to the collection of 'illegal' fees from pupil by teachers, which is in turn a reaction to low teacher salaries" (MoEYS & UNICEF, 2005, p. 11). Overall, this social reality portrays teachers in Cambodia as "teaching philosophy" in class but "do not do philosophy" outside the class. Branson (2003) also put this point clear that "students learn when teachers know their stuff", and by this he means knowing stuff does not mean only having a clear understanding about the program goals but also doing it in everyday life.

Apart from this social reality, another socio-cultural factor that prevents students from internalizing and applying civics and moral values to become "active citizens" is the extremely hierarchical nature of Cambodian society. Traditional Cambodian culture put strong emphasis on the importance of "behaving appropriately and graciously" and avoiding conflict and giving offense. Conflict avoidance and a culture of "saving face" have served to reinforce this nature (WB, 2009, p. 6). Brown (2008) proposes two aspects of this value: "age hierarchy" and "knowledge hierarchy"; However, the "status hierarchy" can also be another aspect in this matter. According to Yong (2005), the leaders or local authorities and the old tend to think that young people are inexperienced and that they should listen to the more mature and experienced members of the community. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted by UNCT in 2009 has confirmed this observation in which the young interviewees aged between 15 and 19 years old in the discussion expressed their sense of exclusion from and limited involvement in various community activities:

> Village local authorities never allowed us to participate and express our opinion and ideas in any village meeting. 'Angkar' conducts agricultural trainings in the village. The youth were not allowed to participate in these trainings because the elders believe that they will not absorb what is being taught. The elders and village chief only call youths to a meeting if there is conflict among young people. The youths are never called on to participate in drafting the village development plan. (UNCT, 2009, p. 78)

At the same token, parents of the students from Siem Reap also expressed their own opinions in similar ways that "elders and local authorities think that youths have less experience in development; therefore, their ideas have been ignored" (UNCT, 2009,

p. 78). This kind of social blueprint, therefore, portrays Cambodian context as running counter to its promoting "active" citizenship values in the young (as propagated by MoEYS, 2004) and those in lower status quo because it demands blind obedience and conformity. What is more, the conventional pedagogical practices in Cambodian schools can be seen as an impact of this socio-cultural value.

4.3 The Impacts of Cambodian Political culture and Religious Ideology

The MoEYS vision and mission on civics and moral inculcation for "active or functioning citizens" reflects the government's adoption of a modern ideology based on liberal democracy as a roadmap for the country's modernization and economic development. In line with this fresh embarkation, the new MCE textbooks have included modern concepts such as principles of democracy, human rights and citizen rights, government and electoral procedures, the creation of political parties and national assembly, and civic participation. This deliberate attempt to modernize its political culture takes place against the backdrop of the country's time-honoured conventional political culture in several ways.

First, there are tensions and conflicts between MoEYS's goal to nurture "active or functioning" citizenship values and the country's long-standing "patrimonial traditions" and "patron-client" relationships. Cambodia has a long history as a "patrimonial society" (Chandler, 1991, pp. 3-4), in which both the authoritarian rulers, who often wielded absolute power, and the ruled tend to conceive power in "zero-sum" terms (WB, 2009, p. 5). Such patrimonial system can be traced back to the Khmer Empire of Angkor era where Indianized concept of *devaraja* (God King) was adopted and practiced by the Khmer kings at Angkor (Coedes, 1968). In such a system, the idea that the political power holders must be held accountable to those under their rule is absent or quite unfamiliar, and any oppositions to the ruler or the ruling party, whether it be democratic or peaceful, tend to be considered an act of disloyalty or disobedience. The WB (2009) has pointed out that in Cambodia today, "power tends to be highly centralized, steeply hierarchical and personalized rather than institutionalized", and "the government's difficulties in enhancing governance effectiveness, enforcing regulations and improving public service delivery are in large part due to specific ways in which informal patrimonial power structures have penetrated formal bureaucratic institutions" (WB, 2009, p.5). Furthermore, it has been found out that in recent years, the power of patrons and their networks of clients in Cambodia has merged with the formal structure of government to form what the WB termed *"neo-patrimonial"* system of governance, under which decision-making power and influence are largely determined by powerful patrons (ibid., p.5).

In another respect, this MoEYS's goal can also be vitiated by the political anxiety

and an anti-civic engagement ethos among Cambodians, both in academic and public spheres. Due to the civil war and violence resulting from the conflicts of ideologies of the last three decades, political involvement has historically been associated with risks and death. Reports by UNCT (2009) has shown that Cambodian parents and relatives tend to be wary and discouraging of civic activities done by their children because they perceive such actions as "too political" and therefore dangerous (UNCT, 2009; UNDP & BBC, 2010, p. 36). In line with this, academic freedom has also been restricted. Schools in Cambodia are barred from political discussions or any political meetings so as to keep this public space neutral (UNDP & BBC, 2010). For instance, topics or motives on political matters have been banned from any academic debates or discussions at RUPP. Furthermore, some other instances can also highlight this point. On February 2, 2012, the Director of the Research Department of the Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE) issued a "directive" to senior undergraduate students, forbidding them to write their final thesis on 14 topics[4] on a reason that "these topics have already been severely written". However, such action has been explained to be "politically motive". The questionnaire survey at RUPP also shows that most students (72%) say "yes" to the question *Do you think talking about politics in your country is dangerous?*"

Secondly, this patrimonial system in return demands obligation and social obedience to itself, resulting in a culture of conformity and passivity and an articulation on and preference for social harmony, which also run counter against MoEYS's goal to nurture "active or functioning" citizenship values. Studies have found out that it is not only the old, who have naturally been exposed to this patronage system, that tend to have authoritarian views and attitudes towards the young but the young themselves who also adopt this ideology. UNDP & BBC's country-wide study, *Youth Civic Participation KAP 2010*, has shown that more than half (64% male and 57% female) of the respondents (aged from 15 to 24) agree to statement: "the leader of the government is like the head of the family, so we should follow what they have decided" (UNDP & BBC, 2010, p. 37). Also, the study through Focus Group Discussion by UNCT (2009) discussed in the previous section also confirms such prevailing patronage system in the present day's Cambodian society. Fieldwork by The World Bank shows, in-

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4 These topics are: 1. Drug problems in society; 2. The organization and the working of the Cambodian Red Cross; 3. The goal and the legal resolution of land dispute resolutions in Cambodia; 4. The legal resolution of land disputes in Cambodia; 5. The legal authority in land disputes in Cambodia; 5. The advantages of the stock market in Cambodia; 6. Prevention and resolution of work disputes in Cambodia; 7. Commercial and work dispute arbitrations in Cambodia; 8. The regularization of the stock market; 9. The publication of public stocks; 10. The evolution of the publications on the public sale of stocks by public companies in Cambodia; 11. Stock companies; 12. First time printing and sale of publicly-owned stocks; 13. Registration of commercial companies; 14. Publications of information affecting stocks (Translated from Khmer by the author)

terestingly, that there are increasing levels of civic participation in commune council meetings (in the wake of the government's decentralization policy) but largely in a passive, listening role (WB, 2009, p. 5).

Finally, there has also been a general argument that traditional Buddhist culture and philosophy has tended to reinforce (or even breed) such culture of conformity and social harmony through the so-called *Law of Karma*" (Chandler, 1991, p. 4; WB, 2009, p. 6, Morris, 2000, Eng, 1998). The patrimonial characteristic of Cambodian society is argued to be able to preserve its time-honoured existence due mainly to a strong belief among Cambodians in the Buddhist concept of karma and fate and the doctrine of relative merit, in which one tends to accept sufferings, social injustice, and one's place in the social hierarchy because that is the consequence of one's deeds in his or her previous life (Chandler, 1994; Morris, 2000). This leads to a sense of powerlessness and a perception that social change is unlikely or impossible (ibid., p. 4). As a result, state affair has always been accorded to those in power, and those in the lower status tend to take their status quo for granted or as a given, and tend to develop strong expectation for the powerful to provide them dependency and a chance to gain merits. In this sense, Cambodian Buddhism has predominantly exposed Cambodians to a process of enculturation in which they naturally internalize norms and values that place strong emphasis and high importance on harmony, reconciliation and peace, but in a way that does not require accountability and retribution (Marks, 1999, pp. 716-717). This, in another respect, runs contradictory to the MoEYS's goal to create "active or functioning" citizenship for its new-born democracy, a concept originated from the West.

5. Conclusion

The attempt of the government to promote citizenship values in Cambodia schools has been largely ineffective. Given the high levels of poverty and the prevalent practices of rampant corruption (both within and outside the academic sphere), the unfavourable social condition of widespread violence and impunity, human rights violation, and the Cambodia's predominant traditional social and political culture, it is far from clear to see how MoEYS can achieve its goals. While the level of understanding about "democracy"—a concept foreign and still abstract to most Cambodians—is still low (UNDP & BBC, 2010), most Cambodians still retain a recessive posture in politics, and the low level of associational activity tend to be very traditional and local (often linked to the pagodas), very small in size and quite isolated and unconnected (WB, 2009). This Western concept must be mingled with the predominant authoritarianism and the existing social and political culture in Cambodian society to form the so-called "Cambodia-style democracy", in which the balance tends to be tipped in favour of the

latter. The report from The World Bank (2009) put this point clearly:

> Although the executive power is ostensibly checked through the existence of a parliament and independent judiciary, in reality these institutions do not currently have the capacity to effectively perform their mandated functions. In practice, the executive tends to dominate other branches of the government. One political party, the Cambodian People's Party, continues to dominate and there is a strong legacy of viewing the government as an instrument for implementing party policy. (WB, 2009, p. 4)

For the inculcation processes of civics and moral values in Cambodia schools to be contextually meaningful and effective, the government needs to further demonstrate its genuine willingness and to build up the country's social and cultural capital. In recent years, it is noteworthy, however, that the government has introduced many initiatives and mechanisms through its "decentralization" and "deconcentration" policies, aimed at facilitating citizen participation and accountability. These include school support committees, school cluster system, commune councils, provincial accountability committees and accountability boxes, and pilot ombudsmen offices (WB, 2009, p. 56). A good example of this is the Commune Council Support Project (CCSP), which was established in 2000 as a joint initiative of nine national and international NGOs[5] to advocate for equal participation and to build the capacity for both civil society organizations and NGOs for engagement with state bodies (ibid., p. 57). These can be a good platform for promoting collaboration between schools and community as well as the local authorities and religious groups. Also, in order to officially encourage citizen and community involvements, the government has introduced the school support committees (initially called "parents associations") to all public schools, but it has been found that although these committees are widely known, the status and mandate of these committees are not clear to people, and even the members of these committees are unaware of their mandate and power (WB, 2009, pp. 56-59). Furthermore, in reality, there are fundamental reservations for these organizations to be involved in those initiatives or mechanisms for fear of being "absorbed, neutralized or co-opted" (ibid., p. 56). Such reality can obstruct relationship between schools and the community in various ways. Also, it has been found out in this study that there are actually few social activities within the schools that link students with their community work and vice versa. Therefore, it is recommended that these existing mechanisms of dialogue and participation should be further facilitated with more social accountability.

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5 These include Buddhism for Development, Church World Service, CIDSE, COMFREL, Concern World, NGO Forum, Oxfam GB, SEDOC and World Vision Cambodia.

Traditionally, community involvement in school issues has long existed, mainly linked to the pagodas (*Wat* schools and the pagoda monasteries). As discussed earlier, these existing Buddhist institutions play crucial role in not only promoting civics and moral values but also facilitating associational bonds and spiritual activities within the communities. However, one of the problems with these institutions is that they usually face financial problems because they are financed mainly by the local communities, which are already facing poverty themselves. In order to address this inconvenience and to meet the growing demands, it is recommended that MoEYS and the external donor agencies encourage more private religious organizations through the platform of the Commune Council Support Project (CCSP), in which the Buddhist institutions along with other religious organizations such the Church World Service can work in collaboration to promote civics and moral values, apart from public schools. For instance, many faith-based Buddhist organizations such as The Buddhist for Development and Santi Sena are playing a progressive role in applying core Buddhist values to address vital contemporary social issues, while Christian-based religious schools such as the Life School are promoting civics and moral values in their schooling programs (WB, 2009, pp. 6-57). Overall, such collaboration does comply with the MoEYS's educational decentralization and deconcentration policies, and will provide a better environment for promoting civics and moral values in Cambodia, provided that the government's genuine willingness is in place.

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