Chapter One

THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION PERIOD
The Vichy Administration and the Cambodian Reaction

By the year 1936, as noted in the preceding chapter, the bi-weekly newspaper *Nagaravatta* and the Friendly Association of the Old Students of Sisowath College (*Association Amicale des Anciens Élèves du Collège Sisowath*) were founded. The *Nagaravatta*, with nationalist Pach Chhoeun as its editor, had a wide public response with a circulation of about 4,000 per issue. (1) This paper, according to its founder, had a two-fold purpose. The long-range one was to educate the Cambodian masses with the ultimate objective of regaining the independence of Cambodia. The second and short-range one was to bring Cambodian grievances to the notice of the French authorities. (2) This paper was moderate in its criticism of the French administration, and the latter, on its part, had been showing some regard for the views of this paper.

(1) *Évolution de la Politique Intérieure Khmer de Fin 1945 à Juin 1951* (Phnom Penh, 1951) (Typed script) 2. M. Pach Chhoeun informed the present writer that the circulation rose to about 5,000 per day. He claimed that the paper had readers in the Vietnam and France also.

(2) The above information was given to the present writer by Pach Chhoeun, the editor of the paper, in January-February, 1959, in Phnom Penh.
The Suspension of Nagaravatta

This mutual give-and-take attitude, however, came to an unhappy end with the establishment of the Nazi-controlled Vichy régime in France. Its representatives, regardless of the maturing nationalist sentiments and the democratic leanings of the Cambodian leaders, took certain steps which drove a wedge in Franco-Cambodian relations. A leading role in this direction was played by the Censor Department headed by one M. Folie in the office of the Resident Superior. "With the nomination of M. Folie alias Desjardians," observes M. Pann Jung, President of the Cambodian delegation in Paris in 1950, "as the head of the censor Department, the rift between the Cambodian people and the French administration was completed." (3) Attempts were made with considerable success to curb freedom of speech and opinion, and the Cambodian Press was heavily censored.

Pach Chhoeun, the nationalist editor, was summoned to the office of the Resident Superior and was urged to conform to the official Vichy Policy, including the latter's alliance with Germany. The editor, however, refused to submit to these behests as his conscience did not permit him to change his political opinion, particularly under coercion. The colonial officials, who were evidently annoyed by this,


This is a letter addressed by Pann Jung to the President of the French Republic. This manuscript was made available to the present writer by M. Pach Chhoeun.
retaliated by getting a rival paper, by name Cambodge, started with a generous financial grant of about 30,000 piastres. (4) The rival newspaper could not equal, what to say of supplanting, the Nagaravatta. As a final resort Government employees were forced to subscribe to this paper on pain of either losing their jobs or of being transferred to remote provinces. With all this, the nationalist paper could not be coerced into conformity. It became more and more anti-French in its expressions. The Censor Department, too, showed equal determination to curb it. The unhappy episode, however, ended when the paper was finally suspended on 13 April 1942, leaving behind a feeling of bitterness among the Cambodian nationalists.

The Script and Calendar Reform

Meanwhile, the Resident Superior, M. Gautier, brought about two important changes that wounded Cambodian sentiment severely. The first measure was aimed at replacing the traditional Khmer script by the Roman script, while the second was to replace the traditional calendar by the Gregorian calendar. By themselves these changes were modernist and normally there ought not to have been any objection to them. (5) In introducing these reforms, however, the French had obviously ignored the average Cambodian's love for tradition. In a country like Cambodia, where every institution is traced back

(4) Ibid., 3.

(5) In a way King Sihanouk too was responsible for their introduction. See Sam Sary, La Grande Figure de Norodom Sihanouk (Phnom Penh, 1955) 3.
to the past and where the approximate ratio of the bonzes
(the upholders of Cambodian tradition) to the laity is one to
fifty (6), it can be guessed what strong reaction these changes
might have brought about. Typical of the reaction was the
remark attributed to a Cambodian who derided the idea by saying,
"He M. Gautier wishes to give a 'Quoc Ngu' (7) to the
Cambodians." (8) The Cambodian never forgave the French for
this, for he considered the innovation to be grotesque.

The Japanese Occupation and the Loss of Territory

On the top of these came the Japanese occupation of
Cambodia, which, on the one hand, exposed French weakness, and
on the other, brought a new and vigorous master to Cambodia.
The more important military and economic powers hitherto
exercised by the French passed into the Japanese hands, thus
reducing the former's sovereignty over Cambodia to something
nominal. Consequently, Cambodia suffered a further national
humiliation, by being reduced to the status of sub-protégés of
the Japanese. In the beginning, however, the Japanese
exploitation of Cambodian resources did not go much beyond the
utilization of the Cambodian transport and communications system
for the movement of troops and war material to Bangkok. (9)

(6) Geography: Le Cambodge, Les Etats Associes, Les Etats
Voisins de l'Indochine (Phnom Penh, 1953) 2. Even in 1955 the
ratio remained almost the same.

(7) Quoc Ngu is the term given to the romanized script of
the Vietnamese language.

(8) Kirby Lewis, Le Malaise Cambodgien (typed script)
(Phnom Penh, 1946) 12.

(9) The Japanese controlled the air-ports of Pochentong,
Siem reap and Kompong Thom. To some extent they had developed
them. The Cambodian railway (the only line) which terminated
at Poipet in the western border was linked up with Aranya on
the Thai side.
A more serious injury than this was the Japanese aid to Thailand in the latter's attempt to regain the Cambodian border provinces ceded to France in 1907. As the relations between the Vichy French and the Japanese were getting settled, Thailand reopened the question of regaining those provinces by bombarding Stung Treng, Sisophon and Poipet between 6 and 8 January 1941. (10) The French efforts to repel the aggression were checked by the Japanese as they feared that this side-show would go against the military and strategic calculations they had already planned. (11) So Japan imposed an armistice on the combatants reserving the task of supervision to its own mission stationed at Sisophon. (12) In this venture Japan gained a new ally; Thailand realized her territorial ambition; the French suffered a loss of prestige; and most significant of all, Cambodia underwent a grievous territorial loss.

In accordance with the Peace Convention of 9 May 1941 France ceded to Thailand the provinces of Battambang, Sisophon and a part of the province of Siem Reap, retaining however the famous ruins of Angkor Wat. Thus, Cambodia was deprived of about one-third of her territory and about 450,000 Khmers.


(11) Japan was prepared to go to the extent of giving away the whole of Cambodia to Thailand if that was necessary. See F.C. Jones, Japan's New Order in East Asia, Its Rise and Fall, 1937-45 (London, 1954) 234. See also Willard H. Elsbree, Japan's Role in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements, 1940 to 1945 (J. Suisse, 1953) 17.

besides a few important irrigational projects. (13) Economically speaking, the most important loss was the region of Battambang, the rice-bowl of Cambodia. A French-managed agricultural society, the Agricultural Society of Battambang (La Société Rizicole de Battambang), for example, was cultivating about 17,000 hectares of land, in which about 6,000 Cambodians worked of whom about 3,500 were permanent employees. On an average the Battambang area exported 120,000 tons of paddy by rail annually. (14)

The French economic and financial interests, in apparent disregard of Cambodia's loss as regards territory and population, were comforting themselves with the hope that the Bangkok Government would not adversely affect their special interests and privileges in this area. For instance, just before the signing of the Convention, a pro-French newspaper, L'Echo du Cambodge, reflected French hopes in this way.

First of all, it is necessary to stress that the Tokyo agreement recognises that the rights of the French and their jurisdiction are equal to those enjoyed by the Thai nationals in the zones newly ceded to her. The interests of France in Battambang, therefore, do not appear to have been compromised - at any rate from the economic point of view. It is reasonable to hope - always on the condition of final confirmation - that the Agricultural Society of Battambang will be able to pursue her operations as usual. (15)

(13) Gaudel, L'Indochine Française en Face du Japon, 114. See also Sabattier, Le Destin de l'Indochine, 17.

(14) L'Echo du Cambodge, 2 April 1941.

(15) Ibid.
These expectations, however, were not realized, for Thailand did not allow the French to work in the ceded areas. (16)

The Question of Succession to the Throne

As for the Cambodians, the shock of the arbitrary amputation of what they regarded as "beloved provinces" hastened the death of their monarch, King Sisowath Monivong, who died on 24 April 1941. (17) The King's death reopened the question of a successor to the Cambodian throne. Prince Monireth, the eldest son of the late king, was the legitimate claimant and the French Republic, in the person of M. Mandel, Minister for Colonies, had even given "a sort of a promise" to the prince to consider his case favourably. (18) But when the time for final decision came the French administration preferred to instal Prince Norodom Sihanouk, then a boy of 18 years pursuing his studies in Chasseloup-Laubat in Saigon, on the throne. According to Admiral Decoux, the then Governor-General of Indochina who placed the Crown on the head of the young Prince, the overriding consideration for this choice was the desire to end the feud between the two rival branches - the Norodom and the Sisowath - of the Royal family by "blending the bloods," somewhat similar to the famous marriage of the "Roses" in the British history. Admiral Decoux wrote:

(16) The rice production results from the Battambang area for this period are left blank in the Cambodian statistical reports. See *Annuaire Statistique Retrospective du Cambodge 1937-1958* (Ministry of Planning, Kingdom of Cambodia, 1958) 35.


Whatever it might be, it appeared necessary in order to put an end to this rivalry by bringing a prince to the throne who could blend in himself the elder and younger branches. Such was the case of the young Prince Sihanouk (who) by his father is the great grand-son of Norodom and by his mother the great grand-son of Sisowath ... (19)

In the choice of the Cambodian kings, the question of legitimacy did not trouble the French so much as the need of ensuring unswerving loyalty from the person on the throne. For instance, after the death of King Norodom (1834-1904), his son Prince Yukanthor (1860-1934) should have legitimately succeeded to the throne. (See Genealogical table). But as he followed an anti-French policy throughout his career (he died in exile in Siam), his claims were set aside on the pretext of giving the throne to one who had ably aided the French in the pacification of the country. Thanks to the selection of Prince Sisowath (1840-1927), the younger brother of Norodom, the feud between the two branches developed and continued till 1927, when Prince Sisowath Monivong (1876-1941) was chosen as the King, apparently to justify the question of legitimacy. (20) If the principle of legitimacy had been followed logically Prince Monireth must have been the rightful claimant. This was not done, because, as Decoux explains, the French wanted to undo what they did before, that is, to end the feud between

(19) Ibid., 286.

(20) A good number of the Cambodian nationalists expected that the Crown would pass on to a member of the Norodom family. The French showed an inclination for it in 1923, but they subsequently changed their mind and chose Sisowath Monivong as King. For details see Norodom Sihanouk, "Comment Samdech Preah Monivong devint Roi," in Réalités cambodgiennes (Phnom Penh) 26 July 1958.
GENEALOGICAL TABLE

Ang Duong (1796-1859)

Norodom (1834-1904) Si Vatha (1841-91) Sisowath (1840-1927) (Crowned in 1906)

Yukanthor (1860-1934) Suthirot (1872-1945) Sisowath Monivong (1876-1941) (Crowned in 1928)

Princess Rasmi Sobhana

Norodom Suramarit (Crowned in 1956)

Princess Sisowath Monireth (1909-)

Kossamak

Norodom Sihanouk (1923- ) (Crowned in 1941 and abdicated in 1955)
two rival royal branches. The deeper cause, however, for setting aside the case of Monireth, was that this Prince, with or without reason, was suspected to entertain anti-French feelings. (21) It is to be noted that the choice of Prince Sihanouk had taken the prince himself by surprise. But the French in this case, as the later events were to show, had unwittingly placed on the throne the wrong person!

The Demonstration of 1942

The rapid accumulation of Cambodian grievances against the French, as shown above, coupled with the French submission to the demands of Japan, thereby exposing the former's weakness, made Cambodia ripe for some overt nationalist manifestation. The rising spirit of nationalism was symbolized in the persons of Pach Chhoeun, Son Ngoc Thanh and Achar Hem Chieu.

Pach Chhoeun, the editor of the now defunct Nagaravatta, was touring the provinces from early forties spreading nationalist propaganda, especially among the intellectual élite and the bonzes. He made use of the Friendly Association which had branches all over Cambodia, as a convenient medium for this purpose. Son Ngoc Thanh, a pure-blooded Cambodian (22) and an associate of Pach

(21) The present writer was informed in Cambodia that Prince Monireth's association with the influential family of Pok El, allegedly pro-Siamese and anti-French, as also his occasional anti-French expressions were responsible for French suspicion.

(22) Western writers on Cambodia, almost without exception, hold the view that Son Ngoc Thanh is a person of mixed Vietnamese-Cambodian blood. The present writer has learnt from some of Thanh's closest associates, from some of his blood relations, and from independent sources that he is a pure-blooded Cambodian born in Travinh province, which, along with Soctrong and Rachgia, are called in Cambodia Kampuchea Krom. These three provinces once belonged to Cambodia, and even today the majority of the population is Cambodian.
Chhoeun, was also engaged in spreading secretly anti-French sentiments among the bonzes by taking advantage of his profession as a teacher in the Buddhist School, Institut Bouddhique, in Phnom Penh. In addition, a few secret organisations were also started which worked on the basis of something like "each one teach ten."

Nationalist propaganda was intensified somewhat openly after the French set-back over the Cambodian border question. The two leaders appealed to the students and businessmen for support, and with a view to preparing themselves "for all eventualities" they also commenced recruiting followers from the Cambodian lower-classes for the "clash-ready" groups. (23) Thanks to the cooperation of the bonzes and the Krous, or magicians, by April 1942 several hundred "guerilleros" were recruited.

Achar Hem Chieu, a teacher in the Ecole Superieure du Pali, Phnom Penh, who was considered as the prospective "Gandhi of Cambodia," used a different technique to collect followers. Taking advantage of his deep learning in Buddhist theology he sedulously clothed anti-French propaganda in religious and spiritual garb. He informed his audience that in the end spirit would triumph over matter, and reason over force. His preaching, apparently non-violent, had a tremendous effect on the bonzes and on the masses in general. While the Gandhi of India practised non-violence as a way of life and, incidentally, as a means for the liberation of India from the British yoke, this would-be

(23) Evolution de la Politique, 2.
"Gandhi of Cambodia" did not minimise the importance of force as an instrument of national liberation. He was conspiring with the local Cambodian army advising desertion, if possible *en masse*, from the French command. The French secret police, consequently, arrested him on 18 July 1942, and threw him in prison without defrocking as the custom went. "Sir," the Achar said when he was arrested, "you can do everything you like here. You are the master. You can take my life, but my spirit would continue to live." (24) His assertion, though perhaps unmeditated, was prophetic.

The arrest and imprisonment of the Achar without defrocking him brought matters to a head. According to Buddhist injunctions—which remind us of Thomas Becket—Henry II controversy in British history—a monk cannot be arrested, much less imprisoned, without first being defrocked. The right of decision over such matters always rested with the Religious High Council. This violation of the religious susceptibilities of the Cambodians was the last straw. It provided a convenient opportunity for Pach Chhoeun and Son Ngoc Thanh for a showdown with the French. (25)


(25) Martin F. Herz seems to suggest that the demonstration was due solely to the efforts of Son Ngoc Thanh, and that Achar Hem Chieu was arrested along with Pach Chhoeun after the demonstration. See Martin F. Herz, *A Short History of Cambodia* (New York, 1958) 74. The fact is that the 'revolt' itself was the outcome of the arrest of Achar without defrocking him.
The nationalist leaders chose 20 July 1942 as the day for the anti-French demonstration. (26) At 9 A.M. on that day several hundreds of the Cambodians, who gathered in Phnom Penh from various parts of the country, started a demonstration and marched towards the office of the Resident Superior, situated near the famous Wat Phnom. Pach Chhoeun, as an elected member of the people's Representative Assembly (1940), took the lead followed by Son Ngoc Thanh. Disregarding the heavy police security force, he dashed forward pressing the authorities to hear what he had to say. He said that the demonstration was not so much directed against the French as it was to demand the release of the Achar. No one apparently heard the voice of the people; only the batons of the French security police in full action were heard. (27) The Japanese authorities, on whom the leaders counted for support, were neutral. So the batons did their job unhindered; the demonstrators were dispersed; Pach Chhoeun and a few others, such as Achar Duong and Venerable Pan Khat, were arrested. Son Ngoc Thanh managed to escape into the Japanese legation from where he was sent to Bangkok. Those who were arrested were tried by court martial in Saigon and later sent to Poulo Condore for penal servitude. There, in the uninhabitable hovels, several (there were about 30 Cambodians)

(26) Regarding the year of the demonstration there appears to be some confusion among writers. W. G. Burchett and even Admiral Decoux, the then Governor-General of Indochina, place the year as 1943. See W. G. Burchett, Mekong Upstream, 106 and Admiral Decoux, A La Barre de l'Indochine, 236. In fact, the demonstration occurred, as noted above, in 1942.

(27) Cambodge (Phnom Penh), 19 July 1945.
of them suffered from illness while Hem Chieu succumbed to it, saying on his death-bed, "I will die happy if I were sure that my country will be liberated from foreign yoke. I pray for its freedom." (28)

As the leaders, who rose from the ranks of commoners, were removed from the political scene by arrest and deportation, the only symbolic figure that was left to take the lead was the King in association with the aristocracy. While it is difficult to enter into the inner workings of his mind, his attitude at this time, judged by his official pronouncements, does not appear to keep in step with this manifestation of national sentiment. In this connection we quote in extenso a letter King Sihanouk addressed to Governor-General Découx in July 1943:

Your steady and clear-sighted policy, to which history would render legitimate homage, has indeed made the miracle of bringing to the Union the Indochinese Union, in a world upset by War, an 'Oasis of Peace' in whose bosom Cambodia has pursued untrammelled her fortunes, an oasis of peace which presents moreover to a foreigner the picture of intense activity in all spheres of an unswerving desire to overcome all difficulties, of display of creative imagination which evokes admiration and confidence . . .

I need not recall the last proof of interest you showed me in placing as the chief of the Protectorate, M. Gautier, a friend of Cambodia and of the Throne, who — I am convinced — knows how to lead my Kingdom towards a better future.

Admiral, it is a very great pleasure for me — and all people are one with me — to recall the benefits that Cambodia had taken advantage of during the past three years, the period which shall be marked as a pierre-blanche in the history of Cambodia. (29)

(28) Ibid.

(29) Quoted from L'Impartial (Saigon) 29 July 1943. This letter was addressed to Admiral Découx on the occasion of the third anniversary of the Admiral's assumption of office in Indochina.
It is not clear how this out-and-out praise for the French rule of this period would fit in with the humiliation suffered by the Cambodians including his predecessor, King Sisowath Monivong. It makes us think that the King was not a free agent. His tender age and inexperience, and also the knowledge that he owed his accession to the French who could remove him from the throne if they so chose, were perhaps responsible for his obsequiousness to the French rule.

Thus, for want of leaders, the movement went into the background after the 1942 demonstration. When, however, it was revived after the Japanese coup de force on 9 March 1945 it took a new and more positive significance.

The Japanese Grant of Independence

It was very clear to Japan by the end of the year 1944 that she was fighting a losing battle against the Allied forces in the Pacific. During the first week of February 1945, an American plane (B-29 'Flying Fortress') dropped six bombs to wipe out Japanese military installations in Phnom Penh. The first one exploded near the Wat Unnalom situated on the right-bank of the Mekong river. Unfortunately, the target was missed and about 600 non-combatants were killed. In early March the overall military situation for Japan, in the words of her Minister for War, General Suzuki, became "unprecedentedly grave." (30) In the face of an imminent massive Allied attack, Japan had to revise drastically the blue-print she had prepared

earlier for the control of Asia. The overriding concern now was to consolidate by all means what she had already gained, and if that was not possible to deprive the Allied forces a smooth entry into the colonial countries of Southeast Asia. The immediate task was to win over the nationalists of Southeast Asia to her side by granting them the much-longed-for independence.

Accordingly, on 9 March 1945, at 21 hours, the Japanese military authorities in Cambodia effected a well-planned coup de force (31) by arresting at one sweep all the French military forces, police and Native Guards. Admiral Decoux and the commanders of the three armed services were taken under the Japanese "protective custody" on the charge of their "insincere attitude" towards the Japanese, and of their secret dealings with the Allied forces. Indochina as a whole was placed under martial law, and death penalty was decreed for those who maintained a hostile attitude towards the Japanese forces. (32) On 13 March, King Norodom Sihanouk, under Japanese pressure, formally proclaimed the independence of Cambodia abrogating the Protectorate treaties of 1863 just as Emperor Bao Dai had done two days earlier in Vietnam. The Domei Agency Report said:

(31) There was an efficient Japanese secret service functioning in Phnom Penh at this time. For instance, there was a fake business concern at the Old Market area in Phnom Penh called the Dainan Kooshi. The manager of this concern, a Japanese national, pretended to be deaf and dumb. He, it is alleged, would gather secret information about the French administration and its war-potential from the Vietnamese and other employees in Government offices. After the coup de force he turned out to be a colonel and acted as a liaison officer to the Japanese occupation forces. The present writer's interview with Daubdhaj Abbasaly, an honorary mandarin in the Cambodian Royal Court. See also Lewis, Le Malaise Cambodgien, 12.

Because of the present conditions, France was in no position to offer any protection to Cambodia. The latter has realized that no purpose would be served in continuing under the protection of France. Consequently, Cambodia annulled the protection of France, and proclaimed her independence. (33)

All the French civilian population was interned in a quarter to the north of Phnom Penh. All the departments of Cambodian civil administration, except finance and budgetary powers, were transferred to native hands. The Japanese Military Command had also taken under its control the military and propaganda machinery. A few buildings such as the Hôtel du Gouvernement (the erstwhile residence of the Resident Superior) and the École Doudart de Lagrée, which had been retained by them for official use, were also transferred to native hands in July 1945. The old administrative structure as well as the laws and regulations made by the French were retained. The reasons for their retention were given in the proclamation of the Japanese Army Command in Indochina on 15 March 1945:

Because of the existing military situation facing the Japanese army, Japan wished to assume complete responsibility only for the defence of Indochina in collaboration with the people of Indochina. Consequently our immediate task is to pacify the people and re-establish public order of such a sort that the defence of Indochina is quickly strengthened. For this reason the Japanese army have no intention whatever of changing the local Governmental organisation, nor the laws and decrees in force, nor the administrative structure created by the French. It wishes to protect all the functionaries, whoever they may be, who cooperate with the Japanese army. (34)

(33) Quoted from Cambodge, 21 March 1945. A message of greetings was sent by Dr. Baw Maw, the Adipati, to King Sihanouk. There appears to have been a close association among all those leaders sponsored by the Japanese in the southeast Asian countries.

(34) Ibid., 22 March 1945.
Under Japanese auspices a Cambodian Cabinet was formed with the following members:

- Ung Hy ... Minister of Finance (he was the principal minister)
- Norodom Montana ... Minister for National Economy
- Meal Nal ... Minister for National Education and Propaganda
- Tea San ... Minister for National Defence and Rationing
- Chan Nak ... Minister for Justice
- Sum Hieng ... Minister of Interior and Political Affairs
- Var Kamal ... Minister for Culture, Religious Education and Fine Arts. (35)

The heroes of the 1942 demonstration were released by the Japanese and were brought back to Phnom Penh. Son Ngoc Thanh too returned to the Cambodian capital after nearly three years of stay in Tokyo. He was made the Foreign Minister. (36) The Cambodian intelligentsia, for the first time in modern history, had had an opportunity of occupying all the important administrative posts including those of the Resident Superior and the Residents. (37) The powers of the King too were not seriously affected. He could, for instance, appoint freely officers even to such important posts as Chauvaykhet (Governors) in his kingdom. The Cambodian political life having thus entered into a new atmosphere of independence, King Sihanouk told his compatriots in a New Year Message:

(35) Royal Order dated 18 March 1945.

(36) After his escape into the Japanese legation in Phnom Penh, after the 1942 demonstration, Thanh was sent by the Japanese army to Tokyo where he rose to the rank of a captain. See Le Than Khoi, "Cambodia in Transition," Eastern World (London), 8 (February 1954) 21.

(37) Cambodge, 17 April 1945.
It is a year during which the Empire of the Rising Sun, the Liberator of the Asian people, has given to Cambodian history the inestimable gift of independence.

It is a year which calls upon all the Cambodians to Work, to Unite and to Cooperate.

To Work! We worked under the protectorate. But all of us worked, it is necessary to admit, more or less as 'mercenaries'.

It is different today. The destiny of our Country is in our hands. The integrity of our land is left to our protection. (38)

In order to effect a close supervision over the Government, the Japanese nominated Prince Monireth as the "Counsellor to the Government" with powers (i) to supervise all the functions of the Government; (ii) to make suggestions for its smooth working; and (iii) to be consulted by the King in all matters pertaining to the Government of Cambodia. (39)

Although the transfer of power was nominal, the Cambodians by the end of July 1945 became masters in their home in so far as the civil administration was concerned. The Government, as soon as it took possession of the administrative machinery, abrogated the much-hated Gregorian calendar and also the Romanized script introduced by M. Gautier, a former Resident Superior. The names of all the Cambodian offices and public buildings were written in Khmer script in very bold letters. (40) The French colours were discarded, and the Cambodian National Anthem was revived.

(38) Sam Sary, Le Grand Figure, 4.

(39) Cambodge, 7 June 1945. It might interest Indian readers that the first reception held after the transfer of the Hôtel du Gouvernement to the native hands was in honour of Maj-Gen. A. C. Chatterji of the Azad Hind, which was attended by Foreign Minister Son Ngoc Thanh.

(40) Lewis, Le Malaise Cambodgien, 12.
The Effects of Japanese Occupation

Negative Effects

The transfer of the major symbols of sovereignty by the Japanese to the Cambodians, it is known, was not due so much to altruistic motives, as it was the result of the pressure of circumstances. Possibly Japan would have assumed power straightaway after expelling the French if she had had sufficient time and Japanese personnel to man the various branches of Cambodian administration. In any case, the transfer of power was not an unmixed blessing to the Cambodians. While, on the one hand, they had had an opportunity, however short-lived, of tasting the first fruits of independence, on the other hand, they suffered helplessly from the process of Japanization and the enforced collaboration with the Vietnamese. Also they became victims of economic and military demands caused by the perilous state of affairs of the Japanese. Japanese films were exhibited sometimes in the immediate presence of the King, the Counsellor and other ministers. Similarly, Japanese language classes were started by the local Japanese authorities. The Cambodians evidently resented this. For instance, at the opening ceremony of the Japanese language class on 24 April, 1945 the Cambodian Minister for Education stated rather sarcastically:

We have to lift our thoughts towards the Japanese Cultural Association the Futsuin Kyoei Kai and towards the local Japanese authorities, who without losing a moment have opened courses in the capital and in the provinces for spreading the Japanese language among the Khmer people, who, it is necessary to state, are three years behind their neighbours.
Indeed, a reciprocal understanding of our respective languages is one of the primary conditions for better understanding and appreciation, for assuring us a very close union, and a strong confidence, for tightening the union of our two peoples, and for working for the prosperity of our two nations and that of the Nations of the Greater East Asia. (41)

On the economic side, Cambodia's suffering was not negligible. The Japanese demands on such products of vital importance as maize, rice and cotton were so heavy that the Government was forced to introduce rationing even though the production was on the increase. For example, the production of rice as given in the figures supplied by Prince Montana, Minister for National Economy, for the 1943-4 was 690,366 tons while in 1944-5 it was about 800,000 tons. (42)

Interviewed by the Domei Agency reporter the Minister said:

In so far as the food materials are concerned, we are taking steps to supply the Japanese army rice, maize and other foodstuffs in as great a measure as possible. We will be able to supply as much of rice as shall be necessary. The only practical difficulty is that of transport. I hope, however, to find a solution to this problem which would permit us to increase the combative strength of the Japanese army. (43)

Regarding the privations that the Cambodians were suffering, the Minister, apparently in a mood of resignation, pointed out:

(41) Cambodge, 24 April 1945.

(42) Ibid., 13 July 1945. It is not possible to assess the quantity of rice exported from Cambodia because (i) the Statistical Yearbook suffers generally from many gaps and it is particularly so for this period; and (ii) since Cambodia, along with Vietnam and Laos, was drawn into the Customs Union, Cambodian exports within the region were considered as internal trade only. See Annuaire Statistique Retrospective, 122 and 105.

(43) Cambodge, 13 July 1945.
"we are now in a decisive phase of the War. Therefore, Cambodians will have to accept certain privations caused by war." (44) As a result of reckless exploitation of natural wealth and of Cambodian manual labour the country in about eight months was "considerably impoverished." (45)

More than in any other sphere, the Japanese pressure was heaviest as regards the recruitment of Cambodians to serve the former's war-effort. A corps of more than 7,000 Cambodians was taken over by them. As the strain of war grew more and more the local Japanese authorities issued a Proclamation to organise "Cambodian Voluntary Troops" with the assistance of the Cambodian government. The Proclamation with the caption "Let Us Defend Ourselves" stated:

With a view to aid and perfect Cambodian patriotism the Japanese army stationed in Cambodia has decided to organise 'Cambodian Voluntary Troops' with the assistance of the Cambodian Government . . .

The Voluntary Troops shall be placed under the immediate direction of the Japanese so that it would be an effective contribution to the defence of the Khmer territory. (46)

Accordingly, with the assistance of Son Ngoc Thanh, about 500 'Volunteers' were selected and placed under the captaincy of one Captain Thioun Moung, who, according to the Domei Agency report, was "a patriot brought back to Cambodia after a long exile following his activities in favour of racial unity." (47)

(44) _Ibid._


(46) _Cambodge_, 28 June 1945.

(47) _Ibid._, 3 July 1945.
Besides the 'Voluntary' force, another batch of about 480 Cambodian soldiers called the Heihos, or Military Assistants to the Japanese Army, similar to the Peta in Indonesia, were recruited in order to "defend the Kingdom against common enemies." (48)

To sum up, the Japanese occupation of Cambodia touched almost all aspects of Cambodian national life. Socially, attempts were made to instil Japanese culture (like the French mission civilisatrice) into the Khmer intellectual life and to bring about unity between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians. Cambodian labourers were requisitioned and transferred from one place to another indiscriminately for laying roads and other sundry purposes. Economically, the resources of the country were drained to subserve the Japanese war demands. Besides this, the sudden disappearance of the French technicians and administrators brought about a "rapid economic decline." And militarily, the Cambodians were drafted and kept almost in bond-slavery.

Whereas in other countries of Southeast Asia, like Indonesia and Burma, there was an organised resistance to the Japanese in the later stages of the war, in Cambodia there appears to have been only a few half-hearted and isolated attempts in this direction. Some French nationals in Cambodia, who escaped Japanese vigilence, organized some resistance in

(48) Ibid., 26 July 1945. The basis of allotment was as follows: Phnom Penh - 150; Kampot - 100; Kompon Speu - 100; Kompong Cham - 80; and Kompong Chhnang - 50.
some places like Kompong Thom. But they were soon crushed by the Japanese. (49) The failure of the French-sponsored resistance movement was attributed by Ellen J. Hammer to the failure of the French to associate the Indochinese nationalists with the movement. (50) As regards Cambodia, it may be stated, that the Cambodian nationalists, unlike their counterparts in Indonesia and Burma, did not appear to have been very serious about organising and participating in the resistance.

**Positive Effects**

The Japanese occupation of Cambodia, despite the privations suffered by the Cambodians, had given a fillip to native nationalism. For about a decade, it may be noted, Japan had been sowing the seeds of anti-westernism and anti-colonialism with such slogans as "Asia for Asians" and "the Emancipation of the People of the Greater East Asia." As Japan occupied southern Indochina in 1941 anti-western sentiments were further spread, indeed with greater intensity, by encouraging, according to Admiral Decoux, the Cao Dai organization in Vietnam, and the Buddhist 'bhikkus' in Cambodia. (51) Furthermore, Japan sponsored a Conference of the 'Ambassadors' and a little later, of the 'Assembly of Peoples' (in which Cambodia participated) of East Asia, which met in Tokyo during the last week of April and the first week of May, 1945. (52) In this atmosphere of

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(51) Decoux, *À La Barre de l'Indochine*, 236-7.

(52) *Cambodge*, 26 April 1945 and 4 May 1945.
maturing nationalism and anti-colonialism, Japan gave power into the native hands. The Cambodians, who never had had an opportunity of occupying high posts of trust and responsibility in recent times, now found themselves placed in such positions. This was more so after the "sudden disappearance" of the French officials from Cambodia. The short experience they gained created in them a new confidence. The words of bravado uttered in July 1945 by Captain Muong reflect the mood of self-confidence the Cambodians had gained at this time. He said:

I am convinced that my patriots and myself are the best Cambodian troops because we have been chosen from among 3,500 men and our officers are selected from among the intellectuals. I am happy to learn that those who have not been chosen as officers have preferred to defend their motherland as soldiers in collaboration with Japan. Our sole aim is to become strong to serve our independent nation. (53)

Moreover, the experience gained during about a century of French colonialism and later the Japanese tutelage brought home to the Cambodian nationalists the advantages of self-rule. The taste of the first fruits of self-government enjoyed by them during the last phase of the Japanese occupation served as a stimulus to their nationalist movement.

Faith in its destiny, national pride, and above all, self-confidence were being restored in the Cambodian mind. The glorious days of Jayavarman and Yasovarman, and the artistic achievements of their forefathers as depicted in the Angkor as well as the miseries suffered during the French rule were brought into sharp focus. Calling the attention of the Cambodians to these facts, the newspaper Cambodge wrote:

(53) Ibid., 17 July 1945.
Descendants of a vigorous race — a race that has left behind glorious pages in your History, for half-a-century you have been obstructed, enchained and enslaved; and if ever you had made so much as an attempt to loosen your chains and agitate in your cage, they would double the chains and the bars, and after having so kept you do you recall? send to penal servitude or to the gallows . . . (54)

The inherent contradictions in French imperialism were also clearly brought out:

Imperialism is paradoxical. It harps before the world: 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' and wherever it went it suppressed the weak under its yoke, it treated them like beasts while it did not ameliorate their condition . . .

Therefore,

The re-establishment of Imperialism in Cambodia shall be the death of the Khmer people and the disappearance of Cambodia itself from the map of the world. (55)

Apart from the tasks of reviving ancient glory and of bringing about unity, the future frame-work of Cambodian administration and economic, military, political, cultural and other problems were also discussed.

The Rise of Son Ngoc Thanh

One problem rather fundamental to the course of the movement itself was yet unresolved: Who was the leader whom the nationalists should follow? Was it King Sihanouk plus Son Ngoc Thanh, or King Sihanouk, or Son Ngoc Thanh? The influential paper Cambodge (apart from the Nagaravatta lately revived), urged the people at one time to follow King Sihanouk

(54) Ibid., 24 August 1945.
(55) Ibid.
for "the ship of independent Cambodia is in the hands of an excellent guide." (56) Later on, the same paper advised the people to follow the wise and able leadership of Son Ngoc Thanh. (57) This vacillation lends colour and, at the same time, confusion to the movement as a whole.

For the present, however, because of certain decided advantages, Son Ngoc Thanh was in the ascendant. He had the whole-hearted support of the Japanese till their defeat. From the time he became the Foreign Minister he took steps to control and perfect the propaganda machinery. Besides this, his own oratorical talents (like that of Sukarno of Indonesia) gave him a grip over the public imagination. On 9 August 1945 a coup d'etat was effected by certain "ultra-nationalists" led by Thanh Moung, the Commandant of the National Guard, and the cabinet was dissolved. A new cabinet was constituted on 14 August with himself as Prime Minister. The following were the members of the cabinet:

Son Ngoc Thanh  ...  Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs
Norodom Montana  ...  Minister for Agriculture
Sum Hieng  ...  Minister for Interior
Var Kamal  ...  Minister for Culture, Religious Education and Fine Arts
Pach Chhoeun  ...  Minister for National Economy and Rationing
Pitou de Monteiro  ...  Minister for Justice
Khim Tit  ...  Minister for Defence
Nhiek Tioulong  ...  Minister for National Education
Penn Nouth  ...  Minister for Finance.  (58)

(56) Ibid., 29 April 1945.
(57) Ibid.
(58) Ibid., 15 August 1945.
Soon after assuming office the Prime Minister made a declaration of policy outlining the internal and external policies that his Government would follow. Internally, the Government would work for national unity, protect the country from external aggression and internal subversion, and pursue such economic policies as would further the welfare of all. Externally, he said, his Government would direct its energies to maintain good neighbourly relations with Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. (59) Son Ngoc Thanh hardly had the time to consolidate the gains made by Cambodian nationalism during this period and to give effect to his policies. Certain differences of opinion among the nationalists led not only to the return of the French power to Cambodia in September 1945 but also to the arrest of Son Ngoc Thanh himself.

(59) Ibid.