Applied Khmer Philosophy

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บทคัดย่อ

The article aims to show how the ancient Khmer philosophy can be applied in Cambodian society nowadays. Based on research conducting in Khmer society, shows that the ancient Khmer philosophical concept is still the most important practice, and significantly role-plays both the Khmer mindset and also political thought in society to establish the Khmer identity in “oneness” according to what Khmer ancestors had done for many generations until present time.

The philosophical concept, the academic paper, will discuss three main points 1) what is the source of the concept of Khmer Philosophy 2) how to bring the main concepts of Khmer philosophy put into a practical way in society 3) the new knowledge obtaining from practical concepts of the Khmer philosophy.

คำสำคัญ: Khmer Philosophy

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Introduction

All nation always owned their philosophical concepts for the sake of enhancing both society's and people's mindsets to shape a "Unique in Diversity". As for Khmer society, it has owned philosophical concepts as well.

Earlier in the first century, they found that there were two religions that influenced ancient Khmer society at that time ត្រាណោ ម., ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រនៃព្រះរាជាណាចក្រកម្ពុជា ចក្រភពកម្ពុជទេស ពីស.តវទី៩ ដល់ស.តវទី១៣នៃគ.ស, ២០០៦), and among those religions are Brahmanism and Buddhism from India meanwhile the ancient Khmer officials and the Kings always practiced with combined with both theories of religions into one concept of Khmer philosophy, especially the teaching of Buddha and also Brahmanism thought in terms of strictly practiced based on these theories, so the ancient Khmer society rarely seen happened to lead to sectarian conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism, including other religion was recognized by Khmer people and its own constitution.

The local wisdom or local philosophy, (ប៉ុណ្ណ, ២០០៧) Moreover, to contribute integrate on the concepts of this philosophy as well, including supernatural belief and spiritualism that the ancient Khmer people practiced what so-called "Totemic belief" in the form of ancient belief based on nature for earlier centuries in the country. Significantly, the woman also had a crucial role played in ancient Khmer society, such as the first female King (ត្រាណោ ប. ម., ២០១៨) , ruled the Kingdom of Khmer in earlier centuries, and after that Khmer ancestors regarded as women at the top figure of society until established the word ***"ME BA"*** refers to the mother the most important catalyst in the central concept of Khmer society as well.

In doing so, related to the value elements to generate the foundation of Khmer philosophy, based on the history of Cambodia recalled:

> "The element of Cambodian life and thinking, especially in the countryside, have changed a great deal since Angkorean times (ninth to mid-fifteenth centuries) or even over the last few thousand years. These elements might include the village game played at the lunar new year, the association of ancestor spirits ***(Nak Ta)*** with stones, the calendar, d the soil, the belief in water spirits, or dragons, the idea tattoos protect the wearer, and the custom of chewing betel, to name a few" (Chandler, 1993)

Those theories of both religions have become a catalyst for enhancing the foundation of the Khmer philosophy that Khmer people still practicing until now in the Kingdom.

Based on observation, young Cambodian people often discuss or post their status on social media about philosophical ideas and showing of opinions from other businessmen, philosophers, foreign scholars, or famous leaders from around the world, but they seem to forget what that Khmer society also has many scholars and philosophers in ancient time for many centuries ago who has left valuable philosophical concepts and value moral to shape this society in a good faith at the national level.

A professor of philosophy, Dr. Pann Vutha, and his dissertation on the Foundation of Khmer Philosophy graduated from the Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC) and is one of the most prominent authors of the book in the Khmer society at the present, confirmed to the media that Cambodians have a philosophy, but Cambodians do not write who the philosophers are. (Vutha, 2014)

On the other hand, Khmer philosophical theories were written in many forms such as Khmer literature, poetry, slogans, and proverbs for example **“Do farming with water, fighting with rice"** is a Khmer philosophy developed during the Angkorian period. This philosophical value was continued practice and performance by the Khmer leaders for many generations before the Khmer Rouge era took over the country from 1975-1979.

A researcher of the Foundation of Khmer Philosophy (រុំគ្លា, ២០១៤) and also a doctor of philosophy at the Royal Academy of Cambodia asserted that the Khmer Society had its own philosophical theory, especially during the Angkorian period, the glorious period of the Khmer Empire.

During the Angkorian era, the Khmer Kings always used their power to expand their territory and use virtue to rule the country. **"The suffering of the people is the suffering of myself"** are the words of Jayavarman VII (1181-1218) (ត្រាណេ ម. , ព្រះសន្តិវង្សនាសម័យមហានគរ, ២០០៦), whom Dr. Pann Vutha claimed that these words were his great philosophical thought, which made the people consider him a King-God and it means that his profound concepts are full of royal splendor in the ancient Khmer empire.

In addition to the philosophical concepts of the Angkorian period, the ancient Khmer society also has many scholars, poets, and philosophers who have left great ideas and perspectives for Cambodians to consider in order to lead a prosperous and harmonious family life and the whole society.

"The foot is not the eye, the eye is not the foot, but the two organs on the same body. Anything that has a negative effect on the foot also has a negative effect on the eye." (Nath, 1967)

This phrase above is quoted from the words of the Supreme Patriarch of Cambodian Buddhism, Samdech Sangharaja Chhuon Nath (Nath, 1967), a very famous Buddhist monk scholar in Khmer society around the 1960s which Dr. Pann Vutha elaborately explained that this phrase is a philosophical idea that refers to how to conduct the work that must depend on each other to achieve that, and it means that everything in this world needs help from each other like the Khmer society need national unity to get rid of ignorance, and mutual collective effort to reach its goal.

The Source of Ancient Khmer Philosophy

The ancient Khmer society has its own philosophical concepts to educate and brainstorm for one generation to another generation for ages, those concepts are reflected in what the Khmer thought to build up its own state stronger and stronger in the past.

According to the Foundation of Khmer philosophical concepts, found that in the mind of Khmer people believed in Totemic belief which related to spiritualism, Guardian-spirits, and supernaturalism. In order to be clear on the foundation of Khmer philosophical concepts, the summary is as follows, related to three main concepts 1) The Totemic belief is the central concept of Khmer philosophy in ancient times, consisting of supernaturalism, and spiritualism. These core values create a Khmer social norm that allows them to practice Khmer daily life from they were born until their last life (death). The local wisdom or called local philosophy was integrated with Totemic belief in which to promote this thought as well. Also, the theory of the women-based approach is included. 2) Both theories of religions are namely Brahmanism and Buddhism

coming from India, integrated into Khmerization theory, were a core element to stick with the philosophical thought. 3) Khmer Literature is a main part of Khmer philosophical thoughts because literature implied for educational purposes for many generations in Khmer society through traditional folk tales given moral model to shape the society into one unity.

The summary of the conceptual framework of the foundation of Khmer philosophy is below:

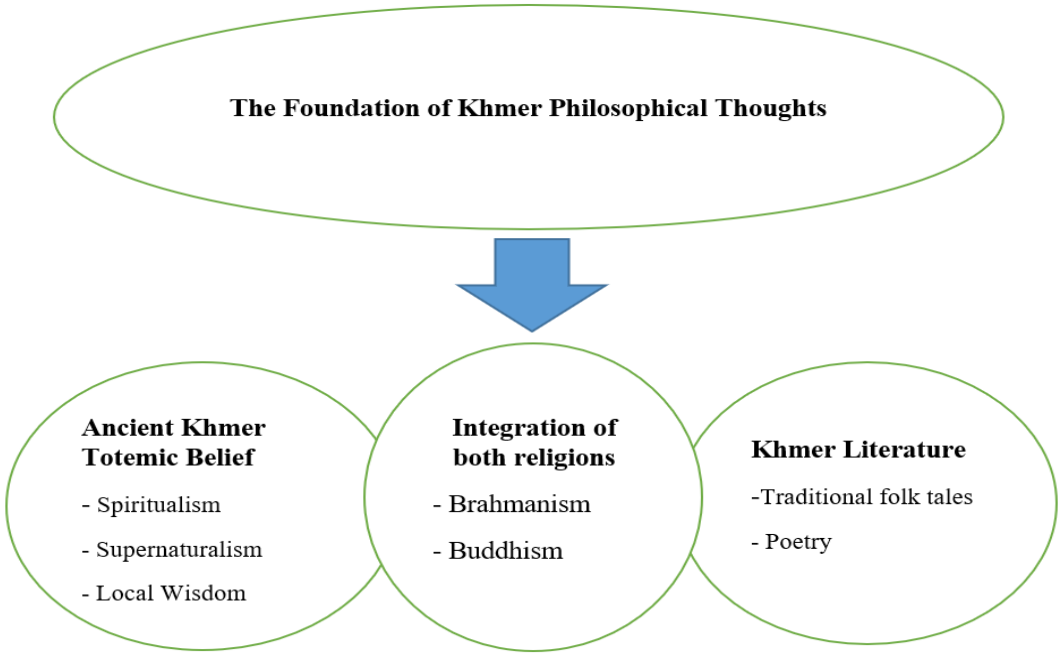

Figure 1: The Source of Ancient Khmer Philosophy

The Khmer Philosophy in Practices

The Khmer society or Cambodian society always brought those philosophical concepts to apply in daily activities of both the common people and political figures as well, in terms of creating from the concepts to the reflection in the real society. For example, while reading the Khmer literature book, one would be aware of the core value from that book is moral and philosophical concepts, so the core value is the most

important sharing to generate the concepts of Khmer philosophy that can be applied in real life such as how to conduct properly manner that it is a small part of social norm and moral way, extracted from the concepts of Khmer philosophy.

The Khmer philosophy is regarded as the way of life as attached a summary of the concepts of philosophy, moreover, everything is happening now can be resolved by philosophical thought, given Khmer people, because of all those concepts can look and see. In addition, there are two ways that can be applied, including creation, and reflection while practicing these concepts, which will create a good model in society, and after that the result will reflect on the concepts of philosophy, showing through applying these concepts. For instance, Khmer people have brought the concepts of sculpture like base relief at the Angkor Complex or (Angkor Wat) to explain their activities in daily life, therefore, the Khmer mythology in the Angkor gallery is an example of practicing in the way of life as normal both private life and public life of Khmer people. It is a way of application from the philosophical thought of its ancestor for generations until now even though a new wave, globalization trend, little effecting on Khmer cultural perspectives.

How to apply the concepts of Khmer philosophy in real society through this interactional way or **(dependent approach)** in summary, the table as attached followings:

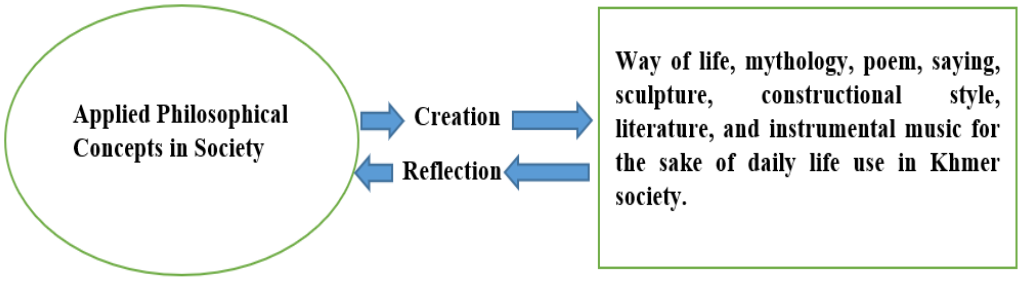

Figure 2: The Khmer Philosophy in Practices

The New Knowledge received from the Khmer Philosophy

After studying based, the Khmer philosophical concepts are given to three new knowledge involving the practice based in Khmer society, starting from ancient the contemporary times. The new knowledge that has got from that philosophical concepts namely are:

1) Wisdom in Use, this comprehensive understanding of the Khmer philosophical thought because all the theories give tips for the wisdom in the use of Khmer people's life, for example, how to find a way to resolve the problem of life through the manner of smart approaches in accordingly in the real situations. Wisdom in Use is the most significant mechanism to fulfill what you want and also the central concept of the Khmer philosophical idea. The main concepts show a lot of lessons throughout literature such as folk tales, traditional tales, and also old saying in order for educational purposes from one generation to one generation in the whole Khmer society, especially critical thinking or bare comprehension for all.

2) How to act, the concepts provide the ethical idea to determine how to divide between right and wrong in the name of humanity. On the other hand, the concepts of Khmer philosophy, taught common people how to act in conformity with moral character according to social norms, avoiding the blame of others in the same community and also holistic society.

3) How to experience, the Khmer philosophical idea shows through the experiences, including theories in the experience-based approach, because while ones get more experience will have a new knowledge that what will be going on as well and how to face it. Experiences are the most important tool to teach the human mind, and avoiding from previous mistakes moving forward to the correctional ways in the daily life of human beings, starting from the experiences.

4) How to Live, this is a main point for knowing to live altogether in one society, under co-existent peaceful living in the name of One Khmer, One Spirit, and One Country. Once again, this focal point was understood from the idea of Khmer philosophy that Khmer people always stick with that concepts in accordance with the local wisdom of the Khmer people.

The new knowledge received from the Khmer philosophical idea in four points is summarized below in the table.

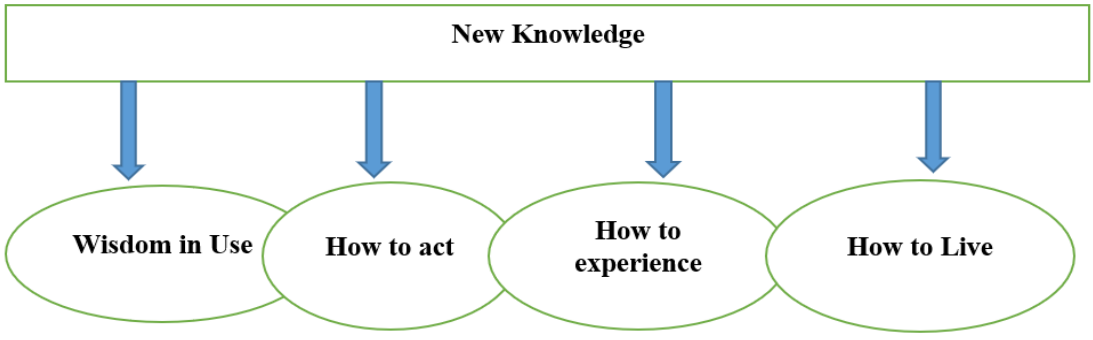

Figure 3: The New Knowledge received from the Khmer Philosophy

Conclusion

As the world facing on the disaster of war, natural disasters, and challenges, the concepts of applied philosophy is a significant role play in all societies in the world, including Khmer society. The Applied Khmer Philosophy gives considerable knowledge from the ancient time until the present day because those concepts become a crucial scaffolding to support society to become stronger to stronger both state affairs and cultural perspectives.

Since earlier the first century, the ancient Khmer society has had its own Totemic belief, leading to becoming a main concept of philosophy for generations, so that why the Khmer people can be able to construct the Angkor complex and more than a thousand temples around the country, and showing that the Khmer people at that time applied its own the highest core value philosophical thought in framework of both sides of the political-socio philosophical concepts.

On the other hand, Brahmanism and Buddhism were integrated with the Khmer spirit had created the Khmerization theory even though these religions came from India, the Khmer ancestors knew how to use and know how to act in both religious teachings put into the practices, and established their own philosophical ideal for many Khmer generations until now.

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