

Royal University of Phnom Penh & Hiroshima University  
Collaborative Online International Learning

## **The Influence of WWII and Khmer Rouge on Education**

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## Introduction

This report aims to research the influence of catastrophes on education. In the context of Japanese education, WWII can be considered as one of the most important actors in its change. In the same way, the Khmer Rouge can be recognized as a milestone for Cambodia. Although the two are not in common in the scale, era, and its context, what is common is that both incidents are remembered by people in Japan and Cambodia. Learning how the WWII and Khmer Rouge as milestones contributed to the development of education in Japan and Cambodia, would guide us to discuss the historical and educational meaning of WWII and Khmer Rouge. Through the comparison of the two case studies on WWII in the context of Japanese education and Khmer Rouge in the context of Cambodian education, it is expected to have discussion of the significance of overlooking education. Through the case studies of Japan and Cambodia, focusing on how education was like before, during, and after the big incidents, it can be expected that similarities and differences will come out. Later on, in the comparison part, the similarities and differences found will be discussed from various perspectives with four small topics, such as teacher training, educational model, current education, and power of milestones. Although the two countries have either historically, economically, or socially different backgrounds, it would be interesting to investigate the educational change brought by the social reform by the big incidents usually considered as milestones.

## **Case Study in Japan**

### **I. Education Before WWII**

After the school system, the financial burden of primary compulsory education has been left to school districts and municipalities. It was a big burden for the municipalities that the school entrance rate expanded, the collection of tuition fees was abolished, and the period of compulsory education was extended further. Teachers' salaries and treatment tended to deteriorate. In the 1920s, the philosophy of the new political education movement began to influence Japan. The philosophy of the new education was to practice child-centered and activism education. Moreover, the free picture movement which valued the free expression of the child and the children's literature movement represented by the magazine "Red bird" were prospered. These were collectively called "Daiso free education".

Since the 1930s, however, Japan's education policy has rapidly intensified its ultra-nationalist. It has grown against democratic trends that were spreading to Japan as part of the post-World War I international movement. The global recession that began at the end of the 1920s also caused Japan to fall into a severe economic crisis. In such an environment, forces that are contrary to democratic tendencies have rapidly become stronger. The national policy of eroding, mainly promoted by the military, began to affect education. When the Sino-Japanese War began in 1937, militarism emerged.

### **II . Education Under the WWII**

Education during the war is sometimes referred to as indoctrination. History classes began with the myth of the founding of the nation, rather than historical and archaeological facts as today, and even geography textbooks contained phrases that emphasized national prestige. In addition, importance was given to the "Shushin" (spiritual training) aimed at cultivating morality of the Imperial Japanese people. This

trend was seen even before World War II, but as the war intensified, the militaristic tone in schools increased.

In addition to these content aspects, educational opportunities were also lost. Due to the prolonged war, university students were starting to be drafted beginning with liberal arts students. When bombing attacks began in urban areas, schoolchildren, mainly in the lower grades, were moved to the countryside, and secondary school students and older were forced to work in military factories.

### **III. Education After the WWII (1945- present)**

Education was reconsidered as a means to foster citizenship after defeating WW2. For instance, Social Studies was introduced from the U.S. which is the main country ruled several years to democratize Japan. This subject influenced by progressive education in 1920s America integrates history, geography and civics education to provide empirical education as a means for children to solve contemporary problems. Although these ideals were still appreciated today, It is said that there were actually not a few traditional style history education classes due to the fact that the transition was too fast during the confusion after the war.

From the point of view of these issues, the idea of focusing on the systemic aspect of contents began to be seen in the middle of the 1950s. Over the following decades, content-based education has been conducted based on this systematic approach, although the names and structure of these subjects have changed. However, it is said that competency-based education is desired to respond to the change of society today.

In addition to that, the system of education was also changed to democratize and equalize that. The singularization of the education system and the training of teachers in universities are examples of this. A publicly elected education committee was also established. However, due to the following "reverse course" caused by the outbreak of the Korean War, it was replaced by the appointed system of today. It can be said that the reforms right after the war were quite strongly aimed for democratization in systemic aspects as well, even compared with today's system in some points.

#### IV. Analysis

As education changed, Japan became more focused on increasing educational opportunities for everyone in the country with the purpose of democratization. For instance, before modern days, history education was mainly for people who ruled the country. Therefore, history education was not open to everyone in the country. From the Meiji era to the end of the war, history education became the one for making a strong country. Japan has a long history of fascination and delight with foreign factors since the Meiji restoration, when western cultures or traditions suddenly have started entering Japan after national isolation. This inspired Japan to be modernized by raising the level of the education of people in Japan. For this reason, education can also be considered as one thing affected by the inflow of western cultures in Meiji restoration. As for the examples of educational policy in the Meiji era, in 1871, the government set the Ministry of Education which is in charge of educational administration. In the next year 1872, Gakusei (the school system modeled France) was adopted. Therefore, it can be said that not only the purpose of history education, but also the means of education was changed in this era.

After WWII, history education became the one for nurturing democratic people and the country, which means that it became more open for people in the country. Looking at what was taught in history class during and after WW2, the drastic change of the contents can be found. For example, teachers who had been teaching the content of justifying the war had to teach the contents such as democracy, basic human rights, and peace as soon as the war ended. From this change, Japan's principles of international cooperation/understanding can be found.

Based on the research about the history of education before and after WWII, it would be interesting to investigate at which point Japan considered the principle of international cooperation/understanding. Ever since the new subject named Social Studies was brought from the U.S., history education has become a part of social studies and has been taught in a systematic approach with the purpose of guiding students to solve the issues in the world. Although the role of education could be interpreted as a tool to indoctrinate people in large scope especially during WWII, it would be important to note that after WWI, Japan had once valued the importance of international cooperation/understanding in response to the tragedy of the war.

## **Case Study in Cambodia**

### **I. Education Before Khmer Rouge**

In the early twentieth century, history education just only traditional education in Cambodia was handled by the Buddhist monastic (wat) schools, and the bonzes (Buddhist monks) were the teachers. The students were almost entirely young boys, and the education was limited to memorizing Buddhist chants in Pali, which had been the village moral and social learning center. Nation-building and education reform in the 1920s aimed at modernizing the traditional education system within the wat schools and creating Franco-Khmer public schools to train local executives needed by the public administration, which had been focused on teaching new subject matter including arithmetic, French and geography in pagoda schools. By the beginning of World War II, the Cambodian education system was under-developed, with only 125 primary schools over Cambodia. Cambodia's education system in the 1950s and 1960s after independence from France in 1953 there were some 800 primary and lower secondary schools in Cambodia. By the end of the 1960s, teaching in Khmer was transformed into public schools under the Khmer civilization movement. The education was reformed and modernized pagoda schools into public schools and the number of public schools increased rapidly to 1,653 in 1958 and to 5,026 in 1968/69. However, the number of higher education institutions increased from 2 in 1955 to 37 in 1966 with some 7,360 students.

### **II. Education Under the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979)**

During the Khmer Rouge years, between 1975 and 1979, schools were closed and destroyed and intellectuals were executed. At the beginning of the 1970s, more than 20,000 teachers lived in Cambodia and 90 percent of all teachers were killed under the Khmer Rouge regime. Educators and teachers were centered on precepts of the Khmer revolution, suspicion, and harsh treatment and execution. Khmer Rouge "schools", the children were taught the revolution and guerilla warfare techniques to children and instructed them how to make victims "break into convulsions and die. On the blackboard at school was written "No stealing, No drunkenness, No prostitution, No marriage outside the commune, No commerce without permission, No contact with outsiders, No listening to any radio station, but Khmer Rouge. People will be killed if

they disobey the Angkar (Angkar was a Khmer Rouge organization). Though, Cambodian children grew up illiterate.

The Khmer Rouge destroyed more than 90 percent of school buildings, libraries, and educational materials. Seven out of nine higher education institutions in the country were destroyed and two others were severely damaged. Intellectuals were the target of the Khmer Rouge cultural revolution. They turned schools and universities into prisons or barns. Textbooks and other documents were burned and destroyed. The Democratic Kampuchea regime brought the education system in Cambodia to zero. Only about 15% of intellectuals survive. A large number of scholars also decided to flee abroad.

Pol Pot created a new educational policy, namely, the 1976 Four Year Plan (1976-1980) to build socialism in all areas that required all children to attend at least three years of a part-time primary school program. Pol Pot had an extreme vision to fast track the education of Cambodian students from illiteracy to become an engineering graduate in 10 years of training and practical works. The most popular slogan during this regime was "Study is not important. What's important is work and revolution." As highlighted by Chandler (1993), the DK ignored educational quality by recruiting uneducated peasants, based on their revolutionary positions and honesty, to be teachers and to teach students during lunch breaks in a 14 hour workday. Moreover, DK introduced many revolutionary songs depicting national sacrifices in the curriculum of reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, natural science, physics, chemistry, history of the Cambodians, world revolutionary struggle, the party's politics, and moral philosophy in order to transform students and to purify their political consciousness. In short, the failures of DK's extreme communist ideology and its educational policy brought Cambodia to year zero of the destruction of education in the country.

### **III. Education After the Khmer Rouge**

After the Khmer Rouge were driven from power, the new Cambodian Government, during 1979-1992, the educational system had to be rebuilt from ground zero. The illiteracy had climbed to more than 40 percent, and most young people under the age of 14 lacked any basic education. After 1979, a system of pre-service and in-service training was established "Crash training courses". The teachers and education managers were retrained as a priority. 1979 and 1983, some 36,000 teachers were trained or re-trained for primary education in the "crash training" system. The children could not go to school because schooling both in towns and in the countryside required enrollment fees. The education system was followed by the Vietnam backed

People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and it was very close to the Vietnamese model, it has been changed into direct translations of Vietnamese terms for primary and secondary education.

#### **IV. Analysis**

Before the 20th century, history education just only traditional education in Cambodia was handled by the local wat, and the Bhikkhu were the teachers. The students were almost entirely boys, and the education was limited to memorizing Buddhist chants in Pali. But during the period of the French protectorate (1863-1953) , an educational system based on the French model was inaugurated alongside the traditional system. Initially, the French neglected education in Cambodia. In the 1920s aimed at modernizing the traditional education system within the wat schools and creating Franco-Khmer public schools to train local executives needed by the public administration, which had been focused on teaching new subject matter including arithmetic, French and geography in pagoda schools. After the 1950s to 1960s education in Cambodia was only a French education system, but since the late 1960s, education in Cambodia has improved and the government has sought scholarships for university education abroad. Students studied in France, but after independence increased enrollment in universities in the United States, Canada, China, the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

During the Khmer Rouge year between (1975-1979), history education in Cambodia was closed and destroyed. The school became a rice barn detention center. Seven out of nine higher education institutions in the country were destroyed and two others were severely damaged. Intellectuals were the target of the Khmer Rouge cultural revolution. Textbooks and other documents were burned and destroyed. The Democratic Kampuchea regime brought the education system in Cambodia to zero.

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## Comparison

### I. Teacher Training

This section refers to and compares with teacher training in both countries. Because quality of teaching related to teacher training is considered important for guaranteeing better education, teacher training has been paid attention to by both of them especially after the big historical incident which means cataclysmic.

In Japanese case after WW2, the system and way of teacher training was completely changed as mentioned before and it is hard to say there is no confusion even among in-service teachers because of changing ideals and contents to teach. Since the end of World War II until today, teacher training has been supported by democratic principles, and efforts have been made to ensure opportunities for teachers. On the other hand, it has been said that there is a lack of freedom in the contents of teacher training, a significant burden on in-service teachers, and a hurdle in recruiting teachers, and it is a fact that teacher training is still in the process of seeking better.

When you see cambodian cases, there are a lot of similarities and differences with Japanese one. During the Pol Pot regime the slogan "study is not important" can be said to destroy education. This is not only meaning that there is a lack of opportunity for education for each person, but also meaning that there is a lack of teachers because of the massacre of intellectuals which means it must take much more time to recover. Today, the rebuilding of education is in progress, but the quality of education is still not sufficiently insured due to issues such as the low income level of teachers and the employment environment caused by the lack of budget. Furthermore, the opportunities for training in order to guarantee the quality of education are said to be limited, especially in rural areas.

### II. Ideal Country to Make New Education (Vietnam or USA)

This is the comparison between a new education and a foreign influence. As is well known, both countries were under the same foreign influence, with Japan under the influence of the United States during World War II and Cambodia restoring its education after the Khmer Rouge. The Reds destroyed the school under Vietnamese influence.

For comparison, in the case of Japan after WW2, a new education was created that brought the United States. The new subject was brought to the United States named Social Studies that the history education has become a part of social studies and has been taught in a systematic approach with the purpose of guiding students to solve the issues in the world.

That was different between Cambodia's case, after the Khmer Rouge government was driven from power, the new Cambodia government has been working to improve education from scratch. Because schools were destroyed by the Khmer Rouge and made it become detention facilities and barns. And the new government that called the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) followed Vietnamese education system. They have translated books from Vietnamese into Khmer for primary and secondary education.

### **III. Current Education**

Here, we compare education between Japan and Cambodia and consider where we can find international cooperation routes. First, the Central Education Council of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has listed the following three points as necessary for promoting education in response to the situation of internationalization. (1) Develop the qualities and abilities to have a broad perspective, understand different cultures, respect them, and live with people with different cultures. (2) Establish one's own self as a Japanese and as an individual for international understanding. (3) In the international community, we will develop communication skills such as the basis of foreign language skills and expressive skills from the viewpoint of cultivating basic skills that can express one's thoughts and intentions while respecting the other person's position. Based on these, Japan promotes international understanding education through morality, special activities, and school-specific events. Each school offers international exchange activities in a variety of forms, including school trips to foreign countries, sister school collaboration, study abroad, and acceptance of international students. In foreign language education, we have a teaching system that emphasizes communication. However, Japan is focusing on the education of English by the name of the foreign language education. In all aspects, Japan has focused on Europe and America advanced nations at any rate. Today, however, as exchanges with Asian and Oceanian countries deepen in various ways, it is necessary to look further at these countries in the future.

Next, we will think about education in Cambodia. In Cambodia, historical education during the Pol Pot era began in 2010. Until then, the Cambodian government had not provided history education, but in 2010, a supplementary reading of textbooks created by NGOs was adopted as a textbook for high school society. However, social studies in Cambodia are a comprehensive subject that includes not only geography, history, and citizens, but also an extremely wide range of fields such as morality, home economics, and art. This social studies curriculum is extensive and plays a central role in school education. As part of its social contribution activities, the Hiroshima University Center for Educational Vision Research cooperated with the "Social Studies Curriculum and Textbook Development Support for Building a Sustainable Society in Cambodia" project. According to them, the problems of social studies education in Cambodia are (1) curriculum, (2) textbooks, (3) inheritance of know-how, and (4) dissemination and dissemination of new educational principles. Improvements such as the lack of goals and uniformity in the syllabus, the quality of textbooks, and problems with the development system of textbooks are necessary. These improvements are essential to building a sustainable, peaceful, and democratic society in Cambodia.

#### **IV. Power of the Milestones (Khmer Rouge and WWII)**

This section tries to find the clue of if Khmer Rouge and WWII have worked as milestones which brought great influence on the change in education in both countries. Through the case studies centering alteration of education in Japan and Cambodia, it can be said that drastic change was found after the historical incidents which are considered as "milestones". For example, looking at the case study of Japan, the contents of the education has changed from what makes Japan a strong country to what leads people to be democratic. Although teachers used to teach the contents of justifying the war until the end of WWII represented by national history, they were suddenly asked to teach the contents such as democracy, basic human rights, and peace as soon as the war ended. Therefore, WWII could be considered as a milestone which led Japan to be more international cooperative, being more acceptable of other countries. Focusing on the case study of Cambodia, a similar affair can be found. During the Khmer Rouge, education collapsed due to the closing of school by the regime. Instead of the school they closed, Khmer Rouge "schools", taught the children about the revolution and guerilla warfare techniques such as, how to make others "break into convulsions and die. In the Pol Pot regime, education was for doctorinating children to be revolutionary. national sacrifices, and history of the Cambodians, world revolutionary struggle, the party's politics, and "moral" philosophy were highlighted in

the curriculum. After the Khmer Rouge, since literacy was low due to the educational policy by the Khmer Rouge regime, education had to be rebuilt from ground zero. Compared to Japan, it was quite hard for Cambodia to show the direction of international cooperation in their educational curriculum right after the end of Khmer Rouge because education itself needed to be made in the first place. Though the educational contents and the organization offered the education during the incidents happened in the two countries were not exactly the same, what is common is that both country offer the education justify the war and murder during the milestones, and after the milestones, education was drastically changed.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the history of education in Cambodia and Japan shows the evolution of education from one stage to another. Education Before WWII in Japan was still limited because after the end of World War I, Japan plunged into a severe economic crisis, leading to a lack of progress in education. Education under World War II, education declined due to the war, some students had to go to school in rural areas, some had to drop out of school and others were forced to work in military factories. After the end of World War II, Japan was hit hard, so the restoration of education was also important. Japan has incorporated education, democracy and peace into the principles of education so that the next generation or youth can understand and learn. In order to avoid falling into further war. Education in Cambodia is not much different from Japan. Before the arrival of the French, Cambodia had a traditional education, with daughters learning from their mothers at home and sons learning from monks at pagodas. When the French arrived in Cambodia, they began to shift from traditional education to French education, with the establishment of schools and female students as well as male students. Later, Cambodia began to develop gradually in the field of education, especially between 1960-1975 with the sending of students to study abroad. Education during the Khmer Rouge era almost fell to zero because schools were closed and turned into human prisons. Education fell under the tree and learned from the ideology, and very few children learned. After the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, the restoration of education was low because Cambodia did not have complete peace in the country. Cambodia has gradually improved its education to date. The similarity between the education of Cambodia and Japan during the war (World War II and the Khmer Rouge)

was the decline of education, and most education focused on ideology. After the end of the war, the two countries tried to restore their education systems, especially the introduction of peace education to the younger generation to understand and avoid war.

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