

# Chapter 12

## Cambodian Higher Education Governance: The Politics of Global Summitry and Clientelism



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### Introduction

There is a great irony in the governance of Cambodia's higher education sector. Despite the structural organization of higher education spread over a diversity of supervising agencies, governance is concentrated in the hands of a few high-ranking politicians. This reality is at odds with the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports' (MoEYS) aspiration for so-called world class university governance standards.<sup>1</sup> These standards, based on advice from the World Bank, call for operational autonomy of higher education institutions and limited government interference in institutional practices and procedures (Salmi 2009). This chapter sets out to unpack this irony by situating contemporary higher education governance in Cambodia in historical context, specifically by addressing the role of external agents in shaping the institutional and policy contexts that now operate in the higher education sector in Cambodia.

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<sup>1</sup>The stated vision of the Cambodian higher education is “to build a quality higher education system that develops human resources with excellent knowledge, skills and moral values in order to work and live within the era of globalization and knowledge-based society” and a goal “to develop a good governance system and higher education mechanisms that ensure qualified students have an opportunity to access quality higher education programs which respond to the needs of socio-economic development and labor market” (MoEYS 2014, p. 3). These declarations echo the three factors Salmi (2009), a World Bank staff member, outlines for world class universities: “(a) a **high concentration of talent** (faculty and students), (b) **abundant resources** to offer a rich learning environment and to conduct advanced research, and (c) **favorable governance** features that encourage strategic vision, innovation, and flexibility and that enable institutions to make decisions and to manage resources without being encumbered by bureaucracy” (p. 7; original emphasis).

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## *Theorizing Governance of the Higher Education Sector in Cambodia*

The governance of higher education in Cambodia is both complex and institutionally intrusive. Some fifteen different ministries have oversight responsibilities for the higher education sector (a result of the Soviet era; see Pit and Ford 2004), which includes 118 universities (of which 46 are public). Although the large number of supervising agencies might allow for a certain level of decentralized institutional autonomy, in practice this has not happened. Rather, there is a level of *concentrated authority* vested not in MoEYS (or any other supervising agency) but in the Ministry of Economic and Finance (MEF) and the Council of Ministers. The MEF controls the purse strings of public higher education institutions, and the Council of Ministers, which reports directly to the Prime Minister, Hun Sen, oversees the quality assurance and accreditation of all higher education institutions (at least through 2015).

How then can we make sense of governance issues in the Cambodian higher education sector? One way to do so is to use the theoretical lens of “global summitry” and more broadly notions of policy diffusion (Alexandroff and Brean 2015; Roberts 2009). Global summitry is a relatively new manifestation, reflecting the rise of global and regional institutional policy-political architectures that impact, shape, and help inform domestic policy and institutional practices. This has been especially the case in Cambodia, where nascent domestic political institutions combined with low institutional capacity have historically made the sector malleable to external agents, typically transmitted through global and regional institutions. In recent years, for instance, the proliferation of higher education summits has brought together policymakers from across Southeast Asia to disseminate “best practices” in the design of higher education institutions and governance of the sector. Cambodia has been greatly influenced by such summits, with the ideas, agendas, and policy practices discussed in such forums being transmitted into the policy-making processes in MoEYS and other bodies responsible for oversight of Cambodia’s higher education system.

While the role of external agents in shaping the policy preferences and practices of domestic policy actors is not new, in the Cambodian context it is particularly significant. In part, this reflects the country’s tumultuous history, in which war, genocide, and dislocation have weakened various state and juridical systems, and contributed to the social and political relations dominated by systems of clientelism and patronage. I argue in this chapter that by combining the ideas of global summitry and clientelism, we can begin to make sense of—or theorize—the contemporary landscape of higher education governance in Cambodia (e.g., Un and Sok 2014).

This chapter begins with an overview of the Cambodian higher education sector, addressing developments in the governance of the sector since the 1960s. The chapter then turns to the idea of global summitry, analyzing Cambodia’s experience amid regional attempts to “harmonize” standards, degree structures, quality assurance systems, and credit systems in Southeast Asia. As I argue, however, theorizing higher education governance in Cambodia exclusively through a prism of external agents without recognition of the historical dominance of clientelism makes for an

incomplete theoretical explanation. In the subsequent section, I thus turn to the role of clientelism and patronage, addressing the case of the Accreditation Council of Cambodia (ACC) and the World Bank's involvement in quality assurance development. The chapter concludes with recent (up to April 2016) developments in higher education governance, offering some observations and obstacles for future development in the sector.

## Historical Overview of Higher Education in Cambodia

The first university in Cambodia opened in 1963 and was quickly followed by eight more.<sup>2</sup> The nine universities established in the 1960s were governed by the Ministry of National Education, and, by 1966, enrolled over 7,000 students (Ayres 2000). Despite the overall promise of post-colonial Cambodia,<sup>3</sup> the institutions of education generally and higher education especially experienced massive disruption due to the intensifying conflicts in Indochina (e.g., the American war in Vietnam) and state budgetary shortfalls.

Just as the Khmer Royal University (known today as the Royal University of Phnom Penh) first opened its doors to students, Norodom Sihanouk, then the head of state, cut ties with the USA and aligned more closely with Mao's China. Since the USA had provided essential budgetary support to the education sector commencing in the mid-1950s, the newly founded universities, which included such faculties as medicine, fine arts, agriculture, and oceanography, were starved of essential capital and placed in a state of financial and operational limbo. Despite this precarity, by 1970, 9,228 students enrolled in the higher education sector (William et al. 2016, p. 173).

In the ensuing years before communist rebels, known colloquially as the Khmer Rouge, took control of the state, the financial precariousness of universities was made worse by civil war between the USA-backed General Lon Nol, who had in 1970 overthrown the supposedly non-aligned (in the Cold War sense of the term) Sihanouk, and the budding Khmer Rouge movement in the rural provinces. As the two sides fought for control of the state, destroying many provincial university buildings in the wake of war, the financial instability of universities spiraled out of control. Vann (2012) claimed, "universities in that period faced a severe shortage of teaching staff with foreign lecturers playing a dominant role in university teaching, and employers complained about the lack of competent graduates" (p. 15). The early promise of higher education, seen in the increase in total student enrollment, was thus halted by internal struggles for state power.

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<sup>2</sup>Kitamura and colleagues (2016, p. 208) show that some institutions of higher education were established as early as 1918 (e.g., the Royal University of Fine Arts) but that the designation of "university" did not occur until the 1960s.

<sup>3</sup>Cambodia achieved independence from France in 1953.

The situation was only to become worse once the Khmer Rouge came to power in April 1975.<sup>4</sup> Under the banner of a “Super Great Leap Forward” (*moha loot phloh moha oschar*; see Chandler et al. 1988, p. 11), echoing Mao’s economic program, the Khmer Rouge disbanded all institutions that were thought to be “Western” or have colonial heritage, adopting a brutal political vision of returning Cambodian society to an agrarian utopia. When the Khmer Rouge came to power, for example, they “forcibly emptied Cambodia’s towns and cities, abolished money, schools, private property, law, courts, and markets, forbade religious practices, and set almost everybody to work in the countryside growing food” (Chandler 1999, p. vii). Chamnan and Ford (2004) estimate that 75% of higher education professors and 96% of university students were killed by the Khmer Rouge because they represented all things considered evil under the Khmer Rouge ideology. The education system was effectively dismantled; the higher education system went from experiencing an early boom marked with budgetary problems in the 1960s to being non-existent by 1975.

After three years, eight months, and twenty days of genocidal rule, the internally divided Khmer Rouge was quickly toppled in 1979 by dissidents and defectors who organized in and received support from communist Hanoi. The new regime that controlled the state, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), emphasized education in its massive state rebuilding project. Eight higher education institutions reopened in the 1980s; however, only 702 students enrolled in the tertiary education sector in the first year (Williams et al. 2016, p. 173). Since the PRK was backed by Hanoi and its patron, the Soviet Union, higher education in Cambodia aimed “to provide good political training with its primary goal of promoting socialism in Cambodia” (Vann 2012, p. 16). Higher education in this period was an elite, fee-free institution, reserved for those who came from families in positions of power, with most graduates automatically guaranteed a civil service position (Chamnan and Ford 2004).

Similar to the 1960s, higher education in Cambodia during the Soviet period was heavily influenced by foreign agents. Many professors came from Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union; textbooks and curricula were translated from countries in the Soviet sphere of influence; and the language of instruction was typically either Vietnamese or Russian (Clayton 1999). There was even a mobility scheme whereby Khmer students studied in Vietnam, the Soviet Union, or Cuba. Unlike the 1960s, however, universities were administratively organized under different government ministries, which was like other communist countries at the time. Starting in the 1980s, ministries governed universities that shared a common area of interest. For example, the University of Health Science was administered by the Ministry of Health and the University of Agriculture by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The system of higher education changed again in 1989 when the Soviet Union ended central economic planning and embraced markets as part of *perestroika*, which was adopted by Vietnam under the heading *doi moi*. Soon, foreign professors in

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<sup>4</sup>In a move he would later regret, Sihanouk backed the Khmer Rouge in an ill-fated attempt to regain state influence, which he had lost to Lon Nol in 1970. The Khmer Rouge used Sihanouk’s Royalist credentials to legitimize its growing communist uprising against Lon Nol. Once in power, however, the Khmer Rouge imprisoned Sihanouk in the royal palace, leaving him powerless to combat the genocide for which the Khmer Rouge is infamous.

Cambodia returned to their home countries while financial support to the sector was reduced. This was like the situation in the 1960s when the USA reduced economic aid. By 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and Vietnam had withdrawn government support in Cambodia, ending early than planned a 25-year friendship agreement. Cambodia's two patrons for a decade had disappeared almost overnight, leaving a sizable gap in human and financial resources for universities. A new patron quickly emerged in the form of the United Nations, which administered Cambodia for the two years before the 1993 elections (Doyle et al. 1997). Cambodia was again changing at the behest of the geopolitical order of the era.

Under the banner of liberal internationalism, Cambodia was to transition its Soviet-inspired institutions to so-called democratic institutions through the direct involvement of the international (i.e., Western) community, which had just triumphed over the Soviet Union. One such early educational intervention as pointed out by Vann (2012) was the Cambodian Australian National Examination Project (CANEP) that worked with the newly created MoEYS "in improving and enhancing all aspects of the Cambodian national secondary school exams, particularly grade 12 ... the final high school leaving exam" (p. 19). Although the CANEP reforms increased the number of high school graduates, the Soviet-inspired system of elite higher education, which relied on challenging entrance examinations, proved unable to support the large numbers of students seeking tertiary education. Even for the students who could pass the higher education entrance examinations, the publicly funded system of higher education could not support a massive increase in student enrollment. There were simply not enough seats available for the number of students demanding higher education. In this environment, the newly established MoEYS granted permission in 1997 for the first private university to open, which was in line with the government's privatization policies and encouraged by the Western international community (Ngoy 2005). Allowing private universities to open also expanded access to higher education without burdening the MoEYS budget, allowing it to concentrate on basic education, which had been the chosen area of focus by various international actors such as UNICEF and the World Bank under programs such as the Education For All and Millennium Development Goals (King 2007).

Another intervention as part of the new liberal internationalism that defined the Cambodian Post-Soviet period was the idea of New Public Management (NPM), a policy approach that arose in the UK under Margaret Thatcher. As Turner (2002) notes, NPM embodied a system of governance based on seven features:

letting the managers manage; setting explicit standards and measures of performance; greater emphasis on output control; disaggregation of units in the public sector; greater competition in the public sector; greater use of private sector management techniques in public sector settings; and greater discipline and parsimony in resource utilization (p. 1495).

A specific outcome of the NPM reforms in Cambodia was the Royal Decree on the Legal Statute of Public Administrative Institutions (PAI), which was signed in 1997 and revised in 2016. Although the 1997 Royal Decree impacted the administration of institutions across the government, including water and power administrative units, in higher education the law increased autonomy in some of the publically administered



universities by establishing independent governing boards. These boards were supposed to be able to make financial and management decisions without the oversight of the parent ministry. In effect, PAIs turned *some* public universities (a total of 10 institutions in 2016) into “quasi-government institutions” (Rany et al. 2012, p. 238). PAIs were thus a private sector management technique being employed in the public sector. PAIs also met Turner’s (2002) NPM feature of “letting the managers manage” by supposedly removing bureaucrats from the daily operations of universities.<sup>5</sup>

In the end, the NPM reforms resulted in Cambodia having three distinct types of higher education institutions: completely public (i.e., universities managed by their parent ministries, reflecting the legacy of the Soviet Union period), Public Administrative Institutions (i.e., public universities with semi-autonomy, which were the product of NPM), and completely private institutions (i.e., universities with little government oversight). It should be noted, however, that the 2016 Royal Decree on PAIs removed some of the autonomy originally provided in the 1997 decree—a development I return to later in the chapter.

Another specific outcome of the NPM reforms in higher education was the introduction of fee-paying students inside public and PAI universities, replicating the trend in private universities and moving away from the Soviet system of fee-free schooling, which continued its legacy through the government-sponsored scholarship scheme (William et al. 2016, p. 175).<sup>6</sup> In the 2016 *Education Congress Report*, for example, data on student enrollment and scholarships indicated that 87% of bachelor degree students paid fees in 2015 (MoEYS 2016, p. 43). In effect, the meaning of “public” had been transformed, no longer reflecting the idea of fee-free education as it had been during the Soviet period but rather on the administrative and regulatory rules public (and PAI) universities must follow.<sup>7</sup>

The changes in governance since the arrival of liberal internationalism, which included NPM and privatization reforms, have resulted in a move toward a mass system of higher education that relies on fee-paying students. In the early 1990s, only 1% of college-aged youth enrolled in tertiary education. By 2014, that number had climbed to 16% (Vann 2012). In the 2015–2016 academic year, 182,987 students were enrolled in a bachelor degree program (MoEYS 2016, p. 43). Although the 2015–2016 enrollment rate is lower than the previous year (likely because of the stricter high school leaving examination reforms implemented in 2014, which drastically reduced the number of secondary graduates), the trend remains: Since the 1990s, and especially after 1997 when private universities began operating and public universities began charging fees, higher education enrollment has experienced exponential growth. The system has thus moved away from being an elite fee-free

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<sup>5</sup>It is not clear to me that the Royal Decree changed in any meaningful way the manner in which politicians were involved in higher education governance in the first place.

<sup>6</sup>It should be noted that publically funded scholarships are given to students to study at public and PAI higher education institutions but not private ones. Some private universities offer their own scholarships.

<sup>7</sup>For instance, public universities receive financial subsidies related to paying for services, such as electricity.

sector in the 1960s toward being a mass fee-based system by the 2010s (William et al. 2016, pp. 180–181).

Despite the movement toward mass higher education, Soviet legacies remain. As of 2016, for example, there were 118 higher education institutions (36 public, 10 PAI, and 72 private) operating in the country and supervised by 15 different ministries/agencies. This type of governance system reflects reforms implemented in the 1980s when Cambodia was heavily influenced by Vietnam and the Soviet Union. MoEYS supervises the most institutions (71, including 59 private) while 25 are supervised by the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training. The rest of the 22 higher education institutions are supervised by 13 different government ministries and/or agencies, including the National Bank of Cambodia, Ministry of Public Works and Transport, and the Ministry of Health (MoEYS 2016, p. 42). Although a Supreme National Council of Education is supposed to coordinate long-term strategies across the 15 ministries/agencies supervising universities, as was envisioned during the liberal international period of educational governance, it has not yet been established, leaving ministries to compete for influence and resources (Un and Sok 2014, p. 7).<sup>8</sup> In effect, the massive dislocations since independence from the French in the 1950s and the fits and starts of various systems of higher education ever since have created a *mélange* of governance arrangements: an increasingly powerful MoEYS slowly turning into its historical antecedent, the Ministry of National Education; multiple ministries overseeing different universities as per Soviet organization; and the rise of private universities emblematic of privatization movements of the liberal international order in the 1990s.

## **Global Summitry in Higher Education: The Rise of ASEAN Harmonization**

As the previous section argued, the system of higher education in Cambodia has been heavily influenced and supported by regionally dominant foreign actors and resources. The USA provided essential financial support from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s as part of its geopolitical struggle to control Indochina; the Soviet Union and Vietnam rebuilt the system of higher education in the 1980s through a system of technical assistance, writing curricula and advising on management structures; and in the 1990s, various international development institutions began to play an active role in the governance of the schooling system and higher education sector.

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<sup>8</sup> Although beyond the scope of this paper, it is interesting to point out that MoEYS oversees the bulk of private institutions (59 out of 72). It could be argued that in the crowded space of higher education governance, where 15 different ministries compete for influence and resources, MoEYS implicitly or explicitly advocated the privatization of higher education as a way to increase its relative power among the competing ministries (or at least, MoEYS gained the most from privatization in terms of power relative to the other supervising ministries). With most universities under its control, MoEYS is in a strong position to exert authority over the entire higher education sector.

Although there are still many examples of multilateral and external actors actively participating in the higher education system,<sup>9</sup> the technical assistance by such actors is now less pronounced than it was in previous decades. This is not to say, however, that Cambodia since the 2000s has been developing its higher education system independently. Rather, it is to highlight that the locus of external influence has shifted from direct involvement (although examples of this still persist) to indirect influence. The latter can be found in the rise of regionalization as the primary means by which the transfer of educational ideas is occurring in the Cambodia higher education sector. Hirosato (2014), for example, claims that international trade among the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Cambodia is a member, together with the increased mobility of people within the region “places higher education in a pivotal role in developing human resources capable of creating and sustaining globalized and knowledge-based societies and promoting ‘brain circulation’ in and outside Southeast Asia” (p. 145). Indeed, in more recent years the role of ASEAN in promoting regimes of good governance, comprised of standardized approaches to degree structures, academic calendars, and quality assurance systems has been noticeably enhanced (Yavaprabhas 2014, p. 94). ASEAN, for example, has championed regional harmonization as part of a larger political project to strengthen the organization and the ability of member states to compete internationally. Through regionalization, Cambodia is thus being encouraged to harmonize its higher education system and align it with international practices as a means to position its economy internationally (see Footnote 1).

The push for higher education regional harmonization is not occurring in an *apolitical* vacuum, however. Specific values are contained within such practices and the reforms they recommend. The idea of “global summitry” is helpful in understanding these broader forces and how governance of the higher education sector in Cambodia is being impacted.

Global summitry is a term popularized by Alexandroff and Brean (2015), two scholars of international relations. The concept embodies the notion that the global political architecture of the post-2008 era is dominated by networks of policy communities, international organizations, and communities of practice where leaders exchange ideas and adopt specific ideational perspectives about governance and approaches to governance. Global summitry is thus concerned with the “policy behavior of the actors engaged in the influence of outcomes of common concern in the international system” (p. 2). Instead of focusing on the amorphous concept of globalization, global summitry focuses on the practices of policy transfer and ideational formation that transmits specific governance practices into national contexts.

In the Cambodian context, global summitry has become an increasingly important driver shaping governance practices in higher education. The global and regional summits serve important functions in agenda setting, defining policy discourses, and setting in place approaches to how specific communities of practitioners and policy makers communicate notions of best practice in the governance and management of higher education, sector reform, and composition. Cambodian leaders and bureau-

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<sup>9</sup>The country is still dependent on international assistance from institutions such as the World Bank.



crats, for example, participate along with other education officials from regional neighbors as well as Western countries, but often as a net receiver of ideas and practices in relation to the management of higher education. As Yavaprabhas (2014) argues, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) is one of the most important regional institutions in Southeast Asian higher education harmonization. Although started in 1965, annual meetings of SEAMEO were not held until 2005, around the time when Alexandroff and Brean (2015) locate the ascendance of Global Summitry as a defining feature of the global order. These meetings, held at SEAMEO's Regional Center for Higher Education and Development (RIHED), are organized by a Director General, Secretary General, and Commissioner of Higher Education in Southeast Asia, and involve the ministers of education from the 11-member states of ASEAN to promote educational harmonization:

Since its work is at the level of 'government,' agreements at meetings hosted by SEAMEO RIHED are highly likely to affect all HEIs [higher education institutions] in every country in the region, which means around 7,000 HEIs (Yavaprabhas 2014, p. 90).

It is, however, not simply a process of senior-level summitry which promotes policy transfer and harmonization in higher education. Equally, the communities of practice that operate beneath these summits are engaged in deepening levels of "shared thinking" and adopting similar policy practices that are translated into national contexts. In Cambodian higher education, for example, the rise of summitry at various levels is increasingly evident. The 2016 *Education Congress Report* details the many summits (including conferences and meetings) in which lower-level Cambodian officials (and sometimes teachers) participated (see Table 1). These summits are often under the guise of "training" whereby the purpose is to build bureaucratic capacity and the ability to manage the higher education system or, where necessary, to reform it in line with dominant practices in the regional and international order. Rather than explicit intervention into Cambodia's higher education sector as has been the country's historical experience (i.e., French colonialism, Vietnamese/Soviet intervention, and the United Nation's liberal internationalism), the contemporary order transmits policy and governance practices through various regional and international forums, creating a seemingly homogenous system of higher education that is being articulated by Cambodians themselves.

In the next section, I address how global and regional summitry is impacting a particular policy area in higher education in Cambodia—quality assurance and accreditation.

## **Clientelism in Quality Assurance and Accreditation**

The concept of quality assurance initially entered the Cambodian higher education policy space through the idea of university accreditation in the early 2000s. The World Bank was the primary external agent advocating such a reform by encouraging the adoption of a law on accreditation as a precondition for a US\$30 million higher

**Table 1** Partial list of 2015 “summits” in higher education, Cambodia’s participation

Event	Where	Type	No. of Cambodian participants	Organized by
Second Higher Education Forum: EU-Cambodia Higher Education Policy and Cooperation	Cambodia	Conference	200	European Union
Training on “project management team to achieve transformation” in higher education	Malaysia	Training	4	SETYM International
7th annual ICMI-East Asia Regional Conference on Mathematics Education	Philippines	Conference	5	East Asia Regional Conference on Mathematics Education
Summer Institute: “Higher Education for Tomorrow in Hong Kong” and Asian Higher Education Summit	Hong Kong	Workshop	8	The University of Hong Kong
International conference on quality of higher education, global expectations, and best practices	Vietnam	Conference	13	British Council Vietnam and Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Training Center (SEAMEO RETRAC)
6th International Conference on Teaching English as Second Language	Vietnam	Conference	13	SEAMEO RETRAC
8th International Conference on Industrial and Applied Mathematics	China	Conference	4	Professional Society
Learning for Sustainable Futures: Making the Connections	UK	Conference	4	UKFIET, The Education and Development Forum
7th Annual Higher Education Summit Asia	Singapore	Conference	5 Cambodians	IBC Asia, a division of Informa PLC.
Internationalization of higher education: moving beyond mobility	Italy	Conference	3 Cambodians	International Association of Universities

Source MoEYS (2016)

education loan. The case study I explore here highlights the nature of policy transfer from international bodies and their articulation into national contexts.

From early 2001 to mid-2002, the World Bank hired a team of consultants to study the higher education system in Cambodia. The team was led by John Dawkins, the former Australian Minister for Employment, Education, and Training (1987–1991). Dawkins championed what was termed a tertiary “revolution” whereby he controversially incorporated features of NPM into Australia’s higher education system. One of Dawkins’ team members studying Cambodia was Mark Turner, an Australian professor who has spent his career studying public sector reform in developing countries. At the time of his consultancy with the World Bank in Cambodia, Turner (2002) wrote that NPM entered countries in Southeast Asia through “courses in leading public administration training institutions throughout the region; for more than a decade academics and bureaucrats have been *attending international workshops and conferences where NPM ... is a major topic*; and published materials on NPM have been circulated in academic and government circles over the same period” (p. 1496; emphasis added).

During multiple trips to Cambodia the team of consultants “met with university and education-ministry officials to discuss the proposed laws” (Lin-Liu 2001). The proposed laws, one of which ended up being the Royal Decree on PAIs (see previous discussion), were preconditions for World Bank loans to fund higher education initiatives in Cambodia. Specifically, the proposed reforms involved the introduction of legislation for the accreditation of universities in the higher education sector. For the World Bank, and Turner, it was the lack of formal accreditation systems that posed the greatest risks to Cambodia’s higher education system (Lin-Liu 2001). John Dawkins, for example, noted the absence of such a system posed the potential for chaos in the sector. The introduction of a legal framework for accreditation was needed (Sine 2002).

To facilitate its agenda, the World Bank utilized multiple avenues to build support. These included capacity building programs, summitry, and agenda setting. One such conference was held in Phnom Penh between July 31 and August 2, 2002. This conference, which was attended by Dawkins and Turner, focused on accreditation and higher education (Falby 2002). At the conference, attendees discussed the draft legislation and governance reforms to the higher education sector:

The draft legislation calls for a board [overseeing the accreditation process] nominated by school directors, foreign donors to education, Southeast Asian university networks and the Ministry of Education. The board would be chaired by the Minister of Education and include four Cambodians with advanced degrees or extensive experience in higher education. It would also include two members, foreign or Cambodian, with experience in existing accreditation programs... The World Bank has offered to release a major loan to train teachers, develop curricula, upgrade libraries and buy equipment if the law passes (Sine 2002).

As is typical of the legislative process in Cambodia, however, political revisions are often made behind closed doors, and are often driven as much by clientelism and the politics of patronage as they are by processes of orderly policy making. The law on university accreditation was no different, undergoing a series of revisions that produced unintended outcomes. Changes to the law commenced on February 21,

2003, with the Council of Universities in Cambodia chaired by Senior Minister Sok An, revising various provisions in the legislation. These included (1) Sok An, a close ally of Hun Sen, was to be appointed the Permanent Vice-Chair of the Accreditation Committee; (2) it would be optional rather than compulsory to invite two experts in accreditation to sit on the committee; (3) and the body would have three additional members on the committee, representatives from the ministries of agriculture, health, and culture, diluting the power of MoEYS. In short, the proposed changes by the Council of Universities in Cambodia politicized the board.

After the revisions were made, the World Bank sent a team to review the new legal framework. The World Bank said of the proposed changes: “We’ve always said that we would prepare a project if there’s a satisfactory legal framework, and that hasn’t materialized yet. The longer you wait, the more competition there is for funds [by other World Bank projects around the world]” (Woodsome 2003). With the World Bank’s preconditions not met, it decided in March 2003 to defer the loan for higher education (although it did provide loans for primary and secondary education).

Despite an absence of World Bank funding, Cambodia nevertheless moved forward with the accreditation law. On April 19, 2004, the Royal Decree on Accreditation of Higher Education was signed into law. The Accreditation Council of Cambodia (ACC) was subsequently established and situated under the Council of Ministers, which reports directly to the Prime Minister. As noted by Un and Say (2014, pp. 9–10), the ACC’s “ability and capacity as a quality assurance guarantor have been legitimately questioned. Some question its independence from political interference; others see it as a body with little professional experience in accreditation and operated by less experienced staff or criticize its ‘very complex and bureaucratic’ application procedure.” As Ford (2015) concludes, “key features of the draft law were amended by the Council of Ministers; their removal effectively eliminated the independence and broad stakeholder participation of the proposed Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) and its nomination committee, resulting in a greater concentration of central control in spite of the government’s stated policy direction toward decentralization” (p. 13).

The attempts by the World Bank to have Cambodia adopt accreditation and quality assurance legislation produced unintended outcomes, in part a result of an entrenched politics of patronage and clientelism (Ledgerwood and Vijghen 2002). In Cambodia, it is not uncommon for individuals to pay various “fees” to a person in some position of power who provides a level of protection or service. Ebeling (2008), for example, found that 70% of the population pays an informal fee *everyday*. These fees often go to police officers, school teachers, and doctors. These types of social positions provide needed services (safety, education, and health) to individuals, who thus see an informal fee as a necessary payment. This is called a patron-client relationship and is the basis of the social system of clientelism (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984).

One such patron-client relation involves university and government officials. Government officials (the patron in this relation) sit on many boards of universities and stand to gain both politically and financially from their involvement with universities. They can receive payments for their involvement or they can advance their political identities through their involvement. Universities (the client) meanwhile are

offered protection in the sense that they will not be overly regulated by government agencies and can pursue their work uninhibited. Private universities stand to gain the most as they are for-profit entities. Ford (2015) argues that in multiple cases of legal reforms, including the case of accreditation, the “new laws that have challenged powerful, politically connected vested interests have been obstructed, or if legislation was passed then actual enforcement has been weak” (p. 13). In the case of the ACC, the changes implemented by Sok An at the last minute resulted in weak enforcement of quality assurance. Indeed, the main achievement of the ACC between 2005 and 2009 was the accreditation of foundation year programs at universities. Regulation was not tough, leaving in place the patron-client relations between government officials and university administration.

The story does not end here, however. The adoption of an accreditation and quality assurance system also created a politics of competition between various government ministries and bodies, in part to capture the spoils of patronage. In October 2013, for example, the secretariat of the ACC, which did the actual work of university evaluation, moved from being organized under the Council of Ministers to being placed under the structure of MoEYS. This occurred after the World Bank initiated a US\$ 23 million project in 2010 entitled the “Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement project.” Still, the final stamp of approval for accreditation had to come from the board of the ACC, which continued to sit under the Council of Ministers. By April 2016, however, that arrangement changed: Both the ACC board and its secretariat now sit under MoEYS. The back and forth movement for ownership over the process of accreditation and quality assurance highlight the instability of the quality assurance regime in Cambodia and the dynamics of clientelism. It also explains why the emergence of a quality assurance regime remains formative, essentially functioning only in relation to foundation year programs.

Arguably, then, the attempts by the World Bank to have Cambodia adopt governance practices typical of advanced Western countries and to drive notions of sector harmonization, contributed to poor governance outcomes in the sector. Indeed, such approaches when melded with the country’s engrained system of clientelism, produced governance systems that further empowered elites and contributed further to systems of informal patronage.

## Conclusion

The case of the ACC provides an example of the confluence of global summitry and clientelism in higher education. This chapter has argued that these two ideas explain the contemporary form of higher educational governance in Cambodia. Thus, while the World Bank was directly involved in bringing the idea of quality assurance to Cambodia with its conditional preconditions for loans to the higher education sector, and by building popular support for university accreditation through conferences, seminars, and summits where various Cambodian government and university officials were trained on governance techniques, this initiative produced unintended out-



comes. Indeed, the transfer of quality assurance systems did not happen as smoothly as the World Bank had hoped. Political patronage continues to exert a powerful presence in Cambodia, where such reform initiatives or attempts to harmonize educational systems in terms of regional and global practices can also provide avenues for deepening patron-client relationships which further the interests of elites. Cambodia, unfortunately, provides a lesson in the limitations of harmonization processes and the need for new approaches in development assistance.

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