



From Schoolgirls to “Virtuous” Khmer Women: Interrogating *Chbab Srey* and Gender in Cambodian Education Policy

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ABSTRACT *Chbab Srey (Code of Conduct for Women) is an important piece of Khmer literature outlining expected behavior for girls and women in Cambodia. Pieces of the poem are taught in secondary school and interwoven into the educational experiences of girls and female teachers, yet there is little research on Chbab Srey in education. Using discourse analysis, this article considers the influence of Chbab Srey on gender-related education policy in Cambodia. This research highlights the juxtaposition of Chbab Srey and gender mainstreaming in education policy and in the curricular experiences of girls and teachers in Cambodia, and introduces an unexamined and culturally coveted piece of Cambodian curriculum to the fields of teacher-related policy and girls' education.*

KEYWORDS *Chbab Srey*; girls' education; female teachers; Cambodia; policy discourse analysis

Introduction

This article investigates the ways in which the *Chbab Srey*, an important piece of Khmer poetic literature, contradicts Cambodia's incorporation of gender mainstreaming within its education policy agenda. Aligned with the special issue's thematic foci, this article centers *Chbab Srey* as an important context for teachers' lived experiences and girls' access to “gender-redistributed” curriculum (Kirk, 2004, p. 394). We apply policy discourse analysis (Allan, 2008; Anderson, 2016; 2017; Monkman & Hoffman, 2013)

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to describe how *Chbab Srey* is embedded in policies that affect girls and female teachers in Cambodia.

Chbab Srey is a poem that was orally passed down from the 14th to 19th centuries, and then codified in written form. It details a mother's advice to her recently married daughter. The mother, as narrator, advises her daughter to maintain peace within the home, walk and talk softly, and obey and respect her husband. The poem survived recent Cambodian history, which saw the complete destruction of the Cambodian education system at the hands of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, or Khmer Rouge, and mass genocide that targeted teachers, monks and those considered the educated elite. During this time, all educational activities were banned, teachers were outlawed and killed, and illiteracy increased (Chandler, 2007; Ogisu & Williams, 2016). The persistence of *Chbab Srey* in Khmer culture, despite the Khmer Rouge's attempts to wipe out Khmer culture through mass genocide and banning Khmer cultural expression, and the inclusion of *Chbab Srey* in the newly rebuilt education system and curriculum, are indications of the poem's importance in Cambodian society.

Until 2007, students were expected to memorize the entire *Chbab Srey* as part of the secondary school curriculum in Khmer literature. In 2007 the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) substantially reduced the number of verses taught in schools, though copies of the poem are usually found in school libraries. Currently, Cambodian girls in Grades 8 and 9 use textbooks and lessons that include a truncated version of the poem highlighting important verses as prescribed in the national curriculum (Derks, 2008; Ledgerwood, 1990). The decision to remove most of *Chbab Srey* from the school curriculum stemmed from concerns regarding whether it supported gender equity in schools (Derks, 2008). In addition to socializing women to accept the dominance of men, Brickell (2016; 2017) argues that the influence of *Chbab Srey* contributes to silencing domestic violence victims and normalizing domestic abuse. According to Jack and Astbury (2014, p. 220) *Chbab Srey* "represents a profound obstacle to gender equality and the reduction of violence against women."

We apply a feminist discursive institutional approach (Kangas, Niemelä, & Varjonen, 2014; Kulawik, 2009; Mackay, Kenney, & Chappell, 2010; Schmidt, 2008) to policy document and curriculum analysis in order to interrogate gender-related policy and agenda-setting in Cambodia, using *Chbab Srey* as context for our analyses. We consider the policies themselves, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which they exist. Our feminist discursive institutional analysis centers gender and constructions of gender-related policy as both meaning and messaging that inform the lived experiences of female Cambodian teachers and the girls they teach. There has been limited research on the role of *Chbab Srey* in women's and girls' lives, and none investigating how *Chbab Srey* informs educational policy and curriculum, despite, or perhaps as a result of, its status as a representation of Khmer culture and literature. We center *Chbab Srey* to investigate its

intersections with gender equality in girls’ education policy and practice. Inspired by Kirk’s (2004; 2008) work on the lived experiences of female teachers, we consider how *Chbab Srey* informs teachers’ work and the contexts of girls’ education in Cambodia as policy and as official curricula.

Chbab Srey and “Virtuous Womanhood”

Chbab Srey is considered an important piece of Khmer culture and is thus taught in schools as Khmer literature by teachers of Khmer language and literature. *Chbab Srey* is attributed to Krom Ngoy, who is acknowledged as the “father” of Khmer poetry; however, it existed in oral form long before it was codified in writing. The writer’s voice alternates between the perspectives of a third-person narrator and of a recently married women’s mother, and instructs girls and women to obey their husbands, walk and talk quietly, and keep family matters in the home by maintaining the boundary between home and community (Brickell, 2011; Derks, 2008; Ledgerwood, 1990; Smith-Hefner, 1999).

Chbab Srey codifies women’s status in the home, reminding them that married women should show deference and subservience to their husbands. Khmer women are expected to perform domestic duties within the household, and to model accommodating, submissive, virtuous and demure behaviors when interacting with men (Ledgerwood, 1996; Smith-Hefner, 1999). For example, the poem instructs girls to “turn around the cooker” (“*sut trey voel jong krann min chum*”), translated as to “stay at home,” while boys are expected to move out into the world and earn a living for their families (Velasco, 2001). *Chbab Srey* explicitly instructs girls to “forgive and be fearful” of their husbands, not to “say anything that treats him as your equal,” and to “instead keep silent in order to have peace.” These directives are culturally embedded and reinforced at the family and school levels. That is to say, expectations for girls and young women in the home, and in Khmer culture generally, reflect *Chbab Srey*’s influence (Derks, 2008; Ledgerwood, 1990; 1996).

Chbab Srey as Cultural Context for Education Policy and Reform

In the discursive analysis that follows, we describe the ways in which *Chbab Srey* is embedded in official curriculum and policy documents. We hope our study will inform future research that purposefully interrogates teachers’ identities and girls’ experiences in school. We begin with an overview of the gendered-conditions of teaching as a profession in Cambodia in order to introduce the policy contexts that inform teaching and learning. Following these policy document analyses, we focus attention on the policy contexts of girls’ education. Together, these discursive analyses show the ways in which

Chbab Srey is embedded in the policies that inform female teachers' professional identities and girls' educational experiences in Cambodia.

According to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS, 2016) just over 20% of secondary teachers identify as female. According to data collected as part of MoEYS's 2015 analysis of capacity for technical-vocational education, teachers in upper-secondary schools can expect to earn 60% less on average than professionals in other fields with commensurate levels of education and training (MoEYS, 2015a, p. 24). Low salaries coupled with the low status of teaching as a career have necessitated policy attention on how to recruit, retain, and professionally develop female teachers in secondary schools. Further, preliminary evidence from an ongoing study of gender equity within the teaching profession in Cambodia suggests teachers believe strongly that *Chbab Srey* is an important part of the curriculum (Grace & Eng, 2015). However, teachers determine how those lessons are taught and the extent to which they engage students with the meaning of *Chbab Srey*. Teacher Training Centers (TTCs) briefly address how to teach *Chbab Srey* for pre-service teachers, however teacher manuals are limited and rarely available once teachers are in the classroom (Grace & Eng, 2015).

Existing scholarship suggests that curriculum and instruction in Cambodia relies largely on memorization (Ogisu, 2016). How and to what extent teachers engage in critical consideration of *Chbab Srey* as curriculum is currently underexplored. What is known, however, is that students are exposed to *Chbab Srey* through official curriculum as embedded in literature lessons about the structure of poetry.

Data and Analytical Approaches

Our analysis uses an original Khmer-to-English transcription of *Chbab Srey* as the primary source of evidence. *Chbab Srey* has significant cultural value and meaning in Cambodian society. As white, female scholar-practitioners engaged in this research, our distance from the cultural and identity contexts of *Chbab Srey* inherently limits our ability to fully understand the ways in which it informs the lived experiences of female teachers and the girls they teach. As former classroom teachers ourselves, we were drawn to this work because of the ways that teachers' lives and practices are intimately tied to the cultures and contexts of the children they teach and the communities they serve. Neither author has direct experience teaching in Cambodia, where – as our findings show – *Chbab Srey* influences expectations for female teachers and girls' education. Drawing from our experiences as former classroom teachers, and now as scholars in comparative and international education, we undertake this work with care and concern for how our cultural distance from *Chbab Srey* may affect our conceptual and methodological approaches and the conclusions we derive therefrom.

The poem was transcribed by one of the authors with two native Khmer speakers over a six-week period in 2017, with the support of a Khmer language and literature secondary teacher to ensure accurate translation and interpretation. Transcribed lines were organized as discrete analytical units and categorized by theme. Thematic categories were then derived from the transcribed text to maintain the narrative features of the poem and to reflect their “situated meaning,” described by Gee (2004, p. 160) as, “cases where words and phrases are being given situated meanings that are nuanced and quite specific to the speaker’s worldview or values or to the special qualities of the context the speaker is assuming and helping to construe or create.” Cross-sections of text were audited to ensure intercoder agreement (Creswell, 2018). Lines were further refined using descriptive and pattern codes to contextualize the text within and across each thematic category (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

Limitations

An important limitation of this research is that neither co-author is a native or fluent Khmer speaker. One author has extensive field experience working in Cambodia and participated in translating the text to English. With the support of two fluent Khmer speakers, we were able to clarify specific terms in use as they appeared in the transcript. Keeping the text structure intact when applying first and second-cycle codes shaped our reading and analysis of the poem as education policy discourse. Consequently, if we had instead applied descriptive first-round codes to the entire text and not by narrative section, the analysis would have resulted in different findings than those identified here. We tested this approach when first working with sections as they were transcribed and found that the narrative and rhetorical elements of the poem were lost. Ultimately, we segmented our analysis by sections of the text’s original poetic form. Keeping related lines of text together enabled us to interrogate the poem’s embedded and “situated” meanings (Gee, 2004, p. 160) in their original narrative contexts. This manner of examining textbooks is both a limitation of the study as well as a potential line of further inquiry that expands textbook analysis.

Policy Documents

The document corpus was created using publicly available reports, white papers, and policy guidance on girls’ education and teacher education, recruitment, and retention policy in Cambodia. Our analysis of the document corpus applied the same descriptive and pattern codes derived from our work with the translated version *Chbab Srey*. We used a date filter to search for all publicly available policy documents published between 2005 and 2015 on the

MoEYS website to construct the corpus. It was then further refined to 12 documents to reflect policies affecting lower secondary grades (6 to 9), girls' education, and teacher-centered policies, and to reflect the grade levels where *Chbab Srey* is implemented as official curricula. Table 1 lists all documents included in the corpus.

Publication Year	Document Title	Authoring Institution
2006	School Health Policy	MOEYS
2007	Educational Law	MOEYS
2008	Strategic and Operational Plan for HIV 2008 - 2012 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-Decree on the Organization and Functioning of Ministry of Education Youth and Sport Royal Government of Cambodia • Sub-Decree on the Ethics Code for the Teaching Profession 	MOEYS
2009	Kingdom of Cambodia Education Strategic Plan	MOEYS
2014	Cambodia Gender Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 2: Gender Relations and Attitudes • Chapter 7: Gender Relations and Violence 	MOWA
2015	Master Plan for Technical Education at Upper Secondary Level (2015-2019) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Policy Action Plan 	MOEYS

Table 1. Document Corpus

Textbook Excerpts

To further contextualize *Chbab Srey* as implemented curriculum, we applied the same descriptive and thematic codes to translated textbook excerpts used in Grades 7, 8 and 9. The textbook corpus was constructed using convenience sampling (Creswell, 2018), from those textbooks available to the authors through colleagues working in girls' education in Cambodia. As with the translated text, we cross-checked randomly selected sections of the document corpus and textbook sample to support intercoder agreement. Table 2 describes the textbooks included in these analyses.

Of the four nationally-issued Khmer language and literature textbook excerpts examined, two contained passages taken directly from *Chbab Srey*, two contained passages from the corresponding Code for Boys, *Chbab Pro*, and one contained biographical information regarding the author. Sections of

Chbab Srey are included in the eighth and ninth grade textbooks of Khmer literature and language.

Publication Year	Document Title	Authoring Institution
2011	Khmer Studies Book Grade 7	MOEYS
2011	Khmer Studies Book Grade 8	MOEYS
2011	Khmer Studies Book Grade 9	MOEYS

Table 2. Textbook Corpus

Ninth-grade students are presented with six lines from the *Chbab Srey*. This short presentation of *Chbab Srey* is followed by an equally truncated version of *Chbab Pro*, which warns boys against impolite behavior towards their elders, lest their parents be subjected to gossip and their family be seen as “poorly educated.” The eighth-grade excerpt from *Chbab Srey* includes 33 lines directly from *Chbab Srey*. This excerpt introduces warnings against “babbling childishly” and “laughing flirtatiously,” warning that this will bring the unwanted advances of ill-intentioned men. Girls are instructed that girls and women who participate in such behavior are “bad,” lacking value, character and self-control and will be a “dishonored” woman. The excerpt urges girls to work hard and complete any work that they begin, to take care of their body while they are single, as later they will be “busy with crying children and will rarely have the chance to work hard” (Translated, Line 29), and “you will be worried and short sighted with a baby, one after another, crying for food; Suffering in your heart to find something for your one or two children so that they are quiet” (Translated, Line 31). Finally, the excerpt references the “three flames” that women must keep in order to ensure harmony in the home: respecting their parents, respecting their husbands, and controlling the spread of gossip.

Findings

In the sections that follow, our analysis shows how girls and female teachers are targeted as specific populations of interest in the policies used to advance gender equality in Cambodia. The analysis then moves to interrogate the juxtaposition of *Chbab Srey* and the Teachers’ Code of Conduct as policy contexts for teaching, and of girls’ education in Cambodia. Our findings suggest an alignment between *Chbab Srey* and education policies that are targeted at Cambodian girls and their female teachers. This alignment, however, conflicts with Cambodia’s gender-mainstreaming policies. We

integrate direct passages from *Chbab Srey* in policy analysis to highlight the poem's influence on the contexts of teaching and learning in Cambodia.

Gender Mainstreaming in Education Policy and Reform in Cambodia

In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (hereafter, MDGs) and Education for All (hereafter, EFA) converged through their shared goal to achieve gender parity in primary education by 2005 and at all levels of schooling by 2015. During the MDG era and into the Sustainable Development Goal (hereafter, SDG) transition, Cambodia addressed issues of gender equity in education through a gender mainstreaming approach to policymaking. The most salient of these policies is the *Neary Rattanak: Five Year Strategic Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment* (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014a). It outlines the government's gender mainstreaming strategic plan, which has provisions for the promotion of gender equity in education, reducing violence against women, and supporting education for women and girls. The *Neary Rattanak* includes only a single reference to educational rights, but offers specific provisions for women and girls' social and civic entitlements.

The *Neary Rattanak* articulates Cambodia's inter-sectorial approach to gender mainstreaming; this approach is also represented in the country's education development agenda. The policies described in the document corpus reflect a holistic, inter-sectorial approach to gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve the targets set through EFA, the MDGs and the SDGs. In addition to these policy areas, gender mainstreaming is also used to promote teacher retention and HIV/AIDS prevention education. As an example, the *Technical Vocational Education (TVE) Plan* explicitly frames gender as a "cross-cutting issue" (MoEYS, 2015a, p. 24), which involves capacity building, incentives (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987), and advancement of female teachers, as strategies to improve TVE upper secondary education. Building from Cambodia's EFA commitments, the 2009-2013 *Education Strategic Plan* promotes children's schooling access, retention and transition at all levels. Training and retention and evaluation of pre- and in-service teachers and training programs for students in rural, remote, and economically disadvantaged areas are provided (MoEYS, 2010, p. 56).

Population Targeting

Women and girls are targeted as two specific target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993) across the document corpus. The social construction of target populations rely on normative, often stereotypical, constructions of identity that are reified through policy language. The *Education Strategic Plan* targets girls as a discrete population of interest and explicitly focuses on their

schooling access as a policy priority. Girls are discussed in distinction from “marginalized students,” who are described in the policy guidance as “children from poor families, child labor, children in disadvantaged areas, children with disabilities, children affected by HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases” (MoEYS, 2010, p. 15). Overall, the education policy guidance included in the document corpus narrowly and purposefully constructs target populations to identify the policy needs of both girls and female teachers. This narrow construction enables girls’ educational needs and the barriers that restrict female teachers’ professional status, development, and retention to be aligned with the policies themselves.

The focus on female teachers in Cambodia’s education policy agenda is apparent throughout the 2015 *Teacher Policy Action Plan* (MoEYS, 2015b). The Action Plan articulates the Kingdom’s priorities for recruitment, retention, and professional development for teaching staff. As with the Strategic Plan’s focus on girls as unique and distinct from other “marginalized” student populations, the Action Plan differentiates women from other targeted groups including those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, differently-abled persons, and those from ethnically marginalized communities.

Cambodia’s approach to gender mainstreaming within education policy extends to improving teachers’ living and working conditions. The Action Plan articulates policy goals for improving housing and sanitation facilities for teachers as a way to improve retention. Female teachers are not the explicit population of interest in the document, but they are identified as the primary population of interest, who require dedicated pathways to become school leaders and are integral in the effort to “strengthen” the “effectiveness of school leadership mechanisms” (MoEYS, 2015b, p. 18).

The commitment to teachers’ professional development and training is also referenced in the 2008 *Sub-Decree on the Organization and Functioning of Ministry of Education Youth and Sport Royal* (MoEYS, 2008a). Girls are not identified in the Sub-Decree as a unique or distinct population from children; nor are female teachers differentiated from or within educational personnel as a targeted population. The 2008 Sub-Decree provides additional guidance on MoEYS’s focus on teacher education and training within its overall strategy to improve the contexts of teaching and learning. It includes specific language supporting the inclusion of gender-responsive approaches to education policy and development by integrating “gender management work” (MoEYS, 2008a, p. 6) into how teachers and other educational personnel are recruited, evaluated, and retained. The Department of Teacher Training is established in the Sub-Decree (Article 27), which also mandates teachers’ access to professional development through the creation of regional training centers and inter-sectorial engagement with private and community-based providers. While the Sub-Decree references an accountability and data-sharing mechanism between the regional and national providers, it does not identify how these interactions will be supported. Further, there is no

reference to how these centers are funded or regulated. The lack of targeted funding to support teachers' training and professional development is also apparent in the *Teacher Policy Action Plan's* (2015b) attention to female teachers. Despite the direct attention to female teachers as a population of interest within Cambodia's gender-mainstreaming efforts, these mandates are largely unfunded, thus distinguishing them from the other actionable policies detailed in the Action Plan and Sub-Decree.

The Ethics Code for the Teaching Profession

Teachers' rights are expressed in the policy documents included in the corpus under study. Our document analysis unveils similarities between teachers' rights and the behavioral expectations for girls communicated through *Chbab Srey*. Teachers' rights to professional status, development, and respect are all explicitly guaranteed under the *Education Law* of 2007, although the gendered-dimensions that shape their work are not addressed. For example, the 2007 Law guarantees teachers' "right to achieve career value dignity and social high respect" (MoEYS, 2007, p. 14). Teachers' obligations under the law require that they respect their professional code of ethics and the law, and obliges them to "undertake and develop their work with due high diligence and responsibility" (MoEYS, 2007, p. 14). The absence of *Chbab Srey* in the 2007 *Education Law* is consistent with the other policy documents sampled in the document corpus. *Chbab Srey* is not discussed explicitly as a context for teachers' work or the ways it informs teachers' engagement with parents/caregivers. It does emerge as an implicit context for teachers' professional roles and responsibilities as articulated through *The Ethics Code for the Teaching Profession* (MoEYS, 2008b).

The *Ethics Code for the Teaching Profession*, also referred to in policy as the *Teachers' Code of Conduct*, was created in 2008 and fully implemented in 2011. The 2009 *Education Strategic Plan*, discussed previously in relation to Cambodia's gender-mainstreamed approach to teacher recruitment, training, and retention, also references the *Code of Conduct*. While the Code is referenced explicitly, the 2009 *Education Strategic Plan* does not provide inducements or targeted funding to professionally develop current teachers under the Code.

The explicit focus of the *Teachers' Code of Conduct* is to "improve" the morale and dignity of teachers, as well as the "quality and effectiveness of education" (MoEYS, 2008b, p. 2). Teachers' duties are outlined in the Code and range from providing support for activities and processes as directed by education managers, prohibiting financial gain through or as part of their teaching assignment, and requiring they uphold the law as part of their professional role. Chapter 2 of the Code specifies teachers' duties and dispositions. Table 3 highlights the behavioral dispositional expectations noted in Chapter 2, Articles 5-14, of the Code. We focus on these Articles

because they detail behavioral expectations for teachers that mirror the expectations communicated to girls and women in *Chbab Srey*.

Article 5	Teachers shall respect the life, body, psyche, and dignity of people in their teaching profession. Teachers shall strongly hold the morale in their teaching profession.
Article 6	Teachers shall keep their profession as confidential in case it is restricted by law or regulation in order to protect the beneficiary of learners. Teachers shall strongly hold liberation during teaching profession such as: independence, freedom, and prosperity.
Article 7	Teachers can be a guardian of learners and shall listen, monitor, and give advices to learners fairly and equally. Teacher shall not discriminate by age, sex, language, race, nationality, color, disability, gender, belief, religion, political view, or social status, resource, or others situation in education and educational service.
Article 8	Teachers shall strongly hold the conscientiousness in their profession. Teachers have duty to prepare the lesson plans and define good explanation in order to achieve the quality and effectiveness in teaching.
Article 9	Teachers shall be self-study and do more research for self-development; and teachers shall regularly attend every training activity. Teachers shall do self-evaluation and evaluate their own performance during the teaching profession.
Article 10	Teachers have duty to support every education activity and education service in all management level of education authority.
Article 11	Teachers shall speak carefully and think of their own speech's repercussion to students and publics when they release any information related to (public + private) education through media myths. Teachers shall not do the demagoguery to the learners. Teachers shall not reveal the result of disciplinary judgment of administration and people in the educational circles as well as public circles.
Article 12	Teachers shall not conspire to ruin the benefits of students in Education service. Teachers shall not punish the students physically and psychologically which they will be affected.
Article 13	Teachers shall not raise the money or collect informal fees or run any business inside the class. Teachers shall avoid doing others job in the education institution.
Article 14	Teachers shall avoid doing anything to disgrace their profession. Teachers shall not provide several facilities that make them be illegal.

Table 3. (Chapter 2 of the Sub-Decree on Ethics Code for the Teaching Profession; MoYES, 2008b, pp. 1-2)

As referenced in Table 3, the Code specifies teachers' conscientiousness and service to the profession as expectations. It provides that, "Teachers shall strongly hold the conscientiousness in their profession" (MoEYS, 2008b, p. 2) through lesson planning and delivery. The concept of teachers' conscientiousness as a professional domain is also referenced in a subsequent section of the Code, stating, "no matter what the circumstance is teachers shall not lose the conscientiousness of their duty and obligation in the teaching profession which is covered by the contract or statute of public and private education institutions" (MoEYS, 2008b, p. 4). Service to the profession is discussed as preserving the honor and status of teaching as a profession. The Code operationalizes service to the profession as supporting "every educational activity and service" (Article 10, p. 2). The Code specifically references the importance of upholding "good relationships" with school personnel and parents (Articles 34; Article 3.18). The Code's attention to service and servitude to the teaching profession mirrors *Chbab Srey's* expectations for women in the household. The convergence of the *Code of Conduct* with *Chbab Srey* extends and institutionalizes women's service at work and at home.

The convergence of the Code and *Chbab Srey* illustrates how ingrained traditional gender norms are in Khmer culture; these norms continue to be reflected in contemporary policies despite the aim to achieve gender equality in educational, social, economic, and political spheres. Next, our analysis turns to how girls are targeted as populations of interest in Cambodia's gender mainstreaming policies. We focus on the contradiction between *Chbab Srey's* implementation as official curriculum and girls' education policy in Cambodia.

"The Disgraced Ones": Chbab Srey and Girls' Education in Cambodia

These girls are called the disgraced ones, who are not afraid of rules of conduct for women.

Chbab Srey (Translated, Line 20)

Like the *Teachers' Code of Conduct*, *Chbab Srey* is a directive that demands adherence to the rules for virtue, character, and ideal Khmer girlhood and womanhood. In the discussion that follows, we describe how *Chbab Srey* is implemented as official curriculum and evidence the ways girls' schooling access, opportunity, and mobility are informed by the implementation of *Chbab Srey* as official curriculum. Building on these findings, we draw parallels between *Chbab Srey* and the *Code of Conduct for Teachers* to further highlight the disconnection between Cambodia's education policy agenda and the poem's implementation in girls' education.

Although Cambodia has reached near parity in primary schools, girls continue to drop out of secondary schools at high rates and are less likely to

enroll in tertiary education (MoEYS, 2016). Cambodian women’s traditional roles are located in the home as wives and mothers. Girls’ responsibilities to home and family, conceptually and materially, are perceived to interfere with their educational attainment, and subsequently diminish their ability to work outside the home to support their own school fees (Escamilla, 2011; Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2014b; Velasco, 2001; Velasco, 2004). The 2009 *Education Strategic Plan* specifically targets children’s equal access to quality schooling as a strategic priority to promote national economic and social development (MOEYS, 2010), reflecting a rights-based approach (Tomasevski, 2003) to ensuring children and youth’s full access and participation through all levels of schooling, and the explicit prohibition of discrimination.

The Plan highlights gender differences in students’ enrollment and retention as an ongoing challenge across all school levels, with emphasis on girls’ transition to secondary school. It also includes protections for children from ethnic minority groups and those with disabilities (p. 13), and incentives to support girls’ retention and transition in grades 7 to 9 through scholarship and food subsidy. It includes, “increasing the supply of teachers, providing houses to teachers and building dormitories for students in disadvantaged areas, especially girls” (MoEYS, 2010, p. 13) as policy priorities. The focus on girls as a population of interest extends from linking their educational opportunities with increasing the numbers of female teachers, to establishing a scholarship program to support secondary enrollment and retention. Interestingly, the Plan links teacher recruitment and capacity building with these barriers to girls’ schooling access and persistence, but does not reference *Chbab Srey* as a potential barrier to girls’ schooling opportunity or mobility, or teachers’ professional development.

Because *Chbab Srey* is implemented as official curriculum, girls are explicitly taught how to become virtuous wives through their embodiment of the characteristics described in the poem. *Chbab Srey* includes 225 lines dedicated to the need for careful vigilance regarding women’s societal, family and marital duties and obligations. Service and conscientiousness are discussed throughout these sections of the poem and exemplified in a description of virtuous women as vigilant and careful keepers of “The Three Flames.” The Flames further characterize what it means to be a virtuous Khmer wife. The First Flame describes preventing bringing gossip or bad news into the house as well as keeping unpleasant events from spreading outside of the house. These sections are translated as directives to,

Control the flames; don’t let them spread by blowing on them. Otherwise they will scatter and spread, and burn everyone. (Translated, Lines 37-38)

Don’t bring an outside flame into (the family), and stubbornly blow on it and let it start a fire. Carelessly controlling an inside flame (in the family), brings it out to start a fire outside. (Translated, Lines 39-40)

One flame you must keep is the good deeds of your parents who took care of you. And girl, commit to the path, serve your parents and do them no wrong. (Translated, Lines 45-46)

One flame is to respect your husband and regularly have sex with him. And definitely serve him. Don't upset and disappoint him. (Translated, Lines 50-51)

As exemplified in these sections of the poem, service and conscientiousness are central to the tenets of "The Three Flames" and the role of women in society, family and at home. These tenets extend to the profession of teaching through directives and language in the *Teachers' Code* that reflect those prescribed in *Chbab Srey*. Conscientiousness also implies that teachers are careful and vigilant of their behavior and their duty and obligation. Here again, the implementation of Chab Srey as curriculum contradicts the national policy framework to improve teachers' professional status as well as girls' schooling access, opportunity, and mobility. This mixed-messaging communicates that girls are meant to develop themselves both to fulfill the roles of virtuous wives and mothers as an outcome of schooling, and to persist in schooling to fulfill social and economic demands outside, or in addition, to their responsibilities to home and family.

Speaking Up and Speaking Out

(Don't) Use strong or mocking language without considering that you are a girl.
Chbab Srey (Translated, Line 70)

Both *Chbab Srey* and the *Teachers' Code of Conduct* reinforce the expectation that speech is a dangerous act that will result in the loss of status. These risks are heightened for girls and female teachers because they extend from the home and are reinforced in the classroom. The rules for girls' and teachers' speech are explicit; speaking out or out of turn is strictly prohibited and, if violated, will result in consequences that bring shame to the family or to the profession. Both the *Teachers' Code of Conduct* and *Chbab Srey* outline expectations related to speech. The Code details moral and ethical behavioral expectations for teachers, which communicate the obligation that they refrain from public or private acts that may reflect poorly on the profession. Article 11 (2008b, p. 2) states,

Teachers shall speak carefully and think of their own speech's [sic] repercussion to students and publics when they release any information related to (public + private) education through media myths. Teachers shall not do the demagoguery to the learners. Teachers shall not reveal the result of disciplinary judgment of administration and people in the educational circles as well as public circles.

Articles 14 and 20 continue in this vein, requiring that teachers "avoid doing anything to disgrace their profession" (Article 14, p. 2) and "maintain good

interpersonal relationship with others in order to be a good model or pattern for students and in order to protect teachers’ honor and dignity” (Article 20, p. 2). Here, the Code cautions teachers from speaking freely or in ways that may conflict with MoEYS’s authority.

The Code’s focus on expectations for teachers’ speech acts closely aligns with how *Chbab Srey* articulates expectations for girls’ speech. In the example that follows, girls are cautioned from speaking and from speaking out of turn; “If you must speak, as a woman, do not say something silly” (Translated, Line 14) and warns, “don’t be fickle, my dear, if your words are not (strong), you should be ashamed” (Translated, Line 18). Along with shame, other consequences are also implied as outcomes for speaking out or out of turn.

Chbab Srey identifies shame as a consequence of girls’ failure to abide by her husband’s wishes. *Chbab Srey* gives specific advice for girls, as future wives, to ensure harmony in their marriage. A wife’s deference to her husband and expectations for speech are noted in the following excerpt (Translated, Lines 79 - 83):

Even though your husband curses you, go to bed and think it over.
Come back to him and use gentle words to rectify his mistake.
Even though your husband admonishes you, remember to keep it to yourself.
If something goes wrong, don’t forget the advice which you were given.
If you are not afraid and don’t listen to the advice which has been given to you,
(you will) create only arguments.

The preparation for “good” girls to become “good” wives continues in the section detailing the “Seven Characteristics.” The first line of this section states, “A wife like an enemy does not have the seven good characteristics” (Translated, Lines 168). “Bad” wives are framed as those who do not fear or obey their husbands. Here, like in the example above, girls are cautioned to follow their husband’s word. The first of the Seven Characteristics is that “good” wives should listen to and obey their husbands. The following stanza characterizes girls who do not listen and obey as “insolent and reticent:” “Her husband tells her three words, but she does not reply” (Translated, Line 170). The next line continues by further describing “bad” wives as those who do “not like to listen when her husband advises (her) regarding some rules” (Translated, Line 171). Although these pieces of the poem are not taught in the classroom, *Chbab Srey* often can be found in libraries in primary and secondary schools, with lessons taught and developed by librarians (Grace, 2017).

Conclusion

Cambodia’s use of gender mainstreaming as a framework to achieve the shared goals of EFA and MDGs 2 and 3 is evident throughout the document

corpus, particularly in the policy language used to construct populations and goals. Girls and female teachers are named as specific populations of interest for achieving the goals and targets set throughout the policy documents under study in this article, with few exceptions. Both groups are constructed as separate and distinct populations of interest in these two important policies. Naming girls and female teachers as discrete populations is a rhetorical extension of the gender-mainstreamed approaches to policy making. The focus across the document corpus on female teachers' retention and salary, as well as their need for improved access to professional development and training, highlights Cambodia's inter-sectorial approach to gender mainstreaming during the MDG-era and provides a framework for ongoing education development through the SDGs. Although naming is not enough on its own, our findings illustrate the ways in which policy language can enable more narrowly targeted policy guidance.

Chbab Srey prescribes a model for women's marital and maternal behaviors, which has been passed down as oral tradition, and contemporarily through official curricula. Our findings identify the diffusion of *Chbab Srey* within the policies that inform female teachers' professional and girls' schooling experiences. As we conclude our analysis, we identify limitations in document and artifact selection, as well as the transcription used in our analyses. We also highlight opportunities for future research that continues Jackie Kirk's legacy of scholarship in the areas of female teachers' work and girls' education.

Future research on female teachers and the girls they teach is important and necessary and will, we hope, come as an outcome of the analysis presented here.

Contributing to Jackie Kirk's Legacy: Interrogating the "Conditions" and "Approaches" of Gender-Mainstreamed Education Policy in Cambodia

Our analyses of the policy and curricular contexts of teaching and girls' education in Cambodia is inspired by Jackie Kirk's body of work. We attempt to embody her commitment to understanding the cultural and contextual conditions of teachers' lives and girls' schooling experiences. The "symbolic power" (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008, p. 648) of schooling in Cambodia is intertwined with *Chbab Srey's* value as a cultural artifact. As posited in her collaborative work with Winthrop, Kirk asserts, "under certain conditions and with certain approaches, schooling can support children's well-being" (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008, p. 639). By questioning the normative expectation that formal schooling can be a catalyst for all things from peace to development, Kirk, with her collaborators, called into question the conditions of and approaches to formal schooling that influence children's experiences and outcomes. Our contribution to this Special Issue of *Studies in Social Justice* aims to extend Dr. Kirk's work in fields of comparative and

international education and girls’ education, particularly by centering *Chbab Srey* as a “condition” that shapes girls’ education and female teachers’ engagement with formal schooling.

Chbab Srey holds significant symbolic and cultural value in Cambodian society and communicates expectations and consequences for women and girls’ behavior at home and at school. These values are further reified through *Chbab Srey*’s diffusion as curriculum and embodiment in the *Teachers’ Code of Conduct*. The codified and normalized conditions of girls’ education and female teachers’ work informs individuals’ schooling experiences as well as the approaches used to implement curriculum. As noted by Kirk & Winthrop (2007) in their work on education in refugee contexts, teachers play an instrumental role in girls’ protection at school. By locating girls and female teachers as populations of interest within Cambodia’s education policy agenda, our analysis reflects Kirk’s inquiry (2008) into how girls and their teachers experience schooling, and the ways that culture and experience intersect with policy implementation.

Chbab Srey is unique to Cambodia and the Cambodian education system and forms a codified description of patriarchal expectations for girls and women that is handed down through educational channels and solidifies girls and women’s place within Cambodian patriarchal society. While Cambodia’s patriarchal society is not unique, Khmer culture supports the socio-cultural expectations of women through *Chbab Srey* (Derks, 2008; Ledgerwood, 1990; Ledgerwood, 1996). The findings presented here provide an initial attempt to empirically and theoretically examine the implementation of *Chbab Srey* as a culturally-coveted, written poem in the national curriculum that remains an active force in the lives of female teachers and the girls they teach. As Cambodia seeks gender equity in education, future research is needed to consider how this influential text is embedded and contested in policy documents and curriculum artifacts, as important contexts of teachers’ and girls’ educational experiences.

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