

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results from this study show that Preah Ko in Cambodia's legend is a metaphor for the statue of a bull. Preah Ko was the symbol of Brahmanism—institutions, texts, and learnt men. Preah Keo in the legend is a metaphor of a sacred Buddha image and was perhaps Prah Keo or the Emerald Buddha or a sacred Buddha statue of a similar type. The capture of Angkor by the Siamese and the destruction and removal of statues, texts, scholars, priests, artisans and population were considered a big loss for the administrative and religious bases of Cambodia. It was the loss of fundamental religious bases of Brahmanism and Buddhism including texts, cult objects, religious teachers and scholars that can be compactly represented by Preah Ko (Brahmanism) and Preah Keo (Buddhism). For this reason, the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was first composed to explain the fall of Angkor. At the beginning, its popularity was probably not high. The legend perhaps achieved greater attention only when some parts of it were added in order to be linked with the other major event, the sack of the capital at Lovek. Thus, two important historical events were combined together in one story. In its early stage of composition, the legend perhaps told only about the capture of Preah Ko and Preah Keo to Siam. The part of the story that mentioned Preah Ko and Preah Keo hiding in the bamboo forest at Lovek was probably added in later periods. Since the story had existed in oral form; therefore, it was easy to delete, add or change parts of it. People who told the story in the later periods even attempted to include in the legend the event at Oudong, another of Cambodia's capital following Lovek in the 18th and 19th centuries. For example, among the several places that Preah Ko and Preah Keo attempted to take refuge from Siamese's capture, was Oudong Hill. From these evidences, it shows that the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was not a story which belonged to one particular period as many Cambodian people and scholars believe. The story covered or combined three historical periods together—Angkor, Lovek and Oudong. Due to the flexibility and

adaptation of the story and the nature of Cambodian- Siamese historical relations, the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has remained prevalent and occupied a place in Cambodian society until the present-day. It is possible that the story in the future will undergo further changes and link with more new events if relations between Cambodia and Siam become disharmonious.

Despite the existence in several forms, almost all versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo share a lot of things in common regarding their general representations of the Thais. In almost all versions, Thai people were depicted as threatening, invasive, hostile, deceptive etc. In contrast, the story generally displayed Cambodian people as peace-loving, sympathetic and caring. Furthermore, they were usually shown in a defensive position. They did not offend Siam or take revenge.

However, certain versions of the story also showed some specific representations of the Thais and the Khmer. For example, some displayed that Khmer people were not always the victim of the Thais; they rose up fighting against the Siamese soldiers. Preah Ko and Preah Keo also offered their help by joining with ordinary Cambodian people to attack Thai troops. Another version showed that the King of Cambodia was corrupted by the King of Siam. The Cambodian king took bribes from the King of Siam who wanted to capture Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Some versions especially those of oral told that the Siamese started to have their own national identities, letters, and culture only after they possessed Preah Ko Preah Keo. Some even went even further to link the idea that the majority of Thai people do not eat beef because they have great faith and respect in Preah Ko and Preah Keo.

Although there are some changes or adaptations of the original story in certain versions, the representations of the Thais were not usually positive. Both generally and specifically, the Thais were usually portrayed more or less with negative representations. The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo aims at suggesting that the loss of Preah Ko and Preah Keo to the Siamese resulted in Cambodia's decline and lack of peace and prosperity in

the later periods. In contrast, the Thai state has been peaceful, glorious and more superior to Cambodia because they possess Preah Ko and Preah Keo. However, Khmer people's perception of Thai people in the story was not a reflection of the Khmer people in the past as a whole. It was rather the perception of Khmer leaders, the elites and the authors of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. These elites intended to use the legend to create a collective memory among Cambodian people. They wanted the people to remember collectively the past events and feel sad over the loss of their country's heritage to Thailand. At present, the collective memory among Cambodian people about the past as told through the legend is not a memory that comes from their direct experience of seeing or living in the past period, but through indirect sources such as family, communities, schools etc. Therefore, this memory is changeable, particularly if the means or channels of passing on the memory change.

The findings from the research also show that the political and nationalist functions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo have become less strong and less visible at present due to the good relationships between Cambodia and Thailand. The legend will resume its strength and popularity or not depending on the nature of political and diplomatic relationship between both countries. Despite its age, the legend is still influential, at times, in contemporary Cambodian society. It has survived and adapted since a long time ago and has continued to be popular until present-day and will remain existed in the future as well. Most Cambodian people at present cannot tell the story from the beginning to the end. Yet, nearly all of them know the main episodes or themes of the story like Preah Ko and Preah Keo going into hiding in the bamboo forest at Lovek and their subsequent capture and removal to Thailand by the Siamese.

The popularity of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo may decline as many Cambodian people cannot tell the story. However, the story has reappeared from time to time. During periods of tension between Cambodia and Thailand, the story was popular and considered as a weapon or tool used to raise national consciousness among

Cambodian people. During peaceful and harmonious times, its popularity declines. However, Preah Ko still maintains his high status among Khmer people regardless of the political situation. In religious and psychological perspectives, Preah Ko is always in the Khmer soul. Cambodian people consider him as God. Until modern times, they still worshipped and sought protection and blessing from the power of Preah Ko. Preah Ko helps people feel more secure and focus on their lives in the present while looking to the future with hope.

Each new publication and version of the legend may be or may not be an attempt by the authors or the publishers to politicize the story or to raise nationalism. It was perhaps the demand of readers that encouraged writers or publishers to produce a new version. Therefore, it is obvious that the popularity of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was high at times when there was difficult relationship or tension between Cambodia and Thailand. The emergence of new versions of the legend or the promotion of the legend through radio broadcasts or other broadcast media likely had political or nationalist motives. However, the worship of stone statues of Preah Ko at various places throughout Cambodia and news releases of the birth of strange cows believed to possess the spiritual power of Preah Ko do not have any links with politics or nationalism. They purely serve the religious and psychological functions.

The contemporary perception of young educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh of either Thais in the story or present-day Thais is different from the legend's portrayal of Cambodian people's perception on Thais. In the legend, the Siamese were shown negatively. Cambodian people in the story did not perceive the Siamese as good at all. Unlike the legend, Cambodian people's attitudes towards Thai people are both positive and negative. Some have good opinions of Thai people, while others do not like them. The results from the in-depth interviews show that each informant got exposed to the story more than one time. The results also suggest that the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was very influential when young Cambodian people were exposed to the story the

first time. When they were young, they believed the story was true. However, their belief in the story faded when they grew up and had enough maturity. At present, some young educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh like or admire Thai people. Some feel neutral, while some others feel upset or dislike Thai. Their unhappy feelings or hatred towards Thai people do not come much from the influence of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, but more from contemporary factors including the teaching of history, Thai politics, news releases about border tensions, behavior of some Thai people and so on. Many people interviewed also mentioned that they would pass on the legend to their children or future Cambodian people. This reflects that the legend will remain in Cambodian society. However, many of the informants said that they would tell their children to learn the lessons from the past, but not tell them to have racial prejudice. This means that the informants do not want to see difficult relationships between governments and people of both Cambodia and Thailand.

The findings suggest that the negative perception of some young educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh towards Thai people are changeable, since it comes from contemporary factors like teaching of history and news releases etc. The findings are an important message to the governments of both countries to work together closer to find ways to make the teaching of history and reporting news a means of promoting peace, mutual understanding and friendship between people of both nations. Besides that, the results from the research are also useful information for either the people or governments of both countries in order to understand that some Cambodian people view some Thai people negatively because they feel that they are often underestimated or poorly treated. This reflects that there is not enough mutual understanding between people of both countries. More mutual understanding should be promoted to encourage Cambodian and Thai people to view each other as friends, brothers, and good neighbors.