

CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF THE LEGEND OF PREAH KO PREAH KEO ON CAMBODIAN PEOPLE IN THE MODERN TIME

“It’s good to promote this story to encourage people to love their country, but not to encourage them to hate others. Promoting nationalism does not mean you encourage your people to hate or look down on other races. It simply means to love and support what you have,” interview with a university lecturer.

4.1 Introduction

The legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has long existed in Cambodia, and has influenced to some extent the socio-political as well as religious aspects of this country. Moreover, it also has an influence on the way Cambodian people at present form their views of the Thais. For these reasons, this chapter has two main objectives. First, it investigates and analyzes the various functions of the legend. Second, it offers an analysis concerning the influence of the story on the contemporary perception of Cambodian people towards the Thais.

4.2 The Legend and Its Functions

The legend has played several important functions in Cambodian society, namely historical*, political and religious functions. In the parts below are a discussion and analysis of these.

* See Chapter 2 for discussion of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo and its link with Cambodia’s history.

4.2.1 The Legend and Its Link with Real Contexts

Despite its mythical nature, the story has links with real places and nature in Cambodia. These links include the names of areas, mountains, trees, etc. Below are some examples of these.

The legend says that Preah Ko and Preah Keo went to seek refuge in a thick bamboo forest in the Lovek area when they attempted to escape capture by the Siamese. The story further mentions that the King of Siam ordered his soldiers to fire silver coins into the forest in order to encourage Khmer people in the area to destroy the trees. In this case, it is relevant with a real historical event that took place when the King of Ayutthaya attempted to capture the capital of Lovek. The bamboo forest surrounding the capital was so thick that the Siamese soldiers could not enter the city. The Thai monarch thereafter ordered his men to fire silver coins from cannons into the bamboo thicket. In no time the entire forest was destroyed by local Cambodian villagers who were searching for the coins. As a result, the Siamese were able to capture the Khmer capital. Although the forest that protected the city was destroyed at that time, evidences that the area used to have a thick bamboo forest remain until the present day. Nowadays it is observed that there are still some clumps of bamboo trees scattered all over the area. However, some of them now are being destroyed as villagers clear the land to build houses or to do farming. An old lady in a village in Lovek remembered the following:

When I was young, there were a lot of bamboo trees in this area. Some clumps of bamboo trees were so big that only four or five men together could put their arms around them. Now they are all gone because villagers and soldiers have constantly cleared the forest to free land for houses and rice fields¹.

In addition to the bamboo trees, there is also a mango tree which people in Lovek believe to be the one in the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. The legend informs us that in her last month of pregnancy, the mother of Preah Ko and Preah Keo had a mouth-

¹ A talk with an old lady, aged 75, at Tralengkeng Monastery, Lovek, 20 November 2006.

watering desire to eat green mango. She had asked her husband several times to climb and pick the fruit for her. However, the man tried to divert her attention from eating the fruit because he knew that it would kill her if she did so. Unable to bear her desire, the poor lady climbed up the tree herself when her husband was away from home. Just as what the fortune teller had warned, the pregnant woman fell down the tree as she attempted to pick the green mango. She died immediately there under the tree as her belly exploded and gave birth to the calf, Preah Ko, and a baby boy, Preah Keo. Nowadays in Lovek there is an old mango tree. People in the area believe it is the tree that has survived since the time of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. At present, the mango tree is part of a Bodhi tree that people believe to have grown in a later period. The Bodhi tree has grown so big that only a branch of the mango tree can be seen surviving and growing at the trunk of the Bodhi tree. At present under the tree, there is a small shrine built to house cement statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. The tree is on a path in Lovek at the turn to Tralengkeng monastery.



Picture 7 A mango tree which people in Lovek believe to be the one from the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo.

There is also a pond in Lovek that villagers believe to be the one from the legend. This pond is called *Sras Neang Pov* (the pond of Neang Pov). It is located in Tralengkeng monastery. The pond is approximately more than twenty meters long and more than ten meters wide. According to the legend, Neang Pov, the youngest daughter of the King of Cambodia, together with her sisters and mistresses bathed in the pond. While they were bathing and playing in the water, the young handsome Preah Keo appeared and joined them in the game. This pond was the place where the first love between Preah Keo and Neng Pov started to develop.



Picture 8 The pond of Neang Pov in Tralengkeng monastery, Lovek.

Moreover, the *Kandaol* tree in the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is the name of a kind of tree that can be found in the natural environment of Cambodia. Based on the legend, Preah Ko was seized by people of a village. The villagers tied him with a big rope tightly to a big *Kandaol* tree and attempted to kill him in order to get the precious objects from his belly. Minutes before he was killed, Preah Ko flew up with Preah Keo holding his tail tightly thus uprooting the tree. The tree and its branches fell down injuring a number of villagers. When he was in the sky, Preah Ko looked down and shouted to the

injured to use pieces of the *Kandaol* tree to boil and drink. Following Preah Ko's recommendation, all wounded people became well recovered. Until the present, roots or branches of the *Kandaol* tree have often been used along with other trees as medicines by traditional Khmer doctors. This practice is likely to have been reinforced by their belief in the power of Preah Ko.

Besides Lovek, there are also several real places in Cambodia that were portrayed through the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. These include Phnom Srouch, Phnom Etereus, Palin, Phnom Sampov, Phnom Thbaeng, O Chrov etc. Based on the story, these places were at one time the sites where Preah Ko and Preah Keo took refuge when they tried to escape from the chasing Siamese soldiers.

Due to its link with real places and nature in Cambodia, the legend makes many Cambodian people believe that it is true to a large extent. People usually considered the sites where both Preah Ko and Preah Keo used to take shelter as sacred and they often build small shrines or altars for worshipping both brothers there. For these reasons, it shows the vibrant nature of the legend and its important place in the Cambodian society.

4.2.2 Various Versions of the Legend and Their Links with Socio-Political Contexts

The publication or the issuance of new versions of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo very often appears to have been linked with the periods when there were tensions between Cambodia and Thailand, or when there were attempts to raise national consciousness among Cambodian people to value their own nation and culture. In the parts below are the discussion and analyses of various social and political contexts behind the publication of each version of the story. However, not all versions are raised for analysis here due to the fact that some of them were released at similar times.

4.2.2.1 Kem Ky Version (1952)

The *Kem Ky Version* of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is a written one. This version came out in 1952. Its publication in this year was likely to have been motivated by three main factors.

First, reading materials in Cambodia prior to France's occupation were usually available on palm leaf. The early 1950s saw the gradual decrease in French power in Indochina especially in Cambodia and the increase in the use of modern printing machines in the country*. Therefore, it is possible to say that the publication of this legend was perhaps due to the desire to make use of modern technology, and above all to have more reading materials available to a large number of readers.

Second, the early 1950s in Cambodia were a period of various movements against French rule of the country. Cambodian people formed into several groups fighting against France for independence, which they finally achieved on November 9th, 1953. Therefore, the publication of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo by Kem Ky in 1952 may have had political implications. As it is known, the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo portrays the ambition of a foreign country (Siam) to take control of Cambodia and to take away its precious cultural and national heritage. Therefore, the publisher perhaps wanted to encourage Cambodian people to appreciate their culture and tradition, and to raise their consciousness against foreign rule (the French). Noticeably, the new French *Resident Supérieur*, Georges Gautier in 1943 announced his intention to replace Cambodia's forty-seven-letter alphabet with a Roman one. The transliteration was worked out by George Coedes. Gautier and his colleagues saw the reform as a step towards "modernization". However, many Cambodians especially the *Sangha* considered the reform as an attack and a degradation of Cambodia's tradition and culture². King Sihanouk claimed that he

* Information collected from some old people who were in their youth during the period and experienced these events.

² David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992), p. 170.

was on the point of abdicating on the issue. Although there were strong objections, the reform was pushed vigorously by the French between 1944 and 1945, especially in government publications and in schools. The Romanization decree did not apply to religious texts. However, when the French were replaced by the Japanese, one of the first actions of the newly independent Cambodian government was to rescind the Romanization. From then on, no attempt has been made by any Cambodian government to romanize the language³. Although the French came back in early 1946 to replace the defeated Japanese, they did not reconstitute the previous status quo⁴. The publication of the legend in 1952 also could have been an effective counter to any attempts to Romanize the Khmer script by the French.

Last, France's power and influence in the early 1950s in Cambodia, as well as in Indochina, was in a steady decline. There was the possibility of the withdrawal of French soldiers from the region. Noticeably, France had acted as Cambodia's protectorate and helped Cambodia reclaim its three Western provinces from Thailand which had been recently claimed again, this after a history of Thai control. The provinces of Battambang and Siemreap, including Angkor, were absorbed by the Thai in 1795 during the reign of King Ang Eng⁵. Since that time until its return to Cambodia in 1907, the provinces had been controlled by Chao Fa Baen's family for six generations. Chao Fa Baen's family was Cambodian. However, they were answerable not to the Cambodian kings, but to the Thai kings. They sent tributes and collected tax for Bangkok⁶. After France came to set up their colony in Cambodia, it negotiated with Siam for the return of the provinces to Cambodia. The agreement was finally reached between Siam and France on 23 March 1907. In this agreement, Siam agreed to grant the retrocession of the Cambodian provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap, and Sisophon to France in exchange for France's

³ Ibid., p. 170.

⁴ Ibid., p. 172.

⁵ Michael Vickery, Cambodia after Angkor, the Chronicular Evidence from the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries. (A Ph. D dissertation, Yale University, 1977), p. 508.

⁶ Tauch Chhuong, Battambang samai lok majas (Battambang: During the Time of the Lord Governor) (Honolulu: EAST-WEST CENTER, 1994), pp. 4-15.

abandonment of extraterritorial rights for her Asiatic nationals⁷. The French, then, handed over the provinces to King Sisovath (1904- 1927) of Cambodia. However, after the French were kicked out of Indochina by the Japanese during World War II, Thailand with the support from the Japanese ignored the treaty and in 1941 they came to seize control of the entire north and north-west of Cambodia (Battambang, Siem Reap and Preah Vihear Provinces). Thailand occupied the area from 1941 to 1946. Most Cambodian people in the area at that time had anti-Thai sentiment⁸. When the Japanese lost the war in 1945, the French returned to Indochina in early 1946. In 1947, the provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap and Preah Vihear were returned to Cambodia⁹. From the above events, Thailand was seen not to follow the agreement. It abided by the treaty when it was in a weaker position with France, but changed their minds as soon as they regained superiority through the help of the Japanese. It was assumed that Thailand had maintained its desire to take back the Battambang and Siem Reap provinces whenever the opportunity arose. For this reason, the publication and the promotion of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo in 1952 may have resulted from the fear by the Cambodians that they might lose their territory, an important part of their heritage, to Thailand again.

All of these hypotheses about the social and political reasons behind the publication of the legend by Kem Ky Bookshop may be more or less true. Nonetheless, the reason for the publication of the story may have also come simply from the desire to preserve the national and cultural heritage combined with the aim to promote literacy among Cambodian people through the increase in the publication of reading materials. As it was known, Kem Ky Bookshop in the early 1950s published not only the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo, but also many others whose themes have nothing to do with Siam or foreign countries.

⁷ G. Coedes, *The Making of South East Asia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 170.

⁸ Ben Kiernan & Chanthou Boua, *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1942- 1981* (London: Zed Press, 1982), pp. 127- 128.

⁹ David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 176.

4.2.2.2 Mural Painting Versions (1987)

As described in Chapter 3, so far there have been two mural painting versions of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. One is at Svay Chrum monastery and another is at Tralengkeng monastery. However, in this section only the mural paintings at Svay Chrum monastery will receive focus. The complete story of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was painted in 1987 on the wall inside the Vihāra of the monastery. There are two main episodes in the mural painting version of this monastery that appear to be different from the general story found in other versions. One episode portrays the Cambodian King and his officials taking bribes from the Siamese king to plan the plot to bring Preah Ko and Preah Keo to Siam. Another episode shows ordinary Cambodian people together with Preah Ko and Preah Keo rising up against the Siamese soldiers. They fought bravely and destroyed the Siamese army*. The fact that this mural painting version at Svay Chrum monastery near the capital of Phnom Penh, came out in 1987 and that the two episodes pictured there are different from the general story might hide political implications. The painting version of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo at the monastery is thought to have served the political purposes of Cambodia's government at that time.

From 1979 until the early 1990s, Cambodia's territory was controlled by two governments. Both governments fought against each other. One government controlled Phnom Penh and the majority of the country's territory. This government was known as the People's Republic of Kampuchea and was supported by Vietnam and the Soviet Union. There were large numbers of Vietnamese soldiers stationed in Cambodia between 1979 and 1989. Another government controlled the territory along the Cambodian-Thai border. This government was formed by three important groups—the remaining Pol Pot soldiers and regime members, Son Sann's Khmer Serei and the Moulinaka groups of ex-King Sihanouk. This government was supported by China and the United States. During this period, Thailand was seen to back this tripartite coalition government and considered

* See photos of these episodes in Chapter III.

it as a frontline defense against the Vietnamese. Thailand was strongly condemned by the Government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea for its assistance to this tripartite government. In 1983, the Phnom Penh government issued a thick white paper of more than 80 pages entitled "*Thai Policy vis-a-via Kampuchea*". In this paper, the People's Republic of Kampuchea accused Thailand of collaborating with China and the Khmer Rouge to sabotage Cambodia. Below are some quotes from the paper:

Thailand has let its territory be used by China as a logistics base for the many-sided war of sabotage against Kampuchea and the other Indochinese countries. China is the main supplier of weapons, ammunition, war materials, food and money to the Pol Pot remnants and other Khmer reactionaries. Thailand is the intermediary who receives this aid, conveys it in transit over Thai territory and delivers it to the Kampuchean reactionaries¹⁰.

The paper by the Government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea further mentions:

Refugee camps along Thai border are nurturing places for Khmer reactionaries of all kinds—Pol Pot remnants, Son Sann's Khmer Serei and Sihanouk's Moulinaka groups—where they are shielded, where they recruit new members, where they come to rest, where their headquarters are located and from where they start intrusions into the territory of the People's Republic of Kampuchea, killing people and sabotaging the rebirth of the Kampuchean nation¹¹.

Based on what is stated in the white paper, the Government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea viewed the Thai government in a negative way. It treated the Thai government as its enemy. Therefore, the mural paintings in 1987 of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo at Svay Chrum monastery near Phnom Penh was very likely to have been influenced by the perception of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Noticeably, Sihanouk was an ex-king of Cambodia and was an important figure in the tripartite coalition government. Therefore, one of the episodes of the story in the painting version which portrays the Cambodian king and his officials as having colluded with the Thai king in bringing Preah Ko and Preah Keo to Siam seemed very likely to be under the

¹⁰ The Government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea, *Thai Policy vis- a- vis Kampuchea* (Phnom Penh: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1983), p. 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

influence of this political atmosphere. Another clear evidence of being influenced by the politics of the People's Republic of Kampuchea is the last episode of the legend which showed ordinary Cambodian people together with Preah Ko and Preah Keo fighting bravely and defeating the Siamese forces. This part is like what was stated in the concluding paragraphs of the white paper of the People's Republic of Kampuchea.

Past generations of Kampucheans were determined to oppose the Thai ruling circles' policy of expansionism and hegemonism. The present and future generations of Kampucheans will certainly resolve to crush this criminal policy¹².

4.2.2.3 Written Version (1996)

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo published in 1996 was a short written version. The name of the author is anonymous. The publication of the story in this period perhaps also had some links with social and political contexts. Although there was a Paris Peace Agreement signed by all major Cambodian political factions on 23 October 1991 to end the long civil war and the general election held in 1993, Khmer Rouge soldiers still occupied the areas along the Cambodian-Thai border. They occasionally carried out attacks against the United Nations Peace Keeping Forces and the armed forces of the newly-elected government. The Cambodian government managed to disperse the Khmer Rouge and brought peace to the entire Kingdom of Cambodia only as recently as 1997. According to David Chandler, the Khmer rouge still had about 5,000 men and women in its armed service during this period¹³. The Khmer rouge occupied about one fifth of Cambodia's territory in the north and northwest. In these areas, they were involved in lucrative business with Thai entrepreneurs in logging, and purchasing diamonds. Their activities severely harmed the environment¹⁴. Chandler further added that up until the mid 1990s, Thailand's Ministry of Interior still issued licenses to Thai logging companies

¹² Ibid., p. 87.

¹³ David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Translated version in Khmer. Cambodia: Center for Khmer Studies, 2005), p. 262.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 262.

to trade in timber gathered from Cambodia's forest resources¹⁵. Is it possible that this new publication of the legend had connections with this political situation?

4.2.2.4 Reyum Version (2001)

The version of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo published by Reyum Institute in 2001 is the work of Mr. Preap Chan Mara and his colleagues. Mara, the author of this new version, is a graduate student from the Department of Archaeology of the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. According to what is stated in the preface, there are three main reasons for publishing this new version of the legend. First, the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is an important part of Cambodian culture. Therefore, preserving the story is like preserving the culture. Mr. Mara, in an interview with me, explained the reasons why he treated the legend as an important part of Cambodian culture:

First, it is the legend. Second, it is not simply a legend; it's the legend that explains the historical events that really took place in Cambodia. It's not simply a story for the entertainment; it is Khmer literature. It is also part of the civilization of Cambodia. In this Khmer legend, the main character is Preah Ko, not Preah Keo. It is different from stories in Siam and Laos that give more value to Preah Keo because they practice Theravada Buddhism. In contrast, Khmer people value Preah Ko more than Preah Keo. In this sense, Preah Ko is nothing but Nandin, the vehicle of the lord Siva, who is an important god in Brahmanism. Khmer people worship Preah Ko intensely. The statues of Preah Ko are available in many places throughout Cambodia. The legend is rooted deeply in Khmer culture. We practiced both Brahmanism and Buddhism in the past. However, the influence of Brahmanism was stronger. It is related to both the history and the civilization of our country, that's the reason why we think it is important¹⁶.

Second, despite its longevity, the legend had never been standardized into a definitive written version. Consequently, the writer hoped that his effort would contribute to the standardization of the story. However, they admitted that some printed editions of the story like the Kem Ky version existed long before their publication. Last, the author had an intention to teach the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo to future generations, especially

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 267.

¹⁶ An interview with Mr. Preap Chan Mara, the author of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo of Reyum Version, 21 November 2006.

children, and thus to continue the tradition of telling this tale in Cambodia. In an interview, Mara explained why he intended to preserve the tradition of telling the legend as follows:

In my opinion, the word *legend* means in Khmer *Rourng Preng* that is *Preng Neay* or stories composed by our ancestors a long time ago. It contains an intended message. It is not simply for entertainment. The story has existed since a long time ago. Why should we let it disappear during our generation? If we don't contribute to its preservation and improvement, what right do we have to throw it away? If you have a pair of hands, why should you cut one off? Another reason is that people in general recognize that the story is somehow associated with history. Why should we eliminate it? We should preserve it. Therefore, the publication is a way to preserve it¹⁷.

In addition, the reasons they chose to use both Khmer and English languages for writing the story, as the writer explained was that he intended to make the story more accessible to a larger audience including foreigners who might come into contact with Cambodian people nowadays or those who love Cambodia.

However, if the periods in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Cambodia are considered, it is possible to interpret that the publication of the new version of the story by Reyum in 2001 had some links with the social or political context. In the paragraphs below are the analyses of these.

Noticeably, from the late 1990s, especially from 2000 onwards, English became a very popular foreign language in Cambodia. Both the young and the old alike turned to learn this language. Many parents sent their children to private English classes which are available everywhere in Phnom Penh and in various provincial cities. Thus, publishing the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo using both Khmer and English languages with young learners as its main target was very significant. From the business perspective, the book would be appealing to language learners, and it would become best-selling. Thus, the

¹⁷ An interview with Mr. Preap Chan Mara, the author of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo of Reyum Version, 21 November 2006.

publishers would make a lot of profits. For those in favor of idealism and conservatism, the publication of the story in Khmer and English together with many attractive pictures is seen as the author's effort to make the legend more flexible and relevant to modern Cambodian society. Therefore, the story would survive and remain resonant in Cambodian society during the age of modernization and capitalism. According to these people's point of view, the legend will be known to not only Cambodian people inside Cambodia, but also children of Cambodian people living abroad. In addition, the story will also be accessible to foreigners, whom it previously was not.

Another reason behind publishing the story perhaps had connection with attempts to raise national and cultural awareness among the Cambodians in order to counter the influx of popular foreign culture. It was generally observed that the late 1990s and early 2000 onwards saw an increase in Thai influence in Cambodia. Thai culture flowed into Cambodia through its films, music and songs which were shown and played on Cambodia's local televisions and radios. For this reason, Cambodian people especially the young started to adopt Thai culture and ways of behavior. This could be seen through their hairstyles, clothes, housing styles and other manners. In opposition to the dominance of Thai culture, some people especially the elders began to criticize the new phenomenon. They feared that Thai culture would dominate its Khmer counterpart and Khmer culture would finally disappear. Some attempts had been made to prevent the widespread of this foreign popular culture. Therefore, if the social situation in this period is considered, it could be interpreted that the publishing of the story perhaps came from an attempt to raise consciousness among the young Cambodian people especially those who were learning foreign languages. Young people who learn foreign language like English and Thai were often believed to be more easily changeable and influenced by popular foreign culture than their conservative elders.

The 2001 publication of the legend was also the year when there was tension along the Cambodian-Thai border. In December 2001, the Thai Army closed the border

gate on the Thai side in Sisaket province to Cambodia's Preah Vihear temple. This was because of a sewage problem from the market vendors on the Cambodian side. The move by Thailand effectively shut down tourism to Preah Vihear temple. Cambodia responded by sending hundreds of troops to Preah Vihear and accelerating efforts to build a road link on its side of the border and to de-mine the ascent to the temple. Some Cambodians viewed this closing as yet another Thai encroachment¹⁸. According to Dr. Sorn Samnang, the President of the Royal Academy of Cambodia and Chairman of the Cambodian Culture Committee, the tension at the border in 2001 had damaged the relationship between Cambodia and Thailand and was also one of the motives leading to serious tension that finally broke out into riots at the Thai Embassy in 2003¹⁹. For this reason, the printing of a new version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo in 2001 could be interpreted as a response to this political tension. However, Mara, the author of this version of the story, denied this allegation. In the interview with the researcher, he said:

We do not have any underlying intention to use the story as a weapon against anybody or anything. We simply want to contribute to the promotion and the preservation of our literature that is promoting reading, publication and works of art. That's it. The legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is like a means or a vehicle that we can use to achieve these purposes²⁰.

He further continued:

Reyum is an institution, not a place for political propaganda. We are academics, so we do not have any reason to provoke racial bias. This book was published a long time ago before the riot against the Thais took place. There was no connection between the two. So far Reyum has published hundreds of books that do not talk even the least about Thais. It is not logical to say the publication of this story aims at raising racial prejudice. One should look at many books we have published so far before coming to this conclusion²¹.

¹⁸ Alexander Hinton, "Khmerness and the Thai 'Other': Violence, Discourse and Symbolism in the 2003 Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37 (3), October 2006, p. 460.

¹⁹ "Prothean kanakamaka vapathor Kampuchea mean prosas tha samdei robos bokul Thai men mein chea panha t'ngun t'ngor te (Chairman of Cambodian Culture Committee Said the Opinion of Thai Individual Not a Serious Case)," *Raksmeypuchea* 15 January 2004.

²⁰ An interview with Mr. Preap Chan Mara, the author of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo of Reyum Version, 21 November 2006.

²¹ An interview with Mr. Preap Chan Mara, the author of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo of Reyum Version, 21 November 2006.

It is hard to say whether the publication of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo by Reyum in 2001 had any political or social implications or not. On the one hand, were the apolitical claims and explanations of purpose for the publication by the author and the publisher. On another, were the controversial events and situations that emerged during the period which created rationale for critical analysis.

4.2.2.5 Ly Thaily Version (2004)

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo written by Mr. Ly Thaily and published in 2004 is a short written version in prose. Concerning the reasons of writing another version of the legend, Mr. Ly Thaily, in his preface, explained that he wrote the version in prose because it was the demand of Pai Neth Bookshop. Another reason was that he wanted to see a variety of written versions of the legend. He wanted to see the written versions of the legend both in verse and prose. Despite his explanation, some people may think that the publication of the story in another written form has some links with political implications. Noticeably, the year this version was published coincided with a period in which Cambodia had a stormy relationship with Thailand. Therefore, the printing of the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo at this time was likely to have links with the political atmosphere at that time. In the paragraphs below are the discussion and analysis of the political issues in 2003 and 2004 which were very likely to motivate the writing of a new version of the legend.

The promotion of the story in 2004 perhaps had connection with anti-Thai sentiment. Noticeably, there was a riot in Cambodia in 2003 against the Thais after there was a rumor that a famous Thai actress Suvanan Kongying had claimed that Angkor Wat should belong to Thailand. *Rasmei Angkor*, a small pro-government newspaper, gave a news release about a rumor that had been circulating for months. The newspaper alleged Suvanan Kongying, who was often called by her character's name in a popular Thai soap opera, 'Morning Star' (*Phkay Preuk*) as saying:

She would only ever accept an invitation to perform in Cambodia if the Angkor Wat was returned to Thailand and she looked down [on the Cambodians] by saying that if she was reincarnated, she would rather be a dog than be a Khmer national²².

Morning Star's comment supposedly uttered in a cable interview, provoked widespread anger in Cambodia, particularly among young men. This feeling of outrage had intensified on 27 January 2003, when Prime Minister Hun Sen made a televised speech during the opening of a school for the blind and deaf in Kampong Cham. Hun Sen commented about Morning Star, whom he began calling 'Thief Star', and added the following:

The value of Morning Star is cheaper than a few clumps of grass at Angkor Wat.... TV channels in Cambodia must reduce or stop showing Thai movies, especially movies starring Morning Star²³.

The Prime Minister's criticism of Suvanan Kongying was seen as his attempt to take advantage of the situation and promote himself before the upcoming general election in July 2003. Cambodia holds general election every five years in July. Hun Sen's comment was considered an attempt to portray himself as the protector of Khmer culture and the defender of Angkor Wat temple, which is the centrality of every Khmer soul. Angkor Wat is rooted deeply in all of Cambodia's political, historical, social and cultural aspects. Government regimes whether they are monarchical, communistic, republican, authoritarian, genocidal, or democratic all have the picture of Angkor Wat temple on their flags. The picture and the name of Angkor Wat are given to hotels, national beer, cigarettes, restaurants and many other things. Hun Sen's proclamation was also seen as his effort to take the opportunity to start a plot to crack down or silence members of his opposition parties. His speech seemed to have given green light to the demonstrators. Despite Morning Star's widely publicized denial that she had never made the aforementioned remarks, a denial that appears to be true, several hundred protestors, most of them students, began demonstrating in front of the Thai embassy around 10 a.m. on 29

²² Alexander Hinton, "Khmerness and the Thai 'Other': Violence, Discourse and Symbolism in the 2003 Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia," p. 446.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

January 2003. The crowd burnt tires and pictures of Morning Star and demanded an apology for her alleged remarks from the Thai ambassador, Chatchawed Chartsuwan. In the late afternoon, the protest intensified after a rumor circulated that the Cambodian Embassy in Bangkok had been set on fire and several Cambodians killed by a Thai mob. Finally, in the evening the crowd became wild and began to burn Thai flags and the Embassy. The Thai ambassador and staff escaped from the compound just minutes before the mob went inside²⁴. Some groups of protestors went further to destroy the property of Thai businessmen like hotels, telecommunication companies, cement company and so forth. The angry people also destroyed a few television stations, TV 3 and TV 5, which were seen to show Thai movies or concerts very often. Thai diplomats, businessmen and tourists were evacuated from Phnom Penh airport by military planes of the Royal Thai Air Force during the following days. The side-effect at that time was very significant. In Cambodia, all TV channels stopped showing Thai movies, concerts or advertisements of Thai products. Cinemas that had often shown Thai movies changed to Chinese, Indian or Hollywood movies. The names of shops especially cosmetic shops named after Morning Star or those with Thai names began changing for fear of attacks by protestors in the aftermath of the incident. On the part of Thailand, the response was also immediate and forceful, since the Thai government downgraded diplomatic relations; closed the border; began evicting thousands of Cambodian traders, beggars and laborers; and demanded an apology, an investigation, arrests and compensation. Thousands of Thai people participated in a potentially violent riot at the Cambodia Embassy in Bangkok and which was calmed down only after an appeal from the Thai monarch²⁵. Although the Cambodian government took responsibility by showing 'regret' over the riot, agreeing to undertake an investigation, paying the compensation of roughly 54 million US dollars, and re-establishing normalized diplomacy, the side-effects of the riot lasted well into 2004 and 2005. In 2004 and 2005, there were a minimal number of Thai movies shown in cinemas and few advertisements of Thai products on television channels in Cambodia. Additionally, no Thai movies were shown on local television. 2004, the year of the

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 448- 449.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 450.

publication of the Ly Thaily Version, was not long after the riot. Therefore, the anti-Thai sentiment in this period remained strong.

Besides the effects from the riots in 2003, 2004 was also a period when there were a number of strained relationships between Cambodia and Thailand. There was escalating tension along Cambodian-Thai border caused by an incident at Toul Prasat village, Prey Kup, Poi Pet commune due to unclear border demarcation. Newspapers in Cambodia reported that in early and mid April 2004 black-uniformed Thai soldiers from Division 12 came to demolish houses and fences of Cambodian people built on the Cambodian territory. The Cambodian authorities at the border considered the demolition as a provocative act²⁶. Furthermore, in 2004 there was also a dispute between Cambodian factory workers and a Thai woman, all of whom were working at Shantex, a garment factory in the suburban area of Phnom Penh. The workers protested against the comment by the Thai lady who reportedly said that Angkor Wat belonged to Thailand. The news release about the protest was fully covered by newspapers in Cambodia. Worrying that the situation could become worse like the one in January the previous year, Thai authorities urged all media in Cambodia to stop covering the news about an outbreak of conflict at the garment factory. The proposal by Thailand was published by The Nation on May 11 2004. Some NGOs officials in Cambodia considered the appeal by Thailand as a violation of the freedom of press. At that time the Thai ambassador to Cambodia also asked for more tightening of security within and around the Thai Embassy for fear that the workers' protest would turn into violence like the one in January 2003²⁷.

Whether the publication of a new version of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo had any political implications or consisted simply of what was stated in the preface could be doubted. During the talk on the phone for about half an hour with the researcher, Mr. Ly Thaily, the author of the 2004 version of the legend, refused to give any further

²⁶ "Sapheap ka tam prum daen s'ngop s'ngat te nov kur oy kot samkol (Situation at Border is Calm But Remains Noteworthy)," Raksmeykampuhea 1 May 2004.

²⁷ "Thai prouy barom pi dam bov chas som pro porn phasop phasai Kampuchea oy s'ngop s'ngat (Thailand Worries about Old Wound, Ask Cambodia's Media to be Calm)," Raksmeykampuhea 12 May 2004.

comments besides what was stated in the preface²⁸. He stressed that there were no underlying intended messages behind the publication of the story. Thaily claimed that the real purpose of writing the new version was simply like that stated preface. However, due to several evidences showing the tension between both countries that occurred in 2003 and 2004, it is still possible for some people to think that the underlying intention of the publication of the legend may not simply reflect the words in the preface. Perhaps, it was not the author's intention to politicize the legend; it was probably the renewed interest in the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo among readers that encouraged the publisher to come up with a new version of the story. This shows that the popularity of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was still high at a time Cambodia and Thailand had a difficult relationship with each other.

4.2.3 The Legend and Its Political Function

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is influential. From time to time, it has been used by Cambodian leaders and politicians to raise nationalism among the Cambodian mass population when political tension occurred between Cambodia and Thailand. Sometimes the story has also been used as a political tool by people in power to explain the reasons why Cambodia remains poor. They took advantage of the legend to divert people's attention from the many problems of their regimes (poverty, draught, famine, instability, war etc.). They did this in order to calm the public from rising up against their government. Sometimes they also mixed the story with the Buddhist concepts of *Karma*.

In the late 1950s to early 1960s, Cambodia and Thailand were not at ease with each other both politically and diplomatically. Milton Osborne noted that the record of relations between both countries was marked by frequent of border incidents, accusations and recriminations²⁹. These led Cambodia to suspend its diplomatic relations with

²⁸ Interview with Mr. Ly Thaily, 18 November 2006.

²⁹ Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light Prince of Darkness* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books 1994), p. 152.

Thailand in 1958³⁰. The tension was sparked by two main issues—the occupation of Preah Vihear temple by Thailand and the exchanges of accusations between Cambodia and Thailand.

In 1958, Thailand took control of the tenth-century Khmer temple of Preah Vihear (Khao Prah Viharn in Thai), which stood atop a cliff that straddled the Khmer-Thai border. The occupation threatened to erupt into open conflict. In 1959, Sihanouk brought the dispute to the attention of the International Court in The Hague³¹. In 1962, the International Court of Justice decided that Thailand had no right to occupy the Angkor-period temple of Preah Vihear, and that the temple should be returned to Cambodia³². Cambodia greeted the decision with celebrations, and in early January 1963 Sihanouk formally retook possession of the temple in a festive ceremony on the top of the temple.

Apart from the dispute over the Preah Vihear temple, the periods from the late 1950s to the early 1960s were also fraught with exchanges of accusations between the Cambodian and the Thai governments. The Thai government of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat alleged Cambodia as a base supporting communism in the region³³. Sihanouk of Cambodia also accused Sarit Thanarat's government of supporting Cambodian dissidents led by Sam Sary and Son Ngoc Thanh against his government. Sarit wanted Sihanouk overthrown, and he had supported a movement called *Khmer Serei* (Khmer freedom movement). The Thai government allowed this movement to operate along its border with Cambodia, and the setting up of a radio broadcast station on Thai soil³⁴. Although the *Khmer Serei* movement posed no serious threat to Sihanouk's rule, he was infuriated

³⁰ For more detailed information, see Documents: Relatifs à la Suspension des Relations Diplomatiques entre le Cambodge et la Thaïlande (Phnom Penh: Royaume Du Cambodge, 1958), pp. 1- 59.

³¹ David P. Chandler, The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945 (Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 98- 99.

³² Milton Osborne, Sihanouk: Prince of Light Prince of Darkness, p. 154.

³³ For more detailed information, see Livre Blanc: Sur la Rupture des Relations Diplomatiques entre le Cambodge et la Thaïlande. (Phnom Penh: Royaume Du Cambodge, 1961), pp. 1- 35.

³⁴ David P. Chandler, The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945, p. 136.

by its existence and by its clandestine radio broadcasts emanating from Thailand, which made serious attacks on him and the royal family³⁵.

During this period of tension over the occupation of Preah Vihear temple by Thailand and the exchanges of accusations between both Cambodian and Thai governments, the Cambodian government undertook several campaigns to raise national consciousness among its mass population. Interestingly, among the several methods used was the promotion of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. A long presentation of the myth was carried out by the famous National Theater troupe, which performed the story in several episodes for entire evenings on the radio. Needless to say, the episode relating the flight and subsequent capture of Preah Ko Preah Keo by the Siamese left many audience members with tears in their eyes³⁶.

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was used not only to raise national awareness when there arose conflicts or tension with Thailand, but also used as a tool for political benefits by Cambodian leaders to divert the attention of ordinary Cambodian people from various socio-political problems of their regimes. This means that the suffering, hardship and lack of progress that the country was experiencing were not caused by their government's weakness and inability, but by foreign countries. This can be explained by what General Lon Nol told US ambassador Swank in 1971. Lon Nol together with Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak and their colleagues were the coup makers who toppled Sihanouk's regime. After the coup in 1970, General Lon Nol declared himself the Prime Minister of Cambodia. His new government was known as the Republic of Cambodia and lasted until 1975 before it was defeated and taken over by the Khmer Rouge on 17 April 1975. Throughout Lon Nol's regime, there was crime, corruption, instability and war in the country. The attacks from all directions by the communist forces of Pol Pot on the republican army of Lon Nol, and the US intensive bombing campaign in rural areas

³⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

³⁶ Ang Chuléan, "Nandin and His Avatars," in Helen I. Jessup & Thierry Zephir (eds.), *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory* (Washington: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 67.

against the Pol Pot's communist forces made the situation in Cambodia during this period a nightmare. In 1971, the US ambassador to Cambodia visited General Lon Nol. They held a discussion for two hours. In the discussion, they talked about the continuation of US aid to Cambodia. When they turned to the domestic situation, Lon Nol became more animated and talked about the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo³⁷. Here is a quote of Ambassador Swank's report on Lon Nol's explanation:

He spoke of the historic superiority of the Khmer people to their western and eastern neighbors. He recounted the legend explaining this decline involving the capture by the Thai of a sacred buffalo impregnated with the creative soul of the Khmer nation. The present task, he continued, "is to restore to the nation its soul."³⁸

From his speech, it is seen that Lon Nol used the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo to explain how Cambodia's superiority to its neighbors had been depleted. He aimed at linking the problems of his regime with the long time loss of Preah Ko and Preah Keo to Siam. Lon Nol's last sentence was seen as his attempt to legitimize his rule and portray the image of his government as the rescuers or rehabilitators of the country from this long-term setback. It has been observed that previous governments of Cambodia often used the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo to cover up the mess or to raise the image of their regimes. Only the present government of Prime Minister Hun Sen uses a different political approach to explain the country's poverty, weakness and lack of progress. Cambodian people often hear Prime Minister Hun Sen, in his speeches to the public, very often remark about the present socio-political problems in Cambodia and the long-term result of the destruction during the Pol Pot's regime. His government is reflected as the rescuer of Cambodian people's lives and the rehabilitator of the country from the zero economy.

With all these evidences as displayed above, it is clear that the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has often been used by Cambodian governments as political tool to raise

³⁷ David P. Chandler, The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945, p. 213.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

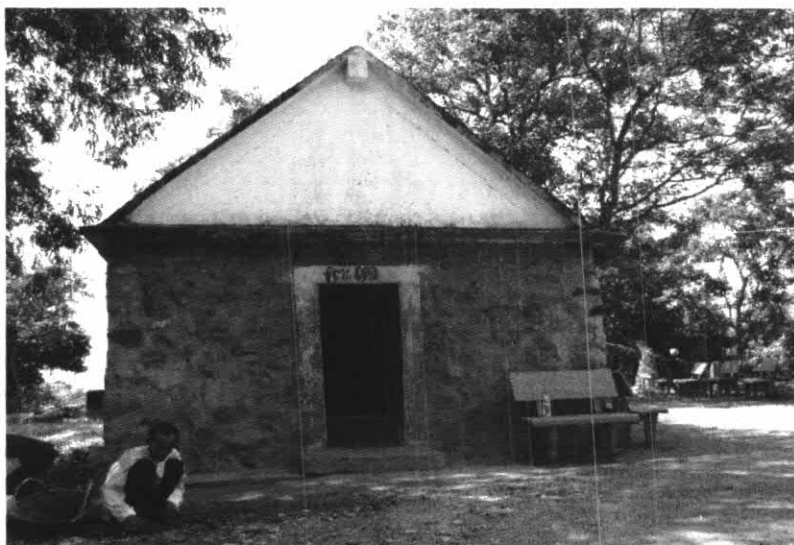
national consciousness and to lift up the image of their governments. The legend was promoted in the early 1960s during Sihanouk's regime and again by General Lon Nol in 1970s. Interestingly, it became popular again in 2003 when there was an anti-Thai riot in Phnom Penh. Both Vannak and Rith, the participants in the riot at the Thai Embassy, who were later on interviewed separately by Alexander Hinton about the incidents, all spoke of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo³⁹. The legend gave a general representation of the Thai as invasive, aggressive, tricky and ambitious. The rumor that Suvaran Kongying wanted Cambodia to give Angkor Wat to Thailand fueled the demonstrators. They perceived Suvaran Kongying, a Thai, as one of those Thais in the story. The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has played significant political and nationalistic roles. In the past, it was promoted by word of mouth. In the modern time, the legend has been publicized through printing, broadcasting media and other modern forms of technology that has potential to lead the mass Cambodian population to enormous feelings of nationalism.

4.2.4 Religious and Psychological Functions

The legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is rooted deeply in Cambodian society. It has played not only historical, political, and nationalistic functions, but also religious and psychological ones. This section will deal with two aspects of the roles of Preah Ko and Preah Keo in the religious and psychological thought of Cambodian people. The first main part is the presentation of information about the statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo that people worship in various places throughout Cambodia and their religious significance. The second part is about the rebirth of Preah Ko into the form of strange cows and their connotation of religious and psychological importance. Due to limited time during the field trip, the researcher was not able to investigate all of the places in Cambodia that have statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. The information on this part is based mainly on the research by Ang Chuléan. The places discussed below are only a few examples of the many places where stone statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo were built.

³⁹ See Alexander Hinton, "Khmerness and the Thai 'Other': Violence, Discourse and Symbolism in the 2003 Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia," pp. 445- 468.

On the top of Oudong Hill are a number of different foundations. Among them are two chapels on the peak, one housing Preah Ko and the other Preah Keo. Oudong was the next Khmer capital after Lovek. The latter had been smashed by the Siamese. Therefore, it is logical that the two chapels were placed on the hill, which had long been the site of religious foundations⁴⁰. At present, Oudong Hill is considered one of the sacred places in Cambodia. It is also a popular tourist spot. At the weekend, people from nearby places, especially Phnom Penh, go for relaxation there. People who go there usually climb up the hill and pay their respects at the chapels of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. They believe that the power of Preah Ko and Preah Keo will give them protection and blessing.



Picture 9 A small chapel housing the stone statue of Preah Ko on Oudong Hill.

⁴⁰ Ang Chuléan, "Nandin and His Avatars," p. 66.



Picture 10 The statue of Preah Ko, Oudong Hill.

Thon Mon Hill is about 20 kilometers south of Phnom Penh. The present-day temple is located on the summit of the hill. To the south of the main Vihāra and built on the same foundation is a small sanctuary called *Vihāra Preah Ko* (the Temple of the Devine Bull). In the middle of the building there stands an altar. Three grooves are visible on the rock platform, which were supposedly left by Preah Ko himself as a sign for his brother Preah Keo, who was looking for him after they were separated during their attempts to escape from the Siamese. In the 1960s and 1970s, the rock itself sufficed as a symbol of the legend of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. In the late 1980s, a cement statue of Preah Ko the Bull was installed. It portrayed him with his legs apart and his head tilted to one side, as if ready to make the grooves with his horn. Behind the statue of the Bull there is also the statue of Preah Keo. Against the wall of the temple is a bed with two pillows, one for each brother⁴¹. Nowadays, this site is considered sacred, and worshipped by people.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 66.

Cement statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo are also seen at Sa'ang Hill. The hill is located not far from Thon Mon Hill, and is also the site of a monastery. The principal Vihāra and the other buildings are at the base of the hill. Yet, on the peak of the hill there is a small structure. This was built to dedicate to the Devine Bull, Preah Ko. There are cement images of Preah Ko and Preah Keo inside this chapel⁴². The icons of Preah Ko and Preah Keo at this hill are also popular among local worshippers.

Chapel sheltering statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo are also found at Kien Svay Krau, a monastery which is about 15 kilometers south of Phnom Penh. Several episodes from the legend are painted on the wall, and in the middle of this small structure are cement representations of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. An interesting event took place in this monastery. The site of the monastery was occupied by a garrison of Vietnamese soldiers shortly after their invasion of Cambodia in 1979. One night a Vietnamese soldier thought he saw a luminous sphere descending onto the spot where the present chapel would later be built. At the moment when it touched the ground the light seemed to take on the form of a bull. The next day, the soldier reported what he had seen to the local people. The villagers believed that it was Preah Ko who came to reside there. The news spread quickly and, despite the lack of religious freedom at the time, they began to construct the chapel and the necessary idols⁴³. Nowadays, the small building housing the images of Preah Ko and Preah Keo is not only a holy site for worshipping, but also a place that people call on to consult the auguries through a form of bibliomancy called *cāk kambī*⁴⁴. This shows a direct rapport exists between the magical powers of the bull Preah Ko, manifested in the different objects—including the texts—enclosed in his stomach, and the belief in the magical efficacy of the manuscripts (*kambī*)⁴⁵.

At Phnom Thbaeng (Thbaeng Mountain) in Preah Vihear Province, there is also a cement statue of Preah Ko. Oral tradition tells us that Preah Ko and Preah Keo when

⁴² Ibid., p. 66.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 66.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

escaping chase by the Siamese soldiers went into hiding beneath a big stone at the site. The Siamese soldiers tried very hard to find them, but could not see them. At present, the big stone is still there and also the footprint thought to have been left by the sacred Bull. People have built a cement statue of Preah Ko beneath the big stone. Both the cement statue and the footprint are worshipped and considered as sacred by local people. Because of their strong faith in Preah Ko, local people built a monastery called Vat Perng Preah Ko over there in 1994 devoted to the divine Bull. The monastery is situated in Mahaphal village, Chhean Mok commune, Thbaeng Mean Chey district about 10 kilometers from Preah Vihear provincial capital. It is observed that there are soldiers and people from various places going to the monastery to seek protection and blessing from the divine power of Preah Ko⁴⁶.

In the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh nowadays, there are also statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. The idol of the Bull was made in the seventh-century from a silver-rich alloy. The ancient statue was discovered in 1983 at the Toul Kuhear archaeological site in the Koh Thom District near the Vietnamese border. Rumors immediately began to spread about the supernatural nature of Preah Ko, who had at last reappeared though he had suffered damage in places. After having been justified from the archaeological, historical, and artistic points of view, the famous statue was immediately transported to Phnom Penh to be housed beneath the Throne Room of the Royal Palace, which was then a museum. People came from all over the country to view the icon of the Bull. Not long after that a white marble Buddha seated in meditation, sculpted in the Burmese style was found in a pond in suburban area of Phnom Penh. It was natural to install the statue of Buddha a few meters behind the Bull. Preah Ko and Preah Keo once again reunited as in the legend. The differences in style, provenance, and materials—the basic incoherence—of the two idols were unimportant. The fact that the two rediscovered characters were

⁴⁶ “Vat Perng Preah Ko Preah Keo knong chum ner robos prochea pulroth nov khet Preah Vihear (Perng Preah Ko Preah Keo Monastery: in the belief of people in Preah Vihear Province),” *Kohsantepheap*, number 5853, 5 September 2006, p. 18.

there created coherence in itself⁴⁷. Later on, the statue of the Bull was moved to a place in the heart of the Royal Palace in the Silver Pagoda compound, in a small building called Ho Preah Trai (Chapel of the Divine Tripitaka), where the Tripitaka collection on palm leaves is kept. This gave the statue of Preah Ko an association with sacred texts and thus with supernatural power, a status that he always occupies⁴⁸. Because of its age, there was an attempt to remove the statue of the Bull of Toul Kuhea for a temporary international exhibition abroad. However, the psychological impact of removing the statue even temporarily from Cambodia was so strong that the proposal was turned down⁴⁹. This was a reflection of the strong position of Preah Ko the Bull in the religious and psychological thought of Khmer people. Preah Ko is always associated with magic, sacred or mystical texts, and the protection of the Khmer race.



Picture 11 The seventh-century statue of a Bull in the Royal Palace, Phnom Penh.

⁴⁷ Ang Chuléan, "Nandin and His Avatars," p. 69.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Apart from statues, Cambodian people also worship oxen born with strange appearances. Whenever there is calves born of unusual appearance, people usually go to see and worship seeking protection, blessings, and good fortune from the animal because they believe that it is the spirit of Preah Ko who has come to reincarnate himself in the animal. Cambodian people believe that Preah Ko is kept in Thailand and cannot escape to Cambodia in physical form, but only in spiritual form and is often reincarnated into a strange calf or inside a human body. In the paragraphs below are some pieces of news about calves or humans that are believed to possess the spiritual power of Preah Ko. They came from news releases in the years 1997 to early 2007. The focus on this period does not mean that before there were no such events. The stories like these have appeared quite often in Cambodia's society. The focus on this period comes for two main reasons. First, it was due to the lack of news documents before the mid 1990s. Newspapers and magazines in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were mostly destroyed by war and the Khmer Rouge's regime. After the Khmer Rouge were kicked out by the Vietnamese soldiers in 1979, Cambodia was engaged in long civil war lasting until the mid 1990s. During this period, not much attention was given to newspapers. Newspapers, magazines and other printed media began to be set up and were popular again only after the mid 1990s. Second, it aims at showing that such belief in the spiritual power of Preah Ko among Cambodian people remains strong until as recent time as 2007, since the news about them can draw the attention of journalists.

In 1997, there was news about Preah Ko and Preah Keo coming spiritually into two oxen. This took place in Sihanoukville, an important Cambodia's coastal city. Tales of miraculous healings and the extraordinary powers of the two very special oxen have consumed the southern coastal region. "*Preah Ko* and *Preah Keo* have come back to Cambodia!" a remark made by one Sihanoukville restaurant owner. The restaurant owner added, "They can do anything...heal people, bring peace, fly, anything!" The story about

both oxen began shortly before Pha-Chum Ben* in 1997 when rumours started to circulate of two oxen that were curing people's illnesses in the village of Bet Trang, about 10 kilometres north of the city. According to Sok Vanny who tends their shrine, the oxen's powers were discovered after a farmer from Bet Trang unknowingly sold them to a butcher at the market. That night, he (or his son) had a dream that the animals were actually Preah Ko and Preah Keo. He bought them back and, upon returning to the village, the ox now known as Preah Ko reputedly performed two healings, first restoring the leg of a lame man by licking it and then curing a chronically thin woman by drinking from the family cistern. Since then the oxen have become local celebrities and Bet Trang has become a boom town as hundreds of pilgrims arrive everyday to pray and seek relief from a variety of conditions. Once in their presence, many of the faithful people attempted to feed Preah Ko (considered the more 'powerful') with grass, bananas, water and anything else he might eat in the hopes of retaining the scraps from which to make medicine. The ox called Preah Keo is white and slightly larger than Preah Ko who is dark brown with a "5" branded into his rump from his temporary stay at the butcher's. Despite their average appearance, many of the faithful argue that these oxen somehow embody the legendary Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Shrine tender, Sok Vanny, went on to explain that it is the "spirits" of Preah Ko and Preah Keo that have returned to Cambodia in the oxen in Bet Trang⁵⁰. To believers, the return of Preah Ko and Preah Keo to Cambodia, even in this spiritual forms, represents a return of power and possibility. They offer hope for the future on both a personal and national level.

* It is a Buddhist festival held throughout Cambodia for fifteen days every year. During this period, people bring food to the monks at monasteries in hope that the good-merit they are making will help their dead relatives.

⁵⁰ "Betrang village: The Sacred Cows," *The Cambodia Daily* 21 September 1997. The news was posted at <http://www.canbypublications.com/photosnew/sihanoukville6.htm>



Picture 12 People are feeding the ox believed to be Preah Ko, Sihanoukville. Photo taken from <http://www.canbypublications.com/photosnew/sihanoukville6.htm>

The news about the spiritual power of Preah Ko the Bull possessed by a cow started again in 1999 at Chuotpun Pagoda in Srang District of Kampong Speu Province. The animal was seized and transported from Phnom Penh to the monastery. Many People believe the animal is Preah Ko of the Cambodian legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. Preah Ko gained fame as the determined bullock which escaped a slaughterhouse and caused traffic jams all over Phnom Penh as it wandered into homes and even tried to enter the Royal Palace. Ta Kaing, a Buddhist monk from Chuotpun monastery, happened to be in Phnom Penh on that day and met the cow after it had installed itself in someone's living room, while traffic police were threatening to kill it. An animal lover, the monk said he felt Buddhist mercy for the cow and offered to take it home. The monk said, "I touched the cow's head and said, 'Let us tie you up, it does not mean we are going to kill you. We are trying to rescue you. If you don't, I can't be responsible for your life'". Ta Kaing told the animal of a few peaceful places that it could go to. However, it did not react. Only when he named his pagoda did the cow bow his head down in affirmation. To the wonder of onlookers, the cow then knelt down and let itself be tied easily and let into a truck. Rapturous believers mobbed the truck from the Independence Monument to the Intercontinental Hotel, and continued to visit the monastery. Stories that the cow is Preah

Ko of the Cambodian legend then spread quickly. Some believers including Ta Kaing himself are convinced that the cow was killed by an electric shock at the slaughterhouse and came back to life to escape. Others claimed the cow leaped a two-meter high fence to reach freedom. “I am not superstitious, but I believe in this cow, I really believe,” said Sing Soy, 69, who traveled over two hours from Phnom Penh to meet Preah Ko. “Hundreds of thousands of cows could never escape slaughter, but this one could. It was like there was something behind him, to take care of him,” she said. At the monastery, Ta Kaing held a huge ceremony to welcome Preah Ko to his remote, hillside temple. “We had seven days and seven nights of celebration. The pagoda grounds were full of cars,” he said. People stayed for the whole week, doing work for the pagoda for free just to be near the holy cow. The monk reported that he had received tons of cement and over 100,000 Riels in donation. He says he will use them to build a new palace for the cow Preah Ko. People who go to meet the cow at the monastery have strong belief in the power of the animal. They brought water with them and asked the animal to perform blessings for them. Some even took away the divine bovine's urine and manure to use as medicine to cure their various illnesses⁵¹.



Picture 13 People are worshipping the ox believed to be Preah Ko. Photo taken from the Phnom Penh Post.

⁵¹ “Holy cow!,” *Phnom Penh Post*, Issue 8/ 11, May 28- June 10, 1999.

In April 2005 on the day of Khmer New Year, there was a calf born to a cow belonging to a poor farmer couples living in Svay village, Ba Srei commune, Angkor Borei district of Takeo province. The little animal is strange, since it has three eyes and double heads. It is white on its body and brown on its heads. Some old superstitious people believe that the calf possesses divine power which will bring happiness and prosperity to the village. The fact that the ox is strange and born on the holy day of New Year makes it the celebrity among worshippers. People travel from many places to see the animal. Some of them contributed money and asked the animal to grant them protection, happiness, good fortune and recovery from all illnesses. Some pilgrims who went to see the calf think that it was Preah Ko who came to be reincarnated in this small animal. Muth Teng, an old woman aged 65, who is the grandmother of the farmer, said that since the calf was born, it has brought some fortune and prosperity to her grandchild's family⁵².

In 2006, there was news about the rebirth of Preah Ko at a village in Preah Vihear Province. Villagers in Khyong Haung village, Kampong Pronak commune, Thbaeng Meanchey District of Preah Vihear Province assembled to see the strange calf. The villagers went there by bringing along incense sticks, candles and some money to worship the unusual animal because they had strong belief that it was the spirit of Preah Ko who came to reincarnate in this small ox. They believed that the return of the magically powerful Preah Ko of the Cambodian legend to their village would bring happiness and prosperity to the area. The strange animal is brown. It has four legs like other cows, but it was strange that its head had hair similar to that of human beings. Its tail is similar to a donkey's. Most strangely, on its head there are no spots for horns to grow. Unlike normal cows which have long ears, the small ox has short round ears. Mr. Khy Mouk, aged 47, who is the owner of the animal said that the calf was born on November 27, 2006. Old people in the village told news reporters that people in Preah Vihear Province have strong belief in the power of Preah Ko and Preah Keo because oral

⁵² "Kor cham laek phnek bei kbal pi (Strange cow: Three eyes, Two heads)," *Popular Magazine*, Issue Number 312, 11- 20 May 2005.

tradition of Preah Ko and Preah Keo in the Cambodian legend were born in Krang Doung village, Preah Klang /*Klæng*/ commune, Thbaeng Meanchey district of Preah Vihear Province. They further added that Preah Klang /*Klæng*/ commune has been known as such for quite some time up until the present. Long time ago, it was called Preah Klang /*KlAng*/ (Preah: a term used to call a member of the royalty, or a religious figure or idol possessing divine power; Klang /*KlAng*/ means strong or powerful). The commune was called Preah Klang /*KlAng*/ because it was the place where the magically powerful Preah Ko and Preah Keo were born. The area also has a mountain named *Phnom Preah Lean Chul Kor* (Mountain of the Square for the Racing Bull). What make people feel impressed about the strange calf is that it appears to refuse lying on the ground; It lies down and sleeps quickly if a mat is laid down for it⁵³.



Picture 14 A calf with hair like that of human believed to be Preah Ko. Photo taken from *Kosantepheapdaily*, 02- 03 Dec 2006.

Recently in January 2007, a young girl named Ry Simali, aged 21, who lives in Prey Krang village, Meanrith commune, Dangtung district of Kampot province was

⁵³ “Kon kor mean sok doch m’or nush p’erl tha Preah Ko (A Calf born with human-like hair make people to believe it is Preah Ko),” *Kosantepheapdaily* 02- 03 December 2006. Available at http://www.kosantepheapdaily.com.kh/khmer/cow03_12.htm.

believed to have the power of Preah Ko. People are flocking to see and seek help from her to cure their diseases. Due to their strong belief, some people with eye diseases are also brought by their families to seek treatment from her. The girl performs the healing by dropping water from tree's root into the eyes of the patients. Some patients said that the magical power of Preah Ko in the girl is strong because they can see things clearer after the treatment. Also, some people with rheumatism said they felt better after receiving the holy healing. According to her mother, Simali had been sick for years. Her parents tried all their best to cure her with both traditional and modern medicines. However, those medicines did not help. One day on the full moon of January 3rd, 2007, their daughter changed her facial look and voice. Simali told her mother to prepare an altar for her. Her parents were shocked and ran to inform people in the village. When old people asked the girl, she said that the spirits of the holy Preah Ko and Preah Keo came to stay inside her, and that the sacred brothers came to help people from suffering and death⁵⁴.



Picture 15 Ry Simali is curing eyes for a man. Photo taken from Kosantepheapdaily, 23 January 2007.

⁵⁴ “Nak mean rok phnek p’erl tov som tek thnam pi neang kro mom snong bamei Preah Ko (People with eye diseases gets water from a girl with divine power of Preah Ko),” Kosantepheapdaily, Issue 40, No. 5947, 23 January 2007. The news is available at <http://www.kosantepheapdaily.com.kh/>

As recently as February 2007, there was also news about Preah Ko the Bull coming to reincarnate in a calf in Kampot Province. People in Kon Sat commune and other neighboring areas assembled on 22 February 2007 to see a calf whose owner and his neighbors claimed to be Preah Ko. Believers had held a ceremony for the little animal for three days before it was brought to a monastery called O Thom in Kon Sat commune of Kompot Province. Mr. Kry Sao, aged 40, the owner of the ox told journalists that after his cow was pregnant, he observed that it was very strange because it seemed that the animal understood human language. He further added that when he or his wife insulted or beat it, the pregnant cow stood shedding tears and refused to eat grass even though the grass is fresh and green. At that time, he simply thought it was strange. He did not think of the magically powerful baby animal inside the cow. Since the calf was born one month ago, it has never eaten grass. It only sucked the milk from its mother cow. He felt suspicious, and then decided to open its mouth. To his surprise, the little animal has a tooth on its upper mouth, which is different from ordinary cows which have only the lower teeth. He further mentioned that in the meantime, his wife at night dreamed of an old man telling her not to harm the small animal because it was the sacred Preah Ko who came to be reborn. It will bring happiness and prosperity to people in the area. The dream and the fact that the little animal has an upper tooth made people very interested in it and they decided to hold a ceremony for it for three days and three nights to seek happiness and fortune from the power of the little Preah Ko. However, it is noted that all of these beliefs are short-lived. Its popularity lasted for a while and then faded⁵⁵.

From the descriptions and evidences in the above paragraphs, it is clear that the popularity of Preah Ko is very high in Cambodian society. There are statues of the sacred Bull in many places throughout the country. People considered everything related to Preah Ko as sacred. They worshipped not only the statues of Preah Ko, but also the impressions thought to have been left by him. Statues of Preah Ko are usually found at

⁵⁵ “Kon kor dos thmenh ler klay chea bamei Preah Ko (A Calf with an upper tooth considered as Preah Ko),” *Kosantepheapdaily*, Issue 40, No. 5976, 26 February 2007. The news is available at <http://www.kohsantepheapdaily.com.kh/>

Buddhist monasteries. Sometimes, worshippers build monasteries to dedicate to the divine Bull. Preah Ko is the metaphor of the Hinduism that Cambodian people practiced in ancient times. At present, the idols of Preah Ko are placed in Buddhist monasteries. This reflects the adaptation and blending of Brahmanic and Buddhist concepts together on top of the animistic beliefs of Cambodian people.

Preah Ko has a very strong bond with Cambodian people. The people even worship the cows that are born strange, and these kinds of cows from time to time have been born at different places in the country, and they always enjoy great respect and love from worshippers. This shows the firm and constant position of Preah Ko in the religious and psychological beliefs of the Khmer people. In Cambodian society, Preah Ko's younger brother, Preah Keo, is less important than the Bull. From many several news items, it has been observed that Preah Keo was not talked much about or sometimes was not mentioned at all. The pieces of news about Preah Ko coming in the spiritual form to reincarnate did not have any political or nationalistic implications. They were purely religious and psychological. Preah Ko who has often come in the form of a spirit, so Cambodian people think neither of the bitterness when the Thais took him and Preah Keo, nor the suffering when the Siamese sacked their capitals. Most villagers do not know or remember much about the legend and the history. What they know is simply that Preah Ko possesses great magical power and could grant them protection and blessing. According to the careful study of the news releases about the subsequent reincarnations of Preah Ko, the news did not mention anything about the capture of Preah Ko and Preah Keo by the Siamese or the previous Siamese attacks on Cambodia's capitals. The subsequent returns of Preah Ko, though in spiritual form, constitutes the return of power and possibility to Cambodia. This makes Cambodian people feel hopeful and optimistic about their present as well as their future lives.

4.3 The Influence of the Legend on Modern Perception of Cambodian People towards the Thais

At present, the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, to some extent, has influenced the way Cambodian people form their perception of Thai people. Thai people here are divided into two types—Thai people in the legend (or the Siamese) and Thai people who live in present-day Thailand. The study here aims at answering a number of important questions as follows:

1. How influential was the legend on Cambodian people's perceptions of Thai people when they first learnt the story?
2. How influential is the legend on Cambodian people's present perceptions of Thai people?
3. Of those Cambodian people influenced by the legend, have their perceptions changed or not?

The data used in this part comes mainly from the in-depth interview with 15 educated Cambodians people in Phnom Penh. The educated Cambodian people in this sense refer to those who are studying at universities or those with degrees from universities. Therefore, the findings are not entirely representative of Cambodian people as a whole.

4.3.1 Influence of the Legend on Cambodian People When They First Learnt It

4.3.1.1 Contexts in Which the Legend Was Passed on

The objectives of this part are to answer such questions as:

1. On what occasions is the legend usually told?

2. What are the places where telling the story usually occurs?
3. Who usually tells the legend?

Village & Family

Some of the informants interviewed in Phnom Penh used to live in the countryside when they were young. Their childhood lives involved socialization from families and the communities they lived in. Some of them learnt the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo from old people in their villages, while others learned it from people in their families.

A few of the informants learned the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo the first time from listening to old people in the villages. A technician interviewed said, “I knew the story from listening to old men when I was young. They told it to me and other young cowherds when we went out to let our cows eat grass outside the village.”⁵⁶ The man further added, “The old men usually told us different stories. When they told us the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, they simply did it like other stories, without giving any political, historical or nationalistic messages. However, they expressed sadness that we lost Preah Ko and Preah Keo.”⁵⁷ Another informant, a sales manager of a beer company in Phnom Penh, also learnt the story from people in his village when he was young. He described it as follows:

I also heard the legend from villagers, but not in detail. Many people in my village knew the story especially the old. Many children in my village at that time also knew the story. Sometimes in our plays, for fun, we chose the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo. Some of us played the roles of Preah Ko and Preah Keo, while others took the roles of kings. We usually played in the evening when we gathered together. I think those children learnt the story from their parents or grandparents or old people in the village because at that time there was no movie or book reaching our remote village yet. When we had free time, we

⁵⁶ Interview with informant number 1, 08 November 2006.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

often gathered at houses of the old and asked them to tell us stories. As children, we liked listening to stories very much especially the ones about magic⁵⁸.

Some people interviewed learnt the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo from people in their families when they were young. Those people who told it to them include their parents, grandparents, or relatives. The results from the interview show that it was usually the women who passed on the story to their young family members. They were mothers, grandmothers or aunts. In Cambodian families, children usually spend more time and have stronger attachments with women than men. Of all the 15 informants, only one learnt the story from his father. A third-year university student in Sociology said, "It's my mother who told the story to me. She told it to me when we went to a monastery. At the monastery, I saw a cement statue of a bull. I asked her about the statue. Then, she told me the legend briefly."⁵⁹ Another university student mentioned that, "I first knew this story from listening to my grandmother when I was about 7 or 8 years old. She told the story by singing it as a lullaby to put me to sleep."⁶⁰ The informant continued, "My grandmother did not give any educational messages or morals of the story. She simply told it. She told it to me often because she knew that I liked the story."⁶¹ Besides telling the story upon seeing the statue of Preah Ko or when putting the children to sleep, parents also told the legend to their children when topics about miracle or magic were raised. Some parents often told different stories in which the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo is one of their daily routines with their children after meal time. A few parents chose to tell the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo to their children in order to give educational messages to the young. A university student in Law said:

My father, a teacher of Khmer literature, told the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo to me and my brothers and sisters. At that time I was about 8 or 9 years old. He told me at home after meal time. He wanted to explain why Khmer became like they are nowadays. After finishing the story, he gave the moral messages that Preah Ko and Preah Keo are Khmer and both brothers love and help each other very much. Khmer love each other very much

⁵⁸ Interview with informant number 13, 23 November 2006.

⁵⁹ Interview with informant number 2, 10 November 2006.

⁶⁰ Interview with informant number 3, 10 November 2006.

⁶¹ Ibid.

in this context. Preah Ko as a brother took high responsibility and obligation to take care of his brother, Preah Keo. As I remember, my father told the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo several times especially when we, the children, quarreled with each other. He wanted us to love each other like Preah Ko and Preah Keo. He also wanted us to remember our identity as a Khmer, and not to have much trust in foreigners. They often want to exploit us. His final message was that he wanted us to keep and preserve what we have, and never lose it⁶².

A University lecturer of Khmer language also mentioned that his mother linked the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo with educational messages when she told it to him. He put it as followed:

I heard the legend from my mother when I was 13 or 14. She told not only me but also my brothers and sisters. She told us when we were free after meals. In rural areas, it is common for the old to tell stories to their children. I think my mother told us the story so we would know about the history of Cambodia. After telling the story, she told us that the story is about Lovek. It is about the Siamese sack of the capital. It's hurtful and painful for the Khmer. All of you should try to study hard to protect ourselves from being vulnerable to foreign invasion and exploitation⁶³.

School

Despite its popularity and its socio-political functions, the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has never been put in the national educational curriculum. However, more than half of the informants have heard the story from their teachers when they were in primary or secondary schools. Based on the results from the interview, there were several occasions that the topic about the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was likely told by teachers to their students. These included situations when topics about historical relations between Cambodia and Thailand were taught, or when the teachers wanted to criticize Khmer people. Some teachers routinely told stories at the end of a teaching session in which the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was included in order to cheer up students after their tense study during the day. A university student of law said:

⁶² Interview with informant number 6, 14 November 2006.

⁶³ Interview with informant number 8, 21 November 2006.

My teachers at secondary school especially a teacher of history told that story to students when topics about Cambodia's historical relations with Thailand were concerned. My teacher mentioned that Preah Ko and Preah Keo are kept in Thailand. I myself have never been to Thailand. I don't know whether it is true or not. It's word of mouth. My teacher told the story not in a legendary style where oxen could fly, but more in a historical one-- that is the Siamese fired silver coins into the bamboo forest at Lovek to get into the capital to take the statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo to Thailand⁶⁴.

An informant, an NGO staff, claimed that her teacher raised the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo to tell to students when topics about the bad behavior of some Khmer people were discussed. The teacher raised examples from the legend to explain how dangerous these behaviors were to the country. The informant recalled what her teacher said as related below:

My teacher told the students of some plots in the legend like where the Siamese threw silver coins into the bamboo forest at Lovek, Khmer villagers destroyed the bamboo to get the coins, and the Siamese were able to capture Preah Ko and Preah Keo after the forest was gone. After finishing the story, the teacher criticized those Khmer people. They are stupid, money-minded, and short-sighted⁶⁵.

Apart from teachers, students also heard the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo from their peers. A few of the people interviewed mentioned that their friends at school told them the story or sometimes they raised the legend as topics for discussion among their peer groups. As a second-year university student has put it:

I used to bring up the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo for discussion with my friends when we were in secondary school. At that time we were talking about topics of history, then they led us to link to the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo. We also thought of the story when we talked about the cultural issues. Thai culture is similar to ours. One of my friends remarked that even the culture the Thais took from the Khmer is similar in many ways to them also taking Preah Ko and Preah Keo⁶⁶.

⁶⁴ Interview with informant number 6, 14 November 2006.

⁶⁵ Interview with informant number 5, 13 November 2006.

⁶⁶ Interview with informant number 10, 22 November 2006.

Self-Reading

Many of the informants said that they also have read a short story of the legend although they knew the story already from their parents, old people or their teachers. There were several reasons that motivated them to read the story themselves. The short story in the book was more interesting and practical. There were many nice big pictures. Moreover, the language used to describe the story was moving and fascinating. Unlike oral telling, the short story in the book depicted romantic love and the conversations between Preah Keo and the king's daughter, Neang Pov. The episodes about miracle and magic are also better described in the book than in oral telling. Another main reason was that the story in the book gave a more detailed description than what they were told.

Others

Some of the informants went to see the film of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo although they had heard and read the story already. The main reason was that they wanted to know whether the film was different or more interesting than what they already knew or not. One of the informants has seen the performance of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo in a Theater troupe.

4.3.1.2 First Reaction to the Story

All of the 15 people interviewed claimed that they were exposed to the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo the first time at a very early age, either before starting school or in primary school. Many informants share similar reactions towards the story. When they were young, they believed that everything in the story was true. They felt sad and pity for Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Many of them also mentioned that they liked the story very much when they were young because the legend was full of miracles and divine power. A

university lecturer of English described her feelings when she learnt the legend the first time:

When I was in primary school, I believed entirely in the story because at that time I was still under the influence of fantasy. I remember that after I finished reading the story, I almost cried because I felt great pity for Preah Ko and Preah Keo. I was very angry with the Siamese because the author showed that the Siamese cut open Preah Ko's belly and also nailed his feet. Everyday at sunset, Preah Ko and Preah Keo always sobbed and looked in the direction of Cambodia⁶⁷.

Another university lecturer expressed his childhood emotion when he listened to the legend:

At that time I did not think it was a story; I thought it was true. I heard that the Siamese placed a sacred *Sima** around the palace where they kept Preah Ko Preah Keo. I thought it was true. I believed that if we could get them back our country would be prosperous. At that time I remember that I thought of making a commitment to getting Preah Ko and Preah Keo back when I grew up⁶⁸.

One of the informants also expressed her feeling of sadness and pity for Preah Ko and Preah Keo. However, her childhood feeling was a little bit different from those of other informants since she did not feel angry with the Siamese, but with the Khmer that they destroyed the bamboo forest, allowed the Siamese to capture Preah Ko and Preah Keo⁶⁹.

4.3.1.3 Cambodian People's Perception of Thai People

The Cambodian people's perception of Thai people when they learnt the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo during their childhood were both positive and negative. A few informants stated that they neither hate nor were angry with the Siamese because they were too young to think about the concepts of races and nations. An MA student said:

⁶⁷ Interview with informant number 4, 11 November 2006.

* *Sima* in this sense refers to the chanting of holy religious scripts to place an invisible boundary around someone or something to prevent them from escaping.

⁶⁸ Interview with informant number 14, 25 November 2006.

⁶⁹ Interview with informant number 5, 13 November 2006.

I was very young when I was told the story. At that time, I did not have any feeling of hatred towards the Siamese because I did not know what Siam was and where it was. I did not know it was our neighboring country. I simply knew that there was an ethnic group called Siamese who took away Preah Ko and Preah Keo⁷⁰.

However, more than half of the informants who appeared to learn the story in their teens held negative views of the Thai during their childhood. They hated the Siamese, and they viewed them as tricky and ambitious. The Siamese took the property of others. A technician recalled, “When I was young and listened to the story, I felt dislike for the Siamese. I think it is normal for people to hate the bad characters in a story.”⁷¹ A university lecturer of Khmer literature also commented, “When I listened to my mother telling the legend, I hated the Siamese because they took our Preah Ko and Preah Keo to their country. I felt hurt and pain. The story had a great influence on me.”⁷²

There are some informants who had normal views towards the Siamese, while others had a negative perception of them. The results from the interview show that the majority of the informants held negative views towards the Siamese when they learnt the legend. This reflects the strong influence of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo on Cambodian people’s perception of the Thai when they first learnt the story.

4.3.2 Influence of the Legend on Cambodian People at the Present Time

4.3.2.1 Cambodian People’s Perceptions of Cambodian People in the Story

The people interviewed were asked not only to give their present opinions of the Siamese, but also of their countrymen in the legend. Their point of views towards

⁷⁰ Interview with informant number 9, 21 November 2006.

⁷¹ Interview with informant number 1, 08 November 2006.

⁷² Interview with informant number 8, 21 November 2006.

Cambodian people in the story was both positive and negative. Cambodian people in the legend here consisted of two types—ordinary villagers and the King and his officials.

Many informants expressed regrets that Cambodian villagers destroyed the bamboo forest at Lovek to get the coins, which allowed the capital be captured and the statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo to be taken to Siam. However, they do not blame those villagers because they think that those people were perhaps very poor or uneducated. They perhaps did not know that it was a Siamese trick. Some of the informants also suggested that the concepts of nationalism may not have existed yet during those days. Whoever ruled the country were not important to ordinary villagers as long as their lives were not affected. A University lecturer explained her reasons as follows:

Most people perhaps blame villagers who destroyed the bamboo forest. People might say they were money-minded or not considerate. I think it's hard to blame them because they were perhaps very poor. When poverty is at the door, conscience and loyalty fly out of the window. Perhaps there were some ambitious people like the rich or the powerful who also engineered the destruction of the forest. According to reactions from many people, those villagers were stupid. I think they may have been really stupid and illiterate. However, we could not blame them because they may not have had a chance or access to education and that's why they did so⁷³.

A third-year university student also gave positive views of those villagers. He said, “We cannot use our thinking at present to apply or evaluate the decision of people of those days because people tend to form a certain perceptions according to the present in which they live. If all those villagers had had similar thinking to ours, they would not have done so.”⁷⁴

Some informants also do not blame or criticize the Cambodian king and his officials in the story. The Cambodian King in the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was seen to accept every proposal for animal fights by the King of Siam. He was also unable to

⁷³ Interview with informant number 4, 11 November 2006.

⁷⁴ Interview with informant number 2, 10 November 2006.

protect the bamboo forest from being destroyed. He is also not condemned or criticized by any of the informants. According to these informants, the king decided to do so perhaps because he intended to protect the nation's pride and prestige. He did not want the Siamese to underestimate the Khmer. Another reason was probably to avoid the King of Siam making an excuse to wage war against Cambodia. A civil engineering student put it as below:

If we refused, it meant that we would lose our prestige and power. Accepting every proposal implied that we wanted to show that our country was a nation with enough resources to counter any attempt of aggression or invasion. It was a sign of warning to the enemy, not allowing them to underestimate the Khmer. It was national pride⁷⁵.

A university lecturer interviewed also expressed her support for the Cambodian king in the story. She gave her reasons as follows:

I think the Khmer king agreed with every proposal by the King of Siam perhaps because the Siamese king was more powerful or dominant. If the Khmer king rejected the proposals, the Siamese king would take it as an excuse to wage war against us. In another perspective, we could say that he was not clever. However, I do not want to say that because of the story it was clear that the Siamese had the intention to defeat us again and again. We should ask why the king still accepted the proposals. There may have been a lot of hidden reasons⁷⁶.

However, there are a few informants who strongly condemned the behavior of ordinary Cambodian people who cut the bamboo forest. They also criticized the Cambodian king in the legend. They viewed him as too proud and too kind. The king was short-sighted and less thoughtful. A technician interviewed expressed his opinion, "Those Khmer people were stupid. Because of money, they destroyed the forest, which allowed the Siamese to capture Preah Ko and Preah Keo. They did not know the value of having Preah Ko and Preah Keo."⁷⁷ A university student showed his disappointment with the Cambodian king and his officials, "I felt disappointed with Khmer leaders that they could not protect the bamboo forest and Preah Ko and Preah Keo. The protection was the

⁷⁵ Interview with informant number 12, 23 November 2006.

⁷⁶ Interview with informant number 4, 11 November 2006.

⁷⁷ Interview with informant number 1, 08 November 2006.

obligation of the state and soldiers. They did not perform their obligation well.”⁷⁸ An MA student also criticized the Cambodian king as follows:

I think that the Khmer king and his officials were too proud. They accepted all proposals from the King of Siam. The animal fight symbolized Siam’s intention to take our territory. The Siamese king was clever. He did not place his kingdom up for bet. I think the author wanted to criticize or portray that the Khmer king was shortsighted and less thoughtful. The king dared to put the kingdom and people up for bet and agreed with every proposal. He was not clever and caring. He was not a capable leader. The king and his officials could not stop the rampant activities of bamboo forest destruction⁷⁹.

A few informants were unhappy with Cambodian villagers’ behavior and the King’s decision. However, the majority of people interviewed chose not to blame them. Their answers seem to suggest that the villagers did so because of the Siamese tricks. The Khmer king decided to do so because he had his own reasons. Their opinions seem to suggest that the mistakes of Khmer people were caused by Siam’s tricks.

4.3.2.2 Cambodian People’s Present Perception of Thai People in the Story

Positive Perception

When asked about their opinions of Thai people in the story concerning their firing of silver coins into the bamboo forest and their proposed animal fights, some informants gave positive views of the Siamese. They think the Siamese King was clever and caring about his own country and people. The Siamese King and his officials knew clearly about the psychology and situation of Khmer villagers. They pursued every means to bring peace and prosperity to their country. An NGO staff gave this comment, “Talking about firing silver coins into the bamboo forest, I think the Siamese were clever. Of course, it was a trick, but they were clever in thinking of such a trick. They understood

⁷⁸ Interview with informant number 3, 10 November 2006.

⁷⁹ Interview with Informant number 9, 21 November 2006.

the psychology of Khmer people very well. They knew that people in the area needed money.”⁸⁰ An MA student also gave similar comment, “I think the Siamese were clever in thinking of using silver coins to encourage Khmer people to cut bamboo trees. I do not criticize them because it was a war strategy. In war, each side always tries to use different approaches to win over the other side.”⁸¹ The informants also commented that it was normal in the past for states to wage war against one another. A university student of law pointed out that:

I think that it was normal that the Siamese were ambitious. It’s usual that we don’t like them. We have the right to be angry, but we cannot blame them. It is common for each country to have a desire to take something valuable from others. For example, the US wanted to control oil in Iraq. However, the justification nowadays is more difficult to make than in the past. In the past, a country could attack others when it simply had a better and stronger military. It was common. Cambodia also used to attack others in the past⁸².

An employee of a company also made similar remark regarding the Siamese capture of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. He said:

If you had asked me before about the King of Siam taking Preah Ko and Preah Keo from Cambodia, I thought it was not good. But now I think it was not right or wrong; it’s common for mankind. I don’t know the situation at that time. Perhaps the Siamese could be compared to a poor family and Cambodia to a rich family. The poor came to get something from the rich for their survival and this was not wrong⁸³.

Negative Perceptions

There are some informants who gave negative opinions of Thai people in the story. They felt angry and disappointed with the Siamese. The informants viewed the Siamese as ambitious and invasive. The Siamese were also believed to have the intention to take Cambodia’s territory. A university lecturer said, “Through the story, the Siamese

⁸⁰ Interview with informant number 5, 13 November 2006.

⁸¹ Interview with informant number 9, 21 November 2006.

⁸² Interview with informant number 6, 14 November 2006.

⁸³ Interview with informant number 11, 22 November 2006.

King came again and again for animal fights. I think it was not for pleasure. The author revealed clearly that the Siamese wanted our territory.”⁸⁴ A first year university student also condemned Thai people in the story. She gave her opinion as the follows:

For the Siamese who captured Preah Ko and Preah Keo, I strongly oppose and condemn them for doing so. If we talk from present viewpoints and take into account human and animal rights concepts, it was not right at all because the capture was not on voluntary basis. I never forget this story. I think from the point of view of Thai people, the Siamese king was a great and highly respectful figure. He made his best to do whatever possible for the sake of his kingdom and people. But it was not the act of a good man; it was not the act of a hero when he caused harm to others in order for his own people to lead prosperous lives⁸⁵.

Another university student was also unhappy with Thai people in the legend. He expressed his feelings below:

I felt hurt and pain when seeing the Siamese invaded and wanted to take our territory. However, our hatred should have limits because it was a story in the past. It's common for leaders to pursue every means to make their country and people prosperous. However, speaking from the point of view as a Cambodian, I felt hurt to see them treat us like that. I think Thai people would also feel the same if we did the same thing to them⁸⁶.

The result from the analysis shows that most informants admire the Siamese king in the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo for being able to think of a trick of firing silver coins into the bamboo forest at Lovek. They also appreciate him for his great care of his country and people. However, most of them do not support his use of tricks to take the property of others. They compare Preah Ko and Preah Keo to a national asset or heritage of Khmer people. The act by the Siamese was like theft or robbery.

⁸⁴ Interview with informant number 4, 11 November 2006.

⁸⁵ Interview with informant number 7, 15 November 2006.

⁸⁶ Interview with informant number 3, 10 November 2006.

4.3.2.3 Cambodian People's Perception of Thai People at Present

The main objective of this part is to examine whether the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has a great influence or not on the way Cambodian people at present form their perceptions of present-day Thai people.

Positive Perception

About half of the people interviewed hold positive perceptions of Thai people at present. They do not hate Thai people. A first year university student said, "My feeling towards Thais in the legend is negative. But my feeling towards Thais now is neutral. However, there are some Thais who still hate Khmer and think that Angkor Wat belongs to them. Other Thais do not hate Khmer. They treat Khmer neutral like they treat other races"⁸⁷. Another informant, a technician, also has a neutral perception of Thai people. He said that he did not hate them because he had never been to Thailand. He had never come into contact with Thai people⁸⁸. A university student of law also holds positive views of Thai. He said:

Cambodia and Thailand are neighbors. Therefore, we should not hate each other. I used to stay abroad. I found it common for neighboring countries to have feeling of distrust and hatred towards each other like between Germany and Poland, between Germany and France. They did not like each other. The Polish felt afraid that Germans wanted to buy all their land. Now their relationship has become better after joining the EU. I feel it is similar to our situation. Now we are members of ASEAN. If we do not trust each other, it'll break the relationship within ASEAN. The strong relationship between two countries will take place not much between politicians of both countries but more from the good relationship between their people⁸⁹.

One of the informants, a university lecturer teaching Khmer literature and history, even expressed his admiration of Thais. He gave his opinion below:

⁸⁷ Interview with informant number 7, 15 November 2006.

⁸⁸ Interview with informant number 1, 08 November 2006.

⁸⁹ Interview with informant number 6, 14 November 2006.

I don't hate Thais now. I admire them because in history we know that Thailand was not colonized by the West. They have worked hard to build their country with whatever means they have. I read Thai history because I try to understand and study Thai people. They are admirable and should be role models. I have met some Thai people. Some of them are open-minded and realistic. They admit that Khmer culture is older and the brother of Thai culture. However, there are also some Thais who reject the idea that Cambodia's culture is the brother of Thai culture. Those people are too nationalistic⁹⁰.

Another informant, a third year university student, believes that present-day Thai people are different from the Siamese in the legend. He likes the Thai because they have a similar culture and religion like the Khmer⁹¹. This opinion parallels what Evan and Rowley described in their book. There was no basic cultural division between the two countries. The Khmer did not think of the Thais as 'fundamentally and irretrievably racial enemies'⁹². Cambodian people view Thai people differently from the Vietnamese. The Khmer view the Vietnamese as its enemy. Because of the historical legacy, the Khmer consider the Vietnamese as the aggressor, the expansionist, and the swallower of Cambodia's territory. In fact, Angkor lost more territory to the Thai than to the Vietnamese⁹³.

Negative Perception

The other half of the informants hold a perception different from the previous group. These people perceived present-day Thai people negatively. However, their perception was not influenced much by the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, but more by contemporary issues. An NGO staff stated, "I do not hate Thai because of the influence from the legend. I dislike them when I listen to real stories from people who attempted to cross the border into refugee camps in Thailand after the fall of the Pol Pot's regime. On the way to the refugee camps along the border some of them were seriously harmed and

⁹⁰ Interview with informant number 8, 21 November 2006.

⁹¹ Interview with informant number 15, 26 November 2006.

⁹² Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War (Verso Edition, 1984), p. 2.

⁹³ Milton Osborne's argument cited in *ibid.*, p. 2.

killed by Thai soldiers.”⁹⁴ A university student felt unhappy with Thai people. She said, “My disturbed feelings of Thai people comes from several factors, but the legend is one of those. I was told the story since I was young. This legend more or less influenced me. However, such factors like history and the environment we are living in have greater influence on me. Many Khmer people do not like Thais because we are poorer and are often looked down on by Thais.”⁹⁵ An MA student expressed his opinion that he does not like Thai not because of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, but because of the history and Thailand’s contemporary politics towards Cambodia. He revealed his feeling as follows:

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo used to have an influence on me. But it is not influential anymore. What is influential is the real history of the fall of Lovek. Nevertheless, I did not take this past event seriously. I think it was common for states to go to war with each other. My limited negative feeling towards Thais now are not influenced by the legend and the history, but by their contemporary politics. Until the present-day, their politicians still maintain the intention of taking advantage of Khmer territory. They occasionally moved their frontier into Cambodia’s territory. They are also involved in timber trade from Cambodia. In the past, the Siamese threw silver coins into the bamboo forest to encourage Khmer villagers to destroy the bamboo thicket that protected the capital. In the modern time, they use Thai baht to encourage Khmer officials and traders to destroy their own forest and to smuggle antiques to Thailand⁹⁶.

An engineering student mentioned that his negative feeling towards Thai government does not come from the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. He claimed that the story has almost no influence on him. His perception of Thai comes from the frequent news about Thai soldiers’ provocative acts and encroachment along the border⁹⁷.

In the history of Cambodia, it shows the greatness of the Angkorean Empire of the Khmer. It was glorious and had extensive territory covering what are present-day Laos, Thailand and Southern Vietnam. The Empire was later on weakened by the growing presence of the Thais and the interference of the Vietnamese. The Thais, like the

⁹⁴ Interview with informant number 5, 13 November 2006.

⁹⁵ Interview with informant number 10, 22 November 2006.

⁹⁶ Interview with informant number 9, 21 November 2006.

⁹⁷ Interview with informant number 12, 23 November 2006.

Vietnamese are viewed by Cambodian people as playing a major role in the demise and diminishment of their empire. A number of twentieth-century events reinforced the idea of a continued Thai desire to annex Cambodian land. For example, Thailand had taken Battambang and Siem Reap provinces from Cambodia in 1795. They agreed to give them back to Cambodia in 1907 by the treaty between Siam and France. Thailand took control of both provinces again between 1941 and 1946 during World War II with Japan's backing when the French were kicked out of Indochina by the Japanese. After Japan was defeated in World War II, the French came back and Thailand withdrew from the provinces in 1947. Thailand took control of Preah Vihear temple in 1958 and continued to rule until losing the case in the International Court of Justice in 1962. Occasional tensions and conflicts along the border in later periods (1980s, 1990s, and 2000s) have also been reported by Cambodian newspapers. Not surprisingly, all these incidents have convinced some Cambodian people to distrust the Thai government. They perceive Thailand as the aggressor and an invader, and disrespectful about the territorial sovereignty and independence of Cambodia.

The result from the analysis of the response from the informants shows that about half of the informants have normal or positive perceptions of Thai people, whereas another half have negative opinions. For the informants who hold negative perception of Thai, their perception is not influenced much by the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, but more by such contemporary factors as the teaching of history, news releases about border and territorial encroachment, and Thailand as a market for the smuggling of Cambodia's artifacts and timber. Cambodian people also think that Thai people often look down on them or treat them lowly.

Other studies in recent years also confirmed with the above result that the Cambodian people's perceptions of Thai people are more influenced by contemporary factors. A study in 2003 suggested that Cambodia and Thailand have encountered bitter relationships in modern times mostly because of mutual misunderstanding over history,

culture and media⁹⁸. The study also pointed out that Thai people to some extent feel superior to Cambodian people because there is a big economic gap between Thailand and Cambodia. And this makes Cambodian people feel that they are often underestimated by Thais⁹⁹. Another research carried out jointly by research teams from Thailand and Cambodia in 2004, a year after the burning of the Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh, also gave similar results. The research topic is “The Attitude of Cambodians in Phnom Penh towards Thai People and Thailand”. The study followed a quantitative research method and was conducted in all of Phnom Penh’s seven districts. The sample size was 295 people with two thirds being male. Most of the informants were aged between 21 and 30. The people came from six groups of occupations with politicians 16.6%, soldiers and policemen 16.3 %, civil servants 16.9%, businessmen 16.6%, people working in the service sectors 16.9%, and university students 16.6%¹⁰⁰. The 37-page long report offered information about both positive and negative attitudes of Cambodian people towards Thai people. However, only the negative ones are quoted in here. Based on the research, Cambodian people in Phnom Penh do not like Thai people for several reasons, most of which are due to contemporary factors. The findings suggested that over two thirds of the sample do not like Thai people because Thai people look down on Cambodians. More than half of the sample group claims that Thai people exploit Cambodian people and try to disseminate cultural influence¹⁰¹. Other less noted reasons include the news about border tension, the smuggling of Cambodia’s antique to Thailand, the claimance of Preah Vihear temple and Angkor Wat by Thailand etc¹⁰².

⁹⁸ Ourn Pheakiny, Cambodian-Thai Relations in the Contemporary Period An unpublished MA thesis, Waseda University, 2003, p. 55.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁰⁰ Supang Chantavanich, Praweenya Suwannathachote, Ly Vanna, Somai Chinnak, Khansamruat thatsanakhati khong chau Kampuchea nai krung phanomphen thi mi to chanthai lae prathethai (The Attitude of Cambodians in Phnom Penh towards Thai people and Thailand) (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University in collaboration with the Mekong Sub-region Social Research Center, Ubon Ratchathani University and Psychology Department, the Royal University of Phnom Penh, 2004), p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 10.

4.3.2.4 Is the Legend True?

All the educated Cambodians interviewed said that their beliefs in the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo now are different from when they were young. When they were in their childhood, all of them believed everything in the story. At present, they do not believe entirely in the legend. They agree that some parts of it are true like the firing of silver coins into bamboo forest at Lovek and the metaphor of Preah Ko as a statue of a Bull. They form such belief because it is relevant with the history they learnt at school. All of the informants think that some parts of the story are fictitious especially the parts about magic and miracles such as the flying ox. A university student when asked about his belief in the story answered, “Some parts of the story were true especially the ones which are coherent with history. Some parts about miracle are not true. The metaphor of Preah Ko as a statue and real places like Lovek and Thailand are true.”¹⁰³ A university lecturer also gave similar belief. He put it as described below:

Now I believe in the story but in the comparative or metaphorical meaning, not in the literal sense. Preah Ko and Preah Keo metaphorically represent texts and precious things. I believe the Siamese took all of this because in war the winners always collected and took valuable things away from the countries they defeated. Not only texts and jewels were taken, but also people because they were also valuable assets like scholars¹⁰⁴.

Educated Cambodian people do not entirely believe in the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. However, the old or poorly-educated Cambodian people may believe everything in the legend.

4.3.2.5 Cambodian People’s Viewpoints about Thailand’s Peace and Prosperity

Some informants agree with the notion that Thailand has been peaceful and prosperous because of having Preah Ko and Preah Keo, and Cambodia has subsequently

¹⁰³ Interview with informant number 3, 10 November 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with informant number 8, 21 November 2006.

declined and lacked progress because of losing Preah Ko and Preah Keo. However, Preah Ko and Preah Keo here they refer to the symbolic meanings. According to these people, Cambodia lost a great deal of resources that were necessary for development. The country lacked texts and knowledgeable people after Siam sacked her capital. In contrast, Siam became increasingly powerful and wealthy after it brought wealth, texts and intellectuals from Cambodia. Nevertheless, the informants also acknowledged that Thailand became prosperous, just as in the present, partly from their own efforts and intelligence while Cambodia has faced hardship partly from internal conflicts among rulers. A university lecturer gave the following comments:

I believe in history. I believe that Siam destroyed the capital of Lovek. We lost material, human and intellectual resources. I think the argument that Thailand is progressive because of possessing Preah Ko and Preah Keo is partly true. Thailand could establish their country because they also had some human and intellectual resources from the Khmer. However, at the same time it also came from their efforts. Khmer's loss of intellectual resources was a big loss because it took time to re-establish. Losing Preah Ko and Preah Keo had a tremendous psychological effect on Khmer people. Psychology is very important to motivate people to do things¹⁰⁵.

Another university lecturer also gave similar opinion. She said:

Preah Ko and Preah Keo represented Khmer identity. Preah Ko and Preah Keo symbolized texts about art, language, culture and the civilization of Khmer people. When we lost them, it's like we lost something that made up our identity. When the Siamese got all these—arts, language, culture and civilization, it was easy for them to build up a nation on the basis of these. I believe when they got these set of resources, they could use or adapt them, which helped them to be prosperous. I believe the Siamese had taken texts and knowledgeable people from Khmer in the early and subsequent periods of the establishment of their kingdom¹⁰⁶.

However, some informants disagree with the above argument. They think that Cambodia became weak and poor not entirely because of losing Preah Ko and Preah Keo,

¹⁰⁵ Interview with informant number 8, 21 November 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with informant number 4, 11 November 2006.

but because of several factors. They believe Thailand is peaceful and progressive, but don't place the possession of Preah Ko and Preah Keo for largely responsible. Thailand's establishment of her country eventually bringing it to the high status it presently has comes from various factors. A university student challenged the hypothesis by asking a question, "If you say Thailand became peaceful and prosperous because of having Preah Ko and Preah Keo, what about other developed nations like Japan or the United States. They do not have Preah Ko and Preah Keo, but why are they so rich?"¹⁰⁷

Despite their different ideas, many informants share similar beliefs that sacred objects like Preah Ko and Preah Keo could help people's psychology. They made people feel secure and confidence. However, the development of a country does not depend largely on sacred objects, but on real and practical social, political and economic factors.

4.3.3 Should the Legend Be Preserved or Not?

Almost all the informants agree that the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo should be preserved. Many of them think that the story is different from other stories. A few of the informants even consider the legend the national heritage of Khmer people. There are several reasons why they support the preservation of the myth. One university lecturer thinks that there are many good lessons in the story that present and future Cambodian people should learn from. He gave his long comment as follows:

Knowing through the legend, the mistakes and misunderstanding of our ancestors and tricks by our neighboring countries in their attempts to swallow Khmer's territory and destroy the Khmer race is not simply for knowing and feeling, but the most important thing is to draw experiences from it and treat them as lessons for the present and future to avoid falling into the same traps that have severely ruined the nation's prosperity. Besides, the display of tricks of our neighboring countries through the legend does not mean to encourage enmity, racial prejudice and revenge. Cambodian people always want to live in peace and harmony with people of neighboring countries providing that they respect Cambodia's territorial sovereignty, independence, and national interest¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with informant number 3, 10 November 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with informant number 14, 25 November 2006.

A university student suggested that the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has a lot of good moral messages. The story encourages brothers to love and take care of each other. Elder brothers should look after the younger with great care and high responsibility like Preah Ko. Cambodian people should also love each other and have strong unity. Examples from the legend show that when Khmer people were in disunity and placed individual interests above national or common interests, they lost priceless assets like they lost Preah Ko and Preah Keo¹⁰⁹. Some people also believe that the preservation and the promotion of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo could help instill nationalism among Cambodian people. It inspires them to love their country and to protect their country's belongings. A university lecturer said, "It's good to promote this story to encourage people to love their country, but not to encourage them to hate others. Promoting nationalism does not mean you encourage your people to hate or look down on other races. It is simply to love and support what you have."¹¹⁰

Many informants also mentioned that they would tell the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo to their children. However, some of them said that they would not tell the story in a legendary, but in a historical and realistic style. They do not want their children to blindly believe in the legend. When asked, a university student answered, "Yes, I will. But I will not tell my children as related from film or in a book. I want to invent my own version of the story. I'll tell them the parts that are true. I don't want them to blindly believe and hold extremist views."¹¹¹ An NGO representative also stated, "I will tell the story in the future to my children. Yet, I will not tell them to believe, but tell them how to analyze it."¹¹² A university lecturer also has similar opinion. "I'll tell my children the story, but not to make them hate Thais, but to encourage them to develop their own strength."¹¹³ If these opinions are taken into consideration, it means the legend of Preah

¹⁰⁹ Interview with informant number 6, 14 November 2006.

¹¹⁰ Interview with informant number 4, 11 November 2006.

¹¹¹ Interview with informant number 2, 10 November 2006.

¹¹² Interview with informant number 5, 13 November 2006.

¹¹³ Interview with informant number 8, 21 November 2006.

Ko Preah Keo will undergo further changes in the future, and new versions of the story will keep coming out of the printing houses.

4.4 Conclusion

The political and nationalistic functions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo have become less strong and less visible at present. They will resume their strength or not depending on the nature of political and diplomatic relationships between both countries. Despite its age, the legend is still influential sometimes in contemporary Cambodian society. It existed a long time ago and has continued to be popular until present-day and will remain in the future as well. This is true even though most Cambodian people at present cannot tell the story from the beginning to the end. Nearly all of them know the main plots or themes of the story like Preah Ko and Preah Keo going into hiding in the bamboo forest at Lovek and the Siamese capturing Preah Ko and Preah Keo bringing them back to Thailand.

The popularity of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo may weaken as many Cambodian people cannot tell the story. However, the story has reappeared from time to time. In the periods of tensions between Cambodia and Thailand, the myth was popular and considered as a weapon or tool used to raise national consciousness against foreigners. During peaceful and sweet times, its popularity has declined. However, Preah Ko still maintains his high status among Khmer people regardless of political or nationalist roles. In religious and psychological perspectives, Preah Ko is always in the Khmer soul. Cambodian people consider him as God. Up until modern, they have still worshiped and sought protection and blessing from the power of Preah Ko. Preah Ko helps people feel more secure and look more towards their lives in the present and the future more optimistically.

Each publication of the new version of the legend may be or may not be the attempts of the authors or the publishers to politicize the story or to raise nationalism. It may be the demand of readers that encouraged writers or publishers to come up with a

new version of the legend. However, it is clear that the popularity of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was high at times when there was difficult relationships or tensions 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 the stone statues of Preah Ko at various places throughout Cambodia or the news releases about the birth of unusual cows that are believed to possess the spiritual power of Preah Ko do not have any links with politics or nationalism. They purely serve 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 of Thais. In the legend, the Siamese were portrayed negatively. Cambodian people in the story did not perceive the Siamese as good at all. Unlike in the legend young educated Cambodian people's contemporary attitude towards Thai people is both positive and negative. Some have good opinions of Thai people, while others do not like Thais. 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 exposed themselves 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 received higher education. At present, some young educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh like or admire Thai people. Some are upset by or hate Thais. Their negative feelings or hatred towards Thai does not come much from the influence of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, but more from the 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 continues to have life in the Cambodian society.