

CHAPTER III

THE LEGEND OF PREAH KO PREAH KEO: BACKGROUND AND ANALYSES

...Having heard the condition set by the two kings, some people hid themselves when they returned home to avoid being captured by the Siamese, while others put rice and food in bags in preparation to run if the king of Siam wins...

__Kem Ky Version 1952, p. 80.

3.1 Synopsis of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Kem Ky Written Version)*

Though existing in different forms-- oral, written, film, and paintings, the details are of some variety, most of these versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo share similar things in common which are the important message, theme, and main episodes of the legend. For this reason, it is more convenient to write a common summary of the story. The synopsis here is based on Kem Ky Version because it has been often referred to by later versions.

The story of Preah Ko Preah Keo started with portraying the lives of a poor Cambodian couple. Despite the poverty, the couple made an honest living. One night, the woman dreamed of getting three bright jewels. In the morning, her husband went to see the fortune teller. The astrologer told the man not to allow his pregnant wife to eat mango as it could kill her if she did so. During her last month of pregnancy, she had an irresistible desire to eat a green mango growing on a tree near their house. She insisted

* See detailed information of every version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo in the next section.

that her husband pick it for her. He tried to distract her from the subject by various means, finally pretending that there was some urgent errand requiring him to go to the forest. He promised that he would pick the fruit for her when he came back from the forest. The woman, who could not bear her desire, climbed the mango tree to pick the mango herself because she had been waiting for her husband for a long time and did not see him coming back. Unfortunately, she fell down and died quickly on the spot. Her belly exploded and a calf came out. The calf went to find his father to inform him the news. The man followed the small animal to the place where his wife was lying dead. He rescued a second child, a human boy, who was still in the womb.

Because the mother died, the baby boy Preah Keo had no one to feed him milk. The calf, Preah Ko, was alright as he could survive on green grass. His father asked women in the village to help feed the baby. However, the villagers considered them as evil or a bad omen for the village, so they chased them out of the village. The poor man brought his sons to live in the forest. He fed them by picking fruits from trees. A few years later, the father died leaving Preah Ko (magical bull) and Preah Keo (a young man) orphaned. Preah Ko was a supernatural being endowed with extraordinary power. Each time his brother was hungry or needed something, he satisfied him by conjuring various objects out of his belly. For example, when Preah Keo was hungry and had no new clothes to wear, Preah Ko conjured up delicious food with golden and silver dishes and the bright new clothes from his belly. The news about Preah Ko having precious objects inside his stomach reached the ears of people living in a village near the forest where the twin brothers were hiding. The villagers came with strings and weapons like choppers, axes, daggers and long sticks to capture the ox. They intended to cut open his belly to get all the precious objects and share his flesh for cooking. Preah Ko had good prescience in mind of this danger. However, he allowed those people to capture him because he wanted to teach them a lesson. The villagers had seized the bull and tied him tightly with big ropes to a big *Kandaul* tree. As the hostile people were about to slaughter him, the magical ox told his younger brother to hold his tail tightly. Preah Ko then flew up,

uprooting the tree to which he was tied, causing it to fall on the villagers, injuring a number of them. As he was flying high in the sky, Preah Ko called down to the people telling them to take pieces of wood from the tree and boil them for drinking. After the villagers followed his advice, their wound was healed, and surprisingly they became younger as their white hair changed to black.

At that time, the King of Cambodia had five unmarried daughters. One day all of his daughters went to visit the forest. While they were bathing in the pond, Preah Keo appeared and joined them. After hearing that Neang Pov, the youngest daughter, loved Preah Keo and allowed the man to kiss her, the King was furious and ordered his soldiers to kill her. Her behavior was considered as violation of the Kingdom's law. Fortunately, she was saved and brought to life again by the rescue of the Lord Indra. After months of traveling alone in the forest, she was able to find Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Preah Ko arranged their wedding ceremony, and gave them a palace which he had taken out from his belly to offer as accommodation for the newly-married couple. The cute tiny palace taken out of his stomach, when placed onto the ground, became a gigantic, luxurious palace in the midst of the forest.

Meanwhile, the King of Siam had a great cock. There were no cocks in the whole Kingdom of Siam that could beat it. Therefore, he traveled with his officials and soldiers to Cambodia to have a cockfight with the cock of the King of Cambodia. The Siamese king promised that if his cock lost, he would give all Sampovs (big boats) and his soldiers that he brought along to the Cambodian king. For the Cambodian king, if his cock lost, he would give all the Cambodian territory and its population to the King of Siam. In the fighting, the cock of the Siamese king won. However, the King of Cambodia asked for another round of cock fighting scheduled to be held in the next three days. The next fighting was based on a new agreement that if the cock of the Cambodian king lost, he would offer more on top of what was promised in the first bet. The King of Siam accepted the request. Luckily enough, on the way to find a new cock for fighting with the

cock of the Siamese king, an official of the Cambodian king happened to see Neang Pov. Hearing what the official said, Neang Pov agreed to find a cock for her father. Due to the request by Neang Pov and Preah Keo, Preah Ko agreed to transform himself into a cock to fight with that of the Siamese king. In the fight, Preah Ko managed to win. After returning to his kingdom in Siam and staying for a while, the King of Siam came back to Cambodia again to propose an elephant fight. This time he came with larger numbers of troops and elephants. The King ordered his officials to gather all the elephants with their mahouts from every part of Siam to accompany him to Cambodia. This time if any side won, they would get many elephants. Like before, Preah Ko changed himself into an elephant. In the fight, he managed to defeat the elephant of the King of Siam. After the Siamese king lost, the Cambodian king took only the elephants of the Siamese king and kindly allowed him and all his officials and soldiers to go back to Siam. On his way back to his country, the Siamese king was angry and sad. After consulting with the astrologer, the King of Siam realized that the bull had supernatural power. Therefore, he wanted to bring Preah Ko to Ayutthaya. The capital, and all Siam, would become peaceful and prosperous with the presence of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. The King consulted with his officials and the fortune teller in order to find a trick that could get Preah Ko and Preah Keo for Siam. During the meeting, they came up with an idea of making a mechanical bull to propose a fight with Preah Ko. Then, the Siamese king came to Cambodia with the mechanical bull, disguised as an ordinary bull, to make a fight with Preah Ko. The sacred bull realized that the bull of the Siamese king was not ordinary bull. However, he still decided to fight because he realized that this time destiny had chosen Cambodia to lose. He secretly advised Neang Pov and Preah Keo to grab his tail tightly if he mooed three times during the fight. And indeed, the mechanical bull was immune to the blows that Preah Ko made, so he mooed three times and flew away with the young couples. The Siamese had foreseen that he might flee and quickly deployed their troops to follow his flight. Neang Pov was exhausted and fell, dying at once. Her body petrified immediately. The two brothers flew from place to place to escape capture by the Siamese. They had hidden in a dense bamboo forest at Lovek. However, they had just escaped from it when

the whole bamboo forest disappeared as a result of the destruction by Cambodian villagers who wanted to get the silver coins. The silver coins had been fired from cannons at the command of the Siamese king. After countless attempts, the Siamese finally managed to arrest Preah Ko and Preah Keo, and brought them to the palace in Ayutthaya. The Siamese built a gigantic palace and placed the two brothers inside. They placed a magical *Sima** around the building and used a lot of soldiers to guard the palace day and night so both sacred brothers could not escape. The story ends with depicting the great sadness of both Preah Ko and Preah Keo who have lived in the large palace in Siam until the present day. Despite their inability to escape, they have longed to return back to Cambodia since. This is the quote adapted into prose from verse in the ending part of the story in Kem Ky version:

Every evening Preah Ko and Preah Keo look in the direction of Cambodia. Every night with full moon, both brothers shed tear ceaselessly as they miss the motherland of Cambodia. They were kept and guarded in gigantic and luxurious temple in Ayutthaya, from where they could not escape back to Cambodia until the present day¹.

3.2 Background of Different Versions of the Legend

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has several versions in the forms of oral, written, film and painting. The author or authors of the original version of the legend are unknown. The legend was believed to have first existed in oral form. And people simply passed on the story verbally for several generations before the story came to the ears of a French scholar, G. Janneau, who then wrote and published the story in 1870. Janneau's work is considered the first known publication of the story. Later on, various versions of the legend were made at different times. These included those mentioned above. In the parts below, overall information concerning the background of each version will be given.

* The chanting of holy religious scripts to place an invisible boundary around someone or something to prevent them from escaping.

¹ The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Phnom Penh: Kem Ky Bookshop, 1952), p. 209.

3.2.1 Oral Version

The oral tradition of the legend is believed to be the original version. The author or authors who had composed the story earlier may have had an idea that the country was in difficult times and many people were not interested in reading or were illiterate. Therefore, making the story in the form of written text would not be fruitful because it would not spread widely among the population. Mouth-to-mouth telling was the best and most effective means not only to preserve the story, but also to spread it rapidly and widely. However, this means of promoting and publicizing the story also had some disadvantageous feedback, since the story's information would be lost, added or changed along the way as it was told from one mouth to another, and from one generation to the next. The author or authors of the legend may have known about this problem beforehand. They may have realized that the small details of the story would appear different from their own. Nevertheless, it was not their intention to make known to Cambodia's population the small details of the story. Instead, it was the main theme that was their goal and message. And of course, they have achieved their objectives, since the legend's main theme and message remained unchanged no matter how the story was passed on through millions of mouths and for several centuries. The story has been told differently from one area to another and even differently within the same area. However, the important message of the story which is similar or the same conveys that is "the Siamese took Preah Ko and Preah Keo away from Cambodia."

The majority of Cambodian people know the story through oral transmission*. However, the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo that people told each other would be categorized into two main groups—the story told from those who had read, watched or witnessed it, and the story told from those who had never been exposed to these modern forms of the legend. The former group will not be considered as oral since it falls into the

* Most of the young educated informants said that they have learnt the legend when they were young. Most of them first learnt through listening to older people before they started to read the story later on.

groups of written, film and painting that will be discussed in their respective parts. Only the latter category is given attention here. The criteria to judge whether the story told really belong to the old original, oral version are based on two major factors. First, the details of their story appear to be different and strange compared to the written, film and painting forms. Second, the legend is told by old people living in rural villages who heard the story from old people when they were young. For example, if a story teller is in his or her 70s or 80s now it means that it was in the 1930s that they heard the story from their grandparents or great grandparents. And their grandparents or great grandparents may have heard the story in the 1850s or 60s. So it means they heard it before the first-known publication was made in 1870 and also prior to the much thicker, better known publication of the 1950s. Below are a few examples of the oral versions' details considered to be different from other forms of the legend.

According to an old Buddhist layman of Tralengkeng monastery, when King Ang Chan established his capital in Lovek, he ordered the construction of a bronze statue of a bull to store precious objects and texts. The old man further instructed that the bull could walk and fly. The news about the miracle of the statue reached Siam. The Siamese king wanted to have the statue of the bull in his country. Therefore, he sent to male Thai spies to the capital of Lovek. The men stayed at Wat Preah Ang Tep, a monastery in Lovek area². A temple guard, aged 43, in Lovek area also told similar story to the above old man's version. However, the guard of Wat Sor Sor 120 (A temple with 120 pillars) related that after the Siamese king learnt the news about the magical bull, he sent his soldiers who were disguised as merchants to Lovek. The fake merchants developed a plot to capture Preah Ko. However, the bull with his magical power knew about the event before hand. Thus, the animal escaped and flew to take hiding in the bamboo forest of Lovek³.

² An interview with an old Buddhist layman, aged 74, of Wat Tralengkeng, Lovek, 19 November 2006.

³ An interview with a temple guard, aged 43, of Wat Sor Sor 120, Lovek, 20 November 2006.

The telling of the legend sometimes varies from place to place or even within the same area. Here are a few examples of oral telling of the story by people in areas outside of Lovek. These oral versions perhaps were traditional or original and composed to explain the capture of Angkor by the Siamese, since they did not mention the name Lovek at all. According to a man, called Khim, there was a bull in bronze whose stomach contained a lot of writing in Pali. If people rubbed the statue, it would come to life, eating and walking after seven days time⁴. Mr. Khim also gave information that there had existed another belief in his village named Pisei about the story. Villagers in his village also said that there had existed one female *Nak Ta* (a local spirit act as guardian protecting people of an area) known as Khuoc and was represented by a standing statue with no head. When the Siamese attacked Cambodia, the Khmer people treated the *Nak Ta* badly. She appeared in the dreams of the Siamese and told them to use the trunk of the banana to cut the head of the statue. With that, the Siamese were able to take Preah Ko, which they had been pursuing for a long time. In that era, the Siamese did not have texts⁵. In a commune called Creh in Battambang province, people also told a story about a buffalo in bronze. Inside the stomach of the big buffalo, there was a little buffalo in bronze. When the Siamese approached the statue, the buffalo ran into the pond⁶. Through these, it is noticed that the tradition of telling the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo is popular. The statue of the bull in bronze could eat and walk. Another statue of a buffalo in bronze with a smaller one inside could run when the Siamese came. All of them have different details. Yet, they share the common similarity that the special part of their bodies is the belly with one containing texts in Pali and the other holding a smaller buffalo inside. The author or authors of the story invented the story of Preah Ko Preah Ko in different images in order to make them popular among local villagers, but the main focus was on the belly of the statue and the intention of the Siamese to possess them.

⁴ See footnote number 3 in Evelene Porée Maspéro, *Etude sur les rites agraires des Cambodgiens* (Vol. 1, Paris, 1972), p. 111.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Since there exist a variety of details within the oral telling, it is impossible to detail every story from each teller here. No matter the variety of different details or parts of the story, the main episodes, plots and theme share a lot of the same characteristics among the oral telling themselves along with those of the writing, film and painting versions.

3.2.2 Written Versions

The palm leaf versions were believed to be the first original written versions, from which several later written versions, either in the forms of verse or prose, had consulted. According to Khing Hoc Dy, there had been a palm leaf manuscript about the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo preserved in the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh until 1971. It was numbered 1571 under the title *brah go brah kaev*, which is written in verse consisting of 7 sheaves⁷. The date of copy was July 27, 1955. There was also another palm leaf manuscript, but it was incomplete and also kept at the Buddhist Institute under the number 1411. This one has only sheaf 1 and sheaf 2⁸. Before 1971, there had existed these two palm leaf manuscripts preserved at the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh. But at present they are no longer there*. Due to the inability to gain access to the manuscripts, the background of the palm leaf manuscripts will not be included here. Another version of the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo was written by a French man named G. Janneau and was published in 1870. His work is considered the first-known publication of the legend⁹. However, his version is very short consisting of less than a

⁷ See the note in the article written by Khin Hoc Dy, *La Legende De Brah Kaev* (National Institute of Languages and Oriental Civilization: Cahiers de l'Asie du Sud-Est, n. 29-30, pp. 169- 190, 1991), p. 187.

⁸ Khin Hoc Dy, *La Legende De Brah Kaev*, p. 187.

* The researcher has been there, but could not find the palm leaf manuscripts. The staff at the Buddhist Institute said the manuscripts are not available there anymore. They suggested that the researcher go to EFEO's library (a branch of France-based Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient) located in Vat Onalom in Phnom Penh, but there are none there as well. One of the EFEO's staff said he heard a palm leaf manuscript of the story kept at Peam Khnong monastery in Kampong Cham province.

⁹ G. Janneau, *Manuel Pratique De Langue Cambodgienne* (Saigon: Imprimerie, 1870), pp. 85- 86.

page. He wrote the story in Khmer, French, and a transliteration of Khmer language. Below is a quote of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo from Janneau's version.

The Khmer kingdom in the past was great and prosperous. I heard it was long time ago, not knowing whether it was hundred or thousand years ago. But the Royal chronicle mentioned that a long time ago there was a king named Prah Chéy Chêda who resided at the citadel of Lovek. This fortress is vast, and surrounded with bamboo trees and moats. Inside the city there were two statues named Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Inside the citadel, there were Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Inside the statues' belly were sacred texts made from gold which contain all knowledge and know-how which one needed. The Siamese king was in dear desire to have Preah Ko and Preah Keo, so he commanded the army to wage war against Preah Chéy Chêda. However, he was not successful. Therefore, the Siamese king ordered the firing of silver coins from cannons into the citadel of Lovek. After that, the Siamese retreated back to their kingdom. Seeing the coins fired into the bamboo forests, Cambodian people cut and destroyed the bamboo to get the coins. Having known that the entire bamboo forest was gone, the Siamese king came again with his army to launch a second attack on Cambodia. This time they won the war and seized Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Then, they opened up the belly of the statues to get the precious texts, which allowed them to study the contents. For this reason, the Siamese have become superior in knowledge to the Cambodians, and for this reason Cambodian people are in the state of ignorance, and lack knowledgeable people to do what is necessary, unlike other countries¹⁰.

Concerning the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, later on there existed another version which is much longer and more beautifully written than by Janneau's. It is Kem Ky's version copied from palm leaf, the details of which will be given in the part below. In 1996, there was also another publication of the story. The name of its author was not given. Later on in 2001, Reyum Institute also published its version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. And until the time this thesis was being written, the most recent publication of the story was in 2004. Its author is Mr. Ly Thaily. In the parts below, the background of each of these written versions will be provided.

3.2.2.1 Kem Ky Version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo

The legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo published by Kem Ky Bookshop in 1952 used to be issued in seven volumes, each of them sold separately. The publisher printed the

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 85- 86.

story into several thin books. One book is one volume. Later on, the Buddhist Institute bounded all the seven volumes together and published them into one single thick book. This book is the thickest if compared with other available books about the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. It consists of 209 pages and is organized so that each of the seven volumes portrays different episodes of the story. The legend in the Kem Ky version was also written based on the original palm leaf versions. Due to its origin from the palm leaf manuscripts, the book was written in beautifully literary verse employing several different metre styles. According to the compiler, Kem Ky Bookshop had collected fragmented parts of the story from different people who possessed palm leaf manuscripts, then compiled and published them as a book on October 22, 1952*. The following were people who had possessed the fragmented parts of the palm leaf manuscripts, and who had contributed to the publication:

- Mr. Yu Yuon owned parts of the original version which he had borrowed from Mr. Lay at Chrouy Roluos north of Kab Ko market (Phnom Penh).
- Other parts of the original version came from Mr. Lak working at Khemrot Publication House (Phnom Penh) who had borrowed from Mr. Chhorn at Tekvel.
- Mr. Toch from Koh Oknhatei had borrowed some parts of the story from a Buddhist monk at Wat Thmei in Koh Ksach Tonlea.
- Mr. Meas Sameurn at Wat Saravondechor (Phnom Penh) had collected and rewritten the story based on various fragmented parts of the palm leaf manuscripts. After he had finished writing, he gave it to Kem Ky Bookshop for publication.

The publisher mentioned in the preface that the sources collected for the publication were fragmented and so some information was lost or they were unclear and difficult to understand in some parts due to their age and the use of old language. For these reasons, the compiler at Kem Ky Bookshop had made some adjustments before the book was

* See Chapter IV of the thesis for the analysis of the motives behind the publication of the story that year.

published. The compiler had added some words, phrases and sentences to form a logical completion of the whole story. As a result, the information in the story, despite the compiler's great effort, may not be a hundred percent accurate or representative of the original palm leaf versions.

According to the publisher, there are three main purposes for the compilation and the publication of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. First, the publisher intends to protect the story from disappearing. Second, they wish to make the legend better known to the mass population of Cambodia. Last, Kem Ky wants to treat and preserve the legend as part of Cambodia's national heritage¹¹.

3.2.2.2 Version 1996 of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo

The names of author and publishing house of the 1996 version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo are anonymous. The reasons why they kept their name confidential are not mentioned in the preface*. Consistent with this kind of secrecy, the author also did not give the reasons regarding his or her writing the new version of the story. The myth is quite different from others as the author did not focus much on other characters in the story. The story here is mostly about Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Another quite interesting difference is that the theme of the legend here is about love between Preah Keo and Neang Pov. Unlike other versions where the story ends with Preah Ko and Preah Keo being captured, this author ends the book with their escape from the Siamese*.

¹¹ See the preface part in The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Phnom Penh: Kem Ky Bookshop, 1952). Also see Chapter IV of this thesis for the analysis of other possible reasons behind the publication of the story.

* See Chapter IV for the discussion of the possible reasons behind the publication of the version in 1996.

* See Chapter IV for the analysis of possible reasons why the author ended the story by making Preah Ko and Preah Keo stay happily in Cambodia out of reach from Siamese arrest.

The 1996 version of Preah Ko Preah Keo is a thin book consisting of 38 pages. The story is written in prose in fairly simple language. There are pictures on every page of the book. Unlike other written versions, the story in this version is not a description of events. It mostly contains conversations between characters, and these offer the framework for the whole story.

3.2.2.3 Reyum Version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo

Reyum was jointly established by Mr. Ly Daravuth and Ingrid Muan. The Institute has a number of major tasks, one of which is publication¹². 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. He has been working for Reyum since 2000¹³. According to Mara, he had referred to the existing Kem Ky version in writing the new version of the story. However, he did not copy from it. “We simply used Kem Ky, but it does not mean that we copied from it. In fact, we had read (the story) from the beginning to the end. Then, we summarized it as briefly as possible,” said Mara during the interview.

The Reyum Version of the legend is a thin book consisting of 37 pages, most of which are pictures. The story has been summarized and written in prose using fairly simple language due to its prime target readers who are children and young learners¹⁴. Different from other written versions, the Reyum Version describes the story using both Khmer and English languages. More interestingly, there are many big colorful pictures

¹² An interview with Mr. Preap Chan Mara, the writer of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo of Reyum Version, 21 November 2006.

* See Chapter IV for the analysis of the possible reasons behind the publication of the story that year.

¹³ An interview with Mr. Preap Chan Mara, the writer of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo of Reyum Version, 21 November 2006.

¹⁴ See the preface part in Preap Chan Mara, *The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo* (Phnom Penh: Reyum Institute, 2001).

appearing on almost every page to draw the readers' attention and facilitate their comprehension of the story. According to the authors, there are a few motivating rational for publishing this new version of the legend¹⁵. First, the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is an important part of Cambodian culture. Therefore, preserving the story is like preserving the culture. Second, despite its longevity, the legend had never been standardized into a definitive written version. Consequently, the writers hoped that their efforts 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 authors had an intention to teach the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo to future generations, especially children, and thus to continue the tradition of telling this tale in Cambodia. Further than that, they used both Khmer and English languages to tell the story. The writers explained that this would allow them to make the story more accessible to a larger audience. As a result of using the Kem Ky version of the story as the exclusive reference, the main episodes in both versions contain many similarities.

3.2.2.4 Ly Thaily Version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo

Mr. Ly Thaily, the author of the 2004 publication of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, is in his 70s now. He used to be a teacher of Math and Physics in secondary school. Later on, he worked as a policeman. Now he has retired. At present, he lives in Kampongsom¹⁶. Through an interview with him, it appeared that he had sound knowledge in Cambodian literature*. At the moment, he is working on a book about Cambodian sayings¹⁷.

¹⁵ Ibid. Also see Chapter IV for the analysis of other possible reasons behind the publication.

¹⁶ An interview with Mr. Ly Thaily, 16 November 2006.

* Mr. Ly Thaily could chant the poem of the story of Tum Teav fluently and beautifully.

¹⁷ An interview with Mr. Ly Thaily, 16 November 2006.

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo by Mr. Ly Thaily is written in Khmer language. It was published by Pai Neth Bookshop in 2004*. The author wrote the story in prose based on the original poetic version. Yet, in the preface he did not mention the name of the sources he had consulted with. He simply said that he had consulted with the older version in verse¹⁸. However, during the interview, he said that he had used the Kem Ky Version because it is considered as the standard version and is easily accessible. In the Ly Thaily Version, the legend is short and easy to read and understand. The book has 74 pages with four or five pictures illustrating each main plot of the story. Although his version is much shorter than the older version (Kem Ky), Mr. Thaily claimed that his work kept all the main ideas of the story as those from the old story in verse. Because the story in the book is short and uses simple language in prose, the readers may find it easier to comprehend the story. Furthermore, they spend less time to finish it. Concerning the reasons of writing another version of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, Mr. Ly Thaily explained that he wrote the story in prose because it was the demand of Pai Neth Bookshop. Another reason was that the author wanted to see a variety of written versions. He particularly wanted to see the written versions of the legend exist both in the form of prose and verse*. Like other books that used the Kem Ky version, the Ly Thaily edition contains comparable main episodes with its primary reference. However, the Ly Thaily Version seems to portray the Siamese in a more negatively than the Kem Ky Version. It seems to suggest that the Siamese who proposed animal fights with the Cambodian king had the intention of taking over Cambodian territory.

3.2.3 Film Version

In the 1960s or 1970s, there used to be a version of the film of Preah Ko Preah Keo. However, because of wars in the later periods, most films made during those days

* See Chapter IV of the thesis for the possible reasons behind the publication of the legend that year.

¹⁸ Read the preface part of Ly Thaily, *The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo* (Phnom Penh: Pai Neth Bookshop, 2004).

* See Chapter IV of the thesis for the analysis of other possible motives behind his writing and publication of another version of the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo.

were destroyed or disappeared. A few years ago, the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo was filmed again. It was made by FCI Production. The production director is Mr. Kam Chanthy. The actors and actresses for this film are famous stars. The story in the film is so lengthy that it occupies two VCDs from the beginning to the end. The film version differs from the written Kem Ky volume when it comes to the bull Preah Ko who is white in the film and black in the book. In addition to that, Preah Keo is portrayed as having an important role nearly equal to that of his brother the animal. The film also depicts the sweet love between the handsome young Preah Keo and the beautiful Princess, Neang Pov. Nevertheless, the main theme, plots and episodes are not much different from those of the written Kem Ky Version. However, the film does not show much about the Siamese king's intention to take over Cambodia's territory. The main message seems to suggest that the Siamese king only wanted to have exclusive possession of Preah Ko and Preah Keo in his kingdom, and outside Cambodia's territory.

3.2.4 Mural Painting Versions

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has occupied a prominent position in Cambodian society. Its great popularity has allowed the story to remain in not only oral, written and film compositions, but in paintings as well. Statues of Preah Ko the bull and various impressions believed to have been left behind by Preah Ko have been worshipped in countless places through out Cambodia until the present day. These will be presented in Chapter IV of the thesis. For the time being, only the information concerning mural paintings of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo on walls of Viharas of monasteries is the focus. Of the monasteries known in Cambodia, only two of these Viharas sacrifice their inside walls entirely for the painting of the complete story of Preah Ko Preah Keo. The Viharas of these two monasteries do not have the paintings of any other stories, but only the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. They are the Vihara in Svay Chrum monastery in Kandal province and Vihara Preah Ko in Vat Tralengkeng (Tralengkeng monastery) in

Kampong Chhnang province¹⁹. In Cambodia, some other monasteries also have the paintings of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo on the walls of their Viharas; however, they do not have the complete version of the legend. They simply contain a few pictures of the main episodes of the story²⁰. Below is the overall information about these two monasteries and the paintings.

Vat Tralengkeng (Tralengkeng monastery) at present is located in Banteay Lovek village, Kampong Tralach district, Kampong Chhnang province. The pagoda is situated in the middle of the eastern side of the capital of Lovek near a big lake. Tralengkeng used to be an important monastery when Lovek was the Capital of Cambodia in the 16th century. Although the capital of Cambodia is no longer there at Lovek, Tralengkeng has remained its status amongst the famous monasteries in Cambodia. Its popularity draws Buddhists not only from Kampong Chhnang and other neighboring provinces, but also from Phnom Penh and other distant places. During major Buddhist festivals, a lot of people flock there because they believe the monastery has strong sacred power. Vat Tralengkeng was built during King Ang Chan's reign²¹. The name "Tralengkeng" means "cross, crossing," and was named after a famous Buddha statue called *Prah Putharub Tralengkeng* that used to be in one of the Viharas of the monastery during Lovek period. In those days, Prah Putharub Tralengkeng was also considered sacred. According to historical sources, one day King Ang Chan went sight-seeing in the forest. He saw a big piece of stone almost covered by a big branch of a Ko Ki tree*. The King ordered his men to cut the branch of the tree so it could be made into four standing Buddha statues with their backs against each other and their faces looking into the four main directions. The King named the statues Prah Putharub Traleng Keng. As for the stone, it was used as the support of the statues. King Ang Chan also ordered the construction of a monastery in

¹⁹ San Phalla, *Kum nu nov tam vat (Mural Painting at Various Monasteries)* (Phnom Penh: Reyum Institute, 2007), pp. 160- 162.

²⁰ A talk with Mr. San Phalla, who has conducted extensive research on mural paintings in about 600 monasteries throughout Cambodia, 18 December 2006.

²¹ Treng Ngea, *Pravatasas Khmer (A History of Khmer)* (Phnom Penh, 1973), p. 19.

* Ko Ki is a kind of tree which is highly valued for making boats and other construction due to its durable quality.

1530 at his capital of Lovek to house the statues²². The original statues were removed leaving behind only their stone support and their 8 feet. Each foot is about 1.40 meters long. According to local people in Lovek, when the Siamese took Lovek, they cut the statues and attempted to take them to Siam. After cutting the four gigantic Buddha statues, the Siamese soldiers dragged the idols to their boats that stopped at the nearby Ton le Sap. However, as they attempted to load the big statues on to the boats, the Buddha figures fell into the river. And the Siamese could not get them out²³. The villagers added that as the Siamese soldiers dragged the four heavy statues from the monastery to their boats, the path became a small stream called *Prek Kambot* (*Prek* in Khmer means “small stream”; *Kambot* means “cut or lose limb”) near the monastery and leading down to the Ton Le Sap²⁴. At present, new replicas of Prah Putharub Traleng Keng are located near the original spot. The reason that the new replicas are not placed on the original site is because people want to keep the marks as historical evidence and hope that the lost Buddha statues will one day come back²⁵. However, according to Cambodian chronicles, the statues of the Buddha were ordered to be cut and destroyed not by the Siamese but by the late king of Lovek at the suggestion of two Thai fake monks.

²² Adhémard Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1^{er} Siècle De Notre Ère* (Translated version from French into Khmer. Phnom Penh: Angkor Bookshop, 2005), p. 236.

²³ Oral tradition collected from the interviews with old people at Lovek between 18 and 20 November 2006.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ An interview with an old Buddhist layman at Wat Tralengkeng, Lovek, 19 November 2006.



Picture 1 The temple that housed *Preah Putharub Tralengkeng*, Tralengkeng Monastery, Lovek.

Tralengkeng monastery has not one temple or Vihara but two. Besides the famous cruciform temple that gives its name to the monastery, Tralengkeng has a second Vihara also located near the first temple. It is called Vihear Preah Ko (the Temple of Preah Ko the Bull). Its altar occupies a wide space. It contains statues of the Buddha as well as sculptures of the characters from the legend including Preah Ko, Preah Keo, Preah Keo's consort Neang Pov, and the brothers' parents.



Picture 2 The statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo, Tralengkeng Monastery, Lovek.

Inside, covering the entire wall of the Temple of Preah Ko, are the beautiful mural paintings of the complete story of Preah Ko Preah Keo. The murals were just recently painted. It was painted about ten years ago by an old man, said an old Buddhist layman of Tralengkeng monastery. The pictures of the story on the wall are big and appear clearly and beautifully. They are oil paintings*. There are together 13 pictures depicting the main episodes of the story. The theme and main episodes of the paintings are similar to those in the Kem Ky written version, with the first picture showing Preah Ko Preah Keo was born to the poor couple, the second one about the two brothers were chased out of the village to live in the forest, and the last picture portraying the twins kept in Siam.

* Oil paintings are popularly used in monasteries in Cambodia due to its easy accessibility, cheaper price, and beautiful color. However, the color will fade after about ten years.



Picture 3 Preah Ko and Preah Keo's mother dying under a mango tree after both brothers' birth.

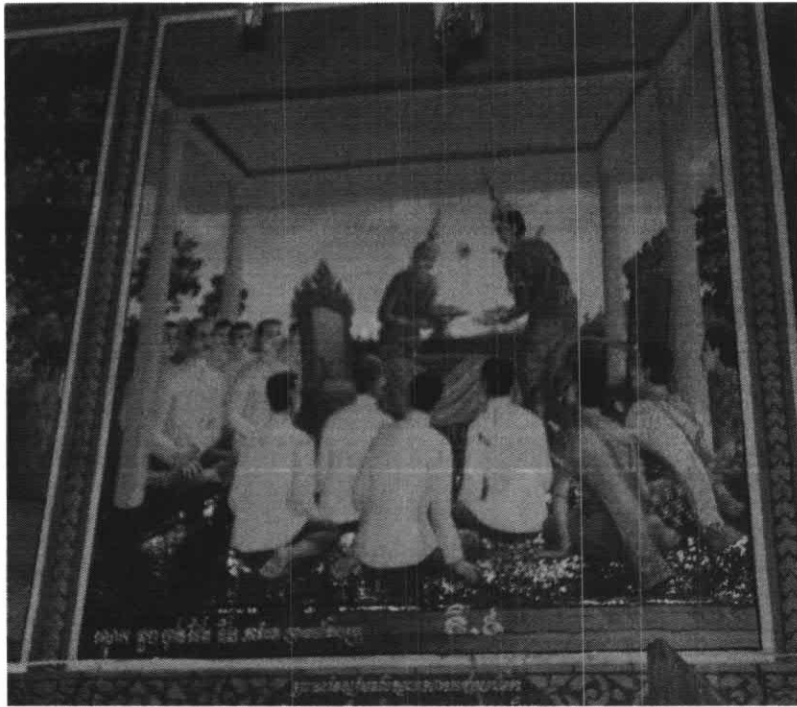


Picture 4 The Siamese king and his officials worshipping Preah Ko.

Another monastery that also has murals of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo on the wall of its temple (Vihara) is Vat Svay Chrum. The monastery is situated on the east bank of the Mekong, just upstream from Phnom Penh. It is in Kandal province. The Vihara belonging to the monastery of this name has twenty-one mural panels inside. Each of them represents different episodes from the narrative. The fact that the entire wall of the temple of Vat Svay Chrum, a monastery which is not the place where the story took place, is a reflection of the popularity and important role of the legend in Cambodian society. The paintings at Svay Chrum monastery look older than those at Tralengkeng. They were painted in early 1987. However, the temple that houses the murals was built a long time ago and used to have mural paintings of other Buddhist stories. Later on in early 1987, those stories were replaced by mural paintings of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. The idea that they changed to favor the story at that time may have had some link with political or social messages*. The paintings of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo at Vat Svay Chrum portray a more detailed story than those at Vat Tralengkeng. The beginning part of the story is similar to that of Tralengkeng monastery and the Kem Ky written version because it shows how Preah Ko and Preah Keo came to be born in a Cambodian village. However, the last part of the story is different as the paintings do not portray the capture of Preah Ko and Preah Keo by Siam. Interestingly, its focus is that Preah Ko and Preah Keo were able to defeat and save Cambodia from Siam's invasion. The possible reasons why the painting version of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo at Svay Chrum monastery finishes the story with happy ending for Cambodia will be discussed in Chapter IV. Unlike other versions of the legend, the mural paintings at Svay Chrum monastery show the Cambodian King and his officials taking a bribe from the Siamese king and helping the Siamese king capture Preah Ko and Preah Keo*.

* See Chapter IV for more detailed discussion.

* See Chapter IV for detailed discussion about the reasons why the mural painting version at the monastery shows happy ending, and the Cambodian king and his loyalists helped the Siamese king.



Picture 5 The Siamese king giving a bribe to the Cambodian king.



Picture 6 Preah Ko and Preah Keo joining hands with Cambodian villagers as they fight against the Siamese.

3.3 Images of the Thais in the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo

In this section, the images of the Siamese as reflected in various versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo in oral, written, film and paintings will be studied and analyzed. Although available in different forms, these versions share a lot of things in common regarding the general representations of the Thais. However, there are also some slight differences about specific images of the Thais found only in certain versions but not in others. Therefore, the section is divided into two broad sections. The first one is about the general identities of the Siamese that are found in all or most versions of the legend. The second part is about certain images that are found only in specific versions. The article will focus not only on the picture of the Siamese, but also on the Khmer. The reason is that sometimes the authors allow readers to understand and contextualize these images by employing particular techniques that look through the eyes of certain characters. As will be shown, the images of the Siamese in the story were mainly portrayed through their king. In the legend, the author depicted the Thai king as the main character of representation of the Siamese people. The author reflected his characteristics through his behavior, facial expressions, speech, thought and the reactions he received from other people. As the monarch was the highest figure in Thai society, he was recognized as the representative of the identity, ideal culture and attitude of Thai people.

3.3.1 General Images of the Thais

In this section, the information regarding the general representations of the Thais may come primarily from the Kem Ky version, the written version published in 1952. The main reason is that several later versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo like Reyum 2001, Ly Thaily 2004, mural paintings at Tralengkeng, film and others have originated from it and do not possess significant differences from this earlier interpretation.

From the story, it reflects that all the power was in the hand of one person. To entertain themselves, both the Siamese and the Khmer kings bet on animal-fights by placing their respective people, resources and kingdoms up for wagering. However, the interpretation of the story is not that simple. The author used animal-fights as a metaphor for wars that actually took place between Cambodia and Siam in the past. In the story, both kings bet using their populations, territories, elephants, soldiers, Samphov (large boats) as their wager. If one has a close look at all these, one finds that they were resources for war, power and prestige that each side desired to have. In the past, war was waged mainly to mobilize more manpower from the other side and to capture the territory or war resources like elephants, horses and Samphov from the other side. It is resemble how a Thai historian put it:

Ayudhya's wars against the two older kingdoms (Sokhothai and Cambodia) seem to have been advantageous in so far as its manpower reserves were concerned, since victory resulted in the capture of enemy populations. The more the manpower Ayudhya could gain from its rivals, the weaker were these rivals in the future, and the more assured Ayudhya's dominance became²⁶.

Also, the legend shows that the Siamese king was always superior to his Cambodian counterpart when it came to the conditions of the bet. Every time the king of Ayutthaya came to Cambodia to bet on animal-fights, it was on unequal basis because he set the conditions. For example, if the Khmer king lost on the bet in cock-fighting, he had to hand over his territory and population to the king of Siam, while the Siamese king advantageously promised to hand over only his soldiers and elephants should he lose. In real war, it is logical and understandable that when country A invades country B, it is country A that is superior in terms of everything. If country A wins, it can gain control of territory, resources and population of country B. In contrast, if it is defeated in the battle, it simply loses the soldiers and war resources that it brings along.

²⁶ Charnvit Kaset Siri, *The Rise of Ayudhya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 119.

In most versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, the Siamese was generally portrayed as threatening, invasive, provocative, and war-addicted and wanted to get control of Cambodian territory and all its resources. The story shows that each time the King of Ayutthaya came to Cambodia to bet on an animal-fight, he brought along with him tens of thousands of soldiers and thousands of elephants when he came on lands and hundreds of Somphov (big boats) when he came by sea. For example, the story reveals that before the King of Siam left for Cambodia to propose on elephant fight, he had given this order to his officials, "This time we go for an elephant fight, so mobilize all elephants from every corner of our country."²⁷ The act of mobilizing elephants in large numbers from every part of Siam reflected the attempt to project military power and muscle and also to prepare for the large-scale invasion of Cambodia. Once arriving in Cambodia, the Siamese King told his messenger to inform the Khmer king to find an elephant to fight with his. Otherwise, they would have needed to mobilize troops for war with him²⁸. The story shows that Cambodian people knew for sure that it was possible for war to break out particularly through their awareness that the Siamese had come all the way from a distant land and displayed a hostile manner²⁹. Another element is that the King of Siam was depicted as having a great desire to take the Kingdom of Cambodia. This can be seen through his talk to the Cambodian king after his cock defeated the cock belonging to the Cambodian king, "My cock wins. Now I'll give you three days to find a cock to fight with mine. If you cannot find one, I'll take hold of your country."³⁰ Another example that also reflected the real motivation of the Siamese king was through the words of the Khmer king while speaking to one of his officials when he heard that his youngest daughter, Neang Pov, was still alive. The King ordered his officials, "Go and tell my daughter to help find a cock to fight tomorrow. If she cannot find a cock to beat the cock of the Siamese king, we will lose our kingdom."³¹ It is commonly true that if a

²⁷ The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Phnom Penh: Kem Ky Bookshop, 1952), p. 101.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

³⁰ The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Film version, 2004).

³¹ Ly Thaily, The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Phnom Penh: Pai Neth Bookshop, 2004), p. 28.

state could not project similar power in an effective way to deter its enemy, it would be likely vulnerable to possible aggression or invasion by its rival state.

Furthermore, most versions of the legend also described the King of Siam as ambitious and revengeful. Based on the story, when the Siamese king lost the bet on an elephant-fight, he walked back to his boats and ordered his soldiers to leave quickly. He felt revengeful and was determined to win next time³². The author of the Ly Thaily written version of the legend used the phrase “a sea of ambition and unlimited desire” to describe the characteristics of the Thai king. For example, it mentioned that the night before leaving for Cambodia to have his mechanical bull fight with the bull of the King of Cambodia, the King of Siam with his sea of ambition and unlimited desire was extremely delighted about his dirty trick³³. All versions of Preah Ko Preah Keo also linked the Siamese king with cruel, hostile manners or images. For example, Ly Thaily as well as other versions described that when his cock lost, the Siamese king was furious and looked hostile. His steady eyes on the Khmer king and his officials seemed to signify that he wanted to eat the raw flesh of these people³⁴. Another example of associating the Siamese king with cruelty is found in what the Cambodian King said to his consort a night before the date of cock-fighting came. The Khmer monarch talked to his queen sadly, “I must be arrested and killed by them [the Siamese] if the kingdom falls into their hand...”³⁵

Besides, the Siamese were seen to be tricky as well. The Siamese king was shown as pliable³⁶. Sometimes he was very strong and wild, while at other times he was soft and tame. He was strong and rude, especially when he thought that he was in the superior position to his opponent. He bowed when he was defeated and was in danger. For example, according to most versions of the story, when the elephant of the Siamese king

³² The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Phnom Penh: Kem Ky Bookshop, 1952), p. 92.

³³ Ly Thaily, The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, p. 45.

³⁴ Ly Thaily, The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, p. 33.

³⁵ The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Phnom Penh: Kem Ky Bookshop, 1952), p. 81.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

lost in the fight with Preah Ko, Preah Keo said with high tone to the Thai king, “Now your elephant lost, or does your majesty the owner want to fight between people and people. If so, tell your soldiers to be ready.” The King of Siam realized that he was in danger, so he talked to himself, “If I dare to resist, I’ll lose my country and also my life. Therefore, I must pretend to admit the failure.”³⁷ Then, he pretended to shed tears and begged Preah Keo:

Everything is now in your hand, your majesty. If you fault me for my mistake towards you, of course I’ll die. If you take only the elephants I brought and grant pardon for our lives, it’ll be a great gratitude that we owe to you. Now I am willing to give in and accept your great power³⁸.

Author or authors of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo also used the opinions and expression by some Thai villagers and ordinary soldiers to portray a negative image of the Siamese king. The story mentioned that when he was back in Siam after his failure in cock-fight in Cambodia, the King of Siam was extremely unhappy. He called on a meeting with his officials to find a trick to win over Cambodia. During the meeting, they came up with an idea for proposing an elephant fight. For this reason, the Thai monarch ordered the drawing together of all elephants with their mahouts from all over Siam to accompany him to Cambodia. Anyone who refused or escaped would get beheaded. At this point, the narrative described the expression and reaction of ordinary Thai villagers in response to the King’s command. The story described the situation like this, “Oh, why is my husband separated away from me and my children?”³⁹ Asked a Thai woman. The story went on as showing Siamese women sobbing and complaining:

The wives of mahouts cried and complained that wives of those men without elephants are happy as their husbands stay. We are very unfortunate to have elephants because they forced our husbands to go to Cambodia. Some said the king for his own pleasure caused others to be away from their wives and children⁴⁰.

³⁷ The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Film version, 2004).

³⁸ The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Phnom Penh: Kem Ky Bookshop, 1952), p. 120.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴⁰ Ly Thaily, The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Phnom Penh: Pai Neth Bookshop, 2004), p. 37.

However, at this point the legend also showed some positive images of the Thai king. The story showed that he was caring and felt pity for his people and soldiers⁴¹. On the way to Cambodia, the Siamese king was very sorry for his men because they were traveling with him in the deep jungle away from their families. The author described his feeling like this:

The King saw all his soldiers were sad, but he could not permit them to go back. He was extremely sorry for them when he saw them sobbing miserably because they missed their native land and families. Therefore, he changed his mind about putting his troops up for wager and offered only elephants⁴².

On setting the condition of elephant fight, the Siamese King proposed that the Khmer king only put the elephants up for wager, not to include troops and people like before because he did not want to cause problems and suffering to his countrymen⁴³. At this point, the author of the story intended to send an important message to readers, listeners or film viewers that the Thai king despite his hostility to others, was friendly and caring towards his own country and people. For the sake of peace and prosperity in his country, the Siamese king and his officials and soldiers tried their best to achieve their objectives. The Siamese were indirectly portrayed as goal-pursuing people. They never gave up their aims although they had been defeated several times. They placed the matter of their kingdom and people above all else. They traveled days and nights back and forth many times from their distant land to Cambodia without thinking of danger or disease. They resorted to every means they could even some considered tricky. This was particularly reflected in the manner which they sought victory, seeing Preah Ko and Preah Keo, the symbols of peace and prosperity for Cambodia. The Siamese always kept on following the tracks of the two brothers, which could be comparable to their shadows from one forest to the other, from one mountain to the next.

⁴¹ The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Phnom Penh: Kem Ky Bookshop, 1952), p. 103.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

The general representations of the Siamese in the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo are shown not only through their behavior, expressions, speech, thinking, and the author's description of them, but are also reflected through the Khmer. The Cambodian people, ranging from the highest figures like the king and his officials to the lowest like ordinary villagers and soldiers, had negative opinions of the Thais. The story to a large extent depicted the Cambodian king and his officials as peace-loving people. They were generally postured in the defensive and protective position. They were never in the offensive position; for example, like threatening or attacking Siam. The Khmer leaders were seen as people full of understanding and sympathy towards all people including their enemy although the Siamese brought them troubles several times. In the paragraphs below are the detailed examples of these.

The Khmer king and his officials felt sad each time they heard the news about the Siamese king coming to propose for an animal-fight. They had no option, but to agree because the Siamese king and his soldiers were already deep inside Cambodian territory. For example, when the king got a letter from the King of Siam inviting him to have a bet on the elephant-fight, his officials and he were very sad⁴⁴. He said to his officials:

... the Siamese came this time with cruel manner not peaceful; thus, all of you have to be very careful. We cannot stop them from coming because their letter firmly states that they must come. Therefore, we must mobilize our troops to stand to attention in case the war breaks out⁴⁵.

The ordinary Khmer soldiers also felt afraid of war because the Thais had brought along with them a lot of elephants⁴⁶. The soldiers were concerned because they were not certain whether they were able to find enough elephants to have a balance of power with the Siamese. Elephants were very significant for war in the old days. They could be compared to tanks or modern war vehicles that are used in present-day warfare. Therefore, in their eyes, the Siamese were more militarily superior and better-equipped.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 109.

The legend also reflects the negative perception of the ordinary Cambodian people who lived in villages and cities towards the Siamese. In their eyes, the Siamese were threatening to their family's happiness. The story told that ordinary Cambodian people were shocked and nervous each time they heard the news about the King of Siam coming for an animal fight with their king⁴⁷. They felt afraid of being separated and forced to move to Siam; they did not want to be separated from their families and relatives. This can be indicated by the description of their reactions in the Kem Ky version of the legend:

.... Having heard the condition set by the two kings, some people hid themselves when they returned home to avoid being captured by the Siamese, while others put rice and food in bags in preparation to run if the king of Siam won...⁴⁸.

Another example from the story about the feeling of ordinary people towards the Siamese was expressed by those at markets as they saw the small Preah Ko- transforming into cock. They did not believe that the cock would be able to beat the cock belonging to the Siamese king. Therefore, they were very shocked and fearful. The author described the situation like this:

... those at the market. Their faces became dark. Some call their husbands whereas others call their wives to rush out...The husband said that this cock cannot beat the cock belonging to the king of Siam. Thus, escape now; otherwise, we will be moved by the Siamese...⁴⁹.

The author showed that ordinary Khmer people felt afraid of being moved to Siam. This could be inferred that those people had already experienced or heard about this act before. In the past, one of the motives to wage war against other states was to capture its population. The defeated state would suffer from the lack of manpower which was needed for the production of food and defense of the kingdom. Thus, the victim became the vassal state of the aggressor. In contrast, the winner would gain more people and

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

manpower that was necessary for both the production of food and the preparation for further wars to subjugate weaker or rival states.

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo depicted the contrasting images of the Khmer rulers with those of the Thais. According to the story, the Cambodian king was a man of great merit and sympathy. Although the King of Siam and his officials had brought continuous troubles to him and his kingdom, the Cambodian king did not take revenge. Instead, he forgot and forgave them when their animal lost in the competition. Here is the quote of this example from the story:

After the elephant of the Cambodian king defeated that of the Siamese, Preah Keo said with high tone to the Thai king, "Now your elephant has died, but its owner did not. So you can come in for a fight if you wish." All the Siamese officials and soldiers knelt down to beg pardon from the Cambodian king. The Siamese king learnt that his life and those of his men were at stake. Therefore, he asked for forgiveness from Preah Keo, "Everything is now in your hand, your majesty. If fault me for my mistakes towards you, of course I'll die. If you take only the elephants I brought and grant pardon for our lives, it'll be a great gratitude that we owe to you. Now I am willing to give in and accept your great power." Hearing this, Preah Keo replied, "It's alright Preah Chao. I saw you came with a huge army. I thought that you would probably want to smash our military bases. Therefore, I said this to you. By the way, it is common for gamblers to be sharp-tongued. Now we'll take only the elephants. For this reason, Phrea Chao please stop looking miserable. You may bring all your men back to your kingdom now."⁵⁰

This quote from the myth was intended to mean that the Khmer were good-hearted. They did not take unfair advantage of their enemy. On the contrary, the Siamese king and his men were reflected as cunning. They not only failed to remember or pay back the gratitude granted for their lives, but still maintained ill intention to cause problems for Cambodians. The Siamese King never gave up his ambition. He came again and again until he was in the superior position and made the Khmer lose strength and enter into great despair. For example, the story mentioned that when receiving the letter from the Siamese messenger proposing a bullfight, Preah Keo was in deep sadness⁵¹. Preah Keo

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 120.

⁵¹ Ly Thaily, *The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo*, p. 47.

reported the news to Preah Ko. Preah Ko with his magical power saw a foretelling of what was to come. He told Preah Keo, “This time we’ll be separated from our native land, since their ox is not a normal one; it’s a mechanical ox. I cannot defeat it. However, I have to fight because destiny preset us to do so.”⁵² The mechanical bull brought by the Thais could be inferred that they had modernized their technology in an attempt to win over Cambodia. Regardless, Preah Ko chose to fight with the mechanical bull knowing that he would lose. He did this because of destiny. However, if Preah Ko’s words are critically analyzed, his reason was not simply that Buddhist philosophy of karma and predestination. It was not simply that a religious concept required him to do so. There was a hidden political reason that forced him to fight although he knew that the percentage of success was quite thin. In the past, a weak state had to struggle with whatever resources and power it had against the invasion of a stronger one. It had no option but to fight because there were no regional or international bodies like ASEAN, NATO or the United Nations that they could called on for help and intervention. Because of the absence of these regional and international law and order mechanisms at that time, the threat and harm caused by the Siamese was so great and unbearable that the Cambodian people did not know how to solve the problem and who to refer to for help. Therefore, the author used the Buddhist concept of karma and predestination to comfort the people and help them forget their feeling of suffering and hardship. An example of this is seen through how Preah Ko tried to comfort his brother and Neang Pov. Preah Ko said to them sadly:

Oh my beloved brother and sister. Please stop thy sobbing. It is common for all beings to be born and gone... so both of you take up the Dharma to help you be calm and free from all suffering...⁵³

The story also showed that Preah Ko and Preah Keo were kind and caring towards Cambodia and its people. The story depicted that both brothers had strong determination

⁵² Ibid., p. 47.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 48.

to sacrifice for the Kingdom of Cambodia and its people. For example, knowing in advance before the fight that it would be impossible to defeat the mechanical bull of the Siamese king, Preah Ko urged Preah Keo to talk to the Siamese king in order to review the conditions regarding the bet. Preah Ko told Preah Keo, “Oh, my brother! You go and make a new deal. Don’t bet on the kingdom because this will bring harm and suffering to our people. If anyone loses or dies, let it happens only to you and me.”⁵⁴ In addition, the story showed that Preah Ko and Preah Keo were very fond of and faithful to their native land (Cambodia). Preah Ko, when escaping from the Siamese’s pursuit, chose not to fly away to another foreign land, but to stay in Cambodia. Their feelings were even clearer after the Thais captured them. Even though the Thais showed them great respect and reverence, the story highlighted their desire to escape. The brothers’ continuous looks in the direction of Cambodia and unending tears were a clear example of this.

3.3.2 Specific Images of the Thais

While most versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo agree with each other about the generalized representations of the Thais, they are also slightly different on some particular points especially when some authors attempted to add or make some adaptations to the story. As was mentioned earlier, this section not only has depictions of the Thais, but also those of the Cambodians so that a clearer picture of their relations with one another can be extracted.

Most versions of the story show that Cambodian people never felt happy about the animal fights proposed by the Siamese king despite the animal of their king winning most of the time. However, the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo in the Ly Thaily Version tells us that villagers were afraid at the beginning when they heard the news about animal fight. Yet, they became happy and cheerful when they learnt that the animal belonging to

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

the Khmer King won. They shouted and laughed about the victory⁵⁵. The narrative in Ly Thaily Version described the situation as follows:

Sellers at the markets rushed out leaving their goods behind to join and cheer for their victory. A man of Chinese descent was also so delighted that he jumped up so high without knowing that his trousers had torn revealing his manhood⁵⁶.

That most versions of the story portrayed ordinary Cambodian people feeling fear about the animal fights, could be interpreted that authors of those versions intended to provide a general view of Cambodian people as peace-lovers. Animal fights in the legend's context were a metaphor for war as was pointed out above. The myth showed that Cambodian people never felt enthusiastic about wars no matter which side won. Nevertheless, the author of the Ly Thaily Version made an addition by revealing the happy emotion of the Khmer following their victory over the Siamese. The author's attempt here could be understood that he wanted to show the real nature of the people and the situation. More or less, Khmer people must have felt happy when they could defeat their enemy. The general pattern in most versions of the story, that Khmer people were not happy with wars no matter which side won, was unrealistic.

Furthermore, nearly all versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Ko demonstrated that the Khmer were sympathetic, non-violent and were always in the defensive position. They were generally depicted as the victims of the Siamese. The Siamese brought them subsequent troubles, yet they never stood up to fight back or invaded Thailand. Moreover, Preah Ko, although he had great magical power, never used his magic to fight back or kill all the Siamese. Instead, Preah Ko and Preah Keo simply chose to run. In stark contrast, the ending part of a mural painting version of the myth at Svay Chrum monastery portrayed a Cambodia that was unresponsive and passive. Cambodian people rise up to fight back and slaughter all the Siamese soldiers. More interestingly, Preah Ko and Preah Keo, who were generally seen on the run trying to

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

escape capture by Thai soldiers, are displayed differently in the mural painting at this monastery. Both brothers, Preah Ko and Preah Keo, were displayed as heroes joining hands with ordinary Cambodian people to defeat and smash all the Siamese troops⁵⁷. The author of this mural painting version of the legend may have intended to criticize some parts of the original version of the story. Furthermore, he or she perhaps wanted to raise hope and encourage Cambodian people to be proactive and strong in the face of the approaching enemy. In the version of Preah Ko Preah Keo published in 1996, it showed Siamese that did not stick to their goals. After the failure of several attempts to capture Preah Ko and Preah Keo, the Thais were hopeless and returned to their country. Preah Ko and Preah Keo then lived happily with Cambodian people until each of them died of natural causes⁵⁸.

While most versions of the story portrayed good images of the Khmer king and his officials when contrasted with the Siamese king and his men, the mural painting version at Svay Chrum monastery revealed the Cambodian monarch and his officials willingly cooperating with the Siamese. They were corrupted by the Thais. Mural column 9 at the monastery exhibits that the Thai king brought tribute and paid bribery to the Khmer king so that he could hatch a plot to seize Preah Ko and Preah Keo*. The Thai king was pictured furnishing illicit money to buy Preah Ko and Preah Keo from the Cambodian king.

Moreover, most versions of the story remarked that when the Siamese gave chase to Preah Ko and Preah Keo, both brothers went into hiding in the bamboo forest at Lovek. The forest was so thick that their troops could not penetrate it to capture Preah Ko and Preah Keo. The fortune teller of the Siamese king suggested that the king order his soldiers to throw silver coins into the forest so that poor Khmer people in the area would

⁵⁷ The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Painting Version at Svay Chrum monastery, Kandal Province).

⁵⁸ The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Written Version published in 1996), p. 38.

* See Chapter IV to understand the reasons why mural paintings at that monastery associated Cambodian king with bad images like corruption and bribery.

clear the forest to get the coins. At this point, most versions of the story did not blame those villagers. Instead, they accused the Siamese for using the trick. They mentioned that Khmer villagers at Lovek did so because of their poverty. Preah Ko and Preah Keo did not blame those people either. However, an oral version told by a temple guard at Lovek gave a complete different picture. According to him, after the bamboo forest was gone, the Siamese managed to seize Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Angered by the inappropriate behavior of those villagers, Preah Ko cursed all the villagers in Lovek to be born poor for five subsequent incarnations*. Then, he allowed the Thais to arrest both his brother and himself*.

Nearly all versions of the legend ended the story by revealing that the Thai king and his officials kept Preah Ko and Preah Keo at gigantic temples in Thailand. They all respected and honored both brothers to their best effort. The Ly Thaily Version also had a similar ending like the others. However, the author of this edition attempted to add more information which would associate both Preah Ko and Preah Keo with the creation of national identities for Thai people. It seemed the author wanted to suggest that the Thais possessed their own national symbols only since they acquired Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Below is a quote from the ending part of the myth written in the Ly Thaily Version:

The Siamese king had spent a lot of his resources to build beautiful gigantic mansions to house the two great power-possessing brothers because he considered them as the national identities or the national souls. The people of the whole of Siam had great faith and respect in Preah Ko and Preah Keo. They worshipped and treated them as national symbols. Due to these reasons, most Siamese people do not eat beef until the present day⁵⁹.

While most written versions, film, and paintings noted that the Siamese King and his officials treated Preah Ko and Preah Keo with great respect, some oral versions described that they were cruel to both brothers. In the palace of Siam, the Thai king

* Villagers at Lovek at present are among the poorest in Cambodia.

* An oral version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo told by a temple guard, aged 43, Lovek, 20 November 2006.

⁵⁹ Ly Thaily, The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, pp. 73- 74.

ordered his men to apply vinegar and strike nails on Preah Ko's feet to prevent him from flying away. Moreover, the Thais cut open the belly of Preah Ko and got all the *Vedas*⁶⁰. *Vedas* is a Sanskrit word meaning knowledge. It is a holy book in Brahmanism. According to one story teller, after the Thais cut open the stomach of Preah Ko the bull, they acquired all the precious texts about literature, culture and civilization. With these, the Thais were able to invent their own alphabet and form their own culture. For this reason, the Thai alphabet and culture are similar to Cambodia's⁶¹.

3.4 Conclusion

Although still remaining in several forms, almost all versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo share a lot of similarities concerning their portrayal of the general images of the Thais. Based on details in these versions, Thai people were depicted as threatening, invasive, war-addicted, hostile and tricky. Unlike the Thai, Khmer people were generally displayed in the story as peace-loving, sympathetic and caring. Furthermore, they were usually represented in a defensive manner. They did not offend Siam or take revenge.

However, certain versions of the story also carried some differentiated characteristics of both the Thais and the Khmer. For example, some displayed that Khmer people were not always the victim of the Thais; they rose up to fight against the Siamese soldiers. Preah Ko and Preah Keo also offered their help by joining with ordinary Cambodian people to smash Thai troops. Another version showed that the King of Cambodia was corrupted by the King of Siam. The Cambodian king took a bribe from the King of Siam who wanted to capture Preah Ko Preah Keo. Some versions, especially the oral ones explained that the Siamese started to have their own national identities, letters,

⁶⁰ Oral versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo told by informant number 1, 08 November 2006 & informant number 3, 10 November 2006.

⁶¹ An oral version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo told by informant number 5, 13 November 2006.

and culture only after they possessed Preah Ko and Preah Keo. Some even went so far to link the idea that the majority of Thai people do not eat beef because they had great faith and respect in Preah Ko and Preah Keo.

Although certain versions of the story gave some additional information or adapted the original story, the representations of the Thais were not usually positive. Both parts about the general and specific images, the Thais were usually linked with more or less negative representations. They were seen to have taken Preah Ko Preah Keo from Cambodia. The legend aims to suggest that the loss of Preah Ko and Preah Keo to the Siamese resulted in Cambodia's decline and lack of peace and prosperity in the later periods. In contrast, the Thai state has been peaceful, glorious and superior to Cambodia because they have possessed Preah Ko and Preah Keo. However, the perception of Khmer people in the story of Thai people was not a reflection of the perception of Khmer people in the past as a whole. It was rather the point of views of Khmer leaders, the elites, and authors of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo.

Every versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo depicted the Siamese as villains and Cambodia's Preah Ko Preah Keo as heroes. The main reason that authors of the legend put the Thais in antagonistic images was probably because they wanted Cambodian people to collectively remember the past historical events. Their likely intention was to encourage Cambodian people of later generations to feel pain and sorrow about the past heritage that they lost to Thailand. At present, many Cambodian people could not tell the story, but they remember the main episodes of the legend, for example, the Siamese used silver coins to fire into the bamboo forest in Lovek and then captured Preah Ko and Preah Keo to Thailand. Whenever they talk about Lovek, they remember the legend and vice versa. It is interesting to see that the legend has been used to create a collective memory among contemporary Cambodian people regarding past historical events. At the same time, these people do not have the direct experience of seeing these events with their own eyes. Questions may be asked why it was possible for the legend to

enter and remain strong in public memory. Cambodian people did not experience the events collectively, but how and why are the events remembered collectively? There are several factors that make collective memory possible. According to Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist early in the 20th century that formulated a comprehensive theory of collective memory, collective memory evokes the present in the past. As a living imagination, collective memory is continually reshaped by the social contexts into which it is received. The more powerful the context, the more imposing its memories will be. The monuments and shrines locate memorable places on the landscape of memory. It anchors the past in the present⁶². For Patrick Hutton, it is literacy in antiquity that makes humans self-conscious about the traits of memory, and so raised doubts in their minds about their hold on the past. It served as the setting in which the art of memory was invented—a spatial framework of places and images that reinforce our natural powers of recollection⁶³. If based on theories by Halbwachs and Hutton, the collective memory of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is possible because of the use of names of real places and nature in Cambodia, for example, Lovek, Kandaul tree etc. In the present, it has also facilitated the interest of people in the past represented by the making of statues or images of Preah Ko and Preah Keo all over Cambodia. Noticeably, all the young educated Cambodian informants interviewed believe that the story of Preah Ko Preah Keo was partly true because there were a lot of places, natural settings and people that could be found in real contexts*. Another scholar on memory, Pierre Nora, suggested that collective memory is established when a sense of historical continuity persists, and when the present events create the thinking of the past of similar events⁶⁴. If Nora's theory is considered, it means that the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo could create collective memory among Cambodian people of the present-day because of the similarities of the contemporary events with those of the past. Noticeably, in the periods of late 1950s and

⁶² Maurice Halbwachs cited in Patrick Hutton, "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," *The History Teacher* Vol. 33, No. 4, August 2000, p. 537.

⁶³ Patrick Hutton, "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," p. 533.

* See Chapter 4 for detailed information on this point.

⁶⁴ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," trans. Marc Roudebush *Representations* No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, 1989, p. 7.

early 1960s, and from the early 1980s to early 1990s, the relationship between Cambodia and Thailand was not in harmony*. The tension in the modern time refreshed the memories of past historical events several centuries ago. Nora further added that the spreading of collective memory takes place through religious institutions (like churches or monasteries), schools, the family or the state⁶⁵. Interestingly, Nora's notion is very similar to the promotion of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. Mural paintings and statues of Preah Ko are found in a lot of monasteries throughout Cambodia. The story is told in schools, in families, and was promoted by the Cambodian government in the late 1950s and early 1960s. New versions of the legend have also been published in the subsequent periods*. All of these factors contribute to the possible making of the legend in Cambodian people's collective memory.

* See Chapter 4 for more detailed information.

⁶⁵ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," p. 7.

* See Chapter 4 for more detailed information.