THE LEGEND OF PREAH KO PREAH KEO AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE CAMBODIAN PEOPLE’S PERCEPTION OF THE THAIS

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นายกิมลี หงวน

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THE LEGEND OF PREAH KO PREAH KEO AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE CAMBODIAN PEOPLE’S PERCEPTION OF THE THAIS

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo on Cambodian people’s perception of the Thais. The author focuses on how the legend has been used to shape the identity of the Cambodian people and their perception of the Thais through time. The study also explores how the legend has been used to teach history and to influence the perception of Cambodians about Thais. The findings show that the legend has been used by both sides to propagate their own narratives and to shape the identity of the Cambodian people.

Keywords: Preah Ko Preah Keo, Cambodian People’s Perception of Thais, Legend, Influence, Identity, History, Teaching

Thaksin Hong (2549)

Advisor: Dr. Surachet Amrith, 181

Chapter 1: Historical Background

The relationship between Cambodia and Thailand has been marked by wars and conflicts. The wars have resulted in the destruction of cities and the displacement of people and wealth. The Cambodian people have created legends such as the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo to explain historical events. These legends have been used by both sides to influence the perception of the Cambodian people about the Thais.

Chapter 2: Influence on Identity

The legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has been used to influence the identity of the Cambodian people. The legend has been used to teach history and to influence the perception of the Cambodian people about the Thais. The findings show that the legend has been used by both sides to propagate their own narratives and to shape the identity of the Cambodian people.

Chapter 3: Influence on Perception

The legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has been used to influence the perception of the Cambodian people about the Thais. The findings show that the legend has been used by both sides to propagate their own narratives and to shape the identity of the Cambodian people.

Conclusion

The legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has been used to influence the identity and perception of the Cambodian people about the Thais. The findings show that the legend has been used by both sides to propagate their own narratives and to shape the identity of the Cambodian people.

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Advisor: Dr. Surachet Amrith

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1. Hong, Thaksin. (2549). The Influence of Preah Ko Preah Keo on Cambodian People’s Perception of Thais. Master’s Thesis, Faculty of Southeast Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University.


The history of Cambodian-Thai relations was marked by war and conflicts. War resulted in the destruction and the movement of people and wealth from the defeated country to the victorious one. The Cambodians composed a legend called Preah Ko Preah Keo to explain the historical events involving the subsequent captures of their capitals by the Siamese. The legend portrayed the Thai in negative images. In the modern time, the story has been used by Cambodian elites to raise national consciousness and to explain the past historical legacy on the country’s contemporary situation. Moreover, the story also has an influence on the way Cambodian people at present form their perception of Thai people. Therefore, the thesis has two main objectives. First, it aims at studying Khmer people’s perception of the Thais as reflected in the various versions of the legend. However, this perception did not represent Khmer people’s perception in the past as a whole. It was simply the perception of Khmer leaders and the authors of the legend. Second, the thesis intends to study the influence of the legend on the contemporary perception of young educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh of Thai people.

Findings suggest that all versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo portrayed Thai people more or less negatively. The Thais were perceived as invasive, ambitious, tricky etc. The story showed that Thailand had taken Preah Ko and Preah Keo, the symbols of peace and prosperity, from Cambodia. Therefore, the former was also considered as the cause of the decline of the latter. Findings also indicate that in the modern time the legend was popular and influential when there occurred political tension between both countries. The story was promoted by Cambodian leaders in the late 1950s and early 1960s when Cambodian-Thai relations were strained. In later periods, it is also observed that new versions of the legend have been published when there were difficult relations between both countries or when Cambodia attempted to counter the flow of foreign influence. The results also show that young educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh at present have both positive and negative perceptions of Thai people. However, their negative perception is not much influenced by the legend, but more by contemporary factors. This shows the decline of the story’s influence. Some young educated Cambodian people perceive Thai people as clever and hardworking, while some others hold negative perception of Thais. Their negative perceptions come from the teaching of history, news releases about border encroachment, behavior of some Thai people etc. This reflects that there is still lack of understanding between people of both countries.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The Cambodians and the Siamese throughout their history had many wars with each other. The Siamese had sacked the Khmer’s capital of Angkor. Later on, Lovek, another of Cambodia’s capitals in the 16th century, was also captured by Siam. The Siamese after their successful capture of either Angkor or Lovek were believed to have brought many precious objects, statues, texts, learned men and many prisoners of war from Cambodia to their capital of Ayutthaya. The loss of these materials and human resources had a tremendous effect on Cambodia. The country had declined and lacked signs of progress in the later periods*. To explain these historical events and to express the great sadness over the loss of these priceless resources, the Khmer composed a legend called the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. The exact period the legend came into existence is unknown.

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo told about twin brothers who were born in Cambodia. The older brother was an ox called Preah Ko and the younger was a man named Preah Keo. Preah Ko was an animal possessing great divine power. His belly contained precious objects and valuable things that people wanted very much. Both sacred brothers were believed to bring peace and prosperity to the place where they resided. Before long, the news about them reached the Siamese King. The King of Siam wanted to have Preah Ko and Preah Keo in Siam so that his whole kingdom and

* See Chapter II for detailed information about the war between Cambodia and Siam.
population would be peaceful and prosperous. Therefore, the Siamese King came with his officials and soldiers to Cambodia to propose animal fights with the King of Cambodia. Preah Ko the Bull helped the Cambodian King by transforming himself to various animals to fight with the animals of the King of Siam. Preah Ko managed to defeat the animals of the King of Siam several times. Finally, the Siamese brought a mechanical bull to fight with Preah Ko. During the fight, Preah Ko could not defeat the mechanical bull. Therefore, he flew up bringing Preah Keo and Preah Keo’s consort, Neang Pov, to escape from Siamese capture. Preah Ko and Preah Keo went to take refuge in many places like the bamboo forest at Lovek. Finally, the Siamese managed to capture them and brought them to Siam. In Siam, Preah Ko and Preah Keo were kept in a gigantic palace and were guarded days and nights by soldiers, from where they could not escape back to Cambodia until the present-day.

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is popular in Cambodian society. The story has existed in several versions including oral, written, film and painting. Although not all Cambodian people at present can tell the story, many of them know the important episodes of the story like Preah Ko and Preah Keo going into hiding in the bamboo forest at Lovek and the Siamese firing silver coins into the forest to encourage Cambodian villagers to destroy the trees. Many of them also knew from the story that Preah Ko and Preah Keo were brought to Thailand. The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has played several important roles in Cambodian society. These include historical, political, nationalist, religious and psychological. In the modern time, the story has been sometimes used by Cambodian leaders to promote nationalism among the Cambodian population or to explain the legacy of the loss of Preah Ko and Preah Keo on the contemporary situation of the country. Besides that, the story also has some influences on the perception of Cambodian people, at the present time, about Thai people.
1.2 Objectives

The main objectives of this thesis are:

- To analyze the Cambodian people’s perception of the Thais as reflected in the various versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo.
- To explore the popularity and influence of the story on the Cambodian people’s contemporary perception of the Thais.

1.3 Hypothesis

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, which has been very popular in Cambodian society, tells the lives of a sacred bull and a young man, both of whom symbolize Cambodia’s peace and prosperity. This story is believed to have its root in real historical events during the post Angkorean period when the wars between Cambodia and Siam frequently occurred and a large number of prisoners of war and valuable things were taken from Cambodia to Ayutthaya. Being passed on for hundreds of years, this legend has provided strong influence on the emotional and historical thought of Cambodian people and the way they have perceived Thai people. In every version, the Thais are seen as expansionist, ambitious and threatening etc. As the legend ends with the Thai king taking Preah Ko and Preah Keo to Siam, the Thais are also perceived as the cause of the decline of Cambodia. In the modern time, the legend has been especially influential when the political tensions or conflicts between the two countries have occurred.
1.4 Methodology and Scope of the Research

1.4.1 Documentary Research

The information about the history of Cambodian-Siamese relations is in Chapter 2, the background and analyses of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is in Chapter 3, and the legend and its functions which is about half of chapter 4 come mostly from documentary research. Various published sources in Khmer such as books, articles, magazines and newspapers are relied upon. Besides, VCDs and information from reliable internet websites are also included. The materials relied upon consist mostly of written works in English, and some in French. A few written sources in Thai are also studied. The different versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo are oral, written both in verse and in prose, painting, and film. They form integral parts of this research.

1.4.2 Interview

About half of the information in Chapter 4 about the influence of the legend on the modern perception of Cambodian people towards the Thais, and some information in other preceding chapters come from the result of fieldwork research conducted in Cambodia between 04 November and 09 December 2006. The people selected for the interview comprised of three groups.

The first group were the authors of some versions of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. They were Mr. Preap Chan Mara, the author of the Reyum Version, and Mr. Ly Thaily, the author of Ly Thaily Version printed in 2004. The interview with Mr. Preap Chan Mara took place at Reyum Institute. However, for Mr. Ly Thaily, a talk lasting for approximately half an hour was conducted on the phone due to some inconveniences of meeting him in person. The interview with this first group of informants aims at getting
further information and clarification regarding the writings and publications of their versions of the story. Authors of other versions were not included because some of them were anonymous while others could not be contacted. This group also includes Dr. Ros Chantrabot, a historian and the dean of the Faculty of Sociology and Humanity of the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

The second group of people interviewed consisted of six old villagers in the area of Lovek, the place where the majority of Cambodian people believe to be the birthplace of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. With this group of informants, the researcher traveled to a few villages and some monasteries in the area to ask for old natives of Lovek who could tell the story. The informants were simply asked to tell the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, and what they knew about Lovek. The chief purposes of interviewing these people was to collect oral versions of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, to gather oral traditions related with Lovek and to understand the history of Lovek from the points of view of local people.

The last group of informants was young educated Cambodian people either studying or living in Phnom Penh. Educated people in this sense refer to those who are studying at universities or those with degrees from universities. The main purpose of interviewing these people was to understand the influence of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo on their perception of Thai people and how they perceive present-day Thai people. There are two reasons why young educated informants were the focus. First, their perception represents one important part of the general perception of Cambodian people about Thai people. Second, they are an active group that is likely to influence the present and future relationship between Cambodia and Thailand. There are also two main reasons why Phnom Penh was chosen. First, Phnom Penh is the capital city. It is the place of concentration for important institutions and major events that influence the internal and foreign politics of the country. It is the place from which broadcast news spreads to the rest of the country. Second, the demonstration leading to the burning of the Thai Embassy
in 2003 took place in Phnom Penh. Because this thesis follows a qualitative approach, the number of the informants is not fixed. However, fifteen informants were selected for this third group. Fifteen informants may not be considered a big enough sample size to represent the general perception of young educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh. However, the fifteen informants selected for the interview come from various backgrounds. Some have graduated from universities already, while others are studying. Some hold Master degrees, whereas others hold a Bachelor. Also, the informants come from different universities and from a wide range of majors. These include sociology, history, English, Khmer literature, business, law, economic, engineering etc. The researcher decided to choose only fifteen informants because when the number of informants reached ten, their answers started to become similar. Another reason is that earlier research projects about the attitude of Cambodian people in Phnom Penh towards Thai people also gave results similar to those of the researcher. With each of the fifteen informants, an in-depth interview was conducted separately to get deeper interpretation and clearer understanding of the gathered answers. The researcher followed two methods in choosing the informants, selection and snowball techniques, a technique that once a key informant is identified, then he or she is requested to locate the next informant. The researcher approached the people he knew who could tell the legend for the interview, and he also asked those people to introduce anyone they knew who could tell the story to him. Both methods allowed the informants to feel more comfortable with the researcher, thus reducing tense emotions and increasing the confidence and trust that allowed the access to the most accurate answers possible.

1.4.3 Field Visit

Visits to a number of places in Cambodia were made during the field research period. The purposes of the visits were to learn more about the areas which had a connection with the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo or had the statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo or had mural paintings of the story, and to interview local people about the
legend. The researcher spent two days at Lovek where he visited and observed villages, some monasteries, and the geography as well as the historical remains of the area. Lovek used to be Cambodia’s capital city in the 16th century. It is the place where many Cambodian people believe to have been the birth place of the story. The researcher also went to a few other places where there are statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo like the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh and Oudong Hill in Kampong Speu province. A visit to Svay Chrum monastery which has a complete painting version of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was also made. During the visit to these places, some photographs were taken to add more evidences and understanding of the attempted explanations into this thesis.

1.4.4 Scope and Limitation of the Research

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has had several written versions so far. The study does not include any version released after the period of doing the research. The written versions included in this study are the Kem Ky Version published in 1952, a version published in 1996 with an anonymous author and printing house, the Reyum Version published in 2001, and the Ly Thaily Version published in 2004. The reason the researcher selected only these versions was because it seems that there are no other available written versions. Of course, there was also one written version written by a Frenchman, Par G. Janneau, published in 1870. However, this one is excluded from the analysis, since it is very short and not written by Cambodians.

It may be true that contemporary Cambodian people’s perception of Thai people are influenced by other factors besides the legend. However, the focus of the research is regarding the influence of the legend on the attitude of Cambodian people towards the Thais.
The fifteen informants selected for the interview are educated Cambodian people who are studying or living in Phnom Penh. Therefore, the result from the research about Cambodian people’s perception of Thai people does not entirely represent the perception of Cambodian people as a whole. It gives only the general perception of the young educated people in Phnom Penh. The attempt to include research from the perception of ordinary Cambodian people such as the old and the lesser educated throughout Cambodia is beyond the capacity of the researcher. Before the research commenced, the researcher had the objective to study the influence of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo on the Cambodian people’s contemporary perception of the Thais. The researcher had the intention to include in the study people from different social and educational backgrounds and from different age groups. However, when he began the research, he encountered a big problem that made him decide to make a mid-course change. The research approached a number of ordinary, less educated Cambodian people for the interviews. However, those people could not tell the story from the beginning to the end. They could remember only very few important episodes of the story. Besides, they did not know much about Cambodia’s history. They also did not know much about Thailand. These posed a big challenge for the researcher, since his objective is to study the influence of the legend on Cambodian people’s perception of Thai people. To achieve the objective, it was essential that the informants could tell the story, know Cambodia’s history, and have some knowledge about Thailand. For these reasons, the researcher selected only young educated Cambodian people as his informants, since this group best matched the criteria.

1.5 Significance of the Research

- Understanding the Cambodian people’s perception of the Thais as reflected in every complete form of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo.
- Understanding the influence of the legend on the Cambodian people’s contemporary perception of the Thais.
- Being a reference for the future study of the Cambodian people’s general perception of the Thais.
- Being a reference for the study of the Cambodian-Thai relationship.

1.6 Literature Review

As far as the researcher knows, so far there have been only three important academic studies about the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. They are the separate works by Cambodian scholars, Khing Hoc Dy and Ang Chouléan, and a Thai scholar, Santi Phakdeekham. Below are the brief reviews of each of the works of these scholars.

Khing Hoc Dy wrote an article in French about the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. His article entitled *La Legende de Brah Go Brah Kaev* was published in 1991 in *Cahiers de l’Asie du Sud-Est*, n° 29-30, National Institute of Languages and Oriental Civilization, 1991, pp. 169-190. The first few pages of Khing Hoc Dy’s article are about the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo and its link with Cambodia’s history during Lovek period, and the information about the first printed written version of the legend by a French researcher, Par G. Janneau. The rest of his article is devoted to the summary of the legend, which he based on Kem Ky’s written version. His work offers brief information about the old written versions of the story including the palm leaf manuscripts, Par G. Janneau’s printed version, and the Kem Ky Version.

Another major study by a Cambodian scholar about the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was published in 1997. Ang Chouléan wrote an article whose title is *Nandin and His Avatars*. The article was published in a book called *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, Eds. Helen I. Jessup, and Thierry Zephir. Washington: Thames and Hudson, 1997. In the article, Ang Chouléan attempted to suggest that Preah Ko in the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo referred to *Nandin*, the Bull used as vehicle by Lord Siva. He tried to explain the deep root of Preah Ko in
Cambodia’s civilization. His work also looked into the living nature of the cult of worshipping for Preah Ko the Bull.

The academic research about the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was also carried out by a Thai scholar. Santi Phakdeekham wrote an article in Thai with its title *Prah Keo nai tam nan Prah Ko Prah Keo Khamen: Prah Keo morokot ching re? (Prah Keo in the legend of Khmer Prah Ko Prah Keo: Is Prah Keo the Emerald Buddha or not?)*. His article was published by Faculty of Archaeology, Silapakorn University in 2002. In his work, Santi attempted to explain that Preah Keo in Cambodian legend was not the Emerald Buddha housed in the Grand Palace in Bangkok at present, but was a metaphor for a Khmer Prince or important Khmer Royal family member who was brought to Ayutthaya when Angkor was sacked by the Siamese.

Although there was earlier academic research on the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, none of them have studied the story in broad context. Each one simply focused on certain aspects of the legend. This thesis looks beyond the earlier works. The thesis is probably the first study of the legend, which attempts to explain or examine the story in its broad and multi-dimensional aspects. The researcher’s work also covers the interpretations done by earlier scholars. However, some of the findings are different from earlier research. For example, the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was not a story belonging to a particular period of Cambodian history as put forward by earlier studies; it was a story that combined three major periods of Cambodian history together—Angkor, Lovek, and Oudong. This thesis’s most important and most original points of emphasis are its analyses of various versions of the legend in its different forms—oral, written, film, and mural paintings—and the study of the influence of the legend on the contemporary perception of young educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh of Thai people.
CHAPTER II
A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAMBODIAN-SIAMESE RELATIONS BETWEEN 14th AND 19th CENTURIES

“History is what happened, more or less. Legend is how men remember it, or try to explain it, or seek to realize in story what is unattainable in life.”


2.1 Introduction

The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has its roots in the real history of Cambodia and its theme is also about the Siamese and their relations with the Khmer. It is therefore necessary to take a look at the historical relations between both kingdoms. The knowledge of the past relationship between the two states is an instrumental tool with which one can use to comprehend and interpret the story. As the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo originally existed in the oral form, the exact time when it first came into existence is unknown. It is also uncertain whether it was first composed mainly to explain the event concerning the capture of Lovek by the Siamese. Some scholars argue that the legend appears to have been linked with the hold of Angkor by the Siamese in the early 15th century, while others claim that it was related to the capture of Lovek in the late 16th century. Interestingly, another hypothesis suggests that the story has connection with

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Cambodia’s situation in the 18th and 19th century when the kingdom was in the darkest period of its history. Her administration was under significant control and influence of its two neighbors, Siam to the west and Vietnam to the east. During these periods, a number of Cambodia’s kings were crowned in Bangkok as the royal regalia were kept there\textsuperscript{4}. Due to the variety of arguments concerning the existence of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, there is a vital requisite to include some brief information about Cambodia-Siamese historical relations in this thesis. This chapter will present the brief historical picture of Cambodia’s relationship with Thailand before the Lovek period, during the Lovek period, and after the Lovek period. This historical snapshot will enable readers to contextualize and gain some understanding of the time frame that the legend came into being.

The relationship between Cambodia and Siam from the late 13th and 14th century up until the French occupation of Cambodia in the 1860s had been fraught with wars, destruction and the movement of mass populations from each other’s territory. Since the early establishment of the first Thai kingdom, Sukhothai, the relationship between both neighbors had already been marked by warfare. However, Sukhothai will not be included in this chapter as the kingdom lasted less than two hundred year and was absorbed into Ayutthaya. Besides, it is the relationship with Ayutthaya that filled a long period of Cambodia’s history from the mid 14th century until the 19th century. Given a chapter of this length, it is impossible to describe in detail all the historical events between both countries so only the major ones will be described and analyzed. However, more focus will be on the Lovek period. The main reason is that the majority of Cambodian people believe that the legend took place during the Lovek period. More importantly, whenever they talk about the legend, they remember the events of Lovek and vice versa.

2.2 Cambodia before Lovek

This section will present brief information regarding the emergence of a new Thai kingdom, Ayutthaya, and how Ayutthaya soon challenged the power of the older Angkorean Empire. Brief information about attacks by Ayutthaya on Angkor, which have been considered one of several possible factors making the Khmer decide to change their capital, is also given.

2.2.1 Angkor and the Newly-Emerging Ayutthaya

After the death of King Jayavarman VII of Angkor, several new states emerged in the territories that used to be under Angkor’s control. These included Chiang Mai, Lan Na, Lan Chang, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and some others. Although Chou Ta-Kuan’s account, written during his stay at Angkor between 1296 and 1297, described Cambodia as wealthy and territorially extensive controlling more than ninety provinces, the emergence of new states especially those near Angkor such as Sukhothai and Ayutthaya suggested that Cambodia’s political power and influence were on the steady decline. The decline resulted from several factors which could be categorized into two main groups—internal and external. Internal factors included the overuse of resource, both manpower and wealth, for wars and the construction of mega projects by previous kings, the change of state religion from Hinduism to Buddhism, the take-over of the throne at Angkor by force among the Angkorean elites, and several others. For the external factors, the migration of Thai and Laos people started several centuries earlier in small numbers down to areas north of Angkor and in the Chao Phraya basin but their population began

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to reach large numbers in the 13th century. As soon as they had significant manpower and wealth, they started to bid for power independent from Cambodia by establishing their own respective states. The change in international trade was also one of the factors, as China in the 13th century came to trade on their own in Southeast Asia, especially in the mainland. Besides that, the policy of ‘divide and rule’ was a way through which Kublai Khan encouraged the Thai to weaken the Angkorean Empire. This was after King Jayavarman VIII (1243-1295) ignored Chinese demands that he pay homage and went so far as to imprison Kublai Khan’s envoy. As it is not possible to elaborate all factors in this short section, only the emergence of Ayutthaya and its relationship with Angkor is the main focus.

Ayutthaya was established in 1351 by King U Thong or Ramadhipati I whose reign was between 1351 and 1369. Prior to its establishment, there were several major towns located on the lower reaches of the rivers in the Chao Phraya basin, and around the upper coasts of the gulf of Siam. These especially included four places Phetchaburi, Suphanburi, Lopburi, and Ayutthaya. After a struggle between the ruling families of these places, Ayutthaya emerged as the dominant centre in the mid-fourteenth century. The Chinese called this region Xian (Hsien), which the Portuguese converted into Siam. According to Michael Vickery, Hsien made its first appearance in the Chinese records in the 1280’s and continued to deal with China under that name right up until modern times. Situated on the lower Chao Phraya River and close to the sea, Ayutthaya prospered as a major international trading center where goods were exchanged between China to the east, India and the Arabia to the west, and the Malay Archipelago to the south. Westerners who arrived in Ayutthaya in the early sixteenth century made a

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11 D. G. E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia, p. 123.
remarkable impression that the city was one of the great powers of Asia, along with China and the Indian empire of Vijayanagar. Before it fell under Thai control, Ayutthaya had in the thirteenth century been the western provinces of the Angkorean Empire with its important administrative region centered in Lopburi. By the end of the thirteenth century, Khmer’s control of the region had faded. This was perhaps caused by the dynastic difficulties in Angkor, the separatist ambitions of a ruling line established in Lopburi and the new assertive mood of the growing Thai population of the lower Chaophraya valley, who had recently been inspired by the example of Sukhothai’s successful bid for independence. As the rulers at Angkor were busy challenging each other for the throne and destroying each other’s religious beliefs, this presented an opportunity for the elites in the Chao Phraya basin to build up their power and connections which finally made Ayutthaya a strong and powerful kingdom.

No one knows for certain about the origin of the founder of Ayutthaya. Topics like who King U Thong or Ramadhipati was and where exactly he came from prior to his rule at Ayutthaya remain controversial and debatable among scholars. What historians know about him is his date of birth in 1314, and his marriages to a princess of Suphanburi in 1331 and to a princess of Lopburi in the 1340s. A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara in their study of Sukhothai history also touch on Ayutthaya and suggest that Ramadhipati was a Thai. However, G. Coedes thinks that he perhaps belonged to a family of Mon or Khmer origins. For David K. Wyatt who agrees with Charnvit Kasetsiri’s hypothesis believes that King U Thong came from a powerful Chinese merchant family who may have been located in Phetburi. Whether his origin was Thai, Mon, Khmer, Chinese or others is not important here. What is important is that King U Thong must have been a

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relatively wealthy and powerful figure in the area. This argument can be supported by the notion that if he had been the opposite, he would not have been able to mobilize mass support, and the powerful Suphanburi and Lopburi families would not have given their respective princesses to him as consorts. His wealth, power and connection through marriages with princesses of powerful families from Suphanburi and Lopburi made U Thong an even more prominent and legitimate ruler. Therefore, his ambition to establish a new kingdom and to proclaim himself king would not upset local people and rulers. Instead, they perhaps gave him enthusiastic support. As it is generally known, Suphanburi was a powerful military city controlling the areas to the west of Ayutthaya, while Lopburi to the north-east was a major administrative and cultural center. Therefore, U Thong would benefit from gaining all the necessary assistance from the two families in term of military, administration and civilization which were fundamental components for state-building in the old days. According to A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, the Suphanburi family was perhaps more Mon or Khmer than Thai. However, for David Wyatt, Suphanburi was preeminently a Siamese, Theravada Buddhist state. For Lopburi’s population, many scholars believe that they may have been predominantly Khmer people especially in the long-established towns dependent on Lopburi including Inburi, Singburi, Chainat, Nakhon Nayok, and Prachinburi. Nevertheless, Wyatt also acknowledges that in Lopburi a substantial Mon element and a growing number of Thai may also have existed. Through connection with both families, U Thong was equipped with special rights and capabilities with which he could draw support from all major ethnic groups in the Chao Phraya basin—Khmer, Mon and Thai—which the Lopburi and Suphanburi families could not.

King Ramadhipati’s court was established much on the model of Angkor because the King got married to a princess from Lopburi, which was an important administrative

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21 David K. Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History, p. 64.
22 Ibid., p. 64.
23 Ibid., p. 64.
and cultural outpost of the Khmer. Moreover, his new kingdom was founded on the territory previously under Angkor’s control. For these reasons, like the king of Angkor, the king of Ayutthaya referred to his subjects by the epithet ‘dust on the holy feet’, and the whole Khmer vocabulary reserved for the person and actions of the king was taken over en bloc for the protocol in the Court of Ayutthaya. Besides, not only the whole vocabulary for the king, but Khmer words, ideas, arts, royal ceremonies, and ‘Indianized’ or ‘Khmer-ized’ institutions were found at the Ayutthayan court as well. For example, these can be seen through the adaptation of divine kingship to Buddhism, the transformation of the Khmer tower into the Prang, the U Thong School of sculpture etc. Because there were several of Angkor’s features at the Ayutthayan court and perhaps Khmer Brahmans, O.W. Wolters make the pertinent suggestion that the Khmer rulers at Angkor may have regarded the struggle with Ayutthaya as a civil war rather than one between two independent kingdoms. He based his argument on the idea that there was no reference to it in Ming records, no Khmer complaint of Siamese aggression.

2.2.2 Angkor and the Attacks from Ayutthaya

Soon after the establishment of Ayutthaya, there was an almost permanent state of war between Angkor and this new kingdom. According to Thai and Cambodian chronicles and historians, the attacks from Ayutthaya resulted in the capture of Angkor by the Siamese a few times in 1353, 1389, 1394 and 1431. However, whether Angkor was seized by the Siamese one time, two times or three times is still a dubious topic and debates among scholars. Their hypothesis will be discussed in length in the paragraphs below.

24 G. Coedes, The Making of Southeast Asia, pp. 146-147.
The real reasons why the first king of Ayutthaya started his war campaign against Cambodia in 1352 soon after he became king remain unknown to historians. However, based on one chronicle about Ayutthaya, King Ramadhipati or King U Thong waged war against the Khmer capital because “khôm prae phak”. The exact intended meaning of this sentence also remains doubtful and subject to different interpretations. According to the chronicle, vassal mo’ an, circa 1351-1352, there is an entry stating that because the “khôm prae phak”—“the khôm turned their faces”—king Ramadhipati sent an army to subdue them. The first attack was defeated, but the second, led by a prince from Suphanburi, was successful. According to Charnvit, “Khôm” is an old Thai word for Khmer or Cambodian; “prae” means to change or to turn; and “phak” is a Pali word “batra” meaning face. Regarding this phrase “khôm prae phak”, King Mongkut’s writing in the nineteenth century suggested “khôm prae phak” means that parts of eastern Siam, which had formerly belonged to Cambodia, had then implicitly “turned their faces” to Siam. King Mongkut’s hypothesis also sounds logical because in the ancient time ordinary Khmer people perhaps could not distinguish clearly between the rulers at Angkor and Ayutthaya because the elements of kingship in both courts looked similar.

Thai scholar, Charnvit Kasetsiri, defined the phrase as ‘the Khmer have turned their faces away in the other direction’ and suggested that because the phrase “khôm prae phak” is now accepted by present-day Thais, it implied that the Khmer were ‘no longer faithful’. However, the interpretations by these modern historians may have been driven by political or national consciousness, since the phrase can also have other meanings. The word “prae” is also used in Khmer language meaning “turn, change, become etc.”, and “phak” which came from Pali, has meaning in Khmer and Thai that is therefore not different than its original meaning of “face”. Therefore, “khôm prae phak” can also mean

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“khôm has changed their face or facial expression” implying that their facial expression or they themselves became unhappy or angry. This notion I have put forward here can also be logical as it is generally known that Ayutthaya was founded on a site which was previously under Khmer control. Moreover, Ayutthaya grew so increasingly wealthy, powerful and influential that its sphere of influence came into conflict with that of Angkor. Consequently, this made the Khmer rulers at Angkor become uneasy and irritated. Perhaps afraid of being attacked by Angkor, King U Thong of Ayutthaya took precaution by attacking Cambodia first. Nevertheless, whether the word “khôm” which the Thai at present think refers to the Khmer was really in use in the early Ayutthaya period or not and whether it was really the term used to address the Khmer is controversial. According to Michael Vickery’s observation, “….before the eighteenth or nineteenth century “khôm” did not refer to Cambodia, and the Burmese and Mon use of krom, which is acceptable as a form of khôm, refers to Ayutthaya.”\footnote{32} Vickery went further to suggest that:

Assuming that khôm refers to the Cambodians, the phrase prae băktr, in the sense commonly given it, implies a condition of previous subjection or vassalage, which at the date 1350-51 seems anachronistic\footnote{33}. If the khôm was used to refer to Ayutthaya as Michael Vickery’s suggestion, then it could mean that it was the Ayutthayan rulers that “prae phak”. It meant they did not want to be under Khmer’s control. Nevertheless, whatever the real intended meaning of the phrase was or whose interpretation is the most accurate does not matter. Common knowledge tells us it was normal in the past within mainland Southeast Asia or perhaps also in other regions of the world for states to wage war against each other as the victory over the enemy would bring to the winner prestige, power, wealth, manpower and other rewards.

\footnote{32} Michael Vickery, Cambodia After Angkor, The Chronicular Evidence for the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries, pp. 409-410.\\footnote{33} Ibid., p. 377.
After several wars with Cambodia, Ayutthaya managed to capture Angkor. However, how many times exactly and what years Angkor fell into the Siamese’s hands is still an argument among scholars. Some like D. G. E. Hall argued that the Siamese managed to occupy Angkor twice\textsuperscript{34}. Yet, Hall failed to give the years when the events occurred. A Cambodian scholar, Michel Tranet, pointed out that the Cambodian capital of Angkor Thom was successfully captured by the Siamese in 1389. They moved 90,000 people to Ayutthaya\textsuperscript{35}. Nonetheless, Tranet fails to give the sources he used. Besides, the year 1389, that he claimed as the fall of Angkor to the Thai, is strange because many well-known historians like Coédes, Vickery, Briggs, Leclère, O.W Wolters and some others did not mention about this year at all. Based on Coédes’s study of the chronicles, the Siamese succeeded at least twice in taking Angkor, the first time in 1353, the second in 1394. However, Coédes warned that these sources are of dubious reliability\textsuperscript{36}. Coédes was certain that Angkor was held by the Siamese during the reign of the Siamese King Boromraja II whose reign started in 1424. The chief event of his reign was the siege and capture of Angkor in 1431, which finally put an end to the Angkor period of Cambodia’s history\textsuperscript{37}. However, Coédes was not certain whether the Siamese managed to capture the capital of Angkor during their wars with Cambodia prior to 1431. A group of historians including Leclère, Rong of Chulalongkorn University, and W. A. R. Wood who wrote “A History of Siam” believe that the Khmer city of Angkor fell to the Siamese a few times. These were in 1353, 1394 and 1341\textsuperscript{38}. According to these scholars, who appeared to have relied mainly on chronicles about Ayutthaya, in 1352, King Ramatibodi I nominated his son, Prince Ramesuan, as the head of the army for the invasion of Cambodia. However, the Thai army was defeated and the King had to dispatch Prince Boromraja, the king’s brother in law, with another army to save his nephew. Boromaraja made a forced march

\textsuperscript{34} D. G. E. Hall, \textit{A History of Southeast Asia}, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{35} Michel Tranet, \textit{Prayatasas nai prah reachea nachak Kampuchea: Sampornapheap roveang prochea chun Khmer-Thai chab tang pi so. vo. ti 13 nai ko. so. (A History of the Kingdom of Cambodia: Relationship between Khmer-Thai since the 13\textsuperscript{th} Century)} (Phnom Penh, 2005), p. 35.
\textsuperscript{36} G. Coédes, \textit{The Making of Southeast Asia}, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 150.
\textsuperscript{38} Adhémard Leclère, \textit{Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1\textsuperscript{er} Siècle De Notre Ère} (Translated version from French into Khmer. Phnom Penh: Angkor Bookshop, 2005), p. 179.; Rong Syamananda, \textit{A History of Thailand}, p. 34.
to Cambodia, where he inflicted a severe defeat on the enemy and captured its capital, Angkor Thom the following year\textsuperscript{39}. The main reason that the Siamese were able to capture the city was because the Khmer King, Prah Srei Lampong Reacheadhiraj, fell ill and died during the Siamese siege of the capital\textsuperscript{40}. Coédes, based on the Annals of Ayutthaya, mentioned that the King of Siam had placed one of his sons on the throne at the Khmer capital. This prince died immediately. Two other Siamese princes, one succeeding the other, reigned until 1357, when a Khmer prince, brother of Lampongra, who had taken refuge in Laos, liberated the city and was crowned there under the name Suryavansa Rājādhirāja\textsuperscript{41}. The second capture of Angkor by the Siamese took place in 1394. In 1393, the king of Siam, Ramesuan, invaded Cambodia and besieged its capital\textsuperscript{42}. According to Leclère, who relied on Cambodian chronicles, the capital was surrounded for several months and finally fell to the Siamese. The main reason of the fall was because of the betrayal of two high Cambodian officials, Ponhea Keo and Ponhea Tai, who opened one of the gates of the city for the Siamese soldiers\textsuperscript{43}. This time the Ayutthayan King placed his son, Indaraja, in charge of Angkor, but he was soon assassinated and Angkor was liberated and ruled by the Cambodian again\textsuperscript{44}. The last capture of the Cambodian capital by the Siamese took place in 1431 when King Boromaraja II of Ayutthaya whose reign was between 1424-1448 managed to hold Angkor Thom after surrounding it for a long time. Rong described the situation after the capture as the following:

With an intention to turn Cambodia into a vassal state of Ayutthaya, Boromaraja II set up his own son, Pra Intaraja, on the throne at Angkor, before the army started its return journey, bringing back to Siam a vast number of prisoners and a large quantity of valuable objects of art including bronze images of animals. But Pra Intaraja occupied the Cambodian throne only for a short time. He was ill and died. Thus, it resulted in the failure of Siam in subjugating Cambodia\textsuperscript{45}.

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\textsuperscript{39} Rong Syamananda, \textit{A History of Thailand}, p. 34. ; W. A. R. Wood cited in G. Coedes, \textit{The Indianized States of Southeast Asia}, pp. 235- 237.

\textsuperscript{40} Adhémard Leclère, \textit{Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1er Siècle De Notre Ère}, p. 179.

\textsuperscript{41} G. Coedes, \textit{The Indianized States of Southeast Asia}, p. 236.

\textsuperscript{42} Rong Syamananda, \textit{A History of Thailand}, p. 35. ; Adhémard Leclère, \textit{Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1er Siècle De Notre Ère}, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{43} Adhémard Leclère, \textit{Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1er Siècle De Notre Ère}, 187.

\textsuperscript{44} G. Coedes, \textit{The Indianized States of Southeast Asia}, p. 237.

\textsuperscript{45} Rong Syamananda, \textit{A History of Thailand}, p. 36.
However, the theories that the Cambodian capital, Angkor, fell under the Siamese occupation a few times have been challenged by Lawrence P. Briggs in his article *The Siamese Invasion of Angkor*. In this article, Briggs’s argument, with which Michael Vickery and Thai historian Charnvit and many other scholars agreed, suggested that the capital of Angkor was captured by the Siamese only one time, and that was in 1431. This argument is based on the Chronicle of Ayutthaya by Luang Prasert, and Ming records listing of Cambodia’s missions to China between 1368 and 1424\(^46\). The Chronicle of Ayutthaya by Luang Prasert, considered to be the most reliable chronicle of all chronicles about Ayutthaya while also being written during the Ayutthaya period, did not mention anything about the capture of Angkor by the Siamese prior to 1431\(^47\). According to Vickery, historians thought it was two times or three times because of the confusion or mistake in the translation and interpretation of the chronicles and the inaccuracy of the chronicles themselves. Vickery’s study and analysis of the Ayutthayan and Cambodian chronicles came to his finding that:

> What the Ayutthayan and Cambodian chronicles say about the latter country before A.D. 1500 is fiction. In the chronicles of both countries, much of the fiction seems to have resulted from honest mistakes over records which were not clear, and which in the absence of any tradition of critical analysis of sources could not be clarified\(^48\).

Vickery raised the examples of controversy in the Ayutthayan and Cambodian chronicles as followed:

> …the name found in Luong Prasert, *brah nagar indr*, would seem to be the more appropriate, for it fits titles which have been used for Angkor in later centuries and which included the terms *nagar indapatha* or *indraprastha*. I suggest that there has been confusion both among the Thai chronicles themselves and among the Thai and Cambodian texts concerning the conquest of Angkor and the conquest of Ayutthaya by a prince from Suphanburi. The confusion was probably due to the fact that the situations,

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conquest of Angkor by Ayutthaya, conquest of Ayutthaya by Suphanburi, conquest of Ayutthaya from Chainat were all structurally similar situations, each involving a *brahmahānagar* or *nagar hluon*, “capital,” the differences between which may not always have been clearly understood, and princes Nagar Indr or Indarājā who were both related to king Paramarājādhirāj.\(^{49}\).

In his article *The Siamese Invasion of Angkor*, Briggs was impressed by the Thai Phongsawadan versions because they speak of an attack on Cambodia in the 1350s, but not on an attack on, or conquest of, Angkor. Briggs pointed out that, in fact, the Thai-language versions all say the attack was against “krun kambujādhipati”, which may mean the Cambodia kingdom, or Cambodian capital, or even, in Cambodian usage, the Cambodian ruler. Therefore, it is simply the matter of loose translations in European languages which did not convey the full meaning of the original\(^ {50}\). In my opinion, the argument by Briggs and Michael Vickery of the fall of Angkor to the Siamese in 1431 seems to be logical. It is less possible that Ayutthaya only two years after its foundation managed to defeat the rulers at Angkor, which was an old empire. It would be more convincing if the phrase “against *krun kambujādhipati*” is interpreted as the attack against the Cambodia’s towns or provincial cities. The Ayutthayan kings perhaps waged wars against the Cambodian provinces near Ayutthaya taking their population and subjugating the territory first. These can be compared to cutting the limb of the Angkorean kings. Once Ayutthaya became stronger, while Angkor became weaker, Ayutthaya finally advanced to the Khmer capital.

### 2.2.3 Changing of Cambodian Capitals

After the occupation of Angkor for a while, a prince known as Chao Ponhea Yat together with his loyalists managed to force the Ayutthayan prince and his troops out of Angkor. Despite the success, Chao Ponhea Yat did not attempt to re-establish Angkor as his capital. A decision was made to move the capital down to Srei Santhor, a site near the Mekong River. Because the new city was flooded during rainy season, Chao Ponhea Yat

\(^{49}\) Ibid., pp. 394- 395.

\(^{50}\) Lawrence P. Briggs cited in ibid., pp. 302- 307.
moved his court to Chaktomok (four faces), a place where the present-day Phnom Penh is situated. According to Leclère, the decision to abandon Angkor occurred in 1388\textsuperscript{51}. For Coédes, this took place in 1431\textsuperscript{52}. Briggs thinks that the decision to move the city was made in 1432\textsuperscript{53}. However, O. W. Wolters suggested that Angkor was abandoned not in 1432 as Briggs supposed, but sometime after 1444\textsuperscript{54}. It is hard to say which scholar’s notion is the right one, as their suggestion is simply their hypothesis which each of them made based on what sources they had. However, we can say for certain that the abandonment of Angkor did not take place before 1431.

No one knows for certain about the real reasons behind the transfer of the city from Angkor to new places because these have not been found in inscriptions. Instead, they were found in the chronicles. However, the chronicles were not written by people at that time. They were written much later, approximately 300 or 400 hundred years later. Therefore, they cannot be totally reliable. There have been a number of historians who attempted to make the hypotheses. Coédes and Leclère came up with the notion that the city was abandoned because it is near Ayutthaya. Therefore, it was too vulnerable and too difficult to defend\textsuperscript{55}. For O. W. Wolters, he suggested that the decision to abandon the capital was made due to feuds within the Khmer royal family stimulated by Siam, which caused a civil war involving regional divisions, rival capitals, and a wasteful consumption of manpower in the fighting\textsuperscript{56}. Some historians even went further to suggest that Angkor was abandoned because of such reasons as the failure of the irrigation system at Angkor, the shortage of water\textsuperscript{57}, the epidemic, natural disaster etc. However, David Chandler and Michael Vickery have a viewpoint different from those of the above scholars. Based on their theories, the city was transferred from Angkor to a new location in the south.

\textsuperscript{51} Adhèmard Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1\textsuperscript{er} Siècle De Notre Ère, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{52} G. Coedes, The Indianized States of Southeast Asia, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{54} O.W. Wolters cited in D. G. E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{55} G. Coedes, The Making of Southeast Asia, p. 196.; Adhèmard Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1\textsuperscript{er} Siècle De Notre Ère, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{56} O.W. Wolters cited in D. G. E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{57} See Heng Thung, “Revising the Collapse of Angkor,” SPAFA, Vo. 9, no 1, 1999, pp. 1-20.
because the new place is near the Mekong River and is closer to the South China Sea. Therefore, it is easy to trade with foreigners especially with the Chinese. Noticeably, in the 13th and 14th centuries there was a rapid expansion of Chinese maritime trade with Southeast Asia, and particularly with the mainland. Both Chandler and Vickery regard a dozen tributary missions sent from Cambodia to China between 1371 and 1419, nearly equal to a handful sent throughout the previous 500 years of Angkor history, as attempts to trade or set up trade arrangements, not as a sign of trouble with the Siamese as believed by other historians. Therefore, they see the Cambodian’s relocation of their capital not as a result of fear of the Thai or Thai military superiority, but as a result of a desire to trade. Chandler and Vickery argue that the struggle between Ayutthaya and Cambodia was a depiction of two states nearly equal militarily, with Cambodia most of the time, well into the seventeenth century, able to defend the Thai attacks. The Cambodians even carried warfare into the 1570s and 80s right up to the Chao Phraya river basin. These attacks all came during the reign of Mahā Dharmarājā, at a time when Siam was recovering from a Burmese invasion and destruction of the old Ayutthayan dynasty. Even when the Thai had recovered under Naresuan and were able to mount a devastating invasion of Cambodia, the effects were short-lived and Cambodia quickly recovered its independence. Though each intellectual came up with different theories concerning the relocation of the Cambodian capital, there is no single theory that can claim absolute rightness. The actual causes behind the move of the city were perhaps not isolated, but the combination of several determinants.

Although the Khmer king moved the capital from Angkor to new locations far south, Angkor has never been abandoned as several scholars thought. There have been

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59 Ibid., p. 78.; Ibid., p. 515.
60 Ibid., pp. 77-78.; Ibid., p. 515.
61 Ibid., p. 78.; Ibid., p. 502.
people living in the area until the present day. A Christian missionary, Father Gabriel de San Antonio, who traveled around the region in the late 1500s, wrote records that also mentioned the name Angkor. His record was written and sent to King Philippe III of Spain in 1603. His report titled: “A Brief and Truthful Relation of Events in the Kingdom of Cambodia,” was published in 1604. Below is the quotation from it:

The main cities are Anchor (Angkor), Churdumuco (Chaktumuk Phnom Penh) and Sistor (Srei Santhor), which means “big villages”. This last city is so named because it is very important and has more than fifty thousand inhabitants. There are the king’s court, the kingdom’s councils, the audience and the chancellery through which it is governed. It is on the river Mekhong’s shore (Mekong), fifty leagues inland.

If his comments are true, it means that Angkor was not abandoned. It happened to be that some locations along the rivers also became cities and received more focus, perhaps due to trade as suggested by Chandler and Vickery. Nevertheless, it could also mean that Angkor was abandoned for a short time before it was rediscovered by King Ang Chan in the 1530s. There is also evidence that the king and his successor attempted to stay there for a while. Therefore, when father Gabriel de San Antonio arrived in Cambodia in late 1500s, Angkor had already been known and gained some attention from settlers. However, Chuléan, Prenowitz & Thompson believe that there have been always people settled in the area of Angkor. They base their argument on the notion that there is a stone inscription in the 16th century at Phnom Bakhéng. The owner of the inscription is a faithful Buddhist. To the west of Angkor Thom there also remain Buddha statues of that period. Furthermore, at Chon Prah Pon and Chon Ba Kan, were found 40 inscriptions from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Nonetheless, people who had settled there between the change of the capital and the rediscovery by King Ang Chan may have been relatively small in number. This resulted from the large movement of people to Siam, and death as a result of war, poverty and disease. Some had escaped to the forest or settled down in

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63 Ang Chuléan, Eric Prenowitz & Ashley Thompson, Angkor: Past- Present- Future, p. 83.
65 Ang Chuléan, Eric Prenowitz & Ashley Thompson, Angkor: Past- Present- Future, p. 85.
66 Ibid., p. 89.
other areas, while others went along with the king to the new capital. The argument above can be supported by the evidence that before King Ang Chan discovered Angkor and settled there for a while, very few people or perhaps none in the new city had heard of or known the old city. This can be exemplified by what Father Gabriel de San Antonio wrote in his record:

In the year 1570\(^{67}\), a city in the kingdom was discovered that the natives had not yet seen nor heard of … it is magnificently built, has a well fortified stonewall. There are many coats and letters that nobody understands\(^{68}\).

2.3 Lovek Period

As stated above, the majority of Cambodian people believe that the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was composed with the chief aim to explain the historical events during the Lovek period when the Siamese sacked the capital. Therefore, this section contains longer and more detailed information than the other two. Despite the length, it is not possible to cover everything. “Lovek period” in this usage is used to refer to the period when Cambodia’s capital was in Lovek area.

2.3.1 Overall Characteristics of Lovek: Name, Meaning, Location & Its Construction as the Capital

No one knows for certain when and why the area was named “Lovek”, and who named it. In the old Khmer inscriptions, they used lvek (inscriptions K 850 and K 144), but its modern usage is Lovek\(^{69}\). However, the meaning of the name is controversial. The name “Lovek” may be a possible derivative of one of the following Khmer words—Vaek, Lovaeng, or Lovaek. The meaning of these three Khmer words should be

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\(^{67}\) 1570 was not the correct year that Angkor was discovered. The old temple was discovered by King Ang Chan in the 1530s.

\(^{68}\) Gabriel de San Antonio, A Brief and Truthful Relations of Events in the Kingdom of Cambodia, p. 7.

explained here so that we can get a picture of the possible meaning of the name of the area. In explaining the meanings, the Khmer Dictionary written by the Supreme Patriarch Chuon Nath and published by the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh has been referenced. The word “Vaek” in Khmer as a verb means *to open, to make space* etc. As a noun, “Vaek” has two meanings. The first one is *ladle*. Another one is *kinds of poisonous snake*; for example, Vaek Roneam (Cobra), Vaek Sró’ngae, Vaek Dambok etc.70 For “Lovaeng”, used as an adjective, means *spacious, large, open-spaced* etc.71 The word “Lovaek” in Khmer as a noun means *a period between two events* (transitional period), or *a location between two places* (transit place). It is hard to say from which one of the three words the term “Lovek” had derived. Regarding the definitions, each of the three words can claim to be the origin of “Lovek” since each of them makes sense of the area. Based on the interviews with some old Buddhist laymen at Wat Trolengkeng, an important monastery in Lovek, there are two oral traditions concerning why the area was called so. The first oral story is that long time ago there was a king who came with his officials by boats along Tonlé Sap. Their boats stopped over in the area. The king, then went onshore by *Vaek* (using his hands to open up the way to pass through) the mangrove. Up there he found a good open space. The King felt satisfied with the area, and thought that his palace should be built there. From that time on, the area was called *Vaek*. Later on, it was transformed into “Lovek”. Another oral tradition is that long time ago there was a king who was accompanied by many of his officials and servants came by boats along Tonlé Sap. Their boats stopped over at the river bank in the area of Lovek. When cooking a meal on the boat for the monarch, the king’s chef accidentally *Lung* (dropped, fell) the *Vaek* (ladle) into the river. As a result, the chef could not prepare the meal in time for the king. From that time on, people called the area *Lung Vaek* (dropping the ladle). As time passed, *Lung Vaek* developed to Lovek.74 However, the old men

71 Ibid., p. 1142
72 Ibid., p. 1091
73 Interviews with old Buddhist laymen at Wat Trolengkeng, a monastery in Lovek area, 19 November 2006.
74 Ibid.
interviewed did not know the period and the name of the king who came to the area. The two stories are different—one involving opening the mangrove area for walking, and the other dropping the ladle into the river. Nevertheless, they share one thing in common, and that is that the king and his officials came by boats along Tonlé Sap, and they stopped over in the area before they went on their journey. This means that the area of Lovek served as a transit point for people who traveled up and down Tonlé Sap. If this hypothesis is correct, it means that the term “Lovek” was derived from “Lovaek,” which means a location between two places (transit place). Noticeably, Lovek is located near Tonlé Sap en route between Angkor to the northwest and Phnom Penh to the southeast. Another hypothesis is that the area was named so because there were a lot of Vaek (poisonous snakes) living in the mangrove forest, but it is groundless due to the unavailability of oral tradition and sources.

Lovek in ancient times was one of the provinces of Cambodia. Then, its status was reduced as a district in the province of Kampong Chhnang province. Later on, it was changed to Kampong Tralach district also in Kampong Chnang province. Lovek also used to be the name of a military base in the old Cambodia’s capital of Lovek.

Lovek became Cambodia’s capital during the 16th century. It is located approximately 60 km to northwest of Phnom Penh. Lovek is situated close to Ton Lé Sap (Sap River), one of the major rivers which converges with the Mekong River at the junction in Phnom Penh and flows down to the South China Sea via the present-day Southern Vietnam. Lovek was built as Cambodia’s capital during the reign of King Ang Chan or Chan Reachea (1516-1566). The king, after he had defeated his rival Sdach Korn also known as Srei Chetha in 1525, ordered the move of the capital from Pursat to Lovek. It took three years from 1527 to 1529 for the construction of the new city. It was at Lovek that King Ang Chan received his coronation. According to Treng Ngea, the

selection of the site as a new city came mainly because of security reasons\textsuperscript{76}. He based his argument on the fact that the city was situated at the best geo-strategic location for self-defense against the invasion of the enemy with a river, lake, and thick forest surrounding it. This military city was built in rectangular shape with a width of 2 km and length of 3 km. The city was enclosed by high earthen fortification. Besides, there were moats and thick bamboo forest acting as a hedge with its dimension of 160 meters on all sides. Moreover, the citadel of Lovek was so large that no horse could gallop around it\textsuperscript{77}. Another important reason for the selection of Lovek as the capital may have been associated with trade, which contributed to the flourishing economy of the country. Noticeably, Lovek is close to the river. This provided the capital with opportunity and easy access to international trade in the South China Sea via the Mekong River.

After the construction was complete, King Ang Chan moved to the new capital in 1529, and had reigned there until he died in 1566. After his death, Lovek had served as the Khmer capital for the next three Cambodian kings before it was finally destroyed by Ayutthaya’s army.

2.3.2 Lovek before the Status as the Capital

Although Lovek gained its status as Cambodia’s capital in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, evidences show that the area had long been inhabited. As the name “Lovek” perhaps derived from the Khmer word “Lovaeck,” which means \textit{a location between two places} (transit point), it gives us an idea that Lovek may have been an important port that people called on when they traveled along Tonlé Sap between Angkor and other provinces to the south and the east.

\textsuperscript{76} Treng Ngea, \textit{Provatasa Khmer (A History of Khmer)}, p. 18. This book is in Khmer language. It is usually referred to by Cambodian historians.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 19.
According to a Thai historian, the area of Lovek was known to the Siamese at least since the early Ayutthaya period\textsuperscript{78}. Santi Phakdeekham found the name Lovek appeared in one of the old Ayutthaya chronicles, which the Thai historians think was written in the early Ayutthaya period\textsuperscript{79}. According to a Cambodian historian, Dr. Ros Chantrabot, who is now working on a book about strategic military bases in the ancient Khmer Empire, the city or the military camp at Lovek was not new. It had been there since the Angkorean time. Chantrabot added that during Angkor period, there were several military bases around the capital of Angkor, all of which Lovek was one\textsuperscript{80}. His comment is interesting and logical. Geographically speaking, Lovek is situated near the river on the way to Angkor. This means that if the enemy from the South China Sea; for example, Champa, came by the river to attack the capital of Angkor, they had to clash with the Cambodian troops at Lovek first before they reached Angkor. In addition to the opinions by Santi and Ros Chantrabot, another concrete evidence proving the long-existing importance of Lovek is the finding of stone inscriptions in the area. Interestingly, the inscriptions, K136, K137, and K432, all dated back to the Angkorean period. The inscriptions were written in Sanskrit and old Khmer. Inscription K 136 in old Khmer and Sanskrit is believed to have been written in the 10\textsuperscript{th} century. Inscription K432 in Sanskrit found at Wat Tralengkeng in Lovek should have been written in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{81}.

The idea that Lovek was one of Angkor’s military strategic bases, and the fact that old inscriptions dated back to the Angkorean period were found there, suggests that the area of Lovek had been an important place since the Angkorean period or even earlier than that. More importantly, Lovek was known and recorded by foreigners, the Siamese, since the early Ayutthaya period shows that the area had settlements there and was perhaps an important city of the Angkorean Empire.

\textsuperscript{78} Santi Phakdeekham, “Lovek: Ratchathani Khamen yuk lang muang phranakhon (Lovek: The Khmer Capital After Angkor),” pp. 79- 120.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., pp. 79- 120.
\textsuperscript{80} A talk with Dr. Ros Chantrabot, a historian and the dean of the Faculty of Sociology and Humanity of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, 28 November 2006.
\textsuperscript{81} Santi Phakdeekham, “Lovek: Ratchathani Khamen yuk lang muang phranakhon (Lovek: The Khmer Capital After Angkor),” pp. 79- 120.
If it is the case that the area of Lovek had been an important place since the Angkor period, new light is illuminated on the existence of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, which the majority of Cambodian people believed to have linked with Lovek. If the hypothesis above is true, the legend can also be considered to have existed in Lovek, but it is a problem of timing—when? Did it take place when Lovek was a city or military base of Angkor, or when Lovek was the capital city in the 16th century? After all, the story had been passed on for several generations orally before it was written down. Therefore, the story probably emerged a long time ago, but people have adapted it and linked it with new events to make the story alive. However, this is simply one of the theories. The accurate answer cannot be given. It opens to readers the opportunity to analyze the concepts and make sense on their own.

2.3.3 Lovek and Its Significance

Lovek prior to its capture by the Siamese was a strong and prosperous city. There were trade activities taking place between the city and South China Sea. That the size of the city was large is the evidence of the richness of the kingdom. If Cambodia had not been so rich, it would not have had the resources to build a capital of that size82. The record of the Spanish priest of the Dominican Order Father Friar Gabriel de San Antonio, about Cambodia, gave very descriptive information about the wealth and prosperity of the country. Below is a quotation from it:

In Cambodia, there are gold, silver, precious stones, lead, tin, brass, silk, cotton, incense, gum, benzoin, lacquer, ivory, rice, elephants, buffaloes, horses, cattle, goats, deer, chickens and fruit as plentiful as it is savory. Besides, that country holds the trade for the whole of Asia and it is a necessary door which will open to the priceless wealth of the kingdom of Laos. Cambodia has so many of those precious things that, when king Apram Langara fled to Laos, he scattered gold and silver coins on his way so that the Siamese were so busy picking them up that they did not catch him up83.

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83 Gabriel de San Antonio, A Brief and Truthful Relations of Events in the Kingdom of Cambodia, pp. 87-88.
Father Friar Gabriel de San Antonio’s report went further to say:

And even if that proof were lacking, one thing only would suffice to demonstrate the said truth, and that is the great and continuous affluence of the Japanese and of the Chinese in the kingdom. Those foreigners are like the Jews; they never go to barren or poor lands but always live and trade in countries where milk and honey flow, where they can reap a profit. It is an established fact that the reason why they trade with the kingdom of Cambodia is because that kingdom is very rich and procures great profits. The Spanish who live in that archipelago do not need anything else to rely on to see the difference between rich and poor countries, than the presence or the absence of the Japanese and the Chinese.

Although some of his description may be an exaggeration, it at least gives us a picture that Cambodia in the 16th century depended on trade. That there was the presence of Chinese and Japanese in Lovek shows that the capital was one of the major international trading centers in Southeast Asia. Beside the Chinese and the Japanese, various sources also mention that there were the Arabs, Spanish, and Portuguese as well as traders from the Indonesian archipelago who were trading and residing there too. According to David Chandler, Cambodia in the 15th and 16th centuries, was a powerful trading center and was also just as attractive to foreign traders as was Ayutthaya.

In addition to its status as the trading center, Lovek was an important arts and religious center of Cambodia at that time as well. Based on the Cambodian legend, inside Lovek were two statues, Preah Ko (sacred bull) and Preah Keo (sacred precious stone). Both of them were worshipped by local people. Because Cambodian people considered Preah Ko as sacred, they placed precious texts and formula inside his belly. Treng Ngea suggested that even though the belief is legendary or mythical in nature, it gives us an idea that Lovek was a considerably strong-hold city built for the purposes of not only defending against foreign invasions, but also as a Klang (storehouse/warehouse) for the storing or housing of the national cultural heritage after Angkor. Besides, sources from

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84 Ibid., p. 88.
85 David P. Chandler, A History of Cambodia, p. 78.
87 Ibid., p. 19.
old people in the area related that there were about 120 Buddhist monasteries in Lovek at the time it was the capital. Though the number of the monasteries was reduced after the fall of the city, at present, there are still a considerable number of pagodas located near each other in the area. The great number of Buddhist monasteries in the city means that Lovek at that time was a chief concentration center of religion. The big number of the monasteries can also be interpreted to mean that Lovek had a huge and prosperous community, which could afford to serve the functioning of the approximately 120 pagodas.

2.3.4 Cambodian-Siamese Relations before the Attack on Lovek

According to Cambodian chronicles, the early 16th century marked the internal conflict in Cambodia developed between new rulers (officials or chieftains) against the power of the king. It also showed increasingly intensifying wars between Cambodia and her neighbor, Ayutthaya. Cambodian King Srei Sokunboth, whose reign was between 1504 and 1512, had his power challenged by one of his brothers-in-law known as Sdach Korn. As a brother-in-law of the king, Korn became so powerful and influential that he finally attempted to confront the king. Chronicles mentioned that King Srei Sokunboth arranged a plot to assassinate Korn since he felt afraid that Sdach Korn would take over his throne. Fortunately, Korn managed to escape from the assassination. He gathered men in distant districts and provinces to wage war against King Sokunboth. After several wars, Korn managed to kill King Sokunboth in 1512 and declared himself to be the new king of Cambodia with the royal name as Srei Chethathireach Reameathipdei. King Sokunboth’s younger brother, Prince Ang Chan or Chan Reachea, who was responsible for supervising Phnom Penh and provinces in the west fled with some of his royal family to take refuge in Siam. Four years later in 1516, Prince Ang Chan returned back from

88 Interviews with old Buddhist laymen at Wat Trolengkaeng, and old people in Lovek, 19-20 November 2006.
89 Eng Soth, Prabreach pong savada Khmer: Mohaboros Khmer (Khmer Chronicles: The Khmer Heroes) (Phnom Penh: Buddhist Institute, 1969), Part III.
Ayutthaya with an army, elephants and weapons. According to Cambodian chronicles, Prince Ang Chan when taking refuge in Ayutthaya was responsible for capturing elephants for the Siamese king. One day because of the desire to return back to Cambodia, he made a request to the King of Siam. However, his request was turned down. Prince Chan Reachea, therefore, came up with a plan to create false information that there was a large white elephant living in the forest to the east of Ayutthaya. Hearing the news, the King of Siam desperately wanted to have this elephant. Therefore, he ordered Prince Chan Reachea to take the responsibility of capturing the elephant. Prince Chan Reachea made a request to the King of Siam that in order to seize the elephant, he needed 5000 soldiers, 100 elephants, weaponry, food and the royal sword with him⁹¹. But another source says Prince Ang Chan requested only 500 men from the King of Ayutthaya⁹². With the military resources in hand, Ang Chan marched into Cambodia and mobilized additional tens of thousands of Cambodian people from provinces along his way. After nine years of war, he managed to kill Sdach Korn and received the coronation as the new king of Cambodia at Lovek in 1529. Chandler suggested that King Chan Reachea’s temporary refuge in Ayutthaya and his restoration to power under Thai patronage set a precedent that many Cambodian kings were to follow⁹³. However, according to Cambodian chronicle, Chan Reachea was a very strong and powerful king. Western scholars like Coédes and D. G. E Hall think that Ang Chan was the most powerful monarch Cambodia was to produce after the fall of Angkor. During his long reign of fifty years he was able to turn the tables on Siam and regained for his country at least some of its former prestige⁹⁴. After Ang Chan became king, the Siamese king sent his diplomats to Lovek asking him to send tribute to Ayutthaya as dictated by traditional practices. However, this order was rejected by Lovek. As a result, the Siamese king sent ten of thousands of his soldiers to wage war against Cambodia. However, King Ang Chan was able to defeat the Siamese force and even able to wage counter attacks against Siam.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 15.
⁹² Adhèmard Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1er Siècle De Notre Ère, p. 221.
⁹³ David P. Chandler, A History of Cambodia, p. 81.
in an attempt to get back the population and provinces that the Khmer had lost earlier to Ayutthaya⁹⁵. The Siamese chronicles mention a Cambodian raid on the Prachim province in 1531. However, W. A. R. Wood in his History of Siam placed the Cambodian raid on Prachim in 1549 during the Burmese siege of Ayutthaya⁹⁶. From 1559 onwards Ang Chan unceasingly raided Siamese territory. In 1564 his armies advanced to the wall of Ayutthaya, but returned empty-handed, for the city had fallen into the Burmese hands in February of that year⁹⁷. Ang Chan’s greatness brought about Cambodia’s independence, peace and prosperity during his reign which lasted until thirty years after his death in 1566. After his death, he was succeeded by his son with the reign title of Preah Samdach Boromreacheathireach reameathipdei or Borom Reachea I, whose reign was from 1566 to 1576. Like his father, Borom Reachea I was also a very strong king. He carried on the task his father had been doing. He also led the soldiers to attack Ayutthaya at the time the city was surrounded by the Burmese led by the great Burmese king known by the name Bayinnaung. Under Borom Reachea I’s reign, provinces in Korat fell once again under Cambodia’s occupation⁹⁸. According to David Wyatt, the Cambodia’s raids on Siam took place frequently in the next two decades (1570, 1575, 1578, 1582 twice, and 1587), each time moving war captives from the prosperous eastern and gulf provinces from Chantaburi to Phetburi⁹⁹.

While Cambodia’s frequent attacks presented additional nightmares for Ayutthaya when the kingdom had already suffered from the Burmese assaults, they also provided King Maha Tammaraja of Ayutthaya with a good excuse to propose to the Burmese the permission to improve Ayutthaya’s army and fortification¹⁰⁰. During that time, Ayutthaya became Burma’s vassal state after the capital was captured by Burmese King

⁹⁷ D. G. E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia, p. 136.
⁹⁹ David K. Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History, p. 100.
Bayinnaung. Maha Tammaraja was crowned king of Ayutthaya with the support of Bayinnaung. The improvement of the army and the city’s military bases earlier was one of the reasons that Maha Tammaraja’s son, Prah Naresuan, managed to restore his country’s independence from Burma and his successful wars against other states including Lovek of Cambodia.

### 2.3.5 Siamese Attack on Lovek

Following Borom Reachea I’s death in 1576, his son, Preahbath Satha I (1576-1595), succeeded as the new Cambodian king. At the end of King Satha’s reign, bad fortune took place in Cambodia as the Siamese led by Prah Naresuan began war campaigns against the kingdom. Prah Naresuan or Naret was born in 1555. He is the son of King Maha Thammaracha who was enthroned in Ayuthhaya by the Burmese after they had sacked the capital. Naresuan had spent most of his childhood in Burma before he was permitted to return back to Siam in 1571 when his sister was presented to King Bayinnaung. The death of the great Burmese King Bayinnaung in 1581 weakened Burma’s hold on Siam. This opportunity allowed Prince Naresuan to rapidly begin building up his country’s power of resistance against Burma’s suzerainty. After several wars, Prince Naret managed to bring back full independence for Siam. According to various sources in Thai and foreign languages, Prah Naresuan was a leader of magnetic personality, a born soldier with great intelligence, resourcefulness and courage. He is the greatest Siamese in 1,000 years. David Wyatt commented in his book, “It is difficult to imagine that the history of Ayutthaya would have been the same without King Naresuan, for he is one of those rare figures in Siamese history.”

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101 “The greatest Thai hero comes to life,” The Nation 18 January 2007. It is available at http://nationalmultimedia.com/2007/01/18/headlines_30024447.php. The Nation comments King Naresuan as the greatest Siamese in 1000 years. However, the Nation fails to identify what 1000 years means, considering from what year or period or dynasty. Noticeably, the date of the foundation of the Sokhuthai Kingdom until now is less than 800 years.

102 David K. Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History, p. 100.
of the Burmese, Prah Naresuan started to turn his forces against the Cambodians. The reasons of his war campaigns against Cambodia are presented in the paragraphs below.

According to Coédes, Ayutthaya and Lovek agreed to reconcile by signing a treaty in 1584\textsuperscript{103}. But, for Wood, the treaty was concluded in 1585 between King Satha of Cambodia and Prah Naresuan\textsuperscript{104}. But in Cambodia’s chronicle, this took place between King Satha and Prah Naresuan’s father, King Maha Thammaracha\textsuperscript{105}. The signing of the agreement between King Satha and King Maha Thammaracha would sound more logical than between King Satha and Prah Naresuan since the year 1584 or 1585 Naresuan had not become king yet. Nonetheless, whoever signed the agreement with who is not important here. The importance is that there was some form of agreement at that time. Based on Vickery’s opinion, the treaty at that time perhaps was proposed by Ayutthaya because the kingdom was going through hard times as a result of the Burmese attacks\textsuperscript{106}. Under the term of the agreement, King Satha of Cambodia decided to help Siam against the Burmese. He sent an army under the command of his brother Prince Srisup’anma (Suriyopor) to assist the Siamese in defeating a Laotian invasion led by the Burmese governor of Chiang Mai\textsuperscript{107}. However, after the victory in the battle, Pra Naret and the Cambodian prince had quarreled with each other. The argument, thus, broke up the alliance, and led to the renewal of Cambodia’s raid on Siam in 1587 at the time when Ayutthaya was besieged by the Burmese. After the Burmese abandoned the siege through shortage of supplies, Pra Naret turned to deal with Cambodia\textsuperscript{108}. Another reason for Siam’s decision to attack Cambodia found in Father Gabriel de San Antonio’s report was

\textsuperscript{103} G. Coedes, \textit{The Making of Southeast Asia}, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{104} Wood cited in D. G. E. Hall, \textit{A History of Southeast Asia}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{105} Eng Soth, \textit{Prahreach pong savada Khmer: Mohaboros Khmer (Khmer Chronicles: The Khmer Heroes)}, Part III.
\textsuperscript{107} Wood cited in D. G. E. Hall, \textit{A History of Southeast Asia}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p. 132.
involved with the desire to have a rare white elephant. The Spanish missionary described what he had heard as the following:

… King Apram (the name of the Khmer king called by Westerner) obtained the kingdom of Cambodia and began to reign from 1570. Shortly before his birth, a white elephant was born in that kingdom, a rare and very much wished for event that had never happened before in those provinces. The king of Siam wanted to force Apram Langara, the king of Cambodia, to hand over the animal to him. For that purpose, he gathered together an army of thirty thousand men along with three thousand war elephants to attack Cambodia and took away the animal109.

Though his report here cannot be totally reliable, it gives us the new angle that further reason for the assault against Cambodia, besides taking revenge, probably involved King Naresuan’s intention to impose suzerainty over Cambodia. This since the white elephant in those times was the symbol of superiority or suzerainty in Southeast Asia’s concept of kingship. However, if we have a look at what Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit describe about the intention of the Burmese when they sacked Ayutthaya, it gives us an idea that Ayutthaya’s attack on Lovek seemed to come from the desire to prevent Cambodia from becoming a rival state of Ayutthaya in terms of military and trade rather than just an attempt to reduce Cambodia to a tributary state. Baker and Pasuk’s description of the Burmese intention is as follows:

The Burmese aim was not to force Ayutthaya into a tributary status, but to obliterate it as a rival capital by destroying not only the physical resources of the city, but also its human resources, ideological resources, and intellectual resources. Any of these which were movable were carted away to Ava, including nobles, skilled people, Buddha images, books, weapons and members of the royal family. Resources that were immovable were destroyed110.

This hypothesis also appears to be logical, because when King Naresuan captured Lovek, he was said to have destroyed the city and moved thousands of Cambodian people including some royal families, skilled people and intellectuals. Besides, Cambodia’s

109 Gabriel de San Antonio, A Brief and Truthful Relations of Events in the Kingdom of Cambodia, p. 10.
legend mentioned that he also brought statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo to Siam. Yet, a question may be posed: if King Naresuan had had no intention of making Cambodia a vassal state of Siam, why did he leave one of his commanders in charge of Lovek when he returned back to Ayutthaya? Though taking revenge, imposing suzerainty or simply destroying Cambodia’s potentials appears to be the major reason of the war against Lovek, several other reasons should also be considered. These include such matters as manpower, wealth and rivalry in trade. The victory over the Cambodians brought more population and wealth to Ayutthaya to supplement what it had lost earlier during the wars with Burma, and could also be used in preparation for further campaigns against Burma. Besides, the rivalry in trade was also likely one of the motives for the war. In the 16th century, trade provoked east-west rivalries with Ayutthaya in the middle. To the west of Ayutthaya is the Irawadi basin, where Pegu became dominant over the other Burmese states. To the east is the Khmer capital of Lovek. To Siam, destroying Lovek; therefore, meant reducing one of her trade rivals.

How many times Prah Naresuan had attacked Cambodia before he managed to capture Lovek in 1594 remains a bit uncertain among historians since there were some different sources regarding the years of war campaigns. According to some Cambodian chronicles, King Noreasuan began his first war against Cambodia in 1584 when he led 100,000 soldiers, 800 war elephants and 1850 war horses to attack Cambodia. However, some historians suggested that the first war campaign led by Prah Naresuan to raid Cambodia occurred in 1587. Vickery, based on the Anlok inscription, agreed that a Thai invasion in 1587 is probably true. However, Naresuan’s attack on Cambodia at that time failed to capture the city due to the lack of supplies. He ordered his men to

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111 Ibid., p. 11.
withdraw back to Ayutthaya\textsuperscript{115}. Cambodia’s chronicles mentioned that before his army retreated, Prah Naresuan ordered his soldiers to fire silver coins from cannons into the thick bamboo forest, which was a source of strong protection for the capital of Lovek. Once they withdrew, Cambodian people and soldiers started to clear the forest in a search for the silver coins\textsuperscript{116}. The part which scholars all agreed to be true was the expedition in 1593 after King Naresuan managed to defeat another attempt by the Burmese to restore their hold over Siam\textsuperscript{117}. This time the Siamese were able to approach the capital of Lovek and capture it in January 1594\textsuperscript{118}. However, according both Spaniard Antonio de Morga’s account and Wood, the city was taken in July 1594\textsuperscript{119}.

According to Leclère whose opinion is based on chronicles, King Naresuan’s army in 1593 went to attack Cambodia from different directions. One group went to Korat down to Siem Reap then took the boats down to Kampong Svay province. The naval force came by sea to Bassac province (in present-day southern Vietnam). Another naval force attacked Banteay Meas (in present-day Kampot province)\textsuperscript{120}. Based on Thai Chronicles, the routes are different from Leclère’s description. The forces were divided into three main groups. One group recruited in Nakhon Ratchasima moved down to Siem Reap and Kampong Svay on the eastern side of the Tonle Sap, while a fleet from the Southern provinces was to attack Buddhaimās (in Khmer: Banteay Meas). Nareasuan himself would lead another army overland via Battambang\textsuperscript{121}. However, concerning the attack of Banteay Meas, Michael Vickery suggested that it was untrue and a fiction of the

\textsuperscript{116} Eng Soth, Prahrach pong savada Khmer: Mohaboros Khmer (Khmer Chronicles: The Khmer Heroes), Part III, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{119} Antonio de Morga’s account cited in Rong Syamananda, A History of Thailand, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{120} Adhèmard Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1er Siècle De Notre Ère, p. 247.
\textsuperscript{121} Thai Chronicles cited in Michael Vickery, Cambodia After Angkor, The Chronicular Evidence from the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries, pp. 448-449.
chronicles. The event of attacking Banteay Meas was perhaps lifted by chroniclers from the eighteenth century account when the route was well-known to the Siamese troops. Vickery’s argument came from his study of the name of the places and their history. He claims that records from Europeans found no evidence of an important port at Banteay Meas (Thai call: Buddhaimās) and no evidence that the canal there linked with the Mekong was in use in the sixteenth century. Besides, both the Cambodian and Vietnamese chronicles mentioned that the canal was first built around 1820 and connected Chaudoc and Hatien. Based on all these evidences, Vickery came to the conclusion that the Siamese fleet when raiding Cambodia in the 16th century came up the Mekong. Michael Vickery’s argument sounds logical concerning military strategy. Supposing the canal that the Thai chronicles mentioned had existed in the sixteenth century, the Siamese fleet must have gone with a large number of boats. Therefore, going through a small canal would not be a good choice. Besides, using the Mekong up to the Cambodian capital would be much less time-consuming. If they had used the canal, it was perhaps only a smaller portion of their troops, while a bigger one would have used the Mekong. Strategically speaking, it would be unwise to place all the troops traveling along a small canal while ignoring the big Mekong.

Before the capital fell to the Siamese, King Satha had asked for help from the Spanish governor in the Philippines promising in return commercial concessions as well as the promise to treat well the Christian missionaries who preached in the country. However, the Siamese managed to capture the capital and left before the arrival of the Spanish fleet of about a hundred men. According to the Royal History of Siam, King Satha of Cambodia after the city fell was captured and executed in a ceremony called Pathomkam. His blood was brought to clean King Naresuan’s feet. However,

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123 Ibid., pp. 400-406.
124 Ibid., pp. 400-406.
125 Ibid., pp. 400-406.
Ayutthaya Chronicle by Luong Prasert did not mention this ceremony at all. But many of the chronicles written during the Rattanakosin Period say the same thing or even have the same wordings\textsuperscript{127}. Chanchai Phak-athikhom who read many old legal documents in the Ayutthaya period explained that the meaning of the ceremony 
\textit{Pathomkam} in the Ayutthaya period was not associated with beheading. Based on her opinion, 
\textit{Pathomkam} referred to the ceremony of catching and taming the elephant. There were three ceremonies for the king—Pra Ratchapithi Pathomkam, Mathayomkam, and Odomkam\textsuperscript{128}. Therefore, what was mentioned in most Ratanakosin period about the beheading ceremony is not true. The idea was probably to overawe the Cambodians, deterring them from rising again\textsuperscript{129}. For Vickery, he thinks that what stated in the Thai chronicles about the execution of King Satha by King Naresuan was the conflation of several “Satthas”. Noticeably, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were also two other Cambodian kings named Satha. The first was born in 1620, became king in 1641, and died in approximately 1658. The second was born in 1703, became king in 1722, abdicated seven years later, became king again in the same year, lost the throne in 1737, and died in approximately 1748. Both of them were in conflict with older relatives who were pro-Thai and both of them were involved in actions leading to Vietnamese intervention. The last Satha died after the Thai intervention\textsuperscript{130}. Whatever the reasons were regarding the intentions in the chronicles are not important now. The fact, as supported by Cambodian chronicles and Western sources, is that King Satha of Lovek was not killed by the Siamese. He together with his son had escaped to Laos before the city fell leaving behind his brother, Prince Suriyopor, in charge of Lovek\textsuperscript{131}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{127} Chanchai Phak-athikhom, “Prarataphithi pathommakam nai po. so. 2127: khotoyaeng nai prawattisat thai (The Ceremony of Pathommakam in 2127 Buddhist era: Controversy in Thai History),” in Sujit Wongthet (ed.), Pra Naesuan ti mueang Lavek tae mai dai kha phraya Lavek (King Naesuan Attacked Lovek But Did Not Kill the King of Lovek) (Bangkok: Matichon Press, 2001), pp. 3-64.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid., pp. 3-64.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Rong Syamananda, A History of Thailand, p. 60.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Michael Vickery, Cambodia After Angkor, The Chronicular Evidence from the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries, pp. 400-406.
\end{itemize}
2.3.6 The Fall of Lovek and Its Effect

The collapse of Lovek, based on Cambodian chronicles, came from several causes. These included the strong and larger number of the Siamese forces, the loss of the thick bamboo forest that protected the city, and the anger and disappointment among local people and the King’s officials at King Satha’s inappropriate acts. At the end of his reign, King Satha had crowned two of his young sons as kings while he himself was only in his late thirties. This caused disappointment among some of his officials and ordinary people. The King’s admission of two male Thai spies disguised as Buddhist monks known by the names Tepanhao and Sophanhao into his palace in Lovek, and his destruction of Teverak statues (the local, magical god who protects the districts or kingdom) at the suggestion from the two fake monks, angered the people and his officials even more. In addition, the loss of the thick and strong bamboo forest that had acted as the promising shield for the capital made the situation in the country even more chaotic.

When occupying Lovek, the Siamese sacked and burnt the city. They destroyed everything that was immovable including various cult objects and statues which were worshipped by the Khmer. Tranet, a Cambodian scholar, made a remark that very often when the Siamese attacked or captured the Cambodian capitals, they destroyed statues or brought them to Siam. According to him, the main reason was that the Siamese believed that the sculptures and statues always helped unify the Khmer communities. The destruction of these sacred objects would totally destroy the national spirit and unity of the Cambodians. Tranet added that as long as the sculptures, cult objects and sacred statues, which were symbols of national happiness and prosperity, stayed inside Cambodia regardless of their locations, Cambodia remained stable and prosperous. On
the contrary, the loss of those sacred objects and statues meant the Khmer lost something on which they could depend, and thus made them become weak and hopeless. It may be true about what Tranet suggested concerning the destruction and removal of various statues to Siam. However, bringing statues to one’s own kingdom was also a symbolic gesture of superiority or suzerainty of the winner over the loser. This is important since sacred statues in Southeast Asia of the past were considered a symbol of superiority and suzerainty associated with kingship or the universal monarch either deva-raja or Buddha-raja. For example, when the Khmer king of Angkor attacked Champa, he also brought and collected a lot of statues and Lingas back to Angkor. Likewise, when the kings of Siam seized the Cambodian capitals of Angkor and Lovek, they brought along with them a lot of sacred statues. Similarly, when the kings of Burma sacked Ayutthaya, they also destroyed and brought a lot of cult objects and statues to Burma. When the Arakanese king captured Pegu, they brought sacred objects to their state. When the Siamese king seized the Laotian capital of Vientiane, they also brought the famous sacred Buddha statue, the Emerald Buddha, to Bangkok. These examples show that the destruction and removal of statues are not only unique in the case of Siam towards Cambodia. In contrast, it was a common past practice in Southeast Asia.

The destruction of Lovek and the removal of thousands of people including some royal family, intellectuals, skilled and religious men, precious texts, valuable things and statues to Siam were likely to have made Cambodia lose the necessary resources and manpower for rebuilding the country. The event of the capture of the capital is still in the memory of Cambodian people until the present day. Cambodia’s chronicles and its legend describe the capture of Lovek as a catastrophe from which the nation never fully

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136 Ibid., pp. 63- 64.
137 See the information in the above sections about Ayutthaya’s attacks on Angkor and Lovek.
139 The information from one of the lectures by Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond, Chulalongkorn University, Southeast Asian Studies Center, Southeast Asian Civilization Course, semester 1, 2006.
139 G. Coedes, The Making of Southeast Asia, p. 166.
recovered. They interpreted the event as a turning point in the history which marks centuries of Cambodian weakness and Thai superiority.\textsuperscript{140}

### 2.4 Post Lovek Period

This section contains much less information than the above two. There are two main reasons regarding this. The first is that the historical relations between Cambodia and Siam in the later periods appeared to be less relevant with the origin of the birth of the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. Second, after Lovek, it was not the Siamese alone who played the game with the Khmer; the Vietnamese also joined in. Wars in Cambodia commonly took place between Cambodian factions with Siam supporting one side, while Vietnam backed the other. These wars which filled the history of 17\textsuperscript{th}, 18\textsuperscript{th}, and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries were too numerous to describe and analyze here. Therefore, this section simply contains information which is more descriptive than analytical.

After Lovek fell under the control of a Siamese commander, Preah Reamea Cherey Prey, from a distant royal family, he managed to push the Siamese out of Cambodia. However, he had no intention to restore Lovek as the capital. Reamea Cherey Prey did not reign long as he was soon assassinated under the hand of the Portuguese Diogo Veloso and his Spanish friend Blaz Ruiz de Harlan Gonzales, both of whom were proponents of former King Satha. Because King Satha had died when taking refuge in Laos, his son Ponhea Tan (reigning title: Paramaraja II) was crowned king under the support of the two Europeans. Yet, Ponhea Tan was soon murdered by some Malays in 1599. He was succeeded by his uncle, Ponhea An, brother of former King Satha. But he in turn was assassinated, after reigning as Paramaraja III for a year. As the country faced problems in selecting their new king, Cambodian officials and royal families proposed to Siam the release of Prince Suryavarman or Soriyopor, who had been kept in captivity

since the capture of Lovek. According to Coëdes, he was proclaimed king sometime around 1603\textsuperscript{141}. The fact that each king reigned shortly and was assassinated one after another suggests that Cambodia at that time was in a turbulent and unstable situation.

In 1618 Suryavarman abdicated in favor of his son Jayajetha (Chei Chettha). King Chei Chettha during his reign moved his court to Udong, which is situated between Lovek and Phnom Penh. It was during his reign that Cambodia started to engage the Vietnamese in order to counter Thai aggression and alleviate Their distress. In 1620, King Chettha married a Vietnamese princess, the daughter of King Sai Vuong of the Nguyen dynasty. He married the princess perhaps in hope that the tie between him and the Vietnamese royal family would help Cambodia to counter Siam. However, his prediction was wrong since his choice placed Cambodia in a more difficult position as the kingdom had to deal with two mighty states now. Coëdes commented that the marriage had far-reaching consequences for Cambodia in the years later\textsuperscript{142}. King Chettha’s marriage with the Vietnamese Princess allowed not only the existence of some Vietnamese standing within the Khmer royal court, but also the increasing movement southward of Vietnamese settlers into Cambodia’s territory. After King Chettha’s death, there were several factions within the Cambodian royal families battling against each other for the control of the throne. This led to a series of civil wars which involved Vietnamese intervention supporting one side and the Siamese supporting the other. These countless wars are impossible to describe here. The intervention of the Vietnamese and the Siamese in Cambodia’s civil wars became tradition in the history of Cambodia throughout the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries. However, what Coëdes, termed ‘add supply’ usually meaning support for internal wars between factions, was not provided for free by Cambodia’s Thai and Vietnamese neighbors. The Thais and Vietnamese usually expected something in return for their military backing\textsuperscript{143}.

\textsuperscript{141} G. Coedes, \textit{The Making of Southeast Asia}, pp. 197- 198.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 198.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p. 198.
Historians commented that Cambodia in the 18th and 19th centuries was in the darkest period one that never before had existed in her history. The kingdom became the helpless pawn of her two powerful neighbors, and found no way to escape. One of her neighbors even remarked that Cambodia was like a kid, and Siam was like a mother, while Vietnam was like a father. When the kid was angry with the mother, he approached the father. When he felt upset with the father, he ran to the mother. However, the remark was simply a word of political rhetoric to legitimize their influence and control over this weak state.

In addition, the 18th and 19th centuries also saw the loss of Cambodia’s status as an independent state. The royal regalia were kept in Bangkok. Some of Cambodia’s kings like Ang Eng (1794-1797) and his son, Ang Chan, were crowned in Bangkok by the Siamese king. His son, King Ang Duang (1848-1859), was crowned in Udong of Cambodia, but the coronation ceremonies took place under the patronage of the Thai court. Besides, Cambodia lost not only their sovereignty, but also their territory during this period. To the east, Vietnam gradually eclipsed its provinces one by one, while to the west Siam started to impose her authority over the Khmer provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap. In theory, Battambang and Siem Reap provinces remained Cambodia’s soil. However, their governors received the orders not from Oudong but from Bangkok.

However, the agreement in 1863 to place Cambodia under the French protectorate changed the whole landscape of earlier politics of Cambodia. The places previously occupied by the Siamese and the Vietnamese now were replaced by the French. To get rid of Siamese and Vietnamese influence, in 1854 King Ang Duong of Cambodia decided to send an emissary to the French consul in Singapore to ask for French aid. France sent a mission in 1855, but it failed due to the mismanagement of its leader. The following year Ang Duong, who felt that his health was getting weak, asked the court at Bangkok to

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146 Ibid., p. 200.
send his eldest son to him, who succeeded him in 1859 under the name of Norodom\textsuperscript{147}. In March 1861 Admiral Charner, who was in command of the French forces occupying Saigon, sent King Norodom a message of friendship. In September 1862, the new Cambodian king received a visit from Admiral Bonard. Negotiations carried out by Captain Doudart de Lagrée enabled Admiral La Grandière, the governor of Cochin-china, to sign a treaty at Oudong in July 1863 establishing a French protectorate over Cambodia\textsuperscript{148}. But before France could ratify the treaty, Siamese officials had forced Norodom to sign another treaty accepting Siamese suzerainty. However, Doudart de Lagrée having the Siamese plot in mind prevented Norodom from going to Bangkok for coronation as the royal regalia were kept there. After the ratification for the protectorate was made with France, the coronation ceremony of Norodom took place at Oudong on 3 July 1864. The crown had been brought from Bangkok back to Cambodia and was received from the hands of the French representative\textsuperscript{149}.

The treaty with the French allowed Cambodia to escape from the authority and influence of Siam and Vietnam. Had there been no French intervention, the interference of these two neighbors would have had persisted, and Cambodia would have faced the same destiny as the Mon and the Cham kingdoms.

2.5 Viewpoints on the Legend: Period of Existence and Metaphorical Representations of Preah Ko and Preah Keo

In this section, there are two main parts. The first one is the Period of Existence, which presents various theories and hypothesis regarding the time the story came into existence. The second part is the Metaphorical Representations of Preah Ko and Preah Keo. This part provides arguments by various scholars on the metaphor of the bull, Preah Ko and his brother, Preah Keo.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., p. 200.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., p. 201.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., p. 201.
2.5.1 Period of Existence

There are two most likely periods in the history of Cambodia that the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo seemed to have existed from, that was during the capture of Angkor or the hold of Lovek by the Siamese. The reason is that although there had been several wars between Cambodia and Siam, only two important events, the capture of Angkor in 1431 and of Lovek in 1594, which were considered disastrous and had terrible long-term effect on Cambodia. Besides, the two events involved the destruction and move of statues, precious texts, royal family, learned men and a mass population to Ayutthaya. Moreover, they also caused the Khmer to change their capitals. For these reasons, hypotheses and beliefs concerning the legend’s existence mostly center on these two periods with some historians suggesting that the story took place during Angkor, while others argue that it was during Lovek. Below are these hypotheses.

The majority of Cambodian people until present still firmly believe that the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo took place when the Siamese sacked the capital of Lovek. They believe that there were Preah Ko and Preah Keo in Lovek*. This can be supported by what an old Buddhist layman of Tralengkeng monastery said, “In the old days, there were the statues of Preah Ko Preah Keo in Lovek. I don’t know whether it’s true or not. I heard this from old people when I was young.” Not only ordinary Cambodian people, but also journalists believe the story took place at Lovek. This can be proved by the quotation from an article written in one of the most popular local Khmer-language newspapers.

The Siamese used both force and psychological warfare against Cambodia at the time the Khmer faced hardship. Finally in 1593, Lovek was totally under the Siamese occupation. The Siamese brought a lot of precious objects which also included Preah Ko Preah Keo to their kingdom. The capture of Lovek and the loss of many precious things led Khmer people, writers and historians to compose the legend with the aim of educating all

* All the young educated Cambodian informants interviewed believe that the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo took place at Lovek. The interviews were conducted from 04 November to 09 December 2006.
Cambodian children of later generations to feel sad about the loss of their ancestral heritage.  

Apart from the ordinary people and the media, Cambodian scholars and historians like Treng Ngea, Khing Hoc Dy, Ang Chuléan and others also suggest that the legend came into existence to explain the event of the fall of the Khmer capital of Lovek caused by the Siamese. Ang Chuléan makes this remark in his book:

The event of the capture of Lovek is still remembered and told for many generations until the present day. The catastrophe was so enormous in the history of Cambodia that a legend “Preah Ko Preah Keo” was made to explain the reasons behind the fall of Lovek. The legend has not only been told throughout the country, but also was written on palm leaves.

For Treng Ngea, he even went further to link the bull, Preah Ko, and the Buddha image Preah Keo that Cambodia had lost, with statues of a bull and the Emerald Buddha (Prah Keo) at the Grand Palace in Bangkok. According to him, when King Naresuan captured Lovek, he brought Prince Suriyopor together with the Khmer royal family, precious texts, scholars, artisans, statues of Preah Ko Preah Keo and many Cambodian people to Siam. Additionally, Treng Ngea made a remark that:

After all, in front of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Keo) in Bangkok at present, there is a statue of a bull as big as a real bull with a hole beneath at its belly. Is this the statue of Preah Ko Preah Keo that the Siamese had brought to Siam after they took Lovek?

According to a Thai scholar, the statue of the bull in front of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Keo) in Bangkok is not the same statue of Preah Ko (bull) that...
Cambodia had lost. The statue of the bull in front of Wat Prah Keo in Bangkok is Western art.\(^\text{155}\) Santi Phakdeekham points out that the statue of the bull in Bangkok was used as a decoration during the reign of King Mongkut. Later on, King Chulalongkorn ordered the statue to be moved to place in front of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.\(^\text{156}\) However, Santi fails to give any information concerning the origin of the statue, and the reasons behind the move of the statue to a place in front of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. It is a coincidence with Cambodia’s statues of Preah Ko (a bull) and Preah Keo that always stayed together. However, whether that statue of a bull in the Grand Palace in Bangkok is Cambodia’s Preah Ko or not is not is not my subject here.

However, other sources claimed that it was during the capture of Angkor by the Siamese that the statues of Preah Ko and Preah Keo were brought to Ayutthaya. According to the Royal Chronicle of Cambodia, the Siamese king went to observe the city of Angkor after he held it. While he was walking, he saw the statue of Preah Ko (a bull). The Siamese king then asked an old Cambodian official, “What is this?” The old man replied: “It’s the statue of Preah Ko which had been built long time ago when Cambodia was the empire to store the Tripitaka. People worshipped the statue very much and considered him the pillar of the kingdom.” The Siamese king was very pleased with the answer. Therefore, when he returned to Siam, he brought along with him the statue of Preah Ko and many Buddha statues made from gold and silver. The king also brought with him religious men, traitors--Ponhea Keo and Tai, and 70000 prisoners of wars.\(^\text{157}\) Nevertheless, the information in the chronicle cannot be totally reliable as it was written much later. A Thai historian who studies the historical relationship between Cambodia and Thailand also thinks that Cambodia’s legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is the story during the period that Cambodia lost Angkor to Ayutthaya, more likely than the Lovek period. According to Santi, many statues, which may have included Preah Ko, were taken from Angkor to Ayutthaya when King Boromraja II of Siam attacked the Khmer capital


\(^{156}\) Ibid., pp. 79- 120.

\(^{157}\) Adhèmard Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge: Depuis Le 1er Siècle De Notre Ère, p. 188.
Later on, when the Burmese sacked the capital of Ayutthaya, the Burmese took those statues to Hongsavadei, and the statues were moved many times. At this time, they were in the temple named Wat Pra Mahamony in Mandalay and presently there are still only five statues left.

David Chandler’s hypothesis is a compromise of the arguments about the events at Angkor and at Lovek with an extension into the 19th century events. Chandler made a brief note that:

Although keyed to the capture of Lovek, the legend may in fact be related to the long-term collapse of Angkor and perhaps to the relationships that had developed between Siam and Cambodia by the nineteenth century, when the legend emerged in the historical record.

Detailed explanation cannot be expected from Chandler as it is not his main task. It is simply a small part in his book that he appears to touch on.

The various hypotheses by the above scholars and historians are not enough yet to draw the conclusion at this moment as whether the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was from the Angkor or Lovek period. The answer can be better given after the analysis of the metaphorical representations of Preah Ko and Preah Keo in the part below.

### 2.5.2 Metaphorical Representations of Preah Ko and Preah Keo

Despite some differences, the interpretation of the metaphors of Preah Ko seems to share common ground. However, the real metaphor of Preah Ko’s younger brother

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159 Ibid., pp. 79-120; Ibid., p. 420.

remains problematic and vague. Below are the discussion and debate about the possible abstract meanings of Preah Ko and Preah Keo.

From the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo both oral and old written versions, the magical Preah Ko is a black ox. It is relevant that a black statue of a bull made from bronze was known to have been worshipped in Cambodia in the past. According to Treng Ngea, Preah Ko in the legend’s context is possible to be interpreted as a Klang (store house/ warehouse) containing precious texts, study materials, and formula that one can study about religion, architecture, culture, arts, crafts, ceremony etc. The special part of Preah Ko is his belly in which all the things one needed were stored\textsuperscript{161}. This interpretation was made perhaps based mainly on Cambodian chronicles and oral tradition that inside the belly of the statue of Preah Ko in Lovek had precious texts about various formula and knowledge that one could study about anything. However, the belief that people had placed all precious texts inside the belly of the sacred statue has been challenged by Keng Vansak, a Cambodian linguist and historian. He challenged the theory by asking the question below,

How come that the belly of the statue of the bull was big enough to store all the texts? The belly of the statue was small. Some people argued that the precious texts placed in the belly of the statue had been made tiny before they put inside it\textsuperscript{162}.

In Keng Vansak’s opinion, the firm belief by many Cambodian people and historians that Cambodia declined and became inferior to Thailand because it had lost Preah Ko is not logical. For him, Cambodia became weak and inferior to Siam not because of the loss of Preah Ko Preah Keo but because of the flow of foreign influence and culture into the country. The foreign culture then dominated and eclipsed the local culture and knowledge. Finally, local texts and culture disappeared and were replaced by those of

\textsuperscript{161} Treng Ngea, Pravatasas Khmer (A History of Khmer), p. 18.
\textsuperscript{162} A talk on Radio Free Asia by Keng Vansak, a Cambodian linguist and historian, April 10, 2005. His talk was related with the topic of Preah Ko Preah Keo. His talk is available at http://www.rfa.org/Khmer/kammakvithi/neatisasnaningsangkum/2005/04/10khmer-soul-as-demonstrated-by-keng-vansak/
foreign countries. Nonetheless, Keng Vansak’s argument is not strong enough as he failed to explain the reasons why foreign influence and culture could dominate its Cambodian counterpart. The possible domination of foreign influence and culture on those of local culture reflected that the country was weak during that time. And why did Cambodia become weak? The answer then would go back to the explanation that Cambodia was weak because it had lost precious texts and skilled people to Siam. This simply is to point out the problem within the argument. It is not my task here to challenge or analyze his theory in detail.

Regarding Preah Ko in the legend, David Chandler suggested that the bull was a metaphor for Cambodian’s Indian heritage. However, he fails to specify or clarify as to what Indian heritage it took into account. Later on, the notion was brought into deeper and more critical analysis by a Cambodian scholar, Ang Chouléan in his article “Nandin and His Avatars.” Chouléan went deeper than David Chandler by pointing out that the sacred Preah Ko in the legend symbolized Nandin, the sacred bull used as vehicle by the Lord Siva of Brahmanism. He further added that since ancient times in Cambodia, the power of association has been so strong that the bull could be considered to command as much magic as the supreme god who rode him or alternatively sometimes he is also represented as a god in his own right. Ang Chouléan argued that:

Considering that the official Chronicles, those of Chiang Mai and others, link the Emerald Buddha with the Tripitaka, one can affirm that the Khmer tradition has replaced this Buddha with Nandin the Bull. The bull, an important figure in Brahmanism, appears as a sort of guardian of Buddhism in the Middle Period and today.

163 Ibid.
164 David P. Chandler, A History of Cambodia, p. 86.
166 Ibid., p. 62.
167 Ibid., p. 69.
From these, Chouléan came to his conclusion that the decline of Cambodia was caused by the capture of the statue which was associated with Nandin by Cambodia’s neighbor and the abandonment of Brahmanism especially the Brahmanic nature of the palladium (Nandin)\textsuperscript{168}.

Preah Ko in the legend may embody Brahmanism or perhaps specifically Nandin as suggested by the scholars above. However, talking from a scientific and logical point of view, losing a statue of a bull or a statue of Nandin used simply for worship would not cause Cambodia to face hardship, since a new statue could be made to replace the absent one. In contrast, it was likely the loss, destruction and moving of texts, materials and mass populations including intellectuals, artisans, craftsmen, religious teachers during wartimes that had a tremendous effect on the country. The loss of all these resources—manpower, knowledgeable people and precious texts—was one of the main factors that put Cambodia into a backward position. To recover from this, it took several generations to re-establish.

Concerning Preah Ko’s younger brother Preah Keo of the legend, his symbolic meanings are considered as vague and controversial among historians. Based on some opinions, Preah Keo may represent a Cambodian king, prince or royal family member who was captured and brought to Ayutthaya when the Siamese invaded Angkor and Lovek. According to a Thai historian, Preah Keo in the legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo is a metaphor for an important Khmer prince or Khmer royal family’s member who was brought to Ayutthaya after the Siamese sacked the capital of Angkor\textsuperscript{169}. Santi Phakdeekham, whose argument is based on the Ayutthaya Chronicles of Loung Prasert and other Chronicles written in the Ratanakosin period, claims that Preah Keo in Cambodia’s legend referred to Phraya Keo. He added that Phraya Keo was an important person in the Khmer royal family, who was brought to Ayutthaya with many animal

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., p. 65.
statues which may have included Preah Ko in this group, all this took place after King Boromraja II captured Angkor. Santi quoted the chronicle of Ayutthaya discovered by Loung Prasert as saying that Chao Phraya Keo and Phraya Tai were brought from the Khmer court to Ayutthaya during the reign of King Sampraya (Boromraja II) with many magical images and statues. Additional evidence to prove his hypothesis, Santi refers to an Ayutthaya chronicle numbered 2/k 104, of which, the original document is stored in the Watchirayan royal library and is believed to have been written in the middle period of Ayutthaya. The chronicle mentions about Phraya Keo and Phraya Tai. After they had spent time in Ayutthaya, they both intended to launch a rebellion and wanted to assassinate King Boromraja II. They intended to bring the royal symbols that King Sampraya had brought from Cambodia back to Cambodia again, but they were captured and executed. From what was written in the chronicles, Santi came to the conclusion that Preah Keo in the Khmer legend referred to Phraya Keo, the symbol of Khmer royal and political legitimacy, not Preah Keo Morokot or the Emerald Buddha or the symbol of Buddhist legitimacy. However, Franfurter, in his translation of the chronicle by Luong Prasert, treated Keo and Tai as two Cambodian officials, not prince or members of royal family. Michael Vickery also thinks that they were officials or monks. Cambodian Chronicles also agree with Luong Prasert’s Chronicle of Ayutthaya that Keo and Tai were brought to Ayutthaya together with many statues when the Ayutthayan king captured Angkor. In addition, Cambodia’s Chronicles mention that both Ponhea Keo and Ponhea Tai were officials who betrayed the king of Angkor by opening one of the gates of the capital for Siam’s army when the Siamese were besieging the city. From the preceding interpretations of Ponhea Keo as a possibly treasonous monk or official, it is

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170 Santi Phakdeekham, Preah Keo nai tam nan Preah Ko Preah Keo Khamen: Preah Keo morokot ching re? (Preah Keo in the Khmer Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo: Is Preah Keo the Emerald Buddha or not?), p. 420.
171 Ibid., p. 419.
172 Ibid., p. 419.
173 Ibid., p. 420.
174 Michael Vickery, Cambodia After Angkor, The Chronicular Evidence from the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries, p 396.
175 Ibid., p 398.
clear that Preah Keo in the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo did not refer to Ponhea Keo, the traitor, as thought by Santi Phakdeekham. As for the information in the Ayutthaya chronicle numbered 2/k 104, it mentions that Keo and Tai were later killed in Ayutthaya by the Siamese king for their rebellious attempts. However, its assertions are unclear, since some Thai chronicles also mentioned that the king of Ayutthaya had built gigantic Chedi (stupa) for them when they died. The theory that Preah Keo in the legend is a metaphor for a Cambodian king or Prince is less supported by historians and seems unlikely compared with the overwhelming belief that Preah Keo is a representation of a Buddha statue or Tripitaka or Buddhism, since the former fails to specify who that prince or king was. It was not possible to be Ponhea Keo because he was not a prince; he was simply an official, and also a traitor to Angkor’s King and Cambodia. There were a few prominent Cambodian princes who were held in Ayutthaya in the later periods like Ang Chan and Suriyopor. However, they had been there for only a few years, and later on returned to become kings of Cambodia.

The majority of historians believe that Preah Keo in Cambodia’s Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo may refer to a Buddha statue, a Tripitaka or a symbol of Buddhist legitimacy. Michael Vickery, a Western scholar on Cambodian history, who compared and analyzed the terms banā and brah/ vrah put forward his hypothesis that Brah Kèv (Preah Keo) may be a sacred crystal, a Buddha image, or some other unidentified cult object. Another Western scholar on Cambodian history, David Chandler, also proposes that Preah Keo may be a metaphor for Buddhist legitimacy, embodied by a Buddha image like the one (the Emerald Buddha) taken from Vientiane by the Thai. Whether Preah Keo in the Khmer legend and Prah Keo (the Emerald Buddha) installed at Wat Prah Keo (the temple of the Emerald Buddha) in Bangkok is the same statue or not is unknown. However, information about the history of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok should be briefly studied and analyzed here to draw the conclusion whether it has any

177 Michael Vickery, Cambodia After Angkor, The Chronicular Evidence from the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries, p 398.
178 David P. Chandler, A History of Cambodia, p. 86.
connection with Preah Keo in Cambodia’s legend. The Emerald Buddha, of all the images of the Buddha, is the most famous. According to Notton, the Emerald Buddha acquired its long enduring renown due to the fact that it had undergone all sorts of catastrophes—wars, fires in different locations—and had emerged safe from these. He further commented, “For these reasons, it is not too much to say the Emerald Buddha, the possession of which was so much coveted, came to symbolize all aspirations for happiness and prosperity, and still does so.” The famous image of the Buddha was brought to Bangkok from Vieng Chan in 1778, and now is in Wat Prah Keo or the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the Grand Palace in Bangkok. The origin of the Emerald Buddha is a bit doubtful to modern historians. What they know about its history is through the work of a young Chiang Mai monk named Brahmaarajapāṇa. The date of his work is unknown. It is only known that he based it upon an already-existing version in Thai, and only that his Pali version existed by the reign of Rama I (1782-1809), founder of the present-day dynasty. In line with the Chiang Mai monk’s manuscript, several historians are in agreement with the particular point that Prah Keo (the Emerald Buddha) had made its route through several kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia including Cambodia, Siam and Laos before its installation in Bangkok. What was written by the Chiang Mai monk about the history of the Emerald Buddha shares a lot of similarities with that written in the Royal Chronicle of Cambodia.

According to the Chronicles, the Emerald Buddha was built with the initiative and great merit of a priest named Nāgasena. After Mahā Dhamma Rakkhita died, Nāgasena said to himself:

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180 Ibid., p. vi.
183 See Camille Notton, The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha ; Mak Phoeun, Chroniques royals du Cambodge (des origines legendaires Jusqu’à Paramarṣādā) [1].
The Omniscient Lord, who had all the Doctrine in him, created the Tipitaka…. What can be done by me to make the religion of the Omniscient Lord extremely flourishing. But if gold and silver are used in its making, it would certainly put the statue in jeopardy, as there will be wicked people in future times. The Buddha, the Doctrine and the Church, each represents a gem, so I have to get a precious stone with a very great power in it to make the statue of the Lord184.

The chronicle continues that the Lord Indra seeing the good faith of the priest came to help find the precious stone to be used as material to make the statue for him. Lord Indra went to mount Vipulla to get the precious stone. He wanted to get Manijōti (resplendent jewel) but could get only Keo Amarakata (crystal-smaraged). After the statue was made, a big ceremony was held to honor the holy image as it was to be placed at the monastery of Asoka185. Then, the Chronicle goes on to say that Nāgasena, through his supernatural knowledge, had a prescience of future events and made this prediction: “this image of the Buddha is assuredly going to give to religion the most brilliant importance in five lands (1), that is Lanka Dvipa (Ceylon), Rāmalakla, Dvāravati, Chiang Mai & Lan Chang (Laos)186. Rāmalakla referred to 3 states Deya (Tai), Ramakira (Khmer), and Ramasira which is Mara (Burma)187. This part of the chronicle means a lot to historians. Then, the 2nd epoch of the Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha continues to talk about how the Emerald Buddha came from Lanka to Southeast Asia188. It mentions that King Anuruddha of Malla country (Pagan) sent two boats while he himself flew on a horse to Lanka so he could copy the Tripitaka and bring the Emerald Buddha to his kingdom. He ordered a copy of the Tripitaka be placed on one boat and another copy together with the Emerald Buddha on another boat. King Anuruddha flew on his horse back to his country when the two boats also left Lanka. Far offshore in the sea, there was heavy storm. The storm blew both junks apart. The one with the Tripitaka managed to reach Malla, while the other with the Emerald Buddha and the Tripitaka went to the town

185 Ibid., p. 16.
186 Ibid., pp. 17- 18.
187 Ibid., p. 17.
188 From this part, Camille Notton, The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha is very similar to Mak Phoeun, Chroniques royals du Cambodge (des origines legendaires Jusqu’à Paramarājā 1er).
of Indapatha Nagara (Angkor Thom). The Khmer king at Angkor was very happy to have the Tripitaka and the Emerald Buddha in his kingdom. Later on, King Anuruddha of Malla country came to Angkor to get back his property. However, he decided to bring back only the Tripitaka, while leaving the Emerald Buddha there. With the Emerald Buddha in the kingdom, Angkor’s kings and their people had enjoyed prosperity and peace for some periods of time. In the reign of the next Khmer king, an unpleasant event began at Angkor as the monarch ordered the drowning of the son of the Purohit (Brahmin) after the boy’s fly had eaten that of the king’s son. The Brahmins and all their families were displeased with the king’s decision. For this reason, they decided to leave the capital. Seeing that the king was cruel and did not practice the ten royal virtues, the Dragon King got angry and brought flooding to the city. The Khmer king, all his officials and families escaped by boats. Hearing that the Khmer king came to stay near his city, the king of Ayutthaya came to get the Emerald Buddha from the Cambodian king. Then, the chronicle goes on to say that the Lord of Kampeng Bheja (Kampengphet) came to get the statue from the King of Ayutthaya. However, the image did not stay long in Kampengphet as the king of Chiang Rai Maha Brahmadatta took it to his state. Later on, the Prince of Chiang Mai begged for the statue from Chiang Rai, and the holy statue had remained from that time in Chiang Mai until 1506 A.D. when it was brought to Lan Chang (Laos). The Emerald Buddha had resided for quite a long time in Vieng Chan before it was brought to Bangkok by Phraya Chakri (King Rama I).

If the Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha and the Royal Chronicle of Cambodia are believable, it means that Prah Keo or the Emerald Buddha were once at Angkor.

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189 See Camille Notton, The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha and Mak Phoeun, Chroniques royals du Cambodge (des origineslegendaires Jusqu’à Paramarajā 1st).  
191 Also see Camille Notton, Legende D’Angkor Et Chronique Du Buddha De Cristal (Rougerie, 1960), pp. 37-42. This one seems confused about another Buddha statue which was also brought to Bangkok under the reign of King Taksin by Phraya Chakri.
However, the story in both chronicles seems to represent the arrival of Singhalese Buddhism to Thailand and Laos via Cambodia. But usually when religion came to a land, it also brought along with it its missionaries, texts, statues and other religious-related objects. Therefore, it is possible that the Emerald Buddha had arrived in Angkor. To determine whether the sacred image of the Buddha used to be in Angkor or not, it is necessary to know how popular Singhalese Buddhism was in the late part of Angkor history and how rich the capital was in Buddha statues. According to what was written about the history of Cambodia, the new form of Buddhism became very popular among the mass population of Cambodia. Some historians even compare the spread of Theravada Buddhism to that of forest fire. From history, we also know that Angkor was like a Buddhist hub that sent its top monks and famous Buddha statue to spread Buddhism in other foreign states. A Laotian Prince, Fa Ngum, came to take refuge in the court at Angkor. The young prince was brought up there by a Buddhist monk and scholar from the capital, and when he reached the age of sixteen the Khmer king gave him one of his daughters in marriage. Later on, he asked his father-in-law for an army to accompany him back to Laos to claim the throne. Fa Ngum was a great warrior. After several wars, he managed to unify all Laotian states into one single big polity under the name Lan Chang or the “Million Elephants”. After he was crowned king of Lan Chang in 1353, his Khmer consort, a devout Buddhist, proposed to her father King Jayavarman Paramesvara of Angkor to send top Buddhist monks to spread Buddhism in Laos. At Princess Keo Keng Ya’s request, her father sent a group of Buddhist monks, the Tritipitaka, one of his most famous Buddha statues called Prabang and a sacred young Bodhi tree to Lan Chang. Prabang was so much welcomed by the people of Laos that they named their city Luang Prabang after this holy statue. This evidence shows that

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*Prabang was cast in 874 in Ceylon by a Buddhist priest called Chulanagathera. King Srichularaj of Intapat sent an embassy to Ceylon in 1056 to ask for the statue from the king of Ceylon. Prabang was supposed to contain five relics of Buddha: one in the forehead, one at the chin, one in the chest, one in the left arm and one inside the right arm, M. L. Manich Jumsai, History of Laos, pp. 50- 51.

Angkor before the capture by the Siamese in 1431 was rich in statues not only of Brahmanism but also those of Buddhism. Based on the Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha and the Royal Chronicle of Cambodia together with evidences from the history, a conclusion can be drawn that Prah Keo (the Emerald Buddha) may have resided in Cambodia before the sack of the capital by Siam’s King Boromraja II. After the capture, King Boromaraja II brought a lot of people and statues that perhaps included the statue of the bull (Preah Ko) and the Emerald Buddha (Preah Keo) to Ayutthaya*. The idea that the Khmer king gave one of his famous sacred Buddha statues, Prabang to his son-in-law, Fa Ngum, the king of Lan Chang was a reflection that he possessed several sacred Buddha statues. The sacred Prabang was simply one among his favorites. The Khmer king was a devout Buddhist; therefore, it was necessary for him to keep sacred statues for worshipping and making merit. Therefore, the Buddha statue that he kept at Angkor was perhaps considered more famous and sacred than Prabang or at least of similar status. The statue was perhaps Prah Keo or the Emerald Buddha or a statue of a similar type. Although there are no sources or evidences mentioning he had kept the Emerald Buddha, it is a logical interpretation that stems from the analysis of the Chronicles and the history.

As for the argument put forward by a Thai historian, Santi Phakdeekham, that Prah Keo or the Emerald Buddha was cast and originated from Chiang Rai because it is in the art style of Chiang Sen,194 it is not convincing since he failed to explain and showed the evidences and sources that mentioned about this. He needs to show that Chiang Sen’s art style was older than the Emerald Buddha, not the copy of the Emerald Buddha’s art style. The Chiang Mai and Cambodian chronicles mentioned that the Emerald Buddha came to mainland Southeast Asia by sea from Ceylon. Though we cannot totally believe in the legend of the Emerald Buddha due to its miracle and supernatural power, it at least gives us an idea that the sacred image perhaps came by boat from sea. From the sea here means that the statue probably came from a distant land. Moreover, the arrival of the Emerald

* See Chapter 2 for more detailed information about King Boromraja II’s attack on Angkor.
194 Santi Phakdeekham, Preah Keo nai tam nan Preah Ko Preah Keo Khamen: Preah Keo morokot ching re? (Preah Keo in the Khmer Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo: Is Preah Keo the Emerald Buddha or not?), p. 412.
Buddha had a connection with the Tripitaka and the arrival of Singhalese Buddhism to mainland Southeast Asia and to Cambodia before spreading to Ayutthaya. If the scholar wanted to have his argument strong, he also has to find evidences to show that the Tripitaka that came to mainland Southeast Asia first originated from Chiang Rai, not from Ceylon. Nevertheless, evidences show that the Tai of Siam and Laos have received some influence of Buddhism a long time ago via China when they were there. However, the Singhalese form of Buddhism that they had received when they migrated to the territories of present-day Thailand and Laos came from Angkoreans and the Mons. For this reason, Prah Keo did not originate from Chiang Rai, but from Ceylon and perhaps via Cambodia before the statue was brought to Siam. From all these arguments, a conclusion can be made that the Khmer lost Preah Ko Preah Keo when Ayuttthayan soldiers took their capital of Angkor in 1431, not when they captured Lovek in 1594 as most people believe. Due to the fact that Cambodia had been influenced by Brahmanism long before Singhalese Buddhism, and that Brahmanism was rooted more deeply in society at that time than Buddhism, the Khmer gave more importance to Preah Ko the bull than Preah Keo as reflected in the order of words in the legend’s title *Preah Ko Preah Keo* and the relative significance of Preah Ko and Preah Keo in legend’s stories.

In conclusion, Preah Ko in Cambodia’s legend is the statue of a bull. Preah Ko is the symbol of Brahmanism—institutions, texts, and learnt men. Preah Ko’s younger brother, Preah Keo, is a metaphor of a sacred Buddha image and is likely Prah Keo or the Emerald Buddha or a statue of similar type. The capture of Angkor by the Siamese and the destruction and move of statues, texts, scholars, priests, artisans and population was a big loss of the administrative and religious base for the kingdom. It was the loss of fundamental religious bases of Brahmanism and Buddhism including texts, cult objects, religious teachers and scholars that can be in short represented by Preah Ko

* Usually Khmer people like putting something more important in the front.

* Preah Keo in the legend is not associated with any magical power or importance. For this reason, Ang Chuléan remarked that Preah Keo could be removed from the story without making a difference. See Ang Chouléan, “Nandin and His Avatars,” p. 65.
(Brahmanism) and Preah Keo (Buddhism). For this reason, the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was first composed to explain the fall of Angkor. Its popularity may not have been high at the beginning. It perhaps achieved greater attention only when it was linked with the subsequent major event, the sack of the capital of Lovek. Two major historical events, the fall of Angkor and Lovek, were mixed into one story. At the time of its original composition, the legend perhaps told only about the capture of Preah Ko Preah Keo to Siam. Part of the story that mentioned Preah Ko and Preah Keo going into hiding in the bamboo forest at Lovek was probably added in later periods. Since the story had existed in oral form, it was therefore easy to delete, add or change parts of it. People who told the story in the later periods not only linked the legend with the event at Lovek but also extended to include events at Oudong, another of Cambodia’s capital after Lovek, in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Kem Ky written version of the story told that Preah Ko and Preah Keo, after escaping from Lovek, were captured by the Siamese at Oudong. From these evidences, it shows that the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was composed to explain not solely the events of the fall of Angkor or Lovek or Oudong as many Cambodian people and scholars believe. The story covered or had links with the three periods—Angkor, Lovek and Oudong. Due to the flexibility and adaptation of the story and the nature of Cambodian-Siamese historical relations, the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo has remained existent and occupied a place in Cambodia’s society until the present-day. The myth in the future may undergo further changes and link to more new events if relations between Cambodia and Siam become shaky and fragile.

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...


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.

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

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

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*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 area\(^2\). 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 Lovek\(^3\).

\(^2\) 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.

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 sheaves. 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 2. Before 1971, there had existed these two palm leave 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 legend. However, his version is very short consisting of less than a

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* 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.

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 Chêsda 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 Chêsda. 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 countries\(^\text{10}\).

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

\(^\text{10}\) 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

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* 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 heritage.

### 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.

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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 publication. 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 2000. 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 learners. 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.

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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 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. 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 Kampongson. 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 sayings.

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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.
17 Mr. Ly Thaily could chant the poem of the story of Tum Teav fluently and beautifully.
18 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 verse\(^{18}\). 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...
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 throughout 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 province\textsuperscript{19}. 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 story\textsuperscript{20}. 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 16\textsuperscript{th} 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 reign\textsuperscript{21}. The name “Tralengkeng” means “cross, crossing,” and was named after a famous Buddha statue called \textit{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\textsuperscript{*}. 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

\begin{itemize}
\item San Phalla, \textit{Kam nu nov tam vat (Mural Painting at Various Monasteries)} (Phnom Penh: Reyum Institute, 2007), pp. 160-162.
\item A talk with Mr. San Phalla, who has conducted extensive research on mural paintings in about 600 monasteries throughout Cambodia, 18 December 2006.
\item Ko Ki is a kind of tree which is highly valued for making boats and other construction due to its durable quality.
\end{itemize}
1530 at his capital of Lovek to house the statues. 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 out. 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 Sap. 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 back. 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.

23 Oral tradition collected from the interviews with old people at Lovek between 18 and 20 November 2006.
24 Ibid.
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.
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.
Preah Ko and Preah Keo’s mother dying under a mango tree after both brothers’ birth.

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.

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

28 Ibid., p. 104.
29 Ibid., p. 113.
30 The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo (Film version, 2004).
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

33 Ly Thaily, The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, p. 45.
34 Ly Thaily, The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo, p. 33.
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 power 38.

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.
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 soldiers. 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 elephants.

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 countrymen. 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.

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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 sad\(^44\) He said to his officials:

\[\text{… the Siamese came this time with cruel manner not peaceful; thus, all of you have to be very careful. We cannot stop them from coming because their letter firmly states that they must come. Therefore, we must mobilize our troops to stand to attention in case the war breaks out.}^{45}\]

The ordinary Khmer soldiers also felt afraid of war because the Thais had brought along with them a lot of elephants\(^46\). 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 forget 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.”

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 sadness. Preah Keo

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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.” 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...

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

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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.” 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

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54 Ibid., p. 51.
the Khmer King won. They shouted and laughed about the victory\textsuperscript{55}. 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 manhood\textsuperscript{56}.

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

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 34.\textsuperscript{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 troops\textsuperscript{57}. 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 causes\textsuperscript{58}.

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

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

\textsuperscript{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

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* 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’s 61.

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,
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 present 62. 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 recollection 63. 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, Kandaул 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 events 64. 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.
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 state. 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.


See Chapter 4 for more detailed information.
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 fields.

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-

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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 \textit{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.

\textbf{Picture 8} The pond of Neang Pov in Tralengkeng monastery, Lovek.

Moreover, the \textit{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 \textit{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 worshiping 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

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* Information collected from some old people who were in their youth during the period and experienced these events.
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 language. Although the French came back in early 1946 to replace the defeated Japanese, they did not reconstitute the previous status quo. 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 Eng. 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 Bangkok. 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

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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 nationals\textsuperscript{7}. 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 sentiment\textsuperscript{8}. 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 Cambodia\textsuperscript{9}. 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.

\textsuperscript{9} David P. Chandler, \textit{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-vis 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 reactionaries.

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 nation.

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

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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 policy.\[12\]

### 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 period\[13\]. 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 environment\[14\]. Chandler further added that up until the mid 1990s, Thailand’s Ministry of Interior still issued licenses to Thai logging companies

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\[12\] Ibid., p. 87.
\[14\] Ibid., p. 262.
to trade in timber gathered from Cambodia’s forest resources\textsuperscript{15}. Is it possible that this new publication of the legend had connections with this political situation?

\textbf{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 important\textsuperscript{16}.

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

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 267.

\textsuperscript{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 it.

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

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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 encroachment. 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 2003. 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 purposes.

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 conclusion.

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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),” Raksmeykampuchea 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 national.22

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 Star.23

The Prime Minister’s criticism of Suvaran 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

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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 act. 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 2003.

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

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26 “Sapheap ka tam prum daen s’ngop s’ngat te nov kur oy kot samkol (Situation at Border is Calm But Remains Noteworthy),” Raksmeykampuchea 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),” Raksmeykampuchea 12 May 2004.
comments besides what was stated in the preface. 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 occured 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 recriminations. These led Cambodia to suspend its diplomatic relations with

28 Interview with Mr. Ly Thaily, 18 November 2006.
Thailand in 1958. 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 top 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 Hague. 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 Cambodia. 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 region. 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 soil. Although the Khmer Serei movement posed no serious threat to Sihanouk’s rule, he was infuriated.

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30 For more detailed information, see Documents: Relatifs à la Suspension des Relations Diplomatiques entre le Cambodge et la Thailande (Phnom Penh: Royaume Du Cambodge, 1958), pp. 1-59.
33 For more detailed information, see Livre Blanc: Sur la Rupture des Relations Diplomatiques entre le Cambodge et la Thailande (Phnom Penh: Royaume Du Cambodge, 1961), pp. 1-35.
by its existence and by its clandestine radio broadcasts emanating from Thailand, which made serious attacks on him and the royal family.  

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 eyes.

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

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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

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 Keo\textsuperscript{39}. The legend gave a general representation of the Thai as invasive, aggressive, tricky and ambitious. The rumor that Suvanan Kongying wanted Cambodia to give Angkor Wat to Thailand fueled the demonstrators. They perceived Suvanan 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.

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 foundations. 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.

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40 Ang Chuléan, “Nandin and His Avatars,” p. 66.
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 Divine 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 brother. Nowadays, this site is considered sacred, and worshipped by people.

**Picture 10** The statue of Preah Ko, Oudong Hill.

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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 chapel\textsuperscript{42}. 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 idols\textsuperscript{43}. 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\textsuperscript{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 (kambi)\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 66.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 66.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 66.
\textsuperscript{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 to 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 Ko.

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 appeared 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

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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-Clum 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.

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 Riel 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](image_url)  
**Picture 13** People are worshipping the ox believed to be Preah Ko. Photo taken from the Phnom Penh Post.

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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 family.\(^{52}\)

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 lack phnek bei khal 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 Meanchevy 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 /Klæng/ (Preah: a term used to call a member of the royalty, or a religious figure or idol possessing divine power; Klang /Klæng/ means strong or powerful). The commune was called Preah Klang /Klæng/ 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](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),” Kohsantepheapdaily 02-03 December 2006. Available at http://www.kohsantepheapdaily.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 death.


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 faded.55

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

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 anthing 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

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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 magic.\(^{58}\)

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 Thailand.\(^{64}\)

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-sighted.\(^{65}\)

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 Keo.\(^{66}\)

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\(^{64}\) 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
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 Cambodia.  

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 up.

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 Keo.

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:

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67 Interview with informant number 4, 11 November 2006.
68 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.
69 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 Keo.70

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 so.  

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.”

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

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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 pride.\(^\text{75}\)

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 reasons.\(^\text{76}\)

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.”\(^\text{77}\) 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.”\textsuperscript{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 destruction\textsuperscript{79}.

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

\textsuperscript{78} Interview with informant number 3, 10 November 2006.
\textsuperscript{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 past. 82

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 wrong. 83

**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

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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. 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 lives.

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 them.

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 people\(^88\). 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 people\(^89\).

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

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90 Interview with informant number 8, 21 November 2006.

91 Interview with informant number 15, 26 November 2006.


93 Milton Osborne’s argument cited in ibid., p. 2.
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.”

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 Thailand.

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 border.

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

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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,
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 Thais. 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%. 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 influence. 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 etc.

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99 Ibid., p. 57.
100 Supang Chantavanich, Praweenya Suwannatthachote, Ly Vanna, Somai Chimnak, *Khansamruat thatsanakhati khong chau Kampuchea nai krung phonomphen thi mi to chanthai lae pratet thai* (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 Ko 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 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?”

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 interest.

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 Keo. 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.”

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.” 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.” 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.” If these opinions are taken into consideration, it means the legend of Preah

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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.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

Although there are some changes or adaptations of the original story in certain versions, the representations of the Thais were not usually positive. Both generally and specifically, the Thais were usually portrayed more or less with negative representations. The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo aims at suggesting that the loss of Preah Ko and Preah Keo to the Siamese resulted in Cambodia’s decline and lack of peace and prosperity in
the later periods. In contrast, the Thai state has been peaceful, glorious and more superior to Cambodia because they possess Preah Ko and Preah Keo. However, Khmer people’s perception of Thai people in the story was not a reflection of the Khmer people in the past as a whole. It was rather the perception of Khmer leaders, the elites and the authors of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo. These elites intended to use the legend to create a collective memory among Cambodian people. They wanted the people to remember collectively the past events and feel sad over the loss of their country’s heritage to Thailand. At present, the collective memory among Cambodian people about the past as told through the legend is not a memory that comes from their direct experience of seeing or living in the past period, but through indirect sources such as family, communities, schools etc. Therefore, this memory is changeable, particularly if the means or channels of passing on the memory change.

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

The popularity of the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo may decline as many Cambodian people cannot tell the story. However, the story has reappeared from time to time. During periods of tension between Cambodia and Thailand, the story was popular and considered as a weapon or tool used to raise national consciousness among...
Cambodian people. During peaceful and harmonious times, its popularity declines. However, Preah Ko still maintains his high status among Khmer people regardless of the political situation. In religious and psychological perspectives, Preah Ko is always in the Khmer soul. Cambodian people consider him as God. Until modern times, they still worshipped and sought protection and blessing from the power of Preah Ko. Preah Ko helps people feel more secure and focus on their lives in the present while looking to the future with hope.

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

The contemporary perception of young educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh of either Thais in the story or present-day Thais is different from the legend’s portrayal of Cambodian people’s perception on Thais. In the legend, the Siamese were shown negatively. Cambodian people in the story did not perceive the Siamese as good at all. Unlike the legend, Cambodian people’s attitudes towards Thai people are both positive and negative. Some have good opinions of Thai people, while others do not like them. The results from the in-depth interviews show that each informant got exposed to the story more than one time. The results also suggest that the Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo was very influential when young Cambodian people were exposed to the story the
first time. When they were young, they believed the story was true. However, their belief
in the story faded when they grew up and had enough maturity. At present, some young
educated Cambodian people in Phnom Penh like or admire Thai people. Some feel
neutral, while some others feel upset or dislike Thai. Their unhappy feelings or hatred
towards Thai people do not come much from the influence of the Legend of Preah Ko
Preah Keo, but more from contemporary factors including the teaching of history, Thai
politics, news releases about border tensions, behavior of some Thai people and so on.
Many people interviewed also mentioned that they would pass on the legend to their
children or future Cambodian people. This reflects that the legend will remain in
Cambodian society. However, many of the informants said that they would tell their
children to learn the lessons from the past, but not tell them to have racial prejudice. This
means that the informants do not want to see difficult relationships between governments
and people of both Cambodia and Thailand.

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INFORMANTS

No. (Occupation, sex, age, date of interview)
1. Technician with Bachelor degree, M, 33, 08 Nov. 2006.
2. Third-year Bachelor’s degree student of Sociology, M, 23, 10 Nov. 2006.
3. Third-year Bachelor’s degree student of Khmer Literature, M, 24, 10 Nov. 2006.
9. An NGO staff and also an MA student, M, 28, 21 Nov. 2006.
11. A private company’s employee with Bachelor’s degree in Marketing, M, 26, 22 Nov. 2006.