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**Religious Imagery at the Khmer Pagoda of Canada:
The Significance of Images for Education**

Wayne A. Kennedy

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art Education

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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Abstract

Religious Imagery at the Khmer Pagoda of Canada: The Significance of Images for Education

Wayne A. Kennedy

Through a qualitative case study of the Khmer Pagoda of Canada and its visual media, this thesis examines the significance and meaning of the Khmer Temple and its religious imagery for members of the Cambodian Buddhist community. This research study involved formal and informal interviews, participant observation as well as a review of literature related to Khmer and Buddhist views on art and education. Study participants explain how this Theravâda Buddhist Temple and its visual media reflect the traditional and contemporary Cambodian Buddhist culture and religion. They describe the significance of the Temple and its artifacts for themselves, their families and the Cambodian community in Canada as a whole. These participants explain how the Temple and its imagery have contributed to their own learning process. Finally, they discuss a Khmer Buddhist perspective of education through the visual arts.

The interview participants indicate that the Khmer Buddhist Temple and its visual media are meant to preserve the Khmer culture and Buddhist teachings through education as well as to remind them of their lives before leaving Cambodia. The successful production of Khmer Buddhist imagery requires respect for traditional models and their strict imitation. This is because all meaningful visual forms contain implicit values and morals. All education, and particularly education in art, is always considered as an education in morality.

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Chapter One

Background of the Study

1.0.1: Introduction

In this study, I have examined the close relationship between images, art and religion from the South and Southeast Asian, the Theravâda Buddhist and specifically, the Cambodian perspective. The religious imagery found at the Khmer Pagoda of Canada defines and conveys the identity of the Khmer Buddhist people, the ethnic Cambodians, who have immigrated to Canada over the last two decades. Through related literature and my own observations, I have discovered that the arts and imagery are extremely important within the cultural traditions of the *Khmer* people. The Khmer artistic heritage has changed very little from ancient to modern times. (Pou in Jessup & Zephir 1997: 53, Thompson in Jessup & Zephir 1997: 22) The stability demonstrated through the relatively unchanging imagery defines the complex socio-cultural and religious context of Cambodia as much as its people can only be understood in relation to their art and its production. This is as true today as it was at any other period over the long history of the Khmer. In the words of Ashley Thompson: “The Khmer people continue to reflect on images of the past.” (Thompson in Jessup & Zephir 1997: 22)

In Canada, the Khmer people have constructed an accessible and centrally located cultural and religious centre, the Khmer Pagoda of Canada, in the Côte des Neiges district of Montreal. (See Figure 2) This centre not only represents the interests of the Khmer

Buddhist people of Montreal, but also Cambodians across Canada. It serves as a place to hold events, festivals and rituals and also to educate its members through *dhamma* (Pāli:

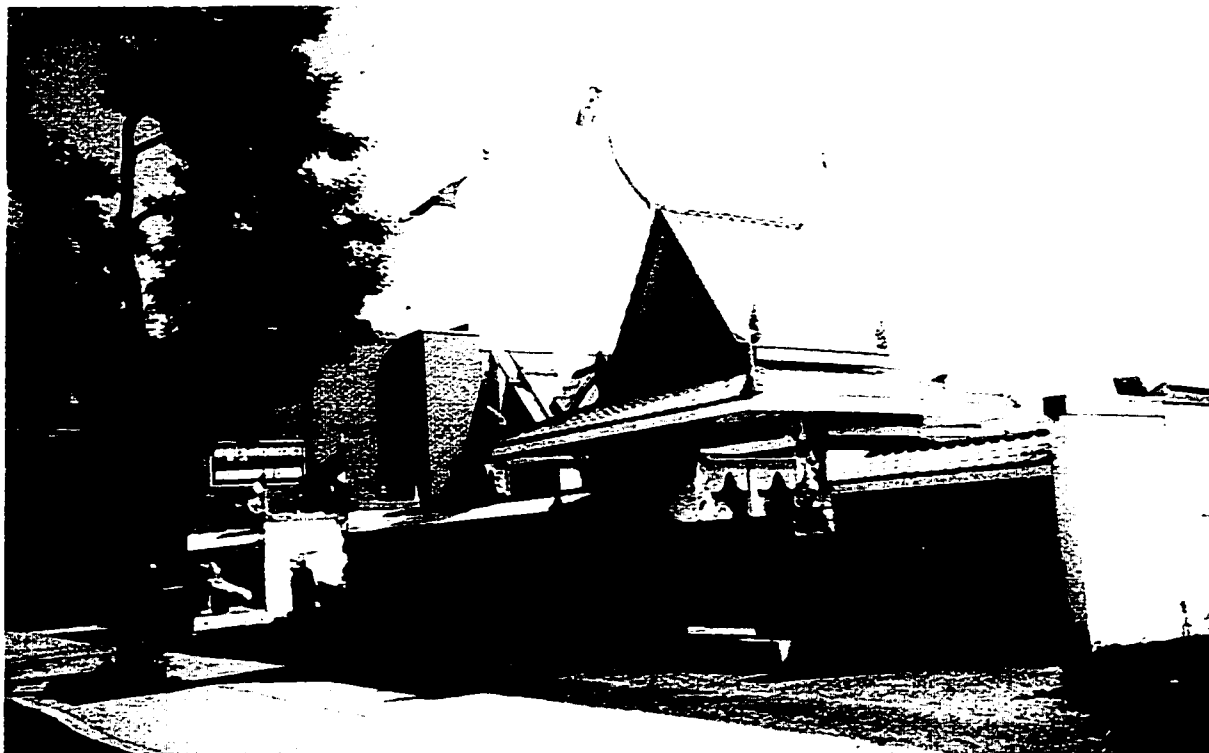


Figure 2: Khmer Pagoda of Canada

Located in the Côte des Neiges district of Montreal, this Temple serves as a meeting place for Canada's Cambodian Buddhist community. The Temple includes a Pagoda as well as two apartment buildings converted to meeting rooms and classrooms, etc. as well as residences. Its architectural features reflect the traditional Khmer style.

morality) talks and discussions, distribution of written materials and particularly, through visual imagery. Within the Pagoda, a person is surrounded by large, naturalistic and richly colored paintings, photographs, and sculpted Buddha, Bodhisattvas and *jatâka* (Sanskrit: story) images from the Buddha's life and previous lives as well as other Cambodian imagery (See Figure 7).

This specific Pagoda is one of the four Theravâda Buddhist Temples in the Montreal area and is the oldest and most established (i.e. since 1983). Although the population of Laotian and Vietnamese Theravâda immigrants is considerably less, both groups founded temples in the area during the 1980s. In Montreal's large Vietnamese community, the majority are from the Mahâyâna Buddhist tradition. A Thai Buddhist temple opened in 1998 even though there are still relatively few Thai immigrants in Montreal. Large numbers of Cambodian immigrants have continued to come to Canada since the early 1980s and the Khmer Pagoda in Montreal has become a vibrant and growing center of Khmer religious and cultural life.

1.0.2: Research Objectives and Question

This study examines some aspects of the significance and “power” of religious images as educational tools to influence and shape individual and cultural meaning for the Khmer people of Montreal. In order to discover the importance of the Khmer Pagoda of Canada, its paintings, photographs and statues within the people's lives today, it was first necessary to acquire a brief knowledge of the historical significance of these artifacts. Excerpts from interviews with members of the Cambodian Buddhist community of Canada further explained their ties to traditional Cambodian culture and religion which are reflected through the Khmer Pagoda and its many artifacts. From within these Khmer Canadian's understanding of the visual media within this Temple, it was possible to acquire a basic knowledge of their Khmer artistic tradition. I investigated

the current significance of the Khmer Pagoda and some of the images found inside this Pagoda for the study participants. From this, it was possible to learn how these participants perceive the Temple and its imagery and how these influence them in their contemporary daily lives. Finally, I investigated how these Cambodian people have used the images of this Temple to facilitate their own learning. I believe this suggests principles for education using art and imagery for others from the Cambodian Buddhist community. The objectives of this research study were the following:

- 1) To identify the historical significance of the Khmer Pagoda in Montreal for my research participants
- 2) To understand the contemporary significance of the Pagoda and some of the paintings, photographs and statues at the Khmer Pagoda for the interview participants
- 3) To determine the role of the Pagoda and its imagery in shaping the thoughts and beliefs of these members of the Cambodian Buddhist community
- 4) To speculate on how this information could reveal a concept of art and art education for these members of Montreal's Cambodian Buddhist community

Based on these objectives, research questions were formulated that specify the focus of this thesis. These questions are the following:

What is the educational significance of Montreal's Khmer Pagoda and some of its images for informants in this study? How is art and art education conceived by these members of Montreal's Cambodian Buddhist community?

1.0.3: Social and Cultural Context

In this section, I will give a brief overview of the Cambodian people who have come to Canada, a short history of the Khmer civilization and the tragic events of the Khmer's more recent history. I will briefly look at a solution proposed by Buddhist scholars and the Cambodian people to reduce their suffering. This leads into a description of the Theravâda Buddhist religion and the history and role of the temple in Khmer society. From this, I will continue with a description of Buddhist education within the temple and the important function of images in this educational process.

1.0.3.1: Cambodian Canadians

Canada has increasingly grown into a country of great diversity in terms of cultures, religions and ideologies over the last several years. Five of the eight countries with the highest number of immigrants to Canada are predominantly Buddhist countries, according to my calculation of the Canadian Immigration Statistics, 1994 (Canadian Government 1997: x). While the majority of these people are Mahâyâna Buddhists, a large proportion of the more recent immigrants to Canada have also come from the

Theravâda Buddhist countries of the Indochinese peninsula or other predominantly Theravâda Buddhist countries of South and Southeast Asia.

In the case of the Cambodian immigrants, the majority have come to Canada in search of an ordinary life and to escape the injustices of their Communist government, wars, atrocities against human life and the social upheavals that have ravaged their country for the last 30 years. Since the late 1970s, about 30,000 Cambodians have come to Canada and over one-third of them currently live in Montreal (Venerable Visal Soth 1998, Personal communication). However, the number of Cambodian immigrants to Canada has steadily decreased since the late 1980s and into the early 1990s. Canada Immigration Statistics in 1994 reported only 398 Cambodian immigrants. (Canadian Government 1997: 24) Of these people, the number of women was almost double that of men¹, which probably reflects the casualties of male soldiers through many years of war (Ibid. 1997: 24). After arriving in Canada, Cambodian immigrants have found a place where the Buddhist values of peace, non-violence and respect for human life, nature and diversity of opinion are also appreciated. Most of these people have experienced great tragedy, but also much happiness, and bring with them many fascinating life stories. Through their many activities and the expression of their ideas, the Khmer Buddhist people, who are all originally from Cambodia, are currently making significant contributions to the Canadian social landscape.

Most of the Cambodian people in Canada have emigrated to Montreal or the other large urban centers such as Toronto or Vancouver. Adjusting to the urban lifestyle and a

¹ This source reported that 136 males received immigration compared to 262 females.

“Western way of thinking” is often a difficult transition. Before the problems began in the late 1960s in Cambodia, 83% of the 5.7 million people lived in rural areas (The last official Cambodian Government Census, 1962 in Peang-Meth 1991: 451). The economy was based on subsistence agriculture and centered around small rural villages. The people were always close to the land and the laws and cycles of nature were a part of their everyday lives.

1.0.3.2: A Brief History of Khmer Civilization

Although Cambodia has been inhabited for many thousands of years, the Khmer civilization can be traced back over 2,000 years. The Khmer are believed to have emigrated from India and their Kingdom was first known as “Fu-Nan” to the Chinese, which means *king of the mountains*. The Angkor period, from the ninth to the thirteenth century A.D., is considered to be the pinnacle of Khmer cultural achievement. This period was marked by the construction of many ingenious architectural monuments, such as Angkor Wat² (See Figure 12), as well as a large number of distinctive sculpted images and other artistic productions. During this period, the Khmer civilization spread across the territory that today is northwestern Thailand, the southern part of Laos and included South Vietnam. The social and artistic influence of this Empire extended throughout the entire South and Southeast Asian region, and its accomplishments have often been compared to those of ancient Greece or Egypt. This is the same artistic and cultural

² Pāli: Temple

legacy that has been preserved by the Khmer people into the twentieth century and will surely persist over the centuries to come.

The conventional reality of the Khmer people in Canada has been shaped by many events over their long history, and particularly those of more recent times. After Angkor was raided several times by the Thai during the 14th century, it was eventually abandoned in 1431 for a capital in the southern region of Cambodia (Le Bonheur in Jessup & Zephir 1997). Since that time, much of the original Khmer territory has been divided between Cambodia's neighbors. In 1863, Cambodia became a protectorate of the French Government and was administered by a French Resident Superieur. It was not until 1954 that the people gained full independence again under King Norodom Sihanouk. The Kingdom of Cambodia was a relatively peaceful nation until the late 1960s when American and South Vietnamese troops invaded the Cambodian countryside (Jones 1995).

1.0.3.3: Cambodia's Tragedy: The Khmer Rouge

The wars in Cambodia, which began in 1970, and the rise to power of a ruthless communist government in 1975, marked the beginning of a more recent period of political instability and human suffering. Cambodia, during this period, was re-named *Democratic Kampuchea*. The communist Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot, who were backed by the Chinese Government, inflicted one of the worst genocides of the modern age. It has been estimated that more than two million Cambodians lost their lives through

torture, starvation and disease between 1975 and 1978 alone (Peang-Meth 1991, Jones 1995). A May 1981 census showed that 6.7 million people were living in Cambodia but the population, according to the United Nation's estimated growth rate of 2.8% per year, should have been 9 million (Jones 1995). By September of 1995, the population had grown to 10.4 million, according to the UN's estimates (Jones 1995).

The Khmer Rouge attempted to destroy all the established institutions within the Cambodian society: not only political but also cultural, religious and social institutions.

Pauline Dyphon (1988) further describes this catastrophe:

Between 1975 and 1979, the holocaust of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge destroyed not only between 2 and 3 million lives, but uncountable artifacts bearing witness to Cambodian culture and civilization. I can give examples of such destruction that I myself witnessed: the decapitation of the large statues of Buddha and the crushing into dust of the smaller ones; the burning of the handsome ceremonial costumes used in dance and weddings; and the confiscation of our personal jewelry. (In Judkins 1988: 5)

The destructiveness of the Khmer Rouge was witnessed by virtually every Cambodian living in the country at that time. Venerable Heng Monychenda (1988), chairman of the Khmer Buddhist Research Center in Bangkok, further describes the complete disregard of the Khmer Rouge members for the Buddhist religion, temples and monks:

Half of the pagodas were totally destroyed and many others turned into prisons, torture chambers and places of execution: Buddhist monks were forced to renounce their orders and many, including the Supreme Patriarch and several high-ranking monks, were put to death: Buddhist canons and scriptures were burned and statues of the Lord Buddha smashed. (p.22)

Those who adopted the radical communist ideology under the Khmer Rouge were taught to disrespect not only the Buddhist religion, but also knowledge, those who possessed knowledge and also the tools used for learning and education.

Much of the written documentation on Khmer culture was similarly lost. As a result of the deliberate destruction of texts by the Khmer Rouge, combined with loss and neglect and the effects of elements, less than half of the Khmer language materials from before 1975 exist today. For example, the National Library in Phnom Penh has only three hundred unduplicated titles in Khmer... while the old Buddhist Institute library used to house more than sixteen hundred palm-leaf manuscripts, in Phnom Penh today there are less than eight hundred manuscripts left at four sites. (Ledgerwood cited in Ebihara 1994: 2)

The disrespect for manuscripts, books, wisdom, knowledge, tradition and the wise and elderly people of Cambodia was the tragic yet common characteristic of this radical communist ideology that was implanted into the minds of many Cambodians. The propaganda of the Mao Tse Tung Chinese Government was taught over the radio, at Chinese language schools and the Cambodian leader, King Sihanouk, also perpetuated the “virtues” of communism to the Cambodian people. Venerable Hok Savann (1998) confirms that: “The Cambodian families were being educated by the communists not to respect one another. The communists taught the children to follow their family members and to spy on them. It came to a point where they ordered the children to make their parents comply or else to kill them.” (p.6) The Governments’ disregard for morality, compassion, human rights, wisdom, education, religion, tradition and culture from the time of the Khmer Rouge to the present day is described in more detail in the experiences of every participant in this study.

The tragedy of the Cambodian people did not end after the Khmer Rouge were defeated in 1979 by the Vietnamese communists. Since the invasion of the Vietnamese forces into Cambodia in 1979, the number of Vietnamese settlers coming into Cambodia dramatically increased. Government statistics from before 1970 also show that about 90% of the Cambodian population were ethnic Khmer, while most of the others consisted

of Chinese elite or Vietnamese settlers. (Peang-Meth 1988). Since many of these Vietnamese people preserve their loyalty to Vietnam and support the annexation of Cambodia, they are believed to contribute to Cambodian's political instability. The Vietnamese Government's control over many Cambodian Government Offices, including that of the current Prime Minister Hun Sen, is another major factor causing unrest in Cambodia. (Muny Sara 1998, Rainsy 1998) Many of these leaders, who also control the country's military forces, have demonstrated their loyalty to the Vietnamese Government and their disregard for the country of Cambodia, its people and their interests. For example, in the last 20 years the Hun Sen Government and his C.P.P. (Cambodian People's Party), which was formed by the Vietnamese Government in 1979, have moved the Cambodian border giving Vietnam and Thailand an additional 4,510 km² of Cambodian's territory and have recently granted over 2 million Vietnamese refugees full citizenship³. (United Nations officials cited in Cambodian Community of Canada 1999) This dictator, Mr. Hun Sen, and his police force have continued the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocent Cambodians since 1979. During the 1980s, he implemented the *Kar 5 Project* which sent hundreds of thousands of Khmer people to clear the forests along the Khmer-Thai border in order to weaken the Cambodian liberation forces who represented the interests of the Cambodian people. This resulted in the death of more than 200,000 people. (Muny Sara 1998, Savann 1998 [based on United Nations Reports]) Human rights abuses, killing and genocide continue today under Cambodia's Vietnamese backed communist Government.

³ This occurred in July, 1999

The many events of recent times, including the Vietnamese invasion, the emigration of Vietnamese refugees to Cambodia, the wars and genocide and the massive immigration of Cambodian people to Western countries such as Canada, have radically uprooted the entire nation. According to Abdulgaffer Peang-Meth (1991):

This rendering of the social fabric will surely alter the force of traditionalism in Khmer society. The preponderantly youthful population will have no memory of the past: the adults are far less educated in Khmer history and traditions than were their parents, many of whom did not survive the years of war and the Pol Pot period. (p.451)

The reconstruction of a new and peaceful Khmer Buddhist society in Cambodia now appears to be a priority for not only those Cambodians who have survived the recent atrocities but also for the younger generation who recognize the fragility of their heritage which was nearly destroyed and its value within their contemporary daily lives.

1.0.3.4: Ending the Suffering

The events of the past 30 years have effected every Cambodian person. Loss of property, livelihood, stability, traditions and particularly, the loss of family and friends through death or separation has resulted in suffering that can never be imagined by most Canadians. When everything else has been lost, the only thing that provides some amount of stability in the lives of many Cambodians is their remaining family, their community ties and their religion. Buddhism teaches that everything is impermanent and that everything changes. The ability of Khmer immigrants to relate these teachings to their personal tragedies makes their traditional Buddhist religion seem more enticing.

Kalab (1994) confirms that: “Khmer refugees aspire to a special kind of constancy, trying to recreate and revive the rituals and decorations as they were in Cambodia in the 1960s...” (in Ebihara: 57). Temples, such as the Khmer Pagoda in Montreal, are decorated with images and statues that not only remind the Khmer people of their lives in Cambodia, but also of a time before they knew about the unthinkable pain and sorrows that life was capable of unleashing upon them. The Temple is a religious and cultural centre where the Khmer people in Montreal and Canada can go to meet others from their community who share many of their experiences and concerns: it is an oasis in the middle of an unfamiliar and often unfriendly environment. However, the Temple also functions as a psycho-educational clinic in the sense that Cambodian Buddhists can come here for mental and spiritual healing.

According to the Buddhist conception of medical science, *kamma* (Pâli: action) is often related to a person's health. Bad actions are thought to be the cause of disease: not only physical, but also mental and spiritual. If a person lives a balanced and healthy life in all three of these categories, then physical illness or mental and spiritual suffering can almost completely be avoided, unless it is caused by the bad *kamma* of other people. This last scenario is undoubtedly the case for most Cambodians. Although their suffering is caused by the atrocious actions of a few Khmer Rouge members and Cambodia's uncaring leaders, all Cambodians have to deal with the physical, mental and emotional results of these crimes that were inflicted upon them.

In the *Mangala Sutta* (*Kuddaka Nikâya, Sutta Nipâta*), a *paritta*⁴ which is often chanted at Khmer weddings, human beings are not considered to be isolated moral agents. Rather, solving social problems occurs as a result of bringing many individuals into a common awareness of these problems at ever greater levels of *mangala*⁵. The ultimate goal is to bring society and nature together for the achievement of human being's true potential which is the realization of benevolence and lasting happiness. The *mangalas* are described according to 38 groups of virtues that identify an increasingly broader awareness of morality beginning with the individual and progressing to the family, community, country and then to the entire world and universe. These are further described by Venerable Mettanando Bhikkhu (1993):

Following these sets of virtues gives one an impression of climbing up a flight of stairs leading to salvation. In all, there are thirty-eight mangalas, and the manifestation of any one mangala will lead to the development of the next higher mangala in the sequence. Mangalas are more important than other types of manifestations because they assure a presence of a deeper unseen network of causes and effects which interact together in cycles of positive feedback. Using mangalas for the ethical development of society cuts through non-objectiveness that might lead to superficial social changes (an individual's prosperity, for example, being misunderstood as a sign of social development) by never separating social ethics from social development. Social development that is unethical is, for Buddhists, a contradiction in terms. (p.44)

Buddhists believe that all bad kamma will eventually result in suffering at some level of society and that all good kamma will eventually result in happiness. However, lasting happiness in the world is only possible with truly good action that requires the awareness of all levels of mangala. Until a person is aware of all these levels, they can not know if

⁴ Pâli: Safeguard or protection

⁵ Pâli word meaning *good omen* or *blessing*; This is a sign that something good is about to happen to a person, society or the entire world depending on the mangala level.

their actions are truly good. However, the aspiration for good action and knowledge of higher *mangalas* will eventually lead to truly good action.

Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung, the nun who was interviewed in this study, applied the *mangala* principle to the current problems in Cambodia and the suffering of so many innocent people which has been the consequence of these problems. She confirms that although most of the people lived honorable lives and respected the Buddhist teachings, the leaders and the King of Cambodia destroyed all levels of *mangala* or the moral fabric of the society. In fact, these leaders brought about the moral decline of Cambodia resulting in *avamangalas*⁶ or negative *mangalas*. She further describes this situation:

I believe that the power of the Buddha can bring respect for different ideas and political parties. Even during the Khmer Rouge regime when there was a big war, all the people believed only in the way of the Buddha and they prayed to Buddha to help them and they wanted to stay on the way of Buddha. They believed that one day this will bring peace for Cambodia.

But you may wonder; if Cambodians really believe in the Buddha, why is it so bad there now? You know... it's not the Cambodian people who are responsible for this situation. It's not the population. The people really believe in the country, but when the leader is not a good person it is like when the driver of a car turns left and then everyone has to turn left too. If he turns right, then everybody has to turn right. Ask the Cambodian people. They have no say. And the former leader, King Sihanouk, has 10 wives and each wife has a nice house, nice dresses and diamonds. And his daughter, Bopadavi, has had many lovers and has been divorced 6 times and nobody respects her or her family. And this King, Sihanouk, has no respect from anyone because of his bad actions. Many years ago, Cambodia was a big country and had a big empire in Southeast Asia. After the Geneva Conference in 1954, Cambodia was liberated from France. But King Sihanouk never thought about the interest of the country. He only thought of the interest of his own family and himself too. He took care of his ten wives and he had a nice car for each wife and all his family, but he never thought about the Cambodian people. So in a way, all of Cambodia suffers because of their bad leaders. (Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung, Personal communication 1999)

⁶ Negative *mangalas* or bad omens which correspond to the 38 levels of *mangala*.

Mrs. Phoung went on to describe why the Buddhist religion, its temples and its images are the key to bringing about the achievement of a virtuous and civil society in Cambodia. She points out how they can also lead to the end of the suffering that is a part of life for all the Cambodian people who have been the victims of their self-interested and uncaring leaders.

The people of Cambodia have always believed in the Buddhist religion. So, the temples, like this one, and the images are also very important for the Cambodian people. For example, if you compare the traditional life in Cambodia to the communist regime that is there now, the communists do not have a temple with everything (all the images) that you see here at this one (See Figures 3 to 14). Everyone who follows communism has completely forgotten about the Buddha and the Buddhist religion. So, this makes them go in a bad way, and more and more day after day. But these pictures -- these images here -- remind everyone not to go in a bad way -- not to do what they know is bad in their life -- and to help them make the right decision before doing something. They think; "Is it good or bad,?" These images remind them of cause and effect. When someone is doing bad they have to know that after a few days or months, the effect will be received from their actions. (Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung, Personal communication 1999)

The decline in the condition of the country of Cambodia is linked to the infiltration a flawed rationale which does not respect human rights, justice or democracy. Many Khmer people believe that faulty reasoning leads to negative results and that the communist ideology is such an example. The Communists in Cambodia radically opposed and overturned all established and traditional structures, institutions and social order rather than seeking to bring about gradual and peaceful change from within. As the leaders of Cambodia adopted the Chinese Mao Tse Tung and Marxist communist philosophies, it is believed that they were subsequently led into a decline of mental health or reasoning. Their continuing allegiance to this communism caused increasing levels of *avamangalas* (negative groups of values) within Cambodian society until all justice,

morality and ethical action had practically disappeared. The “killing fields”, genocide and murder of innocent people, that continue today under the present Communist Government, are considered to be a continuation of the lowest levels of *avamangala* which bring the leaders to mental states which are much lower than any living creature on earth and results in their inhumane and deplorable actions.

Unfortunately, ordinary Cambodian people continue to suffer not only from the unhealthy reasoning and actions of their leaders, but due to the loss and separation from their loved ones. The feelings that cause suffering such as grief over the loss of loved ones, solitude caused by the separation from family and friends, or anger against those who have committed terrible atrocities are all considered to be mental or spiritual afflictions. The ancient Indian physician, Carâka, gives a prescription that many Cambodians would presumably apply to their current circumstances:

Good life means not only an ethically virtuous life, but a life which enjoys good health being free from diseases... Mental diseases are to be cured by right and proper knowledge of things, self-control and self-concentration, while physical diseases are to be cured by medicines... (One must) control certain tendencies of the body and mind, which induce one to do such karma that lead to mental and bodily diseases. He says that everyone should be careful to the extent so that he does not commit mistakes of mind, speech and action. In order to keep one's mind and body clean, (s)he has to control his(her) passions of greed, and his(her) feelings of grief, fear, anger, vanity, shamelessness, envy, attachment and solitude. (Carâka-sâmhita in Dasgupta 1952, Vol. II: 273-436)

This holistic approach to spiritual and mental afflictions allows the victims to cope with the reality of their loss and suffering with reason and sanity.

Most Cambodians strive to bring about inner peace for themselves and for their family and friends. Through the Khmer Temple in Montreal and its visual media, these people can find mental, spiritual and physical release from the pressures of daily life in

Canadian society and from the loneliness and grieving for family and friends. The Temple and its images can also bring about their peace of mind through meditation, prayer and concentration. At the same time however, Khmer Buddhists can develop and nurture a sense of religious and cultural identity within a larger group and compassion for others in Cambodia and around the world. Many Cambodians eagerly contribute their time and effort to bring about good government, human rights, justice and peace for the country of Cambodia. In this way, their realization of social responsibilities and problems is also accomplished through the role of the Khmer Temple in Montreal. The importance of the Buddhist religion, its temples and images will be discussed at more length in Chapters Five and Six.

1.0.3.5: Theravâda Buddhism

The desire to re-create the missing and necessary components within their lives and to preserve Khmer social, cultural and religious identity appears to be of extreme importance to the Khmer Buddhists who have arrived in Canada. For many centuries the Buddhist religion has been an inseparable part of Khmer society and influenced all facets of life. "To be Khmer is to be Buddhist, say both Khmer and observers." (Ledgerwood et al. cited in Ebihara 1995: 23) Cambodia was originally influenced by *Brahminism*, an early form of the Hindu religion, and this is still apparent today in many aspects of Cambodian religious practice from a strong belief in predestination to rigid pyramidal social order through class, rank and role relationships. Although Cambodia has adopted

many ideas from *Mahâyâna* Buddhism⁷, Theravâda Buddhism has been the most influential and was officially declared as the State religion in the 14th century. Venerable Visal Soth, Head Monk of the Pagoda, informed me that 95% of the Cambodian people in Montreal still claim to be Theravâda Buddhists (Personal communication 1998).⁸

Theravâda originated in India and is the oldest form of Buddhism. This Pâli term translated into English means *wisdom of the elders*. However, it is sometimes referred to as “lesser vehicle” or *Hinayâna* which are sometimes regarded as a derogatory terms. Theravâda Buddhism is based on the *sangha*⁹ tradition. Here, the various structures of society, the state and the individual are integrated in a way that makes Buddhism a primary part of the everyday life of the people. Many formal distinctions, specializations and disciplines are generally not recognized, such as those between religion, philosophy, psychology, and art and culture (Coomaraswamy 1956: back cover, Buddhadâsa 1989: 8-10, Sutthi 1982: 13-14). In the Theravâda Buddhist countries, hierarchical relationships extend to every level of existence and the rulers or government heads are viewed as *bodhisattvas*.¹⁰ The idea of the “god-king” ruler, known as the *devarâja*, came from the earlier Brahmin influence in the Theravâda countries (Houtart 1977, Peang-Meth 1991). The Buddha is seen as a great leader or an example to be followed rather than a god or a savior. Although it is believed that the actual Buddha was an historical figure, he is considered to be a recurring phenomenon throughout history. Unlike the Mahâyâna or

⁷ Sanskrit: (Mahâ) great + (yâna) vehicle; Most common form of Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

⁸ Smith-Hefner (1999) has estimated that at least 90% of Khmer in the Boston area identify themselves as Buddhists. Estimates vary in both Canada and United States. However, several participants in this study confirmed a very high percentage of Khmer Buddhists in Canada (See section 5.0.3).

⁹ Sanskrit: Assemblage; Usually refers to the assembly of monks (Bhikku) and (Bhikkhunî) or the monastic order in Theravâda Buddhism.

*Vajrayâna*¹¹ (Tibetan) form, in which anyone can attain Buddhahood and where many Buddhas can exist simultaneously, the Theravâda form holds the tradition that only one Buddha can exist at a given time and that this only occurs rarely throughout history. For this reason and because Mahâyâna Buddhism is separated from other social systems, it is often considered to be a “folk religion”. On the contrary, the Theravâda tradition strives to place Buddhism in a central position within both society and an individual’s daily philosophy and life.

1.0.3.6: The Khmer Temple

For the Khmer Buddhists who have come to Canada, and to Montreal in particular, the Khmer Pagoda of Canada was established not only as an expression of the people’s religious and philosophical beliefs, but also as a monument to preserve the culture and values associated with their homeland (See Figure 2). Consequently, the Temple’s primary function, to educate members of the community, has not changed from traditional Khmer society.

In Cambodia, the *wat*¹² was the “moral, social and educational center” of Khmer villages since at least the 15th century (Ebihara 1990: 21). The transformation of monastic and temple schools to elementary state schools only began in 1912 with the influence of the French colonial officials (Houtart 1977). This process was gradual and

¹⁰ Pâli: (bodhi) wisdom + (sattva) being; A pre-incarnation before becoming a Buddha.

¹¹ Sanskrit: (Vajra) thunder + (yâna) vehicle; Form of Mahâyâna Buddhism traditionally practiced in Tibet.

¹² Pâli: Temple

any education that peasant villagers received during the colonial period was by monks at monastic schools (Chandler 1983: 161, 162). However, it was not until the introduction of the Western notion of “modern development” in the countries of Indochina during the 1950s and 60s that “formal” schools and education gained somewhat in their importance. During the 1970s and 80s, the Communists also favored public schools as the institutional tools for education and indoctrination. They completely despised the Buddhist temples, monks and the form of education that they provided. If temples were not destroyed, they were turned into storage centers, prisons or extermination camps. (Keyes 1994: 56) After being forced to disrobe, Venerable Chea Tong (1981) was told by Khmer Rouge soldiers that: “Religion is feudal and oppressive and monks are useless parasites..., leeches living on the blood of the people.” (cited in Richardson 1981: 104) In the minds of most Cambodians however, the monks were educators and the temples remained as the most important educational institution not only for moral, but also for social and cultural education. Venerable Visal Soth elaborates:

Before the Communist regime in Cambodia, the temple was really the place of education and the monks would educate the children and their parents. Many young people would become a monk or a nun in order to study and learn Buddhism. In Cambodia, everyone believed in Buddhism. Before, the schools were in the temples. All the children studied in the temple and the nuns and monks were the teachers. The parents respected and trusted the monks with their children. But, it hasn't been like this for 20 or 30 years. (Venerable Visal Soth 1998, Personal communication)

Education was traditionally associated with the role of the monastery or temple and many of the public schools today are still operated and administered by Buddhist monks and nuns (Gohlert 1991). Mory Ouk et al. (1988) confirm that ‘renovated’ temple schools adopted the same curriculum as national public schools, although the monk run schools

retained their special Buddhist program. Along with a uniform system of education, the French established “a limited number of ‘modernized’ temple schools in the Khmer countryside...” (Kalab 1968: 162) Although foreign influences in recent years, such as modernism, communism and commercialism, have undermined the education of the Buddhist temple, its place in Cambodian society continues to be prominent. Seri Phongphit (1988) further describes the role of the Buddhist temple in traditional Indochinese society.

The temple operates as a social institution which helps develop the spirit, educates, is a health-care, cultural and social welfare centre, and an important influence for reaching a balanced economy and lifestyle... In modern development, we ignore our greatest social resources, Buddhist monks, village wisdom, and local resources.
(pp.28, 32)

The Khmer Temple in Montreal was built by Cambodian immigrants precisely for this purpose: to preserve traditional wisdom and values and to provide community support, healing and security in the face of the modern, highly developed and rapidly changing country of Canada. The Khmer elders within the Temple, who consist almost exclusively of elderly nuns (See Figure 1), are respected greatly by the Cambodian community and also depended upon to educate younger people in Buddhist knowledge and customs.

Within the Temple, thoughts are focused on Cambodia’s “golden age” under the leadership of Jayavarman VII during the construction of Angkor Wat. (See Figure 12) This period of Cambodian prosperity is also associated with the Khmer people’s allegiance to the Buddhist religion with its primary aim of non-violence, the end of suffering and respect for life and nature. This message is more appealing than ever,

considering the recent misfortunes of Cambodians due to the Communist's complete disregard for life and the Buddhist religion.

The Khmer Pagoda of Montreal was constructed during the early 1980s as a large number of Khmer people immigrated to Canada. In 1983, Venerable Visal Soth, Head Monk of the Pagoda, converted a former carpet factory in the Côte des Neiges district into a Temple. After renovations were finished, it was first used for gatherings early in 1984. Unfortunately, this first Temple was destroyed by a fire. Since Venerable Visal Soth had acquired the neighboring lot which contained an apartment building, this was used for the construction of the present Temple (See Figure 2). This new Temple was joined onto the pre-existing apartment structure and was completed in 1987. Over the last decade, the Cambodian community has continued to grow and during festivals and celebrations, such as Cambodian New Year¹³ or Bonn Phchoum Ben¹⁴, this Temple is usually overflowing with people. As a result, the construction of a large new Temple is beginning which will be joined onto the current Temple. When it is finished, this Temple will not only be spacious but also a beautiful architectural monument built in the traditional Khmer style.

1.0.3.7: Buddhist Education

The Buddha said that an educated person is one who knows the higher values of life and then sacrifices the lower values for the higher values (Buddhadâsa 1989). In

¹³ Celebrated in mid April according to the lunar calendar.

¹⁴ Khmer: "Spirit Commemoration Festival"; Celebration in September where people contact the spirits of their dead relatives and offer food for them.

other words, this is a person who sacrifices personal material gains for the love of others. Securing a high paying job or nurturing “ambition”-- meaning the desire to get ahead of other people -- are not the goals of a Buddhist education. Neither is its purpose to acquire mere facts and information that will allow the individual to exploit or control others and subjugate nature. A person is taught to provide for their basic needs through sustainable activities, not to hoard possessions that they cannot immediately use, and not to destroy the earth for future generations. Many decades ago, Mahatma Gandhi said, “Mother earth has enough for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed.” Sulak Sivaraksa (1992) believes that modern education has lost sight of the notion of wisdom. In his words;

Consumerism works hand in hand with the modern educational system to encourage cleverness without wisdom. We create delusion in ourselves and call it knowledge. Until the schools reinvest their energy into teaching wholesome, spiritual values instead of reinforcing the delusion that satisfaction and meaning in life can be found in a higher-paying job, the schools are just cheerleaders for the advertising agencies, and we believe that consuming more, going faster, and living in greater convenience will bring us happiness. (p.8)

The first goal of education from a Buddhist perspective is to establish peace within the minds of individuals or students. The calming of the mind is achieved through the calming of one’s physical, mental and spiritual desires. This is reflected by a person’s ability to concentrate and control their physical actions or movements. Through concentration, mindfulness, meditation or prayer, etc., a person learns to control or cut off their endless cycle of personal desires. In accomplishing this, a student can understand the ease at which benevolence in society is achievable. They also realize the benefits of a selfless and peaceful society for all living beings. This is opposed to the current rationale of some educational institutions where “teachers emphasize praise and public displays of

mastery by individual students.” (Smith-Hefner 1999: 131) The Buddhist educational ideology contradicts the assumption that students should feed their personal desires for achievement, material success and consumerism.

Education or *enlightenment* in Buddhism is viewed as a personal quest for true knowledge, understanding and wisdom for the benefit of all people through many diverse forms of learning. Each person is encouraged to find their own way and this is accomplished not simply by taking and believing everything at face value. A quote from the Buddha’s *Kalâma Sûtta* translated from its original Pâli is incorporated into the principles of education or standard curriculum prescribed by the Temple: “To avoid blind belief.... be not led by reports, tradition, authority of texts, mere logic, inference, considering appearances, agreement with an approved theory, seeming possibilities or the notion that ‘this is our teacher’” (trans. n.d., Savann, *The Buddha*). Ideas are passed from generation to generation through the communication of personal stories related to Buddhist principles or through visual stories (Skt: *jatâkas*) of the Buddha’s life and previous lives. Within the Khmer Buddhist Temple, the preference for oral methods and visual imagery over other forms of educational tools, such as written texts, is easily detected. Traditionally, the temple was not only the place of moral learning but also of religious, cultural and social learning where each person could pursue their own education, discovering the complexities of life.

Vocational skills, on the other hand, were generally learned through apprenticeship or practical training with the mother in the home or with the father in his daily work activities. Traditional culture lacked a separate process called *education*.

After living in a small Tibetan Buddhist community for 20 years, Helena Norberg-Hodge (1992) described what she found as the traditional notion of vocational learning or education from a Buddhist perspective. This description could easily apply to Cambodia and Cambodian people.

Education was the product of an intimate relationship with the community and its environment. Children learned from grandparents, family and friends. Helping with the sowing, for instance, they would learn that on one side of the village it was a little warmer, on the other side a little colder. From their own experience, children would come to distinguish between different strains of barley (or rice) and the specific growing conditions each strain preferred. They learned to recognize even the tiniest wild plants and how to use it, and how to pick out a particular animal... They learned about connections, process, and change, about the intricate web of fluctuating relationships in the natural world around them.

For generation after generation, they grew up learning how to provide themselves with clothing and shelter... Education was location-specific and nurtured an intimate relationship with the living world. It gave children an intuitive awareness that allowed them, as they grew older, to use (local) resources in an effective and sustainable way. (pp.110, 111)

Buddhist education is meant to teach students about their own traditional, sustainable, ecological and local practices and is not meant to train them as specialists in a world of large scale, technological production where they become detached from their responsibility to nature and the environment. Education based on Buddhist principles meets the everyday needs of each individual and does not advocate that resources, techniques and ideologies should be standardized according to a “universal” reality or “proven” models. The economist E.F. Schumacher (1974) agrees that: “Man is small, and therefore, small is beautiful. To go for giantism is to go for self-destruction.” (p.133) Buddhist education does not look to a bigger and “better” world where the traditions that are learned at home or at the Temple seem irrelevant and shameful. Norberg-Hodge (1992) confirms that: “Modern schooling acts almost as a blindfold, preventing children

from seeing the context in which they live. They leave school unable to use their own resources, unable to function in their own world... (It) makes the children think of themselves and their culture as inferior. (pp.110, 113) Ultimately, when Buddhist principles are applied to education the result does not undermine the self-esteem, peace and tranquillity of both the individual and his/her community. They do not feel ashamed of their way of life and thus feel the need to buy into a universal culture of commercialism and unrealistic dreams of success. Buddhist ideology does not try to convert people into ascetics who will continue to sacrifice their happiness, contentment and the wholeness of each moment of their life for a chance to gain unlimited comfort and wealth in the future.

The contrast between modern and Buddhist forms of education usually presents great difficulty for many Buddhist people who immigrate to Western countries such as Canada. Venerable Monychenda (1988) outlines the difference between these two types of education:

This modern education, instead of diminishing our problems and providing greater peace within us and about us, only brings greater and more insoluble problems. The old way taught us how to be whole... Previously, in the pagoda, students did not learn only how to acquire knowledge and skills for making money, but how to live decent lives: to do good, avoid evil, cultivate compassion and humanity, diminish self-centeredness and selfishness, develop purity, honesty, love and so on... (p.23)

In Cambodian education and in Cambodian society, monks, nuns, elders and people with good personality traits, such as compassion, self-discipline and wisdom, are idealized and respected, even though they often have few material possessions. In contrast, Western society often idealize young, reckless and competitive individuals who demonstrate little compassion for others but possess great wealth, power and influence.

“American (or similarly I believe, Canadian) success means one must have materialistic wealth, power and individual freedom. This is a totally new definition of a better person.” (Luangpraseut in International Child Bureau 1989). In his autobiographical novel *Monsoon Country*, Pira Sudham (1988) illustrates this dichotomy between traditional and modern values through the experience of a young teacher trying to establish a modern school in a rural Indochinese village in the 1960s. He describes:

Barefoot, they splashed through puddles and mud. They left the village streets and turned into the temple precinct. The school building was on the temple ground... These were the bewildered children experiencing their first day at school. And he had snatched them away from the wilderness, from the rice fields, from the Darkness. Had there not been this school they would still be roaming the plain with their water buffaloes, or working beside their parents in the paddies. (pp.20-25)

The context and values of most Canadians are obviously much different from this description. Young Cambodian people must learn to cope in a new context and culture in Canada. But, this raises the question as to the ultimate purpose of formal education and its benefit to the society as a whole.

It is very easy to romanticize about the advantages of traditional Buddhist learning over the destructiveness of modern learning. Here, I have tried to perhaps unrealistically contrast the two for clarity of understanding. However, in a world dominated by money, greed, efficiency and new technologies, it is not so easy to ignore the material benefits of a modern education, from a practical point of view. Since each person is a part of the larger world, they must learn how to balance both material and spiritual interests. Each person has to find a middle path between the advantages of modern scientific knowledge and those of traditional knowledge that advocates humanitarian values, compassion, and wisdom.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the benefits of Buddhist principles and education are grossly ignored today. In Cambodia, educational models of the “developed” countries are emulated while Buddhist education is usually forgotten. In the “developed” countries such as Canada, pollution increases and environmental and ecological disasters loom closer day after day as we continue in our destructive life-styles of uncontrolled consumption. Schumacher (1974) concludes that: “...modern man has built a system of production that ravishes nature and a society that mutilates man.” (p.246)

Venerable Hok Savann (1998) recognizes the necessity of change in the current educational practices in Cambodia. According to him:

The Department of Education in Cambodia is responsible to give knowledge and ethics to the boys and girls of Cambodia. Therefore, they should have educational programs that reflect the order and values of the Cambodian society but also the changes and progress of the outside world. At the present time, the Department of Education should increase two essential areas of study across every subject in their curriculum. These areas are: 1) Civics; or the study of laws and citizen's rights and duties and 2) Morality; or the value of virtue, morality itself, culture and traditions... The subject of Morality should cite Buddhism's Dhamma...” (p.7)

The opportunity for Cambodian immigrants coming to Canada to learn about traditional Buddhist principles (Dhamma) is even less certain. In the public schools here, children quickly integrate into the ways and customs of Canada and the adults are often concerned about financial burdens or other problems to be worried about learning traditions, culture or *Dhamma*. One clinical psychologist has noted;

By design or by circumstance, most of those (Cambodians) who come here as refugees have not had the opportunity to learn extensively about the Dhamma. In any situation this would be sad, but given the incredible suffering that Cambodia has gone through, and continues to endure, it will be an added tragedy if this cannot be reversed.” (Bernstein in International Catholic Child Bureau 1989: 120)

The purpose of the Temple and its imagery is to educate all Cambodians about the Dhamma and their culture, language and traditions. This is especially true for the young people who can easily forget the importance of their heritage and the value of traditional wisdom as they are easily enticed into the mainstream culture of commercialism, desire and greed. However, the Buddhist religion, the Temple and its images provide stability, offering both young and old ageless wisdom about life and its many difficulties for anyone who takes the time and makes the effort to learn.

1.0.3.8: Khmer Buddhist Imagery

In Buddhist societies it is thought that when a person practices and respects a religion, such as Buddhism, then they value the images of that religion. Although all forms are ultimately considered to be sacred, religious images are thought to be more significant than non-religious images because they do not relate merely to material values but to spiritual and therefore “higher” values. If a person values items, such as a car, a house or an art image, only objectively, then this reflects his/her lack of concern for spiritual matters.

Significant images also contain messages, lessons or morals about the world that are validated from within each person’s unique perspective, particular situation and context. For example, when a person learns and practices a particular philosophy, such as Buddhism, this will validate the image of Buddha for that person. All the symbolism associated with this image will also hold special significance for this person because they



Figure 3: Large Buddha Statue

The main Buddha statue which sits in the center of the shrine in the Montreal Pagoda. It is made of brass and was originally brought from Thailand.

have learned why this symbolism is important and believe this. Consequently, images are an effective media through which ideas, information and messages related to a specific conventional reality are communicated, both consciously and unconsciously.

In the case of the Khmer Buddhist people of Montreal, imagery plays a central role in the education and transmission of ideas within their Temple. Paintings and statues have many layers of meaning that are intended to teach Buddhist lessons and morality. The Khmer people's seemingly ageless artistic tradition is



Figure 4: Buddha Shrine

Statue of the Buddha which is found in the garden on one side of the Temple. Worshippers may pray and offer incense here.

considered to be a form of guidance towards an individual's "perfect enlightenment".

The interior of the Khmer Buddhist Temple is decorated with paintings, photographs, wood-relief carving and statues (See Figure 7). At the front and center of the Pagoda is a large statue of Buddha. (See Figure 3) The statue is about 6 ft. high but is



Figure 5: Bodhisattva

Probably Lokeśvara or Prajñāpāramitā. One of the ten emanations of the Buddha's former lives before achieving enlightenment. In Sanskrit, Bodhisattva means (bodhi) wisdom and (sattva) being.

raised another 4 ft. on its platform. This statue was made in Thailand and then brought to Montreal by ship. Directly behind this statue of Buddha and mounted on the shrine is a painting of a Cambodian landscape similar to the forest of Saraneath where the Buddha obtained enlightenment. Two Bodhisattvas¹⁵ are placed on each side of this statue. (See Figure 5) These probably represent

Lokeśvara and

¹⁵ Sanskrit term; In Pāli this is Bodhisatta and means a wisdom (bodhi) + being (satta). This refers to a preincarnation or emanation of the Buddha. There are usually thought to be ten according to Theravāda doctrine, however this sometimes varies.

Prajñâpâramitâ. Several smaller Buddha statues and emanations, such as Lokešvara, Matreya and Havajra, are placed around the Buddha statue. This shrine sits on a large platform and is surrounded by a small white fence. An 8 ft high stûpa or caitya is set on the floor on the left side of this shrine.¹⁶(See Figure 6)

This symbolizes the burial chamber or house of the Buddha's relics which are thought to retain an enormous concentration of religious energy. This is also the place where the Head Monk sits during special festivals. Candles and incense are always set in front of the Buddha shrine for worshippers as it is believed that their light and sweet fumes bring the souls of the



Figure 6: Caitya Shrine

In Sanskrit caitya means burial chamber. The remains or relics (Pâli: dhâtu) of the Buddha were originally divided among the eight kings of the earth and placed in a caitya. Since this is thought to contain the actual relics of the Buddha, it is considered to be one of the most sacred reminders of him.

¹⁶ Pâli: Burial chamber

deceased to the shrine. Four vases are always filled with fresh flowers since these are offered to the Buddha or to deceased relatives. Upon praying to the Buddha, fortune messages can be drawn from a small bowl in front of the shrine. This main altar of the Pagoda is never touched because this is thought to bring bad fortune. People usually come here at all times during the day to worship, bring gifts, pray or meditate.

On the three walls surrounding this shrine are several¹⁷ large paintings depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha¹⁸. (See Figure 7) Most of these are 6 ft. square and are mounted in pairs, one on top of the other, covering the walls of the front half of the Pagoda. These were painted by a Cambodian artist who now lives in Los Angeles. Two large 12 ft square paintings of Cambodian landscapes cover another corner of the Pagoda, from floor to ceiling. Several other landscape paintings are found here as well (See Figure 11) These were also painted by Cambodian painters in Cambodia. The back wall of the Pagoda, with a door in its center, is covered with photographs and pictures of the temples and architecture of Cambodia, including many images of Angkor Temple. (See Figure 12) On this wall, there is also four pictures of traditional Cambodian dancers. One is a wood-carving relief, two are photographic prints and the other is a painting. (See Figure 13) In the other back corner of the Pagoda, there is another door. Next to this door is a large 8 ft. square painting of the place where Prince Siddhattha (Buddha) was born in Lumbini, Nepal. The other wall of this corner is filled with pictures of festivals and events organized by the Cambodian community in Montreal. People are dressed in traditional costumes with white shirts and different brightly colored silk pants and skirts.

¹⁷ Usually about 30

¹⁸ Jātāka scenes



Figure 7: Worshippers

This is a formal gathering during the Cambodian New Year Celebration in mid April. It demonstrates one aspect of how Buddhist visual media is used during special ceremonies within the Temple. Worshippers sit in contemplation facing the Buddha statue with hands respectfully folded.

There are several photographs with monks, along with Venerable Visal Soth, and other dignitaries who have come to visit the Khmer Temple. In addition, some photographs of recent events in Cambodia are displayed in one section of this wall. These include photos of democracy demonstrations in Phnom Penh and graphic pictures of people killed by the current Government of Cambodia. The center of the Pagoda, in front of the main shrine, has a large 1 ft high platform where the monks sit when they are in the Pagoda during ceremonies or for receiving *dāna*¹⁹. (See Figure 7) Although the floor of the entire Pagoda is carpeted, traditional mats are placed around the center platform and the shrine for people to sit when they come to the Temple. Chairs are not used in the Temple.

The other rooms of the Temple are also covered with paintings and images. One room overlooking the Pagoda has relief carvings of traditional Cambodian scenes. In the same room is a large cabinet with smaller artifacts such as metal sculptures and wood carvings of Bodhisattvas, Cambodian instruments, working figures, carts and water buffaloes and elephants, etc. This cabinet also contains a large collection of Khmer language books. Another room has a brightly colored painting of five Buddha emanations (See Figure 14), another sculpted figure of Hevajra and many items such as bowls and vases, etc. that are used in traditional ceremonies. The dining area and the other rooms of the Temple all have photographs, prints and statues associated with Cambodian and Buddhist imagery.

The exterior of the Khmer Temple, as it exists now, has many architectural features and sculptures that identify its Buddhist and Khmer identity. (See Figure 2) The

¹⁹ Pāli: Charity: The ritual of giving food to the monks for deceased ancestors.

gates to the Temple are protected by sculpted guardian figures, such as the traditional lion-headed guardians and *dvârapâla*²⁰. The corners of the large 8 ft. high cement wall surrounding the Temple and the corners of the Temple itself are decorated with *garuda*²¹ and *nâga*²² balustrade ends. A large stûpa is built on the inside of the wall between the two gates. The steep roofs of the Temple and the gates are decorated with yellow shingles and are styled after the Khmer temples of Cambodia. A garden is also found along one side of the Temple which is accessible through a side door of the Pagoda. This garden, with its trees and flowers, has a Buddha shrine at one end where people can go to burn incense, worship and pray to Buddha. (See Figure 4)

1.0.4: Chapter Summary

The religious imagery found at the Khmer Pagoda of Canada defines and conveys the identity of the Khmer Buddhist people. Since the early 1980s a large population of Cambodian people have immigrated to Canada. They bring with them their Theravâda Buddhist traditions and a heritage and culture with many diverse influences. Khmer history can be traced back for over 2000 years. The communist regimes of the last 30 years in Cambodia have had a devastating effect on all Cambodians and have resulted in great tragedy and suffering. In particular, the rise of the Khmer Rouge to power and the Vietnamese backed Hun Sen regime, influence the current values and reality of the

²⁰ Sanskrit: *Guardians of the gate*; Specifically intended to protect principal entries.

²¹ Sanskrit: Mythical bird

²² Sanskrit: Cobra

Khmer people. Many Khmer people perceive communism and its ideology as an inversion of the Buddhist religion. This perception also applies to those who have recently immigrated to Canada.

In Canada, the Cambodian people recognize the importance of Buddhism, the Temple and its art and imagery as a way to re-establish a religion, culture and heritage that have been almost completely destroyed through the social and political problems in Cambodia during the past 30 years. The Temple and its images are also seen as good omens²³ for individuals and the Khmer society in general. They are perceived by many Khmer people as a solution to the current crisis in Cambodia. These images are thought to be therapeutic since they provide inner peace and contentment and therefore, bring an end to the suffering endured by all Cambodian people.

After presenting the research topic of this thesis, Chapter One has given a thorough description of the background of this study. The next chapter will review the literature related to Theravâda Buddhist teachings about art and imagery and the significance of representations of the Buddha and other Buddhist symbols. It will then look at literature related to education through art and imagery from a Buddhist and Khmer perspective.

²³ Mangala

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

2.0.1: Introduction

The literature used for this thesis covers a broad range of academic disciplines. My own search for literature related to the specific issues covered in this research has not revealed an excessive amount of written information. The particular issues of this thesis include Buddhist views of art and education, the contemporary significance of Buddhist imagery, the social/cultural life and religious/philosophical views of the Khmer people and Khmer immigration and life in Canada. The disruption of ordinary life in Cambodia in recent years and the Khmer people's dependence on oral and visual communication throughout their long history perhaps explain why a relatively small amount of literature has been published on Khmer and Buddhist life, culture and traditions. Although the majority of the relevant literature is published in Cambodia, Thailand, India and Sri Lanka, etc., many of the original sources are written in Khmer, Pâli, Sanskrit or other local languages. However, it was possible to obtain access to much of this information since it has been translated into English in recent years. The surprisingly small amount of literature available on this subject within the Western countries has been published at various times over the past century. It is found under quite diverse subject areas such as religion and rituals, culture and anthropology, temple architecture, stûpa symbolism, the history of Indian or Southeast Asian art, the Cambodian war, Pol Pot and the Khmer

Rouge, travel guides, human interest stories in magazines and newspaper articles, etc. Many of the related books and articles on post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia are currently published in the United States. The majority of writings related to Cambodian history and religion were published during the earlier part of this century in Europe; particularly in France, Germany and Britain. A surprisingly small amount of literature is available on Cambodians within the Canadian context. This chapter will look at the literature related to Theravâda Buddhist doctrine on art, the significance of the Buddhist imagery and forms and how these are related to education in art from a Buddhist perspective.

2.0.2: Buddhism and Art

The teachings and practices of Theravâda Buddhism are an important part of the daily lives of the Buddhist people in Cambodia. For most of these people, and for those who emigrate to other countries such as Canada, the strong influence of their beliefs and traditions is also apparent in every aspect of the art and imagery found within their Temple. Even within the contemporary lives of the people, the images of art and religion are usually perceived as identical. According to Krishna Murthy (1991):

The basic purpose of Buddhist art, and all Indian religious art is functional or instrumental. Its primary purpose is not that of producing a detached or objective aesthetic experience. An image is merely the means through which a divinity is revealed. The divinity, rather than the figure that represents or conceals it, answers prayers or reveals itself during meditation. (p.39)

Consequently, many Buddhists believe that certain forms and images are more “special” than others and these are endowed with a greater concentration of religious energy. These

are different from other forms or objects that may be constructed or found in the natural world.

Although images related to Buddhism or Buddhist teachings are considered to have more significance, according to the Theravâda doctrine, it is also thought that all art forms are derived from and relate to *tanhâ* (Sanskrit: desire or the sensual) and *vasâna* (Skt: nostalgia, memory or the intellect). In other words, all forms reflect the “attachment to the enjoyment of the senses or to the exercise of the intellect” (Roy in Ahir, 1995: 423). In this respect, all images relate only to “the world of *nâma* and *rûpa* (Skt: name and form) and are, therefore, to be shunned by one who aspires after *nibbâna*²⁴ (Pâli: the end of all suffering), *suññatâ* (Pâli: the emptiness of all things) or *prajñâ* (Pâli: the conditionality of all things or wisdom)” (Roy in Ahir: 423).

This apparent “double standard” for the use of art and images for the education of ordinary people or “beginners” is explained by a general Buddhist acceptance of multiple realities. For example, images are a part of the world of forms and are necessary for the understanding of conventional truth or reality (Pâli: *sammutisacca*) and the teaching and preservation of traditions and culture. However, ultimate truth or reality (Pâli: *paramatthasacca*) extends beyond the world of forms and therefore, beyond tradition, culture, art forms and even language. Images are seen merely as guides to direct “less enlightened” individuals onto the right path so that they can obtain an awareness that extends beyond the world of form and representation. Nevertheless, art and images, such as the statues and paintings of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas or other enlightened teachers

²⁴ Sanskrit: Nirvâna; The goal in Theravâda Buddhism. This is when an individual has extinguished his/her passions through obtaining knowledge of the true nature of things.

(Pâli: arahants) and other images are an essential component of ordinary existence for most Khmer Buddhists. For these people, and Buddhists in general, images are effective and powerful tools for the communication of religious, philosophical and cultural ideas.

Although Buddhist imagery is constructed merely as a guide for those still within conventional or cultural reality, it does not restrict an individual from achieving knowledge of other realities. According to Buddhist teachings, ideally a person should seek knowledge of ultimate reality or reality 'as it is,' free from distorting concepts. To know this reality means to first recognize the conditionality or dependence of all forms upon other forms (*prajñâ*), their emptiness of singular essence (*sûnyatâ*) and the inherent emptiness of any type of existence in itself, including an individual's selfhood or "identity" (*annatâ*). It is also essential to understand the distinction between ultimate truth or reality which extends beyond the limits of causality, space and time and conventional truth or reality. Conventional truth includes both individually constructed realities and culturally acquired realities. In fact, the realization of an individual's ability to construct realities and also understand ultimate reality is believed to constitute a beginning phase in the path toward enlightenment and the end of all suffering (*nibbâna*). Every individual is encouraged to pursue this ideal path toward *nibbâna* demonstrated through the life of the Buddha and his perfect enlightenment.

According to Theravâda belief, the Buddha is present in every aspect of the material and spiritual world and thus art or an image (Skt. *stûpa*; this word originally referred to a pile of dirt or an object of veneration) is, according to Frank E. Reynolds (1978), "a transformation of the more public deity of the soil" (in Smith: 187). Producing

art from this perspective is like cultivating and planting a crop in the ground which only changes the surface appearance while leaving the ground below in its original state. In the case of image production however, the actual composition of the material used remains in its original state. From conventional reality, the newly created image takes on a sacred meaning.

2.0.3: Images of the Buddha

After the cremation of the Buddha in 543 BC, his relics were divided into eight parts and then given to eight kings from the four corners of the world, according to the *Parinibbâna Sutta* (trans. Rhys-Davids 1899). The remains were further divided within each Kingdom and a burial chamber (Skt: caitya; also called a stûpa or thûpa in Pâli) was built over each of these relics (Pâli: dhâtu) (See Figure 6). These relics were not thought to be merely tokens or reminders of the “dead” Buddha, but living relics “saturated or invigorated with morality, knowledge and wisdom” according to the ancient inscriptions found at Nâgârjunikonda in India (Schopen 1997: 158). Several years after the division of Buddha’s actual relics, a classification was made between 3 types of relics in order to recognize the different amounts of religious energy contained within each one. The corporeal relics, such as bones, teeth and hair, etc. were considered to be the most sacred. This was followed in importance by the objects used by the Buddha himself, such as the Bo tree under which he was enlightened, his begging bowl and the Dhamma scriptures, which are considered to be his actual spoken words (Foucher 1972; Snellgrove 1982;

Tambiah 1984; Gombrich 1988; Schopen 1997). The third classification, the image of the Buddha (See Figures 3 & 4), was not actually considered to be a “relic” at all, but rather a reminder of the Buddha or his *caitya*²⁵. The status of this image was improved when a first or second order relic was contained inside the image (Foucher 1972, Gombrich 1988, Schopen 1997). However, only relics of the highest two orders were used in the early years of the Buddhist religion.

During the first 700 years after Buddha’s death (543 BC to 157 AD.), the Buddha was increasingly represented through symbols that corresponded to relics of the second order. This included objects related to the life of the Buddha such as his footprints, a nibbâna wheel, a Bo tree or his caitya (Barua 1946, Foucher 1972, Snellgrove 1978, Tucci 1988, Murthy 1991, Schopen 1997). The caitya, or burial chamber, was built with a dome (Skt: anda) resting on four corners or pillars representing the four cardinal directions of east, west, north and south (See Figure 6). The caitya was then covered with a spire that met at a single peak (Skt: htî). This peak was believed to represent the summit of the sacred Mount Semeru and the meeting place of the gods from the four corners of the earth. It was the center of this world (Skt: samsâra), but also the place of departure into the Brahmâ world beyond. This was later simplified into a two dimensional form or a mystic circle (Skt: mandâla) displaying different emanations of Buddha in each of its cardinal points (Tucci 1988).

The mandâla and, more specifically, the caitya signified a human body and was considered to be a body for the dead. (Govinda 1976, Tucci 1988, Schopen 1997) The

²⁵ Burial chamber; Also referred to as a stûpa.

ribs, along with its four attached appendages (the bones of the arms and legs), resemble the bell-shaped dome resting upon its four pillars which is plastered with dirt (or flesh). The hollow interior of the body, filled with air, is the sanctuary of the consciousness (Skt: vijñāna; Pāli: viññāna; Khmer: viññān). The mind, as the apex (or peak), becomes the place of communication with the gods and the worlds beyond through mindfulness and concentration. Thus, the human body and the image of Buddha are similar in the sense that they are both capable of containing the *sambhogakāya* (glorious or glorified body) through purification of the mind or consecration rituals (the transference of mental purification).

According to Stanley Tambiah (1984), the image of the Buddha is “an indexical symbol” of a broader Buddhist tradition and cosmology (p.204). Images of the Buddha are like symbols or mirrors that reflect many levels of the design structures of the cosmos in both the spiritual and material realms of the individual, society, and the universe (Passage from Kuladatta’s *Kriyāsamgraha* & Sanskrit Treatise *Stūpa-laksanā-kārikāvivicaṇa* trans. Roth in Dallapiccola 1980, *Hsüan-Tsang’s memoirs* 629 AD trans. Beal 1968, Govinda 1976, Snellgrove 1982, Snodgrass 1985, Tucci 1988). The Buddha image is believed to encompass the “Law” (Skt: Dharma) or the interrelationships within society and nature.

The Buddha himself advised his followers to respect or worship the deities of the four quarters, the zenith and the nadir which were seen as metaphors for different social relationships. In the Sigālaka Sutta in the Dīgha Nikāya III (trans. 1921, T.W. & C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha, Vol. III*: 180), the six directions are outlined as

follows: 1) parents (east), 2) teachers (south), 3) immediate family (west), 4) friends and relatives (north), 5) servants and workers (nadir) and 6) samanas²⁶, brahmans²⁷ and mendicants²⁸ (zenith). Within each of these sociological relationships lies certain responsibilities that are essential to the successful functioning of any society. Interestingly, Khmer children are taught to respect their parents as their “first gods”. (Smith-Hefner 1999). The same notion of respect is applied to ancestral spirits and to the Buddha who is reflected within his image. The worship and respect for the image of Buddha is metaphorically also respect for the various societal or social structures.

The act of building an image (or “piling dirt”) into the Buddha form or, for that matter, any other form is regarded as an act of veneration or worship of that specific form. This requires a previous conception of the image or a model. Murthy (1991) states that;

Precise rules were laid down for the representation in visible form of entities that transcend understanding. The rules are not considered to derive from custom or tradition but from the Buddha himself, or from equally enlightened teachers. Lines and proportions are instrumentalities for giving one specific form and no other to supernatural reality. The rules furthermore, have magic powers, like the mantras or sacred formulas. A mantra incorrectly or incompletely pronounced is void, and the spirit will not recognize itself in an image that does not follow the rules. The lines and proportions must be correct. (pp.39, 40)

Sukrâcârya, a monk of the medieval period, believed that the image maker (Skt: pratimâkâra) could only measure the ideal contours of the Buddha through disciplined practice of inward vision or meditation (in Coomaraswamy 1934: 113). This attention to precision may explain why the Buddha’s form has changed very little in almost 2,000 years.

²⁶ Pâli: Those who are similar; it also refers to great leaders in the Buddhist religion.

²⁷ Ruling class of the Indian sub-continent in ancient times.

²⁸ Recognized professionals in ancient times.

Small changes, such as in the facial features, are said to relate to the changes within local contexts or particular cultures while leaving the Buddha's underlying meaning or its universal principals intact. Images of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas or other arahants portrayed in sculptures, paintings and photographs are made into "living" images by constructing or adapting them in a specific location in space and time and within a unique cultural, historical and geographical area. "Living" images of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas or arahants are thought to represent the dispensation of part of the actual Buddha throughout the universe (Gombrich 1966, Tambiah 1984, Schopen 1997, Schober 1997). The notion of making a "living" image is usually linked to specific consecration rituals (Skt: *pratisthâ*). "Hence, after the consecration the receptacle is no longer a conglomerate of profane substances, but an embodiment of the *yi-dam* (Tibetan: chosen Buddha. In Sanskrit this refers to *sambhogakâya*: glorious body or *nirmânakâya*: emanation body) which has taken the original form or appearance of that receptacle" (Bentor 1996: 5).

The specific rituals of the Khmer Buddhists for the consecration of images vary somewhat from other Theravâdâ Buddhist regions in Southeast Asia. The monks begin the ceremony by symbolically cutting the hair and shaving the head of the image, as if it were a candidate entering the monkhood. (Leclère 1899, Thierry 1984, Tambiah 1984, Swearer 1995) They then proceed to 'open the eyes' (Khmer: *poek brah netr*) of the statue using a pin or sharp object (Leclère 1899, Thierry 1984, Tambiah 1984, Thompson 1996). Following this, the monks recite a prayer several times²⁹ while seated around the

²⁹ Thompson (1996) refers to a Commissions des Moeurs et Coutumes du Cambodge (CMC Phnom Penh) manuscript that mentions this number as normally 19 or 108. However, 3, 7 or 9 are also common. (p.14)

object of consecration and at the same time, pass three lighted candles (Pāli: *baḍḍi*). Once the candles are extinguished, the smoke is waved toward the object in order to bestow blessing upon it. (Thierry 1984, Thompson 1996). The entire ceremony re-enacts the enlightenment of the Buddha and after it is completed, the image is thought to be “living” or containing the energy of the actual Buddha.

Atisha, a Bengali monk living in Tibet in the late 11th century, further explains in his text on consecration:

The consecration is both necessary and unnecessary. When examined ultimately (i.e. in ultimate truth), who blesses what how? From the beginning (it was there) without birth and cessation; how could it be established/consecrated? For those who possess the realization of all dharmas as clear light, consecrations of objects for worship are unnecessary. Neither is it for those who have not realized emptiness but have realized that stūpas, books, images and so forth arise from blessed emanations of the Buddhas, and do not arise otherwise. If they have strong faith, a consecration is not necessary. For the beginners, the untrained, in relative truth, in worldly labels, for beings who do not know the real essence, the Teacher taught consecration. (trans. 1996 Bentor: 16)

Essentially, the consecration of images related to Buddhism reflects a person’s respect for material forms and for this life in *samsāra*, the world of both sense / desire and intellect / understanding. The life that we cherish so dearly is governed according to the *Dhamma* (Pāli: the law of nature which is also the law of the Buddha), the *Sangha*³⁰ (Pāli: the social expression of this law) and Buddha himself who *is*, and whose image also *is*, the visual manifestation of this law.

Imagery is related to our visual sense and in this respect, dominates both our desire and understanding in *samsāra*. Thus, the light that shines upon the forms making them visible and then through our eyes stimulates our desires and also en’*light*’ens our

³⁰ This term means *assembly* in Pāli. It normally refers to the assembly of monks (*bhikkhu*) and nuns (*bhikkhuni*).

minds. Several Suttas³¹ and their commentaries, such as *Paramatthadīpani, Vol.II*, state that “wise men are *light-makers*” (trans. 1935 Woodward: 196). Numerous sources also identify four types of light: that of the moon, sun, fire (which could also include electric lights or the combustion of other materials) and wisdom. It is often said that the living Buddha blazes brightly, illuminating the world like a fire, the sun, moon, stars, etc. (*Buddhavâmsa* trans. 1975 Horner: 28). These references do not distinguish between a Buddha as a human being made of dirt, air, water and fire (actually flesh, bones, blood, saliva, water, breath and a temperature, etc.) and simply, a Buddha as a sculpture (also made of dirt, air, water and fire). T. S. Eliot (1972) elaborates further upon this Buddhist concept of vision and knowledge in a section of his poem *The Waste Land* known as “The Fire Sermon”. Here, he makes reference to a translation of the *Vinaya*³².

All things, O priests are on fire. And what, O priests, are all those things which are on fire?

The eye... forms (seen by the eye)... eye-consciousness are on fire; impressions received by the eye are on fire; and whatever sensation, pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent originates in dependence on impressions received by the eye, that is also on fire. (*Vinaya, Vol. I* trans. 1896 Warren in Eliot: 40)

The fire of wisdom (or Dhamma) is realized in all the forms seen by the eye and through the sensations that the eye receives. However, the true realization of wisdom is accomplished not by attempting to satisfy these sensations but through constant mindfulness (Pâli: *satî*) of these and then “letting go”. This Buddhist conception of achieving wisdom will be further discussed in the next section on Buddhist education through art.

³¹ Pâli: Thread: Considered to be the threads of discourse or dialogue texts in the Pâli canon of Theravâda Buddhism.

In conclusion, Buddhist forms and images play an essential role in the daily lives of most Cambodian Buddhists in order to help them learn the Dhamma and the True nature of life and then live to their fullest potential. This is particularly true for those members of this community who have recently arrived in their new and unfamiliar environment within Canada.

2.0.4: Buddhist Education through Art

In this section, I will discuss a conception of education related to the Buddhist teachings about material forms and “art”. Since the ideal Theravāda Buddhist education on *higher* or more meaningful forms would differ significantly from the current teaching, practices and techniques of art education in Canada, it is necessary to bridge these two interpretations with some of the defining concepts associated with each. I will first look at the Buddhist notion of holistic thought and its implications for education in art. Specifically, this includes the conception of an individual’s consciousness in relation to his/her body and environment through presence and mindfulness. I will then present what might conceivably be a general Buddhist perspective of two central principles underlying the rationale for art education in Canada. Namely, I am referring to *creativity* followed by an analysis of *beauty* or aesthetics.

³² Theravāda monastic code

2.0.4.1: Forms and Holistic Thought

According to the Buddhist principles of *prajñā*³³ and *suññatā*³⁴, all forms in samsāra, including art, should ideally be seen as one single entity that is undifferentiated and connected. Individuals are also thought to be a part of this single and ever-changing environment. They are not believed to have an exclusive “identity” or “self” separate from nature and other people. This is illustrated by the fact that a human being would cease to exist without air, water, food, human interaction, etc.

This basic view of the world results in a different way of understanding, knowing and seeing things related to the material world. According to Ashok K. Gangadean (1996);

There are two ways of knowing and two kinds of knowledge. Egocentric (divisory or deductive) knowing eclipses primal (holistic) knowledge and is lodged in a chronic pattern of fragmentation and dualism. It cannot process the infinite structure of the unified (holistic and selfless) field. In contrast, the quest for primal (holistic) knowledge breaks down barriers and crosses into the play of Logos (primal Truth). (p.58)

In recent times, many Western scholars have imagined vast divisions within the world and between all aspects of nature, whose elements are actually part of the same phenomenon. For example, distinctions are often made between objects that are purely *aesthetic* and those which are completely *functional*, with the possible exception of traditional arts and crafts. However, it can never be said that any object is exclusively aesthetic or exclusively functional since these qualities exist together in every single object. Most tragically however, many people today also perceive their environment and their consciousness of this as two unrelated entities. In other words, the mind mistakenly

³³ Pāli: The conditionality of all things or wisdom.

distinguishes the outside from the inside world or a “self” from the non-self. The renowned agronomist, Wendell Berry (1977), elaborates further in his book, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*;

Divided, set against each other, body and soul drive each other to extremes of misapprehension and folly... we get, not reverence or respect for the body, but another kind of contempt: the desire to comfort and indulge the body with equal disregard for its health... These think they oppose each other, and yet they could not exist apart. They are locked in a conflict that is really their collaboration in the destruction of soul and body both...

By dividing body and soul, we divide both from all else. We thus condemn ourselves to a loneliness for which the only compensation is violence – against other creatures, against the earth, against ourselves. For no matter the distinctions we draw between body and soul, body and earth, ourselves and others – the connections, the dependencies, the identities remain. And so we fail to contain or control our violence. It gets loose. Though there are categories of violence, or so we think, there are no categories of victims. Violence against one is ultimately violence against all. The willingness to abuse other bodies is the willingness to abuse one’s own. To damage the earth is to damage your children. To despise the ground is to despise its fruit; to despise the fruit is to despise its eaters. The wholeness of health is broken by despise. (p.106)

Ashok K. Gangadean (1996) sheds more light on this imagined mind / body dualism:

“One symptom of egocentric thought is chronic fragmentation, the dualizing of rational life. These divisions lie in deep ignorance and produce human suffering.” (p.58) In the process of trying to better understand the world, each division is dissected further into ever tinier components. Divisions are demonstrated through invented linguistic subtleties, the establishment of new academic disciplines and through quantitative and analytical methods of learning. Every distinction, term and object becomes a “science” or a specialization to be further studied and then reduced to new levels of scientific analysis.

Berry (1977) again confirms;

³⁴ Pāli: The emptiness of all things.

What the specialist never considers is that such a boundary (of absolute control) is, in itself, profoundly disruptive. Its first disruption is in the mind, for having enclosed the possibility of control that is within his competence and desire, he becomes the enemy of all other possibilities. And, secondly, having chosen the possibility of total control within a small and highly simplified enclosure, he simply abandons the rest, leaves it totally *out* of control; that is, he forsakes or even repudiates the complex, partly mysterious patterns of interdependence and cooperation... by which human culture joins itself to its source in the natural world. (p.71)

E. D. Hirsch (1967), E. F. Schumacher (1974) as well as W. Berry (1977) have suggested that this way of thinking which results in obsessive categorization and specialization is simply the result of a desire to subjugate nature and dominate other people by harnessing the events of the past through statistical quantification in order to reduce probabilities and thus, predict and control the future. The desire to predict the future and enhance our lives when we finally arrive there is indeed an honorable aspiration. However, in order to follow the mind's romantic vision leading to greater physical comfort and peace in the future, a person must usually sacrifice the body's inner contentedness in the present moment and their physical actions that are in tune with nature, survival and well-being. Some of these sacrifices related to the body that reflect a lower quality of life include stress and pressure, little time for family and friends, inadequate leisure time, little exercise, unhealthy food, unclean air and water, excessive use of medications, loss of initiative and a decline of morality, etc. The results of living this lifestyle are easily imagined.

In traditional Cambodian and Buddhist cultures however, concern for the present circumstances and responsible actions are of primary importance and are thought to be the key to a successful future. This requires a holistic way of understanding and knowing the world at each moment of time rather than sacrificing one's present well-being.

environment and nature for an illusory, more comprehensive and egocentric knowledge of the future. The individual's search for holistic knowledge is realized through learning techniques and traditions practiced in Cambodian and other Buddhist societies. These techniques and traditions, which include meditation, concentration, chanting, prayer, presence and mindfulness, will be further discussed in the following section.

2.0.4.2: Presence and Mindfulness

The dilemma of choosing appropriate and responsible action at every moment of life is often referred to as the *body / mind* or *theory / praxis* dualism. The body lives in relation to nature and reacts to the processes of the outside world. It deals with circumstances as they arise and strives for contentment and peace in the full presence of each instant. If the mind respects the presence of the body and its environment then the individual will have both peace of mind and body. On the other hand, if the mind abstractly envisions the glories of a distant past and future, then the present is forgotten. The mind can overpower the body making it sacrifice its momentary peace and well-being for actions that disregard the body's comfort and the laws of nature. The mind justifies itself by the probability or chance of bringing even greater fulfillment, satisfaction and comfort to the body in the future. Berry (1977) states:

It is no doubt impossible to live without thought of the future; hope and vision can live no where else. But the only possible guarantee of the future is responsible behavior in the present. When supposed future needs are used to justify misbehavior (or harmful action) in the present, as is the tendency with us (North Americans), then we are both perverting the present and diminishing the future... (p.58)

Most frequently in the modern world, people are guided toward unrealistic “needs” of great success and achievement in terms of material wealth, power and physical well-being by the hopes and dreams perpetuated through the advertising and marketing tools of commercialism (Sivaraksa 1992).

The individual’s dreams and aspirations for success in the mainstream and commercial art world also apply to this rationale for motivation. In *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, T. S. Eliot (1964) writes; “The progress of an artist, is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.” (p.3) In Canadian society and in our mass media, the young romantic visionary is idealized. This person, who is often an artist, musician, movie star, etc., is expected to live as an ascetic sacrificing his/her physical contentedness for a prophetic vision of the future. This heroic role-model is described further by Harpham (1987): “A figure of supernatural personal charisma, the romantic artist descends from the Holy Man, a thaumaturge who stands in uncanny proximity to a highly charged realm of imaginative power and privilege... Asceticism transforms the gruesome “public spectacle” of sacrifice into a bloodless display of form.” (p.31)

The romantic idealist or artist is generally expected to deeply understand the historical roots and the established culture and traditions of their society and yet at the same time, boldly disregard all of these in order to create a “new” future. In other words, the future is born through a reaction to the past. In the process of envisioning movement into the “future”, which is accomplished through rapid change, the consciousness must drift into an imaginary world while neglecting the biological needs and the interests of the

body, its environment and nature. Interestingly, Socrates reminds those who are intoxicated with movement (or the “new”) that becoming destroys as much as it creates. (in Lefebvre: 11) This expectation of rapid change, the institutionalized disregard for society’s “established” traditions and the individual’s ascetic practices and romantic flights of mind from the present are the legacy of our modern notion of *creativity* (Harpham 1995). The mind wanders from the base of its perceived heritage into an apparent conceptual “openness” of a seemingly unconstructed and distant future. As the body waits for the mind to return, it strives for peace, contentment and oneness with the elements of nature within each instant of time. If the consciousness neglects its responsibilities within the present, then the body, its environment and nature will suffer from the consequences.

In Buddhist societies, such as that of Cambodia, Buddhist monks and nuns and other wise elderly people are idealized as role models for their balanced lifestyles, relatively unchanging principles, peace of mind, stability, wisdom and their respect and knowledge of Dhamma (The Laws of the Buddha and Nature). (Smith-Hefner 1999: 92. 93) Disregard for one’s body and the forces and elements of nature is not encouraged. Sacrificing one’s well-being / contentedness and social / environmental responsibility for romantic and abstract pursuits is generally held in low regard. Mr. Sokha Ly, one of the participants in this study, expands upon this view of the individual’s responsibility in relation to art: “In my country, you have to go to school to learn how to paint... you also have to respect the traditions... you cannot do whatever you want... they would not respect a person who does this and they would think he is crazy.” (1999, Personal

communication) Ampai Tiranasar (1984), an art educator from Thailand, confirms that the Indochinese society's emphasis on individual mindfulness and presence is reflected in the goals of both art and education which are "imitation... preservation rather than progress... (and) the transmitting tradition of teaching, particularly of skills in art." (pp.58, 61)

The essence of this philosophical / religious perspective as it relates to education and learning is found in the techniques and methods employed in the learning process. These techniques are not only intended to develop an individual's morality, self-discipline and understanding of life and the forces of nature but also to bring presence and mindfulness to each moment of life. The Theravâda practices of *Satipathâna Vipassanâ* (Pâli: insight meditation or mindfulness) along with *sîla* (Pâli: morality) and *dâna* (Pâli: charity) are the cornerstones of Buddhist education (Eindaka 1995). *Vipassanâ* meditation is thought to lead to the highest form of enlightenment, cessation of *dukkha* (Pâli: suffering) and nibbânic peace. The four types of this meditation are *Kâyânupassanâ* (Pâli: mindfulness of the body), *Vedanânupassanâ* (Pâli: mindfulness of feelings), *Cutânupassanâ* (Pâli: mindfulness of consciousness) and *Dhammânupassanâ* (Pâli: mindfulness of mental and physical phenomenon). (Eindaka 1995: 9,10) Each of these focus on mindfulness within the present moment. A. N. Whitehead (1929) concludes his preface to *The Aims of Education* that "...the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity." Venerable Eindaka (1995) outlines the seven benefits of *samâdhi* (Pâli: concentration) or mindfulness of the present conditions:

- 1) One's mind can be free from defilements.
- 2) One can overcome worry and anxiety.
- 3) One can overcome sorrow and lamentation.
- 4) The practice can extinguish physical suffering.
- 5) The practice can extinguish mental suffering.
- 6) It can bring forth the Noble Path Knowledge.
- 7) It can enable the practitioner to realize nibbâna -- the end of suffering. (p.10)

Obviously, the benefits of the educational methods of concentration, mindfulness, prayer, meditation, etc. within the learning process of individuals within any society cannot be ignored. The realization of potential in the present moment is the key to learning and enlightenment. These learning methods which I have introduced are particularly applicable to the Cambodian Buddhist perspective and are discussed later in this thesis by each of the participants in this study.

2.0.4.3: Creativity and Production

“Buddhists do not use the words *create* or *created* (or, for that matter, *creativity*).” (Veradhammo 1996: 8) This is simply because most Buddhists believe in the *Law of Conditionality* (Pâli: Idappaddayatâ) and *Dependent Origination* (Pâli: Paticca-Samuppâda) which are also the *Laws of Nature* (Pâli: Dhamma). According to the Law of Conditionality, everything in the universe, including “original art” or any other production, arises or evolves based on causes and conditions. The renowned French scholar of Buddhist studies, Louis de La Vallée Poussin (1937) quotes the *Madhyamakâvatâra* VI, 17; “How can a [“thing”] which is born dependently on a totality of causes and conditions and attains its identity thanks to something else, like a reflection,

have real own-being!” (p.354) The Law of Dependent Origination states that everything, including causes and conditions, arise only at the moment of a person’s *contact* with that thing. This contact is composed of three sets of factors: 1) the six sense organs, 2) the objects of the six sense organs and 3) the six senses’ consciousness interacting with the objects (Veradhammo 1996). Feelings arise from within the individual’s consciousness of these objects. For example, without consciousness of an object, a person has no feelings about that object. Then, desire and craving for the object arise from these feelings. After indulging in or fulfilling one’s desires several times, attachment to the object gradually arises too. This attachment is believed to be the essence or beginning of a person’s existence, being, selfhood and identity since it requires the investment of their time and effort in specific actions or performance. From a person’s selfhood or, in other words, from their attachment to a particular reality, arises the desire to continue this reality known as *self* through *birth* or procreation. Essentially, *birth* refers not only to the physical procreation (actually, continuation) of a reality but also to the metaphysical continuation of a reality (Veradhammo 1996). Birth must necessarily lead to old age, suffering and death (Veradhammo 1996, Barua 1999). Most Buddhist intellectuals agree that the only place where an individual can realistically intervene in this endless cycle causing continual suffering is in the link between his/her feelings and desires (Chah 1992). According to Buddhist philosophy, if a person uses Wisdom, they can realize that all feelings are dependent on object consciousness, not originating from a *self*, impermanent in nature and that they result in suffering. Consequently, the resulting

components of desire, attachment, birth, death and suffering may be avoided (Chah 1992).

The notion of *creativity* has the underlying assumption of a feeling of empowerment or domination by the individual over the forces of Nature. For most Buddhists, and others as well, it is easy to understand why this term is illusory and misleading. Nâgârjuna, an influential Buddhist scholar who lived in the first century B.C., explained in his *Yuktisastikârikâ (Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning)*:

18) Those persons who imagine that there is birth and destruction in the things that are composed, those persons do not know the world as (it really is:) the wheel of Dependent Origination.

19) What arises depending on this or that, that is not created as a thing with an own being. Whatever is not created as a thing with an own being, how can it be called 'created'?...

21) Thus nothing is created, nothing ceases. (The Masters) have spoken about the processes of creation and destruction (only) by reason of necessity.

22) By knowing (what) creation (is), destruction is known; (by) knowing (what) destruction (is), impermanence is known; through the knowledge which penetrates into impermanence, the Supreme Truth is understood.

23) These persons who know that Dependent Origination is deprived of creation and destruction, those persons have crossed the ocean of existence, created by the false views. (trans. Tola & Dragonetti 1995: 36, 37)

To recognize the concept of *creativity* is also to legitimize the feelings of an individual, their desires for power, their attachment to an ego, selfhood and other material forms and thus, their continued suffering (Varadhammo 1999, Personal communication).

Nâgârjuna elaborates further:

58) If a standpoint (theory, ego or self) exists, passion (exists); and if (the standpoint) is destroyed, freedom from passion occurs; (but) for the great beings who have no standpoint there is neither passion nor freedom from passion.

59) Those persons whose mind, although unsteady (by nature), becomes steady as they consider that (everything) lacks an own being, those persons will cross the ocean of the intolerable existence, agitated by the serpent of impurities... (trans. Tola & Dragonetti 1995: 41)

In summary, the concept of *creation* and *creativity* serve only to distract the individual's mind from understanding absolute reality or the true nature of the world. This is because it assumes that *created* forms are somehow born beyond the Laws of Nature (Dhamma) or more specifically, that they arise outside of the Law of Conditionality (cause and effect) and Dependent Origination.

Production, on the other hand, usually implies an action or duty which is performed within the course of one's daily life for survival. This notion of *production* can be understood to fall within the *Law of Conditionality* (Pâli: Idappaddayatâ) and *Dependent Origination* (Pâli: Paticca-Samuppâda). Production, rather than what might be thought of as "creativity", within a Buddhist culture such as Cambodia is undoubtedly more in tune with Nature and is used for coping with day to day realities rather than instigating rapid change and "progress" for its own sake or for a person's own selfish interest. As such, production or "creativity" is inherent in all the activities of daily life from drawing, painting, sculpture, carpentry, cooking and sewing to reading, working in a rice field or factory to having a conversation with family and friends. Despite the general lack of belief in creation and creativity, Buddhist societies are very open to new ideas (Norberg-Hodge 1992, Kennedy 1999). These ideas are studied and evaluated from within the existing Buddhist culture and traditions. Change does occur in Buddhist societies but, until recently, this was a gradual process which did not undermine the people's stability and security. In the last 30 years, the stability and traditions in Cambodia have been almost completely destroyed through rapid changes and political innovations, not to mention those within the educational sphere. In her dissertation, the

art educator Ampai Tiranasar (1984) identified this trend in educational planning and development in Thailand, which is somewhat more “advanced” in its degree of Westernization than is Cambodia. She states:

New ideas are introduced by the Western world and they are accepted sooner than they are fully understood. Particularly in the area of art education, teachers accept new concepts just because they are new and they work in the Western countries. Although the teaching trend is changing from imitation to creation, the value of implementing this concept of creation is still in doubt... In reality, the new concepts are almost a contradiction to the traditional teaching of the past... Obedience to adult authority, for example, confused both teachers and students when the concept of self-expression was introduced. (p.58)

The contemporary Western ideas of “creativity”, “self-expression” and rapid change as well as the disregard for traditions, authorities and elders are still generally not accepted within the educational practices and policies of many Buddhist cultures, such as Cambodia.

In contemporary Western society, changes occur faster than ever before. Time and efficiency have become our most valuable commodity. It was only with the flourishing of the monetary economy that time-keeping became time-saving. Interestingly, minute hands were only added to our clocks in the mid 1890s and second hands in the late 1940s (Mumford 1961). We are expected to believe that through “progress” and our own “innovation” and “creativity” we can control our destiny and have domination over the natural forces. This ideology of rapid change, innovation and creativity is no more apparent than in the public schools and is reflected through their curriculum. For several decades, the subject of Art in the schools has been specifically

devoted to creativity and innovation. This is confirmed through most of the textbooks used in the art classrooms today³⁵. Al Hurwitz and Michael Day (1982) state that:

The belief that all children can benefit from art education is related to the notion that all children possess innate creative abilities that can be nurtured through art. Art expression in its purest form is an expression of the individual's interaction with life. In order to create this personal statement, an artist requires significant freedom of thought, feeling, and mode of expression." (pp.43, 44)

Viktor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain (1982) confirm in their preface to *Creative and Mental Growth*, one of the most widely used art education textbooks in North America for decades, that: "This book should provide the means for parents and teachers to understand the importance of creative expression and to realize that creativity and art are a vital part of the learning process... (It) is about children, from the child who is just beginning to walk, to the young adult who is taking his place as a mature member of our society." (First page) The purpose of art is usually to elicit "new" ideas within the individual which will in turn benefit their society. In order to ensure "progress" in society, the younger generation is educated to stimulate and instigate change and innovation. At the same time however, these young students are often taught to accept the fast-paced and stressful lifestyle of their parents where their inner peace of mind, stability and contentment is diminished.

³⁵ For example see Hurwitz & Day 1982, Wachowiak 1985, Lowenfeld & Brittain 1982, Chapman 1978

2.0.4.4: Style, Beauty and Aesthetics

The modern conception of *aesthetics* and *art* emerged as a discipline in the eighteenth century in Europe and North America separating art from its previous functional role (Norton 1991, Harpham 1995). It was based on the study of the principles of *taste*, *style* and *beauty* (Reynolds 1769-90 trans. Wark 1957). Like every other “science” during this period, art production and art objects became detached from any particular function except to provide the viewer with an aesthetic experience. As objects of appreciation, art became associated with morality and the highest and most respected values of a society (Wark in Reynolds 1769-90 trans. Wark 1957, Norton 1991). It was believed to be possible to educate the entire civilization into moral living and heal the alienation caused by scientific and political rationality (Norton 1991). This alienation was thought to be caused by humans’ separation from nature and from inner emotions and feelings. Through the rehabilitation of alienated people and the production of new innovations, art became the vehicle of progress and development in the West (Norton 1991).

In *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), Frederick Schiller attempted to show that it was “the responsibility of the artist and the task of art generally to provide the public with examples of the conflict between the demands exacted by our moral law and those imposed by the sensuous nature that prods our selfish susceptibilities.” (Norton 1991: 7) He thought that tragedy in art and poetry should extend our capacity to feel sympathy and empathize with others. The purpose of experiencing art, if it was properly

constructed according to certain criteria that allowed for this dramatic response, was to heal the division between cold rationalism and irresponsible impulse or emotion in order to find a “third condition” which lead to harmonious and beautiful living.

In *Discourses on Art* (1769-90), Sir Joshua Reynolds also proposed that the artist and humanity could proceed to an elevated state of morality through a particular formula or canon, called “Rules of Art”. Its morality was based on the pursuit of Ideal Beauty. “The assumption was that if (a person) generalized from the particular (with its blemishes and defects) by eliminating what was specific and individual, they would proceed to a “higher” more universal truth and approach the abstract idea embodied in a family of forms. Truth and beauty were thus identified with the general.” (Wark in Reynolds 1769-90 trans. 1959 Wark: xix) The “general” was a perfect state of nature and was devoid of any unique or individual features (i.e. blemishes). Both Reynolds and Schiller and many other theorists of Western civilization since their time have searched for a perceived state of perfect human nature and beauty. The epitome of this ideal vision of culture and beauty was often found in the constructions of classical Greece.

Style, beauty and aesthetics, from a Buddhist perspective, are also misleading terms (at least, when aspiring to ultimate reality). In Theravâda doctrine, all forms are connected and without singular existence and are therefore, both functional and aesthetically beautiful at the same time. One form is not preferred over another for its aesthetic qualities since all forms are thought to be from the same whole entity. Forms are chosen according to their suitability to perform a particular function.

The search for “beauty” and “style” is the pursuit of an Ideal that gives direction and purpose to action, knowledge and reality. A. N. Whitehead (1929) confirms that:

Style in art, in literature, in science, in logic, and in practical executions have fundamentally the same aesthetic qualities... Style pervades the whole being... It is the ultimate morality of the mind... But above style, and above knowledge, there is something, a vague shape like fate above the Greek gods. That something is Power. Style is the fashioning of power, the restraining of power.” (p.12)

Whether this “something” is called “*Power*”, *Beauty*, *the Sublime*, *the Forces of Nature*, *Truth*, *God*, *Brahman*, *Nammo*, *Tao*, *Logos* or *Buddha*, etc. depends upon one’s philosophical, religious or cultural affiliation. Each of these terms are used to convey the same ultimate defining concept. This concept is the origin of all knowledge and wisdom (often called *primal knowledge or logos*) for which every human strives to understand. Kleinknecht (1967), the renowned religious philosopher, explains the *Logos* concept in greater detail:

It is presupposed as self-evident [in ancient Greece]... that there is in things, in the world and in its course, a primary logos, an intelligible and recognizable law which then makes possible knowledge and understanding in the human logos... [according to Heraclitus, because] the same logos constitutes the same being of both the cosmos and man, it is the connecting principle which forms the bridge and possibility of understanding, [first.] between man and the world and also between men. (p. 81)

Similarly, Ross (1966) defines the Hindu concept of *Brahman* as “an indescribable, supreme principle of life, non-personal, the supreme one, that pervades all things and transcends all things.” (p.19) For Buddhists, the image of Buddha, Bodhisattvas and other forms reflecting the Dhamma are thought to idealize beauty, style and taste. This is because these forms have greater concentrations of religious energy or wisdom (See Foucher 1972, Snellgrove 1982, Tambiah 1984, Gombrich 1988, Murthy 1991 or Schopen 1997).

Each individual must subjectively experience this Ideal. *Rasa* (Skt: flavor) or the taste of Beauty describes the individual's experience within a single moment (Sutthi 1982: 21). Essentially, *Rasa* is the difference between the imagined (*de jura*) and the experienced (*de facto*) concept. From this perspective, *Rasa* is the realization of Dhamma within each person. This may be referred to as either a religious or aesthetic experience, depending upon one's preferred terminology. As a person experiences this objective representation of Beauty (Skt: *Rasavant*), their relationship to it will differ with each encounter. However, the object will remain relatively unchanged since it is based on the Ideal. When an individual (Skt: *rasika*) wishes to construct this form through sculpting, painting, drawing, etc., the same principle applies. Specifically, the Ideal remains relatively constant while the artist attempts to approximate this. The result may differ slightly because of one's personal *Rasa*, but the vision of Beauty remains relatively stable. Sutthi (1982) summarizes this Buddhist / Hindu perspective of religious / aesthetic experience:

...pure God -- pure beauty -- is enjoyed by those who are completed thereto, in identity, just as the form of God is itself the joy with which it is recognized. The Hindu (or Buddhist) aesthetic point of view is pure God, material truth with spiritual ideal -- Beauty, and this point of view can originate with the spectator as well as the artist. (p.25)

In terms of actual practice, this religious / aesthetic experience (*Rasa*) is something that each person must realize on their own terms and in their own way. This is normally achieved through various methods such as meditation, concentration, prayer or chanting. For many Khmer Buddhists, including those living in Canada, experiences of this nature are an essential part of daily life. This will be reflected in the interviews with the study participants in Chapters Five and Six.

2.0.6: Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature related to the Theravâda Buddhist conception of art. The difference between art seen from conventional reality and art seen from ultimate reality was outlined. The significance of the image of Buddha, Bodhisattvas and other images of “wisdom”, that are a part of conventional reality, was mentioned. The final section of this chapter elaborated more specifically on the implications of this Buddhist perspective of art as it relates to education through art. Here, I focused on two central beliefs of the Theravâda philosophy in relation to forms and imagery and two underlying concepts of the Canadian perspective of art education. These beliefs and concepts included: 1) *forms and holistic thought*, 2) *presence and mindfulness*, 3) *creativity and production*, and 4) *style, beauty and aesthetics*. Through these discussions, I have outlined some practices that may be associated with education through art for Khmer Buddhists including mindfulness, concentration, production and the knowledge and realization of Nature (*Dhamma*).

Chapter Three

Methods of the Study

3.0.1: Introduction

This research involves a case study of the significance of the Buddhist imagery found at the Khmer Pagoda of Canada in Montreal. In this study, six members of the Cambodian Buddhist community of Canada have explained their ties to traditional and contemporary Cambodian culture and religion, which are reflected through the Khmer Pagoda and its many images. From within these Khmer Canadians' understandings of the visual media within this Temple, we are able to acquire a basic knowledge of their Khmer artistic tradition. Most importantly, these participants have explained how they perceive the Temple and its imagery and how these influence them in their daily lives. Finally, I have investigated how these Cambodian people have used the images of this Temple to facilitate their own learning. From their personal experiences, they suggested principles for education using art and imagery for others from the Cambodian Buddhist community.

3.0.2: Research Interest

There are several reasons why I have chosen to study the imagery and views of the Cambodian Buddhist population of Montreal. First, I believe those who hold Buddhist ideology rarely have a voice in the larger Canadian context. Due to a general absence of

both Khmer and Theravâda Buddhist people's representation in the Canadian mass media, many Canadians lack knowledge and understanding of Khmer and Theravâda Buddhist culture. Considering this, I believe that studying their views, ideologies and practices could reveal valuable information and inform those in the field of art education. The art and imagery of Cambodia is integrated into a holistic web of individual and social structures, institutions and disciplines that work together to preserve life and stability over a long period of time.

The second reason for my interest in this research is my belief that there are many positive ideas that can be gained from studying Buddhist culture. It is in many ways different from Western systems and realities that are generally situated within Judeo-Christian theologies and religious traditions. I have often found the ideas of Buddhism capable of providing explanations for my own life experiences, although I also retain an enormous amount of pride in my own parents and family who have come from both Christian and Jewish ancestry. Throughout my life, I have come to know many close friends who are from Buddhist backgrounds and I have learned to respect them greatly and their Buddhist beliefs and practices.

Finally, I believe that this research will prove to be beneficial to myself as an art educator. Specifically, it will provide new insights into meaning, communication and education through various media for those from Buddhist cultures, such as that of Cambodia and surely others as well. The connection of art to every aspect of life, including religion, has always been a part of my personal view of art and art making. This research has allowed me to explore this connection from the perspective of a few

people from Montreal's Khmer Buddhist community. I have found that their views do not differ greatly from my own. I have been able to learn about the subtleties of their culture and traditions related to imagery and education through visual media. This knowledge of the Khmer perspective regarding imagery will undoubtedly assist in my possible future endeavors of planning educational materials or curriculum. It has also provided valuable and practical knowledge about the teaching and learning procedures and techniques that are customary in the context of Khmer education.

3.0.3: Access to the Site and Participants

Obtaining access to this particular Theravâda Temple was not too difficult since I had established a social contact with a person who attends this Temple occasionally for religious events. At first, I went to the Khmer Pagoda with this friend who knew many people from the Cambodian community, including the Head Monk of the Pagoda. I had the opportunity to meet the Head Monk, Venerable Visal Soth, and others and to attend the Temple on some occasions. I came to feel quite welcomed and accepted within this environment.

I believe that I was able to integrate into the Temple community without being too conspicuous. This is because I have been able to learn some of the Buddhist customs and practices from my experiences with other Theravâda and Mahâyâna communities in Canada over the years. These communities included the Malaysian, Thai, Burmese, Bangladeshi, Vietnamese and Chinese. Some of the more important customs are related

to ways of interaction and the demonstration of respect. For example, respect is shown by bowing before elders and other dignitaries, removing shoes and hats, looking down when speaking to monks and elders, offering them food or assistance and not questioning their wishes or interrupting, etc.

Within a couple of months, I was able to establish a rapport with members of the Cambodian community by visiting the Temple at various times. I informed Venerable Visal Soth of my proposed research topic in November of 1998. He gave his consent and offered his assistance in obtaining information and research participants. He also gladly volunteered to be interviewed. After each time that I went to the Khmer Pagoda, I wrote field notes in order to document my observations. As several people from the Khmer Buddhist community learned about the purpose of my research, they were quite willing to be interviewed or give other helpful information. Each time I would go to the Temple for an event, I would try to schedule another interview. I collected these interviews over the course of a six month period from November of 1998 to April of 1999. I always found the Khmer people to be extremely generous and helpful.

3.0.4: Data Collection Procedures:

This study is a qualitative case study. However, it is situated within the broader scope of a *ethnographic study*. This theoretical framework rejects the notion that the world is “directly knowable and that it cannot empirically present itself.” (Willis 1977: 194) In other words, it assumes that factors beyond the observable (or empirical) world

are also working to influence the end results. According to this framework, the researcher simply “attempts” to describe a complex intersection between constantly evolving social or cultural structures as well as the participants’ and his / her own single or multiple ever-changing reality(s). This perspective also assumes that “the researcher’s prior theoretic and political commitments are informed and transformed by the lived experiences of the group she or he researches”. (Roman & Apple in Eisner & Peshkin 1990: 62) Buddhist philosophy teaches that the world and universe are in constant motion like an endless river. (Hesse 1951: 106) Personally, I am convinced that this river exists, but at the same time a person cannot stop the flow in order to quantify or qualify this in any “rational” way. True or ultimate reality lies beyond the phenomenal which informs our senses and perceptions. Therefore, any type of linear examination or symbolic description can never capture the dynamic process of life. The written aspect of this thesis is fictional in the sense that the information presented here is used to convey the informants and my own political, philosophical and religious perspectives and realities.

In order to determine the context and describe the Khmer Buddhist Temple in Montreal and its imagery, I have used two specific research procedures. First, I searched for *archival literature* related to the Khmer Temple and its imagery. Unfortunately, no records were found. Secondly, I conducted *informal interviews* and *discussions* that revealed some of the more important historical information. Specifically, I spoke to Venerable Visal Soth and others who were in Montreal and involved in the Temple from its beginning. Venerable Visal Soth was primarily responsible for the establishment and construction of this Temple. He arranged to have paintings and sculptures brought from

Cambodia, Thailand and other countries and commissioned most of the artists who painted the many canvases, made sculptures, carved reliefs, took pictures, etc. However, since the Temple's development occurred gradually, it was difficult to determine the precise dates, names and addresses of the artists. For example, the artist who painted the *jatâka* works that cover the largest part of the Pagoda now lives in Los Angeles. He could not be contacted for an interview, although several attempts were made to locate him. Nevertheless, enough information was gathered through these informal interviews regarding the history of the Pagoda and its imagery in order to provide a brief description within this thesis. These discussions were held at various times over the course of this research. They were done separately from the six formal interviews that related to the current significance of the Temple and its images, which are discussed below.

In order to determine the current meaning of the imagery within the Temple for the various participants, I relied on two additional procedures: *open-ended interviews* with key informants and *participant observation*. I conducted formal interviews with six different key informants. These people are involved in the daily life and functioning of the Khmer Pagoda of Canada in one way or another. Some of the informants attend festivals and ceremonies regularly as lay people and others have leadership positions and responsibilities within the Temple. They all freely volunteered to participate in the interview. All the participants also offered to give further clarification regarding the interview and additional information if needed. These people included the Head Monk, a nun and four lay persons. The study participants are introduced in Chapter Four. A brief overview of each person is given in the following chart:

**Chart 3.01:
Study Participants**

#	Name	Distinguishing Characteristics	Age	Yr. in Can
1	<i>Mrs. Neang Mom Srey</i>	- Medical doctor - Involved in several Cambodian organizations - Lived in France and Thailand for several years	middle	1990
2	<i>Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung</i>	- Nun who teaches children in the Temple - Widow with 7 children and also several grandchildren - Quiet spoken, highly respected	elderly	1981
3	<i>Mr. Visna Chua</i>	- Single - Computer engineer - Came to Canada alone at 16	young/middle	1980
4	<i>Mr. Sokha Ly</i>	- Married with children - Ten brothers and sisters - Came to Canada at 18	middle	1980
5	<i>Mr. Sovin Yong</i>	- Recently married with 3 children - His mother is a nun at the Temple - Brothers and a sister live in Montreal	young/middle	1990
6	<i>Venerable Visal Soth</i>	- Head Monk of the Temple - Highly respected in Canada and abroad - Vast knowledge of life and religion	elderly	1981

Participants were selected on the basis of their desire to participate and their availability. The interviews were all scheduled at separate times and conducted within the Pagoda. Before proceeding with each interview, I explained the purpose of this research to the participant. I made sure that they were aware of their right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. They were also informed that their identity could remain confidential, if they wished. I explained to them that their words would not be kept confidential and that these might be used in this thesis and could later be published. Each informant was asked to sign a consent form before beginning the formal interview. (See *Appendix A*)

During each interview, I followed a questionnaire that contained open-ended questions outlining general topics in order to elicit and guide the discussion. (See

Appendix B) In *Part I*, questions focus on the context including the circumstances that brought this person to Canada and their memories regarding the temples and their use of imagery in Cambodia. *Part II* contains questions related to the meaning or significance of the Cambodian Temple in Montreal and its imagery from this person's perspective. At this time, I asked the participants to elaborate upon specific images which they have found to be the most meaningful for themselves. In the last segment of the interview, *Part III*, I asked these people how they personally experience or learn from the art within the Pagoda. I questioned them as to how these learning experiences through the visual media might suggest a conception of education and art education about Buddhist images and from a Buddhist perspective. The interviews involved the implementation of several techniques of ethnographic research. (Merriam 1988) These included descriptive questions ("What do you remember about the Temple in your town?"), the rephrasing of questions ("Do you think of this image when you are at home or at work?"), hypothetical questions ("What would you think if images of Buddha were shown on TV?"), clarification of responses ("So, you believe that creativity is more important than respect for tradition?") and sharing experiences ("I also know from my own experience how stressful university can be.").

Each of the interviews was scheduled with the research participant before the interview. Some of the participants whom I had met earlier at the Temple, were asked for an interview and others were selected on the basis of their willingness to respond and their ability to communicate well in English. The interviews were scheduled during the day over a period of six months from November, 1998 to April, 1999. These normally

lasted between 45 minutes and 3 hours. The interview length depended on the amount of information that the participant thought was relevant to the research topic and the speed of our communication. All of the interviews were conducted in English with the exception of one. For this interview with the nun, Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung, her words were translated from the Khmer language into English by Mrs. Mom Srey Neang. Each of these six interviews was audio-recorded and then later transcribed and analyzed.

The second procedure that was used in order to determine the current significance of the Khmer Buddhist Temple and its imagery for the people involved in this study, and the Khmer Buddhists in general, was participant observation. Through this observation, I was concerned with developing a deeper understanding of the participants' personal descriptions. This assisted greatly in contextualizing the interviews and also pointed out characteristics of the people and events that were overlooked or simply not revealed in the comments of those who were interviewed. Most importantly, I was able to learn many details related to the context, traditions, religion and culture of the Khmer Buddhist people. By placing myself into an unfamiliar environment, I was able to experience, empathize and thus better understand the realities of these Cambodian Buddhists. I have come to feel quite comfortable within this environment. Despite this, I am an "outsider" and therefore, I reflect my opinions from this viewpoint.

In order to provide visual support for this thesis, I *photographed* both the interior and exterior of the Pagoda. The visual media that was photographed for this thesis was selected on the basis of which images were chosen to be significant by the interview

participants or other images that appeared to be treated significantly by these people or by other Cambodian Buddhists during my participant observations.

The selected photographs of this imagery will serve as a visual reference for my descriptions of the Temple history, context and imagery and also those of the interview participants. When visual forms are tied to local meaning relations, metaphors and allegories, such as in writing, they are considered *thick descriptions* and provide a deeper meaning beyond that which is visible (Hastrup in Crawford & Turton 1992). Kirsten Hastrup emphasizes that written and video (or photographic) records are complementary and provide different types of information to better assist in a person's understanding of a situation. I believe the photographs that are included in this documentation will also provide the reader with a *thick* description of the unique environment of the Pagoda.

3.0.5: Reducing Bias and Preconceptions

As I conducted the field study and data collection, I took several precautions in order to avoid personal biases, misunderstandings or misinterpretations as much as possible. For example, I did not necessarily attempt to resolve ambiguities in the understanding of the participant's comments in the formal interviews and in other discussions. Although I remained inquisitive, I attempted to withhold my personal opinions and judgments. In addition, I did not necessarily regard differences of opinion, other people's grammar or definitions as "mistakes" because these did not conform to standard English, established definitions (*Webster's Dictionary*, my own definitions, etc.)

or “acceptable” Western theories and preconceptions. I believe these are all generally outside the world views of Cambodian Buddhists. In summary, I believe that what a person says should simply be “what is said”. Although I have tried to understand what was said, this may or may not relate to an “accurate” understanding of what these words were intended to mean. As to the study participants’ personal views and ideas, the same logic applied. In my research for example, I found it necessary to contact the participants after the interviews were transcribed in order to clarify statements which I did not understand. In terms of a qualitative description, I believe it was important for me to remember that: “It is multiple realities rather than a single reality that concern the qualitative researcher” (Bogdan & Bicklen 1992: 42). This should also be taken into consideration by the reader of this thesis as I am presenting multiple realities, but only from a single narrative voice.

3.0.6: Data Organization and Analysis:

Before I began conducting this research, I had a general idea regarding the type of information that I intended to pursue through the course of this study. “A research design is the logic that links the data to be collected to the initial questions of the study.” (Yin 1984: 27) The questionnaire was constructed to provide a general format to elicit this information. As I spent more time at the Khmer Temple, I began to better understand the Cambodian people and the things that were more meaningful to them. For example, as I observed the practices within the Temple, I came to know which images were more

significant to the people and how these were treated in different ceremonies and practices. After conducting the first interview, I realized that some of my original questions needed to be revised in order to obtain more relevant information. For example, in *Part I* of the interview schedule, I found that many of the questions were redundant and did not request information related to the informants' personal experiences in Cambodia. Also, the questions were only related to the relevance of the Khmer Pagoda in Canada. This part of the interview schedule ignored questions related to the meaning of other temples and images for this person when they lived in Cambodia. I came to the conclusion that personal memories of Buddhist temples and their imagery was essential for this study since it situated the participants' current practices and views about Buddhist visual media within a larger context. Although I always tried remain open to the opinions and information that was shared, during the course of the study I refined my questions in order to obtain data that was meaningful to the nature of this study. I was also able to narrow my participant observation to focus on the information that was the most important for my final analysis and presentation of data.

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman 1995, Patton 1990, Yin 1984). Once the interviews were transcribed into writing, I separated the information that related to the profile and personal history of each interview participant. The responses of each person related to the significance of the imagery and the Temple were then analyzed to see if particular themes or categories arose. According to Spradley and McCurdy (1972); "We begin by trying to find out when someone is treating a group of different objects as

equivalent without imposing our own categories on what we see.” (p.61) This process of searching for coding categories may be related to specific context, process or event codes (Spradley & McCurdy 1972, Patton 1990). Searching for these coding categories is a way of imposing order onto the data, but it is done only after extensively, and not judgmentally, familiarizing oneself with the data. Marshall & Rossman (1995) explain this process in terms of five modes: 1) organizing the data. 2) generating categories, themes, and patterns. 3) testing the emergent hypotheses against the data. 4) searching for alternative explanations of the data, and 5) writing the report. (p.113) After extensively reviewing the remaining data from the six participants I found that it revealed two general themes relating to the type of questions that were asked. The first theme was the importance of the Khmer Temple and its images for social and cultural identity within Canada. The second theme was related to Buddhist education and visual media. These are the basis of Chapter Five and Six of this thesis. From this data, sub-categories have emerged that reveal patterns of common understandings among the study participants. Although many similar ideas seemed to appear from the data, each person also demonstrated a unique way of perceiving the issues of this research. This will become more evident upon reading excerpts from the interviews.

Finally, from the individual opinions of each participant and the similarities demonstrated in their experiences, I have tried to piece together a common thread that could lead to a larger view of Buddhist education through art and visual media from a Khmer perspective. At a first glance, this could be said to resemble the ways and practices of art education conducted in Canada, however I believe the underlying logic or

mentality will prove to be much different. I have attempted to describe these conceptual differences related to imagery and education from the informants' perspective. In the final analysis, my objective in doing this study is summarized in the following statement: "...to make a description of your informants' cognitive map for some cultural scene and to do so in a manner that introduces the minimum degree of distortion." (Spradley & McCurdy 1973: 61)

My own observations and field notes were used to enhance my understanding of the interviews and the individual and social perspectives of the participants. In addition, these have allowed me to remember specific practices, events, and objects in my description of this research and in my findings. "(Participant observation) is used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings... It requires the difficulty of managing a relatively unobtrusive role and the challenge to identify the 'big picture' while finely observing huge amounts of fast-moving and complex behaviors." (Marshall & Rossman 1995: 80) During the time of my research, I was able to participate in events and ceremonies within the Temple, such as the Cambodian New Year's celebration, and assist in the activities organized by the Cambodian Community of Canada. This allowed me to acquire more knowledge of the participants and their environment. I believe this was the most valuable procedure of this study since I was able to gain deep insights about the Khmer culture. The photographs of the Pagoda and its images also serve to enhance my descriptions and those of the participants as well as to give additional information.

3.0.7: Limitations of the Study

This study consisted of the participant observation and interviews with six Cambodian Buddhists concerning their views on visual media of the Khmer Temple in Montreal and its relation to education. Because this research was conducted entirely within a single setting (ie. the Khmer Pagoda), it was difficult to check or triangulate the statements and views of the participants at other locations outside of the Temple, such as in their homes or places of work. The location also limited the available participants and views expressed, since it did not include those Khmer who do not attend the Temple or attend rarely because of religious, ideological or other differences. Those who do attend this Temple, and particularly those involved in its daily functioning, undoubtedly share common religious and political ideas. This is quite evident from the opinions expressed through the interview excerpts. However, as a qualitative researcher, I have tried to reflect the views of my participants while remaining reasonably critical and objective. I realize that the views expressed do not reflect the perspectives of all Cambodians and especially those who are not involved in the life of the Temple. A broader study including interviews with more people and observations of the practices in other settings, other Cambodian Temples and in other countries as well as Cambodia would have allowed me to produce more generalizable findings related to the role of Buddhist imagery for the Khmer people. Nevertheless, the purpose of this research was to allow me to better understand the intimate dimension and the uniqueness of these participants' relation to the specific religious imagery within the Khmer Pagoda of Canada.

One of the greatest difficulties encountered in the course of this study was the cultural differences between my own understanding of an *individual* and that of the participants. Since research and its methods always assume that the individual is the baseline or the constant factor in a study, this presents a real problem in achieving empirical and generalizable results. Bogdan and Bicklen (1992) confirm that; “The self is the definition people create (through interacting with others) of who they are... people come to see themselves in part as others see them.” (p.37) From the Khmer Buddhist cultural view of the *individual*, exercising a voice and reflecting a “self” as a separate entity is an uncusomary practice. Because of the Khmer people’s collective identity and group spirit, it was rare for an interview participant to refer to themselves alone in their response. For example, when I asked participants about their personal experiences and feelings regarding particular issues or their life in Cambodia, their answers would normally begin with “we”, referring also to their family and the Cambodian community. Patton (1990) confirms that the *open-ended questionnaire* or the *interview guide approach* “can result in substantially different responses from different perspectives and cultures.” (p.289) The equivalent of the Western notion of the *soul* is the Khmer notion of consciousness (Khmer: viññān; Pāli: viññāna; Skt: vijñāna). This notion of consciousness “is not strictly the single, spiritual, immaterial counterpart to the material body as the modern Western soul is commonly conceived. It is instead, as one of the five aggregates, a function of mind and matter.” (Thompson 1996: 2) In fact according to Theravāda belief, each person does not have a “soul” or “identity” (annatā) separate from their environment and community. This perspective made it difficult to gather the type of

data that I had originally intended, such as personal life experiences and opinions. The Khmer Buddhist's interpretation of the place of the "individual" within society challenges the basic assumptions of methodology related to qualitative research. Nevertheless, I found this aspect of the research process to be a valuable learning experience of the Khmer Buddhist culture.

3.0.8: Chapter Summary

Chapter Three has described the methods of this research in detail. This study is a qualitative case study of the importance of the visual media seen at the Khmer Pagoda in Montreal for six study participants. I have discussed the benefit of conducting research of this nature and the reasons for my personal interest in this study. I described how I was able to obtain access to the research venue. The data collection procedures were then outlined. These include informal interviews, open-ended formal interviews, participant observation and documentary photography. The open-ended interviews were conducted at the Khmer Pagoda and used the interview guide approach. All of the procedures were carried out over a six month period. In this chapter, I described the techniques that were used in this study in order to reduce bias and preconceptions. A brief explanation was provided of the methods of data organization and analysis. I concluded with a description of some of the difficulties or limitations that I have faced in the course of completing this study. The interview participants will be introduced in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Profiles of Key Informants

4.0.1: Introduction

The data for this study was collected over the course of six months and included separately scheduled formal interviews with six participants selected for this study. All the participants either attend the Khmer Pagoda of Canada regularly or have a role in its daily functioning. Each interview was conducted at the Temple where the participants could see and refer to specific images. The interview with the nun, Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung, was translated from Khmer. The others were carried out in English with the occasional use of French terminology. My own questions have been edited out, but otherwise the words are verbatim from the transcribed interviews taped with these participants. In three of these six cases, pseudonyms are used instead of the actual names in order to protect the privacy of the participants. Each participant was given the option to use a pseudonym if they wished.

The personal life stories were extracted from the information reflected by the study participants in relation to *Part I: Context* of the interview questionnaire (See Appendix B). The specific questions that I asked were related to their life experiences of coming to Canada and their memories of life in Cambodia, both before and after the Khmer Rouge came to power. For example, I asked; “What do you remember about your life in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge regime and communism?” I particularly

focused questions on the role of Buddhist temples and imagery in the participant's life in Cambodia as well as in Canada. For example, I asked; "What was the place of the Buddhist temples and images in Cambodian society at this time?" All of the participants explained their dramatic and unforgettable life stories, which most people could hardly imagine without also living through these events themselves. I will now introduce these six study participants.

4.0.2: Story #1; Mrs. Mom Srey Neang

This informant is a middle aged woman. Her father now lives in France, her mother died when she was very young and she was the only child in her family. She arrived in Montreal in 1990 and then arranged for her husband to also come to Montreal. She was later divorced. Although she was born in Cambodia, she studied and lived in France for several years before going to work in Thailand. In the 1960s and 70s, she left Cambodia to study medicine in Lille, France and became a doctor. From 1983 until the end of 1989, she worked in the Cambodian refugee resistance camp run by the KPNLF (Khmer People's National Liberation Front) on the Khmer-Thai border. Her life experiences have left her with an extraordinary concern for Cambodia and its people. Mrs. Neang further explains about Cambodia's tragedy and what she is doing in Canada to bring about changes and improve life in Cambodia:

The war began in 1970 and has continued for many years. This was because the Khmer Rouge, who killed over 2 million people, were first supported by the Chinese Government. Now, the former Khmer Rouge members are supported by the Vietnamese Government. But, Cambodia was ruled for almost 100 years

before by the French. The French allowed Vietnam to take 27 provinces from Cambodia. Thailand took another 21 provinces before and now Cambodia is left with only 19. The Vietnamese Government wanted to take even more. So now, they are also trying to move the border into Cambodia, wherever they can. They now have taken 4,510 km². Cambodia is a small country, but it is very rich in natural resources and minerals. We have petroleum, sulfur, diamonds, etc.

In recent years, the Communists under Hun Sen have taken power and he is like another Pol Pot. The American Congress recently called him "Pol Pot II" because he is one of the most terrible murderers in the world. Hun Sen has managed to keep his position of Prime Minister because he has strong support from Vietnam. For this reason, he has stayed there now for 20 years. In 1998, there was an election and everyone believes that it was not free or fair. In reality, nobody wants Hun Sen in power. All the Cambodian people would like to see democracy in Cambodia. The American Cambodians made a petition for the US Congress to ask them to bring Hun Sen to the International Tribunal as a war criminal. The US Congress and Senate have passed Resolutions declaring him as a war criminal. We are now doing the same in Canada and we presented a petition with over 3,000 signatures to the House of Commons. There was recently a big democracy demonstration in Cambodia on September 11, 1998 and Hun Sen killed and injured almost 200 people, including monks and students. Hun Sen abuses his power and kills people indiscriminately.

So for this reason, I am contributing my time and trying to help solve these problems in Cambodia. I hope that one day soon all the people of Cambodia will be able to live without the fear of danger from Hun Sen and his regime. Achieving democracy, peace and justice in Cambodia is the first priority in my life. (Mom Srey Neang 1998, Personal communication)

Mrs. Neang has had the opportunity to help countless Cambodian people in many different ways. This interview participant is actively involved in Cambodian politics. She reflects a deep sense of pride and interest for all Cambodian people and for her country.

4.0.3: Story #2; Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung

This participant, Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung, is an elderly nun or temple grandmother (Khmer: yeichi) who spends much of her time at the Khmer Temple. Mrs. Phoung is a

mother who has 7 grown children now living in different countries of both Europe and North America. She is always happy to see her children and grandchildren when they come to visit and she occasionally has the opportunity to also visit her family. She adds:

As for myself, I had ten children and three were killed by the Khmer Rouge regime. Now I have only seven. They all have received a high education. My youngest son drives me to the Temple and comes to sit with me and asks for my advice. He is a very good boy because he always listens to his mother. He is so wise. He has followed his mother's advice since he was young. He asks his mother to choose for him. (1999, Personal communication)

Originally, Mrs. Phoung came to France in 1979 as a refugee when one of her older sons, who had been living there for several years, requested that she come and live with him. Soon after, another one of her sons applied for her citizenship in Canada. She arrived in Canada in 1981 and has lived here since that time. Although she can speak a few words in French, she usually speaks Khmer. I was fortunate to find another person, Mrs. Mom Srey Neang, who is fluent in both Khmer and English and was willing to assist in the translation of this interview from the Khmer language.

Mrs. Phoung began to explain about her life during the Khmer Rouge regime:

Under the Khmer Rouge, life is so short. I thought when they (the soldiers) passed; "My life--so what!" The next day when the sun arose, everyone was so afraid to die. And again when they passed, I was so happy, but I (would) wait for tomorrow. We lived day by day. They passed and we were so happy, but only for a day. But nobody believed in the future; nobody looked to the future. They thought they would die the next morning.

I would always have to make a prayer secretly. Before praying, I would look around me and if it was noisy then that was a sign that meant someone would follow me after. So, if there were people around, I wouldn't pray. If the Khmer Rouge soldiers saw me praying or even if they knew, then they would kill me.

The Khmer Rouge tried to destroy the people's belief in everything so they would only believe in the leader of the Communist Party. We had to consider the leader of the Communist Party as a god. But, I really believe in Buddha. During the Khmer Rouge regime, their soldiers checked up on everybody. They took gold, diamonds and precious things from everyone. The Communist regime

killed my husband and 3 of my children at the same place. They came to visit every home. And, I was the only one they did not touch. They let me keep my job in the Government and this is how I raised my children after the Communist regime. I prayed to the Buddha; "Help me Buddha!" and said; "I won't do any bad action if you help me." I prayed to the Buddha; "Save my life and keep me in peace!" And, I alone was not touched and checked on by the Khmer Rouge.

They tried to destroy the temples and everything else because they wanted to replace the Buddhist religion with communism. Communism itself is like a religion that never respects the laws of nature. It is completely opposite from the established religion. In each country that takes it, communism has to completely re-invent itself as a religion and make new rules.

The Khmer Rouge regime destroyed the temples and they burned all the books. If someone approached the temple, then they killed them. And they were so surprised that in the province of Siem Reap when the Khmer Rouge ordered three men to destroy a temple, they were later killed by natural causes. One was riding on a bull; the bull ran so fast and he fell down and this man was killed. And another person who destroyed the temple was walking on a small lake that had land over it and he ran and fell into the lake and was drowned. And the other was a strong man and he also died.

But now, I appreciate the Buddha more than ever before; I appreciate the Buddha and the way of the Buddha and cause and effect. I believe that someone who does bad will also have to receive bad. Now, I pray to Buddha three times every day; morning, noon and night.

I am so lucky to be living in Canada and to have a good family who respect and care about me. In Cambodia, the Communists did not even allow a family to live together. The babies were kept in a nursery, the small children were put together in a daycare center, children who were 14 years of age or older had to work hard and the mothers and fathers were separated. (Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung 1999, Personal communication)

Mrs. Phoung considers herself to be very fortunate compared to so many other people in Cambodia. After hearing her life story, a person cannot help but feeling grateful to be alive, not to mention living with all the comforts offered by the North American lifestyle.

4.0.4: Story #3; Mr. Visna Chua

Mr. Visna Chua is a young single man in his early 30s. He has finished university and works as a computer engineer. He has a sister and her family living in Quebec and another younger sister living in Cambodia. Both of his parents have died. Visna has been in Canada since January of 1980 when he came as an international refugee. He was alone and only 16 years old at the time. He lived with a Quebecois family while he attended CEGEP and University. A couple months after his arrival, his sister and her family also came to Canada. Visna further describes his life in Cambodia and how he came to Canada:

I remember when I was young, there was peace in Cambodia. I lived in the countryside and my family was poor. We had to work very hard to live. I worked with my father every day except for one day a week when I would go to school.

When I was 12 years old, the war came into the country and then the Communist regime. One day I saw an American airplane over my head and they were dropping bombs. This was in 1969 or 1970. This was because in the country where I lived there were many communist movements that the Americans and the Vietnamese did not like. The Americans did not just go to war in Vietnam, but in Cambodia too. There was so much fighting between the Vietnamese communists, the Cambodian communists and the Americans. Many Cambodians died because of the American bombs.

My family could not stay in the countryside in the place where they lived because this place was under fire. We had to go as refugees to the town. When we came to the town, we did not have much money or a house to live in and my family had to work hard in order to live. But, I was still able to go to school. My father always sent me to school. Every morning, I had to sell meat and bread before I went to school in order to make enough money. I would have to wake up at four o'clock in the morning and then at six, I would sell the bread and meat. By seven, I would have to be in school. Everyday, I did this from 1970 to 1975. On the weekend, I would also have to help my brother-in-law to make money.

But in 1975, there was a big war when the Khmer Rouge went into the countryside. Every Cambodian had to leave his/her town because the Communist Government said that everyone had to work for them; everything was for them. I was there with the people and we would have to wake up at six o'clock in the morning and work until six o'clock in the afternoon; twelve hours a day. There was no week-end and also no salary. You could only eat one or two

times a day. But, you could not eat too much because if you did, then they would kill you. Many people died because of starvation.

During the Communist regime, all the people had to work for the Government; even the young people who were 6 years old. The children who were 12 to 16 had to work or fight for the Communists. I had to do this. There was a war between the capitalist and communist factions. We fought and I was under fire. But, I was not in the military because I was too young. Some places were like concentration camps. I am sure you know about the Jewish people? It was the same. There was no liberty; we had to work all the time and you could not eat too much. We had rations and many people died because they didn't have enough to eat and many people also died because the Government killed them. The Communists would say; "The bad people do not respect our politics or movement." The Khmer Rouge also destroyed all the religion and the temples in Cambodia. There were so many temples and the Communists destroyed all these. So, no one could go to the temples and everyone had to work.

In 1979, the Vietnamese attacked the Khmer Rouge Communists. They went inside Cambodia and so I took this opportunity to get out of Cambodia. At that time, many other people also took the chance to leave the country. The Cambodian refugees had to escape to camps on the border of Thailand through mine fields. In order to go from Cambodia to Thailand, you would have to walk through a big forest that is full of landmines. Many people died because of these landmines. I knew that I could die if I cross. But I said to myself; "If I stay in Cambodia, I don't have a future and if I leave then I might." Either way I could die and I was alone and only 16 years old. But, I was lucky because I made it to the refugee camp. I was lucky because I did not have to stay there long; maybe 2 months. Canadians went there to pick up some refugees and I asked if I could leave the country. They said; "No problem, you can come!" This is why I came to Canada.

When I came to Canada, I also had to struggle because at first I did not speak English or French. I had to go to school and I had to adapt to a new society. When I was in college, it was very difficult; I was very stressed.

So, I know all about war and famine. I know what it is like to have nothing to eat. I know about living alone and about being apart from my family; my mother and father who have both died now and my sister who is still in Cambodia. But, I know several other people have similar stories as myself; some have had even more difficulties than me and so many people have died. (Mr. Visna Chua 1999, Personal communication)

Many of the people who came to Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s have very similar stories. For the most part, they escaped from Cambodia via the Thai-Khmer border refugee camps where they were offered the chance to escape to countries in

Southeast Asia, North America and Europe. However, since the beginning of the 1990s, the Khmer who are now emigrating from Cambodia often have somewhat different stories and do so for other reasons. They now leave in order to join their parents, other family members or marriage partners.

4.0.5: Story #4; Mr. Sokha Ly

This informant is a middle age man who has been living in Canada since 1980. The events of how he came to Canada are somewhat similar to those of Visna Chua, the previous interview participant. He came here when he was 18 years old after escaping to a Thai border refugee camp when the Vietnamese Communist forces attacked the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in 1979. He was from a family of ten brothers and sisters, all who were eventually able to leave Cambodia. The tragic events in Cambodia during the 1970s and 80s changed the course of life for both him and his family. He explains:

Before 1975 in the province where I lived, there was no war. This was on the border of Thailand and I used to go to the Temple very often with my younger brother. I remember a few things about my father. Once, he went to the Pagoda for three months. He used to give advice to the people in our village and he always told them to go in the way of the Buddha. I also know about Buddha's story and why this is so important.

At the time of the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian people did not have a good education. The Communists tried to convince the teachers and students to follow their teachings. Communism is not democratic and once the Communists came to power, they could not be controlled. Once they had power in Cambodia, they could kill whoever they wanted. So, if you had money or were a doctor, lawyer or professor, etc., then they thought you were a threat. But before the Communist regime, all the people respected the Buddhist religion and today they still do.

In Cambodia there were many temples and these were all destroyed by the Communist regime. In the capital of Phnom Penh for example, there was just

one temple left for the King and all the other temples were destroyed. There were also no more monks because they were forced to work like everyone else. The Communists had no respect for the monks; they had no respect for the Buddha, the temples or the religion. The Communist soldiers came right into the temples and killed the people and the monks. You could never imagine.

There are now some memorial sites where they have gathered the skulls of all the people who were killed. These are put on the shelves in a place where you can go to see them. You can still smell the blood of the people who died there. Before they killed people, the Communists took pictures in order to keep accurate records. You can see these pictures on the walls of these death camps.

When I was in Cambodia, I never thought I would live, let alone my family. I remember how Cambodians would say; "If just one person from a family of ten lived and the rest died, then they were lucky." In my family, there were more than ten who were killed; two in-laws who were professors, my father died because he had no milk to drink and also my uncle, aunt and cousin and many more. All the land, houses, motorcycles, property; everything was confiscated by the Government. During the Khmer Rouge regime, all the people in the village where I lived were sent to the forest to work and at that time I was really scared. Everyone had to work long days without any salary; even the sick people. Everyone also had to help in gathering the rice at the harvest season. You could not eat or drink more than the Government provided for you. At that time, I never thought I would come to Canada. I thought I would die!

At the time when the communist Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia and destroyed the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, I escaped to the refugee camps in Thailand. Now, I think that I am so lucky to have had the chance to come to Canada. Ever since this time, I thought about my family who were still in Cambodia and I wished they could also come to Canada. It seemed that there were so many obstacles. Eventually, they all were able to come to live in Canada. (Mr. Sokha Ly 1999, Personal communication)

Mr. Sokha Ly has reflected on his very extraordinary and powerful life story. Although the events of his life may seem beyond possible to many people, they are not considered unusual to many other Cambodians who have lived through similar tragedies in their lives.

4.0.6: Story #5; Mr. Sovin Yong

This participant, Mr. Sovin Yong, is also a young man in his thirties who is married and has 3 children: one boy and two girls. He has been living in Canada since 1990. His story is different in the fact that he came to Canada in order to be with his family. He explains further:

After first coming to Canada, I lived in Kingston, Ontario for about 2 years because my mother was living there. My mother moved to Montreal and so, I also moved with her. Part of the reason that we later moved to Montreal is because I have 2 brothers and a sister living here. So, they helped us in getting settled. But, it's always nice to be close to all your family too. Actually, I was recently married to a very nice Cambodian woman and we now have 3 young children.

The Khmer Pagoda is very important to me. It is also important for my family and my mother too. I really hope that in the future my children will not forget about their culture, heritage, language and religion. Actually, this is why the Temple is so important to me and my family. I know that the Buddhist religion will help us to live a good life here in Canada. And, I think it is necessary for my children to remember their country and their language. Maybe someday, they will want to return. (Mr. Sovin Yong 1999, Personal communication)

Sovin's mother is a nun and so, he often comes to the Khmer Temple to visit her. He is always willing to help out at the Temple when anything is needed. Most importantly, he recognizes its value in his own life and especially for that of his family. Mr. Sovin Yong is optimistically looking to the future with his family in Montreal.

4.0.7: Story #6; Venerable Visal Soth

This last interview participant, Venerable Visal Soth, is the Head Monk of the Pagoda. He is an elderly monk who is respected greatly as a moral and spiritual leader,

not only within the Temple, but also within the Cambodian community in Canada and around the world. He has been largely responsible for establishing this Temple since its beginning in the early 1980s. He has contributed to the development and well being of the Cambodian community in countries around the world, and particularly in Canada. He emigrated to Canada in 1981 from Thailand after leaving Cambodia. He first lived in Longueuil, Quebec for a short period before moving to the Temple in the Côte des Neiges location where he has lived ever since.

As a child, he lived in Takeo Province of Cambodia about 70 miles south of Phnom Penh. He studied comparative religions, Buddhist philosophy and classic languages in Phnom Penh at the Buddhist Institute. He has a great knowledge of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam and is currently working towards his Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies at the University of Delhi. He is a strong advocate of justice, democracy and human rights around the world. In addition, he is a man who possesses great character and wisdom with a profound understanding of life; both secular and moral. He discusses the significance of the tragedies caused by the Khmer Rouge regime for himself and Cambodians today:

In the community where I came from, I went to learn in the Temple. I think this education was good because it really helped me to have a good and successful life. The education in the temple helps a person to learn to have good conduct and to be respectful. For example, we learned that we should bow to the Buddha and to the monks because this shows respect. But, traditional Buddhist education was much different from the education of the Communists.

I remember when the Khmer Rouge came to power and how they went into the countryside and tried to get the children to study their ideology. They took the children who were 8, 9 and 10 years old from their parents and tried to teach them. They used the Chinese language schools in the beginning and never used the temples.

During the Khmer Rouge regime, it was especially difficult to practice Buddhism. There was no Buddhism! The Khmer Rouge also destroyed and killed many people. They made the people cut all the trees in the forest. Many people could eat only one meal a day that was at breakfast. They had to work very hard to have breakfast. There was poverty; no money, no rice and no food. Families could not eat together. There were no monks because they were all disrobed or killed. So, we could not practice Buddhism.

Everyone says; "Remember the past; remember the good and the bad, but there was no good! Many Cambodian people don't want to remember. Some things are too difficult to remember. Many people would rather forget. I don't want to look at the past. I would like to forget this. But rather, I would like to look ahead to a good future. Cambodians should remember their culture and traditions, but they need to look to the future. (Ven. Visal Soth 1998, Personal communication)

The sentiments expressed by Venerable Visal Soth undoubtedly reflect those of most Cambodians who have often lived through some of the worst conditions in the recent history of our human race. When asked to describe these tragedies, many Cambodians may recommend that you watch a film called *The Killing Fields* which they believe gives some flavor of these events. However, this film can not express the reality of all the suffering and grief that these people have endured. just as it could never be expressed in words. Cambodians will never forget the events and lessons learned from their recent history. but now they look toward a bright future which incorporates the ancient and time-tested principles of Buddhism with modern life.

4.0.8: Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the six study participants Mrs. Neang Mom Srey, Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung, Mr. Visna Chua, Mr. Sokha Ly, Mr. Sovin Yong and Venerable Visal Soth described their life experiences. Every person that was interviewed in this study was

profoundly affected by the events in Cambodia over the past 30 years which included wars, genocide, human rights abuses, starvation, famine and disease. All of these people can not forget these traumatic experiences but somehow, each person also expressed an incredible passion and thankfulness for their present life in Canada and the privileges they have today.

Out of the six participants, four described how they arrived in Canada as refugees in the early 1980s after fleeing from the Khmer Rouge communist regime. Their life stories reflect some of the devastating events inflicted upon the Cambodian people by the Khmer Rouge. The other two participants, Mrs. Mom Srey Neang and Mr. Sovin Yong arrived in Canada in the early 1990s as part of a more recent wave of immigration based on family ties and support. This is the reason why many Cambodians now come to Canada.

Although every participant in this study is over 30 years of age, all Cambodians, including those who did not witness first hand the terrible events in Cambodia in recent history as well as the younger generation, are affected deeply by the stories of their family members and friends. This is a part of Cambodian history that will never be forgotten or erased, as much as everyone wishes. Each Cambodian person who was interviewed in this study expressed their concern for current issues that affect all Cambodians and their desire to concentrate on finding solutions and bringing a much better future for Cambodia and its people.

Chapter Five

The Temple and the Reconstruction of a Culture

5.0.1: Introduction

The Theravāda Buddhist religion has always been an important, if not defining, element of the Cambodian culture, at least since the fourteenth century. It is no coincidence that Angkor Wat is displayed at the center of the national flag and is thought to be not only the geographical center of Cambodia but also the heart of Cambodian identity. When Khmer are asked about their religious affiliation, most will respond by stating: “To be Khmer is to be Buddhist”. The association of Buddhist beliefs with Khmer culture has also been noted by most researchers of Khmer culture (such as Leclère 1899, Ebihara 1968 & 1994, Keyes 1987 & 1994, Chandler 1983 & 1991, Smith-Hefner 1999, etc.). Because of this belief that their religion is their culture, few Khmer have converted to Christianity or other religions, even in recent times (Ebihara 1968, Smith-Hefner, 1999). The re-establishment of Buddhism in Cambodia as well as among other Cambodians in diasporic communities around the world depends largely upon the rebuilding of Buddhist temples and the reconstruction of Buddhist imagery. In this chapter, I will further examine the views of the study’s participants in relation to the role of the Khmer Buddhist Temple in Montreal, Canada (See Figures 2 & 7). The views of the study participants regarding the function and significance of the Temple are extracted

from *Part I: Context* and *Part II: Meaning* of the interview questionnaire (See Appendix B).

5.0.2: The Khmer Temple; Social and Cultural Life

For centuries, Khmer Buddhist temples and monasteries have acted as centers of community life. They provided the cohesion that held Khmer society together. Traditionally, the temple had many functions ranging from a health, counseling and welfare clinic to an information centre and library to a moral, social/cultural and educational center (Ebihara 1966 & 1990, Phongphit 1987, Ouk et al. 1988 & Smith-Hefner 1999). In the minds of many Cambodians today, the Buddhist temple is still considered to be the regenerative and uniting force within Khmer society. This perception could also easily apply to the Khmer Pagoda in Montreal.

In this study, I asked the interview participants questions regarding the significance and role of the Pagoda within their own lives, that of their families and the Khmer community in general. They reflected on the activities that are carried out within the Temple and what functions it could possibly play in the future. This was covered in *Part II: Meaning* of the interview questionnaire (See Appendix B). Mr. Sovin Yong stated the following:

The Temple is really important for the Cambodians in Canada. Most of the Cambodians who came to Canada live in Montreal because their family is here. But, many go to Toronto to work there. About 99% of Cambodian people are

Buddhist.³⁶ So, wherever they go they have to have a temple where the older people can go to study Buddhism and preserve the traditions. At the temple you find everything that is really important. (Mr. Sovin Yong 1999, Personal Communication)

Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung, one of several *yeichi* (Khmer: temple nuns) at the Pagoda, added a few words regarding the role of the Temple in Montreal for the Cambodian people. She also stressed moral and social education as the foremost purpose of the Temple:

Only the Temple respects the power of Buddha and this can transform everyone in a good way. I believe that everyone can get a good education from the Temple. It can change people from bad to good and this is why I believe it is so important for the Cambodian people to come here. Venerable Visal Soth very much represents the highest values of Cambodian and Buddhist society and the Temple represents Cambodian society and life and gives the people a single identity.

We have always had good organization within the Buddhist religion, under Sihanouk and even under the Khmer Rouge regime³⁷. The leaders were so popular because they had a high education from the Buddhist religion in India and Sri Lanka. They have the power of Buddha and give the way of the Buddha by TV every week. We have one Sunday (each month) in this Temple where everyone pays attention to hear this way of Buddha by TV. On Sunday, one time a week, everyone comes to the Temple, as you see here. So, this meeting here really represents the identity of the Cambodian community. (1999, Personal Communication)

Many Cambodians living in Canada and in countries around the world would probably share the opinions expressed by these participants since the Buddhist temple is considered to be the heart of Cambodian culture and identity.

Venerable Visal Soth gives additional information regarding the events and celebrations that are held in the Khmer Pagoda of Canada and the role that it has in

³⁶ Smith-Hefner (1999) has estimated that at least 90% of Khmer in the Boston area identify themselves as Buddhists. Venerable Visal Soth (1999) has estimated the percentage of Khmer Buddhists in Canada to be about 95% (See section 1.0.3.5).

³⁷ The Chinese backed communist government of Pol Pot in Cambodia who overthrew Lon Nol's Khmer Republic on April 17, 1975.

educating members of the local community. He indicates how the function of this Temple has changed somewhat from traditional Cambodian society.

On Saturday or Sunday, many people and also children come to the Temple to learn from the nuns. The nuns teach them about Buddhism and about the Khmer language and culture. Many people come to take the five precepts. Lay Buddhists take these five precepts by following after the monks. Lay Buddhists practice five precepts and some people practice eight (or ten; many nuns for example), but for the monks it is more difficult (since they practice 227 precepts plus 4 disciplines). Some people come and I teach them how to do meditation and then once they know, they can practice on their own. Each week, many people come here to practice Buddhism; to chant, respect the Buddha and to bring food for the monks.³⁸ On the weekend, mostly men and children come here.

We have always taught the children the Cambodian language, how to read and write and about their culture. We have 7 classes with about 20 children in each. Now, many of the children are born here and a few in Cambodia, so it's different for each one. It's especially different for the people who live here compared to those who come from Cambodia. Here in Canada, I don't think as many people come to the Temple regularly because their lives are so much busier. Some people don't really understand; they don't really study but they just believe. They don't really know about the significance of the Buddha or his image. In Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma, all the children go each week to the temple for a lecture and meditation. But here, the fathers work and are busy and so they don't always bring their children to the Temple to make prayers and meditation. But, usually when we have a special ceremony the children also come. (Ven. Visal Soth 1998, Personal communication)

The Buddhist religion emphasizes personal responsibility and enlightenment. For this reason, the Temple is usually open at all hours during the day for worshippers who wish to give *dâna*³⁹, receive counseling or advice or practice meditation and prayer. Smith-Hefner (1999) confirms that in North America "the *wat*'s practical and symbolic prominence is undercut by activities -- school, shopping, and work -- that draw Khmer away from the temple and into the surrounding non-Buddhist society." (p.30) For these reasons and because of geographical factors (i.e. distance), many Khmer living in Canada

³⁸ Known as *dâna* (Pâli: *charity*)

find it difficult to attend except for special occasions such as ceremonies and festivals.

Ms. Mom Srey Neang mentioned a few of the special ceremonies that are considered to be the most important for the Cambodian people in Canada:

We have many different festivals and celebrations here in the Temple. There are five official celebrations altogether. In January, we celebrate the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha (Visâkbôchea) as well as the unannounced meeting of 1,250 monks with Buddha (Meakbôchea). On the 13th to the 16th of April, we celebrate the Cambodian New Year (Chaul Chnām) and in July we have the celebration for the relics of the Buddha. In September we have another big celebration where we remember our ancestors (Bon Phchûm Ben) and also in October (Bon Kathen) where we give new robes to the monks. All Cambodians try to come for these festivals. (Mrs. Mom Srey Neang 1998, Personal communication)

Visna Chua further explains the importance of traditional ceremonies and festivals for Khmer Buddhists:

Not all Cambodians believe in the temple, but I think most believe in the Buddha and the religion. And, I don't think all Cambodians practice regularly. A lot of people come only for special events, like the New Year or the birth and death of the Buddha. Most young people come here because their parents come here. Those who are over 35 or 40 years old really believe a lot in the Buddha. The young people come to the Temple with their friends or their parents just because it is a tradition. But some young people, like myself, come here to be with the spirit of the Buddha and to be calm.

All the people come to the Temple in hope of getting a better life or good luck in the next life or they come to practice Buddhism and to make contact with dead people (family or ancestors). But, I think the people really come here for those people who are dead. Like me, for example, I have both parents who are dead. I come here to contact my dead parents. The place to make this contact is here in the Temple. The images in this Temple are related to rituals and are used for contacting the dead. When I make a ritual before the Buddha, I can contact them. Like when I give money to someone in the temple, then I think about my father who died and he will get the merit of the money that I give.

When Cambodians come here to this Temple, everyone respects all the other people in the Temple. You think of everyone like they are your friends and your brothers. They are all considered to be from one house. After we give dāna⁴⁰ to

³⁹ Pāli: Charity

⁴⁰ Charity: This is usually food.

the monks at a ceremony, we all eat together from the same plates. (Mr. Visna Chua 1998, Personal communication)

Although Buddhist doctrine often emphasizes the individual responsibility for belief and action, the social, family and community aspects of Khmer morality are clearly evident within the Temple. From the perspective of Khmer's moral obligation to their family and homeland, their "embedded" or organic reality of the family and community takes precedence over the reborn soul's individualized identity." (Smith-Hefner 1999: 65) Maintaining strong community ties is especially important for the recent Khmer immigrants, as they often find themselves isolated and alone in a new and unfamiliar culture upon their arrival in Canada. However, many of these people find it difficult to attend the Buddhist Temple regularly because of busier schedules.

The Temple is the center of the Khmer community and thus, a place of socialization and learning of the customs and traditions that unite individuals into the larger Khmer Buddhist community. At the same time, the Temple and its images contribute to Khmer individual's conception and understanding of morality and life in general. Chapter Six will elaborate further upon the role of visual media within the Temple in this process of learning and socialization.

5.0.3: The Significance of the Khmer Temple

For Cambodians, the Buddhist temple signifies the center of religious, cultural and social life. Today, more than ever, many Cambodians realize the value of preserving

their religion, culture and heritage. They also recognize the fragility of their traditions, the importance of these within their daily lives and how these are necessary for the survival of Cambodia. For all Cambodian people, including those living in Canada, Buddhist temples and their visual media are seen as a means to re-establish a culture, religion and tradition that were almost completely destroyed through the social and political events that have devastated the Cambodian landscape over the past 30 years.

Although the recent Governments of Cambodia have claimed to respect Khmer culture, the Buddhist religion, its values and its images, these have often been completely disregarded or used as tools to gain political recognition (Keyes 1990 & 1994). The Khmer Rouge tried to obliterate the Buddhist religion along with the Khmer culture (Dyphon in Judkins 1988, Ven. Monychenda 1988, Ledgerwood in Ebihara 1994, Keyes 1994, etc.). After the invasion of the Vietnamese forces in 1979 and the subsequent formation of the People's Republic of Kampuchea⁴¹. Theravâda Buddhism and its *sangha*⁴² were partially restored in order to win public support (Richardson 1981). Religion was still viewed by the Government from the Marxist perspective as the "opium of the people" with the potential to give them "unhealthy beliefs". However, in 1989 Prime Minister Hun Sen recognized the inevitability of competing in public elections and thus apologized before a national audience for the "government's 'mistakes' towards religion." (Hiebert 1989) In April 1989, the Cambodian constitution was amended in order to once again make Buddhism the national religion. Until today, the Communist Government of Cambodia has remained ambiguous, at the very least, in its description

⁴¹ Known as the State of Cambodia after 1989.

⁴² Pâli: An assembly; Refers to the assembly of the monks (bhikkhu) and/or nuns (bhikkhuni).

and support of the role of Buddhism and its sangha in Cambodia. According to Charles Keyes (1994): “A government run by men who remain members of a Communist party has discovered that communism has little to say about national reconstruction (or construction, for that matter). The pursuit of that goal in Cambodia, the leaders have come to accept, requires looking to the Buddhist religion.” (p.64) For this same reason and because every Cambodian Government from the time of the Khmer Rouge has been Communist, many Khmer people now perceive the communist ideology and its goals as being completely antithetical to Buddhism. Keyes (1994) affirms that:

When the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975 they were confronted everywhere by the physical presence of the past in the *wats*⁴³ and shrines found in every village as well as in Phnom Penh and other towns. They did not ignore these icons of the Buddhist world, but set out literally to remove them from the Cambodian landscape or to convert them into non-religious purposes. But in the very act of doing so, they made the world they pointed to more significant for many people. (p.66)

Buddhist temples and images were once common in Cambodia. Venerable Tep Vong estimated there were about 3,600 temples and monasteries in Cambodia before 1970 (in Hiebert 1989: 37) Now, many of the Cambodian people can still remember the times before the Khmer Rouge and communism. They look back on their memories with a great sense of pride and nostalgia. These memories are like dreams; almost unreal and surely too good to ever become real again. It reminds them of the enormous loss they have suffered, but it also gives them hope of a vision of the glory that can soon be returned to Cambodia.

When asked about the significance of the Buddhist temple for Cambodians, Ms. Mom Srey Neang explained:

I believe that the temple is so important for Cambodia! It is not only important for Cambodian people in Cambodia, but for Cambodian people living in other countries like Canada. Cambodians respect the Buddha and only the Buddhist religion can resolve the Cambodian problems. Every Cambodian temple around the world is a center where all Cambodians can come together and celebrate traditional ceremonies, festivals and customs. Buddhism teaches non-violence, respect for life and the laws of nature and this is important for Cambodia. Buddhism is about reducing human suffering and bringing peace and democracy. This is why the Communists do not like Buddhism; because it is completely opposite to what they believe. The Communists have tried many times to eliminate the Buddhist religion. The temple is really the only center that can bring peace to Cambodia. The monks are examples to us and they can help us find real peace (Mrs. Mom Srey Neang 1998, Personal communication).

Mr. Sokha Ly confirms that the Buddhist religion, its temples and images were an essential part of Cambodian life before the Khmer Rouge came to power. He believes that they are still irreplaceable components not only within his own life, but for all Cambodians living inside and outside of Cambodia and other people as well.

My family and I used to go to the temple because we knew the Buddhist religion was important for all Cambodian people. The Buddha gave good advice to all people not to kill anything. Everyone in Cambodia used to go to the temple to respect his advice and the people lived in security before the war in 1970. Nobody thought that the Communists would kill like they did.

Because all the temples and statues were destroyed in Cambodia, the images and temples are very important to help us remember Buddha and to rebuild the Buddhist religion. We have to come to the Temple to respect and to listen to the Head Master in the monastery, like Venerable Visal Soth. After the Buddha, he can give us the best advice. So, we respect him very much. Some people don't know about religion, but they come here so they can learn more.

This Buddhist Temple is important for the Cambodian people to remember the Buddhist religion. I think we should build temples in Canada and in other countries; real temples, you see, because this is important for Canada too. In Canada if there are no temples and statues of the Buddha, then I think many Cambodian people who live in Canada would make big mistakes like stealing and robbing, etc. This shows them a good way to live. All the statues in Cambodia were destroyed by the Communists and when the people have no religion then they do anything and have no control. If they want to kill, then they will kill. Without the religion, the people know nothing. So, the images and the

⁴³ Pāli: Temple

temple are very important for the Cambodian people (Mr. Sokha Ly 1999, Personal communication).

Buddhist temples and their images are practically inseparable. The temple is defined and identified by its use of visual media and particularly, the statue of Buddha. At the same time however, the Buddhist visual media is an integral part of the educational function of the temple. Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung recalled the educational role of visual media in the temples of Cambodia and its importance of teaching morality to the Cambodian people today.

The Buddhist pictures here (in this Temple) are not enough. Under the Sihanouk Kingdom⁴⁴, the Cambodian people did not know about destruction, so life was so good and comfortable. We never knew about war. In all the temples we had nice pictures. The images of the temple help everybody to first think before doing something. Everyone has to think; "Is it good or bad"? If you are doing either good or bad, the effect will come after. Secondly, we have to keep the same way of the Buddha. So, the pictures here now are really not enough; before there were a lot more. This is important for Cambodian society. (Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung 1999, Personal communication)

Each of the study participants confirmed that the Buddhist religion, its temples and images are essential in learning Buddhist morality and for the future of Cambodia and its people. They see the Khmer Rouge and communism, along with its leaders and the countless atrocities they have committed against the Cambodian people, as a very dark hour in the history of their country from which all have suffered and learned. The lesson is simple but painful; do not forget the Buddhist teachings of respect for life, wisdom, tradition, individual choice and democracy. Most Cambodians believe that by following the Buddhist precepts and teachings, further tragedy and suffering will be prevented and their country can rebuild itself as a successful, intellectual and strong nation that will gain

the respect of other countries around the world. This seems to be a very real and achievable dream for most Cambodians. In the realization of this objective, temples and visual media are thought to be essential components.

5.0.4: The Khmer Temple and the End of Suffering

The Buddhist temple and its images are also seen as having a therapeutic effect on individuals who have suffered through the recent events of Cambodian history and extremely traumatic experiences in their personal lives. Every Cambodian shares in the suffering caused by the death of family members or friends. The images of Buddhism that reflect the serenity and peacefulness of the Buddhist teachings seem to provide these people with an inner calmness and a sense of relief from the pain of death and separation from those they love. It is not surprising that the most significant architecture in Cambodia in the last 20 years has been the construction of the Choeung Ek Memorial and Tuol Sleng Museum, shrines built at the site of former extermination camps. (Duffy 1994, Keyes 1994) The same rationale would apply to the Buddhamundul Monastery and Meditation Center which is currently under construction 20 kilometres east of Phnom Penh. This large internationally funded project is meant to serve as a symbol of national culture and pride as well as a center for Buddhist education and training (Ven. Savann & The Council of Association of Dharma Mission 1998). The need for inner spiritual peace and contentment may partly explain the massive restoration of at least 2,400 temples and

⁴⁴ From 1954 to 1970.

monasteries in Cambodia, according to 1989 estimates. (Ven. Vong in Hiebert 1989)

This reasoning leads us to the flourishing of Khmer temples in the late 1980s and 1990s in the United States and in several other countries, not to mention the importance of the Khmer Temple in Montreal and its imagery for those who have come to Canada⁴⁵.

Mr. Visna Chua conveyed the therapeutic importance of the Montreal Buddhist Temple and its images for himself:

When I first came here (to Canada) as a boy, I was alone and it was very difficult. I used to come to this Temple where I felt comfortable and where I could remember my homeland and family. Sometimes, I would ask the Venerable if I could stay late in the Temple. I would fall asleep under Buddha's statue because I felt safe there where I knew Buddha was watching over me.

My religion really means a lot to me. When I come to the Temple, everything in my mind is clear; it comes to me. When I am here in the Temple, I think of Buddha and about my own spirit and many other good things. When I come here, I meet people who are from the same religion and I feel that I am not alone. It helps me to gain confidence. I also have memories here of when I was young in Cambodia. I remember both the good and the bad times in Cambodia.

Here in Canada the society is very good compared to the one I knew in Cambodia, but it is a very different culture and you have to adapt and sometimes you have to change. Now, I feel that I have two cultures. When I am outside I try to integrate with everyone else, but when I come to the Temple and because of the Buddhist religion, I feel very relaxed. (1999, Personal communication)

Visna sees the value of the Buddhist religion, the Temple and its images in his own life, even though he is living in Canada far from his family and homeland. His opinions probably reflect those of many other young Cambodian Canadians.

Mrs. Neang elaborates more on the healing attributes of the Temple for each Cambodian person:

Most of the Cambodian people in Canada remember their traditional customs and images when they come to the Temple, but this depends a lot on the

⁴⁵ Gyallay-Pap (1990) & Smith -Hefner (1999) further explain this phenomenon in the United States while Kalab in Ebihara (1994) writes about this issue in France.

person. The Temple is the one place where we can do this. Cambodia is not a country that is developed like Canada. So when the people come here, they remember that their own country still needs many things. So, even though they have become very comfortable in their lives here, they still think about their country where they were born. (Mrs. Mom Srey Neang 1998, Personal communication)

The therapeutic effect of the Temple and its images for individuals, in this case, is derived not only from memories of their homeland and family in Cambodia but from the empathy for others who are still suffering and living under less fortunate circumstances. Buddha taught that realization of enlightenment required a balance between both knowledge and compassion. When a person understands that their body and mind are “pure nature” (i.e. one with nature), then “every action or gesture is solely for the benefit of others; for that of all things” (Varadhammo 1996: 16, 17). The therapeutic healing benefit of the Temple and its visual media for individuals is interwoven into a complex network of Buddhist teachings and philosophy that result in multiple healing benefits for each individual within the community. From a Buddhist perspective, an individual’s mental, spiritual and physical healing is realized not only at a personal level but as the result of bringing many individuals into a common understanding of social problems through the awareness of greater levels of *mangala*⁴⁶. This is accomplished through the role of the Temple and its visual media. The Temple helps each person to find mental, spiritual and physical release from the pressures of daily life in Canadian society and from the loneliness and grieving for family and friends. It also helps them to bring peace of mind through meditation, prayer or concentration. At the same time, each person can

⁴⁶ Pāli: *Good omen or blessing*; This is a sign that something good is about to happen to a person, society or the entire world depending on the *mangala* level. (Refer to section 1.0.3.4)

develop and nurture a sense of religious and cultural identity within a larger group and compassion for others in Cambodia and around the world. The therapeutic use of visual media will be discussed in greater detail in section 6.0.2.

5.0.5: Chapter Summary

Cambodian people living in Cambodia and in countries around the world are a part of all the achievements of the long and proud history of both a Khmer and Buddhist civilization. Buddhism, its temples and its imagery are defining elements of the Cambodian culture. The Cambodian people now living in Canada share this heritage. But, they also share the tragedy of their recent history; specifically, the rise of the Khmer Rouge to power in Cambodia, its “killing fields”⁴⁷ and the social and political instability caused by repressive communist governments since this time.

The Khmer Rouge Communists and subsequent Cambodian Governments have since generally disregarded Khmer culture and the Buddhist religion along with its temples and artifacts (Keyes 1994). As a result, many Khmer today believe that communism is a moral inversion of Buddhism. Each of the interview participants associated the communist ideology with revolution, radical change, and the destruction of not only the Buddhist religion and its values but also traditional Cambodian culture. Unlike the more radical forms of Marxist and Maoist communism, Buddhism is based on respect for human rights; freedom of speech and democracy. Buddhism also teaches

respect for the older generation, wisdom and traditions, while communism does not. In addition, Buddhism is centered on the appreciation of life and the continuity of social order whereas communism, at least in its more radical form, is based on social upheaval often demonstrating little concern for human life. It is for this reason that every Cambodian person interviewed in this study believed that the Buddhist religion offers the only hope for the renewal of Cambodia and a strong new country. They wish to follow the Buddhist teachings and precepts in order to prevent further tragedy and suffering. For this purpose, the Temple and its imagery has an educational function for Cambodian people to learn about Buddhist morality. It is also thought to have a therapeutic effect on those Cambodians who have suffered through the traumatic events in recent Cambodian history. The rebuilding of Buddhist temples and the reconstruction of Buddhist images is thought to be essential for the survival of Cambodian society.

⁴⁷ The rice fields of Cambodia where over 2 million people died because of war, disease, starvation and genocide.

Chapter Six

Buddhist Imagery and Education

6.0.1: Introduction

In this chapter, I present the data that was gathered in the interviews with the six study participants on the subject of the Khmer Pagoda's visual media and also education and learning in relation to this visual media. Section 6.0.2 deals with the views of the six Cambodian Canadians regarding the significance and purpose of the Buddhist imagery within the Khmer Pagoda for themselves, their families and for the Cambodian community as a whole. The next section, 6.0.3, is related to their perspectives on the production of Khmer Buddhist visual media. The questions that I asked in order to elicit their responses in these two sections correspond to those of *Part II: Meaning* and *Part III: Education and Art* of the interview schedule (See Appendix B). In section 6.0.4, the study participants elaborate their views on how the Buddhist visual media could apply to education. The topics of their discussion are also directed by the questions found in *Part III: Education and Art* of the questionnaire (See Appendix B).

6.0.2: The Significance of Khmer Buddhist Images

Khmer Buddhists in Cambodia as well as those who emigrate to other countries, such as Canada, continue to reflect on images of the past (Pou in Jessup & Zephir 1997,

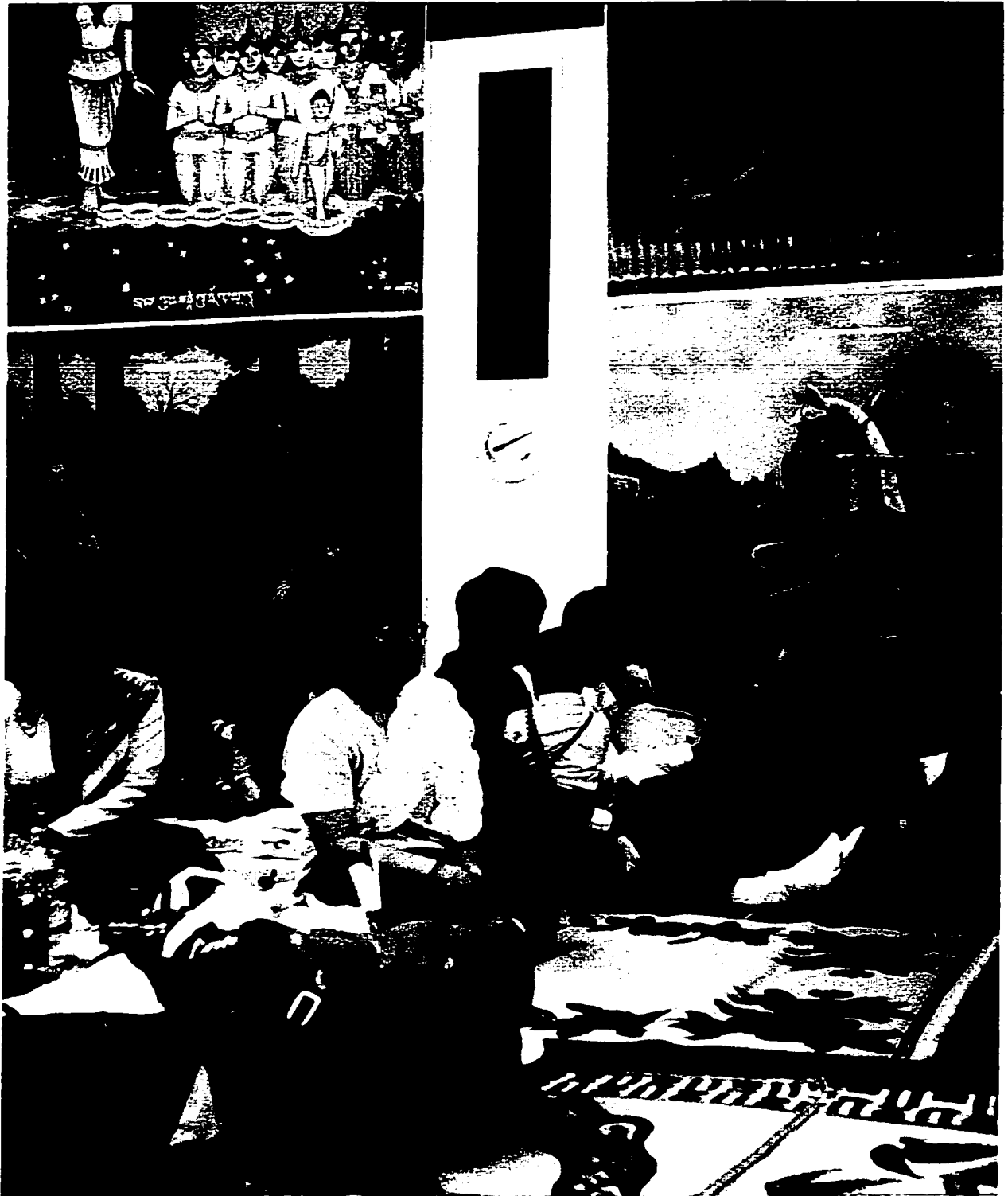


Figure 8: Education through Images

A mother is showing and explaining to her children the meaning of a Buddhist painting. This demonstrates the informality of a Temple celebration where people sit together on the floor with the food they have prepared to give as *dāna* (Pāli: charity) to the monk.

Thompson in Jessup & Zephir 1997). Imagery is evidently an important part of the daily lives of many of the Cambodian people and it also plays a central role in the construction of their specific individual and cultural reality.

The visual media within the Khmer Temple in Montreal serves many practical functions. It is intended to restore memories of life in Cambodia as well as to remind individuals of their traditions and how these are necessary for their life within a much different culture and context. The imagery also helps to preserve the Khmer heritage and culture which have become extremely fragile in recent years due to social and political events in Cambodia. Most importantly, the visual media of the Khmer Temple functions as a tool to socialize individuals of the community into the Buddhist way of living and to educate them about Buddhist values and principles of morality. Mrs. Mom Srey Neang elaborates:

Cambodian people have a strong attachment to the pictures that you see here (See Figures 7, 8, 9, 10 & 14). The pictures reflect the objectives and principles of Buddha. For example, all the paintings teach morals so that people will not commit crimes; sexual misconduct or killing. This is so important for people to remember and to avoid problems for themselves. They help Cambodian people to do good actions, especially the five precepts which are:

- 1) don't kill
- 2) don't steal
- 3) don't have sexual misconduct
- 4) don't lie, and
- 5) don't drink intoxicating substances.

These are the five precepts that all Buddhists respect. Some of the nuns take eight precepts; three additional ones (but only if they practice for 1 or 3 days a week). These are:

- 6) don't eat after 12:00 noon until the next day
- 7) don't engage in entertainment such as performances
dances, TV, movies, music, etc. and
- 8) don't put any scent or cosmetics on your body.

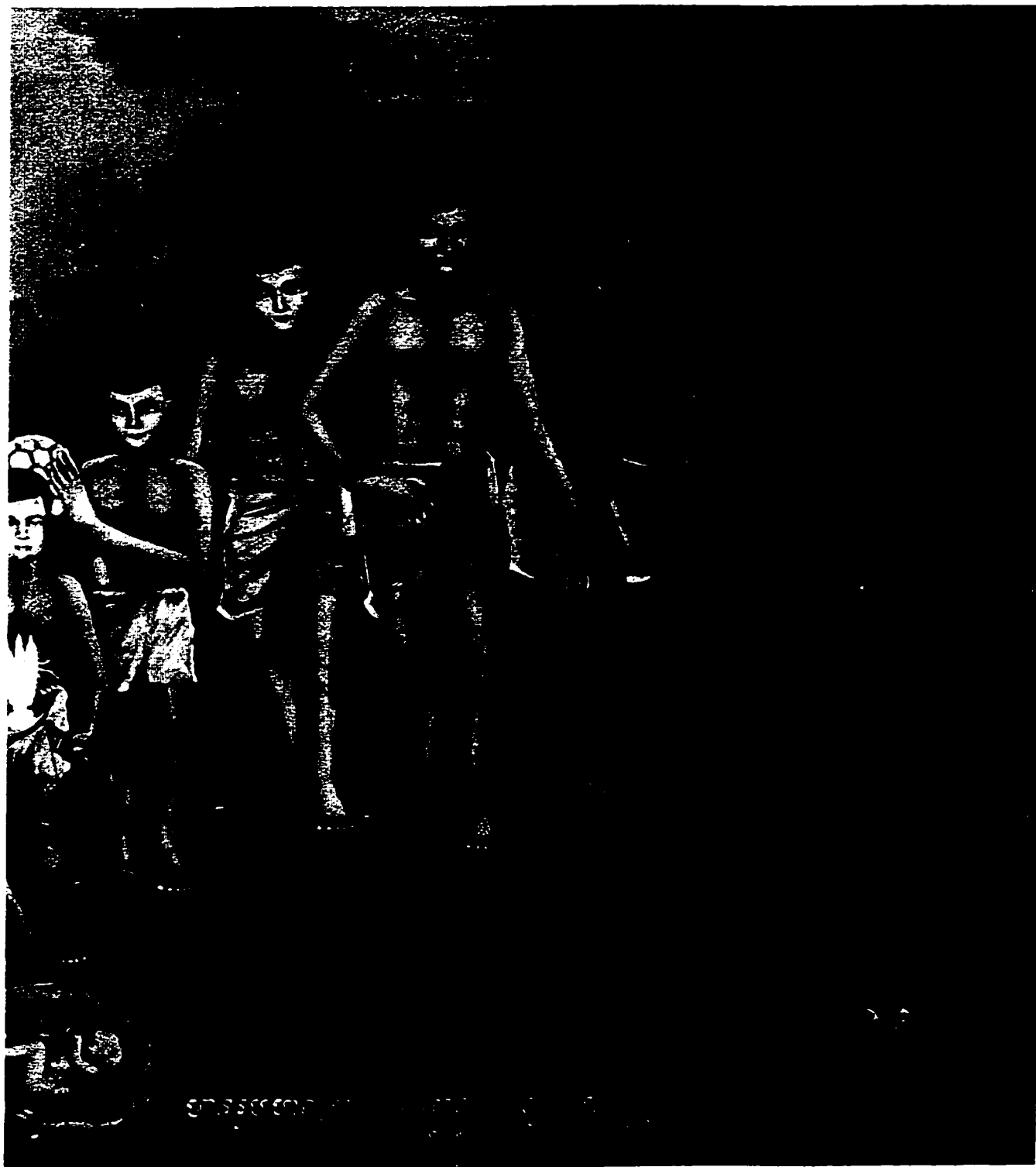


Figure 9: Cycle of Life

Jatâka (Skt: story) painting by a Cambodian artist illustrating the cycle of life, death and rebirth.
This is found on the side wall of the Pagoda.



Figure 10: Consequences of Bad Actions

Jatâka painting by a Cambodian artist illustrating the consequences of bad actions. This is placed above the painting showing the cycle of life (Figure 9) on the side wall of the Pagoda.

The nuns who dedicate their life to Buddhism take ten precepts and this is very difficult⁴⁸ and the monks take 227 (plus 4 disciplines⁴⁹). If everyone can respect the precepts, then we all have good health and peace with our neighbors. These laws of nature help us to live in this world without creating problems. The images that you see here (See Figure 10) remind the people about these laws and that is why they are so important. (Mrs. Mom Srey Neang 1998, Personal communication)

Venerable Visal Soth explains more about the function of visual media and art from a Khmer Buddhist perspective. He alludes to different individual interpretations and understandings of images depending on a person's age, knowledge of the world and level

⁴⁸ These precepts are: 9) don't sleep on high, soft or comfortable mattresses since this brings pleasure, and 10) don't take, handle or seek after money, gold or diamonds (i.e. material wealth).

⁴⁹ These include: 1) No outside business activity, 2) Detachment; Analyze and reflect upon all objects and offerings as being only part of this world (samsâra) and as either fire, water, air or soil. 3) Entry sakharak seilak; Pâli: Be happy with whatever is given, 4) Bademok sakharak seilak; Pâli: Believe and respect all 227 precepts and 4 disciplines.

of enlightenment. His own knowledge of the visual media demonstrates a deep understanding of ultimate reality.

The arts can be used to educate the community about a philosophy or about good and bad. In Marxism for example, the arts are considered to be materials of interest that show ideas. All religions have their own arts. Some people don't need the arts because they practice the religion in their minds. I see that many cultures and religions have arts to help them. For example, in the temple, what is the Buddha? It is art. Everyone perceives the Buddha and then they can show respect. If we had only bare walls or mirrors on the walls, then it would not work. If there are statues and pictures of Buddha, then everyone can practice Buddhism. I think that images help everyone to practice their tradition or religion.

It is one thing for a lay person to relate to the images, but for a monk it is different. I study, write and practice meditation and try to purify my mind. I have no wife or children. But, if you have a wife or children, you are busy every day; In a way, you are suffering. For practicing Buddhism, most people have to see a picture, whether this is a girl or boy, man, woman, etc., and this helps them to eliminate all suffering and purifies and preaches to their mind. Paintings help everyone to practice Buddhism and to eliminate suffering. After someone sees the images, they practice the teachings. However, it is only helpful to see these pictures. It is also very important to practice and to study about the Buddha. The Buddha image here helps the Cambodian people to think about the Buddha; to perceive him and to make up their minds to believe in Buddhism (See Figure 3). It's like when a Christian sees the cross of Christianity which is a symbol for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit or the dying Jesus Christ which is also a symbol. With Buddhism it is a little different, but when it comes to the use of symbols it's the same idea.

The images are different for the younger children who are brought up in Canada and the older people. They are different for each person. If someone is highly educated, they will understand the ideas. Someone who does not have education will not understand the meanings; they will understand some, but they will like seeing it because it is nice to look at. There are different arts and they all have different meanings. (Ven. Visal Soth 1998, Personal communication)

The ability of individuals to comprehend the visual media from various levels of understanding and reality is confirmed by Mr. Visna Chua. He explains:

The older people who come here understand the meaning of each picture. But personally, I don't know the meanings of everything. Every temple has a big Buddha statue (See Figure 3). When you go and face this Buddha, you have to salute in order to show respect. Imagery is very important for the Buddhist religion. The pictures tell the story of the Buddha; from the parents of the

Buddha, when he was a baby until he died (See Figures 7 & 8). Every picture recounts this story.

The people think of the images and pictures during the festival. Because of this, they can imagine the birth and death of the Buddha. But many people, like the young people, find it difficult to imagine. The people try to imagine in their life when and how the Buddha lived. For the people, the Buddha is a separate (important or sacred) thing. We can't touch the Buddha; we respect the Buddha because it is a higher Thing. But, the paintings we can touch. (Mr. Visna Chua 1999, Personal communication)

Mr. Sokha Ly reflects on the purpose of the paintings and statues within the Khmer Temple. He confirms the views shared by the other participants.

I know very little about the statues and paintings. They were put in the world so that people could come and see the pictures on the wall, the picture of the Buddha, the birth place of the Buddha. So they can say; "Oh, the Buddha was born there and like this." The pictures tell stories about the Buddha from the beginning of his life to the end. I learn from these pictures. I come and I see. It's like Christians who see the cross or the image of Christ. They say; "I know how my God looks in the world now." So when I see the pictures, in a way it becomes real for me. The images give me a vision in my mind. I can be a nice person but if I do not have a Buddhist statue, then I will not know what to do. It helps me to understand. (1999, Personal communication)

Mr. Sovin Yong expresses a similar view and also explains how the imagery is used for Khmer cultural ceremonies. He speculates on why they are so important for this purpose, although he admits; "I don't really understand everything about my culture."

Each of these paintings tells a story (See Figures 7, 8, 9 & 10). Even myself, I still don't know very much about the details of the stories. Only the Master (Venerable Visal Soth) here knows what each picture is about and the full story. The Buddhist images mean a lot to my people at every moment. In general, I think Cambodian people pay close attention to details that many other people would not. It is difficult to explain. We believe that everything is somehow connected.

The images here in the Temple are very helpful for the Cambodian people, especially the older people, who come here to worship the Buddha. Many of the older people worship everyday. But, most people cannot come as often because they have to work. At the big ceremonies every year, like Bonn Phchoum Ben⁵⁰

⁵⁰ An important ceremony celebrated by Khmer Buddhists in September.

that commemorate the spirits of the dead, everyone has to come. At this ceremony, the dead people come back to the Temple to look for their relatives. If they don't see them here, then they will be very sad. This is the most important ceremony for Cambodian people. I come here to give food to my father and to show respect for him. At these ceremonies everyone has to come to worship and to pray to these images. So, the images are a big part of all these ceremonies. But at New Years, they are not as important as at Bon Phchoum Ben. Much of the time, I don't really understand everything about my culture. Sometimes we just do things without really knowing why. (Mr. Sovin Yong 1999, Personal communication)

From a conventional perspective, the visual media of the Temple constructs the cultural reality of most Cambodian Buddhists who attend. As explained in section 2.0.2, the Buddhist art and images are used to guide those individuals who conceptualize from a conventional or cultural reality onto the right path of life and toward greater enlightenment. Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung elaborated upon her understanding of this function of the visual media within the Temple and images in general. She makes a comparison between the role of visual media within the Temple and that found in a museum.

The images in this Temple and also those that I have seen in the museum are important for life and also the life of the culture. The pictures here in this Temple help us to keep a good way for our life and the pictures of the museum demonstrate to my children how to integrate into this society. They show how Canadians and this country bring a new understanding of life, which I think represents good fortune and luck. (Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung 1999, Personal communication)

According to this participant, both religious and non-religious visual media represent beliefs and concepts. It is used as a means to socialize and educate people into a Buddhist or secular culture through visual perception.

Like most of the other study participants, Mrs. Phoung also raised the possibility of the Buddhist visual media to contain religious energy. Particularly, the statues of

Buddha and Bodhisattvas are thought to be “saturated or invigorated with morality, knowledge and wisdom” (Schopen 1997: 158). Concepts and beliefs are sometimes referred to as *intentions* or *potentials* since they represent and translate into actions (Pāli: kamma) realized in the individual’s mind and yet to unfold. This nun observed the following:

These pictures here (in this Temple) represent the energy and potential of the Buddha. The Buddhist religion believes in the intelligence and good intentions of the individual. The Buddha had good intentions and tried to do everything good. He wanted to save his energy and potential for achieving compassion for others and wisdom. The Buddha had ten pre-incarnations (i.e. Bodhisattvas) and in each of these incarnations he tried to do his best to reach his fullest potential. He died each time and after he died he always knew which life he had lived before. In ten lives, ten died too. He had ten potentials and in the last life, he got his highest potential. His potential was always reflected in his appearance. So, the images are also meant to teach these to the people. Here in our Temple, we have just the two highest potentials represented (See Figure 5). Only two out of ten; this is not enough! (Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung 1999, Personal communication)

The belief that certain images contain a higher concentration of religious energy, wisdom and knowledge was also mentioned in the earlier statement of Mr. Visna Chua. He said, “For the people, the Buddha (statue) is a separate (important or sacred) thing (See Figure 3 & 4). We can’t touch the Buddha; we respect the Buddha because it is a higher Thing. But, the paintings we can touch.” (1999, Personal communication) Mr. Sokha Ly also confirmed that; “I always get inspiration from the images in the temple. But, I think that the statue of the Buddha is the most meaningful for me. To me, all the rest are less important. The Buddha here is more than just an image or a statue.” (1999, Personal communication) According to all the participants, the statues of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas are the most respected images in the Temple.

Other paintings and pictures were thought to be especially inspirational and



Figure 11: Landscape Painting

Painting by a Cambodian artist of a traditional Cambodian landscape. This is found on the side wall of the Pagoda.

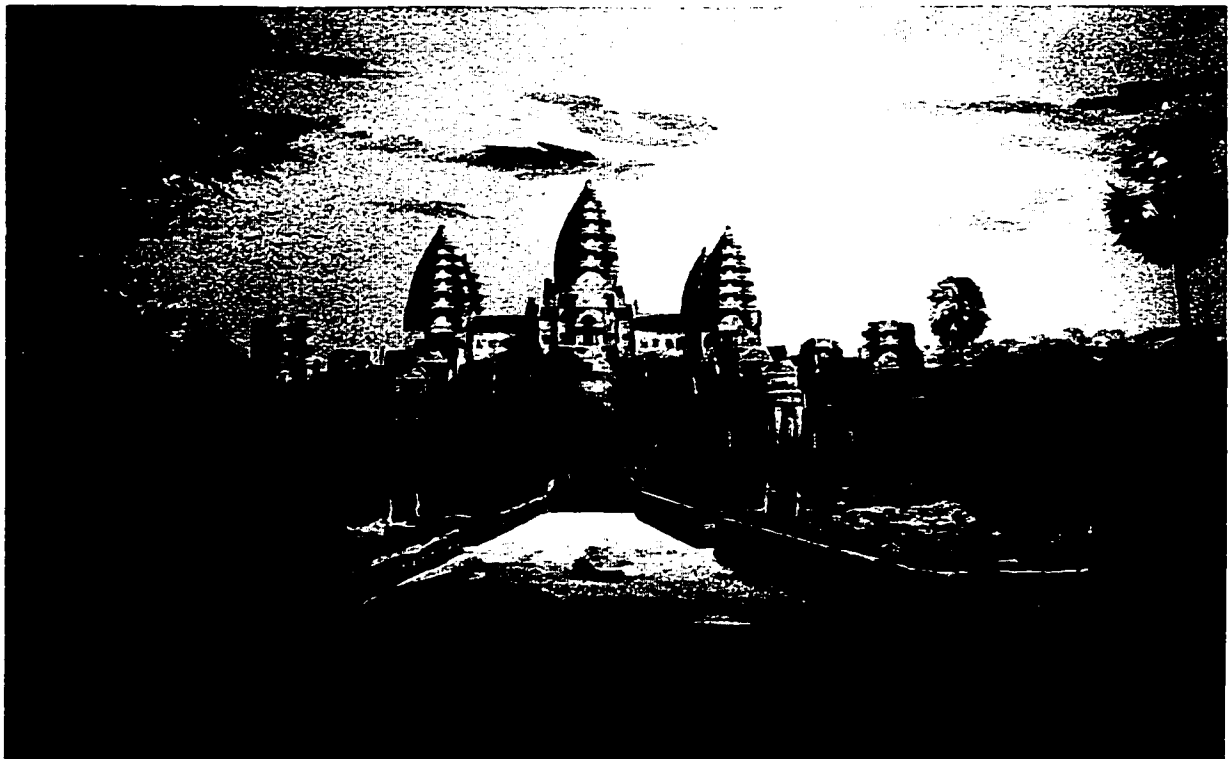


Figure 12: Angkor Temple

Painting by a Cambodian artist of Angkor Wat (Pâli: Temple) at sunset. This is the largest Temple in Cambodia and is a national symbol. It was built at the height of the Khmer civilization from the 9th to the 13th centuries. This is found on the back wall of the Pagoda.



Figure 13: Traditional Dancers

Painting by a Cambodian artist of traditional dancers dressed in Cambodian costumes. The woman wearing the white dress in the center of the painting is Bophadavi, daughter of King Sihanouk. This is found on the back wall of the Pagoda.

educational for the Cambodian people in general and specifically for the individuals who were interviewed, although these were considered to be less significant than the Buddha and Bodhisattva statues. Most of the study participants viewed the Angkor Temple as the most prominent symbol of Cambodian culture and life (See Figure 12). Images associated with the Angkor Temple and the Angkor period of Cambodian history⁵¹ (described in section 1.0.3.2) such as the traditional dancers and statues were also believed to have extraordinary meaning within the lives of Cambodian people today (See

⁵¹ Considered to be from the Ninth to Fourteenth Centuries.

Figure 13). These pictures were thought to inspire nationalism and remind the people of their common heritage. Mrs. Mom Srey Neang further explained:

The Temple of Angkor is one of the most famous temples in the world and we have many pictures of this here. We look at these (pictures) and the traditional dancers and these help us to have courage and to keep our association with Cambodia. These pictures are most important for the next generation of Cambodians. To explain to them that they have to keep and continue their traditions for future generations in this world. This is especially true for the younger generation of Cambodians who are born in Canada. (Mrs. Mom Srey Neang 1998, Personal communication)

Mr. Sokha Ly agreed with the views that she expressed. However, he added:

For us, the Cambodian people, the Angkor Temple really defines our culture and ideals, even today. It is really a great wonder of the world. It is like the pyramids in Egypt. In fact, it is interesting that it is opposite on the globe; that is, if you look from a satellite, one is in the West and the other is in the East. The Angkor Temple has such complicated architecture that many people who have tried to study this cannot even begin to understand its complexity. This Temple and the Buddhist religion are the most important symbols of Cambodia. (1999, Personal communication)

The many pictures of the Angkor Temple as well as the paintings of Cambodian landscapes (See Figures 11 & 12) help these Khmer immigrants in Montreal recall both the pleasant and unpleasant mutual events of their lives in Cambodia and the problems they now share. This visual media gives them a renewed sense of community and belonging and provides the younger generation with continuity of traditions and Khmer Buddhist insights that assist them in coping with the many problems of life here in Canada.

Although the *jatâka*⁵² paintings of the Buddha's life and previous lives, which cover over half the walls of the Pagoda, are the most obvious and defining feature of its

⁵² Sanskrit: Story

interior, these images were usually mentioned as having a more subtle and indirect effect in the lives of the participants (See Figure 7 & 14). During my field observation for this study, I often noticed the people discussing the meaning of these jātāka paintings or comparing them to circumstances and events within their own lives. It is quite common to see an older person such as a parent or one of the Temple nuns explaining the moral implications of one of these stories to a younger person (See Figure 8). The jātāka paintings depicting narratives of the Buddha's life and former lives have traditionally played an enormous role in the educational process (Cowell et al 1895, Gombrich 1985, McGill in Schober 1997). Mrs. Neang explained:

When I leave the Temple and go home, the Buddhist images stay on my mind all the time. For example, this picture is about someone who does a bad action. (See Figure 10) So, I keep this on my mind and when I do something I remember; "Oh, no! I won't do this bad action. This action is out of the way of the Buddha." I try to go on the way of the Buddha and never go out of this way. I keep this on my mind. (Mrs. Mom Srey Neang 1998, Personal communication)

The jātāka paintings obviously play a central role in the preservation of Khmer Buddhist values and morality while at the same time, conveying a specific cultural reality in the minds of the Khmer Buddhists.

At the ceremonies and in religious practices within the Temple, these paintings as well as the statues of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas are extremely significant objects of attention. My numerous field observations of the Temple ceremonies and practices confirmed this assumption. The interviews with the six study participants also revealed the value of the Buddhist paintings and images in constructing a way of seeing the world and a specific reality. Mr. Sovin Yong elaborated:

During the ceremonies or when I meditate, I see these Buddha pictures in my mind. When I worship, I see what the images mean to me. I don't know exactly how to explain this. If I do good, then I know I will also have good results and if I do bad, then I know things will go bad. But when I pray, I see the Buddha and then I remember all about my actions and I know if I will have good or bad results.

The images of Buddha are always in my mind. Every time I wake up or go somewhere, it is still in my mind. Even when I travel, the images are very alive in my mind. In my daily life, like when I am driving somewhere or even on my tie, I may see a small Buddha. When I am driving, I pray and I know that Buddha is very close. Everything that I do, I know that Buddha is in that also. I can't really compare it with anything, but I know that it is real. In my home before I go to bed, I pray to Buddha to help my teacher and my brother; I think this is good for them. The Buddha that I see

in my mind when I pray is the same Buddha that I see when I come here to the Temple. The Buddha is real for me and this is different from other images that I see. For example, in a museum when I see a painting, I walk away and then it is gone. But in the Temple, I see all the pictures and it's like they are always real. To me, there is only one Buddha and this is how I imagine Him. (Mr. Sovin Yong 1999, Personal communication)



Figure 14: Buddha Emanations

Painting by a Cambodian artist which shows five emanations of the Buddha. This is found in one of the upper rooms in the Temple.

The quiet-spoken and highly respected nun, Mrs. Phoung, expressed a very similar point of view. She explained how the Buddhist visual media is applied to situations that arise in her daily life.

If I come here to the Temple or if I stay at home, it's the same because the power of Buddha and these pictures remind me of life and they help me all the time and in everything that I do. The most important images for me are the emanations; that is, the ten emanations of Buddha (See Figure 5 & 14). From these, I learn the potentials of the Buddha. I also read from a book about these emanations and potentials. Each emanation has one potential which describes the different characteristics of the Buddha. I apply these to my life, depending on the situation. So, at a different time when I have a different problem, I will see a different emanation. (1999, Personal communication)

Mrs. Phoung demonstrates an exceptional understanding of Buddhist visual media which she learns from studying books about Buddhism and also from her practice of Buddhism within the Temple and then by applying this learning to her personal life experiences. In the case of these two previous participants, visual media is used as an educational tool to gain practical knowledge that can be used to cope with everyday circumstances as they arise.

The Khmer Buddhists who were interviewed for this study described the importance and the purpose of the Buddhist images in the Khmer Pagoda of Canada for themselves and Cambodians in general. Their perspectives reflect how the Temple's imagery is an irreplaceable component within their lives. The purpose of this visual media is to restore memories of a previous life in Cambodia as well as to remind the people of their traditions and how these are necessary within their new lives here in Canada. In addition, the many pictures, paintings and statues of the Khmer Temple also

function as tools to educate and thus construct a shared Khmer Buddhist reality for each person of this community.

6.0.3: The Production of Khmer Buddhist Images

The production of images in the Khmer Buddhist culture is considered to be a skill that requires not only great technical ability but also knowledge of Theravâda Buddhism and a deep understanding of the Khmer culture. The acquisition of the necessary knowledge demands that the artist be dedicated to the achievement of a character that reflects Buddhist morality and virtues (Coomaraswamy 1934). Imitation and the preservation of traditions is thought to be the basis of successful art production (Coomaraswamy 1934, Tiranasar 1984, Murthy 1991). This often requires many years study and practice of Buddhist teachings. By the same accord, an artist who wishes to represent the Khmer culture and values must be a Khmer or at least, understand Khmer life from within.

In this section, I will outline the opinions of the interview participants on the production of art from a Khmer Buddhist perspective. Each person responded to questions regarding the production of Khmer Buddhist art and visual media. I first asked: “How do the specific features of the Buddhist images and art in this Pagoda reflect the Cambodian Buddhist community?”. I then asked them to reflect on the specific media, styles, patterns and criteria that should or could be used in the production of their cultural/religious art.

Each person in this study believed that the visual media of the Temple depicted unique Cambodian features. These features are usually thought to be slight variations in the surface details of the imagery, which are similar to those found in other neighboring Theravâda countries. Venerable Visal Soth explained:

The theories of Buddhism are the same in each country and culture. This is taken from the life of the Buddha. But in each nation, Buddhism has a different effect on the imagery because of the culture. The pictures are the same subjects because they are taken from the same history of the Buddha. Theravâda Buddhism has the same meaning in any country, but this is different from Mahâyâna Buddhism⁵³. For example, Cambodian, Sri Lankan, Burmese, and Thai pictures have the same meaning. In each country, artists draw similar pictures based on the same Buddhist books. If you read a Thai or Cambodian book, they will have a different language but the meaning and the pictures will be similar because they both write about the same Theravâda Buddhist teachings. (Ven. Visal Soth 1998, Personal communication)

Sovin Yong described a perspective which is quite similar:

The style of the image does not mean anything too much by itself. A person can still draw Buddha images if they are not perfect, but it's the mind that draws them that is the most important. For example, the styles of the Buddha in China, Japan, Korea and Burma are all different. But it is more important that the people respect the image because the meaning is still the same. The cultural and contextual differences are evident in different areas but it is also true that these tell the same story and give a similar message. So you can make changes, but the Buddha will always be the Buddha. (1999, Personal communication)

Again, Mr. Sokha Ly extended further information based on the same viewpoint:

These pictures here are Cambodian and they are a little different from Thai (See Figures 7 & 8). Although it is the same ideas and the same person, they are different. When I visited Thailand, I recognized this immediately! Each person who makes these images makes them like those of which he is familiar. The differences between Thai and Cambodian pictures are in the faces and in the colors. I think the colors of Cambodian paintings are more natural; not as bright. And the faces are Khmer. In Thailand, many sculptures actually come from Cambodia. Also, the pictures of the traditional dancers are from Cambodia. (See Figure 13) (1999, Personal communication)

⁵³ Sanskrit: "Great vehicle" Buddhism; Most common form of Buddhism practiced in Southeast Asia.

Facial features were the most common cultural difference noticed in the production style of Buddhist visual media. However, some of the respondents, such as Mr. Visna Chua, found color variations quite noticeable:

In terms of making these images, I think it is possible that they could be made of other things. The material is not so important. But, the paint or color should be brown or gold for the statues and the shape is also very important. The styles and techniques are very important too because each country has a different style. Maybe it is the same Buddha, but the face is not the same. So, it is very important to get a maker who is Cambodian because if you take a maker who is Indian, then the Buddha will not be the same. Like the pictures, it is the same idea but the look is a little bit different. I can easily differentiate between those of other nationalities, like the Thai. The clothes and the shape of the face show the most noticeable differences. (Mr. Visna Chua 1999, Personal communication)

Mr. Chua has pointed out several defining elements of a Cambodian style of image rendering, painting and sculpting.

Since the country and culture were seen as the determining factor in the variations between images, the possibility of a Canadian or European style of Buddhist images was suggested. Mrs. Mom Srey Neang contemplated:

I know that probably some Europeans have painted Buddha. I am not really sure; but each country, like Cambodia, has its own way of drawing or painting Buddha, especially the face of Buddha. So, it really depends on the particular painting or sculpture and the country where it is made. (1998, Personal communication)

The context of the individual image maker is thought to be the most important criteria in the construction of a Buddhist picture, painting or sculpture. The Head Monk of the Montreal Pagoda, Venerable Visal Soth, added another comment on styles of Buddhist art production:

When it comes to styles that should be used for making images of the Buddha, it is up to each person. There will be a different study and practice for each individual, so each person will also interpret the image differently. (Ven. Visal Soth 1998, Personal communication)

Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung, the nun who was interviewed concluded with a few words of great wisdom:

It is possible for a person to represent Buddhist principles by using other styles of images that are not used in the Temple. To be smart is also to adapt to all different kinds of styles and images. In the Buddhist religion, the Buddha asked the people to be smart all the time because intelligence is important for everyone. It's not to have money, a big house and car, diamonds, and everything else. The most important thing in your life is intelligence; this is so wise. For example, medical texts for many years said that the wrist only has 278 blood vessels, but the Buddha said there were 318. Now, doctors have found that there really are 318 because some are very small. If you are smart, you will save your life. You have to choose to bring your life onto a good way. If you know a bad person and if you are smart, then you will know this is not a good person to be with. The Buddhist religion adapts to many styles of life, its not so hard. Even today, it still adapts in the same way. (Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung 1999, Personal communication)

According to the views of these Cambodian Canadians, if a person knows their culture and at the same time respects the laws of nature and wisdom or if they study and practice Buddhism, then they should be capable of making visual media that is meaningful to themselves and to other people around them. As the nun pointed out, "The Buddhist religion adapts to many styles of life." The same principal applies to visual media in general and Buddhist visual media in particular. Specifically, so long as images influence other people to truly become better individuals, then they would be seen as complying to the Buddhist principals.

Each of the Cambodian participants who were interviewed recognized that the particular themes of their Buddhist art are not unlike the other Theravâda countries and cultures of South and Southeast Asia. However, they suggested that small variations in facial features, shapes, colors and clothing are the elements that make the Khmer style

unique. In order to understand these subtleties and then relate to them personally, an individual must be a Khmer.

The Khmer identity is largely defined by its association to the Buddhist religion (Leclère 1899, Ebihara 1968 & 1994, Chandler 1983 & 1991, Keyes 1987 & 1994, Smith-Hefner 1999). Therefore, if a person wishes to deeply understand the Khmer culture, he or she must also study and understand the Buddhist religion. The necessity of having knowledge about Buddhism and Khmer traditions as prerequisites for the production of Khmer Buddhist visual media was further described by the study participants. Mrs. Mom Srey Neang expressed the following opinion:

Someone who makes Buddhist images has to have respect for the Buddha and appreciation for his power. Before starting the painting, the artist has to always remember the face of Buddha and the position and the character of Buddha; specifically for us, the face of the Cambodian Buddha. But, for someone who does not appreciate the Buddha and wants to paint him anyway, this is not good. This is because he (the artist) does not have the power of Buddha in his mind and when he is studying the painting, he will go out of the reality. It is not the reality that Buddha would have. For example, Buddha's character is that he sits down beside the tree in the grass and is peaceful. If the painter doesn't take time to know what Buddha thinks and if he paints him in another way, then it will not be the character that Buddha has. It will be different from Buddha's character, so then it is not good.

In order to paint good Buddhist pictures, the painter first has to be practicing the Buddhist religion. Secondly, the monks have to teach him the way of the Buddha and about the Buddha's power. Even if the painter is considered as a successful painter but never practices the way of Buddha, then his or her painting will never reach its potential in terms of teaching morality. Although the painter has a model when he or she paints, there is still something extra that requires a good knowledge and imagination. There is something that comes from deep inside the person and this is why this person must really respect the Buddha. (Mrs. Mom Srey Neang 1998, Personal communication)

Following and practicing the Buddhist teachings is thought to be the key to the successful production of Buddhist visual media in Khmer culture.

Respect, humility and fear are central components of Khmer and Buddhist morality. From a very early age, children are expected to develop self-knowledge, social understanding and respect toward parents and others (Smith-Hefner 1999). According to the Sigâlaka Sutta in the Dîgha Nikâya III (trans. 1921, T. W. & C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*: 180), the Buddha metaphorically describes the six directions as deities in order to emphasize the respect that is owed in different social relationships. Parents and ancestral spirits (east) and professionals as well as political, social and religious leaders⁵⁴ (zenith) are considered to occupy the most prestigious positions. The Buddha himself is the most honored and respected of all the religious leaders. His image is also considered to occupy the zenith position since it is thought to be “the living Buddha... saturated or invigorated with morality, knowledge and wisdom” (Schopen 1997: 158). At the same time, the worship and respect for the image of Buddha is metaphorically the respect for the various sociological structures and Nature itself.

All Buddhist visual media, including representations of the Buddha, reflect Buddhist morality and values and must therefore demonstrate knowledge and respect for the Buddha and his teachings. Mr. Visna Chua explained the importance for individuals to demonstrate respect in relation to the production of Buddhist visual media:

The paintings for the temple have to show a lot of respect. It is not the same when they make a picture for a store and for a temple. A person has to know the Buddhist teachings very well to paint pictures for the temple. But, there are many kinds of people and some people will do anything for money. Some people play with the image of the Buddha and try to make money using it. This is not good for the Buddha's image. You have rules to respect. For example, you can't paint the Buddha with a girl; you can't paint this because you have to respect the Buddha. There are also those who want to respect the rules of the Buddha but they don't know what these are. For example, in a temple, people

⁵⁴ Mendicants, brahmans and samanas

go to respect the images but if you take the Buddha statue and put it on St. Catherine Street, this is your choice. But if you do that, then this is not good for those who really do believe and respect the Buddha. These people may take a statue of the Buddha and put it in a bathroom. But for them, they don't know. Then, there are people who don't know about the rules of the Buddha and those who don't care. There are also many who will try very hard to respect the rules of the Buddha.

For example, in Cambodia today there are many temples. But, I think the values have changed a lot since the Khmer Rouge. Somehow, people don't have the same respect for the temples because there are some monks who go into the temples not for the Buddhist rules but maybe just to have a comfortable life. The values are not the same as before and I am really afraid that if people abuse the Buddhist rules people will not respect the rules of the Buddha in the future. It is like when someone places the Buddha statue by a toilet or paints the Buddha with a girl; it causes people's values to change. I am afraid that if people forget the rules in the future, then this will be terrible for everyone because the Buddha's rules are the rules of nature. (Mr. Visna Chua 1999, Personal communication)

Venerable Visal Soth agreed that respect for the image of Buddha is essential for understanding Buddhist values:

The picture of Buddha is only a symbol. No one today saw the Buddha because he passed away 2,543 years ago. However, we draw the picture of the Buddha as an example to show respect. I think that if everyone sees the picture of the Buddha, it makes it clear for them that they have to show respect. They imagine; "Oh, Buddha is still here! He is still alive!" But in reality, it is just a symbol. So, it helps them to envision with their minds. (1999, Personal communication)

Mr. Sokha Ly also recognized the necessity of the individual's respect in the production of Buddhist visual media. However, he emphasized the various social relationships, which are thought to be the social aspect of the Buddha, rather than the Buddhist religion or the Buddha image itself. He reflects:

In my country, you have to go to school to learn how to paint... you also have to respect the traditions... you cannot do whatever you want... they would not respect a person who does this and they would think he is crazy. There is always a good and a bad way to make Buddha images. It really depends on the Head Master of a temple. I know when I was young, one temple made a painting that was not good, so they did not keep it. It is like making bread; if it is not made right then it will not taste good to those who eat it. So for making paintings

and sculptures, you have to follow certain rules. (Mr. Sokha Ly 1999, Personal communication).

Embedded within the different social relationships are implicit expectations and duties that demonstrate an individual's respect for their society and culture as a whole.

Khmer Buddhist visual media emerges out of an artist's respect for Khmer culture and for the Buddhist religion. The artist demonstrates this allegiance to the Buddhist and Khmer traditions through his/her artistic production. Since Khmer culture and traditions are largely defined by Theravâda Buddhism, the production of imagery that reflects the values and morality of Khmer society must necessarily include the artist's understanding of the Buddha and his teachings. At the same time, Buddhist forms and images are thought to be a reflection of nature and also of the various social relationships. Respect for Buddhist visual media, and particularly the image of Buddha, is believed to demonstrate an individual's respect for other social relationships. Consequently, the perpetuation of a Khmer and Buddhist society in general is dependent upon and also reflected in the continuation of the Khmer Buddhist artistic heritage.

6.0.4: Buddhist Education and Visual Media

Buddhist visual media is an extremely important and necessary element in the attainment of a Buddhist education. From a conventional or cultural perspective (discussed in section 2.0.2), material forms of any kind relate to "the enjoyment of the senses (*tanhâ*) or to the exercise of the intellect (*vasâna*)." (Roy in Ahir 1995: 23) In

order for an individual to achieve greater enlightenment, they must first learn to understand these forms and symbols 'as they are'. This means they must always recognize the singular emptiness (sûnyatâ) of any form, its conditionality upon other forms (prajñâ) and, associated with this, its impermanence (annica). The relational aspect of every form to others, including the "self", is the most fundamental principle of Buddhist morality. In particular, this relational understanding of the world is imposed into the individual's expected social interactions within society. Buddhist morality (as it was discussed in the previous section 6.0.3), is based primarily on the perpetuation of culture and traditions through each person's fear and respect for established social relationships as well as their respect for the forms and images that their society values. Every significant visual form is believed to embody values and morals. In the case of Cambodia, Khmer Buddhist images reflect the specific conventional truth or morality understood by this society. Visual media and particularly, Buddhist visual media, contributes enormously to the education and moral training of individual's within Cambodian society.

All education, from a Khmer Buddhist perspective, is considered first and foremost as moral education (Ouk et al 1988). This is because all education, including the teaching of basic skills, techniques and knowledge is recognized not as being ethically relative but as having inherent values. Education in Cambodia has been closely associated with the role of the Buddhist temple or monastery and this association continues today (Houtart 1977, Vickery 1990, Gohlert 1991). Mr. Visna Chua expresses his view on education as it relates to the Buddhist temple:

Before the French rulership in Cambodia, all the education was in the temples. Even now, the country people still send the children to the temple for the first grade and maybe the second. In 1968 and 1969, I stayed at the temple and the monk was my teacher. In the schools of Cambodia today, we don't have a religion course. Everyone learns about the Buddha in the temple or from their parents or brothers and sisters. But, there are many temples. But in the future, both here and in Cambodia, I think we should teach the young children in the classroom and not just by word of mouth. Each school in Cambodia should have a religion course. When you learn the rules of the Buddha when you are young, then you will grow up to be a good person. (Mr. Visna Chua 1999, Personal communication)

Michael Vickery (1990) assures us that moral instruction in Cambodia remains central to the school curriculum. However, most of the participants in this study expressed their fear that the Buddhist temple has lost its influence in education over the past century.

Venerable Visal Soth outlined the importance of imagery and particularly, Buddhist visual media, in Cambodian Buddhist temples and within the educational process of Khmer Buddhists. He explained how learning occurs at various stages of physiological development as well as in relation to the person's level of understanding.

The Buddhist pictures are important to educate people. There are many nice pictures of the Buddha's life. These help us to practice the religion and learn, especially for the young children. I remember when I was young in Cambodia how the monks would show us some pictures and then ask us to think about this. This would make it very easy to understand. They would draw some pictures to show us. For example, if they wanted to teach a young child about tea, they would draw a picture of tea and then the children would understand. But, they also read from the books. At different ages people understand different things. For example, a girl or boy who is 6 or 8 years old can understand better through the pictures.

But it is important to remember that there are principles when drawing the Buddha. If it is abstract, then the person will not understand. For example, I can identify that a radio is a radio by its appearance. The pedagogy of the teacher should be to show a picture of the Buddha and to implant knowledge about a subject. If the students don't understand, then the teacher can take a picture to explain. But if the picture is abstract, then they will not understand the way they are supposed to. So there are actually two ways to teach; the teacher can use the picture or they can explain the idea.

I think it would be helpful for the younger children to make a Buddha and then reflect on this. But, there are many cartoons on TV and many books in English and French with interesting pictures and the children like these pictures. Once you see a picture, in a way, you also come to understand a new pictorial language. You come to understand the meanings of the pictures. And when a young girl or boy sees a picture, s/he learns to like these pictures because s/he sees other girls and boys and learns to relate to this. So to educate children, it is important to show the children pictures of art and images.

But, older people sometimes understand what is real and what is not. For example, when I see something, I always try to realize what this thing really is. At first, I don't believe it. I know that I see it. But before I believe it, I concentrate and say; "What is this thing? What does it mean based on Buddha's teaching?" If you see one person who is a good man or a good woman, you can tell. You can know about his/her wisdom. When you really concentrate, you will know if this person is a good person. You see by the eyes if there is evil or goodness. All things you will see, but you don't believe you can see them. You only believe when you realize the truth, after you see with your eyes. When it's covered, you don't see. For example, if I cover this cup, do you believe that it has water or not? A person will guess because they think they cannot see. Only if you see with your eyes, then you will believe. But if you believe first, then you will see the water. If you can't believe when you are told by someone else, then what you have to do is to see for yourself. So, the pictures and images are for those who have to see to believe; for their eyes. But when you live, then you realize. By experience and learning, you learn the Truth. When you believe wrong, then you will make wrong assumptions. When you believe right, then you will reason right. So, can you do right by just knowing or do you have to see with your eyes? When you study a lot and live a good life, then you can have good reasoning and find the Truth; you can know what is real and what is not. You see the Truth by itself; but most people don't know this.

Arts have many different meanings to many different people. But, there are some that give Truth; some present things in a good light and some in a bad light. Good art shows Truth and gives morality. Art should help the people and the children to have morality; to have compassion and this is the good way to make images. But some art shows violence and how to make violence and this is not good art. The image of the Buddha is non-violent. So when the children see the Buddha, it educates them to practice non-violence. (Venerable Visal Soth 1998, Personal communication)

All visual media is thought to contain implicit values and a specific understanding of morality. Thus, morality is expressed through the values that each society assigns to specific forms.

The development of a person's morality is believed to be the underlying rationale for all education since all education, by its very nature, must include the teaching of morality and values. Morality and respect are virtually synonymous terms, from the Khmer Buddhist point of view. As children develop self-knowledge and social awareness, they learn to have a respectful attitude toward their parents and grandparents and the material forms and symbols that they value. By extension, this increased social awareness leads them to acquire respect for other members of society including friends, neighbors, teachers, legal and governmental officials to monks ancestors and the Buddha himself. In the words of one Cambodian man interviewed by Nancy Smith-Hefner (1999): "We Cambodians believe that children owe something to their teacher--that is, respect and obedience. They owe that to their teachers, to their parents, and to the older people." (p.131) Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung elaborates upon this Cambodian conception of education:

In terms of education, our teaching is completely different from European ways. In Asia--China, Cambodia and Thailand--they respect everyone. If you watch a film from Asia; China for example, you will see that the students respect others very much. And you may ask, "Why?" It's because everything is taught from the Buddha's way. The Buddha advised the students, "Don't believe in me, but believe in yourself". If you do bad, you will see bad too. For example, if you kill someone, you will be put in prison or suffer after. And this is not nice, and you are kept and cannot go. In this way, you destroy yourself. But if you do good, you will go high and will have peace. The most important thing is to remember that there is always cause and effect. If a person keeps peace first in their mind, then they will find peace and will always have success. There is this saying, "Help yourself and then the sky will also help you." (1999, Personal communication)

This wise elderly nun went on to explain how the Buddhist principle of cause and effect also applies to consequences for good and bad actions, whether in this life or the ones that

follow. She believes that the understanding of consequences leads a person to the living of a virtuous life and inner peace of mind. She stated:

Nothing is a coincidence. When I was younger, I lived with my husband and children near Phnom Penh. One day during the Second World War, a German airplane flew over Phnom Penh and the pilot was intending to drop a bomb. I really believe that Buddha protected us! The plane crashed in a rice field close to where my family was living. That same evening, one of the women who lived near to us conceived her baby. At first, when the baby was born, everything seemed normal. But, when the baby was able to speak, we recognized that its first word was German. As this child grew up, he liked playing with airplanes. Now, he has become a pilot and lives in Germany. I don't think this is a coincidence.

But you know, the power of the Buddha is explained to everyone in the Temple. The effect of living is dying. When someone is afraid to die, this does not help. But, if they believe in the Buddha or in the power of the Buddha, this person will never be afraid because, you know, everyone dies. Everyone has died before. What did Buddha explain to everyone who was afraid to die? He said that if you do good, and especially if you keep the five precepts, you will be confident about yourself and you will not be afraid. But, you have to remember the precepts: Don't kill, even a small animal or anything because all life is so special. Killing will make your life very short. Something bad will come to you. Don't steal, lie, etc.

So, for education about Buddhist images, I always tell the children to look at the pictures in the Temple. I say, "Look around you, keep these pictures in your mind and never think of other things. Think of the pictures in this Temple and the power of the Buddha. Try not to do what you know is bad, do what you know is good in your life. Always try to be a nice person when you are with your family and also when you are by yourself." (Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung 1999, Personal communication)

Mrs. Mom Srey Neang also thought that Khmer Buddhist values and morality were implicitly a part of the visual imagery found in the Khmer Pagoda. She applied her views to the teaching of children about Buddhism and the production of art images. Mrs. Neang emphasizes the necessity of learning and respecting Buddhist traditions and image styles.

She explains more:

I have never tried to paint myself, but I think the best way is to use a model -- like to use a Buddha statue -- because from the model you can make relationships and remember things accurately. As for teaching children about Buddhism and

how to make Buddha images, I think it is important to have books that teach about the power of Buddha and the Buddhist religion. They should explain clearly how to practice this religion. When you are teaching someone and you give a lot of pictures, you say, "Look, this is the Buddha." But if a person has no interest to learn about the power of Buddha, then even 1,000 teachers will not be able to interest them. But, if you want to learn this, then it is good for you and for everyone else. It helps if the teacher can explain to you clearly what it is and what it means and if they use good books that have simple and clear pictures.

But, according to the objectives and principles of Buddhism, each person is free to make up their own mind. It doesn't order any person to be faithful to this religion or any other one. The Buddha always thought that each person should have the liberty to study other religions. The Buddhist religion gives complete liberty to every person and never orders anyone to do anything, unless it hurts other people. Buddha never ordered anyone to do something even if this was contrary of the Buddhist religion. According to Buddhism, if you observe that something is good, then you should do this. The Buddhist religion is based on the laws of nature. It is based on cause and effect and also upon action and consequence. So, I cannot tell you whether freedom of expression or respect for tradition is better. The Buddha taught me that I should respect each person and their choice. If you tell me that the Catholic religion is good, then I will respect your decision.

Buddhism has to be applied to the everyday lives of the people so it can be successful. In Cambodia, people have the liberty to practice Buddhism only if they want and this is how it becomes real for them. I think religion is something that has to be very personal. But if it is too strict, like in Thailand, then some people find it is too hard to follow. The Thai monks study the Buddhist religion a lot. In Thailand, meditation is very important. They do this everyday and even in the schools. (Mrs. Mom Srey Neang 1998, Personal communication)

Mom Srey believes that a person should have the liberty to make decisions that will affect their life and also the freedom to express themselves in art production. At the same time, she realizes that Buddhist visual media must continue to clearly convey the same messages that it has done in the past. In her view, it is still essential to respect the Buddhist traditions and learn art through imitation, but this must come from the individual's heart. Mr. Sokha Ly stated an opinion that is quite similar:

A good painting is very difficult and the person who makes it must have a good eye and also study Buddhism very much. They also have to respect the traditions. That is another reason why you have to go to school; to learn to respect the culture and tradition. You cannot do whatever you want; like in

Canada where people are encouraged to do whatever they want. (Mr. Sokha Ly 1999, Personal communication)

The Buddhist traditions and teachings have provided stability in Cambodian society for thousands of years. The visual media embodying these beliefs and traditions is complex. Small changes in this visual media would undoubtedly have catastrophic effects on people's perception and understanding of these traditions. While these interview participants were convinced that each person should be free to make their own decisions, they share the opinion that Khmer culture, along with Buddhism and its imagery, should not be altered. Mr. Sovin Yong discussed his thoughts about this issue:

Sometimes there are things about a tradition that we don't understand, so it is best to follow and respect this because we don't really understand. I think this also applies to teaching children about the images in the Temple and teaching art. When I bring my kids here, I try to explain to them the meaning of the images and to respect these images (See Figures 7 & 8). The Buddha said; "If you do good then you will receive good, but if you do bad then you will also receive bad." If you do bad then you will know and this will affect your life. So, I try to teach my kids these things. If images are good then they will help you to live a good life and if they are bad then they will not bring good for you. So, it's really about living and life.

I always pray to Buddha that my father, brother, family and relatives will be successful. For my children also, I think this is something that they have to develop and learn. But, it's hard to say because after the older generation is gone, I am not sure. It will be hard for my children because there are so many different religions and ideologies in Canada. You know, everything changes and the Buddha said that everyone should not really believe in him but they should be smart for themselves. I really hope that my children will also relate to the Buddhist religion when they get older. (1999, Personal communication)

There is a general agreement amongst most Cambodians of the vital importance of preserving the traditions of the past. These traditions include the techniques and styles of visual media that have been replicated for many centuries by artisans educated in the Khmer and Buddhist cultures. Education in culture and arts is therefore essential in

fulfilling this aim of preservation. This is especially true for many of the young Cambodian children who are now growing up in foreign countries, such as Canada.

6.0.5: Chapter Summary

The visual media found at the Khmer Temple is significant to the six participants of this study in that it helps them to remember their life in Cambodia and their traditions. At the same time, it is meant to preserve the Khmer Buddhist tradition, which has become quite fragile in recent years, as well as to educate members of the Khmer Buddhist community. The visual media has many levels of meaning which depend on an individual's knowledge and understanding. It forms the conventional reality of the Khmer Buddhist community and is used to give them further enlightenment. The statues of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas were the most significant to all the participants, however the pictures of Angkor Temple and the jātaka scenes were thought to contribute greatly in socialization and education.

The production of Khmer Buddhist visual media requires both skill and education in Khmer and Buddhist culture and traditions. The imagery within the Khmer Pagoda was thought to reflect a unique Cambodian style of Buddhist art production. However, Buddhist art was viewed as being adaptable within many contexts. Since the image of the Buddha is considered to be "living" and also a metaphor for sociological structures and Nature itself, it is given the greatest respect. Respect is a central component of Khmer Buddhist morality and essential for the production of Buddhist visual media.

Buddhist education in visual media is considered to be primarily moral education. All visual media is believed to contain implicit values and morals. Morality and respect are similar, from the Khmer perspective. Education related to imagery has and continues to be associated with the role of the Buddhist temple. Education in the arts is seen as a necessity in the preservation of the Khmer Buddhist culture and traditions.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

7.0.1: General Findings

For the most part, the findings of this research study have confirmed the information found in available literature on the subjects of Buddhist perceptions of art and education, the significance of Buddhist visual media today, the social/cultural life and the religious/philosophical views of the Khmer people and issues related to their immigration to Canada. From the Buddhist perspective and from the views of every study participant, all meaningful visual forms contain implicit values and morals. Consequently, all art or significant forms are considered to be “religious” in some way. The art that is important to a specific culture represents their shared conventional reality or truth. Although the realization of ultimate reality, which is beyond the world of forms, is the objective of all learning in Buddhism, education using art or visual forms is always an education in the values and morals of life. Therefore, all education, and especially education in art, is thought to be an education in morality. From the Khmer point of view, respect, humility and fear for all things is virtually synonymous to morality since every person and thing is a part of Nature (*Dhamma*) and also the Buddha. For this reason, Buddhist art is meant to preserve Buddhist beliefs and teachings (Pāli: *sasana*) which are also considered to be the laws of Nature. Variations in Buddhist visual media

occur within each culture however, the continuation of Khmer culture and the Buddhist religion depend on the imitation and preservation of its traditions and art forms.

Although the principles of art and education, from the Buddhist perspective, are generally similar in most of the Theravâda Buddhist countries and regions of the world, some variations are evident in the views expressed by the Cambodian people interviewed in this study. For the most part, this is related to the long and unique history, traditions and culture of all Khmer people. Most importantly, the events of recent history have deeply affected the lives of all Cambodians, individually and as a whole society. For centuries Buddhism has been the single most defining element of Cambodian culture and life. Since this was almost completely destroyed by the Khmer Rouge and communism, most Cambodians today see Buddhism as its moral inversion. This partly explains the popularity and significance of the Theravâda Buddhist religion, along with its temples and images, for Khmer people living in Cambodia and in countries around the world, including Canada. According to the study participants, the Buddhist Temple and its visual media are used to educate people not only in the values and morals of Buddhist teachings, but also to preserve a tradition, culture and language that is threatened with extinction. At the same time, the Pagoda helps to remind the people of their life in Cambodia before the recent atrocities and provides them with inner peace and relief from the pain of death and separation from those they love. Finally, the Khmer Pagoda functions as a community centre to unite individual's living in Canada into the larger Khmer Buddhist community.

7.0.1.1: Significance of the Images

This study has examined some aspects of the significance of the Khmer Buddhist Temple and its religious visual media to influence and shape both the individual reality and a general Khmer Buddhist reality. In fact, the first two objectives of this research study, stated earlier in this thesis, are:

- 1) To identify the historical significance of the Khmer Pagoda in Montreal for my research participants, and
- 2) To understand the contemporary significance of the Pagoda and some of the paintings, photographs and statues in the Khmer Pagoda for the interview participants

For the most part, the contemporary significance of the various paintings, photographs and statues of the Khmer Pagoda of Canada for the study participants is associated with the heritage of the Khmer civilization that has survived for many centuries. The Khmer Buddhists interviewed in this study reflected their contemporary and individual views of the Temple and its images in relation to this well established Khmer artistic tradition. They reflected on how the Temple and its visual media influence themselves, as well as their families and the Cambodian community in general, within their daily lives in Canada.

The Khmer Pagoda in Montreal is the functional and symbolic center of the Khmer Buddhist culture in Canada, just as the Angkor Temple is the cultural, religious and geographical center of Cambodia and of the Khmer civilization. The Canadian

Khmer Pagoda serves as a place of moral, religious and cultural instruction as well as preservation. Each of the participants confirmed the association of moral and cultural preservation with the Buddhist Temple and its images. For example, Sokha Ly stated: "In Canada if there are no temples and statues of Buddha, then I think many Cambodian people who live in Canada would make big mistakes... All the statues in Cambodia were destroyed by the communists and when the people have no religion then they do anything and have no control." Every participant in this study agreed that Buddhism, along with its temples and visual media, is the only way for the Khmer people to restore the glory to their country which has been so terribly devastated in recent years. In addition, they saw Buddhist temples and their imagery as having a positive therapeutic effect on individuals who have suffered many losses and personal tragedies. For example, Mr. Visna Chua said; "When I come to the Temple, everything in my mind is clear; it comes to me... I think of the Buddha and about my own spirit and many other good things... It helps me to gain confidence. I also have memories here of when I was young in Cambodia. I remember both the good and the bad times in Cambodia." The significance of the Buddhist Temple and its visual media, according to the study participants, is found in its function of individual healing through memories as well as its role of preserving Khmer Buddhist morality, religion and culture. Education through images is an essential component in the achievement of this goal of moral and cultural preservation.

7.0.1.2: Meaning for Art Education

The main objective of this research was to investigate how the participants of this study have used the images of the Khmer Pagoda in Montreal to facilitate their own learning and beliefs and then to speculate on how this information could reveal a conception of art and art education for Khmer Buddhists. These research objectives relate to the following questions:

- 1) What is the educational significance of Montreal's Khmer Pagoda and some of its images for the informants in this study? and
- 2) How is art and art education conceived by these members of Montreal's Cambodian Buddhist community?

Almost every image within the Temple is associated with the Khmer and Buddhist culture and is thought to describe or represent some element of this heritage. The visual media of the Khmer Pagoda in Montreal defines, for the most part, the shared conventional reality of the study participants.

From the perspectives of these interview participants, every significant visual form contains implicit values and morals. For example, Mrs. Mom Srey Neang stated: "...all the paintings teach morals so that people will not commit crimes; sexual misconduct or killing..." Venerable Visal Soth agreed that; "The arts can be used to educate the community about a philosophy or about good and bad." Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung also said: "The images of the Temple help us to keep a good way for our life and the pictures of the museum demonstrate to my children how to integrate into this

society.” According to the views of all the study participants, education using art or visual forms must be an education in the values and morals of life. Since all education somehow incorporates visual media, it is always an education in morality.

An individual’s repeated exposure to visual media is thought to result in the formation of this person’s specific cultural reality. For example, Mrs. Mom Srey Neang said: “When I leave the Temple and go home, the Buddhist images stay on my mind all the time.” Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung expressed a similar view: “If I come here to the Temple or if I stay at home, it’s the same because the power of Buddha and these pictures remind me of life and they help me all the time and in everything that I do.” And, Mr. Sovin Yong confirmed; “The images of Buddha are always in my mind. Every time I wake up or go somewhere, it is still in my mind. Even when I travel, the images are very alive in my mind. In my daily life, like when I am driving somewhere or even on my tie... The Buddha that I see in my mind when I pray is the same Buddha that I see when I come here to the Temple” Since most Cambodian Buddhists spend at least some of their time in the Temple, the visual media that they are exposed to here constructs a shared reality within their minds.

The preservation of this reality and its associated images is thought to be essential for the continuation of the Khmer culture and the Buddhist beliefs and teachings, which are also understood to be the laws of Nature (Dhamma). Each of the participants expressed the necessity of an individual to have education and respect of the Khmer and Buddhist culture and traditions before possessing the capacity to represent these visually. Venerable Visal Soth stated; “...it is important to remember that there are principles when drawing the Buddha. If it is abstract, then the person will not understand... the

way they are supposed to.” Mr. Sokha Ly confirmed; “A good painting is very difficult and the person who makes it must have a good eye and also study Buddhism very much. They have to respect the traditions. That is another reason why you have to go to school; to learn to respect the culture and tradition.” In the words of Mr. Sovin Yong; “Sometimes there are things about a tradition that we don’t understand, so it is best to follow and respect this... I think this also applies to teaching children about the images in the Temple and teaching art.” Mrs. Mom Srey Neang elaborates; “It helps if the teacher can explain to you clearly what it is and what it means and if they use good books that have simple and clear pictures.” And finally, Mrs. Sacheatha Phoung confirmed; “...for education about Buddhist images, I always tell the children to look at the pictures in the Temple. I say, ‘Look around you, keep these pictures in your mind... Think of these pictures and the power of the Buddha.” Although variations in Khmer Buddhist artistic representations are inevitable from one individual to another, the continuation of Khmer culture and Theravâda Buddhism depend on the imitation and preservation of its traditions and artistic forms, according to the views expressed by the interview participants. The preservation of the Khmer culture, religion and values is ultimately the purpose of all Khmer Buddhist art as well as education in the arts.

7.0.2: Recommendations for Future Research

Having spent a considerable amount of time doing field observations and with members of the Khmer community, I believe there are several areas of research that would prove beneficial to enhance understanding of the Theravâda Buddhist and,

particularly, the Khmer Buddhist perspectives on art and education. In addition, I believe this type of research is necessary in order to accommodate the views of the Khmer people as well as other Buddhist immigrants in educational programs which are intended to educate these people within the mainstream Canadian society. More specifically, the data gathered from studies of this nature could be used to inform those who are responsible for the production of art, culture and language curricula, programs and courses within the local schools and community centres. As local demographics in Canada continue to evolve, it is only through a meaningful dialogue with all people that effective educational programs can be developed. Theravâda Buddhists, and especially the Khmer, are a growing minority and a vibrant part of several communities in Canada today. Considering this, there is a great need to conduct further research in the following areas:

- 1) A similar qualitative research study is necessary on the significant imagery and views of art and education within the Khmer community in Canada as a whole (i.e. in the homes of Khmer people outside the Temple). Although nearly all Khmer people are Buddhist, it is possible that those who do not attend the Khmer Temple regularly would express other opinions.
- 2) It should be a priority to conduct more research on the significance of Buddhist visual media and views on art and education involving other Khmer temples in North America and in Cambodia. This would provide more comprehensive data to confirm the findings of this study as well as to allow for more generalizable findings.

- 3) Comparative research studies on the significance of Buddhist visual media and views on art and education within other Theravâda Buddhist communities of Canada should be considered. This would be beneficial to educators in gaining a greater knowledge of general Theravâda Buddhist views on art and education in Canada.
- 4) It is essential to complete additional qualitative research to examine how Buddhist visual media is incorporated into the formal and non-formal educational programs, their curricula, rationale and teaching practices within the Cambodian Temple. This research could possibly be extended to other Theravâda Buddhist temples and communities in Canada. I believe this would reveal further insights into the use of Buddhist imagery in the educational process from a general Theravâda Buddhist or, more specifically, from a Khmer Buddhist perspective.
- 5) A further study should be conducted to examine how the Khmer and Buddhist conception of visual media and education could contribute realistically to other educational programs within the local communities of Canada in order to better accommodate the learning needs of Khmer and Buddhist immigrants and empower them in their daily lives.
- 6) I believe it is necessary to conduct more research on the general Buddhist doctrine and teachings regarding the notion of “creativity” in the production of art. I am convinced

that this would be insightful and enlightening to those in the field of Art Education in Canada and in North America.

7) Further research could also be done on the Khmer and Buddhist understanding of the “individual”, the “self” or “identity” in relation to Khmer and Buddhist “society”. This is an issue that is often ignored in research methods and undoubtedly has enormous implications on the findings and results of research studies.

8) This research study did not include interviews with the artists responsible for the production of the paintings, statues, photographs, relief carvings, etc. within the Khmer Temple. I am convinced that a study involving formal interviews with these people would lead to further insights. These could be compared to the findings of this study.

The research that I have conducted for this thesis has allowed me to gain a broader understanding of the Khmer Buddhist people of Montreal. Over the past two years, I have had the privilege of learning more about the complexities of the Cambodian culture and traditions as well as the opportunity to further develop my knowledge of Buddhist teachings. At the same time, it has been a great honor for me to hear and then convey the compelling personal life experiences of the interview participants. I continue to hope that the Cambodian people will one day find justice for the terrible atrocities they have witnessed and endured in their lives. The Khmer people of Montreal have graciously provided their views on many issues and particularly, those related to Khmer Buddhist

imagery and education. Through the many hours which I have spent with the Khmer people at the Temple in Montreal, I will always be indebted to them for the enormous amount of wisdom and compassion they have shared with me as an individual.

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Appendix A

Participant Information and Consent Sheet

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Wayne Kennedy as part of his case study of the Religious Imagery at the Khmer Pagoda of Canada (Montreal). This is for an M.A. thesis in Art Education at Concordia University under the supervision of Dr. Lorrie Blair.

Information:

The purpose of this research study is to describe and understand the imagery of the Temple and the close relationship between art and religion from the Cambodian Buddhist perspective. As an art educator, I believe this will provide insight into the teaching and learning of art for those from Buddhist cultures and others as well. This is a qualitative case study which will involve audio recorded interviews with the participants regarding the meaning and significance of the Buddhist images within the Temple.

Consent:

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences. I also understand that by participating in this study, my identity will be revealed in the results. This information will become part of a thesis and may be published. I understand the purpose of this study and know that there are no hidden motives of which I have not been informed.

I have carefully studied the above and understand this agreement. I consent and agree to participate in this study.

Name (please print)_____

Signature_____

Date_____

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Imagery found at the Khmer Pagoda of Canada

Part I: Context

- 1) How long have you been in Montreal and how did you arrive in Canada?
- 2) What do you remember about your life in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge regime and communism?
- 3) What was the place of the Buddhist temples and images in Cambodian society at this time?
- 4) How were the temple and its images important for you and your family at this time?
- 5) What do you remember about your life in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge regime and communism?
- 6) What was the place of the Buddhist temples and images in Cambodian society during communism?

Part II: Meaning

- 1) How does the Cambodian community in Montreal relate to this Temple and its art? i.e. What does it mean for them?
- 2) How do the specific features of the Buddhist images and art in this Pagoda reflect the Cambodian Buddhist community?
- 3) How are these images used in practices within the Temple?
- 4) How do you perceive this art in your own life?

Part III: Art & Education

- 1) What are the specific artistic media (painting, sculpting, etc.) that should be used to depict the Buddha or his life?
- 2) Are there specific styles of painting, drawing, sculpture or photography) that should be learned for Buddhist art or could other techniques be equally effective?
- 3) Should images of the Buddha be depicted according to specific patterns and criteria or should they be open to new interpretations (i.e. more personal views) ?
- 4) Is there (or should there be) a distinction between religious and non-religious art? If so, what is the difference?
- 5) Based on your learning experience in relation to the images in this Temple. are there some things that are important for teaching other people about images? i.e. Are there some Buddhist principles of education in visual media that are important?