

Cambodia

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Culture Name

Cambodian

Alternative Names

Kampuchean, Khmer

Orientation

Identification. The name "Cambodia" derives from the French *Cambodge*, which comes from the Khmer word *Kâmpuchea*, meaning "born of Kambu." During the socialist regimes of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) (1975–1979) and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) (1979–1989), the country was known internationally as Kampuchea, but more recent governments have returned to using Cambodia, and the official name in English is now the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Khmer as a noun or adjective can refer to the Cambodian language, people, or culture and thus suggests an ethnic and linguistic identity more than a political entity. From 1970 to 1975, the country was known as the Khmer Republic (KR).

Location and Geography. Cambodia lies between Thailand and Vietnam in mainland southeast Asia, with a smaller stretch of the northern border adjoining Laos. The most central region culturally and economically is the lowland flood plain of the Mekong River and Tonle Sap Lake. The Sap River meets the Mekong at Phnom Penh, where the river soon divides again into the Bassac and the Mekong, which flow through southern Vietnam to the South China Sea. Although Cambodia also has a coastline on the Gulf of Thailand, the coast is separated from the central flood plain by mountains; only since the 1950s have railroads and roads provided ready access to the coastal port towns.

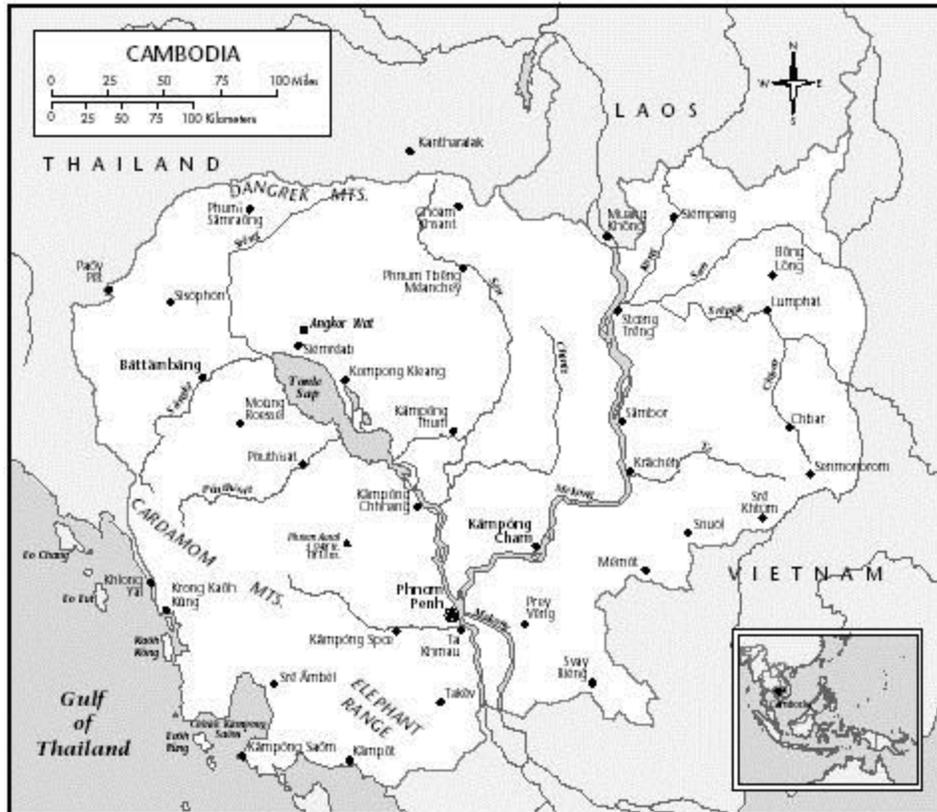
The economy is dominated by wet rice agriculture. The iconic image of the countryside is one of rice paddies among which are scattered sugar palms. Until recently, much of the area outside the flood plains was forested.

The ancient capital of the Khmer Empire was at Angkor, close to present-day Siem Reap. In the fifteenth century, the capital was moved to the area of the intersection of the Sap and Mekong rivers, near present-day Phnom Penh, perhaps to enhance trade. The most densely populated areas now are along the rivers in the provinces near Phnom Penh.

Demography. According to a 1998 census, the population is 11.42 million. There are no reliable statistics for ethnic populations, although the Khmer population is certainly the largest. A 1993 demographic study estimated that Khmer represented 88.7 percent of the population; Vietnamese, 5.2 percent; Cham, 2.5 percent; Chinese, 1 percent; and others (Thai, Lao, and smaller minority groups in the north and northeast), 2.6 percent.

Linguistic Affiliation. The dominant Khmer language belongs to the Austroasiatic language family and is related to Vietnamese, Mon, and a number of other Asian languages. Khmer writing, derived from Indian systems, may have begun as early as the third century C.E.; the first dated inscriptions in Khmer are from the seventh century C.E. While Khmer is closer to Vietnamese than to Thai, a shared literate tradition related to a common religion and centuries of cultural contact has resulted in much vocabulary being shared with Thai. As in Thailand, Laos, and Burma, the language of [Theravada](#) Buddhist scriptures, Pali, often is studied by young men during temporary periods as monks and is an important influence on literary Khmer.

A scarcity of written materials resulting from the colonial dominance of French and later periods of political turmoil had left the educated population highly dependent on second languages, and in urban areas there is a great desire to learn English and French. Despite the efforts of France to promote the continued use of French as a second language, it is



Cambodia

probably giving way to English. Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cham, who are often bilingual, freely use their own languages, and Vietnamese and Chinese newspapers are published in Phnom Penh.

Symbolism. The most important cultural symbol is the ancient Khmer temple Angkor Wat, along with the ancient Khmer Empire and its monumental antiquities. Pictures and bas-relief carvings of the four-faced tower of the Bayon at Angkor Thom and of *âpsâras* (celestial dancing girls) are ubiquitous in homes and public buildings. Since independence, every flag except the one used by the United Nations when it administered the country in 1993 has featured the image of Angkor Wat. Classical dance, also an important national symbol, consciously tries in costume and gesture to recreate Angkorean bas-reliefs.

The institution of kingship, which was reestablished in 1993, is an important national symbol, especially in rural areas, where devotion to the king never died out during the socialist period. It is not clear to what extent the symbolism of kingship can be separated from its current embodiment in Norodom Sihanouk.

In the 1980s, the government promoted the memory of the atrocities of 1975–1979 DK period, also known as the **Pol Pot** regime, including holidays to commemorate

bitterness (20 May) and national liberation (7 January). However, the DK atrocities symbolize Cambodian identity much less for its people than they do for foreigners. Nevertheless, many Cambodians express a sense that their culture has been lost or is in danger, and this cultural vulnerability stands as a kind of national symbol.

National identity sometimes is mobilized around the idea of hostility to Vietnam. This derives in part from the ways in which national identity was defined by resistance groups during the PRK period, when there was a strong Vietnamese military and cultural presence.

History and Ethnic Relations

Emergence of the Nation. The roots of the nation lie in the systematization of wet rice agriculture and the gradual development of a more extensive political organization that climaxed in the Khmer Empire in the period 802–1431. The Khmer Empire was not a nation in the modern sense and varied in size from king to king. However, at different times the empire ruled large parts of what is now Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. The population of the empire included Siamese and probably other Austroasiatic peoples who gradually assimilated to the Khmer. Khmer culture and language were clearly dominant during that period, and the Khmer population extended well beyond the current boundaries.

The rise of Siam (now Thailand) as an empire and nation and the gradual expansion of Vietnam drastically decreased Khmer territory and led to a period when Cambodia was dominated by those kingdoms. It is generally accepted that if Cambodia had not been colonized by France, it would have been swallowed by its neighbors.

National Identity. True national identity was created during the French colonial presence. The French fixed boundaries, systematized government and ecclesiastical bureaucracies, promoted the empire as a national symbol, encouraged an increasingly elaborate ceremonial role for the king, and introduced secular education.

Ethnic Relations. There are significant populations of ethnic Khmer in Thailand and Vietnam. The Khmer in Thailand are well integrated into the Thai state, with few significant links to Cambodia. The Khmer in southern Vietnam, called Khmer Kraom, have historically had much stronger ties to Cambodia proper, and several important Cambodian political leaders have been Khmer Kraom. There continues to be migration of Khmer Kraom to Cambodia, including young men who come as Buddhist monks; many Khmer Kraom have a strong sense of identity with the nation. Their role in

Cambodia is complex in that while they are glorified as a symbol of lost territory, they are sometimes distrusted as being Vietnamese.

Large numbers of the Cambodian refugees who fled to camps in Thailand during the DK period and the early PRK period resettled in the United States, France, Australia, and New Zealand. The largest ethnic minority population is Vietnamese, whose numbers range between 500,000 and a million. However, those numbers are hotly contested for political reasons. Tension between ethnic Khmer and Vietnamese is strong. Scholars disagree about whether this hostility has a long history or is a recent political construction. State-sponsored killing and forced expulsion of Vietnamese occurred during the KR and the DK periods. Since the 1991 Paris Agreements, there have been two well-publicized massacres of Vietnamese villagers and numerous smaller incidents of violence against Vietnamese, mostly attributable to [Khmer Rouge](#) guerrillas. Other new political parties employ strong anti-Vietnamese rhetoric. Vietnamese influence in Cambodia dates at least to the seventeenth century. A significant Vietnamese population in Phnom Penh predated French colonialism; however, the pattern of migration increased when the French brought Vietnamese to Cambodia as administrators, plantation workers, and urban laborers. As rice farmers, Vietnamese have often been in direct economic competition with Khmer. There are also large fishing communities of Vietnamese, and in urban areas, Vietnamese engage in a number of small trades, including construction work, another area where they compete with ethnic Khmer.

The Cham, a predominantly Muslim people, began migrating to Cambodia in the fifteenth century from the South China Sea coast as that area came under Vietnamese political domination. Their population is between 240,000 and 300,000. Many Cham live in riverfront communities and engage in fishing, small business, and raising and slaughtering of livestock (an occupation avoided by Khmer Buddhists for religious reasons). Cham suffering during the DK period was especially severe, when resistance to Khmer Rouge communal discipline led to brutal pogroms. In recent years the Cham have cultivated links to Muslims in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Arabic countries.

A recent estimate of the Chinese population is 100,000, although because of the numbers of Chinese who have historically lived in Cambodia, the numbers of persons with some Chinese blood, and Chinese cultural influence, the impact is much greater. There has traditionally been much more



A family attempts to net fish in their backyard after a flood. Next to rice, fish is the most important staple in Cambodia.

intermarriage between Khmer and Chinese than between Khmer and Vietnamese, and ethnic relations are considered much better, although there has been periodic discrimination. There has been a Chinese presence since the time of Angkor, but immigration increased dramatically during the colonial period. Chinese are particularly associated with urban areas; before 1970, there were more Chinese and Vietnamese than Khmer in Phnom Penh.

Urbanism, Architecture, and the Use of Space

Phnom Penh, the capital and the only major city, is relatively small, but rapidly increasing in population. At the time of the 1998 census, it was 997,986. A lack of political and economic integration with rural Cambodia and peasant resentment of the urban population probably influenced the decision of the DK government in 1975 to evacuate the entire urban population to the countryside. Since 1979, Phnom Penh has experienced only a gradual rebuilding. Architecturally, the city is a mixture of pre-1975 French colonial, Chinese, and [modernist](#) styles alongside the simple socialist styles of the 1980s, garish new buildings, and shanty towns.

The Royal Palace compound and the nearby National Museum lie on Phnom Penh's park-lined central riverfront and form a prominent cultural focal point of the country and city. Norodom Boulevard, lined with embassies, government buildings, and villas, runs between Independence Monument and the Wat Phnom temple. Several key markets, Buddhist temples, and luxury hotels serve as major landmarks. City streets are full of

people, evoking a sense of social flux with no clear boundaries. Communication is easy and natural.

Provincial capitals have compounds of government buildings, large central markets in pre-1975 modern buildings, and several Buddhist temples. At the district and subdistrict levels, there are more modest temples, makeshift markets, and simple school buildings. Distinctions between public and private buildings tend to be free-flowing.

Food and Economy

Food in Daily Life. The staples are rice and fish. Traditionally, a home meal is served on a mat on the floor or with the diners seated together on a raised bamboo platform. Meals are eaten in shifts according to status, with adult males and guests eating first and food preparers last. Breakfast typically consists of rice porridge or rice noodles. Lunch and dinner may be a combination of a spiced broth with fish or meat and vegetables, fish, fresh vegetables eaten with a fish-based paste, and stir-fried vegetables with chopped meat. A strong-smelling fermented fish paste called *prâhok* is the quintessential flavoring of Khmer food. Fruit is savored, and its display is considered a mark of abundance. It often is given as a gift. *Teuk tnaot*, a liquid tapped from sugar palms and drunk in various degrees of fermentation, generally is not taken with meals.

The tradition of Khmer cuisine in restaurants is undeveloped, and restaurants typically serve what is regarded as Chinese food. There are no food taboos, although devout Buddhists refrain from alcohol. Monks also cannot eat after noon and are enjoined to eat whatever they are given without making special requests.

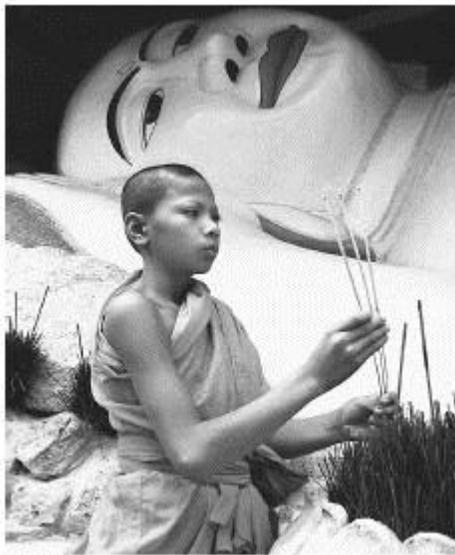
Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions. During festivals, elaborate and painstakingly seasoned dishes are prepared, such as curries, spiced fish sauces, complex stir fries, and a variety of sweets. At a temple festival, each family brings dishes that are ritually presented to the monks. After the monks have eaten, the remaining food is eaten by the lay community.

Basic Economy. The basis of the economy continues to be rice agriculture, and much of the population farms at a subsistence level, linked by a relatively undeveloped market system for rice, fruits, and vegetables, and using the riel for currency. Rice farmers are vulnerable to market fluctuations and to drought and insect infestation. State-owned rubber plantations dating back to the colonial period have remained a peripheral part of the economy.

Land Tenure and Property. Radical attempts to communalize property during the DK period and more modest attempts to encourage collective agriculture under PRK met

with strong cultural resistance. Cambodians have a strong sense of personal property shared within the domestic unit. Constitutionally, the PRK recognized only three kinds of economic organization: state, cooperative, and family. Only after 1989, with the conscious shift to a market economy, did corporate enterprises and foreign investment become legal.

Commercial Activities. Cambodian artisans are known for silk and cotton weaving, silver work, silver and gold jewelry, and basketry. Handmade pottery is sold from oxcarts that travel from city to city. Straw mats made by hand at local workshops are available in markets; they also are made for personal use. In rural areas, plows, machetes,



A young Cambodian monk burning incense. Monkhood offers a means to education for boys in Cambodia.

looms, fish traps, and winnowing trays are often made for personal use, although imported factory-made products now are used more often.

Tourism is an important part of the economy, but it was hindered by fear of political unrest during most of the 1990s. It increased dramatically in 1999 and 2000.

Major Industries. Industry is undeveloped. State-owned sawmills, soap and cigarette factories, and small workshops for the construction of aluminum products, together with larger state-owned textile and rubber tire factories, have been privatized, and new breweries and cement factories have opened. After 1994, foreign-owned garment factories began to appear, employing mostly female laborers at extremely low wages. The economic role of those factories has expanded rapidly.

Trade. The government lacks effective controls over cross-border trade. In the 1980s, resistance groups near the Thai border financed their activities by trading in gems and timber. Illegal timber exports to Thailand and Vietnam are uncontrolled, and the country is rapidly becoming deforested. Illegal sales of rice to Thailand and Vietnam are also considerable and in 1998 resulted in domestic shortfalls. Besides rice and wood products, Cambodia exports fish products, cement, brewery products, and handicrafts to nearby Asian countries. The garment industry is linked to markets in the United States and the European Union.

Social Stratification

Classes and Castes. Ideas about status and the display of wealth have changed dramatically since 1991. Under socialism, the state promoted an ideology of egalitarianism, and personal wealth was not easily detected. Since 1991, extremely wealthy individuals have emerged among high-ranking government officials and well-placed businesspersons in a country where the population remains very poor. Cambodians have traditionally cultivated the practice of exaggerated respect for a small class of civil servants and other "big men," perhaps defined in terms more by influence than by wealth. There is great sensitivity to degrees of relative wealth, especially in decisions about marriage partners. A relative status hierarchy figures conspicuously in personal relations.

Symbols of Social Stratification. There is a general assumption that degrees of wealth can and should be publicly known. In the absence of banks, wealth was traditionally worn on the person as jewelry, which still is an important marker of status. Folk categorization distinguishes between the poor family's house of bamboo and thatch, the more economically secure family's traditional wood house on stilts, and the richer family's house of stone or cement. In Phnom Penh, the wealthiest families live in villas as opposed to apartments or wood houses. More contemporary markers involve cars and consumer goods.

Political Life

Government. The 1993 constitution established a constitutional monarchy devoted to the principles of liberal democracy. The national government consists of a 120-member National Assembly, a Council of Ministers, and a Constitutional Council. In 1999, the Assembly voted to create a Senate. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the government was still in transition from the one-party system of the 1980s to a liberal democracy. Although 1993 United Nations-sponsored elections instituted a multiparty

system at the national level, and multiparty elections determined the membership of the National Assembly and the choice of prime ministers in 1993 and 1998, there have not been local multiparty elections. While provincial governorships and ministerial positions were decided by negotiations between the major parties after the national elections, officials at the district level and below were usually persons who had been in office since the socialist 1980s. Local elections were tentatively scheduled for early 2002.

Leadership and Political Officials. The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) is an outgrowth of the [People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea](#) (PRPK), which through the 1980s served as the single party, providing discipline and leadership for the socialist state. It is not clear to what extent the transition to a multiparty democracy has taken place.

Social Problems and Control. There is much dis-trust of the police and judicial systems, which are believed to be corrupt. Traffic disputes and claims to property often are negotiated outside the legal system. Common criminals are dealt with brutally, and there is a widespread assumption that persons with wealth and political power are effectively outside the law. There have been many cases of violence against opposition politicians and journalists.

Military Activity. The military continues to dominate the national budget despite the collapse of the Khmer Rouge insurgency. In 1997, defense and security represented 53.9 percent of government expenditures. Fighting on the streets of Phnom Penh at the time of a 1996 coup is remembered with resentment. Individual soldiers often break the law with impunity. The military is not a particularly cohesive social force and has not threatened to seize power.

Social Welfare and Change Programs

While a basic government framework to address the needs of widows, orphans, veterans, and those handicapped by war has been in place since the PRK period, those programs have been plagued by a lack of funds. International organizations (IOs) and [nongovernmental organizations](#) (NGOs) played an important role in the emergency reconstruction of the country in 1979–1982, providing food and helping to rebuild the agricultural infrastructure. The issue of aid was complicated in the 1980s by an international embargo. Some aid organizations chose to provide relief to Cambodians on the Thai border; other organizations were restricted from working in the provinces. A small number of international NGOs continued to offer assistance in health care,

rehabilitation for mine victims, food relief, and agricultural training and assistance. After the beginnings of a negotiated political settlement



A Cambodian boy pulls a forty-four gallon drum full of water on his cart, a trip he makes eight to ten times a day.

at the end of the 1980s, rapidly increasing numbers of NGOs and IOs have played a role in the country.

Nongovernmental Organizations and Other Associations

Local NGOs usually are funded by IOs, donor countries, or international NGOs. In 1999, there were over two hundred local NGOs, all but two formed since 1992. Given a traditional absence of associations outside the state and religious institutions, NGOs represent a significant development. Some have focused on rural development, welfare, education, and women's issues. Perhaps the NGOs with the greatest immediate impact have been local human rights organizations, which have established extensive grassroots networks to document human rights abuses.

Gender Roles and Statuses

Division of Labor by Gender. In most spheres, there is some flexibility in gender roles. Most tasks performed by men occasionally are performed by women, and vice versa. Traditionally among villagers, men fished, plowed, threshed rice, made and repaired tools, and cared for cattle. Women transplanted seedlings; did washing, mending, and

housecleaning; performed most of the child care; and did the everyday shopping. Women are traditionally responsible for a family's money and engage in small-scale marketing.

In the DK period, communal work further broke down gender barriers, and in the post-DK period, when conscription created a shortage of men in civilian life, women were forced to do more hard physical labor. This gender imbalance meant that a small number of women played important roles in civil service and politics. The numbers of women in civil service and politics decreased somewhat in the 1990s, but new foreign-owned textile factories employ almost exclusively women laborers. Only men can enter the monkhood. While women assume ascetic lifestyles and take up residence in temples, they are considered part of the lay population.

The Relative Status of Women and Men. Bilateral kinship and a strong tendency toward matrilocality leave women in a position of relative strength. The fact that women control family finances may not be regarded as a sign of superiority but represents real power in practical terms. However, women have much less access than men to the highest positions of political and economic power.

Traditional codes of behavior for women are more elaborate and strict than those for men. Their role is often marked symbolically as inferior. While traditional art and contemporary media images of women show them as active agents, they often are depicted as physically vulnerable to men. Domestic violence against women at the village level is widespread, and those women have little legal recourse.

Marriage, Family, and Kinship

Marriage. Marriage traditionally is arranged by the parents of the bride and groom or by someone acting as their representative. Ideally, the groom originates the courtship process by asking his parents to approach the parents of a woman to whom he is attracted. Neither the groom nor the bride is forced to take a marriage partner, although parents may have considerable influence in choosing a partner. Considerations of the benefits to the two families often figure more prominently in the choice of a marriage partner than does romantic love. It is not unusual for decisions about marriage to be made before a couple has had much contact. Specialists in reading horoscopes typically are consulted about the appropriateness of a wedding, although their advice is not always followed. The groom pays bride-wealth to the family of the bride; this money sometimes is used to buy jewelry or clothing for the bride or defray the cost of the wedding.

Although polygyny was legal before 1989, true polygyny, sanctioned by ceremony and both wives living in the same house, was rarely practiced outside of royalty in modern times. However, a mistress is referred to as a second wife, and even though bigamy was prohibited by the 1993 constitution, the practice of keeping a second or third wife does not carry a social stigma. There is strong social pressure to marry and for those who marry to have children. Divorce is a socially recognized option, although there is social pressure against it and some reluctance to grant it.

Domestic Unit. The domestic unit is classically a nuclear family consisting of parents and children; however, there is much flexibility in allowing other arrangements. Residence after marriage is ideally neolocal but often, for practical reasons, with the parents of one of the spouses. The preference is for matrilocality, although this is not a rigid rule. Aged parents often live with their adult children. Major family decisions are shared by the husband and wife.

Inheritance. An inheritance is ideally divided equally among children without regard to gender or age order, although the child who supported the parents in their old age may be favored and a child no longer living in the village may receive less property.

Kin Groups. Kin groups larger than the family have no socially prescribed role, although they can be a source of emotional bonds and personal alliance.

Socialization

Infant Care. Infant care is characterized by almost constant attention to the child, who is rarely left alone. The child is carefully observed to determine the character it is believed to already possess; it is considered from birth an active agent and its wishes, such as who should hold it, are observed and respected.

Child Rearing and Education. Children are socialized early to respect the authority of parents and older siblings. There is a strong cultural value of "study," but little sense of study as oriented toward a specific goal or profession. Schools in Cambodia emphasize the copying of texts and memorization. Since the DK period, education has been plagued by the poor condition of buildings, lack of books and trained teachers, and the inability of the government to pay teachers. Boys sometimes enter the monkhood as an alternative to state education.

Higher Education. Tertiary education has only gradually been re-instituted since 1979 and is still on unsteady foundations. Over the course of the 1980s, different universities were reopened: The Faculty of Medicine, Pharmacy, and Dentistry in 1979, teacher training schools in 1980, a technical school in 1981, an Institute of Economics in 1984,

and the Agricultural Institute in 1985. The University of Phnom Penh was not reopened until 1988. Tertiary education has been very dependent on foreign aid, foreign faculty, and overseas training of students.

Etiquette

Khmer has a complex system of pronouns and terms of address that distinguishes between people of formal rank, people with whom the speaker is in everyday interaction (further distinguished by relative age), and those with whom one assumes a marked informality, including people of clear inferior status and those with whom the speaker shares a long-standing familiar equality. Those addressing monks or royalty are expected to use even more complex linguistic systems, which, in addition to special pronouns and terms of address, include special



A woman registers to vote in Phnom Penh. Despite this right, women wield little political power.

vocabulary for sleeping, eating, walking, and, in the case of royalty, for body parts. Relative rank is also distinguished by the order by which traditional greetings, palms together raised in supplication, are made, the degree of the hands' elevation, and the consideration of whether this greeting or a Western handshake is used. A major part of etiquette involves knowing these systems and how to negotiate their ambiguities; the systems were partially abandoned during the socialist periods, but since 1991 have been revived with new emphasis.

There is a much stronger taboo against public touching between men and women than in Western countries, but same-sex touching is more accepted than, for example, in the

United States. Conventional wisdom holds that the head is the highest part of the body and the feet the lowest, and it is rude to touch another adult's head, just as it is rude to point one's foot at another person. However, a certain kind of intimacy among equals is characterized by the breaking of the norm, with friendly cuffs to the other person's head.

Religion

Religious Beliefs. Theravada Buddhism spread in the later years of the Khmer Empire and is traditionally considered the religion of ethnic Khmer. Animist practices and what are called Brahmanistic practices are also part of the culture and are deeply intermingled with the everyday practice of Buddhism. They are not considered separate religions but part of the spectrum of choices for dealing with moral, physical, and spiritual needs. Buddhism is a national tradition, with a bureaucracy and a written tradition. Brahmanist and spirit practices are more localized and are passed on from person to person rather than as a formal institution.

All religious traditions were weakened by the banning of religious observances by the DK and by the religious policies of PRK, which restricted religion and emphasized a Buddhism consistent with socialist modernity. Since restrictions were lifted in 1989, religion has enjoyed a revival. Christian converts returned from refugee camps and foreign countries, and Christianity has established a strong foothold among ethnic Khmers. A number of other religious movements draw on the appeal of powerful traditional cultural icons and funding by overseas Khmer.

Religious Practitioners. Theravada Buddhist monks can be seen in saffron robes walking in procession in the early mornings, when they go from door to door asking for food. A lay specialist, the



These two Buddha factory workers are representative of the female-dominated industrial work force in Cambodia.

achar, also plays an important role as the person who leads public chanting and an expert in the formulas for different rituals.

Outside the formal sphere of Buddhism there are other practitioners. The *krou* (or *krou khmaer*) specializes in traditional medicine and magic, including the making of amulets, and negotiating with certain kinds of spirits; the *thmuapis* a kind of *krou* specializing in black magic. The *rouporroup arâkk* is a spirit medium through whom special knowledge can be obtained.

Rituals and Holy Places. The Buddhist temple complex, or *vott*, is central to community life, as is the calendar of Buddhist holidays, which is linked to the seasons and the agricultural cycle. Monks must reside in a single temple for the length of the rainy season, and ceremonies mark the beginning and end of the retreat. The period around the end of the rainy season, after rice has been transplanted but before the harvest takes place, includes two major holidays: Pchum Ben (a two-week period of rituals in honor of the spirits of the dead) and Kâthin (a day for processions and the ceremonial presentation of monks' robes). The day of the Buddha's birth and enlightenment (May) and the day of the Buddha's last sermon (February) are also important holidays. The beginning of the Buddhist lunar calendar occurs in April and has both religious and secular aspects.

Death and the Afterlife. Cambodian Buddhists believe in reincarnation, although this may include temporary periods in realms resembling heaven or hell. The dead usually are cremated after an elaborate procession. Ceremonies in memory of the dead are held on the seventh and hundredth days after death.

Medicine and Health Care

Western and Chinese medicine and health care coexist with traditional Cambodian practices that partly derive from Ayurvedic tradition, under the guidance of *krou khmaer*. Western medicine enjoys great prestige, but there is a lack of professionals. Widespread use of imported western drugs, including intravenous serums and other injections, involves the role of semi-skilled professionals. Even when the medicine is "western," its practice is deeply shaped by Khmer folk categorizations of the nature of illness and the properties of medicine.

Secular Celebrations

In Phnom Penh the most popular secular holiday is the Water Festival, 21–23 November, with its colorful longboat races and the nighttime display of illuminated

boats. Spirit practices also associated with the boat races mean that the holiday is not completely secular.

Independence Day (9 November) and the King's Birthday (31 October) have in recent years involved large government-sponsored celebrations. However these holidays, and other smaller ones, like Constitution Day, the Day of the Royal Plowing Ceremony, and the Victory Day over Genocidal Crime, do not have the widespread cultural resonance of more religious celebrations such as New Year's, Pchum Ben, and Kathin.

The Arts and Humanities

Support for the Arts. Since 1979, there has been a governmental effort to restore aspects of traditional culture destroyed during the DK period. Most state and international funding has gone toward the restoration of Angkorean antiquities, but there also has been support for classical dance and for recording traditional music and setting up workshops for making traditional instruments. In recent years, there has been NGO support for preserving and developing marketing strategies for traditional weavers. Some musicians, singers, and theater groups earn money by performing at village festivals and weddings. The most successful perform on radio and television and market their work on cassette tapes. Overseas Cambodian musical groups and video producers also sell their work in Cambodia.

Literature. There is a long tradition of the use of writing, with important religious texts, royal chronicles, and epic poetry, but modern literature is undeveloped. Oral traditions are strong: domestic storytelling and a genre of narrative singing to a banjolike instrument play important cultural roles.

Virtually no literature was produced during the DK period, and many writers were killed or fled. Literature in the 1980s had a socialist orientation. Since 1991, there has been greater freedom to publish pre-1975 literature but little money to publish new books. Small newspapers have flourished, and some satirical writing has appeared. Pre-1975 authors living overseas and younger writers have published Khmer books in their countries of resettlement.

Graphic Arts. While much work in graphic arts is produced, it often is seen as mere artisanship and has received little attention. Some art is produced for tourists and the decoration of homes and offices. Since the early 1990s, the most important project for painters has been the restoration of murals in Buddhist temples. Graphic art is rarely seen as the individual expression of the artist.

Performance Arts. Classical dance and music, originally associated with the court, enjoy great prestige, although live performances by the national companies are not frequent. Less professional musicians, singers, and theater artists keep alive local traditions. Virtually every village has musicians who play at weddings. A pop tradition has revived since the end of socialism.

While filmmaking was revived in the 1980s, the output remains small and the budgets are low. Television is dominated by films and soap operas from Thailand and Hong Kong, dubbed into Khmer.

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