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**ADAPTATION OF CAMBODIANS IN NEW ZEALAND
ACHIEVEMENT, CULTURAL IDENTITY AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Man Hau Liev

**ADAPTATION OF CAMBODIANS IN NEW ZEALAND
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A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
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University of Auckland**

Abstract

This thesis has two foci: how Cambodians with a refugee background manage their new life in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and how an identity as a Khmer Kiwi transnational community has developed.

Analytic concepts — such as forced migration, cultural bereavement, adaptation, integration, diaspora, transnationalism, identification, and community of practice — are used to trace the trajectory of the contemporary way of life of Cambodians, their community development, and their cultural identity. The data gathered from mixed-method research reveal the various opinions, strategies, coping mechanisms, and paths that Cambodian participants have adopted in order to adapt to life in New Zealand and still maintain their Khmer heritage. The majority of participants were proud of their personal achievements, and now have found normalcy in their new life.

Individual struggles to engage and integrate with multicultural New Zealand society have required negotiation and protection of group interests, and inevitably some of these have resulted in conflicts and fragmentation within the Khmer community. Religious practice, organisation, and leadership became the main driving forces for asserting Khmer community identity. Collective memory was harnessed to deal with shared cultural bereavement, and the quest for belonging lent momentum to the community's development and management of its identity. Khmer Theravada Buddhism has emerged as a means by which the majority of Cambodians can achieve their spiritual wellbeing, and has become a platform for various community identity developments within the New Zealand social and legal contexts. Gender roles and structures are a significant part of community development and of my analysis.

This development of Khmer identity in New Zealand is a new strand of Khmer identity: Khmer heritage, transnational experience, and 'Kiwi-ism'. Such transformation of identity reflects geo-political influences on integration in the form of belonging to and identifying with two or more groups. For example, the majority of participants proudly identified themselves as Khmer Kiwis. Their transnational lives have been enriched by their country of origin (Cambodia) and their country of residence (Aotearoa/New Zealand).

Key words:

Cambodian refugees, forced migration, adaptation, integration, transnationalism, Buddhism, Khmer identity, community development, and community of practice.

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BLDP	Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
FUNCINPEC	<i>Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendent, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif</i>
ICCI	Inter-Church Commission on Immigration and Refugee Resettlement (the present-day Refugee and Migrant Service — RMS)
IRC	International Rescues Committees
KPNLF	Kampuchean People's National Liberation Front
LRCRCS	League of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NZIS	New Zealand Immigration Service
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
RMS	Refugee and Migrant Service (previously known as ICCI)
SOC	State of Cambodia
UNBRO	United Nations Border Relief Operation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
USA	United States of America

Glossary of Khmer Words

Achar	អាចារ្យ	Khmer elder administrator of ceremony; ritualist.
Ajakh	អាជ្ញ	Daily Buddhist monk's prayer.
Anusangha Vacchāra	អនុសង្ឃវច្ឆរា	An annual national meeting of the monks.
Barb	បាប	Bad merit.
Boun	បុណ្យ	Good merit or punya.
Brahma	ព្រះព្រហ្ម	One of the principal gods of the Brahmanic trinity, the “creator”; generally represented with four faces and four arms, mounted on the Hamsa or sacred goose. Symbols associated with him include: disc, ladle, book, rosary, vase, flywhisk and sceptre.
Bodhi Tree	ដើមពោធិ	A papal tree or <i>Ficus religiosa</i> . The tree under which the Buddha achieved Enlightenment.
Buddha	ព្រះពុទ្ធ	Founder of Buddhism; a north Indian philosopher, Gautama Siddhartha, who attained enlightenment and discovered the law of reciprocal origination of causes and effects, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path which lead to the end of transmigration — Samsara and suffering.
Buddhism	ព្រះពុទ្ធសាសនា	Asian religion based on the teachings of Buddha.
Cambodia	ប្រទេសកម្ពុជា	English name of Kampuchea (Kambuja).
Cambodian	ខ្មែរ	People of Cambodia – ជនជាតិ ខ្មែរ ប្រជាជនខ្មែរ
Chedi	ចេតីយ	A stupa or Buddhist monument of a funeral or commemorative nature, often containing relics or cremated remains.
Four Noble Truths		The doctrine expounded (after the Middle Way) in Buddha's first sermon, viz. (1) life is suffering — ឥត្ត; (2) suffering has a cause; (3) suffering can be eliminated; (4) there is a path for elimination.
Five Precepts	សីលប្រាំ	Pancha Sila — បញ្ចៈសីលា — are the five basic Buddhist rules to refrain from (1) destroying living creatures, (2) taking that which is not given, (3) sexual misconduct, (4) incorrect speech, and (5) intoxicating drinks and drugs.

Karma	កម្ម	Actions with moral intention; good karma leads to good merit or boun បុណ្យ។
Kampong	កំពង់	Pier, port, or village on the bank of a waterway.
Kampuchea	កម្ពុជា	Formal name of Cambodia.
Khmer	ខ្មែរ	Cambodians who are descendant of the indigenous people living in ancient Kampuchea and present Cambodia, or ភាសាខ្មែរ language of the Khmer.
Khmer Krom	ខ្មែរក្រោម	Khmer indigenous living in Vietnam.
Nain	លោកទេស សាមណេរ	Samaneir or Buddhist novice.
Nikaya	និកាយ	Sect of Sangha, a body of monks sharing an ordination tradition, and in agreement on matters of discipline. There are two nikaya in Cambodia. Dhamayuttika-Nikaya ធម្មបុត្តិកនិកាយ is based on a strict interpretation of the rule of conduct (Vineya or discipline) and the various roles of the monk. This school places great emphasis on education and meditation in the quest for Nirvana and less on pastoral and parish activities than does the school of Moha-Nikaya មហានិកាយ.
Ramayana	រាមកេរ្តិ៍	Famous Hindu epic (Khmer: ‘Reamker’); portraying Rama’s struggle to find his consort, Sita — who has been captured by the demon Ravana — with the support of the monkey King Hanuman. Scenes from this magnificent tale have been widely used in the ornamentation of temples throughout Southeast Asia.
Ramvong	រាំវង់	Khmer dance performed in a circle where couples follow one another.
Panhia	បញ្ញា	Intelligence and knowledge.
Phchium Ben	ភ្ជុំបិណ្ឌ	A commemoration of the spirit of ancestors, this is one of the main festivities of the Khmer calendar around the last crescent of September or October. The festival lasts 15 days, each of which is called a day of Kan Ben កាន់បិណ្ឌ. A Ben is an offering. The word ‘Ben’ is derived from Sanskrit pinda, or balls of rice to be offered to the souls of the dead. On the last morning of Phchium

Ben, the majority of Cambodians go to the temple to offer the food for the spirit of their ancestors.

Phiku	ភិក្ខុ	Buddhist monk.
Popil	ពពិល	A burning candle with melted wax on an upside-down heart-shaped handle as a symbol of the union of God Shiva and his consort Uma: the candle represents <i>linga</i> of Shiva (or male), and the upside-down heart-shaped handle represents <i>yoni</i> of <i>Uma</i> (Shiva's wife or female).
Salar Chun	សាលាឆាន់	A hall for Buddhists offering food to the monks.
Samadhi	សមាធិ	Meditation and focus.
Sampot	សំពត់	Fabric panel worn round the lower half of the body.
Sangha	ព្រះសង្ឃ	Buddhist monks or their community.
Sila	សីល	Virtue or a precept.
Simar	សីមា	A boundary.
Stupa	ចេតីយ	A Buddhist monument of a funeral or commemorative nature, often containing relics or cremated remains.
Theravada Buddhism	ព្រះពុទ្ធសាសនាផ្នែកហិនយាន	An orthodox branch of Buddhism, also called “small vehicle” school, that spreads southwards from Nepal across to South Asia and Southeast Asia.
Tontine	តុងទីន	A rotating saving and credit association (ROSCA) or an informal financial network of 12 to 24 members who contribute equal share of money to a pool and take turns to access the money pool for their needs through bidding.
Tripitaka	ត្រៃបិដក	Buddhist canon, composed of: (1) <i>Sutra Pitaka</i> — the monastic discipline; (2) <i>Vinaya Pitaka</i> — discourse; and (3) <i>Abhidhamma Pitaka</i> — doctrinal analyses.
Vihara	វិហារ	A ceremonial building which hosts the statue of Buddha.
Wat	វត្ត	A Khmer Buddhist temple.

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