

Cambodia in Transition: Family, Culture and the New World

Novel: *Made in Cambodia*

Exegesis: **Cambodia in Transition: Family, Culture and the New World**

Robert Horne

Master of Arts (University of Adelaide)

Graduate Diploma of Education (University of Adelaide)

Bachelor of Arts (University of Adelaide)

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Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

University of Technology, Sydney

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Date:

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the current state of relations in Cambodia between individuals, their families and elite forces, and the direction taken by traditional spirit beliefs since the introduction of Western capital and education. I argue that Cambodia has been in the control of elites at least since the days of the Khmer kings from the 7th century, and that the didactic elements of Theravada Buddhist literature have been a critically important controlling factor. In my novel and my exegesis I examine the concept of the ‘ideal woman’ at the centre of the Buddhist social model and discuss the radical changes visited upon young women since the introduction of internationalism. In my exegesis the sociological theories of Max Weber and George Herbert Mead are used to show how Cambodian peasant life has been sustained for centuries by the Symbolic Interaction of individuals with family and Theravada Buddhism; I argue that in the last twenty years there has been a shift towards Marxian Conflict Theory. In my novel the advent of capital and factories has been followed by unionism, which I dramatise through the struggle of industrial garment workers for wage improvements. A related romance between an Australian man and Cambodian woman links the reader to an examination of the modern Cambodian family and the state of traditional spirit beliefs. My exegesis places my novel in the context of modern literature written by outsiders about Cambodia, and my interviews with five Cambodian writers show the confines still placed by Government on writing by Cambodians. I look at the impact of new capital on the lives of young women in the garment factories and examine the various types of relationship between Western men and Cambodian women. Drawing on my own interviews with forty young Cambodians, I argue that the new generation of young people has retained family ties and many traditional beliefs despite new materialism, Western education and often physical separation from their families. Despite outside influence the family remains strong for now and, in my novel at least, Western culture can bend to the Cambodian way.