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From “Originals” to Replicas: Diverse Significance of Khmer Statues¹

Keiko Miura

1 Introduction

Khmer statues of diverse materials and states from “originals” to replicas have been taken out of Cambodia throughout its history and are found today in a number of foreign galleries, museums, and private collections, many through illicit trade and trafficking. This chapter attempts to discuss the ambiguity of originals, replicas, and fakes, and demonstrates the discrepancies of the importance of the conditions of such statues for diverse actors, such as local religious followers, government officials, art producers, antique dealers, and buyers.

Headless or bodiless sandstone statues lie or stand in an ancient temple ground. Equally, countless headless bas-reliefs are found on the walls of historic monuments. This has become a common sight in Cambodia that reminds us of the country’s tragic past. Many wars, invasions, and occupations have taken place, and the genocidal Pol Pot regime (1975–1979) which reigned over the country killed

¹ I am indebted in various ways to staff members of the National Museum in Phnom Penh; the Angkor Conservation Office; the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts; EFEO in Siem Reap; UNESCO office in Phnom Penh; the APSARA Authority; an ICCROM consultant; JASA; JICA’s Cambodia office; Wat Dâmnak, Hang Chansophea (researcher); Ang and Rithy, (research assistants-drivers) as well as many other people who have kindly co-operated with my research. This research was also possible with research funds from the Research Group on Cultural Property of Göttingen University, for which I am truly grateful.

innumerable people; during these events uncountable buildings and treasures were destroyed and looted. Negligence of restoration and conservation due to armed struggles, migration, lack of labour forces and concern, and/or funds has equally facilitated natural decay, fomenting an environment favourable for plunder. As a consequence, Cambodia has become one of the countries so devastated both physically and socio-culturally that have fallen prey to the illicit traffic of cultural property on a large scale. The trade has been especially rampant during the last four decades, most extensively during the last twenty years, so much so that the sites exposed to such traffic can be found throughout the country.² The increase in the trade since the 1990s is, in part, due to the steady peace advanced in Cambodia, which has facilitated the safe access of robbers and traders to even remoter sites. Furthermore, the trade was intensified when the country became unstable prior to and immediately after the national elections in 1993 and 1998. A great amount of Cambodian cultural property, in particular stone, wooden, and metal statues, once trafficked beyond its national borders, has ended up in private collections and museums abroad, mostly in Europe, the U.S.A., and Asia (cf. Bunker and Latchford 2004, 2011; Davis 2006; GoCambodia n.d.; Lafont 2004; MIAR 1999; Meo 2007; Nagashima 2002; Stark and Griffin 2004; Thosarat 2001).

Prior to discussing Khmer statues in detail, it is necessary to clarify my use of terms such as “replica,” “copy,” “reproduction,” “fake,” and “forgery.” The terms “replica,” “copy,” and “reproduction” are used interchangeably to mean that the object is not “original” or “authentic” in the art historical sense, and is reproduced in place of the “original,” but not necessarily with the intention of deceiving the parties involved.³ The terms “fake” and “forgery,” however, are used interchangeably to mean that the object has been reproduced with the intention of deceiving the parties involved regarding the quality of the object in the cultural context given. These objects are intended mostly for art dealers, collectors, and some tourists (cf. Schefold 2002: 10-14).

Where “original” stone statues or figures have been lost or damaged, one may find either empty spaces or replicas. Some stone statues are partially original with cement or new stone parts added to make up for the missing elements, while others are completely newly made of stone or cement. The Angkor Conservation Office was established in Siem Reap in 1908 by the French, more specifically the *École Française d’Extrême-Orient* (EFEO; APSARA Authority 2004), and has been mainly, but not exclusively, responsible for sheltering endangered cultural goods subject to threats or actual looting, restoring “original” ancient statues and buildings, and producing replicas to be placed in heritage sites, museums, and other places for religious worship and touristic purposes (Ang et al. 1998: 104; Khun 2008: 11).

² See UNESCO (1995-2012).

³ See Bendix (1997) for debates on and diverse use of a notion of authenticity by a variety of professionals.

Each statue has its own history of tragedy, survival, and/or reproduction. The enforcement of the law regarding the export of cultural property in Cambodia since 2000 has prompted the establishment of a new business of producing replicas and fakes in Cambodia and stimulated more in Thailand, where such business has already been in existence for decades. Some objects are so well made that even experienced dealers and experts may be unable to easily distinguish the “authentic” from the inauthentic (KI Media 2010; Lafont 2004: 59-61, 76; Meyers 2004: 19-24; Porte 2004: 173-177; Thosarat 2001: 13-14).

The details of the illicit trade of Cambodian cultural heritage are in preparation by Hauser-Schäublin for another publication as a result of the research conducted by the members of the Cultural Property Research Unit, Göttingen University. Therefore, while this chapter is also expected to contribute to the study of illicit traffic of cultural property and restitution (cf. Davis 2006, 2011; Hoffman 2006; Manacorda and Chappell 2011), its focus is on the discrepancies in the significance of the respective statues for local religious devotion and rededication to the damaged, restored, relocated, and copied objects contrasted with the concerns about the materiality and the “authenticity” in the art historical sense or such façades. The latter are relevant for the staff members of the Angkor Conservation Office and museums, illicit traffickers, antique dealers, art shop owners, replica producers, forgers, and government officials, who may, at times, show conflicting interests.

1.1 Khmer Statues and their Contextual Meanings

Stone, wooden, or metal statues of Hindu gods, the Buddha, or kings associated with ancient monuments and temples, or those symbolically representing the founders of the villages, districts, or the kingdom have played important roles in the religious lives of Khmer people. Ancient temples, statues, and sites had undergone restoration, destruction, alteration, and/or addition, well before the French colonization, which have been noted by archaeologists, architects, art historians, restorers, and conservators in the course of research, excavation, and restoration (see Ang et al. 1998; Jacques 1999).

The best-known restoration was one described in inscriptions that King Sitha restored Angkor Wat (meaning a “City Temple”) in 1577-1578. His mother, overjoyed with her son’s devotion, pledged to restore the Buddha statues in the Bakan (Ang et al. 1998: xvi; Chandler 1992: 84; Warrack 2013: 220). Another case is that of an enormous stone statue of the four-faced Buddha that was lost in Longvek, the capital after the fall of Angkor, leaving only four pairs of feet, after the Siamese attack in 1594 (Chandler 1992: 84). The plundered statue was replaced by a replica, though much smaller, and has been a place of worship for Cambodians until today.

Hindu or other objects of earlier periods, and usually not Buddha statues, have been worshipped as *neak tā* (territorial guardian spirits) by the communities nearby; this veneration encompasses cultural memory, legends, codes of conduct, and ritu-

als (cf. Miura 2004:24, 38-176).⁴ The *neak tā* is considered as the founding “grandfather” and “grandmother” of a given community and also the protector of “good” people in its territory.

The general term for cultural property in Khmer is *sāmbat wabbathor*, which is distinct from that for cultural heritage, i.e. *ker morodâk*, *ker dâmael*, and more recently, *petekapboan wabbathor* (cf. Miura 2011: 101-102). However, when talking about antiquities subject to illicit trade, they are often referred to as *kebal neak tā* or the head of a *neak tā*. Despite the name, the *kebal neak tā* is not necessarily the head of a *neak tā* statue, but an important part of a *neak tā* statue lost, or more broadly, antiquities of any form or material that were looted, including those recognized as sacred by the local community at large. The *kebal neak tā* is generally regarded as being beyond individual use or possession. In particular, sandstone, the material predominantly used for carvings and statues in ancient monuments in Cambodia, is believed to be so sacred that nobody dares to take it into the house. If one does, however, it is believed that misfortunes will follow. Members of spiritual communities, therefore, usually do not dare to steal a *kebal neak tā* for themselves or sale.⁵

2 The Multiplication of the Leper King Statue

The most exemplary figure of worship is that of the legendary “*stec gamlañ* or *sdach komlong* (Leper King).” It is made of sandstone and used to be placed facing east, at the centre of the so-called Terrace of the Leper King in Angkor Thom (Fig. 1), the major capital city of Angkor from the end of the 12th century to the mid-15th century. Two other “original” stone statues of this “king” with similar designs exist, according to a senior staff member of the Angkor Conservation Office: one in Wat Khnat (Khnat Temple) near the southwest corner of western Baray (a huge water reservoir located west of Angkor Thom), though it was not known as the Leper King then (Chandler 1996: 7). The other, broken without a head, was discovered in 2003 in Tuk Thla village not so far from Wat Khnat when a farmer was ploughing the ground. The first statue was moved from the Terrace in Angkor Thom to the National Museum in Phnom Penh. The one from Wat Khnat has been placed in the traffic island in front of the royal residence in Siem Reap. The third one was moved from Tuk Thla village to the Angkor Conservation Office.

These “original” statues are not in perfect conditions, because the heads of the first two were looted and replaced with replicas, the accounts of which will be

⁴ *Neak* means a person. *Tā* means an old man or a grandfather, which is used as an honorific attached to the name of a man who may not always be old enough to be called an “old man.” The *neak tā* can be both male and female.

⁵ Bertrand Porte, an EFEO stone conservator of the National Museum’s restoration workshop, also said, “Khmer people cherish religious artefacts,” so “[t]hey don’t want to keep them at home” (GoCambodia n.d.).

elaborated later. The third is lying in the compound of the Angkor Conservation Office and may be restored for veneration in the future. Because of stylistic reasons, conservators identified the three as statues of the Leper King, but as Chandler (1996: 6) points out, the name of the Leper King came from the Terrace, not from the statue, because the second one found in Wat Khnat was not called by that name by the local people.

As for the name of the Leper King, Chandler (1996: 6) states that the statue was revered as such by the mid-19th century, which may be related to the fact that its surface was partly corroded and covered with lichen, which was reminiscent of a person suffering from leprosy (see also Freeman and Jacques 1999: 110).

The Leper King statue from Angkor Thom is seated with the left leg bent inwards and the right leg bent up (Fig. 1). Three toes of the left foot are missing. The left hand is placed on the left knee; the right hand without an attribute is on the right knee. The right hand probably held an attribute, possibly a mace. The face has a carved moustache and shows two fang-like teeth (Freeman and Jacques 1999: 110; Hang 2004: 115).⁶ Some stone statues of this legendary king and even replicas with variations in style and often with more complete form than the three “originals” have missing parts and were exposed to Khmer Rouge destruction in the 1970s and/or attempts at looting since the 1980s. Their survival, however, seemed to have augmented the popular belief in the protective power of the spirit embodied in the statues. It is not clear how many replicas exist in the country, but there are two in the Angkor Conservation Office, excluding one in a different style.

⁶ Scholars have argued whom the statue represents: either Yama – the Hindu god of justice and death (Dagens 1989:91; Freeman and Jacques 1999:110; Khun 2008:150; Sahai 2007:73; Thompson 2004:106), Kubera – the Hindu god of wealth, who was reputed to have suffered from leprosy (Moura cited in Briggs 1999:232), or Dharmarāja – the equivalent of Yama (Coedès and Fino, cited in Briggs 1999:232; Chandler 1996:6).

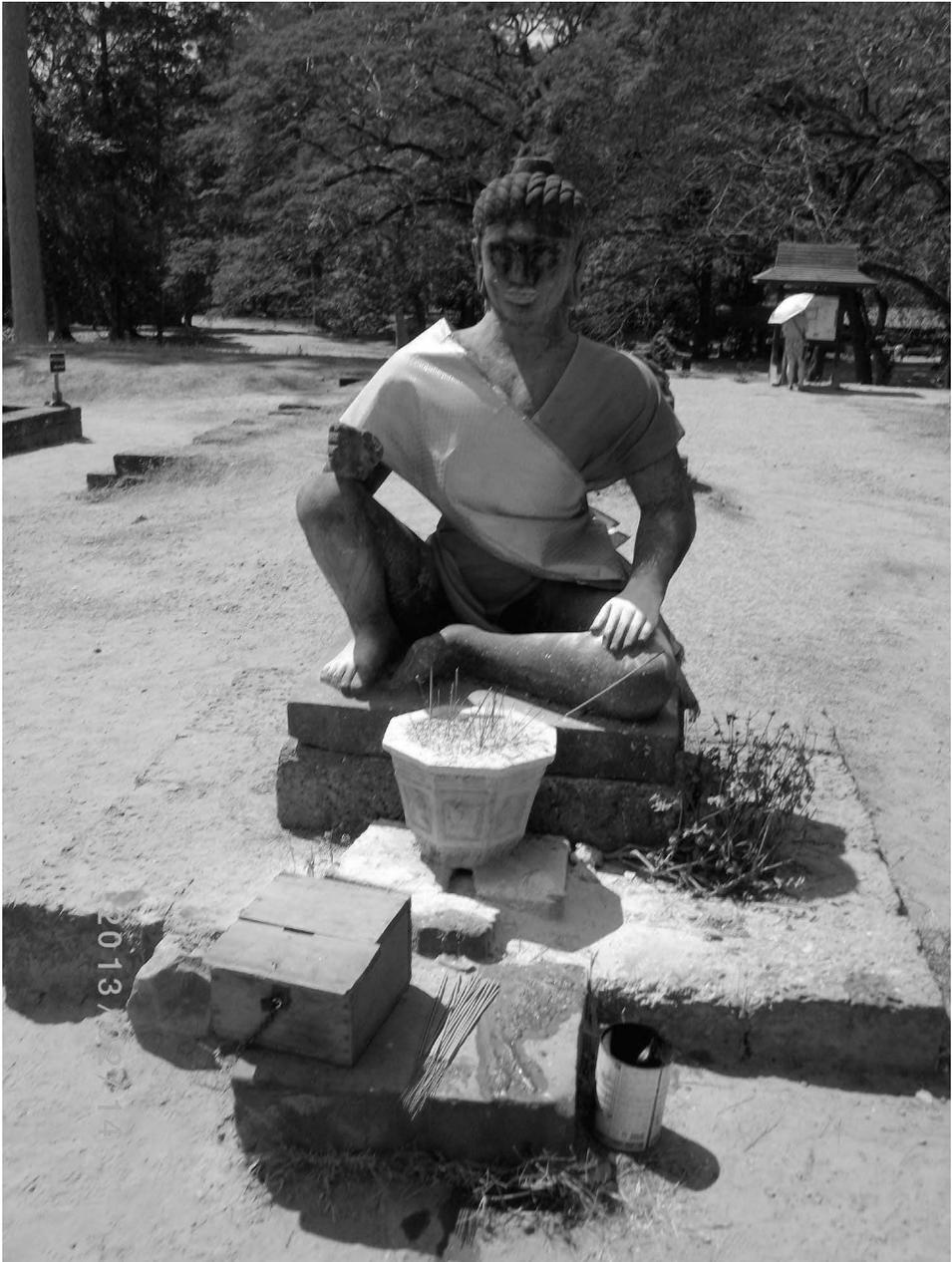


Fig. 1: Replica statue of the Leper King in Angkor Thom (2013, Keiko Miura).

The “original” statue from Wat Khnat is referred to as *neak tā Yiey Tep* (*neak tā Grandmother Tep*)⁷. Two fairly new replicas, one in cement and the other in stone, exist in Siem Reap as well. There have been four replicas reported in Phnom Penh, of which two were lost.

The importance of the Leper King for Cambodians is explicit in a local legend that tells of the beginning of the Angkor civilization, differing from the standard scholarly knowledge or official art history. The Leper King was called Preah Thaong. He arrived from abroad by boat and met and married a human-formed daughter of the *nāga* – multi-headed snake – the owner of the land.⁸ According to a legend, the place that the couple met was an island called Kôk Thlok surrounded by the sea, where the Bayon temple stands today.⁹ The king of the *nāga* swallowed water to drain the land for the couple to create a capital. Here, Preah Thaong is credited with having constructed Bayon against the plea of the *nāga* king, who was so scared of the faces of a (foreign) god depicted on the temple.¹⁰ Having despised his non-human father-in-law, Preah Thaong killed him. When the *nāga*'s venomous blood splashed on his body, this inflicted leprosy on Preah Thaong (cf. Ang 2007: 365; Briggs 1999: 232; Chandler 1996: 4-5; Gaudes 1993: 333-358; Miura 2004: 62-63).

⁷ *Tep* means *tevoda* or the god, according to a staff member of the Angkor Conservation Office.

⁸ “Preah” means “holy” or “sacred” and is used as an honorific of the king, queen, prince, princess, Hindu deities, the Buddha, and Buddhist monks. Thaong is the name of the prince/king. The spelling is closer to how it is pronounced in Siem Reap, whereas Thong is a spelling more commonly used. The *nāga* is a mythic snake depicted in Hindu and Buddhist iconographies and represented with an odd-number of heads.

⁹ Kôk means a mound which does not become inundated during the rainy season. Thlok is a kind of a tree, *parinari anamensis* (Ang 2007: 364; Dy Phon 2000: 490). In this case, the term for the island *kob* is not used, but *kôk* to show the actual geography of the time when Angkor Thom was supposed to have been created and how it appears today.

¹⁰ The local name of the faces, Prohm Muk Buon (Brahma's Four Faces) led earlier scholars to believe them to be such, but later the identity came to be regarded as those of Avalokiteśvara because the creator of the temple was Jayavarman VII – a pious Mahāyāna Buddhist (cf. Jacques and Freeman 1997: 12). The story may be interpreted as indigenous animistic power resisting the influences or domination of a foreign religious power represented by these faces. Scholars have also argued about the real identity of the king. Aymonier (cited in Briggs 1999: 232; Chandler 1996: 6-7) considered him to be Yaśovarman I (889-900+) – the founder of the city of Angkor (Yaśodarapura) and known to be a leper. Notton identified him with Indravarman III (reigned 1296-1308) (cited in Chandler 1996:7), while for Marchal, an EFEO conservator, it is Śiva ascetic (cited in Briggs 1999: 232). Chandler (1996: 3) regarded him to be Indravarman II (reigned c. 1220-1243), a forgotten king without inscriptions of his own. Some, like Goloubew (cited in Chandler 1996: 9) and Thompson (2004: 102-108) argued that the Leper King was Jayavarman VII (1181-1219) who constructed Angkor Thom, Bayon and other prominent buildings. Among the Khmer, Jayavarman VII is today one of the most respected Angkor kings. Statues and heads of Jayavarman VII and Buddha statues considered to represent this king have also been respected and venerated by Cambodians, but not as *neak tā*.

The legend is still told in the Angkor region and has been passed down from generation to generation; several statues of the Leper King were made of stone, as mentioned above. The figures of the King vary in style and are rather simple and not particularly artistic compared with other more elaborate or expressive statues. Notwithstanding, a number of replicas have been produced and placed in and around the ancient and contemporary capitals, i.e. Angkor-Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. This shows how important the representation of statues is: not based on art historical or historical sense. Regardless of their being “originals” or replicas, they have been objects of worship among Cambodians, while conservators, art dealers, and collectors pay almost exclusive attention to the “originality” and “authenticity” of such cultural objects. In the process of restoring a number of statues and producing and installing replicas, there have been attempts to imitate the setting of the original statue of the Leper King in Angkor Thom (Hang 2004: 125). In imitating the setting, attention was paid that the statue faced east and that it was located at the centre of the raised cruciform platform north of the royal palace (Bayon is regarded as the symbol of royalty in the legend); an island (representing Kôk Thlok) was newly created on which to place the statue, though this is also done for other statues.

After the original statue on the Terrace of the Leper King was taken to the National Museum for safekeeping in 1967, a cement replica took its place on the terrace in 1988, whose head was later decapitated by a thief who mistook it for an original (cf. Freeman and Jacques 1999: 42, 110).¹¹ A new head was produced, but, fearing a second theft, it was not placed on the replica body on the terrace for a while. Then, in 1999, a traditional healer from Phnom Penh was said to have been instructed by his spirit *grū* to install a new head on the body in order to maintain the healing power. Following the instruction, this healer and his family funded the Angkor Conservation Office to install the new head on the terrace (Figure 1) (Hang 2004: 124).

Another statue of the “Leper King” produced and placed at the pond of Wat Khnat was said to have been used to treat skin disease. It was transferred to Siem Reap at some point of time and was placed facing east on the traffic island, i.e. in the middle of a road under a *bodhi* tree (*figus religiosa*), north of the royal residence in the centre of Siem Reap. Some say that after the Khmer Rouge period, it was called Yiey Tep, but the regard as a *neak tā* seems to predate as Chandler (1996: 7) writes that throughout the 19th century, the statue was sheltered in a small hut in the manner of the *neak tā*. The only difference from the Leper King of Angkor Thom is that the statue of Yiey Tep has no fangs. The statue representing Yiey Tep was broken into pieces by the Khmer Rouge and thrown into a pond near

¹¹ A similar thing happened in the pre-Angkor heritage site of Sambor Prei Kuk in Kompong Thom Province, where one of three replica statues, produced and placed by a Japanese restoration team in recent years, was stolen by a thief mistaking it for an original (personal communications with Ichita Shimoda on August 20, 2011).

Wat Dâmnak (Dâmnak Temple) in Siem Reap. It was believed that the supernatural power (*parami*) of the statue prevented the total destruction.¹² The pieces were recovered in 1985 by the staff members of the Angkor Conservation Office together with the people of Siem Reap and returned to the spot under the *bodhi* tree. The head later disappeared, so a cement replica was produced and attached to the original, and the body was restored in 1988, which was soon afterward stolen by a thief who mistook it as the original, so another cement head was attached which remains until today (Hang 2004: 116-118).

The late King Sihanouk and his Queen sponsored the construction and consecration of a pavilion to shelter the statue in September 1998 just days before the opening of an intergovernmental summit to be presided over by the King. The summit was to be held to resolve conflict between warring political factions, following the July 1998 elections. When in residence in Siem Reap, the royal couple used to regularly present offerings to this statue. Military leaders are also said to have requested Yiey Tep’s assistance before undertaking military campaigns and afterwards returning to thank her with her favourite offerings – grilled open chicken and rice wine. The statue lacks sexual organs, but is considered male, yet Yiey Tep, a female *neak tā*, has notably become increasingly feminine over the last decade or so. Most worshippers nonetheless pay no heed to this transformation. She has been made up with face powder, cream, lipstick, and red finger-nails. Hang (2004: 118) was told by one of the caretakers that make-up was primarily applied by prostitutes, believing that “if she is beautiful, those who worship her in this way would be equally so.” There are a few spirit mediums around Siem Reap that can be possessed by Yiey Tep.

An original body of a statue in the style of Koh Ker – the 10th century capital – is associated with Yiey Tep as well and is in the compound of the Angkor Conservation Office that is located north of the royal residence. The statue sits facing east under a shelter next to a Viṣṇu statue. This figure looks clearly different from that of the Leper King, apart from its seated posture, but it has been called and worshipped as Yiey Tep by the staff members of the Angkor Conservation Office and local visitors alike. The statue was brought here from the military station near Angkor Wat in the mid-1990s. A new head in the Koh Ker style was attached, and various parts of the body were repaired. Its lips were also coloured red, like those of the “original” Yiey Tep.

A new cement replica of the Leper King statue was also created and placed facing east at the centre of the enclosed courtyard of the renovated buildings in the Angkor Conservation Office in 1996 (Hang 2004: 124). The first replica was made of concrete, which was replaced later by a stone copy because the *parami* of the

¹² Pronounced as “boramey” (Bertrand 2004: 150). The difference between the *neak tā* and the *parami* is not clear, but old mediums and people in rural areas tend to use the term *neak tā*, while more urban and younger mediums and people with stronger Buddhist influences tend to use the term *parami*. See also Bertrand (2004: 151) for his findings.

stone statue was considered stronger, according to the former director. The original plan was to place the statue in the centre of an artificial pond, which could not be realized due to lack of funding (Hang 2004: 124). The cement copy was moved to the open-air compound, where other figures are also placed.

Two replicas of the Leper King differing in size and colour are to be found facing south at the left side of the gate of Wat Svai Romiet (Svai Romiet temple) along the road connecting Angkor Wat and Siem Reap Airport. Wat Svai Romiet stands on the southeast bank of the West Baray. Apparently, the two statues are replacements for a pair of standing statues called Yiey and Tā representing female and male ancestors of people in this area. One of the original standing figures, not in the form of the Leper King, together with the entire complex of this monastery was destroyed during the Pol Pot regime. Afterwards, the abbot sought to reconstruct the destroyed buildings and statues. New statues were created to protect the area and the descendants of the people in nearby villages, i.e. Banteay Chheu and Khvien. However, these figures are not called *neak tā*, but their functions are the same. The statues of the Leper King were selected and produced by a craftsman on his own initiative to replace old Yiey and Tā statues; a simple stone statue representing Tā, and the other, painted with gold, representing Yiey. Yiey and Tā are mainly worshipped by those who pass through to do business in and around the Angkor Park. The local villagers tend to respect the *neak tā* Tā Balat in the temple compound more than Yiey and Tā outside the temple gate, although Tā Balat's original figure is lost.

The head of the original statue of the Leper King on the terrace in Angkor Thom was subject to an attempted robbery in 1967. This incident led the statue to be brought to the Angkor Conservation Office for safekeeping and then moved to the National Museum in Phnom Penh in the same year (EFEO 1908-1973:1004). The museum is located just north of the Royal Palace. The statue was then placed in the centre of the courtyard of the museum and facing east, a suggestive recreation of the Kôk Thlok Island. The statue was moved later to the gallery and is no longer subject to popular offerings. Instead, the cement replica placed in the centre of the courtyard receives offerings daily and whenever visitors come to pray with their wishes to be heard by the *pāramī* of the legendary King. Previously, this cement copy was located under a *koki* tree (*hopea, dipterocarpaceae*) (cf. Dy Phon 2000: 348-350) north of the museum building and facing east. Like the one in Siem Reap, it was also known as Yiey Tep. Her function was to protect the original statue of the Leper King, since potential thieves should believe that this was the original at a time when the security of the city and the country had become so precarious. The very fact that the original statue of the Leper King, together with the entire museum collection survived intact throughout the period of war must have convinced the Cambodian people of the extraordinary power attributed to the figure (cf. Hang 2004: 113-126).

A replica statue of the Leper King called *Brah̄ Aṅg* (Preah Ang) *Sāṅkh Cakr* (Hang 2004: 122) existed, with the addition of a conch, a disc, toes, hands, and a bouquet of lotus buds, but without fanglike teeth.¹³ This statue used to sit in a pyramid-like roofed pavilion along the Tonle Sap River directly opposite Wat Unnalom – the headquarters of the Mahānikāy sect followed by the majority of Cambodians. The statue, facing east and located northeast of the royal palace, was originally erected near this site by King Norodom (reigned 1860-1904) in the late 19th century when the capital was moved from Oudong to Phnom Penh. Local residents who fled to Wat Unnalom during World War II died from bombing; only those who sought the protection of the statue survived. Once it lost its head, but the statue was restored during the Lon Nol regime. The statue was attacked and destroyed during the Pol Pot period, but in the early-1980s the head was found in fishing net by a Cham fisherman in the Tonle Sap River. The head was purchased by a merchant in Phnom Penh who offered it to the late King Sihanouk in 1993. Members of the royal family and those of the royalist political party FUNCINPEC then sponsored to fabricate a cement replica of the Leper King statue of the museum. It was consecrated before the national election that took place in the same year. The royal family members sent offerings to the statue on holy days for many years. The statue was worshipped by local residents, including many Chinese and Vietnamese, survivors of the bombing, their children and those living overseas who occasionally visited Phnom Penh. Other people also used to come to pray when danger threatened the city or when they had marital problems, were suffering from long-term illnesses, searching for lost relatives, or wishing to win boat races during the water festival (cf. Hang 2004: 120-121). This statue is, however, no longer found there. Nobody seems to know where the statue went, but on the location now there are facilities of the Project for Flood Protection and Drainage Improvement in the Municipality of Phnom Penh of the Japan International Cooperation Agency constructed in 2007.

Another altered cement replica without fangs, but with added toes and hands, can be found facing north on a traffic island between Wat Unnalom and the river, just to the southwest of the Leper King statue previously mentioned. This statue was erected by members of the ruling party, Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), the rival of FUNCINPEC, before the national elections in 1993. This was apparently decided in consultation with a *gŕi*, a medium bearing the spirit of the Leper King, who told them it would help them win the elections on condition that a statue should be placed at the site where the original statue had been erected by King Norodom. Though the number of visitors to this replica has been less than those mentioned above, this statue receives offerings from local residents on holy days and whenever they wish, and occasionally by the founders who are members of the CPP City Hall (Hang 2004: 122-123).

¹³ The meaning of the statue is “august god (bearing a conch and a disc)” (Hang 2004: 120).

What can we learn from this phenomenon? An obvious component is that this legendary king's figure represents the seat of legitimate power and that this is tantamount to magical power, considered more potent than the others for protecting the livelihood of individuals and communities at large. The historical experiences of survival for both people and ancient objects from attacks by various forces only seemed to have convinced the people of the potency of these statues, whether they are originals or replicas. Whenever a danger is imminent or a loss is incurred, the number of statues may increase and more worshippers gather. The spirit cult is rather malleable: its potency has been adapted to shifting requirements, such as passing exams, political victory, enhancing beauty, or winning a boat race. Nevertheless, ignoring the rule of the cult or the authority of powerful spirits is believed to cause terrible consequences, which, in turn, enhances the influence of the Leper King among believers throughout Cambodia. While the cult of the Leper King or Yiey Tep literally changes shape and holds sway even without a representative figure, its potency still seems to permeate the minds of believers. There have been attempts to reproduce the configuration of the original statue in a number of cases. It is irrelevant to the believers whether they are addressing an original statue or a copy, the precise form, identical material, correct gender, or appropriate context: the Leper King's potency transcends such menial details. This Khmer acceptance of the reality of the loss of their religious objects may be conveniently exploited by art traffickers, even though it can be seen from another perspective as celebratory that the people's religious beliefs are little disturbed by it.

In summary, it can be said that the Cambodians in their ritual lives mind little whether potent statues are "originals," "replicas" with alterations or even a similarly styled statue which can be used as a replacement; this has been demonstrated with the multiple existence of the Leper King statues. Material authenticity and precision have little relevance concerning the objects used for the spirit cult in Cambodia, though a particular setting has been reproduced. The Khmer – much as believers of other faiths – hold to the power of religious narrative and knowledge. The strength of belief is rarely tied to the originality of statues – though, of course, there are pilgrimage sites and singular material objects, such as relics, that are said to hold particular potency. This may be unfortunate for the guardians of cultural heritage, conservationists, or art historians, but one cannot make believers responsible for preventing vandalism and theft. After all, it is not believers, but the aforementioned interest groups that contribute to the purported value of "originals" on the black market.

3 The Angkor Conservation Office and Its Collections

In contrast to sacred locations with originals and/or replicas standing, the Angkor Conservation Office and the statues it houses demonstrate that some statues keep

their sacredness and are worshiped even though they are housed in depots. In other words, even the site does not matter so much.

The depot of the Angkor Conservation Office under the auspices the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts has the largest collection of Khmer art in the world (ICOM 1997: 21). It also houses some offices and laboratories of foreign conservation teams that do not have their own independent facilities in the city. With the changing socio-political environment, however, the Angkor Conservation Office has gradually reduced the number of objects stored because of vandalism and the transfer of some objects to other newly opened museums in the country. In addition, the Angkor Conservation Office has slowly shifted its area of operations as well as parts of its former functions since Angkor’s World Heritage nomination in 1992. The establishment of the APSARA Authority in charge of the development and management of Angkor and Siem Reap in 1995 curtailed the field of activity of the Angkor Conservation Office. The management of fairly large and important heritage sites, such as Angkor and Koh Ker, was transferred to the APSARA Authority and, prior to the World Heritage nomination of Preah Vihear, to the Preah Vihear Authority.

The repository of the Angkor Conservation Office looks like a mausoleum of antiquities today, with many fragments and broken figures with missing parts, i.e. heads, torsos, feet, arms, etc. The sight reminds us of countless acts of vandalism in the Angkor heritage space. The Angkor Conservation Office itself was also subjected to vandalism, despite the fact that the most precious objects had been transferred to the National Museum in Phnom Penh in 1967 (Ang et al. 1998: 104). Hundreds of objects disappeared during the civil war and unstable periods between 1970 and the early-1990s; direct attacks were conducted by armed soldiers between 1970 and 1975, between 1976 and 1977, and between 1992 and 1993.

The attacks in the 1970s were conducted by Vietnamese and Khmer soldiers, in response to an increase in outside demand, initiated by American soldiers and officials based in Thailand. The Cambodian army needed money for fighting the civil war. Almost all the Cambodian conservators were killed, and dozens of statues disappeared due to the attacks between 1976 and 1977 during the Pol Pot period (cf. Lafont 2004: 44). In the 1990s, soldiers undertook the first attack in 1992; they took ten statues. The second time, in February 1993, 300 soldiers attacked with rocket-propelled grenades and AK47s;¹⁴ the 40 unarmed guards were no match for these weapons. Twenty-one sculptures were looted and several guards killed. The third attempt, however, failed due to enhanced security measures with 30 guards armed with AK-47s on 24-hour duty (Ang et al. 1998: 112; Art at Risk n.d.; Barford 2012; Brouwer 2005; Crampton 2003; Davis 2011; ICOM 1997: 20-

¹⁴ The term “AK47” is commonly used as regards to the weapons used by Cambodian soldiers; the type is specific, not just Kalashnikov rifles.

23; Lafont 2004: 44-46; Stark and Griffin 2004: 126).¹⁵ Some of the stolen objects were identified and returned to Cambodia because of the inventories established by EFEO in the 1960s and 1996 (ICOM 1997: 22-25).

With the enhanced security in recent years, the Angkor Conservation Office has become a place to visit similar to a museum for those endowed with special permission or tourists who pay some money as a voluntary donation. Since 2000 the Angkor Conservation Office has also become a site of worship, predominantly for high-ranking government officials. According to a staff member, this was prompted by a famous *grū* from Kandal Province, who prepared a ceremony to pray to the Leper King replica installed in the courtyard of the Angkor Conservation Office. On this occasion, a number of high-ranking officials presided over the ceremony, when the *grū* was said to have identified three statues in the compound as most potent. They are namely, Preah Ang Kōk Thlok, Tā Dāmbong Daek, and a Viṣṇu statue named as Preah Ang Kāng Chum by the *grū*.

The sandstone Buddha statue of Preah Kōk Thlok used to be located west of the Bayon temple, and was transferred for safekeeping to the Angkor Conservation Office in 1982. Its fame and popularity no doubt emanate from its original location and the name connected to the origin myth of the first kingdom (cf. Ang 2007: 362-377). According to the above-mentioned staff member, the late King Sihanouk prayed to it in the original site for the safety of Preah Vihear in 1962 when Cambodia fought with Thailand in the International Court of Justice in The Hague (cf. Mißling 2011: 58-62); this fact, together with the legal victory may have enhanced the credibility of the power of the statue.

¹⁵ According to different written sources and/or interviewed, there are variations on the number of attacks, the number of objects stolen and the number of guards. I adopted the detailed data from Crampton's article in the New York Times because the reporter received the information directly from Uong Vong, the then Director of the Angkor Conservation Office.



Fig. 2: Preah Kôk Thlok in the Angkor Conservation Office visited by Cambodian dignitaries (2013, Keiko Miura).

According to local informants and the staff member, the Khmer Rouge soldiers tried to destroy it with explosives made of landmines during the Pol Pot regime, but without success, though most other Buddha statues in Angkor Thom were damaged. This story of survival further enhanced the reputation of the potency of this Buddha statue. The present King Sihamoni also prayed to it. Since the *gru*'s identification of its potency, this Buddha has had a replica of the *nāga* covering attached to the back and was installed in an impressive shrine constructed especially for him (Fig. 2). Though there are many Buddha statues in the compound, this one receives the highest honours from dignitaries who visit to pray to it on special occasions. In fact, what can be seen at the *vibear* (temple hall) of Preah Kôk Thlok next to the Bayon temple today is a copy that also receives popular veneration.

The body of Tā Dâmbong Daek is original, but its head is a stone replica and minor parts are restored. The statue holding a long stick represents a guard that normally stands at a temple gate. This particular statue was brought from Preah Khan temple north of Angkor Thom to a location near the Grand Hotel in Siem Reap in 1993 before it was brought to the Angkor Conservation Office (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: The army general guarding Preah Vihear praying to original Tā Dâmbong Daek from Preah Khan (2013, Keiko Miura).

All the ancient temples have Dâmbong Daek statues guarding their gates, thus this *neak tā* is fairly popular, and many local mediums can be possessed by it during healing rituals.

The aforementioned Viṣṇu statue also used to stand in the Preah Khan temple. It was found in a pond of Neak Pean, thrown there possibly by a robber; it was taken to the Angkor Thom district office, and then transferred to the Angkor Conservation Office for safekeeping in the mid-1990s. Only the body is original, and the missing head, arms and lower legs have been restored with concrete.

The other figures venerated include Preah Ang Chum (or Neang Chum), a small standing Buddha statue in bronze from Angkor Wat, a footprint of the Buddha in sandstone, a standing Avalokiteśvara statue in sandstone from Phnom Dei, north of Angkor Thom, and a number of standing wooden statues of the Buddha from Angkor Wat. Occasionally, prayers are offered to the Leper King statue in the courtyard. The military general guarding the Preah Vihear temple and his entourage visited the Angkor Conservation Office in March 2013 to pray to most of the statues mentioned above. The *pinpeat* music (religious music) was played in front of Preah Ang Kôk Thlok (Fig. 2).

Heritage goods or selective cultural objects with their potential power are often rediscovered and reappraised to serve today's purposes. The Angkor Conser-

vation Office filled with the remains of “original” heritage materials has, therefore, been endowed with a new role to meet contemporary requirements.

4 Commercial Reproduction and the Sale of Replicas and Forgeries

Ancient statues and their reproductions considered sacred and powerful by Cambodians of different localities and social classes begin to take on completely different values once trafficked or sold illegally to outsiders. Some forgeries and objects with deliberate alterations to the originals have also been produced and circulated among art dealers and collectors.

There used to be many antique shops in Phnom Penh in the 1990s in front of Hotel Cambodiana, along the road beside the National Museum, and Toul Tum Pong Market (the so-called Russian market) where ancient ceramics, pottery, bronze artefacts, and/or wooden sculptures, predominantly Buddha statues, used to be sold. Today, many art or antique shops in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap sell replicas made of stone, bronze, or wood, and they are honest about what they are selling because the law enforcement of trade in genuine antiquities has become stricter. They apply to the provincial Department of Culture and Fine Arts for permits to sell their products, so this business is legal.

During my research, I visited several workshops that produced replicas in Battambang and Siem Reap. Old wood was used for wooden artefacts, mainly Buddha statues. A black varnish was applied onto which black, golden, and red colours are added, followed by a fire jet with sand. A six-month-training was required to become a professional producer of wooden objects, according to the workshop owner. Three brothers owned and ran a workshop to produce replicas of stone sculptures in Battambang. One of them adored ancient artefacts, so he studied them in the French Cultural Centre either in Phnom Penh or Siem Reap, and then worked in a place near Aranyaprathet, Thailand, where ancient artefacts from Cambodia were restored. There he learned how to produce new heads resembling old ones to attach to ancient bodies. Another brother studied the skills of stone carving with a master in Pursat – the province well-known for marble sculptures. This workshop obtained sandstone from Phnom Malai in Banteay Meanchey Province, bordering Thailand, where the best quality of sandstone in Cambodia was available, and conducted experiments on how to make replicas of high quality. It took about half a year or more to produce such an artefact. Iron was first immersed in acid to blacken the artefact, and then it was burnt and soaked in a drum half-full of mud and many kinds of grass. Afterwards, a fire jet with sand was sprayed on the artefact to give it an old look, and finally, the product is buried underground for a long time (see also KI Media 2010). The three brothers’ clients were mainly from Siem Reap and Thailand.

Another workshop produced replicas or forgeries in Siem Reap and also obtained stone from Phnom Malai or Battambang. The owner studied the sculptures in art books. He buried the statues for a year, and the artefacts were then taken directly to Thailand to sell, or sent to France. His main clients were Koreans, Japanese, and French, but the sales were on the decline. The craftsman knew the shop owners' intentions, namely to sell his products as well-made replicas or fakes, and this determines his professional class, i.e. either a replica producer or a forger, though he might not accept the latter category. Unless artistic producers receive permits from relevant authorities to export their work as replicas, the producer may be called a forger. It is difficult to know the real identity of the producers because they are not likely to tell researchers about any illegal motivations or actions; sometimes they simply do not know what category their products may end up at the final sale's destination. Some replicas or forgeries are so well made that amateurs and casual tourists are most likely unable to tell fakes from the authentic, as reported by Porte (2004: 173-177), GoCambodia (n.d.), Latchford (KI Media 2010), Lafont (2004: 59-61,76), Meyers (2004: 19-24), and Thosarat (2001: 14).

Replica producers said that once a stone sculpture was cut, the authenticity could be verified, but who dares to do that? According to Meyers (2004: 20-21), a microscope can be used for authentication, but such treatment alters some of the surface properties, as it damages part of the material. As for Latchford, he "takes a very small chip of the stone from the base or somewhere it won't be noticed and tests it, and if it contains chemicals and acid and coloring, it's a fake" (KI Media 2010).

Bertrand Porte, an EFEO stone conservator working at the National Museum in Phnom Penh, pointed out that a Ganeśa statue from Prasat Bak, Koh Ker, disappeared at some time after the last photo was taken in 1966, which reappeared in *Adoration and Glory* published by Bunker and Latchford (2004: 168-170).¹⁶ The photos of the front and back of the statue in the latter book show new decorations added to the more simple necklace on the original figure, and both hands are cut off whereas the original ones are intact and touch the body, which can be seen more clearly in the photo taken by Henri Parmentier's Mission in 1934 (Porte 2004: 176; Chasing Aphrodite 2014). In addition, broken parts of the face of the original were restored, resulting in a smooth surface. This "face-lift" must have been added by a forger, presumably to avoid it being traced as an illegally trafficked artefact and/or to make it more attractive to sell for a higher price. The new Ganeśa is no longer original, but not a complete fake. The borderlines between the authentic and forgeries are difficult to draw with increased and advanced technology of replica and forgery production today. Porte also points out that there are

¹⁶ The photos were taken by Madelaine Giteau, according to Bertrand Porte (personal communications in September 2013). When shown the photos of the Ganeśa statue from Prasat Bak in *Adoration and Glory* (Bunker and Latchford 2004), a number of local villagers in Koh Ker recognized having seen the statue before.

some fakes among artefacts donated to the National Museum in Phnom Penh (GoCambodia n.d.; Lafont 2004: 59-61; Porte 2004: 173-177).

Several art and antique shops in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, and Bangkok sell artefacts which are considered less than 100 years old as well as some “original” or fairly “authentic” looking antiquities over one hundred years old in stone, wood, bronze, etc. A shop owner in Siem Reap explained me the system of procuring antiques. People working for her in the provinces send her photos of “artefacts discovered by chance” or art objects that owners wish to sell, from which she chooses what she wants to sell in the shop. A fairly tall, old-looking wooden Buddha statue sold in the shop had rather unusual decoration of mother-of-pearl inlaid on the fingernails. According to the shop owner, this statue was from Preah Vihear Province and was sold by monks of a very poor monastery, who were allegedly stated that they wanted to buy a new statue with the money obtained from its sale. Expensive items in this shop, possibly looted objects as well as high-quality forgeries and replicas, are placed upstairs for only potential buyers to view. One large dark-coloured stone statue with the head and body disjointed was said to have also come from Preah Vihear Province; it was placed beside the stairs and behind the door of the main shop. This object looked looted even to the eyes of the western stone conservator accompanied me because the surface of the disjointed section was smooth as if it had been cut off with a sharp instrument.

Khmer objects and pieces from the region are displayed in a plain view in antique shops in River City, Bangkok, despite the fact that they may well have been looted and illegally traded (cf. Lafont 2004: 78). Some of the shops that sell Khmer artefacts, whether in Bangkok or Siem Reap, have books written by Bunker and Latchford (2004, 2011) for reference for both clients and sellers. Scholars, however, argue that the majority of Khmer art objects in Thai galleries are fakes. Yet, at the same time, it is said that even the most professional critics, trained conservators, connoisseurs, or “experts” cannot easily distinguish the “authentic” from fakes unless they are allowed thorough investigations and the taking of photographs, which are normally forbidden by the galleries and shops (cf. Porte 2004: 173-177; Lafont 2004: 59-61; Meyers 2004: 19-24).

Some art shops in Siem Reap usually sell only replicas, but at times, artefacts “found by chance when cultivating land” are brought in from other provinces to be sold at these shops. Two such shops allowed me to photograph the objects. According to one of the shop owners, one statue brought in was a replica produced during the French Protectorate, which is considered as one of a Siva with a Skanda statue facing him, which is shown on the book cover of *Adoration and Glory* and as described inside (Bunker and Latchford 2004: 142-143). The statue in the shop, however, has no figure of Skanda, except for the feet, unlike the whole body shown in the book. Some statues brought in look genuine, but the others do not; even the shop owner could not distinguish the authentic from the fakes. The aforementioned stone conservator also looked at some of these artefacts and thought some might be “authentic.” Reporting this matter to the Ministry of Cul-

ture and Fine Arts in Phnom Penh did not alarm the officer in charge at all. I was then told to contact the Department of Culture and Fine Arts in Siem Reap or the Angkor Conservation Office. An officer of the latter explained to me that it had been their responsibility to handle such cases in the past, but now their role is limited to areas in which neither the APSARA Authority nor the Preah Vihear Authority is operating. One of the directors of the APSARA Authority showed interest, but even he had to tell me the most disappointing experience he had had in the past when reporting such encounters in a shop in Siem Reap to other directors of the Authority who showed little interest in acting upon it.

My finding is contradictory to Article 10 in the “Sub-decree of 2002 Respecting Implementation of Cultural Heritage Protection” (RGC 2002) in that licenced merchants are to “[r]efrain from acquiring for sale or exchange cultural property of which the origin is dubious or of which the owner cannot be identified with certainty the sale of cultural property of dubious origin”. It also indicates that the Ministries of Culture and Fine Arts, Commerce, and Economy and Finance are responsible authorities for that matter (RGC 2002: 4–5). Antiquities that receive high international profiles only seem to receive positive interest and have a chance of restitution, such as the highly publicized restitution of two Koh Ker statues from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to Cambodia in 2013 (UNESCO 2013), the agreed restitution of another Koh Ker statue from Sotheby’s in New York and two more from the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena with Christie’s in 2014 (Chasing Aphrodite 2014), but prevention seems to lack willingness on the part of the authorities. It is unclear whether this is because the authorities are worried about stepping on the feet of somebody in higher authority, or whether they consider all these artefacts as fakes not warranting thorough investigations (see also Lafont 2004: 96).

5 Conclusions

This chapter discussed the varied significance of Khmer statues from originals to replicas for diverse actors such as local people, the Angkor Conservation Office, museums, illicit traffickers, antique dealers, art shops, replica producers, forgers, and government officials.

For most Cambodians, ancient monuments and statues are sacred and are the abode of powerful spirits, represented by the *neak tā* or the tutelary spirit. Selective statues have become the objects of worship for local people to pray for protection, healing, and the general welfare. For them, the distinction between “originals” and “replicas” of ancient statues is of little relevance, as was demonstrated with the case of the Leper King. “Original” statues of this legendary king have been copied in stone or cement with some modifications, and have been placed in strategically important places, in many cases with the original setting imitated, and have been worshipped in both previous and recent capital cities. Because some heads had

been looted, statues often consist of original bodies with reconstructed parts. Survival of the statues from terrible ordeals and/or their proven protective power has augmented people’s beliefs regardless of the material and stylistic authenticity of the statues.

The statues safeguarded in the Angkor Conservation Office are mostly originals from the heritage sites, but many have been exposed to attempts of looting. Some important statues in stone have been restored with concrete or newly carved stone, while replicas have been produced for ritual and touristic purposes. The recent conversion to a place of worship of selective statues by high-ranking officials demonstrates that the Angkor Conservation Office has become a new sanctuary. The relevance of setting seems immaterial here for prominent powerful statues once they have been consecrated and venerated by dignitaries.

In the economic dimension, however, the distinction between originals, replicas, and fakes becomes crucial. Cultural objects sold in Cambodia, Thailand, and elsewhere cover obvious replicas, fakes, and potentially genuine antiques. The techniques of forgers and networks of business transactions of fakes are becoming so advanced that it is nearly impossible for casual tourists, amateurs, shop owners, and even collectors to distinguish the authentic from fakes.

It can be concluded, therefore, that “originals”, replicas and fakes of Khmer statues attract a variety of actors whose concerns may differ, and are at times contradictory or compromising. The study showed not only the differing values of statues held by heterogeneous categories of people, but also how difficult it is to draw a line between originals, replicas, and fakes. Another finding is that western notions and economic concerns of the authenticity of cultural objects has little significance in the popular Cambodian cultural context, in which immaterial authenticity, i.e. spirituality and the credibility of salvation, is of primary importance.

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