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TAKE A LOOK!
CAMBODIA 2013





EDITORIAL

After years of dwelling on Cambodia's dark past, there is a new narrative emerging among Cambodian youth. It is about the future. In "Take a Look—Cambodia 2013", second-year journalism students at the Royal University of Phnom Penh's Department of Media and Communication tell the stories of the people who are moving Cambodia forward. In these pages, you will find stories of artists, scientists, chefs, designers, politicians, educators and computer programmers who are laying the foundation for a modern and global Cambodia. The rising young journalists at DMC set out to find the rising stars in other fields to find out what visions they have for the future of Cambodian culture, commerce and communication. Taken together, we hope these stories about the people at the cutting edge of Cambodian society will inspire other young Cambodians to follow their lead, and show everyone that there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about Cambodia's future.

Best Wishes,
DMC Batch 11

Supervisor:

Colin Meyn

Design Supervisor:

Christine Schmutzler, Tith Chandara

Writers, Editors and Designer:

Chan Seyha, Ath Chhunmuoy, Sun Dalin, Cheng Mengchou, Chhit Kanika, Chouy Chamnap, Dara Saoyuthnea, Hang Sokharo, Hak Sreynith, Hean Socheata, Hun Keoveasna, Ket, Monny Vathna, Ly Bela, Mao Chandaly, Nget Kan Davith, Rin Sokreth, Rom Molyka, Samreth Sodh, San Sel, Seng Litor, Seng Vibol, Som Rina, Tep Chansophea, Yang Chan Dara, Yav Sokhim, Vorn Sreyleak, Koeut Chantrea



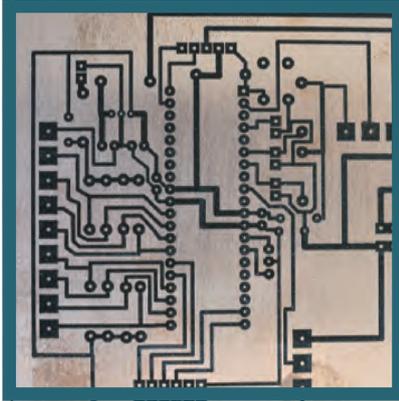
Department of Media and Communication
Royal University of Phnom Penh
Russian Boulevard, Phnom Penh
Tel: (+855)23 88 44 08
Fax: (+855)23 88 44 08
Email: admin@dmc-cci.edu.kh
Website: www.dmc-cci.edu.kh



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Looking back over the past decade, advancements in technology in Cambodia have been remarkable. From people having occasional access to the web at internet cafes to millions of people being connected 24 hours a day through their smartphones, Cambodia is now in a place where online technology can have a major impact on the population. Through the development of online tools in Khmer-language, technology buffs and IT experts in Cambodia are allowing their compatriots to access a world of information.

With internet connectivity rapidly expanding in the country, the next step in allowing Cambodians to access information online is breaking the language barrier that until recently has prevented Khmer-

language speakers from fully engaging with technology. But today, thanks to a small group of programmers and designers, Cambodians can use social media, online encyclopedias and translation tools in their native tongue. The possibilities are as wide as the web.

Building blocks

As computers and the tech industry became an emerging market in Cambodia, several types of Khmer text were developed as well. The lack of a common code meant that people would often open documents or load websites only to find that they didn't have the software to read it. In order to type, people had to learn new keystrokes for each digital text. Simply put, it was a

struggle for people to create and spread information on the internet in Khmer.

In late December of 2009, the government passed a sub-decree requiring the Khmer Unicode text for all government correspondence. Khmer Unicode fonts are uniformly formatted so that users can quickly and easily load or input Khmer text into their computers or smartphones. Four years later, other texts have become irrelevant, and Khmer Unicode has become the foundation for digital development in the Khmer language.

The man behind the Unicode solution was programmer Danh Hong, 42, a member of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom ethnic minority. "Before I was also a user of Khmer fonts. In Kampuchea Krom, I created a dictionary



Mr. Danh Hong, A creator of Khmer Unicode
Photo by: Tep Chansophea

and wrote articles and I found the previous Khmer fonts very complicated. So I tried to do research and make it becomes better.”

Now there are more than 100 fonts available in Khmer Unicode being used on websites, in newspapers or other print publications. Many of the young people now posting or sharing information on social media sites in Khmer take for granted the ease made possible by Danh Hong’s work.

But despite the success of Danh Hong’s work, he said that Cambodia’s technology sector is still struggling, and development of the industry is slow compared to other countries. Nonetheless, he believes that as more people begin to understand the benefits of technology, there will be a stronger push for improvements across the sector.

Expanding encyclopedia

In 2002, about 100,000 people had regular access to the internet in Cambodia—less than 1 percent of a population of 11.4 million. Just 8 years later, in 2010, according to the International Telecommunication Union, almost 2.5 million people, 17 percent of 14.7 million people, were accessing the web at home, at internet cafes, or through mobile phones. That number is set to keep growing. And with each internet user, another Cambodian has access to an ever-increasing library of Khmer-language content.

While some of the content is purely for entertainment, groups like the Wikimedia Foundation aim to offer internet users a trove of educational information, in whatever language they speak. Wikipedia, the world’s biggest online encyclopedia, has more than 3.4 million articles in 283 languages, including Khmer. Khmer Wikipedia has about 4,000 articles and counting, created and edited by more than a hundred volunteer contributors with a passion for making knowledge and information more open to their people.



Oum Sovannarith has working on the Khmer Wikipedia project since 2006 as a key contact. “Because of the lack of informational resources and the fact that we only have printed resources, it has been a struggle to make information accessible online,” he said.

Khmer Wikipedia was launched in 2005 with just a few articles. At the time, it may have been difficult to see how the project would contribute to Cambodia’s development as a whole. But with so many Cambodians now online, the potential benefits are becoming clear.

“If we are all sharing the information together, we can learn something new

from each other.” said Oum Sovannarith. He believes that Khmer Wikipedia will contribute to the Cambodian people in term of promoting learning in Khmer language and building up the collective knowledge of the Cambodian people.

While Khmer Wikipedia is the main project of the Wikimedia Foundation in Cambodia, volunteers are also working on other Khmer-language learning tools including Khmer Wiktionary, Khmer Wikibooks and Khmer Wikisource.

Personal translator

After a decade of having to adapt to using the internet mostly in English, Cambodian now have the opportunity to take websites in any language and translate them into Khmer. Thanks to work being done by a team of tech-experts working with Google, the entire world wide web will soon be understandable to Cambodians with a few clicks of a button.

“No matter what languages you speak; you can read any languages worldwide,” said Divon Lan, a product manager at Next Wave Emerging Markets, which is working with Google to make the web translatable into Khmer.

With English proficiency representing one of the largest remaining obstacles for Cambodians to engage with the internet, Google Translate could become the bridge across Cambodia’s digital divide. “The main objectives of generating Khmer translations on Google translate are to allow Cambodians



Mr. Oum Sovannarith (right)
Photo contributed by Oum Sovannarith



Mr. Divon Lan, A Product Manager at Google
Photo by: Tep Chansopheha

to be able to read content from newspapers or anything else written in other languages," Divon Lan said.

"At the moment, people are thinking about English, but not only English. We can access to Thai or French newspapers with comprehensible reading due to the aid of Google Translate," he said, adding that he hoped the technology would encourage Cambodians to learn about what is going on across the world.

But much work remains to be done for users to easily read Khmer text translated through Google. Lonh Samdy, a Google Developer Group leader in Phnom Penh, said that "the most challenging thing is to comprehend Khmer language structure, phrase, word order and grammar."

He continued that, while Google Translate in Khmer can currently only translate word-by-word and still has many errors in its translations, intensive usage and feedback through Google was constantly improving the technology. In the near future, he said,

vast improvements will be made to the translations.

The long-term mission of GDG in Phnom Penh, Lonh Samdy said, is to reach out to students in Cambodia's provinces to train them how to use Google Translate and encourage them to pass on information to their friends and family.

Kheng Piseth, a program manager at the Open Institute said that he is encouraged by the transition of software from hard drives to the internet, where they are more easily accessible and often easier to use. As more of this technology is made available on the web in Khmer language, the value of the internet will become more apparent to Cambodians, he said.

"In the future, the percentage of Khmer-language internet users will increase dramatically," Kheng Piseth said. "As soon as Cambodians can access internet by using their own language."

By Chan Seyha, Tep Chansopheha,
and Rom Molyka



EDUCATIONAL ANIMATION

Over the past decade, people all over Cambodia have watched cartoons created by foreigners. Animation from Tom & Jerry to Spongebob Squarepants have become well-known among the country's TV-watching audience. But Cambodian animators today are creating cartoons that can not only be enjoyed by their own people, but educate them as well.

"I am sure that soon we will see animated movies and animators everywhere in Cambodia," said Poy Chhunly, a founder of 1000 Hands animation studios in Cambodia. 1000 Hands was founded in 2007 under the support of the arts NGO Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS) as a vocational training program for students graduating from the PPS visual arts school.

"Little boy drinking bad water" is a animation movie produced by a team from 1000 Hands. It was awarded the best animated film produced in Cambodia in 2007 by Cambofest, an international independent movie festival in Cambodia.

Every project of 1000 hands is overseen by young members of the studio, who serve as the director, animation director, character designers, background designers and animators for the films.

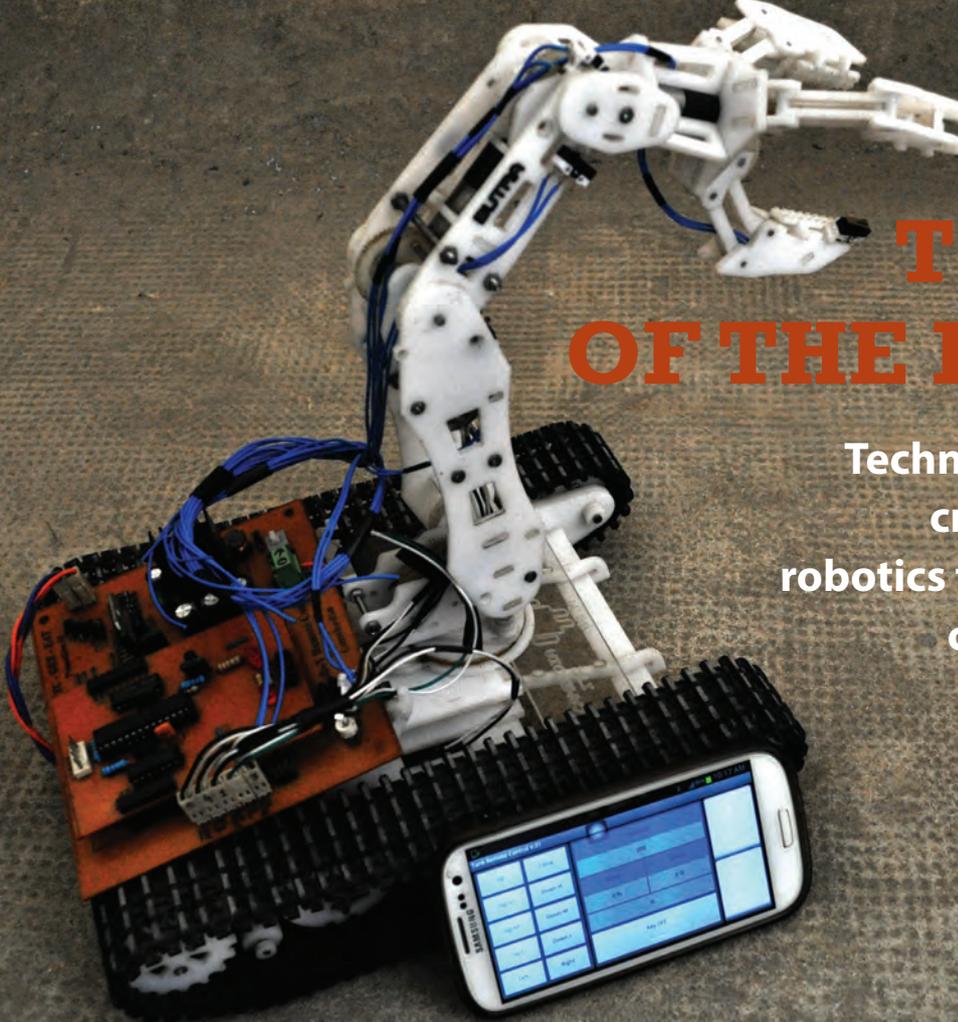
Today, '1000 Hands' is among the major developers and producers of animated content in the country. But while many people appreciate the visual appeal of their cartoons, the movies these young animators are creating are not only to entertain their audience. They are working on

creating awareness-raising cartoons relating to health, safety, and human rights.

Cartoons, said Poy Chhunly, can play a significant role in contributing to the knowledge of Cambodian people by delivering a clear message into animated films that address a specific issue or problem in society.

"Education is what I really want to do," said Poy Chhunly. "I can't always speak out as my heart desires. But [through animation], we are not just speaking, we are singing a song."

By Tep Chansopheha



THE RISE OF THE ROBOTS

Technology whizzes are creating a fledgling robotics field in Cambodia, controlled by their smartphones.

Photo by Samreth Sodh

In a hot stuffy warehouse, scores of young people are quietly creating something. They are each toiling away at different tasks. One is designing a sample on a computer. Another is trimming and drilling boards mounted with computer chips. Another is putting together small pieces of different materials to form what is starting to look like a body of some sort.

Together, they are creating a robot. It may be happening quietly, but to the surprise of many, Cambodian technology and engineering students are joining their peers around the world to create a robotics field here. While there may not be a silicon valley in Cambodia, this group of students represents the beginning technology center, a place for technological innovation in the Kingdom.

If you have seen the movies “Iron Man” or “Transformers” and admired the ingenious and stylish robots created by Tony Stark in a gloomy cave, you might be a bit

underwhelmed by the robots being made by these students—It turns out that creating robots with limited technology is not as easy as they make it look in the movies.

But although this group of Cambodian students is not equipped with fancy materials or machines, they have the innovative spirit. They are taking secondhand equipment and bits and pieces of other objects to make their own moveable machines.

Ky Leng, an electrical engineer lecturer at ITC, said, “First, it is usually cheaper than making original ones. Second, I want them to have creative ideas in how to recycle the used product for the sake of our environment. Regardless of its quality, if it is workable, we should recycle it and use it.”

But not all parts of their robots are used products; some parts are bought from local stores such as grippers, legs, screws, nuts and washers. Some pieces are even ordered from other countries— Thailand, precisely. These materials include rare items such as

controller boards and sensors, which are not available in the country. Without these items, the robots won’t work.

And creating robots doesn’t just teach you to make robots. The same principles can be used for other things that could benefit society—skills that can help advance the manufacturing of machines for industry, make workers more efficient, create computer chips for smartphones or other electrical devices, improve the military, health care and other fields.

According to a report in the Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research, “In the coming decades, robots will gradually move out of the industrial and scientific worlds and into daily life, in the same way that computers spread to the home in the 1980s.” Simply put, robots will soon be everywhere.

Sitting on the bench and talking robotics, lecturer Ky Leng says that, “In the future, our ultimate concept is to create a machine that



Photo by Samreth Sodh

The Next Fly of Cambodia

“We believe we can fly” is the motto of 36-year-old Pann Linth, an Automotive Engineer. Pann Linth, a professor at the National Polytechnic Institute of Cambodia (NPIC), initiated the idea of building a helicopter, despite a scarcity of advanced materials to make it happen. Having conducting research on creating a helicopter for more than four years, his proposal received \$7,000 in funding from the institute last year. Along with 26 students, Pann Linth began building the helicopter with his bare hands using simple material to create the body and other parts of the flying machine. Over a period of more than 8 months, the helicopter took shape, propelled by an motorboat engine. Right now, the helicopter has only been tested a few centimeters off the ground, because Pann Linth says that his crew lacks professional pilots and the he wants to make sure no one gets hurt in the chopper. But Pann Linth believes that the initial success of he and his students can make great contributions to the technology sector here, and encourage more young Cambodians to take an interest in engineering. Even though the helicopter is a relatively small step, it show curiosity and creative ideas of Cambodians. Nowadays, Pann Linth is working on improving the helicopter and has a plan to create a small electrical car that can be used around enclosed areas such as business compounds or college campuses.

By Samreth Sodh and Nget Kan Davith

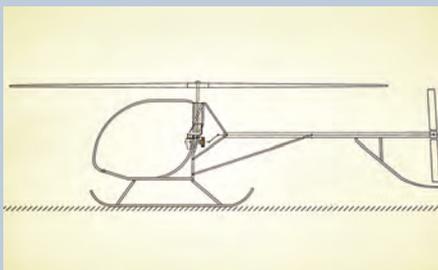


Photo by Samreth Sodh

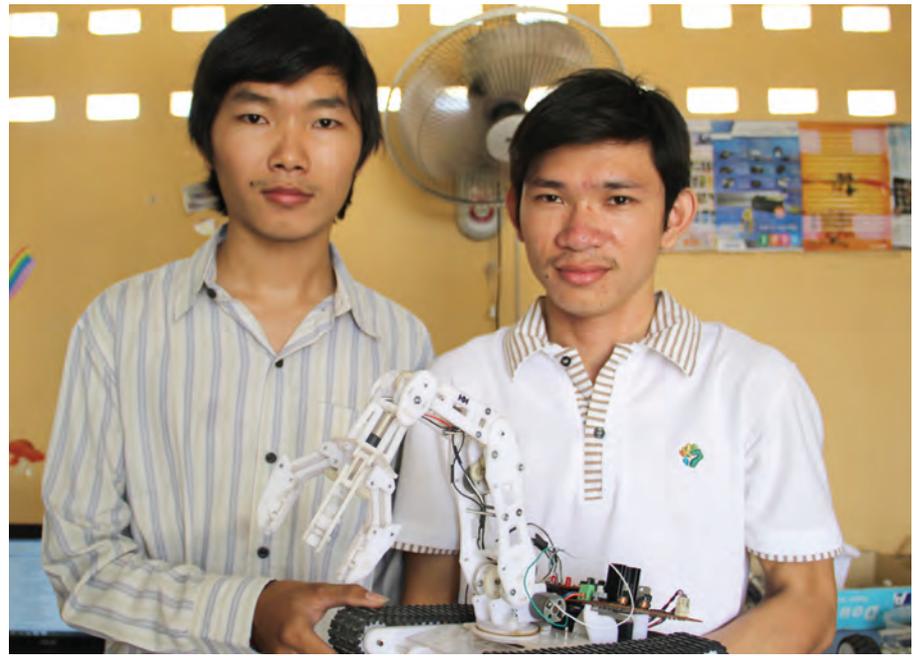


Photo by Samreth Sodh

is operated using brain signals. It will enable those who are disabled or handicapped to write letters or express their ideas verbally.”

In more advanced countries, robots can already be operated through eye blinks, eye movements, head movements, and through brain signals, according to the Biosignals and Biorobotics Conference 2013. Although Cambodia is a developing nation, the importance of robots is undeniable.

Yet there are only a few institutes that have courses focusing on building robots and technological devices, including the Institute of Technology of Cambodia, Norton University, National Polytechnic Institute of Cambodia, and ArrowDot, an organization focused on robotics.

At ITC, year five students are assigned a school project in electronics automation, requiring them to make devices like robots and chips. As they pursue their different majors, they learn different skills such as how to arrange electrical systems or program the operational software necessary for robots. Those who take mechanics majors have to design layouts and appearance of the robot. Generally, the work is divided into three sections: programming, mechanics and electronics.

“It is different from actual studying in which you have to sit in class and learn, which can trigger stress. Instead, practicing real work makes us feel more engaged. When our project is successful and we see things get done, we are heavily motivated to do more,” said Kimhong, an ITC student responsible for electronic set-up.



Photo by Samreth Sodh

The robot he is working on looks like a tank with a quite long towing arm and is operated by an Android tele-robotic system, a breakthrough for the ITC robot crew, according to Daraly, another member of Kimhong’s team.

“It took us three months to make this robot, and as one of the programmers I spent two weeks writing the Android operating system.” Daraly said. “The main challenge we are still facing is a lack of

mobility, as we can only control it within 10 meters, and it can only be used for an hour at a time," he added.

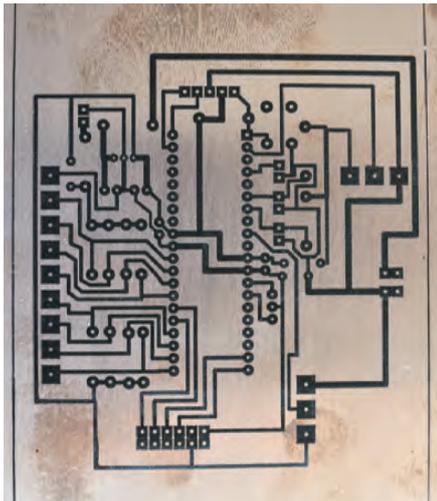


Photo by Samreth Sodh

However, their continued struggles have not undermined the students' passion for making robots. Alternately, it has encouraged them to think big and work harder to improve their weaknesses. They plan to upgrade the wireless control system and battery capacity so it can move and last longer.

Arrowdot, an organization of tech gradu-

ates that focuses on robotics, is working out similar issues. There are roughly twelve members in the group, which recently created a robot that somewhat looks strikingly similar to the title character in the movie "Wall-e." It took them only a month to build at a cost of \$100, but it too still needs upgrades to make it move more smoothly.

"I will renovate it and make it better," said Hor Sophanna, a 22-year-old electrical engineering graduate and co-founder of ArrowDot. "Next year, I will create a new Wall-E version 2 that has better abilities and appearance." Now that they have the necessary tools, he said, the team already has a good start on creating the next generation of robots.

But Hor Sophanna is not only thinking about making the next Cambodian version of Wall-e. He plans to use his skills make toys—airplanes and robots to be specific. He dreams of working with foreign investors and entrepreneurs to start a toy industry in the country.

"Technology is a catalyst for change in the country's economy," said Ky Leng, the lecturer.

By Samreth Sodh and Nget Kandavith



The Robot team shows their robot, Photo by Samreth Sodh



Photo by Samreth Sodh

Angkor Car Gets Rolling

The Angkor car may be small, but that makes it perfect for navigating narrow streets in the country and saving on expensive fuel. For years, Nhean Phaloeck, the creator of the car, has been working on the vehicle, which would be the first car designed and created in Cambodia. The car operates with an electrical engine and uses a fingerprint scan to open the doors and start the engine. Nhean Phaloeck says that his latest model can drive 300 kilometers on a 3-hour charge. He says curiosity led him to visualize his dream of actually making a car, bringing together only four members to assemble the vehicle, which has a hard top and scissor doors normally seen on sports cars, in only six months. Nhean Phaloeck says he has devoted his full energy and effort to create the car, but has nonetheless run into plenty of obstacles along the way. His achievements, though modest, mark the beginning of what he envisions as a thriving automobile manufacturing field in the country. As the Angkor car has yet to make it to the assembly, Nhean Phaloeck is still working to improve the car. His focus now is improving the car's operating system, and even hopes to allow people to control the car through their smartphones. With an ambitious vision, Nhean Phaloeck hopes his small car will make big changes to in Cambodia.

By Samreth Sodh and Nget Kan Davith



Photo contributed by Nhean Phaloeck



LEARNING WITH A DIGITAL MONKEY

Welcome to a land of evergreen forests. Your guide will be a blue-haired monkey wearing traditional Cambodian clothes. This is the world of Asva, the first-ever mobile gaming application created in Cambodia. The game combines presents puzzles in various settings that depict Cambodia's cultural treasures to create a truly Khmer digital experience.

Ear Uy, a 30-year-old game producer at Osja Studio said that "Asva", or the monkey game, is the first Cambodian-created game for mobile phones, and is available on IOS and Android devices, and can be

downloaded on the App store or Google Play. Along with an interactive 2D and 3D graphic animation. Asva is not only entertaining, it requires players to solve puzzles using analytical skills and critical thinking to pass each level.

Ear Uy also said that the design of the templates used in the game was inspired by Cambodian settings, including the Angkor Wat temple complex, to attract gamers and celebrate the country's culture.

"Mixing in graphic animation of Cambodian culture made people interesting in the exquisiteness of Angkor Wat Temple and can make players feel enthusiastic

about visiting Cambodia's sights," Ear Uy explained, adding that he hoped Osja's games would attract a global audience to explore Cambodia's wonders.

Ear Uy said that finding specialist capable of creating gaming apps remained the greatest challenge to expanding the studio's operations, adding that such knowledge required a great deal of individual motivation and education, as the availability of related classes and courses in Cambodia remains limited. Marketing the game both in Cambodia and around the world has also been difficult, he said.



But there have been successes along the way. The Asva game was exhibited in the Good Game Show in South Korea and was among only 30 games, selected from thousands of entrants, that was showcased at the E3 Expo in the U.S.

Pum Sothearoth, 24. A team leader in 2D and 3D animation at Osja Studios, said that the lively and cute face of the monkey along with the enjoyable soundtrack composed of traditional Khmer traditional music contributed to the success of the game, which has two versions in Khmer and English. He also said that new levels will be added, and efforts to create a version for computers is underway.

The next step for Ear Uy is to fulfill his dream of starting school for gaming developers to pass on his knowledge to a generation of Cambodians who are enthusiastic about expanding the gaming sector to computers and mobile devices.

Ly Da, a 28-year-old Pannasastra University student, said that the fact that the Asva game was developed by Cambodia, she was curious to play it. "Normally I am not a game player, but it made me want to test it out. I really had to wake up and think in order to overcome the challenges in this game," she said.

Although the game is not as mindless as many of the most popular mobile games, Asva is an entertaining way to test your intelligence, said Ly Da. Players have to analyze each step before walking. And with Khmer culture coming through in everything from the graphic design to the accompanying music, it is an authentically Cambodian creation.

Asva not only showcases Cambodian culture to gamers around the world, it shows that Cambodian can create a fun and addictive puzzle with high production quality and cutting-edge ideas.

By Chan Seyha



Mr. Ear Uy, Photo by Osja Studio



THE JUNGLE'S SECRETS

A biologist does the lonely and vital work of discovering new species in Cambodia's forests

Photo by Jeremy Holden

The Cardamom Mountains, a green range lying in the western part of Cambodia, is home to myriad fauna and flora, many of which are unknown to the world. For a long time, no one had the itchy feet and curiosity to head to the jungle and see what is there, let alone searching meticulously for a certain species. Neang Thy is simply obsessed with both activities.

Neang Thy works tirelessly in nature, and has revealed a variety of species in Cambodian jungle that are unique to the world. Never before has Cambodian biodiversity been so clearly known to people, especially scientists. His work has brought more and more insight to the world of biological field—and society.

“Our Khmer citizens say a tree is valuable only if they can cut it down for building a house. For a frog, they might say it’s only worth something if it’s big enough for cooking. They can’t give value to even a tiny species provided that they don’t know

its value in ecosystem” said Neang Thy who is a biologist working with Fauna and Flora International (FFI).

While confronting the threat of deforestation, the jungle has been delved into by researchers, including Neang Thy, who have been trying to study about Cambodian biodiversity in wildlife sanctuaries to understand more about the ecology and to promote conservation since the country has risen up from decades of war.

Specializing in amphibians and reptiles, Neang Thy has become well-known in his field for his great achievements. Holding a master degree of Science in Forestry from the former Soviet Republic, he has the dark and gentle face of a man who spends his days under the sun. He worked as an official the Forestry Administration and the Environment Ministry prior to moving to work at FFI where he became a full-fledged researcher.

“When I first started doing this work, I didn’t like it. I had cold feet when I went to the forest. I was afraid of snakes and the like,” he said. Nonetheless, day in day out, he became more and more interested after working with, and learning from, international scientists who came to do research in Cambodia.

Neang Thy has become a global success story for finding a number of new species because of his hard work. His discoveries have been recognized by the global scientific community and published in *Zootaxa Magazine*, a famous science magazine in New Zealand.

“His discovery has surprised the world of biology,” said Chhin Sophea, a colleague of Neang Thy at FFI whose expertise is birds and bats. “Not only have more scientists come to Cambodia, but even Japanese news agencies came and has broadcasted the Kampuchea Snake he discovered on their channel. At last, everyone knows that

SPECIES SPOTTED

Neang Thy found five new species in Cambodian forests in the last six years. All of these six species exists only in Cambodia, as far as anyone knows.

2007



Green Blood Turquoise bone frog (*Chiromantis samkosensis*), scientifically called *Chiromantis samkosensis*, was discovered in 2006. Neang Thy played a part in the discovery in 2006, which was recognized a year later.

Photo by Jeremy Holden

2011



Legless Blind Lizard, discovered in Samkok Mountain in 2009.

Photo by Neang Thy

2012



Kampuchea Kukri Snake (*Oligodon kampucheaensis*), discovered in Samkok Mountain, was recognized worldwide and published a year after its discovery.

Photo by Neang Thy

2012



Veunsai Earless Skink (*Lygosoma veunsaiensis*) was discovered in Veunsai, Rattanakiri.

Photo by Gabor Scorba

2010



Darked Rounded Eye Gecko (*Cnemaspis neangtyi*), another new species found in Cardamom Mountain, was published in *Journal of Herpetology*.

Photo by Lee Grismer



Neang Thy, the pioneer of the five new species discovered in Cambodia, by Ket Monny Vathna

this species was discovered in Cambodia, so they know Cambodia," Chhin Sophea said with enthusiasm.

As a matter of fact, this biological work is beneficial to Cambodian society. If something in the forest is unknown, even the name, it is hard to show to the world what exists in the forest, let alone how it can be protected. That is why biologists since Aristotle's time have classified and given an identity to every species they have come across.

Neang Thy explains that "As soon as we give its name, everyone knows it. We can discuss any matter about it easily when we know its name, appearance, and its location. And if we want to conserve or preserve it, it'll be much easier and more effective," he said. "Even if somebody someday discovers it, let say in Vietnam, they still have to refer to it by the name I gave."

Not much information is known about the new five species he has discovered, beside their name, appearance, location and their role in biodiversity. Yet, because of his discoveries, with scientific study and research, those species will be given greater importance in the future.

Based on United Nation Environmental Programme (UNEP), it is estimated that around 150 to 200 species become extinct in every 24 hours. Recently, not only others part of the world but also Cambodia's ecosystem has been threatened, such as the disappearance of Ko Prey and the decline

of some species such as tigers. "Wildlife can't exist to next 100 years unless each of the species consists of 4000 members and live sparsely in the forest," claims Tuy Sereivathana, FFI's country director, who was awarded the Goldman Prize in 2010 for his work on solving elephant-human conflict in Cambodia.

What he has found is vital for the study and comprehension of the ecosystem because every species has relation with one another through biodiversity. That is why "everything in the forest needs to be known," says Neang Thy, "The loss of one species can influence on other species which is the former's predator or prey. Thus, its function is essential for the stability of ecology."

Suppose there was any plan having to do with deforestation. With understanding of the environment, people could find a suitable solution by analyzing the forest and determining whether it needs to be protected for the sake of biodiversity. Today, Cambodia has nine protected national parks and 10 protected wildlife sanctuaries nationwide, based on Mekong-Protected Area organization's website. The work of environmental researchers can ensure the stability of those places and perhaps more locations, ensuring that those places are not disturbed.

Similar to any other adventurer we can see on television programs about wildlife, Neang Thy's work is on the brink of danger. While spending time in the jungle at least 5 days at a time doing research, he never gets a good night sleep, since most amphibians and reptiles he is seeking appear only at night time. Ranging from leeches to venom snakes, he searches for new specimens at his own risk.

"In the forest, danger lies everywhere and you can't predict what will happen in forest," says Sok Sophanny, a lecturer in the biology department at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). "But [Neang Thy] is always telling jokes and it helps us forget the fright," he said.

"He's like an icon in biology field! In Cambodia, he's the only one expertizing in that field," said Sok Sophanny. "And we haven't found any students who can continue his work after his retirement," he adds with concern.

The 43-year-old biologist, who is also lecturing in the masters program at RUPP, also worried about the next generation of biologists. So far, he says, there is no student daring to dedicate their future for the profession. However, the work of biologists is becoming more and more recognized. Recently, Tuy Sereivathana and Neang Thy have been awarded a certificate of appraisal from Information Minister Khiev Kanharith for their achievement and their contribution to society in environmental perspective.

"We have been mainly focusing on community people who live closely to nature. At the same time, we almost forget urban people," said Sereivathana. With that in mind, the FFI representative has distributing environmental leaflets in the city and started sharing information via social media. Besides the FFI website, environmental work has also been published for local government officials to improve their understanding, while other organizations are also working collaboratively to conserve the environment and the community.

Also attempted to spread his knowledge further, Neang Thy established a research group entitled Cardamom Mountain Research Group, which has educated people who rely on nature to comprehend more about the essential importance of biodiversity. No development is done without eco-deterioration. Nonetheless, slowly but surely, people can deal with nature in a very reasonable and sustainable manner.

Luot, 60, a former ranger who entered the jungle with the group said, "Before I didn't know or notice about that wildlife's value. But as I worked with them, it dawned on me more and more that those species are important."

By Hun Keoveasna and Ket Monny Vathna



PLANTING SEEDS OF PROFIT

Photo contributed by Asia Foundation

As Cambodia's rice industry expands, who will benefit?

Som Saroeun is one of about four million rice farmers in Cambodia. Along with 32 families in his community in rural Takeo district, he rejoiced after this year's hardest, having set record yields on his patch of land. He is one of a minority of farmers in the country who have learned the value of enriched land, high-yielding seeds fertilizers. Yet many poor farmers across the country continue to use outdated farming technology and struggle to move beyond subsistence farming.

Cambodia, which has vast agricultural land with a natural interlocking water system, has recently emerged as a major rice exporter in the region. Yet, most rice farmers continue to practice traditional techniques while only a small population has been

trained to employ modern techniques for greater outputs. The quality of Cambodia's rice has brought the country to the brink of becoming a player in the high-price rice marketplace, but how much farmers will benefit is yet to be seen.

As rice exports increase, there is potential to significantly import (improve) the livelihood of the millions of people who depend on the crop. A third of Cambodians, mostly farmers, still live below the national poverty line of \$0.61 a day, and 90 percent of the total poor reside in rural areas, according to the World Bank. As profits from rice exports have increased, the inequality levels in the country have also been rising dramatically. Recent research conducted by the Cambodia Development Research Institute (CDRI)

indicates that the agricultural sector has relatively slow productivity growth, with smallholding farmers benefitting less than intermediaries.

But Cambodia is a great place to grow rice. The 2012 World's Best Rice Award went to Cambodia for her jasmine rice, highlighting the potential to cultivate high-quality rice in the country. In these last few years, there has been a dramatic increase in volume of exported rice since the government adopted a new policy of agricultural expansion. Analysis by the Asia Foundation found that if Cambodia's rice exports were to reach their full potential, it could produce 3 million tons of milled rice per year, with the total export value amounting to \$2.1 billion (approximately

20% of the GDP), adding an additional \$600 million (approximately 5% of the GDP) to the national economy. It could also significantly boost employment and income for farmers.

But that boost can be enjoyed by the masses if subsistence farmers change the way they work.

For the most part, the rural poor have yet to be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to compete with industrial farms on what is an increasingly uneven playing field. They lack access to market information, financing, training and necessary land. They face high transport costs to get their products to market and high prices on inputs such as fertilizer and seeds.

"To date, there are only 200,000 families practicing modern techniques in cultivating rice, which accounts for more than 10 percent of total farmer families throughout the country," said Yang Saing Koma, president of the Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC).

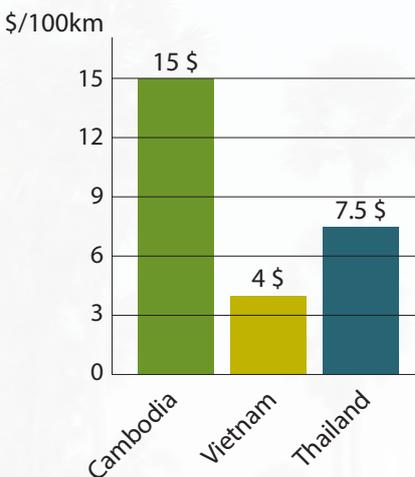
Despite some organizations working to improve agriculture in Cambodia, there remain very few outreach workers helping farmers to improve production and pest control. Yang Saing Koma encouraged rice farmers to apply modern techniques because it brings farmers greater paddy yield than traditional plantations. Farmers need to understand the importance of land quality, seeds, fertilizers and care, he added.

Som Saroeun, a leader of farmers' community in Takeo Province, who was trained by CEDAC, said that using modern techniques, he could harvest between 2 to 3 tons of paddy per hectare, while using traditional methods he could only harvest about 1 ton of paddy per hectare. Moreover, the rice he grows with modern techniques and higher quality seeds can be sold for more than double the price of rice grown using antiquated methods and inputs.

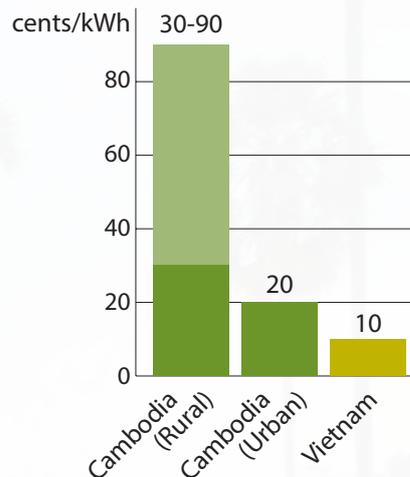
Som Saroeun explained that to begin improving their harvest, farmers first have to restore the quality of their land through using natural fertilizers, and then they also

Additional Costs (Source: Asia Foundation)

TRANSPORT



ELECTRICITY



need to select pure and high-quality seed to meet market demand. He said he chooses to use natural fertilizers for his crops since he became aware that quality of land is degraded if fertilized with chemicals.

He also mentioned two key challenges that most farmers face: high interest loans and a reliance on rain-fed cultivation, which allows for only one crop per year. Most Cambodian farmers cultivate paddy rice once per year during the rainy season, while farmers in Vietnam's delta region cultivate 3.5 times annually.

A lack of infrastructure for transport and irrigation and high price of fuel also lower farmers' profits. To transport one ton of rice on a 100 km road, Cambodian farmers must spend \$15, according to Asia Foundation report. To date, the Ministry of Rural Development has restored and constructed 25,658 kilometers of roads, more than initially planned according to National Development Strategic Plan.

"A large barrier is the lack of loans for buying and processing paddy rice," said Seu Rany, a rice miller in

Prey Kabas district in Takeo Province. By early 2013, MFI interest rates stand high about 2.5% per month, which is a major burden for smallholders, according to a report from CDRI. There are 30 micro-finance institutions operating across Cambodia, but poor farmers still find it hard to access formal credits as they can't put up the necessary collateral. Many poor farmers also encounter a high risk of crop failure, making official loan providers reluctant to increase their loans. As informal borrowing is



less complicated process with less stringent requirements, there is an incentive for farmers to choose informal moneylenders despite high interest rate of around 5% per month.

Kem Ley, a socio-economic researcher, said: "Despite government subsidization, Cambodian microfinance institutions should enforce 'International Best Practice on Microfinance' through providing a loan package to smallholders alongside entrepreneurial leadership skills training and closely monitoring their clients' financial management performance."

Cambodia's overall rice production has



Photos contributed by CEDAC

continued to increase, from about 8.2 million tons in 2010 to 8.8 million in 2011, according to government figures. In spite of this growth, rice millers and exporters continue to complain about the many challenges which hamper their efforts to meet market demands. For instance, in 2012 Cambodia enjoyed a surplus of more than 4.7 million in paddy, according to the Ministry of Agriculture. Yet, official figures from the Ministry of Commerce showed that it only exported 200,000 tons of milled rice last year, or only 10 percent of its full capacity.

Okhna Lim Bun Heng, president of Loran Group and co-president of Cambodian Association of Rice Exporters, blames the high cost of electricity for the slow progress in milled rice exports. "There should be a free competitive market in electricity supply so that the price will be decreased," he told the 9th Private-Sector Working Group Meeting on Rice and Paddy. Along with other members of the association, he also suggested lower interest rates, which will enable rice millers to buy paddy from the community and local farmers so that they can have sufficient rice stock for export demands, which will decrease the amount of relatively cheap paddy being exported to be milled in other countries. CDRI has discovered that exporters are facing significant milling capacity constraints, since the current infrastructure is sufficient for milling only 21 percent of surplus paddy. Thus, more large mills are needed to meet the target of exporting one million tons by 2015. Shipping also remains an issue, as 90 percent of rice export activities take place at Sihanoukville port, where the capacity is currently inadequate to handle one million tons of milled rice.

The government seems to be in an upbeat mood over the likelihood of meeting its target of annually exporting one million tons of milled rice in the next two years. But even if it does meet its target, which looks unlikely, income from the growth must be directed to enriching the poor, as the policy is ultimately meant to serve the farmers.

By Cheng Mengchou and Seng Litor

RUBBER: THE WHITE GOLD

Among Cambodia's top agricultural products, rubber has played an important role in boosting the country's economy in recent years. Agriculture continues to remain a crucial sector to enhance Cambodia's gross domestic product, increase employment, and alleviate rural poverty. Prime Minister Hun Sen has pushed hard for an increase in rubber production, hoping that increased exports will help Cambodia compete with the third world's largest rubber exporter, Vietnam. According to figures from Hun Sen, rubber trees are planted on 280,000 hectares of land, 118,000 hectares of which is located in Economic Land Concessions (ELCs), while another 107,600 hectares are on small-scale farms. In the next five years, the number is predicted to reach 840,000 hectares of rubber plantations. Due to high demand from foreign markets and a steady increase in price, the number of investors rubber investors has also skyrocketed, especially from China and Vietnam. Twenty new rubber investment projects in 2011 were valued at \$675 million, up from nine projects in the previous year valued at only \$190 million, according to data from the Council for the Development of Cambodia. The rubber sector seems to be on the right track, but problems remain unsolved and more challenges are still to come. The controversial granting of ELCs is still a hot-button issue, especially for farmers. The Cambodian Center for Human Rights found that at least 150,000 households nationwide were impacted by rubber investments in 2011, an increase from 120,000 households in 2010. The report also found that the companies did not provide compensation, or the compensation was under the below market price of their property, resulting in a drop in farmers' livelihood after losing their land. Moreover, in order to expand the existing market for Cambodian rubber to other markets, including the European Union, the quality needs to be more standardized. According to a report from the Commerce Ministry, Cambodia must improve its certification standards to make international buyers trust the quality of and pay the proper global price for rubber coming from Cambodia.

By Cheng Mengchou and Seng Litor

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

Educators are struggling to overcome cultural barriers to teach young Cambodians about sexual health and relationships

Photo contributed by RHAC

Hom Phaniet is struggling to keep up with the lyrics scrolling across the LCD screen as she sings one of her favorite karaoke songs along with her friends, gathered together in a dimly lit room. Every Thursday evening, if they can get out of the house, Phaniet and a small group of friends meet for a few hours of karaoke.

But they don't go to the nearest KTV parlor or bar to sing their heart out. They come together in the library of a local youth center in Phnom Penh run by the Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia (RHAC). During their evenings at the Karaoke Library, Hom Phaniet and her friends not only pass around the microphone to do their best rendition of pop songs, they also spend an hour learning about safe sex and reproductive health. RHAC teachers talk to them about condom use, gender-based violence, contraception on other topics that are still not discussed in schools.

"Besides having fun there, I have learned many things related to sexual education that

are very important for my health. Moreover, I also can make new friends with other young people who come there," said Hom Phaniet, a second-year student at Phnom Penh International University.

This program is part of efforts by RHAC and other health NGOs to engage young people in serious conversations about reproductive health, a pressing concern because Cambodia's education system offers no information about sexual health despite the emergence of a generation of young Cambodians that are more sexually active than their parent's generation.

"This program [Karaoke Library] has received a lot of interest from many young people," said Om Yutheary, a training officer for RHAC's youth health program. "It's exactly what is needed" to educate young people about sexuality, she added.

Despite widespread changes in the sexual norms of young Cambodians over the past decade, the country's conservative culture is a barrier to open discussions and access to information about how to keep

yourself, and your partner, safe in sexually active lifestyle.

"People do not like to talk openly about sexuality. Instead, they prefer to talk secretly. This leads risky behavior," said Dr. Chong Vandara, an expert who has been working on sexual health in Cambodia since 1998.

"Most citizens believed that sexuality is something that is learned without any need for lessons, or that sexual issues should not be talked about in public," said Om Yutheary. "When I was teaching in a rural area, some parents had a strong reaction against the program because they believed that we were teaching their children to behave badly."

Nonetheless, the government, with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is developing sexual health lessons that Dr. Chong Vandara hopes will become part of the national curriculum.

Along with lessons about reproductive health, gender-based violence and family planning, this curriculum will teach students how to lower their risk of HIV transmission.

Dr. Var Chivorn, an associate executive

director at RHAC, which operates in 14 of the country's 24 provinces, said that he is optimistic that the government will begin implementing the new curriculum in secondary schools across the country.

"[Sexual education] has been improving. If we look back over the past two decades, we had nothing. Recently, the [Ministry of Education] has developed a new curriculum on life-skills education and also trained many teachers about sexual and reproductive health," he said.

But the government still has a way to go. Only 45 percent of young people in Cambodia could correctly identify ways of preventing the transmission of HIV, according to the 2012 country progress report from the National AIDS Authority.

Changing attitudes about sex, among both educators and students, remains a central issue in spreading information about related issues, said Dr. Chong Vandara. "This curriculum [on life skills education] has been rolling out to several provinces in the country and we have faced a lot of challenges in terms of changing the perspectives of those teachers and public," he said.

"Teachers and school directors are so limited in their knowledge and capacity in talking about this subject. They too may still be conservative," he added. But as Cambodia tries to confront major problems



Photo contributed by RHAC

such as rape, and continue its fight against sexually transmitted diseases, change will begin through basic education.

The rate of HIV in the country dropped from 2 percent in 1998 to 0.6 percent in 2006, according to a 2011 report from Ministry of Planning. This success was largely attributed to widespread efforts to promote the use of condoms. But with less funding going toward the fight against HIV/AIDS today, the message still needs to be communicated to youth. Moreover, by integrated sexual education, or "life skills"

classes into public schools, similar strides could be made in the struggle to reduce violence against woman, according to Dr. Var Chivorn.

In 2011, 658 rape cases were reported in Cambodia, with the vast majority of victims—72 percent—under the age of 15, according to report by ECPAT Cambodia that compiled statistics from various human rights NGOs. These figures only account for rapes that are reported, meaning the actual figures are likely much higher.

The report says that schools are an ideal place to disseminate information and raise awareness among children and their families about support services, trends and risks regarding gender-based violence.

Dr. Var Chivorn said that courses about responsibility, negotiation, and unwanted touch in relationships, will contribute to reducing rape and abuse in the communities where they are taught, and that those communities can spread what they have learned.

"Change can happen overnight if people believe they can do it," Dr. Chong Vandara said. "Changing is from you first and then count the people around you and continue to encourage people to do something that counts."



Photo contributed by RHAC

By Hang Sokharo

YOUTHS ON DEMOCRACY

Future leaders of Cambodia give their perspectives on politics



Hun Many
Photo by Koeut Chantrea



Meach Sithyka
Photo contributed by Meach Sithyka

Some of Cambodian youths feel pessimistic about what is going on with Cambodia's democratic process. Yet, it is the young generation of voters who will shape the future of democratic development in the country. According to research conducted by the UN's Development Program and the BBC World Service, youths between 15 and 24 still have a limited knowledge of democratic institutions and electoral participation.

Understanding their role in politics is crucial for the next generation of Cambodians to make their voice heard and demand that the government serves their interests. Five prominent Cambodian youth talk about how they see democracy developing in the coming years.

Hun Many

Parliamentarian, President of Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia

Youth's participation in democracy is very important since youths are the main pillars of the country's development. However, we should consider whether the youth's participation is focusing on the development of the country or the development of democracy? Should we sit and wait to see whether the democracy in our country is developed or should we try to develop our country along with the development of democracy?

As a youth and as a representative of Union Federal Youth of Cambodia, I am working on social work and social work participation. We are trying to encourage youth to get involved in our activities through various kinds of volunteer jobs, some of which we have done already, such as blood donation, cleaning cities and Angkor Sangkran, which has held [in 2013].

Social work also gives youth the chance to understand what is going on in our society—to understand the democratic process—and they will be able to be involved in political affairs in the future. I think that the government is now providing a lot of chances to Cambodian youths to be involved in social work.

In short, youth's participation is a main part of our country's development, including democratic development.

Meach Sithyka

Army Officer, West Point graduate

Democracy development and politics are two different things. I know it is hard in Cambodia to separate it sometimes, but it's possible to do it. I think we have some unique issues that most democracy have to change. I do not compare Cambodia with other countries because we are unique.

I think the older generation has the power, but we are the future, and it is important if everybody understands how

to work together and to want to work together. Cambodia needs people who are passionate about the country and passionate about Khmers in general and want to work together. You have to be realistic about your expectations for the country doing very good right now. When everybody criticizes our democratic process, I think they have to understand our unique issue and work along with it. So, I'm quite happy with what is going on in Cambodia.

I understand there's a lot of bad news sometimes—very horrible news that you don't want to see. But if you come to your own overall conclusion, there are a lot of things to be positive about. Youths have to study hard and make it happen. Don't complain about things. That's what I would say to next generation. You need to take action. You need to go out there and help. You cannot just say it is hard and never do it.

Tong Soprach

Social affairs columnist for the Phnom Penh Post

Democratic development in Cambodia is now improving very slowly. Therefore, we have to take a look at other countries which have stronger democracies than our country and take some good points from them as examples for our country.

In Cambodia, there is a big number of youth and if the youths have a chance



Mr. Soung Sophorn
Photo by Yav Sok Him



Ms. Chak Sopheap
Photo by Rin Sokreth



Mr. Tong Soprach
Photo contributed by Tong Soparch

to be involved in politics, it means that they have power in the government. Therefore, they will help other youths become involved in politics and improve democratization in Cambodia.

To me, as one of youths, I have been writing column about social affair for Phnom Penh Post in order to improve democracy in Cambodia. Most of the columns are about social analysis and critical issues. For example, I have written about Boeng Kak land conflict, about the education system in Cambodia compared to Asian countries and the differences between democracy in Cambodia compared to the United States.

So, to improve democratic development in the country, first, youths have to be involved in politics. Politics is about our responsibility to think about society, to be involved in it, and to complain about it. Second, youths themselves have to strengthen their own ability in order to be a smarter thinker. They can't just have somebody tell to do something and they just go ahead without critically thinking about it.

Chak Sopheap

Program director at Cambodian Center for Human Rights

It is very important that the government acknowledges that the fundamental freedom of the citizens is absolutely necessary to develop the country. An example is

the freedom to access information. Without proper and independent information, people cannot make informed decisions.

In order to urge youth to be more involved in democratic development, firstly, we have to guarantee the space for youths to communicate, to meet, and to discuss. Secondly, civil society, and especially the government, needs to work to improve the human rights situation, because when the human rights situation is restricted—when one activist gets killed—it sends a very strong message to the public that they have to be silent.

Moreover, youths have to be encourage themselves, not just receive encouragement from the government or from outsiders, because this is a generation for change. It is very crucial that the youths have to understand that they can affect the change for later generations or for themselves. If they just wait to be urged, then they become passive.

Soung Sophorn

Human Right Activist, CNRP youth leader

There have been some positive changes in our country's democratic process. However, the change is not from the older generation but it is from the younger generation, because now Cambodian youths like to use their freedom of expression and respect each other's rights. For this reason, we hope

that our country's democratic development will be better in the near future.

What that can change our country's democratic process for the better is to put the younger generation to positions in all level of the government, because most of the older generation leaders are tainted by a communist mindset because they have experience in a number of communist regime, such as Khmer Rouge regime for example.

One more thing is about their educational level. Most of them are not well-educated people. They did not enroll to receive any university degree or anything, so they don't have many ideas to develop the country. Hope rests on the youth, who can rescue us from these problems. This does not mean that we ignore our older leaders, but they can become our advisors or they can stay in positions that are not so important in the government.

Finally, I would like to suggest that all Cambodian youth become involved in political activities. Cambodia can become a real democratic country as long as Cambodian youths come together to try to help or improve the country.

By Rin Sokreth and Koeut Chantrea

SPEAKING OUT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Cambodians are finding that the most comfortable place to participate in democracy is often online

I do not want someone to admire me when I express my opinion,” said Yem Vanna, 30, a Cambodian migrant worker living in South Korea. “What I want the most is a social change after good opinions are spread via social media.”

The idea that Cambodians can use the internet to share and promote ideas to improve the country is quickly catching on, particularly among youth, who make up an increasing majority of the population.

Social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google Plus and blogs are playing a crucial role in promoting freedom of expression around the world, creating a space for critical discussion in countries where direct dissent is not tolerated. In Cambodia, social media emerged as a vital tool for the opposition CNRP during the July election, and civil society leaders and media experts say that sites such as Facebook will continue to encourage people to participate in politics and promote good governance.

According to a report from the Discover Cambodia blog, the number of Cambodian Internet users reached almost 2.5 million people, or about one in six Cambodians, in October 2012, with about 700,000 people using social media. Both figures are expected to rise sharply as internet penetration expands and internet-equipped web devices continue to get cheaper. Pen Samithy, president of the Club of Cambodian Journalists, said that the social media would transform the future of media in the country, with the vast majority of Facebook users under the age of 30 using the site for entertainment, information sharing and to spread political messages.

Compared to other Asian countries including China, Vietnam, Laos, and Burma,



Photo by Koeut Chantrea

Cambodia’s government has allowed nearly complete freedom of expression on social media, noted Mr. Samithy. “People have more freedom; they can do whatever they want on the Internet. Therefore, some people start to talk about social issues, politics and country development,” said Mr. Samithy. “If a person has a smartphone, he or she can access information, even in remote areas,” he added.

For the young and increasingly connected generation of Cambodians, posting on Facebook or Twitter has become a daily obsession. Keeping a blog has caught on among young academics and socialites. Online shopping and gaming are a favorite pastime and borderline addiction for more affluent youth. Uploading and downloading videos is done constantly between smartphones in the urban and rural centers of the country. Cambodia is truly becoming connected.

The importance of social media in informing Cambodian youth is beginning to rival mainstream media such as television and radio, but it is also creating a space for people to respond to current events and share their feelings about what is happening with their friends, favorite celebrities or politicians. For many Cambodian who were not comfortable with expressing their opinions in person, this has created an expanding area for freedom of expression, and for the truly engaged, a chance to document what is happening in society as so-called “citizen journalists.”

Chin Sopeaktra, a third-year student at the Department of International Studies of Institute of Foreign Languages, said that though she did not feel prepared to engage in politics on the ground, she was enthusiastic about helping society in different ways—mostly through social media. “Every day, I spend three or four hours on social media sharing information with my



Mr. Moeun Chhean Nariddh
Photo by Yav Sokhim



Ms. Chin Sopeaktra
Photo contributed by Chin Sopeaktra



H.E. Khieu Kanharith



Mr. Pen Samithy

friends and expressing my opinion toward any social issue. I always discuss what is going on in society with my friends; then we may find solutions to the problems," she said, adding that she still shies away from commenting on particularly sensitive social issues on Facebook.

Among Cambodia's most active Facebook users is Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith, who not only shares an eclectic mix of news stories from around the world each day, but corresponds directly with his many friends and followers on social media. Nonetheless, he warned Facebook users in the country to be careful when gathering information on Facebook, as stories were often politically motivated or not based in facts. "Consequently, users should verify the information, making sure that it is true.... More importantly, because people are now [acting] as citizen journalists, they must [take on that]

"If I had not used social media, I would never have known about my country."

responsibility. They must not use insulting words and they must follow the codes of [journalistic] ethics," the minister continued.

Khieu Kanharith reiterated promises made by Prime Minister Hun Sen that the government has no intention of censoring social media, a concern among human rights groups who fear that the country's first cyber law, which remains in a drafting stage, will be used to curtail internet freedom. It would not be the first time the government has been seen as interfering

with what online content Cambodians are able to access.

In January 2011, the pro-opposition website KI-Media, which is highly critical of the Hun Sen administration, was blocked by a number of internet service providers in the country. Government officials, however, denied that they were behind the shutdown, despite widespread reports in the media of government letters ordering ISPs to block access to the controversial site. Two other sites, Khmerization, another pro-opposition blog, and reahu.net, which depicts topless Apsara dancers, have also seen access restricted among Cambodian internet users in recent years.

There have also been more recent warnings over the "abuse" of online freedom. In May, the National Election Committee issued a statement requesting that social media users and bloggers "do not provide wrong information about the election (especially the date of the election), create fear, confusion or a loss of confidence in the secrecy of the vote," according to a report in *The Cambodia Daily*.

After an election in which the popularity of the ruling CPP was shown to be on the decline, social media users are hoping that the government lives up to its promises to protect internet freedom. "Social media is one of the most effective ways to promote freedom of expression and to know what is going on in Cambodia," said Yem Vanna,

the migrant worker in South Korea, citing clashes between activists and government authorities that are not broadcast on state-controlled television or radio stations. "When Boeung Kak's activists were hurt by the Municipal authorities, news did not appear in local media but it was fully shared on Facebook," he said. "If I had not used social media, I would never have known about my country."

According to Moeun Chhean Nariddh, director of the Cambodian Institute for Media Studies, it is important for people using social media to understand the responsibilities they take on when acting as citizen journalists. "We have to be neutral, not biased. Report the truth and minimize harm," said Moeun Chhean Nariddh, adding that it is important for social media users to take responsibility for the information and images they post.

On the other hand, Moeun Chhean Nariddh said that the Cambodian government should continue to exercise patience with citizens new to social media, and react with a cool head when people post defamatory or misleading stories about politics or current events.

Yem Vanna said that he hopes the government helps to ensure the "sustainability of social media so that Cambodians can get accurate information." Also, he urged Cambodian citizens, especially students, to use social media because it is vital to promoting freedom of expression, which will lead the country toward a real democracy.

By Yang Chandara and Yav Sok Him



NEW FORM NEW FOCUS

Seeking to define contemporary dance in Cambodia

Photo by Tep Chansophea

What we need is emotion," said Belle, explaining how dancers can communicate with their audience. "For example, when I am happy, I dance happily with a smile on my face and sparking eyes while broadening [my shoulders]," she said, moving her body accordingly.

Trained as a classical Cambodian ballerina, Belle is among a small group of dancers who are daring to take what they have learned and create something completely new: contemporary Cambodian dance.

Classical Cambodian dance is slow. The careful flexing of hands and feet, bending of joints and contortion of the torso create the hundreds of poses which form the vocabulary of traditional dance. The female dancers never sing a song or talk while performing. They perform with grace and good manners. The traditional dances, said Belle, tell folk stories from the past. "But

contemporary dance tells what is happening now," she said.

Unlike the rigid constraints of Classical dance, modern dancers are taking the freedom break out of the classic mode and move to their own beat, Belle said. "Contemporary dance brings a new form that reflects the modern day," said Belle. "In the modern dance, we can sing, we can talk, we can stand still or we can use wild gestures and movement."

The new generation of Cambodian dancers is seeking to create new dance forms by mixing the traditional techniques with foreign influences to create dances that express their reality. These dancers believe that by combining traditional teachings with a variety of influences, dance can help keep the country's culture alive while attracting new audiences to its beauty.

Among the first dancers to together classic forms from Cambodian and other

countries was King Norodom Sihamoni, who was part of a group of dancers in the mid-1990s who brought together Cambodian and French styles to create what is believed to be the first contemporary Cambodian dance, according to Hun Pen, the Deputy Director of International Cultural Cooperation at the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts.

In 1995, King Sihamoni, who was trained as a ballet dancer in the Czech Republic, put on a series of performances with dance troupes from Cambodia and France in which French dancers wore traditional Khmer costumes and Cambodian dancers added their own traditional techniques to classical French ballets, according to Hun Pen, who said that the crossing of cultures made it impossible to label the performances as belonging to either country.

But despite the excitement created by these early collaborations between Cambodian and foreign dancers almost

two decades ago, contemporary dance is still in its infancy. Most Cambodians have no idea what contemporary dance is, and Cambodian dance continues to be defined by centuries-old classical ballet or Apsara dancing, which dates back to the Angkorian era.

But today Cambodian dancers, like their contemporaries in other art forms, are pushing the boundaries of their form and building on the legacies of their traditional predecessors. So will their vision for the future of Cambodian dance be accepted into popular culture?

"When the new form of arts is accepted by the whole country, then we can say that dance is a part of our culture," said Hun Pen. "If you ask me whether or not the contemporary dance is accepted now, I will say I don't know because there are many kinds of contemporary dance, and we don't know which one the audiences prefer," she said.

Although it may be too early to tell which experiments in dance will garner the attention of Cambodian audiences, Hun Pen said that innovators in the realm of contemporary dance are part of a wider movement of youth advancing a new vision for the arts. "The new forms of contemporary



Photo by Tep Chansopheha



Photo by Anders Jiras

dance contribute to the development of Cambodian art by creating new form and avoiding repetition," she said. "[Contemporary dance] is helping to create a new culture in the new era."

While dancers in the era may find inspiration from foreign countries and cultures, integrating traditional Khmer styles and techniques is part of what makes these new dances authentically Cambodia, said Hun Pen. "I create contemporary dances that maintain a Khmer aesthetic," she said. "I like using my personality and characteristics to point out that it's me, Hun Pen, [who is performing], not anyone else. It strengthens my own identity. I make dances that let the audience know that it is Khmer, or if they don't know Khmer, at least they know it's from Asia, not from France or Russia," she said.

A number of the the pioneers of contemporary dance today, including Belle, have come out of Amrita Performing Arts, an arts NGO in Phnom Penh that was founded in 2003 to help a young generation of artists discover new forms of movement through

collaboration with international choreographers, directors and dancers.

By creating a space for emerging Cambodian dancers to learn from and collaborate with their peers around the world, dancers will have the knowledge, and sense of freedom, to create dances that are both new and authentically Cambodia, said Fred Frumberg, who earlier this year stepped down as executive director of Amrita Performing Arts. "Foreigners can help introduce contemporary techniques that are not yet taught in Cambodia and are important if a Cambodian choreographer or dancer are going to create their own Cambodian form of contemporary creative expression", said Fred Frumberg. "Eventually, it is the Cambodians who will create their own work but we are still in a phase of development in which outside exposure is crucial."

"For the Cambodian dancers and choreographers, it is important that their work remain rooted in their traditions and therefore they are looking to their international colleagues for guidance in technique," Fred Frumberg said. "But ultimately, they will



Photo by Tep Chansophea

develop the new techniques as Cambodian artists, based on Cambodian dance vocabulary.”

“We, the contemporary dancers, use classical dance as our background because we were classical dancers before,” explained Belle, “But when we perform, we use new techniques that speak to the modern day.”

A number of Cambodia’s best dancers and choreographers came together in the Season of Cambodia festival, which took place in New York City in April and May. The festival combined dance performances, films, visual art exhibitions, concerts, classes and discussions. Dancers from Amrita Performing Arts, the Khmer Arts Ensemble and a troupe from the Royal Ballet of Cambodia presented a wide spectrum of Cambodian dance, from the ancient to the brand new.

But getting to New York City was not easy, particularly for the contemporary

dancers trying to break away from classical constraints. “My masters criticized us for dancing in a crazy manner, running or rolling up and down onstage, as if we were writhing,” said Belle of her initial foray into contemporary dance. “The masters said we were going to kill classical dance.” Belle said that female dancers in contemporary compositions were often looked down upon for being too emotive or touching their male counterparts. But Belle believes that audiences today are less conservative and more willing to open their minds to new forms of dance in which performers express their newfound freedoms and feelings through movement.

“I’m interested in the contemporary dance,” said Tan Sonika, a young dancer who started taking ballet lessons in 2011. “I think it differs from the classical dance because we need to have strong emotions

in our dancing,” she said. “We follow our emotions when we perform – we express different feelings depending on the scenario of the story.”

So should champions of classical dance be concerned about contemporary dance gaining more popularity? Sang Phorsda, who has been practicing classical dance for 14 year, said that the modern and classical were becoming intertwined. “[Contemporary dancers] are not really separated from our traditions,” said Sang Phorsda. “It just develops traditional dance into a modern thing. ... Apsara is our heritage and must be preserved, but the art should not become repetitive. There must be some creativity,” she said.

Belle has her own ideas about how to keep traditional art alive. She recognizes the value of classical dance as foundation for training. “I can say if I were not a traditional dancer, I would not be a contemporary dancer,” Belle said. “Traditional dance is very important; it’s the core or base for me. I have basics of classical dance that have given me a flexible body and sharpened my morals and values toward the arts.”

Hun Pen said that she is not concerned about competition between the traditional and contemporary in Cambodian dance. “Honestly, I don’t worry at all because Cambodian classical dance has high moral value and identity. Even if many kinds of foreign arts enter Cambodia, classical dance will remain unbreakable,” she said. “I don’t care about foreign influences, but what I do care is whether or not there is someone who will carry on the legacy of classical dance.”

To the next generation of Cambodian dancers, Hun Pen said, “try to express your own identity and uniqueness through dance. Dance whatever you like, but do not copy from the others. Make your own original dance. ... Every original masterpiece is priceless.”

By Mao Chandaly and Hean Socheata



THE NEXT GENERATION OF ENTREPRENEURS

Ms. Net Khosok and Mr. Meng Cheaplay are discussing about their business plan. Photo by Dara Saoyuthnea

The era of copycat business is on the decline as a new generation of creative entrepreneurs is emerging

Driving from Thom Thmey Market to the west along the Kampuchea Krom Boulevard, rows of houses on either side of the road are home to small businesses: dozens of clothing and computer shops clustered together. On Sihanouk Boulevard, in the former Kirirum Cinema area, the business of choice for shop-house owners is motorbike sales. IN both areas, all the businesses look the same. They are not creative enterprises. Despite there being countless business in Phnom Penh, the entrepreneurial spirit of innovation seems to still be lacking. In short, there are lots of businesspeople and not many entrepreneurs.

Both sets of people own businesses and invest in new ventures, however, they are different in terms of their mindset, attitude, creativity and perspective. In the past, if

one business was successful and profitable, soon that business would be copied again and again by competitors, often living on the same block. Also, business served only to generate profit, with little effort toward social development. In the spirit of entrepreneurship, there is an emerging group of younger businesspeople who are innovative, with a long-term vision for the development of their businesses and society.

The increasing number of entrepreneurs has been fueled by economic growth, which the World Bank estimated at 7 percent in 2013, a figure set to remain stable over the next two years. Additionally, World Bank data indicates that GDP per capita in this country in 2012 was \$897, a significant increase. Data from the National Institute of Statistics says that the number of small and medium enterprises in Cambodia increased by 36

percent from 2009 to 2011. This upward trend of the economy has encouraged investment and led to an emerging consumer class in the still developing country. Young entrepreneurs in particular are showing a passion for launching start-up businesses which can help society, themselves and their family. Their vision will guide the future of the Cambodian free market as it increasingly competes with regional countries and the world.

Ping An, at the age of 20, has a dream—along with confidence and drive—to be entrepreneur and get social return on his business. Currently pursuing a bachelor degree in media management at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, he said “I always want to own a business and my business is not just for profit, but a social enterprise, meaning I can earn money and help people

at the same time. "Ping An, whose parents' business is selling motorbikes, feels grateful that his parents have support his studies, and wants to avoid the difficulties they have faced trying to compete with identical copycat competitors. "Every day, both of them work very hard to get me to where I am today. I am trying my best to study hard and work hard to get decent job, so that I can help my parents out because they are getting older every day," he said.

Ping An's, business plan, created along with a group of fellow students, is called "Community Supported Rice Product." Ping An and his group have various backgrounds, from agriculture to economics and media. The plan, he explained, will provide farmers free training, seminars, loans and consulting services as well as helping farmers connect with a market for their rice. "Our business adventure will help raise awareness among farmers to practice good agriculture which sustains the environment too. There are many social benefits such as poverty reduction, reduction of labor force migration, promotion of investment in the agricultural sector toward and green cultivation practices," he said.

According to an August 2012 report by Cambodian Center for Study and Develop-

ment in Agriculture (CEDAC), rice farmers comprise about 60 percent of Cambodia's population of almost 15 million people. This high percentage of Cambodians who still rely on their rice field for survival seems to be a strong motivation for young entrepreneurs to venture into the agriculture sector. Meng Cheaplay, 22, is part of a team of students who came up with a business plan called TU-YO KHMER, which won first place in the AIESEC Business Plan Competition 2013.

TU-YO, he explained, is a pipe made from agricultural product for helping farmers transfer water from field to field. "It does not always start from something big," he said. "We can start from something we can do. We produce a lot of crops, a lot of agricultural products. We have potatoes, so we can make potato chips. You can learn [to increase production." Net Khosok, 21, member of the TU-YO KHMER team, said "[the irrigation pipes] can lift the living standard of farmers as it's sold at a low price with the convenient and new method to supply water into fields. Moreover, it creates jobs for production area as well as induces economic growth by increasing the agriculture yield."

Regarding the opportunities for young entrepreneurs these days, Mengly J. Quach,

founder of American Intercon School said, "Sometimes, you end up saving for your whole life and you're never able to start a business. Sometimes, you need to have some guts, encouragement and start small." The 44-year-old entrepreneur is very optimistic about the chance that a new generation of businesspeople will overcome the challenges ahead. "Within a decade, we will see a lot of strong generation of entrepreneurs or intellectuals," he said.

However, opportunity alone doesn't make a person become a successful entrepreneur. Although youths have strong passion for business, they cannot achieve their goal simply by staying still in Cambodia. Traveling is a crucial way to develop new ideas, said Chy Sila, 38, general director of CBM Corporation. "When you travel overseas, it's like you are buying a valuable book. The more you take, the more knowledge you get."

Similarly, Din Somethearith, 39, CEO of Frangipani Villa Hotels describes how travelling has made his business aspirations come true. "I have had a business mindset for a long time, since I was in the second year of university, but we could not make it happen because we have no funds and entrepreneurial skills," he said. "So when I



*Miss. Net Khosok
TU-YO KHMER Team member
Photo by Rithy Lomor Pich*



*Dr. Mengly J. Quach,
Founder of American Intercon Institute/School
Photo by Dara Saoyuthnea*



*Mr. Din Somethearith,
CEO of Frangipani Villa Hotels
Photo contributed by Din Somethearith*

have chance to travel a lot and learn more degrees, my brain becomes smarter, so we can make it happen without depending too much on money.”

Most entrepreneurs are inspired by their passion. Both experienced and upcoming entrepreneurs need to believe in what they are doing, because starting a new business is risky. “You have to follow your passion,” said Ping An, adding that his team will continue to compete in business plan competitions to showcase and refine their business model. “Even if we lose or win, we are going to start our business. Maybe next year we will implement it,” he said.

At the same time youth face a number of hurdles in getting their business off the ground, from finding out information about the Cambodian marketplace to accessing capital to launch a small business. “Reaching [information] resource in Cambodia is very limited,” said Net Khosok, complaining that she finds it very difficult to find information or data about the business sector or economics in Cambodia through the internet.

Having enough information is one thing. However, getting money is an even more important challenge for young entrepreneurs to bring their business plans into existence. Ping An, who has just won the

first round of a business plan competition in Singapore, expressed his concern over this challenge. “Sometimes we get idea, we know how to do it but we don’t know where to get the money,” he lamented.

Kem Ley, a socio-economic researcher, said that the government has adopted a policy to encourage young entrepreneur. However, the implementation seems to have stagnated due to a lack of data or a clear strategy and structure to turn the policy into an actionable plan that allow entrepreneurs to enter the market. “The government has not initiated a policy for private sector or microfinance institutions about which channels young entrepreneurs can approach for loan.”

Net Khosok voices her concern that “the government should provide us some support—the grants and information that we need, and also open opportunity for youth to do business. I see AIESEC or other organizations trying to organize business plan competitions, [but the government’s involvement] is still limited. The government should involve themselves in those competitions,” she said.

Until the government plays a more active role in encouraging entrepreneurship, business-minded youth are turning to other



SmallWorld Cambodia
Photo by: Dara Saoyuthnea

people and organizations to help launch their ventures. Ping An said, “I would try to get into specific group of people first before I go to the bank because those people know what we have been through when we start a business; they know what we need.”

There are also a number of events that encourage young entrepreneurs to initiate innovative business ideas, including the National SME Business Model Competition and AIESEC Business Plan Competition. In addition, there is a non-profit institute named “Small World,” which provides office space and services, such as training and consultation, to young entrepreneurs.

SmallWorld was founded to ensure that entrepreneurial youth can work in an enjoyable and productive environment. Its founding vision is to test, enhance, and develop a business area to ensure funding for future business development. “We do consulting and share each others’ experiences,” said Thul Rithy, co-founder of Small World. “We also connect people with other people who have succeeded in business, so we connect them with source of knowledge.”

Those young entrepreneurs think that entrepreneurship is so important to reduce unemployment rate and give youths a chance to engage in improving the society. Because youths are the core part of development, the next generation of young entrepreneur would help accelerate the speed of Cambodian economic growth and represent Cambodia as it is increasingly connected to other countries in Asia and around the world.

By Som Rina and Dara Saoyuthnea



Mr. Ping Ann whose business plan called ‘Community Supported Rice Product.’
Photo contributed by Ping Ann



Mr. Thul Rithy, Co-founder of Small World Cambodia
Photo by Dara Saoyuthnea



YOUNG ARTISTS EVERYWHERE

Photo by Cambodia Daily

Tiny Toones

Tiny Toones, Cambodia's first break dancing NGO, was formed in 2007 by an American-born Cambodian known as KK. Today, Tiny Toones isn't only about teaching kids to dance to the beat, the NGO also offers many other useful skills including DJ skill, painting, composing songs and music, English and Khmer languages, and computer skills. But the break-dancing that started it all continue to thrive. The main purpose of creating the group was to give children the skills, and offer the freedom, to express themselves. By giving them an opportunity to show their talents, they also have a chance to learn communication skills, have an optimistic view of the future, the ability to grab a chance when it comes along and a work ethic to keep moving toward their goal. Tiny Toones is open to anyone, rich or poor, between the ages of 5 and 24.



Photo contributed by Tiny Toones



Photo by Cambodia Daily



Photo by Khvay Samnang

Cambodian Circus

Cambodia's most famous circus was started by the arts NGO Phare Ponleu Selpak in 1998. The group, which is based in Battambang, has about 80 expert members and around 100 students who are studying hard in order to grab a chance to perform on the stage. They not only perform in the country, but have also showed off their skills with performances in Japan, the Philippines, Brunei, South Korea, Thai, and Laos. The Phare Ponleu Selpak circus was created to encourage kids to lead more healthy and active lifestyles through practicing exercising, gymnastics, juggling, and the many other talents involved in being a circus performer. But now the circus has become much more. The top performers from the NGO have opened a year-round circus in Siem Reap to showcase their talent as professional performers. Bringing their own interpretations of the circus to the stage, the performers from Phare Ponleu Selpak are spreading Cambodian art through an unlikely medium: the circus.



Stiev Selpak

Stiev Selpak is a group of young visual artists who work in painting, mixed media, installations, photography, video and performance. It was formed by six young Cambodian men in 2007, and now has its own studio and gallery. The main objective of the group, from the outset, was to learn and share from one another. "The initial purpose when we formed the group was to continue our art practice together. We hoped by being together, we could share and learn from each other. Our dream evolved to opening the first artist-run gallery in Phnom Penh," said Vuth Lyno, director of Sa Sa Art Projects. Their dream came true. Stiev Selpak opened their first art space, Sa Sa Art Projects, inside Phnom Penh's White Building in 2010 after they had opened Sa Sa Art Gallery in 2009. They hosted 11 exhibitions in less than two years and attracted hundreds of visitors to see their work. In 2011, the group, along with Erin Gleeson, opened SaSa Basaac, a contemporary art gallery, education and resource center dedicated to creating, facilitating, producing, and sharing contemporary visual culture in and from Cambodia. Together, they have been running art class over the past three years training about 20 young students age from 17 to 25 in using photography, mixed media and sounds.

Fledgling Filmmakers

The Cambodian Youth Art Group, a group of young filmmakers, was created by 12 youths in 2011. There are now 26 members in the group, each with special skills and talents necessary to produce a film. Everyone in the group has a specific position such as a script writer, camera operator, video editor, director or actor and actress. Most of the members spend their days studying at university, but still manage to get together to make films. While the young members have a passion for film, they still have a lot to learn about what it actually takes to create a high-quality production, and have received some training from the Support Child and Youth organization. "The main objectives of forming the group were to promote Cambodian art, to make it well-known and become more prosperous in order to compete with the neighboring countries," said Seang Virak, a director in the Cambodian Youth Art Group. So far, the group's contributions can already be seen, having worked closely with the government, and non-government organizations such as the Meta Karona Foundation and Cambodian Tourism Corporate Association, which commissioned the group to help spread good messages about the country and educate Cambodians through film. One of the group's films, "My Dream," was given the top prize at Film Camp 2013.

By Ath Chhunmuoy,
Chhit Kanika and Ly Bela



OUR MUSIC SOUL

KHMER MUSIC MAKES A COMEBACK

Phnom Penh was a pretty cool place in the 1960s and early '70s. Psychedelic rock music was introduced to the country by American soldiers during the Vietnam War and was mixed with traditional Cambodian music and beautiful voices of the day to make a sound that still resonates today. Unfortunately, when the communist Khmer Rouge took over the country in 1975, entertainment was outlawed in the country. They killed most of the singers and banned music, books, dancing, and poetry.

But while many sectors in Cambodia have moved forward in the past two decades, good Cambodian music remains rare, with

most popular songs simply copied from musical artists in other countries.

However, some young Cambodians are struggling against all obstacles to bring back the richness of Cambodian music through their own creations. Some of them are mixing foreign music like hip-hop into their own sounds, but their songs remain unique and a modern Cambodian music is starting to catch the attention of people in the country and around the world.

These rising artists include Klap Ya Handz, a hip hop group, Anti-Fate, a punk-rock band, and Count Me In, a female rock group, along with future Cambodian rock bands sure to be formed by the country's

young and talented musicians. Despite the challenges they face, like time, money and a conservative culture, they still follow their passion and are creating a truly Cambodian music scene.

Klap Ya Handz is an independent hip hop and alternative music "family" that is changing the face of Khmer music. They are now trying to promote and bring back originality and creativity into the Cambodian entertainment world by mixing Hip Hop with traditional Cambodian music.

Most of their songs focus on education and Cambodian culture. A song, for instance, called "Kingdom Of Wonder Klap Anthem," sung by Pou Khlaing and Lisha, describes

Angkor Wat, which is built in the golden land of Cambodia, "Angkor Dor Sros Sen Laor, Angkor Dor Sros Sen Laor, Angkor Dor Sros Sen Laor. Please welcome to the beautiful land. This is a special chance to visit wonderful country which everyone wants to visit. This is amazing Angkor in Cambodia kingdom of wonder," the song goes, mixing Khmer and English.

Sok Visal, a founder of Klap Ya Hand, said, "If everyone just does the same thing, nothing is interesting. By doing something different and unique, we can catch audiences' attention. Mixing hip-hop music with Cambodian music is the way to express myself and to promote my country. We can promote Cambodia through music."

He added that young people rarely listen to old music; in contrast, they prefer to listen to some kinds of music like hip hop or rock. If artists today want people to actually look back to the past, they should mix the old songs with hip hop or rock music. This way, when the audiences find the music interesting, they will be inspired to find out more about the original songs.

Even though there is still limitation of

"Mixing hip-hop music with Cambodian music is the way to express myself and to promote my country."

new groups in Cambodia who are trying to create new music, these groups are moving forward step by step, from performing at their friend's party to performing at night clubs and other venues where they are building their own audience to support them. Groups like Klap Ya Handz have even created their own line of promotional products and have a number of CDs sold in Cambodia and abroad.

Anti-Fate, another rising group, was formed by four young Cambodian men who compose and perform their own rock songs. So far they have written six original rock songs in English, but plan to start writing songs in Khmer as well.

Jumping up and down with the two hands holding a guitar, Propey is wearing skinny jeans and a black T-shirt. He looks at home on the stage, playing the guitar and singing in a distinctly punk-rock style.

"Khmers used to be powerful in music. I am proud of what I have done. I do not care if others value it or not; I prefer to create something by myself rather than copy from the others," said Propey.

Music is meant to entertain people. But it also expresses the emotions of its creators and their audience. This can be a tough task for musicians to fulfill. They have to struggle to create something special, often starting from zero.

"We are limited by time and money because music doesn't pay anything. Sometimes I think it is a waste of time but because I love music so I keep doing it no matter what happens," said Sok Visal, another member of Anti-Fate.

In the Cambodian context, it is even harder for women to make a name for themselves in music. Most people in older generations give little to no value to music as a career, as they know it doesn't pay much and would be horrified to see young women jumping and shouting in front of a crowd.

But the young women in the band Count Us In don't seem to care. Lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist for the band, Virak Vinich also known as Nikki said, "It's hard for us to go out at night to perform because we have to ask permission from our parents and sometimes it is also conflicts with our study time as well."

Even they have to faces many problems while walking down the path of music, the members of Count Us In haven't given up hope because they are truly passionate about their music.

Nikki said, "If we can make things by ourselves, why do not we do them? Sometimes

we might think our songs are not so good. However, as long as the lyrics reach people, and we make the music by ourselves, the audiences will support us."

"If you love music, you have to devote yourself to it," said Propey of Anti-Fate. "Our generation should do something by ourselves, we have to change. The purpose of composing the songs is to spread the message and to raise awareness. I am willing to help as long as it benefits to the society."

It would be an exaggeration to say that punk rock or hip hop are popular in Cambodia, but the young musicians are still optimistic about what they are doing.

Sok Visal imagines of a future of music when young Cambodian will collaborate with famous composers from the past. "I really believe that Cambodian will be able to do their own music by cooperating with the local singer. Recently, we can have seen some old talented composers who have been to abroad during civil war in Cambodia are coming back."

Sok Visal also wants to encourage the next generation of Cambodians who truly love music to start producing their own music by and using their own creativity to promote Cambodia. "I hope that people will not consider music as a business but make it with your heart."

*By Ath Chhunmuoy,
Chhit Kanika and Ly Bela*



Photo by Klap Ya Hand



MAKE CHANGE TOGETHER

Graduate students from abroad change education in Cambodia from their hearts and experiences

Im Somony is thinking about how to win an oversea scholarship. Photo by Tep Chansophea

When Ting Layheng arrived in the US in 2004 to pursue post-graduate degrees, it felt completely different from Cambodia. Not only the quality of education, but student life in general.

Now a technical advisor at department of higher education in the Ministry of Education, Ting Layheng, 33, says that students at universities in the US are not only taught by qualified professors, but learn how to teach themselves. Student are able to use research material and study groups to make the most out of their classes. They even find time for fun activities outside of class, at gyms or clubs on campus.

After coming back to Cambodia, Ting Layheng is working to apply what has learned from the outside in the hope that it will improve the quality of education in Cambodia.

Scholars who have experienced education abroad have the potential to make a improvements in the education sector, experts say, because they have seen the strengths of foreign education systems and can apply it in their home countries.

Post-conflict Cambodia is similar to other developing countries, however, its

tragic past—four years under the Khmer Rouge and a more than a decade of civil war—took a particular toll on the educated class. Intellectuals and academics were specifically targeted by Pol Pot’s regime, decimating the education system.

According to the Asian Development Bank’s report which was conducted in 1996, it was estimated that between 75 and 80 per cent of the teachers and higher education students fled or died between 1975 and 1979.

However, in the past two decades, new schools have been built reaching rural and remote areas; and universities, which were almost non-existent under French colonial rule, have been established in the capital and several main provinces.

But the schooling system remains one of the worst in Southeast Asia. Cambodia has struggled to improve basic education for its people by ensuring all children complete primary school and expanding basic schooling to nine years. But creating a higher education system from scratch has, in many ways, been even more difficult.

In academic year 2012-2013, Cambodia has 250,000 university students including

associate, bachelor, master, and Ph.D. degree, but there is not enough qualification. Most academics who are old enough to be professors were either killed or fled the Khmer Rouge. The number of qualified educators, while growing, simply cannot keep up with the number of students.

Seeing this lack of quality in Cambodian education, students with the necessary ability or resources have sought opportunities to pursue their higher education overseas, especially in developed countries such as US, EU, Australia or Japan.

Luise Ahrens, who arrived in Cambodia in 1993 to work with the government to establish a proper higher education system, agreed with the ADB’s research. “Compared to 1979, it’s wonderful. Great achievements. Cambodia has moved the very long [way] to build this education quality,” she said.

However, Luise, a technical advisor at Royal University of Phnom Penh, explained that the quality of education still does not meet social and market needs. “If you look at the perspective of objective standard is very poor, so you have to say two ways,” she said.

Besides the lack of standards, Pen Sithol, deputy secretary-general of the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC), said that Cambodia also lacks resources such as a budget for conducting a research, quality of teaching and curriculum.

He explained that many lecturers teach for multiple universities every day—more than 24 hours a week—so they do not have enough time to do research, or even properly teach their students. Some lecturers also lack training in teaching methodology and sometime have to teach classes with up to 70 to 80 students.

Pen Sithol, who graduated from a university in Australia, said students graduating from abroad have learned those country's about what education quality means, and can help Cambodian by sharing their knowledge from overseas.

He continued that some students can help the university to reform its curriculum by mixing the local and international system. "Now, we see that most universities create English language programs for students because new teachers present and use the foreign documents, most of which are written in English,"

Although human resources in Cambodia are in the urgent need of being improved, some students who are educated abroad do not want to come back to their home country because they think that they will face too many challenges.

Mr Sithol agreed with this concern, saying that some students do not want to return home because they hope to get a good job opportunity or citizenship from the host country so their children can live and study abroad. Furthermore, those students think that their salary in Cambodia would be relatively small, compared to a developed country. They are also worried by a dysfunctional bureaucracy, cronyism and nepotism, which often make it difficult to rise in your career, regardless of your skills.

According to the draft budget for 2013, funding for education increased from \$245 million last year to almost \$280 million in 2013. In its financial plan for higher

education this year, the government set aside \$11,725,000, an increase of 39 percent compare to \$8,410,500 for year 2012.

However, Luise Ahrens said the budget is not enough for Cambodia to deal with the problem. The government must also address problems of inefficiency. She explained that if the teachers get money through the bank, they will get it. But if they get it through state institutions, some amount of money might not end up in their pocket.

Most importantly, there is a need to reform academic programs to meet the social and market needs of students. There is an urgent need for faculty and staff development, pay-increases for highly qualified lecturers and staffs, reform of financial and managerial structures in higher educational institutions, and a greater focus on research according to a 2010 report from the Development Research Forum in Cambodia (CRF).

However, CRF noted this will not happen immediately. It requires careful long-term planning in close cooperation with university leaders who are appointed and recognized on the basis of excellent academic and administrative leadership. It will also require reviews of the finances of higher-education institution, including the identification of current gaps in research funding—especially for research-oriented public universities.

Ting Layheng suggested that the government increase the national budget on higher education to 10 percent of the education budget per year. She added the government should expand access and equity and strengthen the quality standards of higher education, meaning that students have enough knowledge—both hard and soft skill—after they graduated to compete in the job market. In addition, the government should strengthen the good governance to ensure that money is well spent.

Having received a masters and Ph.D degree from the US, Ros Soveacha, 33, is now a program coordinator for the education unit of UNESCO Cambodia. He agreed

with the above recommendations, adding that education and economy should be run on the same speed. Right now, he said, the government has placed a great focusing on economy, which has grown rapidly—and is set to continue to grow at more than 7 percent per year, according to the International Monetary Fund.

"I think the economy and education sector need to go on-track at the same time," he said. "The government needs to expand the national budget for education to strengthen teacher's ability, research, and materials."

He said most of scholars want to come back, but the government sometimes ignores them. "The ministry of education should control the number of these scholars—how many students graduated from abroad each year, and the ministry should welcome them by giving them an opportunity to get a high-paid job when they come back," he suggested.

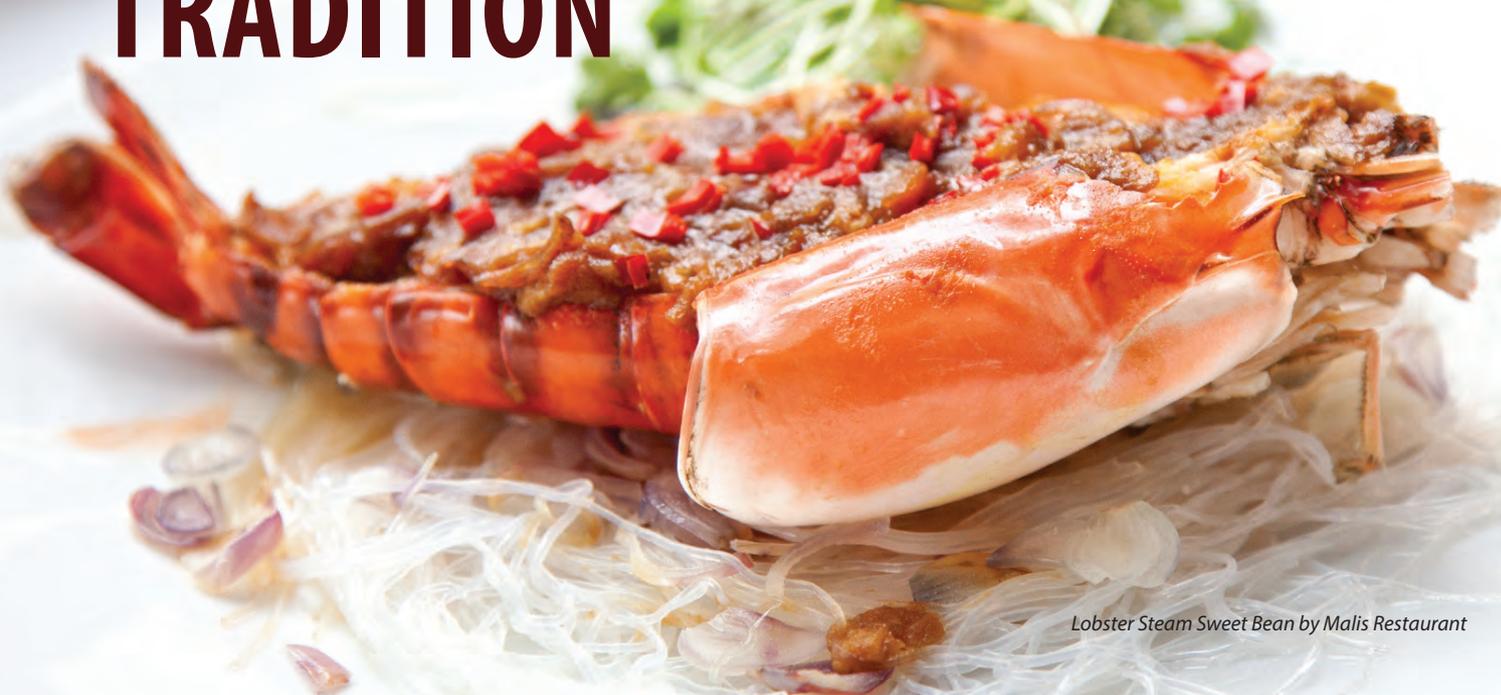
"These students will make change happen in Cambodia to improve the quality of higher education for next generation," said Luise Ahrens. "But they must work together if they want to change. Their voice will be strong if they are together."

By San Sel and Seng Vibol



Ting Layheng, a technical advisor at department of higher education. Photo by San Sel

MIXING UP TRADITION



Lobster Steam Sweet Bean by Malis Restaurant

Chefs are keeping things fresh by putting a global spin on traditional Khmer food

Just because fish amok is famous doesn't mean that snail amok isn't delicious. It is just one of the doesn't dishes to have come out of Cambodia's test kitchens, where chefs are playing with tradition—mixing new and time-tested ingredients—and coming up with mouth-watering results. Foreign influence is nothing new to Cambodia. Even before the French arrived in the 18th century, Cambodian cooking was already absorbing influence of nearby countries including Vietnam, China and Thailand. However, there is nothing exactly like Khmer food. There are ingredients and dishes here that aren't found anywhere else in the world. They are the foundation upon which Khmer chefs today are creating modern Cambodian cuisine.

Cambodian chefs can no longer offer only the classics and expect to succeed. In urban centers like Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, restaurants are opening from around

the world. Customers expect something special. Similar to developers in technology field, Cambodian chefs have to be innovative, staying one step ahead of the competition. By honing their skills and staying creative, Cambodian chefs today are moving traditional Khmer food into the modern age and keeping it alive for the next generation.

"As a chef, we have to create something new for customers' needs. But creativity does not mean we change on basic ingredient," said Luu Hong, a chef at Malis restaurant in Phnom Penh. "Prahok is the soul of Khmer traditional food since our forefather's generation, and remains the secret behind the taste of Khmer food," he added. Seemingly as long as people have been cooking in Cambodia, prahok, a fermented fish paste sometimes called Cambodian cheese, has been used to give food an infusion of flavor. To prove his point that prahok can be at the

heart of innovation, Luu Hong pulled out his newly created dish: snail amok. It is a new dish, as far as he knows, but it still contains prahok, the classic Cambodian ingredient.

As Cambodia once again establishes itself as a cultural center, its chefs are increasingly taking the opportunity to travel abroad to learn the ways of chefs around the world. They can not only broaden their own skills, but pass along their knowledge to chefs to other countries. "I have been to training courses in Singapore, and I have learnt tips about how to keep the meat fresh, decorate food and exchanged some experiences with foreign chefs," said Luu Hong. "I can learn something new that I can use to develop myself," he added.

"There is no other food as special as the Khmers," said Hak Sokkhern, a professional chef at Romdeng restaurant in Phnom Penh. Romdeng aims to serve authentic Khmer food to relatively upscale customers.

"I have 14 years of experience in cooking Khmer dishes, and although I have learned much more than what I can say, I have been thinking that the variety of ingredients is an outstanding feature of our food," he said.

Cambodian cuisine is generally known as one of the world's oldest living cuisines, and it continues to catch the attention of people around the globe. An article titled 10 Delicious Cambodian dishes you've got to try was published recently on CNN Travel. TV chefs including Anthony Bourdain and Andrew Zimmern have brought their crews to Cambodia to sample the local fare. With a focus on simplicity, freshness, seasonality and regionalism, Cambodian food is well-loved by just about anyone who tries it, and a relief for people who find other regional food too spicy for their palate. Its harmonious arrangement of contrasting flavors, textures and temperatures within the meal, and its thoughtful and understated



Snail Amok by Malis Restaurant

presentation of dishes with herbs, pickles, greens, dipping sauces, edible flowers and other garnishes and condiments make the food a gorgeous sight in itself.

But for people who have grown used to eating Khmer food, changing up classic dishes can keep them coming back, said Hak Sokkhern. "The creation of new dishes make people feel the difference and with the new taste and they never get bored of eating Khmer dishes. This is the way we keep traditional Khmer food alive," he said. At Romdeng restaurant, Khmer traditional food is always being kept fresh. Four new

types of main courses or desserts are on offer every week. "Invention here does not necessary mean we change everything," Hak Sokkhern continued. "We basically build off the old recipe from the older generation, particularly recipes we have from Royal Palace."

Makk Dany, 52, a chef Khmer Surin Restaurant, says "Khmer dishes today are far different from in the past, because now they have become modernized to fit with the people of this time." Keeping Khmer food alive is not only important to pass along Cambodian culture to the next generation, she said. A unique cuisine "is quite important because delicious food can attract more tourist to visit our country."

When one thinks of "Khmer dishes," certain essentials come to mind. Prahok, Kreung, Naem or Samlar Kor Ko among others. But Khmer food is more than this. Food is not only about eating but it is also about the national pride. It is a symbol that represents the country, a central part of a people's culture and history.

For Khmer food, this is particularly true. If you hear people talking about prahok you immediately know a Khmer dish is coming. Because of this link between a country and its food, Khmer cuisine is a key part of attracting tourist seeking an authentic



Mr. Luu Hong by Malis Restaurant



Mr. Hak Sokkhern, chef of Romdeng restaurant, Photo by Hak Sreynith

Cambodian experience. "When tourists visit our country, they look for accommodation, transportation and to taste the local food," said Hak Borith, general manager at Malis restaurant. "The invention of new food allows foreigners to get to know Khmer products and the taste of Khmer food. They will spread this information to their friends, and Khmer food will become well-known in their countries as well," he added.

As time passes by, everything cannot stay the same. This is also true for food. There will inevitably be changes to some ingredients or technique used in cooking Khmer food. Yet the heart and soul of Khmer cuisine—the ingredients and combinations that make it unique—will remain. Khmer food will continue to offer people a chance to remember their past, and offer flavors they will not forget.

By Chouy Chamnap and Hak Sreynith



Lotus Root and Chicken Salad with Young Lotus Seeds in Galangal by Malis Restaurant



Photo by Tep Chansophea

THE NEWEST FASHIONS

The scrappy style of fashion designers in Cambodia

If you ever visit any of the hundreds of garment factories in Cambodia, you won't be surprised to find piles of clothing scraps in various colors, patterns and textures. But it may surprise you to see how all the different ways these pieces of material are being turned into creative and beautiful pieces of fashion. A number of clothing designers in the country are taking the waste of factories and turning it into fresh designs that are sold at shops around the city to meet the demand to a growing group of fashion-conscious Cambodians and expatriates.

As Cambodia becomes a modern and global country, and its war-torn past becomes a more distant memory, fashion is becoming a core part of life more a growing

consumer class looking to try new things and define their personal style. During the Khmer Rouse, each and every Cambodian person was forced to wear the exactly same thing – black pants and shirts, sandals made of car tires and a red and white checked scarf. Those sandals are regarded by some as a rather inventive and functional design. Following the Khmer Rouge, a number of traditional styles re-emerged: sarongs, kramas and so forth. Yet a modern Khmer style has yet to emerge.

Many clothing retailers sell clothes imported from China, South Korea, Thailand and Hong Kong to fill the domestic need, with few people in the country producing clothes for Cambodians. As a result, seeing there is an unmet demand for unique

Cambodian fashion, a number of local and foreign designers have turned their attention to making clothes in the country that are new, attractive and unique to Cambodia. By using reused material from factories across the country, they are even creating clothes that are environmentally friendly.

Hung Chin is both a design student and a design practitioner who sells his clothes in five designer clothes shops. He says that a good designer has to be able to meet the needs of their customers and foresee the upcoming fashion trends in the country. On this note, he specifies that a designer has to be acutely observant of the fashion tendencies among their target demographic group.

"Most of the clothes I design fit best with dandy youth," says Hung Chin. As a result of his observation and understanding of the wants of those youth, Hung Chin has made himself well-known among Cambodian youth for his creation of two different brands—Mr. Moustache and Dr. Fashion.

"To some local people, the clothes I design look a bit like Korean or Thai style; only the Mr. Fashion brand makes my clothes different from those imported products," said Hung Chin, who while speaking wore an orange V-neck shirt he designed.

In addition, this fresh and energetic designer believes that a successful designer can't be too aggressive pushing his products but must remain calm and imaginative. However, he can't isolate himself from the surrounding reality too. In this respect, he stresses that a designer must pay attention to cultural factors which he believes are the most influential aspect on his designs.

In other words, it takes peace mind and tranquility to dream of what will best suit future fashion hunger. To identify those hidden needs of those youth, Hung Chin has to do some extensive research to gain more insight as well as to boost his creativity. Having an independent mindset in fashion, he is determined to stick to his creative personality.

"I want to create a totally new thing or a new thing out of an old thing," Hung Chin says. That is why, he explains, all of the clothes he designs are made of leftover cloth materials from factories.

Nevertheless, there was a moment where Hung Chin almost gave up his dream of being a designer when he became frustrated with the lack of appreciation among youth, and their elders. "I almost gave up because some Cambodian youth seemed not to understand or value what is behind a design" and "some elderly people have criticized me for what they called craziness and imitation of my designs," Hung Chin said.

Rachel Faller, the owner and designer at the Phnom Penh clothing shop Keok'Jay, which means fresh and green in Khmer, saw that most handicraft products produced by

NGOs in Cambodia were traditional, and that no one was working to create something fashionable for a good cause. Many NGOs that make clothes or handicrafts depend heavily on donors and struggle to make a profit through the sale of their products.

So Rachel Faller, as a young graduate with little background in business, decided to start a company that would help women in Cambodia while creating fashionable and comfortable clothes. Since opening her shop in 2005, Rachel has been the head designer for the shop while overseeing the work of a number of guest designers and interns. Keok'Jay, which employs HIV-positive women to create modern, eco-friendly apparel and accessories, has received attention from dozens of local and international press outlets, exports clothes to various countries and is turning a healthy profit. And she also uses mostly scraps from Cambodian factories and finds inspiration from the places and people in the country.

"All of our clothes and every collection we come up with, we have an idea that comes from Cambodia," says Rachel. "So the basic idea is inspired by Cambodian culture." She further explains that every season of her work is a different story as she believes that there is a different story behind each product. For instance, for one of the seasons last year, her design team worked on clothes inspired by 1960s architecture. "We were really inspired by geometric shapes of modern architectures in Cambodia," she said holding up a shirt with its front side printed with a pattern of Olympic stadium seats.

"We were really inspired by Vann Mollivan's buildings," she said. Rachel's team also worked on some mythical creatures such as Guruda, Hang and some crocodiles. Those designs were about mythology and animals in Cambodia.

During a recent photo-shoot, she hired a contortionist to wear an Apsara dancer's crown while she modeled her clothes, so it is a mixture between tradition and modern. Rachel's team has aimed at making some-

thing from Cambodia that is both modern and international.

"The idea is to make it very inspired by Cambodia, but you can take it anywhere in the world and wear it and you could still be fashionable," said Rachel. When asked what is unique about her design, Rachel said that she believes that her designs are having an influence on Cambodian designers through her collaborations with a number of design students and young designers who have come through the shop to work with her team.

"I think to be a good designer, you need to pay a lot of attention to what people are wearing and what makes people feel good," Rachel says.

Although the clothes created by Rachel Faller and Hung Chin are quite different, they both build their clothes from the same



Photo by Tep Chansopheha

basic element: scraps from garment factories. Another fashion designer who finds treasure in this trash is Lim Keo Piseth, who has created his own line of clothes called simply Lim Keo, a name that is quickly catching on among Cambodian fashionistas.

Lim Keo Piseth first broke into the fashion world in 2004 during a cultural show in France. There, he presented 20 clothing

designs made from silk cocoons which would otherwise have been thrown away. Competing against contestants from 25 countries, Lim Keo Pisith was selected as the winner for his creativity of using the cocoons and the unique design of his clothes. Since his graduation from one of the oldest design schools in France, Lim Keo Pisith says that his perspectives about design have been heavily influenced by French concepts—classy clothes for elegant people who often join night shows, parties and other high-class events.

“A design can be successful when it is accepted by the general population of a certain culture and social context,”

“I think I can do anything, and I believe that one can make anything out of anything as long as they are creative,” said Lim Keo Pisith. While many local designers have copied from other designers from the outside world, Lim Keo Pisith sticks to his principle: not to copy but to think of something first

by using his own imagination and creativity. “When I want to create something, I have to be so sure after thinking hard about it,” he said.

Ly Souden, editor in chief of *Sovrin*, a popular Cambodian fashion magazine, believes as demand grows among Cambodians for their own designs, there has to be an understanding among designers of what people really want, and acceptance that Cambodia’s culture has been irreversibly influenced by other cultures. Nonetheless, as Cambodia progresses, the nation will certainly strive to see its national identity reflected in fashion. This young fashion watcher, who studied in Australia, emphasizes that designers need to be flexible in their interpretation of modern Cambodian culture. Simply put, he says that designs must be fresh and modern, but also socially acceptable in Cambodian culture.

“A design can be successful when it is accepted by the general population of a certain culture and social context,” said Ly Souden, whose magazine focuses mainly on high-end fashion and design.



Photo by Tep Chansophea

This design enthusiast says that as fashion plays a crucial role in defining a culture’s identity, he hopes to see more fashion designers developing the sector in Cambodia.

“Design should have a strong connection with (our) cultural aspects such as tradition, religion and other treasures,” he said.

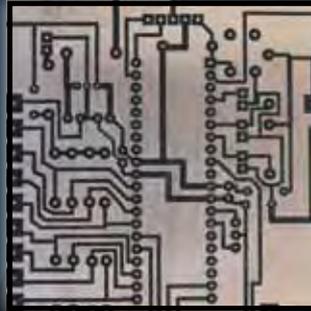
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Translating Technology



The Rise of the Robots



Learning with a Digital Monkey



The Jungle's Secrets



Species Spotted



Planting Seeds of Profit



Let's Talk about Sex



Youths on Democracy



Social Media



New Form, new Focus



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Young Artists Everywhere



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