



***Teanh Prot* (Traditional Rope Pulling) in Cambodia**

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1. Context and Background of the Game

Tug-of-war, as it is known in English, is a very common game played worldwide. In some countries, the game is a pure contest of strength between two teams. In others, however, it connects to significant socio-religious ideas of the culture, and it is played only during specific ceremonial occasions for both religious purposes and social entertainment.

In Cambodia, the tug-of-war is known as *teanh prot* (literally, rope pulling). It is played during the traditional Cambodian New Year celebrated in mid-April and during *chlong chet*, a ceremony associated to rice cultivation, which takes place shortly after the New Year. Notably, although it is played along with other traditional games, such as *bos angkonh* (throwing *angkonhnuts*, which can be seen in Figures 1 and 2), *chol chhoung* (throwing a wrapped scarf), and *lakanseng* (hiding a handkerchief), the *teanh prot* proves to be one of the most important games played nationwide. Every Cambodian has experienced playing or at least has seen the game. Its popularity and prevalence in Cambodia indicate that its centuries-old cultural background is rooted deeply and firmly in Cambodian agrarian society.

However, while it is popular and prevalent, the *teanh prot* is steadily fading away and being substituted by other forms of entertainment, such as modern dancing (Fig. 3). This is coming about for three major reasons:

- young people migrating en masse to urban areas for employment
- lack of encouragement from the elders
- the emergence of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation

However, in northern Cambodia, which is less modernised and urbanised, the game remains relevant and has more or less retained its strong association with rice cultivation. Nevertheless, during our research study, we found that many temples in which the game had traditionally been played are no longer engaging in the *teanh prot*. Moreover, little attention is paid to transmit the game, although some villagers expressed the importance of encouraging preservation of the game.

Aiming to establish ‘the groundwork for cultural exchanges, sharing information and building with cooperative relationships with Member States regarding the traditional tug-of-war’, and to build ‘information for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Asia’, ICHCAP requested a partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MoCFA) of the Kingdom of Cambodia to conduct field research on the current status of Cambodian tug-of-war. The MoCFA agreed to form a research team to collect and analyse data and material related to the traditional tug-of-war in Cambodia. The aim of the research is to have a better picture of the current status of the game.

The research team is composed of

- Dr Bong Sovath, the research team leader
- Mr Vin Laychour, a field researcher
- Mr Chy Rotha, a field researcher
- Ms Tuy Lida, a field researcher
- Mr Tan Sovann Oudom, field researcher
- Mr Siyonn Sophearith, field researcher and data analyst

After obtaining approval from the MoCFA and ICHCAP, the team conducted field surveys in six provinces—namely, Kampong Cham, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Kampong Thom, Siem Reap, and Banteay Meanchey—to gain a better understanding of game’s prevalence throughout the kingdom. The team also observed the *teanh prot* in three locales in Siem Reap Province during the 2013 New Year celebrations. Moreover, a team member had the fortunate opportunity to shoot video clips when the game was taking place during the *chlong chet* ceremony, which takes place on the day of the full moon during the month of *chet*.