

3. Current States

3.1. Fading Away

The *teanh prot* is unfortunately fading away for a number of reasons. Young people are migrating away to seek employment in urban areas, which is changing their attitudes towards their own local customs. The elders are not encouraging the youth to learn about the *teanh prot*. And the emergence of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation are also having an effect.

During our field research, we learned that although the game is still vividly remembered, it was abandoned in some locations around ten years ago, and others it was abandoned just recently or surprisingly just this year. Asking why it was not played, we were told that no one was interested in the game and the elders did not lead the younger people to play the game. Furthermore, young people preferred to entertain themselves with the dancing (Fig. 4).

Another simple factor that could have also easily led to abandoning the game is that the rope isn't readily available. In Kambor Or Village, we received reconfirmation that the game would be certainly played. However, when we arrived, a temple committee member surprisingly told us that a few villagers, who were asked to collect vines from the forest to use as the rope in the game, had not yet returned. So without the rope, the game would not be played. Fortunately, a plastic rope was purchased from the market through the financial contribution of the research team. Once the rope was brought to the temple by a few elders, including the temple committee members, the game started vividly and joyfully. This example shows us that being unable to obtain tangible materials due to financial constraints is jeopardising the continuation of the game.

3.2. General Classifications of the Game

According to our field surveys, we can loosely classify the game into three different groupings, based on geographical landscapes and rice farming communities:

- 1) The northern parts of Cambodia, including Kampong Thom, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, Banteay Meanchey, and Uddor Meanchey, are less modernised and urbanised. And more importantly, these areas are rice farming-based communities, so the game retains a strong association with rice cultivation, and the game has strong sense of ritual.
- 2) The southern parts, including Kampong Cham, Prey Veng and Svay Rieng Kandal, where the communities are not so much based rice farming, the game is not as ritualistic; it is more a contest of strength between the two teams, a kind of

entertainment. Furthermore, many places have already stopped playing the game around ten years ago.

- 3) In urbanised areas, which include the provincial town and capital city, the game is purely a contest of strength and a pure entertainment. Or the game is rarely played.

4. *General Description of the Game*

4.1. Name of the Game

In Khmer, the game is called *teanh prot*, where *teanh* means ‘to pull’ and *prot* means rope, specifically a type of rope traditionally made of woven strips of hide from buffalos or cows.¹¹ Thus, *teanh prot* literally means ‘to pull a rope made of woven strips of hide from buffalos or cows’. (Further information about the term *prot* is in the next section below). The suitable rendering in English, however, should be ‘rope pulling’.

4.2. When the Game Is Played

The *teanh prot* is a ritual game played in two traditional ceremonial occasions—namely, the New Year and the *chlong chet*. As observed, the game is generally played in the afternoon.

4.2.1. *The New Year*

The Cambodian New Year, like the New Year in Thailand or Laos, is celebrated for three days in mid-April. During the New Year celebrations, the *teanh prot* is played. These days, the game is generally held on the second and the third days of the holiday, although there are no traditional restrictions preventing the game from being played on the first day. Of the holiday celebration days, the third, which is also the last day of game play, is the most important one. In Khmer, this day is called *thngay tras*, which means, ‘the day on which the ceremony ends’, or *thngay phdach prot*, which means, ‘the day on which the rope is cut’. The latter name refers to an important stage of the *teanh prot*. This is when the *prot* is physically or ritually cut (see figure 4,6). Some villagers strongly express their opinion that on the last day, it is essential for the game to be played. The importance of the last day and the cutting of the rope is seen in the expression *phdach prot*, which is a generic expression used to mean the last stage of any game, race, or contest. The symbolic act of cutting the rope is full of socio-religious and cultural meaning. The importance and relevance of these will be described in greater detail in Section 4. For now and in short, let us just say that cutting the rope is a ritual expression to show the passage of time from the old year into a new one.

¹¹ Normally three strips are woven together.