

ល្បែងប្រជាប្រិយ

Traditional Games of Cambodia

In modern Cambodia, many of these games are played at the New Year celebration. Theravada Buddhists hold this celebration in early to mid April, a time just before the planting season. In the villages the New Year celebration is a time to pray, to feast, and to play games that relax strict social rules. You will notice that some of the games pit boys against girls; these games are opportunities for young men and women to get to know each other with parental supervision. The *sie* is great game for showing athletic ability and is often played by young men, while *lek konseing* and *cat chases rat* are usually played by younger children and perhaps some of the younger elders. *Tres* is a typical everyday kind of game that can be played alone or in a group.

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Sie

The most popular traditional game that has found a niche in the lives of modern Khmer youths is called *Sie*. The rules of *Sie* are the same as a game familiar to us called *Hacky Sac*. The difference is in the *Sie* itself. The *Sie* is four feathers bound at the tips with a series of discs. The discs at the base give the *Sie* great flying power when it is kicked correctly and cause it to descend base-side down for another kick. The players stand in a circle and kick the *Sie* between them aiming for ever higher flight and ever fancier and more athletic kicks. This is what the *Sie* looks like:



ត្រីស

Tres

This game is a bit like what we know as Jacks. It is played most often with chopsticks and a lime, but I have seen it played with sticks and stones as well! The player throws the lime in the air with one hand and attempts to pick up an increasing number of chopsticks or stones and catch the stone in the same hand.



បោះអង្កញ់

Bos Angkunh

This game is played with large fruit seeds, called *Angkunh*. It is played with two teams, often girls against boys. One team sets up their *Angkunh* seeds in the dirt or sand in front of them. The seeds are set in groups of five with one seed in the middle, with the broad side facing the opposing team, and one on each of the four sides of it, with the thin sides facing the opposition. The other team stands four long paces away and tries to knock down the four outer seeds by tossing their own seeds at them. If they successfully knock down the four outer seeds and leave the middle seed standing, they win. If they knock down the middle seed, they loose. The winners take two seeds each, and *chwa* ផ្លុំស each of the losers. The *chwa* is accomplished by holding one seed against a joint -- preferably the knee bone, but the shoulder or elbow is also used -- and hitting it with the other seed. The *chwa* should hurt a bit!

These pictures show the proper set up for a group of 5 *Angkunh* seeds. Note how the center seed is an easier target than the side seeds!



The YouTube clip below is from a typical New Year's party in Cambodia. You can see people playing *Boh Angkunh* and especially giving each other *chwa*!
<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=cD-LncYA7Ao&feature=Playlist&p=7B5BDBF60D4F9236&index=1>

ចោលឈ្នុង

Joal Chu-ung

The *Chu-ung* is a scarf that is tied into a ball with knots leaving a bit of a tail. There are two teams, usually boys against girls. The teams stand ten paces apart from each other.

Below are two versions of this game. One is the singing and dancing version and the other is a free your partner game.

Singing and Dancing

To start off the game, the boys lob the *chu-ung* toward the girls for the girls to try to catch. If one of the girls manages to catch the *chu-ung*, the girl who catches it throws the *chu-ung* at a boy on the opposite line in an attempt hit him. More often than not, participants aim at the person on whom they have a crush. The boys are allowed to try to dodge the *chu-ung*, but they may not leave the line.

If the girl does not hit anyone on the opposite line, then the game starts over with the boys again lobbing the *chu-ung* towards the girls.

If the girl hits a boy with the *chu-ung* then the girl's team calls: **ល្ងងអើយល្ងង** *Chu-ung Awy Chu-ung* and demands a song or a dance from the other team. Everyone claps and helps out with the singing.

Free Your Partner

This version is played in the same way as the singing and dancing version except that when someone is hit by the *chu-ung*, they are captured by the other team. Sometimes the prisoners are used as shields to keep from getting hit!

This picture shows people playing *Joal Chu-ung*:



This picture shows the tied scarf used for playing *Joal Chu-ung*- the scarf is stuffed to make a bulbous end.



It is interesting to note that these ‘traditional’ games are in fact constantly changing. In the book *Silent Temples, Songful Hearts*, pg. 70, (available from the SEAP lending library) you can find a similar version of this *free your partner* game with a much more involved song. If you listen closely, you can hear parts of that song in the clip below.

The YouTube clip below is from a typical New Year’s party in Cambodia. You can see people playing *Joal Chu-ung*. They play both versions of the game in this clip. <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=xe38nsGqBks&feature=PlayList&p=7B5BDBF60D4F9236&index=7>

លក្ខកន្សែង
Lek Konsieng

This is a circle game. All players but one sit in a circle. The last player holds a scarf tied with a big knot at the end and walks around the outside of the circle while the seated players sing this song:

លក្ខកន្សែង ច្នាក់ាមកង ឱលុឱលុ *Lek Konsieng Chma Kamaking Olo! Olo!*

The works in English are: ‘Mark it with the scarf and the cat grabs your ankle.’ While the seated players are focused on singing the silly song, the walking player drops the scarf behind one of the seated players. That player then grabs the scarf and tries to hit the player next door.

In the book *Silent Temples, Songful Hearts*, pg. 70, (available from the SEAP lending library) you can find the music and the same words as this version, but the rules of the game are a bit different!

Here’s a picture of children playing *Lek Konsieng*:



ឆ្កា ដេញ កណ្តុរ
Cat Chases Rat

This is a circle game in which the players stand in a circle holding hands. Two players do not join the circle. One is the cat and one is the rat. The rat goes into the middle of the circle. The cat stays on the outside of the circle. Play begins when one member of the circle calls out ‘*Denya konda*’ which means ‘chase the rat.’ The cat tries to get inside the circle to get the rat while the rat tries to avoid being caught. The action in the game comes from the circle players, who raise and lower their arms in an effort to aid or hinder the cat and rat. There are

no rules regarding who to help, or who to block. It is up to the circle group. Sometimes the circle has different ideas and this can lead to much confusion and fun! The round ends when the cat catches the rat. The cat then becomes the rat and another player becomes the cat.

For other variations and games you can visit these websites:

<http://www.khmerinstitute.org/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambodian_New_Year

The SEAP outreach lending library has all the tools necessary for playing the above described games. The SEAP library also has numerous books on Cambodia and the New Year traditions (*Silent Temples*, *Songful Hearts* noted above is just one example) that could help to develop a lesson plan involving these games.

The games outlined above are just a few of many played in Cambodia. They are also representative of games played in other parts of Southeast Asia in various forms. For example, in Vietnam *tres* is known as *truyen* and in the Philippines *sie* is called *sipa*.

If you are interested in looking at games from across the region this website is a good place to start:

<http://simgames.wordpress.com/category/top/>

SEAP has other resources available on regional games:

The SEAP lending library has books from across the region as well as toys from Indonesia and Thailand. You can also find a useful Teacher's Guide to the Traditional Games and Toys of Southeast Asia.

This presentation was prepared by Courtney Work. She is a PhD student in Anthropology and has studied many aspects of Khmer culture and society and Southeast Asia more broadly. Her research interests include ritual in society, and myth and discourse in the context of modernization and development. She collected information and materials used in this games webpage while she was in Cambodia.