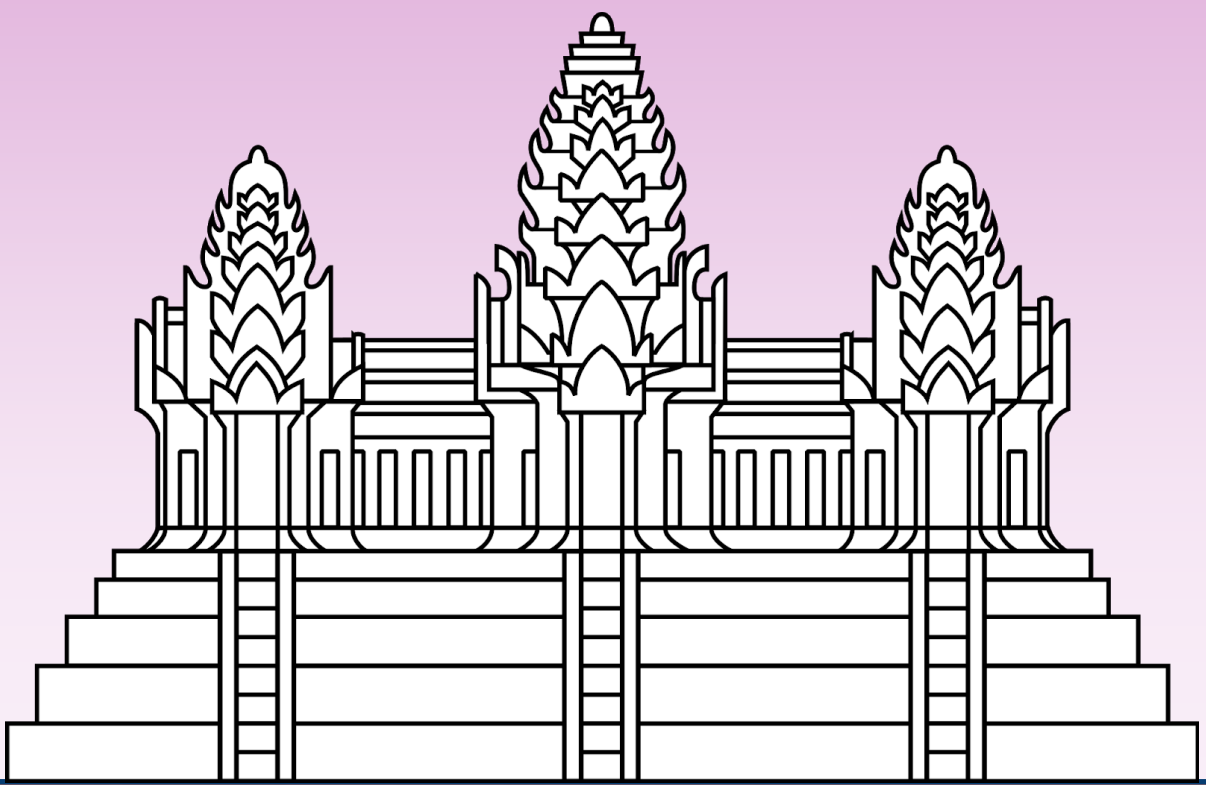


Curative Cuisines of Cambodia:

Traditional Khmer (Food-) Medicine Use During Periods of Human Ecological Instability in Siem Reap, Cambodia

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Introduction

Recent studies on the prominence and use of Traditional Khmer Medicine (TKM) in Cambodia have garnered conflicting results thus making the current status, role, and trajectory of TKM unclear.* Understanding the conditions and shapers of how Cambodian people living in rural areas perceive, access, and use TKM is crucial to addressing health disparities in areas where TKM might be the only form of healthcare available. Given that TKM features an abundance of “wild” plants that are foraged and gathered, the study of TKM remedies allows for the identification and assessment of surrounding ecological conditions and how they may shape the relationships between people, their environments, their diets, as well as their health and healing.

* NIS (2015), Walker (2017), Turner et al. (2017), and Cui et al. (2020)

Research Question

In what ways do human ecological instabilities caused by seasonality, maternity, and the COVID-19 pandemic shape how rural populations living in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia use and consume Traditional Khmer (food-)medicines?

Methodology and Sample Overview



Siem Reap Province in Cambodia

This study is composed of data from several interviews (individual/group), ethnobotanical specimens, participant observation, as well as autoethnography conducted during fieldwork that took place in Siem Reap, Cambodia from February 2020 to July 2020. It includes insights from 40 people living across 10 villages and 4 communes within the Siem Reap Municipality District of the province.

- 34/40 interviewees were women aged 20 to 76 years old; the remaining 6 were men aged 25 to 71 years old – 33/34 identified as mothers and 6/6 as fathers
- 4/40 interviewees identified as TKM practitioners (healers, sellers, etc.)

Villages: Anhchanh អង្គាញ, Kravan ក្រវ៉ាន់, Mondol Bei មណ្ឌលបី, Phoum Krom ភ្នំក្រោម, Rohal រហាល, Sras Srang Khang Cheung ស្រះស្រង់ខាងជើង, Trapeang Ses ត្រពាំងសែៈ, Treang ទ្រាំង, Triek ត្រៀក, and Veal វាល

The Traditional Khmer Medicine System is a widely-used, highly flexible, and accommodating form of healing that has a range of customizable remedies which values food and medicine equally and their relationship synergistically; its use is not deterred by changes generated by seasonality, maternity, nor the COVID-19 pandemic

Results and Findings



Assortment of TKM remedies (Photo by ATKD)

- 33/40 participants reported using exclusively TKM or a mix of TKM and Western Biomedicine (WBM) for healthcare
- Study participants identified a total of 130 different plants species; 67 of these plants (belonging to 39 plant families) have been matched with their scientific names using local botanical keys, while the remaining 63 have only been documented with their local Khmer names
- Although some plants occupied multiple niches of use, 112 /130 plants were designated as TKM remedies for maternity, 11/30 species were designated as being used as TKM remedies outside of maternity, and 37/130 were noted as eaten as a part of household diets
- Study participants identified 18 Khmer foods (dishes/standalone edibles) as TKM food-medicines consumed for disease prevention, symptoms treatment, or improvement of health; 17 full TKM remedy recipes were also given

Seasonality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• TKM’s extensive substitution protocol allows for specific plants or plant parts that are only seasonally available (e.g. flower petals) to be replaced or forgone while having these alternative remedies still be effective• Angkor Archaeological Park & Phnom Kulen Mountain were identified as “havens” where TKM plants are found all-year-around
Maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are hundreds of options within TKM that address similar health issues/symptoms during maternity and are easily accessible through foraging/gathering or purchasing at marketplaces• Maternity (pregnancy, postpartum, breastfeeding) was stressed as a period where TKM use is highly encouraged
COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Out of the 23 interviewees who gave commentary on COVID-19 treatment preference, 12 (52.2%) said that they would opt for TKM or a mixture of TKM and WBM regiments to prevent or treat COVID-19 → Popular system of treatment overall• Participants provided 5 different TKM remedies for prevention or treatment of COVID-19 symptoms and stressed that TKM practitioners were pursuing and developing TKM remedies to address COVID-19 and that they would consider trying them