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Cambodian Youth as Creative Force in Cultural Reconstruction of the Khmer Traditional Arts

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| APA | Amrita Performing Arts |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| RUFA | Royal University of Fine Arts |
| RULE | Royal University of Law and Economics |
| SSFA | Secondary School of Fine Arts |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization |

Abstract

Based on the case study at educational institutions and international NGO in Cambodia, the research aims at understanding how Cambodian youth function in the process of cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts. Especially, due to the cultural destruction by the Pol Pot regime and globalization in recent years, the Khmer traditional culture is vanishing, and in a state of crisis for the Cambodian government, in terms of building national identity. In these circumstances, various stakeholders entrust Cambodian youth with the task to preserve the culture. By focusing on youth of the age 16–31, the study attempts to understand the complex circumstance in which Cambodian youths are involved, and how Cambodian youths perceive and experience their engagement in the process of cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts. What was observed in the fieldwork was that Cambodian youths demonstrate their creativity to negotiate their positions toward the Khmer traditional arts, within or outside a spectrum between preserver and creator, under the dynamic day-to-day culture. In these continuous processes, they exercise their agency, and take part in cultural reconstruction of the Khmer performing arts.

Keywords

Traditional arts, Cambodia, the Khmer culture, youth, cultural reconstruction, national identity, agency and structure.



Youths performing the Mask dance.
Photo by the author 2012.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

This chapter functions as the introduction to an overall picture of the study. It shows relevance and justification in the field of development studies, and furthermore this part explains the research strategy, and indicates the scope and limitation, as well as position of the researcher.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the turmoil after 1970s, following the outbreak of civil wars, the escalation of the Vietnam War, and vandalism in Pol Pot regime, ethnic cultures and traditional customs in Cambodia were struck a disastrous blow. Especially in the field of Khmer culture, due to the cultural destruction by the Pol Pot regime, and globalization in recent years, the Khmer traditional culture is vanishing, and in a state of crisis. It is crucial for the Cambodian government to revive the Khmer traditional arts, in terms of reconstruction Khmer identity (Takahashi 1996: 201). Hence, the Cambodian government seeks to revive Khmer culture through a promotion plan, recognizing classical dance as one of the pillars of Khmer culture (Hagai 2008: 31).

A sense of crisis was distinctly reflected in the promotion plan, which is implemented by The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (Hagai 2008: 31). This plan emphasizes the importance of Cambodian youth, and includes enhancement of arts education for young people. Various stakeholders entrust Cambodian youth with the task to preserve the culture, and it is clear that the reconstruction of Khmer culture cannot be realized without Cambodian youth. In fact, whilst the higher educational institution, such as the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), expects youth play a role as bearers of culture, domestic and international NGOs seek to revive the Khmer culture by training youth in the Khmer performing arts. However, we know very little so far about young people on the ground. We know very little about how youth function in the process of cultural reconstruction, and how they carry out their mission to revive the culture, as well as realize their ideals.

Many traditional cultures all over the world are threatened with extinction, or at least, would find obstacles in ensuring continuity into the next generation. In particular, Cambodia has suffered a loss of culture, after the genocide of the communist Khmer Rouge (Sam 2008: 83). Khmer Rouge destroyed nearly everything and everyone, including traditional arts and artists, such as, ‘the craftsmen, the dancers, the musicians, the painters, the sculptors, the monks and the poets’ (Sam 2008: 83). The Khmer traditional culture was in a critical condition after a societal state of disorder.

Considering the number of few surviving master artists, the role of youth as successors is indispensable. Moreover, in this specific condition, young people may be more keen than elsewhere to be introduced to these traditional arts, and willing to succeed the traditional arts. In the process of cultural reconstruc-

tion in Cambodia, youths will function to revive the traditional culture, and rebuild the nation.

In addition, the wave of globalization in recent years overwhelmed Cambodian society. The Cambodian government mentions that the people are influenced by foreign culture through the media, and especially young people's alienation from Khmer culture is an extremely serious problem (Krsuong wbbthoa ning vicet selbak 2003: 1-2, as cited in Hagai 2008: 32-3). 'The economic factors play a crucial part' (Sam 2008: 83), and this overemphasis on economic development also affects how Cambodian people relate to the cultural area in the context of globalization. 'Foreign popular videos and television programs also make it very difficult to preserve Khmer culture' (Sam 2008: 83).

Cambodian demographic statistics indicate that 'the Cambodian population is still at an early stage of a baby boom' (Chheang 2008: 283), and 65.2% of the whole population is under 30 years old as of 2008 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2009). Cambodia is a young state, and Cambodian youths are involved as a part of nation building. Namely, the presence of Cambodian youth influences the future of Khmer culture. There are a lot of demands on youth, and Cambodian youths are fitted into expected roles under various structures, such as, government's policy, educational institutions, and NGOs.

In this complex context of cultural reconstruction, how does Cambodian youth act as agents, and contribute to nation building in Cambodian society? How do they carry out their mission to revive the culture? Are they preservers of the traditional culture, or agents as creators of new hybridized culture? Or, is there a destruction of culture by youth going on? The purpose of this research is to understand how Cambodian youth function in the process of cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts, in the context of nation building, as a form of Khmer identity construction. Insights are focused on how Cambodian youth perceive and experience their engagement in the process of cultural reconstruction, in the present context of social and economic development within the globalization. The research works on the actual condition of Cambodian youth, in terms of culture, tourism, education, and government policy.

1.2 Relevance and Justification of the Study

The nation building, as a form of identity construction, is recognized as a development issue. Especially, after the turmoil in 1970s, it is crucial for the Cambodian government to reconstruct Khmer national identity in the process of nation revival. In addition, tourism has a relevance to development studies in terms of both economic aspects and promoting nationalism. Therefore, this research is significant for the field of development studies.

Furthermore, this study is relevant to youth studies, and contributes to existing literatures. Cambodian youth tends to be only categorized as a bundle of personnel resources to support the cultural reconstruction, although the role of

youth might vary considerably in terms of their position, their gender, and their characteristics. Surely, there are a lot of demands on youth. Besides, there are various incentives and inspirations of young people to learn the traditional arts, whether they learn throughout their lives, or temporarily in their lives. What has not been explored in literatures is, at the individual level, how Cambodian youth perceive and experience their engagement in the cultural reconstruction in the Khmer arts.

This is also a timely contribution to scholars in light of the movement beyond revival and preservation of the traditional arts. As Frumberg argues, young artists in Cambodia have begun to ask how one can allow the Khmer arts to become ‘a living, breathing part of Cambodia’s contemporary performing arts scene which responds to an ever changing social and political landscape’ (2006: 161). These tendencies cannot be understood if Cambodian youth is regarded as a single bundle of personnel resources to support the cultural reconstruction.

1.3 Research Strategies

1.3.1 Objective of the Study

The objective of this research is to understand how Cambodian youth function in the process of cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts, in the context of nation building, as a form of Khmer identity construction. I consider the youths as agents, major actors, who contribute to nation building in Cambodian society. The main objective of this research is to understand the complexity in which Cambodian youth are involved.

1.3.2 Research Questions

Main research question

- How does Cambodian youth perceive and experience their engagement in the process of cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts?

Sub questions

- What is the motivation of youth for learning the traditional arts?
- What kinds of factor affect the motivation of youth for dedicating to the tradition?
- What kinds of contradictions do youth have in learning the traditional arts, compared with modern culture?
- What is the ideal Khmer for youth in Cambodia?
- Is there a difference between the Khmer, which the nation recommends, and the Khmer, which youth try to create?
- What is the use of the acquired skills of traditional arts, on both a national and individual level?
- Are there any differences in answers between males and females in reaction to the questions above-mentioned?

1.3.3 Methodology and Methods

The research is based on the fieldwork done in the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), the Secondary School of Fine Arts¹ (SSFA), and the Amrita Performing Arts (APA). While RUFA has a mission to ‘develop professional dancers, arts managers, resources personnel’ (Chey 2010: 33), SSFA is the educational institution, which ‘trains students to become teachers of the traditional dancers or professional dancers’ (Chey 2010: 35). APA is an International NGO, which helps revive the Cambodian traditional arts by national capacity building, as well as pursues the possibility to fuse the traditional performing arts into the contemporary dance (Amrita Performing Arts 2009). Hence, the research participants were the students of RUFA and SSFA, who learn the traditional skills of the Khmer performing arts, and the artists belonging to the APA, who perform both domestically and outside the country.

There are two reasons for choosing this particular school and organization. Firstly, the study sought enriched insights and broadened perspectives by approaching both the educational institution of Cambodia and an International NGO with US nonprofit status. Secondly, the study tried to interview not only the young people as bearers of the traditional culture, but also the young artist who can be creators of a new hybridized culture. This is why the author approached APA as well as RUFA and SSFA.

As the methodology used to collect data, I conducted qualitative interviews and semi structured interviews. In addition, in order to go beyond the simple qualitative interviews, the ethnographic approach was also chosen. As Abbott illustrates, the research chose a methodology, which can let people to tell their stories as they want, rather than structured survey methods for gathering quantitative data (2007: 213).

The research participants were students and artists of both sexes aged 16 – 31. The reason why I chose that age group was because the study tried to approach youth of an age at which they can be aware of the future of Cambodia in a realistic way. As the purpose of this research is to clarify how Cambodian youth contribute to the reconstruction of Khmer culture, I wanted to hear voices of both male and female young Cambodians. In addition, I tried to find differences in answers between males and females, in reaction to the questions. The sample I took included both males and females; I have interviewed 10 males and 10 females. They major in the Khmer performing arts, which includes ‘Yike theater²’, ‘Classical dance’, ‘Mask dance’, ‘Folklore dance’, and ‘Speaking theater’.

¹ The Secondary School of Fine Arts (SSFA) used to be the part of the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), but became independent as a different school for the junior training program (Burrige and Frumberg 2010).

² Yike Theater is an ancient form of Cambodian musical theater (Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and UNESCO 2004: 65).

As for the interviews at SSFA and RUFA, the author could contact the director of SSFA through one professor of Pannasastra University of Cambodia, who helped the RUFA develop its curriculum. In the beginning, the selection of students was done by teachers. Later, students were selected by the author with the assistance of students' connections. As for the interviews at APA, the selection of artists was firstly done by a Cambodian program director, and later, the author contacted additionally one artist with the help of participant artists. Therefore, on the whole, interviews were based on snowball sampling through gatekeepers. The author got the permission to interview from the top of organizations, who are a director of SSFA, and an executive director of APA. Given the timeframe and scarce personal connections before the fieldwork, it can be seen that the research has succeeded in a practical way.

My second group of participants group were the teachers. Consequently, I interviewed four teachers who have been teaching at the SSFA approximately for more than ten years; I have interviewed three male teachers and one female teacher. The reason to choose teachers as interviewees is that I wanted to know how teachers view youth, and also I tried to grasp their views in terms of generational aspects.

The interviews were conducted in Khmer, through a Cambodian interpreter who interprets from Khmer into English, when the participants were students of the SSFA and RUFA. When I interviewed artists of APA, the interviews were conducted in English. Although sometimes it was not easy for some artists to express themselves to the full in English because it was their second or third language, for the most part we've been able to make ourselves understood by what we have in common. Five interviews could be sound-recorded with the permission of interviewees, but not others. Therefore I had to take notes intently when I interviewed the others. In both cases, I made it a rule to write down what I got from interviews immediately after the interviews, to prevent any possible lapse of memory. Interview data were transcribed, ordered and analysed in themselves, but also against the broader context of developments in Cambodia. Results are presented in the Chapters 4 and 5.

Importantly, my female interpreter played a role as a third category of participants and a reliable research partner. She is a student of the Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE), and of the same generation as the interviewees. Accordingly, the female students of SSFA and RUFA appeared relaxed and happy to explain their lives with the female interpreter. As I carefully explained about my aim of research through repeated e-mails before entering Cambodia, she tried hard to convey my intention to the interviewees. Her supplementary explanations about Cambodian society and the situation of youth have been very helpful to analyse answers from the students. In addition, she has become interested in the traditional arts, as this field was an unknown world for her. Hence her curiosity enriched the interviews. Had the interpreter been old or undertaken technically, the outcome would have been different.

Secondary data were drawn from the documentations, such as, newspaper (The Phnom Penh Post), statistical data of Cambodia, activity report by each cultural institution, and evaluation report by the NGO. Making use of articles on the state of arts education in Cambodia has been useful to overview how the traditional arts are positioned under 'the structure of arts education in the school system from primary to secondary and higher education' (Sam 2008: 84). I also conducted relevant literature reviews mainly related with 'nation building', 'globalization' and 'the roles of youth'.

1.4 Position of the Researcher

Firstly, I am interested in an aspect of youth as a creative force. Especially, I am attracted to youths who try to express themselves through physical movement in performing arts, as well as taking part in a society, as a new generation shaping, even creating it on their own terms. For these reasons, the particular settings in Cambodian traditional arts stimulated my motivation to research because young Cambodian people try to express their identity through dance and negotiate their positions toward the Khmer traditional arts. I wanted to know the voices of youth in a peculiar circumstance of traditional culture. Hence, I have a strong reason to focus my research in Cambodia particularly on youths who learn the Khmer performing arts.

As 'a foreign-based researcher' (Abbott 2007: 225) I have limited ability to understand the cultural background of Cambodia, which has advantages and disadvantages. I can raise questions about all that Cambodian people take for granted, and make my respondents reflect in the interviews. On the other hand, I cannot understand truly the meanings or nuances of answers of Cambodian youth when I conduct interviews through an interpreter. Especially, as a Japanese researcher 'from a position of clear privilege' (Abbott 2007: 225), I need to acknowledge that this position leads to a superficial understanding of socio-economic issues, such as livelihood. However, I tried to overcome these constraints by asking the interpreter's supplementary explanations about Cambodian society and the situation of youth, as mentioned at methodology and methods part.

In addition, there are some pertinent ethical considerations. Considering the unequal power relation between an adult and foreign researcher, and young students, I can easily exploit interviewees to get beneficial data for the research without feedback, which is restored to informants. Namely, I need to consider these concerns especially when I solely am going to benefit personally, since I can at least obtain my degree from the research (Abbott 2007: 226).

Also, power relation, as an adult researcher, and particular setting of 'inside school' where interviews were conducted, would have affected the responses from young students, although I explained to the students before interviews that the interviewer would not evaluate answers, nor tell answers to their teachers. Importantly, I have to consider that all these elements, including the

way of sampling, shaped the data and interactions with interviewees, hence I need to be aware these are not neutral settings and I should be critical of the findings as a researcher when I analyze and generalize them.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

Due to the timeframe and practical limitations, this research has been carried out within several constraints. Firstly, considering the small and limited sample, this research does not claim to represent the whole of Cambodian youth. I cannot generalize for the entire Cambodian youth from the result of interviews. The data also can be 'subject to limitations in measurement and reporting, translation and data processing' (Münys 2008: 415).

On the other hand, as for the scope of this research, the findings in Cambodia may raise new questions regarding what kind of distinctions can be found in the traditional arts elsewhere in Southeast Asian countries. Especially in Thailand and Indonesia, new movements beyond revival and preservation of the traditional arts can be observed, likewise in Cambodia. As it has not sufficiently been explored how youths perceive and experience their engagement in traditional arts, this study can submit some considerations in the situation of youths, who are engaged in performing the arts of Southeast Asian countries, although the study cannot be generalized for the whole of youth in Southeast Asian countries.

In addition to that, as my sample is a highly particular group of young people, namely the students of the SSFA and RUFA, there is a strong possibility that the results show and confirm youth's role as the bearer of culture, which stands for the Khmer traditional arts. In other words, interviewing current students in these educational circumstances is likely to lead to reproduction of the official position, which emphasizes the 'importance of traditional arts'. Besides, this study excludes the sample of, not only the students who do not study in the arts field, but also the students, who dropped out from the art school. Hence, in the process of subsequent generalization in findings, I need to carefully consider their highly specific settings.

Lastly, when I was accompanied by a Cambodian interpreter who belongs to the Khmer culture, I needed to discuss our recognition of the Khmer culture with my interpreter. There was a risk that the aim of my questions cannot be properly conveyed to not only the interpreter, but also the interviewees. I tried to overcome this issue by repeated explanation and discussion with an interpreter. Her curiosity to the art field and enthusiasm to this research also helped me to overcome this limitation.

1.6 Organization of the Paper

The paper is divided into six chapters. This chapter has briefly illustrated an overall picture of what this study aims at. The second chapter illustrates the analytical framework, the concept of culture and youth in Cambodia, and youth's agency in structure, which function as a basis for framing the questions and the analysis of the data. Chapter three introduces the Khmer traditional arts. It furthermore sets out the government policy and educational system in the traditional arts. Chapter four and five present the findings of the case study. Chapter four tries to explore the meaning of young people being agents of culture in present-day Cambodia by presenting their motivations, their opinions about the globalization, and challenges that they face. Chapter five focuses on their perspectives about their future. As a conclusion, chapter six presents a meta-analysis by taking into account the entire findings and research questions, and reflecting on the insights gained.

Chapter 2

Concepts and Analytical Framework

This second chapter shows which concepts and theory function as a basis for framing the questions and the analysis of the data. It is divided into four parts. The first part presents the big picture, which frames the youth in this study. The second part explains about how youth are perceived in Cambodian society. The third part illustrates how the culture is defined in this study. The last part illustrates the meaning of agency in structure.

2.1 The Big Picture

The purpose of this research is to understand how Cambodian youth function in the process of cultural reconstruction. I conceptualize youth in two ways, namely, firstly youth as young people in an empirical category, in terms of their age, secondly youth as a generation in an analytical category. As mentioned in the introduction, Cambodian youth, as young generation, are entrusted, by the old generation, with the task to preserve the culture through various stakeholders, such as the higher educational institutions, the government, and NGOs. In the complicated structure of cultural reconstruction, this study tries to work on how Cambodian youths act as agents, and major actors. It also examines how they carry out their mission to revive the culture. In particular, the research tries to grasp the roles of Cambodian young people; as bearers or preservers of the traditional culture, or creators of a new hybridized culture, or as some elderly Cambodians would say: ‘destroyer’ of the culture. This research considers youth as agents playing various roles.

2.2 The Concept of Youth in Cambodia

According to the definition by the Youth Department of Cambodia, one of the departments under Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the one department responsible for youth policies, youth are defined as people between 14 and 30 years old (Forum SYD 2002: 7). This is slightly wider than the definition of youth by the UN, which mentioned the age from 15 to 24.

According to the population census from 2008, the population of Cambodia today is about 13.4 millions as of 2008, and 65.2% of the population is under 30 years old (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2009). The Cambodian demographic structure is described as a very high percentage of young people because of the severe decimation during the Pol Pot regime and a following post-war baby boom in the 1980s (Forum SYD 2002: 7).

As for the youth as a generation in Cambodia today, they were born and grew up, after the Khmer Rouge regime (Forum SYD 2002: 7). Therefore, while elderly Cambodian were planted the seeds of suspicion, distrust and fear of compatriots, young Cambodian have a different outlook, which has trust in others, interacting with others and they are open to new perspectives and ideas

(Forum SYD 2002: 7). There seems to be differences between the young generation and elderly Cambodian, regarding how they perceive the future of their country.

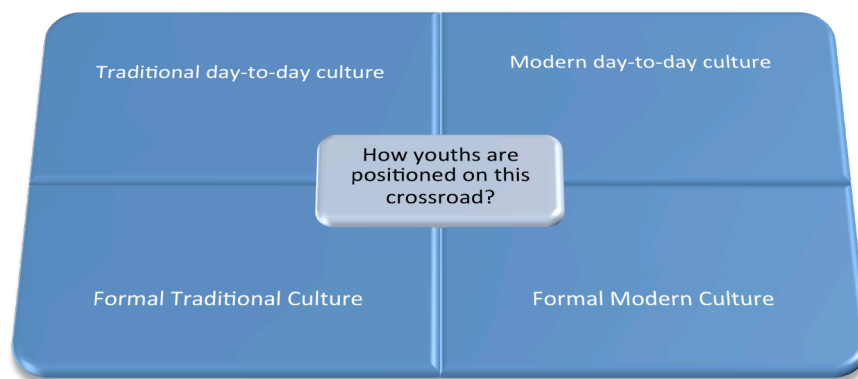
Although the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia states the principle of equality between women and men, women of all ages in Cambodia face difficulties and gender discrimination in their rights (Forum SYD 2002: 14). Especially Cambodian girls are taught a set of manners ‘chbab srey’ (rules of women), which defines the proper behaviour of girls and women, such as speaking quietly, and walking slowly, in addition, a common Cambodian proverb ‘the letter cannot be bigger than the envelop’, is used to show a deep-rooted practice, which means that girls and women cannot disobey their parents and husbands (Forum SYD 2002: 14).

2.3 The Concept of Culture

This part illustrates how the culture is defined in this study. First of all, it needs to be emphasized that there is a distinction between day-to-day culture, and what is considered or labelled officially as formal ‘Culture’ with capital letter ‘C’. A day-to-day culture means what is seen as ‘normal’ or even taken for granted in each society, such as, eating habits, typical role of men and women, the division of labour between male and female, or masculinity and femininity. On the other hand, formal ‘Culture’ represents the Arts, and in this study the ‘traditional culture’ refers to the Khmer performing arts, which should be protected in the process of reconstruction. In this view, all people are engaged in day-to-day culture, but not necessarily ‘bearers’ or preservers of traditional Culture.

It also can be seen that the globalization affects day-to-day culture, which includes behaviours and thoughts of citizens in the nation, which form their lives on a daily basis. Some day-to-day cultures are affected and changed by outer influence, such as globalization. As a result, traditional day-to-day culture can be reinterpreted and become modern day-to-day culture. Importantly, even formal traditional culture, which is assumed to be a relatively static one, can also be affected by globalization, and reinterpreted as a modern traditional culture. For example, the treasured Apsara dance is, contrary to popular belief, not a classical dance handed down from the Angkorian period, but a contemporary interpretation, as a part of the reconstruction and revival program, which was choreographed in relatively recent history, in 1962 (H.R.H. Princess Norodom Buppha Devi 2010: 4; Frumberg 2010: 148). These are reasons why four domains of culture are illustrated in <Figure 1>.

<Figure 1>The Domain of Culture



(Source: Own Construction)

As Handler argues, ‘the construction of an objected culture involves a new contextualization of the elements selected, in other words, one particular form of culture, viewed in a different era, becomes something other than what it was’ (Handler 1984: 62). Therefore, this study is cognizant of the fact that culture is never static but always changing, and youths are positioned in this crossroad of ‘the domain of culture’, which is illustrated in <figure 1>. In these complicated settings in culture, the study tries to understand the role of Cambodian youths.

Importantly, Cambodian youths take part in not only formal culture in both traditional and modern meanings, but also day-to-day culture in both traditional and modern aspects, which means that they not necessarily cope solely with the Khmer traditional culture. Also, as a day-to-day culture is never static, youth’s relation to day-to-day culture affects how they take part in formal culture. In addition, culture is closely related with national identity. As Cheney argues, cultural performance can function as a mechanism for the negotiation of national identity (Cheney 2007: 263).

2.4 Youth’s Agency in Structure

Individual acts within a system of relationships, which is the social structure (Gomez 2011). Under the social structure, individuals try to find their own way to exercise their agency. The structure is influenced by various factors, such as historical background, social and economic situation. While the structure gradually changes according with the change of the time, individuals try to find ways to exercise their agency within the structure. Besides, the character of individual as human agent itself has the potential to change. In addition, the structure and agent mutually reinforce each other, in other words, the social structure is maintained and altered by agent (Gomez 2011). Thus we can see that the relationship of agent and structure is dynamic, and changeable. As illustrated in <Figure2>, affected by social turmoil in 1970s, such as cultural destruction by Pol Pot, or globalization in recent years, the social structure surrounding Khmer traditional culture has gradually changed. The study tries to

understand how young people are relating to traditional culture in these circumstances.

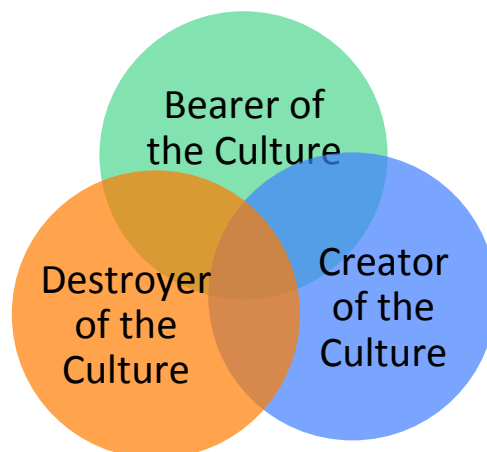
<Figure 2> Youth in Structure



(Source: Own Construction)

As stated, this research regards youth as agent that is composed of various roles <figure 3>. This means that young people have multiple roles in the structure, and these roles are the result of exercising their agency. In other words, all action of youth is the result of exercising their agency. Hence, even if conservative youths try to preserve the traditional culture, as 'bearer' of culture, it can be regarded that they exercise their agency. This concept is also applicable for 'creator' of the culture, and 'destroyer' of the culture. Moreover, the youth possibly have multiple roles as a result of exercising their agency. This is the reason why each round figure is piled with the others in <Figure 3>, which shows the functions of youth in relation to the Khmer Formal Traditional Culture.

<Figure 3> Function of Youth



(Source: Own Construction)

Chapter 3

The Khmer Traditional Arts

Firstly, this chapter briefly explains about the Khmer traditional arts at a glance. It furthermore sets out the government policy and educational system in the traditional arts.

3.1 The Khmer Traditional Arts at a glance

The Khmer traditional arts include various forms. Cambodian classical dance, as typified in *Apsara* dance, is a form performed entirely by female dancers (Burridge and Frumberg 2010: 212). Classical dance (Robam Boran) and Cambodian large shadow puppetry (Sbeik Thom) were listed as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO (Frumberg 2010: 146).



Youths performing the Classical dance. Photo by the author 2012.

Although these two art forms attract foreign tourists from all over the world, there are other diverse expressions. Folklore dance (Robam Prapeini) refers to traditional dances linked to an ethnic group's ceremonies, and their motifs are usually based on the everyday life of the people in the village (Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and UNESCO 2004: 33).



Youths performing the Folk dance. Photo by the author 2012.

Mask dance (Lakhaon Khaol) is one of the oldest forms of dramatic performance, which was developed as a male version of classical court dance (Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and UNESCO 2004: 57-8). Besides, Khmer Traditional Circuses, which feature juggling and acrobats, and Spoken Theater are also included in the Khmer traditional arts (Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and UNESCO 2004). In addition, musical instruments ensemble, traditional crafts and artisan skills play an important role to support the Khmer performing arts. In particular, this study focused on students and artists who major mainly in ‘Classical dance’, ‘Mask dance’, and ‘Folklore dance’.



Youths performing the Mask dance. Photo by the author 2012.

3.2 The Government Policy in Traditional Arts

3.2.1 *Reconstruction of Cambodian national identity*

As mentioned in the introduction of the research, it is crucial for the Cambodian government to revive the Khmer traditional arts, in terms of reconstruction Khmer identity (Takahashi 1996: 201). Following the Pol Pot regime, the government of Heng Samrin, under the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, preponderantly implemented policies to patronize and promote traditional arts as a part of measures for cultural reconstruction, as well as policies toward economic recovery (Takahashi 1999: 199). Although the Royal University of Fine Arts was closed during the Pol Pot regime from 1975 to 1979, thereafter it was reopened to place the school at the heart of the activity to restore the culture (H.R.H. Princess Norodom Buppha Devi 2010: 3). After the Kingdom of Cambodia was founded in 1993, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts has built up and carried out several policies to promote the Khmer traditional culture, such as having the art festival (Takahashi 1999: 199). Importantly, as Cheney argues, “cultural system” of the art festival can effectively function as a purveyor of both national cultural tradition and constitutionalism (Cheney 2007: 225). Therefore, it is important to see how the government promotes traditional arts in tourism policy, and how it is reflected in the arts education system.

3.2.2 In Tourism

The Cambodian government seeks to revive the Khmer traditional culture, owing not only to the cultural destruction by the Pol Pot regime and people's alienation from Khmer culture in globalized society, but also to the economy. In particular, Cambodian government tries to reconstruct the Khmer culture, using the framework of tourism development, and this is one of Cambodia's strategies under the pressure of globalization (Hagai 2008: 31).

In fact, in October 2003, Cambodian classical dance was registered in the UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the Cambodian government officially came to work out the promotion of this heritage (Hagai 2008: 31). Cambodian classical dance, and Khmer performing arts are regarded as tourism resources, besides Angkor Wat. Youth are involved as actors of tourist resource.

Tourism plays a role of the second largest contributor to the Cambodian economy after the textile industry (Chheang 2008: 284). In, 2006, tourism generated about 16 % of Cambodian GDP, which is about US\$ 1.6 billion, and produced about 250,000 jobs (Ministry of Tourism 2007, as cited in Chheang 2008: 284). In 2011, 2.8 million foreign tourists visited the country, and the government plan to double the current amount of annual tourism arrivals by 2020 (Gleeson 2012).

Moreover, as Chheang argues, the government is interested in the tourist industry not only for economic reasons, but also for promoting national identity and nationalism (2008: 286). The promotion of Khmer culture through tourism contributes to Khmer identity construction, which is conceptualized as a manifestation of nation building. In other words, it can be observed that 'tourism is a new form of nationalism in which traditional art performances and costumes represent the national identity of the host country' (Yamashita et al. 1997: 22-23, as cited in Chheang 2008: 286).

3.3 The Cambodian Arts Education System

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has responsibility for education at all levels in Cambodia, by the scheme of 6-year primary, 6-year secondary, and 5-year higher educational system (Sam 2008: 85). Although arts program has been included in the curriculum of primary schools since 1994, it is only a 30-minutes lesson per week on Khmer music (Sam 2007: 133). On the one hand, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts is responsible for the whole cultural community, and supervises the educational institution, namely the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), which is the only higher educational institution to foster traditional artists (Sam 2008: 86).

3.3.1 Royal University of Fine Arts

At the end of the Pol Pot regime, the present Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) was reopened in 1980 as the School of Fine Arts, although this school was initially inaugurated many years ago in 1918 (Chey 2010: 32; H.R.H. Princess Norodom Buppha Devi 2010: 3; Tuy 1996: 5, as cited in Sam 2008: 87). The university has five different faculties, such as the faculty of choreographic arts, music, plastic arts, archaeology, and architecture (Sam 2008: 88). The whole university enrolls more than 1,500 students, and approximately 400 are dance students and 200 are music students (Sam 2008: 88).

3.3.2 Secondary School of Fine Arts

The Secondary School of Fine Arts (SSFA) used to be the part of the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), but became independent as a different school for the junior training program (Burrige and Frumberg 2010). The school has five departments, such as dance, music, theater, circus, and the fine arts (Chey 2010: 35). It takes nine years for students to complete their academic training at SSFA, including two major examinations (Chey 2010: 35).

3.3.3 Others (NGO)

While several non-government projects have been initiated entirely by Cambodians (Frumberg 2010: 144), public support, as well as the help from foreign countries, was crucial to the success of the cultural program (Sam 2008: 89; UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust 2002: 8). Numerous international non-government organizations have also dealt persistently with the cultural renaissance since during the 1990s (Frumberg 2010). Amrita Performing Arts (APA) was founded in 2003 with a mission related to the post-war revival and preservation of the Khmer performing arts, as well as an aim of pursuing ideals to shape a sustainable life for the young generation of artists (Frumberg 2011).

Chapter 4

The Meaning of being Agents of Culture

This chapter presents the findings of the interviews conducted at the Secondary School of Fine Arts (SSFA), the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), which is the only institution of higher education to foster the traditional artists, and Amrita Performing Arts (APA), which is categorized as an international non-governmental organization. The chapter will focus on three main aspects; the first is related to a beginning: why and how Cambodian youth start learning traditional arts, the second is the opinion and contradiction related to globalization, the third deals with the challenges that interviewees confront. By presenting the results of interviews, this chapter will grasp the actual condition of youth in Cambodia, and clarify the meaning of being agents of culture in the present context.

4.1 Beginning

As the first aspect, the study tries to find out not only what motivates youth to learn traditional arts, but also what kind of factors attracted youth to tradition. As a result, 11 students and young artists out of total 20 informants answered that they started because of their own interest in the arts field. This is the majority, yet to appreciate the value of their answers, these need to be contextualised. Therefore, as a further step, in order to analyse and grasp the actual situation in Cambodia, this part presents the answers in terms of the social, educational, and gender contexts.

4.1.1 Social Context

Recently, in Cambodia, students tend to choose economics or law as their major, considering the possibilities to get jobs after graduation. As the number of students who chose to study the traditional arts decreases, the school tries to recruit students from all provinces. In fact, RUFA offers scholarships to promising students, also the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts requests the Culture and Fine Arts provincial office, especially remote provinces, to send their promising dancers or students to SSFA and RUFA to pursue their study (Graduates of SSFA and RUFA, personal communication through e-mail on 19th and 20th October 2012).

The attractiveness of the traditional arts as the subject to major in might be diminishing in modern Cambodian society. Even in this situation, some students started to learn the traditional arts to contribute to the nation, which means that they want to play a role as bearers of culture. One male student mentioned that he sacrificed himself to the traditional arts.

“My father was a musician. When my father died, I thought that I had to continue my father’s mission to spread the Khmer culture. I need to sacrifice myself to the traditional arts. Who will choose this field now? If no one chooses it, what will be the result?”
(Male student aged 21 years old, who majors in ‘Yike Theater’)

His word 'sacrifice' seems to represent difficult situations in traditional arts. In addition, he was inspired by his father, which means his devotion to the art was passed on from different generation. Importantly, he also mentioned about the relationship between traditional arts and the nation.

"Art is the mirror which reflects the nation." (Male student aged 21 years old, who majors in 'Yike Theater')

If art reflects the nation, as he stated, I thought, through arts, he succeeded what the nation reflects, namely, the national identity. In other words, traditional arts enabled him to be a successor of the previous generation's identity. In this sense, he works on nation building, as a form of Khmer identity construction, through the succession of traditional arts. As Cheney argues, 'cultural performance can serve as a mechanism for the negotiation and improvisation of national identity' (Cheney 2007: 263). Of course, it cannot be asserted that national identity is only expressed through traditional arts. It also should be noted that traditional art is one particular kind of expression, which is valid in a form of Khmer identity construction, and its validity is questioned in globalized culture.

Other Students also recognize the present situation of the traditional arts, and are concerned about the number of students who study at the Secondary School of Fine Arts, although they really want to contribute to the cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts.

"I want to continue the dancing until I get old and cannot dance anymore. I feel this as a mission. However, I cannot preserve the culture alone. I need cooperation. Recently, fewer students decide to study the mask dance. The reputation of mask dance is decreasing." (Male student aged 22, who majors in 'Mask Dance')

In addition, students at the arts school tend to be from poor families in poor provinces.

"The students from upper class don't choose this field (the traditional arts). Students studying this field tend to be from the lower class." (Male student aged 21 years old, who majors in 'Yike Theater')

As for the motivation of youth for learning the traditional arts, few students mentioned the willingness to contribute to preserve the culture at the beginning of the their studies. This does not mean that students do not care about the future of the traditional arts. It seems that the passion to contribute to preserve the traditional culture is rather generated from their long continuous process in their engagement in the traditional arts.

Most of the students are proud of their role in the traditional arts, although some did not like the arts at the beginning of the study. In fact, one female artist was forced to sit for examination of classical dance, in order for school to acquire enough applicants. The result was that she unexpectedly passed the examination, while her sister, who was enthusiastic for dance, ironically failed. As her mother was a professional dancer, she must have been naturally endowed with the talent for dancing. Similarly, one male artist mentioned that he had no choice because teacher recruited him to study traditional dance in Phnom Penh. Although no one in his family was engaged with arts, he went to Phnom Penh from suburb area. Importantly, in spite of their forced entry, both of them are now very keen on the traditional arts as a result of their long engagements, and they are eventually selected as artists of APA.

By means of the interviews, it was found out that many students started to learn the traditional arts on the recommendation of their parents or relatives. Interestingly, their recommendations come from practical merits in educational and gender context, which means added benefits of studying at the Art schools.

4.1.2 Educational Context

Although all children are entitled to study for 9 years as basic education by the Cambodian Constitution, the national census in 1998 shows that only 48 % of students had completed primary education (Forum SYD 2002: 9). As for the tertiary education, about 25,000 students are enrolled at present, but there is a big imbalance between the different provinces, in the number of students enrolled in higher education (Forum SYD 2002: 9). Hence, parents want their children to pursue their studies, if they have chances to study. The Secondary School of Fine Arts forces students to take class not only for the dancing but also in general knowledge, which is taught at ordinary public school in a similar way. In this sense, the curriculum at SSFA appears very attractive to the parents of students, considering the benefits of the acquired knowledge.

“From 7:30-11:00 in the morning, we study dancing, and in the afternoon, we study general knowledge, such as physics, mathematics, history, Khmer, biology, English, chemistry, geology, and morality.” (Female student aged 18, who majors in ‘Classical dance’)

“Before studying, I knew nothing. After studying, I could acquire both skills and general knowledge. I am happy to have learned both. I could also get chances to travel to perform. A TV program broadcasted my performance.” (Male student aged 19, who majors in ‘Mask dance’)

The curriculum at SSFA also seems to be attractive for students. Answering the question about how they had changed after learning at SSFA, some students mentioned the benefit of the curriculum.

4.1.3 Gender Context

Family members seem to recommend their children to study the traditional arts in terms of an ideal image of women in Cambodia, as well as the practical merit of education. Especially for female students, it was found out that parents particularly care about how their daughters should behave in Cambodian society. The following answers from female student and artist reflect the aspect in gender context.

“School teaches not only dancing, but also how to behave as an elegant woman, like being gentle and elegant. This is why my aunt recommended me to study classical dance.”
(Female student aged 18, who majors in ‘Classical dance’)

Similarly, another female student mentioned as following.

“School teaches not only dancing but also how to behave as a woman. This is why my mother recommended me to attend this school although I liked to play outside like boys.”
(Female artist aged 27, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

What is more, students seem to accept the ideal image of women, which is expected in Cambodian society.

“...Yes, I have changed a lot since I learnt classical dance. Everybody came to respect me. Everybody regards me as a Cambodian girl, a real Cambodian girl who is polite and elegant.” (Female student aged 18, who majors in ‘Classical dance’)

As stated, some interesting results were gained from the survey of interviews. The study could find out not only what motivated youth to study the traditional arts, but also what kinds of factor affected their decision to dedicate themselves to the tradition. As a result, factors were analysed in terms of social, educational, and gender context. What is more, the next part shows how Cambodian young people perceive the globalization.

4.2 Under the Globalized Culture

It is observed that the wave of globalization in recent years has a huge impact on Cambodian society. As a result of the rapid economic growth after the 2000s, the circumstances in which Cambodian people live has dramatically changed. In particular, in a big city like Phnom Penh, people starts to rejoice in the flow of globalized culture, such as American, European and Korean culture. As the diffusion rate of mobile phones substantially increased, young Cambodian people can easily access the outer world.

The young generation in Cambodia is curious and drawn to the new culture, hence they are affected by the globalization which has a powerful impact (Chey 2010: 37). The Khmer youngsters are won over by the stream of Western pop music, therefore they prefer the musical instruments, such as, guitars, keyboards, and drum, rather than the Khmer ensembles which seem to be slow, old fashioned, and boring (Sam 2007: 126). In this circumstance, it is not known so far how the young people studying the traditional arts think about the globalization. The interviews tried to find out the actual situation of youth, and the contradiction which young Cambodian people experience while engaging in the Khmer arts field.

4.2.1 *A Sense of Crisis*

As stated in Chapter 2, the globalization affects both a day-to-day culture and the formal traditional Culture, which means the specific Khmer performing arts. Almost all student and artists are concerned about the influence of globalization and new culture on a day-to-day culture, especially the impact of Korean culture.

“Although we can not prohibit the globalized culture, we should prioritize Cambodian culture. If Cambodians keep copying foreign culture, such as hair styles, our culture will be forgotten gradually.” (Male student aged 21, who majors in ‘Yike Theater’)

“Firstly, Korean culture really affects Cambodian society and culture, such as hairstyle in particular. Affected by Korean culture, boys have become weak-looking. Before, men were strong, but now, they look feminine like ‘lady-boys’.” (Male artist aged 24, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

Some students seem to completely reject the globalized culture, and showed a strong dislike for the culture of other countries.

“As for the globalized culture, I feel uncomfortable because those kinds of culture are different from our own.” (Female student aged 25, who majors in ‘Folklore dance’)

“As for the globalized culture, I cannot accept pop culture. I am firmly opposed to that kind of culture.” (Male student aged 22, who majors in ‘Folklore dance’)

Teachers at the school are also concerned about the attitude of their students toward globalization, considering the difference between the present situation and the previous circumstance of their own generation.

“Young generations accept all without considering differences between the good and the bad. When I was young, I didn’t have a television in my house. Only once a week, at

the theater, I could experience the culture from foreign countries. I was not influenced by globalized culture so much." (Male teacher, who has taught 'Folklore dance' for almost 10 years.)

Some students seem to be frustrated by the tendency of even the same generation. In addition, one student criticized the attitude of politicians, and mentioned that the government does not implement any effective policy to preserve the traditional arts.

"Although the arts are included as general subjects in junior high school, students ignore the importance of the arts. They are affected by Korean culture." (Female student aged 22, who majors in 'Folklore dance')

"Cambodia is affected partly by globalization. This is only one part. The present leaders don't pay attention to the traditional arts." (Female student aged 22, who majors in 'Folklore dance')

Interviewees are young, however, they are concerned not only about the younger generation, but also about the future of the formal traditional Culture, which means the specific Khmer performing arts.

"Our Culture can be easily affected by the globalization, and young people don't know our Culture well. For example, when they are asked how many types of dancing exist, they cannot answer. As for the even questions about 'Rorm Vong', which is the typical Cambodian dance, they cannot answer. I don't criticize the globalization completely. Naturally, we can accept other cultures, and learn from them. However, we should not forget our own culture. Before accepting other Cultures, young generation should know our Culture. For example, some mothers encourage their children to go to 'Angkor Wat', yet they refuse, because they don't understand the greatness of the heritage, and they call it 'just a pile of stones'." (Male student aged 24, who majors in 'Mask dance')

"We will lose our Culture if we don't have a clear understanding of it. Without a clear understanding, the Culture will be lost. As for movement (in the classical dance), such as, which leg, and which size, how you move in the dancing, if it is not clear for students what to do, our Culture will be lost. Young people only follow European style, TV, hip-hop. If they don't know Cultural dance, then they cannot answer questions from foreigners on Cambodian traditional dance. Thai dance is similar to the Cambodian one. If we cannot tell the difference, our Culture will be lost. I know clearly about my dance. If you don't know the basics, traditions will die out." (Female artist aged 30, who majored in 'Classical dance')

"As for the impact of globalization, I'm worried that people just follow only the globalized Culture. Why don't we work (to create) contemporary Khmer dance? We should not only follow others. We have our own movement." (Male artist aged 31, who majored in 'Mask dance')

These answers represent their sense of crisis among youth about the negative impacts on the future of both a day-to-day culture and the formal traditional Culture. Besides, it could be observed that some young students and artists have a passion to create their own formal Culture, emphasizing the importance of the traditional arts.

4.2.2 As new opportunities

By contrast, some students accept the globalization to some extent, considering the merit of introducing foreign culture into the country, and the opportunities to compare various cultures, although they admit the disadvantage of globalization.

“I feel that globalization has two aspects. Firstly, I do not accept hip-hop music. On the other hand, I can learn the classical Culture and opera of other countries. In this sense, I appreciated globalization.” (Male student aged 19, who majors in ‘Mask dance’)

“In good aspects, people can exchange their art forms, like the mixture of Indian and Khmer Culture, represented by ‘Reamker’³. However, we cannot follow foreign cultures blindly. We have to limit ourselves.” (Male student aged 22, who majors in ‘Mask dance’)

“I accept globalization to some extent, like 50 %, because I feel that globalization can update myself. Although I like Korean culture, I wear the traditional dress when I attend ceremonies or formal occasions.” (Female student aged 22, who majors in ‘Speaking theater’)

One young artist mentioned about the globalization in terms of fostering the originality of her own culture.

“What do I think about globalization? It has both good and bad aspects. Good thing is that young generation can develop itself by using the energy of other countries. We can exchange cultures, although, of course, we cannot foster the same culture as Korean culture. As for the bad thing, it is that the young generation seems to follow the Korean style, Korean stars, and Korean dancing. They try to do the same as Korean people do.” (Female artist aged 28, who majored in ‘Folklore dance’)

³ The Cambodian version of the ‘Ramayana’, which is the Indian ancient epic (Burridge and Frumberg 2010: 213).

Interestingly, one student criticized the media, which takes up the globalized culture too much.

“I think that globalization has a positive aspect. Although we can accept and appreciate the globalized culture, we have to prioritize our culture. I criticize the media, which tends to focus on Korean or American culture too much. There are only a few programs introducing ‘Bassac’ or ‘Yike theatre’, (which are the Cambodian traditional arts). We should not be influenced by the media. The media should spread our Culture. Only once a week, TVK⁴ broadcasts a classical dance on Saturday. We should not be trapped by the media.” (Female student aged 18, who majors in ‘Classical dance’)

An answer from one female artist seems to represent the contradiction which young Cambodian people experience, while engaging in the traditional arts field. Also, it reflects the present situation in Cambodia.

“This is about civilization. Even if globalization has no influence, the traditional arts in Cambodia must remain weak. There are several obstacles. However, we are living in a world, which has no boundaries. We are living in a democratic society. We have to open the gate to the outer world. We cannot block these trends. Firstly, globalization wakes up Cambodia. Secondly, the globalization colors the culture. Globalization gives us opportunities to compare the culture. This is the positive aspect. I call this a ‘partnership’. Thirdly, globalization is a reality. We have to accept it. We need the balance, between the traditional and the contemporary.” (Female artist aged 26, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

She also mentioned about the example of ‘Kimono’, which is Japanese traditional dress for women. She illustrated that Japanese ladies not necessarily wear ‘Kimono’ everyday. By showing this example, she emphasized the importance of balance, between the traditional culture and the modern globalized culture, in both day-to-day and formal meanings of culture.

4.3 Challenges

As Chey (2010: 37) explains, at present, the Secondary School of Fine Arts (SSFA) confronts difficulties such as the number of students decreasing year by year, and she mentions this as a critical situation. By conducting interviews, the study tries to grasp the present situation of youth who engages in the traditional arts, and find out what kinds of challenges they face on the ground. This part tries to set out two points; the first is related to the obstacles for youth in detail from the point of view of the young students and artists, the second is related to the difficulties and problems in cultural reconstruction, which is observed in a broader structural and generational aspect.

⁴ National Television of Cambodia.

4.3.1 *The Obstacles for Youth*

As for the obstacles for youth, this part can be categorized in the following four aspects; the first is the priority in dealing with daily lives, namely about surviving, the second is the difficulty in gender perspective, the third is the administration of the school, and the last is the present situation of facilities, which results from the lack of sponsor.

Firstly, as Sam illustrates, several obstacles for youth come from the ‘priority in dealing with their daily lives’, and this aspect is especially affected by ‘market and career competitiveness’ (2007:125). Particularly, many students mentioned the difficulty to get jobs after the graduation.

“After graduation, students can not get the job except for two options, such as working at the National Theater or becoming school teachers. Hence, parents recommend their children to study economics, or tourism.” (Female artist aged 27, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

“Near the graduation, students have to pay for music and costumes to prepare for examinations. However, after the graduation, they don’t have a job. When students from poor families realize this, they tend to give up their studies. This is the problem. Hence, some students study pedagogy after graduation in dance field. The reason is that after two years in pedagogy, they can get a job. Some students drop out, and some become addicted to drugs.” (Male artist aged 24, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

It can be seen that many students are struggling with this ‘uncertain future’ (Chey 2010: 38). For this reason, some students come up with a practical strategy to support themselves.

“Besides the traditional field, I want to pursue a different specialization, such as accounting and banking. Having two skills is better than only one.” (Male student aged 22, who majors in ‘Folklore dance’)

“I don’t want to talk about ‘money’. But, it is important. Salary. Job. Without working, we cannot continue to teach, and to preserve culture.” (Female artist aged 30, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

Some young dancers have to take care of their families, therefore they perform the traditional arts at the hotel to earn money. However, because of ‘fewer public performance opportunities’ (Chey 2010: 38), they face the difficulty to earn money from their skills.

“Why people are not interested in ‘Bassac theater’? This is because they cannot earn money by performing ‘Bassac theater’, and there are not so many opportunities to perform.” (Male teacher, who has taught for 15 years in ‘Bassac theater’)



Youths performing the Folk dance at hotel. Photo by the author 2012.

As stated in interviews, the answer showed the difficulty to continue studying the traditional arts, and the reality in this field.

“At the beginning, there were 40 students, however, at the graduation, only 4 students remained at the school. The reasons? Some started to work. Or, they realized that they didn’t have the talent for dancing, although parents wanted children to enter the school at the beginning. In addition, young students are impatient.” (Male artist aged 24, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

Secondly, in gender perspective, some students and artists mentioned the expected role of male as a breadwinner in Cambodian society. They referred this aspect as one of obstacles for male who tries to continue to engage in traditional arts.

“In Cambodia, the responsibility of male is huge. Cambodian male is expected as a breadwinner. If males engage on arts, they cannot be breadwinners.” (Female artist aged 26, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

Interestingly, the same comments about males as breadwinners, were made by three females, not by males. On the one hand, one female artist mentioned that it is very hard for female to be independent by dancing, or to continue career in dancing after getting married because husband expects his wife to do housework, tends to say that dancing is not good, and forces wife to stop dancing. It can be seen that these comments reflected the expected roles as ideal men and women, which still remain rooted deeply in Cambodian society. Thus, these ideal images become the obstacles for both men and women to continue their studies in the traditional arts.

In another case, maternity leave makes a female to suspend her career as a dancer.

“(Interviewer questioned) What do you think about the present pregnant period for you as a dancer? (She answered)...At first, I felt unhappy. Because I like to dance so much, the pregnant means that I have to have a big holiday as a dancer. However, after that, I thought that if I don’t have a baby now, when could I have? I always perform. So, (I accept this situation, and) I decided to stay at home. When some imagination or idea came to my mind, I wrote it down on my book.” (Female artist aged 28, who majored in ‘Folklore dance’)

Although she accepted her present situation, her case reminds me that she spends a day-to-day life, and has a role in household, while she engages in performing arts. Definitely, she will return to work as a dancer after childbirth, and this experience must enrich her power of expression. It should be noted that this is a question of physical ability but also of gendered arrangements regarding motherhood in combination with performing arts, which no father would experience as obstacles.

Thirdly, some obstacles for youth come from the way of administrating the school (Chey 2010). For instance, the new location of the school, caused by a massive land deal, made it difficult for both students and teachers to go to school. As the new North Campus is located seven kilometers further outside the city, many teachers and students cannot afford the extra mount of petrol. As a result, there has been a severe dropout rate (Burridge 2010: 125).

“After the change of location of the school, it became very difficult for students and teachers to go to school. In addition, the schedule for examination for the Secondary School of Fine Arts (SSFA) and the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) used to be different, but now it is on the same day, which means that we don’t have enough time for rehearsal. One day for teachers, one day for examination.” (Male artist aged 24, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)



School buildings of SSFA away from a city center. Photo by the author 2012.

An artist also mentioned the present situation of human resources. What is more, a student criticizes the way of teaching.

“Human resources are cut down (personnel reduction is carried out), owing to cost reduction. If these tendencies continue, our Culture will be lost. The teacher does not come, students cannot concentrate on the class. In the past, students could study in a whole day thanks to enough human resources, such as teachers. There used to be no free time except for classes.” (Male artist aged 24, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

“Teachers don’t teach well, they cannot satisfy my needs to learn. I have more that I want to know. Teacher does not teach us all the skills. (If teachers teach us everything, nothing is left for the teachers.)” (Male student aged 16, who majors in ‘Mask dance’)

Lastly, other obstacles result from the situation of facilities and equipment in schools. Apart from some grants from foreign-based organizations and some supports from the government, it is difficult to get funds (Chey 2010: 38). The necessity of improving equipment at the school was pointed out from both students and teachers.

“Regarding the difficulties in learning, there is only a limited amount of materials to support training. For example, there are no mirrors in the classroom to correct our postures when dancing. So, we need support.” (Female student aged 20, who majors in ‘Classical dance’)

“Because of the revenue shortfall and lack of sponsor, we cannot set up mirrors in classrooms. I wish we had enough equipment to help students improve their skills” (Female Director of the department in ‘Folklore dance’, who has taught for more than 30 years)

“Although many students are interested in this field, they tend to be from poor family. Hence they need financial support from organization, such as NGOs. As their families cannot support them, I need to ask other organization to support students. If the dormitory was provided for them, they wouldn’t have to pay any rent.” (Male teacher, who has taught for 15 years in ‘Bassac theater’)

4.3.2 Difficulties and Problems in Cultural Reconstruction

In this part, by reviewing the outcome of interviews, the study tries to place the challenges of youth in a broader structural and generational context, and set out the difficulties and problems in cultural reconstruction. This part is divided into the following three aspects; the first is related to the quality and disposition of young students, the second is related to the reality of teachers, such as low salaries and low status, the third is related to the situation of the transmission of traditional arts.

To begin with, the answers clarified the difference in the quality and disposition of students between generations. Particularly, teachers mentioned that the disposition of young students and the attitude to the learning, are different from the one of their generation.

“I think that young students are impatient. For example, wearing mask itself is hard for dancers. Many students cannot endure even these kinds of trials.” (Male teacher, who has taught for 16 years in ‘Mask dance’)

“Nowadays, students stick to freedom in a democratic society.” (Male teacher, who has taught for 16 years in ‘Mask dance’)

“I’m also a teacher. I notice some differences between my generation and the younger one. When I studied, it was a very struggling process, very hard. I needed to concentrate on the class. Teachers also tried hard to teach. Hence, we could become good dancers. Now, young students cannot concentrate on the class, also their attentions is distracted by a happy life outside the class. They don’t try hard. As for the old generation, after the Khmer Rouge, they still remember the smell of the past. Now, the quality of present-day students is not as high as before.” (Female artist aged 28, who majored in ‘Folklore dance’)

These answers show the difference in generations. Hence, the policy of teaching might be changing according to the disposition of young students.

“Nowadays, we cannot punish students. We have to persuade them rather than punish them. When I was a student, we used to be forced to run round a schoolyard, for instance 20 times, or sometimes, to stand on one leg. The teachers were very strict. However, after those periods, I realized that all punishment benefits the students, as practice in dance. ...Nowadays, especially students over 14, 15, 16, they have their own opinions, and they don’t listen to the teachers.” (Male teacher, who has taught for almost 10 years in ‘Folklore dance’)



A teacher instructing students in the Folk dance. Photo by the author 2012.

The decrease in the number of students, as well as these changes in the quality of students, affects the process of the entrance examination for the school in the traditional arts. An experienced teacher mentioned this point.

“In our generation, good voice, beautiful figure, and physical ability were strictly considered in the selection process. However, recently because of the decreasing number of students entering the school, the selection process is not as strict as before. Even if they (applicants) don’t have a good talent, they are selected differently as a student, for example, who plays musical instruments.” (Male teacher, who has taught for 15 years in ‘Bassac theater’)

One artist pointed out the tendency of young students, who follow blindly the brilliant aspects of contemporary dance, without experiencing hardships to acquire basic skills in the traditional arts.

“...My opinion about the new generation? I am very worried about them. They just look at me (contemporary dancer), and try to follow me. However, everything is generated from tradition. I want to emphasize the Khmer Culture, not the western culture. From my experience of 10 years in teaching, the young generation tends to forget our culture. I am very worried about this point.” (Male artist aged 31, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

In the second place, as for the difficulties and problems in cultural reconstruction, the interviews revealed the reality of teachers in the traditional arts. Owing to low salaries and their low status as teachers, they have to find other works to support themselves (Chey 2010: 37), and it is very difficult for them to enhance their reputation in the present Cambodian society.

“Nowadays teachers have side jobs to earn money, in addition to teaching dance.” (Male teacher, who has taught for 10 years in ‘Folklore dance’)

“(Interviewer questioned) Although the role of teachers is important in the traditional arts, why isn’t the importance of your role recognized by society? (Teacher answered)... (He burst into tears.) ...I cannot answer that question. ...I cannot answer. ...Society disregards traditional culture. In spite of our endeavour, for instance, costumes and masks for the performance are owned privately by teachers, society doesn’t recognize our role.” (Male teacher, who has taught for 16 years in ‘Mask dance’)

Because of a budget deficit, the school cannot purchase enough costumes for performances, hence this teacher prepares theatrical costumes by his own expense. In spite of teachers’ effort, society does not recognize their importance. His tears must have been tears of frustration or bitter disappointment. The teacher earnestly requested the author to arrange the performance in Japan to spread the Khmer traditional culture. These interviews with teachers made it clear what is the real situation for them.

Lastly, the situation of transmission can be illustrated by the difficulties and problems in cultural reconstruction. For instance, the aging of masters and the teaching method were mentioned in interviews.

“I am worried that teachers of the traditional arts are old, and they can not stay longer. We will lose more than we get. If we want to develop our culture, we have to think about this reality.” (Female artist aged 30, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

As most teachers prefer to teach through their own experience rather than through written texts (Chey 2010: 37), the accumulation of knowledge has not been integrated into texts or documentation.

“In fact, at present, there are only a few books about the classical dancing.” (Female artist aged 26, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)



Rehearsal for performance of the Yike theater. Photo by the author 2012.

A loss of quality in arts education result from these complicated reasons. Then, it can be seen that the present education in the traditional arts cannot adequately prepare students for challenges after the graduation, and students find it difficult to find jobs as means of livelihood (Chey 2010: 37-8). Altogether, this chapter presented the actual condition of youth being agents in the Khmer performing arts. As stated, there are various ways to start their learning in the beginning, and Cambodian young people continue to learn under the globalized circumstances, in spite of many challenges they face.

Chapter 5

Views on the Future: What lies ahead of youth?

As we have seen in chapter four, young Cambodian students chose to learn the traditional arts in present Cambodian society based on various motivations. While youth feel some contradictions under the globalized culture, they still seek to continue their studies and engagement with the Khmer performing arts in spite of diverse challenges. What lies ahead of them? What do they think about their future? Where are they heading toward? Also, how do Cambodian youths perceive and experience their engagement in the process of cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts? This chapter tries to analyse their answers about their future, and observe how they exercise their agency.

5.1 The future

The first half of this part analyzes answers from youths about their future in terms of following three aspects; the first as an individual agent, the second as a social agent, the third as an agent as both an individual and member of society. The question focused on how youths make use of the skills they acquired in the traditional arts, as well as their dream about the future. The latter half of this part examines the opinion of youth about the prospects of Cambodia.

5.1.1 *As an individual agent*

Some students mentioned their future based on school career and occupation, considering their individual advantages. Seven students of SSFA referred to their intention to aim for a Bachelor degree at RUFA. Besides, it should be noted that their individual intentions are also partly backed up by their social perspectives.

“After graduating, I will apply for the position of teacher at the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), but if I cannot pass, I will apply to become a teacher at the Secondary School of Fine Arts (SSFA). I have a mission to spread our culture.” (Male student aged 24, who majors in ‘Mask dance’)

One student mentioned that his self-confidence as an individual agent was formed and strengthened by the expectations of others for him.

“Before I started the traditional arts, I was a simple boy. But, I became to a real dancer. Now, I feel that I am needed, as people expect me to perform in many public performances. So, I deepen my self-confidence more and more.” (Male student aged 22, who majors in ‘Mask dance’)

When the ‘empowerment’ discourse is applied to the way to analyse Cambodian youth here, this answer means that the student has acquired ‘not only

greater extrinsic control', which is learning art skills through arts education, 'but also a growing intrinsic capability', which is self-confidence gained through performing arts in public (Sen and Batliwala 2000: 18).

5.1.2 As a social agent

Furthermore, many students and artists fully recognize their roles in the cultural reconstruction. In particular, they seem to accept their mission to pass on what they learnt to the next generation. In fact, most of them mentioned their dreams to share their precious experience when they were asked about their future.

"I want to establish an association of my own, to teach students from both rich and poor families. I want to make Cambodian culture known in other countries." (Female student aged 18, who majors in 'Classical dance')

"If I had a lot of money, I would establish my own association in my province (Pailin), in order to create a dancing team." (Male student aged 20, who majors in 'Mask dance')

"In the future, I want to pass on my learning process to the young generation. I want to teach at school, although personnel reductions are carried out. I want to share my specific skills and experience. I want to be a friend, rather than a teacher. Dance changed my life a lot positively, hence I want young people to know my story and life." (Male artist aged 24, who majored in 'Mask dance')

"What do I want to do in the future? I want to be a choreographer to guide the young generation. I don't want to complain about the present situation, nor do I want to just copy other cultures. In addition, I want to establish my own organization to teach, to choreograph." (Female artist aged 28, who majored in 'Folklore dance')

Interestingly, it was found that some students give consideration to the next generation to be trained, in spite of the fact that they presently receive an education in the traditional arts.

5.1.3 Agent as both an individual and member of society

What is more, it could be observed that some artists pursue their ideals as well as contribute to the society.

"I recognize myself as the first generation of contemporary dance in Cambodia. Hence, I want to be a teacher to share my experience. I want to inspire the young generation. In fact, one young girl was inspired by my interview on TV. This girl said, 'No matter what I choose as an occupation in the future, I want to be strong like you'. Secondly, I

want to be a choreographer, because when I get older, I cannot dance. Thirdly, I want to construct my own theater for acting, which is very important for us. Although we have a lot of ideas as performers, we have no place to perform.” (Female artist aged 27, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

“What is my dream? I want to teach the next generation, especially in the field of contemporary dance. I want to convey the attractiveness of contemporary dance to the audience in local areas. Not by following contemporary dance from other countries, we want to create contemporary dance by ourselves. At the present time, contemporary dance is young in Cambodia, but I want to teach it, and promote the contemporary dance scene. Unlike foreign people who come to Cambodia, and transmit dance like ballet from Germany or the USA, we should have our own contemporary dance.” (Male artist aged 31, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

“What is my dream? ... (With a smile and bright expression on her face)... Firstly, I want to be an inspiring and independent choreographer, even if I’m not famous. Secondly, I want to be a teacher, who performs. Thirdly, I want to be a professor, who teaches about dances physically and theoretically. And fourthly, I want to be an entertainer to deliver hope, and to foster democracy. (And, later she added) I want to start my business.” (Female artist aged 26, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

She answered cheerfully as mentioned. These answers seem to reflect her positions to the full, not only as a culture bearer or preserver, but also as an agent to realize her identity. Apparently she exercises agency, i.e. ‘the capacity of humans to ultimately decide what action to take’ (Berner 1998: 4).

“The master of the Royal Palace emphasized two things. Preserve, and rebuild (make it happen again). However, my generation tries to pursue a career in terms of individual aspirations. Not only as a preserver, I perform to earn, and to express my identity. Based on what I interpreted from teachers, I teach to preserve, to transmit to the next generation. I do not want my students to play only as preservers or bearers. I want my students to be independent. The burden seems to be very heavy for students. I want to teach them how to dance in their own way, and want my students to be independent dancers. I teach them as their sister.” (Female artist aged 26, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

Her words show how the young generation perceives and experiences engagement in the process of cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts. In other words, they do not limit their roles. They assume broader perspectives not only as bearers but also as agents to express themselves.

5.1.4 The prospects of Cambodia

This part examines the opinion of youth about the prospects of Cambodia. Before introducing young people’s opinion, the voice of a teacher is presented to show generational differences in their opinions about the future of Cambo-

dia. As the old generation who experienced the dark Pol Pot regime and a state of civil war, it might be difficult for teachers to imagine the positive prospect of their country.

"I cannot predict the future of Cambodia. I cannot imagine that the culture will be developed. However, the only thing that I can do is to keep teaching." (Male teacher, who has taught for 16 years in 'Mask dance')

While teachers feel concern about Cambodia, the majority of students and artists showed a positive attitude toward the future of their country.

"I am optimistic. I think that the country will be dramatically developed. Many students believe in the development of Cambodia. Even local people start to value our culture, and foreign people are also interested in the Khmer culture. I feel that many students start to learn the traditional arts." (Female student aged 22, who majors in 'Speaking theater')

"Even if it might be at a slow pace, I believe in the future of Cambodia. This country can move forward. I feel honor to contribute to the country. Whatever happens in this country, changes will be in the right direction. Luckily, art can contribute to Cambodia. While there are problems such as corruption in the political world, I feel honor to be a dancer. I have pride. The more independent people become by respecting their own ways, the better this country becomes." (Female artist aged 26, who majored in 'Classical dance')

On the other hand, some students and artists seem not to be able to picture simply a bright future. One artist, in particular, mentioned about the future of contemporary dance in Cambodia.

"Question about the future of Cambodia? This is a difficult question to answer. If people try to advertise more our culture, many people will understand the culture." (Male student aged 23, who majors in 'Mask dance')

"I'm worried that teachers don't like contemporary dance, although nowadays some teachers start to realize the meaning of contemporary dance in Cambodia. Moreover, I'm worried that students follow only contemporary dance. I want to emphasize the importance of traditional dance. At present time, the government doesn't know contemporary dance. They believe that contemporary dance only breaks the tradition. If the government relaxes the restrictions, and frees the movement in contemporary dance, we can create its future. Last time, when I was interviewed on a TV program in Cambodia, I also mentioned that regulations should be eased." (Male artist aged 31, who majored in 'Mask dance')

Considering their opinion about the future of Cambodia, which is mixed with positive expectations and concern, like Cole and Durham argued, it can be

seen that the future is also constructed through hope and anxiety, which let Cambodian youths have particular expectations (Cole and Durham 2008: 14).

5.2 Where is youth heading toward?

–Take off the Mask

In order to take up the new movement beyond the preservation of the Khmer performing arts, this part presents the voices of young artists, who work for the Amrita Performing Arts (APA). APA is an International NGO with US non-profit status, which committed to create the cutting-edge Cambodian contemporary dance, responding to the creative force of young dancers with a mission to usher Cambodian ancient performing-arts heritage into hybridized arts (Amery 2011). Fred Frumberg, an executive director of APA, mentioned in his article that, although the revival and preservation of the lost Khmer performing arts will remain an urgent priority, the notion must shift to one that emphasizes creativity and productivity (2006: 162). This part introduces answers from artists of APA, and examines how they perceive and experience their engagement in the performing arts. In particular, this part tries to explore where they are heading by taking off their masks or costumes of the traditional arts.



Flyer for a new work of contemporary dance 'CRACK'.

(Source of image: Amrita Performing Arts)

5.2.1 The urge for new expression

All artists of APA mentioned the attractiveness of contemporary dance in terms of expression, while they recognize the difference between the traditional performing arts and contemporary dance. They have an urge to create a hy-

brid expression. It can be seen that they have impulses to express themselves, namely, to exercise their role as creators.

“The difference between mask dance and contemporary dancing? As for the mask dancing or traditional dance, the role is provided, and I have to follow the role. On the other hands, in contemporary dance, I can express myself through the dancing.” (Male artist aged 23, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

“Contemporary is hard for me. I have to create new things. New experience, my whole body tries to find the meaning of what to do.” (Male artist aged 24, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

“What did I discuss the gap between classical and contemporary dance? (When I created contemporary work.) Although there is an influence from foreign countries, we have a role to develop a new style. Firstly, we have to consider the transition from tradition to contemporary. Secondly, affected by feelings from both outside and inside Cambodia, I wanted to create new movements. Thirdly, I tried to combine traditional arts and new contemporary dance.” (Male artist aged 31, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

“I wanted to do something new. Classical dance is the opposite of contemporary dance. In classical dance, dancers wear very beautiful costumes, and look gorgeous. It expresses a special occasion, and dancers can become kings or princesses. On the other hand, contemporary dance expresses normal life. It is not as beautiful, dancers don’t makeup heavily, what is more, the movement looks strange. In classical dance, dancers act other roles, such as a giant or a monkey. In contemporary dance, I feel that this is myself. This does not mean it is good or bad. Why I do contemporary dance? I still ask myself this question.” (Female artist aged 27, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

It could be observed that young artists seek new possibilities of expression between the traditional and contemporary forms, while they answer their own question; why are they engaged in contemporary dance?

5.2.2 The urge originated from the tradition

As special mention, although the young artists of APA seek a new form of expression through contemporary dance, they all emphasized the importance of the traditional forms as their bases.

“Possibilities of ‘Mixing traditional and contemporary dancing’. Both develop together. If you do not know classical dance, you cannot develop the contemporary one.” (Female artist aged 30, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

“When we make contemporary dance, some ideas can be applied from our traditional culture. ‘Water, dancing under water’⁵. This idea was gotten from ‘Sbeik Thom’, which is Cambodian large shadow puppetry. New movement can originate from traditional art.” (Female artist aged 27, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

“When I’m engaged in contemporary dance, I want to use some gestures of Cambodian traditional arts. I cannot go far from the Cambodian character. I take some from the dance story in classical or folklore, but I recreate or reinterpret them. Contemporary dance has no rules, while classical and folklore have some. What is important is what we want to express through the dancing. The meaning of what is inside is important.” (Female artist aged 28, who majored in ‘Folklore dance’)

At the same time, they fully understand how their new trials in the contemporary dance are recognized in conservative society of Cambodia. It could be observed that young artists are patiently struggling with this process.

“The people tend to think that contemporary dance only breaks with tradition.” (Male artist aged 31, who majored in ‘Mask dance’)

“In 2005, our first attempt at contemporary dancing, was regarded as crazy. Many people said to us, ‘you destroy our culture’. There were a lot of criticisms, although I also wanted to develop my culture. It was difficult to persuade them to understand our intention. Hence, I kept silent. The government does not support the organization ‘Amrita Performing Arts’. The situation seems to have changed gradually. However, even now, one staff from the government said to me ‘you are not doing something bad for our culture, but I am watching what you are doing’. I think that this is a progress, compared with the previous situation.” (Female artist aged 27, who majored in ‘Classical dance’)

To sum up, as stated, the young artists recognize themselves as multiple actors. Their words showed how the young generation perceives and experiences its engagement in the process of cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts. They have impulses to express themselves through the contemporary dance, and create a hybrid culture based on the Cambodian traditional culture. Namely, they exercise their agency as creators. On the other hand, they all emphasized the importance of the traditional forms as their bases, and recognize their role as bearers of culture. Consequently, it can be seen that Cambodian youths play a role as both bearers and creators.

⁵ The concept of her contemporary work, which she choreographed in the work ‘Water Master’.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Youth as Creative Force in Dynamism

To summarise the study, this chapter works on the meta-analysis, and conclusion of the research paper follows. The meta-analysis part is divided into two sections; the first emphasizes the dynamism of the social structure as opposed to a fixed and static structure, the second focuses on the creative agency of youth in their dynamic circumstances. As a conclusion, the last part tries to summarize my observations on how Cambodian youth function in the process of cultural reconstruction in the Khmer traditional arts, by taking into account the entire findings and research questions, and reflecting on the insights gained.

6.1 Meta-Analysis

6.1.1 The Dynamism as opposed to Fixed and Static Structure

As stated in Chapter 2, each individual (female/male young person) and each category (youth) acts within the social structure. Although the structure is often considered to be static, I argue that the structure is also fluid, and changing. While the structure gradually changes with time, individuals try to find ways to exercise their agency within the structure. Namely, I even realized that what youths preserve or create is actually not fixed. Besides, the character of the individual as human agent itself has the potential to change. As a result, we can see that the relationship of agent and structure is dynamic, and changeable.

In the context of Cambodia's situation, the social structure is influenced by social and economic situation, and the historical background. The present social structure of Cambodia is affected by various factors, such as globalization and the destruction of culture by the Pol Pot regime. It seems that young people engage in the traditional arts in complicated circumstances. In particular, as stated by young people themselves, globalization affects the social structure, which includes day-to-day culture and the traditional Culture.

Globalization affects modern day-to-day culture. Many young people feel a sense of crisis, in particular, by the influence of the Korean culture, while other youths feel it as a new positive opportunity. Students feel uneasy about the change of lifestyle, such as fashion or hairstyle, and one artist expressed his misgivings about even the change of temperament in males. As some artists mentioned, globalization influences the formal traditional Culture directly. They referred to a specific Cambodian traditional dance and its design of postures is beginning to be forgotten because of the impact of globalization. At the same time, some youths accept globalization by admitting the merit of learning foreign culture, and the opportunities to compare various cultures. On the whole, individuals are challenged to exercise their agency within the fluid social structure, which is influenced by globalization.

As a result of changes in the social structure, several obstacles were referred in interviews of both students and teachers in Chapter 4 (4.3). The transition of priority in dealing with daily lives represents the change in the social structure. Owing to 'market and career competitiveness (Sam 2007:125)', the attractiveness of the traditional arts as a subject might be diminishing in modern Cambodian society. In fact, many students confront the difficulty to get jobs after graduation. Besides, the reality of teachers, such as low salaries and low status, is also regarded as the result of changes in the social structure. Moreover, the tears in a teacher's eyes represent the gap between his enthusiasm and public indifference to the traditional arts.

At the same time, the character of the individual as human agent itself might have changed. This is observed in the change of the quality and disposition of young students, introduced in 4.3.2. Teachers and experienced artists mentioned that the young generation seems to be impatient, or stick to freedom, compared with the older generation.

As we could see in detail, I argued that the structure is also fluid and changing, hence the relationship of agent and structure is dynamic, and changeable. In conclusion, Cambodian young people engage in the traditional arts within the fluid and dynamic social structure.

6.1.2 Creative Agency in Dynamism

As stated in the previous part, the structure is not static. Also, I could observe that Cambodian youths were creatively reacting to this dynamism of the social structure, in which they were involved. I recognized that youths are creative forces, and their creativity itself has several elements such as preserving, hybridizing, and creating. Although the aspect of destroyer was assumed in Chapter 2, I found that there is no such destruction of culture by destroyer going on. I have not found any explicit actor of destruction. Despite all the labels, which may be given, it is more preserving plus hybridizing plus recreating. In this process, Cambodian youths contribute to the whole nation state.

Firstly, it could be observed that there were several pathways for Cambodian youths to start to learn traditional arts. Although some students were interested in arts, from the beginning, and recognized their mission and roles as bearers of the traditional arts, other students were encouraged, and sometimes, forced to learn the Khmer performing arts by family members. In addition, some were recommended by schools, supported by scholarship, and affected by the inspiration to go to Phnom Penh from rural areas. Data shows that, in some cases, these were not necessarily the entire choices of youth to start traditional arts. To sum up, there are different pathways for youth to learn the arts as bearers of culture, and those pathways are combined.

Even after Cambodian youths accept their roles as bearers of culture, they have several choices and possibilities thereafter. Some students accept and adapt to the role of safe-guarders of Khmer cultural reconstruction by becoming teach-

ers at the school or official dancers at the National Theater as their occupations in traditional arts. In these cases, they stay as bearers consistently, based on their passion to preserve the Khmer performing arts.

Some students negotiate their roles as bearers of culture by pursuing a different kind of specialization in addition to the arts, such as accounting or pedagogy, as a practical strategy to earn their livings. In this case, they demonstrate their creativity to adjust themselves according to constrained circumstances. Other students reject the role as bearers, and give up their studies in the arts because they consider the difficulty to get jobs after graduation, or realize they do not have the talent for dancing. In another case, maternity leave causes a female to suspend her career as a dancer. This case shows that women have to lead a day-to-day life, and fulfill a role in her household, while she engages in traditional arts.

Other youths manipulate the role of safe-guarders of traditional arts, while valuing their self-realization. These artists start to realize their passion as their roles as creators. They have an urge to create hybridized expression through contemporary dance. It can be seen that they have impulses to express themselves by showing their creativity, namely, to exercise their agency as creators. Importantly, while most artists have urges to develop the contemporary dance scene, they all recognize the expected role to pass on what they have learnt to the next generation. Clearly, these young people are aware of their multiple roles as both bearers and creators. In other words, they are creative enough to manipulate their multiple roles, and exercise their agency to act not only as bearers but also as creators.

Regarding relationship between youth and culture, as mentioned in Chapter 2 (2.3), there are multiple dimensions in how Cambodian youths take part in both day-to-day culture and formal culture. They not necessarily cope solely with the Khmer formal traditional culture. In fact, I witnessed young students listening to Korean pop music through their mobile phones while a break in traditional dancing class. In this case, youths are engaged in formal traditional arts, while they are involved in modern day-to-day culture. Furthermore, young artists belong to the globalized society, and a modern day-to-day culture, which was affected by foreign countries, definitely stimulated them to explore the possibility to mix formal traditional culture and formal modern culture, namely contemporary dance. To sum up briefly, in the real world, Cambodian youths negotiate their positions toward a sense of culture, within a society where not only formal culture in both traditional and modern meanings, but also day-to-day culture in both traditional and modern aspects, coexist.

Considering these aspects, the very simplistic notion of bearers or creators is not able to explain the function of youths in the dynamic structure. In reality, Cambodian youths demonstrate their creativity constantly to negotiate their positions toward the Khmer traditional arts, within or outside a spectrum between bearer and creator, under the dynamic day-to-day culture. In these continuous processes, they do exercise their agency.

6.2 Conclusion and further reflections

As I got a chance to watch the contemporary dance performed in Groningen city, the Netherlands, I could meet again six artists of the Amrita Performing Arts (APA), whom I have interviewed in Cambodia. Undoubtedly, they are the driving force of the future of contemporary dance in Cambodia, and they will be able to get increasing numbers of opportunities to perform abroad in the future. In fact, their performance in this European tour was awarded the patronage prize as part of the Zurich Theater Festival. According to the reason for a reception of the prize, the head of the jury mentioned that this performance was ‘a successful piece because its topic, the tension between tradition and modernity, is strongly reflected in the movement aesthetics’ (Zurcher Theater Spektakel 2012). The artists of APA will definitely have a large number of offers from international dance organization.

Through their contemporary dancing performance, I felt their strong passion to express their identities as flesh-and-blood persons, beyond the role as bearers, which is expected from the government, the school, and the whole of Cambodia. I felt their anger, and was counterattacked by their pulses, as if they were insisting that they will not submit tamely to accepting the role of exhibition as world heritage. It seemed as if they had rejected being controlled like puppets. It was not until I watched their performance without their gorgeous costumes that I, at last, began to understand how young artists really feel.

More importantly, the young artists do not solely seek new expression through contemporary dance. They clearly recognize the importance of traditional and classical arts as their bases, while they try to express themselves. Further, they are strongly committed to training the younger generation. In this sense, their creativity itself has several elements such as preserving, hybridizing, and creating. These findings are beyond my imagination.

What I learnt from the fieldwork in Cambodia was that my initial notion of young people being either bearers or creators of culture was inadequate to capture the reality. In reality, Cambodian youths always demonstrate their creativity to negotiate their positions toward the Khmer traditional arts, within or outside a spectrum between bearer and creator, under the dynamic day-to-day culture. Sometimes, they adapt to the role as bearers, sometimes, reject or manipulate their positions. In these continuous processes, they do exercise their agency, and take part in cultural reconstruction of the Khmer performing arts.

Certainly, it is very hard for young Cambodian people to work in the process of cultural reconstruction in the present situation. Owing to the dawn of market-oriented tendency, Cambodian society loses its interest in the traditional arts. In fact, young artists and art students face various obstacles to continue their activity in the Khmer performing arts. On the other hand, the Cambodian government seeks to revive Khmer culture through a promotion plan, using the framework of tourism development, which reflects their sense of crisis (Hagai 2008). Numerous international non-government organizations have also

dealt persistently with the cultural renaissance (Frumberg 2010). As we can see several trials to mix traditional Khmer dance with contemporary movement, there is a limitless potential for new expressions. In these circumstances, young Cambodian people have several options to take part in the Khmer performing arts, though choices are not so plentiful.

As Frumberg (2011) states, young artists and students in Cambodia, are taking responsibility for their own cultural destiny. Definitely, young Cambodian people bear the destiny of the Khmer traditional arts. They have creative potential to adapt themselves vis-à-vis any unpredictable change in the social structure. I listened to young people's voices, and those voices represented the youths' number of ways to relate to a day-to-day and formal culture. No two voices were the same. What is more, all voices were permeated with their own personality and creativity. When I close my eyes, the faces of students and artists come back vividly alive in my memory. Their keen passion and their steady activities constitute a powerful force to shape the future of the Khmer performing arts in Cambodia, and contribute to Cambodia's cultural identity.

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Annex A: Lists of the interviewed Participants

The students of the Secondary School of Fine Arts (SSFA) and the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA)

| No. | Gender | Date of Interview | Age | The place of birth (km: how far from Phnom Penh city) | Specialization |
|-----|--------|-------------------|-----|---|------------------|
| 1 | Female | 20/07/2012 | 18 | Kho Kong (220km) | Yike Theater |
| 2 | Male | 20/07/2012 | 21 | Takeo (70km) | Yike Theater |
| 3 | Female | 23/07/2012 | 18 | Phnom Penh (0km) | Classical dance |
| 4 | Female | 23/07/2012 | 20 | Phnom Penh (0km) | Classical dance |
| 5 | Male | 23/07/2012 | 19 | Kandal (15km) | Mask dance |
| 6 | Male | 23/07/2012 | 16 | Kampong Chhnang (85km) | Mask dance |
| 7 | Female | 23/07/2012 | 25 | Kampong Speu (45km) | Folklore dance |
| 8 | Male | 23/07/2012 | 22 | Kampong Speu (45km) | Folklore dance |
| 9 | Male | 01/08/2012 | 22 | Phnom Penh (0km) | Mask dance |
| 10 | Male | 01/08/2012 | 20 | Pailin (300km) | Mask dance |
| 11 | Female | 02/08/2012 | 22 | Kandal (15km) | Folklore dance |
| 12 | Female | 02/08/2012 | 22 | Battambang (260km) | Speaking theater |
| 13 | Male | 03/08/2012 | 24 | Phnom Penh (0km) | Mask dance |
| 14 | Male | 03/08/2012 | 23 | – | Mask dance |

The artists of the Amrita Performing Arts (APA)

| No. | Gender | Date of Interview | Age | Specialization |
|-----|--------|-------------------|-----|---|
| 1 | Female | 20/07/2012 | 26 | Classical dance |
| 2 | Female | 24/07/2012 | 30 | Classical dance |
| 3 | Male | 25/07/2012 | 24 | Mask dance |
| 4 | Female | 28/07/2012 | 27 | Classical dance/Folklore dance/ Shadow puppetry |
| 5 | Female | 31/07/2012 | 28 | Classical dance / Folklore dance |
| 6 | Male | 11/08/2012 | 31 | Mask dance |

The teachers at the Secondary School of Fine Arts (SSFA)

| No. | Gender | Date of Interview | Teaching experience | Specialization |
|-----|--------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Male | 20/07/2012 | Almost 10 years | Folklore dance |
| 2 | Female | 20/07/2012 | Director, More than 30 years | Folklore dance |
| 3 | Male | 23/07/2012 | For 16 years | Mask dance |
| 4 | Male | 02/08/2012 | For 15 years | Bassac theater |

Annex B: The Map of Cambodia



Source: <<http://www.geographicguide.net/asia/cambodia.htm>>(Accessed on 2nd November, 2012)

Annex C: Interview Guide for Data Collection

The following questions were asked as the guidance for semi structured interviews.

Interview Question for Students

As the first explanation

1. This interview is aimed for my research on 'The role of Cambodian youth in cultural reconstruction of the Khmer traditional arts'.
2. The content of this interview is confidential.
3. I don't evaluate your answers, and I don't tell your answers to your teacher.
4. Hence, please feel free to say anything.

General background question

1. Can I have your name? Age? Which province are you from? Specialization? (Classical dance / Folklore / Mask dance)

Questions about the beginning of the study

1. When did you start learning the traditional arts?
2. Why did you decide to study?
3. You decided by yourself? Someone recommended? Your family supports?

Questions about the present time

1. Do you enjoy the class?
2. How do you spend a day? How many hours do you practice? (week-day/weekend)
3. What do you like the most about the school?
4. What is the most struggling (hard) thing in the school?

Questions about the change

1. Do you feel that you had changed since you learnt the traditional arts?
2. In what way? Is it a growth?

Question about the future

1. What do you want to do in the future? (by the skill)
2. How long do you want to continue the study?
3. Do you have any plans or dreams in your life?

Questions about the culture

1. What do you think about the traditional Khmer culture?
2. What do you think about the new culture, globalized culture, pop music, and American culture?
3. What do you think about the future of Cambodia?

Questions about choice and gender

If you were male/female, you chose the same way as you did?

Interview Question for Teachers

As the first explanation

1. This interview is aimed for my research on 'The role of Cambodian youth in cultural reconstruction of the Khmer traditional arts'.
2. The content of this interview is confidential.

General background questions

1. Can I have your name?
2. How long have you taught the traditional arts? (Can I ask your age?)
3. What is your specialization? (Classical dance / Folklore / Mask dance)

Questions about the generation

1. What is the difference of the situation between you (your generation) and your students?

(For example, a: the reason to learn the traditional arts, b: the motivation, c: the attitude to learn)

2. What do you think about your students?

(For example, the future of students is bright?)

Questions about the culture

1. What do you think about the present situation of the traditional arts (after the loss of culture by Khmer Rouge)?
2. What do you think about the new culture, globalized culture, pop music, and American culture?
3. What do you think about the future of Cambodia?

Question about the choice

If you were young at this moment, you choose to learn the traditional arts (as the same way as you did)?