

AMBOK PRODUCTION AT SVAY CHRUM DISTRICT, SVAY RIENG PROVINCE

Interviewees

Date	Name	Location
17 September 2021	Mr. Udom (Head of Ambok processing Community)	Romdeng village
16 September 2021	Old villagers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pal Yat - Sou Saphy - Sin Pha - Klok Saban - Klok Sambath - Bo Ry 	Krol Kol Village
02 October 2021	Pen Saron (Ambok producer)	Thlok village
02 October 2021	Mrs. Ry (Ambok producer)	Thlok village
21 October 2021	Srey Nich (Ambok producer)	Kok Kandol
27 October 2021	Pen Sokunthea (Ambok producer)	Thlok village
27 October 2021	Chan Theary (Ambok producer)	Kok Kandol
27 October 2021	Prak Sophy (Ambok producer)	Prek Top
10 November 2021	Ambok producer (Ambok producer)	Kampong Thom
17 November 2021	Mao Bunthoeun (Consumer) Rus Vanna (Consumer) Kan Sophal (Consumer)	Phnom Penh

Introduction

Ambok (Flatten rice) is a type of processed food product for Khmer people since ancient times, which is closely associated with one of the main Khmer ceremonies: the Water Festival, the floating of lanterns, the worship of the moon god, and the Og Ambok festival. Every November of year, the Water Festival, Cambodians do not forget the Ambok, which is an important food to celebrate in this festival, they always pray Ambok to the moon on the night of the full moon.

Some people especially young generation living in the city do not know how Ambok is made. Traditionally, people in rural areas usually gather to produce Ambok at night time under the full moon light after completed rice harvesting and to celebrate the annual rice yield.

Currently, beside a primary rice occupation, Ambok producing becomes a daily business of people that generate additional income in order to support the family lives. The Ambok business exists in some provinces include Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang, Kampong Thom and Siem Reap etc.,



The origin of Ambok based on Buddhist tale

Eating Ambok and Moon festival is a traditional festival in Cambodian society that is closely related to the history of the Buddha and is performed by the Cambodian people to commemorate the bodhisattva who was born as a bodhisattva rabbit and sacrificed his life. In fulfillment of alms to Indra Brahman, according to Buddhist legends, the Bodhisattva was born a bodhisattva rabbit. During a full moon, the bodhisattva rabbit prays for auspiciousness and dedicates himself to the

bodhisattva's bodhicitta in order to attain enlightenment. Indra knew this, he disguised himself as an old Brahmin and asked the bodhisattva rabbit for food. After hearing the request of the Brahmin rabbit, the bodhisattva ordered the Brahmin to start a fire, and the bodhisattva rabbit shook three times so that all the insects clinging to his fur fell out and immediately jumped into the fire. The fire is no longer burning like before. Seeing this, Indra Brahmin rushed to bring the bodhisattva rabbit and flew to the center of the moon forever.

By the power of the bodhisattva's hand and the prayers of Indra, the image of the rabbit is still in the center of the moon to this day, and everyone sees the image of the rabbit clearly on the 15th day of birth (full moon day). The locals always hold this celebration every year to commemorate the bodhisattva in the pagodas, villages, districts and towns, with bananas, coconut water, fruit every year to the bodhisattva. Thus, the story of Buddhism and the bodhisattva rabbit became a strong belief for the Khmer people and then organized a festival to worship the moon in progress in Cambodian society because the influence of Buddhism is deeply rooted in the souls of the whole Khmer nation, who always worshiped the Samma Samputa as their lord, especially the bodhisattva who was born as a rabbit, imprinted his image with the moon to enlighten the world forever.

Eating of Ambok

Traditionally, Cambodians choose the 15th day of the month to celebrate the worship of the moon and eat Ambok at 12 o'clock that night, because the moon has a full circle, brighter than any other night and the moon near the planet. Where humans and animals live, it is easy to communicate, see and hear each other. In the absence of technology in weather forecasting, this month, during the worship service, candles are lit on fresh banana leaves to wish next year's rain. After lighting the candles, they perform Og Ambok, which is done that night, and during the worship of the moon god and eat Ambok, the Cambodian people always raise their hands to pray for good luck in the ancient tradition.

Khmer people celebrate Og Ambok at pagodas and at home after the rice harvest to dedicate to the deities in the moon worship ceremony, which provides favorable weather and pray for rain and rice production. Good or bad results next year. On the other hand, Cambodian farmers in the rice fields had the opportunity to meet man and woman. They expressed their intimacy with each other in the favor of the tradition under the eyes of their parents.

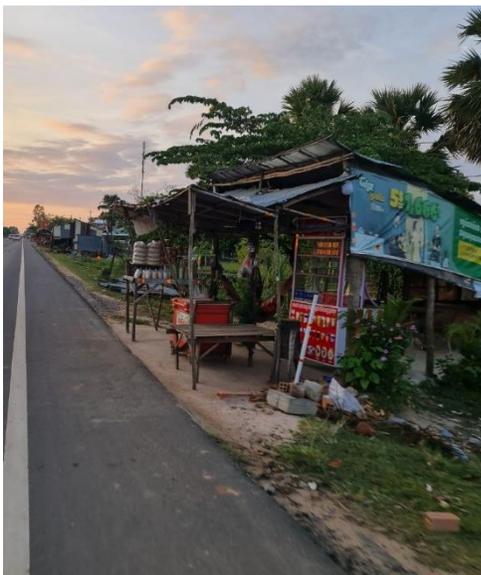
Svay Chrum flatten rice

Geographically, Svay Chrum is a district of Svay Rieng province, which situates on the southeast of Cambodia, about 125 kilometers from Phnom Penh. Beside rice production as the main agricultural occupation, people in that area have produced Ambok as their second family-based business which generate additional income to support the family.

Ambok has a long traditional production in Svay Rieng province like other provinces in Cambodia. Producers at Svay Chrum area have unique expertise to make Ambok crispier in feature that allow its recognition on local market and among Cambodian consumers.

The growth of selling Ambok in the area began with Mrs. Pen Saron's family, who engaged in the producing Ambok to sell at Svay Chrum market, about 1.5 km west of her house in 1985. At that time, she used many types of rice varieties that she was able to buy from villages to make Ambok such as Pro Pey, Phkar Ampel, Neang Sor, Neang Khmao, Krosang Teap. She punched Ambok in the early morning and ready to sell at the afternoon.

In early 1990s, Mrs. Saron built a wooden store to sell Ambok in front of their house at Thlok village on National Road No. 1. After then, the sales had grown gradually from day to day, leading the neighbors who wanted to do this business came to learn to do Ambok as well. The growth of the Ambok business has expanded the family business more and more from village to village in Svay Chrum district. Currently, the Ambok selling has spread to seven villages include Thlok, Krol Ko, Kok Kandol, Nearea Ten, Daun Lep, Prek Top and Trabek Prohong. There are approximately 100 stores engaged in Ambok business.



- Ambok Sruoy is made by double roasted, while Ambok Svet is made by only one time roast.
- Ambok Sruoy is well roast and it does not cause any health problem (diarrhea) comparing to Ambok Svet.
- Ambok Sruoy is less aromatic than Ambok Svet
- Ambok Sruoy is less sweet than Ambok Svet
- Ambok Sruoy is dim white color than Ambok Svet

The Ambok producers in Svay Chrum district make only Ambok Sruoy for supplying in the market. The unique characteristic of making this by double roasting. First, they roast rice to punch into Ambok and package together with bran and husk in a sack after punching. When they need to sell, they roast them again (called chao) to make Ambok crispy, then they screen to select good Ambok for sale by removing bran, husk and small pieces of Ambok.

Type of rice

Currently, Ambok producers use only Romdul rice, which is one of the best rice types to produce Ambok because:

- It makes Ambok crispy and fragrant than other rice.
- The yield of Ambok production is higher than other rice with an average yield of 3.5 kg of Ambok consumes 10 kg of Romdul rice.
- It can keep for consumption up to a month.

Glutinous rice is another kind of rice that produce Ambok with good taste and fragrant, but it is produced by handed punching (traditional method of Ambok making) mostly in special occasion and by consumer ordering. The characteristics of Ambok made from glutinous rice are:

- Short time storage, which less than 15 days
- Low yield of Ambok production with an average of 10 kg of glutinous rice yield on 1kg of Ambok.
- It cannot be eaten much because it causes the throat to be hot
- The selling price is double higher than Romdul rice

There is optional type of rice to be produced Ambok such as aromatic ER rice. However, there is not market because it is not tasty, fragrant, bitter and uses a lot of fertilizer to grow.

How to make Ambok

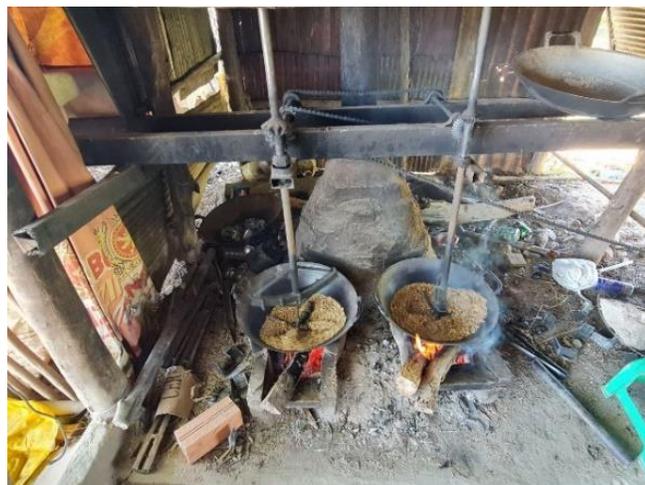
About rice

- The rice is dried under the sun for 3 to 4 hours to make rice husk tighten the grain.
- Then it gets washed to remove debris and rice which has failed to develop, and left to dry overnight.



Roasting rice

Traditionally, Khmer people roasted rice using clay pot with stick wood about 1 meter long. Currently, Producers use machinery to roast rice with two pans, one pan for drying rice using low heat and fast stirring. Another for roasting until the grains explode to 15% to 20% of roasted grains using high heat and slow stirring.



Source: www.enn-news.com

Punching Ambok

There are three methods of punching Ambok

A. Punching Ambok using hand pestles

It is an ancient method with people standing around the large mortar using long pestles of 1.5 meter in length and shredding wood of 1 meter in length to shred roasted rice until it is flat and scatter the rice husk. There are two punchers using two long pestles and one shredding wood. Currently, this method is still used in festivals or entertainment at pagodas and villages only in order to show to young generation.



B. Punching Ambok using foot pestle

This method uses two people, one is responsible for punching roasted rice with foot pestle and another is responsible for shredding roasted rice in the mortar using iron tool for shredding. This method is used for family business, which can yield an average of 40 kg of roasted rice per day, as it can be punched with an average of 1.5 can of rice per time.



Source: www.wmc.org.kh

C. Punching Ambok using machine

Currently, most family businesses use machine to punch Ambok instead of foot pestle. This method can reduce manpower, punch quicker and get more yield of Ambok. This needs only one person to shred roasted rice using shredding iron and the machine is used as punching the rice. Normally, the producer can punch Ambok up to 100kg of roasted rice per day.



Screening Ambok

In order to have good quality product after punching, the producer remove husk, bran and small pieces of Ambok using flat basket. The husk, bran and unused flatten rice become food for ducks.



Rice supply

- At the beginning, producers bought rice from their villages to produce Ambok. They use several types of rice as they could buy from.
- After that, producers have ordered Romdul rice from main suppliers in Prey Veng province, who collected rice from other provinces such as Kampong Cham, Pursat, Battambang, Prey Veng and so on. The reason of ordering from those suppliers because they can supply pure rice, and are able to provide more rice on credit. The price of Romdul rice to be purchased from suppliers is 0.38 UD dollar per kilogram.
- The reason why producers do not buy to Romdul rice in Svay Rieng province because it becomes more abundant as farmers often change their rice varieties on the same field. Moreover, rice cultivation is mostly family use and not for sale, which leads to insufficient supply for Ambok producing.

Storage and package

Th Ambok is packaged in plastic bag with no label and tight it without using rubber band. The Ambok cannot stay in the air for a long time because it causes to be hard. The Ambok is kept tightly in a bag or glass with a closed mouth. The quantity of Ambok in the plastic bag for sale can be 2 cans, 5 cans and 10 cans. Some outlets also sell in kilograms.



Market

Much sales of Ambok are in November because of the rice-rich months and the Water Festival. The selling price is 2.5 US dollar per one kilogram. The selling price can go up to 3.38 US dollar per one kilogram in November because it is the month of the Water Festival, the floating of lanterns, the worship of the moon god, and the Og Ambok. Sellers can sell up to 100 kg of Ambok per day during those months and down sales to 10 kg in normal day of the other months. Most of the customers are travelers who come to Svay Rieng and buy Ambok back home and for relatives and friends. Each purchase can be from 1 kg to 5 kg. Customers who buy Ambok in Svay Chrum area usually satisfy its quality as tasty, crispy and delicious than Ambok made by other provinces.

The consumption of Ambok

The Ambok can be eaten without any mixture because it is a kind of cooked food. Having Ambok immediately after punching gives it a delicious and aromatic tastes. However, in order to get the Ambok more delicious, people often eat it with various dishes such as eating Ambok with dried fish, maple sugar or fried Ambok, etc.



The Ambok can also be processed into other foods according to the consumer's preferences, with ingredients including:

1. Ambok with ripe banana

People like to get Ambok with ripe banana more than other types of bananas. There are two ways to eat Ambok with banana: First, they mix ripe banana and Ambok, and second, they dip banana with the Ambok directly. These two ways of eating the Ambok are based on the tastes and preferences of the people.



2. Ambok mixed with coconut water

It can also be mixed with young coconut water to have a delicious sweet taste. Boil the young coconut, remove the water, scrape the meat into pieces, then put the Ambok in the coconut water to make it expands and then add the coconut meat and mix the sugar to sweet taste.



3. Ambok with roasted meat

Another popular favorite to make creative food is to roast the Ambok with meat (pork or beef) by mixing the ingredients and some shrimp.

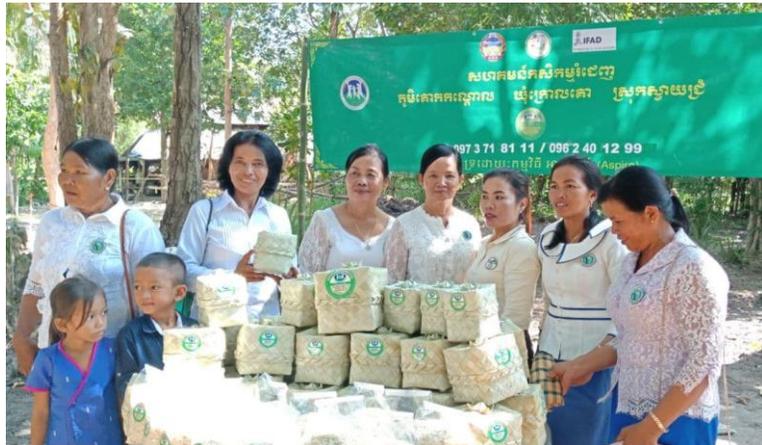


Protection and trademark

At present, the Ambok is recognized as a processed product of Svay Rieng province and is under the control of the Ambok processing community, which is an activity of the Rumdenh Agricultural Community of the Provincial Department of Agriculture. Currently, the Ambok processing community has 32 operators among total Ambok producers in Svay Chrum. The main activities of this community are to encourage those operators to improve the quality and package of Ambok by comparing the processing of Ambok with other operators. The quality to be checked including:

- Better packaging
- Longer storage
- Preventing odors

Moreover, the community organizes hand punching Ambok in events such as provincial exhibition, festival, ceremony both inside and outside the province. In the events, the Ambok is packaged in bags and palm leaves with the logo of Rumdenh Agricultural community.



Impact Analysis

Perception by Ambok processing community

The Ambok processing community expressed hope for the future when encountered during the present study. Currently, the community has limited effort to motivate Ambok producers to improve the quality and market approach. Therefore, the community hope that project support for the quality system as well as promote market efforts for Ambok production.

Impact on local economic

Ambok production is an additional income for people in rural area in order to support their living and education of their children. Although rice production is the main occupation, this activity cannot fully support family lives as increasing family expense while unstable yield of rice production and its price. Building capacity of producers ensures the quality that raise consumers' awareness among Cambodian market. However, poorest producers will face some difficulty in adopting the quality due to a lack of investment capital.

Social Impact

Ambok is a long traditional production of Cambodia and it is one of a provincial identification that need to be protected. The preservation and promotion of the tradition of Ambok will contribute to protection of Khmer heritage product for the next generation.

Conclusions and recommendation

Strengths

- Svay Chrum Ambok is recognized by local market and among Cambodians
- It characterized as crisper compared to other provincial producers
- It is recognized by provincial department of agriculture as the Svay Rieng product

Weakness

- The Ambok sales with no labelled packaging
- There is no quality control to every producer
- Some producers do not consider the hygiene of producing Ambok
- The Ambok processing Community has limit resource to promote the Ambok quality
- Rice variety in SR does not qualify to produce good Ambok quality

Ongoing activities

- The study suggests to have next project by collaboration with provincial department of agriculture in order to promote the Svay Chrum Ambok by development of strategy for quality system and marketing awareness.
- Moreover, the unique characteristic of Ambok Svay Rieng should be identified on layout decoration and packaging.

Reference

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