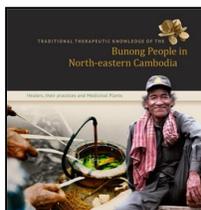


## Chran Dim - The Long Apprenticeship

***“I would need to be aged 50 to be a Kruu Boran”*** (a Traditional Health Practitioner in Khmer) such is the importance and reverence of age and experience for these essential first-line health providers among Mondulkiri’s remote Bunong Indigenous communities. Dim is aged just 29 but has been learning his craft from a small boy. He has accompanied his father to find health plants in the forests and observe healing ceremonies.



Dim is the second child of 10 in his family. He and an older sister (who is disabled) were born in the forest when his parents were alone. Dim’s father attended to his wife’s birth of Dim. If fate had been different, Dim may have grown up knowing only such a life and little of the outside world. But then dramatic events before and after he was born have shaped his life. Today, he hopes to put those events behind him, as he attends a national six-month training course in traditional medicine in Phnom Penh. This, he hopes, will lead to a new family business with a shop and treatment facility.



Dim’s parents came together and were married by the Khmer Rouge, although in their case they were happy to do so. They have had an enduring marriage despite so many hazards. His mother is Khmer. His father, Jiran, is Bunong and features in Nomad’s book about traditional medicine. Although the Khmer Rouge forces were defeated in 1979, resistance pockets remained in areas such as Mondulkiri until 1998.

Dim’s earliest childhood memories are of the sounds of bombing and gunfire, with the family’s bags always packed with their most important possessions, ready to run away at any time. Eventually like many Bunong, they made their way by foot, often at night, over the mountains to Anlong Veng near the Thai border in North-West Cambodia. The journey took at least one year, holed up sometimes for days, to hide from military. Dim remembers being constantly hungry and frightened. It was in Anlong Veng where his father resumed traditional health medicine. It was there that Dim, aged 12 or 13, first worked with his father. As the eldest son, it is his responsibility to assist the family to make a living. Anlong Veng did not last long, however, as again the family escaped danger and crossed the border to live in the Pan Noch refugee camp. Like most refugees, all the family wanted to do was to go home. In 1998, when the Khmer Rouge finally gave up its armed struggle, UNHCR offered to help them back to Mondulkiri, and they jumped at the chance.

“New Hope” village became their new home. UNHCR provided them with some rice and salt, he remembers, and authorities gave them 4 hectares to farm that they still have today. In this sense, as Dim acknowledges they are lucky as many Bunong people have lost their land to economic concessions. His village is located inside the Phnom Prich Wildlife Sanctuary, a protected area by the Ministry of Environment supported by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The family still enjoys access to community forestry to search for medicinal plants. That task now usually falls on Dim as his father has difficulty in walking these days.

Dim, with just two of the 10 siblings, has been able to attend school, in his case for less than two years. Thanks to his mother’s native language and being self-taught, he has good speaking and fair writing Khmer skills, as well as his Bunong spoken-only language. If he had not acquired this knowledge, he would not have been able to join the course in Phnom Penh. There he is one of just two Bunong in a class of 52, the first-ever students from Mondulkiri. Apart from their escape to Anlong Veng, it is his first trip away from

home and to the big city of Phnom Penh! Almost all others on his course, including around 10 women, are much older. Originally the invitation was for his father but he asked for Dim to take his place due to his immobility. The course is significant as it will bestow on the Kru Boran, still often called “*Bu Blao*” in Bunong “*one who knows*”, official recognition by the Ministry of Health. Traditional Health Practitioners have



struggled to be recognized until the National Centre for Traditional Health succeeded in being included in national health policies. That struggle was partly caused by widespread discredit through enforced methods of the Khmer Rouge by people “who did not know”. Dim’s father and many Kru Boran are acknowledged to be true and effective practitioners, a status that Dim hopes to accomplish.

*Dim’s father Jiran treating a patient who has come to his house. Jiran always initiates a ceremony to get the support from the spirits during the cure.*

The new policy, for Bunong People, accords closer to the World Health Organization definition of good health “*A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being*”, as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Articles 24 and 31 on traditional medicines and plants, etc. Animism places great importance on metaphysical forces that influence health, diagnosis and cure. These are explained in the book or by reference to Nomad’s website - <http://nomadrsi.org/Medicinal-Plants.html>

Dim’s course is class-based and with practical study trips to two provinces, Kampong Speu and Kandal. He is very impressed by the knowledge of the teachers, and appreciates that his accommodation has been provided by Cambodia Corps, Inc. for Indigenous students. This has helped to make it possible for him to attend. [http://www.cambodiacorps.org/University\\_Program/Current\\_Students.html](http://www.cambodiacorps.org/University_Program/Current_Students.html)

Dim’s family is still very poor. They have a modest house, no electricity, TV etc. In fact if Dim were to marry it could require the major sacrifice of one or both two buffaloes that they need for farming. Now patients come to the family house and are treated there, but Dim would like it to be organized better, with a shop to store and sell medicines. For now though, that is a dream. He hopes someday the money can be found for it. Dim’s father, like many Bunong Kru Boran, first learned of his vocation through a dream, a signal from ancestral or other spirits. Dim cannot be sure if he has had a similar dream. Such knowledge is often passed from parent to child. However he can personally vouch for his father’s ministrations. He once had serious knee troubles. It was suggested that he made his way to the hospital, but instead they tried his father’s treatment.... and it worked!

We wish Dim well during his course and for when he returns to join his father in their vital traditional health service to their community and to ensure it continues on to future generations.



*Dim with John and Vanny, Nomad colleagues and Bunong neighbours, who made a point of calling in to meet him to see how he is doing on his course. John and Vanny were travelling from Mondulkiri to Malaysia as guests of “Non-Timber Forestry Products (NTFP) for a SE Asian Regional Conference on Indigenous People and forestry resources.*