Most research on late 19th century and 20th century Cambodian history has concerned itself with “official” history, recording events perceived as important and focusing on leaders and rulers. If we want to know about the everyday life and experiences of ordinary people during this period, these official histories do not offer us much information. For example, when we hear elderly people talking about “wearing the water jar”, “wearing the tin gas can”, or “wearing the house”, few official histories that we know of can tell us much about these habits of the early 1940s. Through our interviews with elderly people, however, we learned that these figures of speech refer to an extreme shortage of clothing during the time of Japanese occupation in World War II. At that time, some families - especially those living in remote areas of the countryside - sometimes had only one set of clothing for all members of the family to share. Thus, while one family member went out wearing that set of clothing, the rest of the family hid themselves naked in their house. If visitors came to the house, the owner of the house would only poke his head out of the door or window in order to greet the guest. Sometimes they used a tin gas can to cover themselves, or they went and sat in the water jar to hide their nudity from the person they wanted to talk to. This everyday history produced the figures of
speech which we still hear the elderly using—
"the era when we wore the water jar, wore the
gas can, or wore the house." Such details of
life in Cambodian society will die with the
elderly people who experienced them. Our
project, The Memory Bank, aims to collect
such local everyday histories.

Over the last two years, we have
interviewed many elderly people over the age
of sixty, both about their own experiences,
and about their memories of events and
experiences which their parents and
grandparents told them when they were little.
Thus the horizon of their memory stretches
back over the 20th century to the end of the
19th century.

It is not generally a habit in
Cambodian culture to write down records of
the everyday experiences which unfold
around us. Instead, lived experiences are told
orally, passed down from generation to
generation by telling. Recent events, such as
the Khmer Rouge Regime and the ongoing
political uncertainties, have made inter-
viewing people and asking questions about
the past more difficult, since the elderly are
often afraid. Society as a whole does not
necessarily value the details of the lives of
ordinary people, and memories seem only to
be told (often in abbreviated form) to
grandchildren or small circles of relatives or
friends. Young people are not necessarily
accustomed to asking the elderly about their experiences. Given this context, our interview project often seemed strange at first to our elderly interviewees, and they were sometimes cautious or even hesitant to speak. We had to seek ways to make them trust us, and we spent long periods of time with them so that they would agree to be interviewed in detail on video and tape. After conducting these interviews for more than two years now, we have gathered a wealth of information which we never imagined when we began. Many possible themes and topics have emerged from our interviews.

Clothing and the care of the self is one of these topics which we choose to elaborate here as a catalogue and exhibition. Through detailed interviews, we tried to illuminate habits of clothing and the care of the self from the late 19th century to the 20th century, recording some traditional forms of clothing and ways of caring for the body which are virtually forgotten today, while also charting changes in clothing and makeup which occurred in the region today known as Cambodia during the late 19th century and the early 20th century. Up to the end of the 19th century, local people seem to have generally used and exchanged things made from the natural environment which surrounded them. For example, villagers burned the wood of the pti tree, the skins of
Figure 2: The Queen of Cambodia with her two daughters wearing traditional Khmer clothing. Photographed 1866 or 1878 by Gsell. (Photo: National Archives of Cambodia)

Figure 3: The Queen of Cambodia wearing French clothing. Photographed 1866 or 1878 by Gsell. (Photo: National Archives of Cambodia)

bananas, and the ko tree seed in order to make khong water used for washing both clothing and hair. Such habits gradually changed, however, as people increasingly looked to what they perceived as the modern, and came to rely on store-bought manufactured products such as shampoo and soap. The shift to a consumer society, and the influx of Western influences, accelerated in the early 20th century when the region today known as
Cambodia was under a French Protectorate. Outside influences affected not only types of clothing and habits of dress, but also ways of making clothing and the types of cloth used to make clothing. As the 20th century proceeded, some people continued to wear traditional types of clothing, others began to wear local styles of clothing mixed with French clothing, while still others wore only French clothing. This transition was complex and controversial since some people viewed the changes as good, modern, and civilised, while others - particularly the elderly - decried the changes and viewed them as destroying Khmer traditions. Still societal change proceeded and many of these changes (such as wearing shoes and dressing in Western style clothing) have today become habits of the Cambodian people.

In addition to our research on clothing and ways of making clothing, we have included information on what we call the care and decoration of the self. By this we mean the ways in which people took care of their bodies and made them attractive to others. We have not been able to research this topic in detail, but we present here some of the things that we learned through our interviews.

Many of the problems affecting research on Cambodian history in general affected our research on clothing and the care
of the self as well. There is no one who can tell us about the period prior to the end of the 19th century. We can only rely on the little that inscriptions, temple reliefs, and other documents tell us. Chinese reports, like the one written by Chou Ta-Kuan (on his 13th century visit to the region today known as Cambodia), mention clothing briefly. We cannot however definitively say what local inhabitants wore at that time. There are even fewer sources of information about clothing during the Middle Period (the 15th to 18th centuries). Some foreign visitors (Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch) came to the area, and their clothing and habits may have had some influence, although we have no proof of this. For the period after the French established
their Protectorate in 1863, more information becomes available to us in the form of official reports, photographs, magazines, newspapers, and especially the many elderly people who still remember that time.

During the Protectorate, French clothing and habits of caring for and decorating the self entered Cambodia little by little. Such influences spread out from urban areas into the countryside. The late 1930s and early 1940s were a particularly difficult period for Cambodia. Due to World War II, trade was cut off, few goods entered the country, and there was virtually no cloth for sale in the markets. Most of our elderly interviewees called this period, “The time when the Japanese entered the country.” At that time, people with money bought up cloth and stored it so that they could make clothing. Others, like Khlot Samol, did not do so. She told us, “At that time, the wings of planes were made from thick canvas. I ripped cloth from the wings of a broken plane that the Japanese had abandoned on a path in the forest. I used that canvas to make clothes to wear.” Many others used the fibers of the ko tree seed to weave cloth and make clothing. Seeds of the ko tree were easy to find, but the cloth woven from their fibers was not nearly as good as that made from cotton. At that time, French officials confiscated any cloth which they saw being woven out of cotton.
These officials pressured farmers to sell their raw cotton to France. This was completely different from the period preceding the war when almost every local family grew some cotton and wove cloth from it for their own use and sometimes for small scale exchange. We do not know whether the French policy was initiated in order to destroy family weaving, to begin a cooperative industry, or to force local populations to buy imported French cloth. There is not yet enough clear information about this policy to judge it. The war years were chaotic and complex with the French administration still ruling for most of the period under a Japanese military occupation. We do know, however, that due to the lack of both clothing and soap (which was very expensive if it was available at all), many people became infected with a type of skin-burrowing flea which was tiny and white. These dire conditions lasted only for a year or so. After the war ended, conditions improved somewhat and goods began to enter the country again little by little.

After independence, Cambodians had the freedom to rule and develop their country as they wished. Perhaps because the Sangkum Reastr Niyum Government wanted to decrease the country's dependence on imported goods, its policies emphasized the development of domestic industrial production, particularly factories and
artisanal industries weaving silk and cloth. This silk and cloth production was intended not only to fill domestic demand, but also to be exported abroad. In addition to cloth, raw cotton and other agricultural products began to be exported.

During the Sangkum Reastr Niyum Period, the population was encouraged to modernise and, in terms of clothing, came to particularly embrace modern French fashions. Printed materials, such as the magazine Our Village, tried to show rural inhabitants how to dress and present themselves. As the magazine explained, “Before, men and women in our village did not know how to dress and make themselves up. Many women tied their hair back in buns and wore sampot wrapped so that their belly buttons were exposed. Sometimes they didn’t even close their buttons!” Such habits of wearing clothing were considered inappropriate. In cities, decrees were issued ordering people to dress properly when they went to the markets or used public places. Even just to go outside one’s home, the new decrees explained, one should not wear just a knama or a sarong. While such new decrees had some effect on city dwellers, they were generally ineffectual in the face of long-standing traditions and habits of dressing among the predominantly rural population as a whole. Some people embraced such new and modern notions,
while others found them destructive and bad. In particular, people living in the countryside were used to wearing *krama* and *sarong*, and did not alter such habits easily. Today, we still see people wearing *krama* and *sarong* in a way which the 1950s decrees wished to end.

Our research has relied almost entirely on interviewing elderly people. Our particular topic here - clothing and the care of the self - draws more on our interviews with elderly women than with elderly men, since this topic has traditionally played a greater role in the lives of women than in the lives of men. Our interviewees have provided us with

*Figure 6: A drawing contrasting proper and improper dress from *Our Village*, January 1961.*

*Figure 7: Royal Air Cambodge staff. The stewardesses wear (left) traditional Khmer and (right) more modern uniforms. Photographed in the 1960s. (Photo: RAC Magazine, 1997)*
old photographs which they have saved from the past. They have also drawn pictures of the types of clothing they wore when they were little.

We would like to thank the many elderly people who took the time to be interviewed and answered our questions patiently. We apologize that we cannot include all their names in the text that follows. We thank the following institutions for generously allowing us to access and use

Figure 8: Modern fashion presented on the cover of the United States Information Service magazine Lok Serei (Free World) published in the 1950s (vol. 5, #2).
ការបញ្ចប់ការប្រការជាប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ នេះកំណត់ការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ ពីអ្នកការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ នេះកំណត់ការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ ពីអ្នកការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ នេះកំណត់ការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ ពីអ្នកការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ នេះកំណត់ការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ ពីអ្នកការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ នេះកំណត់ការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ ពីអ្នកការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ នេះកំណត់ការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ ពីអ្នកការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការដែលមានការប្រការ នេះកំណត់ការប្រក�