

**THE RITUAL OF WELCOMING TEVADA CHNAM THMAY:
SIGNIFYING THE CIRCULATION OF GODS AND THE BEGINNING
OF THE NEW YEAR TIME CYCLE OF THE KHMER PEOPLE
IN SOC TRANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM**

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Abstract – *The ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay is a meaningful and indispensable event in the Khmer New Year. This ritual denotes the time of a year’s transition and welcomes the new Tevada. The study adopted the theory of symbolic anthropology proposed by Victor Turner to explain the meaning of ritual symbols and considers ritual symbols as a mechanism for maintaining traditional society. By employing the participant observation and sociological interview method in Soc Trang Province, the study contributes to clarifying the appearance, role, and meaning of the Tevada Chnam Thmay in the spiritual life of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam.*

Keywords: *Khmer New Year, ritual symbols, Southern Vietnam, symbolic anthropology, Tevada Chnam Thmay.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Chol Chnam Thmay (ច្រូលឆ្នាំថ្មី) means New Year, which is a significant event for the Khmer community in Southern Vietnam. The New Year celebration consists of a series of consecutive events that take place continuously for three days, from the 13th (or 14th) to the 15th (or 16th) of the fourth month annually. Among these events, the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay marks the final transition from the old year to the new year, and it is welcomed and celebrated by the community with sincere reverence. The

sacred space of the welcoming ritual contributes to the cohesion of family members and the community, reflecting the distinctive cultural and religious practices associated with the New Year celebration of the Khmer community in Southern Vietnam.

The research studies the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay from the perspective of symbolic anthropology. Symbolic anthropology aims to interpret the meanings of symbols in human life. It is represented prominently in this study by Victor Turner, who views ritual symbols as mechanisms that contribute to the maintenance of society. The research aims to clarify the appearance, the role, and the meaning of the ritual.

II. LITERATURE

Research on symbols in rituals has attracted the attention of foreign scholars, such as Victor Turner, who represents the trend of approaching functional structuralism in studying symbols in his work *The Forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. In his study of the Ndembu people’s rituals, he approaches symbols through the investigation of their meanings. According to the author, three aspects need to be explained: (1) the external form and observable characteristics of the symbols; (2) the interpretations provided by experts and the locals; and (3) the broader contextual meanings studied by anthropologists [1]. This article follows the perspective of approaching ritual symbols by explaining the layers of meaning when examining the structure of ritual symbols to clarify the appearance and layers of meaning associated with the ritual symbols of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam.

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The ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay is closely associated with the New Year festival. It has been addressed by several scholars in their works on the traditional cultural festivals of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam.

Regarding the Tevada Chnam Thmay, Le Huong [2, p.47] assumed that Tevada refers to:

‘The celestial beings, the sons of the Jade Emperor Indra, who change every year according to the twelve zodiac signs in a cycle of twelve years. The first God returns after twelve years. Each year, they wear different costumes, consume different foods, and use different instruments. People interpret these details to predict the fortunes and outcomes of the new year.’

In the study on the culture of the Khmer people in Soc Trang, Tran Minh Thuong [3] viewed Tevada as heavenly beings sent down to take care of the community for a one-year term, and they are replaced by another deity at the end of the year. Pham Thi Phuong Hanh et al. [4, p.118] also supposed that according to Khmer beliefs, Tevada is a group of celestial beings sent by the heavens to care for the people throughout the year.

Regarding the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay, So Ry A [5] suggested that before bidding farewell to the old year and welcoming the new year, in every household in the village, they set up an altar in solemn places to welcome their ancestors. On the altar, they arrange five branches of flowers, five candlesticks, five incense sticks, five sweet rice flakes, and various fruits. Parents and grandparents gather their children and grandchildren, sitting with their legs folded to one side in front of the ancestral altar. They light the incense and candles, fold their hands in prayer, bow to the sky three times, and earnestly request blessings from Tevada Thmay (the new deity) while reciting prayers to pay homage to the Buddha. Thach Voi et al. [6] believe that on New Year’s Eve in each pagoda, many elderly people and monks organize chanting ceremonies to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new year. In every household, they also light candles, burn incense, and perform rituals to bid farewell to the old Tevada and wel-

come the new Tevada. They believe that Tevada is a celestial being sent down by heaven to take care of the people for one year, and at the end of the year, another deity is brought down to take over that responsibility. The significance of the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay, as stated by Son Phuoc Hoan [7] in the study of the traditional festival of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam, is to seek blessings from the new God and the ancestral spirits for protection and support, ensuring prosperous business and fortunate activities in the coming year. Son Luong [8], in the research on the customs and festivals of the Khmer people in Soc Trang Province, suggests that performing the ritual of welcoming Tevada reflects people’s hopes to pray for peace and blessings in the new year.

For stories associated with Tevada Chnam Thmay, Tien Van Trieu et al. [9] stated that Khmer people perform a three-round procession in the New Year’s welcoming ritual, which is closely associated with the Buddhist stories of Thomabal and Kabil Maha Prum the Four-faced Deity.

When Kabil Maha Prum lost, before beheading himself, he instructed seven daughters (Tevada) to carry his head on a golden tray and place it on Mount Kailash in the Himalayas. Since then, the Deity committed suicide every year on the day, the seven girls take turns carrying their father’s skullcap on a tray to Mount Sumeru, and they walk around the mountain three times (similar to how the Khmer people walk around the temple three times) in the direction of the sunrise to commemorate their father’s day of failure.

Previous studies have approached the symbolism of Tevada from various perspectives related to the New Year festival of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam. However, these studies have not fully clarified the role of Tevada Chnam Thmay in the ritual of welcoming and why the Khmer people chose this Tevada during the transition from the old year to the new year of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam. Therefore, this research aims to shed light on the welcoming ritual and the appearance of Tevada

Chnam Thmay and explain the layers of meaning embedded in traditional cultural practices.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research subject, time, and location

The main subject of the study is the Tevada (តេវតា) according to the *Khmer–Vietnamese dictionary*, which refers to celestial beings, gods, and deities [10]. The author conducted a survey on the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay in 2023, which is a ritual performed by families of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam, to welcome the deity who governs the new year. In addition, regarding the ritual of enacting images of the Four-faced Deity procession by Tevada, the author visited Sro Lon Pagoda, Prek On Dok Pagoda in My Xuyen District, and Khleng Pagoda, Maha Tup Pagoda in Soc Trang City, Soc Trang Province. The selection of these pagodas, which include both rural and urban areas of Soc Trang Province, aims to examine the differences in organization, traditional legends, and the symbolic significance of the Tevada procession with the Four-faced Deity in the Great calendar procession. In reality, only Sro Lon Pagoda and Prek On Dok Pagoda in My Xuyen District enact the ritual procession of the Four-faced Deity in the auspicious calendar procession based on the local folklore associated with the Chol Chnam Thmay festival. Therefore, it can be seen that enacting the symbols of the Tevada procession with the Four-faced Deity is not a mandatory activity for the Khmer people in the Southern region.

B. Research methods

The participant observation method was used to interpret the meanings of the Tevada Chnam Thmay of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam. The first step involved participating in the festive rituals, with a focus on the procession of the Great Calendar and the reception of the Tevada Chnam Thmay. The second step involved observing and taking notes by conducting on-the-spot interviews with participants in the ceremonies, including some monks and Acha Vot.

The third step involved capturing photographs of the ceremonial activities.

Sociological interview method was employed to gather information regarding the purpose and significance of the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay in the New Year celebration. The author conducted various interviews of different lengths, utilizing qualitative and open-ended questions with religious practitioners and individuals knowledgeable about the Khmer culture in localities of Soc Trang Province, such as venerable monks, Acha, and cultural experts who are knowledgeable about the culture of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam.

The author conducted two types of interviews. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with two individuals: Master TCD, a lecturer at Can Tho University who is knowledgeable about Khmer culture, and Venerable KHH, the abbot of Sro Lon Pagoda, My Xuyen District, Soc Trang Province. Before the interviews, the author prepared questions related to the research objectives, such as What are legends associated with Tevada Chnam Thmay of the Khmer people in the South? When do the Khmer people organize the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay? What is the significance of the ritual of welcoming? How many Tevada Chnam Thmay are there, what are their names and characteristics?

Second, standardized interviews were conducted based on a completed questionnaire designed for three individuals living in Soc Trang Province, with specific questions such as: Have you ever heard of the Khmer people's ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay? Have you ever attended the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay? If so, what does the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay mean? Where is the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay organized? When is the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay held?

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

Regarding the procession of the Khmer New Year festival at Sro Lon Pagoda and Prek On Dok

Pagoda, the festival is celebrated continuously for three days, from the 13th to the 15th day, or sometimes from the 14th to the 16th day of April in the solar calendar each year. The Khmer people of Southern Vietnam celebrate the new year continuously for three days. The first day is known as Thngay Veareak Maha Songkran in Khmer, which means the procession of the Great Calendar. On the second day, the Khmer referred to it as Thngay Veareak Vannabat, meaning the day of making offerings. On the third day, they call it Thngay Veareak Laeung Sak, which means the year starts to be counted up from this day (Figure 1).

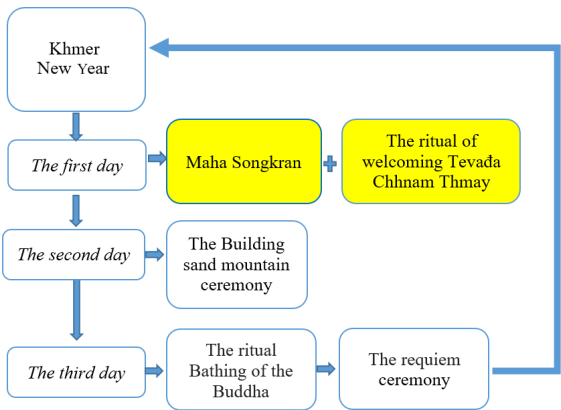


Fig. 1: Diagram of New Year and the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay and important ceremonial rituals of Khmer people at Sro Lon Pagoda and Prek On Dok Pagoda, Soc Trang Province

On the first day, the Khmer people perform the ritual of welcoming the Great Calendar, which is also the time to welcome the Tevada Chnam Thmay. The original Khmer name for the welcoming ritual is Pithi Chaul Tevada Chnam Thmay (ពិធីទទួលទេវតាឆ្នាំថ្មី) which means welcoming the celestial beings (deities) of the new year or can be understood as the ceremony of welcoming the goddess of protection for the new year or the goddess in charge of the new year. Field research found that during the transition from the old year to the new year, Khmer people

in Southern Vietnam perform the ritual at home and the pagoda. Depending on the place, the procession depicting the Four-faced Deity by Tevada will be performed differently.

In each family, depending on their economic conditions, the Khmer people organize the ritual to welcome the Tevada Chnam Thmay at home with different decorations. According to their beliefs, each year, one of the seven goddesses will take turns with the responsibility of managing the earthly realm. They are considered the protectors of the entire world for that year, helping to avoid misfortune in the new year. The welcoming ritual takes place solemnly in each home. At this time, families arrange offerings to welcome the goddess who presides over the new year. At the designated time, the host gathers family members around the offerings, lights candles, and prays to the Tevada Chnam Thmay to protect the family and lineage, wishing for a peaceful and prosperous new year. According to Mr. TCD [11], Khmer people hold the ritual of welcoming to pray for family peace, good business, and good luck in the new year. He also said that Khmer people depend on the appearance of Tevada Chnam Thmay each year and what weapon they carry to predict whether that year will be good or bad.

At Khmer Theravada Buddhist pagodas, such as Sro Lon Pagoda and Prek On Dok Pagoda which were chosen to be the research sites, they perform the scene of the Four-faced Deity parade along with the procession of the Great Calendar (Figure 2, Figure 3). This is an important cultural event during the New Year festival. The procession of the Great Calendar reenacts the legend of the defeat of the Deity Kabil Maha Prum by Thomabal Koma. Therefore, every year, seven daughters of the Deity lead the procession around Sumeru Mountain.

Regarding the procession of the Great Calendar, fieldwork in 2023 examined how the Khmer people of Southern Vietnam performed the Great Calendar procession and welcomed the Tevada on the 14th day of the fourth month of the Gregorian calendar. The specific time of the procession may vary each year. Before performing the procession



Fig. 2: The ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay around the main hall in 2023 at Sro Lon Pagoda, My Xuyen District, Soc Trang Province



Fig. 3: Positioning the Four-faced Deity in the procession of the Great Calendar at Sro Lon Pagoda, My Xuyen District, Soc Trang Province

ritual, the temple prepares the head of the Four-faced Deity, which is the central symbol of the procession. The deity is made of materials such as wood or stone, and its head has four faces, each facing a different direction. The central symbol of the procession is the Four-faced Deity, typically made of materials such as wood or stone. The statue has four faces, each facing a different direction. The statue is placed on a silver or gold tray. The Great Calendar procession takes place within the main courtyard of the Khmer

Theravada Buddhist temple.

Regarding the ritual proceedings at the Sro Lon temple, at the designated time, the Acha, senior monks, and the selected young women playing the roles of the Tevada, the children of Kabil Maha Prum, stand in a line. The female attendants wear colorful costumes, and residents join in the procession according to their order. Leading the procession is a goddess holding a tray with the head of the Deity Kabil Maha Prum, followed by the children of the deity, the monks, Acha, and local people, each carrying a branch of longevity flowers or chrysanthemums. The procession moves slowly while the monks recite scriptures and the Acha chant in unison. At the end of each round, they all chant ‘Sathu’ together. The procession goes through three rounds, accompanied by the sound of gongs and drums coming from the main hall. Afterward, the procession continues to the designated area for the ceremonial offering to the Four-faced Deity, where further recitation of scriptures takes place with the participation of numerous local Buddhists.

According to the Venerable KHH [12], this is a cultural tradition of the ethnic group that has been embraced and preserved. The temple organizes the procession every year, and the young women dress up as the Tevada to escort the Four-faced Deity, connected to the legend of Thomabal Koma’s victory over the Deity Kabil Maha Prum. According to the legend, Prince Thomabal Koma was a young and intelligent man with great preaching skills, admired by the people, and renowned even in the celestial realm, where the gods descended to listen to his sermons. As a result, the celestial lectures of the god Kabil Maha Prum became increasingly deserted. One day, the god Kabil Maha Prum came to test the intelligence of Thomabal Koma. He posed questions: in the morning, where is the blessing? At noon, where is the blessing? In the evening, where is the blessing? and scheduled to return seven days later for the answers. If answered correctly, Kabil Maha Prum would cut off his head; if he failed, Thomabal Koma would have

to offer his head to the god. As the deadline approached and the answers remained elusive, Thomabal Koma felt disheartened. Exhausted, he sat under a tree and suddenly overheard the conversation of eagles, where the male eagle answered the female eagle that in the morning, blessing lies on the face of people, as they wash their face before they begin a new day; at noon, blessing lies on the chest of people, as they bathe to cool their bodies from the afternoon heat; and in the evening, blessing lies on the feet of people, as they wash them to rest from the toils of the day and get ready for bed. True to the appointment, Thomabal Koma answered with the eagle’s words and triumphed over the god Kabil Maha Prum. To fulfill his promise, the god proceeded to cut off his head, instructing his seven daughters to place it on the summit of Mount Kailash, beyond the reach of mortals. If his head fell into the sea, the sea would dry up; if it were thrown into the sky, there would be no rain; if left on the ground, it would become dry and barren, withering the plants and trees. After giving his instructions, the god cut off his head and transformed into rays of light. The purpose of the procession is to mark the transition from the old year to the new year and to pray for favorable business and a bountiful harvest for the local community, wishing for a better life. The organization of the procession of the Four-faced Deity also symbolizes the desire for peace in the world on the first day of the new year. Every year, according to the legend, the Khmer people of Southern Vietnam perform the procession to escort the head of the Four-faced Deity, held at different times of the day predetermined according to the calendar of the Khmer people of Southern Vietnam. The main hall of the temple is considered a representation of Mount Someru (or Meru), the center of the universe, and the procession takes place outside the main hall, with the Achar (those who were a monk and understand the culture) guiding the participants in a continuous order as they walk around the outside of the main hall three times, reciting prayers for the New Year.

The Khmer people attach great importance to

the organization and reception of this ceremony as it marks the transition to the new year. Therefore, everything is conducted with solemnity and reverence, demonstrating a deep respect for the invisible spiritual world. The ceremonial symbols have a profound impact on the entire community, contributing to the creation of a sacred space. Through the research on the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam, the author has compiled the following list of the goddesses who preside over the New Year.

Table 1: New Year goddesses of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam

No.	Days of week	Tevada	Vehicles	Clothing color
1	Sunday	Tungsa Tevi (តុងសាទេវី)	Sacred bird Krud	Red
2	Monday	Koreak Tevi (កោរ៉ាក់ទេវី)	Tiger God	Yellow
3	Tuesday	Reaksa Tevi (រ៉ាក់សាទេវី)	Horse	Pink
4	Wednesday	Mondar Tevi (ម៉ុងដាទេវី)	Donkey	Cobalt blue
5	Thursday	Keriny Tevi (កេរីនីទេវី)	Elephant	Blue
6	Friday	Kemira Tevi (កេមីរាទេវី)	Buffalo	White
7	Saturday	Mohurea Tevi (ម៉ូហួរ៉ាទេវី)	Peacock	Purple

From Table 1, it can be seen that the Khmer people honor and perform the welcoming ritual for the Tevada Chnam Thmay during the New Year. There are seven goddesses, each corresponding to a day of the week. They are all goddesses, and each has different characteristics such as clothing color, accessories, weapons, and the vehicle they ride. During the New Year festivities, depending on the household, the Khmer people may have paintings depicting the Tevada Chnam Thmay with symbolic animal companions and the procession of celestial beings.

According to the calendar, the moment of welcoming the New Year goddesses is calculated by the Hora and shared by the Khmer people in Cambodia. Each year, the transition from the old year to the new year begins at different times and on different days. If the calendar procession falls on a Sunday, it corresponds to the eldest daughter, Tungsa Tevi, who leads the procession and is considered the governing deity of the year.

If it falls on a Monday, it corresponds to the goddess Koreak Tevi, and the sequence continues according to the days of the week as mentioned above. To provide further evidence, the author conducted a statistical analysis for 12 years from 2012 to 2023, specifying the exact dates and times of welcoming the New Year goddesses.

Table 2: Time of the Tevada Chnam Thmay welcoming ritual

Year	Zodiac	Date and month of Tevada welcoming	Time of Tevada welcoming	Tevada Chnam Thmay
2012	Dragon	Friday, April 13 th	7:11 P.M.	Kemira Tevi (ក្រិមីរាទេវី)
2013	Snake	Sunday, April 14 th	2:12 A.M.	Tungsa Tevi (តុងសាទេវី)
2014	Horse	Monday, April 14 th	8: 07 A.M.	Koreak Tevi (ក្រោកទេវី)
2015	Goat	Tuesday, April 14 th	2: 02 P.M.	Reaksa Tevi (រ៉ាក់សាទេវី)
2016	Monkey	Wednesday, April 13 th	8: 00 P.M.	Mondar Tevi (ម៉ុងដារទេវី)
2017	Rooster	Friday, April 14 th	3: 12 A.M.	Kemira Tevi (ក្រិមីរាទេវី)
2018	Dog	Saturday, April 14 th	9: 12 A.M.	Mohurea Tevi (ម៉ូអ៊ូរ៉េអាទេវី)
2019	Pig	Sunday, April 14 th	3: 12 P.M.	Tungsa Tevi (តុងសាទេវី)
2020	Rat	Monday, April 13 th	8: 48 P.M.	Koreak Tevi (ក្រោកទេវី)
2021	Ox	Wednesday, April 14 th	4: 00 A.M.	Mondar Tevi (ម៉ុងដារទេវី)
2022	Tiger	Thursday, April 14 th	10: 00 A.M.	Keriny Tevi (ក្រិនីទេវី)
2023	Rabbit	Friday, April 14 th	4: 00 P.M.	Kemira Tevi (ក្រិមីរាទេវី)

Based on the actual statistics over 12 consecutive years, the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam held the welcoming ritual for the Tevada Chnam Thmay on the 13th day, including the years 2012, 2016, and 2020. In the remaining years, the ceremony takes place on the 14th day of the 4th month each year. The timing of welcoming the Tevada deities varies completely from year to year, with no repetition in consecutive years. Therefore, every year, the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam must observe the time and which goddess to welcome in order to prepare the ceremony appropriately.

From the statistical results, the goddesses and the timing of welcoming the Tevada deities clarify the appearance of the Tevada Chnam Thmay and the ceremony of the Khmer people. The welcoming ritual for the Tevada Chnam Thmay is an indispensable event during the Lunar New

Year, symbolizing the transition from the old year to the new year and the beginning of a new cycle of time. The Khmer people hope that the Tevada deities of the new year will bring blessings to the world, and based on the characteristics of the goddesses, they predict whether the coming year will be auspicious or challenging.

B. Discussion

Through the interpretation of the origin and the ceremony of welcoming the Tevada in the new year, several explanatory premises can be presented based on the ritual’s external forms and characteristics, its symbolic representations, and its implications within broader cultural contexts.

The external forms and observable characteristics of the Great Calendar procession and the ritual of welcoming Tevada Chnam Thmay signify the influence of Brahmanism in early Khmer cultural life. The depiction of the symbolic image of the Tevada Chnam Thmay as the children of the Deity Kabil Maha Prum, which is a cultural assimilation from Brahmanism, shows the influence of Indian astronomy that occurred early in the cultural life of Southern Khmer. When Theravada Buddhism became the dominant religion, the Buddhist calendar became widely used. Therefore, in the cultural life of Southern Khmer, the four eras of time calculation are still observed: Boran Sakrach (Ancient Era), Puth Sakrach (Buddhist Era), Maha Sakrach (Great Era), and Cholah Sakrach (Small Era). However, nowadays, most people use the Gregorian calendar for normal daily activities, but when conducting traditional ceremonies and festivals, the Khmer people still use the Buddhist calendar. So, when entering the new year, they usually write both the Gregorian year and the Buddhist year together. For example, in 2023, it would be written បុណ្យចូលឆ្នាំថ្មី ឆ្នាំថោះ បញ្ចស័ក ពុទ្ធសករាជ ២៥៦៧ គ្រិស្តសករាជ ២០២៣ / Bon Chol Chnam Thmay, Chnam Tho Banhcho sac, Puth Sakrach 2567, Kru Sakrach 2023, which means ‘Entering the new year of the Rabbit, Buddhist year 2567, solar year 2023’.

Derived from the explanations of ritual practitioners, the symbolic representation of the Tevada Chnam Thmay reflects the spirit of creativity in assimilating the ancient Khmer culture. Through the symbols of the Tevada Chnam Thmay, the profound transformation of the image of Kabil Maha Prum as an allegory of '*Preah Prum*' in the culture of Southern Khmer becomes evident. Tracing back to the original version of Brahmanism, the god Brahma is one of the Trinity (Trimurti) with dialectical relationships, where Brahma represents creation, Vishnu represents preservation, and Shiva represents destruction. The earliest Vedas mention Brahma as a creative and powerful deity who rules the entire universe. During the Vedic period, philosophical thinking focused on the theory of monistic metaphysics, discussing the universe and its origin, and the divine power of the creative deity gradually became personified. However, when Brahmanism was integrated into the cultural life of the Khmer people, Brahma was called Preah Prum, and the image of the Deity Kabil Maha Prum in the New Year's tradition is described as a deity with four faces, specializing in descending to preach, and having seven daughters who are goddesses. It does not represent immutable existence. This shows that the Southern Khmer people have made adjustments to make it suitable and adaptable to the local culture for easy dissemination in the lives of the people.

Through contemplation of broader significant contexts, the image of the seven goddesses as the children of the Deity Kabil Maha Prum embodies the concept of the maternal system in the consciousness of the ancient Khmer. The statue of the Deity Kabil Maha Prum is an allegory of the deity Preah Prum or, broadly speaking, the deity Brahma of India. The Deity Brahma in Brahmanism is depicted with four faces turning in four different directions, having many sons and only one daughter. However, when integrated into the life of the Khmer people, it was adapted to fit the local culture. It can be seen that the maternal mindset exists in Khmer society, and it is preserved and clearly reflected through traces

in the religious life and the cultural community of the ancient Khmer, especially in the welcoming ritual of the goddesses in the new year, which highlights the elevated role of women in the community's culture.

The ceremony of welcoming the Great Calendar also contains implications about the changing role of Brahmanism. This religion had long been the pinnacle of power in the spiritual and cultural life of the upper echelons of society, aimed at consolidating power. The transition is described through Buddhist stories. It marks the transition to a new era for the nation, choosing a new religion in spiritual and cultural life. At the same time, it demonstrates the flourishing of Buddhism in the cultural life of the Khmer people, along with the belief in a prosperous new season in the cycle of time that is beginning under favorable circumstances.

Through a detailed examination of the symbolic meaning using Victor Turner's approach to ritual symbolism, it can be inferred that a symbol can represent multiple things and different meanings. The symbolic image of the Tevada Chnam Thmay as a crucial link represents the final moment of the transition from the old year's time cycle to the new year's movement. It also signifies the religious transformation in the spiritual life of the Khmer people throughout history. The symbol of Tevada Chnam Thmay represents the unity and continuity of the Khmer society, where regardless of the preceding or succeeding religions, all are part of the cultural flow of the ethnic group.

V. CONCLUSION

The theoretical approach of anthropological symbolism helps to clarify the appearance and significance of the ritual of welcoming the Tevada Chnam Thmay, who are the goddesses associated with the Tet festival tradition of the Southern Khmer people. The Tevada Chnam Thmay in the New Year festival serves as a tool for expressing their culture through their worldview and their connection between the tangible and intangible aspects of life. They contribute to

strengthening the sense of community and faith among the people through significant cultural events. Clarifying the appearance of the Tevada Chnam Thmay is essential for understanding the cultural heritage of the past and the layers of meaning behind the ritual symbols in the spiritual life of the present-day Southern Khmer people.

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