
The Rite of Passage: Pithi Chamroeun Ayu (Chan Sok Kiri Sot) A Longevity Ceremony in the Khmer Tradition

ពិធីប្រឡងវ័យ ៖
ពិធីប្រឡងវ័យ ចង្កូរស្រុកភីរីសុត

—人生儀礼長寿祝福の儀式（ピティ・チョムラン・アユ）—

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In Khmer society, one comes across a ritual linked to the life of an individual, which is referred to as “Chlang Vei” or in English “Rite of Passage.” In “Chlang Vei,” the word Chlang signifies ‘passage’ and the word Vei signifies ‘age,’ and it consists of a ceremony symbolizing the evolution or change in the age or status of a person in society, or simply the process of that person entering into a specific age group, and this is represented in a fixed ritual.

In Japanese society too, one come across similar rituals, such as the “Jinsei Girei (人生儀礼),” or Life Cycle Rites (or Rite of Passage), where Jinsei means ‘life’ and Girei means ‘rite.’ There are ten rituals in Japanese society related to the rite of passage, and the initiation rites are conducted when the child has been 5 months in the womb of its mother. This is done for its safe delivery and healthy growth, until the death of the individual. In the case of Cambodia, however, the rite of passage has been categorized into seven ritual processes [See, Ang Choulean, Preap Chamara, and Sun Chandoep, Damnoer Chivit Manus Khmer (or Journey of life of the Khmer people), Yosothor, 2014]. Those processes are: (1) A rite related to the baby that was just born (3 days after its birth). (2) A rite related to the boy or girl just before reaching adulthood, (between the ages of 11 and 13). (3) A rite related to the fact of the person having reached adulthood. (4) The rite of Marriage. (5) A rite related to the fact of a person having become a mother. (6) A longevity ceremony (Chamroeun Ayu). (7) The funeral ceremony.

This brief paper introduces the rite of passage referred to as “Chamroeun Ayu,” which means “a longevity ceremony,” which was specially conducted for Prof. Yoshiaki Ishizawa by his Cambodian students, as an expression of gratitude for his guidance and supervision over the past many years (Ph. 1). The ceremony was conducted on March 31th and April 1st 2018 at the Sophia Asia Center, in



Ph. 1 Students and Friends of Professor Yoshiaki Ishizawa

the city of Siem Reap in Cambodia.

On behalf of all his Cambodian students, I wish to take this opportunity to express my sincere thankfulness to all who were involved in this ceremony, and in a special way I wish to thank Dr. Lao Kim Leang, Mr. Lim Srou, and H. E. Seung Kong, for their assistance in enabling this ceremony to be realized. I would also like to thank Professor Ang Choulean and Mr. Lim Srou, for having kindly shared with us their extensive knowledge regarding the conducting of the rite.

1. The Meaning of the Expression “Pithi Chamroeun Ayu”

The ceremony is generally referred to as “Pithi Chamroeun Ayu, ” which translates as the ‘Longevity Ceremony.’ The ceremony generally is of three different types, or is conducted at three different levels. A simple or small ceremony that is usually conducted by people living in the city of Phnom Penh and certain other areas is referred to as “Bon Pachai Buon.” This is associated with the four requisites of a Buddhist monk, namely Ben Bat (provisions), Chivor (clothing), Sena Sanak (shelter), and Kilean Phesacheak (medicine). These four requisites are provided to monks in order that they may accumulate merit by good deeds.

A higher-level or advanced ceremony that people living in the Angkor-Siem Reap area traditionally conduct, is known as the “Chan Sok Kiri Sot, ” and in cases where the carrying out of the ceremony is even longer, it is entitled “Chhak Maha Bangskol.” However, regardless of whether the ceremonial process is short or long, all rites are conducted under the signification of the Chamroeun Ayu, or Longevity Ceremony, which symbolically designates the death and rebirth of an individual. Rebirth or transmigration signifies the fact that a person can begin life as a baby one

more, for the cycle of life involves the fact of a person being reborn, after he or she has once died.

The ceremony is generally performed by children for their parents, who are advancing in years. The object of the ceremony is not merely to commemorate the long life of their parents on earth, but is also a sign of gratitude to them, offered by their children, for the happiness they have so far received from them. As a recompense for their efforts, the children, students, or others who carry out the ceremony, will also accumulate merit for the good deed they have performed. The ceremony is also held for elderly people who are deemed worthy of respect, as also for Kru (masters, or teachers). In Khmer society, from ancient times, Kru were looked upon as equivalent to parents, and this was indeed the case with regard to the ceremony conducted for Prof. Yoshiaki Ishizawa.

2. The Process of the Ritual

The ritual was carried out over two days. Some of the objects used in the ritual, and the Randap (which refers to provisions or objects specially prepared for use in a ritual or ceremony, or gifts for monks who have conducted the ceremony), as well as the orchestration of the ritual, were as follows. The preparation began two days prior to the start of the ceremony. There were 15 villagers including the Achar (a layman having knowledge of Buddhism, who conducts the ceremony in a Buddhist manner in the village), from Kok Thnot village, which is located to the north of Baray Toek Thla (Western Baray). He had prepared all the essentials that were related to the ritual.

2.1. Objects and Randap Used in the Ritual

Banana (that is, a banana tree trunk and leaves) is very useful to decorate objects prepared for rituals. One of these banana-decorated objects is called “Chak Chek”. Chak Chek is a banana tree trunk decoration, created by using a small sharp iron to carve the banana sheath into various patterns (Ph. 2-3). The banana sheath patterns are used with reference to various objects in the ritual, such as for Yama’s altar, for decorating the Sampov (or junk), the coffin, etc. (To be introduced, with the photographs shown below). Elderly villagers carve the patterns by relying on their memories of the past, and without any prepared sketch or plan. This custom has so far remained only in the countryside, but according to those elderly villagers, there is a danger of its disappearing in the near future, since members of the younger generation have no interest in this work anymore.



Ph. 2-3 Achar carved patterns on banana sheath

- **Bay Srei** (or Bay Sei as it is called in some areas, especially in the southern part) is normally made of a banana tree trunk with some decorations, to be used in certain rituals or ceremonies. It is usually designed with legs to which 3, 5, 7, or 9 layers of banana leaves, rolled up into finger shapes, have been attached (Ph. 4-5). Each layer represents a part of the human body, as for example the ears, eyes, hands, legs, etc. Bay Srei is meant to be an object used as a substitute for the person concerned (*op. cit.*, Ang Choulean 2014: 13).

- **Bay Srei Paccham** is used for Chom. Bay Srei Paccham is made of a Banana tree trunk, at the top of which are rolled up banana leaves, and it is decorated with flowers and incense (Ph. 6-8).



Ph. 4-5
Banana trunks were prepared for making 5 layers of Bay Srei



Ph. 6-7 An old lady made Bay Srei Paccham



Ph. 8 Villagers from Kok Thnot village prepared the Bay Srei and Bay Srei Paccham

- **Chom** is an offering consisting of a section of a banana tree trunk, tapered at the top, and decorated with rolled up betel leaves (Ph. 9-10). Chom is offered to a certain person such as the Achar, or to Phleng Khmer group (Khmer traditional musician).



Ph. 9 Chom



Ph. 10 Khmer traditional music group and Chom

- **Chunhching** is a scale used to measure the weight of the person concerned, and also the weight of rice (Ph. 11-12). When the Achar measures the weight, even though the balance may not be the same, he assigns the same weight. The rice will be used for Angkar Snang (see below).



Ph. 11 Achar used bamboo and a piece of wooden for a scale



Ph. 12 Achar weighed the weight of Prof. Ishizawa and rice

- **Kre Snaeng** is a bed meant to convey the person concerned, by proceeding via a three-turn circumambulation in a clockwise direction (called in Sanskrit *pradakṣīna*), around the place of the ceremony. The bed is carried by children, students, or people who desire to show their respect for their parents, teachers, or some other such individual. In the case of Prof. Ishizawa, since the place was narrow, we used a chair instead of a bed. However, the chair was meant to represent a bed (Ph. 13-14).



Ph. 13 Kre Snaeng



Ph. 14 Prof. Ishizawa was carried by students

- **Mochous** is a coffin. The coffin is made of a banana sheath, in order to put a Rup Snang, a substitute person concerned, within (Ph. 15-16). The coffin is placed on the Pé (Ph. 17-18), which is an offering to spirits (often made with a banana leaf plate). The Pé will be thrown away after the rite (please see below). At the end of the rite the coffin will be burned, since it is viewed as the cremating of a body during a funeral ceremony. The person concerned is considered dead, and he will be born again (rebirth) as mentioned above.



Ph. 15 Coffin made by the banana sheath



Ph. 16 Rup Snang



Ph. 17-18 Pé with a coffin on the banana leaf plate

- **Angkar Snang** is the substitute person concerned (in this case it is Prof. Ishizawa) (Ph. 19). Angkar Snang is made from rice, which was already weighed in order to have a correct balance with the weight of the concerned individual (Ph. 11-12). It is packed with a piece of white cloth, and some other elements such as half a coconut shell and pieces of sugarcane and banana that represent a human being, with head, bones, backbone, legs, hands, and ribs.



Ph. 19

- **Sampov**, the direct meaning of Sampov is “large sailing junk.” Sampov represents a journey of life, both according to the beliefs of Buddhism and Hinduism. It simply means to dispatch a person on a journey of life to a peaceful and calm place (that is, to bring about an end to life). According to the Achar, Sampov is not always used for the rite, but exceptions are made in the case of great or well-known persons. The Sampov is made of banana tree trunks, with various decorated patterns (Ph. 20-21).



Ph. 20-21 Sampov with banana trunks decorated patterns

2.2. The Process of the Rites

2.2.1. The First Day

The process started in the afternoon at 3: 30 PM.

- **Romloek Kun Kru, or Repaying a Favor to the Professor**

First, a representative from among the students made a few brief remarks expressing gratitude to Prof. Ishizawa for his guidance and supervision over the years, and for his respect shown and assistance offered to Khmer culture and heritage (Ph. 22-23). In keeping with our custom, we (the Khmer students) gave him certain requisites as a thanksgiving. As for the requisites, Prof. Ishizawa was free to use them or offer them to pagodas or monks, in order to accumulate merit. In return, Prof. Ishizawa also delivered a short speech, thanking the students for their kind preparation of the ceremony, and blessed them with holy water (Ph. 24-25).



Ph. 22



Ph. 23



Ph. 24



Ph. 25

- Srauch Toek, or Ablution

There were two processes involved: one was to invite Prof. Ishizawa to sit on the Kre Snaeng (Ph. 13-14) and bring him in, proceeding according to a three-turn circumambulation in a clockwise direction, around the abluion stage (Ph. 26-27). This process symbolizes a spiritual transition from ordinary life to spiritual perfection, in the journey of life. Another process was to take him to the abluion stage, and students sprinkled water on him (Ph. 28-29). The purpose behind this Srauch Toek or abluion was simply for cooling, since the weather in Cambodia could be rather hot (this information was communicated to me by Prof. Ang Choulean). Also, we (students) washed the body of Prof. Ishizawa to get rid of impurities, cleanse ourselves of guilt (for the wrong we might have unintentionally done to him while we were under his supervision), and to repay the favors received from him.

- Pithi Prong Poli

Pithi Prong Poli is a very important process, since it is done first and ahead of all other processes, and it is always conducted in all great ritual ceremonies in Khmer belief and tradition (Ph. 30). “Prong” means “preparation or conduct” and “Poli” means “sacrifice.” The rite itself is related to “Human Sacrifice,” which simply means to give up one thing in order to obtain something new.

In point of fact, this rite is conducted at dusk. However, since it is sometimes difficult to perform



Ph. 26 Circumambulation



Ph. 27 Ablution stage



Ph. 28-29 Sprinkling water on Prof. Ishizawa

it in darkness, the people living in Angkor conduct it in the late afternoon around 4: 00 PM. This rite cannot be conducted in the morning, and the reason why it has to be done at dusk is because this rite symbolizes a “Human Sacrifice.” Here they symbolically sacrifice a woman, since they believe that women possess some miraculous potential or power within them. By doing so they create a substitute person called “Neang Konghing” (Ph. 31). The Neang Konghing is a symbol of the soil, and it was made of flour. The Neang Konghing is placed in the Pé along with other offerings, and buried in a small hole (Ph. 32-33). So far, the Prong Poli has been a rite to represent the “Dead.”

There is another rite, which possesses an



Ph. 30 Pithi Prong Poli



Ph. 31
Neang Konghing
(Lim Srou)



Ph. 32-33 Achar conducted Pithi Prong Poli



Ph. 34-35 Loek Tung



Ph. 36-37 Phiti Sot Moan

interrelationship to the Pithi Prong Poli, called “Loek Tung” (Ph. 34-35). Loek Tung literally means “to lift the flag,” and it is to form a connection with the sky. It is a symbol of “Living.” So, the two rites are linked to each other, since they symbolize the links between the “Dead” and the “Living.” Normally, the flag is installed at the North-East direction, which in Khmer belief is the direction of rebirth or reincarnation. While lifting up the flag they raise their voices loudly, or sometimes even use fireworks.

- **Phiti Sot Moan** is normally performed in every ceremony. It is conducted by the monks to bless the concerned person and family, so that they may grow prosperous and rid themselves of

anything bad (Ph. 36-37).

2.2.2. Second Day

The activities of the second day of the ritual started in the morning, at 7: 30 AM, and there were five rites to be performed on the second day.

- **Praken Yeakou** consists in offering requisites to the monks. This offering of requisites is done to accumulate merit through good deeds.

- **Chan Sok Kiri Sot** refers to the name of a Sastra (or manuscript), which the monks use for reciting, during the process of the rite. In the course of this rite, we often see the Achar erecting Phnom Khsach (or sand mounts) on several tiers of banana tree trunks. They divide the sand mount into four parts, and each part consists 25 small sand mounts, while the middle consists of the biggest sand mount (Ph. 38-39). If we count all sand mounts within the four parts, it works out to a total of 100. The Khmer people often consider the number 100 as a wish, and it is indicated by the words, "I wish you live to become a hundred years old." And if we were to include in the count the biggest sand mount in the middle, the number works out to 101, which indicates another expression, namely, "may you live a long life of over a hundred years."

This process took over two hours, and the person concerned (Prof. Ishizawa) had to sit or bend



Ph. 38-39 Phnom Khsach or Sand Mount



Ph. 40-41 Process of Chan Sok Kiri Sot



Ph. 42-43 Coffin is put nearby the person concerned or Sampov



Ph. 44-45 Rite of Bak Sbaek

over the Angkar Snang (see, Ph. 19) during the Sampov (Ph. 40-41). Monks and Achars sat around the Sampov and performed the rite, and the monks in particular recited a Dharma contained in a manuscript of the Chan Sok Kiri Sot. Since the person concerned is given the role of death, the Achar places a coffin made of banana sheath (see, Ph. 15) near the Sampov (Ph. 42-43). Also, another process of the rite was conducted, called the “Bak Sbeak,” which literally means “take off

the skin.” The person concerned was covered with a white sheet, and a monk then recites a Dharma and slowly takes off the white sheet, which is meant resemble a baby being taken out of its mother’s placenta, and also to express the fact that the person concerned has just been born again (Ph. 44-45).



Ph. 46 Pé is put behind the Sampov

Behind the person concerned or the Sampov, the Achar places the Pé Romdoh Kroh (Ph. 46), which is an offering made to spirits (to get rid of misfortune). The Pé is thrown away after the rite in a suitable direction, according to the Achar’s suggestion, and coffin also is burned. This rite represents the death of the person concerned, and also his

rebirth.

- Srauch Toek, or Ablution

Here, the monks sprinkled water on Prof. Ishizawa (Ph. 47). The meaning here is not too different from that mentioned above, which was simply for cooling, since the weather in Cambodia could be hot. However, it was also done to get rid of impurities.



Ph. 47 Ablution

- Rap Bat, or putting rice into the bowls of the monks, which are arranged in a row. This is usually done in every Buddhist ceremony. It is simply meant to offer food to the monks, and the persons who provide the food would accumulate merit (Ph. 48).

- Offering the requisites to the monks

Here the meaning is as same as providing food to the monks, which again meant that the providers would accumulate merit (Ph. 49).

- At the end of the ceremony, Prof. Ishizawa offered some gifts to the Achars and old villagers who had prepared and helped during the ceremony, as a sign of gratitude to all of them (Ph. 50).



Ph. 48 Rap Bat



Ph. 49 Offering the requisites



Ph. 50 Offering gifts to Achars and villagers

List of Khmer Words

Transcription	Khmer Character
Achar	អាចារ្យ
Angkar Snang	អង្ករស្នង
Bak Sbeak	បកស្បែក
Bay Sei	បាយសី
Bay Srei	បាយស្រី
Bay Srei Paccham	បាយស្រីបច្ចាម
Baray Toek Thla	បារាយទឹកថ្លា (បារាយណ៍ទឹកថ្លា)
Ben Bat	បិណ្ឌបាត
Bon Pachai Buon	បុណ្យបច្ច័យបួន
Chak Chek	ចាក់ចេក
Chhak Maha Bangskol	ឆាកមហាបង្សកូល
Chamroeun Ayu	ចម្រើនអាយុ
Chan Sok Kiri Sot	ចន្ទសុក្រគីវិសុត្រ
Chivor	ចិវ
Chlang Vei	ឆ្លងវ័យ
Chom	ជម
Chunhching	ជញ្ជីង
Kilean Phesacheak	គីលានភេសជ្ជៈ
Kok Thnot	គោកត្នោត
Kre Snaeng	គ្រែស្នង
Kru	គ្រូ
Loek Tung	លើកទង់
Mochous	មឈូស
Neang Konghing	នាងគង្គីង
Pé	ពៃ
Pé Romdoh Kroh	ពៃរំដោះគ្រោះ
Pithi	ពិធី
Pithi Prong Poli	ពិធីប្រុងពលី
Phiti Sot Moan	ពិធីសូត្រមន្ត
Phleng Khmer	ភ្លេងខ្មែរ
Phnom Khsach	ភ្នំខ្សាច់
Pradakśina	ប្រទក្សិណ
Praken Yeakou	ប្រគេនយាគូរ
Randap	រណ្តាប់
Rap Bat	រាប់បាត
Romloek Kun Kru	រំលឹកគុណគ្រូ
Rup Snang	រូបស្នង
Sampov	សំពៅ
Sastra	សាស្ត្រា
Sena Sanak	សេនាសនៈ
Snang	ស្នង
Srauch Toek	ស្រោចទឹក