

แนวคิดการเป็นข้าชวงใช้ จากมุมมองของสตรีผู้เป็นข้าราชการสำนักฝายใน

ในสมัยรัชกาลที่สี่ รัชกาลที่ห้า และ รัชกาลที่หก



นางสาวบี เมลานี อ้นตระการ

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาอักษรศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

สาขาวิชาไทยศึกษา

คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

ปีการศึกษา 2548

ISBN 974-14-2439-6

ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

**SERVITUDE OF THE LADIES OF THE ROYAL INNER COURT  
DURING THE REIGNS OF KING RAMA IV, V AND VI.**



Miss Bee Melanie Ontrakarn

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts Program in Thai Studies

Department of Thai Studies

Faculty of Arts

Chulalongkorn University

Academic Year 2005

ISBN 974-14-2439-6



นางสาวบี เมลานี อันตระการ: การถวายงานของนางในในราชสำนักสมัยรัชกาลที่ 4-6 (The Concept of Servitude from the Perspective of the Ladies of the Royal Inner Court during the Reigns of King Rama IV, V, and VI)  
 อ.ที่ปรึกษา: ศ.ดร. อมรา พงศพิชญ์, อ.ที่ปรึกษา (ร่วม): อ.ดร. สุนทร ชูดิทรานนท์ จำนวน 111 หน้า. ISBN 974-14-2439-6

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มุ่งที่การศึกษาความคิดของไทยในการถวายงานของนางในในราชสำนัก ในรัชกาลที่สี่ รัชกาลที่ห้า และ รัชกาลที่หก ในงานเขียนของชาวตะวันตกจะพบว่า ราชสำนักสยามมักจะถูกเรียกว่าเป็น “สตรีม” โดยตั้งอยู่บนฐานความคิดเรื่อง การเป็นทาส และ การมีอำนาจเหนือกว่าของเพศชาย งานเขียนที่เกี่ยวกับ ราชสำนักฝ่ายในส่วนใหญ่แล้วเขียนโดย มิชชันนารี สอนศาสนา นักเคลื่อนไหวเรื่องสิทธิสตรี และ นักปฏิรูปการศึกษา ผู้ซึ่งมีมุมมองไปทางด้านสิทธิมนุษยชน และ ประชาธิปไตย เนื่องจากว่านักเขียนเหล่านี้ไม่สามารถที่จะมองสังคมไทย ผ่านมุมมองของไทยได้ พวกเขาจึงไม่สามารถที่จะเข้าใจความตั้งใจของผู้หญิงในสังคมไทยได้ ชาวตะวันตกในขณะนั้นไม่เข้าใจว่า การได้ใกล้ชิดกับองค์พระมหากษัตริย์ผู้เป็นเจ้าของแผ่นดิน ไม่ว่าจะโดยการทำหน้าที่อะไรนั้น เป็นความหวัง จินตนาการอันสูงสุดของข้าแผ่นดิน ข้าราชการถวายตัวในพระมหากษัตริย์ หรือพระบรมวงศานุวงศ์ ชั้นสูงนั้นล้วนมาจาก การที่บิดามารดา ญาติผู้ใหญ่ถวายด้วยความเต็มใจ หรือมิเช่นนั้นก็เป็นไปตามความปรารถนาของเจ้าตัวที่จะได้มีโอกาสรับใช้ใกล้ชิด หรือ ได้มีโอกาสเข้าไปทำงานในราชสำนัก หญิงสาวชนชั้นสูงทั้งจากตระกูลสูงส่งเก่าแก่ และ จากตระกูลคหบดี ก็ได้ถวายตัวเข้าเป็นข้าราชการก่อนที่จะถึงวัยแต่งงาน เนื่องจาก ราชสำนักเป็นสถานที่เดียวที่หญิงสาวเหล่านี้จะได้รับการศึกษา และการฝึกอบรมในทักษะดังที่กุลสตรีชั้นสูงพึงมี


ผู้เขียนได้มุ่งเน้นไปที่การศึกษานเฉพาะในช่วงรัชกาลที่สี่ รัชกาลที่ห้าและ รัชกาลที่หก เนื่องจากภายในรัชสมัยดังกล่าว จะเห็นได้ถึงวิวัฒนาการของราชสำนักฝ่ายใน จากจุดที่รุ่งเรืองที่สุด ถึงจุดจบของราชสำนักฝ่ายใน งานเขียนส่วนใหญ่ของตะวันตกเกี่ยวกับราชสำนักฝ่ายในของสยามที่เป็นที่รู้จักกว้างขวางก็เป็นงานเขียนเกี่ยวกับราชสำนักฝ่ายในของไทยในช่วงเวลาที่กล่าวถึงนี้ ในขณะที่ประเทศเพื่อนบ้านของไทยต่างตกเป็นประเทศอาณานิคมภายใต้อำนาจตะวันตก ประเทศไทยจึงพยายามแสดงตนเป็นประเทศสังคมนิยมใหม่เพื่อรักษาเอกราชไว้จากการรุกรานของประเทศดังกล่าวอาณานิคม เมื่อพระมหากษัตริย์ได้เลิกการมี พหุภรรยาตามธรรมเนียมปฏิบัติดั้งเดิมแล้ว ก็ได้ก่อให้เกิดความเปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างสิ้นเชิงของราชสำนักฝ่ายใน ระหว่างรัชกาลที่ห้า (1868 – 1915) และ รัชกาลที่หก (1915- 1925)

ในการที่จะเข้าใจความรู้สึกของชาวไทยในการได้รับใช้ใต้เบื้องพระยุคลบาทนั้น จำเป็นที่จะต้องศึกษาจากแหล่งข้อมูลต่างๆที่หลากหลายกันออกไป ในที่นี้ รวมไปถึง บทสัมภาษณ์ และ บันทึกความทรงจำของสตรีผู้เคยได้มีโอกาสได้ถวายตัวรับใช้ใกล้ชิด ในราชสำนักฝ่ายใน นอกจากนี้ผู้เขียนยังได้วิเคราะห์งานเขียนวิชาการเกี่ยวกับมโนทัศน์ เรื่อง ทักษะความเป็นกษัตริย์ การเป็นทาส และ ชนชั้นในสังคม เพื่อที่จะได้สร้างความเข้าใจที่สมบูรณ์เกี่ยวกับความเชื่ออันเป็นพื้นฐานของสังคมไทยด้วย

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

สาขาวิชา ไทยศึกษา

ปีการศึกษา 2548

ลายมือชื่อนิสิต 

ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา 

ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาร่วม 

## 974-14-2439-6: MAJOR THAI STUDIES  
KEY WORDS: SERVIDUDE/INNER COURT/WOMEN

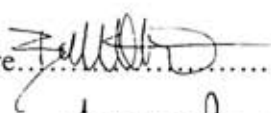
BEE MELANIE ONTRAKARN: SERVIDUDE OF THE LADIES OF THE ROYAL INNER COURT DURING THE REIGNS OF KING RAMA IV, V, AND VI. THESIS ADVISOR: PROFESSOR AMARA PONGSAPICH, Ph.D. THESIS CO-ADVISOR: SUNAIT CHUTINTARANOND, Ph.D. 111 pp. ISBN: 974-14-2439-6.

This thesis focuses on the Siamese idea of servitude to the royal family during the reigns of King Rama IV, King Rama V, and King Rama VI. Western literature has often labeled the royal inner court of Siam a "harem" based on slavery and male dominance. A majority of literature written about the inner court were those written by missionaries, suffragettes and education reformers whose perspective was that of human rights and democracy. Because those writers were unable to see Siamese society through a Siamese lens, the ambitions of women in the society were unfathomable to them. Westerners at the time did not understand that closeness to the king, regardless of one's duties was the highest ambition imaginable. New members were given to the king or princesses by willing parent or relatives, while others came of their own accord with the hope for royal favor or employment inside the palace. Young girls from noble and rich families were usually sent to the palace for a duration of time before they became marriageable, for the palace was the only place where they could be properly educated and obtain all the accomplishments and polish that were required of Siamese ladies of high birth.

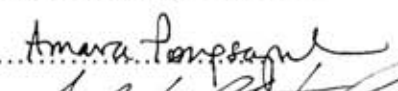
The decision to focus on the reigns of King Rama IV, King Rama V, and King Rama VI is that during these reigns, one sees the absolute height and downfall of the inner court. A majority of western literature and made popular to readers about the royal inner court encompasses this time period. With the Western colonization of neighboring countries during this period, it was vital that Siam portray itself as a modern society to maintain its autonomy. The end of the practice of polygamy by the King caused the inner court (*fai nai*) to change 180 degrees between King Rama V (1868-1915) and King Rama VI (1915-1925).

In understanding Siamese sentiment towards being in service to the King, a variety of sources will be used. This will include interviews and journals of women who served in the royal inner court. Also an analysis will be conducted of academic work concerning Siamese ideas of sacral kingship, slavery and social hierarchy with the implicit purpose of ascertaining a more complete understanding of the beliefs imbedded in Siamese society.

Field of Studies Thai Studies

Student's signature..... 

Academic year 2005

Advisor's signature..... 

Co-advisor's signature..... 

### Acknowledgements

An immense amount of gratitude is due to my grandmother Khunying Nititwadee Ontrakarn for engaging my curiosity on the history of the Royal Inner Court. Her experience working for King Rama VI and my persistence in wanting to learn more about my family were the beginnings of my research for this thesis. To my professor Dr. Susan F. Kepner at the University of California Berkeley for encouraging me to pursue researching the topic of the women of the inner court noting its needed contribution to western academia. These two remarkable women provided the foundation I needed to engage in this endeavor. As for the task of researching and writing, my advisor Dr. Amara Pongsapich must be mentioned for without her, I would not have thought to ask some of the most important questions posed in this thesis. Regardless of how busy she was, she always managed to find the time to meet with me. I would also like to thank Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond who constantly questioned and guided me through the research process and made sure I stayed focused on the task at hand. To my family, the Ontrakarns, the Wibulsawads and Kuramarohits, who have all given me an incredible amount of support, wisdom, and insight. Especially, Dr. Suaree Ontrakarn, Dr. Prida Wibulsawads, and Dr. Wannu Wibulsawads-Anderson who have at various stages of this thesis engaged in discussion with me and encouraged and supported my research. Also, I'd like to thank Khun Churaporn of the Bureau of Royal Households for giving me the opportunity to spend time with H.R.H Princess Petcharat and experience life in the palace as it is today for inner courtiers. And lastly, I must give special thanks to Suwathana Decha-Umphai, who spent many hours in the library and archives with me helping to research and translate volumes of books from Thai to English.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ENGLISH ABSTRACT.....	iv
THAI ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. Importance and Origin.....	1
2. Literature Review.....	8
3. Objective.....	17
4. Scope Of Study.....	18
5. Use of Terms.....	20
6. Research Methodology.....	22
7. Relevant Theories And Hypothesis.....	25
CHAPTER II SIAMESE WOMEN AND SOCIETY DURING THE REIGNS OF KING RAMA IV-V-VI.....	27
1. Social Structure.....	27
2. Role of Religion in the Forming of Social Ideals.....	33
3. Values and Social Norms .....	36

4.	Roles and Status of Women in Siamese Society.....	40
CHAPTER III SIAMESE KINGSHIP DURING THE REIGNS OF KING		
RAMA IV-V-VI.....		
		43
1.	Sacral Kingship.....	43
2.	Mechanisms of Political Legitimization.....	46
3.	Women and kingship.....	51
CHAPTER IV SIAMESE ROYAL PALACES.....		
		53
1.	Physical Structure of the Royal Palace.....	53
2.	Social Structure within the Royal Palace.....	59
3.	Palace Law.....	62
CHAPTER V ROYAL INNER COURT OF SIAM DURING THE REIGN OF KING		
RAMA IV AND V.....		
		64
1.	Historical Background.....	64
2.	Importance within Society.....	71
3.	Inner Court Structure and Administration.....	78
4.	Roles and Status Of Inner Court Ladies.....	84
5.	Justifications for leading a life of Servitude.....	90



6.	Way of life in the Inner Court.....	94
CHAPTER VI THE DEMISE OF THE ROYAL INNER COURT DURING THE REIGN OF KING RAMA VI.....		
		97
1.	Political changes from the V reign to VI Reign.....	97
2.	Change in Structure of the Inner court.....	105
3.	Way of life in the Inner Court.....	107
CHAPTER VII CONCLUSIONS.....		
		109
Bibliography.....		

สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Importance and Origin

Many scholars of Siamese political history regard the period from the reign of King Chulalongkorn to that of King Vajiravudh (1851-1925) as the ‘modernization period’. It was during this time that Siam underwent major changes in order to secure its sovereignty including the change in the appearance of its society to one that was ‘civilized’.<sup>1</sup> The royal court set the stage for these changes to occur in the rest of society. Since foreign envoys would be most likely to come into contact with the royal court, these courtiers also became the representatives of the nation. The inner court was of particular importance because of its visibility, though limited, to foreigners. Many foreigners commented on the treatment of women, especially on the King’s harem since throughout the rest of the world, women’s rights and women’s suffrage was coming under discussion.<sup>2</sup> With limited background knowledge of Siamese culture coupled with a foreigners’ own set of values deriving from their own cultures, the portrayal of these women was often inaccurate. This thesis is being written to discuss women’s position within Siamese society and more specifically, to analyze the situation of the women

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the changing public image of the Siamese monarchy see Peleggi, Maurizio. Lord of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy’s Modern Image. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> An example of the ways in which Siamese women were portrayed, even if inaccurately, can best be seen in Leonowens, Anna Harriette. The Original Anna and the King of Siam from the English Governess at the Siamese Court Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok. Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co, 1870.

living and employed in the inner court during the reigns of King Mongkut to King Vajiravudh.

I originally became interested in the subject of the Royal Inner Court when inquiring about my own family's background. Having been born and raised in the United States, my interest spawned from an innate desire to get to know my heritage and to explore what life was like for my ancestors. It was then that I came to know that my grandmother, great grandmother and great-great grandmother were employed in the Royal Inner Court during the reigns of King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh.

When I went to research the topic of women's lives in the inner court, I found that factual information was very limited. My knowledge of the inner court, like that of so many other Westerners, was limited to its portrayal in *The King and I*, a play turned movie based on the writings of Anna Leonowens. Leonowens wrote of the destitute women in the Royal Inner Court, portraying them as enslaved, 'helpless little creatures'.<sup>3</sup> This however, was not the impression I received from my grandmother who speaks with such pride and honor about her role in the inner court.<sup>4</sup> I knew something was amiss and that perhaps the writings of Leonowens did little justice portraying actual life in the inner court from the perspective of the women who lived in it. It became obvious to me that Ms. Leonowens had an entirely different view of life, coming from a different upbringing

---

<sup>3</sup> Leonowens, Anna. The Romance of the Harem. University Press of Virginia. Charlottesville, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Khunying Nititwadee Ontrakarn. Unpublished personal journal. Bangkok, 2004.

and raised with a different set of values. Too often has western perspective pervaded the study of Asia., especially in the 1800s when missionaries were sent abroad to spread the Christian religion. Many Westerners were also sent out on missions to explore lands and cultures and to seek out new territories that could be colonized. The stage was set, for the many misrepresentations of new cultures made by Westerners—both in understanding and subsequent writings.

A majority of literature written by Westerners during the mid 1800s to early 1900s about Siamese women portrays them as subservient and oppressed. These writings often times only discussed life in the inner court as being similar to a harem. The women who were there to serve the royal family (translated in Thai as *nang nai*) are rarely discussed. A certain delineation must be made between the *nang harm* (the royal concubines or translated from Thai as ‘forbidden ladies) and the *nang nai* (the women that served the King or other royal members), for to only portray one without the other is to miss the function and importance of the inner court as a whole.

When speaking of women within the social context, one must also take into account the events that were occurring worldwide. The women’s movement was gaining steam in most of Europe, and slavery was coming to an end in most of the civilized world. When taking these factors into consideration, one can understand Ms.

Leonowens’ misperceptions that were in fact blatant lies that she published as her true account of life in the inner court. However, despite the lies one fact still remains. At the time, she was the only westerner allowed to enter the private halls of the Royal Inner

Court and her writings are one of the most well known, albeit through the dramatization of Margaret Landon's *King and I*. What is most disturbing is how Westerners have taken her account as truth. From my perspective, and the perspective of the ladies that lived in the inner court, life there was magnificent and honorable. It was this conflicting view that spawned my initial research of the topic, the results of which provided the basis of this thesis.

The Royal Inner Court was the center point of Siamese society; a place where women of high birth resided. Up through the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the inner court served as a breeding ground for the establishment of familial networks. Families sought to install their daughters or nieces in the inner court because it was here where women were put in the best opportunity to be in contact with the King or other high-ranking government officials and hopefully create family bonds through marriage. When considered in this way, women served as the tool for a family's social mobility.

Sunait Chutintaranond suggests that women should be perceived as the main factor contributing to the social mobility of a family. He cites specifically that noble women in Ayuthhaya history played a significant role in affecting the social condition of her family. Sunait also suggests that noble women were the essential factor in the political kinship system which was based on the personal relationships between the noble women and the King. It was her presence that enabled communication between the noble families and the King. One example given by Sunait is the case of Chao Mae Watdusit who was the mother of Chao Phraya Kosalek and how she was able to use her influence

to protect her son from severe punishment. These relations contributed to the formation of the political structure.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout Siamese history, family relationships among the royalty and nobility were of considerable importance politically. In addition to providing strength and loyalty within the various ministries, intermarriage established a degree of control over vassal states and neighboring centers of power. Conquered rulers often times offered their daughters as wives or concubines to the conquering king. This was seen not only as a gesture of tribute, but also served to strengthen the bond between the two rulers and establish territorial rights.<sup>6</sup>

Among the noble class, the number of wives amassed was used to signify one's wealth. The prestige of a man was measured by the number of wives and women who served him.<sup>7</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, polygamy had been firmly established among upper class families in Thai society. Not surprisingly it was strongly attacked by Westerners especially the American missionaries, who came to Siam and became active agents in propagating Western civilization since the 1830's, as an exotic and uncivilized institution.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> See also Chutintaranond, Sunait, *Some Thoughts About Women in History*. The Journal of Thai Studies, Second Year. Vol 1, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Wyatt, David K. Studies in Thai History. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994. Pg. 189.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Pg. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Patana, Suwadee T. Polygamy or Monogamy: The Debate on Gender Relations in Thai Society, 1913-1935. Paper presented to the 13<sup>th</sup> IAHA Conference Sophia University, Tokyo, 1994. Pg. 5.

In addition to the obvious political importance of the Royal Inner Court, it also held social importance to the rest of Siam for it was the court that set the stage for creating a model image of Siamese society. This was of particular importance during the modernization period. Siam is credited as holding its sovereignty because of the modernizing efforts of the monarchy during the mid-nineteenth century when all other neighboring countries were being colonized.<sup>9</sup>

The aforementioned reasons as to the importance of the women in the inner court do not cover what women's actual sentiments were in regards to their social position. We often refer to women as a 'tool' for social mobility, but this does not sound like an ingratiating way to consider oneself. Obviously the power these women wielded was of considerable benefit, both for herself and her family. Not only that but the belief in *bunghun* or *katanyu-kathawethi* (the benefit or favor bestowed, and for which one is obligated to do something in return) weighed heavily on determining the actions of those in Siamese society. It is believed that *bunghun* of parents over their children is so great that whatever favors the children do for their parents, will never be sufficient to repay the *bunghun*. This belief contributed to the willingness of a person to fulfill his or her filial piety. For a middle to upper class Siamese woman of the time, the power over a family's social mobility was her greatest asset. A conglomeration of many beliefs along with the social importance that employment in the inner court held, contributed to an overall Siamese woman's desire (specifically referring to upper class women) to become a

---

<sup>9</sup> Peleggi, Maurizio. Lord of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

servant within its walls. Being a servant in Siamese society did not have the same stigma attached to it as it did in western societies. In fact, the way in which Siamese society was situated including being in service to one another. This will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

Because of the significance of the inner court, a socio-anthropological study of it also sheds much light on the social values held by the elite women of the time. Although these values may not have been the same as those residing outside of Bangkok, they would become more widespread with the modernizing of the country and the rise of the middle class. It was the inner court where things were first implemented. This includes the creation of new social values for women which underwent many changes during the Fifth Reign.

Concluding that the western idea of servitude is not comparable with the Siamese idea of servitude makes this thesis most noteworthy. Only when we can understand the social values concerning servitude in Siamese society can we then begin to understand how living life in the inner court was for women. The fact is, women often times aspired to be employed within its walls for the opportunities it presented to a young woman and her family.

## 1.2 Literature Review



Very few Westerners were allowed into the Royal Inner Court and therefore a limited amount of published works exist in English. The most famous are the memoirs by Anna Leonowens titled Romance of the Harem<sup>10</sup> and the subsequent memoir The English Governess in the Siamese Court.<sup>11</sup> These two memoirs are in part fiction and are based on her life in the inner court while teaching the children of King Mongkut. Though her own perspective of life in the inner court may be the truth in her own mind, it is obvious that her views are skewed by a western idea of women's rights and suffrage. Many of her accounts are a complete farce. An in depth critique of her writings can be found in A.B. Griswold's<sup>12</sup> and W.S. Bristowe's<sup>13</sup> review of her work. It is not my intention to scrutinize every detail of Anna's work in this thesis. A plentiful amount of research, conducted by scholars, have emerged discrediting her work. What does concern me is that her writings and the subsequent musical play and movies based mainly on those writings have caused millions of people to take her account of life in the royal inner court as 'fact'. Her account of life in the inner court was most definitely not 'truth' as she had stated although certain valuable information can be taken from her work.

Other writers of the royal inner court include M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, who wrote the novel Four Reigns<sup>14</sup>, a fictional account of life in the inner court where the protagonist is

---

<sup>10</sup> Leonowens, Anna. The Romance of the Harem. University Press of Virginia. Charlottesville, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Leonowens, Anna Harriette. The Original Anna and the King of Siam from the English Governess at the Siamese Court Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok. Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co, 1870.

<sup>12</sup> See Griswold, A. B. King Mongkut of Siam. New York: The Asia Society, 1961. (expanded version of Griswold 1956) Pg. 60

<sup>13</sup> See Bristowe, W.S. Louis and the King of Siam. London: Chatto & Windus, 1976.

the daughter of a nobleman who is sent to live in the inner court. Though this story is fictional, much of the basis of the story comes from his own experience of life in the inner court where he resided until he was 11.

M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, himself a descendent of a Thai king (Phra Phutthaloetla, Rama II, 1809-1824) and therefore related to King Mongkut, describes the inner palace, particularly during the reign of King Mongkut's son, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910), as the magnificent center and pinnacle of Siamese life.<sup>15</sup> In this glorious world, whose inhabitants were called *chao wang* (literally, "people of the palace"), all that was loveliest and most desirable on earth resided. Young women who had been sent by their parents to be educated in the palace dreamed that they might, by some miracle, one day come to the attention of the king.<sup>16</sup>

Malcolm Smith, in his memoir *A Physician at the Court of Siam*<sup>17</sup>, says that the Inner Palace, or "Inside" (*fai nai*), was supervised by the *athibodi fai nai* (Director of the Inside); under her (all officials and workers in the Inner Palace were female) were a number of officials in charge of departments: the minor wives, the king's kitchen, the police force, and so on.<sup>18</sup> A majority of what Smith describes are technicalities of the

---

<sup>15</sup> This novel is available in an English translation: Pramoj, Kukrit. *Four Reigns*. Tulachandra (Translator). Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Kepner, Susan. *Anna (and Margaret) and the King of Siam*. In *Crossroads. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. Vol 10, Number 2. Illinois: University of Illinois, 1996.

<sup>17</sup> See Smith, Malcolm. *A Physician at the Court of Siam*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1986.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 56-57.

inner court. He does not portray life in the inner court nor discuss the importance of its existence in any detailed way.

There is mention of the inner court by Dhiravat Na Pombejra in his book, Seventeenth Century Court Life as Depicted in European Sources<sup>19</sup> in a chapter dedicated to the study of The Women of the Palace. Although this study focuses on the seventeenth century and uses mostly French correspondence and journals as source material, it provides a valuable overview of the inner court and its purpose. Though again, since it utilizes mostly European sources, as stated in its title, it does not provide an indigenous perspective. The most important observation made, is stated in the quote below.

“The French diplomat also focuses his attention on the practice of giving “ladies” to serve the kings. The monarchs would choose whether to use these young women as “concubines” or in other capacities. La Loubere is most probably wrong, however, when he claims that the women were taken away by force from their families because the Siamese court wanted their relatives to redeem as many of them as possible “for money”. This evidence seems to be contradicted by the well known practice in old Siam of leading *khunnang* giving up their sisters and daughters quite willingly to be the king’s consorts. This was not considered a great privation on the part of the families concerned, but a politically adroit move to cement their relationship with the king.”<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> See Pombejra, Dhiravat na. Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 44-45

Nicolas Gervaise also makes mention of the honor of having several concubines and those nobles who did not have concubines were considered to have managed their affairs very badly.<sup>21</sup> La Loubere gives a slightly different interpretation of the Siamese elite man's preference for having many wives: "The Siamese may have several wives, tho' they think it would be best to have but one; and it is only the rich that affect to have more, and that more out of Pomp and Grandeur, than our Debauchery."<sup>22</sup>

There is also much confusion as to exactly what the inner court comprised of—women or men. Gervaise describes the difference between two types of male pages that worked within the inner court. Though La Loubere believed that the personal servants of the King were women.<sup>23</sup>

Quaritch Wales also writes about the inner court briefly in his book *Siamese State Ceremonies*. "Mrs. Leonowens has given us in her two books a vivid picture of life in the royal harem during the reign of King Mongkut, but her writings are unfortunately biased by a mid-Victorian viewpoint, and much missionary zeal. With such an outlook the life of many individual members of the harem appeared full of pathos, but that this was to a great extent the product of her European imagination might have dawned on Mrs. Leonowens when she speaks of the wonderful fortitude with which they bore the hardship of their lives. She forgets that this was a time-honored institution in the country,

---

<sup>21</sup> Gervaise, Nicolas. *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*. Bangkok: White Lotus, 1989. Pg. 79.

<sup>22</sup> La Loubere, Simon de. *The Kingdom of Siam*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1969. Pg. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Kemp, Jeremy. *Aspects of Siamese Kingship in the Seventeenth Century*. Bangkok: Social Science Review Social Science Association Press of Thailand. Bangkok, 1969. Pg. 29.

not only in the royal, but also in the noble families; that the member of the harem had for the most part known no other conditions, and having but a very limited knowledge of the world were quite contented with their lot , which seemed to them the acme of royal favour.”<sup>24</sup> He also speaks of the functional value of the harem in that it provided kings with a certain sense of legitimacy that was supported by a vast number of concubines and the political function of having many wives in that it provided social mobility for the noble families. This study does not go into detail about the social life of the ladies of the inner court. I do commend Wales’ obvious understanding of the “immense respect in which this time honored institution held”<sup>25</sup> which shows a perspective in tune to the indigenous beliefs of the country.

There are some discrepancies in the ways in which women of the court are mentioned in Western writings. Europeans called all the other ladies in the palace concubines, though Siamese writers prefer the term “consort”. By no means did all of these women cohabit with the King. It was the practice to take many girls of good family into the inner palace to be royal consorts. Some subsequently had sexual relations with the king and bore him children. It was these latter women whom La Loubere specifically called concubines, and he remarks that there were only eight or nine. The rest were taken “for service of the *wang*.” No terminological distinction is made between the two types of consorts both were called *chao wang* or ‘Ladies of the Palace’. Both the ‘Princess-

---

<sup>24</sup> Wales, H.G. Quaritch. Siamese State Ceremonies. Wales: Curzon Press, 1992. Pg. 46-47.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p. 49.

Queen' and the 'Ladies of the Palace' were completely segregated from the outside world and did not leave the palaces except by express order.<sup>26</sup>

The criteria on which women were selected to enter the palace to become royal consorts were beauty and family. La Loubere presents an interesting view by indicating that the recruitment of these ladies was a way of raising revenue. Once taken inside the palace they were never seen by their families, who on occasion were able to redeem their daughters through a payment of money.<sup>27</sup>

Several other mentions of the inner court written in English were found, though were not substantial enough to critique here.

There is a handful of research conducted and written in Thai, the most useful of which was derived from various theses. A thesis titled, Nang Nai written by Pornsiri Buranakhet<sup>28</sup> talks about the social life and roles of the inner court ladies in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. It contributes much in the way of personnel structure of the inner court during this period of time. It also makes mention of the social groups formed in the inner court. This information is very interesting and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5. What I have discovered after reading through various sources both in English

---

<sup>26</sup> Kemp, Jeremy. Aspects of Siamese Kingship in the Seventeenth Century. Bangkok: Social Science Review Social Science Association Press of Thailand. Bangkok, 1969. Pg. 24.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. Pg. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Pornsiri Buranakhet. Nang Nai: Social Life and Roles in Thai Society During the Reign of King Rama V. Bangkok: Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Socio-Anthropology, Thammasat University, 1997.

and Thai is that the word *nang nai* is used in varying ways. Seni Pramoj uses the word *nang nai* as a general term to describe the ladies of the inner court, but in this thesis Pornsiri uses the term *nang nai* to specifically define the wives of the King, not to be inclusive of all the inner courtiers.<sup>29</sup>

Another thesis written about the inner court is one by Chatraporn Chindradej.<sup>30</sup> In her thesis she discusses the inner court administration during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. This thesis focuses on the characteristics of the administration of the inner court stating that it is totally governed by women. It also compares the Siamese administrative structure of the inner court to that of China. Her conclusion is that the main difference between both courts is that the Chinese one is controlled by the eunuchs and the Siamese court by women. These theses are descriptive and not argumentative. The difference between these two theses (Pornsiri and Chatraporn) is that Ponsiri discusses the connection of the people living in the inner court and constructs a structure based on the connection between each queen and important inner courtier officials, while Chatraporn mainly discusses the administrative structure with minor regard to the social life within the court. Chatraporn's thesis is focused on structure and ranks within the inner court as it relates to titles and occupations.

---

<sup>29</sup> See Pornsiri Buranaket, Nang Nai: Social Life and Roles in Thai Society During the Reign of King Rama V. Bangkok: Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Socio-Anthropology, Thammasat University, 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Chatraporn Chindadach, The Inner court Administration in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1999.

Another important thesis titled A Comparative Study of the Court of King Chulalongkorn with that of King Rama VI by Chandrarat Prawalpath compares the characteristics of the two courts. After the reign of King Chulalongkorn there was a change in the structure of the court. When describing this change she divides the change between the outer and inner court. The writer also mentions that it is impossible to write about the change of one court without mentioning the other. This is especially true in the case of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI) when the inner court and the outer court can hardly be divided from one another.

An interesting research study written about *Suan Sunanta*, considered it to be the last official inner court because it was the last huge city of women to house the inner courtiers.<sup>31</sup> This study disregards the inner court of King Vajiravudh even though in his latter years he had 4 wives and 12 women that were employed in the inner court during his reign. It validates its stance by noting that none of the inner courtiers of King Vajiravudh were promoted to be the wives of the King.<sup>32</sup> For this study, most of the information was taken from interviews with women who were inner courtiers during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

Mom Luang Nuang Nilarat wrote a series of articles which originally appeared in Ploy Kaempetch Magazine and later were compiled into a book titled Life In the Inner

---

<sup>31</sup> Naengnoi Tittiranond. *Suan Sunanta*. Bangkok: Suan Sunanta Teacher's College, 1980.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Khunying Nititwadee Ontrakarn. Bangkok, September 2005.



Court. These writings are mostly devoted to stories about people she used to know while working in the inner court and how things have changed since that time.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

### 1.3 Objective

### 1.3 Objective

- 1) To discuss the attributes of the Royal Inner Court during the reigns of King Mongkut to King Vajiravudh.
- 2) To analyze the sentiments of Siamese women living in the royal inner court towards leading a life of servitude.

This thesis lends to the academic community an account of the royal inner court written in English that uses primarily indigenous sources. In researching this topic specifically, it has come to mind that also an in-depth study of the values of Siamese upper class women and their relation to the inner court during this period of time is lacking. Too often Western perspective has pervaded the study of Asia. A study contrived from a certain sense of ethnocentrism is unavoidable when conducting a study based on 'outside' foreign sources. Using indigenous sources will provide a more accurate picture of the status of Siamese women during the mid-nineteenth century to early twentieth century as it relates to Siamese culture and tradition.

#### 1.4 Scope Of Study

The objective for this thesis is two-fold. First, because of the importance of the Royal Inner Court of Siam, it is my intention to discuss its attributes specifically during the reigns of King Mongkut to King Vajiravudh. This period was chosen because during the mid-nineteenth century, in the reign of King Mongkut, the height in importance of the royal inner court occurred and continued on until its final demise in the early twentieth century during the reign of King Vajiravudh. Also, Siam is introduced to the western world by the portrayal of this period of time through the popularization of a play based on the writings of Anna Leonowens. Though her account is based on her time in Siam during the reign of King Mongkut, the importance and demise of the royal inner court lends a more thorough understanding of the royal inner court and the effects that modernization had on this time honored tradition.

Second, in order to gain an understanding of the sentiments of Siamese women living in the inner court, one must first understand the culture—its beliefs, values and social norms. A discussion of this aspect and the way in which it relates to Siamese women, specifically the inner courtiers, is included.

A historical, anthropological approach is used to examine the social aspect of this group of women by analyzing their role and status in the Royal Court of Siam during the reign of King Mongkut to King Vajiravudh. Based on my hypothesis, life in the inner court for women served as an opportunity in life rather than as a life in cruel servitude to

a despotic king as so often is depicted in Western sources. Because of the lack of testimonials concerning the sentiments about the role of inner courtiers, I have chosen to use a historical anthropological approach. This approach provides descriptive information that allows me to analyze this group of people and come to the conclusions that answer the main question of my thesis—the status of inner court women in the context of Siamese culture and tradition.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## 1.5 Use of Terms

The standard I chose to use in the spelling of Siamese names is Pali transcribed according to Prince Chula Chakrabongse.

In using the term ‘servitude’ I want to clarify its use here since servitude during this period of time exists in varying ways around the world. Servitude in the Oxford English dictionary is defined in two ways. 1) the state of being a slave. 2) the state of being completely subject to someone more powerful. Servitude is most often correlated to the idea of indentured servitude, similar to how slaves were defined in the Americas in the mid-nineteenth century. This is not at all similar to how slaves or *thaat* were perceived in Siamese society. For more on the relationship between *phrai* and *thaat* please refer to Akin’s book, The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period<sup>33</sup> which discusses this in detail. To ensure clarification on this point, throughout this thesis I am choosing not to use the first definition Oxford gives. Instead I have chosen to use the second definition for servitude as a ‘state of being completely subject to someone more powerful’.

Also, use of the term Queen, royal concubine, royal consort, and lady in waiting is incredibly varied in literature. So much so, that it may be used over another to portray a person in a more positive or negative light depending on the wishes of the writer.

Therefore, any woman elevated to the rank of *Phra Nang Chao* is defined as a Queen,

---

<sup>33</sup> Radibhadana, Akin. The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing, 1996.

thereby using the same terminological definition inline with that used by Prince Chula Chakrabongse.

Even within Thai academic discourse, there is little cohesiveness in the translation or identification of the word *nang nai* or *nang harm*. Seni Pramroj defined *nang nai* as women who worked in the royal palace and *nang harm* as the forbidden ladies (as in wives or concubines of the king). Whereas a thesis written by Ponsiri Buranaket titled *Nang Nai Chiwit Tang Songkom La Bot Bat Nai Songkom Thai Sammai Ratchakan Ti Haa* translated meaning *Nang Nai Social Life and Roles in Thai Society During the Reign of King Rama V*, focuses on the wives of the royal palace thereby using the term *nang nai* to define the royal wives of the King (as written in the abstract which is in English). I have decided to follow Seni Pramroj's definition of the terms, specifically because it follows the more literal translation of the terms in question. The term *nang nai* meaning 'lady inside' or the 'inner court ladies' and *nang harm* meaning 'lady forbidden' or 'forbidden ladies', presumably referring to ladies reserved for the King.

## 1.6 Research Methodology

This research is an ethnographic study aimed to study, analyze and present issues from historical documents, and other sources written concerning the issue of women in the inner court.

### a) Primary sources

Documents written by the people living in the reign of King Mongkut to King Vajiravudh regarding the King's personal activities and the life of the courtiers, especially the life of the inner courtiers. Chronicles, journals written in that period of time, notes, funeral books, and stories told by the people living in the court during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

These sources are used together with announcements, laws, and biographies.

### b) Secondary sources

General writings such as descriptive writings about Siamese society in that period of time by both Thai scholars and foreign scholars including foreigners who experienced living in Thailand during that period of time.

Historical writings explaining political structure and social conditions in that period of time. For example, writings of Prince Damrong Rajanuphap, Phya Anuman Rajadhon, and Kukrit Pramoj.

Research on Thai political history focusing on the study of Thai political history in the Rattanakosin period. For example, writings of Akin Radibhadana, Tej Bunnag, David K. Wyatt, Piyanat Bunnag.

Information gathered from interviews, journals and funeral books. For example, the interviews of members of the inner court and personal journals written by royal concubines, queens, and inner courtiers.

The content of this thesis will be divided into seven chapters. The first chapter includes introductory material outlining the importance and origin of this thesis and the royal inner court of Siam. Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of the status of Siamese women during the reign of King Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh. This chapter intends to portray women as attached to their family life. Women were always perceived as daughters, wives or mothers and derived their existence in society from this relationship. This status leads to the understanding of the condition of women being the representative of the family and used by her family for social mobility. Also discussed is the role of religion and how it contributes to the strong values and norms created in society. Chapter 3 talks about Siamese kingship and how the perception of the King in general, affected the importance of the relations one had with the King. In Chapter 4, the royal palaces will be discussed. Each Queen's palace and its proximity to the King indicated the importance of that Queen; the closer in proximity, the higher in importance. Also, since the King



resided at several palaces, life was varied for the inner courtiers. This affected the inner workings of the inner court profoundly, especially during the reign of King Rama VI. In the fifth chapter, the royal inner court will be examined including its structure, administration, and the roles of courtiers. Most important from this chapter include the justifications for leading a life of servitude based on the opportunities it provided and the way of life in the inner court which discusses the day to day lives of the inner courtiers. Chapter six discusses the changes in the inner court as a result of the political changes that occurred during the reign of King Vajiravudh.

Through understanding the culture's beliefs and norms, its relationship with the King, and the inner court's purpose within society an understanding of the importance of the inner court can be surmised. Thus, the position of the inner courtiers can be considered not one of indentured servitude, but one of service as an honored member.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## 1.7 Relevant Theories and Hypothesis

The women of the inner court are often depicted as slaves. The concept of servitude and slavery from the Western perspective is different from the concept of servitude and slavery from the Siamese perspective. The use of the term 'slavery' or 'slave' when speaking about other cultures varies greatly depending on the social structure of the culture or society being spoken about. Servitude and slavery can only be described when taking into consideration a slave's social status. In essence, 'slaves' have a different place in Siamese society not equivalent to that of the West.

It would be astonishing if ideological distortions did not enter into the way such judgments are made. Nowhere is this more the case than in the nations, regions and cultural mosaics that form what for want of a better term is known as Asia.<sup>34</sup>

To carry over the idea of Western slavery and apply it to Siamese society is to misunderstand the society completely. The only way to understand it is in the context of Thai social organization. In Thai society, there was no slave market, nor any evidence of selling slaves for profit, although it has been said that a third of the population were slaves.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Aphornsuvan, Thanet. *Slavery and Modernity: Freedom in the Making of Modern Siam*. in *Asian Freedoms*. Edited by Kelly, David & Reid, Anthony. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pg. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Opt cit. Radibhadana, Akin. *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873*. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing, 1996. Pg. 129.

We often talk about the differences under the rubrics of 'social class' and 'occupational hierarchies'. Yet, whilst we know a great deal about the differences which social class makes in the many areas, we know relatively little about how people actually conceive their social world and how social class fits into these conceptions.<sup>36</sup>

Siamese worldview. World views are descriptive theories that serve to explain how life on earth is organized and how it relates to some broad, general principles. Most often they are of a highly symbolic nature and embodied in religion; sometimes they are speculative and embodied in metaphysics; sometimes they are political and embodied in a political ideology; and certain modern worldviews are even supposed to be scientific. Whatever the case may be, they are theories of how life in its actuality can be comprehended, and are as such models of society. They are the products of the reflection of man on his condition, projected symbolically as the truth. Their basis lies in experience, so worldviews can only be understood in relation to the historical societies that produced them.<sup>37</sup>

I use these quotes from various academic scholars who have written about Siamese society or slavery and servitude as the theoretical basis for my research. Their work has provided me with the respect and insight I used in conducting my research and in producing a thesis rooted in the beliefs of Siamese society.

---

<sup>36</sup> Coxon, Anthony P.M. & Jones, Charles L. Class and Hierarchy. The Social Meaning of Occupations. London: Macmillan, 1979.

<sup>37</sup> Mulder, Niels. The Concept of Power and Moral Goodness in the Contemporary Thai Worldview. The Journal of Siam Society. Issue 67 Vol 1. Bangkok, 1979. Pg. 111

## CHAPTER II

### SIAMESE WOMEN AND SOCIETY DURING THE REIGNS OF KING RAMA IV-V-VI

#### 2.1 Social Structure

In understanding the position of women in Siamese society, one must first understand the social structure of the society as a whole. Therefore, a brief overview of the social structure during the reign of King Mongkut to King Vajiravudh will be discussed. Traditional Thailand (then known as Siam) was, if not a planned society, at least an outlined society. In intent, although by no means in practice, it was a totalitarian society, with a single authority-principle and an inclusive, explicit, even quantitatively expressed structure of roles and statuses by which the authority of the King might be exercised.<sup>1</sup> Personal identity was largely determined by reference to this hierarchical matrix. The emphasis in the system was profoundly vertical; the hierarchy identified superiors and subordinates, and “defined” relations between them in terms of status. A superior was entitled to deference and obedience; a subordinate was expected to defer and obey.<sup>2</sup> The most important nobles should be regarded as great servants rather than as great individuals in the European sense of nobility. By the bounty of their master, the

---

<sup>1</sup>For more on this read Radibhadana, Akin. The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing, 1996.

<sup>2</sup>Siffin, William. Traditional Society and Traditional Government. The Thai Bureaucracy Institutional Change and Development. Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1976. Pg.31.

King, they were allowed the honor and respect of the common people in return for the services rendered to the king.<sup>3</sup>

This social order was also a moral order. Attainment of a position was believed to be due to accumulated *bun* (merits or good deeds). The King having infinite *bun*, Siamese kingship was always sacred because it represented dharma, the moral order of society. Ranking was part of the moral order, hierarchy being maintained through the royal distribution of awards in the form of rank (*yot*) and manpower in accordance with the merit (*bun*) of each person. This was the ideological base of the organization.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, it was also often said that the socio-political organization of the Kingdom was merely an extension of the Thai family. The role of the King was said to be modeled on that of a father. Paternalism was widely practiced in the socio-political organization. It may be noted that Thai kinship terminology emphasizes the differences in generation and age, and respect for elders was very important. The essence of this relationship was reciprocity, especially between the senior and junior members of the kin groups.<sup>5</sup>

This concept of reciprocity based on the religious belief of karma played a profound role in the actual social structure of Siamese society. There are two main words

---

<sup>3</sup> Kemp, Jeremy. Aspects of Siamese Kingship in the Seventeenth Century. Bangkok: Social Science Review Social Science Association Press of Thailand. Bangkok, 1969. Pg. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Radibhadana, Akin. The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing, 1996. P. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

used in Thai to describe this concept: *Katanyu* (to be constantly aware of the benefits or favor given to oneself.), and *Bunkhun* (the benefit or favor bestowed and for which one is obligated to do something in return.) This belief governs the personal actions of an individual in this life, past lives, and it is believed that *bunkhun* of parents over their children is so great that whatever favors the children do for their parents, will never be sufficient to repay the *bunkhun*. This dynamic will be discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters.

By the turn of the twentieth century, according to contemporary documents, Bangkok society could have been divided roughly into three strata: the upper class, consisting of princes and high-ranking nobles, the middle class, including government officials, owners and employees of business enterprises, and the lower class, consisting of hawkers, domestic servants and other kinds of wage earners.<sup>6</sup> Most of the upper class could be identified by the amount of people they had in their employment. The rights to ranks and titles allowed the nobility the rights to have personal secretaries and assistants including servants and followers, distinguishing them from the commoners.<sup>7</sup>

The bureaucracy functioned as a social system-more precisely, as the social subsystem which included all the secular strata of society between the king and the commoners. The formal framework of the system was the matrix of official ranks and

---

<sup>6</sup>Patana, Suwadee T. Thai Society's Expectations of Women 1904-1935: An Approach to Women's History. Paper presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> IAHA Conference. University of Hong Kong. Bangkok, 1991. Pg. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Aphornsuvan, Thanet. Slavery and Modernity: Freedom in the Making of Modern Siam. in Asian Freedoms. Edited by Kelly, David & Reid, Anthony. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pg. 4.

roles which derived their meaning and legitimacy from the King. But no social system is merely a matter of an explicit, formal framework; and in the Thai case the formal framework itself helped produce values that were often more meaningful than the aims and orders of the monarch.<sup>8</sup>

The lowest or the smallest unit in the hierarchy was a group consisting of *nai* (master) who was the patron with his *phrai* (follower) who were his clients. These groups were organized into a hierarchy, like an army, with the king at the pinnacle.<sup>9</sup>

The system of titles was little conducive to the rise of a permanent aristocracy among the non-royals since most of the important titles went to the princes. Each man held his title for the duration of his life and this title could only be taken away by the King or one of his superiors. Whatever tendency there was for high status to run in family lines was due solely to the better opportunities a man might be able to provide for his children or to the favor of his superiors. Just as political status was not transmitted intact from one generation to another, so was high financial status transitory. This was due partly to the great insecurity of political tenure, but perhaps even more basically, to the Thai law of inheritance. Indivisibility of an estate is contrary to all Thai customs. All children inherit; daughters as well as sons and wives also receive their own personal shares. This inheritance law holds good for all classes but its effects were the more

---

<sup>8</sup> Siffin, William. Traditional Society and Traditional Government. *The Thai Bureaucracy Institutional Change and Development*. Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1976. Pg. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Radibhadana, Akin. The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing, 1996. Pg. 18.

extreme among princes and officials because plural wives were almost the rule among them and children very numerous.<sup>10</sup>

Though the sons and daughters of lesser wives did not have claims to their father's holdings equal to those of the first wife, they always shared in the property division. The result was a very considerable mobility up and down the social scale and the absence of permanent, entrenched "feudal" families. At any given moment of time, however, the hierarchy was explicit, and the rewards of status were definite.<sup>11</sup>

It has more than once been observed that the relationship among Thai kins is very similar to a patron-client relation, though there is much debate among scholars about whether or not Thai social structure is in fact based on patron-client relations.<sup>12</sup> The patron-client relationship can be defined by the expectation of both parties. A client is the receiver of the relationship. He is socially expected to be obedient to his patron's requests and pays either a "gift" or a social duty to his patron. Normally a client's spouse and children all share the same patron, but there are always exceptions. A patron is socially expected to look out for his clients. The patron must protect them from whatever he can, as well as help the clients achieve a better social and economic standing in the society. The counter argument to the issue of Siamese structure being that of patron-client is that the relationship in Siamese society at the time included property exchange.

---

<sup>10</sup> Benedict, Ruth, Thai Culture and Behavior, An Unpublished War-time Study, Dated September, 1943 Southeast Asian Program, Department of Far Eastern Studies. New York: Cornell University, 1952. Pg. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid P. 6.

<sup>12</sup>Op. cit. ibid. p. 18.



In this respect, the patron-client relation is refuted. Though I take no official stance as to the status of Siamese society's adherence to the patron-client relationship ideology, it is important to note.<sup>13</sup>



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

---

<sup>13</sup> For more on patron-client relations see also Radibhadana, Akin. The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing, 1996.

## 2.2 Role of Religion in the Forming of Social Ideals

Historically, religion has played a vital role in the forming of social ideals in nearly all societies. In Siamese society, the most profound religions include Brahmanism, Animism and Buddhism. The influence of these religions on Siamese society is still present today.

Two main concepts resonate as the most influential in forming the social ideals of the mid-nineteenth century; 1) The concept of reciprocity/karma and 2) the concept of merit accumulation. The concept of reciprocity or karma can be characterized in Thai by the use of *Bun* and *Karma*. *Bun* is considered the amount of merit that has been accumulated in the past life, and therefore affects you now. Generally, it refers to good deeds and is received as such. The belief is—if you are reborn as a noble or king, it is based on the ‘good’ merit you have made in the previous life. *Bun* can also be accumulated in this life time for the next lifetime.

*Karma* refers to the actions in a past life (usually referred to as ‘bad’ deeds) that has its consequences in this life. It implies that if you did something bad in a past life then you are punished for it in this life. It is believed that those born as slaves must have done something in a past life to merit this type of punishment. *Karma* can also imply a neutral action in a past life.

The concept of *Bun* and *Karma* generally kept clashes between classes to a minimum because of its use to justify one's status. However, it also adversely affected many other 'conditions' in which people found themselves. One 'condition' I refer to is specifically gender. *Karma* conditioned gender. To be a woman and not a man meant that a woman had an inadequate store of merit, and the only way to remedy this situation was for a woman to make merit through acts of religious devotion.<sup>14</sup>

Buddhist belief postulates a moral hierarchy that underlies the phenomenal world, a belief that provides a symbolic framework within which all animate existence may be classified. Buddhist rituals manifest and perpetuate this moral hierarchy in everyday social life; the hierarchical order is not simply confined to a sphere neatly labeled "religious", it is a central part of the total social science.<sup>15</sup>

The impression that religion had on creating social values in Siamese society is profound. In Buddhism, each person was given a prescribed place in society. Religious belief also frowns upon the attainment of a higher position than one was born into. Though this is the case in the religious belief itself, it did not keep families from seeking alignment with the King and the nobles in order to elevate one's position. Religion was

---

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, Craig J. *A Nineteenth Century Thai Buddhist Defense of Polygamy and Some Remarks on the Social History of Women in Thailand*. A paper presented for the seventh conference IAHA. Bangkok, 1977. Pg 3.

<sup>15</sup> Kirsch, A. Thomas. *The Thai Buddhist Quest for Merit. The Politics of Southeast Asia*. New York Random House, 1973. Pg. 194.

used in both ways, to justify one's position and also to dissuade individuals from being overly ambitious.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

### 2.3 Values and Social Norms

Literature was used as a tool to communicate society's expectation of an ideal woman. In the early Rattanakosin period, Sunthorn Phu, a well known writer of Siamese literature whose writings were famous among all classes, composed *Supasit Sorn Ying* or "Code of Conduct for Women". He declared that his intention for writing *Supasit Sorn Ying* was that he wanted to teach the people proper conduct so that one could prevent bad deeds from occurring. As stated in his first poem, the purpose of the writing was to tell women what to do and what not to do in order to keep order in the society. It was believed that those who practiced according to these guidelines would have a happy, honorable life. On the other hand, he also stressed that those who did not follow these guidelines, would have a miserable life filled with calamity.

The Code of Conduct mainly addresses the issue of women and gave instructions on how to behave oneself, how to talk, how to dress, and how to serve the men in the family. It also focuses on the fact that a woman's behavior reflects on the honor of her family. Her behavior can dishonor her family as well as benefit her family.

The Code of Conduct set the social values for the role of women in Siamese society. Women were simply expected to be an obedient daughter and/or wife. The Code of Conduct also suggested that a woman should pay attention to her looks and behavior. She had the responsibility of caring for herself and her husband. Her good behavior would bring her marriage, and continued 'good' life with her husband. The poem mainly

talks about women in the domestic sphere and thus, portrays the limitation of women in Siamese society during this time due to the social values and norms it set.

During the reign of King Vajiravudh a newly revised Code of Conduct for Women was written.<sup>16</sup> The objective of this writing was not only to remind women to behave gracefully and honorably, but also included other factors not previously mentioned. In the earlier writing a majority of the acceptable conduct that was laid down was limited to the domestic sphere. The ideal women as portrayed in this newly revised poem had changed. The new ideal woman included such essential characteristics as intelligence and the ability to be social. This new version indicates the setting of values and proper codes of conduct as conforming to Western ideals. This period would emphasize the inclusion of women in social functions and the need to have a wife that could demonstrate herself to be knowledgeable and courteous in western etiquette, thus reflecting the honor of the husband.

The reciprocity concept has always been a prominent concept in Siamese values and social norms. This concept of reciprocity was emphasized in the dominant value of *katanyu-katawethi*. That is, to remember what another has done for one, and to try to do this in return.<sup>17</sup> *Bunkhun* is another term that refers to this concept of reciprocity and can be defined as the good deeds another has done for oneself. The normative construction of household relations in terms of *bunkhun* reciprocity places children in a position of

---

<sup>16</sup> Phra Rajanipon Klong Supasit. King Vajiravudh. Published in the funeral book of Queen Suwattana Phra Woraraja Devi, March 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Radibhadana, Akin. The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing, 1996. Pg 215.

strong obligation to their parents.<sup>18</sup> It was believed that the *bunghun* owed to one's parents was so great, that it could never be fully repaid. Therefore, it can be surmised that a child's main purpose in life was to act in accordance to his or her parent's wishes.

Marriage was considered a duty which a daughter should do for her parents. Her parents would select for her a good husband and as a *katanyu* daughter, she had to comply with her parents' decision. Since marriage was one of the most important things in a woman's life, striving to be a perfect wife with all the desirable qualifications also became a priority.

Siamese society could be characterized by the emphasis on status differentiation (in opposition to class differentiation), and reciprocity in the concept of *bunghun*. Of course, there are reciprocity and status differentiation in all societies, but in Thai society it had been specially emphasized, and used for enforcing as well as justifying social obligations.<sup>19</sup>

The prime symbol of moral goodness is the *bunghun* that a mother gives to her children. She cannot be but good; she cannot do but give and care; she is always benevolent and forgiving; she feeds, loves, and gives without expectation of return; she gives without asking and does not punish. She sacrifices herself for her dependants who

---

<sup>18</sup> Mills, Mary Beth. *Working For Wages in Bangkok, Reworking Gender and Family in the Countryside*. In Women, Gender Relations and Development in Thai Society. Edited by Virada Somswasdi & Sally Theobald. Faculty of Social Sciences. Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University Press, 1997. Pg.139.

<sup>19</sup> Radibhadana, Akin. The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing, 1996. Pg 27.

rely on her for stability and continuity in life. She is a moral refuge, a haven of safety, and the source of the moral identity of her offspring. At mother's side one is safe (*plod-phai*) and knows that one will be forgiven.<sup>20</sup>

The concept of *katanyu-katawethi* and *bunghun* also explains the rationale behind the values and social norms towards women in Siamese society. Meeting society's expectation on being a good and obedient daughter is an undeniable obligation for women because of the strong sense of obligation towards one's parents.

The mother-nurturer role is idealized in the female code of social and sexual conduct. Historically, the Thai tradition has defined a *kulasatrii* ("virtuous woman") as proficient and sophisticated in household duties; graceful, pleasant, yet unassuming in her appearance and social manners, and conservative in her sexuality. These features bear striking similarities to the traditional "feminine mystique" in other cultures, which has come under the criticism of the Western feminist movement. However, most Thai women wholeheartedly endorse the *kulasatrii* notion without resentment, regarding it as a sign of dignity and honor, a sense of cultural identity in which they can take pride.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Kittiwut Jod Taywaditep, et. Al. *Gender Conflicted Persons*. In IES Countries: Thailand Muang Thai, 1994. Page 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Pg. 7.



## 2.4 Roles and Status of Women in Siamese Society

The law of the period, namely “The Three Seals Law Code” (*kotmai tra sam duang*) clearly reinforced the subordination of women. A woman was not a free agent and had to be placed under someone else’s protection. If single, no matter how old, she was under her parents’ control. Once she was married, parental power was converted into conjugal power and transferred to her husband. Along this line, a woman was considered to be an item in her father’s or her husband’s assets, which included land, animals, a wife, slaves, servants, children and the elderly. As his asset, the “owner” obtained the right to sell or give away his wife or his daughter with or without her consent.<sup>22</sup> According to this law, women were perceived as an ‘asset’. In traditional Siamese society a woman was always the possession of a man, whether it was her husband or her father.

It is written that a Thai woman was not a free agent and had to be placed under someone else’s protection.<sup>23</sup> Historically speaking, in Thai society, a woman was always under the responsibility of either her parents and relatives, or her husband. Thai law further substantiates this claim. Within this inferior status, Thai women were confined to the house where they were responsible for the upbringing and care of their children and for household duties like cooking and sewing. It was not until King Vajiravudh, in the

---

<sup>22</sup> Patana, Suwadee T. Polygamy or Monogamy: The Debate on Gender Relations in Thai Society, 1913-1935. Paper presented at the 13<sup>th</sup> IAHA Conference Sophia University, Tokyo. Bangkok, 1994. Pg. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Reynolds, Craig J. A Nineteenth Century Thai Buddhist Defense of Polygamy and Some Remarks on the Social History of Women in Thailand. A paper presented for the seventh conference IAHA. Bangkok, 1977. Pg. 7.

second decade of the twentieth century onward, urged upper and middle class women to accompany their husbands to social gatherings and parties. This notion brought women out of the domestic confines of the house and brought them into the social sphere.

Having been educated in Europe for a considerable period, King Vajiravudh believed that the pleasant personalities of women, including their good manners in socializing, were indicative of a civilized society. There are various examples of this. In his writings, the King tried to encourage women to adopt the Western style of dress and to join social gatherings alongside their husbands.<sup>24</sup>

Marriage also provided an opportunity for the social mobility of a woman and her family. Marrying a man from a higher class or ranking was preferable for a noble family. Kinship was important for the connections and the work opportunities it presented to a woman's family. One could gain connections with higher ranking personnel or influential people via this kinship system. In this regard, marriage was employed as a tool to construct the political kinship system. This will be discussed in more detail later.

Formal education to women was made available on a limited basis. Most schools catered only to the elite woman and taught home sciences such as cooking, sewing and handicrafts. In 1874, the first boarding school for girls, Kulasatri Wanglang, was established by Miss Harriet M. House (an American). In 1880, King Chulalongkorn established a second boarding school in Bangkok, called Sunandalai School, in honor of his consort, who later became Queen Sunanda Kumariratana. Queen Sribajarindra

---

<sup>24</sup> Patana, Suwadee T. Thai Society's Expectations of Women 1904-1935: An Approach to Women's History. Paper presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> IAHA Conference. University of Hong Kong. Bangkok, 1991. Pg. 8.

established the Saowabha School for girls in 1897 and in 1907 a women's teacher training program was organized at the Satri Widya School to train women as primary school teachers. The year 1913 saw the establishment of Benchama Rajalai School for teacher training. However, it is unclear which women were allowed to attend these schools and how many actually did so.<sup>25</sup>

The main role of women during the mid-nineteenth century was of wife and nurturer to both her husband and her children. Her familial obligations tied her to perfecting this role through the only education available to women at the time, the study of home sciences. The ability of women to perfect this role through formal education was limited to upper class women. The status of women was also in relation to a man, whether it be her husband or father. Siamese law dictated this and the social values created further cemented her place in the Siamese family. Her own social mobility and in some cases, that of her family was dependent on her ability to marry upwards on the social ladder, thereby also elevating the status of her family. To Siamese women of the time, this oppression was not obvious, nor felt. The feeling of familial obligation, the importance of their role in the social mobility of the family, and the social values instilled upon them made this so. The self reflection of a Siamese woman and their role and status was not one of inferiority, but of duty and honor.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Education, *A History of Thai Education*. Bangkok: Kurusapha Ladprao Press, 1976.

## CHAPTER III

### SIAMESE KINGSHIP DURING THE REIGNS OF KING RAMA IV-V-VI

#### 3.1 Siamese Kingship

In traditional Siam, the position of the king was conceived of as being the supreme rank of the realm “to be filled by the person with the greatest past merit (bun).”<sup>1</sup>

The early Siamese concept of kingship was considered sacral in the sense that it was tied with the Buddhist religion. In Siamese traditional society, the King was looked upon as a Buddha or *Bodhisatta* for his subjects, as the embodiment of the *Dhamma* (one of the three jewels of Buddhism) and the one responsible for its implementation within his realm, and as protector of the *Sangha* or Buddhist order. Also, with the hegemony of Brahmanism, the King also became identified with the Hindu gods such as Siva, Vishnu and Indra and was invested with the natural powers of fertility and productivity. Within this belief, the King sat at the apex of the national and court hierarchies.<sup>2</sup>

The main function of the King in ancient times was that he served as a bond between the divine and the human, around and below which a social order took form. He was closely identified with the great god Indra, who ruled the heavenly realm

---

<sup>1</sup> Opt Cit. Keyes, Charles. The Power of Merit. Visakha Puja, 1973. Pg. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds, Frank. *Sacral Kingship and National Development: The case of Thailand*. Contributions to Asian Studies. Vol IV. Leiden: E.J Brill, 1973. Pg. 41.

which was located at the peak of Mount Meru, the central mountain in Siamese Buddhist cosmology.<sup>3</sup>

Though the traditional pattern of sacral kingship which had been operative in Siam during the pre-modern period was basically similar to what had existed in the other Theravada kingdoms of Southeast Asia, only in Siam did the historical situation provide an opportunity for the established dynasty to play a positive role in the process of modernization.<sup>4</sup>

The Chakri dynasty provided the primary leadership through which Siam became a viable nation-state within the context of the modern world. It is true that these monarchs were forced to sponsor both religious and political reforms in order to assure the continued vitality of Buddhism and the preservation of their own hegemony. Also, they were under some pressure from modernizing groups among those segments of the population, which had more extensive contacts with the West.<sup>5</sup>

Within the specifically Buddhist context the Siamese leader who had the first extensive exposure to the new Western and modernizing influences and began the work of reformulating the traditional religious doctrine and practice was a monk who would later become King Mongkut. Both Mongkut and Chulalongkorn had encouraged and personally contributed to the development of a modern style of national Siamese historiography. But, it was during the reign of King Vajiravudh

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Pg. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid Pg. 42.

that the encouragement of a full blown Thai nationalism became a prime concern of the monarch and his associates.<sup>6</sup>

The modern, essentially rationalistic world view tended to undercut the cosmological and hierarchical orientation which had been fundamental to the traditional Buddhist, Hindu and other indigenous conceptions of the royal charisma.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the way in which the Chakri kings had used their traditional authority and their flexibility in the face of changing conditions, the challenges to their positions resulted not in the demise of the institution of sacral kingship, but rather in its transformation.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the new ways of thinking introduced from the West, the old cosmological conception and the forms in which they were expressed were never really abandoned. Even during the reign of King Mongkut, who strongly opposed Brahmanic elements of his kingship, he continued to uphold it and in fact reinstated it since it was practiced by his predecessors. Though, after his reign, it was gradually toned down and declined in importance; the conception of the king's divinity and the taboos associated with his person were modified; and the extravagance and rigidity of the court etiquette which had expressed and reinforced the hierarchical aspect of the traditional order were steadily ameliorated.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid Pg. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Pg 46.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Pg. 46

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Pg. 47

### 3.2 Mechanisms of Political Legitimization

During King Mongkut's reign there were many conflicts between the royal aristocratic elite and the newly emerging commoner-bureaucratic elite, especially with the increasing presence of the West. The rapid centralization and bureaucratization of Siam during the reign of King Chulalongkorn to become modernized and protect the kingdom in the face of encroaching colonialism spawned a new elite group. Their conception of legitimacy was no longer based on divinity or other qualifications of the ruler. From the Siamese point of view, political legitimacy had to be grounded in the principle of egalitarianism and merit. Dissent over tradition as the source of authority first surfaced among the younger generations of princes, nobles, and intellectuals, most of whom had been educated in Europe. In 1885, a group of young princes in London and Paris submitted a petition to King Chulalongkorn outlining the problems facing Siam, criticizing the excessive centralization of power, and calling for modernization of the state by transforming the absolute monarchy into a constitutional one.<sup>10</sup>

This exposure of the nobility to Western political ideas, the creation of a modern bureaucracy, and the spread of modern education among commoners planted the seeds of political change in Thai society. The legitimacy of the absolute monarchy began to erode soon after it peaked during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. To be successful, the absolute regime required a capable, responsive, and tactful monarch with political skill and charisma. The King needed to be able to

---

<sup>10</sup> Sukatipan, Saitip. *Thailand: The Evolution of Legitimacy* in Muthiah Alagappa Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia : The Quest for Moral Authority. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995. Pg. 194.

utilize and control the huge and powerful bureaucracy and cope with increasing demands from the modernized sectors of society. King Chulalongkorn was adept at this. His successors, however, were not as successful. Hence the tension between, on the one hand, the princes and nobles who filled the top positions of the royal administration and, on the other, the civilian-military bureaucrats whose influence grew steadily after the death of King Chulalongkorn. This tension was further aggravated by the worldwide depression of the 1920s, which affected Siam's economy and its people.

When speaking about political legitimacy, first, an understanding of the general concept must be made. Political legitimacy is the foundation of governmental power based on the belief that the government has a right to govern and the governed recognizes that right.<sup>11</sup> It involves the capacity of a political system to engender while maintaining the belief that its political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society. It is worthwhile mentioning here that legitimacy has an even broader meaning. It includes the belief that the structures, processes, policies, decisions, acts, and/or officials of government possess the quality of rightness, propriety, or moral goodness, and should be accepted.<sup>12</sup>

The principle of political legitimacy is viewed in terms of 'good' governmental form that guaranteed the common public interest, such as the monarchy, aristocracy and polity, depending on the environment of each respective

---

<sup>11</sup> Sternberger, Dolf. *Legitimacy*, International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol IX. New York: Macmillan, 1968. Pg. 244.

<sup>12</sup>Dahl, Robert A. Modern Political Analysis. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966. p.19.



society. The claims over the right to govern according to these forms seem to be distinguished by the number of rulers.<sup>13</sup>

The rationale of the monarchy is that only a single person with excellent and supreme qualifications should be entrusted with the right and responsibility to govern.

Between 413AD-426AD and at least five centuries following, the idea of political legitimacy was also viewed from a religious perspective. In this light, political legitimacy could not exist if the people felt that the King turned away from the gods. During this period of time the monarchical institution was respected as a divine representative.<sup>14</sup> With regards to the former pattern of rationale, the monarch is often believed to succeed a divine dynasty, if not be a demi-god or god himself.<sup>15</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, political legitimacy was believed to pass down through the line of succession which was, in turn, based on the concept of the divine right of the King and the divine ruling dynasty. This divine right concept was later opposed on the grounds that either the royal institution or another political institution could emerge from a common agreement among members of the society.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Nakata, Thinpan. *Political Legitimacy in Thailand : Problems and Prospects* Journal of Social Science Review. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Vol 1. No.1. March, 1976. Pg. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid Pg. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid Pg. 50.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid Pg. 49.

In the Ayutthaya period, beginning in 1357, the concept of divine kingship derived from Brahmanism was introduced as the basis of rule. The king was viewed as a divinity and had absolute power. The Thai people believed in the latter principle of legitimacy until the beginning of the present Chakri Dynasty. However, King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn returned to a more paternalistic rule.<sup>17</sup>

Under paternalism or patriarchal monarchy, the system of government resembled that of family rule. The father is viewed as the head of the family. The state was ruled by a benevolent paternal king who is conceived of as the father of his people. He was assisted by his public servants. The people were expected to respect and obey the king and those who worked for him. The people were obliged to serve this faction. Under this type of rule, those who have authority always conceived themselves as having the duty to help.<sup>18</sup> The constitutional basis of this notion of kinship is the *Thammasat*. The ideal monarch justifies himself as the King of Righteousness according to the rules of conduct. He “abides steadfast in the ten kingly virtues, constantly upholding the five common precepts and on holy days the set of eight precepts, living in kindness and goodwill to all beings. He painstakingly studies the *Thammasat* and to keep the four principles of justice. Namely, to assess the right or wrong of all services or disservices rendered to him, to uphold the righteous and truthful, to acquire riches through none but just means.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Pg. 57.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Pg. 58.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Siam had been governed under an absolute monarchy for seven centuries until the 1932 coup when the country's name changed from Siam to Thailand.<sup>20</sup>



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid Pg. 57.

### 3.3 Women and Kingship

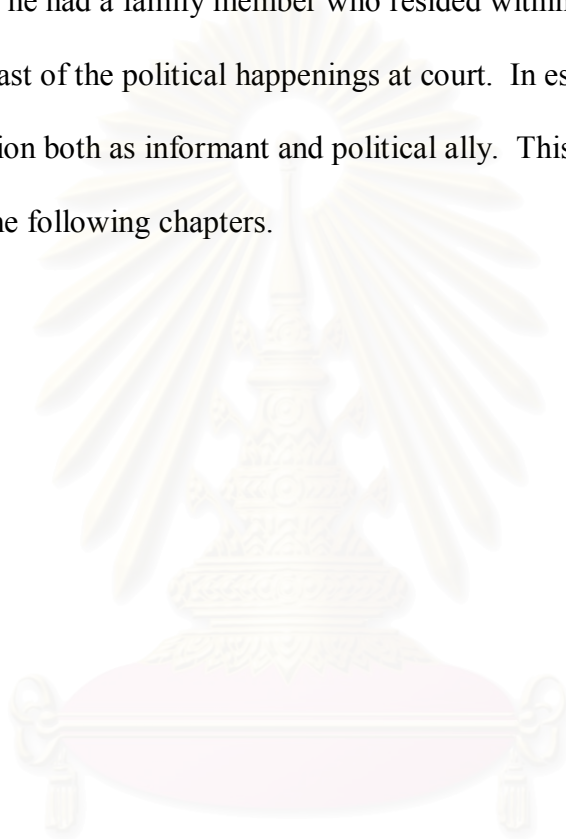
The concept of *devaraja* or god-king was applied to the political legitimization in the Ayutthaya and early Rattanakosin period. The King was perceived as a god and was treated as a god. Everything about the King symbolized his divinity and charisma. Women were considered one of the symbols of kingship. In Hindu myth a god is thought of as living atop the heavenly Mount Meru surrounded by angels. Efforts were made to ensure that the residence of the King was a heavenly residence symbolizing Mount Meru and that he was surrounded by his angels, his inner courtiers. Here, women were an exhibition of the power and divinity of the King. The concept of fertility was also applied to the Siamese court. The King, as the great lord of the nation where fertility was crucial, had to be a fertile person.<sup>21</sup> The fertility of the King is thought to also be a representation of the fertility of the land and the strength and greatness of the kingdom. Therefore, having many wives and children was the best way to prove and symbolize this concept and the King's right to the throne.

Even in the mid-nineteenth century, when patriarchy was applied, this concept of fertility still prevailed. But more importantly, since marriage was considered an important element in the political kingship system, it inevitably included the role of women.

---

<sup>21</sup> Phya Srivisarn Vacha. *Kingship in Siam. Early History and Ayudhaya Period*. Bangkok. Pg. 237.

In the early and mid-nineteenth century, women were used to stabilize a King's position with Siam's neighbors as well as vassal states. His marriage to a vassal ruler's daughter was common practice as daughters were often presented to the King. This was not only considered a gesture of tribute from the vassal ruler, but also cemented ties between the King and the vassal rulers. The vassal ruler also benefited from this in that he had a family member who resided within the royal palace that could keep abreast of the political happenings at court. In essence, this put women in a strategic position both as informant and political ally. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## CHAPTER IV

### SIAMESE ROYAL PALACE

#### 4.1 Physical Structure of Royal Palaces

The royal grand palace of Bangkok or *Phra Borom Maharajawang* covered an area of 132 rai when it was first built in the reign of King Rama I. In 1809, King Rama II expanded the grand palace further to the south of the palace so that more inner court residences could be constructed. The area of the inner court comprised one third of the royal grand palace lands. This designated area spanned from the southern part of the royal grand palace to the central area. The royal inner court was surrounded by two-story buildings to the rear and on both sides of the inner court. These two story buildings were windowless buildings and also functioned as a barrier which separated the forbidden area from the outside world.<sup>1</sup>

King Rama I initially built the inner court residences for his two sisters, his daughters, his wives and the royal servants by utilizing the Ayutthayan pattern which came from Thai cosmology.

The residences were built in the pattern of grouped traditional Thai wooden houses which derived from the Ayutthayan pattern. In the reign of King Rama II, the number of inner courtiers increased. The King built more residences and renovated the

---

<sup>1</sup> Chandrarat Prawalpath. A Comparative Study of The Court of King Chulalongkorn with that of King Rama VI. Bangkok: Department of History, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1978. Pg. 46-49.

old ones. Since the old houses were built with wood and were not durable, King Rama II had them rebuilt with bricks but still kept the pattern of traditional group houses.

During the reign of King Mongkut, even more residences were built due to the ever increasing number of inner courtiers. However, there were no major changes concerning the pattern and model of the residences.

In the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the traditional pattern of grouped housing was scrapped. All the residences were rebuilt in the western style, separated from one another.

The buildings that were more than three stories high were normally divided into three sections; the first floor was for the royal servants to live in, the second floor was a living room used to receive the master's guests, the third and upper floors provided residence to the master of the palace. For the two- story buildings, the first floor would house the royal servants while the upper floor served as a residence for the master.<sup>2</sup>

King Chulalongkorn built a new palace during his reign called *Phra Thii Nung Chakri Maha Prasart*. This palace was the residence of the King and was commonly referred to as *Thii Bon*. The importance of each royal wife can be seen by how close in

---

<sup>2</sup> Chattraporn Chindadach, The Inner court Administration in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1999.

proximity their residences were to the King's. However, the grandness of a residence also indicated the power and importance of each wife.

From the pattern of the physical structure of the inner court, it was very obvious that King Chulalongkorn loved and gave importance to his three half sisters, who were also his wives. In the very beginning, King Chulalongkorn built a palace right behind the Chakri Palace to be the place for *Somdej Phra Nangchao Sunanta Kumarirat Phra Borom Raja Devi, Somdej Phra Nang Chao Sawang Wattana Phra Borom Raja Devi* and *Phra Nang Chao Saowabha Pongsri Phra Borom Rajajininath* to live together because they were sisters. *Phra Nang Ther Phra Ong Chao Saowabha Pongsri* at the time often came to stay with the King at his residence. When the queen was pregnant, she moved in temporarily with the King so that she did not have to go back and forth from her residence. After she gave birth to the King's child, the King built her a palace right beside his. When Queen Sunanta died in a boating accident, her palace was left to Queen Sawang Wattana. However, the King cherished Queen Sunanta so much that he built a beautiful palace called *Suan Sunanta*.<sup>3</sup>

The King intended for the newly built palace to serve as a memorial for his lost beloved queen. *Chao Chom M.R. Sadab* states that "This Sunanta queen was the main queen and also the favorite queen of the King. When she passed away, so suddenly, the King wanted to have something to remember her by. He named the Queen's school *Sunantalai* and built *Suan Sunanta* Palace as a result. He called the queen by the

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



affectionate name he created for her *Ying Yai* or *Mae Yai*. This is seen in his letters to her in which he states “I miss *Mae Yai*”<sup>4</sup>

As stated earlier, not only did the location of the residence indicate the importance of the lady, so did greatness of the residence. Even though she was located pretty far away from the King’s residence, the *Tamnak* of Phra Raja *Chaya Chao Dararasm*i was very large, especially when considering the already crowded inner court area. The King intended to build this palace for his wife from Chiang Mai as proof of her honor and to gain acceptance for her from other royal courtiers. In essence, by strengthening the ties between the kingdom of Siam with that of the great kingdom of Chiang Mai, Siam as a nation was expanded. In addition to this, the strategic alliance made between that kingdom which bordered with Burma (the most reckoned army of the time) legitimized King Chulalongkorn’s claim to the throne and strengthened the position of Siam. The King of Chiang Mai offered to pay for the construction of this palace in order to demonstrate his power through the greatness of his daughter’s residence and also to ensure her status in the Siamese court.

In the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the king built two new palaces in Bangkok ; *Phra Raja Wang Dusit* and *Phra tamnak Phayathai*, together with six upcountry palaces; *Phra Rajawang Bang Pa-in*, *Ayutthaya*, *Phra Rajawang Rim Nam*, *Ratchaburi*, *Phra Ratcha Wang Bon Khao Sattanat*, *Phra Rajawang Chuthathuch Raja Than*, *Koh*

---

<sup>4</sup> Opt Cit. Interview with Chao Chom M.R. Sadab of King Rama V, August, 24, 1979.

*SiiChung, Phra Rajawang Rattanakong, Ranong and Phra Rajawang Baan Puen, Petchaburi.*<sup>5</sup>

With the increasing population in and around the grand palace in Bangkok, King Chulalongkorn often found the palace to be too hot, especially during the summer months. So he decided to build a summer palace with a lot of natural gardens. In 1898, he bought a piece of land with his personal money and built Dusit Palace.

The area of Dusit Palace is considered very large. The king himself designed and supervised all the construction of the building and the decoration. Before construction was completed, the king went and resided in the palace beginning in 1899.

At first, the King intended to spend his time at Dusit palace only during weekends. But after the roads were connected around the palace, it was easy to commute to places from Dusit palace. Therefore, the King ended up spending extended lengths of time at Dusit palace.

King Chulalongkorn also built Phayathai Palace but did not spend much time there. King Vajiravudh presented the palace to his mother, *Pra Borom Rajini Pan Pii Laung* and resided there with her. The queen mother resided at the palace until the end of her life.

---

<sup>5</sup> Prince Damrong Rajanuphap. Compilation of Chronicles Division 626. Tam Nan Wang Kao. Funeral book of General M.R. Lek Ngonrot, 1979.

In the reign of King Vajiravudh, the King had 5 palaces built in Bangkok and other provinces; *Pra Tamnak Chitralada Rahotarn*, *Pra Rajawang Sanamchan*, *Nakorn Pathom*, *Kai Laung Haad Chao Samrarn* and *Pra Rajanives Marukathaiyawan*. He was known to move constantly from palace to palace, never remaining at any one place for more than a few years.<sup>6</sup>



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

---

<sup>6</sup> Nongnuch Praipibulkij. *Phra Rajawang Boran*. Bangkok, 1978. Pg. 9-17.

## 4.2 Social Structure Within the Royal Palace

In the fourth reign, there were the so-called “two-kings” in Siam: King Mongkut and *Phra Pinklao*. When King Mongkut was selected to be the righteous heir to the throne, he insisted that his brother be made as another King. As a consequence, the royal palace apart from being separated into the outer court and the inner court, was also separated into the court of *Phra Pinklao* and the court of King Mongkut. King Mongkut resided at *Phra Borom Maha Rajawang* while *Phra Pinklao* took *Phra Baworamaharajawang* as his grand palace. Apart from this, there were no distinguished changes in the royal court structure of this reign from previous reigns.

In the subsequent reign of King Chulalongkorn, the outer courtiers were divided into several groups. The most prominent one was called ‘The Young Men of Siam’. This group was led by King Chulalongkorn and was formed even before he claimed the throne solely as his own. This group can also be called the group of controversial modern elites since they were educated young noblemen and were the first to be educated abroad. Their Western ideas on political systems would weigh heavily on the changes the King was about to embark on. The King went to visit Western colonies to observe the workings of Western civilization and public works. When he returned to Siam he set out to modernize the country. This group was against the conservative groups and the old Siam groups, especially the group led by the regent of the King. These older, conservative groups knew that the new political ideals being brought from the West could

diffuse the power these older elite men had at court. But the King finally gained victory over them.<sup>7</sup>

This group of “The Young Men of Siam” held their social gatherings inside the royal palace walls. They regularly met up at the meeting hall to discuss issues pertaining mainly to politics and the modernization of Siam.

Like the social structure of the Outer court, the Inner court itself had a similar pattern of segregation. But instead of a segregation that was based on different political ideals, the segregation of the inner courtiers was based on the superiors, namely the King, and the powerful inner court ladies.

The main figures in the outer court administration were all members of the royal family. In the early period of the reign, the King’s brothers were the ones who played an important role in the administration and it was the sons who came to assist their father in the later period of his reign.

The administration of the royal court during the reign of King Vajiravudh was mainly conducted by male courtiers in both outer court affairs and inner court affairs. The court administration was divided into two sections: the Palace Ministry and the Ministry that directly reported to the King on the King’s personal affairs.

---

<sup>7</sup> Chattraporn Chindadach, The Inner court Administration in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1999. Pg. 48-50.

For the Palace Ministry, the King changed the position of Grand Marshal of the Court to be that of minister.

In this reign, royal pages played a significant role in the court administration and operation. The royal pages were selected from members of the royal family with the rank of *Momratchawongse* and *Momluang*, boys from noble families, and also other ordinary commoners. The royal pages in this reign were from various backgrounds and they took over the roles both in the outer court i.e; politics, state administration and government issues, and in the inner court i.e. taking on the tasks previously reserved for women in the earlier reigns such as giving massages and attending to the King in his personal chambers.<sup>8</sup>



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Pg. 89-96.

### 4.3 Palace Law

*Kot Montien Ban* (translated as Palace Laws or The Palatine Law) consisted of the rules, regulations and penalties for the royal court. These laws emphasized the King's position as the lord of life. Some penalties were severe such as the death penalty and some even more severe included the execution of the convict and 7 generations of his or her whole family. This was mainly conducted as a means of keeping offspring from retaliating.

Measures 174- 176 of the Palace Laws outlined special penalties for members of the royal family and inner courtiers, since they were not commoners and required a certain deference paid to them, even in execution. For example, a sandalwood club was used to execute a member of the royal family and before the executioner proceeded with the execution, he had to pay respect by *krab* (translated as bowing to) the convict. The penalties designated in the palace law were used to keep control of the inner courtiers, especially their sexual relations. Since Siamese kings had many wives and concubines, the King had to find a mechanism to keep them under control and retain power without being humiliated. The Palace Law was used as a tool to control their behavior. For example, if a sexual affair with one of the King's ladies was discovered, the male would be tortured to death along with the lady herself. In addition to this, anyone acting as a messenger on behalf of one of the inner courtiers would be sentenced to death.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Chandrarat Prawalpath. A Comparative Study of The Court of King Chulalongkorn with that of King Rama VI. Bangkok: Department of History, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1978.

In the Palace Law itself the Death penalty was the most frequently cited punishment for any misbehavior concerning the King's ladies, though in actuality was rarely used.

Palace laws can be divided into three books. First, the books about traditional practices, for example, Royal ceremonies. Second, the books about the official positions and their responsibilities. Third, the books about royal decrees on regulations and penalties of the courtiers. In the book about official positions, it stated the ranks and decorations of the queens and their sons as follows.<sup>10</sup>

- 1) *Somdet Praakaramahesi* – the title of her son would be *Somdet Nho pra puttachao*
- 2) *Mae Yhuamuang* –her son would be *Phra maha uparaja*
- 3) *Praakarachaya*—if her son is the son of the King the boy will rule the primary city. If the son is the grandson of the King, he would rule the secondary city.
- 4) *Phrasanom*—the title of her son would be *Phra Yaowarat*.

The most relevant issues concerning the inner court ladies in the Palace Laws are the sexual practices and the corresponding penalties for violating them.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



# CHAPTER V

## ROYAL INNER COURT OF SIAM DURING THE REIGNS OF KING RAMA IV AND KING RAMA V

### 5.1 Historical Background

The Inner Palace where the King took up residence was a veritable city of women, wherein no other males above the age of eleven were allowed, except on very special occasions when they were given permission to enter, accompanied by a number of muscular amazons who guarded the palace. In this palace lived the princesses of the blood, the King's concubines, and all their attendants.

The administration of this city was in the hands of high ranking lady officials, directly responsible to the King himself. They had under them lady officials of lower ranks, women who performed the duties of clerks and treasurers together with members of the guard of amazons and women menials. New members were always being added to this large community of women. Some were given to the King or to the princesses by willing parents or relatives; others came of their own accord with the hope for royal favor or employment inside the palace. Young girls from noble and rich families were usually sent to the palace for a duration of time before they became marriageable, for the palace was the only place where they could be properly educated and obtain all the accomplishments and polish that were required of Siamese ladies of high birth. All these women were called *Nang Nai* or ladies of the Inner Palace, but only the royal wives or

concubines and princesses of the blood were regarded as *Nang Harm* or forbidden ladies. These latter were not allowed to marry except by the King's special permission, which was rarely granted. Prior to the Fourth Reign, they were not allowed to be looked upon by any other male with the exception of the King himself.<sup>1</sup>

It is questionable whether the inner court derived its existence from the Khmer civilization or was an incarnation of Siamese society. In ancient times, since territories shifted constantly, inner courtiers were taken hostage back and forth. No doubt that the concept of the inner court, as it existed in Siam during the fourth to sixth reign, was an evolution of these relations. Throughout the history of Asia, some semblance of a royal inner court existed in many other Asian societies including the Japanese and Chinese. Even prior to the mid nineteenth century, evidence of an inner court can be seen not only in the aforementioned societies, but also in that of Pegu and Cambodia.

In Siam, after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, King Taksin made Thonburi his new capital. Since King Taksin had to hastily construct a new capital there was no time to reconstruct a new pattern of administration and therefore the Ayutthayan pattern was adopted. The pattern of the inner court in the Thonburi period is therefore assumed to be the same as the pattern of the Ayutthayan Inner Court.

The pattern of the inner court of the late Ayutthaya period was also employed as the model for the inner court in the early Rattanakosin period. King Rama I assigned all

---

<sup>1</sup> Pramoj, M.R. Seni and Pramoj, M.R. Kukrit. A King of Siam Speaks. Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1987. Pg. 185-186.

the Ayutthayan courtiers still living to revive the old traditions, practices and administrative pattern for the new capital. For the inner court, Chao Fa Pinthawadee, the daughter of King Borommakos, rebuilt the inner court for Rattanakosin according to what she had experienced in the late Ayudhyan period. This pattern of the inner court became the standard for the latter period.<sup>2</sup>

Like all Asian monarchs of his time, King Mongkut practiced polygamy. He already had two sons before he entered the monastery. During his 27 years in the monkhood all sources, Thai and Western, confirm that he abstained completely. Thus King Mongkut did not fully begin his polygamous life until after he was 47. Polygamy at the time was considered a part of the King's stately duties, and many wives were presented to him by their parents who were vassals or noblemen. Most of these women were accepted out of politeness and as a means of helping to cement the ties between the woman's family and that of the royal family. King Mongkut had 82 children, from a total of 35 wives - the largest number among the Chakri Kings. He fathered 43 daughters and 39 sons, many of whom would be of great service to the country.<sup>3</sup>

Although King Mongkut continued the practice of polygamy, he did however, give more freedom and respect to women. King Mongkut was the first King of Siam to

---

<sup>2</sup> Chattraporn Chindadach, The Inner Court Administration in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn, Bangkok: Department of History, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Chula Chakrabongse, Prince, Lord of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand. London: Alvin Redman, 1967. Pg. 187.

allow his inner court ladies, including his concubines, to resign from their positions and move out of the inner palace. This is best illustrated in his Royal Decree:

*Whereas it is no longer the desire of His Majesty to possess, by means of threat or detention, any of the ladies...<sup>4</sup>*

After the reign of King Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn came to the throne as King Rama V of Siam. Before his accession at the age of 20, he already had two non-royal wives, one from the Bunnag family (a very prominent Chinese family), along with two daughters. The King appeared to have had unbridled control of his inner court despite the presence of his great-aunt and former nurse, Princess Lamom who were strong presences in the inner court during his father's reign. Many more noble young ladies were again presented to him as wives whom he accepted in accordance with old customs. It became something of a novelty to have attractive, intelligent, and highly educated young half-sisters a pair of which who were put under his sole guardianship. Four of these half-sisters the King took as wives and elevated them to the rank of Queen which placed them high above former wives of noble birth. The practice of marrying those of noble birth was based on the old Hindu system which kept royal blood pure for succession of future offspring. Three of King Chulalongkorn's half-sisters who later became his wives were daughters of Lady Piam, the favorite wife of King Mongkut. They were Princesses Sunanda, Sawang and Saowabha. The other half-sister who was also a wife was Princess Sukumala, whose mother was from the Bunnag family. All these princesses

---

<sup>4</sup> Pramoj, M.R. Seni and Pramoj, M.R. Kukrit. A King of Siam Speaks. Bangkok: the Siam Society, 1987. Pg. 197.

were made *Phra Nang*- Queen, but some of them would be promoted even higher on later occasions.

King Chulalongkorn had 92 wives. From them he had a total of 77 children, 32 sons and 44 daughters.

It would be 10 years after the coronation of King Vajiravudh before the King had his first inner court ladies. He focused on having an inner court after his mother, *Somdech Phra Pun Pee Lung*, or the Queen of a Thousand Years, passed away. Prior to this, he always had his mother beside him on the throne, giving her the title of the Queen Mother of Siam.<sup>5</sup> Before having his inner court ladies, King Vajiravudh was served by an all male court, comprised of royal pages and servants. He worked amongst men and concentrated only on his work, determined to have only one wife according to the western custom.

In 1920, the King began to have young women invited to the court. Most of them were his cousins, daughters of Prince Narathip and their friends. Soon thereafter, the royal engagement between King Vajiravudh and Princess Vallabha Devi, a daughter of Prince Narathip was announced. The King put at her disposal the new palace, Chitraladda. There, she had a minor court of her own and was surrounded by young ladies which included many pretty younger sisters. The most prominent of her sisters was Princess Laksami, who later became a royal consort of the King. The King, then, broke

---

<sup>5</sup>Chula Chakrabongse, Prince, Lord of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand. London: Alvin Redman, 1967. Pg.281.

off the engagement with Princess Vallabha Devi and soon after that, announced the engagement with her sister, Princess Laksami, whom he married and raised to the rank of *Phra Nang* (Junior Queen) in August 1922.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, King Rama VI's enthusiasm for monogamy had waned. King Vajiravudh announced, "For consideration of the state economy, the King will not make any public celebration of his marriage, but will instead follow the old and trusted customs of Siam". This statement in actuality hinted that the King had given up his plans to practice monogamy and would instead take a number of wives.<sup>7</sup> In October, 1921 and January, 1922, he had taken two sisters of high birth, Preung and Prabai Sucharitkul to be his *Phra Sanom Ake*. Preung held the title of *Phra Sucharitsuda Phra Sanom Ake* and Prabhai held the title of *Phra Indramani P'ra Sanom Ake*. *Phra Indramani* was later appointed to be *Somdech Phra Nang Chao Indrasaksaji Phra Vorachaya*. The last consort King Vajiravudh appointed was Suvadhana Apaiwongse. In October 1925, *Chao Chom Suvadhana* was bestowed by the King to be the title of *Phra Nang Chao Suvadhana Phra Voraraja Devi*.

King Vajiravudh passed away on 26 November 1925. He had one daughter, *Chao Fa Petcharat Ratchasuda Sirisobha Bhanawadi*, with Queen Suvadhana. The Crown Princess was born only one day before her father, the King, passed away.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 296-298.

<sup>7</sup> Greene, Stephen Lyon Wakemen. *Absolute Dreams. Thai Government Under Rama VI, 1910-1925.* Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1999. Pg.133.

In sum, King Rama VI had Three Royal Consorts that he elevated to the status of Queen and one *Phra Sanom Ake*.<sup>8</sup>

During the reign of King Vajiravudh, the King revised the Palace Laws concerning the titles and ranks of the Royal Consorts. *Somdech Phra Akara Mahesi* was the major consort of the King and would receive the title of *Somdech Phra Nang Chao Phra Boromrajini*. He also appointed four positions for the minor consorts; *Somdech Phra Nang Chao Phra Borom Raja Devi*, *Phra Nang Chao Phra Raja Devi* and *Phra Nang Thur Phra Akara Chaya*.

The four consorts of King Vajiravudh were named *Somdej Phra Nang Chao Indra Sakdi Saji Phra Vora Chaya*, *Phra Nang Chao Suvadhana Phra Vora Raja Devi* and *Phra Nang Thur Laksami Lawan* as the Royal Consorts and *Phra Sucharit Suda Phra Sanom Aek* as the Lady Consort respectively.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Chandrarat Prawalpath. A Comparative Study of The Court of King Chulalongkorn with that of King Rama VI. Bangkok: Department of History, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1978. Pg.183-187.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. pp. 187-188.

## 5.2 Importance Within Society

The Royal Inner Court was the center point of Siamese<sup>10</sup> society; a place where women of royal, noble, and upper class lineage resided. Up through the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the inner court served as a breeding ground for the establishment of familial networks. Families sought to install their daughters or nieces in the inner court because it was here where women were put in the best opportunity to be in contact with the King or other high-ranking government officials and hopefully create family bonds through marriage.<sup>11</sup> When considered in this way, women served as the tool for a family's social mobility.

Throughout Siamese history, family relationships among the royalty and nobility were of considerable importance politically. In addition to providing strength and loyalty within the various ministries, intermarriage established a degree of control over vassal states and neighboring centers of power. Conquered rulers often times offered their daughters as wives or concubines to the conquering king. This was seen not only as a gesture of tribute, but also served to strengthen the bond between the two rulers and establish territorial rights. At the outset of the Bangkok Period, the tradition of intermarriage between rulers and the noble elite continued, as in the case of King

---

<sup>10</sup> I have chosen to use 'Siam' rather than 'Thailand' when speaking about the area. This is due to the fact that the term 'Thailand' was not coined until after the reign of King Vajiravudh. It is this reign and prior to, in which this paper focuses.

<sup>11</sup> At this time, a certain differentiation needs to be made between those women presented to the king as concubines or wives, and those working in the inner court. The former were prohibited from coming into contact with other males, while the latter were allowed to venture outside.



Suribunyan of Vientiane, who offered his daughter to King Taksin when he invaded the city.<sup>12</sup>

The period of the Chakri Dynasty exhibits instances in which marriages were made based purely on a territorial, strategic basis. This is important as we will discuss later, when during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, a territory based on vassal states becomes a nation-state with defined borders. However, during the years prior to this, it became practical to have many wives; not only to signify one's power and perpetuate a vast network based on royal blood, but also to ensure territorial rights over neighboring rulers.

During the Rattanakosin Period the royal inner court of Siam was located within the royal residence in Bangkok at the Grand Palace. The royal inner court functioned as a city within a city, comprised entirely of women, with a population during its height in the early 1800's, of more than 9,000 females. Malcolm Smith, in his memoir A Physician at the Court of Siam, says that the Inner Palace, or "Inside" (*fai nai*), was supervised by the *athibodi fai nai* (Director of the Inside); under her (all officials and workers in the Inner Palace were female) were a number of officials in charge of departments: the minor wives, the king's kitchen, the police force, and so on. The population of the "inside" was enormous. Each queen, for example, had her own household of between 200 and 300 women. Her ladies-in-waiting, recruited mainly from the daughters of noblemen, although some were princesses of lower rank, also had their

---

<sup>12</sup> Wyatt, David K. Studies in Thai History. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994. Pg. 189. This marriage did not actually take place.

own servants. Each wife had a fairly large retinue; if she became a mother, the size of the retinue increased; and each had a separate household whose size was proportional of the wife's rank.<sup>13</sup> It is apparent that the royal inner court fluctuated in size according to the amount of wives the King had and how many children those wives bore. This is an important factor when we later discuss the change from the practice of polygamy to monogamy by the king and how it affected the royal inner court.

It may be surmised that women played a very important role at the court of Siam on account of their proximity to the monarchs.<sup>14</sup> Inner court women's close contact to the King made them privy to the day-to-day activities of the King in both personal and political spheres.

It was advantageous for nobles to seek for their daughters a place at court, and generally desirable to marry them upwards on the social scale.<sup>15</sup> During this period of time, women were used as a tool to gain social mobility and favor with the royal family. Families were not hesitant in giving up their sisters and daughter quite willingly to be the

---

<sup>13</sup> Smith, Malcolm. A Physician at the Court of Siam. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1986. Pg. 56-57.

<sup>14</sup> Pombejra, Dhiravat na. Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Art, Chulalongkorn University, 2001. Pg 42.

<sup>15</sup> Wyatt, David K. Studies in Thai History. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994. Pg 117.

King's consorts. This was not considered a great privation on the part of the families concerned, but a politically adroit move to cement their relationship with the King.<sup>16</sup>

Marriage and concubinage were ways of balancing power at the court and of securing the kingdom's perimeters. Vassal rulers seeking the protection of Siam would offer their female relatives to the monarch as tribute to pledge their loyalty. It was in this spirit that the Lao ruler of Vientiane offered his daughter to King Taksin in the 1770s at a time when the Siamese kingdom was aggressively pushing itself to the limits of its empire.<sup>17</sup> In political terms, the institution of polygamy established relationships of influence, obligation, and access between the monarch and other power centers in the kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

Specific cases of marriage being used as a tool to gain or secure territory can be seen during the Chakri dynasty. During the reign of King Rama I, the King's younger brother, Phya Surasi married Princess Sri Anocha of Chiang Mai. This was undoubtedly to create an alliance with the King of Chiang Mai and vice versa with the King of Bangkok. The territory of Chiang Mai, in particular, is of significant importance because of its strategic military position against the Burmese, who the Siamese were in constant

---

<sup>16</sup> Pombejra, Dhiravat na. Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Art, Chulalongkorn University, 2001. Pg 45.

<sup>17</sup> Wyatt, David K. 1963. "Siam and Laos, 1767-1827." *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 4 (2): 13-32. (reprinted in David K. Wyatt. 1994. *Studies in Thai History: Collected Articles*, pp. 185-209. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.) Pg. 18. This particular marriage alliance was not completed.

<sup>18</sup> Reynolds, Craig J. A Nineteenth Century Thai Buddhist Defense of Polygamy and Some Remarks on the Social History of Women in Thailand. A paper presented for the seventh conference IAHA. Bangkok, 1977. Pg. 15.

battle with at the time. The marriage of Phya Surasi and Princess Sri Anocha is the first instance of a Siamese royal being married to someone from the Tipchang Dynasty of Chiang Mai.

Vientiane was another frontier sought after, which often changed tribute. King Rama III married Princess Kaeua (*Sadet Chao Nang Keo Koumarn*) from the Khun Lo Dynasty of Vientiane to secure this territory and establish a familial bond with the royal house of Khun Lo. This alliance was further cemented by the marriage of King Mongkut to Princess Anumara (Numan) also from the Khun Lo Dynasty of Vientiane.

Marriage alliances to secure territory continued to be made up until the reign of King Chulalongkorn. The King, who was still practicing polygamy at the time, was constantly offered wives by vassal rulers and by nobles seeking favor with the King. The main reason why King Chulalongkorn accepted the girls was in order to create an alliance network. Early in his reign, power was not totally his, thus, he had to make alliances with various nobles. Moreover, because of the centralization policy, the King had to make alliances with the tributary rulers. For example, the presentation of *Chao Dararatsami*, a daughter of the ruler of Chiang Mai, was one of the important factors enabling the Siamese kingdom to annex that state.<sup>19</sup> The reign of King Chulalongkorn, and in particular, his marriage to *Chao Dararatsami*, would mark the last instance in

---

<sup>19</sup> Chandrarat Prawalpath. A Comparative Study of The Court of King Chulalongkorn with that of King Rama VI. Bangkok: Department of History, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1978. Pg 206.

which a marriage alliance would be made with the intention of gaining or securing territory.

Polygamy also contributed to the socio-political balance of power. Thus, it was not uncommon for nobles and vassal rulers to offer their daughters or their nieces to the monarch as a tribute to pledge their loyalty. The kings themselves accepted these women in order to build up a network of loyal vassals.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the socio-economic stratification of Siamese society made it advantageous for women to accept placement in the Inner Palace where royal service brought social refinement and social advancement.<sup>21</sup> The inner palace was one of the only places where a woman could be taught the arts that would enable her to be a well-groomed lady. She would be taught about literature, science, and especially home science which would provide her with the tools to be a compatible and appropriate wife for another royal or noble man. Marriage to a royal or noble man thus elevated her status along with that of her family. The arts in which she was taught will be discussed further in the next chapter.

---

<sup>20</sup> Patana, Suwadee T. Polygamy or Monogamy: The Debate on Gender Relations in Thai Society, 1913-1935. Paper presented at the 13<sup>th</sup> IAHA Conference Sophia University, Tokyo. Bangkok, 1994. Pg. 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Reynolds, Craig J. A Nineteenth Century Thai Buddhist Defense of Polygamy and Some Remarks on the Social History of Women in Thailand. A paper presented for the seventh conference IAHA. Bangkok, 1977. Pg.15.

Since the mid-nineteenth century the Inner Palace women had begun to adapt a Western-style dress.<sup>22</sup> It can be surmised that of all the Siamese that foreigners would encounter, they would most likely be the royals and the inner courtiers. In this respect, the inner court ladies not only set the standard for the rest in Siamese society, especially the noble class, but also the emerging middle class who were rising in power. In this respect, the position of the inner court ladies, as playing an important role in the perceived notion that Siam was in fact a civilized country was profound.



---

<sup>22</sup> Patana, Suwadee T. Polygamy or Monogamy: The Debate on Gender Relations in Thai Society, 1913-1935. Paper presented at the 13<sup>th</sup> IAHA Conference Sophia University, Tokyo. Bangkok, 1994. Pg.19.

### 5.3 Inner Court Structure and Administration

The area of the grand palace is comprised of two main sections: the outer court and inner court. The outer court was the area that the King normally used to meet with bureaucrats and noblemen to discuss items relating to the governing of his kingdom. The inner court was the King's most private sphere. It was a restricted area where no men except for the King and his young princes were allowed to enter. It was the place the King spent most of his personal time and functioned as the residence of his wives (*Phra Mahesri, Phra Sanom, Chao Chom*), his children (princes under the age of 11 and princesses), and female servants. That restricted area was all together called *Raj Samnak Fai Nai* or *Fai Nai* (Inside). *Raj Samnak Fai Nai* was composed of women of varying ages and classes. The only males living in the inner court were the young princes who still had their top knot. After the tonsure ceremony (usually between the ages of 11-15 years old. Ie. after reaching puberty), the prince had to be ordained and then was forced to move out of the inner court.<sup>23</sup>

The inner court during the reign of King Chulalongkorn was well structured. The administration was systematically organized like the outer court. The main differences between the inner and outer court was the scope of the administration, the scope of responsibilities and the number of courtiers. All the inner courtiers were women, governed by the highest chief, the Queen Mother *Phra Mahesri Somdej Phra Sri*

---

<sup>23</sup> Chattraporn Chindadach, The Inner court Administration in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1999. Pg. 88.

*Patcharintra Borom Raja Chonnani*. The Queen Mother held the highest position in all the affairs of the inner court and had the assistance of other inner courtiers in various hierarchical positions. These women strictly controlled the inner court by enforcing the rules, regulations and traditions of the inner court.

The rules, regulations and traditions of the inner court employed in the reign of King Chulalongkorn were adopted from the ones used in the Ayutthayan period. As discussed earlier, the pattern of the inner court of the late Ayutthaya period was employed as the model for the inner court in the Rattanakosin period. King Rama I assigned all the Ayutthayan courtiers still living to revive the old traditions, practices and administrative patterns for the new capital. *Chao Fa Pinthawadee*, the daughter of King Borommakos, was the one who directed the rebuilding of the inner court for Rattanakosin based on her experiences in the Ayutthayan court. The princess' pattern of the inner court became the standard for the latter periods.

All the inner courtiers were women, and were thus called *Poo Ying Chao Wang* (translated as Women of the Palace) or *Chao Wang*. During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, like every other reign in the early Rattanakosin period, *Fai Nai* or the Inner Court and *Fai Naa* or the outer court, were completely separated. The King had many royal wives (*Pra Mahesi*, *Pra Sanom*, *Chao Chom*) and children, and as a consequence, there were a lot of inner court officials and servants. The inner court was considered an important community with very unique characteristics. Not only was it the socializing center for women of the upper class, it was also considered the most



important education center for Siamese ladies. It was the educational and social institute located in the inner court that set the standards on social qualifications such as fashion and trends for ladies of high birth. For women, serving in the inner court (in the mid-late nineteenth century) is comparable to receiving a college education (in the present time) in that it was a way for the promotion of one's status.<sup>24</sup>

“....Inside the Grand Palace was the center of women's socialization, way more important than any outside the palace. To put it as a ladies boarding school is an understatement, since it is the place where ladies will have a chance not only to learn and practice but also to show and compete with their impeccable skills and knowledge....”

Women living in the Inner Court can be divided into roughly three (3) classes;

1. The Upper Class consisted of the daughters born and raised in the Grand Palace,<sup>25</sup> high ranking members of the royal families, including *mom chao* and *mom ratchawongse*, who were orphaned and adopted by the King. Moreover, ladies of high birth were also in this group which included daughters of the families related to the King, or the daughters of high ranking officials that were sent to be educated in the Grand Palace. They would be trained to possess the knowledge and skills that would suit their gender and status such as social etiquette, handicraft, cooking, flower arranging, flower garland making, vegetable and fruit

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid 88.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 89.

carving, and literature. These ladies were considered *Chao Wang* through *Karn Tawaii Tua* defined as giving oneself to the king.

2. The Middle Class consisted of the daughters of wealthy families whose parents sent them to be educated in the inner court. As a *chao wang* these women would be trained in the household arts that would later make them suitable for marriage to a male of the same or higher status. The ladies in this group were accepted to be employed in the inner court by being *Nang Kha Luang* or a royal lady servant for a member of the royal family. After training was completed, some would return to their family or get married while others would stay in the Inner Court, some for even the rest of their life. Some of the ladies who chose to stay were able to attain significant positions such as a Middle Lady who was responsible for bringing the King's meal from the kitchen to his chamber, or a 'Tanai Ruen', a lady responsible for delivering news and commands to the palaces and residences in the inner court. The women of this rank were also responsible for accompanying men such as medical doctors into the inner court. Another position included in this class are the 'Ja Khlong' described as the chief of inner court security.<sup>26</sup>
3. The Lower Class were composed of *Khlong* and the servants of the ladies in the above classes. *Khlong* was a *Prai Luang* whose main responsibility was guarding the gate of the palace. The *khlong* were considered an important source of

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid 91.

manpower for the royal inner court especially during the reign of King Chulalongkorn when the city's membership had grown considerably. The *khlong*, in addition to performing their guard duty, also labored in areas such as construction and maintenance. Members of this class were not considered *Chao Wang*. They only lived on the grounds of the inner court.

Due to the King's young age, when King Chulalongkorn first ascended the throne at 15 years old, he had a regent to take care of all the administrative affairs for him. This regent was *Somdej Chao Praya Borom Maha Sri Suryawongse* (Chuang Bunnak). Since the King did not have a wife, the regent appointed *Krom Somdej Pra Suda Rattana Prayoor* to look over the king and head the inner court. She had been the caretaker of the King since the King's mother passed away. After *Krom Somdej Pra Suda Rattana Prayoor* passed away, *Somdej Prasri Patcharintara Boromrajininath* replaced her position.<sup>27</sup>

The administrative positions of the inner court were mostly taken by the *Phra Sanom* and *Chaochoms* from the previous reigns. This was because it was they who were accustomed to the traditions and practices of the inner court from the previous reign and therefore had enough seniority and power to control all the *Phra Sanom*, *Chao Choms* and other inner courtiers. The person holding the highest position in the inner court administration had the rank of *Thao Worachan Boromthammikkapakdi Nareeworakananuraksa*. This was the most important position because she was

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid 92.

responsible for the entire administration of the inner court. The general duty of the *Thao Worachan* was to manage the grand palace, which included giving recommendations and warnings to the inner courtiers and all the royal wives and concubines. It was common that the person taking the position of *Thao Worachan* was a mother consort.

Originally, this title was used in the Ayutthaya period to identify the *Somdej Pra Pii Liang* or King's Royal Nurse.<sup>28</sup> This is stated in the *Pra Ayakarn Tamnaeng Na Polruen* (royal decree on civilian positions). However, by the Rattanakosin period, the title changed its meaning to be defined as the 'chief' or chief administrator. When the *thao worachan* finally retired, she would receive the title of *Thao Worakananan Appantarapatanii* which was considered the highest position above any *Thao Nang* (Senior Inner Courtier), and continued to act as a consultant, although with a limited administrative role.




---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 93.

#### 5.4 Roles And Status Of Inner Court Ladies

There were two main groups of inner court ladies; those who were the King's wives and those who were not.

The wives of the Kings were separated into two different categories; the Royal Consorts/Lady Consorts and concubines. Since the Ayutthaya period, according to the Palace Law, there were various titles used to acknowledge the Royal Consorts and the concubines, for instances; *Phra Akaramahesi* or *Somdech Phra Akara Mahesi*, *Phra Rajatevi*, *Phra Aakara Chaya*, *Mae Yua Muang* and *Phra Sanom*. All these titles did not specifically indicate any practical ranking.<sup>29</sup>

In the Rattanakosin period, ranks and titles of the King's wives were more systematically categorized. Those who were not the Royal Consorts were called *Chao Chom* and *Chao Chom Marnda* or the Mother Consort of the Royal children. *Chao Chom* and *Chao Chom Marnda* could be bestowed with the title of *Phra Sanom* or *Phra Sanom Ake* according to the King's favor.<sup>30</sup>

In the Reign of King Chulalongkorn, the ranking of the Lady Consorts could be indicated by the royal betel container. The exquisiteness of the betel box or lack thereof

---

<sup>29</sup> Chattraporn Chindadach, The Inner court Administration in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

indicated not only the wealth of the family, but also the rank of the person. In fact, it is mentioned in Kukrit Pramoj's book Four Reigns that sometimes women would purchase nicer betel boxes to give the impression that they were of notable importance when they were not necessarily so. This was seen as a bad omen if such a case was discovered and reflected badly on the woman's striving to be in a higher position. The importance in the symbolization of the betel box is discussed below.

The first class Lady Consorts called *Phra Sanom Ake* were *Chao Chom* or *Chao Chom Marnda* that were in a higher position than all the Lady Consorts. They were given by the King, a gold betel tray with gold accessories and a gold spittoon.

The second class Lady Consorts called *Phra Sanom* were *Chao Chom* or *Chao Chom Marnda* were also in the high position. They were given, by the King, a blue enamel gold betel box.

The Third Class Lady Consorts called *Chao Chom Yoo Ngarn* or the Lady Consort attached to the Royal Chamber were the Lady Consorts that the King assigned to serve him closely. They were given by the King gold betel box.

The Lowest Class was the *Nang Yuu Ngarn* or *Nang Kamnan* or concubines in general. Some of them may be given by the King, a silver betel box gilded with gold but this was no indication of their rank and was optional for the King to give.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

The Inner Court Ladies who were not the wives of the King can be divided into four groups; Members of the royal family, the Inner Court Ladies with official ranks, the Inner Court Ladies with no official ranks and the servants.

A woman was expected not only to be a good wife according to the traditional standards but also to be a good consultant, a life partner, a teacher to the children and a sophisticated host. During the reign of King Mongkut, it was realized that having his queen on the scene of royal functions and other events was important. It was the first time that women were included into the male social sphere.

The change in the role of a royal wife is more apparent in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. His favorite queens had their own individual specialties not limited to the traditional lady's tasks. *Somdej Phra Nang Chao Saowabha Pongsri* was the most prominent queen of King Chulalongkorn and was considered to have the quintessential traits of a perfect wife. Queen Saowabha served the King closely in political issues and administration of the state. This outstanding qualification of the queen made her one of the King's favorites and also earned her the status as a royal consort. Queen Saowabha also recognized the importance of education for both men and women but especially for women since women had been neglected in this regard. The King at one point stated that “*Mae Lek* always wants women to have a chance to be educated...”<sup>32</sup>.

---

<sup>32</sup> Op. Cit. National Archive, King Rama V S.5/29

*Phra Nang Chao Sukhumalmarasri Phra Raja Devi* was another queen that had impressive qualifications considering the limitations of women during that period of time. She was exceptionally good at literature. She was a talented poet and an efficient secretary. The King had her employed closely as his “private secretary”<sup>33</sup>

*Phra Nang Chao Sawangwattana Phra Borom Raja Devi* was not as obviously important to the King as her sister, Queen Saowabha. She was not very keen on socializing nor political and administrative issues.<sup>34</sup> However, Queen Sawangwattana was very good with monetary affairs. She was an excellent accountant and was skilled in appropriating funds and generating revenue for the court. The Queen’s skill qualified women as capable of managing financial matters and also led to the social expectation that women manage the financial affairs of the family.<sup>35</sup>

*Phra Akara Chaya Ther Phra Ong Chao Sai Sawalipirom Kromkhun Sutthasininath* was a great chef. She was famous for her skill in cooking. Even though cooking and domestic affairs such as this were a part of the traditional role of the wife, expertise in this arena was considered an important and desirable qualification of a lady. These qualifications affected the status and change in status of the King’s wives. It can be considered that the better skilled one was in domestic affairs, especially cooking, the

---

<sup>33</sup> Op. Cit S. Siwaraks, Interview with M.C. Chongjitthanom Diskul. Bangkok: Kled Thai, 1986. Pg. 83-85.

<sup>34</sup> Pornsiri Buranaket. Nang Nai: Social Life and Roles in Thai Society During the Reign of King RamaV. Bangkok: Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Socio-Anthropology, Thammasat University, 1997. Pg.187.

<sup>35</sup> Chattraporn Chindadach, The Inner court Administration in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1999. Pg. 81.



greater one's social mobility within the inner court. An example of this is in Khunying Nititwadee's discussion of the 'cooking wars' that occurred in the inner court. These were battles that occurred between the various groups in the inner court over which palace the King would dine at. These battles were won or lost depending on that groups' ability to produce excellent cuisine.<sup>36</sup>

For the non-wife inner courtiers, the *Samnak* (defined as a school or group) they belonged to was influential in their role and status in the inner court.

The *Kha Luang* or the royal servants could be divided into three types:

- *Kha Luang Derm* were the royal servant who were with their master before the master gained a royal position or since the master was still a youth.
- *Kha Luang Ruen Nok* were the royal servants who were allowed to live with their family at home and come to work for their master occasionally.
- *Kha Luang Ruen Nok* were the royal servants who lived with their master and were totally under the responsibility and control of their master.

Every inner courtier went through special training with the intention of acquiring skills to be a well-groomed lady. The training was divided into levels. In the basic level, they would be trained to read and write and to do basic handicrafts. The advanced level would be the training of social manners, complicated handicrafts and difficult literature.

---

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Khunying Nititwadee Ontrakarn. Bangkok, September 2005.

When the girls were ready, the master or the senior royal servant would take them along to visit people or to attend events. The girls were brought along to either carry the betel nut basket for their master or to learn to socialize and meet with other noble ladies. If the girl completed her training and was proficient during her training period, she could be officially promoted to be an inner court official. This higher official position was broadly divided into these groups.<sup>37</sup>

- Literature; the ladies would study literature and poetry composition.
- Advanced skills such as flower crafting, cloth embroidery, nursing, mathematics and history.
- *Nang Panakngan* or the lady officials who were responsible for routine tasks such as royal clothing.
- *Nang Yuu Ngan* ; the ladies in this group were responsible for attending to the King and his supplies.
- Dancers and Musicians.

In conclusion, the role and status of the inner court ladies depended on many factors, but the two main factors were 1) their ascribed status and 2) their achieved status. However, it is obvious that the special qualifications of a lady affected her role and status within the inner court. This was especially the case in the reign of King Chulalongkorn when women had sole control over the inner court.

## **5.5 Justifications for leading a life of Servitude**

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Pg. 95 -98.

A part of the reason why placement in the inner court should not be considered as similar to servitude (especially indentured servitude) is identifying the various reasons and justifications women had that caused them to consider their placement in the inner court as agreeable. These require further discussion as many of the reasons are imbedded in the religious and social values of traditional Siamese society.

*Bunghun* is the belief that one has to repay the favor received which can never fully be repaid. This belief set the social norm for the requirement in fulfilling a request made by one's parents. One cannot deny or argue with such a request. One must comply with whatever one's parents want one to do. This belief also contributed to a woman's personal desire to repay this debt to her family through service to the King which could in turn provide social mobility for her parents and her family. Khunying Nititwadee describes her mother's decision to send her to the inner court. She states that she never doubted in what her mother told her to do. The reason that she went to work in the inner court was because her mother sent her there and instructed her to live there. "So when my mom told me to do that, I did it. I never dared ask why."<sup>38</sup> She never doubted her mother's decision for her life.

Being a member of the inner court created personal opportunities for her own life. As a member of the inner court you were considered a part of high society. This dynamism really gained prominence during the reign of King Mongkut and King

---

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Khunying Nititwadee Ontrakarn. Bangkok, September 2005.

Chulalongkorn when being associated with the inner court became an indication of sophistication. Being in the inner court made you a part of the highest portion of Siamese women's society. It came to be an indication of high birth and therefore high society. Placement in the inner court also allowed one to come into contact with other high society ladies. The inner court became the hub for these ladies to communicate. Women from the inner court were considered ideal as the perfect, honorable wife for a man. Her qualifications gave her the opportunities to be with men in the same or higher status thereby elevating her own social status. Her physical presence in the inner court also put her in contact with other high society ladies. These women were always searching for appropriate husbands for each other in the community. Most of these ladies were vying for the attention of or recognition from the King. According to Pornsiri, most of the royal wives of the fifth reign were from the ladies taken from the inner court who the King found desirable. Some were dancers or musicians or were presented to the King. If one could be a royal wife a change in one's status occurs. This status change not only affected the individual but also affected a woman's whole family. One's family would be related to the King as well and the woman could take the credit for providing this for her family. Their newly gained status placed everyone in the family in a better position to be promoted in their jobs, especially government jobs.

The master (a queen or royal wife) of the palace also influenced a woman's chance in this regard. As was stated before, the inner courtiers were separated into groups based on their masters, or the one they were employed to work for. If a

woman was good enough in the eye of the master, the master would try to marry her off to a prince or to the King. This provided a way to increase the master's power in the inner court as well as elevate the status of the inner courtier.

The inner court was considered an honorable institution. In Siam, the monarchy was the highest institution in the nation, not only politically but in other aspects as well. The King is perceived as the man with the greatest amount of merit and the protector of the religion and the nation. When considered in this way, being a part of this institution, in service to the King, was considered an honorable way to live one's life. Since women were not allowed to become monks or gain merit by doing so, it can be surmised that service to the King brought about some semblance of merit. Though this is not supported by any documentation I came across, it can be perceived in this way.

Another factor contributing to the justification of accepting placement in the inner court was that during this period, no other form of education was available for women. In the inner court, women were taught the home arts that would make them into proper ladies and wives. It was not until the reign of King Chulalongkorn did Siam have schools for women. Education was limited for women. However, female schools established during the reign of King Chulalongkorn were only for ladies of the inner court. Wattana Witiyalai and Sunantalai were both established in the area of the King's palaces limited only to noble ladies, most of whom lived in the inner court. Prior to the establishment of schools that women could attend, the inner court served

as the only place where women had the opportunity to study literature, sciences and arts.

As an inner courtier a woman was qualified as a ‘well-groomed lady’. According to Chattraporn, the life of the inner courtiers was all about training and being trained. All the ladies had to be skillful in handicrafts. Being in the court meant they were trained to be a perfect wife. Not strictly trained in handicrafts, they were also trained in traditions, ceremonies, customs, and social manners. Inner courtiers were also considered the trendiest ladies in the country. They were fashionable, knew how to socialize and knew how to handle themselves.

Life in the inner court was leisurely compared with life outside the inner court as a commoner. Khunying Nititwadee, an inner courtier herself, is quoted as saying “life in the inner court is so much fun.” You worked hard, but you had a chance to play a lot too. When you are outside (not in the palace), just like she once was, she had no chance to play. She had to work all the time because “it’s all about making a living. But in the inner court, you just worked on your routine and you could have fun during your spare time.”<sup>39</sup>

## 5.6 Way of life in the Inner Court

---

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Khun Ying Nititwadee Ontrakarn. Bangkok, September 2005.

The life of the inner court was very lively. The inner court was crowded with women from various classes and origins. Each woman had her own attachment depending on who she belonged to when she first became an inner courtier. Most of the time, the attachment was determined by the *tamnak* or *ruen* (group), the girl moved into. The segregation into groups caused quarrels when there were conflicts between concubines, since the people in a group would quarrel against one another siding with their masters.

Each *Phra Mahesi*, *Phra Chaya* and senior *Phra Sanom* had many subordinates under her such as inner court officials and servants who exhibited their power. The routine of the inner court ladies depended on the specialty of their place or the interest of the master of the place.<sup>40</sup>

All the inner court ladies in each *tamnak* were either well-trained qualified women who were skillful in handicrafts or the women who were being trained to be one. The training mentioned includes literature, social manners, traditional practices, customs, flower craft, handicraft, perfume making, cloth folding and culinary arts. Their daily routine consisted of these tasks. The life of an inner court lady was a competitive life. Masters of each *tamnak* were always competing with one another in handicrafts to be honored as the best in a particular craft. Because of the variety of different crafts certain

---

<sup>40</sup> Pornsiri Buranaket. Nang Nai: Social Life and Roles in Thai Society During the Reign of King Rama V. Bangkok: Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Socio-Anthropology, Thammasat University, 1997.

*tamnak* would have specialties. This influenced the decision of a girl's parents on where to send their daughter to be trained. Every *tamnak* contained ladies with skills in each craft even though perhaps not the best at their craft. The larger *tamnak* which were headed by powerful masters were more likely to have several experts in several handicraft categories because they housed many more people.<sup>41</sup>

The daily routine of the inner court ladies was all about training and being trained. For all the inner court ladies, apart from serving the King when he came to the inner court and doing their job according to their responsibilities and positions, they spent most of the time making gifts for the King, to sell, or for other important people. Since they were very close to the King, their interests constantly shifted according to the King's. The King's interest was considered the trendiest thing of the time and the whole palace followed. When Western culture came to Thailand, women of the inner court were the ones leading the trends and setting the example in areas such as dress, hair style and riding a bicycle.

The inner court was totally separated from both the outer court and the world outside. The inner courtiers had their own city inside the walls of the royal palace. Life in the inner court was normal and festive. They enjoyed plenty of free time so they gathered and conducted activities for their amusement. Some made handicrafts for sale. Some gambled or played lotto. Some just gathered and got drunk. Some of the activities caused trouble within the court (such as improper behavior from being drunk, fights and

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



affairs between ladies). Some of these activities had tragic outcomes like the death of Chao Chom Sudd. Chao Chom Sudd loved to gamble and ended up acquiring a large debt. She was unable to pay off the debt so she decided to commit suicide. The King, later, forbade all the trouble causing activities such as gambling, lotto and drinking.

The gates of the royal grand palace opened at 6 am and closed at 6 pm. regularly without any exceptions. The inner courtiers leaving the palace and coming back in had to enter during that time using *Anong Leela* gate and *Sri Sudawongse* gate which were also called *Pratoo Din*. *Pratoo Din* was the gate connecting the inner court and the outer court. The community near the exit of the inner court was called *thaew teng* which was a place where small shops were lined up for inner courtiers to shop. There were shops selling food, cloth, silk, thread, needles, lip balm, betel nuts, cigarettes, toys and etc. The area nearby the gate was always crowded with people coming in and out including the men who wanted to see the inner court ladies.

As discussed earlier, the large population of the inner court allowed tasks to be completed quickly which created plenty of free time. Most of this free time was spent doing leisurely activities such as gift making, gambling or shopping.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Chattraporn Chindadach, The Inner court Administration in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1999.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DEMISE OF THE ROYAL INNER COURT DURING THE REIGN OF KING RAMA VI

#### 6.1 Political changes from the fifth reign to sixth reign

By the time King Vajiravudh came to the throne in 1910, the King was no longer the figurehead, semi-mystical head of state but the director of the administration.<sup>1</sup> This was in part due to the increased visibility of the King and to the insistence of the King that he be treated as the administrative head of state. This was on a par with other foreign royal heads of state, and since Siam wished itself to be viewed as an equal in the international community, it made the conscious move to change the way in which the people viewed the King. As discussed earlier, during the reign of King Mongkut the status of the King changed from a view of the King as a *devaraja* to one that was paternalistic. This continued on until King Vajiravudh who promoted nationalism by instilling the three pillars of the state—nation, religion and king.

The political importance of intermarriage and the practice of polygamy changed after the reign of King Chulalongkorn. During this reign, the entire structure of modern Thailand was brought into being—almost literally from scratch—and a traditional Southeast Asian kingdom ringed by dependent tributary states, was transformed into a modern nation.<sup>2</sup> It was during this period, that a semblance of borders was established to

---

<sup>1</sup> Greene, Stephen Lyon Wakemen. Absolute Dreams. Thai Government Under Rama VI, 1910-1925. Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1999. Pg. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Wyatt, David K. Studies in Thai History. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994. Pg. 282.

comprise the Siamese nation. The need to establish borders occurred with the increasing presence and domination of the colonial powers in Southeast Asia during the 1800's and into the 1900's. When King Vajiravudh came to the throne in 1910, Siam's borders had already been established. In effect, during this period, the practice of polygamy became obsolete in functioning to gain territorial rights for the Siamese king.

The power of the inner court and the relationships it fostered can be seen to have declined during this reign and drastically in subsequent reigns thereafter. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that the King had no wives until his last five years of rule. His desire for a monogamous society crippled the traditional workings of the Royal Inner Court.

King Vajiravudh's reign marks the end of the practice of polygamy by Siamese kings. Many factors can be attributed to this occurrence. Western colonialism was exerting a lot of power in the region and Siam found it important to depict itself as a modern nation. In addition to this, Vajiravudh's reign is littered with discussions concerning his sexual orientation. What can be concluded is that the demise of the Royal Inner Court during the reign of King Vajiravudh is mainly due to the end of the practice of polygamy by the King. Furthermore, the pre-eminent factor contributing to the end of the practice of polygamy by the King is its obsolescence in establishing territorial rights. Vassal states were replaced with a more centralized form of government during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

The grandeur of the royal inner court changed dramatically during the reign of King Vajiravudh. The royal harem, to mention a Siamese institution par excellence, became obsolete only in the Sixth Reign as a result of growing public criticism of polygamy...<sup>3</sup> M.R. Kukrit Pramoj's novel, Four Reigns, describes the inner palace during the Sixth Reign, "...the streets were deserted, the windows shut, and signs of withering and decaying confronted you at every corner..."<sup>4</sup> During King Vajiravudh's reign the royal inner court was in a state of deterioration. Upon his ascension to the throne the King almost immediately moved the royal residence away from the Grand Palace. During his fifteen-year reign, he would continue to move residences, sometimes every few months. The dismantling of the royal inner court began with the departure of the King from the Bangkok Royal Palace. With the King gone, other royal members followed suit and moved elsewhere. Some of the inner court women chose to stay at the Grand Palace, but a majority relocated to their own residences (or to that of their benefactor) outside the Grand Palace.

Traditionally, Siam was not a country made up of delineated, geographical borders. It was a country whose power resided in the control of its people. With its vast, agriculturally rich lands, manpower was of the utmost advantage; essential in harboring its resources and gaining something of value (commodity in trade); and in times of warfare where manpower mattered. Manpower was governed in a hierarchical fashion. In Thai, the unit status in this hierarchy was indiscriminately called *muang*, which meant

---

<sup>3</sup> Peleggi, Maurizio. Lord of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002. Pg 4.

<sup>4</sup> Pramoj, Kukrit. Four Reigns. Tulachandra (Translator). Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999. Page 291.

governed area—that is, the area under the righteous protection of the overlord. In Thai a tributary was called *prathetsarat*. This scheme of power relations in Southeast Asian polity has been known to scholars as *mandala*.<sup>5</sup>

For almost all the Thai peoples, the *muang* was the primary unit of social and political organization above the simple village level. *Muang* is a term that defies translation, for it denotes as much personal as spatial relationships. When it is used in ancient chronicles to refer to a principality, it can mean both the town located at the hub of a network of interrelated villages and also the totality of town and villages which was ruled by a single *chao*, “lord.”<sup>6</sup>

Working from the outer layers inward, we encounter first a circle of semi-independent rulers who did little more than paid tribute to Bangkok on a regular basis and who often paid tribute to other states as well. A second tier of states, or perhaps more properly principalities, was relatively more integrated into the Siamese system. In addition to paying tribute they often were required to provide Siam with manpower for warfare or public works, paid relatively larger amounts in tribute, sometimes married in the Siamese Royal Family, and occasionally suffered Siamese interference in their internal affairs. The next layer consisted of large regional centers around Siam’s periphery, ruled by *chaophraya* and considered to be major, but quasi-independent, provinces... We have, thus, a hierarchy of degrees of control that in fact is neater in

---

<sup>5</sup> Winichakul, Thongchai. Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-body of a Nation. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994. Pg. 81-82.

<sup>6</sup> Wyatt, David K. Thailand A Short History. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982. Pg. 7.

theory than it was in practice. Society, in actuality, was organized primarily upon the basis of personal relationships among individuals and small groups.<sup>7</sup>

During the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) the Siamese nation was established. This change from a *muang* to a *thesaphiban* system was mainly due to the colonization of Southeast Asia, particularly Siam's neighbors. It was essential that geographical borders be established to maintain Siam's autonomy. The move towards a political system based on territory required a massive change in the manner in which people were governed. It demanded the reorganization and redistribution of space to suit the new exercise of administrative power on a territorial basis. The name of the new system—*thesaphiban* (protection of territory)—reflected these changes honestly.<sup>8</sup>

A major indication that Siam had indeed, for the first time in its history, established itself as a nation is the publishing of the so-called McCarthy map...drawn up six years before the 1893 (Franco-Siam) crisis, it is regarded now in Thailand as the first modern map of Siam.<sup>9</sup>

By the time King Vajiravudh came to the throne, Siam as a nation was completely different from what any of his predecessors had come to rule. The Siam of 1910 had assumed its present shape on the map, with neatly defined borders on all sides...gone were the five tiers of gradually diminishing authority of the capital that we distinguished

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Pg. 159-150.

<sup>8</sup> Winichakul, Thongchai. Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-body of a Nation. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994. Pg. 120-121.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Pg. 124.

in the early Bangkok period. They were now supplanted by a single, centralized control exercised by the Bangkok court and bureaucracy.<sup>10</sup>

With the formation of Siam as a nation, there was no longer a need to create marriage alliances to gain or secure territory. This would cause the issue over the practice of polygamy to come into question again as it had during the reigns of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn.

King Chulalongkorn, who died in 1910, was the last polygamous king, but polygamy did not disappear formally until the promulgation of the Civil Code in 1935.<sup>11</sup>

The debate (over polygamy) started during the reign of King Vajiravudh. The King himself wrote a memorandum, dated June 1, 1913, stating his view on the subject in reply to Prince Svasti who advocated monogamy as the basis for drafting the new marriage law.<sup>12</sup> Soon, thereafter, the King and Prince Svasti found themselves at loggerheads over what was the best system of marriage for Thailand. The Prince advocated for the retention of a polygamous system while the King urged a monogamous one.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Wyatt, David K. Thailand A Short History. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982. Pg. 212.

<sup>11</sup> Reynolds, Craig J. A Nineteenth Century Thai Buddhist Defense of Polygamy and Some Remarks on the Social History of Women in Thailand. A paper presented for the seventh conference IAHA. Bangkok, 1977. Pg. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Netisastr Luang Chamroon and Wichiencharaen, Adul. Some Main Features of Modernization of Ancient Family Law in Thailand.

<sup>13</sup> Greene, Stephen Lyon Wakeman. Absolute Dreams. Thai Government Under Rama VI, 1910-1925. Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1999. Pg. 125.

Apart from urging the Thai men to abandon polygamous practice and advising Thai women to react against it, the King tried to set an example for others to follow. In 1920 he announced his engagement to Princess Vallaphathevi, and at a party given to the King and his fiancé by Thai students who had studied abroad, he publicly announced his decision to have one wife only. The King, however, did not carry through with his intention. In March 1921 his engagement was denounced; from 1922 onward, the King married four ladies one after another. However, it should be noted that the number of wives was dramatically less than those of his predecessors, and the old practice of gathering a large number of concubines as an indication of the King's prestige has faded out.<sup>14</sup>

The royal harem became obsolete only in the Sixth Reign as a result of growing public criticism of polygamy as well as King Vajiravudh's sexual inclinations.<sup>15</sup> In addition, there was a demand for monogamy by women's groups in 1924.

According to Vella, King Vajiravudh believed that the status of women in a society was a symbol of that society's degree of civilization. Thus, he instituted a number of reforms during his reign (1910-1925) that he thought would improve Thai women's status, especially education. What may seem more superficial included changes in

---

<sup>14</sup> Patana, Suwadee T. Polygamy or Monogamy: The Debate on Gender Relations in Thai Society, 1913-1935. Paper presented to the 13<sup>th</sup> IAHA Conference Sophia University, Tokyo. Bangkok, 1994. Pg. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Peleggi, Maurizio. Lord of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002. Pg. 4.



women's fashions. Women were encouraged to grow out their short hair and to cease chewing betel nut.<sup>16</sup>



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

---

<sup>16</sup> Vella, Walter F. Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1978.

## 6.2 Change in Structure of the Inner court

The structure of the inner court changed dramatically when King Vajiravudh came to the throne. Because he made the decision not to take any wives, the inner court was distanced from him as never before seen in previous reigns. On top of this his constant moves from palace to palace resulted in further distancing himself from the inner courtiers in *Suan Sunanta* and the Grand Palace.

When King Vajiravudh first came to the throne, the Inner Palace was under the authority of the Mother Queen, *Somdech Phra Pan Pee Laung* and she assigned *Tao Vorachan* to take care of the Inner Court as she had done in the reign of King Chulalongkorn.<sup>17</sup>

King Vajiravudh did not usually reside at the Grand Palace but at Phayathai Palace, Dusit Palace and palaces outside Phra Nakorn; i.e. Sanam Chan Palace in Nakhorn Pathom Province, Chao Samrarn Beach in Petchaburi Province . The Inner Courtiers from the former reigns were still living in the Grand Palace but it was not as lively as it once was since the King did not reside there and there were no Royal Consorts or concubines at all during the first 10 years of the reign of King Vajiravudh. The Royal

---

<sup>17</sup> Chandrarat Prawalpath. A Comparative Study of The Court of King Chulalongkorn with that of King Rama VI. Bangkok: Department of History, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1978.

Pages took care of the King's personal service which used to be the responsibility of the inner court ladies.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the inner courtiers of the former reigns, including the members of the royal family, Lady Consorts, concubines and inner court officials, moved out of the palace to reside with their family or moved to other palaces.

The Inner Courtier from the reign of King Chulalongkorn that served King Vajiravudh were the sisters of Chao Phraya Ramrakop and Chao Phraya Anirudh Deva, Tao Indra Suriya. Tao Indra Suriya became the inner court official responsible for the Royal Wardrobe and Kitchen.

The title *Khun* was invented by King Vajiravudh for the inner court ladies working for him personally. The qualifications for those eligible for the title *Khun* were:

- 1) Inner Court Ladies working close to the king as his personal servant or the Inner Court ladies whose father's rank was higher than *Phra Ya*.
- 2) Inner Court Ladies working close to the king as his personal servant or whom were bestowed with the *Chula Chomklao* Royal Decoration

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

### 6.3 Way of life in the Inner Court

The life in the inner court changed during this reign because women became less important in political matters. The inner court was no longer a ‘veritable city of women’ but consisted of only a small handful of 12 with a few servants beneath them. In total only a few hundred women were considered inner courtiers, with only four wives.

The responsibility of the inner courtiers changed as well. Normally only women were allowed to enter the King’s chambers. However, during the reign of King Vajiravudh only his male royal pages were allowed. These male royal pages took all the tasks that women once held, such as giving massages to the King and taking care of his personal grooming. In the reign of King Vajiravudh, the royal pages played a significant role both in the inner and outer court. The inner court most definitely could not be considered as a harem during and after the reign of King Vajiravudh because of the lack of female concubines. Another characteristic that changed in this reign was that in previous reigns there was a strong connection between the inner courtiers of previous reigns with that of the incoming inner courtiers. However in this reign, they were totally separated because some stayed at the Grand Palace and some moved to *Suan Sunanta*, but they did not intermingle. Most continued to live out their lives as inner courtiers but without the presence of the King at the palace.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Khunying Nititwadee Ontrakarn. Bangkok, September 2005.

Obviously the women lost the ability to socialize with the thousands of other noble families because of the serious shrinkage in size of the court, but still, all the women working as royal servants were nobles and continued to be considered as high society ladies. However, the inner court was no longer considered the only center for high society ladies.

King Vajiravudh traveled often. When the King went to one of the summer palaces, the inner courtiers went with him. This gave these ladies an opportunity to go see many different places. Khunying Nititwadee mentions that once she even went camping in the forest with the King. There were a lot of activities the King planned for them to do for his entertainment. Examples were sprint racing and badminton, which the King taught them how to play himself. She had a chance to see many plays and she loved it. She knew that she would not have had the opportunity to see the things she did and experience the things she did had it not been for her employment within the inner court during the reign of King Vajiravudh.<sup>20</sup>

The inner court ladies of King Vajiravudh had their daily routine. Here is an account of the daily activities of Khunying Nititwadee. She woke up very early in the morning before dawn in order to go out and pick flowers in the garden, because certain flowers had to be picked before the sun came up, whereas some flowers had to be picked later to obtain the best fragrance. It was her duty to take care of the King's and the Queen's (Suwathana) wardrobe. She was responsible for delegating the laundry duties to

---

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Khunying Nititwadee Ontrakarn. Bangkok, September 2005.

those of lower ranks. Her main task was to scent the King and Queen's clothing then fold them. This required that she be able to fold them properly and put them in their wardrobe closet. Sometimes she was given the task of arranging the clothes that the Queen would wear for the day, help her dress, and help her with her hair. After she completed her tasks, most of the time she returned to bed until 4pm when dinner was served. At 4pm, the *khun*'s (defined as the royal servants, a title created in the reign of King Vajiravudh) had to be in the dining room lined up to serve food to the King. After the King completed his meal, these *khun* were responsible for clearing the table. When the King dined, each of them had to take turns (usually in 15 minute intervals due to the heavy weight of the fan) fanning the King. Usually two people were posted behind the King while he dined. One person fanned the King while another person held the bowl with water and soap for the King to wash his hands while he was eating, and help clean his hands for him. Normally, dining took a couple of hours since the King enjoyed lengthy discussions with the people he invited. *Khun Nitwadee* was also responsible for feeding the beloved dogs of King Vajiravudh, whom she fed very much like their master....with a spoon. The dog's meals had to be cut into nice portions and served in the same 'royal' fashion. The dogs even refused drinking water without ice.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

The royal inner court was the center point of Siamese society through the 1800's and into the early 1900's. It was here that resided the most important man and women in all the kingdom: the King of Siam and the women who were royal relatives of the vassal rulers that made up the kingdom of Siam.

The royal inner court also provided women the only education available to them. Though education was largely limited to home science, other subjects such as literature, arts and science were also taught. This education was only available to inner courtiers which were limited to the elite women of Siam or those employed in the inner court. The inner court also became the center for these noble and upper class women to congregate. Here the standards for an ideal woman were set. Trends such as the nature of dress, socializing skills, and etiquette paved the way for the rest of Siamese society to develop. The inner courtiers' role in setting the stage for these changes to occur greatly enhanced the view of Siam to the Western audience.

In analyzing the cultural views and practices of the time, in addition to the daily routine of the inner courtiers compared with that of women outside this elite society, it can be concluded that life in the inner court was a privileged one. Though these women lived their life in servitude, the opportunities available to the women of the inner court outweighed the presumed hardships they experienced. This is

especially true considering life outside the court was still conducted in service to another based on the social system of the period. A person in Siamese society during this period of time, whether it be a man or a woman, would never consider not being in service to another in that it also provided protection. In theory, every man, woman and child was the property of and in service to the King of the land.

During the height of the inner court in the mid-nineteenth century, the inner court not only served a social importance, but also was of political importance. Families used the inner court to gain social mobility by installing their daughters in the court. In addition to this, having a family member's presence in the inner court kept families in tune with the political happenings of the kingdom. In this sense, the inner court was of political importance. Vassal rulers also offered their daughters to the King to cement ties between the vassal and the main Kingdom of Siam. This gesture unified the various kingdoms which in turn created a formidable front against attacking kingdoms.

The royal inner court of Siam declined during the reign of King Vajiravudh. Therefore, the power in the relationships it fostered also was diminished during this period. The demise can be directly attributed to the fact that the royal residence was moved from the Grand Palace and the King, having no wives until his last five years of reign, had no direct ties to the inner court.



The power of the kingdom lay in its ability to control people. This was done mostly through military force followed by continued loyalty through marriage ties to the various vassal states. These marriages, in effect, functioned to gain or secure territory for conquering kings. By the time King Vajiravudh came to power in 1910, an entirely different governing system had been created that had established the geographical borders of Siam. No longer was there a need to marry to gain or secure territory. Since polygamy was in one way validated by the need to create these many alliances, it became obsolete when this need no longer existed. It was not necessary for the King of Siam to perpetuate the traditional, polygamous, way of kingship. The King's desire for a monogamous society crippled the traditional workings of the Royal Inner Court. The demise of the Royal Inner Court during the reign of King Vajiravudh was due to the end of the practice of polygamy by the King. Furthermore, the pre-eminent factor contributing to the end of the practice of polygamy by the King is its obsolescence in establishing territorial rights.

สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## REFERENCES

1. Aphornsuvan, Thanet. *Slavery and Modernity: Freedom in the Making of Modern Siam*. in Asian Freedoms. Edited by Kelly, David & Reid, Anthony. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
2. Benedict, Ruth. Thai Culture and Behavior, An Unpublished War-time Study, Dated September, 1943 Southeast Asian Program, Department of Far Eastern Studies. New York: Cornell University, 1952.
3. Bradley, D.B. Dictionary of the Siamese Language. Bangkok, 1873.
4. Bristowe, W.S. Louis and the King of Siam. London: Chatto & Windus, 1976.
5. Chakrabongse, Prince Chula, Lord of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand. London: Alvin Redman, 1967.
6. Chandrarat Prawalpath. A Comparative Study of The Court of King Chulalongkorn with that of King Rama VI. Bangkok: Department of History, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1978.
7. Chattraporn Chindadach, Karn Boriharn Ratchasamnek Fai Nai Nai Ratcha Samai Phrabat Somdej Phra Chulachonklaao Chao Yuu Hua, The Inner court Administration in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1999.
8. Chutintaranond, Sunait , *Some Thoughts About Women in History*. The Journal of Thai Studies, Second Year. Vol 1, 1984.
9. Coxon, Anthony P.M. & Jones, Charles L. Class and Hierarchy. The Social Meaning of Occupations.. London: Macmillan, 1979.
10. Dahl, Robert A. Modern Political Analysis. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966.
11. Davis, David Brion. The Problem of Western Slavery in Western Culture. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.
12. Dhani Niwat. *The Old Siamese Conception of the Monarchy*. in Chunnum Pra Nipon (Collection of Prince Dhani Niwat's Writings) Bangkok: Prajan, 1974.
13. Gervaise, Nicolas. *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*. Bangkok: White Lotus, 1989.

14. Graham, W.A. *Social Organization*. Siam. London: The De La More Press, 1924.
15. Greene, Stephen Lyon Wakemen. Absolute Dreams. Thai Government Under Rama VI, 1910-1925. Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1999.
16. Griswold, A. B. King Mongkut of Siam. New York: The Asia Society, 1961.
17. Hanks, Lucian. Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order, American Anthropologist. Cambridge, 1962.
18. Kemp, Jeremy. Aspects of Siamese Kingship in the Seventeenth Century. Bangkok: Social Science Review Social Science Association Press of Thailand. Bangkok, 1969.
19. Kepner, Susan. Anna (and Margaret) and the King of Siam. In Crossroads. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies. Vol 10, Number 2. Illinois: University of Illinois, 1996.
20. Keyes, Charles. The Power of Merit. Visakha Puja, 1973.
21. Khuning Nititwadee Ontrakarn. Interview. Bangkok. September, 2005.
22. Khuning Nititwadee Ontrakarn. Unpublished personal journal, 2004.
23. Kidd, Alan. State, Society, and the Poor in Nineteenth Century England. New York: Macmillan Press, 1999.
24. Kirsch, A. Thomas. *The Thai Buddhist Quest for Merit*. The Politics of Southeast Asia. New York Random House, 1973.
25. Kittiwut Jod Taywaditep, et. Al. *Gender Conflicted Persons*. In IES Countries: Thailand Muang Thai, 1994.
26. Kukrit Pramoj. *Karnpokkornng Samai Sukhothai, Political Administration in the Sukhothai Period* in Prawatsat lae Karnmuang. Bangkok : Thammasat University Press, 1973.
27. La Loubere, Simon de. *The Kingdom of Siam*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1969.
28. Leonowens, Anna Harriette. The Original Anna and the King of Siam from the English Governess at the Siamese Court Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok. Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co, 1870.

29. Leonowens, Anna. The Romance of the Harem. University Press of Virginia. Charlottesville, 1991.
30. McDonald, Rev. N.A. A Missionary in Siam (1860-1870). Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1999.
31. McFarland, A. Dictionary of the Siamese Language. Stanford Press, 1944.
32. Mills, Mary Beth. *Working For Wages in Bangkok, Reworking Gender and Family in the Countryside*. In Women, Gender Relations and Development in Thai Society. Edited by Virada Somswasdi & Sally Theobald. Faculty of Social Sciences. Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University Press, 1997.
33. Ministry of Education, *Prawat Sart Karn Suksa Thai, A History of Thai Education*. Bangkok: Kurusapha. Ladprao Press, 1976.
34. Moffat, Abbot Low. *Mongkut, the King of Siam*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961.
35. Mom Luang Nuang Nirarat. *Chiwit Nai Wang, Life In The Inner Court*.
36. Mulder, Niels. *The Concept of Power and Moral Goodness in the Contemporary Thai Worldview*. The Journal of Siam Society. Issue 67 Vol 1. Bangkok, 1979.
37. Nakata, Thinpan. *Political Legitimacy in Thailand : Problems and Prospects*. Journal of Social Science Review. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Vol 1. No.1. March, 1976.
38. Naengnoi Tittiranond. Suan Sunanta. Bangkok: Suan Sunanta Teacher's College. B.E. 1980.
39. Netisastr Luang Chamroon and Wichiencharaen, Adul. Some Main Features of Modernization of Ancient Family Law in Thailand.
40. Nongnuch Praipibulkij. Phrarajawangboran, Ancient Palaces. Bangkok, 1998.
41. Pallegoix, Monsignor Jean-Baptiste. Description of the Thai Kingdom or Siam. Thailand Under King Mongkut. Originally published as *Description du Royaume Thai ou Siam*, 1854. Paris. Translated by Walter E.J. Tips. Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000.
42. Patana, Suwadee T. Thai Society's Expectations of Women 1904-1935: An Approach to Women's History. Paper presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> IAHA Conference. University of Hong Kong. Bangkok, 1991.

43. Patana, Suwadee T. Polygamy or Monogamy: The Debate on Gender Relations in Thai Society, 1913-1935. Paper presented at the 13<sup>th</sup> IAHA Conference Sophia University, Tokyo. Bangkok, 1994.
44. Peleggi, Maurizio. Lord of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.
45. *Phra Rajanipon Klong Supasit. A Collection of King Vajiravudh's Poems*. King Vajiravudh. Published in the funeral book of Queen Suwattana Phra Woraraja Devi, March 1986.
46. Phya Srivisarn Vacha. Kingship in Siam. Early History and Ayudhaya Period.
47. Piyanat Bunnag and Marayat Kijsuwan. An Analysis of Values and Norms in Thai Society During the Early Ratanakosin Period (A.D. 1782-1851): Kinship, Marriage and Family System. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1983.
48. Pombejra, Dhiravat na. Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources. Bangkok: Department of History, Faculty of Art, Chulalongkorn University, 2001.
49. Pongsapich, Amara. Feminism Theories and Praxis: Women's Social Movement in Thailand. In Women, Gender Relations and Development in Thai Society. Edited by Virada Somswasdi & Sally Theobald. Faculty of Social Sciences. Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University Press, 1997.
50. Pornsiri Buranaket. Nang Nai: Social Life and Roles in Thai Society During the Reign of King Rama V. Bangkok: Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Socio-Anthropology, Thammasat University, 1997.
51. Pramoj, Kukrit. Four Reigns. Tulachandra (Translator). Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999.
52. Pramoj, M.R. Seni and Pramoj, M.R. Kukrit. A King of Siam Speaks. Bangkok: the Siam Society, 1987.
53. Prince Damrong Rajanuphap. Compilation of Chronicles Division 626. Tam Nan Wang Kao. Funeral book of General M.R. Lek Ngonrot, 1970.
54. Radibhadana, Akin. The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing, 1996.
55. Reid, Alastair J. Social Classes and Social Relations in Britain. 1850-1914. New Studies in Economic and Social History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

56. Reynolds, Craig J. A Nineteenth Century Thai Buddhist Defense of Polygamy and Some Remarks on the Social History of Women in Thailand. A paper presented for the seventh conference IAHA. Bangkok, 1977.
57. Reynolds, Frank E. Sacral Kingship and National Development: The Case of Thailand. In Contributions to Asian Studies, Vol IV. Leiden: Leiden University, 1973.
58. Reynolds, Frank. *Sacral Kingship and National Development: The case of Thailand*. Contributions to Asian Studies. Vol IV. Leiden: E.J Brill, 1973.
59. Siffin, William. Traditional Society and Traditional Government. The Thai Bureaucracy Institutional Change and Development. Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1976.
60. Smith, Malcom. A Physician at the Court of Siam. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1986.
61. Sombat Phukan. Siamese and Anna. Bangkok: Bangkok Publications, 1999.
62. Sternberger, Dolf. Legitimacy, International Encyclopedia of the Social Science, Vol IX. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
63. Sukatipan, Saitip. Thailand: The Evolution of Legitimacy in Muthiah Alagappa Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia : The Quest for Moral Authority. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995.
64. Szreter, S.R.S. The Official Representation of Social Classes in Britain, The U.S., and France: The Professional Model. Comparative Studies in Society and History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
65. Vella, Walter F. Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1978.
66. Wales, H.G. Quaritch. Siamese State Ceremonies. Wales: Curzon Press, 1992.
67. Winichakul, Thongchai. Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-body of a Nation. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994.
68. Wood, W.A.R. An English Consul in Siam. A Memoir 1896-1932. London: Kegan Paul Limited, 2003.
69. Wyatt, David K. Studies in Thai History. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994.

70. Wyatt, David K. Thailand A Short History. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.
71. Wyatt, David K. 1963. “ Siam and Laos , 1767-1827 .” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 4 (2): 13-32. (reprinted in David K. Wyatt. 1994. *Studies in Thai History: Collected Articles* , pp. 185-209. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.)
72. Zinn, Howard. A People’s History of the United States 1492 to Present. New York: Harper Collins, 1999.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย



## VITAE

Bee Melanie Ontrakarn was born on October 4, 1974 in Glendale, California. She received her bachelor degree from the Department of Public Administration and Urban Studies at California State University, San Diego. After attending graduate classes at the University of California Berkeley she decided to continue her research in Bangkok, Thailand where she currently resides. She began her studies for master degree at Chulalongkorn University in 2004. She is currently employed as the Director of Operations for an international advertising agency.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย