

THAI WOMEN: Changing Status and Roles During the Course of Thai Modernization(I)¹

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INTRODUCTION

Among the studies of Thai women, there are two main categories. The first is the study for official purposes or from official perspectives, including works issued by some international organizations (e.g. Thailand National Commission on Women's Affairs etc.). The contents tend to be demographical data and vital statistics. They focus on descriptions of Thai women's problems in family, work place, and their basic problems of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. Many explain how the projects of governmental and non-governmental organizations are running and planned to improve the standard of living.

The second category is in the theme of sex roles in Thai society. These studies discuss Thai women's position and roles in the past and present through traditional concepts and beliefs (Boonsue, Boonthawee, Kirsch, Keyes, Raviwongse, and Van Esterik). The analysis of this trend lies on the fact that Thai women's inferior social status derived from the gender bias originating from religious beliefs, especially Buddhism in which about 95% of present Thai nationals believe. In the pre-modern times, religious principles seemed to occupy all aspects of Thai people's lives, but nowadays in the modern political economy, religion coexists with other Western ideology. There are some anthropological researches of Thai women in rural areas that provide knowledge of precise roles and status of Thai women in their families and social settings (Potter, Phothisita). However, there are other groups of Thai women that have not yet been studied enough. These are women of different socioeconomic classes, the rural women migrants in urban areas, urban women, and Thai women of ethnic ancestry.

My interest is in the process of modernization in Thai political and economic development during the Thai "modern time"; and the impact of that process on the changes in women's lives in terms of their participation in social and economic activities. Among groups of women I have mentioned above, the roles of upper class women are the most striking to me. Compared to industrialized Asian countries such as Japan and the newly industrialized countries such as Korea and Taiwan, the upper class Thai women engaged in political and economic activities more than

¹ This paper will be presented in three parts due to its length.

women in those countries. Even among the Asian democratic societies (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia), the upper class (or caste) women are the conservative groups to retain traditional culture and values. It is important to find out the factors that distinguish Thai upper class women from their counterparts in other Asian countries.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The changes in Thai women's social status and roles have occurred as a process along with the changes of other social systems during the period of modernization. The word "modernization" in this study context means a *process of imitation of Western culture, including all major social institutions: education, administration, legislation, political ideology, economic system, belief system, recreation, and patterns of behavior*. The objective of this study is to examine the inter-relationship between the modernized institutions and women's socio-cultural roles and social status.

Two institutions, education and the political-economic system which in my opinion are the most influential institutions in this study case will be focused. For the period of study, I divide the process of modernization into five periods, but I will focus on two periods that I think had a great impact on Thai women's lives. One period is from 1932, the year in which Thailand changed its governing system to a constitutional monarchy; to 1957, the year in which politics shifted into another phase. It was the period of national policy that aimed to indoctrinate Thai women into the Western mode of thinking and behavior. The other period was from 1957 to 1973, during which the capitalist economic structure had been strengthened under the authoritarian political leaders. National development plans were initiated as an outline to promote national economic growth. It was a contrast with the previous period in that women's issue were completely dropped from the development plans.

In this study, I concentrate on the women of the upper socioeconomic class, since they were the first group targeted for change and they have long been the role models and frame of reference for other groups of women.

MODERNIZATION IN THAILAND

Thailand in the second half of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century, had been threatened by the expansion of the imperial Western powers. The Thai kings realized an urgent need to modernize the country by Westernizing the system. The modernization continued through the period after the political revolution in 1932. In this study, women's life will be discussed under each phase of political and economic change, at which I would like to divide the course of Thai modernization into five periods according to their distinctive characteristics, as the following:

- . The Pre-reformation Period (1851-1868)
- . The Chakkri Reformation Period (1868-1910)
- . The Pre-revolutionary Period (1910-1932)
- . The Period of Modern Politics (1932-1957)
- . The Period of National Development Plans (1957-1973)

In the first three periods (I-III) from 1851 to 1932, I will basically describe the events and changes, and the general condition of society to give an overview to supplement the understanding in the periods of focus (IV, V) between 1932 and 1973. The outlines of all five periods are as follows:

- . **The Pre-reformation Period** (1851-1868)
 - Socioeconomic System
 - Women's Economic Roles
 - Legal Liberation
 - Women's Education

- . **The Chakkri Reformation Period** (1868-1910)
 - Modernization and Its Limitations
 - Women's Modern Education

- . **The Pre-revolutionary Period** (1910-1932)
 - Problem of Continuity
 - Modernization of Upper Class Women
 - Women's Roles as Citizen and Wives
 - Social Conduct and Appearance
 - Education
 - Polygamy
 - Surnames

- . **The Period of Modern Politics** (1932-1957)
 - Socioeconomic Structure
 - Education for People
 - Urban and Rural Education
 - Women's Opportunities in Education
 - Phibunsongkram and Women's Status and Roles
 - Occupations and Education
 - Family Life and Social Roles

. **The Period of National Development Plans** (1957-1973)

Economic Development and Socioeconomic Structure

Educational Development

Upper Class Women and Social Roles

I. THE PRE-REFORMATION PERIOD (1851-1868)

This seventeen-year period was under the reign of King Rama IV (Mongkut), the prince who was unexpectedly invited to the throne in 1851, at the age of forty-seven. He had spent twenty-seven years in a Buddhist monastery during which he had studied not only Buddhist canon deeply, but widely other subjects such as astronomy and languages. During the monastery years he also had a chance to travel and learn about common people in several parts of the country. Therefore, at the time he became a king he was very mature and more knowledgeable about his own people and country than any previous kings.

Socioeconomic System

The significant event of his reign was the Bowring Treaty which the Thai government was forced to sign with Great Britain in 1855. The treaty provided the British a very low import and export duty rate, and opened up Thailand to the world market economy as a rice producer under the British "mono-culture" trading system. Also cited in the treaty was the extraterritorial rights that allowed British subjects

"....to reside and own land in Siam,under the protection of a resident representative of Her Majesty Government.taxes of their land and activities were restricted to the low level" (Wyatt 1984: 183).

Within a decade later, treaties similar to Bowring were signed with other Western countries, such as France, Portugal, America, and so on.

The Bowring treaty greatly increased the annual international trade amount and value to Thailand as well as increasing the amount of domestic trade. The international trades, which were not only the export of rice but also other agricultural and forestry products, had brought into the country almost double the revenue within ten years. With such an increase of national revenue King Rama IV invested in many construction projects, digging canals all over Bangkok as a means of transportation. (Canal digging had been a continual project since the reign of King Rama II.) Other works were constructions of Buddhist temples and Palaces. These construction projects needed many foreign skilled laborers. Mostly Chinese migrants were hired. It should be noted that the reason of hiring the Chinese or foreign laborers instead of Thai laborers was due to the Thai social system called sakdina system or Thai Feudalism. The word sakdina literally means power (sakdi) of field (na). Under this system, every Thai citizen was appointed by the king, a

certain number of specific amount of rice fields (sakdina). The level of social status depended upon this appointed amount of rice field. The unit of rice field was rai (1 acre=2.5 rai). The slaves and commoners owned sakdina from 5 to 25 rai, but the nobles owned from 100 to 30,000 rai. The princes owned 500-50,000 rai (Rabibhadana 1969:97-103). However, the amount of sakdina did not indicate wealth and power. The possession and controlling of manpower was more important.

Sakdina system was the system that divided Thai citizens into four social classes.

1. *Royal Families* (chao). consisting of the King's family and their descendants. The descendants of the king became commoners after the fifth generation, because the title drops one rank with each succeeding generation and there were only five major ranks (Ingram, 1971:14). Usually the member of the royal family (only males) would marry to or be given a title of the noble class.

2. *Nobles and High Officials* (nai). The titles of nobles were not permanent. Frequently, they forged relationships with the king by sending their daughters to be wives of the king. These wives became both agents of their families and hostages ensuring their obedience (Ingram, 1971:14).

3. *Commoners* (phrai). This was the so-called "free man" who was under obligation to do service labor (corvee) for the king.

4. *Slaves* (thaat). The status of slaves and free men was sometimes interchangeable. Free men could sell themselves, their wives and children into slavery and could redeem them whenever they wanted if they were able to. However, a slave market never existed in Thailand.

There were three types of commoners, one belonged to the nobles, the other two belonged to the king. Theoretically, every commoner had to do the king's service (corvee labor) a few months a year. In fact, the king's commoners were assigned to a master who was a noble person. As such they did the king's service through their master's command. However they were allowed to pay a certain amount of money to be exempted from the corvee. Since labor shortage had been a long-standing problem in the country, the commoners (phrai), mainly peasants, were the main source of farm labor for rice production. They were thus, intended be kept away from construction work as long as a Chinese labor pool was available. The peasant themselves also preferred staying in the farm rather than to working for the king and masters especially during the plowing and harvesting seasons. Sometimes they even bribed the officers to make them exempted.

It can be said that the expansion of international trade had reinforced the social system by loading the peasants' work in agriculture and more cultivation. On the other hand, it brought changes to other segments of the society. It enlarged the local market in terms of expansion of demands and supplies of goods, merchandise, and land. During the previous reign of Rama III (1824-1851) Bangkok had been a small international community, but after 1855 Bangkok became a larger international community than it had ever been in the first half of the century. Among the foreigners, besides the Westerners who were diplomats, missionaries, medical personnel, educators, businessmen, and others, there also were non-Western small business traders or petty merchants and migrant workers such as Chinese, Indians, Malays, Burmese, Laotians, Mons, Cambodians. According to Thai law, all foreigners, except for Chinese, were not permitted to

travel around the kingdom and to reside outside Bangkok region. They had to settle in Bangkok or in a specified areas. However, in order to escape from native juridical system and to gain extraterritorial rights, some of these foreigners registered themselves under the protection of Western governments. They settled into an area according to their ethnicity, and countries of registration (Sombatsiri 1986:43).

Women's Economic Roles

The expansion of the local market more or less affected women's economic roles. Kamphibal reports that during this period, "*Thai women of the feudal class had a trade contact, such as trading of land, with Chinese traders who wanted to contact with nobles*" (Translated from Kamphibal 1986:24). Studies are rare concerning women of the upper class and their economic roles. Gervaise noted that, "*It seems clear that the Thai-women dominated part of the private sector of the pre-modern economy was in the hand of women. Private inter-regional trade tended to fall into non-Thai hands*" (Gervaise 1928:26-29). He did not refer particularly to upper class women. However Van Esterik discusses that,

"No class of women traders arose to take control of the marketing system of the entire kingdom. Instead the role of women in Thai economy was petty and localized...such attempts were tied to being a wife and a mother" (Van Esterik 1982:29).

It can be interpreted that women in the upper social level participated in some commercial activities like selling land, considering the fact that land in Bangkok was plentifully given to the royal families and nobles by the king, and the fact that traditionally Thai women had authority on family finances. One of the traditional roles of being a "good lady" (*kulasatri*) especially a good wife, was to master three management techniques: to manage self (of her own), subordinates, and properties (*khong ton, khong khon, khong saapsombat*) (Translated from Sukumolanan 1993:110-112).

According to Sukumolanan, her aunt, whose was born in 1855 and was the wife of a very high-ranked noble (*Phraya*), divided money received from her husband into portions for spending and saving. At the age of eighty-one in 1936, she told her story to set a "good example" that, her money from savings had all turned into several pieces of land in Bangkok and other provinces. She managed to buy these lands by herself. This was not an unusual practice among the well-to-do Thai women, even nowadays. Their freedom in financial control after marriage is rooted in the tradition that, Thai women may certainly inherit both movable and immovable properties from their parents at any time in their lives, before and/or after their marriage. This is different from some other Asian traditions. Thai women have freedom to manage their own property and extend that freedom to whatever is in their hands. Buying and selling of land, gold ornaments and jewelry, have long been a semi-business hobby among women of the upper class in Thailand until the present time. In economic studies this type of behavior is a means of "passive saving", but from the economic-role perspective, it can be considered a "silent investment".

Legal Liberation

Some laws and royal decrees related to women had been revised during this period. One was the prohibition of selling wives and children by their husbands and parents in 1867. According to the previous law, wives and children were subjects of their husbands and parents; they could be sold as a piece of property. This legal prohibition was the first step for women's right over their bodies. There was no report on how effective it was because common people did not read, and usually did not learn about laws.

There were also other decrees permitting the king's consorts and court ladies a choice of having independent lives. Since the King was the center of power, the vessel countries, the royal families, the nobles, and the well-off people frequently offered their daughters to the king, in order to have a relationship with the court for their own social prestige and power. Particularly if their daughters gave birth to a prince or princess, they could be appointed to a higher rank. These "bridging women" had to spend all of their lives in the royal city as the king's consorts and forbidden ladies. For some women who were not adjusted to the court life, who did not have any children, or whose children left to settle down somewhere else, life was very lonely. Traditionally, polygamy was a common practice and the more number of wives represented the more power of the husband, also applying to the king. By the new decrees, they were allowed to leave the palace, to live outside with their children, and to remarry as they wished (Royal Announcements of King Rama IV, 1851-1861).

Such a royal permission was never done before, nobody dared to resign at first. The king had to make the honest reconfirmed announcement to encourage the liberty of his consorts.

Women's Education

English education was initiated by the king (Mongkut) to his consorts and children. Since the king himself read the English newspapers published in Singapore and Hong Kong (Wyatt 1984: 184) to keep up with the world's events, and Thailand had always hired the foreign advisors for governmental work since the seventeenth century, English was considered part of the education for the governing leaders. The missionaries' wives and female teachers were hired to teach English and lessons conducted in English to the princes, princesses and the young consorts in the palace.

For women's education, traditionally it was done at home. In the royal court there was a scholar in a teaching position, phra-aalak who was in charge of the young princes' and princesses' education in which emphasized literature, reading and writing poems. Other royal and noble families had the same tradition of having a private tutor. Girls were not allowed to study much for fear that they would write a love letter (phleng yao). They were usually trained in womanly work such as cooking, sewing, and flower arrangement. Among the commoners, children had almost no chance to learn how to read and write. Boys had a better chance because at a certain age they were to ordain to become a monk. To prepare to read the Buddhist text, they could study with the

monks at the temple. Girls could never do that since females have a polluted nature and therefore are not allowed to be near the monk.

Even though there was not much change in women's lives during the period of King Rama IV, the increase in contact with Westerners gradually stimulated the atmosphere of the high status people for the next steps of change.

. THE CHAKKRI REFORMATION PERIOD (1868-1910)

Chulalongkorn or King Rama V was the fifth king of Chakkri Dynasty. He succeeded to the throne at the age of fifteen without any strong support from either paternal or maternal relatives. For five years he had to be under the supervision of the Regent Chao Phraya Suriyawong, a very powerful noble at that time. The king was actually in a vulnerable situation for many years until Chao Phraya Suriyawong retired. In the early years of his reign, He made a trip to some British colonial countries such as Singapore and India where he learned and experienced the different systems. However, as soon as he had a second coronation at the age of twenty, he right away announced the abolition of some traditional royal customs in his court such as prostration in royal meetings. He made a request to the princes and spouses to practice manners in Western style (Sayamananda 1988:125). During his reign of forty-two years was

"....a period of struggle for Thailand existence as an independent country. It was agreed then that the only rational alternative for Thailand was Westernization. Western ideas and Western advisors were welcome...."(Sirisamphandh 1962:205).

During his reign he westernized the country's systems in almost all dimensions: administration, military, laws, juridical system, economy, social system, and education. These changes brought the country into a totally new phase of political economy. Therefore, his reign has always been referred to as a period of Chakkri reformation.

Modernization and Its Limitations

The modernization of infrastructure was emphasized along with the centralization of provincial administrations. At the central government, two councils and twelve ministries were established as well as the modern army. One significant change was the abolition of slavery begun in 1874 and finished in 1905, and the abolition of the corvee labor system in 1899. The commoners (*phrai*) were freed to cultivate more lands for rice growing since the market was expanding. In stead of the corvee work, they were required to pay capital tax. Migrant laborers, mostly Chinese were hired for governmental construction.

The themes of the infrastructure in the reign of King Rama V could be concluded as the following:

1. Military force, as a tool of provincial centralization.
2. Public construction for communication and transportation.
3. Irrigation projects for rice cultivation which became the major revenue of the country.

4. Education for upper class and commoners to serve needs of personnel in modern bureaucracy.

The project that yielded immediate success was the irrigation project for rice producing. The revenue from exporting rice had been increasing through out the reign, as shone in the following table.

Table. I Volume and Value of Rice Production, 1870-1914

Period	Average volume/year (in 1,000 piculs)	Average value/year (in 1,000 baht)
1870-74	1,870	5,110
1890-94	7,250	23,780
1900-1904	11,130	61,280
1910-14	15,220	81,230

Note: 1 picul = 60.48 kg. or 133.12 lbs.

Source: Statistical Year Books of Thailand (Sayamananda 1988:130)

However, the primary limitation of King Rama V, was the shortage of personnel and well-trained staff to operate his projects in all fields and levels. This shortage was one of the important factors that provided chances for the capable foreigners such as Europeans, Chinese, Indians, and Muslims, and capable women to participate in high level work in later years. Even though many educational institutions for male and female were established during this reign, it was not effective until the next reign. The Department of Education was established in 1892, and primary schools were also established in the same year. The first Education Project (*krongkarn karnsuksa*) for the whole country was implemented in 1898, twenty-five years after the king's second coronation, twelve years before his death. Chulalongkorn University was planned in 1910 the last year of the reign and was opened six years later in the reign of Rama VI. It seems that education and higher education for commoners was not the prime priority in the reformation plan. On the contrary, it was the last in order among the institutions to be initiated and changed. As a matter of fact, education for commoners in order to produce the domestic trained elites to serve the new bureaucratic systems, was thought about after the unsuccessful outcome of sending elite students to study abroad.

It was obvious that in all areas of works, technicians and scholars were in great demand. Foreigners were recruited at many levels, by the recommendation of the Thai representatives in foreign countries. Most of these foreign specialists and generalists in the first period were British who could be temporarily recruited from India. The recruitment of staff was frequently interrupted by international politics between powerful nations. For examples, Britain tried to take control over the railroad services, and France proposed a law advisor for government and a French director for

a Thai law school. When it was refused, the Thai government was asked not to hire any British in the field of law. However, the real problem in hiring foreigners was that the government could not get capable people for the jobs, as appeared in a few of King Rama V's letters. (King Rama V's Writings between 1891-1910, 1966:112).

For the future prospect, sons of nobles were selected within each ministry for going to study abroad mostly in England, France, and Germany, under the government's expenses. This can be considered the first elite course training for the non-royal people. The king himself also had sent his seventeen sons to study in those countries, mainly in military science. They were successful in study and became a great help to their king father after they returned home. However the results of the noble sons' studies were not quite satisfactory. Many failed in spite of having spending many years, some were sent back because of ill-behavior, and very few were successful. In addition, some successful students could not work because they did not know how, and some even had forgotten the Thai language (Amarinratana 1979).

Later on in 1898, the Thai ambassador to Britain, Phraya Visoota-suriyasak proposed the king a new selective procedure for sending students abroad and a plan for Thai domestic education. His two proposals were agreed upon by the king and by the Head of the Department of Education. In that year the first Education Project based on the British system was announced. However, it was found unsuitable to Thai society so that it was changed to be based on Japanese system and put in practice in 1902 (Yuthayothin 1985:52).

Women and Modern Education

School education for upper class women was established many years before governmental primary education for commoners. The Palace Ladies School (Kulasatri Wanglang) or Harriet M. House's school, which opened in 1874, was a first private school for women. It was also the first boarding school for girls, run by missionaries. In the first two years there were only twenty children of commoners. After Mrs. Cole became a manager, the school became very popular among the royal families, nobles, and high governmental officers as well as among the rich commoners. Especially after Royal Highness Prince Narathip Praphanphong allowed his daughter Princess Phanphimol Worawan to attend this school in 1888, it became a model that the royal families allowed their children attend school and study with the commoners. Modern education for girls was better recognized among the upper class. The studies were general subjects, languages, women's home skills, and Western social manners. Probably, the Western atmosphere in Thai society created a demand for girl's modern education. This school produced many capable school principals and teachers for the later established women schools in Bangkok. Most of these teachers were princesses and daughters of nobility (see names in Kamphibal 1985:31). Along with the popularity of the first private women's school, the first governmental school for women of the commoner was established in 1880 and lasted until 1902.

A few other women's schools were also established under the patronage of the Queen. The most popular one was the Queen's School (Rachinee School) which opened in 1904. The first

generation teachers were invited from Japan to teach English, mathematics, sciences, arts, embroidery, and handy crafts. The principal was Miss Tetsu Yasui, a woman professor educated in England, who later became the president of Tokyo Women's University (Ishii and Yoshikawa 1986:131-146). At the same time Thai teachers were sent to study home economics and arts at women's college, Ochanomizu University, in Japan and came back to substitute Japanese teachers in 1908. It should be noted that, after Yasui, the second and third principals were both Thai princesses. This school was so popular that it had to expand to the higher levels and open another branch school in another location. Later, many women students from this school received many scholarships to study abroad.

In the above mentioned women's schools, the students were not ordinary commoners even though the term commoner (saaman) has been used in many Thai records and studies. The actual meaning of the term "commoner" here, was to indicate that it was "non-royal". The commoners in this content should not be confused with the phrai commoners who performed corvee labor. It can be misunderstood due to the facts previously mentioned that Thai Royal and Noble titles could not be transferred through generations like those in Western societies. The descendants of the king will become a "commoner", a person without any royal title, after a few generations. The descendant of a noble ranked Phraya cannot earn his father's rank unless he becomes government officer and be appointed to his father's rank. Sons can be promoted to a higher or a lower rank than that of their father's, and it can be in a different title. However in terms of social status, usually they still remain in the upper social class. Their kin-relationships with all cousins and relatives are still natural. In this sense, they are "special commoners", contrasting with the "ordinary commoners". In the above discussion of women's education, those women were children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of royal families and nobles.

It can be said that during the period of Chakkri Reformation, a group of Thai upper class women had attended modern education and some started to work in teaching career. For commoner women in the lower level and outside Bangkok, were still in the traditional social system. Many studies by scholars and government organizations reported that ordinary Thai people hardly allowed girls to attend school, particularly when schools were in the temples and most of the teachers were Buddhist monks.

. THE PRE-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD (1910-1932)

This period covered the reigns of Kings Rama VI (Vajiravudh) and Rama VII (Prajadhipok) who were both sons of Rama V (Chulalongkorn). Rama VI was on the throne for only fifteen years, 1910-1925. After his death at the age of forty-four, his youngest brother, the last prince in the line of succession, took over. Rama VII stayed on the throne for even a shorter time, ten years (1925-1935), before he abdicated in 1935, three years after the revolution. After abdication Rama VII lived in England until his death in 1941, at the age of forty-eight.

Personal circumstances and characters of the kings were very important in Thai absolute monarchy since the king was a supreme power. The common characteristic that the two kings

Rama VI and Rama VII shared was that their education was westernized. After learning English in the Royal Palace, they went to schools in England when they were around twelve. Both studied military science, the field to which King Chulalongkorn, Rama V guided all of his sons. As for Rama VI (Vajiravudh), after finishing the course at Royal Military College at Sandhurst, he continued his study in history at Oxford, and returned to Thailand via America and Japan in 1903. Since he was appointed a Crown Prince earlier in 1894, he had long been well prepared to become a king. On the other hand, Rama VII (Prajadhipok) had to become a king unwillingly due to the untimely death of his three elder brothers. He spent even less time in Thailand than his brother (Rama VI) did.

In the studies of history of politics and economics of Thailand, these two reigns are frequently combined and referred to as one period. In fact, this period has not been much discussed in detail by scholars. It might be because the period was too short and it was sandwiched between two interesting periods of Chakkri reformation and constitutional democracy which are more attractive to study. Another practical reason might be that official records of this period are not available. Brown who works on Thai elite society and the economy of 1890-1920 gives the reason for his choice to study this period that,

".... it is only for these years that the Siamese administrative records exist, and are open to scholars, in sufficient quantities to make possible the detailed examination"...

(Brown 1988:7).

Some Thai scholars compiled some valuable documents from national archives such as letters to King Rama VI and reports from nobles who were in charge of administration. These documents reveal the crisis of political economy during this period of 1910-1932 (Nartsupha, Prasartset, and Chenvidyakarn, 1981). However discussions of these documents by Thai scholars are very rare because it is one of the politically sensitive issues.

Problem of Discontinuity

It seems that King Rama VI did not have perceptions and attitudes of the country's reformation in the same way his father did. Rama VI was very talented in literature and theater work, so he put all attention and effort into modernizing those areas. Rama V and Rama VI westernized the country in the different dimensions and scales.

Rama V (Chulalongkorn) looked at the country with a bird's-eye view so that he renovated the whole system and created new organizations. Public transportation and communication facilities, irrigation system, and provincial centralization with modern military power, were the major concerns. They were all well-begun with a copy of Western models, but there were still many problems, and continuity was needed to complete the projects. It can be anticipated that the next stage of Rama V's plan would be in the area of human resources, more changes in social system, and political development. Rama V's prospect in politics was clearly that he foresaw the inevitable entity, constitutional democracy. It was found in his writing to one of his wives that the reason he wanted all his sons to study military science was so that they would be able to have a proper career

in case political change occurred. (King Rama V and Queen Sukumalmarasri's Writings 1950:25).

Different from his father, King Rama VI 's scale of modernization was much smaller. He concentrated mainly on his court and on life styles of the upper class people. He initiated the ideology of nationalism and patriotism, which he strongly propagated in his writings. However, a few other projects such as the Wild Tiger (sua pa) or the Royal Pages, and the Dusit-thani or the supposed democratic city were considered "pet projects". Extravagant life style in his court and generous spending in many "pet projects" brought financial trouble to Rama VI's government. His annual special expenditures between 1910-1920 were about 12-18 % of the national revenue while expenditure on education was about 2-4%, and on military was 24-27% (Statistical Year book of Thai-land, report for financial advisors for the year concerned). Towards the end of his reign (1923-1924) his expenditure was as high as 22% of the revenue (Sayamananda 1988:151). It seems the king himself lacked understanding of the socioeconomic mechanism which had been in administration since the previous reign. Due to a lack of the king's attention in various areas of public administration, many significant projects had been ignored and poorly done. The economic infrastructure and peasants' need for help had been overlooked. Nartsupha refers to the condition of the failure to build up economic and social infrastructure in this reign that,

"...the Thai government paid but a token attention to irrigation problems... the government was called to carry out the irrigation work. A private company was granted privileges to carry out this task... This private undertaking brought a great deal of profits to the promoters and land speculators in Bangkok, but it failed to solve irrigation problems for the farmers (Nartsupha 1981:13; Arasavai 1978).

The hindrance of such a neglect of the peasant's problem was due to the power of the upper class in the sakdina system. The crop failure of 1919-1920 cost the nation so tremendously that it was blamed on the government's rejection of the irrigation scheme proposed by Van der Heide. Feeney discusses that *"Irrigation and better seed were not invested in because the elite would not have received a significant portion of the benefits"*(Feeney 1976: 199).

The economic infrastructure dilemma during this period reflected a few aspects of social condition of Thai society before the political revolution in 1932. The sakdina system had been continued into the era of modernization with a few changes in its characteristics (officially there were no more classes of phrai commoners and slaves). The royal families and nobles were still the group that dominated power in political economy under the leadership of the king. The well-being of common people and the nation's wealth depended totally on the king's capability to manipulate his men and the system. Obviously, Rama VI and his government could not effectively handle and carry on the previous government's projects. During the reign of Rama VI and VII, there was no change in the lives of the phrai commoners and slaves who turned their status into full-time farm workers. They were still illiterate, lacking farming knowledge, and had no bargaining power for their own interests. It was found that after being freed from the obligatory work, the peasants did not go into the wage labor market. It might be because the main labor markets were not in rural areas. The nearest ones were the rice mills of which the owners were

Chinese, and Chinese laborers had already occupied the market. From Ingram's examination, "*There was no significant increase in the relative number of Thai wage laborers*," it is more interesting to find that, "*...in many places men were still required to work for their patrons long after the new law was enacted*" (Ingram 1971:60). It can be said that during the pre-revolutionary period almost all of the indigenous Thai peasants still stayed in agriculture.

The process of Thai modernization at the turn of the century slowed down after the death of King Rama V. Truly, many projects and development were continuing during the reign of King Rama VI, but under the outlines that had been planned in the previous reign. For example, Chulalongkorn University was promoted from the Civil Service College in 1917, for producing commoner elites; the new railroad lines were connected to the Northeast region; and so on.

When Rama VII became king in 1925, he had to confront the unsolved economic and political problems for which he was not prepared and incapable for managing. The Nation's financial problem was aggravated by the world's recession in the late 1920's. Rama VII therefore decided to undertake retrenchment following the advice of his British financial advisor. Retrenchment of several hundreds of government officers was one of the triggers that led to political revolution in 1932.

Modernization of Upper Class Women

The idea of elevating women's status was initiated to women of the upper class by King Rama VI. In his view, Thai women were in low social status and behind in various qualities compared to women in Western countries. His concern was the Western image of Thailand. According to his conception, status of women was a symbol of the nation's civilization (a title of one of his essays). Therefore, the king expressed his criticism on and proposal of Thai women's roles in many of his writings, stage plays, and speeches. Traditionally, the royal court was a center of social life. The behavior and conduct of royal families and nobles became a model for people in general. The changes in women's practice and performance such as fashions, hobbies, and life styles would originate from the queen and consorts. It was called phra rajaniyom which means "royal favor" or "royal ideology". By this tradition, the queen could be more or less influenced and instructed by the king. In case of King Rama VI, he did not have a queen or any consorts to be his monitors since he was not interested in any women until the last few years before his death. His effort to modernize Thai women was directly addressed by himself, on the following subjects:

1. Women's roles as a Thai citizen and a wife
2. Social conduct and appearance
3. Education

The other strong criticism from the king related to women issue was the concurrent practice of polygamy. Another modernity introduced by the king which greatly affected women's lives in the later period was the use of surnames.

Women's Roles as Citizens and Wives

Since nationalism was made a new policy of the reign, the king made it clear that women were included as nationalists. In his play writings and essays, he explained ways that women could love the nation and serve the country, in peaceful times and in war. In one of his speeches to princesses in 1914 he stated,

"the principle way in which women could exhibit their nationalism...was by doing a good job at their main work in the home. They should provide their husbands with happy and comfortable surroundings so that the men could at work apply themselves to their fullest capacities" (Vella 1978:152).

During the wartime, women's ideal role was expressed in one of his dramas, by the heroine that, *"Although I am only a woman, I have sense enough to see that if our Thai nation is destroyed, that will be the end of us Thai"* (Vella 1978:152). Women's role as a wife was actually the traditional role of Thai women. Rama VI's emphasis in nationalism was connected with his para-centralization in the military.

Social Conduct and Appearance

Rama VI looked at Thai women with a Western conception. Thai women were seen as too shy to socialize with men in public. Their appearance with short hair, black teeth and trouser-like skirt (pa-nung) was unsightly. Thus, to accord with the "royal ideology", women of royalty and nobility changed their fashions into wearing a skirt-like pa-sin designed by the king's fiancée, having long hair, and polishing their teeth white instead of chewing betel nuts to blacken them. On socializing matters, the king encouraged women to attend Western-styled parties with spouses, and to associate more often with men such as talking, playing sports, and dancing in public. In order to set a role model, the king appeared in public in many occasions with his fiancée, and he treated her in a Western manner.

Women's look and dress can be considered a temporary fashion in a sense, but the requirement for Thai women to socialize with men and to have physical touching with men in public was a cultural revolution. This conduct was against the concept of "good ladies" (kulasatri) who were taught that purity, being untouched by men, was the most significant value of womanhood. However, since it was the King's favor and it was known as a practice among the civilized people, it was rapidly accepted among the Westernized modern upper class. The socializing between men and women on a friendship basis was viewed as a symbol of Westernization and modernity, and later was accepted by people at large.

Education

Rama VI announced his intention to support school education and encouraged people to build schools for education instead of temples for merit making. In 1921, the Compulsory Primary

Education Act was proclaimed with penalty for the noncompliance. The model primary schools were built in every district. In Bangkok, the secondary schools and occupational schools were also established. In fact quite a number of private schools for women were founded during this period.

On women's education, the king wished to see Thai women more literate, educated and up to date. He expressed his plea to provide women's education for the reason that,

“Women are persons who give births and take care of our children, who are educators and trainers at home. If women are educated, it will be a great help to schools too(Translated from Khamphibal1986:).

Women's education was greatly supported by the government after W.W.I, during which the number of nurses was inadequate. After the war, more women were sent abroad to study medical science. Nursing schools and schools for women's teachers were established in this period. It should be noted that women who studied abroad were descendants of the royalty and nobles. Also women who attended schools were of the middle and upper classes.

Polygamy

King Rama VI was strongly against polygamy practiced among upper class and well-to-do people. He wrote several essays condemning the marriage system that allowed the exploitation of women. The king unsuccessfully tried to issue the “Law on Family Registration”. Since there was quite a large Muslim population in the country, the king hesitated to enact the “one-wife registration law”. Besides, it was reported by Vella that,

“...none of his councilors seemed anxious to share the burden. In the meeting of Ministers on June 4, 1917, for example, a tentative decision was made to send a draft to the Legislative Council.....The problem was that the Legislative Council Chairman.....had resigned and no satisfactory replacement was willing to serve. The matter seems to have been permanently deferred at this point(“Vella 1978:157).

In fact, three years before, in 1914, the King did set up a role model of monogamy by issuing a regulation of “family registration of officials in royal court” to recognize the status of the wife with whom the man had a wedding ceremony, and to prohibit recognition of the mistresses. The purpose was to promote the “one-wife marriage” custom among the royal officials. Also in 1917, another regulation was issued to the royal court officials, to recognize the status of children of the mistresses.

Surnames

In 1913, the surname decree was announced. Every Thai citizen had to take a surname. The surname was to pass down on the male line and women had to change to their husband's surname after marriage. From King Rama VI's discussion on this matter, it can be concluded that surnames were a proof of modernity or a symbol of civilization, such as people in the West and the Chinese

in the past. However, due to the fact that the majority of the people were illiterate, surname registration was a difficulty. In addition, owing to the fact that the Thai kinship system among the peasant commoners was bilateral and uxorilocal or matrilineal residence was in practice, surnames meant nothing to them.

The determination of passing down surname in the male line and of using husband's surname symbolized the paternal power which was practiced in political administration among the ruling class. It reinforced the male dominant legal system which had been practiced for centuries as well. The use of surnames did not comply with bilateral kinship practiced among commoners, on the other hand the surnames helped people in royalty and nobility to trace back to their upper class ancestry. Their noble titles were used as surnames and the newly invented surnames of the commoners were not allowed to be identical.

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