

THE RELATIONSHIP ON PATRONAGE SYSTEM OF THE ROYAL CONSORTS IN THE REIGN OF KING RAMA V

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Abstract- During the period of absolute monarchy, due to the roles of the royal consorts especially in the reign of King Rama V as connectors among the monarchs, the nobility, the courtier and among themselves, the relationship of the patronages system related to power and privilege. This research aims to study the role of the royal consorts as mediators between the king and the nobility in terms of the security and the stability of political power, and to analyze the effect of forming of clusters or network by the royal consorts on cultural and intellectual transfer via patronage system. The research findings based on historical research methodology including social science theories indicate that the support from the royal consorts was vital to stabilize the King's status and authority as well as to earn the prosperity of their own families. The relationship obviously formed the patron-client system. Furthermore, the inner court was notified of the excellence of art and culture, so the second sorts played a vital role in passing the royal customs and craft to their adopted ladies-in-waiting .These kinds of intellect and knowledge were the advantage of the patron-client system, as well as the establishment of the social capital, reflecting the kindness of the superior transcended to the inferior, and helped prolong the existence of Thai culture up until now.

Keywords- Relationship, Patronage system, Royal consort

I. INTRODUCTION

Base on the Absolute Monarchy system, the King was the absolute centralization of power. He possessed the authority to provide privilege or state of inferior to his subjects. This caused his associates attempted to satisfy him by offering gifts and ministrations, including proposing their daughters to become his consorts (in Thai called: Batborijarika). In the reign of King Rama the V, it was said that the number of consorts was the highest. Therefore, this relationship proved the fact that becoming a consort could not only promote status and gain benefits to the consort's family but also consolidate the stability of the King's power. Those consorts were from the royal and nobility families, with ranges of ranks classified by birth status and based on the royal court rules: queens had to be a high rank royal member; the Royal mothers were those who bore princes or princesses; the Royal concubine were the daughters of the royal family member, nobility and commoner. The ratio of consorts which was mostly from the nobility families revealed the patronage relationship between the King and nobility. Due to a large number of consorts and courtiers who resided in the inner court, ones had grouped themselves under the patronage of the queens or the Royal mothers, including forming clusters or network vertically and horizontally. To analyze the relationship of the patronage system and the relatives system in the inner court of courtiers in the reign of King Rama the V were vital to make well understanding of the existence of the two systems during the change of social and culture; meanwhile, it was one point to considerate the patronage system in different aspect without the influence of political, bureaucratic

or economic benefits influences. The transmission of knowledge, culture, value and thought from the Royal consort to courtiers, associates and later generations was concentrated since it was one way to prolong those precious practices continue up to present.



Fig. 1 The Royal consorts
Source: The National Archives of Thailand [1]

II. OBJECTIVES

The research objectives and methodology are as follow:

1. To study the role of Royal consorts in the reign of King Rama V as a mediator between the king and the nobility in terms of the security and the stability of political power.

2. To analyze the forming of clusters of the Royal consorts which had an effect on cultural and intellectual transfer via patronage system .

This research is a qualitative research, conducting by gathering information from primary

and secondary documents, informal and formal interviews, both individual and group, including applying historical methods to analyze information and interpret data for evaluating the reliability, as well as to double check the data by synthesizing and analyzing the concept of patronage system and social capital, which could harmonize and describe the research content rationally.

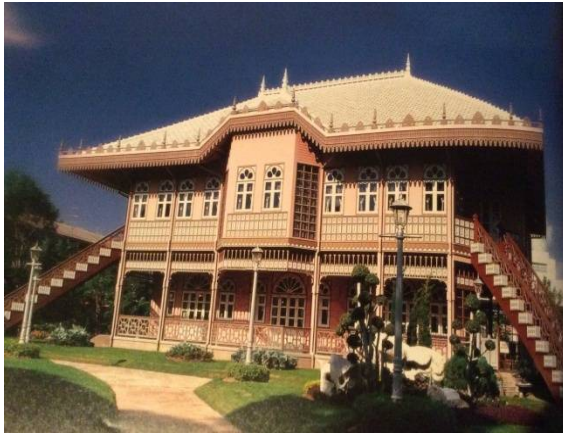


Fig. 2 Royal consort residence
Source: Dusit Palace, 1992 : 24 [2]

III. RESULTS

The inner court or residence was regarded as the private space of the King. Those who resided or served there had to be properly recruited, especially one who was going to be the Royal consort. Based on the study on the family background of the Royal consorts, it was found that they were the royal members or relatives, or the daughters of the nobilities. In terms of the Royal mothers and Royal concubines, it was found that they were from royal families, nobility families, including those from governors whose families could not be detected. [3] From the evidence, the number of the Royal consorts who came from the nobility families was at the highest. Offering a woman to become a Royal consort, an acquaintance with someone in the inner court was a must, so a very few commoners could do such things. When considering in terms of patronage system, this system covered widespread throughout the entire groups in Thai society; however, it was limited in the upper class circle – it was among the king, the Royal consorts, royal relatives and the nobilities.

The other group of Royal consorts who played the vital role in building political connection was the daughters of the governors, such as Chiang Mai, Nakorn Si Thammarat and Nan. Among them, Chiang Mai was deserved the most favor from King Rama the V, being seen from the title as a queen given to his daughter. This could be the King's strategy. Since Chiang Mai border was Myanmar, which was colonized by the British Empire, so it seemed like making a barrier for stopping the invasion of the Imperialism occupying all the

neighbor countries. In addition, this also in line with the King's centralization policy. "In 1882, Queen Victoria of England sent an ambassador from the south of Myanmar to request the Governor of Chiang Mai to adopt his daughter as hers". [4] The attempt to expand the British power in this region made King Rama V to offer diamond earrings and ring to Princess Dararassami, the daughter of Chiang Mai's governor who later was elevated as the Royal Queen Consort, as engaged collateral at the age of twelve. This showed the strategy of King Rama V's strategy in strengthening the relationship with the north before the achievement of the British Empire. However there was no evidence showing whether Thai Royal Court knew about the British idea or not. Since Chiang Mai was Thai colony, when the governor of Chiang Mai offered his daughter to King Rama V, it showed good relation between the two.



Fig. 3 Princess Dararassami
Source : The National Archives of Thailand [5]

The adoption of the Royal consorts who were mostly from the nobility families was in accordance with the political circumstances and social context at that time. It was the time when the nobility gained more power during the reign of King Rama III until the earlier session of King Rama V. A nobility family, the "Bun-nag," had the most vital role: having close relationship with the Chakri Dynasty; gaining wealth from foreign trade and a lot of clients under control. Their most prosperous status was at the beginning the reign of King Rama V when one of the Bun-nag members, Somdej Chao Praya Borom Maha Srisuriyawong, took the seat as the Regent due to the childhood years of King Rama V. During that time, Siam was separated into 3 groups owing to different political perceptions [6]

-Young Siam consisted of members who needed to reform the society to be compatible to the civilized countries, with King Rama the V as the leader. All the members were young nobility.

- Conservative Siam consisted of the leaders of the nobility who did not want to have any sudden change in the society, having the Lord Regent as the leader

- Old Siam consisted of the nobility who did not want to have any changes in the society or in the political circle having the Viceroy as the leader.

The king later had to bring back his centralized power. He promoted the Royal members to play more roles in the administration, abolished the patron - client system, in which the clients were based on nobility's political and economic benefits. The adoption of the Royal consorts who were the Royal relatives and nobility family members was another strategy for strengthen the stability of the throne. It is in accordance with the social value at that time in offering daughters or nieces to serve the inner court for the progress of the ladies themselves, and certainly extended to their families. In the reign of King Rama V, he adopted 21 ladies from the Bun-nags, 1 as a queen consort, and 20 as the Royal mothers and Royal concubines. [7]



Fig. 4 The Bun-nag 's Royal consorts
Source : The National Archives of Thailand [8]

Besides the Bun-nag clan, King Rama V made the relationship with many other nobility families by adopting their daughters and nieces to become the Royal consorts with the purpose of balancing the political power of the Bun-nags. Base on the patronage concept, it was the relationship between the king and the nobility, traditionally proceeding from Ayutthaya period. As the king was the patron, he offered the political, economic and social status privileges to the nobilities. In return, the nobility served and pleased the king. Due to the absolute monarchy system, in which the king held the supreme power, he supported lots of nobilities who relied on him under the top of the pyramid. [9] This relationship was an imbalance patronage system, so the nobilities had to try their best to favor the king. The role of the Royal consorts in allocating and sharing benefits to all concerned in the patronage system covered the forming of network at the superior, equal and inferior levels.

The superior level is the king only. Offering the lady-in-waiting or courtier under one control was

one way to lift the relationship with the king. Although one had been elevated as the concubine, that one was still served as the Royal consort. This portrayed the superior power of that consort. In other word, the more number of Royal consorts adoption was, the more power and privilege that Royal consorts gained.

In terms of relationship among the Royal consorts, the clusters of sisterhood, relatives or affiliation were formed: the sisterhood of the queens and Royal mothers; the relatives of the nobility members; the members of one's affiliation; the princesses, the Royal mothers and Royal concubines.

In terms of the relationship among the Royal consorts, were both positive and negative owing to big number ; however, the later relationship was not obviously detected. The acceptance on individual status, family background and, importantly, the favor of the king might give a very good answer. It was vividly found that there was a formation of clusters; the Queen groups who were born as Her Royal Highness Princesses in King Rama IV, the Queen groups who were the Royal nieces of King Rama III, and the group from the Bun-nags who were the queen, the Royal consorts and Royal concubines. The relationship was based on the circle of relatives and families. Being patronized by the same Royal consorts brought a very well-blended association. Nevertheless, this relationship was also found in the circle of the Princess daughters of the Royal mothers and Royal concubines.

It was also found that the patronage system in terms of the relationship between the Royal consorts and the courtiers resulted in close connection. That is each depended and supported each other. The Royal consorts needed the prestige and courtier's services; meanwhile, the courtiers gained the knowledge on custom and manner, including privilege and benefits which could be transferred to their families. It was in accordance with the Thai tradition, in which it was common for Thai people to send their daughters to be trained in the inner court in order to be the courtier. The courtiers in the inner court were mostly from the Royal and the nobility families. The inner court was a kind of institute serving as resources providing knowledge and transcending the delicacy on food and craft.[10] The training was highlighted on two lines; traditional practice and liberal arts. The first line was the core duty of each individual household; cooking, fresh flower decoration and making garland, embroidery and dress making. The later line only focused on basic literacy. The intellectual transfer in this kind of case; etiquette and manner, art and culture, from the Royal consorts to their courtiers via teaching, demonstrating, and training could be credited as the transmission process, which was the social capital enhancing the Thai cultural beauty continuously existed as the country identity. It could be said that the patronage system practiced by the Royal consorts had created harmony in Thai society.



Fig. 5 Royal Cuisine Training
Source : The National Archives of Thailand [11]

CONCLUSION

The relationship in the inner court was the patronage system in the form of network between the king and the nobility, with the Royal consorts as the mediator. The network or cluster formation among the Royal consorts, and their courtiers revealed that the patronage system played a very important role in the entire parts of Thai society. However, this study focused on the elite group and their associates, only Royal family and nobility members took part. Although patronage system had some disadvantages in terms of dependence on superiors, leading to the lack of identity and preference on individual than regulations, it was a requirement at that time. The political instability and the treat of Imperialism had made the patronage system to become a main principle to secure the throne and power. Moreover, the privilege of the Royal consorts which was transcended to the courtiers, in terms of culture and intellects, was a channel for ladies at that time to elevate their social status which they could not do as men could especially in the monasteries from the monks. It was worth mentioning that the patronage system between the Royal consorts and courtiers could be specified as the social capital; in particular, the royal custom, manner, food, arts and handicraft were transmitted and beautifully conformed as a part of Thai society.

DISCUSSION

The assistance and support appeared in the patronage system and the relatives system were the core relationship commonly found in the entire part of the Thai society, from the inner court - the private space of the king, with the Royal consorts who bridged the relationship between the King and the royal families, the nobility and the courtiers, as well as their relationship among themselves. It could be said that the patronage system in the inner court during the reign of King Rama V was limited within the Royal families and the nobility circle because they were mostly from those background. According to James C. Scott's concept, he identified that the patronage system was a co-supporting between patron and

clients in a pyramid figure, spreading to the base with one center.[12]

The center of the top here in this research was King Rama V, respectively. Lucien M. Hanks regarded these groups as subordinates which covered the close relation based on Thai social structure.[13] Based on the concept mentioned, the close relation also referred to royal relatives and nobilities who had a connection with the inner court courtiers and this led to the channel to send their daughters to serve the inner court.

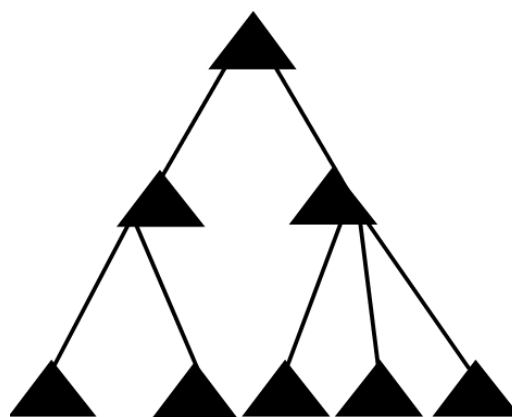


Fig. 6 Pyramid Patronage System

Source: Pongsapitch, Amara and Kuwintaraphan, Preecha. 1996 : 57 [14]

In addition, another finding worthily mentioned was that of the patronage in the political and economic system. This portrayed negative image in terms of the shortage of self-reliance, leading to corruption opportunity. However, the patronage of the Royal consorts was not that bad since it was a way to prolong the beauty in Thai way, in particular, the cultural capital and tradition. Pierre Boudoir mentioned that the difference on cultural capital one possessed, the difference on social status one was.[15] As a result, the elite group, who possessed higher cultural capital, earned higher social status than the commoners. With those social values, the ladies attempted to lift their social status by learning the Royal court etiquette and it was a path for them to become a Royal consort if they were lucky. In addition, the knowledge on the royal culture was also descended from generation to generation continuously. Therefore, the patronage system of the inner court played an important role in transmitting the cultural beauty of the Royal court, as well as the intellectual wisdom, to the present descendants.

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