

# THAI WOMEN: Changing Status and Roles During the Course of Thai Modernization( II )<sup>1</sup>

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## IV. THE PERIOD OF MODERN POLITICS (1932-1957)

A group of military elites called the People's Party (Kanaras) headed by Phraya Pahonpon-phayuhasena, seized power from King Rama VII on June 24, 1932. Since then Thailand has a constitutional monarchical governing system. Most of the leaders in the People's Party were military elites who received education in European countries during the reign of King Rama VI and VII. It should be noted that the incident was called a revolution (patiwat) or sometimes a coup d'etat (rattaprahaan) in Thai, but in fact it was a non-bloodshed changing of power from the king and his men to a group of non-royal people. The action started and ended within one day with only one casualty. Clearly, there was no significant change socially and economically among common people in general. In fact, the People's Party can be considered as having had no power over the economic system, since the royal families and nobles still controlled over lands, capitals, and means of production. The coup party members must have realized their own impairment, so they had a compromising deal with the nobles by inviting King Rama VII's advisor, Phraya Manopakornnithada to be the Chair of the People's Party and also the first Prime Minister.

However, this twenty-five year period was characterized by struggling for control of government among members of the People's Party. Plaak Phibunsongkram (Laung Phibunsongkram) and Pridi Panomyong (Laung Praditmanutham) were the major leaders in political fighting. Phibun (a popular name for Plaak Phibunsongkram) was a prime minister for two periods, 1938 to 1946 and 1948 to 1957. Pridi had to leave the country, and lived in exile in Europe after King Rama VIII 's assassination in 1946. Phibun also had to exile to Japan after Sarit seized his power in 1957.

### Socioeconomic Structure

Owing to the fact that in 1919 Thailand entered the First World War on the side of the Allies, after the war Thailand was granted the privilege of abolishing all the unequal treaties signed with European countries. The abolition of these treaties in the 1920's and 1930's provided import and export opportunities to domestic capitalists. Many companies were established to export

agricultural products, especially rice. Other businesses were also opened in wider ranges, such as manufacturing, shipping, transportation, banking, insurance and so on. Among the exports, rice was still the main product, and other commodities such as rubber, tin, and teak were also increasing in volume and value especially after the 1920's (Ingram 1971, Table VIII, IX: pp. 94-95).

The data from statistical yearbooks of Thailand show the increasing variety of occupations in 1937 and 1947. To compare with the period before the revolution, the statistics of 1929 are also displayed. The percentages in Table II-VI are my own calculations derived from numbers in the original data source.

Table II. Occupations and Percentages of Employed Persons, 1929

Total Number 7,519,757 persons

|  | Male & Female (%) |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Professional and Independent  | 1.2 %             |
| 2. Government Employment<br>(excluding those serving in the Army and the Navy) | 0.8 %             |
| 3. Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry   | 84.1 %            |
| 4. Commerce, etc.  | 6.7 %             |
| 5. Industrial  | 2.2 %             |
| 6. Service   | 5.0 %             |

(Wilson 1983: Table VI-I, pp.86-87)

Table III. Occupations and Percentages of Employed Person, 1937

Male 3,598,247 Female 3,225,309 Total number 6,823,556 persons

|                                       | Total percent | Female (%) |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1. Public Services                    | 1.6           | 8.2        |
| 2. Clerical                           | 0.3           | 2.4        |
| 3. Agriculture, Fishing, and Forestry | 88.62         | 49.6       |
| 4. Mining and Quarrying               | 0.3           | 11.0       |
| 5. Transport and Communication        | 0.8           | 3.9        |
| 6. Trade and Commerce                 | 4.4           | 37.9       |
| 7. Manufacturing                      | 1.6           | 30.0       |
| 8. Building and Construction          | 0.3           | 4.5        |
| 9. Hotel and Personal Services        | 2.0           | 35.1       |

(Wilson 1983: Table VI-I, pp.86-87)

Table IV. Occupations and Percentages of Employed Persons, 1947  
( Total percent Female(%) )

Male 4,682,293 Female 4,309,805 Total number 8,992,098 persons

|   | Per Cent | female(%) |
|---|----------|-----------|
| 1. Professional, Technical, and Related Workers                         | 0.97     | 21.7      |
| 2. Administrative, Executive and Managerial Workers                     | 8.2      | 46.2      |
| 3. Clerical   | 0.6      | 9.5       |
| 4. Sales  | 0.15     | 16.2      |
| 5. Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting, Logging and Forestry                  | 84.4     | 49.96     |
| 6. Mining, Quarrying, & Related Fields<br>(included in Laborers in # 8) |          |           |
| 7. Transportation, Equipment Operators, and Related Fields              | 0.15     | 0.7       |
| 8. Craftsmen, Production Process Workers, & Laborers                    | 4.9      | 29.1      |
| 9. Service Workers  | 0.56     | 42.9      |

(Wilson 1983: Table VI-I, pp.86-87)

I would like to point out some outstanding characteristics of the tables shown above.

1. The overall structure of Thai economy had no significant change from 1929 through 1937 and 1947. The high percentage of workers in agriculture, fishing, and forestry indicates that the country's major economy was in the primary industrial sector. About eighty to ninety percent of population lived in rural areas.

2. Obviously, from the 1930's on, the variety of occupations increased, such as manufacturing, craftsmen, and production process workers. The manufacturing industry was started in this period especially during the Second World War. The shortage of daily supplies such as sugar, coffee, soap, cloth, papers, nails, tools, etc. forced the growth of domestic industries of these products. It was found in Wilson's study that,

*“ The small amount of industry that existed before 1950 consisted mostly of factories making handicrafts and essential household goods for local market-kitchenware, water jars... or of processing businesses such as ricemills, sugarmills, and sawmills. The Thai Government...became involved in industrial enterprise in the early 1930's, taking over the oil and tobacco industries and supporting projects in the rubber, sugar, paper... The only major industrial undertaking by Thai in the first half of the twentieth century was the establishment of Siam Cement Company.... ”* (Wilson 1983:81).

3. The classification of occupations is shown differently in the three tables. This can be misleading. In 1929 the percentage of employed persons in Commerce, etc. is 6.7. It seems to decrease to 4.4 under the category of Trade and Commerce in 1937, but this category of

occupation disappeared in the 1947 table. Instead, in 1947 there is a new category of Administrative and Executive and Managerial Workers, which comprises 8.2 %.

Possibly persons in Commerce and Trade were included in Managerial Workers. These three categories mentioned are interesting for their high percentages of female labor participation. There was no figure for the female labor force in 1929. However in 1937, there are 37.9% in Trade and Commerce, and in 1947 46.2% in Administrative, Executive and Managerial Workers.

Also when I looked into statistics of 1960 and 1970 (Wilson 1983: Table VI-I, pp.86-87) I found that a new category of Sales has a high percentage of general labor force as well as female labor participation. The labor force market shares are 5.3 in 1960 and 5.0 in 1970. The female workers in the Sales are more than half, 55.8% for 1960 and 55.3% for 1970; while the percentage in Administrative, etc. in 1960 and 1970 are very low. To clarify my explanation, the simplified table is constructed as shown below:

Table V. Compared Percentages of Employed Persons by Selected Occupations: 1929, 1937, 1947, 1960, 1970

| Occupation  | F=Female |                  |                   |                  |                  |
|---|----------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
|   | 1929     | 1937             | 1947              | 1960             | 1970             |
| Commerce, etc.                                      | 6.7      | -                | -                 | -                | -                |
| Trade and Commerce                                  | -        | 4.4<br>(F37.9%)  |                   |                  |                  |
| Administrative, Executive,<br>Managerial workers    |          | 8.2              | 0.2<br>(F46.2%)   | 1.5<br>(F9.7%)   | (F7.1%)          |
| Sales   | -        | -                | 0.15<br>(F16.2%)  | 5.3<br>(F55.8%)  | 5.0<br>(F55.3%)  |
| Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting,<br>Logging, Forestry | 84.1     | 88.6<br>(F49.6%) | 84.4<br>(F49.96%) | 82.3<br>(F50.8%) | 79.4<br>(F49.7%) |

(Source: Wilson 1983, Table VI-I, pp. 85-86)

In order to see the percentage of trade and commerce, in 1929 we need to look at the 'Commerce, etc.', in 1937 look at the 'Trade and Commerce', in 1947 look at the 'Administrative, Executive, Managerial Workers, and in 1960 and 1970 look at the 'Sales' categories. There is a trend from the 1920's that high percentages of women were engaged more in commerce, trading and sales than in other occupations, next to the agriculture, etc.

## Education for People

One of the six principles enunciated by the People's Party was the providing of education for all Thai citizens. Four years of public compulsory education was announced in the new National Education Plan (pan karnsuksa chart) of 1932. Before the revolution, many schools and educational institutions had been established under Educational Projects of 1898, 1902, 1913, and 1921. Each plan had problems with Thai social and cultural environment, so the projects were eventually amended. For example, in the 1913 Project, the secondary level was too elite-oriented that it caused a high percentage of dropouts. Another main problem was the shortage of women teachers in urban and rural areas because of a small number of girls' enrollment, and of women's teachers' quitting after marriage. Thus, the women teacher's training college was established for the first time in 1913 (Yuthayothin 1985:70-72). However, in 1950 only 23 % of all teachers held teachers' certificate or higher degree of any kind. Only 1% of all teachers possessed a Bachelor of Arts degree (Wilson 1983:61).

For further discussion I would like to show the figures of total population of Thailand and its illiteracy rates during the period of modernization as the following:

Table VI. Population and Illiteracy Rate: 1911, 1937, 1947,1960, 1970

| Year | Total      | Male Pop.  | Female pop. | Illiteracy Rates (% <sup>2</sup> ) |       |         |
|------|------------|------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-------|---------|
|      |            |            |             | Total                              | Males | Females |
| 1911 | 8,266,408  | 4,122,168  | 4,144,240   | 77.6                               | 67.5  | 87.6    |
| 1937 | 14,464,105 | 7,313,584  | 7,150,521   | 47.6                               | 36.5  | 58.9    |
| 1947 | 17,442,689 | 8,722,155  | 8,720,534   | 32.7                               | 23.0  | 42.5    |
| 1960 | 26,257,916 | 13,154,149 | 13,103,767  | 20.0                               | 13.3  | 26.8    |
| 1970 | 34,397,374 | 17,123,862 | 13,723,512  | 12.4                               | 7.5   | 17.3    |

(Wilson 1983, Table II-I, PP.30-31)

From the above table, it shows a universal trend that higher percentages of women than men were illiterate. In 1911, the second year of Rama VI's reign, women's illiteracy was as high as 87% while only 67.5% among men. These figures represent entire population in both urban and rural areas. If we break down the figures of 1911 by excluding the Bangkok population (the figures were not shown in this paper), the illiteracy would be much higher. It was as high as 98% for females and 80% for males (Wilson 1983, Table I-II, pp.30-31). The difference of the percentages was probably caused by two facts. Bangkok's population in 1911 were mostly upper class people who were more sophisticated in culture such as literature, and the other fact was the most of schools before 1911 were founded in Bangkok. The uneven distribution of schools, or it can be

called the highly centralized education system, is the main factor affected women's to access to education. However, in 1937 more than half of all women were still illiterate. Again, the illiteracy rate in rural areas must be higher.

The Thai education system in democratic period from 1932 towards the end of the 1950's can be viewed from two dimensions, the provider's and the receiver's, or the government's and the people's.

### **The Government's Perspective**

Basically, mass education had never been perceived as a long-run investment in human resource. It was part of the Western ideology that had been introduced by the rulers as a part of the modernization mechanism. The national budget for education was always very small compared to others such as military forces. Moreover, sometimes the education expenditure had been loaded directly onto citizen in the form of an educational tax (nguen kha karnsuksa phlee in the reign of Rama VI). The centralized administrative system had obstructed the flexibility in regional education. It took the government a few decades to realize the seriousness of ethnic and cultural problems in the countryside such as in the southern provinces where most of the population were Muslims and Malays. Some conflicts in government's administrations interfered with the congruence of the education scheme. Different parts and levels of the education system were separately controlled by different ministries, namely the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of University, and Ministry of Prime Minister. Besides, not having been a non-colonial country, no single system was selected to be a basic model, European, American and Japanese systems were all experimented.

After the National Education Plan of 1932 which emphasized compulsory education and occupational education, in 1936 another Plan was issued to bring major change to the occupational school system. Also, there was a request to private sector and municipal offices to help establish schools. However, after the war and the political turmoil, under the regime of a nationalist military leader, General Phibunsongkram, another National Education Plan was issued in 1951. Again, the occupational education was amended, higher education was rearranged, and adult education was introduced in this plan. It seems that the frequent amendment to occupational education was the impact of economic growth. Since it was the beginning period of commercialization, middle levels of personnel and skilled labor force were in great demand, and the education system was trying to catch up with the tempo of economic advancement. The domestic elite education in the 1930's to 1950's was steadily well performed. Chulalongkorn University was the authority in producing bureaucrats and professionals in almost all fields. It was expanded and began to admit women students in 1927. In 1933, Thammasart (Thammasart lae Karn-muang) University was established by Pridi Panomyong, one of the political leaders and founders of the People's Party. Thammasart University had an "open" admission system without an entrance exam. Its liberal policy balanced with the royalist Chulalongkorn University. Other universities in medical science, agriculture, and

fine arts were established in the 1930's and increasing in enrollment.

## People's Perspective

The attitudes toward education were very different between people of the upper and lower social classes. When formal education was introduced in the reign of Rama V, the upper class in Bangkok responded positively by sending their sons and daughters to schools. Women schools' enrollment and career women were noticeable in number. It can be said that traditionally, education was a part of the upper class life styles. There were basic text books designed for reading, writing, and composing poetry (Chindamane, written in the time of King Narai, 1656-1688). Women poets among the upper class were not unusual. Modern education was only a change in pattern of the preexisting tradition. The king's initiative idea in women's modern education was suddenly taken into action. Also the elite consciousness led them to perform the leading roles.

For Thai people in agriculture, traditionally, education was perceived as the attribute of the monks, the community leaders, and the upper class such as nobles. It was understood that education could be a social ladder for becoming nobles, but it was not easy. The highly educated monk could be given a noble rank. However, for general commoners, verbal skill was the most important, and the second was calculating skills, as it was always said that, "paak pen eek, lek pen tho" (Later nangsue pen tri was added, meaning literacy is third in importance). As I have mentioned previously that boys were allowed to learn with the monks for preparation of ordination. If they missed the chance for whatsoever reason, they could practice the Buddhist reciting with the monks by memorizing a month or two right before the ceremony. They could start learning alphabets during their monkhood. Men who experience ordination would obtain a higher social status as "tid". The word is a short form of "bundit" which means, "educated person". They would be addressed by this social rank all of their lives. For instance, if the man's name is Mana, he will be called and referred to as "*Tid Mana*". Frequently, the monks who learned how to read the Buddhist texts prolonged their period of being a monk because they wanted to study.

## Urban and Rural Education

The perception of education of urban and rural people were differentiated not only by their social status and occupations, but significantly by where the economic growth and development existed. Due to the uneven distribution of development in various aspects, rural people especially women had almost no hope for education.

When modern education was introduced to the communities of the entire kingdom, the attitude of "education for elites" was confirmed by the nature of education itself. It took many years before the outcome of the school education appeared. Ability to read and write was not

useful and evaluated by people in the farms who preferred child labor for taking care of younger siblings and herds of animals. In addition, education yielding satisfactory results for rural people could not be finished in their small communities, villages (mubaan) or towns (tambon).

After four years of compulsory education, the secondary level or occupational school education could be continued only in large cities (amphur yai). Not every city (amphur) could provide occupational education, usually only in the central city (amphur muang) of the province. In many provinces, children even had to go to the more developed provinces for the advanced study while children in the upper socioeconomic class of the developed provinces aimed for better schools in Bangkok.

This process of getting education was certainly beyond the peasants' capacity and consideration. Children from villages and towns who could afford to go to school as far as the central city (amphur muang) of the province, or provincial center (tau-changwad) were mostly children of the well-to-do villagers, the town leaders (kamnan), and of the merchants who were economically better off. On education in the Thai village Potter reported in his 1971-72 field research in a village in Chiangmai that,

*"...the children emerge from primary school semiliterate at best, not even knowing how to multiply or divide. ...Those who can read seldom do; village culture is largely an illiterate culture." "Few students have the means of the parental encouragement to continue their education beyond the compulsory four grades... Some family in the village are too poor to buy even primary school books and uniforms for their children..."* (Potter 1976:30-31).

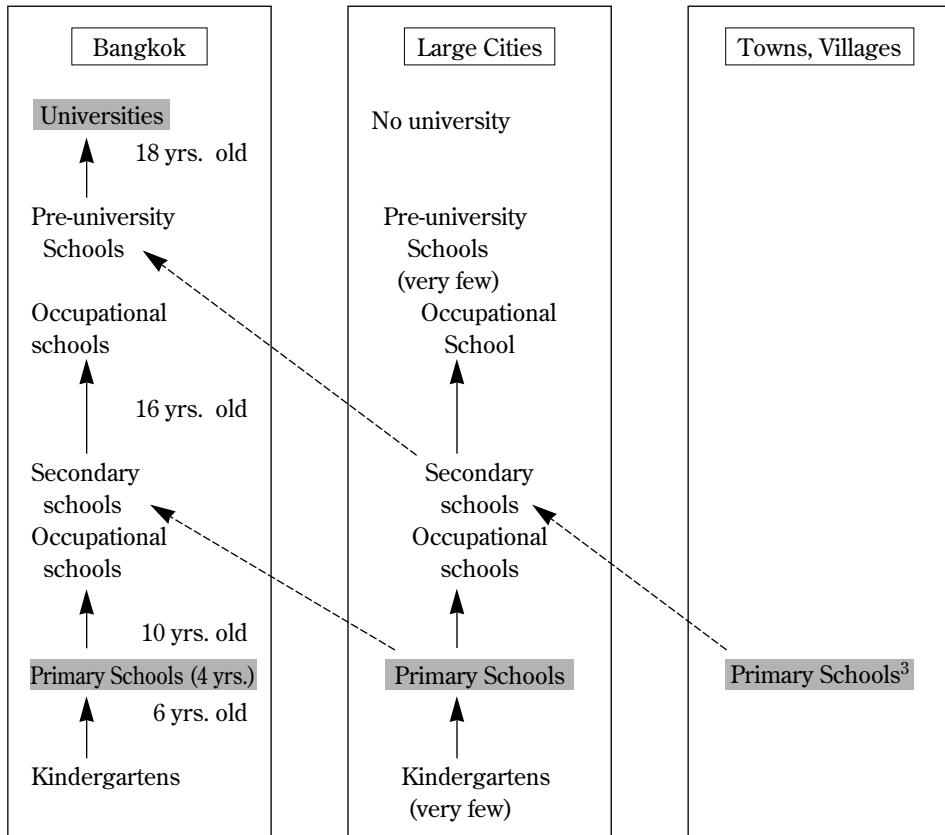
*"The four young people now attending the teachers' training college in Chiangmai city all come from wealthy families. Better education increases the life-chances of these young people. For the girls of wealthy village families, education will assure high status, salaried position as schoolteachers. ...For the men education leads to white-collar jobs in the government bureaucracy. These are the ideal jobs in the eyes of villagers because they are prestigious ...The children of the larger landowning families of the Chiangmai village are the only ones who are given the advanced education which enables them to compete in the changing society of modern Thailand."* (Potter 1976:53-54)

Potter's work was in the early 1970's in Chiangmai, the most developed and modern province next to Bangkok. Other provinces in other regions are not expected to be better. The stratification of school attendance is illustrated in the following chart,

From the above chart, we can see that fundamentally, education facilities were centralized in the urban areas. The lack of infrastructure was a common problem in rural areas. Children had to commute a long distance daily or move to other cities to stay with relatives, or attend boarding schools. Children in larger cities could be said to have better chances for education than rural children, but they were yet limited to a few choices such as only to technical and teacher's schools, in addition to the inferior quality. Ambitious parents would send their children to school in



CHART I. Pattern of School Attendance, 1932 to the 1950's



Bangkok. Usually children will leave home after finishing secondary school at the age around sixteen. Some officials who were transferred from Bangkok usually left their children at boarding school in Bangkok for better education. Hass discusses about the urban center in Thailand that,

*“ Many officials want to live in Bangkok, although it is less comfortable and much more expensive to live there than in a provincial town. It is partly due to...and partly due to the all superiority of schools in Bangkok. The latter reason is important because education is the principle road to advancement in Thai society, and most officials want their children to have the best possible chances of success. The graduates of the best schools in Bangkok regularly do better on the university entrance examinations than do the graduates of other schools, and parents hope to be able to send their children to one of these good schools without having to bear the expense of supporting them away from home ”* (Hass 1979:17-18).

It is a normal practice even after decentralizing higher education in the 1970's that the local elites' children and promising young people in provincial towns and cities have to go to Bangkok

or larger cities for better education.

## **Women's Opportunities in Education**

From the three categories of living areas: Bangkok, large cities, and towns and villages, girls in Bangkok were the group with less disadvantage in accessibility to all fields and levels of education. Particularly for girls in upper class and well-to-do families, social circumstances such as the job market and public attitudes on women's economic roles were encouraging women's aggressiveness, particularly by the government's campaign for women's higher status during the regime of Prime Minister Pibunsongkram.

After the 1932 revolution the royal families and nobles' political roles were much intimidated. King Rama VIII who was invited to become king in 1935 was a fatherless ten-year old boy prince who was in school in Switzerland. In 1939, the government under General Phibunsongkram's leadership arrested about forty royal family members and royalists, of which about half were executed and the others imprisoned for life. It was a bitter period for people in royalty. The degrading of social status coincided with the decrease of wealth and power. Many people in the upper class had to confront the reality of earning their living. Some nobles started business with the know-how they had such as producing traditional Thai cosmetics and perfume, herbal medicines, the Buddhist monastery supplies for religious rituals, making ceremonial flower arrangement, and opening high-class restaurants. Their younger generation males and females were secured by good education and became scholars and professionals, and engaged in many careers. A career in education was one of the "proper" careers for the upper class since "teachers" had very respected social status. A number of schools, women's schools, kindergartens, and modern nursery schools were founded in the 1930's and later by people of the upper class. Some of these schools did not survive until the present time but some still have a high academic performance and good reputation at present.

For example, Khemasirinusorn School was founded in September 1932 by Princess Sooksrisamornkasemsri. According to the school's history, the princess's father favored education so much that he had founded schools many times in his palace yard for children in the neighborhood. The princess spent inherited money from her father to open this school in commemoration of him, His Royal Highness Krom-ma-muen Tiwakorn-wong-prawat, with the assistance of her husband. The school is modeled on English private schools, which the couple encountered while they studied in England. In 1936, boys were admitted in the primary level, which made it the first coeducational school in Thailand. In the same year, girls' education was expanded to the six-year secondary level with a Western cooking course. Also, a three-year training course of primary school teaching was opened for the first time in a private school (Setasuwan 1993:24-25).

It is interesting to mention that Princess Sooksrisamornkasemsri's husband, Prince Poonsrikasem was a noted liberalist in women's education. In 1927 while he was the Dean of the

Medical Science Department, he allowed women to take the entrance exam, and seven women passed the exam to study with men students, among disagreements from many people around. The segregation between men's and women's education was generally strictly practiced, especially at the teenage level. Setasuwan reported that the prince, "...therefore, guaranteed with his royal honor and responsibility in giving this educational chance to women" (Setsuwan 1993:25).

It was a new phenomenon in higher education as evidently shown in the letter from Royal Highness Prince Mahidol, the founder of Thai medical school, to the prince Dean that,

*"Dear Poonsri,*

*Women's enrollment into medical school interests me very much. It was my intention to try if chances provide, but I never expect to see. You are great in managing thoroughly. We need to try to find out whether it is possible or not. Everyone knows we need woman doctors. Everyone knows we should establish a new school for women but we cannot. We can neither destroy the men's school and enroll only women. This is good for the reason that if we have a lot of women's students, the government does not have trouble to find jobs for them. Even being unemployed, it is sure that at least (they) can get a husband* (Translated from Kamphibal 1985:59).

In fact, Prince Mahidol himself married a Queen's scholarship student who was in nursing school in America. She never became a professional nurse after marriage. She had a title of Her Royal Highness King's Mother of two kings, Rama VIII (1935-1946), and Rama IX the present king.

In the 1930's, co-education in higher education was gradually accepted. More areas in higher education were open to students of both sexes, and women's enrollment was outstanding. In 1939 among students who prepared for university entrance exams at a cram school, Sirisart, one hundred and six students passed the exams, of which seventy-three were women. The more higher education expanded, the more the number of educated women increased. In 1943, Chulalongkorn University had five faculties: engineering, sciences, liberal arts, architecture, and accounting and commerce, all faculties to which women students were welcomed. Also, twilight studies were open in engineering, sciences, foreign languages, and journalism, but women students were admitted only to the fields of foreign languages, sciences, and journalism. In the same year, the University of Fine Arts (Silapakorn University) and University of Agriculture (Kasetsart University) were established in Bangkok.

It can be said that women from the elite class were the pioneers in higher education and professional careers. Very few were restricted by some tradition. For example, Princess (Mom-chao) Duangthipchot Aphakorn, Chairperson of the Thai Salvation Army Foundation and who was seventy-nine years old in 1993, gave an interview that she was a top student of her class in high school and she, " ....wanted so much to study medical science at Chula. My eldest brother did not give permission, for fear that I would fall in love with the commoner. It was prohibited at that time " (Translated from Abhakorn in Satrisarn 1993, vol. 49:32).

The mentioned prohibition was the marriage between royal women and non-royal men. Even

among the royal families hypogamy was not allowed; for instance a princess of the rank mom-chao could not marry a prince of the rank mom-rajawong and mom-laung since the generation of mom-rajawong and after were considered commoners. Later she married a prince of the same royal rank and entered university in America while accompanying her husband who was then appointed a Navy Ambassador to America.

For children who lived in the large cities, educational accommodations were available to a certain level. Many private schools in the provinces were branches of missionary schools in Bangkok. Missionary schools played an important role in Thai education. They were popular for the high disciplinary Western manners and strong academic training, especially English and mathematics with which governmental schools could not compete.

Since private schools usually founded by educated people who were in the upper social class, the standard of academics and training were higher than general practice among commoners, tuition was rather high too, but they served the needs of “good education” for middle class parents, especially for the girls’ parents. Usually, after the secondary level at around sixteen, city children who wanted advanced education had to go to Bangkok for entrance examination. The important condition was they must have a place to stay. Staying at relatives’ house was very common. Boarding schools were very few, some were quite exclusive and too expensive even for one child for ordinary parents.

Compared to girls, boys had better opportunities in advanced education. In case that parents had no relatives or friends, boys could stay at the temple with the monks as dek wat, a term literally meaning temple boys. Buddhist temples have been traditionally a center for education. Boys who came to study with the monks could stay at the temple and serve the monks while receiving lessons. Sometimes the ill-behaved boys were “let go” by their parents to stay at the temple to be disciplined by the monks. In case of going to school in other cities, the boys’ parents could ask the monk at the temple in the village or in his hometown to contact the other monk at the temple in Bangkok or other city for the boy’s shelter. Frequently, these temple boys could share food the monks received from laymen’s merit making every morning. Most temples in big cities were full of this type of dek wat, aged from primary education level to university students. The Police Commander of Department of Economic Police in Bangkok in 1993, Watin Kamthongsri is a typical example of this type of boy. According to his interview, he was born as a teacher’s son fifty-eight years ago (should be in 1935), in a small city about five miles from the central city (amphur muang) of Pattani province in the South of Thailand. After graduating from secondary school in his province he came to Bangkok for high school before he entered university. He told his story that,

*“I continued my education in Bangkok, stayed at the temple, being a temple disciple at Prayoon (Prayoonwong) Temple...Chaokun Mujalin who was a very well-known monk in Pattani province took me to (and requested) the monk at Prayoon Temple... It took many days to travel From Pattani to Bangkok in 1952-53....”* (Translated from “Rana” in Dichan 1993, vol.384: 105)

This is the typical example of the ambitious young man who is a son of a community leader in a far away province and had no relatives in Bangkok. A girl in his circumstances definitely could not be given the chance or be treated the same way. In the case of a girl in his situation, having a secondary education was good enough to get a clerical job or to be a teacher, and marry a promising man in her province.

One interesting case of a girl in upper class from a provincial city was Tan-phu-ying (an honorary title) La-iaad Phibunsonkram, the wife of Prime Minister Plaak Phibunsonkram (1938-1944, 1948-1957). She was born in 1903 and a resident of Phisanuloke province. Phisanuloke was a large province and an administrative center of the central north area between Bangkok and Chiangmai. Tan-phu-ying La-iaad learned how to read and write at home with her father who was a government officer under the absolute monarchy regime. In order to get an education, she was sent to Bangkok to attend a well-known girls' school, Satriwittaya. Having problems with relatives with whom she was staying, she returned home and had to attend the government's model boy school in Phisanuloke. A few years later, the first girls' school called Padungnari was founded in that province by American missionaries. She was thus moved to this girls' school, and studied until the age of fourteen when she graduated and married Colonel Plaak Phibunsonkram (Phibunsonkram 1984, referred in Khamphibal 1987). Tan-phu-ying La-iaad was a very active character in helping her husband propagate the policy elevating women's social status.

### **Phibunsonkram and Women's Status and Roles**

There were two periods of Phibun's regime, from 1938 to 1946, and from 1948 to 1957. The typical characteristics of the two periods were Thai cultural nationalism. From the beginning of Phibun's first regime in December 1938, people were requested to cooperate in the "nation building policy" (*nayobai sang chart*). Phibun explained the meaning of "nation building" in his essay as, "...the real meaning (of nation building) is, the nation is existing but some status are still far from the need of democratic level. We must help each other to add, improve and adjust until we are all satisfied. At least to the same level with other countries..." (Translated from Samittasarn 1942:66-67).

Phibun emphasized the consciousness of being a Thai by announcing twelve principles of national ideology (*rattha-niyom*) in November 1939. According to some principles of the ideology, the name of the country was officially changed from Siam to Thailand (means Land of the Free), and Thai language was modified in spelling to exclude Sanskrit and Pali influence. The country's name and language were reversed to traditional ones in 1946 after Phibun was arrested as a war criminal, but when he returned to power in 1948 the name Thailand was used again, and lasts until present. At the same time in November 1939, the government issued a law to advise the Thai nationalists on four kinds of proper conduct. They were: 1. *To eat Thai food.* 2. *To dress with the Thai made costume.* 3. *To help Thai people's business and industries.* 4. *To help public work in order to build national identity*" (Translated from Noomnon 1978:32). Under Phibun's nationalistic

policy, people were suggested by the government's mass media, encouraged by national mottoes and even were forced by laws in what to do to help the country. Seekins comments that, *"The Phibun regime sold nationalism to the public by using propaganda methods borrowed from authoritarian regimes in Europe"* (Seekins 1989:28). It should be noted that Phibun's nationalism was carried along with the pro-Japanese policy during his first regime before the World War II and with the anti-Chinese sentiment. His regimes were *"...also characterized by harassment of Chinese and the tendency to regard them as disloyal and, after 1949, as communists"* (Seekins 1989:33).

In accord with the nation building policy, women were stimulated to view themselves as important partners of men in building the nation. It was clearly announced in Phibun's speech that, *"Women are parts of the nation, they should set up themselves and meanwhile help the nation. Generally, during a short visit, in order to see how much developed the nation is, it can be judged by looking at the women's development"* (Translated from Public Relation News 1943, 6:3, pp. 155-158). A number of government organizations were established, and assigned to be in charge of women's social activities and welfare. Laws and regulations were enacted to support the government's policies related to women. Mass media owned by the government, particularly radio broadcasting, were used to propagate the new ideology.

It seems that the government had a multi-directional policy about women's social and economic roles. It was found that women in the upper socioeconomic class were encouraged to obtain higher education and work in the areas in which they were capable. The full time housewives such as wives of government officers who attained high social status by their husbands' positions were requested to do social work helping the poor or to form associations and socialize with each other. The married women were asked to bear more children and were given education in child care. The wives were told to take good care of their husbands so that they could work efficiently. Women in the lower level were advised to work in the proper careers for women. At the same time women were told to beautify themselves in the Western fashion, to make themselves pretty since women were "flowers of nation" (dokmai kong chart), according to the Government's motto.

Policy concerning women during Phibun's government can be generally divided into two categories: occupations and education, and family life and social roles.

## Occupations and Education

Under Phibun's regimes, it is difficult to discuss women's occupations and education separately. Considering the socio-political situation, policies on women were made to accommodate the concurrent main policies, Westernization, economic nationalism, and the preparation for war. Within a year after Phibun became a Prime Minister in the end of 1938, the war in Europe broke out. Phibun realized that the country was in need of well-trained manpower in many areas. From experience of the shortage of nurses in the World War I, women policies in Phibun's regime emphasized training in medical care, nursing, Red Cross, Girl Scout's activities, and women's

military training. During the course of preparation for war it was realized that the country was very underdeveloped. As intellectuals and professionals in many fields were inadequate in number, the shortage of manpower in higher level brought chances to women. Women graduates from abroad which were quite a noticeable number were appointed to significant positions in education, medical science, and public health. Domestic women graduates were also needed in various areas for governmental work. In order to encourage women to work with the government, the Civilian Official Act was amended in 1939 to hire capable persons without consideration of gender. The Day of Women Government Officers was founded on February 1 in 1943. However, limitations for female officers were specified. Work of the following nature was not allowed to be assigned to women government officers: *1. Work outside governmental offices. 2. Work at night time. 3. Dangerous and tough work. 4. Work in the foreign country.* (Translated from Lailak 1940:505).

This is an important step in Thai women's career change despite limitations that hindered promotion. The term "government officer" in Thai language is kha rajakarn which means "king's subordinate" (kha=subordinate, raja=king, karn=work), or the

person who works for the king. It was a traditional preference that working for the king as an officer was the best. There is an old saying that, "being ten traders do not equal to being a subordinate of a king" (sip po-kha mai-tao paya liang). Being a government officer in Thai society was not only very prestigious in the old days but also powerful and wealthy. Besides, it was usually limited to male descendants of the nobles of the royal blood. Under the constitutional monarchy of the 1940's, governmental work provided certainly prestige, high salary, security, and many fringe benefits which was rare among jobs for women. It can be called a women's career revolution. There was no doubt that in the 1930's through the 1950's during Phibun's regime and later on, to be a government officer was one of the superior careers for women. Undoubtedly, the work opportunities stimulated ambitious women to pursue advanced and higher education to the maximum level.

For the middle and low level jobs on statistics in Table III, it can be seen that in 1937, as many as 88.6 per cent of Thai people were in agriculture, fishing, and forestry, of which 49.6 per cent were women. Phibun's government did not address any particular change about those works, instead he emphasized women's economic roles in general. Phibun was not pleased to see women in some labor intensive work, as he gave his opinion about women's jobs that, "*....nowadays, many kinds of work women should not do, such as digging, cracking the rocks, carrying water buckets and so on. These are heavy work for men not for women.....*" (Translated from Public Relation News 1937 6:3, p.243).

Phibun clearly supported women to have economic activities in manufacturing industries or service work. To encourage women in the middle and low level to work, the pictures of women at work were widely advertised by the government such as works in the cotton factory, toy factory, handicrafts, instant food factory and others. Some occupational training courses such as cooking,

and dress making, were offered to women by the government organization. It seems that works in services and craftsmanship were the areas in which Phibun wanted women in urban areas to engage. It was known that the main purpose of encouraging these urban women was to eliminate the increasing of Chinese participation from business as much as possible. Restrictions in producing and monopolizing some merchandises and businesses such as tobacco, salt, swallows' nests, forestry and others, were announced prohibited to Chinese (Ronnachit 1991, 13:654, p. 49). As a model of service jobs for women, two governmental hotels Rattanakosin and Suriyanon were built in 1943, women were employed for almost all positions, mostly clerical work (Pramuanwan 1943, June 9). It should be noted that tourism in Thailand was officially supported and promoted by Phibun's government in this period. Public services were the new area cultivated for urban women in the middle educational level. In the same period, skilled female laborers were also supported by government's occupation protection. In 1942 the government issued a law reserving twenty-seven occupations for Thai nationals. They were:

*"1. making Buddha images, 2. selling Buddha images, 3. cutting firewood, 4. selling firewood, 5. making charcoal, 6. selling charcoal, 7. Making water bowls, 8. selling water bowls, 9. making rubber oil, 10. selling rubber oil, 11. making torches 12. selling torches, 13. making and selling bricks, 14. making women's hats, 15. making women's dresses, 16. dyeing work, 17. weaving household utensils except for mats, 18. making lacquer ware 19. making inlay work, 20. carving Thai patterns, 21. alphabet proof, 22. making firecrackers, 23. making toys, 24. making umbrellas, 25. hair dresser, 26. lawyer, 27. barber"* (Translated from Royal Decree 1942, vol.59:38, p.1221).

The purpose of the government was to transfer these jobs to the non-agricultural Thai workers. Half of the occupations were considered especially suitable for women. Five years after the law in 1947 the workers in the categories of craftsmen and production process workers and laborers comprised 4.9 per cent of the total labor force, and 29.1 per cent of them were women. However, it should be noted that traditionally craftsmen and artisans were not favorite occupations among the Thais for some practical reasons. They were considered degrading occupations in the eyes of the people (Ingram 1970:17-18). In general there was not much change in occupations of women in the lower socioeconomic level during Phibun's period.

## **Family life and Social Roles**

Phibun's government had a systematic methodology to bring changes to Thai people's lives in terms of relationships between husbands and wives, men and women, and women's social and economic activities. The organizations in charge of women's issues were established under the responsibility of five ministries: Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Defense, and Office of Prime Minister, and also under the Red Cross Council which was then an independent organization. The two most important organizations were the Cultural Council and Department of Public Relations attached to the Office of the Prime Minister. They were directly under control of Prime Minister Phibun. The work of the Cultural



Council is divided into five offices: Office of Spiritual Culture, Office of Order and Traditional Culture, Office of Literature Culture, Office of Artifact Culture, and Office of Women Culture. Tan-Pu-Ying La-iad, wife of Phibun was a Chair of Office of Women Culture. Her major responsibility was to increase women's status and promote women's social roles. Administration of this office was independent and attached directly to Prime Minister Phibun.

For the Department of Public Relations, there were the Section of Women Announcements, and Section of Newspapers. The Department of Public Relations was established in 1933 to control mass media and to communicate with people on many issues, especially on democratic ideology which was a new concept to Thai people. After Phibun came to power in 1938, this department had been utilized most effectively, particularly in radio broadcasting. It can be said that Phibun and his wife had exactly the same viewpoints of Thai women's over-all images. They were similar to those of King Rama VI's attitudes. Therefore the first request from Phibun to Thai women was concerning their fashion. Women were suggested to dress in Western styles, to have long hair, and to wear hats and shoes. Pictures of dresses for different occasions were illustrated to people. Chewing betel nuts was against the law and selling herbs and nuts for chewing became illegal.

Since population increase was a national policy, according to Phibun's thought that

*"...nowadays military power is the top of all important things, every nation is remarkably building their military power, increasing number of population, weapons endlessly..."* (Translated from Department of Public Relations 1941:72). The current population was about fifteen million but Phibun aimed at a minimum of forty million in order to become a powerful nation. Women were encouraged to marry and have more children. The government arranged a group-wedding ceremony for people in Bangkok and in some big cities. Single men and women were encouraged to marry with the same ethnic Thais to thicken Thai blood. Movies were made by the government to admire Thai women's capability in domestic and public works. Phibun's wife composed a number of poems and songs for Thai folk dancing (pleng ram wong), all praising Thai women for their kindness and beauty. The Department of Public Health was founded in the Ministry of the Interior in 1941 to take care of mothers' and children's health. The Ministry of Public Health was established in 1942. Hospitals and public health clinics were founded in many areas in Bangkok and other provinces. Midwife training courses were opened. Social workers and midwives were delivered to rural areas by mobile clinics. People were taught modern knowledge of child care and child rearing. Women's status as mothers was highly recognized. In order to honor women who were a mold of the nation (mae-phim kong chart), a National Mother's Day was founded on March 10, begun in 1943. Celebration of the day was held in central provinces in each region. Mothers with the highest number of children alive would be awarded.

Family life of people was closely attended by the government. The Cultural Council announced a guidance for couples called "Husband and Wife Culture" (wattanatam pau-mia) in February 1944 (Public Relations News 1944, 4:3, pp.678-679). The guidance accentuated four keys of happy marriage: sexual relations, mutual understanding, financial situation, and honesty. At the same

time a decree on “Conduct of Husband and Wife” (karn patibat kong pua-mia) was issued by the Office of Prime Minister (royal decree 1944 vol. 60, pp. 273-274). The Buddhist principles for laymen as husband and wife were referred. Government officers were requested to behave as role models. The happy families among the officers were rewarded.

Adultery was strictly prohibited by Phibun’s policy. A law-prohibited adultery among the government officers was issued. Even novels were thoroughly examined; the married male characters were not allowed to flirt with other women, and not even allowed to think of having an affair because it was against morality and could break the family life (Boonkachorn 1978:161). The government legislated the marriage registration law in 1933. To reinforce the legal practice, under Phibun’s regime, governors were reconfirmed to explain and convince provincial officers, teachers, and people to marry legally and traditionally, or in other words to practice monogamy. Governmental officers were the role models of monogamy. In order to protect the only-one registered wife policy, the following rules were issued to male government officers: *1. To always honor his wife in the status of wife. 2. To take care of his wife and children properly, cannot abandon them. 3. To live with his wife, cannot abandon or divorce her without proper reason* (Translated from Kamphibal 1985:188-189).

The government officers who behaved against these three rules were to be punished; the maximum punishment was to be fired. The Department of Social Welfare (krom pracha songkroa) was established in 1940 but in the provincial cities and towns, there were constantly not enough staff. Phibun proposed the governors to suggest the women government officers and wives of male officers in cities and towns to assist in social works. A part of Phibun’s speech at the governors’ meeting in 1941 was,

*“...The work of department of social welfare is a woman’s work, similar to a child rearing, it has to be finished and to be domineered. Official works in every field, every section can always be interfered by the Department of Social Welfare, the function of this department is like a woman taking care of the baby...”* (Translated from Provincial Governors’ Meeting Report 1943:361)

The interpretation of his speech is, the wives of the officers were de facto allowed to interfere in the governmental activities in social welfare area. The shortage of official social workers obliged the spouses, usually wives, of the government officers to volunteer and participate to a certain level, in the official work or in their husbands’ work. A few groups of the officers’ wives in provincial cities and towns were unofficially formed in Phibun’s period. Phibun as a President of the Cultural Council assigned the responsibility of organizing the officers’ wives to the Office of Women’s Culture at where his wife was a Chair. Apparently, during Phibun’s governing period, the wives of the high-ranked officers were very active in volunteer social work under the guidance of Tan-phu-ying La-ia-d. In Bangkok, also many women’s associations were organized. Since then the volunteer social work has become a traditional activity of higher officials’ wives, especially of the military officers.

Phibun's regime was ended in September 1957 by a bloodless coup d'état led by Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat. Phibun was exiled to Japan where he lived until he died in 1964 at the age of seventy-six.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This is the second part of the paper of which many of references appear in part I, while a few references of part I are shown in Part II. I apologize for this error and confusion.
- <sup>2</sup> Calculated from original data.
- <sup>3</sup> Compulsory education was four years in primary school.

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