

## **Sexualities and the Strengthening of Monarchy in Pre-Modern Thailand**

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In the social context of contemporary Thailand, sexual intercourses are perceived as private activities which should not be put in public sphere. However, in the royal court of pre-modern Thailand or Siam, these intercourses played important roles in state affairs, especially for the strengthening of monarchy and the stability of rulers. During the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767 AD), the royal court routinely held an ancient Khmer ceremony in which the kings must sleep, at least in theory, with a holy serpent who uplifted their kingdom and determined their lives and deaths. Also, it should be noted that many royal courts in pre-modern Southeast Asia had myths about their monarchs who were human-animal or human-ghost hybrids.

The study finds that, according to the law in the Ayutthaya era, the kings established themselves as the center of the universe by appointing at least four royal consorts from princesses of Ayutthaya's four major vassal dynasties. In other words, it was a symbol of Ayutthaya's power and influence over surrounding states.

Sexualities also played the same roles in the Chakri dynasty court of Rattanakosin (founded 1782). The Chakri kings selected daughters of high officials and appointed them royal concubines, in order to assure loyalty and strengthen monarchical power. King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868 – 1910 AD), for example, extended his power and balance the British influence in upper Southeast Asia by marrying Princess Dararasmī, a daughter of the king of Chiang Mai. Furthermore, he and his son, King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910 – 1925 AD), forbade royal princes and princesses from marrying Western foreigners because of the fear of Western encroachment over Siam through marriages.

In sum, the Ayutthaya and Chakri kings of Siam practiced polygamy as a symbol of power and prosperity. The court even determined the concubines' "proper sexual position" when sleeping with the monarchs. Thus, polygamy was the declaration of the so-called *barami* (perfection) over their vassals. At the same time, the kings also tried to strengthen his power by intra-family marriage. As a result, incest became common practice among royals.

However, in the early twentieth century, the flow of Western influence and the growth of the middle class in Siam resulted in the changes of sexual lives of Chakri kings. Polygamy became obsolete and monogamy has become common practice since the reign of King Prajadhipok (1925 – 1935). At the present, the King not only presents himself as a middle-class family man showing affection to his children, but also become "father of the nation" with personal touches.