Call for Panelists and Discussants

Panel Title: Thai History of Ideas

Convener: Dr. Ployjai Pintobtang, Department of History, Chiang Mai University,

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Format: Classical Panel

This panel discussion aims to include a question-and-answer session, providing attendees with the opportunity to engage directly with the panellists. This interaction can foster a more dynamic and participatory atmosphere, allowing the audience to explore the topic of Thai history of ideas and its implications for Southeast Asian studies as well as to seek clarification on complex historical issues proposed by the panellists.

Panel Description:

Each panelist is expected to present their take on “Thai history of ideas” before engaging with the discussants and the audience on both the potential and the limitation of “history of ideas” as an approach in Southeast Asian studies. Thanapol and Ployjai’s papers open up a discussion about the possibility to locate Thai political ideas within the global context that goes beyond the framework of modernization. Pannarat and Worathipa ’s esssay, in a similar spirit, nuances the understanding of the idea of woman’s rights as a benchmark of “progress” through a close examination of western woman travelers’ writings and their relationship with and perception of Siamese women. The essay sheds light on the complex relationship between colonialism and feminism in the nineteenth century. Lastly, Villa’s *A Narrative History of the Securities Market in Thai Financial Magazines in the 1970s and the 1980s* examines an aspect of modern history of financial ideas hitherto overlooked, namely the roles of agencies like companies and mass media in visualizing the market for the potential investors. In so doing, it crucially fills in the gap of existing literature on Thai history of financial ideas as well as examines its links to the regional and global financial history.

For Prospective Panellists and Discussant(s): Prospective panellists and discussants should have an interest in Thai history of ideas in its broadest sense which including but not limited to history of political thought, economic and financial ideas, the idea of modernity and the process of modernisation. Panellists will be selected based on the originality of their research as well as its relevance to the theme of the panel.

Dr. Ployjai Pintobtang, Department of History, Chiang Mai University

**Rousseau in Thai Constitutionalism**

The essay locates Rousseau’s political thought within nineteenth-century Siamese politics and reveals his contribution to the formation of Thai constitutionalism. It focuses on the translation and the interpretation of his idea of General Will in the “Handbook for the New Regime” [Koo-Mue-Raborb-Mai] published and disseminated after the 1932 Revolution. In so doing, the paper situates the Thai republican traditions within the global history of republicanism, which has been hitherto overlooked by both scholars of Thai studies and intellectual history. While Rousseau’s influence post-Democratic Revolution has been surveyed by Suphachai Suphapol and Tomas Larsson, both scholars focus on his legacy on proto-liberalism in Siam/Thailand. Alternatively, this essay proposes that as a global constitutionalist thinker, Rousseau’s rich understanding of constitutionalism was appealing to readers during the democratic revolutionary era and its aftermath because it was able to fill the social vacuum which emerged with the absence of royal absolutism.

(Please kindly note that this presentation is based on this newly published book chapter:

Pintobtang, P. (2023). Rousseau in Thai Constitutionalism. In: Harris, N., Bosseau, D., Pintobtang, P., Brown, O. (eds) Rousseau Today. Political Philosophy and Public Purpose. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-29243-9_10>)

Dr. Thanapol Limapichart, Department of History, Chulalongkorn University

**Rereading** ***the Proposal for Reform the Siamese Government (1885)***:Political Temporal Order, Tradition, and Legacy

The “Proposal for reform of the Siamese Government” was an importance piece of document written by a group of young princes and royal officials in London and Paris, and submitted to King Chulalongkorn in 1885. Scholars of Thai history have commonly interpreted its significance in two ways. First, the Proposal has been seen (since its first publication in 1967) as the beginning of Siam/Thailand’s political modernization. This view emphasizes the role of the Proposal writers or the ruling elite (instead of the People’s Party or the 1932 Revolution) in Siam/Thailand’s democratization. Second, the Proposal is viewed as the earliest criticism of Siam’s absolute monarchy, which would eventually progress to further radical ideas (e.g. republicanism) and political transformation (e.g. the 1912 Rebellion and the 1932 Revolution). Despite their differences, the two narratives approach the Proposal via a teleological lens, that is, the Proposal marks the beginning of Siam/Thailand’s political progress.

This paper proposes that we can understand the significance of this Proposal from a different point of view, namely how it was read and responded to by the King in its historical context. Specifically, the paper argues that the Proposal was a critical moment in which the king came to recognize Western (liberal-imperialist) political thought (e.g. its temporal regime and ideological discourse) as a threat. It was thus perceived because the writers of the Proposal used it as a mode of criticism of His power and authority. More importantly, this recognition brought about three discursive consequences: 1) the rise of political temporal order in which social and political changes are defined in terms of gradualism, continuity, unreadiness, middle path, etc. 2) the stress on Siam’s tradition and the critique of excessive appropriation of Western influences 3) the emergence of the modern concept of “political legacy” as the writers of the Proposal warned the King to think deeply about how he would be remembered by future (generations) because of his decisions today.

Dr. Panarat Anamwathana and Worathipa Satayanusakkul, Department of History, Thammasat University

**Colonial eyes and feminist minds: Writing of western women in 19th-century Siam**

The complex relationship between women and colonialism is a popular topic of study among scholars of gender studies, history, and other adjacent disciplines. Women’s positions within a society is often seen by imperialists as a yardstick for civilization and progress; and many western women found their purpose in “educating” and “emancipating” indigenous women to fight against their oppressive cultures. Nineteenth century Thailand (then known as Siam) occupies a peculiar place within this discussion. Like most Southeast Asian women, Siamese women were seemingly less in need of assistance than others, as they were often regarded as having traditionally relatively favorable social, economic, and legal positions. Although Siam was never formally colonized, the effects of western imperialism on the country can be explored through social and cultural historical lenses.

To elucidate parts of this complex relationship between women and colonialism in Siam, this chapter draws on the writing of western women travelers, especially missionaries and contributors to the Woman’s Work for Woman magazine by the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church. This chapter has two main aims: First, it argues that while these women travelers came to Siam with the feminist mindset of helping their Asian “sisters,” they were complicit in spreading imperial ideas and power, even to Siam that was nominally independent. These women’s travel writings were also used to produce knowledge and depict Siamese women in ways that support western liberalism and imperial ideologies. Secondly, this chapter aims to explore how western women reconciled their feminist views and orientalist mission when they found that Siamese women enjoyed relatively high status and many rights, such as right to property, that western women were still fighting for at home. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of western feminism and how it operates within colonialism, as well as how women’s rights in Asia can have roots in local traditions and cultures.

Dr. Villa Vilaithong, Department of History, Chiang Mai University

**A Narrative History of the Securities Market in Thai Financial Magazines in the 1970s and the 1980s**

The Thai stock market is relatively young comparing with the markets in North America or Europe. Bangkok Stock Exchange, established in 1962, was short-lived and lasted until the early 1970s due to shortages of securities for trading, investors’ interest, and government support. The government began playing an important role in creating a capital market through state policies and regulations. As a result, the enactment of The Securities Exchange of Thailand Act in 1974 provided the basic legislative framework for the formation of The Securities Exchange of Thailand (SET), which started trading in 1975. Existing accounts of the history of Thai stock market have revealed the political and economic roles of the Thai government and the SET in developing the capital market and left other relevant agencies like financial and securities companies, investors, and mass media unexplored. This preliminary study traces the ways in which Thai financial magazines such as Dok Bia (interest) and Kan Ngoen Thanakan (bank’s finance) narrated the stories of this emerging securities market. It argues that their narratives paint the pictures and shape “feelings” of the market, allowing Thai readers to imaginatively invest or engage with the market before they are financially committed. The article follows Per H. Hansen’s narrative approach in the study of business history and Peter Knight’s genres of financial capitalism in reading the market.