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## The Need for Redefining Thai Slavery in History Textbooks

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### Abstract

The definitions of Thai slavery in history textbooks had rarely changed although the national education plans and Thai curricula were revised many times over several decades. This article argues that there is the need for redefining Thai slavery in history textbooks in order to prevent the misconception of Thai slavery among students and to broaden the discussion of Thai slavery definition. The study was conducted by examining many textbooks authorized by the Ministry of Education from 1928 till 2001. Those textbooks were divided into two levels: lower levels (grade1-6) and upper levels (grade7-9), and were categorized in different curricula: the first one before 1960, the second one in 1960, the third one in 1978, the fourth one in 1990, and the latest one in 2001. The study discloses that the scholars writing those textbooks mostly defined Thai slaves as someone with a poor status and portrayed that the abolition of Thai slavery was the great royal duty of King Chulalongkorn. This led students to believe that the abolition of slavery was based on the effort of king Chulalongkorn to ensure freedom and liberty to all slaves. In addition, Thai slavery was compared to the Western slavery by the scholars in term of its status and its abolition. Thai slavery was different from that in other countries. The limited scope of discussion on Thai slavery definition and one-sided narration of Thai slavery should be addressed. This article suggests more in-depth analysis of redefining Thai slavery and encourages more discussion on this definition in both the scholar research and history textbook. This leads to the conclusion that the narration of slavery in Thai history textbooks should be revised in order to broaden students' understanding on Thai slavery.

Keywords: Redefining, Textbook, Thai slavery



## Introduction

In human history, slavery had existed through all ages and countries. The general concept of slavery is presented with tales of cruel and inhumane practices of the slavery system, especially African slaves in the Southern United States, as dramatized in the novel “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” (Stowe, 1852). In Thai history, Thailand has its own slavery recorded in several historical evidences such as the Ayutthaya chronicles<sup>1</sup>, Three Seal Laws<sup>2</sup>, and Description du royaume Thai ou Siam<sup>3</sup>. The institution was known in Thais in the Sukothai period as kha or bondsmen and from the Ayutthaya to the Bangkok periods under that name, as the legal term (Chatchai Pannanom, 1982, pp.15-16). Its status was the lowest one in the social structure of Thailand.

The categories of Thai slaves were generally divided into three types: captive slaves, debt slaves and children born by

slave parents (Anchulee Susayan, 1981, p.18). These slaves functioned as domestic and agricultural productive labors. In addition, the possession of slaves represented the wealth, prestige, and power of their masters in Thai traditional society. Thai slavery was officially abolished in the reign of King Chulalongkorn<sup>4</sup>, who issued the Abolition Siamese Slave Act in 1905. Slavery was prohibited in Thailand since then as a result of this act.

Although slavery was terminated, some details about slavery have been widely narrated and presented in various forms - textbooks, novels, drawings and wax statues. Moreover, based on one of the Fresco drawings in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall<sup>5</sup>, where the government guests are welcome with grand royal ceremonies, portraits King Chulalongkorn’s abolition of slavery as his great royal duties. In that great Fresco drawing, King Chulalongkorn stands on the pedestal in the center of the picture,

<sup>1</sup> The Ayutthaya Chronicles was the records about each Ayutthaya king from 1351-1767, royal court, royal ceremonies, and wars. Slaves were recorded as manpower in battles and rebellion.

<sup>2</sup> Three Seal Laws was the laws revised and compiled in King Rama the first of Siam in 1805. Most of the texts were laws from the Ayutthaya era. The contents of slaves are in Law on Slaves.

<sup>3</sup> It is a description of Simon de la Loubere’s travels to Siam in 1687 in the reign of King Narai of the Ayutthaya era. Slaves were recorded in one of the contents in his book.

<sup>4</sup> King Chulalongkorn or King Rama V (20 September 1853 – 23 October 1910), was the fifth king of Siam under the House of Chakri. His reign was characterized by the modernization of Siam, government and social reforms, the abolition of slavery, territorial menaces from Western expansionism. His policies and acts save Siam from being colonized by Britain and France.

<sup>5</sup> Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall was built in 1908 in the reign of King Chulalongkorn and was completed in 1915 in the reign of King Vajiravudh or King Rama VI. It was used as the Parliament House until 1974.



surrounded by slaves who are men, women and children with black skin, kneeling down to show respect for their majesty. In addition, Thai Human Imagery Museum<sup>6</sup> displays the exhibits of slave wax statues in various gestures, such as an old male slave suffering from flogging wounds on his back, a child sold to be a slave in the master's house, slaves released to be free and the scene when King Chulalongkorn commanded the abolition of slavery – the great king sitting on the throne surrounded by slaves bowing down to him.

The concepts of Thai slavery from these sources lead to Thai people's perception about slavery in the present century as inhumane act between slaves and their masters and cruel institution during that time like that in Western world. The fact that Thais praise King Chulalongkorn's initiation of slavery abolition without considering other factors could lead to the misconception among students and scholars and this is the main focus of this article. Textbooks, authorized by Ministry of Education, are important sources for the investigation of how the concepts of Thai slavery in the textbooks affecting the students' perception

of slavery. This article will, also, contribute more knowledge about the government's and authors' conceptualizing of slavery in Thai history textbooks.

The studies of Thai slavery scarcely mentioned the conceptualizing of slavery. Most academic works focused on slavery abolition. In his study of King Chulalongkorn and the abolition of Thai slavery, Vichai Sewamart (1963) analyze that the process that King Chulalongkorn abolished slavery. He concluded that the king should be praised as the greatest administer of Thailand due to the complexity and difficulty of the abolition of slavery. However, his study does not recognize the status of Thai slaves in economical and social contexts.

The second one is the study of Thai slavery and its abolition relating to the changes of economy and society by Chatchai Panananon. Chatchai pointed out that Thai slavery had been weakened since Thailand signed the Bowring treaty with Britain in 1855. The agreement made rice export of Thailand grow faster than that in other countries. This leads to the fact that commoners and slaves wanted to become free labors so that they could earn their own

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<sup>6</sup>The museum was opened in 1989. It is located in Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand.



living as farmers. Moreover, slaves' masters turned to be landlords, so the number of the slaves' masters decreased since they wanted to own lands more than manpower (pp. 26-30). Chatchai also criticized Vichai's thesis that Vichai exaggerated the royal duty of the King's slavery abolition because Thai slavery was totally different from the Western slavery in terms of the slaves' status and functions in Thai economy (p.27). Another thesis written by Chonlada Kopatta (1990) pointed out that Thai slavery played an important role in Thai economy before signing the Bowring treaty. Slaves had been regarded as both Capital and labor in Thai economy since King Rama II. Commoners and slaves were not different in terms of their status in Thai society (pp. 4-10). Because of the changes of economy, the abolition of Thai slavery was disintegrated step by step. King Chulalongkorn could consecutively decrease the slave price and enacted many Slave Acts prior to the abolition step (1990, pp. 4-10). Both Chatchai and Chonlada agreed that Thai slavery had been an important institution in Thai economy from the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It was weakened before the king issued the Abolition Siamese Slave Act in 1905.

These three works explained Thai slavery into two contrasting ways. One explains that being slaves was the poorest status and slavery abolition led to the slaves' freedom. Therefore, the King should be praised for his attempt to abolish slavery. The other one explains that slavery was indeed a part of Thai economy and thus subject to the external changes. Slavery abolition was not the great royal duty of King Chulalongkorn but the change of economy, especially globalization and free trade led to the abolition of the slavery. These explanations can be found in Thai history textbooks.

Textbooks examined in this article are from two levels: lower levels for primary school (grade1-6) and upper levels for secondary school (grade 7-9), written by Thai scholars and referred to in the curricula authorization of the Ministry of Education. The first curriculum was enacted in 1892 in Thailand to scope details of the subjects and was later used in schools in different levels. The curricula have been revised and changed many times. However, the four curricula referred to in this article related to the samples of the history textbooks: the first one in 1960, the second one in 1978, the third one in 1990, and the fourth one in



2001. Each curriculum provides guidelines about how the scholars should write the textbooks.

This article is organized as follows: an introduction, narratives on Thai slavery in textbooks before the curricula in 1960, narratives on Thai slavery in textbooks in the curricula in 1960, narratives on Thai slavery in primary textbooks (grades 1-6) in the curricula in 1978 and in the secondary textbooks (grades 7-9) in 1981, narratives on Thai slavery in textbooks in the curricula in 1990 and narratives on Thai slavery in textbooks in the curricula in 2001. Lastly, the conclusions of this article will be discussed.

#### **Narratives on Thai Slavery in Textbooks before the Curricula in 1960**

The analysis of textbooks has disclosed that the narratives of Thai slaves have appeared in textbooks since 1928. The examples of history textbooks were in the national curricula in 1928. They were divided into seven books: Book of Morality, Book of Chronicles, Book of Geography, Book of Etiquette, Book of Civic Duty, and Book of History (Witiddarunkul, Praya, 1928, pp.3-5). Only the Book of Etiquette and the Book of History contained narratives on slaves. For

example, the Book of Etiquette for teachers of the second grade of primary school, edited by Praya Witiddarunkul (1928), narrated about King Chulalongkorn's abolition of Thai slavery as follows:

King Chulalongkorn the Great (or King Rama V, whom we called after his ascension to heaven as "the Royal Buddha") saw that the traditions of slavery in Siam obstructed the advancement of the country and destroyed the happiness of its citizens. This was because the status of slaves was as low as that of animals or belongings, which their masters could buy or sell at whim. For example, if a family of slaves consisting of parents and a child, the master could sell away only the child slave if he wanted a small amount of money. Regardless of how strong the love between the slave parents and their child was, the parents could not say a word of protest and had to let their child be taken away. At times, such children and parents never saw one another for their whole lives. This was such an utmost pity. (pp.122-124).

Similarly, the second example is taken from the *Siamese History* textbook states,



“Slavery was an ancient tradition found not only in Siam but also in other countries. King Chulalongkorn saw that slavery degraded the capabilities and freedom of his citizens. Thus, he decreed the Slavery Abolition Act so that every citizen came to have equal rights and liberty”(Wittayawutthi, Khun, Lualamsattri, Luang, Shunnahaksikarn, Luang and Pawarolan Wittaya, Pra, 1935, p.354).

Both explanations of Thai slaves in pre-1960 curricula mainly focus on King Chulalongkorn’s abolition of slavery. Information and analysis of Thai slaves were not offered yet. The lack of explanation could possibly be due to the structuring of history lessons, which focused on historical eras and the roles and contributions of each king.

Freedom and liberty were explained in the case of the abolition of slavery. The narratives of the unconditional surrender of the slaves, the abuse by their masters, and the comparison of slaves to animals were explained in terms of the status of Thai slaves.

### **Narratives on Thai Slavery in Textbooks in the 1960 Curricula**

The first national education plan was used in 1960, and many subjects such as Mathematics, Social Studies, and Thai language were grouped together. In Social Studies Teaching, the subjects, namely Civic

Duty, Morality, Geography, and History were included. In addition, the 1960 curriculum was divided into two sections: the Lower and Upper Primary School Curriculum, and the Lower and Upper Secondary School Curriculum (Suruda Sutthisasanakul, 1993, p.98).

The examination of textbooks of both primary and secondary school in the 1960 curriculum disclosed Thai slaves and the abolition of slavery on two occasions, one under the topic of King Chulalongkorn Day on October 23 and the other on King Chulalongkorn’s reign. For example, the social studies textbook of the 2nd grade of primary school, written by Kor Swadpanich (1962), mentioned slaves in two chapters. A part of the first one under the topic of *The Significant Days of Thailand* is as follows;

Chulalonkorn Day is a significant day because King Chulalongkorn contributed greatly to our country. He had advanced the civilization of our nation by abolishing slavery, founding hospitals, schools, and maintaining commuting routes. The prosperity of our country today is the result of the Great King’s love of his people, and the common people. The King is, therefore, named “Somdej Pra



Piya Maharaja (The Great Beloved King)".

On Chulalongkorn Day, schools and government institutions are all closed so that people can commemorate and appreciate His Majesty's grace. In some places, ceremonies are held to pay homage to his statues (pp.36-45).

The second one was under the topic *The Origin of the Thai People*, it is stated that each king of the Rattanakosin period successively developed the country. For King Chulalongkorn, the book narrates, "He had modernized our country. He declared that slavery was abolished, and improved education, commutation, and public healthcare. Since then, our country has been advancing progressively. Thus, we gave him the title "Somdej Pra Piya Maharaja" or "the beloved king" (Kor Sawatpanich, 1962, pp.43-45). The explanations in this book were quite short and lack of historical details of Thai slaves.

Another example is in *Thai and Foreign History* textbook for secondary school grade 7 in 1971 in the Integrative Secondary School Education Development Project of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education. The details of slavery could be found in the section of Thai history under

the topic of the reign of King Chulalongkorn. A part of this section is as follows:

King Chulalongkorn abolished slavery which had been in existence since the Ayuddhaya period in a subtle and gradual process so as not to affect masters of slaves as well as slaves themselves too harshly. This was because slaves were used to being cared for by their masters and were not satisfied to have to find work for themselves. He issued the Born Slave Price Reduction Act in 1874, which determined new price rates for children of slaves born from 1868 (the year of his coronation) onward. When those born slaves turned 21, they became free and could not be sold into slavery again.

Moreover, slavery would become illegal, both slave traders and buyers punishable by the law. Then, he issued another act decreeing that slaves who were prisoners of war or those who were sold to clear debts would be free when they turned 60. After that, he declared that all born slaves were free, and the prices of other types of slaves were reduced 4 baht per month until their prices ran out. Finally, slave trade and purchase



were strictly forbidden, and those breaking the law would be punished. As such, slavery gradually ceased to exist due to His Majesty's kindness towards his citizens, as well as his subtle plans that made the abolition successful without any bloodshed. The whole process took 37 years to complete (Chusiri Jamornmarn, Pongsri Wittayanan, Sinat Suriya and Sumana Bunyarattavej, 1971, p.49).

According to the narratives above, the abolition of slavery was gradually explained. The historical evidences from The Three Seals Laws, and the first enacted Thai law were referred to in the narratives.

Despite all the changes in Thai education brought on by the 1960 curriculum, explanations on Thai slaves remained the same in the textbooks. They included the topic of the royal duties of the king.

### **Narratives of Thai Slavery in Textbooks in the Primary and Secondary School Curriculum of 1978 (Grades 1-9) and the Revised Edition of the Secondary School Curriculum of 1981(Grades 7-9)**

The national education plan of 1978 changed the primary and secondary school curriculum. Many subjects were divided into

different categories. Social studies belonged to the Creation of Life Experience Category, which were integrated into 7 subjects in Social Studies and Humanities: Geography, History, Civic Duty, Morality, Social Science, Population Education and Ecology, and Economics (Suruda Sutthisanakul, pp. 120-122). They were divided into topics and assigned new subject codes: *Our Country* (S 101 and S 102), *Our Neighboring Countries* (S 203 and S 204), and *Our World* (S 305 and S 306).

The changes in 1978 made the textbooks completely different from those under the 1960 curriculum. There were no more independent subjects such as Geography, History, Civic Duty or Morality. This change affected the writing of slavery history in textbooks.

Social Studies and Humanities textbooks for primary schools in the curriculum of 1978 provided explanations on slavery on the issue of abolition in relation to King Chulalongkorn. For example, in the S 203 *Our Neighboring Countries* textbook for sixth-graders in primary school explained slaves through a fictional character called Bundeel, who was a born slave and gained freedom in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Bundeel's fictional memoir contains narratives of the slavery abolition as follows:

The happiest day in  
my life is April 1st, 1905



A.D., or the year 124 of the Rattanakosin Era. On that day I became free; I received my liberty. Apart from me, there were many children of slaves who were overjoyed as well. The Royal Buddha or His Majesty King Chulalongkorn has been so gracious to his subjects, even to slaves. He has issued the law so that slave masters freed children of slaves, so that prices of children of slaves decreased gradually, and so that the freemen could not be sold into slavery again. As a result, slaves no longer existed in Siam. He spent 31 years altogether to abolish slavery.

On the day that slavery was abolished, the eyes of almost every slave were brimming with tears. Some cried openly in happiness and gratitude. Some knelt on the ground, putting the palms of their hands together over their heads, and prostrating themselves before the picture of the Royal

Buddha. No words could represent our joy, bliss, and thankfulness toward His Majesty's kindness better than these gestures. I know that there had been slaves in Siam since Ayuddhaya. There were slaves in other countries too, such as in America. There was bloodshed in that country; many lives were lost, and so much damage were done in the civil war before they could abolish slaves, unlike in Siam, where the Royal Buddha used gradual means to achieve the abolition so as not to cause problems to both masters and slaves (Darika Yotsawat, Linjong Intrumpan and Thongchang Chaidet, 1982, pp.13-14).

The fictional memoirs above emphasize the miserable status of being slaves and the great royal duty of the king. In addition, these memoirs also compare the achievement of slavery abolition in Thailand to the bloodshed of slavery abolition in American in order to reinforce the success of the abolition in Thailand.



For the revised edition of secondary school textbooks in the 1981 curriculum, which was improved from the curriculum in 1978, the methods of presenting information at this level differed from those at primary school level, especially on the issues of slavery, which were explained in more details and in-depth analyses. More explanations ranging from the abolition, to the definitions of slaves, conditions of slaves, and analyses of changes in the slavery system leading to the abolition were provided.

The outstanding example is *S 605 Thai History Textbook*, in which slavery was written in Chapter 4, *The Thai Social Structure from the Past to the Present*. It is concluded that the slave was a changeable status in Siamese society. A commoner could become a slave if he was sold for money, whereas a slave who could pay for the debt could return to become a commoner as long as he had enough money to buy himself out (Chanwit Kasetsiri et al, 1982, p.50). The abolition of slavery was regarded as a part of the economic changes since the reign of King Chulalongkorn when the demand for rice in the world market was rising significantly. Rice was the most profitable export goods of Siam (1982, p.50).

The government saw the need to liberate common people and slaves, who were the major labor force in the society so that they could plant more rice for export.

Therefore, the system of drafting common people to labor periodically by the government was abolished, and so was the slavery. This kind of system was replaced by the enlistment system for military service in 1905. As a result, the majority of the common people and former slaves became farmers in the new society (1982, p.50).

The abolition of slavery resulted in changes in economy in the reign of King Mongkut, and this led to the changes of the Thai social structure as well. The royal family members and the noblemen became landlords, and business owners while the majority of commoners and slaves became farmers and laborers in the new society, in which its members can advance their status by accumulating wealth (1982, pp.52-53).

The textbook above described Thai slaves differently from the previous textbooks. Evidently, the explanation focuses on slaves' conditions more than the great royal duty. In addition, the status of Thai slaves was not miserable. The abolition of Thai slavery causes economic changes from the reign of King Chulalongkorn to King Mongkut. Slaves were free labors to plant more rice.

Another example taken from *S-0210 The Thai Social and Cultural History Social Studies* textbook at the secondary school level provided detailed explanations on Thai slavery. Slaves were explained as part of the social structure in the Rattanakosin period,



which consisted of the royalty, the nobility, the common people, and the slaves. The narratives are as follows:

Slaves were the lowest class in the society. According to the Siamese feudal law, their Sakdina, or status as figuratively counted in the amount of land they could own, was 5 Rai. Slaves were divided into 7 types. They could own properties and buy themselves out of slavery. Thus, being a slave in the Siamese Society is not a permanent status. Being a slave was a changeable condition. A commoner could become a slave if he was not industrious but was addicted to gambling so much that it came to the point that he had to sell himself to pay off his debts. On the other hand, he could buy his freedom if he had enough money.

King Chulalongkorn spent over 30 years in freeing all slaves in Siam prior to the successful abolition without any violent resistance. When slaves were free, the social structure of Siam in the time of the King changed dramatically, becoming the basis of the Thai society up to now; there were no more restrictive traditions to commoners and no more slaves

(Darunee Keawmoang, Waroonyupa Sanitwongse Na Ayuddhaya and Wutthichai Mulasipa, 1986, p.26).

The narrations above were based on the Three Seal Laws referring to the status of Thai slaves. As for the conditions of slaves, too harsh abuse was not explained. There was also no violence in the abolition, and it was the beginning of the new society of commoners.

Textbooks in the secondary school curriculum of 1981 provided more analyses and data of slaves, slavery, and its abolition than those in the previous curricula. Economic factor is the new explanation of the cause the abolition of Thai slavery.

## 5. Narratives of Thai Slavery in Textbooks in the Revised Edition of Primary and Secondary School Curriculum of 1990

In 1990, textbooks in the primary school curriculum of 1978 and the secondary School of 1981 were revised. This revision neither changed the explanations of the issues of slaves and slavery, nor made them any different from those in the 1978 curriculum.

An example could be found in the *Thai History* textbook for the sixth grade of primary school. Thai slaves were explained under the topic of social development. It stated that the social structure in Ayuddhaya



was divided into the ruling class, and the ruled class. Slaves belonged to the latter category and were given the following explanations.

Slaves were those who lack the rights of their career choice and their lives. They were not free because they were bought by money, or were prisoners of war enslaved to provide labor. So, they obtained the lowest status in the society. A slave could be free if he was bought out with money or if he did a service worthy of recognition to the country, or in case of a female slave, if she became a wife of the master who bought her out (Supon Tim-am, Wiriya Bunyaniwasana and Yaowalak Aksorn, 2000, p.34).

The abolition of slavery was put in the section on the society in the Rattanakosin period. It stated that the abolition of the labor system of commoners and slaves were part of the social reformation in King Chulalongkorn's reign. It was explained as follows:

The liberation of the slaves was systematically and gradually carried out by King Chulalongkorn. In 1874, he issued the Born Slave

Price Reduction Act. The act stated that children of slaves born in the year of the dragon, 1868, the year of his coronation, would be free when they became 21 years old, and they could not be sold into slavery anymore. Children of slaves born before 1868 still remained slaves unless they were bought out. Thus, masters of slaves were not at much disadvantage. Liberating young slaves who could grow up to be significant manpower of the nation was surely beneficial to the country in the long run. However, liberating old slaves, who were already accustomed to their ways of living and thus did not need more freedom but would prefer to be cared for by their masters, would be less beneficial.

Because of this, he gradually proceeded with the liberation so as to provide the slaves more chances to learn to live on their own. In 1900, he issued the law freeing slaves whose parents were prisoners of war or indebted slaves born on or after December 16th in the year 116 of the Rattanakosin Era (1898 A.D.) from slavery. In addition, these slaves could not be sold into slavery again. Then, in 1905 he decreed the



Slavery Act of 124 Rattanakosin Era to be effective all over the country from April 1st 1905 onward. The purpose of the act was to free all Siamese slaves in existence. Each month, the price of each slave would drop by 4 baht until it reached zero. After that these slaves would be free. Furthermore, slave trade was prohibited in Siam from then on. As a result, the Thai citizens have come to have equal rights by the law (Supon Tim-am, Wiriya Bunyaniwasana and Yaowalak Aksorn, 2000, p.45).

Based on the examples of textbooks in this curriculum, slaves were under the ruled class, and lacked freedom. However, they could buy themselves out or be given freedom by their masters. Moreover, the slavery abolition was explained in the section of King Chulalongkorn's reign. The emphases were placed on the procedures of abolition and slavery abolition acts. A similar reason of slavery abolition was given. That is to provide freedom to the people.

#### **Narratives of Thai Slavery in Textbooks in the General Education Curriculum of 2001**

The General Education Curriculum of 2001 significantly differs from the previous curricula because subjects are divided into

eight learning groups: Thai; Mathematics; Science; Social Studies, Religion and Culture; Health and Physical Education; Art; Vocation and Technology; and Foreign Languages (Bureau of academic affairs, 2001, pp.2-3). The Social Studies, Religion and Culture learning group is divided into 5 subgroups. The first subgroup consists of Religion, Morality, and Ethics. The second subgroup consists of Civic Duty, Culture, and Living in Society. The third subgroup is Economics. The fourth subgroup is History. The fifth subgroup is Geography (2001, p.2-3). Issues concerning slaves and slavery belong to the fourth subgroup.

The class is divided into four phases. The first phase spans from the first grade to the third grade of primary school. The second phase spans from the fourth grade to the sixth grade of primary school. The third phase spans from the first grade to the third grade of secondary school. Finally, the fourth phase spans from the fourth grade to the sixth grade of secondary school (2001, p.4).

The examples of the textbooks in the curriculum of 2001 are the *Basic History* textbook in the Social Studies, Religion, and Culture learning group for the sixth grade of primary school in the second phase mentions slavery. These textbooks focused on the issue of abolition in the reign of King Chulalongkorn.



It is stated that based on King Chulalongkorn's vision, slavery caused Siam to be held in contempt by other countries as an uncivilized nation, which could be used by the powerful Western nations as an excuse for colonization. That is why the king declared that slavery had to be abolished in a gradual process. The abolition was successful without any violence as those in other countries due to an act of great kindness that the king had bestowed upon the Thai citizens (Paitoon Meekusol and Taweesak Lomlim, 2005, p.55).

Another textbook for the secondary school in the third phase of education narrates slaves and the abolition of slavery as follows:

Slaves belonged to the ruled class in Thai society. They were the lowest group in the society in the Sukhothai and the Ayuddhaya periods. They were treated like inheritable properties and labor force. Slaves in the Ayuddhaya society could be divided into 7 types according to the Three Seals Laws. In the Ayuddhaya period, all types of slaves except for those taken as prisoners of war could buy themselves out of slavery or could be free by other means. For example, slaves will become free people if their masters allow them

to be ordained as monks, novices, or nuns, or if they were disabled as a result of the work they did for their masters.

The slavery abolition was a part of changes in the basic social structure in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Since other civilized countries had already abolished slavery, it was assumed that the Western power could use the existence of slavery as an excuse to dominate Siam if slavery was not abolished. Moreover, as Siam followed the steps of westernized development, a large amount of labor force was needed in factories and in the fields. As a result, the king foresaw the need to abolish slavery. He decreed the Born Slave Price Reduction Act of 1874 to reduce the prices of children of slaves. The act was followed by other acts on the reduction of slave prices. Thanks to the abolition of slavery, the majority of the Siamese people in all society enjoyed freedom and liberty greatly as never before. This gradual slavery abolition did not cause any violent protests in the society (Pratum Kumala and Taweesak Lomlim, 2005, pp.170-171).



The changes in the General Education Curriculum of 2001 do not make any changes to the explanations of slaves and the abolition of slavery. The explanations are still focused on the abolition of slavery in King Chulalongkorn's reign at both the primary and secondary levels of education. At secondary school level, knowledge of slaves and slavery are simply the expansion of that at the primary school level – an addition of information in the same narratives as those at the primary school level. The additional information involves the types of slaves as defined in the Three Seals Laws, the status of slaves, factors contributing to the abolition of slavery, and the effects of slavery abolition.

### Conclusion

The study of narration of Thai slaves in textbooks suggests that there are some problems in the writing of the Thai textbooks. The first problem is that the four versions of national curricula, created from 1960 till 2001, have not changed the definition of slavery which reflects mainly the royalist view. The details of curricula were changed in terms of structure-subjects and objectives, but the narratives of slavery have been reproduced with the same explanations of Thai slaves.

However, the revised edition of the secondary school curriculum in 1981 was important milestone regarding the

explanations on slaves because it offered the broader definition and discussion on Thai slavery. It demonstrated a role of slaves in both social and economic context. Nevertheless, the change was temporary.

The second problem is that most of the scholars are royalists, so they might over-emphasize the praise of royal duties of each Thai king by his people. As a result, the matters of Thai slavery were treated as a small part of the king's accomplishments.

Both problems were influenced by the Ministry of Education in Thailand, founded in 1892 or in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. The Ministry of Education played a major role to boost nationalistic ideas for Thais to love the country by explaining the royal contributions of the Kings of Thailand as the heroes in textbooks. Most of the scholars were controlled and examined by the Ministry of Education, so they had repeated the same narratives about the royal contributions of Thai kings. The abolition of slavery in the reign of King Chulalongkorn had always been pointed out because the theme of the abolition of slavery was universal concept. Being slaves was dehumanized, so the abolition of slavery was the great duty for mankind.

The third problem is a fallacious reasoning in the narratives of Thai slavery. Evidently, many scholars explained the result of the abolition of Thai slavery was peaceful, and there were no wars between



masters and slaves. Slaves got freedom and liberty. In fact, those concepts were related to the concept of democracy. The textbooks were written in democracy. They also compared the slavery abolition in Siam to the Civil American War in the American history, which caused death and casualties in the US. The comparison lacks the analyses of political, economic and social contexts in Thailand during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Thai slavery was totally different from the American slavery because Thai slaves functioned as domestic servants or debtors. They never functioned as economic labors like American slaves did. So, the effect of the abolition of Thai slavery on the groups of their masters was not crucial.

These problems in textbooks caused Thais to perceive Thai slavery narrowly without analyzing economic, social and political contexts in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. They might misunderstand that Thai slavery are similar to African slaves of the Western world in spite of the fact that each country had its own slave institution. The Ministry of Education in Thailand should concern the production of history textbooks in both lower levels and upper levels. The narratives and explanations of slavery in Thai history should be changed more critically in order to avoid the generalization of the slavery. If the history textbooks have not been revised in depth in terms of contents

and evidences, students will never learn to pose any critical questions on this topic and just accept the slavery abolishment as one of the kings' great duties.

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