

วารสาร  
ประวัติศาสตร์  
ธรรมศาสตร์

**THE THAMMASAT**

**JOURNAL  
OF  
HISTORY**

ผู้หญิงกับประวัติศาสตร์การสวมหมวก,  
ความขัดแย้งทางวัฒนธรรมการสวมหมวกระหว่าง  
ผู้หญิงสยาม ในสมัยสมบูรณาญาสิทธิราชย์  
และหลังการเปลี่ยนแปลงการปกครอง  
“Women and The History of Hat-wearing: the Cultural  
Conflict in the Representations of the Siamese Women  
in the Absolutist and Post-Absolutist Years”

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิชาการนี้ศึกษาบทบาทของการสวมหมวกที่มีต่อทัศนคติในการแสดงออกผ่านร่างกาย (bodily representation) ของผู้หญิงชั้นสูงของสยาม ซึ่งแบ่งออกเป็นสองยุค ได้แก่ ยุครุ่งเรืองของระบอบสมบูรณาญาสิทธิราชย์ (2411-2475) และยุคหลังการเปลี่ยนแปลงระบอบการปกครองภายใต้รัฐธรรมนูญ (2482-2488) ในขณะที่หมวกกะโล่เป็นที่นิยมในชนชั้นแรงงานของยุควิกตอเรียนในภาษาอังกฤษ แต่สำหรับผู้ชายชั้นสูงสมัยรัชกาลที่ 5 นั้น หมวกกะโล่ถือเป็นเครื่องหมายของความศิวิไลซ์ (civilised) ซึ่งแฝงอยู่กับการกลืนอายของอิทธิพลตะวันตกที่คือคลื่นเข้ามาในสยามเวลานั้น เช่นกันสำหรับสตรีชั้นสูงของสยาม ผู้หญิงฝ่ายในตอบรับต่อกระแสการสวมหมวกเป็นอย่างดี พร้อมทั้งสังเกตเห็นว่าการสวมหมวกเป็นการยกระดับการแต่งกายเพื่อให้สอดคล้องกับสมัยนิยม อย่างไรก็ตาม ภายหลังจากการเปลี่ยนแปลงระบอบการปกครอง รัฐบาลภายใต้การนำของ จอมพลแปลก พิบูลสงครามได้นำการสวมหมวกมาส่งเสริมอีกครั้ง แต่กลับถูกต่อต้านจากกลุ่มสตรีจากหลากหลายชนชั้น รวมทั้งกลุ่มผู้ดีเก่าที่เคยนิยมการสวมหมวกมาก่อน บทความนี้จึงต้องการที่จะเปรียบเทียบทัศนคติที่มีต่อการสวมหมวกในสองยุคสมัย โดยผ่านการวิเคราะห์เอกสารทางราชการ เอกสารชั้นต้น และแหล่งข้อมูลทุติยภูมิ เพื่อที่จะตีแผ่ถึงความหมายทางการเมืองที่มีต่อการสวมหมวกตามสมัยนิยม ในช่วงเปลี่ยนแปลงทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรมของสยาม

**คำสำคัญ:** ผู้หญิงสยาม, ความศิวิไล, ความขัดแย้งทางวัฒนธรรม

## Abstract

This paper aims to explore the role of hats in the bodily representation of Siamese elite women in two specific eras: the modern-absolutist state (1868-1932) and the post-revolutionary years of the Cultural Mandates (1938-1942). The bowler hat that had become a popular form of headwear among Siamese men by the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) demonstrates a hint of the Victorian-era influences in fashion of the Siamese royal court. Although bowler hats were worn mostly by the working classes of Great Britain, they represented a symbol of the civilised among the noblemen of Bangkok in the second half of the nineteenth century. Similar to other western accoutrements introduced in the royal court, the women's hats were also embraced by Siamese women as the way to enhance their perceived modern self-image. As hats became popular among the palace women under the absolutist regime, they were once again reintroduced to the more public population during the Cultural Mandates (1938-1942) when General Phibun served as the Prime Minister. In both periods, hats offered the similar connotation of progress and they were used and represented differently by the women of the two eras. By analysing official documents, primary and secondary accounts, this paper will manifest the comparative political significance behind the issue of hat wearing as a cultural conflict among women of both crucial periods of Siam's social and cultural transformation.

**Keywords:** Siamese women, Civilized, Cultural conflict

## 1. Introduction

Two dramatic social revolutions occurred twice in the history of modern Siam. Both of them made significant impacts on the self-refashioning of Siamese urban population, especially the women. The first attempt to modernise female image took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which was initiated by King Mongkut (Rama IV) and reached its heyday during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) and King Vajiravudh (Rama VI). The second transformation of female representations followed the pattern that was laid by the Siamese modernising kings, in the twentieth century when General Phibunsongkram (Phibun) took the role of the Prime Minister. This paper aims to explore the role of hats in the elite women's representations in Siam in two eras: the modern-absolutist state from King Chulalongkorn's reign to the end of absolutist monarchy (1868-1932) and the post-revolutionary years of the Cultural Mandates (1939-1945). In order to understand this symbolic representation of hats as part of the modern Siamese women's fashion, this paper will first explore the role of hats as symbolic representations of Siam's ambiguous position in the semi-colonial period, during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1878-1910). Then, it will examine the utility of hats as part

of the nationalist program to promote national progress or *arayatham* in the post-absolutist period under the Cultural Mandates (1939-1945) and its resistance. At the end of this paper, the comparative political significance of hat-wearing in both periods of absolutist and post-absolutist Siam will be discovered.

## **2. Popular Elite Culture in Siam's Semi-colonial Period**

Semi-colonial status was defined by Professor Thongchai Winichakul as a position of Siam when its rulers cooperated with the colonial powers and benefited from the structure of colonial economy. Under this circumstance, Siam automatically obtained the semi-colonial status, although Siam was not officially colonised<sup>1</sup>. From this statement, it might ostensibly seem that Thongchai referred to the mentioned status mainly in relation to the economic position of Siam, but in fact the cultural impact of the semi-colonial period was nevertheless significantly visible. In this part, the paper takes this semi-colonial status approach to argue that the influence of the Western culture made a great impact on the popular elite culture, which included various

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<sup>1</sup> Thongchai cited in Kaewmala, *Prachatai* on July 22, 2013.

manners, sports, activities and accoutrements. A strong link between imperialism and the elites modes of consumption can be demonstrated here. Brought in and encouraged by the king, Siamese elites quickly adopted the new imported culture. The photographic evidences demonstrate the adoption of western accoutrements in the fashion of the inner court women since the mid nineteenth century. The refashioning of Siamese elites was seen as the way for them to emulate themselves to the civilised West. By the end of King Chulalongkorn's reign, the hybrid Western-Siamese fashion had already become popular. The blouse, made with imported lace and the Victorian styled sleeves, worn with the traditional bottom wear *chongkraben* became the official uniform for palace women. Hats, however, were only used when the queen, consorts, and other high-ranking palace women visited overseas i.e. the picture of King Chulalongkorn and Queen Saowapha's visit to Java in 1896. The Victorian influence that inspired the "western modes of consumptions"<sup>2</sup> of the Siamese elites in the nineteenth century. This highlights the high imperialist culture of the Victorian era, which had a direct influence on representations of Siamese women.

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<sup>2</sup> Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: the Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).



Pic. 1 Queen Saowapha stands in the middle in full Victorian costume with a hat while the King wears the slouch hat.

From National Pictures Archive Collection.

Apart from promoting the refashioning among the elites, the popularity of the western accoutrements also served to support the *sivilai* mission. The term, *sivilai*, was introduced by the Siamese court from English term ‘civilised’, in the second half of the nineteenth century, which demonstrates Siamese adaptation and imitation to Western values and lifestyles<sup>3</sup>. The attempt to create Siam in the image of *sivilai* was not only the way to emulate the West but also to respond to Western criticisms on Siamese way of life, which had a great level of impact on the elite class of the society. In response to the West, the Siamese monarchs carried out policies and reforms that gradually changed the lives of Siamese women. In fact, the first attempt to improve women’s image as a response to Western criticism had begun in the reign of King Mongkut with his famous proclamation, resulting from *Amdaeng*<sup>4</sup> Muean’s petition in the early 1860s, that prohibited parents and husbands to sell or exchange female members of the family (wives and daughters) into servitude<sup>5</sup>. This proclamation granted *Amdaeng* Muean not only the freedom from slavery, but also

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<sup>3</sup> See Thongchai, 1994: Peleggi, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> *Amdaeng* was a title used to refer to commoner women in Siam until 1917 when King Vajiravudh introduced the titles of *Nai* (Mr.), *Nang* (Mrs), and *Nangsao* (Miss), following the Western pattern.

<sup>5</sup> Suwadee T., “Thai society’s expectations of women, 1851-1935,” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation), (University of Sydney, Australia, 1989).

made her the first Siamese commoner woman who had the right to choose her spouse. Nevertheless, this exception was not made possible for royal elite women whose decisions for their marriages still depended on their fathers. In other words, King Mongkut still preferred not to interfere with the social hierarchy among the aristocrats, and hence cross-class marriages between the women of the elite class and commoner men were unlikely to occur.

*Victorian Gentlemen vs. Victorian Gentlewomen*

The concept of *God, Queen, Country* was the key to the Victorian era ideology that influenced Vajiravudh's expectations in gender roles. This concept influenced the first Western-educated Siamese king to introduce a similar slogan *Nation, Religion* [Buddhism], *King* (*Chat, Satsana, Phra Mahakrasat*) to the public, which shaped the role of Siamese gentlemen. The formation of the first generation of scouts (*suea-pa*) in 1911, which were recruited from students of the Royal Pages College (*rong-rian mahatlek luang*), was one of the avenues through which the new nationalist ideology was promoted. The Siamese male scouts were to follow the three most important principles: (i) to be loyal to the ruler of the nation [King]; (ii) to love the nation and have

faith in the religion [Buddhism]; and (iii) to maintain unity among team members<sup>6</sup>. Siamese men, for the first time, were introduced to nationalist sentiments. They were supposed to unite with other men in serving the nation as nationhood became their core value. For Siamese women of the early twentieth century, their images and expected roles were also shaped according to Vajiravudh's interpretation of the Victorian era gentlewomen. In terms of appearance, the fashion of Siamese palace women was influenced by the Victorian period's influence introduced to them by the reign of King Chulalongkorn i.e. the long hairstyle had replaced the former short hairstyle worn by both males and females from the end of Rama V's reign. Princess Walai-alongkon (born 1884, died 1938), daughter of Chulalongkorn, was one of the first elite women to adopt the Victorian era modern style of fashion in her appearance). The princess had abandoned the short man-like hairstyle and the *chongkraben* pantaloons form of clothing, which made the women look similar to men. Together with the new hairstyle and more gender-differentiated style of clothing, hats were also seen as a necessary Victorian era accoutrement for the princess.

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<sup>6</sup> National Scout Organization of Thailand (2013) "In the reign of King Rama VI" (*nai samai ratchakan thi bok*). Accessed October 7, 2013. Retrieved from [http://www.thaiscouting.com/history-of-scouting-in-thailand/http://www.scoutthailand.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=79](http://www.thaiscouting.com/history-of-scouting-in-thailand/http://www.scoutthailand.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=79).



Pic.2 High-class palace women in their hybrid  
Victorian period attire.  
From National Pictures Archive



Pic.3 Princess Praphawasit-Naruemon in the fashion of the late Edwardian Period (1912-1914) in the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI). From National Pictures Archive.

By the early twentieth century, the western accoutrements became a norm of the feminine modernity. As mentioned earlier, Princess Walai-alongkon, a daughter of King Chulalongkorn and Queen Sawangwathana, emerged as a leading fashion figure of the Siamese court of King Vajiravudh's reign. The princess was also known as *satri-thansamai thisut* (the most modern woman) for her long hairstyle and modern clothes<sup>7</sup>. The princess had abandoned the short man-like hairstyle and *chongkraben*, which made the women look similar to men. Together with the new hairstyle and more modern clothing, the princess also used hats to complete her style when she appeared in the public. During the Sixth reign, the princess was often chosen to liaise with foreign guests in official receptions by King Vajiravudh. With the growing number of Western educated Siamese, including the king who had spent over a decade in England, the Victorian-era influence had been seen more clearly in this reign of King Rama the Sixth. The localised utility of Western materials in the reign of King Chulalongkorn, which resulted in the mentioned hybrid fashion, was replaced by the complete imitation of Western appearance. This is the direct outcome of the King's promotion of modern appearance of Siamese women, which involved; first, the adoption of fitted

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<sup>7</sup> Krom Sinlapakon, *Notables Women in Thai History (Satri-Samkhan Nai Prawatitathai)* (Bangkok: Krom Sinlapakon, 2004).

skirt (replacing *chongkeraben*); second, the abandonment of the short man-like hairstyle as women were encouraged to wear long hair: third, the promotion of clean and white teeth at the same time as the abandonment of betel-chewing<sup>8</sup>. As a consequence, the split among the older women and younger women of the inner court had emerged. While the older consorts or even the former Queen Saowapha still preferred the hybrid fashion of the Siamese-Western costume, the younger generation of inner court women chose to model their fashion along the modern concept of beauty that was promoted by the king<sup>9</sup>. This symbolic significance of women's hats in the reign of King Vajiravudh referred directly to the Victorian modernity of the representations of the royal-self. Princess Walai-alongkon saw herself as the Victorian woman rather than agents of Western modernity as Queen Saowapha in the fifth reign. Unlike the queen who still wore the *chongkeraben* but adopted the lace Victorian blouse, the princess was always seen in modern costumes when she appeared in the public sphere.

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<sup>8</sup> Wannaphon B., *Powerful Women of Siam: Rama 4-Rama 6 Reigns and the Wave of Western Cultural Influence (chomnang haeng siam nai samai ratchakan thi 4 thueng ratchakan thi 6 kab krasae watthanatham tawantok)* (Bangkok: Sangsan Books, 2009), 100.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 149.



Pic.4 Princess Walai-alongkon (right end) appeared in full Victorian costume while standing next to the consort who still preserved the hybrid Siamese-Western fashion.

From National Pictures Archive Collection

The comparison between the two leading fashion figures of the inner court women in both reigns of King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh reflects the Siamese interpretation of Victorian modernity. While during the high tide of colonialism in the reign of King Chulalongkorn, inner court women embraced only part of the Western influence in their fashion: younger generations of elite women had fully adopted Western fashion in the age of the Victorian gentlemen under the reign of King Vajiravudh. Semi-colonialism had placed Siam into the ambiguous position and the elite women's fashion in the court of King Chulalongkorn demonstrates the Siamese enthusiasm to embrace western accoutrements but still keep the Siameseness in their appearance. On one hand the Siamese elites were proud of their sovereignty, but on the other hand, their only way to emulate the colonial powers was to refashion their royal-self. As a result, Queen Saowapha wore the full Victorian clothes only during her overseas visits but not when she resided in Siam. This evidence tells us that Siamese elites wanted to be seen as civilised subjects in the outsiders' eyes. However, their actual representation in their own space was a rather hybrid one. Nevertheless, by 1910s, the educated gentlemen who ruled Siam saw colonialism differently from the previous monarchs. They saw and portrayed themselves as the Victorian gentlemen and that resulted in the popularity

of hats and the full adoption of the western fashion among elite women of the inner court until the end of the absolutist monarchy in 1932.

### **3. The Role of Hats under the Cultural Mandates**

The inner city was most prominent during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. The private female quarters served as a space where aristocratic women exercised their autonomous power. Nevertheless, the inner court had entered into decline from the reign of King Vajiravudh, who introduced the removal of the female quarters to Suan Sunantha Palace, away from the Grand Palace, which subsequently became an exclusive space for the king and his male courtiers. After 1932, the roles of these noble ladies diminished, when the People's Party's government closed their quarters at Suan Sunantha. As a result, these former palace women were put under pressure to find new homes. Some of them fled Siam together with their male relatives such as, Princess Phunphitsamai Diskul and Princess Naphaphonprapha, who fled to Penang and Bandung respectively. While the inner court had faced the decline since 1920s, the revolution of 1932 that overthrew the absolutist monarchy placed the

aristocrats in the even more difficult position. With the disappearance of the inner court, women's representations only became significant again in the late 1930s under the leadership of General Phibun.

*Contesting the Concepts of *Sivilai* and *Arayatham**

A number of researchers and scholars initiated a focused study on Siam's survival in the colonial era. One of the major themes of these literatures is the Siamese road to *sivilai*, the term that was introduced to the Siamese court from the direct English borrowing of *civilisation*, by the second half of the nineteenth century. Both scholars Thongchai Winichakul and Maurizio Peleggi have described the civilising process of Siam as a 'conceptualised scheme'<sup>10</sup>. Thongchai classifies varying degrees of *sivilai* from forest, village, city, and Europe. In the nineteenth century, the quest for civilisation was considered most important for the survival of Siam's sovereignty, carried out by Thai elites. The process of *sivilai* demonstrated the Siamese elites' anxiety to adopt what they perceived to be western lifestyles. Instead of focusing on the mission of civilisation on a larger scale with varying degrees as Thongchai, Peleggi confined his work

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<sup>10</sup> See Thongchai, 2000: and Peleggi, 2002.

within the court of Siam. He illustrated the transnational cultural flows represented in the court of Siam, which can be seen in the refashioning of self-images, westernised modes of consumption, residential and representational architectures, and public spectacles. These are all part of the new image of *similai* Siam. Hence, to consume the western sense of self is to bring the nation to civilisation.

On a similar notion, *arayatham* was a more common term for ‘civilisation’ in the post-revolutionary period. *Arayatham* or “peace and happiness that lie on the basis of good morals and law which includes the prosperity of custom and tradition”, as defined by the Thai Royal Institute, was a preferred term that Phibun chose to use in the Cultural Mandates (*rattbanijom*) of 1939 rather than *similai* that had been used earlier<sup>11</sup>. The choice of terminologies reflects the political tensions of Phibun’s era, in which foreigners were considered as most dangerous enemies of state. As *similai* served as a safeguard to colonialism in the nineteenth century, Phibun’s government employed *arayatham* to defend Thailand from foreign enemies in the pre-Second World War period. Colonialism, claimed by Phibun, was a threat to non-civilised nations. Hence, in order to escape colonialism,

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<sup>11</sup> Ratchabandittayasathan, *Thai-Thai Dictionary (Photchananukrom Chabab-ratchabandittayasathan)* (Bangkok: Ratchabandittayasathan, 1999), 1367.

Thai government sought to bring up the nation to *arayatham* or to civilisation through the promotion of the Cultural Mandates. Foreigners were seen as enemies of the state who prefer other nations to remain ‘barbaric’ in order to claim possessions to those territories<sup>12</sup>. This message encouraged people of now ‘Thailand’ to adhere the principles of the Cultural Mandates. While *similai* might have been seen as a mission led by men, *arayatham* required the participation of all people of the nation, as *rath* means ‘nation’ and *niyom* means ‘popular’. Within the political context of Phibun’s era, women were once again subjects of modern representations and this time they were more active than before.

The announcement of the Publicity Division of 1938 (Kong Khotsanakan) requested participations from all Thai women to adjust their dressing style in according to the following principles:

*I All Thai women are kindly requested to wear long hair as according to the popular custom of the present day.*

*II All Thai women are kindly requested to stop wearing chongkeraben and adopt fitted-skirt as according to the popular custom of the present day.*

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 4.

*III All Thai women are kindly requested to wear a blouse instead of a shawl to cover the upper part of the body<sup>13</sup>.*

From this announcement, the western influence had once again played a significant role in reshaping the images of women similar to what King Vajiravudh attempted to promote in the early twentieth century. This post-absolutist refashioning in women had employed hats as tools to promote the mentioned concept of *arayatham* in a much more forceful way than in the absolutist years. Two following examples demonstrate the employment of hats in the nationalist propaganda of Phibun's era; the *mala nam thai* campaign (hats-lead-the-Thai-nation campaign): and Miss Siam beauty pageant.

*Mala Nam Thai* Campaign (hats-lead-the-Thai-nation campaign)

According to Kobkua Suwannathat-pian, Phibun's national culture has two sides: the interior; and the exterior. While patriotism, traditional values, Buddhist teachings, and Thai heritage were believed to (internally) create "a cultured society", the adoption of certain Western cultural norms

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<sup>13</sup> so-tho 15.2.1/13, "Women's dress code (*Kan-taengkai khong satri-thai*)," 4. *Cultural Mandates (rattbaniyom)* (Bangkok: National Archives of Thailand).

would (physically) help the nation gain the civilised status<sup>14</sup>. In order to implement the exterior side of Phibun's national culture, the *mala nam thai* campaign was introduced for all people to wear hats as an important accoutrement of the new dress code. The song *suammuak* (wear hat) produced by the Publicity Division's band and sung by Manthana Morakun, the famous female singer of the department during the Phibun's era, promotes this specific campaign. The lyrics of the song were written by the popular song writer/producer *khru* Auea Sunthonsanan. The message of the song persuades people to wear hats as they would bring the nation to *arayatham*. Moreover, the lyrics also aimed to target at women rather than men. "These hats implement our faces and bodies of us Thai women" demonstrates a persuasive message to Thai females that hats should be seen as essential accessories that would contribute to their beauty. Through the voice of the female singer, it became even more apparent that this campaign was projected toward the female society. Finally, the song also encouraged obedience to the leader as seen in the last sentence of the song which states, "in order to support what the leader had persuaded" (*sanong khao than phu-nam klao kham chuan*)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Kobkua S., *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades 1932-1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), 109.

<sup>15</sup> Baan Suntaraporn, "Suam Muak", <http://www.websuntaraporn>.

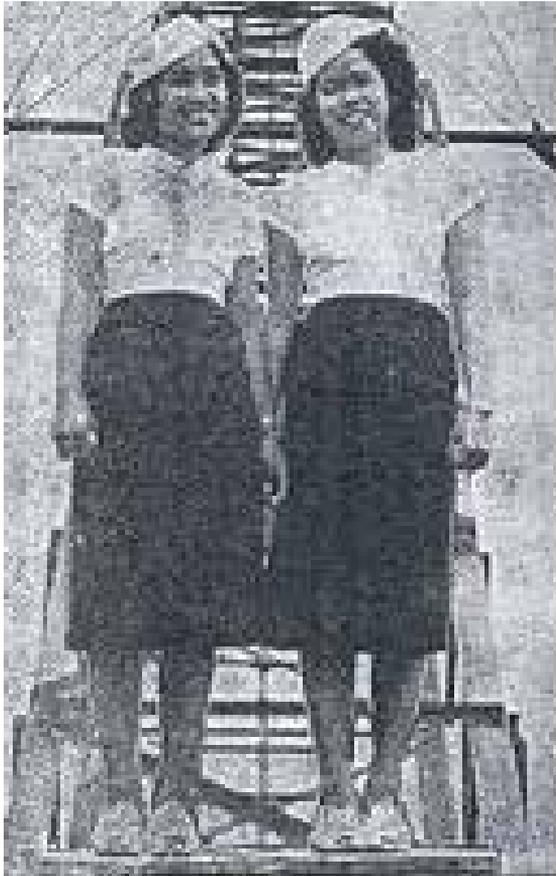
While the launching of the hat-wearing campaign aimed to modernise the appearance of the people and bring up the nation to the civilised status, the campaign was also objectionable at the same time. Fines were charged on people if they are found without hats in public areas. This brought resentment to the public toward the campaign and also Phibun's popularity. Both issues will be examined in the later part of this paper.

*Miss Siam Beauty Pageant*

In the post-revolutionary period, women became objects of the state's manipulation. The organisation of the first female beauty pageant is the evidence of the increased female significance in the national scheme. Women became promoting agents of the constitution from 1934 through the beauty pageant of *nangsao siam* (Miss Siam). Following the success of the revolution, the government had decided to organise the annual celebration of the constitution in December of every year, which comprised of different

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com/suntaraporn/lyric/postlyric.asp?GID=298 (accessed February 20, 2017).



Pic.5 Manthana Molankun (right) became the promoter of the mala nam thai campaign in 1941.  
From National Pictures Archive Collection.

performances, exhibitions, and the beauty pageant<sup>16,17</sup>. Nonetheless, this beauty pageant differed from the modern *nangsao thai* (Miss Thailand) that commodifies women as globalised subjects, the most important objective of Miss Siam was to promote the constitution and send official messages to the masses<sup>18</sup>. Young Siamese women who were contestants took the role as agents of the state. These annual events attracted people from middle to lower classes of the population hence; the message from the government could easily reach the masses. As the contestants in the years 1939 and 1940 acted as agents of the nationalist regime in the promotion of the constitution, they also served as models of new state's approved fashion following the dress code of the Cultural Mandates. These contestants of *nangsao siam* pageant wore "Western-style clothing" together with high-

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<sup>16</sup> Sujira A., "The Political Economy of the Beauty Contest: Case study of Miss Thailand Contest," (*setthasat kanmueang wa douay kan phalit nang ngam:korani seuksa kan prakuad nang sao thai*) (Thesis, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> The pageant took place annually from 1934 to 1940 but due to the crisis of the Second World War, the pageant stopped and only resumed in 1948 under Phibun's regime. However, the objective of the pageant had shifted from the constitution promotion to the promotion of nationalism. See Sujira, "The Political Economy of the Beauty Contest: Case study of Miss Thailand Contes."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

heeled shoes, hats, and gloves<sup>19</sup>. By asserting state's policy into the national beauty pageant, Phibun had demonstrated the intention to transform the mass society without the consultation with the royal court as in the absolutist era when Western influenced fashion was always originated within the inner court<sup>20</sup>. In other words, Phibun had initiated a revolutionary transformation on women's representations of the middle and lower class women, which undermined the role of the court and elite women of the Siamese society.

While hats were popular only among the aristocratic women who had access to the Victorian influenced modernity in the last decades of the absolutist regime, hats became symbols of progress of the Phibun's regime with contestants of Miss Siam pageant as state's agents. Riem Phetsayanawin was the first Miss Siam who entered the pageant with Western clothes in 1939, while all contestants from 1934 had worn Thai traditional costumes of the early *Chakri* period.

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<sup>19</sup> S. Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 325.

<sup>20</sup> Pairaya P., "Thai Women's Beauty Myth 1938-1973" (*maya khathi khwannang khong sattri thai 2481-2516*) (Thesis, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2006), 65.



Pic.6 Miss Siam Winners from 1934 to 1938 in traditional Thai costume of the early Chakri period.  
From Krobkrua Khunyai Vani, “mua pen nagsao sayam,” (2015):  
[http://khunyaivance.com/pro\\_galleries/show/003](http://khunyaivance.com/pro_galleries/show/003)  
(accessed February 20, 2017).

Riem made her way to the crown in 1939 when the Cultural Mandates was introduced with the evening red dress<sup>21</sup>. In 1940, the state had interfered even more in the Miss Siam beauty pageant. Sawangchit Kharuehanon, Miss Siam of 1940 and all the contestants that year were required to wear the western-styled dress that used local textile produced within the country<sup>22</sup>. The event was also extended to five nights with the state's agenda to encourage women to volunteer in the Red Cross. This was the time that the government employed stage of beauty pageant to encourage women's participation in the national public sphere besides the promotion of nationalist campaign.

More important than the stage beauty was the role of Miss Siam as nationalist agents in the years of the Cultural Mandates. Both Riem and Sawangchit had worked closely with the Council of Women's Culture (*sapha-watthanatham fai ying*) that was founded in 1939 with wife of Phibun, *khunying* La-aid, as the head of the committee. These two women promoted the campaign for women to wear hats by representing themselves as models of national women. Images of Riem and Sawangchit in the public domain were

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<sup>21</sup> Orasom S., *Flowers of the Nation (Dokmai khong chat: chakwethu khwam ngam su wetthi chiwit album chiwit 13 nangsao thai yuk rae)* (Bangkok: Ruamtat Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*



*Pic.7 Riem Phetsayanawin entered the pageant in the Western evening dress as encouraged by the dress code of the Cultural Mandates in 1939.*

*From Sujira A., (2007).*

seen with hats, which symbolises the nation's progress. By employing these women who rose to the national scene from non-aristocratic background, Phibun hoped they could convince all women of the country to support the campaigns. Nonetheless, the resistance toward the promotion of hat-wearing was apparently evident and will be explored in the next part.

#### **4. Resistance to the Hat-wearing: Phibun's Regime**

“Orderliness and uniformity”, according to Phibun were two of the basic elements of a cultured and civilized nation<sup>23</sup>. The dress code of the Cultural Mandates reflects Phibun's idea to achieve this goal. As hats had served as symbols of civilised status of Phibun's era, they also served as symbols of power of the rising middle-class women that was granted by the state. While the state undermined the status of aristocratic women, they had successfully included the middle-class women in the mainstream nationalist movement by giving them the role of nationalist agents. The mentioned evidence of Miss Siam's contestants' roles in the promotion hat-wearing campaign and other nationalist

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<sup>23</sup> Kobkua S., (1995), 118.

propaganda demonstrated the rise of the new influential group of women in Thai society that had replaced the roles of the aristocratic elite women. This is the reason why women of the aristocratic background, openly expressed their resentment about the hat-wearing campaign.

Phibun might have inspired new agents of nationalism but he could not completely convince the old group of elite women (*nang nai*) to do the same. Voices of the aristocratic women about the new obligation to wear hats clearly opposed the government. Queen Si Sawarinthira, wife of Chulalongkorn, demonstrated her resentment toward hat-wearing campaign: “As it is, I could hardly maintain my own identity. Now they want to interfere with my head...Well, I won’t wear it. If they want me to wear a hat, they would have to sever this head and out a hat on it themselves”<sup>24</sup>. Queen Si Sawarinthira was one of the leading inner court women who adopted the hybrid Western-Siamese styled clothing in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Nonetheless, she expressed her opinion against the hat-wearing campaign in a very resentful way. From this evidence, it can be seen that monarchical leadership was more inspiring to the aristocratic woman than Phibun.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Nevertheless, the objection towards the hat-wearing campaign was apparent in the public as a whole, for it was simply impractical for the people of the nation<sup>25</sup>. Even Manthana Molakun, the singer of the Department of Propaganda (krom kotsana), who sang the song *suammuae*, complained that wearing the hat in Bangkok was certainly impractical for her everyday life. While one hand needs to grab the hat so that it won't get blown away by the wind, the other hand must hold on to the skirt that women had to wear instead of the more practical *chongkaben*<sup>26</sup>. Even though wearing the hat seemed to be objectionable everywhere, the public offices still imposed strict control over this policy. These public places had the right to deny services for people without hats<sup>27</sup>. As a result, the resentment among people had continued to rise against the authority until the end of Phibun's regime. It was quite unsurprising for Khuang Aphaiwong to have the *mala nam-thai* campaign cancelled as soon as he took the seat of the Prime Minister after Phibun.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Pairaya P., 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## 5. Conclusion

The significance of the *mala nam thai* campaign was in its relationship to the concept of national progress (*arayatham*). The hat-wearing, during the Phinun's regime, became a responsibility of all Thai citizens regardless of their class backgrounds. Everyone was to wear hats when they went in the public without any exceptions. As a result of this campaign, indications of class also became invisible. Therefore, the resentment among the Thai aristocrats towards this campaign could have been caused by the fact that *mala nam thai* was promoted with the attempt to create a class-blinded society; while the non-aristocrats were not satisfied with the campaign mainly because of its practicality. The objective of the People's Party since 1932 was to enhance the position of commoners. General Phibun had continued with the same ideology when he called for the promotion of the Cultural Mandates of 1938. Although the *mala nam thai* campaign did not survive after the Phibun's regime had ended, Phibun had, to a certain extent, enhanced the role of middle class women in the public sphere.

In order to answer the question *to what extent hats served as symbols of political statuses of women in Thai society of both periods of absolutist and post-absolutist regimes?*, one must consider the following. First, hat-wearing in both periods promoted the similar connotations of progress. During the absolutist years, it was the first time that the adoption of western accoutrement offered any meanings to the aristocratic elites. The hats during the absolutist era since King Chulalongkorn symbolises the emulation and imitation to the West (*siwilai*). On a similar account, in the Phibun's period, the nationalist meaning was added to the hat to represent the progress of the nation (*arayatham*). Second, hat-wearing gave rise to the role of women to appear more in the public, although they were still represented within the framework that their male rulers had laid for them. As early as the reign of King Chulalongkorn, inner court women were the main population who transformed their self-representations and eventually inserted their roles in the public sphere with their new modern image as Princess Walai-alongkon served as royal liaison in many occasions. In the same manner as the *mala nam thai* period, women were once again employed to refashion themselves to the new cultural conduct, which made them agents of the state. By considering the aforementioned factors, the impact of hat wearing had significantly transformed the role of women,

which were once kept under the shadow of men, to appear in the public sphere as agents of royal cultural values and nationalism in the absolutist and post-absolutist periods respectively.

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