

The Social History of Bangkok:

--The City Sanitation in the First Half of the Twentieth Century--

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Background and objectives

This research focuses on the city sanitation problems which happened in Bangkok from the end of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. The objective of this study is to clarify the characteristics of Bangkok as a city society in a historical perspective by investigating the comprehensive views from the administration as well as policies of the central government, the autonomous government and each activity of citizen per se. In the end of the eighteenth century, Bangkok, which was royally established, was transformed to be as the Oriental Venice. After the first half of the nineteenth century, however, the problems of sanitation, such as epidemic, garbage and sewage became deteriorated because of the influx of huge immigration from the Southern China. With regard to this problem, how did the city dwellers, including new emigrants, cope with this situation? Particularly, in what way were the self-governing organizations and resident groups formulated? On top of that, when did the meaning of “Bangkok citizen” arise and how was it devised? This research attempts to scrutinize the actual state of this society based on these vital questions. Evidently, this study aspires to shed the light on “the survival basis” of people and necessarily understand the historical ground of nowadays or even future problems.

While most of researches about the history of Bangkok encompass merely on aspects of land use, city expansion, the focus of social history has been neglected. Though the topic of city environment does exist, the framework of modernization which was influenced by the Royal Family has been seemingly dominant. As a result, the actual livelihood of people and their activities have become overlooked. Based upon this existing research problem, this research aims to elucidate the social history of Bangkok by utilizing the primary source of documents in local language while concomitantly contemplating on the roles of city residents. Since Bangkok is a multi-ethnic group-based city, not solely comprising of Thai people and westerners but also Chinese, Indian and other ethnic groups, it is essential that the aspect of ethnic relations be incorporated to understand the livelihood of people. It can be said that this special trait is common among the colonized countries. On the other hand, the fact that Thai society has been originally an independent country is also equally indispensable to be taken into consideration for the study approach.

Figure 1. An ancient water stone spout in Lalitpur



Water stone spouts were paid respect and constructed in the mankind of social welfare. It was a special technique to bring water to human settlement areas.

Figure 2. A narrow alley in Lalitpur



Non-paved alleys in Kathmandu are suspected increasing the concentration of dust in the air.

Figure 3. A clean narrow alley in Bhaktapur



The German government started the Bhaktapur Development Project, such as renovation of old buildings in 1974. As a result, this project has contributed to the improvement of Bhaktapur's sanitary conditions.