

*The Procedure of Nationalism in King Rama VI's Play:
A Case Study of Hua Jai Nak Rob*

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Abstract

In the reign of Phra Mongkut Klao Chaoyuhua — King Rama VI who is known as King Vajiravudh, Thai was confronted with many profound difficulties, especially colonization from western countries. “Hua Jai Nak Rob” was written in 1913 by His Majesty King Rama VI. The purpose of this play was to suggest and arouse Thai people to protect their own country. Therefore, the Thai boy scouts, a group of people who sacrificed themselves to defend country by supporting soldiers in war, were exemplified. In addition to stimulating people, the understanding of boy scouts’ importance has been clarified as well. The role of this play is not merely for entertain, but also demonstrates the power of nationalism clearly. Although “Hua Jai Nak Rob” was written in a hundred year ago, but its idea of patriotism is never obsolete. For this reason, this play has always been chosen to perform in many events until now.

Keywords: colonization, nationalism

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Introduction

“Hua Jai Nak Rob” is one of the most important theatrical plays written by King Rama VI. Evidence show that this theatrical piece was written in 1913. This play has been recognized as one of Thailand’s greatest plays and selected to be performed in various forms such as stage play, TV show and films.

This royal play involves an elderly former government official named Phra Phiromworakorn, who despises the scouts as he views them as of no use. One day, war erupts in Thailand and he witnesses these scouts and soldiers help defend the country. His eldest son volunteers to deliver a message calling for military reinforcements but succumbs to a bullet. His youngest then volunteers to deliver the message in his brother’s place. These events gradually change his attitude towards the scouts. Due to their superior numbers, the enemy captures his house and hold him hostage, but fortunately, the enemy has to retreat as the scouts that come to help have a bigger troop. Once Thailand has secured the occupied territory and after fully realizing the significance and usefulness of the scouts, he full-heartedly volunteered and joined the boy scouts.

There are two main objectives King Rama VI wanted to convey to the readers. First is the purpose of the play which is to support the activities of the scouts. The second is to stimulate and instill patriotism in every Thai citizen. It can be noted that despite it being more than a century old, the main theme has been pertinent to every period in Thai history.

Support for Thai Boy Scouts Affairs

Through Hua Jai Nak Rob, one can see the duties and significance of those who took part in performing scout duties even before the founding of the boy scouts. The scouts are soldiers under the command of the King with the responsibility of gathering military intelligence i.e. the number of enemy troops, the direction they are coming from, the battle strategies etc. Nowadays, the definition given to the boy scouts is used to describe the military spy or scout¹ in English term.

King Rama VI established the Wild Tiger Corps and started to recruit members on May 1st, 1911 with the main objectives of:

1. Defending the territories of the country and protecting the king
2. Acting as reinforcements to the army and police especially during emergency situations

After King Rama VI successfully founded the Wild Tiger Corps, 2 principles were established. The first of which involves the duties that must be carried during times of war, namely defending the territory with no military assistance available, holding the fort when attacked, hindering the enemy’s siege, being in regular communication with the army and assisting in their missions, and gathering intelligence. The second

¹Worachart Meechubot, **Historical Anecdotes of King Rama VI**, (Bangkok: Sangsan Book, 2010), 134 – 135.

involves internal peacekeeping operations, namely assisting officers in general peacekeeping, assisting during fire emergencies, the guarding of the royal palace and philanthropic duties.

The responsibilities of the scouts mentioned previously reflects the intention of King Rama VI to train the Thai people to defend the country and to understand the essentials on what to do in certain situations. The unequivocal guidelines facilitate the scouts in performing their duties of protecting the country. Furthermore, King Rama VI introduced the National Scout Organization of Thailand and its rules and regulations in order to instill discipline, humanitarian values and patriotism to the youths of the country who are currently studying in primary and secondary schools. King Rama VI implemented the knowledge and principles of scouting he learned from England, where he had studied. Thailand is the third country after England and the United States of America to establish scouting.

Nevertheless, the inception of the scouts was met with some skepticisms as many deemed this affair as ineffectual and was squandering the coffers of the country. King Rama VI acknowledged this problem and therefore wrote the play “Hua Jai Nak Rob” to inculcate the public and the sceptics about the significance and advantages of the scouts as seen in the following dialogue revolving around the topic of the importance and duty of a scout. The following exchange is between Luang Manu and Phra Phiromworakorn, who represents the sceptics. Luang Manu is trying to explain to help the protagonist understand the significance of the Boy Scouts.

Luang Manu : My apologies but I think there should be enough reason to forbid something. May I ask, why do you hate the scouts?

Phra Phirom : I think it's wasting the children's time instead of learning in school.

Luang Manu : Training and learning to be a scout is not a waste of time. On the contrary, children who are scouts will have more knowledge than those who are not.

Phra Phirom : I beg to differ. I think it's just fun and games.

Luang Manu : In being a scout, one learns to be strong. Being a scout teaches children to be patient.²

Scout affairs in Thailand has constantly developed and flourished. Nowadays, schools in the primary and secondary level throughout the country have included Scout programs in their curriculum to broaden the students' knowledge, instill values and develop personal physical fitness and abilities.

Inspiring Thai Citizens to Foster Patriotism and Sacrifice for the Country

The reason King Rama VI wanted the people to foster love for the country might be because Thailand, during the King's childhood, faced the danger of the ongoing colonialism, especially by the French ,who desired to spread its colonial powers,

² Phra Mongkut Klao Chaoyuhua, Hua Jai Nak Rob and Ching Nang, (Bangkok : , Suksapanpanich 1972), 6.

brought in boats and ships to the estuary. Thailand opposed France's action but the French did not concede which led to a battle. This crisis ultimately led to the concession of the territory east of the Mekong River, which is part of present-day Laos. I believe that the King remembers that event and did not wish history to repeat itself. As King Rama VI studied in England at Royal Military College, Sandhurst during his youth, he was inculcated with the knowledge and importance of the military and governance. He also knew the dangers of the upcoming World War I. These reasons may have factored in his determination to instill patriotism to the Thai people, so they could defend the country from the ever increasing threat of western colonialism.

In various scenes in the play "Hua Jai Nak Rob", King Rama VI latently infused the important message of spurring patriotism in the hearts of the Thai people and inspiring self-sacrifice for the good of the country through the actions of the scouts who played an important role in helping the country overcome the difficulties of war. One such example of bravery in war time is "Sa-wing", the eldest son of Phra Phiromworakorn who sacrificed every drop of blood and ultimately, his life to defend the country. The most important though is the change in thinking and attitude of Phra Phiromworakorn towards the scouts, from a non-believer who does not see the significance and benefits of the boy scouts and of being one of them. He even forbids his son from joining the scouts. But ultimately, he changes, seeing the importance of sacrificing to defend and protect the country and the King, and joins the scouts to help the country fend its foes.

Commander : If your father answers the question, I will spare his life. Please, talk to your father.

Urai : (Speaking with a shaking voice) I can't. I am Thai.
I would rather lose a father than become a traitor.

Commander : (To Mae Yaem) Will you let your husband be killed?

Phra Phirom : When it's time, it's time. (Walks to wife and daughter)
Mae Yaem, Mae Urai. Don't be sad. I have lived a long life. Everyone born must die. This time, I don't regret it because it is giving up my life to protect my home and king. There's nothing more honorable than sacrificing one's life.

Urai : Father.

Phra Phirom : Urai, my dear daughter. Since you were a child, you have always wanted to be a boy. Now is the time to be as courageous as a man. When you have your own children, teach them to be loyal to our beloved king. Teach them to love our country and be a faithful believer and adherent of Buddhism.³

³ibid, 78 – 80.

Conclusion

Thailand has not been in wars unlike in the past, but after 102 years after its inception, the message of this play by His Majesty King Rama VI still resonates in every period of Thai history, instilling patriotism and the upholding of self-sacrifice for the good of the country among the Thai people. This play is especially pertinent in the current events in Thailand, where there are group segregation and each group openly expresses its radical political opinions that clash with each other that sometimes these people forget that they are bonded by being countrymen.

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