

Thanpicha Rojana 2007: The Ceremony of the Drinking of the Water of the Oath of Allegiance in pre-1932 Thailand. Master of Arts (History), Major Field: History, Department of History. Thesis Advisor: Associate Professor Phuangphet Suratanakavikul, M.A. 213 pages.

This thesis is a study of the Ceremony of the Drinking of the Water of the Oath of Allegiance in pre-1932 Thailand. Based on mostly primary sources, it is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction. Chapter 2 explains the origin of the ceremony and the importance of the sacred text, the so-called “Ong Karn Chaeng Nam”, which was solemnly read by a chief Brahman officiator to inflict all sorts of harm on disloyal officers, It describes how, over the centuries, the Drinking of the Water of the Oath of Allegiance developed into one of the most elaborate state ceremonies in Old Siam. Chapter 3 explains in details how this solemn ceremony was conducted. Chapter 4 discusses the continuity and change in the evolution of the sacred oath taking, focussing on the change of concept and the transformation of the rites performed in the Bangkok period. It ends with a conclusion. The result of this study shows that the oath of allegiance was used as a political device by the rulers of ancient Southeast Asian states to ensure the loyalty of their government officers. The effectiveness of oath was thought to have been based on two elements of the ceremony, “sapatha” or promised words coupled with ordeals and “sapâna” or cursed water. Its sacrosanct aspect, especially regarding the person of the king as Dharmmarâja, “Righteous King”, was reinforced by notions drawn liberally from Hindu and Buddhist sacred texts. During the early Bangkok period, Buddhism began to take precedence over Hinduism in the performing of the ceremony. Its significance remained the same: the oath was imposed on all officers and was the definite way open for them to express their loyalty to the king. Failing to comply with this was punishable by death.

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