

Lessons from opium dependence problem in the first century of Bangkok history

Vichai Poshyachinda

Institute of Health Research, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

ABSTRACT

Review of historical documents during the first century of Bangkok period demonstrates the persistence of opium dependence problem at least through the last 3 centuries. During the social turmoil period between the fall of Ayudhya, the late capital and the birth of Bangkok opium dependence remained in quiescence. However, the opium dependence problem became much apparent again in the second decade of Bangkok period and escalated to small localized civil wars in many provincial districts between the administration and the illicit opium traffickers during the end of King Rama III's reign. The prohibition policy against opium use and trade of the first 3 reigns was changed to official sanction of opium use and trade only for the Chinese in the reign of King Rama IV. The policy implementations failed to confine the use and trade to the Chinese population. Opium dependence was even more wide spread. Morphine dependence broke out in King Rama V's reign. The morphine supply trafficked through the newly prospered modern medical services. The status of the problem at the end of 1st century of Bangkok period was as complex as the current situation of opium and heroin dependence. The evaluation of the opium dependence problem, some major social consequences and their interaction with the intervention efforts were digressed with highlight on the crucial social, economical and political situations which change the historical course of the opium dependence problem in Thailand.

Key words : History, Opium dependence

Chula Med J. 1982; 181-219.