



# Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand

*Tamara Loos*

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Unlike its Southeast Asian neighbors, Thailand was never colonized by an imperial power. However, Siam (as Thailand was called until 1939) shared a great deal in common with both colonized states and imperial powers: its sovereignty was qualified by imperial nations while domestically its leaders pursued European colonial strategies of juridical control in the Muslim south. The creation of family law and courts in that region and in Siam proper most clearly manifests Siam's dualistic position.

Demonstrating the centrality of gender relations, law, and Siam's Malay Muslims to the history of modern Thailand, *Subject Siam* examines the structures and social history of jurisprudence to gain insight into Siam's unique position within Southeast Asian history. Tamara Loos elaborates on the processes of modernity through an in-depth study of hundreds of court cases involving polygyny, marriage, divorce, rape, and inheritance adjudicated between the 1850s and 1930s. Most important, this study of Siam offers a novel approach to the question of modernity precisely because Siam was not colonized yet was subject to transnational discourses and symbols of modernity. In Siam, Loos finds, the language of modernity was not associated with a foreign, colonial overlord, so it could be deployed both by elites who favored continuation of existing domestic hierarchies and by those advocating political and social change.

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