AZJA POŁUDNIOWO-WSCHODNIA I POŁUDNIOWA TAJLANDIA

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KING BHUMIBOL ADULYADEJ – A MONARCH'S JOURNEY

Thailand in 1946

Thailand in 1946 was quite different from the country it had become by 2006. Just one year after the Second World War ended, Thailand was in a state of deprivation as a result of the destruction inflicted during the conflict and the war's socio-economic impact. (...) The economic recession following the war, together with serious domestic economic and social degradation resulting from the Japanese occupation, triggered a slew of problems in Thailand. Fortunately, not being considered as a losing combatant, Thailand was entitled to restorative compensation for harm endured. Nevertheless, the socioeconomic infrastructure had been severely damaged. Railway bridges across rivers in most parts of the country had been destroyed in bombing raids. (...)

His Majesty King Bhumibol in 1946

When His Majesty King Bhumibol ascended the throne, he was 18 years old. He was born in 1927 in Boston in the United States, where his father, His Royal Highness Prince Mahidol, was studying medicine. The royal family returned to Thailand in 1928 but, Prince Mahidol passed away the following year, when then-Prince Bhumibol was only 21 months old. He was raised by Her Royal Highness Princess Srinagarindra (later to be revered as HRH the Princess Mother) under the supervision of Her Majesty Queen Savang Vadhana (Queen Sri Savarindira).

Bhumibol began attending Mater Dei School at the age of five, but the 1932 revolution prompted his family to move to Switzerland, where the children could further their education. And then, 21 months after the revolution, Prince Ananda Mahidol became King.

In the 14 years before his accession to the throne, His Majesty King Bhumibol spent only five years as a young boy in Thailand. The remaining years were spent abroad. During his years in Switzerland, in addition to formal schooling, Prince Bhumibol and his brother Ananda also received a very broad tutorial education in various subjects, including the Thai language, history and culture, and Buddhism. The manner in which the Princess Mother raised her children is well documented. She instilled in them high moral and ethical values to match a high intellect. Prince Bhumibol returned to Thailand in 1938, only briefly, for 49 days, accompanying his brother, now King Ananda Mahidol. During his second visit, in 1946, he had to cope with the awful tragedy of his brother's death and the daunting prospect of his own accession. (...)

3. Learning

It is very interesting to look at the ways in which His Majesty King Bhumibol learned about Thailand and became able to perform his duties in accordance with age-old traditions. Traditional ceremonies have deep roots and often intangible meanings, and it was intriguing to see His Majesty performing these with an aptitude that combined both serene observance and wholeheartedness. It was perhaps more surprising to see the ways in which he communicated and reacted with Thais from all walks of life and, within a relatively short time, how he initiated so many development projects that would benefit them. His response to national and regional crises was exceptional.

When, in 1946, the then-Prince Bhumibol accompanied his brother, His Majesty King Ananda Mahidol, to visit the people of Bangkok and surrounding areas, he learned how citizens felt towards their king. The large turn-outs and openly expressed joy during their visit to Sampheng, Bangkok's Chinatown and other places were overwhelming, especially considering the political turmoil in the country at the time. During that brief return, King Ananda and his younger brother visited temples and government offices, as well as residential communities around Bangkok. Not only did they foster a sense of goodwill, but they also gained first-hand knowledge of the Thai way of life and religion.

A year after His Majesty King Bhumibol returned permanently to Thailand in 1951, he started visiting villages near Klai Kangwon Palace in Hua Hin, in Prachuap

Khiri Khan province. Soon he would travel far more widely, visiting the most distant communities. In addition to local officials' reports regarding the living conditions in the hamlets he visited, he listened attentively to the residents themselves and carefully observed the local situations. Without formality, he talked to the villagers about their problems and how to solve them. He took a genuine interest in their opinions. He often carried maps, as well as a camera with which to collect photographic notes on locations and conditions.

In this way, His Majesty could acquire genuine and first-hand knowledge of the people and their plight. Over several years he visited all the villages in the country, even the remotest ones, in doing so becoming the only Thai able to claim such experience. (...) Between 1964 and 1979 the number of medical units initiated formed a sizeable list. His Majesty's programmes invariably started as small-scale projects responding to acknowledged needs, but expanded gradually as greater needs and opportunities emerged. (...)

According to Dr. Sumet Tantivejkul, Secretary-General of the Chaipattana Foundation, His Majesty was constantly looking for the best means by which to achieve his objectives.

He was always equipped with large volumes of data and information, which he meticulously studied and analysed. Even then, he sought out a wide range of expert opinion and advice before deciding on a course of action. First-hand knowledge, accumulated in the course of His Majesty's countless trips to every corner of Thailand, shaped the principles that governed the King's approach to rural development: respect for the local landscape and culture, listening to the people, and letting them be your teacher. Think far and wide, but remember that the ultimate goal is the well-being of the people. Persuade, never impose. And, while pursuing material security, do not forget to strive for an inner peace of mind through spiritual purification¹. (...)

For over five decades, His Majesty travelled to just about every nook and cranny of the country to listen to people's grievances. Time and again he heard stories of state impositions, of abuses of power, of ineffective policies based on insufficient information, of inter-agency rivalries and disrespect for local people. That probably made him more aware than anyone else of the country's need for administrative reform.

In 1956, His Majesty observed the tradition among Thai men of being ordained a Buddhist monk for a period of three months. He learned first-hand about the religion, its philosophy and practices. He strictly observed the monastic rules and traditions and became interested in Buddhist meditation. After leaving the monkhood, he continued to converse with revered and knowledgeable monks and to

¹ Sumet Tantivejkul, *Tai Buang Phra Yukol Bat*, Matichon, Bangkok, 2003.

study Buddhist teachings. These habits and the practice of meditation undoubtedly helped him in many later situations², with Buddhist principles appearing in many of his addresses and undertakings³.

At his palace, His Majesty furnished himself with extensive sources of information, which he studied assiduously. Telecommunications equipment, including a private radio network, was regularly used. Once personal computers were

² Vasiit Dejkujnorn: *His Majesty's Meditation*, Dhammajak.net, 2006, accessed September 5, 2006: <http://www.dhammajak.net/board/viewtopic.php?t=1875>: "I do not know when His Majesty started his practice of meditation. I guess that he began to learn it when he was ordained as a monk in 1956."

³ Sumet Tantivejkuul wrote in his book *Lak Dharm Tam Roy Phra Yukol Bat* that His Majesty applied the Buddhist principles of Totsapit Rajadharm in all of his works. Dr. Sumet grouped the principles of dharma and action to follow His Majesty's footsteps in ten categories:

1. Work with real empirical knowledge with real empirical results.
2. Persevere and be committed to dharma and righteousness.
3. Observe humility, simplicity and saving.
4. Concentrate on the benefit of the majority.
5. Listen to other people's ideas and respect different opinions.
6. Work wholeheartedly and diligently.
7. Uphold honesty and thankfulness.
8. Promote self-reliance in good and bright people.
9. Love people.
10. Help each other.

developed, he was among the first Thais to learn to use one, and he became proficient in programming his computer. His Majesty also surrounded himself with experts whom he consulted on the topics of their expertise. He personally selected members of the Privy Council to serve on an official basis, and regularly solicited opinions from government departments on specific subjects. Thus, His Majesty learned from many, varied sources. He was meticulous in evaluating each source critically and his first-hand knowledge was far-reaching. At the same time, he retained his own mode of thinking and cultivated a sense of innovation. (...)

Giving

In Buddhist philosophy, giving is the first element in doing a good deed. It benefits both the giver and the receiver, and, as long as the intentions are good, it is considered harmless. His Majesty's contribution to the health of the people was extensive and can serve as an illustration of his benevolence.

When His Majesty returned to Thailand temporarily in 1950, he received a report from Luang Payungvejsat, then the director of the Department of Health, that tuberculosis posed a serious threat to the populace, but there wasn't enough medicine to treat it. So, His Majesty donated his personal money for the purchase of the needed medicine.

In 1951, poliomyelitis was diagnosed in Thailand for the first time. The following year there was a serious epidemic, coinciding with His Majesty's return to Thailand. Three hundred and ninety-one cases were recorded, and 22 deaths. Many of those who survived were left disabled. His Majesty donated 250,000 baht to establish a Polio Welfare Fund to help in their treatment and rehabilitation and to purchase "iron lungs" for hospitals. That same year, His Majesty established the Or Sor Dusit Palace Radio Station, which not only broadcast music but also news about the polio epidemic and appeals for assistance for the disabled, seeking donations "big or small". This was the first occasion on which His Majesty mobilised the public in making a social contribution. (...) Public contributions to the fund were again solicited via radio broadcasts, during which listeners could request the song of their choice. One such request was for His Majesty to perform a saxophone solo! (...)

His Majesty's contribution was not limited to unexpected calamities. Leprosy was at that time still rampant in Thailand, but in 1956 fewer than 8,500 victims were receiving treatment for the disease. Many of the rest could be seen begging in the cities, eking out a living. His Majesty donated a million baht for the establishment of the Rajpracha Samasai Institute, a research and training centre, and for additional treatment and rehabilitation facilities to be set up. A fund and a foundation

under the same name were later established, and in 1959 there were 32,744 patients being treated. In addition, a school for the children of the afflicted and a vocational training site were constructed. His Majesty personally oversaw the project and, when visiting the facility, his beneficence towards lepers gave both them and the general public much encouragement and hope. (...)

In the area of health, the royally sponsored foundations included the Prince Mahidol Foundation for the recognition of contributions to medicine and health. Yet another foundation was established in 1959 to send promising graduates of Thai universities overseas to pursue the highest level of advanced study. This programme started with medicine, but soon expanded to the sciences, engineering, agriculture, dentistry, veterinary science, social science and the humanities. It amply illustrated His Majesty's recognition of the role of advanced knowledge in the country's further development⁴. Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn wrote in her book "Duj Duang Tawan": "To help people is a duty of the royal family. Also, helping those who are in trouble is in keeping with Buddhist teaching. Merit-makers achieve appiness from giving, which is itself a merit"⁵.

Experimenting

The evolution of the royal projects serves to illustrate how His Majesty approached problem-solving and development. He was at first quite cautious, because the national Constitution did not clearly define the scope and limitation of the monarch's role and activities. There was no doubt that those holding political power in the government at the time would be watching closely. Overt expressions of public loyalty to the monarchy led some elements of Thai society to be suspicious of any activity undertaken by the King. His Majesty's efforts in the early stages were, therefore, limited to direct assistance to people, especially those who were outside the reach of government programmes, and to the fields of health and welfare.

In 1952 His Majesty visited the hamlet of Huai Mongkhon in Hua Hin and found that its residents' inability to communicate with the outside world and the area's poor water supply were obstacles to their wellbeing. Using his personal funds, he supported the construction of a road and a reservoir to serve the village. This marked the beginning of His Majesty's development projects. At the beginning,

⁴ *Ananda Mahidol Scholarship Alumni: Five Decades of the Ananda Mahidol Foundation*, a commemorative book showing that 248 scholarships had been granted and 676 million baht spent. Currently the Foundation spends 90 million baht a year on scholarships in eight fields of study.

⁵ Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, *Her Royal Highness Princess: Duj Duang Tawan* ("Like the Sun"), Nanmee Books, Bangkok, 1999.

he put his own money into building a dam to try and reduce the salinity in the soil that left the land barren. (...)

Risk Taking

His Majesty devoted himself to the benefit of society and the people, and on several occasions showed tremendous courage in taking risks. His visits to remote hamlets – by car along rough roads, by helicopter to inaccessible areas or on foot through challenging terrain – brought him into contact with unusual surroundings and people. The mobile medical services that were part of his entourage drew more people, especially those in poor health. Undoubtedly, he was exposed to strange micro-organisms, and the risk to his health was heightened when he became exhausted. At one point, he fell ill with microplasma pneumonia, a rare type of pulmonary infection.

In 1963, His Majesty decided to revive an old ceremony. This was the royal state procession Krabaun Payuhayatra Sathonlamark, in which the King, dressed in full traditional regalia and sitting on a palanquin, was carried by pages in procession through the streets of Bangkok. Citizens came out to pay their respects and offer him good wishes, and some erected “worshipping tables” on the side of the street. This was at a time when Thailand was under threat from communist insurgents and the populace was quite anxious. By taking part

in this ceremony, His Majesty was exposing himself to potential attempts on his life. His personal physician, Professor ML Kaset Snidwongse, was very concerned, but it was impossible to persuade His Majesty to abandon the plan. The King also refused to wear a bullet-proof jacket, stating that any assassin was more likely to aim at his head rather than his body. His Majesty would agree only to having an ambulance follow behind. Sitting in the ambulance, the author of this book could feel the tension, but was relieved to see only the multitudes of people lining the route and wishing their beloved King well.

The ceremonial procession left the people of Bangkok in a more peaceful frame of mind. They were fully appreciative of the fact that His Majesty was courageous enough to stand firm for the country. He made citizens proud of their heritage and identity and, to some extent, public confidence returned. Danger dogs celebrities wherever they go, but when the King insisted during the 1970s and '80s on travelling to remote areas where communist insurgents were active, threats to his personal safety became a nightmare for his aides. Police General Vasiit Dejkunjorn, who was the King's chief of security from 1970 to 1981, has said His Majesty was

oblivious to the danger. He behaved as though he were someone else, practising the Buddhist notion of non-self.

During one trip His Majesty made in 1979 to Yala province in the South, several dozen people were injured when two bombs went off in the crowd only 150 metres from the King. The wounded were removed and His Majesty was advised to leave the scene for safety's sake. Instead, he went ahead with his speech, with no perceptible change in his voice. Another occasion, personally observed by the author, further revealed His Majesty's strong will and courage. The King was visiting a village in the South in 1985 that was labelled pink (or light red) on the map, meaning it was infested with communist insurgents. The entourage reached the village in the late afternoon. As usual, the mobile medical team was aiding the infirm and another group was attending to handicrafts and household products. His Majesty was sitting with a group of residents chatting about the development projects and problems in the village. After the sun went down, because the locale was dimly lit, everyone became anxious, but His Majesty carried on unperturbed. It was ten o'clock when the entourage finally left. The trust exhibited by His Majesty in his people was certainly repaid by their trust in and loyalty to him.

Teaching

Teaching was one of the many functions His Majesty chose for himself. He diligently carried it out in many forms, directly as well as indirectly, and on every possible occasion.

Collections of royal speeches are kept in the archives of the Royal Household and are available to anyone interested, for use on various occasions. Selected parts of the speeches were periodically presented on national radio and television to remind and guide people towards appropriate actions and behaviour, mainly outlining good deeds, social principles and traditional values. Many are sharp and several are quite witty.

A large number of speeches were given on the occasions when representatives of the public gathered at the palace to wish His Majesty a happy birthday. They often addressed current events and the problems the country was facing and contained messages he wished to convey to people in all walks of life. Another set of speeches was delivered at the convocation ceremonies of state universities. It was not unusual for the King to present diplomas to graduates at universities established by previous kings, but it was very unusual for hundreds of thousands of graduates from more than a hundred state universities to receive their degrees directly from

His Majesty. The same applied in later years when leading members of the royal family began acting as his representatives. (...)

Teaching could also be done on a personal basis. His Majesty was very careful in selecting the advice he wished to impart. When this author was saying goodbye in 1957 before embarking on a trip to study abroad, supported by a scholarship from the King, His Majesty recommended a broad education over a specific area of interest. Social and cultural knowledge, he said, should also be studied in order to make full use of a specific area of knowledge. Considering the state of world knowledge at the time, it is amazing that he could have given such perceptive advice at the tender age of just 28.

His Majesty also taught through the writing of books. He translated William Stevenson's "A Man Called Intrepid" into Thai in order to illustrate the power of unity and individual sacrifice. Drawing on a Buddhist classic, His Majesty wrote "The Mahajanaka", which promotes extreme levels of perseverance. This book was also published in comic-book form to reach a younger generation. Over the years, His Majesty overcame all sorts of obstacles to help the poorest and the most far-flung segments of the population improve their livelihoods.

King Bhumibol Adulyadej had a wonderful sense of humour, as seen in his frequent use of metaphors. His book "Khun Tongdaeng", a story about a family of dogs, displays love and sympathy⁶. It coined the epithet "mid-road pedigree" to characterise stray dogs from the streets, but it was left to the reader to determine what the author actually meant⁷.

Much of his teaching manifested in the form of decisions. For instance, the Ananda Mahidol Scholarship committee drew up a contract of commitments for recipients to sign, but His Majesty decided against any such formality. He reasoned that if the committee selected the right recipients, there would be no need for a contract, since moral commitment would be amply binding. His insight on such matters could be breath-taking.

His Majesty's behaviour regardless of his stature provided excellent lessons for others. His relationship with the poorest and least educated people, sitting with them on the bare ground and speaking to them in plain language, as well as his patience in talking with them for hours, served as a blueprint for state officials. His respect for people and their values was an example for all. He was strict but possessed righteousness, integrity, dignity, mindfulness and mercy. His level of tolerance was outstanding. This hard-working monarch guided the people through all types of hardship. (...)

⁶ Manoon Mukpradit, *Torch of the Land*, Tharn-aksorn publisher, Bangkok, 2001.

⁷ *The Beloved King*, an article in the book *A Visionary Monarch*, published by the Bangkok Post for His Majesty the King's 72nd birthday.

His Majesty followed up on the progress of students and regularly rewarded them for outstanding results. Many times during field trips, he gave lectures to students on particular subjects. He named these undertakings the Quest for Knowledge. The teaching was filmed for broadcast, and the images of him carefully explaining each lesson to the students became big favourites among viewers.

Earning Trust

His Majesty's earliest royal endeavours involved helping those suffering from natural disasters and epidemics, in which he encouraged the public to join him in the process. The public response was overwhelming and soon it became a tradition to make donations to worthy causes through His Majesty, both for special occasions and recurring activities. The donated money was efficiently managed and people could rest assured it would be spent according to their wishes and expectations. Thus, trust was created.

It became part of regular official business that His Majesty or other high-ranking members of the royal family would give audiences to individuals, families and representatives of private companies and public agencies so they could formally present donations of money, land, cars, equipment or supplies for specific purposes. The trustworthiness of the royal projects and the clear benefits they brought to

so many was widely recognised. As a result, donations were given with no strings attached to His Majesty to use according to his discretion, reflecting the donors' faith in him. (...)

Intervening

Thailand has seen more military coups d'état in its history than most countries. With each coup, the Kingdom's existing constitution was nullified and a temporary replacement was presented by those who had staged the coup. At times, the generals appointed a civilian as prime minister, in a bid to persuade the public that the coup was well intended, but sooner or later, the civilian heads of government were displaced by military personnel. In the meantime, a new constitution meant to be permanent would be drafted and promulgated. Thailand has had many periods when an elected parliament selected the prime minister and oversaw the functions of the government in a democratic fashion, but, for prolonged intervals, the country was more or less under totalitarian rule.

Following the coups between 1946 and 2006 there were eight "constitutions of the Kingdom" and seven "temporary charters for the administration of the Kingdom". Each stipulated a range of control, from absolute executive power, dictatorial rule supposedly under the constitution, an appointed legislative assembly, and a partly appointed and partly elected parliament, to a fully elected parliament.

The balance of power went through many adjustments. The military was either governing on its own, supporting a civilian government, or keeping away from politics, at varying distances. At the same time, the role of the monarch varied, from having no political control to having a range of veto powers. The passing of laws and decrees as well as judiciary sentences was undertaken in His Majesty's name. His ability to consider any matters at stake was limited and varied according to the constitution and discretion of the governing power of the day. (...)

Early in his reign, His Majesty King Bhumibol was careful in planning and organising his royal activities. Citizens in need who were living in the vicinity of Klai Kangwon Palace were visited and help was given. Those suffering as a result of natural disaster received royal aid even before official action was taken by the government. In these cases, his activities were only filling in gaps in the government's responses. He was very careful not to tackle problems already being addressed by official bodies. His palace radio station mainly transmitted music, and it was only during natural disasters and on special occasions that it provided news and solicited aid donations. His Majesty was well aware of his constitutional and political limitations, as well as the suspicion sometimes directed at the institution

of the monarchy. With political instability and military domination, including occasional totalitarian regimes, it was indeed difficult for His Majesty to navigate a course. Various forms of constitutional rule with different variants of democracy were practised and different governments had diverse views of the monarchy, so he had to avoid taking sides in the political rivalries. Unable to speak out openly about the host of injustices afflicting people across his kingdom, His Majesty could do little more than teach by example, such as by travelling to the remotest regions, beyond the reach of the government, where people were struggling to survive. (...)

Although Thailand's constitutional monarchy limits the monarch's power, His Majesty did choose to speak out directly or indirectly when he believed matters were going awry in one respect or another. At times, he tactfully expressed his opinion. There were official occasions when His Majesty was required to make speeches. Official openings of the national parliament, officiating at political appointments and blessings, and the presentation of degrees to university graduates were occasions when his speeches conveyed his thinking. During well-wishing gatherings on his birthday, he usually gave long accounts covering diverse topics, which included his views and advice. This innovative approach, serving as an "extension" to his constitutional rights as a monarch, contributed to ameliorating some injustices and the suffering of his people.

On one occasion when corruption was covertly rampant among the ruling military officials-turned politicians, His Majesty revived an old traditional ceremony wherein all high-ranking officials had to drink sacred water and vow to be "honest to the land". The Brahman ritual employed antique war weapons from famous battles in Thai history and Brahmin priests chanting about curses that would befall dishonest officials. (...)

There were two occasions of serious bloody conflict on the streets of Bangkok when His Majesty intervened. From 1968 until October 1973, demonstrations by students, activists and working-class people, staged in spite of the dictatorial government's ban on political gatherings, escalated from small events to one involving several hundred thousand people, whose demands had shifted from requests for greater freedom and social justice to calls for a new constitution and the replacement of the government. The police and army responded violently, launching a barrage of teargas and gunfire. Within minutes, a full-scale riot had erupted. The demonstrators were cornered and overwhelmed by the troops, so they retreated towards Chitralada Palace, where the King lived. A large-scale massacre appeared imminent.

With chaos reigning in the streets, His Majesty – ignoring the safety concerns voiced by his immediate security staff – ordered the palace gates opened to the students, who were now being gunned down by soldiers. Contrary to an order

from Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn that the military action be intensified, Army commander General Kris Sivara withdrew his troops from the streets, after the loss of 1,577 lives. His Majesty played a significant role in settling the dispute and, shortly after, appeared on television with this message: "Today is a day of great sorrow that will be recorded with the utmost grief in the history of our Thai nation. For the past six or seven days there have been various demands and negotiations that culminated in an agreement between the students and the government. But Molotov cocktails were thrown and tear-gas was used, causing clashes in which many people were injured. The violence then escalated all over the city until it became the riot that has only just ended, with over a hundred of our Thai compatriots having lost their lives".

"I beseech all sides and all people to eliminate the causes of violence by deliberately suspending any action leading in that direction, in order that our country can return to a state of normality as soon as possible". "Furthermore, in order to ameliorate the present situation, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn has resigned from the post of prime minister earlier tonight. I have since appointed Nai Sanya Thammasak prime minister."

The intervention by His Majesty was a blessing for Thailand. Thanom and his clique were allowed to leave the country and the nation had a new functioning government. In some other countries, such a confrontation would have led to mass slaughter or anarchy, but with His Majesty commanding the trust of all sides, his resolution was accepted as the best outcome. The timing of his intervention had been crucial indeed.

Another occasion when His Majesty intervened was also very frightening. After a coup in 1991, the military government, which had promised to quickly re-establish democratic rule, shifted instead towards dictatorship, even though a general election was held the following year. Middle-class people rallied in the streets, voicing their objection to an attempt by General Suchinda Kraprayoon, leader of the coup group, to take over as prime minister. The military was deployed to control the protesters, but the ensuing violence led to scores of deaths. The situation became increasingly dangerous as neither side would back down and the violence escalated. On the third night, the demonstrators massed on the grounds of a university and there was the fear of an imminent massacre that evening.

His Majesty summoned General Suchinda and the leader of the pro-democracy movement, Major General Chamlong Srimuang, to an audience that was televised live. At the height of the crisis, the sight of both men on their knees before the King as His Majesty called for reconciliation left an indelible impression on the watching nation. In less than an hour, the demonstrators had dispersed. Suchinda resigned soon after.

The elected parliament chose Anand Panyarachun, a civilian former prime minister, to serve again in the role, on an interim basis, thus ending the confrontation. Another general election was held shortly afterwards, resulting in a fresh civilian government.

Another political crisis in Thailand was part of a regional and global conflict. After the 1973 bloodshed, Thailand had a succession of democratically elected civilian governments, but the country was dangerously polarised between a right-wing nationalist faction that included the military and a left-wing alliance of lower-class socialists, workers and student activists.

This was at the height of the Cold War. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were all under communist rule. The communist insurgency in Thailand became a serious problem, with the “domino theory” seen as a genuine threat. Thailand’s confidence was eroded.

The ideological polarisation in Thailand turned violent in 1976 when military forces confronted protesting students in Bangkok. Many were killed on the campus of Thammasat University – the number disputed – and many more left to join the militant forces of the Communist Party of Thailand. Terrorism and insurrection spread to every remote corner of the country. Casualties from the war against the insurgents mounted alarmingly, prompting His Majesty to set up the Sai Chai Thai Foundation to address their welfare. He also visited far-flung villages and initiated development projects. The training of “village scouts” was a call for the unity and

self-protection of remote hamlets by local volunteers. Luckily, a policy of reconciliation by a subsequent government led to peaceful solution.

It is obvious that His Majesty clearly understood his position and role – and how to use them for the benefit of society. For the most part he stayed clear of Thailand's turbulent political stage, preserving his lofty status and his unwritten power for effective use when it became absolutely necessary. "We keep in the middle, neutral, in peaceful coexistence with everybody," he said in a rare interview with the BBC in 1979. "We could be crushed by both sides, but we are impartial. One day it will be very handy to have someone impartial." (...)

Leading

When considering the evolution of His Majesty's activities over the 60 years of his reign, the approach can be roughly separated into three periods, each one lasting 20 years.

The first period was devoted to learning about the real problems facing people in all walks of life, with particular attention paid to the many citizens living in remote villages. His Majesty began visiting such locales in 1946, initially staying close to Klai Kangwon Palace in Hua Hin, then extending his range across the Central plains and eventually reaching every corner of the country. First-hand information was collected from many sources. Issues that could be addressed with immediate action were promptly tackled, such as illness, access to education, water for both individual consumption and agriculture, and shortfalls in household income. Other problems were taken back to the palace for deeper consideration or further study at the experimental station for agriculture and product processing. In the second 20-year period, His Majesty concentrated on the underlying causes of chronic public problems. Direct assistance continued and was further consolidated. Thus, bigger, more fundamental and more overarching development issues were addressed. The need to conduct experiments on a larger scale was the catalyst for His Majesty's rural development study centres. It was recognised that the country's rapid development and the over-exploitation of natural resources were among the root causes of people's hardships. The issues addressed at each centre were unique to each region and the research was targeted accordingly, yet flexibly. For instance, when filariasis, a disease caused by roundworms infecting the blood, was found to be a problem in the South, it was included in the scope of studies at the centre there. His Majesty called these research and demonstration centres "living museums"⁸.

⁸ *Builder of the Nation*, an article in the book *A Visionary Monarch*, published by the Bangkok Post for His Majesty the King's 72nd birthday, accessed on October 5, 2006.

In the third 20 years, as well as consolidating the royal projects by establishing the Royal Development Project Board and the Chaipattana Foundation, His Majesty used his accumulated knowledge and experience to address the philosophical or value-level root causes of the problems facing society.

His Majesty's "New Theory" farming system promoted the maximising of land use to allow family farms to become self-reliant. Balanced and mutually supportive activities in the land use were the key factors. His Majesty was hopeful that farmers, with their collective bargaining power, would no longer suffer from price manipulation when selling their produce or buying the consumer products they needed. To implement this concept, however, would require time, understanding and perseverance. The New Theory was not at all easy to put into practice, as the King himself admitted on several occasions.

As early as 1974, His Majesty mentioned the principles needed for sustainable development. The essential factor fostering sustainable development – for both people and nature – is the individual's own inner balance, he said. This balance keeps a lid on greed while fostering contentment with a modest way of life. "What we should strive for is a reasonable state of wellbeing, or *po khuan, po yuu, po kin*, and peace for the general public," he said in one of his speeches. *Po khuan, po yuu, po kin* can be roughly translated as an acceptable state of wellbeing, with food security as well as sufficient and guaranteed basic needs. For many years, His Majesty maintained that self sufficiency should be the ultimate aim of community development projects. In 1997, he expounded the goal of a "sufficiency economy" and in subsequent years he further defined and explained the concept.

His address on his birthday in 1999 further expanded the concept of an advanced type of sufficiency economy. He said: "Sufficiency economy is like the foundation of life or the foundation of national security, similar to the foundation work in the ground that supports a building. The building is secured because of the piles, but most people do not see or even remember the piles." (...) For someone who does not correctly understand the philosophy of sufficiency economy as envisaged by His Majesty, it may seem like conservatism with a turning backwards from progress, modernisation and globalisation. On the contrary, progress, efficiency, and the pursuit of excellence are not denied, and the benefits of scientific and technological investment are recognised. Wisdom is, however, essential in making development firmer, more sustainable and more humane.

Over a period of 60 years, His Majesty observed the changes that came about in the name of development and modernisation. Globalisation, with the application of sophisticated technologies coupled with advanced management, created progress that resulted in convenience and benefited people's quality of life. Capitalism, materialism, consumerism and market mechanisms were part of this, and

many undesirable consequences followed. Deforestation led to flooding, drought and landslides, all man-made disasters.

Pollution of the water, air, soil and food, as well as a host of unrecognised dangers, caused disease and other forms of suffering. Competition and the maximising of profits were preached in businesses, and domestic and international trade came under pressure to adopt a laissez-faire attitude. Social disruption, conflict and violence, together with disruptive individual behaviour, caused serious problems in society. Value systems changed, often to the general detriment, and education, healthcare, social services and even the civil service and government could not keep up with the changes.

His Majesty's sufficiency-economy philosophy addressed one of the root causes of Thailand's problems. It is, indeed, an answer not only for Thailand, but for the whole world.

Evolution

Since 1946, Thailand has undergone many changes, as indeed the world has. (...)

Thailand has changed in many respects. In the last 60 years its population has more than quadrupled, to over 60 million. Its economy depends more and more on industrial production and exports. The urban population has increased. Education is universally available and the literacy rate stands above 95 per cent. Information and communication technology has brought knowledge and entertainment to the farthest villages. The middle class has expanded, but the income gap has also widened and social inequity has led to conflict and unrest. Globalisation has caught on economically and socially, and free trade and market mechanisms operate within the country and with the outside world. While competition creates efficiency, it is ferocious, and the survival of the fittest is pursued mercilessly. The threatened extinction of the loser has led to more suffering. The undesirable consequences of modernisation – depletion of natural resources, degradation of the environment and social deterioration – are prevalent in Thailand, perhaps at a more alarming rate than in the more developed world, because the ability to cope is limited. Political instability and immaturity, together with the defective application of democracy, has made for weak governance.

On the bright side, the fact that Thailand has never been colonised has helped preserve its strong national identity and pride. Its geographical location and natural resources have been of enormous assistance, and the tradition of monarchy, lasting more than 700 years, represents a unique strength.

In studying typical Thai communities, especially those that have remained largely untouched by the modern world, Dr. Chattip Natsupa and his colleagues reached an interesting conclusion. They found that, unlike the Chinese or Indians, the typical Thai community maintained a tradition of its leader functioning as the “father” of the people, with responsibility for the wellbeing of its members. When Thailand became a nation in the Sukhothai Period 700 years ago, the kings were addressed as *po khun*, meaning “father leader”. It was only during the subsequent Ayutthaya Period that the concept of a god-king or divine ruler, as found in India and China, took root here. Nevertheless, according to traditional belief, the righteous behaviour of the leader was a precondition for his possession of power. In the past, the use of force to overthrow a misbehaving king has been justified and legitimised. A king is recognised in his position by the consent or consensus of others in society.

Buddhism, the religion of the majority of Thais and of the monarch, undoubtedly exerts an important influence. In society, each member has a duty to himself or herself, but also to society at large. Kingship carries added responsibilities, as embodied in the Totsapit Rajadharma – the ten principles of kingship. His Majesty called them “the Ten Commandments of Kingship”. They include the concept of good deeds and making merit as motivation for self-discipline, humility and immense courage⁹.

The three sets of ten *baramee*, or merit, are those that were practised by the Lord Buddha in his human incarnations. The Mahajanaka is the story of one of those supreme merits.

Thais believe in merit and also recognise, as well as respect, those who possess it. For example, Katiya Mana refers to the perseverance of kingship, indicating a greater ability than ordinary citizens possess. Thus, to be a king means having the capacity to shoulder more responsibility, to maintain a stronger work ethic and being obliged to righteousness. Helping people in need is a duty of the royal family.

Many Thais mix elements of Hinduism and Confucianism in with their Buddhism. Multiple gods and supernatural elements are believed to have influence in one’s life. Rituals and ceremonies carry more than just traditional expressions. The god-king notion does have a special meaning among Thais.

As far as the evolution of governance in countries around the world is concerned, democracy has proven to be the best solution. Governance of the people, by the people and for the people is undoubtedly virtuous, but its application in this complex world remains to be further developed. Western brands of democracy are not without their problems. People’s levels of participation and social responsibilities can be interpreted in many ways. Elections have become an accepted mechanism

⁹ Danai Chanchaochai, *By the Light of Your Wisdom: King Bhumibol Adulyadej: A Wise and Righteous King*, Direct Media Group (Thailand), Bangkok, 2006, pp 21-22.

for citizens to express their preferences, but, in an imperfect society, with inequality a commonplace, an election alone is not sufficient. It can, after all, be manipulated. Even in developed countries that are considered democratically advanced, incidences of election irregularities and rationality can still be observed.

Consequently, the role of indigenous values and traditional systems should not be ignored. In particular, the role of the monarchy as an institution in a democratic system of government has been tried for some time in a number of countries and it can still be questioned. Ceremonial heads of state with no political role or a minimal role face challenges. On the other hand, the replacement of a monarchy with a republican government, as has happened in many nations, is not the perfect answer either. For Thailand, the 700-year-old tradition of monarchy and the father-like position of the king in relation to the people have created a different kind of constitutional monarchy.

It is astonishing that His Majesty King Bhumibol, having spent his early years abroad, learned so much after becoming the country's monarch within a democratic system. He blended traditional beliefs and rituals with the most advanced knowledge and technology, especially regarding the true concept of democracy. Over the years he developed a meaningful role for a monarch in a democratic system, for which there was no precedent. A ceremonial head of state with no power and a very limited role could have been the answer, but that was insufficient for Thailand. He found that the monarch could play a much larger role, one that would enhance democracy.

On several occasions, His Majesty welcomed opinions regarding his projects and ideas. The Constitution states clearly that the King is above discussion or criticism, and to challenge him is to commit *lese majeste*. In his birthday speech in 1993, he said: "A royal project is a royal opinion. If a royal opinion cannot be touched, it will mean that Thailand cannot progress". Again, in 2004, he discussed extensively the belief that "the King can do no wrong". In his opinion, it was not a sound notion. If the King is expected to do anything, he can certainly be wrong, he said.

In a country where the king is only a ceremonial head of state and cannot adopt other roles, the arrangement can be fully observed. However, if the king has more roles, a more flexible arrangement may be needed. Again, however, it remains difficult to put this into real practice and to reconcile the two notions. A Thai expression states that the King is "Phra Chao Phaen Din" – Lord of the Land. All land belongs to the King and he must make it fertile so people can live on its fruits.

Being above politics over a long period of time, King Bhumibol Adulyadej was a stabilising element in society. In times of crisis, the country needed someone whom the majority of people could trust, and his benevolent intentions aimed at benefiting the country and people with no sign of self-interest was the basis for

their trust. Violent turmoil in Thailand stopped when His Majesty stepped in – in the Thai sense, “descended” – to help. His actions had to be very selective and appropriate to the times and circumstances. The obligations that come with kingship as ingrained in centuries of practice, in a culture that reveres freedom, provide the unique circumstance for innovative interpretation.

His Majesty King Bhumibol in 2006

His Majesty King Bhumibol accumulated evidence regarding the possible and benevolent role of a monarch in a democratic system of governance. A monarch under the Thai constitution has a position broader than just a ceremonial function. King Bhumibol acquired experience in handling sensitive, difficult and varied situations and his whole heartedness and selflessness is beyond doubt.

There is no justification for questioning whether he sought absolute power or a return to absolute monarchy. His behaviour and actions proved that he always placed the needs of the country and society before his own. The wellbeing of the people and the prosperity of the nation were his only interests. This frame of mind gave His Majesty the wisdom to understand and play his role within a democratic system in its truest sense. Unity and peace were his pleas to the opposing factions in any conflicts. In 2006, the United Nations Development Programme honoured His Majesty with its inaugural Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award, referring to him as “the world’s Development King”.

Experience with many national constitutions over the years in all their variations – like symphonic variations from the main melody – has given us a comparative sense of the diverse aspects of the democratic process, and at the same time made clearer the core meaning of democracy. In the process of trial and error, we have witnessed a vicious cycle of coups, military dictatorships and elected governments; constitutions have been nullified and rewritten. The terms “half-democracy” and “quarter-democracy” have been used on occasion for situations in Thailand, underscoring the partial nature of solution responding to conditions at those times. The wellbeing of all people, social justice and peace and happiness are the aims of society, and self-determination and freedom of expression are the means to achieving them.

The protection of human rights for all is the guiding principle. Equality under the law is for the good of the majority of the people. The interests of individuals or groups must be properly balanced, and good governance with accountability and transparency has to come with a system of checks and balances. Irregularity and misconduct must be sanctioned, and there must be a way of ousting members of

government who are corrupt or otherwise misbehave. Elections must not be just carried out formulaically but must be a means for the genuine expression of people's choices and desires. Intimidation, vote-buying and irregularities in elections undermine the value of the democratic process. Morality, humanity and ethics must be the central values of democracy. Complexity and limitations in society create gaps between the ideal and the actual, and Thailand must ultimately find a democratic system that is workable for the country.

It is an undeniable fact that His Majesty King Bhumibol was highly respected and revered by the people of Thailand. This was not an accident, nor was it the result of inheritance.

His Majesty gained his reputation through hard work over many years. Trust in him was earned by his selflessness, generosity, mercy, honesty and wisdom, and he used this trust for the benefit of the people and nation. With his profound wisdom and kind-heartedness, King Bhumibol devised a successful model for the monarchy to endure within a democratic system.

Never-ending Dedication

In spite of advancing age and health problems, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej never stopped working for the people.

In September 2009, the Royal Household Bureau issued an announcement that His Majesty had been admitted to Siriraj Hospital with flu and pneumonia. After that, he spent most of his time in the hospital. To better relax and get some fresh air, he occasionally ventured outside his room on short trips around the compound of this riverside hospital. To begin with, he came down from his room on the 16th floor of the Chalerm Phrakiat Building to pay respects before a statue of his father, Prince Mahidol. Once again demonstrating his great sensitivity and thoughtfulness for the people, His Majesty – rather than quickly returning upstairs – told the doctor pushing his wheelchair to take a longer circuit so that the people who had gathered to wish him well would have a chance to see him.

In May 2012, King Bhumibol, accompanied by Her Majesty the Queen and Princess Sirindhorn, made his first trip upcountry in three years, to inspect the royally initiated project at Thung Makham Yong in Ayutthaya. During this period, His Majesty granted audiences to foreign guests at Siriraj Hospital. The US president at the time, Barack Obama, and secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, met with him on November 18, 2012.

On January 11, 2016, His Majesty was taken to Chitralada Palace so he could inspect the royal projects within the compound. Crowds gathered all along the route,

eager to greet him – but not knowing that this would be his final public appearance. On October 9, 2016, the Royal Household Bureau issued Announcement Number 37, stating that the medical team at the hospital had asked His Majesty to set aside his work for the good of his health. This was only four days before the King's death.

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej passed away at age 89 on October 13, 2016. Nevertheless, his legacy can only live on. The life of this beloved and revered monarch has set an example and inspiration of never-ending dedication for Thais and for people around the world.

(Fragmenty większej całości do druku wybrała Małgorzata Ławacz)

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