In Remembrance of His Majesty
King Bhumibol Adulyadej
(1927-2016),

Leadership of Benevolence, The King with His subjects at heart…

His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) is the ninth king in Thailand’s Chakri Dynasty. He was born on December 5th, 1927 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States of America to the family of Prince Mahidol of Songkla and the Princess Sri Nagarindra, the Princess Mother (Soravij, 2002). In his childhood, he came back to Thailand for a short visit and then attended school in Switzerland. He ascended the throne as the king of Thailand after the death of his brother, King Ananda Mahidol, on 9th June 1946 (Suvit Wimuttanon, 2001). His formal coronation was held on 5th May 1950. He had completed 70 years 4 months in monarchy and peacefully passed away on October 13th, 2016 which was the greatest loss for all Thais.

The King and His transformational leadership

King Bhumibol has ruled and guided the country through times of peace and turbulence including the prosperous years of socio-economic growth, economic crisis, political change, and natural disasters.

According to the royal projects report, the King Rama IX was awarded the first Human Development Lifetime Achievement from the United Nations in 2006 in recognition of his numerous royal projects (i.e., over 4,000 projects) and determined commitment to improve the lives of his people. He conducted research and educated the people concerned in order to gain
everyone’s understanding and conviction that the project will better their livelihood. With His close support through effective communication, motivation, and information sharing, people are willing to be a part of the initiated projects for their quality of life and community development. His innovative projects were mostly invented to solve the problems and better the life of Thai people. They were based on continuous and rigorous research, experiments, and implementation. His innovative abilities based on his personal interests and inquiries in sciences and technology since childhood are demonstrated through some of his numerous royal projects such as:

**Some of the Innovative Royal Projects for Quality of Life Enhancement**

- Artificial Rain Project
- Moisture Retention Dam Project
- Royal Hill Tribe Projects
- New Theory on Managing Agricultural Land
- The Use of Vetiver Grass to Prevent Soil Erosion
- The Monkey Cheeks
- The Rama VIII Bridge
- Tricking the soil (technique) for planting
- Renewable Energy

During the period of Asian Financial Crisis (Tom Yum Kung Crisis) in 1997, Thailand was claimed as the starting point of the recession. Many economic experts had lost their trust in the Thai economy since they believed that the wide-spread corruption was one of the causes which determined Thai financial crisis. The King Rama IX initiated a philosophy called “ Sufficiency Economy” which aims to strengthen the people abilities to confront with global challenges to achieve sustainable development. This philosophy together with his new theory on agricultural land management could simply build household food-production plan. Then, the surplus from the family consumption could be sold to market without the involvement of middleman.
“...The development of the country must be fostered in stages. It must start with the construction of infrastructure, that is, the provision of food and basic necessities for the people by methods, which are economic, cautious and conforming with principles. Once the foundation is firmly established, progress can be continually, carefully and economically promoted. This approach will prevent incurring mistakes and failures, and lead to the certain and complete achievement of the objectives...”

H.M. The King’s Address delivered on Kasetsart University Commencement Ceremony on 19 July 1974
Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has a connotation of balanced development strategies for the nation. It helps the country’s economy to be resilient and become more sustained. It emphasized the ‘middle’ path which is the overriding principle for Thai people to adapt to their way of life at the individual, family, and community levels.

King Bhumibol has spent more than seventy years improving the quality of his people’s life. One of his major long-term transformation projects is turning the opium field to the prosperous farming areas which provide employment and stable income to people. In early 1960s, the Northern region was isolated from the central region of Thailand and faced with poverty problems. Cultivating opium and process it to heroin was the only way to generate income in that region. However, heroin is strictly illegal and the hill tribe people’s burning-slaughtering farming was not healthy for the natural resources. The Thai military was then in charge to end the problem and concerned issues.

In 1969, the King visited the hill tribe villages. He recognized the problems in the area. Instead of punishing the farmers for producing the opium, the King initiated the idea that the government should help them grow other economic crops. The Royal Projects (called Royal Chitralada Projects) were thus started up in Doi Pui with the aim to teach the local hill tribe people to do environmental-friendly and efficient farming. These projects silently turned the opium field to alternative fruits, plants, and vegetables (Saiyasombut, 2016). Today the area became popular tourist destination. The project has expanded to other mountain areas. "His Majesty said there was no need to stop immediately and that he would bring Longan, Lychee and coffee for us to grow instead." Said Song Yi, a villager in Doi Pui who first met King Bhumibol in 1969. King Rama IX had made a visible change that the entire villagers finally agreed to follow. What he did was to
actually visit the places to grasp the real problem, involve the local opinions, and motivate them to change.

Throughout the past seven decades, His Majesty the King Bhumibol served as the spiritual center and a stabilizing force in Thailand. He has improved the life of his people with his commitment to sustainable development of the nation and helped drive Thailand through times of environmental changes: economic, political, and globalization (Ki-moon, 2016). King Rama IX is obviously a great role model of benevolent leader. He demonstrated his transformational leadership styles with distinctive traits such as being charismatic, extravert, open to experiences, having positive emotional stability, high emotional intelligence, high conscientiousness, integrity, hard-working and most of all, self-sacrificing. He will always be remembered as a great leader of all Thais and those He has touched their heart around the world.

References


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