

H. R. H. PRINCESS MAHA CHAKRI SIRINDHORN

Ambara Villa in Bangkok, where PRINCESS MAHA CHAKRI SIRINDHORN was born on 2 April 1955, was built by her great-grandfather, King Chulalongkorn, at a time when royal power in Thailand was still absolute. Chulalongkorn's reign (1868-1910) marked the high point of the Chakri Dynasty, the royal line that has reigned since 1782 in Thailand (called Siam before 1939). Chulalongkorn's father, Mongkut, had deftly dealt with the European powers sweeping across Asia in the mid-nineteenth century and managed to keep his kingdom intact. Chulalongkorn then launched a program of "self-strengthening," during which he restructured much of the government along Western lines and thus laid the basis for modern Thailand. His reforms helped guarantee the survival of the country, even as nearby Burma succumbed to conquest by Britain, while Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam succumbed to the French. Indeed, no other state in Southeast Asia survived the onslaught. The bequest of SIRINDHORN's royal ancestors to Thailand is, therefore, unique.

The emergence of a small Western-educated professional class in Thailand was an intended consequence of Chulalongkorn's modernization; it was from this class that a movement to end absolute monarchy emerged. In 1932 King Prajadhipok, half brother of SIRINDHORN's grandfather, bowed peacefully to a coup that brought constitutionalism to Thailand. Henceforth, Chakri monarchs would yield to politicians and military men in the day-to-day matters of government. The precise role that kings would play as constitutional monarchs was not carefully scripted, however. Relations were strained and for several years the royal family itself, and many royal relatives, resided outside Thailand, preferring life (and education) in England, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States to life at home. In 1935 the throne passed to Ananda Mahidol, who was a ten-year-old school-boy in Switzerland at the time. He remained there throughout World War II and returned to Thailand only in late 1945. His death by a gunshot wound to the head in 1946—a probable murder that still remains shrouded in mystery—brought the dynasty to its lowest ebb and his younger brother to the throne. Thus, Bhumibol Adulyadej, SIRINDHORN's father, became king of Thailand.

Bhumibol might easily have passed his life in idle travel and other pleasures, lending his residual aura to the occasional state function. Instead, he has labored to restore the monarchy as a central institution of Thai national life. He has done so, not by attempting to regain political power from the country's domineering military men and politicians, but by promoting the monarchy as a symbol of Thai unity and by associating himself and his family with the ideal image of kingship that is deeply rooted in Thai Buddhism. Without any secular power to speak of, Bhumibol has reinvented the Thai monarchy as a moral force. This has meant reinterpreting the work of kingship as doing good. Bhumibol's workaday life is, therefore, one of fervent attention to improving the lives of his subjects.

SIRINDHORN is the third of four children born to King Bhumibol and his royal consort, Queen Sirikit, whom he married in 1950. A brother, Prince Vajiralongkorn (the crown prince), and a sister, Princess Ubol Ratana, preceded her; another sister, Princess Chulabhorn, was born later. Unlike her father, who was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and who spent much of his youth in Switzerland, SIRINDHORN has lived her entire life in Thailand. When she was about two years old, her family left the villa of her birth and moved to Chitralada Villa, a newer residence within the Dusit Palace complex. She still lives there.

The palace complex is approximately one kilometer square. On the grounds, King Bhumibol built a school attached to the palace for the education of his offspring and other children. At Chitralada School, SIRINDHORN and her classmates followed the same curriculum as children in other Thai schools, except here the king supervised the teachers personally. One reason for having a "royal school," explained Bhumibol, was to enforce greater discipline on the young princes and princesses who would inevitably have been spoiled in public schools. Indeed, the palace school teachers were permitted to punish the pupils and SIRINDHORN reports that she was not spared: "I was quite naughty at times," she acknowledges. The teaching staff was international and included a Japanese man who taught drawing and painting, a French woman who taught physical education, and several Britons who taught English and French. However, most of the teachers were Thai, including a favorite named Khru Kamchai who introduced the princess to Thai stories, songs, and the pleasures of writing poetry, and who also taught her a smattering of Pali, a language she would study seriously later on.

"I always hated English," the princess says, but this was a subject her parents stressed. Her mother especially encouraged her to study English diligently and gave her additional words to practice. These SIRINDHORN inscribed in a notebook that she has kept and still adds

to from time to time. Her father encouraged scientific subjects, mathematics, good penmanship, and neatness.

SIRINDHORN's mother often read history books to her at night, reading in English first and then translating into Thai. Her father helped with problem solving. It was he, for example, who taught her how to estimate the number of grains in a sack of rice by counting the number of grains in a single liter and then multiplying the result by the number of liters in a sack. Although SIRINDHORN and her brother and sisters saw their parents each day, the family rarely dined together. The children ate the evening meal long before the parents dined and then were sent early to bed. On weekends, however, there were family meals and on rare occasions the king himself would cook "sun eggs," his specialty.

It was a cloistered palace life, but SIRINDHORN points out that children inside the palace played the same games as children outside. Moreover, with their teachers they went on excursions to interesting places in the city, such as the planetarium, museums, and temples. And by the time she was a teenager, SIRINDHORN was already accompanying her father as he visited his subjects and made the rounds of his many projects around the country.

By her own admission, SIRINDHORN was a spirited and independent child; she was so rambunctious that attendants, she explains, sometimes had to "run and grab me." Contrariness, she reveals, became part of her nature. Growing up, she invariably chose to do what she was advised against doing. For example, her mother pressed her to learn the piano—a proper and "prestigious" thing to do—but SIRINDHORN preferred the bass guitar and actually studied it for a while. She even ascribes her well-known love for traditional Thai music to an act of independence: "I learned Thai music because nobody forced me." As a young girl, she loved action and games of all kinds; she recruited royal guards for football and volleyball matches on the palace grounds. She devoted so much time to games as a teenager that her parents despaired of her becoming a serious student.

During her seven years of primary school and three years of lower secondary school, SIRINDHORN followed the same curriculum as all other students. However, in upper secondary school, when students were required to concentrate on either math and science or the arts, her parents insisted that she take the arts stream. SIRINDHORN longed to study science, a subject in which her older sister excelled. And despite the time devoted to sports, she herself earned high grades in math and her school's highest mark in the sciences. At the time, SIRINDHORN found the arts courses (languages, literature, history, etc.)

less interesting than science classes. Besides, she recounted, “only the less clever people took the arts. The clever ones studied in the science program.” Although she has long since come to terms with her parents’ decision, she still regrets it sometimes. She admits, however, that it did have its compensations. For one, the arts program was easier and left more time for football. Eventually, SIRINDHORN came to enjoy the humanities, especially Thai art and literature. Later, her scores in the arts section of the national school-leaving examination were the highest in the country.

Since the times of Chulalongkorn, royal children had been sent abroad for advanced education. Both SIRINDHORN’s elder brother and sister had embarked upon university studies abroad: Prince Vajiralongkorn at the Royal Military College Duntroon in Australia and Princess Ubol Ratana in the United States, where she studied biochemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In SIRINDHORN’s case, however, her parents insisted that she remain in Thailand. Enrolling in 1970, SIRINDHORN chose Chulalongkorn University for its strong faculty in Thai language and literature. It was, in a way, quite fortunate that she remained at home. College life exposed her, as never before, to life beyond the palace and to the passionate political debates of the times. Idealism was running high at Chulalongkorn in those days. Her friends eschewed ostentatious parties as well as fancy cars and clothes, in favor of public service. “It was the highest aim for students to go out and help poor people,” the princess recalls. This attitude comported with the example set by her father, and she admired it.

SIRINDHORN’s college classmates were also highly politicized. Indeed, 1973 was a year of political crisis in Thailand in which student demonstrators, many of them from Chulalongkorn, helped topple the military government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and embark the country on a brief and turbulent period of democracy, which ended with a military coup in 1976. With fellow students, SIRINDHORN wished for democratic reforms, but she was also distressed by the ideological polarization between the Left and the Right. What she found best about “her time” were the spirit of intellectual curiosity, the questioning of the status quo, and the passion for service.

Even during her college days, SIRINDHORN kept one foot firmly in the palace. She was so busy assisting her father in his various projects around the country that she routinely missed classes. Private tutors accompanied her when she was away from school to help keep her abreast of the lessons. Nevertheless, she excelled at school, won academic distinction during all four years, and graduated in 1976 with top honors.

Although most of her college classes were in the humanities and social sciences (she majored in history and won a prize for her French), SIRINDHORN used her university years to renew her interest in the sciences. Geography, in particular, fascinated her. Since her frequent out-of-town travels made it impossible to keep up with a favorite cartography class, her father arranged for her to study privately with a renowned Thai scholar, General Salvithan Nides, who had introduced the aerial photograph to Thailand in the early twentieth century. Salvithan Nides became SIRINDHORN's mentor in geography, surveying, and map reading—subjects she still pursues at advanced levels.

SIRINDHORN's eclectic interests perplexed her family. Immediately after college, she embarked on two simultaneous master's degree programs, one at Silpakorn University in Oriental epigraphy (the science of deciphering and interpreting ancient inscriptions) and the other at Chulalongkorn in Oriental languages (Pali-Sanskrit). These courses, completed in 1979 and 1981 respectively, led her deeper into the history and traditions of Thailand and also appealed to her scientific side, especially epigraphy and its complex puzzles.

For her master's thesis at Chulalongkorn, SIRINDHORN wrote an etymological analysis of the word *parami*, which in modern Thai connotes the highest principles of Buddhist behavior, i.e., renouncement, tolerance, perseverance, love, kindness, intellect, and thoughtfulness. The degree to which these qualities are manifest in any given person is a measure of that person's sanctity or, in Buddhist terms, his or her closeness to Buddhahood, when the self merges with the blissful state of nonself achieved by Buddha. Although as a code of desired behavior *parami* should be sought by all Theravada Buddhists, it has a special meaning for kings. Ideally, kings, being at the pinnacle of earthly position, should embody the highest virtues of Buddhism, or *parami*. In the final chapter of her study, SIRINDHORN compared the principles of *parami* to Thailand's traditional ten rules of kingship, which serve as a yardstick of kingly legitimacy and which, if violated, entitle the people to displace him. By showing that these political rules were similar to the religious principles of *parami*, SIRINDHORN illustrated the connection in Thai thinking between secular and moral authority. In doing so, although perhaps unconsciously, she invoked the standards of her own father and the source of his authority in modern Thailand.

The question of study abroad arose again in the early 1980s. The princess longed for the opportunity to perfect her foreign languages and for independence. She weighed the advantages and attractions of Germany, the United States, and England. Once again, however, her parents prevailed on her to remain in Thailand. The times were critical,

they said, she was needed at home. She capitulated.

The king's endeavor to place the monarchy at the service of Thai citizens has manifested itself in a stunning array of development projects, particularly in the study of new food crops and innovative methods of farming and animal husbandry. The results are disseminated through government channels on as broad a base as possible. Often referred to as the "hardest-working monarch in the world," Bhumibol spends the vast majority of his time studying, supervising, assisting, and inspecting his many projects, work that involves constant travel and exposure to the people of Thailand. Many members of the royal family contribute to his undertakings, including the queen, the princess mother, SIRINDHORN's elder brother, and her younger sister. (SIRINDHORN's elder sister, the former Princess Ubol Ratana, married an American and has lived outside Thailand for many years.) But it is SIRINDHORN who has thrown herself most energetically into helping her father. "I started to accompany him when I was very young," she says. Although she admits that at the time she was "not much help," in time she became an indispensable assistant to him.

Today, constantly at her father's elbow, SIRINDHORN jots down his observations and thoughts. She has learned to place people at ease and to obtain from them information that would be useful in achieving practical solutions to local problems. She also acts as a surrogate for her father, who often meets as many as ten thousand people when he tours in rural areas. "It is impossible [for him] to talk to everybody," she notes, so she often accepts letters and petitions on his behalf and directs them to her father or to the appropriate government agency.

The king coordinates many of his projects through the Chai Patana Foundation. Before he authorizes any action, data is collected, surveys are undertaken, and the social and economic implications are assessed. During her college years, SIRINDHORN increasingly took on the role of facilitating this complex process. She helped assemble the necessary data and, in consultation with her father and his technical advisers, often assisted in working out an analysis and a plan of action. Afterwards she would join the king in inspecting the results. In all of this, she says, she was "acting unofficially," even though she is often popularly depicted as her father's secretary.

It was work of this kind that drew SIRINDHORN to a double life of learning and doing. It suited her, for it allowed her to integrate her restless curiosity with the spirit of service that she had imbibed from her father and from her bright college years. It also assuaged somewhat the disappointment of not studying abroad. But continue to study she did. In 1986 she completed her doctorate in the field of development

education at Srinakharinwirot University, once again shuttling by motor car, plane, and helicopter from the classroom to field trips in distant provinces and back again. A chronic victim of motion sickness, SIRINDHORN had long since learned to be stoical about traveling.

As important as assisting her father was, the princess established special interests and projects of her own. Her mother, Queen Sirikit, had made it her special charity to aid the families of Thai police and soldiers who were wounded or killed in the line of duty. Taking the cue from her in 1975, SIRINDHORN decided to commemorate her twentieth birthday by establishing the Sai Jai Thai Foundation. Endowing it with her own funds and with a gift from her parents, she dedicated it to humanitarian work, concentrating on financial assistance and vocational training for disabled Thais. Although the initial fund was only 102,000 baht, when contributions from others were added, the foundation flourished. By 1991 it had distributed some 500 million baht to needy recipients. In a related endeavor, SIRINDHORN accepted the vice-presidency of the Thai Red Cross in December 1977, a post she continues to occupy. (Her mother is president.)

In 1977 SIRINDHORN also embarked upon her work with Thailand's border patrol schools. Her grandmother, the princess mother, had established these schools in 1955 to serve the needs of children on the remote and often turbulent borders. Here life was too dangerous to assign ordinary teachers, so the princess mother had arranged for members of the frontier garrisons to be trained to instruct the children. By the late 1970s this program had grown to include well over a hundred schools. SIRINDHORN's special interest was in nutrition. She had noticed in her tours of the countryside that rural children often seemed physically underdeveloped and malnourished. Calling on the help of her elder sister's friend who taught agriculture at Kasetsart University, as well as on experts at her father's experimental farm, she established a fund and launched a school lunch program. In three pilot border schools, teachers were trained to help their pupils plant schoolyard vegetable gardens (SIRINDHORN's project provided tools and seeds) and to prepare healthful, tasty meals each lunchtime. Soon, the parents were assisting in the cooking.

Since SIRINDHORN was eager that the lunch program not result in children's becoming dependent on "free food," she visited the pilot sites personally and made sure the students learned to grow food themselves. She sometimes even took a hand with the cooking. When the program proved successful, she expanded it to embrace other border patrol schools. By 1991, 170 schools were involved, serving 17,500 school children. SIRINDHORN concedes that although it may seem crazy to "teach farmers to farm," through her Agriculture and

Lunch Project she can introduce new crops and gardening techniques to remote villages as well as provide instructions about the proper use of pesticides and fertilizers.

Also rooted in the early 1980s are two other endeavors that bear SIRINDHORN's distinctive signature. In 1980, she was invited to give a lecture in Thai history at the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, a happy venture that led to her appointment as a permanent lecturer at the school the following year. The princess takes a special interest in the lives and works of Thai kings and finds among them worthy examples for modern Thais: some kings were poets, others were men of religion, and still others were brilliant administrators. Her specialty is the reign of her great-grandfather, Chulalongkorn, whose reforms brought an end to many aspects of Thai feudalism, including debt slavery, and who ushered in many modern institutions. "Great kings," she says, "should be our pride."

SIRINDHORN also takes pride in other royal ancestors who did not achieve the throne. One of these was her grandfather, Prince Mahidol of Songkla. Trained in Germany as a naval officer, he later turned his attention to the field of public health. In the United States, where he met his wife, SIRINDHORN's grandmother, Mahidol studied medicine at Harvard University, completing his M.D. degree in 1927, the year his son Bhumibol was born. It was Mahidol who successfully petitioned the Rockefeller Foundation to assist Thailand in establishing its first modern schools of medicine and nursing at Siriraj Hospital. Today Mahidol is remembered as the "Father of Modern Medicine in Thailand."

In 1981, the year she completed her second master's degree and her treatise on parami, SIRINDHORN supervised the renovation of Bangkok's Grand Palace and reestablished Phra Tamnak Suankulab School for the children of low-income civil servants. (The school now has 765 students.) Renovating the Grand Palace was but the first of her several initiatives to bring back the glories of earlier Thai architecture and artistry. Another project was the restoration of an ancient pagoda in Nakhon Sri Thammarat. In this, she recruited master artisans to execute the reconstruction and, in doing so, to pass on their increasingly rare skills to a new generation of craftsmen.

SIRINDHORN admits to a "love-hate" relationship with music. Because both her parents were clever musicians (her father is a noted jazzman who also composes), she felt pressure to excel in that field and consequently rebelled. Nevertheless, the princess found that she savored the "feeling" of Thai music, and she eventually mastered several instruments, including the *ranaad-ek* (xylophone), *saw duang* (fiddle), and *klui* (flute). She became an avid participant in the Thai music

ensemble at Chulalongkorn during her student days and was soon playing in public—an act that raised eyebrows in some circles because public performance had been thought inappropriate for royalty, especially royal women. (The ranaad-ek, in particular, was played mostly by males.) However, there were precedents: King Vajiravudh (1910-25) scandalized some Thais of his day by appearing in European-style plays, and Bhumibol himself was occasionally seen jamming on his saxophone. Musical performances—today usually limited to festive diplomatic events or charity affairs—thus became another characteristic aspect of SIRINDHORN's public life.

During her school days at Chitralada, SIRINDHORN had been tutored in classical Thai music and songs by Khru Paitoon, an elderly woman whom she remembers lovingly and whose songs made a lasting impression. Yet the princess observed that, like so many other aspects of traditional Thai life, these songs were rapidly disappearing. Transnational popular music and other elements of mass entertainment were replacing them. She, therefore, began actively to search for traditional Thai songs so that they could be recorded in standard musical notation and preserved. At her behest, a team of transcribers and archivists is busy at this task. Thai folk songs depicting war, poverty, floods, and other events in the lives of the common people also appeal to her greatly.

In this connection, SIRINDHORN has been invaluable in establishing two libraries of music in Thailand. One of these, located at Mahidol University, will serve graduate students of music. The other, a public library, has been established at her initiative in honor of yet another Chakri luminary, Prince Paripatra (1881-1944), her grandfather Mahidol's half brother. (Chulalongkorn had thirty-two sons and forty-seven daughters, making the Chakris one of Thailand's largest extended families.) An avid music lover who mastered most Western instruments during his military education in Germany, Paripatra reorganized the Royal Thai Navy Brass Band and rendered its stock of traditional Thai tunes in new arrangements using Western musical notation. He also composed new melodies. Since 1981, SIRINDHORN has been supervising the conservation of seven hundred such arrangements, calling upon elderly music masters to help restore the badly neglected and damaged scores. The princess is also acting to preserve the art of Thai instrument-making and hopes one day to build her country's first music museum. Her own instrument collection, formed largely by gifts, now numbers approximately a thousand.

Because she is a high-ranking princess, SIRINDHORN's musical activities are widely known, and this has helped to ignite a new enthusiasm for traditional music among the Thai population, especially

the youth. This is something she promotes by encouraging the schools to provide music instruction. Furthermore, since 1981 she has presided over an annual Thai music contest for school children in which 115 schools now participate. In these contests she performs side-by-side with the children. She has also studied the therapeutic qualities of traditional music—its ability to reduce stress and promote mental health—and has occasionally written articles about the subject.

Over the years SIRINDHORN has become a prolific author on several subjects. She learned to enjoy writing as a girl and her parents encouraged her. By the time she was eight or nine, she had discovered poetry and has been an avid amateur poet ever since. In her poems, the princess explores themes of family and nature, as well as her feelings and fears. One early poem from 1971 describes a night-time encounter with a ghost in her bedchamber. A particularly well-known poem of hers is sung annually at a children's music festival. Set to an old Thai lullaby, it encourages children to be valiant, wise, and "as unyielding as a mountain when honoring your motherland." Other poems explore the greatness of early Chakri kings or plumb the meaning of Buddhist proverbs.

Some of SIRINDHORN's poems delve into more intimate feelings and experiences. Several from her university days, written in French, speak frankly of a lost love. In "Retour" (1974), she writes, "Dan le jardin obscur, je reve a toi, Ami." And in "La Soleil Rudieux," written two years later, she asks, "Quand te reverrai-je, ma douce bien-aimee?" SIRINDHORN, who has never married, published these personal poems in 1981 in a small collection titled *Reflexions, Reflections, Reflex*. In a short introduction to the book, she tells her readers to think of them simply as "memories."

Some of SIRINDHORN's early published writing was aimed directly at children. Her short, amusing pieces were often accompanied by cheerful, cartoon-like drawings and published in children's magazines under the pen name "Waen Kaew." In one such article from 1978, the princess describes the reactions of a group of children who come upon a sea prawn while playing at the shore.

In recent years, SIRINDHORN's writing has ranged over a remarkable variety of topics—from education, history, and the arts, to issues of development, natural resources, and the environment. A compilation of her articles, poems, and songs comes to 675 pages! Particularly popular are the illustrated accounts of her travels to Europe and other parts of Asia. (Between 1973, when at age eighteen she represented her father at the funeral of King Gustav VII of Sweden, and 1990, when she presided over the opening of Thai Week at the International Garden and

Greenery Exposition in Osaka, Japan, SIRINDHORN made twenty-two official trips abroad.) In these travel books, replete with snapshots and drawings, she introduces readers to the sights and sounds, as well as the culture and history, of her host countries. She also regales them with accounts of her own pleasures and travails as a traveler. In Australia, for example, SIRINDHORN amusingly describes a "tugging match" with the wife of an Australian official who was presenting her with flowers, when the princess inadvertently took hold of the woman's scarf along with the bouquet! One of the princess's cartoons humorously depicts the incident.

SIRINDHORN's prodigious output is the result of good work habits, as well as the pleasure she takes in writing. She is an inveterate notetaker, constantly jotting things down as she makes her rounds, whether in Thailand or abroad. She has long since learned to snatch free moments in the midst of busy days to collect her thoughts in writing. This is something she now does with the aid of her laptop computer.

Since the early 1980s SIRINDHORN has come fully into her own. Helping her father remains an important priority, but her own projects and interests also absorb an enormous amount of her time. In addition, she continues to study. Long fascinated with geography and the practical sciences of surveying and map-making, she stays abreast of the technology in the field. This includes satellite imaging and a new field called remote sensing technology (RST), which uses computers and other high-tech instruments to map, or otherwise describe, distant and inaccessible landscapes or matter.

Recognizing the potential for practical application of this modern method in Thailand, SIRINDHORN enrolled in 1984 in a fourteen-week course in RST at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Southeast Asia's premier engineering graduate school located just north of Bangkok. Since then, she has been applying her new knowledge in southern Thailand to a project called "The Study of Land Use/Land Cover Map Accuracy Using Digital High-Resolution Imagery For Narathiwat Province." In the project, she and her assistants are using landsat photographs and thematic mapper technology to survey geographic formations and land utilization in the province. This is helpful in formulating rational development plans for the area and in providing important clues to the region's environmental health.

SIRINDHORN has also discerned the usefulness of RST in deciphering ancient inscriptions. Interpreting computer-produced landscape images accurately, she points out, involves the skill of pattern recogni-

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tion—which is precisely the key to reconstructing inscriptions written in the classical languages of early Southeast Asia.

Narathiwat, Thailand's southernmost province on the Gulf of Siam, is the site of another of SIRINDHORN's major projects. Narathiwat is a largely Muslim province and one of Thailand's poorest. During a tour in September 1988, the princess noticed an unusual number of youngsters who appeared weak and small for their age. She learned that these children were suffering from protein energy malnutrition (PEM), which is common in Thailand. She pledged her own funds to eradicate PEM in the province and launched the program in January 1989.

By this time SIRINDHORN was an experienced project administrator. She knew that to succeed, such a project needed a good design as well as the efficient cooperation of local officials, relevant government agencies, and the administering bodies. From the beginning, therefore, her goal was to animate existing institutions and leaders in a coordinated attack on malnutrition. However, she also knew that such projects only succeed in the long run when the targeted population itself becomes motivated. Self-reliance is the goal.

With this in mind, SIRINDHORN engaged several government agencies to design an integrated nutritional program, to work with the province's agricultural sector in improving livestock and poultry-raising skills, and to promote home vegetable gardens and fish farms. At the same time, the princess urged Narathiwat's health authorities to step up their maternal and child care programs, including immunizations and the promotion of personal hygiene and village sanitation. The most severely malnourished children were given coupons to purchase food at local markets.

As part of SIRINDHORN's integrated strategy, community development workers set up centers in the neediest areas where children could receive healthful food and learn good eating habits; she herself became patroness of eleven such units. To accompany these efforts, books, pamphlets, and videocassettes about nutrition were introduced through the health ministry and other communication channels. One key to the program's success was the involvement of local volunteers and community leaders in monitoring the weight of growing children. The entire Narathiwat project was accompanied by meticulous documentation. Only a few years later, the princess was able to report that since the inauguration of her program, the number of children suffering from moderate malnutrition in the province had declined from over 5 percent of the population to just 0.17 percent, and that those suffering

from severe malnutrition had gone down from 0.8 percent to 0.02 percent.

SIRINDHORN says that she is reluctant to initiate new projects as they invariably require the input of many people who are already too busy. For this reason, before starting out, she collects as much data as possible on the project's feasibility and then discusses it extensively with experts in universities and line agencies and with her father's staff. The princess often tends to depict herself deprecatingly as somewhat of a nuisance to persons more knowledgeable than herself. "I am lucky," she says, "because people tend to be patient with me in explaining and helping."

Once she is convinced of a project's feasibility, SIRINDHORN prefers to advance the initial funds herself. This allows her to keep a tight rein on the project design. Being cautious in the use of her personal funds ("I am a miser," she admits), she usually has sufficient money on hand. She is especially careful to insure that her projects have no unintended negative impact—such as on the environment. Furthermore, working on her father's irrigation projects has alerted her to the complexities involved when outside agencies intervene in local matters; sometimes the true beneficiaries are not the intended ones.

Having decided on a pilot project, SIRINDHORN seeks someone to lead the effort who understands it in the same spirit she does, someone with a "good feel" for the work. Thus, the princess reveals, she simply enjoys the "process" of working, consequently using her computer to keep track of each project's details. An evaluation team is always established to monitor the project's progress, and no venture is carried forward unless the reports remain positive.

Following a successful pilot project, SIRINDHORN enlists the aid of government agencies and more funders. Her frontier-school Agriculture and Lunch Program, for example, now involves the coordinated efforts of three agencies: Border Patrol Police, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Education, inasmuch as Thailand's border schools are incrementally being brought under the auspices of the country's formal school system. Funding of the program is now also diversified. The princess continues to contribute to it through her personal fund, but nowadays some of the program's expenses are defrayed by the government. Private donations that come from civic groups, companies, and banks, as well as from nongovernmental organizations such as Germany's Agro Action, add significant sums to the project's operations budget. Finally, many people who work on SIRINDHORN's projects are volunteers—university professors, civil servants, and the like—who donate weekends and other free time.

Thais give freely to SIRINDHORN's projects because they know that their contributions will be used responsibly. A story is told about the School for the Blind in Chiang Mai. For years, the princess has taken a special interest in the school, even introducing there some of the agricultural programs for which she is noted elsewhere. The school has prospered and grown, so much so that it recently faced a space crisis. New dormitories were needed, but an adjacent property that was ideal for the school's expansion was far too expensive. When alerted to the situation, SIRINDHORN approached the owner and offered to buy the land herself as a gift to the school, whereupon the owner gave it to her for nothing. This is a measure of her stature and credibility among the people.

At her father's wish, SIRINDHORN now supervises Chitralada School on the palace grounds; she has also virtually taken over her mother's duties as head of the Thai Red Cross. She teaches regularly at the military academy where she is now head of the history division and where she plays the ranaad-ek in the school's orchestral ensemble. As chair of the Chai Patana Foundation, she oversees the execution of her father's many development projects. Throughout the school system, she is promoting agricultural education, reforestation, and the need for cooperatives. Children are taught to form cooperatives to grow fruits and vegetables and to raise chicken and fish. They sell their produce to the school canteen and to local merchants, then share the profits—in some cases contributing a portion to the school endowment fund. The goal is not merely self-reliance but self-confidence and teamwork.

SIRINDHORN also finds time to look after the Somdej Phra Debaratana Rajasuda Foundation, which has been set up to help needy students pursue their studies as well as to care for orphans and abandoned children and prepare for their adoption. Then there is the School for the Blind in Chiang Mai and the School for the Deaf in Bangkok. In both, students learn to be self-reliant. At the school for the deaf, pupils grow ornamental plants and flowers to sell.

SIRINDHORN still travels tirelessly, often wearing out her companions as she moves about the provinces, but always managing to be a fountain of enthusiasm as she inspects one schoolyard vegetable plot after another. Observers detect not an ounce of falseness in this; the princess seems serenely happy in the presence of the ordinary Thais who flock constantly to see her. This genuineness is something Thais admire and it speaks to SIRINDHORN's ability to transcend her position as a princess and to project herself as a likable and, in many ways, quite normal human being—for example, she is notorious for falling asleep in full view during public ceremonies. Unapologetic, she says that perhaps ceremonies could be shorter.

SIRINDHORN's unselfconsciousness is remarkable, given the Thai habit of heaping adulation upon the royal family. The princess has earned several academic degrees in her own right and has been awarded some thirty honorary degrees in public health, industrial education, engineering, architecture, and so on. She has also been named an honorary member of the Thai Bar and of the faculty at AIT. Yet, she dismisses all of this as part of being royal. Being inescapably a princess, SIRINDHORN strives to break through the cordon royale that surrounds her and to interact with all individuals as naturally as possible. For instance, during her training at AIT, even though special arrangements were made for her instruction, she insisted on attending class with the other two dozen participants, often despite the commotion created by the presence of her bodyguards. And when the class went on a field trip, she rode in the bus with her classmates—as a palace entourage of some fifteen vehicles trundled along in front and behind.

Some of the fuss made over SIRINDHORN reflects her special status within the royal family. In 1977, when she was only twenty-two, her father conferred upon her the title of Somdej Phra Debaratana Rajasuda Chao Fah Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Rathasimakunakornpiyajat Sayam Borom Raja Kumari. For a princess to be so elevated at such a young age is unique in Thai history. SIRINDHORN downplays the significance of this honor, however, saying that in practice it means little more than being permitted to sit in front of others at public occasions. On the other hand, it is an honor she endeavors humbly to live up to.

Although at times she has yearned for the freedom of a more anonymous life abroad, SIRINDHORN seems to have made her peace with the restrictions of royal life—as well as with its privileges. That she carries the latter with grace and lack of pretension, and gives so much in return, delights modern Thais, who often pay her the compliment of saying that she is “like her father.” Implied in the compliment is the suggestion that SIRINDHORN's behavior comports well with the Buddhist ideal of “the good king” associated with him. She, say many Thais, is “the good princess.” This is the highest praise.

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