

Book Review

The King of Thailand in World Focus. (Fourth Edition). 2010.

By the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand.

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"The King of Thailand in World Focus" was first launched in 1987. The book represented the grateful contribution of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand to the auspicious occasion of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 60th birthday. Its updated versions of 2007 and 2008 were afterward published to coincide with the times when the whole nation celebrated His Majesty's 60th anniversary of accession to the throne in 2006 and his 80th birthday in 2008, respectively. Now, the fourth edition has been printed in a much handier fashion as stated in its introduction that this edition "is an exact editorial reproduction of the third but the first in paperback. It comes in a reduced format that is more portable and less than half the weight of earlier editions." However, the quality of being "the most insightful and readable works on Thailand's widely revered monarch" has still been maintained in its full range.

The book is a comprehensive collection of the original output of professional journalists published in international magazines in several foreign languages. The content is chronically presented in nine parts, excluding the introduction and appendices. The first part comprises journal scoops that flash back to the early years of His Majesty King Bhumibol prior to his coronation. The following two parts follow up

significant incidents over the critical period encountered by the Thai monarch leading to King Bhumibol's accession to the throne. In addition, experiences in his early years after the coronation that have contributed to His Majesty becoming the great King who won the hearts of the Thai people are revealed. The international relationships established by their Majesties King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit as the country's royal ambassadors are elaborated on in Part 4 through worldwide press releases on their extensive official visits to many countries around the globe. Part 5 depicts the royal actions and interventions when Thailand faced political turbulence. The greatest contributions of King Bhumibol and his royal family to the Thai people are reflected in Part 6 where world-renowned royal projects on a wide range of aspects that have provided improvements in the standard of living, mostly in the agricultural sector, are pictured. As a well-rounded person, the multi-dimensional talents of His Majesty the King of Thailand are recognized by the world's leading press in Part 7. Part 8 summarizes all the remarkable royal occasions over the two decades from 1971. These milestone events highlight the worship the Thais have displayed toward their revered monarch over a long period. The book concludes with snippets from articles revealing some angles relevant to the Thai royal family through which a greater understanding

of the Thai national value system, as represented by the Thai monarch, has been gained by the international community.

“The King of Thailand in World Focus” is an outstanding publication among those of the same kind released over the same period. It could be claimed that the book is worthy of either being regarded as print material or as a precious piece of historical evidence. As a print item, the book meets all the elements that should be addressed by quality print media. The information from the first page to the last is well-organized thematically. The page layout with pieces of news and magazine articles on a thematic basis provides a narration that proceeds with unity and harmony. The color photographs are classic. In addition, their rhythmic placement helps balance the text-illustration setting beautifully.

Should one need an insight into the changes and challenges the Kingdom of Thailand has encountered and enjoyed, *“The King of Thailand in World Focus”* can tell it all. Between the lines and behind the photos, there are historical reflections that are illuminated by His Majesty King Bhumibol’s activities and actions. In Thailand, it has been a cultural tradition that the throne could not be left in a vacuum. This is evidenced by the succession to the kingship of King Bhumibol right after the unexpected death of King Ananda Mahidol, his elder brother. It could be said that in the cultural Thai context, the dignity as a member of the Royal Household and the commitment to the kingdom as a state leader prevail over personal affairs. However as shown by the papers, once taking up the position, any activity of the King of Thailand, even a personal one, is placed in the spotlight. This has meant that since his first step in ascending the throne, His Majesty King Bhumibol has been assumed by all to be public figure who has been accorded supreme worship. His righteousness in all aspects has been highly regarded. The reports in *“The King of Thailand in World Focus”* indicates the hardships he has endured to meet those expectations.

The publication also provides the readers with comprehensive inputs regarding social and political movements in Thailand throughout the regime of King Bhumibol. It can be seen that the power of the Thai monarch was confined by the introduction of the constitutional monarchy to Thailand. Being a king under constitutional law, there was international scrutiny on the challenges against the power of the Royal Household. History is informed through all pieces of work presented in the book that the Kingdom of Thailand has been able to stay attuned to the right actions in the right time with the right people through the actions and deeds of His Majesty King Bhumibol. *“The King of Thailand in World Focus”* indicates his leadership in being able to maintain the stability of the social structure and function while balancing negotiations during conflicts that have occurred in His Majesty’s kingdom.

It can be seen that the ninth king of the Chakri dynasty has succeeded in developing his ancestors’ intention to broaden international recognition of the country even before His Majesty’s coronation. One of the press releases publicizes His Majesty’s simple childhood and ordinary upbringing overseen by the Princess Mother that underpins his informal education on the meaningful simplicity of living that is embedded in the cultural context of Thailand. On ascending the throne, this experience has founded the world-renowned concept of the Self Sufficiency Economy which has challenged contemporary materialism beliefs on a modern basis. Not only did King Bhumibol initiate the concept, he has also introduced, invented, and even been involved in a number of royal projects where the concept has been addressed in practice. The reports in *“The King of Thailand in World Focus”* indicates His Majesty’s wisdom in enhancing the quality of living and contributing to the people’s and the country’s well-being based on agricultural wisdom which has been the root of Thai life.

From the past to present, it has been proved through the eyes of international observers that the Thai

monarch has not been merely a symbolic but also a social institution of respect and reverence. Despite an alteration in the social status and role of the King of Thailand constitutionally, the value system implicit in the Thai Royal Household has profoundly persisted within the Thai cultural context. With His Majesty's milestone declaration upon coronation "I shall reign the kingdom by righteousness for the peaceful benefit of all the people of Siam", his Majesty King Bhumibol has constantly committed himself to the Thai people. Throughout his reign, the world has seen evidence of his hand-on and down-to-earth conduct. It could be claimed that King Bhumibol of Thailand is the only king who walks hand-in-hand with his people, no matter what their background. From the book, there is information and pictures of his Majesty's travels around and throughout the country. Besides a visit to his project bases, the trips have been used to gain insight into the lives of his people in all aspects. Hence, much more appropriate development projects have followed. Grounded through his journeys to the common way of living, there emerged the development principles appropriate to the cultural context of Thailand: understanding, unfolding, and undertaking. It might not be too much of an exaggeration to state that these principles could be achievable in all contexts of development worldwide. With a background in engineering, King Bhumibol has introduced and patented a number of innovations and technologies in support of the royal projects. Subsequently, these innovations and technologies have been recognized by and received awards from many international organizations. The text in *"The King of Thailand in World Focus"* indicates his workmanship to pursue his royal projects to their highest achievements as he has pledged his commitment and responsibility for "the peaceful benefit of all the people of Siam".

All above all, the whole story tells us that his Majesty King Bhumibol of Thailand has led the country to win global attention. He has informed the world that instead of "the King can do no wrong", "the King must do it right". He first identified his duty as "to reign" not "to rule" the country, and history has

proved that his actions have been true to his words. He commenced his reign with the supreme target of "people's peaceful benefit", and history has seen this actualized. Not only did he visit foreign countries soon after his accession to the throne in order to introduce himself as the new King of Thailand, but he also led Thailand to be exposed to foreign countries by its new King. Since those royal visits, his Majesty the King of Thailand has travelled within the country more, as other members of the Royal Household or other governmental delegates could represent him overseas. However, what he has done for Thailand and her people nationally has been recognized internationally. The celebration of his 60th anniversary of his accession to the throne by the Heads of State from many countries around the world is one example of this recognition. The articles in *"The King of Thailand in World Focus"* indicate his kingship has been able to successfully shift the universal paradigm from one where a king is impersonal, untouchable, and divinely sacred to a realistic one where a king is a person of dedication, commitment, and sensible.

With regard to human and community development, his Majesty King Bhumibol is the most professional living proponent. His work has been to place people as the central focus. The direction and objectives of his work has been to promote people's human qualities by building and enhancing their learning capacity which forms a firm foundation for their lives in the midst of change and uncertainty. His work has been based on a body of knowledge resulting from research conducted systematically, scientifically, and thoroughly. Last but not least, *"The King of Thailand in World Focus"* indicates his Majesty King Bhumibol's in-depth appreciation of human development rather than the physical enjoyment of material development. The whole publication leads the reader to reflect that the prosperity of the society based on the quality and well-being of its human members can be achieved by a superb well-rounded leader like his Majesty King Bhumibol, "THE KING OF KINGS".