

## **H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn**

DOCTOR OF LETTERS *honoris causa*

Born in 1955 to King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit of Thailand, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn has rendered public service since her early youth. Education and care are unquestionably at the core of her lifelong commitment to the well-being of the people.

From the very beginning, Her Royal Highness showed an aptitude for learning and a passion for literature.

After completing high school in 1973, the Princess enrolled in the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University to study history, Thai and oriental languages, and graduated with first-class honours. Not only did education provide a great opportunity for Her Royal Highness to get to know people from all walks of life, it also confirmed for her the value and ideal of service for the people. More importantly, experiences gained from frequently accompanying her parents to remote areas throughout the country have inspired her with a strong desire to help improve the quality of life of the underprivileged and needy, particularly the children.

The Princess continued to pursue her studies, obtaining an M.A. degree in oriental epigraphy (Sanskrit and Cambodian) from Silpakorn University in 1979, and an M.A. degree in oriental languages (Pali and Sanskrit) from Chulalongkorn University in 1981. She went on to enroll in a doctoral programme in

development education, an interdisciplinary degree at Srinakharinwirot University, and graduated in 1986 with a doctorate degree in education.

Princess Sirindhorn started her academic career by teaching history at Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy in 1980, and became Director of the Department of History in 1987. She has taught courses in Thai Studies, Thai history and Southeast Asian history, East Asian history and contemporary world history.

Her Royal Highness has been involved in numerous charitable activities. She has been Chairman of the Sai Jai Thai Foundation (which promotes the quality of life of veterans who devoted themselves to safeguarding the country) since 1975. She has served as Executive Vice President of the Thai Red Cross Society; and Executive Chairperson of the Chaipattana Foundation (which supports rural development projects), President of the Anandamahidol Foundation (which promotes higher education) and the King Rama II Foundation (which advances the conservation and promotion of Thai culture). She is also President of the Prince Mahidol Award Foundation (which gives international recognition to individuals with outstanding achievements in medicine and public health).

Imbued with a sense of responsibility and caring, Her Royal Highness went on to foster social and community initiatives: providing basic education for children in remote areas, starting the programme of agriculture for lunch, promoting vocational training

in schools, promoting plant genetics preservation and gene bank projects, developing nutritional campaigns for children and pregnant women in remote areas, and instituting IT efforts to facilitate independent living among the handicapped. Some of these projects, begun over three decades ago when she was in her twenties, continue to this day.

Since 1990, Her Royal Highness has led educational and nutritional programmes for the Lao people, Myanmar, the people of Cambodia, Vietnam, Mongolia, Bhutan and Bangladesh. In Sichuan province of the People's Republic of China, she supported the construction of a new school in place of the old one destroyed in the earthquake. She is not a distant benefactor, but inspires those who have followed her life and work to be a part of her charitable deeds. Many people, companies, associations and organisations continuously present her with money or essential resources for implementing her initiatives. On this basis, the H.R.H Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Charity Fund was founded to support projects that improve people's lives, including programmes that relieve those suffering from catastrophes.

The Thai people have acknowledged Her Royal Highness's long-standing efforts to help people in distress and her unselfish service to humanity, regardless of socio-economic status, creed, race or nationality. Borrowing from the Buddhist ideal of "the good king," many have called her "the good princess."

Her Royal Highness has a passion for Thai art and culture heritage. She is especially supportive of reconstructing monuments and preserving antiques, and always champions the cause of culture, as in the restoration of national treasures and the promotion of Thai classical music.

Princess Sirindhorn's achievements have reached well beyond the Thai people. In addition to her knowledge of Pali, Sanskrit and Cambodian, Her Royal Highness is communicative in English and French, and has been learning German, Latin and Chinese. Being an active patron of numerous humanitarian charities and philanthropic foundations founded on her initiatives for public service, Her Royal Highness is in no small way "the good princess."

Mr Chairman, in view of her lifelong commitment to and achievements in promoting social, cultural and community developments, may I now present Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn to you for the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*.

*English citation written and delivered by Prof Stephen Chan Ching-kiu*