

THE THIRD CYCLE BIRTHDAY OF HER ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCESS MAHA CHAKRI SIRINDHORN

BONNIE DAVIS

MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL
THE SIAM SOCIETY

When their third child and second daughter was born to Their Majesties King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit on April 2, 1955 there was great happiness throughout Thailand. No one could have known at the time, however, what an extraordinary young woman this infant Princess would one day become. The Prince Patriarch, Krom Luang Vajiranyanawongse, did predict that the Princess would one day become a famous woman. Now, as Her Royal Highness attains her auspicious third cycle, she is known, admired and loved not only by the Thai people, but people in widespread countries of the world. Wherever she has travelled, the Princess has won friends for herself and the Thai nation.

Evident from the age of only a few months was the merry twinkle in her eyes, the hint of mischief about to happen, and the interest in things around her. Her look of interest always seemed to say, "Well, what is next? Let's get on with it!" Her childhood, and that of all the Royal children, was recorded carefully on film by her proud father, His Majesty the King, and graciously shared with all the people. That merry twinkle and never-ending curiosity may at times have caused some problems for nurses or teachers, but those same traits have endeared her to everyone!

Childhood curiosity grew to become an insatiable desire to learn—one that never left her. Even today the Princess says that when she has free time she likes to "learn new things." One might find it difficult to discover anything that does not interest Her Royal Highness, for she has studied such widely diversified subjects as ancient and modern languages, history, early Thai music, western music, map-making by use of satellite, computer science and soil composition.

H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn has followed in her Royal Father's footsteps in many ways—not only by working for the people's improvement of life, but in the deep interest in the Thai indigenous arts, crafts and archaeology. Her Royal Highness has also shown great knowledge and interest in the restoration and preservation of ancient temples and monuments of an earlier time. His Majesty the King once said that every brick or broken artifact found at the old capitals of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya, or other settlements, is precious because each is a piece of Thai history and culture. To honor H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn for her personal abilities and achievements in arts and culture and for her interest and support for cultural preservation, the Royal Thai Government bestowed the title of "Supreme Patroness of the Thai Cultural Heritage" (Ong Ek Akharachupathamphok Moradok Watthanatham Thai) on Her Royal Highness. Every year the birthday of the Princess, April 2, is Thai Heritage Conservation Day.

H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn has been a member of The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage for a number of years. In the beginning the Princess elected to join as



Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn at the Siam Society.

an Ordinary Member, and paid her annual membership dues from her own pocket money. She has since become a Life Member. Her Royal Highness has used rare books and materials held by The Siam Society Library on several occasions.

The Siam Society was established in 1904 "with the objective of promoting and encouraging the arts and sciences in Siam and the neighboring countries." These goals, as set forth so long ago, are parallel to the many cultural interests of the Princess. Her Royal Highness is a dedicated student of history, and has not only assisted in restoration of cultural and historical sites, such as the renovation of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha for the Bicentennial Celebration of 1982, but recently agreed to chair the fund raising committee for the restoration of the Phra Mahathat Woromahavihara Pagoda in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.

In 1977 Princess Sirindhorn graciously assented to become a Vice-Patron of The Siam Society, and on October 17, 1977 the President and Members of the Council were granted an audience by Her Royal Highness at Chitralada Palace. The announcement of the new Vice-Patron appeared in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, Volume 66, Part I, January 1978.

H.R.H. the Princess has occasionally joined activities held at The Siam Society. On March 8, 1979 Her Royal Highness presided at the opening of a photographic exhibition of Thai mural paintings held in the Society auditorium. More than one hundred photographs from temples all over Thailand were displayed. The Princess, who also has a great interest in museums, took this opportunity to visit the Kamthieng House to view the ethnic artifacts displayed in the old northern style house.

In 1982 Her Royal Highness, on behalf of His Majesty the King, presided at the opening of the Ho Trai at Wat Rakhang in Thonburi, originally the home of King Rama I, founder of the Chakri Dynasty. The Siam Society had helped to support the restoration work which was appropriately completed during the Bicentennial Celebration.

H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn attended a lecture given by Professor Jean Boisselier at The Siam Society on Tuesday, November 17, 1987. The lecture, *The Symbolism of Angkor Thom*, was also graced by the presence of H.R.H. Princess Galyani Vadhana, aunt of Princess Sirindhorn and Honorary President of the Siam Society. It was indeed an honor for The Siam Society to have Their Royal Highnesses present on this occasion. It was also interesting to see both Princess Sirindhorn and Princess Galyani Vadhana making notes in the everpresent notebooks during the lecture by the noted professor!

In October, 1990 H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn presided at the opening of the *Borobudur in Photographs: Past and Present* exhibition, held in the Society auditorium. The Exhibition was arranged by the Embassies of Indonesia and The Netherlands. As is often the case, Her Royal Highness seemed to enjoy the occasion more than anyone, especially striking the gong with enthusiasm to declare the exhibition open!

Whatever people may expect when seeing Her Royal Highness for the first time, few are prepared for the open and friendly manner always shown by the Princess. Her warm smile lights her face, and is always present regardless of how busy her day has been; and if she is tired, no one knows.

Scholar and Professor though she is, the Princess remains a perennial student for there is always something new to be learned. It is not at all difficult to understand why Her Royal Highness is so greatly loved and admired by everyone, for she is all, and more, than one expects a Princess to be. May the twinkle in her eyes never diminish, and may her life be all she wishes it to be.

The President, Council, and members of The Siam Society—with pride and great affection—humbly wish Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn good health, happiness and a very Happy Birthday!