



## OBITUARIES

### H.S.H. PRINCE SUBHADRADIS DISKUL 1923–2003 A PERSONAL APPRECIATION

On 6 November 2003 Thailand suffered a great loss with the passing of His Serene Highness Prince Subhadradis Diskul. A man of great knowledge, charisma and boundless energy, he had touched many people's lives. He possessed the qualities that made him so endearing to people - a true interest in teaching and imparting his vast knowledge to all those who were willing to learn, while he carried himself with the dignity befitting his princely status. He did all this with warm and kind humor, finding joy and amusement in his many endeavors.

Known to his friends and colleagues as Prince Suphad, he was a person who took upon himself numerous responsibilities and carried them out with full attention. He always saw the small picture as well as the bigger one. That is, he gave his undivided attention to students and protégés who needed his advice and assistance, while he never lost sight of what the education and propagation of art and art history should be in Thailand. As professor of art and archaeology and later rector of Silpakorn University, Prince Suphad carried out these duties admirably, while he gave much time and attention to the organizations and institutions of which he was head, patron or consultant.

H.S.H. Prince Subhadradis Diskul was closely associated with the Siam Society for 42 years where he served as president from 1979 to 1981. Under his leadership the Siam Society prospered and focused its activities on projects that involved the public, one of these being the restoration of the mural paintings in several temples around Bangkok, thus helping to conserve a significant aspect of the country's great heritage.

Like his distinguished father, His Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, known as the Father of Thai History, Prince Subhadradis has been recognized as one of Thailand's most eminent historians. Educated in Thailand, France and the United Kingdom, he was well versed in history and many forms of art. With his deep knowledge and understanding of Asian art and history, with an emphasis on that of the Thai and Khmer, he was the author of books on these subjects as well as many articles. His great pleasure was imparting this vast knowledge which he often did through the study trips that he led for the Siam Society, and for which he acted as the Society as Chairman of the Travel Committee for many years. He also gave lectures and seminars on a variety of subjects concerning the art and history of the region. He will be remembered for



his jovial manner in which he explained the obvious, while at other times drawing on his fathomless knowledge to explain and illustrate more complex ideas and principles.

H.S.H. Prince Subhadradis continued his work till the last. He was instrumental in setting up SPAFA, the regional organization for the preservation of the cultural heritage under the aegis of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO). He was widely recognized and honored for his contribution to Thai culture and was awarded the Knight Grand Cross (First

Class) of the Most Illustrious Order of Chula Chom Klao by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Furthermore, the French Government awarded him the title of Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

Prince Subhadradis will be missed, but the legacy that he left in the form of education and the students who are carrying out his work, his writings, and the plans that he put in motion will be a living testament to honor his memory.

Ruth Gerson

## LARRY STERNSTEIN

The Society has only recently learnt that Larry Sternstein, former Honorary Editor of the *Journal of the Siam Society* from 1966–1969, life member of the Society, and teaching in the School of Resources, Environment, and Society at the Australian National University, died in 2001 following an operation for cancer.

He made substantial contributions to our knowledge of the historical geography of Thailand, and is probably best remembered generally for his important book, *Portrait of Bangkok*, marking the two hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the capital, commissioned by the city's municipality. He contributed regularly to the *Journal* before becoming

its editor, his first article being 'An Historical Atlas of Thailand' (1964 v.52/1). His most recent articles to appear in *JSS* were 'Low maps of Siam' (1985 v.73), 'Low's description of the Siamese Empire in 1824' (1990 v.78/1), and 'The London Company's envoys plot Siam' (1993 v.81/2), this last appropriately constituting the lead article and running to 85 pages.

The Society would like, howsoever belatedly, to record his passing, extend its condolences to his friends and family, and thank him for his contributions to our knowledge of the geography and history of Siam.

M.S.



## SIRICHAJ NARUMIT-REKAGARN 1927–2004

Honorary Architect, The Siam Society  
Vice President of the Society 1980-1984

by Sulak Sivaraksa  
(translated by Sumet Jumsai)

The demise of Khun Sirichai Narumit-Rekagarn is a great loss not only for friends and colleagues but for also for the country. Not many people actually knew him. This is because fame was not his way of life compared to many with a high profile who, as a consequence, would not be able to appreciate such a person. Devoting his entire life to social and cultural issues, he was committed to working for the urban poor and conservation of cultural heritage and natural environment. His efforts were marked by perseverance, personal sacrifice and humility. He had, however, the close support of friends and students who rallied to his cause.

As an architect, Khun Sirichai did not mass-produce his work, for each project which he designed was the result of genuine creativity. It coincides with his family name, “Rekagarn”, meaning “aesthetic creativity”. He certainly owed his love of art to his parents, Luang Narumit-Rekagarn and Khun Anong, who were both artists active in art education. Indeed, Acharn Fuea Haripitak, the well known National Artist, was among those tutored by Luang Naramit-Rekagarn.



Khun Sirichai’s grandfather was Luang Jenjityong, a muralist who left behind paintings on the cloister walls of the Royal Chapel. For a family to have produced three generations of artists is indeed commendable. Here then was the third generation, an architect-painter whose quest for beauty reached the spiritual level. Whatever he did, however, was accompanied by a genuine sense of compassion and charity, often at his own expense. In this respect he gave what he could for the happiness of others, friends, young colleagues and students, and even their families.

The few remaining contemporaries such as Khun Vathanyu na Thalang and Khun Nid H. Shiranan, will testify that, while modest in speech, in stating a case it was often done with a sense of humour. It helped to alleviate the gravity of issues at hand which invariably ran counter to people in politics and government. In these instances he might well take a back seat in order to let others take the lead, with his ideas. Acharn Saeng-arun Ratakasikorn, another close colleague and teacher with strong moral standards long since deceased, used to praise him in no uncertain terms as a person who instilled in others the joy of life.

Khun Sirichai contributed much to society through various organizations, principally the Society for Conservation of National Treasures and Environment (SCONTE) which he helped to found; the Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage (ASA) for which he was President in 1972–73, and the Art Committee of The Siam Society which he chaired in 1974–75, a period which saw him most active in historic conservation.

The fact that he grew up in the historic centre of Bangkok, an area encompassing Bamrungmuang and Fuengnakorn Road, possibly led him to activities that culminated in the plan to preserve Rattanakosin Island. In this regard, he was ever ready to conduct guided tours of the area for the young people, showing them not only monuments, but also the communities and their way of life and ritual. In the foot-

steps of Phraya Anuman Rajdhon and Khun Vijitmatra, he thus passed on to the new generation the onus of the safe-keeping of the city's treasures.

Cultural issues aside, Khun Sirichai found time to help set up Duang Prateep Foundation and Foundation for Slum Child Care Under the Patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra, where his only sister, Khun Nongyao, was very much involved.

In 1967, Khun Sirichai became an active member of the Ayudhya preservation group which instigated, besides conservation programmes, the bicentennial commemoration of the fall of the old capital. That event, much praised at the time by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, was to remind people of lessons in history.

At one point, Khun Sirichai campaigned for the master plan of Bangkok proposing, amongst other things, a ring road in conjunction with a green belt. Vested interests, politics and corruption led to the plan falling short of its important aggregate, the green area. Disillusioned, he went to live in London for a time with his small family—he had only a daughter—and there worked for the Thai language programme of the BBC. The years were not wasted for he produced programmes of cultural interest for his audience both in England and back home. Home sickness and loyalty eventually made him return to Siam. However, finding Bangkok congested and “sinking” under the weight of its own mega structures and tall buildings,



he soon urged his friends to migrate with him to the provinces.

It was not idle talk, for he acted upon it. At that late stage in life, he and his family emigrated for the last time, to Chiangmai. To some extent it meant cutting ties with friends and colleagues in Bangkok. Soon enough, however, he found new friends and allies to launch the Lanna conservation movement with agenda ranging from refuse recycling and a “green” grocery store to campaigning against cable cars on Doi Suthep and, with the help of the local Buddhist clergy, instituting programmes to preserve old temples and murals in Chiangmai.

Khun Sirichai studied architecture at Chulalongkorn University and went on to the University of California at Berkeley where he obtained his master’s degree. He then taught at Silpakorn and eventually at Chiangmai University.

A person who preferred to spend a quiet life with Khun Ayako, his Japanese wife, Khun Sirichai devoted his spare time to painting. Born a citizen of Bangkok on 21 March 1927, he died a citizen of Chiangmai a few days after his 77th birthday on 24 March 2004. His family and friends will for a time miss him, but eventually he may be forgotten as is the way of the world. However, his good deeds will remain and undoubtedly take him to peace and tranquility.