

# Popularity as the Adored Monarch: Strategy by Bhumibol Adulyadej and the Royal Court and Its Effect

Year: 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Doctor's Programs

Place of fieldwork: Thailand

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## ■ Research background

In the Kingdom of Thailand, portraits of the present king, Bhumibol Adulyadej, and his family members are displayed everywhere—including shopping malls and classrooms. Not a single day passes without TV reports on the Thai monarch. Under the circumstances, it is impossible for people living in Thailand to escape from the royal image. This visual domination is thought to foster respect and adoration among the Thai people for the royalty and, with it, Bhumibol (who has ruled since 1946) has gained strong political power.

Visual domination refers to the method by which a sovereign strengthens his hand by showing himself in front of his nation. It is a technique for the reigning monarch to make people visually perceive his prestige and to establish his image [T. Fujitani 1992; T. Hara 2011].

as a new king, Bhumibol won his nation's adoration through frequent public appearances [NIO 2008], which proves that this strategy of visual domination has worked effectively.



Portraits of King Bhumibol

## ■ Research purpose and aim

However, the actual conditions of visual domination have been disregarded because many previous studies have focused on the relationship between the king and the politics, rather than that between the king and his nation.

This research historically clarifies the facts of Bhumibol's visual domination. It also provides verification that the national sentiment in favor of Bhumibol—Thailand's constitutional monarch who wields enormous political power—has grown through visual domination. The report focuses on three methods of reigning via visual domination—provincial visits, portraits of the King, and mass media—and using it as a medium to relieve existing political devices.

This survey was conducted to report on research about provincial visits based on analyses. It was also intended to obtain Thai researchers' feedback and find materials, especially those used by schools, regarding the dissemination of portraits of the King.

## ■ Results and achievements by fieldwork



**Presentation of the research report at Chulalongkorn University**

The main purposes of this survey were the research accomplishment report and the collection of new data. Each result is described in detail below.

### 1. Contents and Results of the Research Accomplishment Report on Provincial Visits.

The researcher had an opportunity to report the research and to engage in discussions in Thai with professors and graduate students at the Faculty of Literature at Chulalongkorn University, the most prestigious research institute in Thailand.

Provincial visits have been Bhumibol's main official duty since the late 1960s. This researcher analyzed provincial visits in Thailand by using techniques of Japanese historical study that have prosecuted inquiries into the role of provincial visits by a monarch. By explaining these methods and by presenting data about provincial visits by Bhumibol and his family, this report proposes a hypothesis about the transition process of a method to "build a king's image." This opportunity enabled this researcher to receive professors' comments on the hypothesis and their interesting opinions about future research and new study trends.

A discussion on the contents of the research report was also held with humanities professors at Chiang Mai University, which provided an opportunity for this researcher to serve as the co-author of a book.

### 2. Collecting materials about provincial visits and the mass media.

First, this researcher interviewed Associate Professor Rome Chiranukrom, a vice president at Chiang Mai University, in order to ask permission to utilize the microfilm data of Chiang Mai News that is preserved at the university. He suggested that this exchange should be conducted between universities, rather than individuals, because Kyoto University has many students and researchers who are interested in Southeast Asia. This matter is still under discussion.

Next, a meeting with welcoming marshal Somsak Onon was held in the Chiang Mai Prefectural Office. He is also a specialist in the field and writes books about the various forms of welcoming the royalty. He replied to questions about the transition in welcoming the royalty, the differences in the ways of welcoming the various family members, and so on.



**With Assoc. Prof. Rome Chiranukrom, a vice president of Chiang Mai University**

## ■ Implications and impacts on future research

This dispatch enabled this researcher to engage in a lively discussion with Thai researchers and to seize the opportunity to be a co-author. Seminars were also held at another university and a company; these provided an occasion to think about ways to make use of the research results in society.

However, a collection of materials on portraits of the King, one of the objects in the dispatch, could not be completed because of a lack of pre-examination. Future research needs to delve more deeply into portraits of the King with the help of relevant information such as the law, as well as the number of—and the present situation of—grants to schools.



**With welcoming marshal Somsak Onon  
in the Chiang Mai Prefectural Office**