



RECOLLECTIONS OF DR. PUEY

I was deeply curious about the sources of Dr. Puey's mystique when I moved to Bangkok in the early 1960s to work at the National Economic Development Board. I had heard of his extraordinary technocratic achievements. Principal architect of the government strategy that sparked the country's impressive economic growth, he was responsible for the three primary stages in strengthening the financial system: the liberalization of the multiple exchange rate, the establishment of the Budget Bureau, and the introduction of national economic planning. He had skillfully mobilized the support of foreign aid donors as a powerful lever in the internal political effort to make these changes. Moreover, it was well known that Dr. Puey repeatedly declined cabinet positions—and the great rewards attached to them—in order to retain his independence as Governor of the Bank of Thailand.

But how had this brilliant technocrat become elevated into a symbol of integrity that inspired a generation of young

officials in the government service? The mystery was compounded for me when newspapers carried stories that Dr. Puey had attempted to resign from the prestigious governorship of the Bank of Thailand in order to take up the bureaucratically insignificant position of Dean of the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat University.

I was frankly disappointed when we first met. He had parked the little Morris car that he drove himself in the compound of the planning board. Balding, stocky, nondescript, he was rushing, with a bundle of papers under his arm, into a meeting there. Could this be the person who had such magnetic appeal to the sophisticated economists in my office?

At the first meeting that we attended together, Dr. Puey appeared less concerned about the orthodox economic questions relating to the second Economic Development Plan than I had expected. Instead he wanted to know how the benefits of the plan were going to reach the poorer segments of the population. About a decade before equity-orientation became part of the conventional wisdom of economic planners, Dr. Puey was arguing that the fruits of economic growth should be shared more equitably by people in the urban slums and rural areas. I came to understand that Dr. Puey, son of a poor fishfarmer, had experienced the oppression of poverty and prejudice in his own life and he was morally committed to building a more just, more humane, and more rational society for all citizens.

In the course of work on the preparation of the new plan, I naturally heard a great deal about Dr. Puey and I began to appreciate the reasons for his charisma—and to share in the widespread respect and admiration for him. First, there was his engaging modesty and good humor. The story of the newspaper reporter who went to his house to interview him about receiving

the Magsaysay Award, the Nobel Prize of Asia, was typical; the reporter asked the gardener working in the front of the modest house whether Dr. Puey was at home—the gardener responded, “yes, what can I do for you?” Dr. Puey believed that he could be most effective if he avoided the political limelight and worked quietly within the system; he liked to say that “a Central Bank Governor should behave toward his Finance Minister as a dutiful wife should toward her husband. She can praise him both in public and in private, but any wifely criticism should be offered in private.” Paradoxically, the power of Dr. Puey’s ideas and ideals had political impact far surpassing that of cabinet ministers. Except for an occasional social event honoring a close friend or colleague, he completely eschewed evening receptions, parties and the conventional formalities relating to his exalted rank, in order to share time and love with his wife and children to whom he is completely devoted and who have sustained him in times of need.

Second, there was the integrity for which he was famous. This was commonly equated with his absolute incorruptibility and unswerving commitment to honesty in public service, in an atmosphere where those qualities were all too rare. But I think Dr. Puey’s integrity had a deeper and more general meaning—a belief in consistent moral principles or ideals about how individuals and society should behave and the courage to risk everything for their realization. During World War II this meant risking his life with the Free Thai Movement in order to liberate the country from an alien, anti-democratic occupation. Among his guiding ideals is a stated belief in truth and its potency in a free and open society to contribute to the well-being of society. At a later stage of his life political turbulence would severely test but never blemish the courage of his commitment to

this ideal.

By the time my assignment at the planning board was nearing completion, Dr. Puey and the Prime Minister had reached a compromise solution that permitted him to double up with two jobs, the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat in the morning and the Bank of Thailand in the afternoon. He genially told the banking community that he preferred to be addressed as Dean rather than Governor Puey. I knew enough about Dr. Puey then to understand that he turned to the University, in this case his own alma mater, because of the temporal limits of his own engagement with social issues; the next generation and successive generations thereafter had to be equipped with the knowledge and the ideals to assume the burden of the struggle for a better society. The brightest young faculty members rallied to support his efforts to reform the system of higher education, to free Thammasat and other universities from bureaucratic regulations, and to create an atmosphere conducive to free and critical inquiry about problems of national development. Although an intellectual, a lover of the arts, and an advocate of liberal education, Dr. Puey viewed the University primarily in instrumental terms, as a mechanism for training people to serve the kingdom and for producing knowledge useful for development.

The success of these initial efforts in the University attracted the attention of the Rockefeller Foundation which agreed to support Dr. Puey's plans to build modern undergraduate and graduate programs in economics. Dr. Puey suggested that I join the Foundation staff and work with him on the project. The opportunity to remain in Thailand, which all my family loved, and to share with this heroic figure the task of pursuing a common vision of the University's potential was exhilarating indeed. I agreed to accept and devoted the next seven years to

the cooperative project designed to implement his academic plans at Thammasat University.

With characteristic dedication and energy, Dr. Puey labored over every detail of his responsibilities at the University particularly the selection of junior lecturers and graduate students. When some of my colleagues wanted him to focus on more general issues, he was frequently agonizing over the case of an individual, his concerns, potentiality and goals in life. In each teacher and student, he sought that precious sense of idealism that could be kindled into an understanding and compassion for the common man, especially the farmer. In his work at the University and development agencies, his energies were increasingly drawn to rural development. On sabbatical leave at Cambridge University, he studied and wrote about rural development and, when Prime Minister Sanya's government had been formed, he returned to direct a field research project to analyze the characteristics of rural poverty and plan development projects addressed to the real conditions in the countryside. Elections were being planned at that time and many supporters urged Dr. Puey to throw his hat into the political ring, but he sincerely felt that he could contribute more to society—while maintaining his integrity—by remaining outside the maelstrom of Thai politics, even if he could have been prime minister.

As Dean and Rector, Dr. Puey could not escape the turbulent politics of the 1970s, particularly when radical student politics became a national issue. Faithful to the principle that truth will result from the open and fair clash of ideas, he tried to moderate the ideological tempest. Although the appearance, the manners and the rhetoric of the radical students often were obnoxious to him, he defended their right to free expression at the cost of slanderous attacks on himself personally. His message

was one of a peaceful and non-violent struggle for reform. Seldom complaining, he did unburden himself in writing an introduction to a series of essays in memory of his trusted associate, Khunying Suparb. He wrote: "Straight opposition, I welcome; crooked opposition saddens me. Pleas for freedom of conscience have been declared tantamount to cowardice, evasion, immoral and even treason. Academic freedom has been attacked as dangerous license... In writing these lines, I do not intend to complain to make anybody, least of all you, feel sorry for me. I just want to congratulate you, Suparb, for the fact that your struggle is now ended. Whether you will agree with me on these particular issues of freedom is of little consequence. What is more important is the fact that you and I have always agreed that ideals are worth fighting for."

The question frequently arose whether Dr. Puey could have accomplished more for his country if he had directly entered the political arena, Basically, I think, he is not a political creature. Perhaps he is too honest, too idealistic, too stubbornly committed to the three guiding ideals in his life, Truth, Beauty and Goodness. Some have criticized him for being naive or unThai because of his courage in standing against the current. The cruelest attacks came from those who charged that he was alienated from Thai values because of his Chinese lineage or his English wife and foreign education. Dr. Puey would brush aside such charges with the response that Truth, Beauty and Goodness are universal values—supported by both Buddhism and Christianity, they define what it means to be human.

Laurence D. Stifel



PUEY

In Direk Jayanama's *Thailand in World War II*, Puey has written the following account of his capture on an intelligence mission behind the Japanese lines:

I find it hardly possible to believe that, within less than a second at that time, so many different thoughts came flooding into my head. From the time that I became conscious that there were people surrounding me, to the time that they reached me, so many different thoughts and images passed through my brain that I do not know which came before, which after. I thought of my lover in London; I thought of Mani Sanasen's last words to me before we left England; I thought of my friends still in India; I thought of my two friends still hiding in the grove nearby; I thought of my friends and relatives living in Bangkok; I thought of the official letter from the High Command to 'Ruth' that was still in my wallet; and I