



Unpacking King Rama IX's Aspirational Commitment: Contribution for Governance, Societal Values, and the Monarchy-People Nexus in Thailand

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Abstract

This academic article examines the significant role of King Rama IX's aspirations, as reflected in his speeches, in shaping governance, societal values, and the relationship between the monarchy and the Thai people. King Rama IX ruled for nearly seventy years, merging traditional monarchy with modern governance, with a particular focus on sustainable development, moral leadership, and community engagement. His speeches, beyond their ceremonial function, instilled a national ethos centered on unity, ethical conduct, and civic duty. This study analyzes how these aspirations influenced Thai governance, promoting inclusivity, shared responsibility, and resilience. By positioning the monarchy as a moral compass, King Rama IX strengthened its role as a guardian of social values and national identity. His pledges deeply impacted various social groups, fostering civic participation and aligning royal vision with public aspirations. Additionally, the paper explores how his commitments interact with the broader socio-political landscape, demonstrating their lasting influence on governance and cultural continuity in contemporary Thailand. This study underscores the enduring impact of King Rama IX's legacy, providing insights into the evolving relationship between the monarchy, governance, and the people, and highlighting the balance between tradition and modernity in shaping Thai identity.

Keywords: Monarchy, Governance, Thai Identity, Civic Engagement, Social Values

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1. Introduction

King Rama IX, or King Bhumibol Adulyadej, through his royal speeches, established a discourse that remains deeply embedded in the collective memory of the Thai people. These speeches, more than mere ceremonial addresses, articulated a vision for a unified and progressive Thailand, shaping national governance and the relationship between the monarchy and its citizens. The Thai monarchy's public commitments hold substantial weight, often serving as formal pledges that influence policy, societal values, and the interplay between royal authority and the people.

King Rama IX's reign spanned almost seven decades, a period marked by political upheavals and shifting public sentiment. His speeches reaffirmed the monarchy's commitment to the well-being of the Thai people and social stability. As noted by Phuaphansawat & Unchanam (2023), the King's public declarations were not only aspirations for national development but also strategic efforts to cultivate a collective identity among Thais and reinforce their allegiance to the monarchy.

The significance of his discourse lies in his ability to evoke a sense of mutual obligation between the monarchy and the people. The pledges made by the monarch were not fleeting political rhetoric; rather, they symbolized a sacred covenant aimed at aligning national governance with the public's welfare. By emphasizing moral integrity, shared prosperity, and social responsibility, King Rama IX positioned himself as a unifying figure in a society often divided along political lines. His speeches conferred upon the monarchy an almost divine legitimacy, encouraging civic participation and national pride, while simultaneously reiterating the responsibilities of Thai citizens in preserving their cultural heritage and national integrity.

This academic article examines the impact of King Rama IX's royal speeches, analyzing how his vision continues to shape Thai governance, social values, and the strong relationship between the monarchy and the people. The study also explores how these speeches balanced tradition and modern transformation, forging a unified national identity amidst Thailand's evolving political landscape.

2. Results of the Study

2.1 Governance

King Rama IX emphasized participatory governance, urging citizens to engage in national development efforts, thus fostering a sense of duty and ownership among the Thai people. His approach to governance prioritized community engagement, ensuring legitimacy while addressing social needs. His speeches reflected democratic principles, reinforcing that good governance should align with the values and aspirations of the citizens (Nagavajara, 2020).



One of the most significant themes in his speeches was sustainable development. For instance, in a 1997 address, King Rama IX stated: *“Development must take into account the benefits for all, ensuring that prosperity does not come at the expense of the environment or social well-being.”* This vision informed policies such as the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), which emphasized moderation, resilience, and sustainable resource management (Rungrojsuwan, 2022).

King Rama IX's advocacy for sustainable development has fundamentally transformed community engagement in Thailand. His emphasis on participatory governance was not merely a theoretical concept but was actively realized through the involvement of local communities, particularly within the realm of ecotourism. By integrating sustainable practices, King Rama IX inspired a paradigm shift where local populations became key players in ecological conservation, while simultaneously engaging in economic activities that improved their standard of living.

Ecotourism played a pivotal role in fostering community participation. Tseng et al. (2019) highlighted how local communities, motivated by the King's vision for sustainable development, embraced tourism as a path to economic self-sufficiency. Village leaders and craftsmen began shaping tourism strategies that aligned with both environmental sustainability and cultural preservation. This collaboration not only promoted ecological management but also reinforced the community's identity and solidarity.

Further studies, such as those by Palmer and Chuamuangphan (2021), emphasized the strong connection between community-based tourism and local commitment. They found that in areas where ecotourism thrived, community members took pride in their role as stewards of cultural and natural resources. Local traditions and ecological knowledge became central to the tourism experience, allowing visitors to engage authentically with Thai culture while supporting environmental conservation. This mutual benefit underlined the principles of participatory governance, as residents actively shaped the direction of tourism initiatives, ensuring their voices were heard.

Moreover, as Nomnian et al. (2020) argued, community-led tourism not only provided economic opportunities but also engaged people in decision-making processes that directly impacted their environment. This approach nurtured a sense of social responsibility, where community members recognized their shared role in preserving both their cultural heritage and natural surroundings. The collective understanding of sustainable development as a shared responsibility further strengthened their commitment to the community's well-being.

Palapin and Housengchai (2024) provided additional insights into the success of community-based tourism in fostering social ties and reinforcing cultural values. Their research showed that the income generated from ecotourism initiatives was reinvested into community



projects, improving local infrastructure and quality of life. This reinvestment cycle helped sustain local traditions and ecological practices, creating a robust collective identity centered around shared experiences and mutual benefits.

King Rama IX's focus on sustainable development, particularly through participatory ecotourism, has left a lasting mark on Thai society. Local communities are no longer just beneficiaries of tourism; they are active participants embodying democratic values and social responsibility. These principles continue to influence modern governance in Thailand, especially in sectors like water resource management and healthcare. The integration of participatory planning models has become essential for addressing urgent social challenges while upholding the democratic ideals championed by King Rama IX. However, the implementation of these ideals has not been without challenges.

Chaichakan and Khampeng (2025) examined innovative tools designed to improve participatory planning in local contexts. Their findings emphasized the importance of integrating local knowledge and involving community members in decision-making processes. This participatory approach helps mitigate conflicts over resource allocation and fosters a sense of ownership among citizens. However, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding the inclusivity of citizen feedback and its effective integration into policy-making processes. For instance, while local engagement is crucial for water resource management, many communities still face barriers to full participation.

In the health sector, Tejativadhana et al. (2018) explored the socio-economic factors influencing health governance in Thailand. They argued that participatory approaches must consider these factors to ensure equitable access to healthcare. Public health initiatives must not only engage communities but also address the broader socio-economic realities that impact health outcomes. Scholars believe that incorporating community insights can enhance service provision and contribute to a healthier population, reflecting the social responsibility embedded in Thai national identity.

Institutionalized participatory governance, as highlighted by Rajan et al. (2019) and Boossabong & Chamchong (2019), has made significant strides in aligning with King Rama IX's democratic principles. These initiatives create platforms for citizens to actively engage in governance, strengthening civic responsibility and social solidarity. While transparency and accountability have improved in recent government reforms, challenges such as bureaucratic rigidity and entrenched interests still hinder full citizen involvement.

The successful application of participatory governance demonstrates progress, but it also reveals a dual reality. On the one hand, there have been tangible successes reflecting a more inclusive and participatory approach to governance, aligned with King Rama IX's democratic values. On the other hand, persistent challenges like resource constraints, political



will, and socio-economic barriers highlight that achieving fully participatory governance is neither straightforward nor simple.

The complexity of these initiatives underscores the importance of aligning the wider institutional environment with participatory ideals. To truly reflect the spirit of social responsibility central to Thai identity, efforts must be made to bridge the gap between political intentions and community realities. Only through ongoing commitment and collaboration can King Rama IX's vision of a participatory Thailand fully materialize, ensuring that the voices of all citizens resonate in governance.

2.2 Societal Values (Sustainable Development)

King Rama IX's emphasis on sustainable development resonated with contemporary global concerns, including environmentalism and food security. His advocacy for self-sufficiency was in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting agricultural sustainability and rural development.

The monarch championed the use of local wisdom in economic planning, famously stating: *"To achieve true development, people must be able to stand on their own feet."* (Office of the Royal Development Projects Board [RDPB], 2009). This ideology led to national programs such as the Royal Rainmaking Project and the promotion of organic farming initiatives.

King Rama IX's philosophy of sustainable development is a comprehensive framework that emphasizes self-sufficiency, environmental management, and the integration of local wisdom into development efforts. This holistic approach goes beyond mere economic growth, recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental health and social equity. It directly addresses contemporary global issues such as climate change, food security, and social inequalities. The King's vision remains highly relevant today, offering a practical and adaptable model to address these urgent global challenges.

Central to his philosophy is the emphasis on self-sufficiency, which resonates strongly with the modern discourse on food security. In an era marked by increasing reliance on global supply chains, King Rama IX's philosophy advocates for local agricultural practices that not only meet immediate nutritional needs but also build resilience against global market fluctuations. His "royal projects" promoted sustainable agricultural techniques and diversification, demonstrating that local, sustainable practices could yield high performance without compromising environmental integrity. Sookde (2024) asserts that King Rama IX's promotion of integrated agricultural systems exemplifies how localized solutions can address pressing food shortages by empowering rural communities.

Another cornerstone of the King's philosophy is the recognition of local wisdom. King Rama IX valued indigenous knowledge systems, understanding that they contain invaluable



insights for sustainable development. By incorporating traditional agricultural practices like organic farming and permaculture, he demonstrated that local wisdom was not merely a relic of the past but a vital resource for addressing contemporary challenges. These practices, deeply rooted in generations of experience, align perfectly with modern needs, such as environmental sustainability. This approach ensures that development initiatives resonate with local cultural practices, enhancing their effectiveness and long-term impact.

Moreover, King Rama IX's philosophy actively engaged marginalized communities, offering them not just resources but the autonomy to make informed decisions about their development. His approach to participatory development aimed to empower rural communities as active agents in their progress. This commitment to inclusivity and equity mirrors the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which advocate for social equity as a core principle of sustainable development. King Rama IX's focus on equitable access to resources was an effort to dismantle systemic inequalities, promoting the active participation of all community members in the decision-making process.

The emphasis on local wisdom is central to understanding the lasting impact of King Rama IX's sustainable development philosophy. As noted by Mohanapriya and Suriya (2025), traditional ecological knowledge provides essential strategies for the sustainable management of land and resources, strategies that modern approaches often overlook. By integrating local wisdom into development planning, King Rama IX ensured that sustainable practices were not only relevant but also deeply rooted in the local context. This practice improved the effectiveness of food security initiatives, as traditional agricultural methods, such as crop rotation and organic fertilization, often produce better results than standardized methods imposed from external sources.

Integrating local knowledge also fosters a sense of belonging and ownership within communities. When local traditions and knowledge are valued, community members are more likely to participate actively in development efforts. This leads to increased resilience in the face of modern challenges like urban migration, economic instability, and environmental fluctuations. King Rama IX's philosophy exemplifies how the synergy between traditional knowledge and sustainable development can create stronger, more resilient communities.

Furthermore, local wisdom plays a critical role in protecting agricultural biodiversity, which is essential for long-term food security. As global agricultural practices trend towards monoculture, often driven by large agribusinesses, the loss of biodiversity can render food systems more vulnerable. However, communities that maintain their traditional knowledge continue to cultivate a diverse range of crops and livestock, which not only contributes to food security but also helps maintain genetic diversity. King Rama IX's advocacy for these



practices was not just about preserving tradition but also about safeguarding the future health of ecosystems.

King Rama IX's approach to sustainable development, particularly in agriculture, demonstrates the practical benefits of integrating traditional knowledge with modern practices. His initiatives led to significant improvements in agricultural productivity, soil health, and community livelihoods, providing a viable model for rural transformation. As Singh and Rana (2022) point out, the improvement of indigenous agricultural techniques encourages a more sustainable environment while strengthening cultural heritage and social cohesion.

King Rama IX also championed the concept of the "sufficiency economy," which emphasizes self-reliance and sustainable resource management. This philosophy aligns with the SDGs, particularly those focusing on resilience to socio-economic challenges. By promoting community-based solutions, such as organic agriculture and agroecology, King Rama IX laid the groundwork for sustainable agricultural practices that continue to be relevant in today's global discussions on food security and environmental sustainability.

The integration of local wisdom within the King's development philosophy also empowered rural communities by fostering education in agriculture and sustainability. Educational programs under his guidance emphasized the importance of transmitting traditional knowledge to future generations, ensuring the continuity of sustainable practices. These initiatives equipped rural communities with the tools needed to adapt to global challenges, preserving local knowledge while encouraging innovation within the cultural context.

In summary, King Rama IX's philosophy of sustainable development, which integrates local wisdom and modern agricultural practices, offers a powerful model for addressing contemporary global issues. His initiatives have led to tangible improvements in agricultural sustainability, rural development, and food security. This approach demonstrates that sustainable development is most effective when it honors both traditional knowledge and global imperatives, providing a roadmap for future development that is both locally grounded and globally relevant. The lasting impact of his philosophy continues to offer valuable lessons for nations striving to achieve sustainability in the face of modern challenges.

2.3 Monarchy-People Nexus (Civic Engagement)

King Rama IX's speeches reinforced the monarchy's role as a moral guide, steering the nation toward ethical governance and shared responsibilities. He stressed civic engagement, urging citizens to contribute to the nation's prosperity through active participation in social and economic projects.

For example, his 1974 speech emphasized the role of youth in nation-building: "*The future of Thailand depends on the determination and integrity of its young people.*" (Office



of the National Economic and Social Development Council, n.d.). This sentiment inspired reforms in education and vocational training, fostering an informed and skilled populace.

The performative aspect of his speeches also played a role in strengthening national unity. As noted by Nagavajara (2020), these speeches served as emotional links between the monarchy and the people, reinforcing loyalty and mutual respect.

The speeches of King Rama IX were central to fostering civic commitment and ethical governance in Thailand. His addresses were not just responses to immediate national concerns but were deeply tied to the historical and emotional fabric of Thai society. Through his rhetoric, the King encouraged citizens to embrace their collective identity and moral responsibilities, inspiring active participation in the governance process. This emphasis on duty and virtue shaped a vision of governance that was grounded in ethical responsibility, which was especially significant as Thailand navigated the complexities of modernization and globalization.

King Rama IX's ability to connect emotionally with the Thai people is well documented. His speeches transcended mere rhetoric, acting as catalysts for national unity. Sripokangkul (2021) highlights how the King's use of emotionally resonant language was crucial in shaping Thai identity. His messages not only fostered a sense of belonging but also empowered citizens to believe in their collective ability to create change. King Rama IX's calls for civic participation were not merely inspirational; they were actionable, embedding values of ethical leadership and social responsibility into the very fabric of Thai society.

The importance of his speeches also extended to youth participation. King Rama IX viewed young people as the torchbearers of Thailand's future and consistently encouraged them to take on responsibilities within their communities. His calls for youth engagement were strategic, aiming to empower the younger generation and ensure the continuity of national values. These speeches were not just inspirational but a call to action, fostering a politically conscious and ethically responsible population. This emphasis on youth was essential for cultivating future leaders committed to the principles of ethical governance.

King Rama IX's speeches were more than just orders—they acted like tools that slowly shaped Thailand's identity. He stressed service, moral example, and civic duty, nurturing a shared sense of responsibility among the people. His way of leading, firmly anchored in genuine care for community well-being, clearly struck a chord with many and built loyalty on real respect rather than blind obedience. Instead of merely commanding authority, he invited everyday citizens to get involved in shaping society. When he put forward his calls for action as acts of love for the nation, even tricky political and social issues became relatable and reachable. There was an undeniable emotional weight in his words, a quality that served as a symbol of deeper communications, sparking feelings of gratitude and reverence in the process.



In many cases, this emotional pull crossed generation lines, uniting the Thai people through shared memories of struggle and progress. In the end, his speeches reminded everyone that building a nation is a collective effort—one that depends on the honest involvement of all Thai citizens.

The King's recognition of the importance of intergenerational solidarity, particularly in engaging young people, was a significant aspect of his vision for Thailand's future. By emphasizing the role of youth, he instilled a sense of agency and purpose, encouraging younger generations to engage in social and civic issues. This strategic recognition also planted the seeds for a new wave of ethical leadership, guided by the values King Rama IX promoted. His emotional appeals made the challenges of nation-building seem more manageable, fostering collaboration across various socioeconomic classes.

In addition to promoting intergenerational solidarity, King Rama IX's speeches emphasized the importance of education as a tool for fostering civic responsibility. His commitment to improving education was directly linked to his vision for the nation, as he sought to cultivate informed and proactive citizens. Sripokangkul (2020) notes that the educational programs influenced by King Rama IX had lasting effects, producing leaders who not only understood governance but also appreciated their duties to their communities and country. By integrating civic responsibility into school curricula, King Rama IX ensured that future generations would be equipped to actively contribute to the democratic process.

The emotional resonance of his speeches, particularly through personal anecdotes and references to shared experiences, deepened the connection between the King and his citizens. This emotional bond was essential in instilling values of service, environmental stewardship, and community engagement. As Sombatpoonsiri (2023) argues, the King's ability to connect with young people on an emotional level helped create a powerful narrative of national unity and collective responsibility.

King Rama IX's legacy is particularly evident in the impact his speeches had on youth. His calls for civic engagement were not just rhetoric but had real-world implications, leading to a renewal of youth involvement in national affairs. Young people, encouraged by the King's message, were seen as critical agents of change. His advocacy for leadership development and civic participation cultivated a new generation of leaders committed to ethical governance. Aribowo et al. (2024) highlight that this involvement in governance was not limited to the youth but extended across various segments of society, strengthening collaboration and promoting societal reforms.

In summary, the speeches of King Rama IX were instrumental in shaping the ethos of national unity and civic responsibility in Thailand. By emphasizing ethical governance, community involvement, and the active participation of youth, he created a lasting legacy of



civic engagement. His ability to forge emotional connections and instill a sense of duty continues to inspire new generations of Thai citizens, encouraging them to engage with the nation's challenges and to build a resilient and prosperous future. The principles of duty, leadership, and unity that permeated his addresses remain essential for contemporary governance, honoring the vision of a monarch who believed in the power of citizens to lead positive change

2.4 Legacy

King Rama IX's influence persists in Thailand's contemporary governance and social policies. The continuity of his ideals is evident in King Rama X's approach to governance, which maintains the emphasis on social equity and sustainable development. Policies aligned with SEP continue to shape economic strategies, reflecting the enduring relevance of his principles.

Moreover, his speeches helped shape modern Thai political discourse. By intertwining governance with cultural traditions, King Rama IX created a framework for national identity that remains influential. His emphasis on collective responsibility, moral integrity, and resilience continues to inform civic expectations and governmental approaches.

As Germann (2023) observes, King Rama IX's legacy serves as a cultural touchstone, reinforcing the monarchy's role in stabilizing Thai society amidst political transitions. His influence extends beyond Thailand, with his philosophies being referenced in international discussions on ethical governance and sustainable development.

King Rama IX, or King Bhumibol Adulyadej, left a profound and lasting impact on Thailand's governance, social policies, and national identity. Ascending to the throne in 1946, his reign spanned over seven decades, during which he skillfully guided Thailand through economic turmoil, social unrest, and political crises. His commitment to development and modernization, paired with a focus on rural well-being, has shaped the nation's governance structures and social policies, particularly through initiatives like the "sufficiency economy." This philosophy promoted moderation, responsible consumption, and self-sufficiency, reinforcing sustainability and resilience within Thai communities. King Rama IX's influence extended beyond governance, as he was venerated as the "father of the nation," deeply embedding his legacy into the national consciousness and the identity of the Thai people.

The principles of King Rama IX also continue to shape Thailand's political discourse today. His emphasis on unity, national development, and rural elevation remains central in contemporary political dialogues. The "economy of sufficiency," which champions balanced trade and sustainable practices, has been adopted by modern politicians to legitimize their policies and align with the vision of their late monarch. This model has influenced policies aimed at poverty alleviation and social equity, underscoring the King's deep integration into



the fabric of Thai governance and society. Even in an era of political divisions, his legacy provides a point of continuity, with his ideals still invoked to guide national decisions and promote national unity.

The King's influence on national identity is equally significant. His ability to connect with citizens through philanthropic initiatives and his unwavering support of rural communities allowed him to cultivate a national collective identity based on gratitude, respect, and unity. This enduring reverence for King Rama IX continues to hold Thai society together, especially amid contemporary socio-political challenges. Political movements and parties frequently reference his legacy to garner support, demonstrating that his ideals remain a powerful force within Thailand's current political landscape.

The philosophy of King Rama IX, particularly his model of participatory development, continues to inform contemporary governance. Sookde (2024) notes that King Rama IX's development projects were more than welfare initiatives—they were holistic strategies that considered local cultures and ecological conditions. His emphasis on sustainable development, with projects designed to involve local communities in their implementation, has left a lasting legacy. Initiatives like the "New Theory" have been adopted at various levels of government to promote food security and economic self-sufficiency, ensuring that communities are resilient to external shocks like market fluctuations and climate change. As Rappa (2017) explains, these projects emphasize the sovereignty and commitment of communities, becoming models for current social policies focused on sustainability and equity.

The enduring influence of King Rama IX is evident in the current reign of King Rama X, whose governance is shaped by the foundations laid by his father. Phuapharysawat and Uncham (2023) argue that modern Thai political practices continue to reflect the priorities set by King Rama IX, particularly in areas like socio-economic development and reducing inequality. His legacy is invoked to strengthen the continuity of governance, especially as the country faces modern challenges. Politicians often refer to his ideals as a means to legitimize their policies, suggesting that adherence to the principles of unity, social responsibility, and good governance is seen as a national duty.

The legacy of King Rama IX also continues to be enshrined in education. Thai curricula include narratives that celebrate his contributions to development, health, and the environment, cultivating loyalty and admiration among younger generations. Iamsa-ard et al. (2024) highlight that King Rama IX is portrayed as a model of virtue and service, reinforcing his values of unity, social responsibility, and cultural pride within the educational system. By embedding these ideals in the national education framework, the government ensures that future generations understand the historical importance of his reign while aligning his principles with contemporary challenges. This educational approach fosters a population that upholds



the values of unity and service, further consolidating King Rama IX's role in shaping national identity and political values.

In conclusion, the legacy of King Rama IX remains a central force in shaping the national identity and political practices of Thailand. His emphasis on unity, sustainable development, and good governance continues to guide contemporary political discourse and public policies. His philosophies, particularly the “sufficiency economy,” continue to resonate, providing a model for modern governance that balances progress with cultural and environmental integrity. The reverence for King Rama IX ensures that his vision remains deeply embedded in Thai society, serving as a beacon for national cohesion and a reference point for current and future generations of leaders. His influence is woven into the very fabric of Thailand’s political and social landscape, underscoring the lasting power of his principles in navigating the complexities of a changing world.

3. Conclusion

King Rama IX’s leadership and vision left an indelible mark on Thai governance, societal values, and the monarchy-people relationship. His focus on sustainable development, ethical governance, and civic engagement transcended mere administration, embedding moral and inclusive values into the national fabric. By harmonizing traditional monarchical principles with modern governance, he fostered a leadership ethos centered on empathy, cultural preservation, and public participation.

His speeches remain relevant today, providing guiding principles for governance and social development. By advocating public participation and valuing cultural heritage, King Rama IX ensured that his vision would endure, fostering national unity and resilience for future generations. His legacy stands as a testament to the enduring power of visionary leadership in shaping a nation’s identity and governance model.



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