

July 2021

## Becoming a Thai National Female Leader on a Successful Path: A Case Study of Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap

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### Recommended Citation

Silpasuwan, Pimpan; Rodcumdee, Branom; Rerksngarm, Anchalee; Udchumpisai, Monthira; Saleekul, Sumlee; Tongvichean, Sulee; Poopongpan, Woraporn; and Putthikhan, Phawida (2021) "Becoming a Thai National Female Leader on a Successful Path: A Case Study of Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap," *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 , Article 14.

Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22543/0733.142.1358>

Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/jvbl/vol14/iss2/14>

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### **Cover Page Footnote**

The Thai Public Health Nursing Association supported this work] under Grant [2561-2562 TPHN-C]."

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## Case Study in Leadership

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# Becoming a Thai National Female Leader on a Successful Path

## *A Case Study of Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap*



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### ***Abstract***

*This study was configured to examine one Thai leader's life history and work, namely Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap. At a time when female leadership throughout the world in key governmental and business levels of leadership has begun to show potential for steady growth, studies of individual female heads are particularly noteworthy, especially in countries with ever-changing government types – be it a parliamentary system, a military junta, a nascent democracy, or a constitutional monarchy. The method selected for this*

*study largely involved autobiographical and biographical research. The data was derived from the subject's self-recorded history and accountings of her closest associates. In all, 29 key informants were interviewed during 2019-2020 for this study, employing different question sets. The empirical data's trustworthiness was thoroughly cross-checked for reliability. The outcomes of this research overwhelmingly portray the subject as an exemplary figure who converted formidable challenges into life and career-building opportunities, bettering society overall in the process.*

## **Introduction**

The 21st century was predicted to launch an era marked by female leaders' rise as many of the world's societies had defined human rights as inclusive of women's rights (Akanda, 2020). However, the shortage of female leaders has been noted at all levels of government. The lack of gender parity in Thai society adversely affects the image of a people's democracy attempting to persevere in a country marked by continued vestiges of inequality. The United Nations declared gender equality an essential organizational cultural trait, embodied as Sustainable Development Goal 5 (United Nations, 2015). Leadership theories have led to a paradigm shift from viewing leadership as an innate trait towards the adoption of models that recognize leadership as a social construction. Alongside this theorization, gender and leadership remain of considerable interest, particularly given women's underrepresentation in leadership positions (Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017).

Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap (Khunying) served as Advisor to the President of the Council of Social Work of Thailand from 2018 to 2020. She was a two-time senator. Her public service was exemplary, as evidenced by the many prestigious awards she received along the way. As a leader with a life path as complicated as a labyrinth, she overcame historically marginalizing obstacles until ultimately attaining career success (Eagly & Carli, 2007). A study of the female lead's role in Thai society, which is imbued with authentic decision-making powers, could produce a model for future emulation, presenting the female leader's worldview as the core of a burgeoning, democratic society. To create gender equality in positions of leadership of a more lasting nature, especially during a global pandemic – broader social conditions and goals must be realized. One endeavor is to reshape daily living conditions consistent with Thai culture and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015).

## **Research Question and Objectives**

Suppose Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap's life and career can truly serve as a present-day leadership model. If so, then would it not be critical to examine the most significant aspects of her life story, her family environment, and her work record during different periods of her life – from a young girl to ultimately ascending to the position of a formidable Thai national leader? This study was designed to do just that: to explore, ascertain, and describe the milestones of her personal life, including the impact of family, education, and work, as well as her societal contributions – all of which led to burnishing her place on the world stage.

## **Theoretical, Conceptual Framework**

One challenge of academically deconstructing an autobiography and biography (Wagner-Egelhaaf, M. 2019) is how to best focus on the work and life, profession and person, occupation, and preoccupations of the individual be examined. The examination of her life

describes and reflects upon past phenomena through a complex network of perspectives. In this case, a long record of leadership has often shown despondency and defeat, primarily resulting from the harsh realities of gender inequality in Thai society. A particular Thai idiom says, “The husband is the foreleg of the elephant, the wife is the hind leg,” which indicates the central position that the female occupies (Authentic Leader) in this configuration (Mantler, 2020). Regardless of its positioning, obstacles to female success are significant. It takes tremendous courage and perseverance to break through the *glass ceiling* to overcome these challenges in carrying out leadership duties and responsibilities (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Strong support from personal and professional networks helps maintain the necessary fortitude for individuals to instill fairness in society. Dedication to equity requires empathy – something covered under Buddhist teachings. Deriving happiness from providing opportunities to others involves harmonizing core values and norms of Thai culture, which essentially originate from infusing Buddhism dharma faith, love, and hope into daily practices (Khwanmuang, 2014). Theories predicated upon women’s experiences – often referred to as “women-normed” (Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017) – take into account women’s multiple roles and identities in Easternized culture socialization. These theories also include multiple paradigms (Kapasi & Sang, 2016), such as the self-cultivation of virtues (Wang & Hackett, 2020), and how they are reflected in different points or ways of examining contributions to society.

## **Method**

This study involves qualitative biographic research: a collection and interpretation of personal interviews and documents (Goodwin, 2012) and the semiotic theory (Irvine, 1998) of applying life narratives as they occur. The metrics used consisted of conducting and interpreting semi-structured interviews. In all, 29 individuals were designated as key informants, including historians and those claiming to have a close relationship at different times during the subject’s life. These individuals were divided into five groups. The instrument used to produce the empirical data was comprised of five different sets of questionnaires. After gaining institutional permission to conduct the research project, data were collected from February 2019 to February 2020.

## **Data Analysis**

Inductive content analysis methods were employed to derive meaning and social norm values from identified groups. Culture-based beliefs and traditions of contemporary lifestyle were used in formulating narratives and focused on the symbolic interaction theory (Linder, 2015). They were based on significant contributors’ perspectives and ability to attain credible information (trustworthiness) (Nunning, 2015). The authors used a triangulation technique to analyze data. The research project was approved by the Research Project Subcommittee, Royal Thai Army Medical Department Book: No. N013q / 61\_Exp on January 26, 2019.

## **Research Findings: *Life Milestones***

Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap (Khunying) was born on July 27, 1933, shortly after a coup in Thailand, and before World War II. During this period, confusion and economic turmoil prevailed, and the Thai people greatly suffered. Khunying grew up under the patriarchy of Khun Prasitara (grandfather) – former director-general of the Royal Irrigation Department – in a house located at the edge of the Bangkok-Yai Canal, a tributary of Bangkok’s Chao Phraya River. She was raised in a tightly-knit, multi-generational family, which included both her parents and grandparents. Her father worked as a postmaster.

Her mother had received an 8th grade education from an all-girls' high school at a time when most Thai people had not received a primary education or even completed a government-mandated early elementary education (since 1921, the government announced that Thais had to read and write in order to complete this required early elementary school education).

During her childhood years, her family split up; to this day, neither Khunying nor her other family members are able to pinpoint the exact reasons for the family's demise. In Thai culture, grandparents and other relatives are no longer acknowledged when a couple is unable to reconcile their differences as spouses are expected to love each other unconditionally and stay together for life. In this family, however, Khunying's parents had routinely aired their grievances and expressed their unhappiness openly before other members of the household, forever generating instability in the children's upbringing.

Khunying ran away from home during a period of national political turbulence. At that time, Khunying was only 15 years of age and was in her fifth year of secondary school in the NakhonSiThammarat Province. She received a letter from her grandmother that her father was diagnosed with epilepsy and was displaying symptoms of paralysis, making self-care an impossibility. Khunying was anxious about her father's condition, but did not dare seek her mother's permission to visit him. She snuck onto a train along her young sister to see their father, with the assistance of a family friend who was a railway officer. After their initial visit with him, the sisters returned to live with their mother.

At the age of 18, Khunying's mother wanted her to remain at home to help raise her young sister and brother. However, she was determined to continue her education. She decided to leave home again, doing so with the assistance of the same railway worker who ensured her safe voyage to Bangkok. She moved in with her grandfather and father. From there, she began her studies at the Thai Red Cross Nursing School at the same time of the Rebellion of June 29, 1951 – an uprising that was deemed a failed coup attempt by officers of the Royal Thai Navy against the government of Prime Minister Plaek Pibulsonggram (Phibun). Chaos enveloped Bangkok and unsafe conditions were evident throughout the Thai Red Cross Nursing School as well.

Although that period in her life was rife with conflict and uncertainty, Khunying would eventually overcome her fears to bravely face the risks inherent with her runaway status, largely as a result of her family's early establishment of a sound moral foundation, her incessant love of learning, and the basic tenets of her deep Buddhist faith. This was inevitable as Khunying had been imbued, early on, with a life-long commitment to continuously seek both self and community betterment – all grounded in multi-faceted allegiance to Nation, Religion, and Royalty.

Although Thailand is not recognized as championing equal treatment for girls and women, it is important to note that it does not significantly deprive females of education or work opportunities – generally. However, women are systematically excluded from holding prominent positions in government, in the military, and in private business organizations. With respect to early education, Thailand enacted the *Primary Education Act* in 1921 when an absolute monarchy ruled the country. This primary education system sought to compel children age 7 (in some areas, adjusted to 8, 9, and 10 years of age) to be enrolled in elementary school until age 14. This act was made gender-neutral even before Thailand changed its rule to a constitutional monarchy. However, even with the introduction of a constitutional monarchy – and hence a more discernible form of government – gender rights were not heralded under new rule.





**Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap (Khunying) after promotion**

of three to five petals, each symbolizing love, faith, hope, and luck, each demarcating major life events from childhood to the present day. The labyrinth's first level is foundational in nature, serving as a support base for successive life events. Her self-declared primary motivators are comprised of love of family, love of learning, love of intimate relationships, love of work, love of appointed duties, love of the marginalized, and the greatest love of all: love of virtue – sufficiently in abundance to leave a lasting legacy. Each layer of the labyrinth is labeled, indicating the various points in her life wherein hard work, integrity, determination, and perseverance all contributed to her advancement from sergeant army nurse to major general – the highest position attainable for a Thai woman.





















Her most impactful experiences are shown in *Table 1* below:




Regardless of unequal treatment, Khunying continued to advance in her field and was promoted from nurse sergeant to major general, shattering the usual institutional barriers posed to female advancement in the process. She held several important positions in local, national, and international organizations in later years, achieving benefits and justice for historically marginalized and underprivileged groups. She unfailingly persevered in accomplishing the objectives of multiple royal project missions. Her inspiration continued to be predicated upon foundational Buddhist tenets, guiding her to promote acts of love, faith, and hope in praxis to benefit Thai society.

Her life's path metaphorically resembles a labyrinth (Smith, 1979), occupying seven levels of activity demarcation – each of which is identified by a traditional cloverleaf symbol. The cloverleaf consists



**Table 1: Theme and Subtheme Concepts**

Theme	Subtheme	Cloverleaf
<b>Labyrinth Level 1:</b> Love of family and fear of departing from childhood home ( <b>Painful Point</b> )	1. Overcome fear with self-encouragement	
	2. Make progress through the study	
<b>Labyrinth Level 2:</b> Love of learning tirelessly through graduation ( <b>Transforming Point</b> )	3. Study nursing	
	4. Obtain a position as a new graduate nurse	
	5. Find a life partner	
<b>Labyrinth Level 3:</b> Love of relationships and entry into marriage ( <b>Growing Point</b> )	6. Stabilize the relationship and overcome marital obstacles	
	7. Proceed as a partnership	
<b>Labyrinth Level 4:</b> Love, work, and family ( <b>Energizing Point</b> )	8. Work diligently, seizing opportunities along the way	
	9. Travel abroad	
	10. Return from journeys and improve work performance	
<b>Labyrinth Level 5:</b> Love of duty and virtue; commitment to repay society ( <b>Empowering Point</b> )	11. Care of aging parents	
	12. Show kindness and empathy to the members of both families	
	13. Repay the gifts bestowed by the planet, religion, and the royalty	
<b>Labyrinth Level 6:</b> Love of people and support of the poor ( <b>Inspiring Point</b> )	14. Support job creation and income generation	
	15. Narrow the income gap and social inequalities; promote educational opportunities	
	16. Value people for what they do	
<b>Labyrinth Level 7:</b> Leave a legacy ( <b>Sparkling Point</b> )	17. Volunteer to support communities	
	18. Faithfully support religion	
	19. Promote and support Thai women-oriented activities	
	20. Demonstrate reverence for the royalty and Thai culture	

Note:  3-petal clover leaf  4-petal clover leaf  5-petal clover leaf

**Transforming Point:** Since attending nursing school in 1951, the year of the Manhattan Rebellion, the country’s economic and political stability has been repeatedly tested and witnessed chaotic times, especially after the military’s failed attempt to overthrow the government; however, Khunying remained determined to continue her studies, always supported by her nursing teacher and friends.



**Growing Point:** After graduating from her nursing program, Khunying began an intimate relationship with the person who would become her spouse. The pair would be described as the “perfect couple who turned adversity into charisma,” “a meritorious couple,” and finally, “a majestic couple.”

**Energizing Point:** Khunying’s early experiences working as a practical nurse in a province were recognized before moving to Bangkok. She followed her husband there to study and shortly thereafter, worked abroad for four years. Both recognized the opportunities involved by accepting positions overseas. These experiences provided Khunying with new knowledge, alternate ways of thinking and processing data, a greater understanding of diverse societies, and new ways to confront and handle obstacles and problems. She developed workplace efficiencies which related her ability to integrate and create harmony within the context of corporate value. She was regarded as a budding leader when she assumed the position of Director of the Royal Thai Army Nursing College.

Her evolution was premised on at least three dimensions: inner self-identity, intermediate interactive frontier, and external dimension. She was regarded as a person who did the right thing, at the right time, and within the right circumstances. She pursued opportunities to expand her career as was characterized by a close colleague as follows:

*She was sincere, caring, supportive, worthy, and humble and was respected by others. Her leadership consistently sought knowledge and intelligence; many people came to rely on her advice as a correct solution for them (G4T3).*

*She fosters good human relations and shows kindness and soft verbal communication skills. She advocates working together in a democratic atmosphere where leaders are willing to listen to the team and other people along the way; when angry, she knew forgiveness and practiced mutual respect (G3P4F2).*

*She made quick decisions, which helped the public solve common problems; her actions were deemed very impressive by supervisors and workers alike (G4P2F1).*

Another colleague reflected that:

*She is down-to-earth, simple, warm, supported by family, radiates true love, and is respected; she has expansive vision, morality, and is a talented person to be honored. She always gives people opportunities in all areas. She thinks of others as a whole before consideration of self, e.g., [giving] nursing students who pass the 1st and 2nd levels [of] exams the opportunity to continue study abroad (G3P5F1).*

The National Leader of Nursing Profession mentioned:

*She has been a virtuous person since childhood. She always works hard and is lucky to have a warm, supportive family to make the job go smoothly. She is of good character, promotes well-being, is an excellent facilitator, [and is] a high-quality person – calm and gentle, able to plan great things. I am proud of her for becoming a role model in the nursing profession (G4P1F4).*

The shocking events in her life are remembered today. She stood in senior leadership soldiers’ line ranks but was spurned by military medical students, perhaps due to her previous position as a military sergeant nurse. A turning point for her was the opportunity to reform the *Educational System of Thai Army Nurses* to incorporate professional nursing standards as a professional nurse. Moreover, she added to the nursing profession’s capacity building by including professional nurses in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and police

units, creating a united and robust network. She drove academic and professional progress to be on par with the international profession.

**Empowering Point:** She was elected President of the Nursing Association of Thailand in 1991 and held many other honorable positions, such as President of the National Women's Council and appointment to the Thai Social Welfare Council.

Her impressive contributions to Thai society improved the quality of life for children, youth, women, and disadvantaged groups in society. She championed equity and equality for all people upon attaining positions of authority. The National Women's Council represented an opportunity to help people who were marginalized and lacked primary education throughout various regions. She helped women develop their potential, secure gainful employment, earn their own livelihood, share in benefits, and additionally created social networks to stimulate self-empowerment and self-efficacy further. In Thai culture, Buddhism dharma influences Thai people's lives from birth to death. No matter what burdens or complicated duties were presented, she always felt indebted to her aging parents – never forsaking their contributions to her development – and unfailingly cared for them in alignment with Buddhist core tenets.

From 1996 to 1999, she served as a senator. Her constituents included women and children as well as victims of violence and sexual harassment. Until recently, she was involved in school projects throughout the country. The young senator who worked with her on women's affairs on the Women's Committee referred to her as follows:

*People saw her as a hand-molded brick, not a block brick, because she adjusted her personality, relationship, and work using a skillful hand, intelligent head, and gentle heart (G3P3F3).*

*By applying her knowledge, she sought to improve working conditions with love, faith, commitment, and mutual hope; she was able to effect significant changes more than ever in society, from raising workplace standards to advocating lifelong learning. Furthermore, as always, her subordinates and colleagues love her (G4P3F2).*

**Inspiring Point:** As a senator, Khunying had the opportunity to benefit society, such as rehabilitating and promoting the welfare of women who had been subjected to violence. Initially, campaigns and charity events were organized to stop violence against children and women. Moreover, she organized campaigns to construct homes in various provinces to provide temporary shelter for women and children who had been abused. She realized that those individuals needed help from those authorized to provide such assistance. As to her role in these efforts, the following was said:

*She is like a mother, [committed] to listen and understand and show tenderness and kindness to everyone, not only holding them in her heart, but [supporting them], teaching them how to trap fish instead of taking fish, and providing an example to fund a rural career for low educated, low income, and unemployed women (G5P2).*

*In punishing the accused, we should not focus on the law or solely on the accused issues but give them a chance to do well. She had 'the wind under the wings' to forcefully and actively [uplift] those around her who were supporters [including her] family, brothers, sisters, teachers, etc. She was the force needed to push, pull, and sustain others in order for them to achieve their best and preserve their integrity (G5P2).*

*... She highlighted the discord between men and women in Thai society as she worked to help patients, jointly committing to cases concerning children and women, as functioning as the key in society used to understand injustice in Thai society (G5P2).*

**Growing Point:** She practices her religious principles fervently by extracting the central theme of Buddhist essence, always striving to apply wisdom, virtue, and dignity in everyday life activities.

She is proud of her outstanding national achievements of providing shelter in difficult times for those in need and offering advancement opportunities to her fellow citizens. For example, the “Praewa-Thai Silk Take a Dream” project demonstrates Thais’ embracing of conservation, appreciation of diversity, and observance of local wisdom passed down throughout history. In addition to local Thais, she had value-added projects that generated praise for local female artisans:

*She is a role model, a good leader in patronizing the temple and sustaining Buddhist [principles]; she did not expect anything in return for giving alms to monks as an expression of her faith, invoking the ‘jewel of jewels’ – sacrifice, physical strength, wealth, the power of faith that did not decrease at all. She is a stable force in Buddhism and exhibits mindfulness and good consciousness (G4P3F2).*

The **Sparkling Point** in her life spotlights her commitment to volunteerism. In the tradition of “Mother’s Day,” she made and distributed jasmine bouquets to the poor and disabled groups. For this she received high praise from customers around the country. The proceeds from the sale of jasmine to the Queen helped to establish a “fund” from which proceeds were distributed pursuant to royal wishes, such as the Queen’s provision of particular assistance to the homeless every official day. There are over 100 people per day who await the distribution of a lunchtime meal. She aimed to ameliorate this situation head-on. She and the officers were always willing to offer their services to the Queen’s project to help Thai society overall by aiding the poor and hungry.

When Khunying served as President of the *National Thai Women’s Council*, she attended the meeting of representatives of the *International Women’s Council* to help Thais understand the legal and cultural traditions of the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN) laws and to serve as active participants of the ASEAN civil society. A revered part of ASEAN operations for Thai women and for Khunying personally was a particular regional grouping that promoted economic, political, and security cooperation among its ten members (i.e., Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), known as the *International Women’s Visiting Program*. This program was designed to strengthen the relationship between the *International Women’s Council* and the *National Council of Women* – with Khunying serving as its Chairperson. This project was introduced by lauding the Chairperson and her team members by stating that the “ASEAN women took turns dominating the meeting. In 1996, [Khunying] had the opportunity to become a vice president of ASEAN. She received overwhelming support for Thailand’s Projects for ‘Preventing Violence Against Children, Adolescents and Women.’”

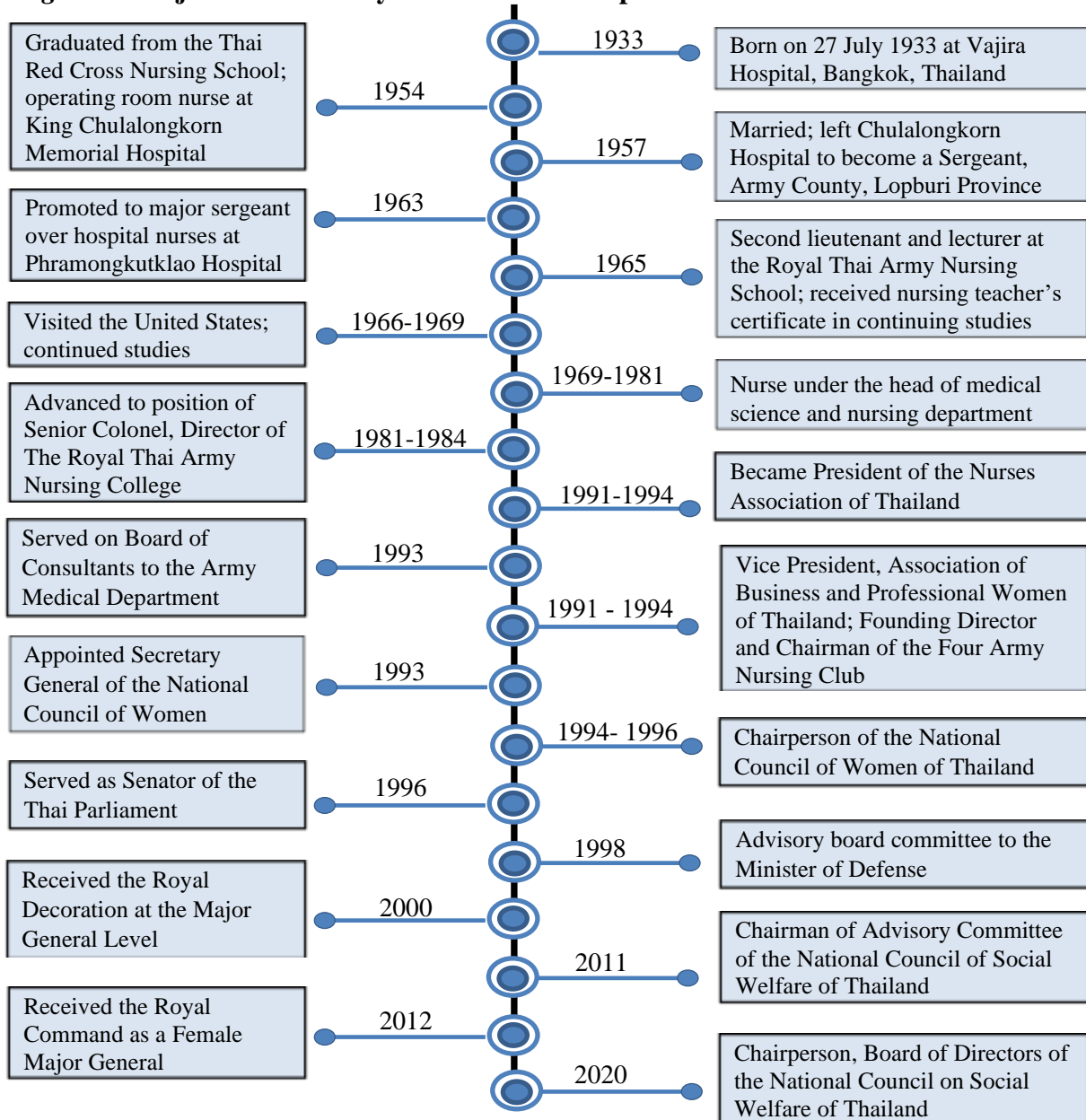
Khunying’s efforts through this program and throughout her adult life were done for the benefit of individuals, groups, and society to improve quality of life and incentivize self-reliance rather than societal dependence. She reflected that:

*For the past 58 years, the intent of my work has been to advance Thai women. It is recognized that the status of Thai women is higher than in many countries. Thai women*

*are changing more and more because of accessing higher education. In the future, as women, we must adhere to the work delineated by the organization's constitution and help each other elevate the status of women in Thai society.*

Loyalty and devotion to the monarchy as a female soldier and advancing from sergeant to lieutenant general, Khunying has indeed been loyal to the King and Royal Family all while highlighting culture harmony and supporting various royal initiatives to aid disadvantaged Thais. Her timeline is set forth in *Figure 1*.

**Figure 1: Major General Lady Asanee Saowabhap's Life Path**



## Discussion

The life of Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap is a portrait of a Thai woman who was born before World War II and grew up under the Ratanakosin monarchy. Early in her childhood, her family's breakup affected her mind, mood, behavior, and development. It was a painful point in her history, prompting her to leave her home and to eventually find

solace in pursuing medical studies – all at a time when she was caring for her ailing father. These early experiences helped to shape her character and to mold her into a servant leader. In essence, these life events formed the necessary foundation for her to take risks wisely while preparing to courageously withstand the obstacles she would confront later in life.

Thai traditional values influenced her life early on, teaching her that children must respect and obey their parents at all times. As Buddhist doctrine deems it sinful to cause parents suffering (Khwanmuang, 2014), she unfailingly adhered to this absolute doctrine of parental respect and deference – even during her teen years.<sup>1</sup> Khunying’s grandparents educated her in manners, respect, obedience to and love of parents, care for elders, showing benevolence to the marginalized, politeness, and steadfast worship (fortified by Buddhist teachings).

Although she came from a broken family and faced the outside world alone, she was afraid to be lonely and was determined to pursue all available opportunities for self-advancement. She could readily empathize with the plight of the poor, the homeless, the very young, the aged, and the disabled and was committed to expanding their opportunities and providing assistance. She also believed in forging partnerships to provide meaningful aid to women and the needy, all of whom primarily resided in rural areas. By elevating their economic situation, she believed that they could take better care of themselves as well as their families and communities.

Women in traditional Thai society have been metaphorically compared to the elephant’s back feet but have had to follow the front feet in daily life; moreover, their prospects for vocational development and financial growth were severely limited. The quest for positions of middle and high-level management was, and remains, hindered. This disparate treatment of women largely replicates unequal gender treatment in other developing countries. According to a survey of Lebanese managers and employees, female executives with high-level knowledge and skills were routinely denied promotions solely based on their sex; men were viewed as “more appropriate” leaders – better equipped with risk-discerning and quick decision-making skills (Wiewiora & Kowalkiewicz, 2018).

Khunying’s successes in her vocation developed from her inner strength; she believed in the faith of perseverance and intended to use it to achieve her objectives. Accordingly, she was ready to take on new obligations, expand her knowledge, and commit to a lifelong learner’s status. She saw everything as a learning experience and an opportunity to improve and develop her identity and uniqueness as well as increase others’ opportunities to grow and advance. Her energizing spirit sought to empower and inspire those she encountered and who would ostensibly become part of her individual supportive networks (Wong & Laschinger, 2013; Sosik et al., 2019).

Balancing family and work harmoniously brought her happiness in life. Strengthening and empowering people benefitted not only her own family (one of her adopted daughters is training to be a film producer in the U.S.) but also the larger community, society, and the whole nation (Moxley, 2015). She penetrated obstacles appearing at each stage of life – from early childhood to school age, from adolescence to adulthood, because she thought

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<sup>1</sup> By contrast in the United States, research indicates that the majority of teenagers aged 14-15 who had run away from their homes developed serious problems with their parents or felt general dislike, experienced depression, and were often subject to detention and addiction (Tucker et al., 2011).



outside the traditional frame of advancement. Moreover, having a husband who acted as a full partner, a committed family man, a reliable source of support, an influential mentor, and the co-architect of a social network, helped her assume direct responsibility. Therefore, she had external power commensurate with “the wind under the wings” to serve; she overcame traditional gender barriers and worked with pride and dignity (Reis & Grady, 2019).

Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap shares characteristics similar to other female leaders, including curiosity, love, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Her clear ideology has centered on showing mercy to, and reducing the suffering of, the citizens she serves. She shares with other female leaders a broad vision to increase educational opportunities and acquire new informational sources to positively change societal attitudes and make wise decisions (Heslin, Keating, & Ashford, 2020). She always believed that educated advisers were crucial to sound decision-making and to the formation of effective informational networks (Kooskora, 2005; Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017). With her thirst for knowledge and access to experienced consultants, Khunying has demonstrated, time and again, the ability to turn a crisis into an opportunity by taking intelligent risks.

She continuously displays good ethical behavior and projects an ever-evolving positive moral image. Her educational achievement level transcends others her same age, exhibiting modernity and freedom of action within a harmonized family structure (Laekngam, 2013). Moreover, she thinks outside the box and accepts full accountability for her actions, respect for her various roles, and a firm commitment to helping people. Her actions reflect her gratitude to the land of her birth and her loyalty to the nation, her religious tenets, and the King. Her devotion to Buddhism has helped her cultivate her family while shaping the social context within the nation. She expressed the following:

*Teachings by grandparents on respect, obedience, and respect for the traditional family, cultivating a polite and respectful Thai lifestyle, and exercising self-discipline must be put into practice. Thai women's culture has been refined and follows the concept, 'Do not be a full cup of water, that could not be filled anymore and be ready to adapt for the better.'*

By working in and learning from foreign country encounters, her demeanor and actions often differ from that of other Thai women, yet she has not eschewed traditional principles (Martin, 2020). Furthermore, in contrast to traditional male governance, her leadership style conforms more to the cumulative findings of a meta-analysis of 160 studies which indicate that women engage in a more participatory or democratic governance model rather than the more dictatorial or less orderly structure attributed to many male leaders (Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli, & Bilimoria, 2008).

How does the cultivation of the female leadership identity in Thai culture produce a good citizen? One values patriotism, religious faith, and loyalty to the King and Royal Family as the triple pillars comprising the Thai ideological perspective. In this regard, Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap continues to inspire and benefit the Thai nation.

During the reign of King Rama IX and Queen Sirikit, the Queen's Royal Highness visited every region to hear people's troubles – an action which led to the creation of 4,877 projects under a blanket royal initiative. It is undeniable that these projects were beneficial and produced empirical results. For Thai people who are open-minded and think positively – like Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap who worked side-by-side with her husband as

the kind physician and trustful nurse – needed services were delivered to underserved communities in remote areas. Khunying continues to help people affected by economic and social problems through her work with the Social Work Council, a Royal Patronage organization.

An authentic leader's key characteristics include a commitment to transparency, accountability, and honesty. An authentic leader's work ethic is consistent with the theoretical leadership model and centers around the values of responsibility and verifiability (Hejase, Haddad, Massoud, & Farha, 2013; Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017; Shaddox & Letra, 2019). Her life's work has exhibited all of these traits.

Despite the coronavirus outbreak affecting more than 212 countries, including Thailand, Khunying remains the leader of a large social mobilization team, serving as the President of the Social Welfare Council of Thailand. In this manner, people in crisis are allocated necessary supplies to mitigate their suffering.

### **Limitation of Case Study**

One limitation of this study pertains to the fact that the critical informants of this study did not reveal potential biases regarding the subject's assumed loyalty to monarchy and government. Exploration of these factors would be required to strengthen future projects.

### **Conclusion**

Using a labyrinth comprised of seven levels in analogical idiom, the cloverleaf was used to record the subject's major life events, characterized by love, faith, hope, and well-being resulting in transcending the usual barriers to success encountered by Thai women. With age has come empowerment, virtue, and self-fulfilling self-actualization. Her educational attainments and Buddhist essence have guided her thinking, acting, and responding to social phenomena. Those experiences have played a vital role in developing leadership skills. Wisdom, mindfulness, and smart decision-making have resulted in necessary societal changes which have reduced inequality and increased social justice by harmonizing traditional culture with modern-day feminism.

The work and achievements of Major General Lady Asanee Saovapap provide a leadership model that could be used to develop, construct, and activate female leadership in harmonization with Thai cultural norms. Her example serves to strengthen the social networks which support a social-democratic climate for women's leadership development.

**Acknowledgment:** The Thai Public Health Nursing Association supported this work under Grant [2561-2562 TPHN-C].

**Disclosure Statement:** Financial support from Public Health Nursing Association has not influenced this research.

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