

Other fields

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day brought home five pots of orchids and hung them in front of the house. When he was growing up, orchids were rare and were treated as wild plants. Only the rich and privileged of Thai society could own orchids. The common people were made to stay away from them. They were special, forbidden plants.

Rapee had a rebellious spirit. He wondered, could he not have access to orchids and understand their nature too? This episode marked the beginning of his long journey toward studying and discovering the wild plants that would later be bred, planted and crossbred, and become fully accessible to all people regardless of class.

Rapee studied agriculture in a pre-college programme at Maejo University, Chiang Mai before enrolling at Kasetsart University.

After graduation, he began serious research into orchids. He was the first Thai who

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applied statistics to the research of agriculture. Rapee recalled, "My teacher was amazed when he saw me applying statistics in my research. 'How could you do this? You fell asleep in my classes?' he asked."

In 1953, he initiated a project for his students to plant orchids. By 1963, he had acquired an international reputation. He was invited to speak at an international conference on orchids. In 1970 he was appointed fulltime professor at Kasetsart University without having to go through the assistant professorship or associate professorship. He retired from academic life in 1980.

Rapee has a generous heart. The knowledge he gained from his orchid research is shared in

a selfless manner. Thai planters and exporters have all directly or indirectly benefit from Rapee's knowledge to the extent that Thailand is one of the world's major exporters of orchids. In recognition of his contribution to orchid study, Siam Commercial Bank and the Department of Fine Arts in 1993 helped sponsor the creation of the Orchid Library of Rapee Sagarik at the National Library.

Rapee donated his lifetime's work to the library with a glad heart so that later generations could learn about him and his study of orchids. In 2000, Kasetsart University also honoured him with The Orchid Garden in his name in its campus.

With the destruction of Thai forests at an alarming rate

every year, many are afraid that some day there will not be any wild orchids left, not to mention other precious and rare plants and animals. Rapee's study helps the people to understand the different kinds of orchids and how to plant and preserve them.

He does not approach orchids as an end in themselves or as the pyramid of knowledge. He rejects specialisation for specialisation's sake. Rather, throughout his life, he has sought to understand the laws of nature and how things in this world interact with each other in an on-going process.

"Man is only part of this process. If we have love and respect for other people, even though they are only common villagers, then we have discovered ourselves, having a good heart and sincerity, which are the most important things of all," he said.

This is the true legacy of Rapee, one that transcends orchids and touches our conscience. ■



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