

MOVEMENTS AND MONUMENTS: STUDENT
MOVEMENTS FOR “DEMOCRACY” IN 1973 AND
2020 AND PUBLIC MONUMENTS IN THAILAND



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การเคลื่อนไหวและอนุสาวรีย์: การเคลื่อนไหวเพื่อ “ประชาธิปไตย” ของนักศึกษาใน
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"ประชาธิปไตยแบบไทย" มักถูกกำหนดจากมุมมองของรัฐ มักเกี่ยวข้องกับชนชั้นสูงในระบบราชการ ทหาร นายทุน ชนชั้นกลาง และสถาบันพระมหากษัตริย์ การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์เชิงคุณภาพนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่ออธิบายคำจำกัดความและพัฒนาการของ "ประชาธิปไตยแบบไทย" โดยใช้มุมมองที่แตกต่างซึ่งเป็นมุมมองของขบวนการนักศึกษาและอนุสาวรีย์สาธารณะของประเทศไทยในปี พ.ศ. 2516 และ 2563 เป็นไปตามการออกแบบการวิจัยทางประวัติศาสตร์และวิเคราะห์เรื่องราวทางประวัติศาสตร์เพื่อให้เข้าใจถึงการจัดวาง จุดประสงค์ สัญลักษณ์ ความหมาย และการเปลี่ยนแปลงของอนุสาวรีย์ประชาธิปไตย อนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญ แบบจำลองอนุสาวรีย์ประชาธิปไตย อนุสรณ์สถาน 14 ตุลาคม 2516 และอนุสาวรีย์ชัยสมรภูมิ ผู้ประท้วงได้เปลี่ยนอนุสรณ์สถานสาธารณะเหล่านี้ให้เป็นสถานที่แห่งประชาธิปไตย และท้าทายสัญลักษณ์และความหมายของอนุสาวรีย์ต่างๆ ผ่านการเดินขบวนของนักศึกษา เมื่อพิจารณาถึงความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างขบวนการนักศึกษากับอนุสาวรีย์สาธารณะและนิยามเชิงปฏิบัติการและคุณลักษณะของประชาธิปไตยในการเมืองไทยแล้ว เป็นที่น่าสังเกตว่าขบวนการนักศึกษาและนักเคลื่อนไหวชาวไทยให้คำจำกัดความแนวคิดเรื่องประชาธิปไตยผ่านการใช้อุสาวรีย์เหล่านี้อย่างไร การศึกษานี้ใช้ทฤษฎีต่างๆ เกี่ยวกับพื้นที่ทางการเมือง ความทรงจำสาธารณะและการเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมในเมือง เพื่อวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลที่รวบรวมจากแหล่งข้อมูลระดับปฐมภูมิและทุติยภูมิ นอกจากนี้ยังใช้วาทกรรมเกี่ยวกับ "ประชาธิปไตยแบบไทย" เพื่อสานความเชื่อมโยงระหว่างขบวนการนักศึกษาและอนุสาวรีย์สาธารณะในประเทศไทย

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"Thai democracy" is usually defined from the statist perspective. It is frequently associated with the bureaucratic elite, military, capitalists, middle class, and the monarchy. This qualitative historical study aims to explain the definition and development of Thai democracy using a different lens—a viewpoint of Thailand's 1973 and 2020 student movements and public monuments. It follows the historical research design and analyzes historical accounts to understand the installation, purpose, symbol, meaning, and transformation of the Democracy Monument, the Constitution Monuments, replicas of the Democracy Monument, the 14th of October 1973 Memorial, and the Victory Monument. Through student demonstrations, protesters transformed these public monuments into venues of democracy and challenged their symbols and meanings. Given the relationship between the student movements and public monuments and the operational definitions and characteristics of democracy in the Thai political setting, it is noteworthy to examine how the Thai student activists define their notion of democracy using these monuments. This study uses various theories on political spaces, public memory, and urban social movements to analyze the data collected from primary and secondary sources. It also applies existing discourses on Thai democracy to weave the connection between the student movements and public monuments in Thailand.

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I also dedicate this work to the Thai youth who continuously fight for democracy and their future. May the odds be ever in your favor.

Gil Diaz Turingan

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Since it was materialized and conceptualized during ancient times, “democracy” has always been a complex buzzword for various societies. It also comprises a long and arduous process for it to be attained and defended. Different meanings continuously emerge as democracy develops, veering away from its original notion. In addition, several definitions and interpretations are also interweaved into this complex idea depending on the nuances, contexts, and perspectives.

The basic meaning of democracy can be traced back to its Greek etymology, which means “rule by the people” (Heywood, Politics 2013, 89). It can also be defined based on different types and approaches, such as constitutional, substantive, procedural, and process-oriented (Tilly, Democracy 2007, 7-11).¹ Aside from these categories, several models of democracy are also formed due to the complexities of the term. Most of these concepts pertain to “government by the people.” The word democracy can also be explained using the Gettysburg Address of Abraham Lincoln in 1863, which is “government of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Heywood, Politics 2013, 89).

In a democracy, the people are given the power and chance to participate in the decision-making process involving important matters of society. The kind of participation the people partake in also varies, and one classic example of democratic participation is through an election. Aside from this, people can also participate in a

¹ The constitutional approach of defining democracy focuses on the democratic laws enacted in the political activities of the government. Democracy is present in society if its constitution and laws are based and aligned on the ideals of protecting the rights of the people. The substantive approach highlights the life and political conditions of the people that the government promotes. Democracy can be present in society if human welfare, individual freedom, security, social equality, and other political and civil rights are enjoyed. The procedural approach centers its definition of democracy on the practice of elections and its significant impact in creating governmental changes. Lastly, the process-oriented approach to democracy identifies a minimum set of processes that must be continuously practiced in characterizing a democratic society. In this approach, Robert Dahl proposed that there are five process-oriented criteria for democracy, namely: effective participation of the members of the society, voting equality, enlightened understanding of the members regarding policies, control of the agenda, or the opportunity of the members to decide important matters, and inclusion of adults because they have the full rights of citizenship in society. If any criteria are lacking in this approach, the society fails to classify as democratic (Tilly, Democracy 2007, 7-11).

democracy by protecting it. Protective democracy as a model of democracy allows the people to maintain their fundamental rights and freedom, such as fighting for their freedom of expression and movement (Heywood, Politics 2013, 89-96).

Asserting the democratic rights and freedom of the people is evident in social movements. In the context of authoritarian regimes, social movements play a huge role in the democratization of society. On the other hand, in a democratic society, democratization encourages the social movement's formation and allows it to prosper. Social movements organized collectively by groups and networks of people for a common social goal exemplify how democracy can be actualized in society (della Porta and Diani 2006, 245-249).

One of the interesting sectors in the history and development of social movements is the sector composed of students, especially university and college students. Based on records, the emergence of student activism in various parts of the world can be considered a phenomenon because students can intervene in society's political landscape and decision-making process. Student-led groups surfaced as challengers to authoritarian regimes starting in the 1960s, mainly in the US and other states in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. They significantly affected their respective political and social developments. As activists, they contributed to the democratization of society by promoting civil rights, freedom of speech and assembly, political reforms, morality, and other democratic rights. They also attracted allies from the different sectors that helped them change their respective societies (Burg 1998, xiii-xvi) (Rootes 2007, 4872-4876).

University and college students are also key players in the democratic campaign of Thailand, just like the rest of the world. They began to assert their role in Thai politics in the early 1970s. Although there were already efforts and organized protests before this period, the first Thai student movement for “democracy” can be derived from the demonstrations of the students in 1973 that toppled the Thanom military regime. Then, it re-emerged with the present-day generation of students fighting for their viewpoints against the current system (Kongkirati 2012, 229-257) (Waiwitlikhit 2020, 16-25).

With all the democratic experiences of Thailand since the term “democracy” was introduced and used in the 20th century, it’s still a challenge for scholars and

observers of Thai politics to analyze and discuss the kind of democracy that Thailand has. There are varying perspectives regarding the definition of Thai democracy. Democracy in the Thai language is defined as the “sovereignty of the people.” It originated from the Sanskrit word *pracha*, which means people, and the Pali word *athipateyya*, which means sovereignty (The Royal Institute's Dictionary 2011).

In addition to its basic definition and etymology, there are two political discourses on Thai democracy. The first is the “Traditionalist School of Thought,” while the second is the “Western School of Thought.” The “Traditionalist School of Thought” argues that democracy has long been part of Thai society through the origin and status of the monarchy. It can be traced back to the Sukhothai Kingdom's idea of the “father-child model” or “father rules the child,” or *rabop phor pokkhrong luk*, explaining that the Thai kings ruled over the people and ascended to the throne with the consent given by the Thai political community. This concept was further developed during the Rattanakosin period using the Buddhist concept of *aneknikon samosonsommut*, which justified the Thai monarchs' existence and the political community's mutual consent (Mektrairat 2020, 64-93).

Under this school of thought, democracy in Thailand is defined as a “Democracy with the Monarch as the Head of the State” because the specter of the monarchy is still visible in Thai politics despite the contribution of the 1932 revolution and other democratic expressions of the Thai people (Winichakul, Toppling Democracy 2008, 13, 32-33). Thai democracy and the monarchy relate to each other, and Thailand's locus of sovereignty becomes ambiguous and complicated due to this relationship (Tejapira 2016, 227-228).

This kind of connection made the concept of Thai democracy distinctive and fascinating. The traditionalist school of democracy influenced the Thai bureaucracy and military, allowing them to justify their rule without going through the rituals of Western ideals of democracy (Mektrairat 2020, 76-77). This term, coined as the “Thai-style democracy,” supports the “Traditionalist School of Thought” because it prefers a democracy that suits the Thai culture and traditions (Phiu-nuan 2020, 109). Moreover, it bolsters the argument that democratic institutions in Thailand have traditionally existed before and not because of the 1932 revolution alone.

Another perspective from this school of thought argues that “Western democracy” is not evident in Thai society. The late Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj claimed that Thailand had no [Western] democracy despite the endless discussions. Democracy and other associated concepts were rarely used and were interpreted negatively between 1932 and 1981 (Connors 2007, 1-3).

The other perspective regarding the discourse on Thai democracy is the “Western School of Thought.” This aspect highlights Thailand's Western ideals of democracy, which started during the 1932 revolution or the “New Age of Hope” for the Siamese people. The *Khana Ratsadon* or People’s Party, overthrew the absolute monarchy and installed a constitutional rule in Thailand in 1932, favoring the Western style of democracy, which focused on French liberal teachings. It rejected the traditionalist school of democracy and believed in humanity's universal rationality and progress, such as freedom, equality, fraternity, separation of powers, constitutional laws, etc. (Mektrairat 2020, 64-93).

Following the Western school, democracy can still be seen relatively in Thailand through practices like parliamentary politics, elections, freedom of the press and expression, and civil rights to organize political activities (Maisrikrod 1997, 141). In this way, it allows the people to label Thailand as a “semi-democratic” society because democratic practices and attempts are evident somewhat despite the limitations brought by the institutions. However, this democracy fails to sustain itself. This failure is associated with the complicated democratization process of Thailand, which can be explained and understood through the rise and fall of political alliances established by the state, the capitalists, and the middle class (Maisrikrod 1997, 141, 164-165).

Based on the definitions and perspectives on Thai democracy, it has been observed that the concept is usually defined from the perspective of the state and the parliamentary government. It is frequently associated with the bureaucratic elite, military, capitalists, middle class, and the monarchy. The history and development of democracy in Thailand also revealed that democracy serves as a political tool for those in power in Thai society. The political actors usually practice it as an instrument for their regime's legitimacy and hegemony (Connors 2007, 1-3).

The *Khana Ratsadon*, who initiated the constitutional monarchy and rule in Thailand, is vital in discussing Thai democracy. To commemorate the historic revolution in 1932 and its legacy, the Democracy Monument, known in Thai as *Anusawari Prachathipatai* was commissioned in 1939 (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 33-34). Aside from the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, there are also other architectural monuments in the northeast provinces that were constructed to memorialize the contribution of the *Khana Ratsadon*, such as the Constitution Monuments in Maha Sarakham, Surin, and Roi Et, and replicas of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum (Lawattanatrakul 2019).

Monuments are usually created to commemorate historical narratives and convey ideas and values to society, like the public monuments in Thailand. Loaded with political meanings and interpretations, public spaces such as monuments can contribute to people's historical awareness and political consciousness about the past. Built environments like public monuments reflect society's identities, culture, and ideologies because of their story, design, symbols, and meanings. It also mediates, constructs, and reproduces power relations. These built forms were programmed and designed according to those who initiated and instructed them (Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* 1999, 1-2).

However, monuments are not just passive warehouses of memories and symbols. People can continuously construct and reconstruct its meaning. The spatial agency allows spatial constraints like the monuments to turn the space into a political and social platform. The spatial agency, such as the protesters and social movements, converts these constrained spaces into their platform for grievances (Sewell 2001, 54-56). Through demonstrations or rallies, protesters transform these public monuments into venues of democracy. These public monuments serve as a platform for social movements and student activism. Since it was installed, many protests have already been staged in these public spaces. It also became the focus of different mass student demonstrations.

The June 1973 protest was one of the biggest demonstrations students organized in the early 1970s. It was also the first time they publicly raised the issue of a new constitution (Kongkirati 2012, 246). Compared to the student demonstrations

before the 1970s, it was the first time the students maximized the Democracy Monument as a venue for their grievances. Since then, the monument has become a staple place for activists and demonstrations. It witnessed various turning points in Thai history, such as the October 1973 student movement and the return of student-led protests in Thailand after the pandemic restrictions began to ease in the country in July 2020.

Given the relationship between the student movements and public monuments in Thailand and the operational definitions and characteristics of democracy in the Thai political setting, it is noteworthy to examine how the Thai student activists and the people behind the public monuments define their notion of democracy. Is it applicable to use all the existing operational definitions and characteristics of democracy in the Thai political setting? Or are there any definitions of democracy crafted by the student movements and creators of the public monuments for the Thai people?

1.2 Research Questions

To further understand the development of Thai democracy using the context of student activism in Thailand and the role of public monuments in student movements and vice versa, this study answers the following questions:

1. How did the public monuments in Thailand construct and convey the notion of “Thai democracy?” What are the symbols and meanings of these monuments in relation to “Thai democracy?”
2. How did the 1973 and 2020 Thai student movements view and construct the ideals of democracy using the public monuments in Thailand? How did the student movements challenge the symbols and meanings of these public monuments?

1.3 Hypotheses

This research argues that the concept of democracy that the 1973 and 2020 student movements fight for is a product of the Thai democracy dichotomy. It also asserts that the existing operational definitions and characteristics of democracy in Thailand, such as democracy with the monarch as the head of state, parliamentary democracy, and liberal democracy, are evident in the demonstrations of the 1973 and 2020 student movements.

This study also argues that the 1973 and 2020 student movements challenged the symbols and meanings of public monuments in Thailand due to the protests staged in these landmarks.

Although the public monuments represent the development of Thailand's democratic landscape and student movements, this study asserts that the 1973 and 2020 student movements have shown nuances regarding democracy. They both had different interpretations and definitions of democracy based on the nature of their political demonstration activities and how they used public monuments as venues of student activism.

1.4 Objectives

This study aims to explain the definition and development of the Thai democracy concept by analyzing Thailand's 1973 and 2020 student movements and public monuments.

It analyzes the meanings and symbols of public monuments in Thailand and how their interpretations changed over time. It also examines the role of the 1973 and 2020 student movements within the historical context of democratic movements in Thailand.

In addition, this research also aims to learn some lessons from the Thai experiences that can be used to defend democracy and other democracy monuments and structures in Thailand, the Philippines, and eventually in the Southeast Asian region.

1.5 Scope of Research

This research focuses on the development and discourse of Thai democracy since it was introduced and manifested in Thailand up to present-day society. To further explain this, it uses the context of the 1973 and 2020 student movements and the public monuments in Thailand.

In the context of this dissertation, the term student movement pertains to the Thai high school, college, and university students who played and continuously played a vital role in the democratic movements of Thailand. This study also defines student movements as social movements composed mainly of critical students and challengers of oppressive and authoritarian regimes in the name of universalist principles of liberty, morality, and democracy (Rootes 2007, 4872-4876).

As part of the concept of social movement, it also follows its definition, which pertains to a protest group with some degree of formal organization and association with size or number (Opp 2009, 41). To further discuss the relationship between Thai student movements and public monuments, this study focuses on the organized and large student movements in Thai history that adhered to the ideals of democracy and civil liberties and those currently fighting for democratic rights and reforms. In this case, this work focuses on the democratic movement organized by the National Student Center of Thailand and its student organizations in 1973 and the 2020 democratic movement organized by the different student groups and their alliances, such as the Free Youth, Free People, *Ratsadon* Group, Student Union of Thailand, and the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UFTD).

This research also examines how the ideals of democracy were understood and expressed by Thai student activists. It mainly studies the June 1973 protests for the *Ramkamhaeng Nine*, the October 6-15, 1973 student-led revolution, and the return of the student movement in 2020. By looking at these critical turning points in the discourse of Thai democracy and using public monuments as protest venues, this research explains how the student movements in Thailand constructed the monuments as representation and a platform for democracy and political and social resentments.

Based on the existing materials written about Thai student activism, this study classifies the student movements in Thai history into different periods. It can be

summarized into the following time frame: the 1932 revolution; the formative years of Thai student activism (1933-1968); the foundation of the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) in 1969; the dawn of the democratic awakening of the students (1969-1972); the democratic student movements and challenges from 1973-1976; the decline of student movement (1977-2013); the road to the revival of student movement (2014-2019); and the 2020 re-emergence of the Thai student movement. Following this time frame, this research centers on the 1973 and 2020 student movements because of their democratic nature based on their agenda and demands and their occupation of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok.

Although this study recognizes the student movement from 1973-1976 as democratic, it only focuses on the June and October 1973 protests because it was the beginning of the democratic movement led by the students that ignited democratic changes in the country and also because of their occupation of the Democracy Monument. Applying the same logic in the current movement and because of its connection too, to the Democracy Monument, this research only focuses on the first year of the re-emergence of the student movement in 2020 because it served as a springboard to the subsequent democratic campaigns of the students and other pro-democracy groups.

The Democracy Monument in Bangkok was insignificant to the 6th of October 1976 Thammasat massacre, unlike the 1973 revolution. The 1976 killings left trauma and tragic memories of where they took place, like the Thammasat University and Sanam Luang. It might be insignificant for the structure, but the Democracy Monument, through the democratic spirit left here by the students in 1973, also joined in mourning this disconsolate portion of the Thai student movement history. In addition, this aspect needs a separate study because other structures were built to commemorate this heartbreaking narrative, such as the sculpture of the 6th of October 1976 Memorial inside the Thammasat University campus.

In this research, the 1973 and 2020 student movements are considered turning points in the history of the student movement because of the students being on the frontlines, their democratic nature, and the occupation of the Democracy Monument. However, this study does not discredit the other events and democratic protests that can be connected to them. For example, the 1973 student movement can

be connected to the 1992 Black May or also called the Bloody May democratic movement led by the Thai elite and middle class who were members of the October generation or known as *Octobrists*.²

This paper also recognizes the birth of the *Dao Din* (Stars on Earth) group in 2009 as a precursor to the 2020 re-emergence of the student movement. The group primarily comprised Khon Kaen University Faculty of Law students.³ It was limited to Khon Kaen and the northeast and was still in the early stages of the student movement regarding networks and alliances. Other movements can also be associated with the 1973 and 2020 student movements, but this research only mentions them on the sidelines.⁴

² Saeksan Prasertkul coined this term in the 1990s to refer to the survivor of the October 1973 and 1976 student movements. Many *Octobrists* played crucial roles in the 1992 mobilization (Lertchoosakul, *The Rise of the Octobrists: Power and Conflict among Former Left Wing Student Activists in Contemporary Thai Politics* 2012, 14-15). However, in this movement, the students, through the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT), were only allies of the *Octobrists*. The SFT supported the democratic cause of the movement by joining the Confederation for Democracy (CFD) that Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, the leader of the anti-military movement, founded (Lertchoosakul, *The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests* 2021, 207) (Offenhartz 2006, 56-58). The political involvement of the Thai students faded after the May 17, 1992 uprising. The young people were more concerned with ensuring their economic well-being than addressing social concerns. The Student Federation of Thailand was still active in the social movements, but the students' general perception was mainly focused on their personal lives (Matkhao and Sooktawee 2005, 138).

³ After years of being inactive in the frontlines of the movement, the students once again showed their power and influence through the birth of the *Dao Din* activists. The emergence of this movement broke the glass ceiling brought by the trauma of the 1976 Thammasat massacre. The group was formed in 2009 to organize activities for the northeastern region of Thailand. They provided extensive legal knowledge to the people of the region and fought for the injustices in the community. Their popularity began in 2013 when they were noticed by Thai society. The people online praised and admired the group because of their campaigns concerning the villagers' environment, rights, and livelihood. Unfortunately, their hero image suddenly changed to a villain when they became involved in national issues and politics.

The *Dao Din* activists opposed the coup carried out by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha on May 22, 2014. The resistance of the *Dao Din* activists was heavily attacked by Thai society online. They were also harassed and intimidated by state officials. After this episode, the *Dao Din* group remained silent and returned a year after launching their protest against the coup. In 2015, they held a demonstration at the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen province but the military officers arrested and violently injured them (Sripokangkul, Muangming and Vulsmā, *Dao Din Student Activists: From Hope to Victims under the Thai Society of Darkness* 2017, 457-470).

⁴ The students were considered symbolic and strategic allies in this polarized political situation in Thailand, particularly the rift between the anti-Thaksin coalition called People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) *Phanthamit Prachachon Phuea Prachathipatai* or also known as the "Yellow Shirts" and the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or also known as the "Red

The massive role of public monuments in developing Thai democracy is highly emphasized in this dissertation. This study mainly uses the Democracy Monument in Bangkok as a unit of analysis because of its function in the 1973 and 2020 student movements. However, it is also important to note the significance of other public monuments installed in different parts of Thailand related to the *Khana Ratsadon*, such as the Constitution Monuments in Maha Sarakham, Surin, and Roi Et, and replicas of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum. In addition, it also tackles other public monuments, such as the 14th of October 1973 Memorial and Victory Monument in Bangkok. These monuments are connected to the 1932 revolution or the 1973 student movement and played a crucial role in the 2020 student movement. This research provides a general picture of Thai democracy and student movement by studying these public monuments. It looks at the definition, representation, and development of Thai democracy comprehensively by focusing on these structures.

1.6 Significance

Various scholars and observers of Thai politics often define democracy from the perspective of the state and the parliamentary government. They also usually associate it with the influence of the bureaucratic elite and the monarchy. Although they significantly contribute to the discourse of Thai democracy, this research dissects it from a different angle and perspective. The study highlights this by defining it from the standpoint of the people, the supposed heart of democracy, and not just through the lens of formal institutions and the state. With the existence of the term and the re-emergence of the democratic movement of the students in the present times, it is noteworthy to explain the development and concept of Thai democracy using the context of the student movement and its symbol, the Democracy Monument.

This research highlights the youth's critical role in Thai society's future. Their political awareness and social consciousness determine the kind of society the Thai people would like to have years from now. The way they understand and

Shirts.” Despite the students' participation in the demonstrations, they were not considered leaders and decision-makers of the two factions (Lertchoosakul, *The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests* 2021, 208).

manifest the concept of democracy is vital for the future of Thailand. Their interpretation of these public spaces matters in continuing the discourse and preservation of democracy because their activism today would be crucial for tomorrow's politics, as proven by the different turning points in history, such as the 1932 and 1973 revolutions. This study stresses that studying past mistakes and learning from them would help the student movements achieve their democratic aspirations for Thai society. Defining the democracy that the current student movements are fighting for would also set the political direction for Thailand.

This dissertation complements existing studies on student movements, democracy, and public monuments. For example, the discussion of the student movements always turns back to the success of the 1973 student revolution. Most conversations in student movement history relate to the October Uprising. It also supplements what was emphasized in the 1973 student movement. It contributes to the narrative of Thai student movements by updating it since the re-emergence of the student movement in recent history.

In the case of existing studies on democracy, this work uses varying perspectives regarding the definition of Thai democracy. The findings in this study concretely justify these perspectives and discourses. The data and information collected from the relationship between the student activists and the public monuments support the schools of thought on Thai democracy. This study also provides a deeper understanding of Thai society's democratic ideals and struggles through the lens of history and politics. Understanding the Thai notion of democracy using past and present events underlines the importance of social movements and their role in the democratic breakthrough of Thailand.

This research underscores the argument that the Democracy Monument is a contested space. The political meanings of the Democracy Monument have changed through time because of the competing narratives of Thai democracy. Using the lens of public memory and monuments, the Democracy Monument represents a narrative of "1932 Thai democracy," which was no longer understood because it was contested and replaced by the "1973 Thai democracy" (Winichakul, *Thai Democracy in Public Memory: Monuments of Democracy and their Narratives* 1999). With the current re-emergence of student movements in Thai society, this research continues and

challenges these points made by Winichakul. In addition, it is noteworthy to look at how the present-day movements continue or change the narrative of Thai democracy.

The results of this paper also emphasize the massive role and importance of public spaces in preserving and defending democracy. Unfortunately, several historical monuments representing Thai democracy have been removed since 2014. For example, it was reported that monuments related to the 1932 Revolution and *Khana Ratsadon's* legacy unexpectedly vanished from the public eye. These are the Constitution Defense Monument in Bangkok's Laksi district and the Constitution Monument in Buriram province (Wongcha-um and Thepgumpanat 2020) (Phataranawik 2019).

The disappearance of the monuments has some possible repercussions on Thai democracy and people's historical memory. Because of these actions, it can be argued that democracy is in peril while the main symbols and public spaces of democracy face a looming threat. Therefore, this study considerably preserves historical memory and defends democracy by raising awareness of the significance of these public monuments to student activism and Thai society.

Defining democracy in the Thai context is essential in institutionalizing knowledge and understanding of Thai democracy. Discussing it through discourse allows people to understand their ideas, beliefs, legitimacy, and practices (Mektrairat 2020, 92-93). Furthermore, by looking at the Thai student movements and public monuments as a platform for political and social resentments, this research contributes to the discourse and institutionalizing of knowledge and understanding of Thai democracy.

1.7 Review of Related Literature

To further understand and explain the development of Thai democracy from the viewpoint of student movements and public monuments, this literature review examines the following themes: (1) perspectives and concepts on democracy, social movement, and student movement; (2) Thai democracy; (3) the 1932 revolution, the Democracy Monument, and other public monuments in Thailand; (4) the 1973 student movement; and (5) the 2020 re-emergence of the Thai student movement.

1.7.1 Democracy, Social Movement, and Student Movement

Many perspectives and explanations are already written about democracy, social movements, and student movements. However, it is imperative to look at the basic definition of democracy first to comprehend its complexities better. In his works *Politics* and *Political Ideologies*, Andrew Heywood provided a comprehensive summary and generalization of the concept of democracy. From its Ancient Greek roots as “rule by the people” to the different forms, models, and meanings, he laid down the perspectives of democracy and other ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, and others. He also explained democracy using the nature of democracy according to Abraham Lincoln, which is “government of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Heywood 2013, 89-106) (Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* 2017, 154-171).

On the other hand, Charles Tilly also summarized democracy using the perspectives of various observers of democracy and democratization. In his work, *Democracy*, he mentioned the four main types of defining democracy: constitutional, substantive, procedural, and process-oriented approaches. The constitutional approach to defining democracy focuses on the democratic laws in its political activities. In this case, democracy can be seen in constitutional monarchies, presidential, and parliament-centered systems if their constitutions are based on and aligned with the ideals of democracy. The substantive approach highlights the life and political conditions of the people that the government promotes. Democracy can be present in society if human welfare, individual freedom, security, equity, social equality, and other political and civil rights are enjoyed. The procedural approach centers its definition of democracy on the practice of elections and its significant impact on creating governmental changes. Lastly, the process-oriented approach to democracy identifies a minimum set of processes that must be continuously practiced to be characterized as a democratic society. In this approach, Tilly mentioned Robert Dahl, who specified the five process-oriented criteria for democracy, namely: effective participation of the members of the society, voting equality, enlightened understanding of the members regarding policies, control of the agenda or the opportunity of the members to decide important matters, and inclusion of adults

because they have the full rights of citizenship in society. In this approach, if any criteria are lacking, the society fails to classify as democratic (Tilly, Democracy 2007, 7-11).

The concept of democracy can also be explained in social movements. However, as Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani argued, social movements are considered direct democracy and criticism of parliamentary and liberal democracy. In a democracy, from the perspective of social movements, people prefer to participate and intervene directly in the political decision-making process on an issue-by-issue basis and reject the principle of representation because it is viewed as an instrument of oligarchic power (della Porta and Diani 2006, 239-240). Aside from this, della Porta and Diani also emphasized the relationship between social movements and the evolution of democracy. They underlined the support of social movements to the democratization process but only under certain conditions. Not all social movements support democracy. There are cases where social movements also support other ideologies and authoritarian regimes (della Porta and Diani 2006, 245-249). Charles Tilly and Lesley J. Wood also supported this argument. They also claimed that there were circumstances in the past in which democracy and social movements did not coincide. These concepts sometimes followed and preceded each other, but neither depended entirely on the other's existence (Tilly, Castañeda and Wood, Social Movements, 1768-2018 2020, 130-131).

An example of a social movement that promotes the ideals of democracy, such as political and civil rights, is the movement led by students, particularly university and college students. Christopher Rootes, known for his works in social movements, and David F. Burg provided a general overview of the emergence of student movements in the world. The beginning of student movements contributed to the development of the social movement. They explained in their respective works that most student-led groups, carrying their political ideologies, surfaced as challengers to authoritarian regimes starting in the 1960s. They also significantly impacted the political and social developments of the US and other states in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Advancements in the economy and industries of the societies, and the high number of enrollments in higher education during that time, are some of the reasons mentioned that exposed the students to democracy and triggered

them to fight for their democratic rights (Rootes 2007, 4872-4876) (Burg 1998, xiii-xvi).

These categorizations of the definition and concept of democracy contribute to this study's general discussion. It also justifies the connection between democracy, social movement, and student movement. The development of Thai democracy can be further explained using the abovementioned angles and perspectives to have a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the complexities of Thai democracy. On the other hand, it is also necessary to study the definition of democracy from the context of Thai society to contextualize the discourse.

1.7.2 Thai Democracy

Thai democracy can be explained using different approaches and perspectives. As mentioned in the previous pages, the international and Western ideals of democracy can be used to understand democracy in the Thai context. Aside from these existing accounts, observers and scholars of Thai politics also explain the background of democracy in Thailand.

The history of democracy in Thailand is full of paradoxes, contradictions, and unexpected turns, as described by Thongchai Winichakul. He also stressed that democracy is a contested space, and several stories of Thai democracy range from liberal, royalist, and radical discourses. For example, democracy during the 1932 revolution meant a constitutional regime, while on the other hand, the 1973 revolution meant the end of military rule (Winichakul, *Thai Democracy in Public Memory: Monuments of Democracy and their Narratives* 1999).

Another means of understanding Thai democracy is by looking at the etymology of the term. Democracy in the Thai language is defined as the “sovereignty of the people.” It originated from the Sanskrit word *pracha*, which means people, and the Pali word *athipateyya*, which means sovereignty (The Royal Institute's Dictionary 2011).

Regarding the perspectives, there are two political discourses on Thai democracy. The first is the “Traditionalist School of Thought,” while the second is the “Western School of Thought.” The “Traditionalist School of Thought” argues that

democracy has long been part of Thai society through the origin and status of the monarchy. It emphasizes that democratic institutions existed traditionally in Thai society before the 1932 revolution. It can be traced back to the Sukhothai Kingdom's idea of the “father-child model” or “father rules the child,” or *rabop phor pokkhrong luk*, explaining that the Thai kings ruled over the people and ascended to the throne with the consent given by the Thai political community. This concept was further developed during the Rattanakosin period using the Buddhist concept of *aneknikon samosonsommut*, which justified the Thai monarchs' existence and the political community's mutual consent (Mektrairat 2020, 64-93).

The other perspective regarding the discourse on Thai democracy is the “Western School of Thought.” This aspect highlights Thailand's Western ideals of democracy, which started during the 1932 revolution. The *Khana Ratsadon*, or People’s Party, overthrew the absolute monarchy and installed a constitutional rule in Thailand in 1932, favoring the Western style of democracy, which focused on French liberal teachings. It believed in humanity's universal rationality and progress, such as freedom, equality, fraternity, separation of powers, constitutional laws, etc. (Mektrairat 2020, 64-93).

Thai democracy is usually defined from the lens of the statist perspective because the political actors use it as an instrument of their regime's legitimacy and hegemony. In his work, *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand*, Michael Kelly Connors cited the late Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj and his claim that “democracy” was not evident in Thailand. Even though people and scholars would like to discuss it, the term was rarely used and interpreted negatively between 1932 and 1981 (Connors 2007, 1-3). The statist view of democracy can be associated with its connection with the monarchy. As argued by Kevin Hewison, the term “Thai-style democracy” explains and summarizes the concept of democracy through parliamentary representation and constitutional monarchy (Hewison 1997, 58-74).

On the other hand, Elizabeth A. Van Buskirk, in her thesis, pointed out the democratic transition of Thailand according to the theory of Samuel P. Huntington. Thai society experiences transformation because those in power, particularly the bureaucratic elite, always end a regime and change it into a democratic system for their advantage (Van Buskirk 2012, 6-10). In addition, Thongchai Winichakul

described Thailand as a “Democracy with the Monarch as the Head of the State” because the specter of the monarchy is still visible in Thai politics despite the contribution of the 1932 democratic revolution and other democratic expressions of the Thai people. By proposing three overlapping series in the timeline of Thai democratization instead of just having a linear history series, Winichakul pointed out several issues of democracy in Thailand. Most of it centers on the role and power of the monarchy in a democracy (Winichakul, *Toppling Democracy* 2008, 111-137). This argument was also supported by Kasian Tejapira in his work, *The Irony of Democratization and the Decline of Royal Hegemony in Thailand*. He cited that after the 1973 form of government, Thailand officially became the “Democratic Regime of Government with the King as Head of the State.” Using the preamble of the 1978 Constitution, the King is positioned as someone above Thai politics. His work also stated that Thai democracy and the monarchy relate to each other, and the locus of sovereignty in Thailand is ambiguous and complicated (Tejapira 2016, 227-228).

The following works mentioned are beneficial in discussing the development of Thai democracy in this study. As observed in the points above, the connection of monarchy, bureaucratic elite, and military with Thai democracy is the common denominator among the existing sources. Democracy is always explained from this viewpoint. Although there is nothing wrong with this approach and perspective, it would also be helpful to understand it further by looking at its definition from the struggles of student movements and their use of the Democracy Monument. Thongchai Winichakul argued in his keynote address titled *Thai Democracy in Public Memory: Monuments and their Narratives* that most analyses of Thai democracy centered on the state rather than the society. Most narratives are about the state-class-center approach and struggle over the state power, such as the military-bureaucratic polity and urban bourgeoisie democracy (Winichakul, *Thai Democracy in Public Memory: Monuments of Democracy and their Narratives* 1999).

1.7.3 The 1932 Revolution, Democracy Monument, and Other Public Monuments in Thailand

Democracy in Thailand can be traced back to the 1932 revolution and the events that prompted it. Many history books and scholars in Thai history refer to this revolution as an essential period in the democratic history of Thailand. This revolution can be considered an intellectual product of the Thai student movement because it was headed by students exposed to Western ideals and allowed to study abroad. It was headed by Pridi Banomyong, a law student during that time and eventually considered the father of Thai democracy. Aside from him, other students joined him in plotting the revolution in Paris. Students at military colleges were also included in this planning, and one of them was Plaek Phibunsongkhram. This group of students eventually called themselves the *Khana Ratsadon*. Due to the exposure to the French liberal teachings and legal tradition, Pridi Banomyong saw the value of putting the monarchy within the boundaries of the law and constitution. As a result, on June 24, 1932, the *Khana Ratsadon* overthrew the absolute monarchy and installed a constitutional rule in Thailand. Even though Pridi Banomyong's ideas were based on the French liberal and legal tradition and European socialism, the other faction, composed of the military and led by Plaek Phibunsongkhram, had a different approach opposing the conservative royalist perspective (Baker and Pongpaichit 2014, 115-121).

To commemorate the coup and bloodless democratic revolution of 1932, Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram, the head of the military faction of *Khana Ratsadon*, commissioned the construction of a monument in 1939. This monument was called the Democracy Monument, known in Thai as *Anusawari Prachathipatai*. It is a public monument located in Bangkok, Thailand, and in the heart of *Ratchadamnoen Klang* or Ratchadamnoen Avenue (Dovey, Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy 2001, 63-64) (Noobanjong, The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms 2007, 33-35).

The works of Kim Dovey and Koompong Noobanjong comprehensively explained the architectural design of the Democracy Monument and the power and

politics that can be seen in its structure. Using the discourse theory, Koompong Noobanjong, in his work, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms*, examined the political forms of the monument and how the Thai people utilized it. He also used the theoretical approach and previous works of Kim Dovey on built forms and framing places. Using the idea of framing places, which was fully discussed in his book, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, he explained in a different article titled, *Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy*, how the Democracy Monument and its collective memories have framed and continue to frame the struggles of Thai democracy (Dovey, *Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy* 2001, 58).

For example, Dovey and Noobanjong argued that the Democracy Monument was built by the military regime of Phibun Songkhram to legitimize his power, authority, and modernization plans. Therefore, different nationalist and militarist symbols and images are evident in the Democracy Monument, such as the images of the coup, the constitution, the military, Buddhism, and nationalism (Dovey, *Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy* 2001, 63-64) (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 33-41).

The existing works of Dovey and Noobanjong, both architecture and urban design scholars, benefit this research because they provide a comprehensive discussion of the designs and meaning of the Democracy Monument. Although they also provided examples of political activities that transpired in this built form, such as demonstrations in Thai history, it is also noteworthy to point out that they both discussed the monument from the perspectives of architecture and urban design. This research augments their claims using the lens of history and political science. To bolster their arguments on power mediation on built forms and framing places, this study provides a deeper understanding of the historical and political context of the monument, Thai democracy, and social movements, particularly the role of the students. Aside from the 1932 revolution, the 1973 student movement was also mentioned in their works. However, this study continues its discussion by including the 2020 re-emergence of the Thai student movement. It also provides further analysis

of recent developments on the relationship between the Democracy Monument and student movements amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aside from Dovey and Noobanjong, some scholars earlier wrote about the Democracy Monument. Janice Wongsurawat, in her work, *A Critical Analysis of the Form and Symbolic Content of the Democracy Monument as a Work of Art, with Emphasis on the Reliefs on the Bases of the Four Wings*, provided a critique of the Democracy Monument as a work of art in 1987. The said research focused on how the monument as art was conceived by corroborating with other materials such as documents, speeches, and pictures about the Democracy Monument. The sources used in the article provided this research with an ample discussion of the monument. Her perspective from the lens of art studies and criticism contributes to the holistic dimension of the Democracy Monument discourse. This research also highlighted the idea of democracy in the monument through the concept and symbols expressed in this architectural and artistic structure. It also briefly tackled the political context of Thailand and the important figures involved in the monument's construction, such as Luang Phibunsongkhram and Silpa Bhirasri (Wongsurawat 1987).

The arguments made by Thongchai Winichakul in his Keynote Address are also valuable in this research. He emphasized that the political meanings of the Democracy Monument have changed through time because of the competing narratives of Thai democracy. Using the lens of public memory and monuments, the Democracy Monument represents a narrative of 1932 Thai Democracy, which was no longer understood because it was contested and replaced by the 1973 Thai Democracy (Winichakul, *Thai Democracy in Public Memory: Monuments of Democracy and their Narratives* 1999). With the current re-emergence of student movements in Thai society, this research continues these points made by Winichakul. In addition, it is noteworthy to look at how the present-day movements contribute to the discourse of “Thai Democracy.”

Koompong Noobanjong is also known for his other works about Thai architectural designs, modern structures, and their relationship with Thailand's democratic history and political landscape. Although not specifically about the Democracy Monument, some of his works are still useful in this research. His works such as *The Aesthetic of Power: A Critical Study on the Politics of Representations at*

Wat Benchama Bophit and Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, Bangkok, The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories, Forgotten Memorials: The Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in Bangkok, Thailand, and The Poetics of Destructions: Demolitions of Iconic Modernist Buildings in Bangkok emphasized how these structures and spaces just like the Democracy Monument serve as symbolic devices to mediate power and how the people turned these areas into contested spaces (Noobanjong, *The Aesthetic of Power: A Critical Study on the Politics of Representations at Wat Benchama Bophit and Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, Bangkok* 2010) (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016) (Noobanjong, *Forgotten Memorials: The Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in Bangkok, Thailand* 2019) (Noobanjong, *The Poetics of Destructions: Demolitions of Iconic Modernist Buildings in Bangkok* 2018).

He also wrote about the transformation and representation of Ratchadamnoen Avenue. Alongside the construction of the Democracy Monument, the said avenue was also a space of politics in Thai society, proof of the modernization plans during the 19th-20th century, and a witness to the democratic struggles of Thailand. In addition, it was reiterated in his work, *The Rajadamnoen Avenue: Contesting Urban Meanings and Political Memories*, that the Rajadamnoen Avenue can convey different messages because of its transformation and how the place used and celebrated by the Thai people (Noobanjong, *The Rajadamnoen Avenue: Contesting Urban Meanings and Political Memories* 2012, 32-33).

Aside from the previously mentioned materials, some studies about the monuments in Thailand can also be helpful in this research. Although it is too broad and overwhelming, the thesis of Ka Fai Wong, titled *Vision of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand*, justified the role of public monuments in developing Thai nationhood, politics, and society in the 20th century. This comprehensive historical research of Wong focuses on the visions from the ideological perspective of the state, just like the approach used by Dovey and Noobanjong. However, one difference between Wong and the previous scholars is that he centers the discussion of the monuments on the Thai political and historical contexts. He classified the various monuments in Thailand according to absolute

monarchy, modern nationalism, traditionalism, and diversity. He also interpreted the meaning of the Thai monuments and reviewed their political and historical contexts. For example, one of the monuments he mentioned in his thesis is the Democracy Monument. The relationship of the said monument with the concept of cultural modernization and nation-building was emphasized in his work (Wong 2000). This dissertation discusses the viewpoints that Wong started and eventually explains the Thai people's perspective on utilizing these public monuments.

Another monument mentioned in the work of Ka Fai Wong was the Victory Monument. Besides the Democracy Monument, this monument was also one of the important structures in the history of Thailand and one of the democratic spaces of the current student movement. The Victory Monument is an obelisk-like stone monument that the Phibun government constructed to memorialize the Thais who sacrificed their lives in the 1940-1941 Franco-Thai War and claim victory over France. As asserted by Wong, the Democracy Monument (1939-1940) and Victory Monument (1940-1941) served as vehicles of Phibun's vision of the Thai nation. They were regarded as Thai modern and national symbols during Phibun's regime. The two nationalistic monuments were also used to promote the elitist idea that the military was the builder and protector of Thailand. After the political changes and significant shift to constitutional monarchy in Thailand, Field Marshal Phibun envisioned military leadership as the best model for the Thai nation (Wong 2000, 83-85). By providing the discourse on how public monuments like the Democracy Monument and Victory Monument were constructed and interpreted initially, this work would solidify one of the research arguments that the student movements transformed these spaces into their own interpretation and meaning.

Similar studies were also written about the architectural structures of Thailand and their connection to the development of Thai society. For example, the dissertation of Lawrence Chua titled *Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910-1973*, examines the development of leisure architecture and the modern culture of nationalism in the 20th century. He argues that Thai architectural structures are political arrangements where the people experience ideas about monarchy, national belonging, and community. Therefore, he focuses on the leisure spaces in Thailand between 1910 and 1973 and the people's consumption

of them because these urban built environments played an integral role in forming nationalist politics connected to the Thai community and monarchy (Chua, *Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910-1973* 2012). Although his dissertation discusses a lot of leisure structures, just like how Ka Fai Wong provides a general discussion on public monuments, his work can still be used in this paper to establish the relationship between public structures and the transformation of Thai society.

Other monuments related to the *Khana Ratsadon* still exist in various parts of Thailand. Many Constitution Monuments were constructed in the northeastern provinces after the 1932 revolution due to the influence of the People's Party representatives in these areas. These constructions were said to be earlier than the construction of the Democracy Monument. In 1934, Luang Angkhananurak (Somthawin Thephakham), the Governor of Maha Sarakham Province, instructed the construction of the first Constitution Monument in Thailand to help the people in the area understand the system of constitutional government. It was built at the provincial hall before it was moved to the Maha Sarakham town municipal offices. In Surin, the Constitution Monument was installed in the area of the provincial hall. In Buriram, it was located in the middle of a roundabout near the market before it was demolished. In Roi Et, it was located on the island in the middle of *Bueng Phlan Chai* (Lawattanatrakul 2019). Articles like this about the other monuments related to the *Khana Ratsadon* provide more information about the structures and their concept of democracy.

Other articles and historical sources were translated into English, such as the poems and documents of the *Khana Ratsadon* archived on the *Sanam Ratsadon* website. It is an online platform founded in 2021 by volunteer translators advocating democracy (Sanam Ratsadon: An Archive of Common(er) Feelings 2021). A poem in Isaan explaining the Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam and the article *Democracy Monument through 80 Years of Political Change, 1940-2021*, are some of the materials posted on the website that can be useful to unearth more substantial information related to this research.

However, despite the existence of the constitution monuments, it has been observed that student movements usually mobilize in other places and not in these

monuments, unlike the case of the Democracy Monument. There are other factors behind this, and this research will try to explain and explore them. The student movements use other democratic spaces instead of Thailand, such as universities, streets, shrines, historical landmarks, and online spaces.

Brian McGrath justified these observations in his *War, Trade, and Desire: Urban Design and the Counter-Public Spheres of Bangkok*. He argued that the political demonstrations in Bangkok shifted from Ratchadamnoen Avenue, where the Democracy Monument lies, to the Ratchaprasong intersection. As a result, the democratic spaces of Bangkok have been continuously reshaped and expanded by Thai urban actors, particularly the demonstrators. Also, he added that there are three models of public space in Bangkok that are still present in the city, such as the monuments and symbols of monarchy, military, and nationalism; commercial and economic centers; and globalized spaces. This article also used Thongchai Winichakul's historical narrative on the democratic struggles of Thailand to support his claim that the democratic spaces in Bangkok also widened through time (McGrath 2013, 75-88).

Before the October 1973 student revolution escalated, student activism in Thailand was already on fire. Outside Bangkok, there were also some protests organized by the students. For example, in January 1973, about 1,500 students staged a demonstration at Khon Kaen University and demanded the resignation of their university rector (Darling 1974, 13).

A miniature replica of the Democracy Monument is found in Khon Kaen. Unlike the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, it is occasionally used as a venue for activists in the northeast. Until the current student movement suddenly turned this replica monument into a symbolic landmark of youth-led protests. The Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen witnessed a series of demonstrations in 2020 and became a venue of student activism in the province. However, it also resulted in filing a petition from a Khon Kaen resident. A petition requesting the relocation of the said monument was filed to the local officials because the protests were said to be annoying ('Khon Kaen has had enough': Pro-democracy activists protest in northeast Thailand 2020) (Black magic and calls for change at large protest at Khon Kaen's Democracy

Monument 2020) (Officials weigh on proposal to move Khon Kaen Democracy Monument 2020).

Narratives from these news articles and stories of the 1973 and 2020 protests in other parts of Bangkok strengthen the discussion on Thai democracy in this study. Looking at these materials avoids the Bangkok-centric bias because it is not limited to the prominent Democracy Monument in Bangkok.

1.7.4 The 1973 Student Revolution

The works published in the 1970s are fundamental in the narrative of Thai student movements. Narong Sinsawasdi and Ross Prizzia discussed the formation of Thai student activism in the year after the October 1973 student revolution. Their work, *Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change*, examined student activism in Thailand by reviewing the history before the 1970s and the narratives of the October student revolution in 1973. It also analyzed the cultural aspects of the political behavior of the Thai students and the political developments in Thailand during that period. This work also used newspaper articles from the Bangkok Post and Thai Rath related to the 1973 student movement. Pictures of the demonstration were also presented in their work. The accounts of the events from October 6 to 15, 1973, which the student activists commonly termed as the “Ten Days” (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, *Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change* 1974) are included. The narratives on how they assembled in the Democracy Monument are essential in this research. Ross Prizzia updated this work and published *Thailand in Transition: The Role of Oppositional Forces* in 1985. It highlighted the critical points in Thailand after the 1973 student revolution and the 1976 Thammasat massacre, which were not pointed out in the previous work.

Ruth-Inge Heinze provided a more detailed discussion of the October student revolution in 1973 in a work titled *Ten Days in October—Students vs. the Military: An Account of the Student Uprising in Thailand*. This article was also published in 1974 and narrated the movement's events. Aside from Heinze, Robert F. Zimmerman also wrote an article in 1974 about the 1973 revolution. In his article, *Student “Revolution” in Thailand: The End of the Thai Bureaucratic Polity?*, he narrated the

events of the revolution and provided his insights on the monarchy's role and the importance of the students in the said movement. It also explained the factions among the students and how they challenged the Thai bureaucratic polity.

Another work about Thai student movements published in 1974 is the article by Frank Darling titled *Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand*. In this article, he emphasized that increasing number of university students in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to student activism in Thailand. Students suddenly started directing their protests to the government leaders and political practices on school-related issues. Darling also pointed out that the students' exposure to Western ideas and lifestyles deeply affected their notion of progress and success. He also underscored the declining state of the Thai national economy during that time, contributing to the unrest and dissatisfaction among their groups. Lastly, the unprecedented events in Thai political history, such as the rise of military leadership and the termination of constitutional rule in 1971, also added to the Thai students' sentiments during those decades.

One advantage of these works written in the 1970s is the closeness of the authors and scholars with the primary sources and accounts of the 1973 revolution. These works were still fresh during that time from the memory and observations of the people. However, analyzing these works is also challenging because the developments were too recent from when it was written. It needed further updates to see a clearer picture of the political situation in Thailand.

The 1973 student movement ended the military regime in Thailand and was referred to as one of the first student-led movements in Asia. However, before this turning point, the 1950s-1970s in Thailand resulted in student activism and significant changes in the Thai political landscape. The democracy movement that culminated on October 14, 1973, at the Democracy Monument stemmed from factors and structural conditions. Prajak Kongkirati argued in his work titled *Thailand: The Cultural Politics of Student Resistance* that the expansion of higher education brought student activism in Thailand, as well as rapid economic growth, changes in the political environment of Thailand, alliances with various sectors of the society such as intellectuals, labor unions, and peasants, and the influx of ideological influences like nationalism, Marxism and socialism after the World War II and during the Cold War

period. Aside from these factors, Kongkirati highlighted the monarchy's role in the success of student movements that ended the military regime in 1973 (Kongkirati 2012, 229-257).

The compilation of headline news articles from the Bangkok Post during the 1970s, edited by (Grossman 2009), is also helpful in establishing the transformation that occurred in the meaning and life of the Democracy Monument after the 1973 uprising.

Photographs are also vital documentation of events from the past. Karin Zackari, in her article, *Photography in the history of the 14 October 1973 and the 6 October 1976 events in Thailand*, asserted that photographs could serve as evidence and shape the understanding of Thai history, particularly the October 14 and October 6 events. The October 14 student revolution photographs affected people's understanding of the October 6 massacre because of the gap or missing photographic records. She argued that the photographs of the October 14 uprising focused on the students as heroes and were saved from vilification, unlike the October 6 massacre. It was because of the symbols of royal loyalty and national belonging found in the photos of October 14. Although her research focuses on comparing the two historical events in Thai politics, the materials she collected and her references are valuable in providing the democracy seen in the October 14 demonstration photos. She studied source materials from private collections, the 14 October Foundation and its website (14tula.com), the Thammasat University Library and Archive, the Bangkok Post Archive, and the National Library of Thailand. She also gathered photographs from newspapers, books, magazines, leaflets, posters, and art exhibits (Zackari 2021, 32-52).

Some research also focused on Thai student movements' history—for example, the Ph.D. dissertation of Chaichana Ingavata in 1981 titled *Students as an Agent of Social Change: A Case of the Thai Student Movement during the years 1973-1976: A Critical Political Analysis*, centered on the political analysis of the 1973-1976 student movements. It emphasized the origins of the student movements and the role of the students in the political and social reforms of Thailand. Elinor Bartak's *The student movement in Thailand 1970-1976* is also focused on student activities and political changes in the 1970s. This work highlighted the primary sources, mainly the

interviews with former Thai student activists such as Saeksan Prasertkul and Prudhisan Jumbala. Another scholar who also studied the Thai student movements was Douglas O'Donnell Offenhartz. In his MA thesis titled *Student Activism in Thailand from 1973 to 2006*, he examined the October Generation, who led the student movements in the 1970s, and the Millennial Generation, who were generally characterized as apathetic in Thai politics, especially during the Thaksin administration.

Student activism in Thailand continued after 1973. The radicalism of the students also succeeded after the said revolution. On the other hand, the middle class and conservative ruling elite became alarmed and suppressed the students. These uprisings ushered in the ideals of civilian democracy. Unfortunately, it resulted in the brutal suppression in Thai history, known as the massacre of October 6, 1976 (Kongkirati 2012, 229-257).

Thai student activism suddenly declined after the horrendous 1976 massacre. Kongkirati pointed out some factors that facilitated the weakening of student movements, such as the changes in the political regime, the lasting effects of brutal suppression, the decline of radical discourse, the commercialization of the higher education system, and the rise of other civil society groups. Student movements continued later on. However, Thai students were no longer leaders and did not play a prominent role in these movements. It was seen as challenging for the students to bring back their activism due to what had happened (Kongkirati 2012, 229-257).

1.7.5 The 2020 Re-Emergence of the Thai Student Movement

Materials written recently were also helpful in writing the narrative of Thai student movements, especially the accounts of the 2020 protests. For example, the article *#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest*, written by the Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR) on October 25, 2020, contributed to the discourse by providing a narration of the demonstrations that happened from January-October 2020 even though the primary goal of the article is to describe the Thai government's response to the 2020 protests and the human rights violation they committed in relation to these protests. The narrative is supplemented

by Janjira Sombatpoonsiri in 2021, titled *From Repression to Revolt: Thailand's 2020 Protests and the Regional Implications*. Sombatpoonsiri looked at the 2020 Thai student movements from a regional point of view. She brought up the concept of Southeast Asian Spring and the Thai protests' contribution to this discourse. But the part of her work that is important in the history of Thai student movements is her explanation of the 2020 student movements as networked and decentralized protest groups. Her discussion on the development of the Free Youth, Free People, and the *Ratsadon* provided a picture of the evolution of the student movements in 2020.

The article by Penchan Phoborisut, *The 2020 Student Uprising in Thailand: A Dynamic Network of Dissent*, also discussed the developments in the 2020 protests. The article narrated the key events that caused the protests and demonstrations in 2020. It also focused on the internet and social media involvement in the said movement.

Other written works have interesting points and take on the current student movements. A paper titled *The Next Generation?: A Comparison between Thailand's 1973 Protests and Thailand's 2020 Protests* discusses the 1973 and 2020 rallies. This article by Pongpasak Waiwitlikhit emphasized the differences between the two demonstrations. But before the comparison, it first briefly overviews Thailand's student activism history. This research is helpful because the comparison can serve as a springboard to a more comprehensive discussion of the student movements in Thailand. Kanokrat Lertchoosakul's article, *The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests*, also provided a brief overview of the history of Thai student movements before its discussion on the 2020 student movements. Although it focused on the high school students who participated in the movement, this article is still helpful because it highlights the differences in the student groups that launched their protests in 2020. The research also focuses more on the motivations behind the involvement of the students in the anti-government demonstrations.

Information can also be collected from photographs, newspapers, posters, and online platforms such as websites, protest videos, and social media pages. Same with the works about the 1973 student revolution, these materials are beneficial in crafting the 2020 student movement narrative. With the advancement of technology,

these sources are still available online, mainly on the websites of news agencies such as the Bangkok Post, The Nation Thailand, Thai PBS, Khaosod English, Prachathai, and the Isaan Record. Video clips and reports from various international news outlets, such as Al Jazeera English, DW News, South China Morning Post, BBC News, and Channel News Asia, still exist online. This research also maximizes the online materials from the October 14 Foundation and its website (14tula.com) and podcasts of the youth activists and social media pages of the 2020 student movements.

It can be observed that cultural and symbolic actions are evident in the current student protests. Some examples are wearing anti-coup shirts, reading George Orwell's 1984 in public, displaying the three-finger Hunger Games salute, using a Harry Potter-themed rally, and reappropriating anime characters such as the Hamtaro character. In addition, the Korean Pop (K-Pop) and Boy Love (BL) fandoms in Thailand also joined the protests online depending on the social issue (Phoborisut 2020, 6-7) (Lertchoosakul, The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests 2021, 208). These examples of performative expressions of dissent against the current regime are valuable in discussing the democracy portrayed in the Democracy Monument.

Initial research recently discusses the 1973 and 2020 protests because of the ongoing student protests in Thailand. The article of Pongpasak Waiwitlikhit emphasized the differences between the two demonstrations. One of them was the support of the monarchy in the student movement during the 1973 protests, which is absent in the current protests. The present student movement advocates the limitations on the monarchy's power, similar to the 1932 revolution. Another point of comparison between the two protests would be their organization. Compared to the 1973 protests, the current student movement lacks centralization and implements leaderless organizations to prevent arrests and attempts of a crackdown from the state. The contexts of the digital age and the COVID-19 pandemic are also units of comparison in this regard (Waiwitlikhit 2020). This initial research is helpful because it can serve as a springboard to a more comprehensive discussion of democracy, student movements, the Democracy Monument, and other public monuments in Thailand.

By navigating the available sources written in the English language, it can be concluded that the bulk of the discussion on the history of the student movement

centered on the October 1973 revolution, including the events that triggered it and its aftermath. Student activism in Thailand has existed since 1927, but the 1973 student movement was considered a pioneer and turning point in Thai democratic history. In addition, the impact of the organized democratic movements of 1973 was still felt years after 1976. The succeeding movements also appreciated the importance of the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) during the 1970s.

The hiatus after 1976 explains the noticeable shortage of sources on student activism. This observation does not discredit the efforts of some student activists who remained relevant in the movement. However, it cannot be denied that the student movement during this period was idle, collecting momentum that benefitted the current re-emergence of the democratic movement of the students. Therefore, it is now a challenge for scholars to write about this new turning point, as most scholars did in 1974 when they wrote a lot of materials about the 1973 student revolution.

1.8 Research Methodology

This dissertation is a qualitative historical study that aims to explain the development of “Thai democracy” from the viewpoint of the 1973 and 2020 student movements, the Democracy Monument, and other public monuments in Thailand.

It follows the historical research design and analyzes historical accounts to understand the installation, purpose, meaning, and transformation of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, the Constitution Monuments, replicas of the Democracy Monument, the 14th of October 1973 Memorial, and the Victory Monument in Thailand. These accounts pertain to the souvenir programs and documentation of these structures' construction and commemoration activities. Using these accounts and their conveyed meanings and symbols, this study compares the original notions of democracy to the present-day context since its installation.

This study also looks at the narrative accounts of the 1973 and 2020 student movements and their use of the Democracy Monument and other public monuments in Thailand as venues of activism. It mainly uses newspapers, articles, and items related to the student movements from the archives of the Bangkok Post, The Nation Thailand, Thai PBS, Khaosod English, and Prachathai as primary sources. In addition,

this research also explores other newspapers and outlets in the provinces, such as The Isaan Record.

Books, journal articles, and feature articles about the student movements are also maximized as secondary sources in this paper. In addition, video clips and reports from various international news outlets such as Al Jazeera English, DW News, South China Morning Post, BBC News, and Channel News Asia are also included in the sources for this research.

Public interviews with former and current student activists are included as references for primary sources. This consists of some former officers or members of the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) during the 1973 student movement and some of the current officers or members of the Student Union of Thailand (SUT), Student Unions, and Free Youth during the re-emergence of the student movement in 2020.

Aside from the public interviews, documentaries of student activists and leaders during the 1973 and 2020 student movements are also included in this study. The primary sources for this research also include videos, footage, and photographs of the 1973 and 2020 protests. Furthermore, online materials from the October 14 Foundation and its website (14tula.com), and podcasts of the youth activists and social media pages of the 2020 student movements are also integrated to help discuss the democratic ideals performed by the 1973 and 2020 student movements in the Democracy Monument and other public monuments.

In analyzing the data collected from the primary and secondary sources, various theories on political spaces, public memory, and urban social movements as focal points to discuss the relationship between student movements, democracy, the Democracy Monument, and other public monuments are incorporated in this dissertation. It also uses existing discourses and arguments on democracy and “Thai democracy” to weave the connection between the student movements and public monuments in Thailand.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This research deals with the existing public space and social movement theories to analyze the meanings and symbols of the public monuments in Thailand and how they experienced changes through time. This study examines three central theories to contextualize the major arguments of this research. It uses Charles Tilly's concept of "Contentious Politics," William Sewell's "Space in Contentious Politics," and Kim Dovey's "Framing Places."

1.9.1 Tilly's Contentious Politics and the Thai Student Movement

In a societal context, contentions are evident and connected to politics and social movements. Contention comes in when one party makes claims about another party. The party can pertain to a person, group, or institution. As coined by Charles Tilly in the 1970s, contention in politics or contentious politics is an episodic and public collective political struggle. It refers to the claim-making of a party directed to the other party's interests through an episode of coordinated efforts, shared programs, and collective action in public. It is also associated with the concept of social movement. However, it is only considered a social movement if it becomes a sustained campaign of claim-making (Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics and Social Movements* 2007, 437-438) (Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* 2015, 7-8, 11).

To put it in the context of the Thai student movement and in this research, the June 1973 protests for the *Ramkamhaeng Nine*, the October 6-15, 1973 student-led revolution, and the return of the student movement in 2020 are episodes of democratic contention collectively organized by the students as the claim-makers under the sustained umbrella of Thai social movements organized in public and directed towards the Thai political institution.

Aside from a sustained campaign of claim-making or contentious politics, a social movement is also defined as an organized network or group with some degree of formal organization and association with size and number that uses repeated performances for advertising and sustaining its claim. These performances include

marches, rallies, meetings, petitions, and lobbying conducted in public (Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* 2015, 11) (Opp 2009, 41).

The contentious performances repeated in a social movement, such as demonstrations, produced spatial routines in the public spaces, shaping the emergence and form of contentious politics. Charles Tilly also calls these spatial routines a “repertoire of contention.” Moreover, these routines attract people to join the protests and establish practices that can contribute to the collective struggle (Auyero 2006, 573). Examples of these contentious repertoires are theatrical plays and the use of chants, signs, and symbols. These repertoires contribute to people’s interaction, express specific emotions, recall memories, and connect the past and the present in relation to their claims. The activists turn the sympathizers into participants because of these repertoires in the demonstrations. This collective presentation of claims in public spaces through contentious repertoires also creates ritualized political performances or demonstrations that usually prevailed over the years. However, these established repertoires also vary and change through time (Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics and Social Movements* 2007, 441-442, 444).

In the Thai political setting and collective democratic struggles, the ritualized political performances can be seen in the demonstrations of the Thai activists in various public spaces, especially during the commemoration of the turning points in the history of Thai social movements, such as the democratic revolution of June 24, 1932, and October 6-15, 1973 student-led revolution. Contentious repertoires have also been established as part of the spatial routines in the Thai activists' demonstrations. With the current student movement, these repertoires also undergo innovation, and the youth protesters started to explore different ways of presenting their claims, including the use of technology and social media in their protest activities.

The Thai students began to assert their role in Thai politics in the early 1970s through the formation of the National Student Center of Thailand. The NSCT is a network of university and college students officially bureaucratized in 1969. It aimed to promote good relationships among the university and college students, their welfare, culture, and freedom. The Center also wanted to protect the student benefits, further the educational standards, and render services for the welfare of society

(Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 28-29).

Although there were already efforts before to make this inter-university organization happen and to mobilize the students politically, the formation of NSCT played a significant role in the history of Thai student movements. It ignited different kinds of protests, including the democratic protests in June and October 1973 that ousted the Thanom military regime and paved the way for democratic opportunities for Thailand.

Different networks and student groups also headed the re-emergence of the Thai student movement in 2020. The Free Youth and the Student Union of Thailand led the return of student protests in Thailand after the pandemic restrictions started to ease in July 2020. The student protesters called for an end to the government's intimidation of critics, dissolution of the Parliament, and creation of a new constitution. Other student groups, such as the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UFTD), are also included in the fight against the current regime and claim to push for structural change in Thai society (Lertchoosakul, The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests 2021, 206-218).

Political contention, collective action, sustained claim-making, and repeated performances are all present in the context of the Thai student movement. It involves an organized network of Thai university and college students who played and continuously played an essential role in the democratic claims and challenges of the country. The students who toppled the military regime during the October 1973 student democratic movement and the present-day students who launched the comeback of the student movements in Thailand a few years ago shared the exact purpose of challenging oppressive and authoritarian regimes in the name of democracy.

1.9.2 Sewell's Space in Contentious Politics and Dovey's Framing Places

The claim-making space is also vital in contentious politics and social movements. It matters in producing collective action by being both the site and object

of contentious politics (Auyero 2006, 567). Space in contentious politics and social movements can be manifested through the ideas of spatial structure and agency.

Space is a container of social relations (Auyero 2006, 570). It is an example of a social structure in which social processes are constrained in an objective and given container. Spatial or geographical structures such as the built environment, transportation and communication infrastructures, pilgrimage sites, landforms, and water forms are durable and constraining. It shapes and determines people's actions because it enables humans to act relative to the existing structures (Sewell 2001, 54-55).

The configuration of the spatial structures, such as the architectural and urban structures, constructs meanings and frames the everyday life within these spaces. The designs of these structures shape human actions. For example, the activities of the people are structured and shaped by the plans of the walls, doors, and windows. In addition, these built forms also mediate, construct, and reproduce power relations in society because they are installed and designed based on specific interests. It could be the interests of the people fighting for freedom, the State establishing social order, or even the private corporations stimulating consumption. These interests become embedded in people's everyday lives over time (Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* 1999, 1-2).

The built forms can mediate power relations through different dimensions. First, these structures can construct a cognitive map that people can imagine and think about. Then, it can also segregate and monitor people through the spaces' surveillance conditions, boundaries, and pathways. The meanings constructed by these built forms also legitimized authority. It produces illusions of stable social order and progress. It also creates socially constructed ideas of identity and differences. Ideologies are also evident in these built forms because of the appropriation of power (Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* 1999, 15-16).

The spatial structures, such as the built forms, shape the nature of contentious politics and social movements. It is one of the major determinants in the operations of the protests. Public spaces can provide venues for political demonstrations or prevent them from organizing one, depending on the conduciveness of the areas. Ready-made and accessible spaces are beneficial for political rallies. On the other hand, the state

can also easily control and restrict these spaces through surveillance and policing (Sewell 2001, 61, 68).

Looking at the spatial structures used by the Thai student movement before and during the 1970s, student protests and marches always took place in Bangkok, particularly in the open fields of universities like Thammasat University and on the open grounds of Sanam Luang. These open areas or spatial structures served as venues for political rallies and activities. On the other side of Sanam Luang, the wide Ratchadamnoen Avenue, where the Democracy Monument lies, the Parliament Building, and the Office of the Prime Minister can be simply traversed and used by the student activists. Based on the accounts, the students usually started their protests on campus. Then they moved along Ratchadamnoen Avenue to the Parliament Building or the Office of the Prime Minister. The wideness of the avenue conveniently accommodated a massive number of students who participated in the protests. The location of the universities, mainly Thammasat University, was also accessible for the student protesters. Unfortunately, it was also easy for the government to stop the demonstrations in this area because of its strategic location. This was seen in 1951 when Thammasat University was closed and occupied by the army (Prizzia and Sinsawadi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 16-21). It was also seen in the re-emergence of the Thai student movement in 2020. There were attempts by the police to control the public spaces for mobilizations, but the students used social media to confuse the authorities. For instance, student demonstrations use social media platforms to coordinate with one another, and one of these platforms is Twitter. Hashtags such as #Mob18October, #Mob19October, and #October16toPathumwanJunction enable student activists to connect with other activists. Creative ideas also proliferated on Twitter and quickly transferred and implemented into street protests (Phoborisut 2020, 6).

It shows that not only the spatial structures that shape and constrain the people's actions, but the spatial agency also turns these spatial constraints to their advantage. In contentious politics, the spatial agency pertains to the social movements, revolutions, and demonstrations headed by the protesters who transform these spaces into political and social platforms. They can also restructure the meanings and uses of these spaces (Sewell 2001, 55-56).

Spaces have designated values and meanings. The meanings of these spaces are significant for social movements. Protesters conduct their demonstrations in places with politically salient meanings. They can use the existing meanings or transform the significance of these locations. The spatial agency can contest the importance of spaces with political meaning (Sewell 2001, 64-66). Public monuments are examples of these spaces used by the demonstrators as venues of activism. Then, their meanings are challenged and contested because of the spatial agency.

1.10 Definition of Terms

This dissertation unpacks the definition of Thai democracy using the two schools of thought, the nature of the 1973 and 2020 student movements, and the public monuments in Thailand. In unpacking this multifarious meaning of democracy, this paper connects it to some related concepts, such as constitutionalism, liberalism, nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism, monarchism, and modernization.

The discourse on democracy would be incomplete if there were no inclusion of the vital concept of constitutionalism or the existence of a constitution or codified rules in government institutions and political processes to ensure checks and balances. Associated with constitutionalism is the concept of liberalism and other liberal values such as individualism, freedom, rationalism, equality, toleration, and consent of the governed. Liberalism centers on human individuals and their desire to construct a society that can satisfy their interests and achieve fulfillment. In connection with democracy and liberalism, liberal democracy, on the other hand, combines these concepts: commitment to regular and competitive elections, a constitution, institutional checks and balances, protection of individual rights, and civil society (Heywood, *Politics* 2013, 32, 98, 337) (Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* 2017, 93, 120-125).

In the political context of Thailand, it is also appropriate to define parliamentary democracy. This democratic rule mediates the government and the people by having popularly elected representatives or a deliberative assembly. It is also associated with deliberative democracy because of its emphasis on the discourse

and debate of the representatives for the sake of the public interest (Heywood, Politics 2013, 98).

Aside from these ideas, this research also examines nationalism and militarism. Nationalism believes that the nation, composed of naturally divided humankind, is the central principle of political organization and the only legitimate unit of political rule. One of its key features is patriotism, which describes the affective or emotional appeal toward nationalism (Heywood, Political Ideologies: An Introduction 2017, 452-456, 462-463). Nationalism also promotes the greatness of being unified and fosters love and reverence for a country. Nationalism in Thailand is attributed to the essence of “Thainess” or *khwam pen thai* anchored to the three pillars of nation, religion, and monarchy. It also includes the spirit of the Thai nation based on values, national arts, Buddhist religion, Thai language, and Thai culture (Traijakvanich and Rojjanaprayon 2020, 420-421).

Nationalism can be aggressive, known as expansionist nationalism, where militarism is one of its key features. Militarism is the achievement of ends by military means or extending military ideas, values, and practices to civilian society. This belief was dominant during the late 19th century when the European powers linked national prestige to expansionism (Heywood, Political Ideologies: An Introduction 2017, 500-502).

Nationalism and militarism can be combined in authoritarianism. The focus of authoritarian regimes is to emphasize their authority over the individual people and suppress them by excluding them from politics regardless of popular consent (Heywood, Politics 2013, 269, 277). They have strong central power, and the people's freedom is limited (Traijakvanich and Rojjanaprayon 2020, 420). It is usually associated with military rule, dictatorship, and absolute monarchy (Heywood, Politics 2013, 269, 277).

Democracy and monarchy are two inseparable concepts in the Thai context, and it is apt to define monarchism or the support of the monarchy as a system. Whether absolute or constitutional, this rule system is dominated by one person and represented by an institution where the head of state is occupied through inheritance or dynastic succession (Heywood, Politics 2013, 292).

Lastly, modernization in this dissertation focuses on the encompassing process of massive social changes affecting the domains of life, from socio-economic activities to political institutions. It emphasizes change, innovation, and human progress (Welzel and Ronald 2007, 3071).

Aside from the concepts mentioned above, the definition of monuments is also essential in putting a context in this project. Monuments are built structures that aim to commemorate an event or person. These structures are erected to memorialize. They are installed by the powerful, such as the state, to memorialize themselves. Or by the bereaved to honor their departed ones. Sometimes, they are also called memorials, mainly when associated with loss (Rowling and Andersen 2021, 4). Modern monuments are also built to recall victories in war or revolution and celebrate groups or nations. It also recollects the sacrifices made by those figures in the monument. They are constructed in public spaces to contribute to the people's collective memory. However, the monument's fate depends on the changes in the social and historical consciousness of the people. The physical objects or monuments remain in public spaces as reminders, but a new narrative can also emerge and challenge the collective memory (Hamilton 1990, 101-111). The meaning and role of the monuments in society transform depending on how the public and mass media define them. Monuments are not passive observers, but they are active participants in social events because of their ability to become communication objects. The collective memory forms it, but it also reconstructs the past by participating in the present and the future (Kulišić and Tudman 2009, 132).

Constructed public monuments are sacred places for contentious politics and social movements. Through demonstrations or rallies, protesters use and transform these public monuments into venues of democracy. Public monuments in Thailand, such as the Democracy Monument, Victory Monument, and the 14th of October 1973 Memorial in Bangkok and the Constitution Monuments and replicas of the Democracy Monument in the northeast, serve as spaces for political resentments and grievances.

Since they were installed, these monuments have witnessed many administrations before transforming into democratic spaces, making their meanings and symbols prone to reconstruction. The following chapters will discuss the

transformations these monuments experienced through time, their history, symbols, and the overlaying of various meanings brought by the political changes in Thailand.



CHAPTER II: DISSECTING THE “DEMOCRACY” IN THE DEMOCRACY MONUMENT

Colossal temples, grand religious structures, and royal monuments are familiar imagery that tourists usually remember after they visit Thailand. However, besides these landmarks, the country is also known for other public monuments outside the spiritual realm—some are situated in the busy streets of Thailand’s capital city, Bangkok. Their intricate designs were constructed to serve a specific purpose and portray different meanings, messages, and symbols. From being a place to commemorate the purpose of these monuments, they also serve as venues for contentious politics or various political protests and social movements.

This chapter and the succeeding chapters examine the stories of the public monuments in Thailand, how they were built, and their symbols and meanings in relation to Thai democracy. It also dissects how they contributed to the discourse of Thai democracy and its transformation through the years.



Photo 1. Democracy Monument in Bangkok.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.

The Democracy Monument, known in Thai as *Anusawari Prachathipatai* (see Photo 1), is a monument located at the roundabout intersection between the middle portion of the Ratchadamnoen Avenue or *Thanon Ratchadamnoen Klang* and Dinso Road or *Thanon Dinso* in Bangkok (see Photo 2). This monument was

constructed to commemorate the legacy of the 1932 revolution in Thailand, romanticize the military leadership, nation-building policies, and modernization plans of Plaek Phibunsongkhram, solidify the influence of the People's Party or *Khana Ratsadon*, and instill the concepts of Western school of democracy and constitution to the Thai people. The democracy uniquely depicted in the Democracy Monument can be dissected into constitutionalism, liberalism, nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism, and modernization. Due to the leadership change, some of these concepts transformed through the years, and the monument became a space in contentious politics.

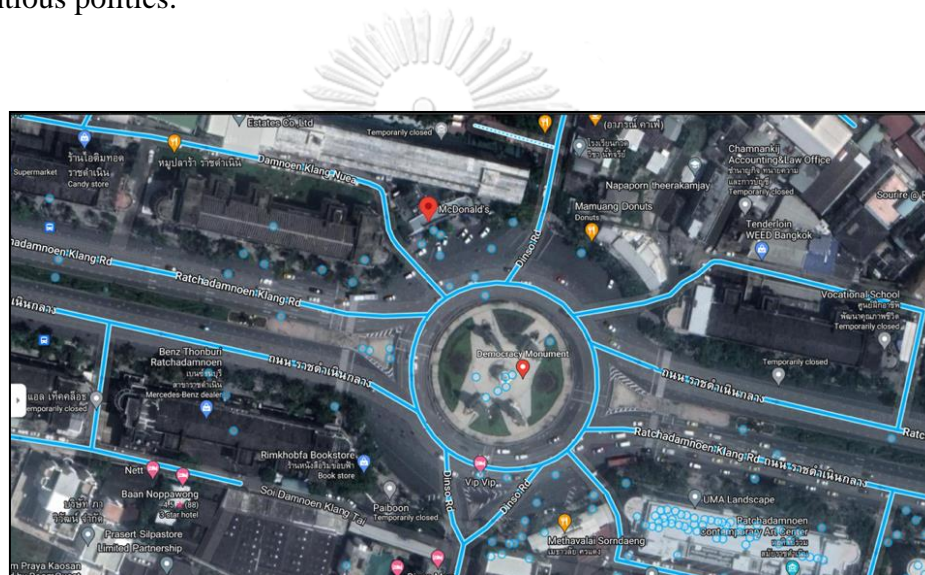


Photo 2. Aerial view of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok.
Retrieved from Google Maps, November 17, 2022.

2.1. The Legacy of the 1932 Revolution

The monument was commissioned to commemorate the legacy of the 1932 revolution. This so-called bloodless revolution and military coup paved the way for the change in the Thai political landscape. The group of students, eventually called the *Khana Ratsadon*, overthrew the absolute monarchy and installed a constitutional monarchy in Thailand on June 24, 1932 (Stowe 1991, 18-22) (Noobanjong, The

Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms 2007, 34-35) (Baker and Pongpaichit 2014, 115-121).⁵

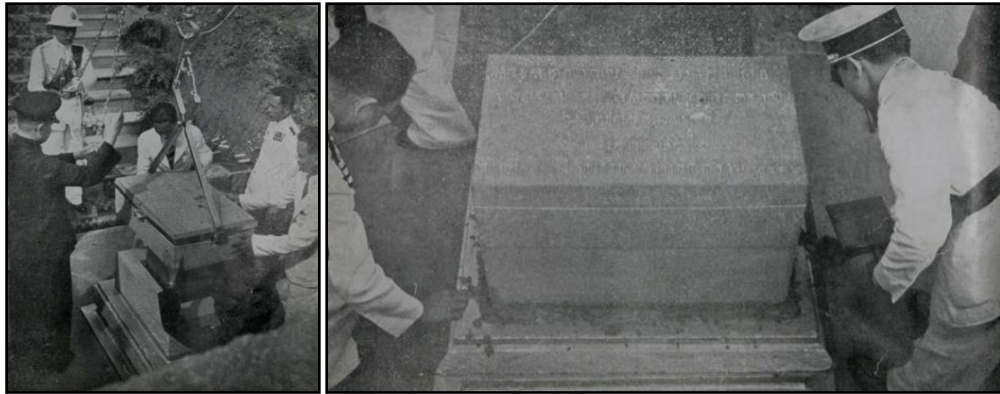


Photo 3. Foundation stone laying ceremony of the Democracy Monument led by Phibun on June 24, 1939.

Retrieved from (ไทยในปัจจุบัน ที่ระลึกงานฉลองวันชาติ 2483 [Thai at the Present: Commemoration of the 1940 National Day Celebration] 1940).

The impact of the 1932 revolution can be seen literally and figuratively in the construction story of the Democracy Monument. Fascination with June 24, the date of the 1932 revolution, was apparent in the monument. Its cornerstone was ceremonially laid on June 24, 1939 (see Photo 3), the same day when the name of the country was changed from Siam to Thailand.⁶ This ceremony was not ordinary because an elaborated religious ceremony was planned for this foundation stone laying. A military parade followed by a nationalist-style float procession was arranged along Ratchadamnoen Avenue to commemorate the June 24 revolution. The foundation stone laying was part of the National Day celebration, which was still June 24 (see

⁵ The 1932 revolution can be considered an intellectual product of Thai students or known as “promoters” because it was led by students exposed to Western democratic ideals abroad. It was headed by Pridi Banomyong, who was a law student at Sorbonne University in France and eventually considered the Father of Thai Democracy. He was the head of the civilian faction of the movement. Aside from Pridi Banomyong, other students joined him in plotting the revolution in Paris in 1927. Students at military colleges were also included in this planning. They formed the military faction of the movement. It was led by Plaek Khittasangha or later known as Plaek Phibunsongkhram, an artillery officer and French artillery school student (Stowe 1991, 9-13) (Baker and Pongpaichit 2014, 115).

⁶ The changing of the name from Siam to Thailand was the first cultural mandate that Phibun implemented as part of his state policy known as the *Rathaniyom*. This policy was mentioned and introduced by Phibun during his National Day speech in 1939, the same day and celebration when the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Democracy Monument occurred (Barme 1989, 124).

Photo 4). Different government ministries, business community members, and the general public were represented in this procession (Barme 1989, 119). Then the monument's construction began in July of the same year, and it was completed and inaugurated the following year, 1940. It was also reported that it was completed on June 22, 1940 at exactly midnight, in time for the celebration of the 1940 National Day celebration (ไทยในปัจจุบัน ที่ระลึกงานฉลองวันชาติ 2483 [Thai at the Present: Commemoration of the 1940 National Day Celebration] 1940) (Wongsurawat 1987, 1-3).

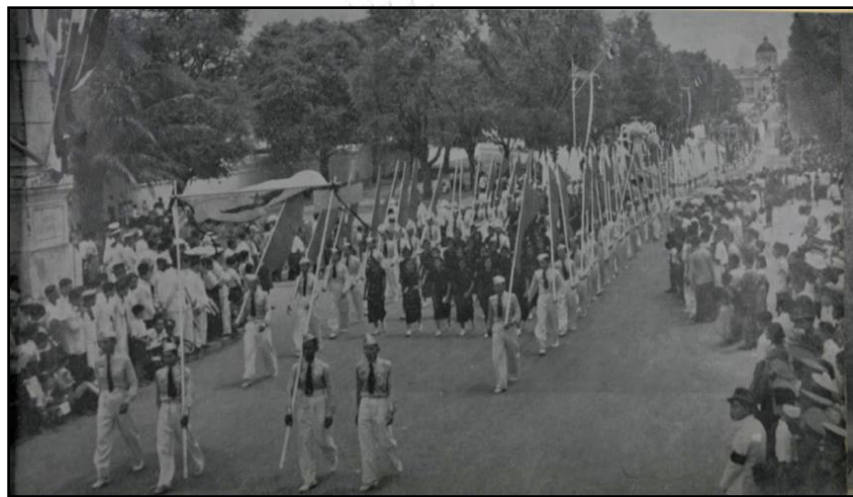


Photo 4. Parade along Ratchadamnoen Avenue on June 24, 1939, commemorating the 1932 Revolution.

Retrieved from (ไทยในปัจจุบัน ที่ระลึกงานฉลองวันชาติ 2483 [Thai at the Present: Commemoration of the 1940 National Day Celebration] 1940).

2.2. Phibun's Militarism, Nationalism, and Modernization

The Democracy Monument romanticized Plaek Phibunsongkhram's military leadership, nation-building policies, and modernization plans. Phibun became the new prime minister of Thailand in December 1938. The head of the military faction of *Khana Ratsadon* instructed the monument's construction in his first months as the nation's leader from its conception, form, content, and up to the minute details of the

plans (Wongsurawat 1987, 1-3).⁷ It only proves how Phibun immediately extended his military ideas, values, and practices to civilian society by constructing monuments epitomizing the power of the military. Attached to the concept of militarism that was directly embedded in the structure, the construction of the Democracy Monument also embodied authoritarian elements. This monument was a product of authoritarianism due to the authority imposed by the Phibun government to construct the monument and his total control in planning this structure.

The monument also symbolically represented his concepts of nationalism and modernization through his programs. Phibun's notion of nationalism was geared towards constructing a modern nation-state inspired by the West and far from the influence of the monarchy. In the 1940 inauguration of the Democracy Monument, he mentioned that the monument represented nation-building (Wongsurawat 1987, 5-7). A year before this, his state policy, known as the *Rathaniyom*, was mentioned and introduced during his National Day speech, the same day when the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Democracy Monument occurred (Barne 1989, 124). This nation-building policy modernized Thai society through cultural mandates, including architecture and urban planning. The core ideas of his Thai nationalism and modernization became evident in the monument's construction. As a result, modern architecture was introduced, and the standard architectural style of the Thai nation was emphasized during Phibun's term from 1938-1944. His administration preferred the modern style to get the attention away from the royal authority, distance himself from the previous regime, implement his nation-building program by creating the modern identity of the Thai people, and assert the authority of his new leadership (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 35) (Chua, *The Aesthetic Citizen: Translating Modernism and Fascism in Mid Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2019, 73-74).

⁷ Interestingly, there was a competition for the monument's design, which was participated by architectural professors and architects in the country. Lucien Coppé, a Belgian architect and professor at Chulalongkorn University, won the competition. But unfortunately, his design was wholly abandoned, and the plan became purely based on the instructions and ideas of Phibun. He simply ordered that the symbolic details of the 1932 revolution must be incorporated into the monument (Fusinpaiboon 2014, 476).

Wichit Wathakan, a Thai intellectual and the head of the Fine Arts Department from 1934-1942, helped Phibun materialize his *Rathaniyom* and visions for Thailand. He was also in charge of the plans for the Democracy Monument and the foundation stone laying ceremony (Barme 1989, 120). Carrying his education and diplomatic experience abroad, he advocated the modernization of Thai culture by mobilizing the power of architecture. For example, he was the one who employed Corrado Feroci, an Italian sculptor who was given a Thai name, Silpa Bhirasri, later (King, Reading Bangkok 2011, 179).

As part of the nation-building program of the Phibun administration, the Democracy Monument was included in the improvement project of Ratchadamnoen Avenue.⁸ It was a major extensive reconstruction project that improved and installed government offices and other structures along this massive area. It was also a project that transformed the avenue, once a symbol of royal absolutism, into a modernized place (ไทยในปัจจุบัน ที่ระลึกงานฉลองวันชาติ 2483 [Thai at the Present: Commemoration of the 1940 National Day Celebration] 1940) (Wongsurawat 1987, 5-6) (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 35).

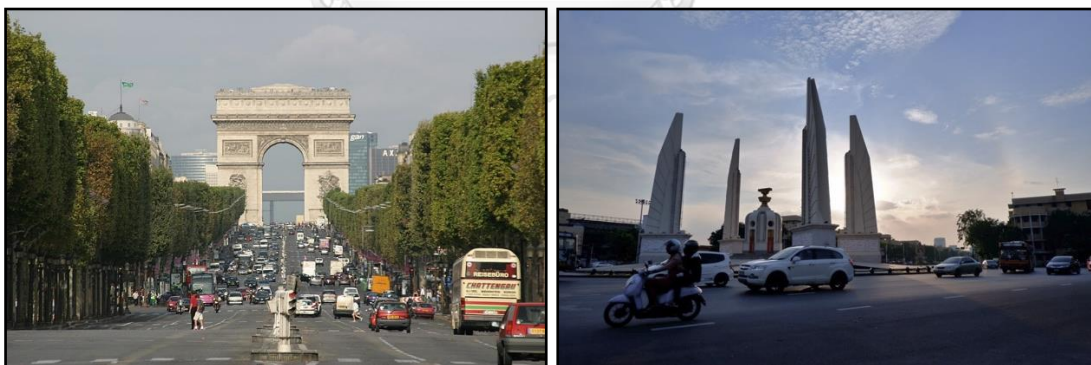


Photo 5. Avenue des Champs-Élysées and Arc de Triomphe in Paris, France and Ratchadamnoen Avenue and the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, Thailand.

Retrieved from (Eichmann 2004) and Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.

⁸ The Crown Property Bureau, which the Phibun government established in 1937 to manage the properties of the Kingdom, commissioned this project. The construction of the Democracy Monument, included in the redevelopment plan of Ratchadamnoen Avenue, was said to have cost 250,000 baht (Fusinpaiboon 2014, 474-476). The budget for the monument was initially pegged at 200,000 baht. But by the time it was completed, it was reported to have cost 250,000 baht (Barme 1989, 120).

Modernization in terms of the Western influence on Thai society is also reflected in the monument's installation. Large-scale designs from European countries such as France, Italy, and Germany inspired Phibun to widen the entire avenue. Due to his personal experiences in Europe, he envisioned the Ratchadamnoen Avenue as the Champs-Élysées and the Democracy Monument as the Arc de Triomphe of Thailand (see Photo 5.1 and 5.2.). The government assigned the Building Committee to oversee this project and placed the monument in the middle of Ratchadamnoen Avenue. Phibun envisioned the monument as the center of progress linked to other parts of Thailand. The Christiani and Nielsen (Siam), Ltd., Engineers and Contractors, under a contract from the Ministry of Finance, served as the construction firm responsible for installing this monument (ไทยในปัจจุบัน ที่ระลึกงานฉลองวันชาติ 2483 [Thai at the Present: Commemoration of the 1940 National Day Celebration] 1940) (Wongsurawat 1987, 5-6) (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 35).⁹

The people behind the monument's creation also lean toward militarism, nationalism, and modernization due to their personal, educational, political, and architectural backgrounds. Although based on the report presented by the Building Committee in 1940, no names of architects and artists were credited for the monument's design and creation. Not even in the dedication speeches of the Building Committee members nor in the official souvenir publication of its inauguration (Wongsurawat 1987, 8-9).

Several names are being floated and associated with the monument's creation. One of them was Jitrasen Aphaiwong or also known as Mew Aphaiwong.¹⁰

⁹ The material used in the monument was steel-reinforced concrete because it was economically practical. With this material, skilled laborers were not necessary, which contributed to speeding up the construction. Furthermore, this structure's production also contributed to Thailand's national economy because the state owned the Siam Cement Company (Chua, *Bangkok Utopia: Modern Architecture and Buddhist Felicities, 1910–1973* 2021, 133). It was one of the reasons, too, why the parliament effortlessly approved the reconstruction of Ratchadamnoen Avenue despite the instability and uncertainties of the global situation because of the brewing World War II. The Siam Cement Company benefitted from this modernization project and the construction of the Democracy Monument (Fusinpaiboon 2014, 478).

¹⁰ He was born in Battambang in present-day Cambodia, a former province of Siam, and his family served as an important figure in the history of Thailand. He is a well-known architect and brother of former Prime Minister of Thailand, Khuang Aphaiwong, who was also part of the civilian faction of the People's Party or *Khana Ratsadon* and member of the Phibun administration. They were part of a

The architectural design of the Democracy Monument is sometimes credited to him (Wongsurawat 1987, 8-9). It can be inferred that since he was the leading architect of the reconstruction of Ratchadamnoen Avenue, and the Democracy Monument was part of this widening project, his name was credited and associated with the monument's creation.

Another name associated with the design of the Democracy Monument was Pum Malagun (Wongsurawat 1987, 8-9) (Chua, *The Aesthetic Citizen: Translating Modernism and Fascism in Mid Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2019, 22). Like Mew Aphaiwong, he also studied at the *École des Beaux-Arts* (School of Fine Arts) in France. He is the son of Chaophraya Thamma (also known as Pum Malagun), the Chancellor of the Ministry of the Palace. Before attending France, he attended Debsirin School and Bangkok's French Department of the Assumption School. After studying abroad, he worked as an architect at the Department of Municipal Works. Aside from the Democracy Monument, he also designed the Victory Monument, Erawan Hotel, and the Chitrlada Palace (Chulasai and Chotpanich 2022) (M.L. Poom Malakoul *Biography* n.d.) (อ่านเอา: นิยายออนไลน์ มีให้อ่านที่อ่านเอา n.d.).

The other names were Silpha Bhirasri and his students and young assistants, such as Sithidet Saenghiran and Sanan Silakorn, who possibly made the relief panel about the military. Under the supervision of Silpha Bhirasri, they executed the sculptural program of the monument. They created the eight relief panels embedded on the base of the four wings of the monument to recall the events and ideals of the 1932 revolution (Wongsurawat 1987, 8-9) (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 35).

group of Thai students who went to France to study before World War II. He graduated from the French Department of Assumption School in Bangkok and continued his studies in architecture at *École des Beaux-Arts* (School of Fine Arts). However, some sources would say that it is still unclear whether Mew Aphaiwong studied at *École des Beaux-Arts* or in Tours because his brother studied politics in Tours, France. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that he was a product of Western education. Mew is known for a lot of works such as the Art Deco structures, including the Sala Chaloe Thai, Grand Postal Building, Rattanakosin Hotel, Bangkok City Library, and the Supachalasai Stadium in the National Stadium (Junsin 2006, 24-25) (Prakitnontakarn 2007, 72-74) (Chua, *The Aesthetic Citizen: Translating Modernism and Fascism in Mid Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2019, 65-78).

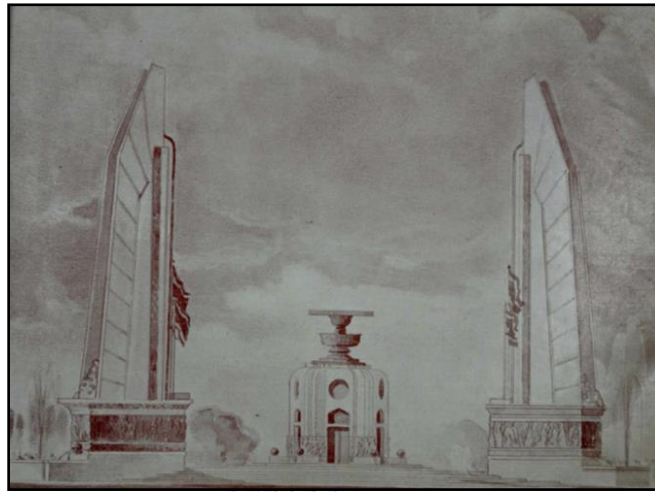


Photo 6. The design of the Democracy Monument.

Retrieved from (ไทยในปัจจุบัน ที่ระลึกงานฉลองวันชาติ 2483 (Thai at the Present: Commemoration of the 1940 National Day Celebration) 1940).

Silpa Bhirasri, also known as Corrado Feroci, was a sculpture teacher in Italy who moved to Siam in 1923 because of the political and economic instability brought on by World War I in Europe. He became a Thai citizen, a full-time sculptor of the Department of Fine Arts, Ministry of the Royal Household, and the director and founder of the School of Fine Arts or *Rongrien Praneet Silpakam*, one of Silpakorn University's core faculties.¹¹ He and his colleagues, assistants, and students served the royal institution, and eventually, they were called by the revolutionaries to help in their administration after 1932. It was not surprising when he accepted the offer of the military leaders because, as an Italian who witnessed the challenges and effects of wars, he had a positive image of the militarist and nationalistic government. Due to his contributions to Thai sculpture and arts, he was named the Father of Thai Modern Art (Wongsurawat 1987, 13-17) (Peleggi, *Purveyors of modernity? Europeans artists and architects in turn of the century Siam* 2003).

2.3. Khana Ratsadon's Power and Influence

The monument also solidified the image of the *Khana Ratsadon*. In flexing the power and influence of Phibun and the People's Party, it uniquely mirrored

¹¹ Phibun was delighted with the relief structures made by Silpa Bhirasri and his students. As a reward, he upgraded the status of the School of Fine Arts, founded and headed by Bhirasri, to a Fine Arts University (Silpakorn University) on October 5, 1943 (Wong 2000, 87).

aspects of militarism, nationalism, and liberalism. On the other hand, the overlapping of these ideologies reflected on the monument also echoed the internal rift and two factions in the party. The socialist-oriented Pridi believed in a liberal version of nationalism, while Phibun advocated militarism and nationalism (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 50).

The Democracy Monument became an instrument for the ideological manipulation and state control of *Khana Ratsadon* and the Phibun administration. The monument was also a product of the assertion of Phibun's authority over the people as part of his nation-building program.

The Western and liberal values were also reflected in the principles and objectives of the People's Party and the constitution embodied in the Democracy Monument. During the structure's inauguration on June 24, 1940, the government uttered messages and words during the ceremony. The Building Committee emphasized the purpose of the Democracy Monument, which was to commemorate the National Day, June 24, 1932, when the change in the constitutional government took effect. Furthermore, it was intended to recall some of the memories of the 1932 revolution and the principles and objectives of the People's Party: sovereignty or independence, security, economy, equality, freedom or liberty, and education.¹² This report from the Building Committee recalled how the People's Party asked King Prajadhipok for a constitutional government on June 24, 1932. In that regard, the Party was recognized for its patriotism and actions. Aside from emphasizing the contribution of *Khana Ratsadon*, the ceremony also insisted on the support of the people in the 1932 revolution and constitutional government (Wongsurawat 1987, 3-5). However, there were also criticisms against this claim. Saengarun Rattakasikon, a Thai architect and professor, argued that the Democracy Monument only raised little interest among the Thai people when it was constructed because they were not generally considered part of the 1932 revolution due to its military coup nature

¹² The six principles of *Khana Ratsadon* can be further explained into the following: to maintain the supreme power of the Thai people; to maintain national security; to maintain the economic welfare of the Thai people in accordance with the National Economic Project; to protect the equality of Thai people; to maintain people's rights and liberties that are not inconsistent with any of the above-mentioned principles; and to provide public education for all citizens (The history and significance of the Khana Ratsadon memorial plaque 2020).

(Fusinpaiboon 2014, 478). Although there were criticisms such as this, it cannot be denied that the Democracy Monument left a powerful legacy for Phibun and the *Khana Ratsadon* despite the factions it had during that time.

2.4. The Representation of the Constitution and Democracy

The Democracy Monument represents two new concepts for the Thai people—the Constitution and Democracy. The Phibun administration installed it to instill the said concepts in Thai society. This intention was evident during the inauguration of the monument.

The 1940 inauguration was a celebration. It emphasized the value of the constitution for the Phibun administration and how the change in the system was considered a historic moment for them.¹³ Phibun also delivered a speech at the event and summarized the meaning and importance of the constitution. Then, as part of the commemoration of June 24 as the National Day, Phibun was heard on the radio and addressed the people. His speech centered on the message that the monument is a sign of the system of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. It only justifies that the Gettysburg Address of Abraham Lincoln in 1863 inspired Phibun's concept of democracy. In addition, he also explained the role of the king, prime minister, civil servants, parliament, citizenry, and armed forces in a democracy. By emphasizing the functional role of each sector in society in his address it accentuates his concept of democracy anchored to constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy, liberal democracy, and military influence in democracy. He also expressed confidence that his administration will strive to sustain, support, and nurture democracy. By having him say all these things about the constitution and democracy, the monument serves as a tool for the democratic promise of Phibun to the Thai nation and its future (Wongsurawat 1987, 5-7).

¹³ Traditions, such as the national anthem playing and the Buddhist monks' chanting, were practiced during the inauguration. The monks also received offerings from the people who attended the ceremony. However, a memorable incident happened on that day that upset Phibun and was considered a bad omen by the people. Pink silk was planned to be pulled up by balloons to uncover the constitution, but it did not materialize because it fell to the ground (see Photo 7) (Fusinpaiboon 2014, 477).



Photo 7. Inauguration of the Democracy Monument on June 24, 1940.

This picture is from the Commemorative Book given to Phibun on his birthday on July 14, 1941, which was kept in the Chulachomklat Royal Military Academy Museum. Retrieved from (Wirunhok 2022).

The intention of creating the monument was clearly political and, at the same time, contradicting in nature. The Democracy Monument was a political tool for the military leadership, nation-building policies, and modernization plans of Phibun. It embodies the ideals of democracy, the constitution, and the legacies of the 1932 revolution, and at the same time, it was installed by his military leadership. Even how it was planned and constructed was purely based on the directives of one person. It can also be justified by how the competition for the monument's design was neglected, and they proceeded with the construction immediately. In addition, the people behind the structure were part and connected to the Thai elite and *Khana Ratsadon*, who were exposed to Western influence and education and embraced the ideas of militarism, nationalism, and modernization. These concepts align with the vision of Phibun for Thailand, which made the monument's installation easier for him. The construction also symbolically marked his state policy and cultural mandates for the Thai people. The short period of its creation and even the vast amount of money put into it, despite the threat of World War II and uncertainties in the world, are signs that the construction of this monument was hurried because it was political, after all.

2.5. Symbols and Meanings of the Democracy Monument

The meanings of the Democracy Monument and its construction and inauguration provided an amusing narrative of the political landscape of Thailand during the time of Phibun. In addition, by looking closely at the monument's details, it also comprises symbols that would help people better understand the context of Thai society in the 20th century. The monument has socio-political implications, from its centerpiece to the wings and relief structures. It combines a lot of representations, such as the images of the coup, the constitution, the military, Buddhism, and nationalism (Dovey, *Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy* 2001, 63).

First on the list of essential parts of the monument is its centerpiece. It comprises a round turret with golden-stacked bowls on top carrying an image of the constitution carved into a folded document. This figure is also known as *phan rattathanun* (see Photo 8). These golden-stacked bowls or sometimes called *phan waen fah* symbolize the Thai tradition of offering an item to those considered sacred. In this case, it is the constitution (see Photo 9). It was cast in brass and copper and weighed four tons. In addition, the turret contains six gates with sword designs that refer to *Khana Ratsadon's* six principles of freedom, peace, education, equality, economy, and unity (ไทยในปัจจุบัน ที่ระลึกงานฉลองวันชาติ 2483 [Thai at the Present: Commemoration of the 1940 National Day Celebration] 1940) (Dovey, *Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy* 2001, 63) (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 35-37) (Fusinpaiboon 2014, 477).

The centerpiece of the monument symbolizes a democracy that is based on constitutionalism and liberalism. Constitutionalism because of the constitution figure and liberalism because of the six principles of *Khana Ratsadon* represented in the six gates of the turret.



*Photo 8. The centerpiece of the Democracy Monument.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.*



*Photo 9. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam in 1932.
Retrieved from (Iudexvivorum 2017).*



Photo 10. The image of Arun at the top of each door.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.

The centerpiece also symbolizes a democracy that is disassociated with the monarchy. At the top of each door is an image of *Arun* or *Aruntheput*, charioteer of the sun god *Surya* and brother of *Garuda* in Hindu mythology (see Photo 10). This figure symbolizes the dawn of a golden age or *sri ariya*, the era of Buddha Maitreya. The People's Party mentioned this in their announcement of the change in the government in 1932. The head of the military faction and leader of the People's Party, Phraya Phahon Phonphayuhasena or Phot Phahonyothin, declared the Announcement No. 1 in the early morning of June 24, 1932, at the Royal Plaza of the Dusit Palace. He uttered, "The time has ended when those of royal blood farm on the backs of the people. Things which everyone desires, the greatest happiness and progress which can be called *sri ariya*, will arise for everyone" (Chotpradit, *A Dark Spot on a Royal Space: The Art of the People's Party and the Politics of Thai (Art) History 2017*, 136-137). This excerpt was part of the announcement that Pridi Banomyong composed. It was used to emphasize the transformation of Siam into a democratic society and represent new beginnings. The figure of *Arun* can be interpreted as an anti-Chakri symbol and as an alternative to the symbols associated with royal brandings, such as the *Garuda*. It became a political symbol that the *Khana Ratsadon* used in their built works and architecture (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts*

of Thai Cultural Memory 2017, 137) (Chua, Bangkok Utopia: Modern Architecture and Buddhist Felicities, 1910–1973 2021, 159-160).

The height of the turret measures three meters pertains to June, the third month of the traditional Thai calendar, and the branches of government such as the administrative, legislative, and judicial branches (Dovey, Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy 2001, 63) (Noobanjong, The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms 2007, 35-37) (Fusinpaiboon 2014, 477).



Photo 11. One of the four wings of the Democracy Monument.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.

The wings and the cannons of the monument represent a democracy that is associated with militarism. Four slender vertical wings with slanted ridges surround the central piece of the monument (see Photo 11). These wings symbolize the guarding of the army, navy, air force, and police of the constitution. The height and the radius of the monument's base are 24 meters, about the 24th day of June, the day of the 1932 revolution (ไทยในปัจจุบัน ที่ระลึกงานฉลองวันชาติ 2483 [Thai at the Present: Commemoration of the 1940 National Day Celebration] 1940) (Wong, Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand 2000, 85-86)

(Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 36).

On the ground, seventy-five half-buried cannons with their barrels facing down encircle the entire monument (see Photo 12). These cannons represent the last two digits of 2475 BE or the year 1932, the year of the revolution (ไทยในปัจจุบัน ที่ระลึกงานฉลองวันชาติ 2483 [Thai at the Present: Commemoration of the 1940 National Day Celebration] 1940) (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 36).

At the base of the wings are supposed fountains sculpted as *Naga*, the protective serpent in Hindu-Buddhist mythology (see Photo 13). Although it adheres to the symbolism of the military protecting the constitution, it was argued that the design and aesthetics of the Naga sculpture do not conform to the Thai religious convention. Instead, it only emphasized the Western stylistic influence (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 36).



Photo 12. Some of the half-buried cannons around the Democracy Monument.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.



*Photo 13. Naga image sculpted at the base wings of the Democracy Monument.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.*

Relief structures are situated at the base of the four wings of the monument. They were created by pre-casting them with powdered stone and cement before being carried to the monument's site. Eight different panels were initially planned for the bases of the wings. One artist was assigned for each panel. However, due to time constraints, they only used four sculpture designs and made it into four pairs of reliefs to fit the eight sides of the bases. The other four sketches were rejected and did not reach the monument (Wongsurawat 1987, 9-10).



*Photo 14. One of the designs of the Democracy Monument.
Retrieved from (Wongsurawat 1987).*

In an interview with Professor Paitun Muangsomboon of Silpakorn University in February 1985, he mentioned that the plans for the relief structures were uncertain, and there were last-minute changes to their original concept. For example, the sketches and plans of the relief structures placed on the souvenir book of the opening day ceremony of the monument and other earlier pictures of monument plans differed from what was installed in the monument. There were pictures of the plan showing giant statues bearing torches and spears mounted on the bases of the wings, which did not materialize in the actual monument (see Photo 14) (Wongsurawat 1987, 9-10). It was the same plan from the Fine Arts Department that the Ministry of the Interior sent to the other provinces in 1940. Although it differed from what was installed in Bangkok, it gave the provincial officials who liked to build a replica in their places and celebrate the National Day with this monument an idea of its design (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Citizen Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monument in Isan] 2018, 91-93).

The goal of the relief structures was to recall the historical events that led to the 1932 revolution and depict the story of the People's Party. However, no specific individual, time, or place was presented in the design. Instead, it only highlighted essential aspects of Thai society, such as the military, constitution, the working class, and Thai values (Wongsurawat 1987, 25-26). These relief panels portray a democracy connected to constitutionalism, liberalism, nationalism, and militarism.

The panels depicting the Thai working class and values are paired in the bases of Wing 1 and 4. In contrast, on the other two bases, the panel about the military and planning of the 1932 revolution are paired in Wing 2 and 3 (see Photo 15) (Google Maps 2022).



Photo 15. Wings and panels of the Democracy Monument.

Wings 1 and 4 contain panels about the Thai working class and values, while Wings 2 and 3 contain panels about the military and planning of the 1932 revolution.

Retrieved from (Google Maps 2022).

Panel 1 depicts the People's Party planning stage of the 1932 revolution (see Photo 16). The person wearing the academic gown in the panel can be interpreted as an illustration of Pridi Banomyong, the leader of the civilian faction of *Khana Ratsadon* (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 136). While Panel 2 displays the military's might and how they fought for the constitution (see Photo 17). Based on the assessment of Janice Wongsurawat, this panel might be the work of Sanan Silakorn. It presented the life and character of the military men by providing details such as their uniforms and equipment (Wongsurawat 1987, 25-29). Panel 2 can also refer to the Boworadet rebellion or *Kabot Bowondet*, the unsuccessful rebellion or coup led by Prince Boworadet in 1933 against the Siamese government led by the *Khana Ratsadon* (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 136).

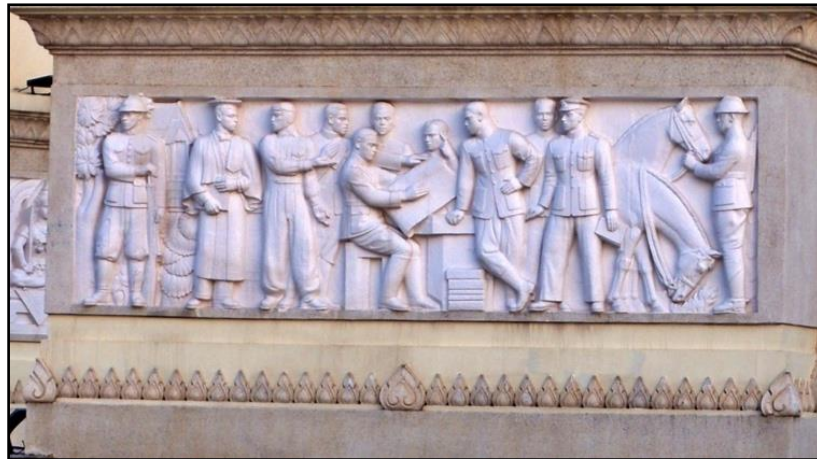


Photo 16. Panel 1 of the Democracy Monument.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.

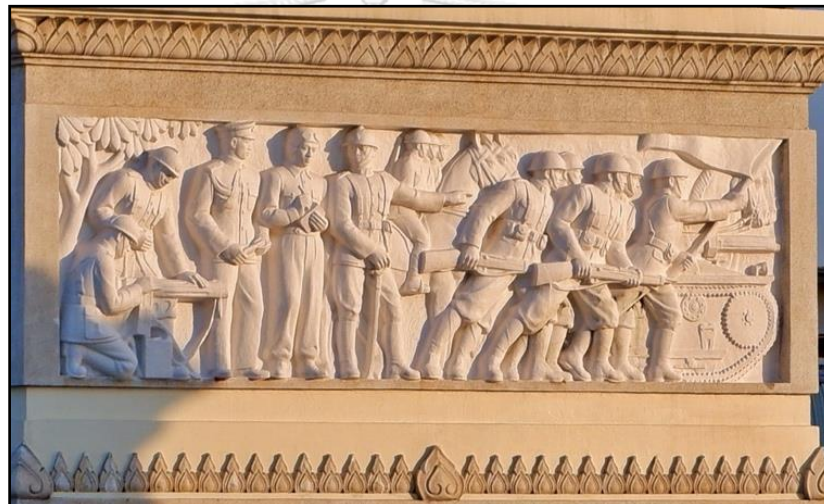


Photo 17. Panel 2 of the Democracy Monument.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.

Panel 3 illustrates the working class with the military still at the center (see Photo 18). The laborers, farmers, and industrial workers are honored in this panel (Wongsurawat 1987, 30-31). It also shows that the military protects civilians because of its location in the panel (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 37). Therefore, it can be inferred as emphasizing the military's role in maintaining peace and order in Thai society (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 136).

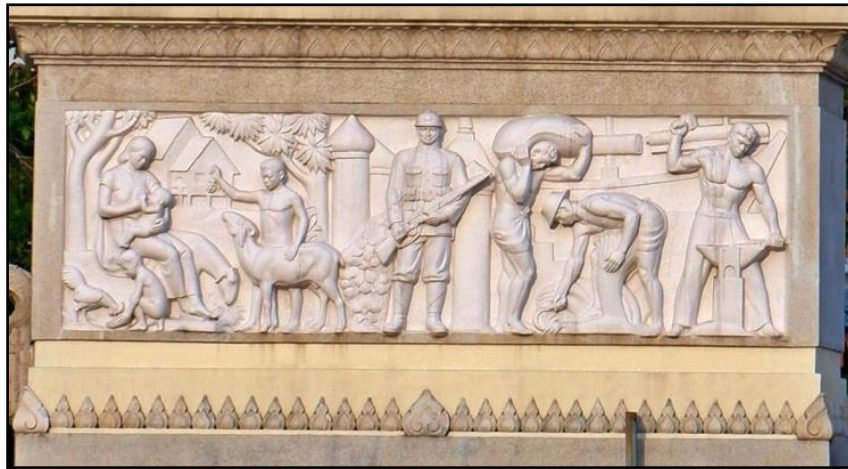


Photo 18. Panel 3 of the Democracy Monument.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.



Photo 19. Panel 4 of the Democracy Monument.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, October 14, 2022.

Panel 4 shows sports, education, public service, and religious values (see Photo 19). The latter was emphasized at the center of the art piece. Finally, the central figure emphasizes justice through the scales, sword, and internal order of Thai society through Buddhism (Wongsurawat 1987, 30-33). On the other hand, this panel can also be interpreted as the representation of the social policies of the Phibun administration. The central figure seated in a meditating posture depicts Phibun's interpretation of Buddhism, and nationalism can be seen in the representation of the scales and sword for the armed forces and justice (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 37). It also signifies the personification of balance and good life, which was aligned with the cultural

mandates of Phibun (Peleggi, Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory 2017, 136-137).

Kim Dovey's idea of framing places can be applied to Thai public monuments. The configuration of the Democracy Monument, including its architectural design, symbols, and meanings, frames the notion of democracy that Thailand has. By calling it Democracy Monument, it constructed a cognitive imagery that people can imagine and think about when they hear this term. After identifying the symbols and meanings behind this structure, it is noteworthy to unpack this concept signified in this monument.

2.6. The “Democracy” in the Democracy Monument

The “democracy” in the Democracy Monument is a young and fragile democracy associated with the Western school, the birth of the constitution and Phibun's military leadership, nation-building policies, and modernization programs. Due to the surface-level introduction of the Western school of democracy to Siamese society immediately after 1932, the democracy in the monument can be dissected into a combination of complicated concepts such as constitutionalism, liberalism, nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism, and modernization. The Democracy Monument served as a mediated built form of Thai democracy based on the Western school of democracy with different and complex ideologies attached to it.

Based on the speeches and messages of Phibun, the monument symbolized a Western school of democracy inspired by the system of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. It also epitomized a democracy anchored to constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy, liberal democracy, and military influence in democracy. Despite Phibun's recognition of the constitutional monarchy, the monument disassociated itself from the monarchy due to the absence of monarchy-related symbols and the presence of the image of *Arun*, an anti-Chakri insignia of the *Khana Ratsadon*.

Constitutionalism and the significance of the Thai Constitution were evident in the centerpiece of the Democracy Monument. The values of liberalism and liberal democracy were apparent in the representation of the *Khana Ratsadon* principles in

the structure. Parliamentary democracy was emphasized in the symbolism of the branches of government through the turret's height. Militarism can also be seen in the wings, cannons, and relief panels. And lastly, modernization and nationalism were blatant in the construction and architectural design of the monument.

However, to further dissect the notion of democracy in the Democracy Monument, Thailand's socio-political background needs further discussion beyond the pertinent details of its construction and its symbols and meanings. Beyond the intended meanings through the symbols of the monument, the structure also represented a young and fragile Thai democracy anchored on a Western school with different and complex ideologies attached to it based on its contexts and various interpretations.

The cornerstone of the Democracy Monument was laid on June 24, 1939. During that time, Thailand's revolutionary government that installed the concept of “democracy” and a constitutional monarchy was only seven years old. Therefore, like a kid going through middle childhood, “Thai democracy” can be described here as someone who is still starting to face many changes in their development and trying to show independence from their family. S/he is also beginning to understand their personality and form their own identity.

In the bigger picture, political conflicts, transitions, and uncertainties were also happening in Thailand. In addition, the looming threat of World War II was also evident when the monument was being planned and constructed. This period was also the time of mass nationalism, cultural policies, and nation-building efforts of Phibun. With these circumstances happening at that time, Phibun still insisted on the construction of the monument and the reconstruction of Ratchadamnoen Avenue, and it only justifies that the “Thai democracy” portrayed and represented in the monument is still immature and fragile (Wongsurawat 1987, 1-2) (Wyatt 2004, 241-245).

Even the way the monument planning was carried out, it seems that it was hurriedly decided. From the date Phibun was installed as the new prime minister up to its construction, it only has an interval of six months. Phibun, who became the new prime minister on December 1938, instructed the structure of the Democracy Monument in his first months. His military leadership was behind the monument's construction. The military leaders seemed hands-on in its creation from the

monument's conception, form, content, and minute details. Therefore, it can be inferred that the military leadership of Phibun early asserted to install a legacy representing a young and fragile democracy through a monument amidst the events and circumstances of that time (Wongsurawat 1987, 1-2).

The widening of the Ratchadamnoen Avenue and the construction of the Democracy Monument resulted in the eviction of residents and shopkeepers in the area. The government also removed hundreds of shade trees, such as Mahogany trees, to create the ceremonial boulevard (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 38). This action justifies the contradiction in constructing the monument that supposedly glorifies democracy and democratic rights.



Photo 20. The pictures of the Democracy Monument construction.

These pictures were from the Commemorative Book given to Phibun on his birthday on July 14, 1941, which were kept in the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy Museum. Retrieved from (Matichon Online 2022).

With how it was created, there is no doubt that the Democracy Monument served as a self-glorifying apparatus for Phibun leadership other than commemorating democracy and the revolutionary spirit of 1932. It flexed the power and political agenda of the military and the People's Party and concealed it in the disguise of a

monument. The Democracy Monument became a vehicle to promote the vision of Phibun for Thailand and a symbol of Thai modernity and nationalism. It avoided architectural styles of monarchy, presented modern architecture from abroad, asserted militaristic decorative elements, and projected the Thai national and cultural identity mandate of Phibun's administration. These are all assembled vis-a-vis the construction of the monument. On the other hand, it symbolized military tyranny and fascism and was labeled as a lip service to "Thai democracy" (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 89) (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 39-42).

The complication, contradiction of meanings, and irony of the monument's creation contributed to its vulnerability of being challenged and re-interpreted. The succeeding administrations and events quickly reconstructed and contested their meanings and symbols. Phibun's successors like Sarit Thanarat, who ruled from 1959-1963, and Thanom Kittikachorn from 1963 to 1973, were Thai traditionalists, and they valued the core concepts of nation, religion, and monarchy more than the idea of having a constitution. The constitution was suspended during their rule, and martial law was imposed. Due to their authoritarian rule, the Democracy Monument lost its meaning and simply served as a traffic roundabout for the Thai people. The military government suppressed commemorative activities for the 1932 revolution. The royal functions were prioritized in social festivities and state ceremonies (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 41-42).

Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn retained the modernization process of Phibun's nation-building program. However, they changed most cultural policies and social practices that Phibun introduced. They replaced the existing meanings of the architectural structures. The Ratchadamnoen Avenue and the Democracy Monument were reinterpreted to express the royal authority and the military regime's power. Ratchadamnoen Avenue goes back to its monarchical origin. The symbolic meanings and interpretations of the Democracy Monument were reframed. From being a platform for the Western school of democracy, it became a space for the traditional school of democracy. For example, the military government of Thanarat and

Kittikachorn interpreted the golden-stacked bowls as a representation of Rama VII's noble deeds and not because of the People's Party. It became a representation of the approval of King Prajadhipok of the constitution to prevent Thai blood from being spilled. This interpretation resulted in proposals to replace the centerpiece with the statue of King Prajadhipok (see Photo 21). The Ratchadamnoen Avenue reconstruction project was attributed as a grand-scale modernization process inaugurated by King Chulalongkorn instead of Phibun's nation-building program. The royal national story was developed, and the People's Party was labeled as Western and too impatient to wait and force Siam towards democracy prematurely (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 48-51) (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 42-43). It only proves that Thai institutions, such as the military and monarchy, can control the narrative of the Democracy Monument as a spatial structure by disregarding and planning to dismantle and replace it.



Photo 21. Sketch of the proposed King Rama VII's monument.
This picture is from the December 2013 issue of *Art and Culture Magazine*.
Retrieved from (Wirunhok 2022).

Aside from the Thai institutions, it was also easy for the different political groups to contest and reclaim the Democracy Monument as a space for their narratives. As spatial agencies, these political groups also transformed this structure according to their respective perspectives by using it as a backdrop and symbol of

various demonstrations, including the 1973 and 2020 student movements. These student protests contested the original meaning and role of the Democracy Monument, and they added layers of meaning and memory to it (Chotpradit, *Revolution versus Counter-Revolution: the People's Party and the Royalist(s) in visual dialogue* 2016, 161). As the student groups continuously contest the meanings and significance of the monument by occupying it, it also contributes to the complexity of Thai democracy that this structure embodies. Therefore, in the second half of this dissertation, it is noteworthy to explore how the 1973 and 2020 student movements challenged the original symbols, added layers of meanings to the said monument, and turned this structure into a space of contentious politics.



CHAPTER III: DILUTING AND DESACRALIZING THE “DEMOCRACY” IN THE CONSTITUTION MONUMENTS AND REPLICAS OF THE DEMOCRACY MONUMENT

The previous chapter argued that the “democracy” in the Democracy Monument in Bangkok is a young and fragile democracy associated with the Western school, the birth of the constitution and Phibun’s military leadership, nation-building policies, and modernization programs. Due to the surface-level introduction of the Western school of democracy to Siamese society, the Thai democracy in the Democracy Monument adhered to a combination of concepts such as constitutionalism, liberalism, nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism, and modernization. As a mediated built form, the Democracy Monument became a container of a complex concept of democracy. However, this notion of Thai democracy was far from the message cascaded to the Siamese people immediately after the 1932 revolution and before the Phibun administration.

The “democracy” advocated by *Khana Ratsadon* was initially diluted to a complicated concept due to various events in Siam after the 1932 revolution. The struggles experienced by the political leaders during the transition phase forced them to implement actions that would allow them to stay in power. It resulted in the distribution of miniature copies of the constitution and the construction of the Constitution Monuments in the provinces, particularly in the areas of the northeastern region such as the ones in Maha Sarakham, Surin, and Roi Et. This distribution and construction not only disseminated the idea of a constitution but also diluted and sacralized the concept of democracy and paved the way for the people to accept this complex ideology. It produced another layer of meaning due to its nuances and how the people received it. The distribution of the Constitution resulted in constitution worship among the people, manifested in the construction of the Constitution Monuments. This diluted democracy contributed further to the complicated concept of Thai democracy introduced in 1932 and the ideological rift among the political leaders during that time. The sacralized idea of democracy and the image of the Constitution Monuments was eventually desacralized when Phibun started his

leadership in 1938. Phibun's regime also shifted the attention from the Constitution Monuments to constructing new monuments, such as the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. This construction influenced the installation of replicas in the provinces, particularly in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum.

This chapter examines the stories of these constitution and replica monuments, how they were built, and their meanings and symbols concerning Thai democracy. It dissects the "democracy" manifested in these mediated built forms and highlights its dilution after the 1932 revolution and desacralization during Phibun's administration. It discusses democracy during the early years of the constitution and its distinction from democracy during the Phibun regime. This part also mentions some of the contentions brought by the spatial agency that these monuments experienced. Aside from the surviving monuments, this chapter also tackles the disappeared public monuments related to *Khana Ratsadon*, such as the Constitution Monument in Buriram and the Constitution Defense Monument in the Laski District of Bangkok, and their implications to the public memory and Thai democracy.¹⁴

3.1. The Early Years of the Constitution

The early years after the 1932 revolution were composed of compromise, competition, coalition, and conflict. The new regime entertained certain agreements from the old power to transition smoothly from absolutism to constitutionalism. Some leaders of the old regime were given positions in the government. For the *Khana Ratsadon* to effectively govern Siam, they compromised with the old regime. It was evident when the National Assembly or *Sapha Phuthen Ratsadon* of seventy members representing the seventy provinces was established on June 27 as part of the provisional constitution or *rattathanun chua khrao* drafted by Pridi Banomyong.¹⁵

¹⁴ This dissertation still classifies the Constitution Monument in Buriram as a disappeared monument even though it was recently reinstalled because of the challenges it encountered from the local authorities.

¹⁵ It was the first stage of the three-stage political development and democratic plan for Siam of Pridi Banomyong, the leader of the civilian faction of *Khana Ratsadon*. The next step was to conduct elections to have an equal number of appointed and indirectly elected National Assembly members. The third and final stage was to fully elect the National Assembly representatives when more than half

The Promoters appointed the representatives, and they were accompanied in the government by an executive committee called the People's Committee or *Khana Kammakan Ratsadon*.¹⁶ These positions were assigned to exercise power on behalf of the people. It included senior officials, leaders of the old regime, and *Khana Ratsadon* members. The officials from the absolute monarchy continued their role in the new administration. It eventually resulted in political tension later with the army and navy officers who were also placed in key positions in the government (Barme 1989, 60-62) (Wyatt 2004, 234-235) (Subrahmanyam, *Amnesia: A History of Democratic Idealism in Modern Thailand* 2021, 28-29).

Aside from the old regime leaders, the permanent Constitution promulgated on December 10, 1932 can be considered a product of compromises between Pridi Banomyong and King Prajadhipok. For example, King Prajadhipok was allowed to supervise the drafting of the constitution and given the right to defer or dissolve the National Assembly, allowing the monarchy to extend its influence in politics continuously. The addition of the word "provisional" or *chua khrao* in the constitution draft and the modification of some wordings in the constitution were also examples of compromises made by the *Khana Ratsadon* with King Prajadhipok (Barme 1989, 61, 66, 88). These compromises showed that the political power of the monarchy did not end absolutely, and it even resulted in competition, coalition, and conflict among the government leaders.

The transition from absolutism to constitutionalism dealt with power competition within the ruling coalition. Due to the political differences and backgrounds of the leaders during that time, coalitions and factions were formed, and political tensions emerged among the members of the old regime and the *Khana Ratsadon* (Barme 1989, 59-61). A series of tensions emerged in 1933 among the conservatives from the old regime, which included Phraya Mano; the senior military

of the population had completed primary education or within ten years from the date of the enforcement of the Constitution (Barme 1989, 60-61) (Wyatt 2004, 234-235).

¹⁶ The People's Committee was composed of fifteen members, and the National Assembly chose them to perform the administrative functions of the government. A premier or chairman led this committee. For visualization and understanding, the People's Committee can be referred to as the present-day cabinet, and the premier or chairman as the president or prime minister. Phraya Mano or Manopakon Nitithada, former Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals, was appointed as the first premier or prime minister of Siam in 1932 (Subrahmanyam 2021, 28-29).

faction, which included Phraya Phahon; the junior military coalition led by Luang Phibun; and the civilian faction led by Pridi Banomyong (Wyatt 2004, 235-236).¹⁷

The conflict between the old regime and the new administration peaked during the suppression of the Boworadet rebellion or *Kabot Bowondet* in October 1933. This rebellion was led by Prince Boworadet, a grandson of King Chulalongkorn, who had been the minister of war under King Prajadhipok. He accused the government of encouraging disrespect towards the monarchy and supporting communism. Accompanied by the rebel forces from several provincial garrisons, they issued an ultimatum calling the government to resign immediately or be removed by force. The government ignored the ultimatum and defended Bangkok. The troops in Bangkok remained loyal to the government. It resulted in heavy casualties on the rebel troops at Bang Khen, who were eventually forced to retreat. Organized and led by Phibun, the government's military forces effectively crushed the rebellion (Barme 1989, 79-81) (Wyatt 2004, 237).

As a result, the Boworadet rebellion marked the end of the political influence of the monarchy in the succeeding years. It paved the way for the emergence of Phibun, Pridi, and other prominent figures of *Khana Ratsadon* in the Siamese political scene and society (Barme 1989, 81). It also prompted government leaders to implement policies that would allow them to stay in power and, at the same time, protect and promote the Constitution and democracy.

¹⁷ The series of tensions among the different factions in 1933 included the outlawing of the political parties, the introduction of the Anti-Communist Act, and the coup against Phraya Mano or Manopakorn Nitithada, former Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals and first prime minister of Siam. After the promulgation of the permanent constitution, the Khana Ratsadon created several political associations around Siam to further its political development and establish a political party system in the country. By early September 1932, it was reported that the People's Party already had approximately 10,000 members. However, this was not supported by King Prajadhipok and was vetoed by Phraya Mano. The new economic plan drafted by Pridi Banomyong that endorsed the nationalization of the Siamese economy was also shelved when Phraya Mano, with the king's approval, suspended the National Assembly and introduced the Anti-Communist Act. Due to competing forces in the military faction, Phraya Phahon mounted a successful coup against Phraya Mano's government on June 20, 1933, and was installed as the new prime minister (Barme 1989, 66-68) (Wyatt 2004, 236-237).

3.2. Promotion of the Constitution

Wichit Wathakan, who was the head of the Fine Arts Department from 1934-1942 and helped Phibun achieve his state policy or *Rathaniyom*, took an active role first in the promotion of the constitution in the early years after the 1932 revolution. Under his leadership, the Fine Arts Department served as a key political organ of the government (Barme 1989, 90, 93).

The National Assembly, through the efforts of Wichit and the committee headed by Pridi Banomyong, proposed a law that would promote a belief in the Constitution, provide protection for its principles, and understand the notion of constitutionalism in 1933.¹⁸ The unsuccessful Boworadet rebellion in October 1933 prompted the quick enactment of this proposed law, named the “Act for the Protection of the Constitution,” by the Assembly on November 5, 1933 (Barme 1989, 95-96).

Aside from protecting it, the government also popularized the constitution because most people were not yet familiar with it, especially those in rural areas. Some people thought that “democracy” was King Prajadhipok’s brother and that the “constitution” was related to Phraya Phahon (Wyatt 2004, 239). In response to this challenge, the Constitution Association or *Samakhom Khana Ratthathammanun* was formed on December 14, 1933, and composed of political figures such as Wichit, Phahon, Phibun, and Supha.¹⁹ This association aimed to support the Constitution of Siam, promote cooperation among the people, and assist the government and people in securing progress for the nation (Barme 1989, 96-97) (Fuwongcharoen 2018, 619).

The association promoted the constitution as a sacred entity or *saksit* and linked it to the religious aspect of Siamese culture. It signaled the start of constitution worship among the people. It started when they distributed miniature copies of the

¹⁸ Constitutionalism is defined as the practice of limited government due to the existence of a constitution. It also fragments the power of the government by providing checks and balances through the concepts of the separation of powers, codified constitutions, bill of rights, etc. (Heywood, Politics 2013, 337). In the context of Siam during that time, constitutionalism pertains to the shift from absolute monarchy to the constitutional monarchy that limited the power and political influence of the monarchy.

¹⁹ Phahon here pertains to Phot Phahonyothin, who was the second prime minister of Siam in 1933, and Supha refers to Naval Commander Supha Chalasai.

constitution to the seventy provinces in 1934. The association also organized an official ceremony where the appointed representatives of the seventy provinces received their copies on August 28, 1934. Each representative stood behind the respective replica then the senior monks chanted religious stanzas accompanied by fanfare music and the beating of gongs. The replicas were also blessed and anointed with water and chalk.²⁰ After receiving the replicas, the representatives delivered them to their respective provinces, and the local authorities accepted them with sanctity, enthusiasm, and fanfare (Barme 1989, 97-98) (Fuwongcharoen 2018, 626).

Several provincial representatives also requested a special cabinet for miniature copies so that the people could participate in locally organized ceremonies of the constitution. Cabinets made of teak with gold leaf inlays were offered to the representatives at approximately 240 baht each (Barme 1989, 98-99).



Photo 22. A copy of the Constitution at the Loei Provincial Governor's Office.
Retrieved from (Wanichsombat 2019).

Due to this ceremonial distribution, the constitution became popular among the people. It became appealing to the people to the point that they started

²⁰ This is an example of a Hindu-Buddhist practice in Siam. It sanctified the replicas as spiritual objects, like how the Buddha images, amulets, and scriptures were blessed and anointed (Fuwongcharoen 2018, 626).

worshipping the document. It was observed that the people venerated it side by side with the images of Buddha and the King (Chua, *Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910-1973* 2012, 64-65).

Most people interpreted the Constitution in terms of indigenous magical conceptions rather than rational and legalistic ones (Barme 1989, 97). It operated as a “traditional totemic object, as opposed to a modern piece of legislation” (Fuwongcharoen 2018, 614). A constitutional deity was formed in their minds, which was perceived as sacred and needed to be respected (Barme 1989, 97). It was observed as an overseeing being from above, governing the ordinary concerns of the people (Subrahmanyam, *Amnesia: A History of Democratic Idealism in Modern Thailand* 2021, 147). The King, considered a god, was also perceived by the people as a subject to the constitution's authority. Allegiance to the Constitution was practiced and added to the nationalist pillars of the Nation, Religion, and Monarchy (Barme 1989, 97, 99).

Khana Ratsadon inherited political supernaturalism, and they mixed the visual and performative culture of Thai Buddhism with Western liberalism. The government sacralized and legitimized the Constitution through different means. The king's blessing of the constitution became a powerful imagery. They used the picture of King Prajadhipok handing down the signed constitution during the December 10, 1932 ceremony to symbolize that the constitution was a gift from above or *khong phraratchathan* (Fuwongcharoen 2018, 620) (Subrahmanyam, *Amnesia: A History of Democratic Idealism in Modern Thailand* 2021, 147).

The government referred to it as a sacred entity and equated it to *dharma* or the teachings of Buddha. For example, Phraya Phahon declared it a sacred object in 1934. In 1936, Pridi pronounced the Constitution as the highest form of *dharma*. It was emphasized that venerating the Constitution would yield good results in return. Even how it was presented to the people also added to its sanctity. King Prajadhipok suggested that the document be written in a thick accordion-style codex or *samutthai* like the traditional religious scriptures to make it “mystical.” This document was placed on a two-tiered golden tray or *phan rattathanun* and honored as a sacred item like how the Buddhist scriptures such as the *Tripitaka* were preserved

(Fuwongcharoen 2018, 625, 637) (Subrahmanyam, *Amnesia: A History of Democratic Idealism in Modern Thailand* 2021, 147).

During the mid-1930s, the Siamese state intensified the popularization of the constitution, and the December 10 Constitution Day became a highlight each year. December 10 became Constitution Day because of the promulgation date of the permanent constitution. It was assigned as a public holiday, but the constitutional celebrations and ceremonies were observed not only for a day but from December 8 to December 12 each year. From 1932 to 1938, the Constitution Day celebrations and activities propagated the idea of a constitution and became pivotal for the People's Party. For six years, the belief in the constitution was centered on Bangkok and eventually disseminated to the provinces. The local officials, with the help of the people, organized the activities on this day. They patterned it from the 1934 distribution of miniature copies and replicated the celebrations in Bangkok (Fuwongcharoen 2018, 631) (Subrahmanyam, *Amnesia: A History of Democratic Idealism in Modern Thailand* 2021, 149) (Charoenvattananukul 2022, 152-153).

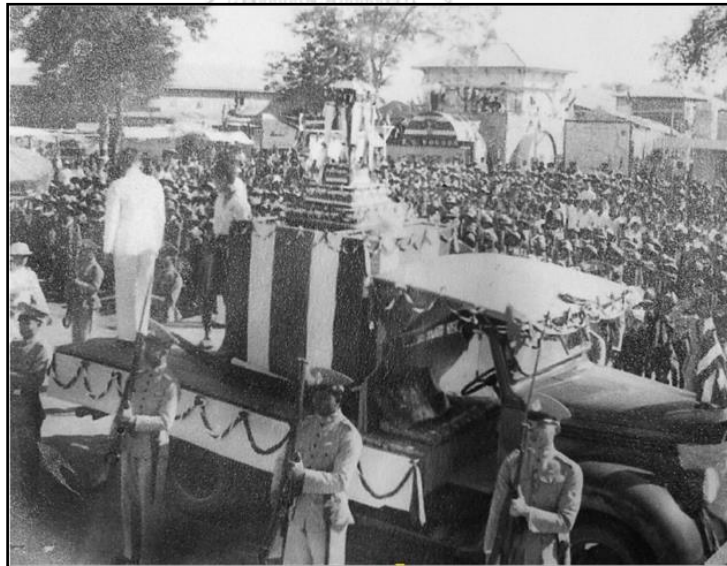


Photo 23. Constitution Day celebration and the parade of the Constitution replica in Khon Kaen on December 9, 1939.

This photo was from Prawit Sangmee and retrieved from (*Thepsongkroh* 2018).

The activities during the Constitution Day included Buddhist and Brahmin ceremonies such as the chanting over and blessing of the monks of the constitution.

The people also conducted a constitutional procession. Bangkok and the provinces begin the celebration with a street procession of the replica. The constitution was toured by the military, businesspeople, workers, farmers, and various people's associations. The people also set up small altars with offerings and adornments along the streets to welcome the replica during the procession. In addition to these ceremonies, beauty pageants, sports, contests, and other pastimes, such as the lottery, were organized yearly. Festivities such as musical concerts, dance, and different types of entertainment were also conducted as part of the December 10 celebration. The government also used these events to generate income for military weapons, constitutional publicity, and poverty relief (Barme 1989, 99) (Fuwongcharoen 2018, 631-632) (Subrahmanyam, *Amnesia: A History of Democratic Idealism in Modern Thailand* 2021, 149-150). Aside from the religious conception, the people also incorporated the constitution into their lives because of these celebration activities. For example, the people from the northeast region were curious and enthusiastic about the introduction of constitutional monarchy (Fuwongcharoen, 'Long Live Ratthathammanun!': Constitution worship in revolutionary Siam 2018, 609-614) (Lawattanatrakul 2019) (Thepsongkroh 2018, 85-91) (Thepsongkroh, *อนุสรณ์รัฐธรรมนูญ สุรินทร์* 2019) (A Poem in Isan Explaining the Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam 2021).²¹

Eventually, this popularity led to the construction of Constitution Monuments in their respective areas. Different Constitution Monuments and replicas of the Democracy Monument were later installed in other parts of Thailand, particularly in the northeastern region, and served as a space for commemoration.

²¹ It was observed that the people in the northeast region were active in the promotion of the constitution because the People's Party representatives from the area played an outstanding role during that time, and the people of the region were described as politically active (Lawattanatrakul 2019).

3.3. The Constitution Monuments



Photo 24. Constitution Monument in Maha Sarakham.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, December 23, 2022.

Some of the surviving Constitution Monuments or *Anusawari Rattathanun* can be found in the municipal hall of Maha Sarakham (see Photo 24), the provincial hall of Surin (see Photo 26), and the island in the middle of Bueng Phalan Chai in Roi Et (see Photo 27). These monuments, constructed in Maha Sarakham in 1934, Surin in 1936, and Roi Et in 1936, promoted the constitution and became venues of the constitution practices and adoration of the people (Fuwongcharoen, ‘Long Live Rattathanun!’: Constitution worship in revolutionary Siam 2018, 609-614) (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนักพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 85-91) (Thepsongkroh, อนุสรณ์รัฐธรรมนูญสุรินทร์ 2019) (A Poem in Isan Explaining the Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam 2021).²²

²² In this study, the monuments in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum will be called replicas of the Democracy Monument because they were constructed after the inauguration of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok in 1940. Then the monuments in Maha Sarakham, Surin, Roi Et, and others built before 1940 will be labeled as Constitution Monuments.



Photo 25. The Constitution Monument was in front of the provincial hall of Maha Sarakham before it was moved to the municipal hall.

This was from the anniversary book of Maha Sarakham province and retrieved from (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018).

The Constitution Monument in Maha Sarakham was the first constitution monument built in the northeast region. The original monument was constructed at the provincial hall. It had the inscription, “The Beloved and Revered Siam Constitution, Built in 1934,” or *Siam rattathamanun thirak lae sak kamraying samang meua B.E. 2477* (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 80-81).

It can be noticed that the said monuments were installed in the middle of the provinces or in a place where people can easily access them and conduct constitution worship and Constitution Day activities. The Constitution Monument in Maha Sarakham was built first at the provincial hall before moving to the Maha Sarakham municipal hall. The Constitution Monument in Surin was also built before the provincial hall. However, in the case of the Constitution Monument in Roi Et, it was constructed on the central island of Bueng Phalan Chai. There was an intention from the provincial committee to install it in front of the provincial hall. But the governor

requested to construct it instead on Bueng Phalan Chai because of the importance of this large swamp for Roi Et (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 88-89) (Lawattanatrakul 2019).²³



Photo 26. Constitution Monument in Surin.
Retrieved from (ทางอีสาน 2019).

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²³ Bueng Phalan Chai is a big island in the middle of a large swamp (see Photo 28). The governor, Phraya Sunthorn Thepkitjarak, ordered the dredging up of this swamp to create a vast island at the middle of the city, making it the center of activities and recreation for the Roi Et people. It was recorded that 40,000 people worked together from 1926-1928 to construct this area. Near the Constitution Monument are the City Pillar Shrine and a pole carrying the flag of Thailand (Tatyanantakul 2017, 206-207) (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 88-89) (Lawattanatrakul 2019).



Photo 27. Constitution Monument in Roi Et.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, December 23, 2022.



Photo 28. Aerial view of the Bueng Phalan Chai in Roi Et, where the Constitution Monument is located.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, December 23, 2022.

The Constitution Monuments in the provinces became the sites of their enthusiasm, festivals, and activities related to the Constitution. For example, the people of Surin celebrated Constitution Day from December 7-11, 1936 at the newly installed Constitution Monument. The structure was inaugurated during this celebration, precisely on December 10. Ceremonies were conducted from December

7-8. Khuang Aphaiwong, who later became the Prime Minister of Thailand, led and attended the event along with other officials. He mentioned the Constitution and unveiled the monument to the audience. Monks chanted prayers, and then the scout band played the national anthem during the event. From December 9-11, different activities were organized for the people of Surin. One was the parade of the Constitution replica, which began at the Constitution Monument. The people, including the beauty queens of the Surin province, attended the procession (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 85-86) (Thepsongkroh, อนุสรณ์รัฐธรรมนูญสุรินทร์ 2019) (A Poem in Isan Explaining the Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam 2021).

The idea of a National Day started during the administration of Phraya Phahon. June 24 was declared National Day on July 15, 1938 to remind Siamese of the legacies of the People's Party and the 1932 revolution. Since its pronouncement, no immediate projects were crafted to highlight the significance of June 24. When Phibun came to office in December 1938, the June 24 National Day commenced the large-scale national celebrations in Siam (Charoenvattananukul 2022, 153).

With the emergence of Phibun as the prime minister, things started to change in Siam. The June 24 National Day celebrations affected the Constitution worship and monuments. The organizational committee for this celebration was formed in February 1939. Then, the first meeting of the Committee of the National Day Celebrations happened on April 10, 1939. Through the efforts of Phibun, and his associates, including Wichit, they inaugurated the first National Day on June 24, 1939.²⁴ During the celebration, the government employees and students were required to attend their respective morning assemblies to listen to the announcements and information about the 1932 revolution. Then at night, people listened to the extended

²⁴ The first National Day was also called the “National and Treaty Revision Day” to represent the “new Siam” due to the abolition of unequal treaties with the foreign powers since the 1855 Bowring Treaty. Through the directives of Phibun and the efforts of Pridi Banomyong, who was the Foreign Affairs Minister at that time, he triumphantly won the negotiations, and Siam got full sovereignty which was one of the principles of the People's Party. Aside from the commemoration of the June 24, 1932 Revolution, this milestone was included in the reasons for a national celebration and prompted the government to expand the name of the first National Day to “National and Treaty Revision Day” (Charoenvattananukul 2022, 153-154).

speech of Phibun on the radio. The foundation stone of the Democracy Monument was also laid on this day at 9 in the morning. The military parade and procession of nationalist-style floats were also conducted. The winners of various competitions for nationalist songs, literary works, and photos were announced on June 24. During the celebration, people were also urged to adorn their houses with the national flag (Barme 1989, 118-119) (Charoenvattananukul 2022, 154-156).

Aside from the plan of conducting celebrations, constructing a monument was also part of the plan of the committee formed by the Phibun administration. Before the idea of a Democracy Monument, the committee initially proposed the Independence Monument to legitimize the accomplishment of the People's Party, particularly their triumph over unequal treaties. They named it Independence Monument to symbolize the independence of Siam from the imposed extraterritoriality principle brought by the foreign treaties. This plan from the committee did not push through because the government had another dream of building a monument, the Democracy Monument (Charoenvattananukul 2022, 154-155). The Democracy Monument not just visually represents the Constitution, unlike the earlier Constitution Monuments, but it also symbolizes the political struggles and other facets of Siam during that time.

The inauguration of the National Day began to compete with the Constitution Day celebration. From December 10, the attention of the government and the people started to shift to June 24. In 1940, the National Day celebration and activities were extended from one day to three days. The June 24 celebration eventually outshined and displaced the December 10 celebration on the Thai calendar (Barme 1989, 123-124). Aside from the date and celebration, the Constitution no longer became the centralizing symbol of the people. The National Day celebration allowed the government to slowly abandon the efforts made by the pre-Phibun regime in popularizing the Constitution. The Constitution Association, formed in 1933, experienced financial difficulties and became inactive in the mid-1940s. The activities during Constitution Day, such as the parade of the Constitution replicas, suddenly stopped and were no longer practiced (Fuwongcharoen 2018, 641-642).

The National Day celebration also replaced the Constitution Day celebration at the Constitution Monuments. These monuments became venues for the June 24

activities. For example, the Constitution Monument in Surin served as the venue of the National Day celebration of the province in 1940 (see Photo 29). The national flag was raised during the festival. Then, the governor addressed the people near the monument (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 90).

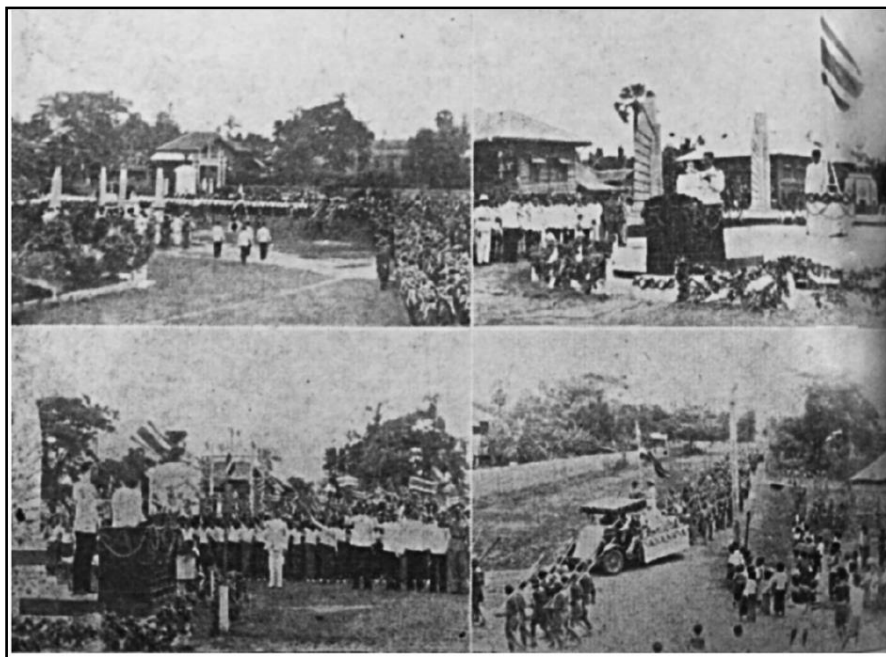


Photo 29. The 1940 National Day celebration at the Surin Constitution Monument. This photo was from the July 1940 issue of Weekly Travel Magazine and retrieved from (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018).

The 1940 National Day celebration, especially the inauguration of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, gained the interest of the people in the provinces. The provincial governors sought this an opportunity to promote the National Day in their respective provinces and motivate the citizens to participate in the celebrations. The Ministry of Interior shared pictures of the Democracy Monument during the 1940 National Day celebration with them. As a result, many provinces expressed their intention to have their replica or version of the monument. The Ministry of Interior responded and sent the plan the Fine Arts Department designed to the provinces. It

was evident in the policy sent by the national government to the provinces stating that it was appropriate to have a replica of the Democracy Monument as part of the National Day celebrations and as a reminder to the citizens about the political milestone of Siam. The monument design differed from what was installed in Bangkok (see Photo 14). Even though it differed from what was established in Bangkok, they continued constructing their version of the Democracy Monument. These replica monuments served as the backdrop of the June 24 National Day celebrations outside Bangkok (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 91-93) (Charoenvattananukul 2022, 159).

3.4. Replicas of the Democracy Monument

After the 1940 installation of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, additional monuments were added in the northeast—these are the replica monuments of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum.



Photo 30. Replica of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, July 2, 2022.

The Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen was said to be inaugurated in 1943 due to the “B.E 2486” indicated on the structure (see Photo 30). It was considered late

compared to the other constitution and replica monuments in the northeast. Unlike the previously mentioned Constitution Monuments erected in front of the provincial hall, the monument in Khon Kaen was installed in a more open area so that people could easily see it. It is located at the roundabout called *Prachasamran* Circle or Constitution Circle. It is also close to the City Pillar Shrine of Khon Kaen, making it visible to the public (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 96, 98).



Photo 31. Replica of the Democracy Monument in Chaiyaphum.
Retrieved from (Thai Lawyers for Human Rights 2021).

Another surviving replica monument is the Democracy Monument found in the Phu Kiaw District of the Chaiyaphum province (see Photo 31). The monument was built in May 1941. It is located in front of the Metropolitan Temple or *Wat Nakhonban*. From the initiative of Phu Kiaw district chief Khun Prasert Sappakij, the district of Phu Kiaw requested, through the Chaiyaphum Provincial Committee, the construction of the said monument to the central government. They allocated 355 baht and 27 satang for its construction. The Phibun government disagreed with the construction of the replica monument because of some concerns regarding funds. However, the Ministry of Interior eventually approved and allowed the monument to

be installed in the area due to the perseverance and cooperation of the people in the community (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 94-95) (Interview with 16-year-old "Sand," Isaan youth leader prosecuted for her political expression 2021).

Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum monuments were constructed to commemorate the June 24 National Day. It also became the venue for celebrations and festivities related to the 1932 revolution. These monuments witnessed the people's commemoration of the historic political milestone of Siam. The replica monument in the Phu Kiaw District of Chaiyaphum province became a symbolic landmark of the June 24 National Day celebrations for the residents. Yearly festivities, gatherings, school activities, and parades were also conducted in their celebration. During the 1941 National Day celebration in the Chaiyaphum province, the procession started and ended at the Democracy Monument. These replica monuments assisted the People's Party in instilling in the minds of the people in the provinces the essence not just of the constitution but also of the 1932 revolution and democracy (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 94-95, 98) (Interview with 16-year-old "Sand," Isaan youth leader prosecuted for her political expression 2021).

The five monuments mentioned became appealing due to the constitution fairs or *nganchalong ratthathammanun* and the National Day celebrations conducted in these spaces. These human interactions with the structures added entertainment value to solicit support from the people. It is important to note that constructing the monuments is not enough to gain popularity and inculcate public memory to the people. Human activities play a vital role in creating the narratives of these monuments and producing their respective meanings (Chua, Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910-1973 2012, 373-374). It is aligned with William Sewell's concepts of spatial structures and agency. The spatial structures, such as the constitution and replica monuments, contain symbols and meanings that can shape people's thinking and actions. At the same time, the spatial

agency, such as the human activities in these monuments, can transform these structures according to their narratives by claiming and occupying them.

3.5. Symbols and Meanings of the Constitution Monuments and Replicas of the Democracy Monument

Like the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, the Constitution Monuments and the replicas of the Democracy Monument in the provinces also comprise symbols and meanings that represent the political landscape of Siam. The details of these monuments also consist of representations such as the Constitution and the influence of *Khana Ratsadon*. However, unlike the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, traces of the monarchy's power can still be noticed and associated with the Constitution Monuments because of the Constitution's sanctity. On the other hand, the replicas of the Democracy Monument in the provinces differ slightly from the Constitution Monuments. The replicas did not just symbolize the Constitution but also the importance of the June 24 National Day and the legacies of the 1932 Revolution. The replicas of the Democracy Monument, such as the ones in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum, also follow the representations of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, particularly Phibun's influence on people.

The Constitution placed in golden-stacked bowls represents the sanctity and significance of the Siamese Constitution. It promotes constitutionalism and emphasizes the Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam or *Ratthathammanun Haeng Ratchaanajak Siam* by putting it at the top of the architecture. This centerpiece boosted worship among the people because of its visibility and became the venue of their adoration.

One main difference between the Democracy Monument in Bangkok and the monuments in the provinces is the involvement and participation of the people. Aside from the symbols and meanings attached to it, these structures also symbolize the cooperation and solidarity of the people because the citizens sponsored them. They were products of the collaboration of the local government officials and the people. The reverence that grew among the people when the government promoted the Constitution as a sacred entity resulted in the people's clamor and prompted its

construction. To promote the constitution to the constituents of the province, the governor of Maha Sarakham in 1934 thought of constructing the first constitution monument in Thailand. It was later supported by his constituents, showing that the construction of the Constitution Monuments was not only an initiative from Bangkok but also from the provincial governor, provincial officials, businesses, and the people (Lawattanatrakul 2019).



Photo 32. The inscribed names of the donors on the Constitution Monument in Surin. Retrieved from (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018).

In the case of the monument in Surin, it was found that most of the donors were civil servants such as teachers, lawyers, military, police, and political groups from the Surin province and nearby Isaan provinces (see Photo 32). In Khon Kaen, the provincial government and the people also donated money to construct the monument. The people of Khon Kaen aimed to commemorate the change in the government that transpired in 1932 and promote the constitution in the province (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan]

2018, 85-91, 98) (Thepsongkroh, อนุสรณ์รัฐธรรมนูญสุรินทร์ 2019) (A Poem in Isan Explaining the Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam 2021). These examples only illustrate the role of the spatial agency in constructing these monuments while contributing to the narrative these spatial structures signify.

However, it is noteworthy to emphasize that the popularity of the Constitution Monuments and the generosity of the people was observed to be limited among the middle class. In Surin, the donors of the monument were primarily civil servants. It also had the same story as the Democracy Monument replicas. The replica monument in the Chaiyaphum province also represented the cooperation between government officials and residents. They raised some funds and helped one another to construct the monument and embody the importance of democracy (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 94-95) (Interview with 16-year-old "Sand," Isaan youth leader prosecuted for her political expression 2021).

By looking at these situations, it can be argued that the people's socioeconomic status played a crucial role in the proliferation of the Constitution Monuments and Democracy Monument replicas in the provinces. The middle-class members were in the front row of absorbing the concepts of democracy and constitution because of their education and socioeconomic advantage in society. The change in the government system in 1932 consolidated and allowed them to have their share of contribution and membership in the community, which was usually structured by race, religion, and monarchy during the old regime. They were able to exercise their participation through crowdfunding for the construction of the monuments (Chua, Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910-1973 2012, 373-374).

The five monuments also represent the influence of *Khana Ratsadon* by deliberately highlighting their six principles: sovereignty or *ekarat*, security or *plotpay*, economy or *setagit*, equality or *samerpak*, freedom or *seripap*, and education or *ganseuksa*. They were constantly embedded and embodied in the monuments through the hexagonal element in the structures. Through these principles, these monuments foster liberal values, like the Democracy Monument in Bangkok.

The replica monuments in the provinces remarkably resemble the architectural design of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. For example, the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen shows some similarities, except for the wings and other detailed parts. It also has a door resembling the Democracy Monument in Bangkok with an image of Arun or *Aruntheput* (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนึกพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎร ผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 98). It is also the same as the Democracy Monument in Chaiyaphum—the replica in this province features a miniature version of the one in Bangkok. These resemblances in the architectural design only indicate that the symbols and meanings of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok share parallels with the monuments in the provinces.

Aside from the symbols and meanings, these monuments also share the same fate as the Democracy Monument in Bangkok after the Phibun regime. Due to the change in leadership, Sarit Thanarat's government (1959-1963) suppressed the activities commemorating the 1932 revolution, including the constitution worship and celebrations. The Constitution Monuments and replicas of the Democracy Monument in the provinces started to get neglected and disused. Many were also physically modified, relocated, or demolished. The sixty-five miniature copies of the constitution distributed to the provinces were also not preserved, and they simply vanished in the areas where they were located (Noobanjong, Samoson Ratsaranrom (Khana Ratsadon's Office): A Neglected Urban Heritage of the People's Party 2023, 88-89). These situations contributed to the vulnerability of the monuments' meanings to be forgotten, contested, or reconstructed, the same as how the Democracy Monument in Bangkok experienced the transformation of its meaning and significance due to the political landscape of Thailand.

3.6. The Constitution Monument in Buriram and the Constitution Defense Monument in Bangkok

Some monuments related to *Khana Ratsadon* have already disappeared from the public eye. As part of the popularity of Constitution Monuments and constitution-related celebrations during the People's Party regime, the Constitution Monument or

Anusawari Rattathamanun in Buriram (see Photo 33) was conceptualized around 1937 and estimated to be completed around 1944. These years were all assumptions because there was no clear evidence when it was constructed, but what was certain is that it started to appear in a roundabout in front of the city hall as a high cylindrical column with the constitution at the top (see Photo 33) (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนักพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 96).



Photo 33. Pictures of the people with the original design of the Constitution Monument in Buriram.

Retrieved from (Prachatai 2022) and (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนักพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018).

The monument experienced modification after the Buriram governor Porn Udompong removed the column around 1987, changed the design into a rectangular bar depicting the Thai national flag, and placed it in front of the provincial hall (see Photo 34). This modified structure was designed by Arnupap Phapromraj, a lecturer in the Department of Architecture of Buriram Technical College (Thepsongkroh, มองสำนักพลเมืองยุคคณะราษฎรผ่านอนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญในอีสาน [Looking at the Citizens' Consciousness in the People's Party Era Through the Constitution Monuments in Isan] 2018, 97) (อนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญบุรีรัมย์ คืนซีพรอบ 2 หลังเทศบาลเคยรื้อหายไปเมื่อปี'61 [The Buriram Constitution Monument was resurrected for the second time after the municipality had dismantled it in 2018] 2022). From focusing only on the significance of the constitution, this modification also highlighted Thai nationalism by representing the national flag and its colors.

Unfortunately, the monument was dismantled on November 6, 2014 to address the traffic problems in the area by replacing the space with digital traffic lights and moving it back in front of the old city hall (see Photo 34). The design also returned to its original plan of a cylindrical column with a constitution on top. However, the monument did not last long because it was dismantled for the second time in 2017 because of the fear that it would obstruct the view of the replica of the royal crematorium of King Bhumibol in Buriram. There were recent reports that the Constitution Monument was again installed in 2022, but this time it was placed silently in the Mueang District, specifically in Soi Khu Mueang and Soi Isaan (see Photo 35) (Historic Constitution Monument Torn Down In Buriram 2014) (Lawattanatrakul 2019) (อนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญบุรีรัมย์ คืบซีพรอบ 2 หลังเทศบาลเคยรื้อหายไปเมื่อปี'61 [The Buriram Constitution Monument was resurrected for the second time after the municipality had dismantled it in 2018] 2022).

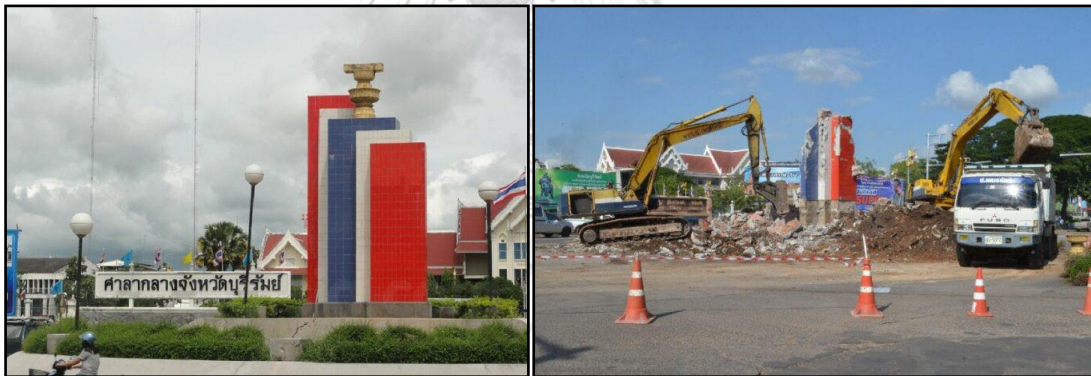


Photo 34. Pictures of the Constitution Monument in Buriram Before and During the Demolition.

Retrieved from (Khaosod English 2014).

Same with the other Constitution Monuments, this structure also represented the importance of the Constitution by putting it on the pedestal. It also depicted meanings and symbols associated with constitutionalism, democracy, and nationalism. When it was demolished in 2014, one of the residents mentioned in an interview: “We call it Democracy Monument. It’s like the symbol of our province. The monument symbolizes the change of regime into democracy” (Historic Constitution Monument Torn Down In Buriram 2014). These representations were

challenged as this structure was quickly removed, destroyed, and reinstalled without informing the community.

The convenience of removing and destroying this structure dramatically shows how the officials perceive this monument. The dismantling and reconstruction of this structure reflect the priorities and perspectives of the local authorities. From just a symbol of the constitution, this monument was later accompanied by representations of the Thai nation, religion, and monarchy. Then, it was removed to give importance to the monarchy. In addition, the silent re-installment of the Constitution Monument away from the city center also sends a clear message to the public. Unlike the other monuments located in the center of human activities, this monument was now placed on the sidelines, making it unrecognizable from the people. These events only reiterate that people or the spatial agency can easily forget the significance of these monuments or spatial structures if there are no commemorations or the local authorities and community do not provide them attention.



*Photo 35. Picture of the recent version of the Constitution Monument in Buriram.
Retrieved from Google Maps, June 21, 2023.*

The Constitution Monument in the Laksi District of Bangkok also experienced the same silent treatment as how the Constitution Monument in Buriram was reinstalled. Unfortunately, it suffered a different fate. The Constitution Defense Monument or *Anusawari Phithak Rattathammanun* (see Photo 36) was removed in the dead of night to give way to the construction of the new Skytrain line. This monument was constructed to emphasize constitutionalism and commemorate the government's victory against the pro-monarchy rebellion led by Prince Boworadet in 1933. It was unveiled on October 15, 1936 and unexpectedly removed on December 28, 2018. Designed by Lieutenant Colonel Luang Naruemitr Laekhakarn, who was a faculty at the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy or *Rongrian Nairoi Phra Chulachomklao*, this monument features an octagonal stupa-like obelisk with *phan rattathamanun* on top (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 46) (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 132) (Noobanjong, *Forgotten Memorials: The Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in Bangkok, Thailand* 2019, 209) (Disappearing democracy 2019).



Photo 36. Pictures of the Constitutional Defense Monument in Laksi District, Bangkok Before and During the Demolition.
Retrieved from (The Nation Thailand 2019).

As discussed in the first parts of this chapter, the rebellion in 1933 prompted the government to protect the newly created constitution and construct structures that would impose their authority and remind the people of their control over Siam. The Phahonyothin government, under the direction of the Fine Arts Department (FAD),

constructed this structure in the area where the rebellion occurred.²⁵ It functioned as a military monument and a war memorial because it once housed the ashes of the 17 government soldiers who died during the Boworadet Rebellion (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 44-46).

The Constitution Defense Monument also contained meanings and symbols attributed to various concepts, particularly constitutionalism, militarism, nationalism, liberalism, modernization, and democracy. The monument manifested these concepts through the emblem of the Thai armed forces on its west facade, its militaristic nature and origin up to the significance of the constitution embodied at the top of the structure. They were also seen in the representation of the People's Party, its ideologies and six principles, and its role in accentuating the power of the Constitution over the monarchical institution (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 46-48).

²⁵ Aside from the Constitution Defense Monument, the government also constructed a Buddhist temple in the area of the rebellion. It was initially called Democracy Temple or *Wat Prachathipatai*, then later renamed Wat Phra Sri Mahathat (see Photo 37). The temple was inaugurated on June 24, 1942, the 10th anniversary of the 1932 revolution. The change in the title materialized when a special envoy from India brought a Buddha relic that was enshrined in the stupa of this temple and branches of the sacred Bodhi tree planted on its monastery's grounds (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 45) (Noobanjong, *Forgotten Memorials: The Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in Bangkok, Thailand* 2019, 196).

The establishment of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat also symbolizes the victory and power of *Khana Ratsadon* during that period. Like the other architectural structures built by the People's Party, their substantial influence on the Siamese society was represented in the meanings and designs of the temple. The temple comprises two significant sections: the *ubosot* (ordination hall) and the stupa (a dome-shaped structure assembled as a Buddhist shrine). The main stupa has a six-tiered spire that represents the six principles of *Khana Ratsadon*. It also houses the ashes of People's Party members and their spouses. The overall design of the ordination hall meant the idea of modern egalitarianism. The choice of materials used in it, such as reinforced concrete and other versatile materials, symbolized *Khana Ratsadon*'s principles in terms of economic management. The choice of materials in the structure served as criticism and response to extravagant and irrational spending during the royal absolutist period in Siam. The temple also veered away from emphasizing symbols connected to royalty and started focusing on the ideas of modernity. For example, the regal code of architectural elements was absent in the structures of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat. It heavily emphasized the notions of liberty, equality, and fraternity instead of the concept of divine royal authority in its designs. Scholars also observed that the figure of the *Aruna* deity in the temple could be interpreted as the emergence of democracy in Thai society. However, the influence of *Khana Ratsadon* and its value on the temple ended in 1957 when a coup installed a pro-royalist military government led by Sarit Thanarat (Noobanjong, *The Aesthetic of Power: A Critical Study on the Politics of Representations at Wat Benchama Bophit and Wat Phra Sri Mahathat*, Bangkok 2011, 52-57, 59).



Photo 37. Stupa of the Wat Phra Sri Mahathat in Bang Khen, Bangkok.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, December 24, 2022.

The structure also epitomized the importance of national unity and nationhood based on the memorial inauguration speech of Phibun in 1936, who was still in the Ministry of Defense during that time. The value of patriotism was represented in the monument through the inscription of King Vajiravudh's poem "The Conscience of Siam" or *Siamanutsati* on the east facade of the structure. It signified the People's Party's reconciliation efforts. It also called for national unity for the nation's sake despite their ideological and political differences (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 50-51) (Noobanjong, *Forgotten Memorials: The Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in Bangkok, Thailand* 2019, 199-200).

Liberal values, such as egalitarianism, were also evident in the monument through the imagery of ordinary people. A bronze relief structure portraying an image of a Thai family consisting of a husband, wife, and child appearing to be farmers was incorporated into the memorial (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 50-51) (Noobanjong, *Forgotten Memorials: The Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in*

Bangkok, Thailand 2019, 199-200). Attaching this imagery to the monument symbolically emphasizes that the people can be represented in a monument far from Thailand's existing and usual architectural structures.

Modernization was depicted in the monument by introducing modern architecture and buildings inspired by the West. It also adopted the principles of simplicity, formal and spatial configurations, functional and rational compositions, and structural and materialistic expressions. It can be seen using inexpensive materials like reinforced concrete in the monument. It represented the careful economic management of the People's Party and, at the same time, their criticism of the extravagant and luxurious spending of cultural commodities during the royal absolutist period (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 51-52) (Noobanjong, *Forgotten Memorials: The Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in Bangkok, Thailand* 2019, 200-201).

Buddhist elements were also incorporated into this architectural structure. For example, it displayed a Buddhist emblem of *dharmachakra*, or the wheel of law representing the teachings of the Buddha. Various interpretations were employed with the inclusion of this emblem in the structure. It symbolized the peaceful and united Siam after the rebellion and denoted the righteous assertion of the power of the People's Party. It justified their military victory during the rebellion and protection of the *dharma* in the name of the Thai nation, constitution, and democracy (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 48) (Noobanjong, *Forgotten Memorials: The Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in Bangkok, Thailand* 2019, 199).

The architectural form of the Constitution Defense Monument can be described as a product of the power struggle between the monarchy and the government at that time. It also symbolized the declaration of the People's Party of their power over the monarchy. The structure was derived from the center pillar of a crematorium. To honor the government troops and military victory brought by the rebellion in 1933, the government organized a state funeral at Sanam Luang on February 17-19, 1934. Despite the repeated objections of King Prajadhipok, the People's Party violated the regal sanctity of the field by erecting this temporary

crematorium. The Constitution Defense Monument memorialized the first time Sanam Luang witnessed a funeral for ordinary people because the area was usually used for royal ceremonies. It was inspired by the crematorium built at Sanam Luang for the 17 government soldiers who died during the Boworadet Rebellion, then mixed with the element of a constitution at the top (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 45) (Noobanjong, *Forgotten Memorials: The Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in Bangkok, Thailand* 2019, 195-196) (Remembering Khana Ratsadon: erasing historical memory and the power dynamic of architecture 2019).

Like the story of the Democracy Monument and other monuments related to *Khana Ratsadon*, the Constitution Defense Monument was a political instrument for the Phibun regime. It generated meanings aligned with the narratives of Phibun and the People's Party. However, it also experienced manipulation and alteration over time due to the leadership change. It was also disregarded and contested through time and ended up being disappeared.

Contentions can be seen through the name itself, depending on the perspective and practicality of calling it. The Constitution Defense Monument was initially named as Rebellion Suppression Monument or *Anusawari Prapkabot* in 1936. It was also called as Memorial of the Seventeen Soldiers and Policemen or *Anusawari Sipchet Thahan lae Tamruat*. This structure was also known as Luang Amnuay Songkhram's Memorial or *Anusawari Luang Amnuay Songkhram* because it housed the remains of Major Luang Amnuay Songkhram who was an army officer, member of the 1932 Promoters, and compadre of Phibun. The monument was also simply called Laksi Monument or *Anusawari Laksi* due to its location, which was situated on a large traffic roundabout called Laksi Circle intersecting Phahonyothin Road, formerly known as Democracy Road or *Thanon Prachatipathai*, Thailand's first major highway (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 48, 64).



Photo 38. Commemoration of the 1933 Boworadet Rebellion on October 14, 1941 at the Constitution Defense Monument.

This picture was taken from Field Marshal Phibun's book at the 100th Anniversary Museum Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy (พิพิธภัณฑ์ทหาร อาคารโรงเรียน จปร. 100 ปี นครนายก). Retrieved from (Silpa Magazine 2021).

The monument also became a platform for commemorative events to remind the people of the role of the People's Party and the significance of the battle against the Boworadet rebels. The Ministry of Defense chose October 14 to commemorate the 1933 rebellion. The commemoration consisted of religious rituals, military rites, and civic festivities (see Photo 38). The ceremony started in the afternoon. Musical performances followed, and movie shows in the evening drew attention and cultivated popularity among the people. These celebrations were considered important public events, especially from 1939 to 1943 or during the Phibun administration (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 54).

Elements of authoritarianism also became more evident in the monument during the Phibun regime. These commemorative events projected Phibun as a strong leader and the savior of the Thai nation because he commanded the armed forces who defeated the Boworadet rebels in 1933. He attempted to protect and maintain the monument by pushing for legislation titled the National Monument Protection Act. Unfortunately, the enactment was shelved after the end of his first regime in 1944

(Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 55).

The emergence of traditionalist and military junta leaders like Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn affected the presence and significance of the Constitution Defense Monument. It was also disregarded like the other monuments related to *Khana Ratsadon* due to leadership change. Narratives and interpretations of the monument began to shift. From being a structure that commemorated the military victory and heroism against the rebellion, some perspectives emerged challenging that the structure symbolized the sad chapter in the modern history of Thailand instead because the Thais killed each other in 1933. In addition, it also represented the killing of those rebels who held different political views from the government forces. These narratives contributed to the monument's fading of public memory (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 55-58).

The monument also experienced physical alterations. It was disassembled and rebuilt on a new spot far from the center of the Laksi Circle intersection because of the traffic problems in northern Bangkok. Then later on, the new area was also converted into a traffic roundabout until it completely vanished from the public eye in 2018 because of the construction of the Skytrain (Noobanjong, *The Constitutional Defense Monument: Vestiges of Meanings and Memories* 2016, 58-59) (Disappearing democracy 2019).

Before its demolition, the monument also witnessed demonstrations from the people, which led to the revival of its original meaning. It was once used and highlighted by the protests of the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or the Red Shirts in 2010. The Red Shirts used the monument to stage their rallies against the military-installed government of Abhisit Vejjajiva (see Photo 39). On March 12, 2010, the protesters adorned the Constitution Defense Monument with Thai national and red flags, Buddhist emblems, pictures of the royal family, and patriotic and democratic banners. The said protest referred to the 1932 revolution by frequently citing the six principles of *Khana Ratsadon* in their speeches (Disappearing democracy 2019) (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 132) (Noobanjong, *Forgotten Memorials: The*

Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Temple in Bangkok, Thailand 2019, 209).



Photo 39. March 12, 2010 protest of the Red Shirts at the Constitutional Defense Monument.

Retrieved from Bundit Euawattananukul and Pinphaka Ngamsom (Prachatai 2010).

This March 12 protest at the monument was part of the “Million Man March” demonstration of the Red Shirts in 2010. Coming from different regions and places, they converged on Bangkok and staged a sizeable popular protest. As part of this great protest, the Red Shirts performed major rituals in places with significant political implications for their struggles. One of these areas was the Constitution Defense Monument. Protest leaders and Red Shirt activists Veera Musikapong and Weng Tojirakan led the demonstration in the said area. They took part in a Brahmanic opening ceremony led by Brahmin Sakrapee Phromchat that around 2000 to 3000

protesters attended (Nostitz, Bangkok or bust, Part 1 2010) (ประมวลภาพเสื้อแดงบวงสรวงวิญญาณทหารพิทักษ์ รธน. ที่หลักสี่ เช้า 12 มี.ค. [Collection of photos of red shirts to worship the spirit of the constitutional defense monument soldiers at Lak Si on the morning of 12 March] 2010) (Red shirt rituals 2010) (Catherine 2010) (Chotpradit, Revolution versus Counter-Revolution: the People's Party and the Royalist(s) in visual dialogue 2016, 155-158) (de Vienne 2022, 196).

The ritual was performed at exactly 12:12 in the afternoon of March 12 because it was said to be a doomsday time or auspicious moment to defeat the *ammāt*, or the Thai aristocracy or traditional elite. *Ammāt* is an archaic word for the civil servants or high-level government officials who were royal advisers and used by the Red Shirts activists in their chants and banners to refer to the ruling elite or bureaucrats who were non-Thaksin Shinawatra allies or supporters. Examples of their usage in their protest banners were *ammāt chua* or “evil elite” and *khon rathaban ammat yup sapha* or “topple the elite government, dissolve parliament.” Albeit the subversive undertones of using this word in their protests, it highlighted inequality, injustices, and oppression in modern Thailand due to social class and hierarchy (ประมวลภาพเสื้อแดงบวงสรวงวิญญาณทหารพิทักษ์ รธน. ที่หลักสี่ เช้า 12 มี.ค. [Collection of photos of red shirts to worship the spirit of the constitutional defense monument soldiers at Lak Si on the morning of 12 March] 2010) (Red shirt rituals 2010) (Catherine 2010) (Buchanan 2013, 67-68) (Chotpradit, Revolution versus Counter-Revolution: the People's Party and the Royalist(s) in visual dialogue 2016, 155-158) (de Vienne 2022, 196).

The ritual paid respect, worshipped, and asked for blessings to the spirits of the soldiers who died in the 1933 rebellion, the *Phra Siam Deva Thiraj* or the Hindu-Buddhist guardian deity protecting Siam against enemies, and the *Phra Mae Thorani* or the Hindu Goddess Mother of Earth, the symbol of the ruling Democrat Party which was the party of Abhisit Vejjajiva. After the ceremony, Veera Musikapong gave a speech to the crowd, explaining the monument's meaning and how the military forces suppressed the *ammāt* rebels in 1933. The demonstrators also displayed figurines of King Taksin due to Thaksin Shinawatra's namesake and the Red Shirts references to their similarities as leaders and portraits of the People's Party leaders such as Pridi Banomyong and Phahonyothin because of their revival of the significance of the 1932 revolution. They also placed salt and dried chili cursing spell

over a coffin with the message “Cremating the Evil Aristocrats” and burned it to represent their criticisms against the *ammatt* or governing elite (see Photo 40). This cursing ritual was derived from Hindu cursing practices. Salt was used to curse the enemy, and the chili was a metaphor for burning an enemy because of the effects of hot chili (ประมวณภาพเสื้อแดงบวงสรวงวิญญาณทหารพิทักษ์ ธรณ. ที่หลักสี่ เช้า 12 มี.ค. [Collection of photos of red shirts to worship the spirit of the constitutional defense monument soldiers at Lak Si on the morning of 12 March] 2010) (Red shirt rituals 2010) (Chotpradit, Revolution versus Counter-Revolution: the People’s Party and the Royalist(s) in visual dialogue 2016, 155-158) (de Vienne 2022, 196).

Aside from the 2010 protests, the Red Shirts also occupied the Constitution Defense Monument on October 14, 2012 to commemorate the anniversary of the monument depicting the 1933 Boworadet Rebellion. In this activity, Major Putthinat Phaholpolphayuhasena, the son of Phraya Phahon, gave an opening speech and the Red Shirts honored the brave soldiers who died during the rebellion to preserve democracy. They also cited the People’s Party and its significance in the democracy of Thailand (see Photo 41) (เสื้อแดงรำลึก 78 ปี อนุสาวรีย์ปราบกบฏ เชิดชูทหารรักษาประชาธิปไตย [Red Shirts commemorate the 78th anniversary of the Rebellion Suppression Monument glorify democracy defense soldiers] 2012).



Photo 40. Red Shirts rituals during the March 12, 2010 protest at the Constitutional Defense Monument.

Retrieved from Bundit Euawattananukul and Pinphaka Ngamsom (Prachatai English 2010).



Photo 41. Red Shirt protest on October 14, 2012 at the Constitutional Defense Monument.

Retrieved from (Prachatai 2010).

However, it is also interesting to note that the said commemoration of the Red Shirts on October 14, 2012 coincided with the observance of another turning point in the democratic history of Thailand, the October 14, 1973 student movement. It was reported that the group also commemorated the movement at the Constitution Defense Monument, and the more radical faction of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) conducted their commemoration at the Democracy Monument (Nostitz, Here were Men in Black! 2012). Some interesting points about these Red Shirts demonstrations can be reserved for future research because these topics are already beyond the focus of this dissertation.

The manner the Red Shirts occupied the Constitution Defense Monument only proved that spatial agency has the potential to revive the meanings and symbols of a spatial structure. The rituals and other performative actions employed by the Red Shirts in their protests at the monument contributed to constructing a new meaning of the structure and claiming the space. This revival of the demonstrators led to complications and contention of meanings. Amidst being disregarded after the Phibun regime, the Red Shirts revived the significance of the contribution of the People's Party to Thai democracy through their occupation of the Constitution Defense Monument. However, in their attempt to make the principles of the *Khana Ratsadon* relevant again, especially in the context of a military junta, they also contested the

militaristic nature and meaning of the monument because it was a project of Phibun to commemorate their victory during the 1933 Rebellion. Unfortunately, this revival of the Red Shirts was short-lived because the monument disappeared from the public eye in 2018.

In recent years, the monuments connected to the *Khana Ratsadon* and the 1932 revolution are being disappeared. It only shows that the construction and destruction of these monuments are undeniably political. The government supported the installation of these Constitution Monuments before, and now their demolition was also reinforced by the government. These monuments in Buriram and Laksi District were victims of the improvement and development plan of the government. It is unfortunate to emphasize that these historic structures are so easy to dismantle for the authorities without considering their narrative and importance to modern Thai history. No matter what ideologies and perspectives these historic monuments portray, it is still apt to preserve these structures because they convey a portion of the identity and story of the Thai people.

Things can be remembered and forgotten because memory is socially constructed (King, *Heritage and Identity in Contemporary Thailand: Memory, Place and Power* 2017, 18). The local government officials and the people built the Constitution Monuments and replicas of the Democracy Monument in the provinces to remember a significant fragment of Thai history. The human activities and the festivities conducted here before made the monuments alive. However, they can also become irrelevant when these activities are prohibited, and the ruling administration neglects the structures. These structures can generate meanings but are also prone to alteration and contention through time because of contentious politics affecting public memory. This power struggle among the Thai leaders and institutions mirrored in the public monuments solidified the diluted concept of democracy and further added to the complicated concept of “Thai democracy.”

3.7. The “Democracy” in the Constitution Monuments and Replicas of the Democracy Monument

The democracy in the Constitution Monuments is anchored to the traditional school, which was still influenced by the monarchy and traditional institutions. It was a diluted and sacralized version of the democracy from the West that was initially planned by *Khana Ratsadon*, particularly the visions of Pridi, who was considered the father of “Thai democracy.” The old regime challenged and influenced his vision of placing the monarchy under the law.

The Constitution, represented by the Constitution Monuments, became a sacred entity due to the transition problems that the Siamese leaders and society encountered. Democracy was too abstract for the Siamese people then, and it became limited to the idea of the Constitution by putting it on a pedestal. The people's unfamiliarity resulted in the *Khana Ratsadon* disseminating a more tangible concept, the constitution, rather than democracy to the provinces.

It was evident that what was disseminated to the people immediately after 1934 was more of the idea of constitutionalism or *rabop rattathanun* and indirectly a democracy or *prachathipatai*. The constitution, being placed on the pedestal, effectively represented the democracy being promoted by *Khana Ratsadon*. It was also efficient in decentralizing the constitution to the people because it quickly encouraged the people, mainly from the provinces, to have faith in the change instituted by the 1932 revolution. The constitution introduced to the people eventually became a sacred entity and an instrument for worship practices, far from the Western and legal notion of a constitution (Subrahmanyam, *Amnesia: A History of Democratic Idealism in Modern Thailand* 2021, 147).

The Constitution became a political symbol to counter the influence of monarchy, but the royal institution influenced it until Phibun came into power in 1938. This influence can be seen in the constitution worship developed among the people that led to the creation of the Constitution Monuments, which served as venues for these constitution activities. This kind of acceptance from the people resulted in the syncretic nature of the Siamese constitution. It also prompted the construction of Constitution Monuments that would later add to the complication of Thai democracy.

The proliferation of Constitution Monuments with *phan rattathanun* or Constitution with golden-stacked bowls at the top represents the mixture of the Constitution and absolutist elements of Thai culture such as religious worship and practices (Chua, *Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910-1973* 2012, 64-65). This complication was also apparent in the kind of democracy signified in these monuments. The Western school of democracy introduced by *Khana Ratsadon* diluted with the traditional school of democracy and other elements of the old regime.

It was clear that the democracy here was statist and not an active democracy coming from the people due to the actions of the People's Party. The activities of the *Khana Ratsadon* justified the "democratic paternalism" concept coined by Arjun Subrahmanyam, such as popularizing the Constitution and Constitution Monuments and disseminating the democratic ideology to the public. The democracy in the constitution worships and monuments after the 1932 revolution became a symbolic tool of the state to justify the changes brought by *Khana Ratsadon* to the Siamese society. It was linked to the propaganda campaigns initiated by the party to legitimize their authority and control over the monarchy. As argued by (Subrahmanyam, *Education, Propaganda, and the People: Democratic Paternalism in 1930s Siam* 2015, 1123-1125, 1141-1142), these were considered democratic because of their references to individual rights and legal equality as justifications for the 1932 revolution. It was paternalistic because they assumed the naivety and inability of the ordinary people to comprehend the democratic ideology due to the poorly integrated nature of the Siamese state. It prompted the officials to implement policies such as education reforms and propaganda campaigns to promote democratic ideology to the people. It only shows that the distribution and adoration of the constitution replicas and the construction of the monuments were examples of campaigns that the authorities took advantage of to hold power and as a response to the threats from the old regime.

On the other hand, the diluted Western democracy in the Constitution Monuments was desacralized when the replicas of the Democracy Monument were created. These replicas contribute to the discourse of the complicated concept of Thai democracy. The democracy in the replicas of the Democracy Monument resonated with the "Thai democracy" that Phibun envisioned. Since these structures were

constructed after the Democracy Monument in Bangkok was installed, it is safe to say that the democracy in the replica monuments in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum is also described as a young and fragile Western school of democracy that is associated with the birth of the constitution and Phibun's military leadership, nation-building policies, and modernization programs. The democracy depicted in the Democracy Monument replicas can also be dissected into concepts such as constitutionalism, liberalism, nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism, and modernization. The messages of Phibun on the day of the inauguration of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok also set the direction for Thai democracy. It inspired and motivated the people from the provinces. These replica monuments highlighted the importance of democracy through the June 24 National Day celebration activities and veered away from the influence of the monarchy. This democracy was far from the democracy linked to the sacred constitution alone, symbolized by the Constitution Monuments and the democracy associated with the monarchy that transpired before Phibun came into power.

Among the monuments mentioned in this chapter, the replica monument in Khon Kaen is the most active structure for democratic movements. Khon Kaen is one of the provinces of Isaan, or the northeast region of Thailand. In addition, it was also described as the hotbed of activism due to its role in Thai social movements. It was the primary base of the Red Shirt movement and supporters of the Shinawatra family (Flashes of fury in Khon Kaen 2019). It was also the birthplace of the Dao Din²⁶ activists who contributed to Thailand's re-emergence of student activism.²⁷

²⁶ The Dao Din or Stars on Earth group was primarily composed of students studying at the Faculty of Law of Khon Kaen University. It was formed in 2009 to organize activities for the northeastern region. This area is rich in natural resources and minerals. Investors are usually attracted to this place, which generally exploits natural resources for profit. However, the government did not carry out laws governing mining activities, which resulted in various environmental and health effects among the communities. Given the problems of their community, the Dao Din group started to provide extensive legal knowledge to the people and fought for the injustices in the community. Although they were formed in 2009, their popularity only began in 2013. They were noticed by the Thai society when images of the Dao Din activists pleading with the military and forming a human barrier against the military officers circulated online. During this time, they fought for the village's protection from expanding the license of a gold mining company in the Loei Province. The presence of this mining company brought some injustices to the people living in the said area and resulted in some environmental and health concerns in the community. The people online praised and admired the group. They started different campaigns concerning the environment, rights, and livelihood of the villagers. Unfortunately, their hero image suddenly changed to a villain when they became involved in

Since then, the replica of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen has become a place for demonstrations, especially the ones led by the students. The students activated the significance of this monument, produced another layering of meanings, and, at the same time, ignited the re-emergence of the Thai student movement in the northeast. It became a platform for the students in the northeast to express their demands and resistance against the government.

As it becomes a venue for student protests, the replica monument is also challenged by the people against demonstrations. It is feared to be included in the list of disappeared monuments and legacies of the *Khana Ratsadon*. In 2020, a petition requesting the relocation of the said monument was filed to the local officials because the protests were said to be annoying ('Khon Kaen has had enough': Pro-democracy activists protest in northeast Thailand 2020) (Black magic and calls for change at large protest at Khon Kaen's Democracy Monument 2020) (Officials weigh on proposal to move Khon Kaen Democracy Monument 2020).

The public monuments in the provinces are evidence of the development and struggles of Thai democracy after the 1932 revolution. Their symbols and meanings played a huge role in understanding the political landscape and complexities of the diluted and then desacralized concept of democracy. The presence of these structures

national issues and politics (Sripokangkul, Muangming and Vulsma, *Dao Din Student Activists: From Hope to Victims under the Thai Society of Darkness* 2017, 457-465).

²⁷ A new turning point began in the history of the Thai student movement in 2009. After years of being inactive on the front of the movement, the students once again showed their power and influence through the birth of the Dao Din activists. The emergence of this movement broke the glass ceiling brought by the trauma of the 1976 Thammasat massacre. In 2014, the Dao Din group was one of the student groups who opposed the plan of the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) to overthrow the government led by Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, the sister of Thaksin Shinawatra. They disagreed with appointing a prime minister without elections. They also demanded the military to end the conflict. The group campaigned to end political violence through elections and peaceful and democratic solutions. They organized academic discussion activities and peaceful candlelight events at Khon Kaen University to end the violent rallies and the military takeover. The Dao Din activists opposed the coup carried out by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) led by Prayuth on May 22, 2014. Five members of the Dao Din group protested in front of the Prime Minister at the Khon Kaen City Hall. They wore black shirts with printed words "We," "do," "not," "want," and "coup" while making the three-finger salute. The students were arrested and eventually released with conditions such as a ban on political activities and a threat to their student status. Thai society online heavily attacked this protest by the Dao Din activists. They were also harassed and intimidated by state officials. After this episode, the Dao Din group remained silent and returned a year after launching their protest. In 2015, students held a demonstration at the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen in cooperation with the demonstrations in front of the Bangkok Art and Culture Center. The military officers arrested and violently injured them (Sripokangkul, Muangming and Vulsma, *Dao Din Student Activists: From Hope to Victims under the Thai Society of Darkness* 2017, 465-470).

contributed to the representation and participation of the provinces in the discourse of democracy, allowing the decentralization of democracy to prosper outside Bangkok. The people's participation in constructing these monuments made them distinctive compared to the installation process of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. The people in the provinces, especially the middle class, asserted themselves in the narrative formation of Thai democracy by contributing to its construction and claiming these structures. It only proves that the spatial agency plays a significant role in making these spatial structures, such as the public monuments in Thailand, meaningful and memorable for the society.

Unfortunately, these structures became wallflowers and were gradually left behind due to the changes in the leadership and priorities of those in power. These monuments started to come alive again and slowly got the spotlight because they became venues for student protests in recent years. In claiming these spaces, these protests helped commemorate these monuments' original meaning and role. At the same time, they added layers of meaning and memory to it because of how they occupy them. In the second half of this dissertation, it is noteworthy to discuss how the 2020 student movements paid tribute to the original meaning of the constitution and replica monuments and added layers of importance due to their protests and demands.

CHAPTER IV: MONUMENTALIZING THE “DEMOCRACY” IN THE 14TH OF OCTOBER 1973 MEMORIAL

The 14th of October 1973 Memorial also contains an interesting story about the democracy portrayed in this structure and its construction. As a mediated built form, this memorial conveys the messages of the 1973 student revolution to the public. It also monumentalizes a democracy mainly associated with the traditional school because of the monarchy's role and intervention in addressing the student protesters' demands and ending the protests. The Western notion of democracy can also be seen on the sidelines through the participation of the people in constructing it and the symbols representing liberal values attached to the monument, such as freedom, human rights, and equality. This spatial structure serves as a vessel of a complex Thai democracy attached to the ideas of modernization, nationalism, liberalism, and monarchism. In addition, the narrative of its construction also represents the democratic struggles of Thailand because it took decades to materialize because of the opposition and challenges it encountered. This chapter discusses the battles that the memorial experienced and how the democracy brought about by the October 1973 student revolution was monumentalized through this memorial. It also examines the transformation of its meanings over the years and how the spatial agencies have maximized this spatial structure.

4.1. Symbols and Meanings of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial

A few steps away from the Democracy Monument, a memorial honoring the people who died in the October 1973 revolution was installed in 2001. This monument, known as the 14th of October 1973 Memorial or *Anuson Sathan Sip Si Tula*, is located at the *Khok Wua* intersection or corner of the middle portion of the Ratchadamnoen Avenue or *Thanon Ratchadamnoen Klang* and Tanao Road or *Thanon Tanao* in Bangkok (see Photo 42) (Dovey, *Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy* 2001, 70) (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 146-147).



*Photo 42. 14th of October 1973 Memorial in Bangkok.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, November 3, 2021.*



*Photo 43. The outside wall and the entrance of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial in Bangkok.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, November 3, 2021.*

It was initially named the 14th of October Heroes' Monument or *Anusawari Wirachon Sip Si Tula* from 1974-1989. Then when the October 14 Foundation was formed in 1990, it was later called the 14th of October 1973 Memorial to remind people of the democratic history of Thailand, particularly the memories of the October 1973 student revolution, and not just the heroes who died in the protests. The structure also aimed to be a venue for various public events and a learning center that

would stimulate the interest of the young people in “Thai democracy” (Thatsanaleelaporn 2020, 73-74).

Modernization and democracy are exhibited through the design and concept of the monument. This architectural structure follows a modern approach to design, which Architect Terdkart Sakdikamduang made. The layout consists of a half-circle building that aims to house a conference room, auditorium, and museum. It also includes a garden and event spaces for debates, music, performances, and a display of Thai democracy history and the narrative of the October 1973 revolution (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 27-30).



Photo 44. The tip of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial in Bangkok.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, November 3, 2021.

The centerpiece structure was added later, and it was created by Surojana Sethabuttra, a known Thai ceramic and visual artist. This inverted cone-shaped and stupa-liked structure composed of a wide rectangular base symbolizes the democratic quest of the Thai people. At the tip of this 14-meter monument, a transparent material can be found that allows light to shine from the structure (see Photo 44). The tip’s design symbolizes that the fight for democracy of the Thai people is not yet finished and completed. The height of the memorial’s centerpiece measures 14 meters to represent October 14. It is divided into different parts, such as the rectangular base,

which measures 5 meters. The long middle portion measures 7 meters, and the tip measures 2 meters. The monument is also a cenotaph of those who fought and sacrificed their lives for democracy. Their names are engraved at the rectangular base of the memorial (see Photo 45) (อนุสรณ์สถาน 14 ตุลา 2516 n.d.) (Susanpoolthong 1998) (Dovey, *Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy* 2001, 70) (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 28-30) (Museum Thailand 2016) (King, *Heritage and Identity in Contemporary Thailand: Memory, Place and Power* 2017, 26-27) (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 147-148, 154).



Photo 45. The rectangular base of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, November 3, 2021.

The modern memorial design, notably the centerpiece, stirred different interpretations and perspectives among the authorities and scholars. The cone-shaped and stupa-liked design, which was selected in 1975 through a competition, received a backlash from the Rattanakosin Island Committee in the 1990s. The cone-shaped structure as the memorial's centerpiece was criticized for having an inappropriate

political overtone because it depicted divisiveness in society. As explained by Adul Vichiencharoen, a senior committee member of the Rattanakosin Island Committee, he suggested to replace it with a sphere to represent unity (Susanpoolthong 1998). The suggestion did not push through, and the cone-shaped structure remained the centerpiece of the memorial.

The stupa-liked design of the centerpiece memorializes the events, people, and democracy in the October 14, 1973 revolution. However, from the architectural viewpoint, this stupa was considered insufficient as a powerful expression of democracy rooted in the struggles of the 1973 student movement. Based on Buddhist symbolism, the stupa invokes a feeling of peace and emptiness of mind more than a sense of the urgent and violent force of the people who fought against the dictatorship. As argued by Chatri Prakitnonthakan, the structure failed to capture the power of the people who gathered on Ratchadamnoen Avenue to demand a constitution and democracy and oppose the power of military dictatorship because of the architectural design (Prakitnonthakan, *Memory and Power on Ratchadamnoen Avenue* 2008, 9).

Democracy attached to nationalism and liberalism is displayed in the monument's details. The rectangular base with terracotta tiles also features poems and poetic lines about democracy, freedom, and human rights (see Photo 45). One of them was written by Thai poet and national artist Naowarat Pongpaiboon. This poem, titled "Freedom" or *seripaap*, emphasizes that humans must have freedom, particularly freedom of speech, and a genuinely democratic society must be based on equality. It also highlights the importance of a quality education system to the youth and democracy (กลุ่มคนรำลึก 2017). Aside from the names of the fallen heroes of the October 1973 revolution and the poems, an inscription titled "14 October 1973 People's Democracy" (14 ตุลาคม 2516 ประชาธิปไตยของประชาชน) is also located at the front area of the rectangular base (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 29).

After the installation of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial, multifaceted meanings of this structure were formed through time. It was not only associated with the heroes and events of the October 1973 revolution but its significance and meanings went beyond the initial purpose and transformed through the years. For

example, it also serves as a site for political movements alongside the Democracy Monument located nearby, a testament that this structure fulfills its objective of becoming a democratic space for the Thai people (Thatsanaleelaporn 2020, 74-114).

The memorial became a perennial venue of protests in memoriam of Nuamthong Praiwan, who sacrificed himself for democracy and did a symbolic suicide against the 2006 military coup.²⁸ In 2013, the 24 June Democracy group had a commemoration activity at the memorial. Aside from the speeches of the group, a poem was also dedicated to the suicide of Nuamthong (Red shirts commemorate 7th anniversary of anti-coup suicide 2013).

The group Resistant Citizen also organized a protest at the memorial on October 31, 2015 in memoriam of Nuamthong. The monument became a meeting point for the protesters before they went to the Royal Thai Army Headquarters to read a proposal for army reformation and Nuamthong's suicide letter. They also walked to the Democracy Monument and held signs and banners such as "We need a professional military, not a coup," "Reform the army before the country," "Get real democracy," "Victory for democracy," and "Remove corruption, start at the army." They returned to the memorial after their protest at the headquarters for their Halloween party-themed event (see Photo 46) (Activities In Memoriam of Nuamthong Praiwan 2015).

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²⁸ Nuamthong Praiwan is a 60-year-old taxi driver who tried to kill himself by driving his taxi into a military tank on September 30, 2006 as a protest. He was severely injured but was found hanging from a pedestrian footbridge on Vibhavadi Rangsit Road in Bangkok on October 31, 2006 (Red shirts commemorate 7th anniversary of anti-coup suicide 2013).



Photo 46. The Resistant Citizen organized the protest in the memoriam of Nuamthong Praiswan at the 14th of October 1973 Memorial.
Retrieved from (Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, 2015).

The memorial, as a built form and spatial structure, constructed a concept of democracy through its symbols and meanings that framed the notion and memory of the Thai people. The spatial agency, including the protest groups and institutions, further reinforced it through their demonstrations, commemorations, projects, and programs at the structure.

Led by Uthai Pimchaichon, the National Assembly designated October 14 of every year as *Wan Prachathipatai* or Democracy Day in May 2003. This resolution was passed on the 30th anniversary of the October 1973 revolution. The declaration explicitly highlighted the significance of the student revolution and the efforts of the students and the people who fought for democracy and opposed the dictatorial rule in Thailand. It also emphasized the valuable lesson of this historic event for the Thai nation. It is noteworthy to underline in this resolution their concept of democracy. It followed the idea that sovereignty belongs to the people and that the country's leaders are representatives of the people. The rulers must exercise their power in the name of the King, and unrighteous use of power has no room for democracy (สมุดรวมภาพเหตุการณ์ ๑๔ ตุลา: ๒๕๑๖ ๒๕๑๗ ๒๕๔๔ ๒๕๔๖ [Photobook of October 14 Events: 1973, 1974, 2001, 2003] 2005). The resolution accentuated the concept of constitutional democracy with the monarch as the head of state. Due to this, it solidified the imagery of democracy aligned with monarchism in the structure. Then, this democracy was further monumentalized in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial and reinforced by the commemorations and various activities.

An organizing committee and sub-committees were formed by the National Assembly and prepared projects and programs aligned with the objectives of Democracy Day and for the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the revolution. It included the grand commemoration held at the 14th of October 1973 Memorial on October 14, 2003 (see Photo 47) (14 ตุลาคม วันประชาธิปไตย รำลึก 30 ปี 14 ตุลาคม 2516 - 2546 [October 14 Democracy Day, 30th anniversary of 14th of October (1973 - 2003)] 2003) (สมุดรวมภาพเหตุการณ์ ๑๔ ตุลา: ๒๕๑๖ ๒๕๑๗ ๒๕๔๔ ๒๕๔๖ [Photobook of October 14 Events: 1973, 1974, 2001, 2003] 2005).

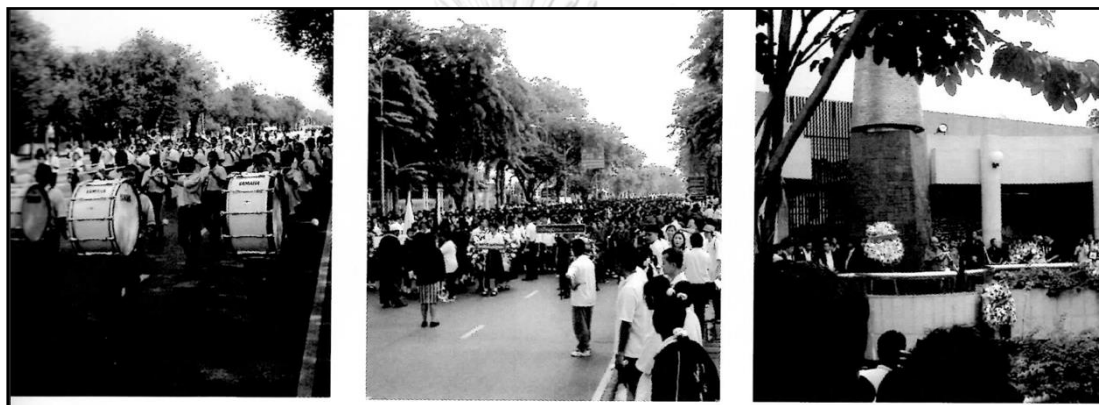


Photo 47. The 30th-anniversary commemoration of the October 1973 revolution at the 14th of October 1973 Memorial.

Retrieved from (สมุดรวมภาพเหตุการณ์ ๑๔ ตุลา: ๒๕๑๖ ๒๕๑๗ ๒๕๔๔ ๒๕๔๖ [Photobook of October 14 Events: 1973, 1974, 2001, 2003] 2005).

The commemoration of the October 1973 revolution continues every year at the memorial. However, these were not as grand as the 30th anniversary anymore due to the different events, leadership changes, and military junta that emerged after. The same thing happened to the commemoration and usage of October 14 as “Democracy Day.” Although people still remember the October 1973 revolution because of the commemoration activities, the term “Democracy Day” rarely rings a bell as the public infrequently mentions it. This day is only a national observance compared to a national holiday, the December 10 Constitution Day. To justify this claim, using the data from Google Trends from 2004 to the present, the interest over time for the term *Wan Prachathipatai* only became famous in 2004, a year after the notable 30th-anniversary commemoration of the 1973 revolution. Then it suddenly registered a

massive decline after 2004. In studying the “interest over time” of Google Trends, it can be interpreted that Thai people with internet access searched for this term because they were curious or talking about it online. 100 is the highest point recorded in the data, indicating peak popularity, while 50 means the analyzed term is half as popular (Google Trends 2023). This interest over time explains the significant volume of searches for *Wan Prachathipatai*, and it can be interpreted that the popularity of the term online only lasted until 2004. In addition, it was only limited to the areas of Bangkok (see Photo 48). Meanwhile, the interest over time of *Wan Rattathanun*, though not that impressive, was much better than *Wan Prachathipatai*'s data, and it was not only limited to Bangkok. It is also noticeable in other provinces in Thailand (see Photo 49).

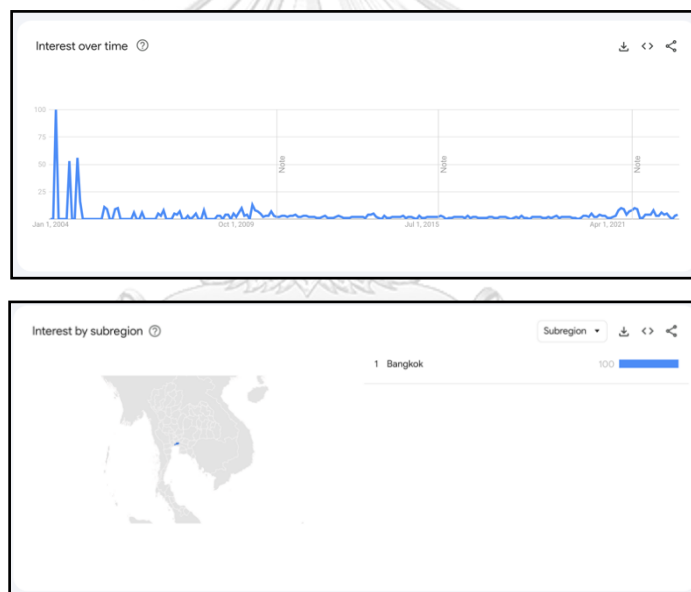


Photo 48. Interest over time and interest by subregion of the term Wan Prachathipatai from 2004-present on Google Thailand. Retrieved from (Google Trends, 2023).

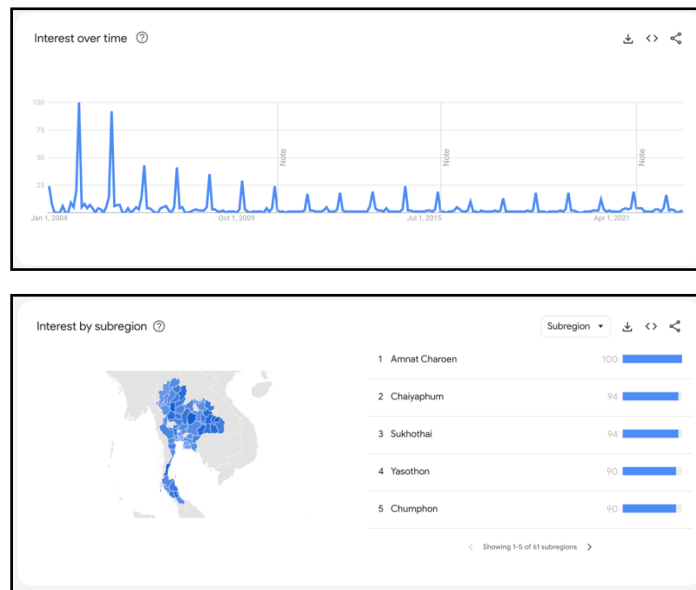


Photo 49. Interest over time and interest by subregion of the term Wan Rattathamanun from 2004-present on Google Thailand. Retrieved from (Google Trends 2023).

In recent memory, October 14 is overshadowed by another national holiday, the October 13 King Bhumibol Adulyadej Memorial Day, commemorating King Bhumibol's passing in 2016. In 2019, October 14 was a substitution holiday for King Bhumibol Adulyadej Memorial Day because October 13 was a Sunday (October 2019 Holidays 2019). Then in 2022, since October 14 is just a national observance, the date was labeled as an additional special holiday of October 13 because of holiday economics. It was just seen as a day to bridge the gap between October 13, which was Thursday, and the weekend (4 extra holidays next year 2021). In 2023, the Thai government officially declared October 13 every year as "Navamindra Maharaj Day," a memorial day and national holiday to commemorate the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Navamindra Maharaj Day: A Remembrance 2023).²⁹

The data from Google Trends and the public holidays in Thailand prove that spatial agency, such as human activities, is vital in preserving and continuing the messages conveyed in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial as a spatial structure. It can contribute to the Thai people's public memory and historical consciousness by occupying this space and activating its meaning.

²⁹ *Navamindra* means "ninth great person," while *Maharaj* means "great king" because the late King was the ninth king of the Chakri Dynasty (Navamindra Maharaj Day: A Remembrance 2023).

Aside from being a democratic space, the 14th of October 1973 memorial also became a tourist site because it was considered an important landmark featured by the Tourism Authority of Thailand and different travel and museum websites. The structure also caters to the everyday life of the people. It is a venue for learning and relaxation for the people because of the workshops, seminars, discussions, film screenings, exhibits, performances, book fairs, youth camps, and contests organized in this venue. It is also a relaxing space because of the people sitting and chatting or playing on the phone here. People also nap, eat, smoke, hang out, and read in this place. It is also a venue for people's income and livelihood, such as lottery tickets and food vending. The memorial is also a waiting area for sex workers and motorcycle drivers. It also shelters homeless people along Ratchadamnoen Avenue (Thatsanaleelaporn 2020, 74-114).

These symbols and meanings framed in the memorial contribute to amplifying the idea of democracy to the Thai people. It also helps the people to memorialize October 1973 based on what was depicted and transpired in this structure. The symbols and meanings of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial are not only attached to Thai democracy, the fallen heroes and memories of the October 1973 student revolution, but they are also linked to the concept of social space where the people claim this space for them to exercise their fundamental human rights and apply its symbols and meaning in their everyday lives. However, before the people could maximize this area, it first went through the eye of a needle because of Thailand's ideological rift and political situation after the 1973 revolution.

4.2. The Construction of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial

This monument only materialized in 2001 due to the complications it experienced and the challenges the pro-democracy groups hurdled for it to be constructed. Its location was one of the government buildings that burnt down during the October 1973 demonstration. The Crown Property Bureau owned the land. Then it was leased to the military and eventually rented by the Lottery Sellers' Association (Dovey, Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy 2001,

70) (Peleggi, Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory 2017, 147-148).

The initial plan of installing this memorial was discussed in 1974, a year after the October 1973 student revolution. The government approved the construction of the structure, and Prime Minister Sanya Thammasakdi and the Ministry of Finance pledged to shoulder half the cost of the memorial. Then the other half came from public donations (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 13) (Peleggi, Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory 2017, 147-148).

On October 14, 1975, the foundation stone of the memorial was laid at the Khok Wu intersection. The ceremony was presided by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and attended by Supreme Patriarch Somdet Phra Ariyavongsagatanana and Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 12).

The National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) also collected four million baht for the construction. However, due to the 1976 Thammasat massacre, the police seized the amount collected by the student organization (Peleggi, Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory 2017, 149). During this period, the military and right-wing groups started to vehemently oppose the construction plan of the memorial because it was seen as a symbol of divisiveness (Susanpoolthong 1998).

While waiting for the approval to install a memorial, a cement structure was placed on the ground in 1989 for the meantime (see Photo 50). This structure, with five young people tangled by a flag, continued to commemorate the sacrifices given by the people who died during the 1973 revolution. Alongside the structure were kiosks selling lottery tickets and occupying the land (Peleggi, Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory 2017, 149).

The memorial became a sacred space, notably because of the statue in front of the structure. Garlands, flowers, incense sticks, and food offerings can be seen in this stone sculpture. It eventually became an instrument for worship by the people in

this area, particularly the families and relatives of the fallen heroes and the lottery vendors paying respect to this structure (Thatsanaleelaporn 2020, 74-114).



Photo 50. "Monument to the Youth Killed in October," located in the 14 October 1973 Memorial.

Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, November 3, 2021.

On October 8, 1990, the October 14 Foundation was formally created, and it was tasked to head the memorial's construction. The confiscated money from NSCT was transferred to this foundation. The construction plan of the monument resumed after the 1992 Black May Revolution and was resurrected by Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun. He obtained permission from the Crown Property Bureau to use the said land again leased by the Lottery Sellers' Association (In memory of a memorial 1997) (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 149).

After many decades of being in limbo and opposed by right-wing groups, the memorial was finally inaugurated on October 14, 2001 (see Photo 51). About 40,000 people attended the inauguration. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra delivered his speech during the inauguration and told the public to leave the past behind (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017,

150). The pro-democracy activists were offended and reacted to Thaksin's address. They insisted that past mistakes would likely be repeated if people moved on without bringing anyone to justice. They also criticized the administration for showing a lack of commitment to the cause of the October 1973 movement. It was observed by the pro-democracy groups that the prime minister only joined part of the celebration, and his political party used the inauguration of the monument as a publicity stunt to boost their popularity (Ruangdit 2001) (Lertchavalitsakul 2016). Naowarat Pongpaiboon also noticed that the address of Thaksin did not mention the promotion of rights and freedom, particularly for the poor and the underprivileged. According to him, it only proved that the country's leader was not democratic-minded during that time (Ruangdit and Susanpoolthong, Calls mount for review of fund panel 2001).



Photo 51. Some of the pictures during the inauguration of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial on October 14, 2001.

Retrieved from (สมุดรวมภาพเหตุการณ์ ๑๔ ตุลา: ๒๕๑๖ ๒๕๑๗ ๒๕๔๔ ๒๕๔๖ [Photobook of October 14 Events: 1973, 1974, 2001, 2003] 2005).

Through the help of the October 14 Foundation, commemoration ceremonies and activities are conducted annually. The organization remembers the people who sacrificed their lives for democracy by arranging exhibits, collecting memories,

documents, and testimonies of the 1973 revolution, and creating materials that will educate people about democracy and the historic student movement (อนุสรณ์สถาน 14 ตุลา 2016).

4.3. The “Democracy” in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial

The 14th of October 1973 Memorial monumentalizes the concept of democracy aligned with student empowerment and the events of the October 1973 revolution. This memorial was built to remember the heroes of the revolution and commemorate the democratic battles of the student movement that are anti-military, pro-constitution, and monarchy allied. The democracy that was being monumentalized here is anchored to the said points. It is anti-military because the October 1973 revolution was a protest against the military government and leaders such as Thanom Kittikachorn and Praphat Charusathien. It is pro-constitution because the students started the revolution by calling for the immediate promulgation of a democratic constitution and the unconditional release of the arrested activists on October 6, 1973. Then it is a monarchy-allied movement because of the monarchy's role and intervention in addressing the student protesters' demands and ending the protests.

It was estimated that half a million people participated in this student-led demonstration from October 6-15, 1973. While handing out leaflets and campaigning for a new constitution, Thirayuth Boonmee and other members of the Constitutional Movement or the Demanding Constitution Group were arrested for treason. They were accused of violating the National Executive Council decree, which prohibited more than five people from gathering for political purposes (The ten days 1973) (Chronology 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 45) (Heinze 1974, 494-495) (Bartak 1993, 8-9) (Grossman 2009, 192) (Kongkirati 2012, 246).³⁰

³⁰ Thirayuth resigned as NSCT Secretary-General when he discovered that the government failed to honor their agreement during the June 1973 protest (Keomongkol 1973). In addition, he also finished his term because he had already graduated from college. From NSCT, he decided to continue the fight and form the Constitutional Movement. Under this movement, he wanted to push the democratic reform of the government. He collected a petition signed by the prominent Thai people, such as

The next day, General Praphat Charusathien who was the Deputy Prime Minister and the Commander of the Communist Suppression Operations Command, argued that the arrested activists were communists, and they spearheaded a plot to overthrow the government (The ten days 1973) (Chronology 1973) (Heinze 1974, 495).

On October 9, as a response, about 2,000 Thammasat University students under the leadership of Saeksan Prasertkul, a Political Science student at Thammasat, started to show their force. They launched a demonstration on their campus for the release of the arrested students (see Photo 52) (The ten days 1973) (Chronology 1973). Saeksan was the public relations officer of NSCT, and he belonged to a radical and independent faction of the movement. However, due to the change of leadership in the NSCT and also being a conservative organization, the new Secretary-General Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, who was a moderate activist, only followed the lead of the Thammasat students (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 46) (Heinze 1974, 495) (Bartak 1993, 10).³¹



intellectuals, journalists, and businesspeople, agreeing to the promulgation of a new democratic constitution (The ten days 1973) (Chronology 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 45) (Heinze 1974, 494-495) (Bartak 1993, 8-9) (Grossman 2009, 192) (Kongkirati 2012, 246).

³¹ The NSCT has been a conservative organization since its formation in 1969. For example, during its first academic year as an organization, they only conducted fund-raising activities for the flood victims, organized a TV program for King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and provided graduating high school students counseling services. It was not yet politically active at that time. They only started to become political and the coordinating center of student activism the following academic year when Thirayuth Boonmee was elected as the Secretary-General of the Center. When Sombat Thamrongthanyawong replaced Thirayuth as Secretary-General, the Center faced a lot of internal challenges, particularly in managing the political differences among the student leaders and members (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 30) (Bartak 1993, 5).



Photo 52. Demonstration of the students at Thammasat University.
Retrieved from (The Nation: Sunday Nation Special 1973).

Rallies were held on other campuses from October 9-10. The other NSCT universities supported and joined the protests. Students from Bangkok universities and teachers' training colleges also campaigned for the same demands—the release of the arrested political activists, eventually named *Constitution 13*, and the promulgation of a democratic constitution on December 10, 1973 (The ten days 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 46-47) (Heinze 1974, 495-496) (Bartak 1993, 10).

On October 11, the NSCT took over the leadership of the demonstration, and Sombat held a meeting with Praphat to discuss their demands. Praphat refused the release of the political activists but vowed to have a constitution purportedly. Meanwhile, the protesters already recorded 50,000 students who assembled on the Thammasat football grounds (The ten days 1973) (Chronology 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 48-49) (Heinze 1974, 497) (Bartak 1993, 10-11).

On October 12, thousands more joined the protest, including teachers, students from secondary schools, and university lecturers. It was reported that Thammasat University had about 100,000 protesters. The NSCT imposed a 24-hour ultimatum to release the activists (The ten days 1973).



Photo 53. Students leaving Thammasat University and marching to the Democracy Monument.

Retrieved from (The Nation: Sunday Nation Special 1973).

On October 13, around 200,000 to 250,000 protesters joined the demonstration while waiting for the government's answer and for the 24-hour demand to lapse. At noon, they started to march from Thammasat University to the Democracy Monument (see Photo 53). The students planned to march from the Thammasat grounds to the Democracy Monument and rally there for one night, then proceed to the Equestrian Statue of King Chulalongkorn at the Royal Plaza and then on to Chitralada Palace (400,000 in march 1973) (The ten days 1973) (Chronology 1973) (Payakvichien 1973) (Zimmerman 1974, 511).

Meanwhile, on the morning of October 13, the arrested activists were eventually released on bail after heated discussions at the Bang Khen Detention Center. Although the student protesters demanded the activists' unconditional release, it ended as a conditional bail. This was broadcasted by Radio Thailand together with the appeal to the student protesters to go home. The NSCT did not believe in this announcement. Thirayuth revealed that the government wanted them to appear at Thammasat before noon to calm the demonstration. They were escorted out of the detention center but refused to join the protest. Thirayuth and his colleagues settled down in front of the center and waited for the instructions of NSCT Secretary General Sombat. Based on their experience during the June 1973 protest and how they were

duped and asked to disperse it, Thirayuth thought that the government was playing foul again (Thirayuth charges "ridiculous" Government plot 1973) (How the protest drama unfolded 1973) (The ten days 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 50-52) (Heinze 1974, 497-499) (Bartak 1993, 11).

Then about 4:00 pm, King Bhumibol met with the representatives of the NSCT delegation and some of the released activists at Chitrlada Palace. The King instructed the NSCT leaders to call off the demonstration because the government had already agreed to the release of *Constitution 13*. The government also pledged that a constitution drafting committee would be chaired by Praphat and promulgated by October 1974 (400,000 in march 1973) (Chronology 1973) (The Nation: Sunday Nation Special 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 50-52) (Heinze 1974, 497-499) (Bartak 1993, 11) (Grossman 2009, 192).

It was announced on the radio that the government and the NSCT had agreed and asked the demonstrators to go home. It was also announced that there was intent from an unknown group to sabotage the agreements and warned the students to take precautions. The students called off their demonstration at the Democracy Monument and went to Thammasat to celebrate. However, some students, under the leadership of Saeksan, remained on the streets and refused to be dispersed. The group went near the Parliament to ensure the promise of the government. However, he received a different and unverified message that the student leaders had been killed. It confused and dismayed him. At this juncture, there was a communication breakdown between the activists and student leaders. As a reaction, Saeksan and his group decided to march to the Palace to seek clarification (The ten days 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 54) (Heinze 1974, 499) (Zimmerman 1974, 518) (Bartak 1993, 12-13).

On October 14, rumors spread about the student leaders, and the students led by Saeksan began to march to Chitrlada Palace. Sombat and Saeksan reunited, and it was proven that the rumors were not true. After the radio announcement, the moderates dispersed the crowds. Then the King met with the other student representatives, including Thirayuth and Saeksan. Sombat asked the group to disband

peacefully (Heinze 1974, 499-500). However, some students were still not satisfied and refused to leave. Unfortunately, the violence had already broken out near the Palace and other parts of Ratchadamnoen Avenue. The police and the students had an encounter and clash that led to the killing of the civilians. Many students and citizens were killed and injured. It was reported that 77 students were killed and 857 were wounded (The ten days 1973) (Chronology 1973) (Grossman 2009, 193) (Bartak 1993, 12-13).

The Nation, in the October 15 and 16 issues of their newspaper, reported that the rifles, tanks, and helicopters massacred about 400-500 demonstrators and injured thousands of people during the violent encounter and dispersal conducted by the police. This figure included student and citizen demonstrators and innocent passers-by (Government resigns 1973) (Thanom, Prapass, Narong OUT! 1973) (Heinze 1974, 499).

As a response, King Bhumibol stepped in. He announced the resignation of the Thanom-Praphat government and the appointment of Professor Sanya Thammasakdi, Rector of Thammasat University, as the new Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister also announced that a new constitution would be drafted, and elections would be held within six months (The ten days 1973) (Grossman 2009, 193).

As a result, October 14 was given various names such as the “Day of Great Tragedy,” the “Day of Great Joy,” the “October Revolution,” and the “Student Revolution.” The student protesters continued their vigilance at the Democracy Monument until the next day (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 54-56) (Heinze 1974, 499-502) (Chronology of 14 October 1973 1998) (Kasetsiri 1999) (Grossman 2009, 193) (Wiriyasiri 2020) (Chua, Bangkok Utopia: Modern Architecture and Buddhist Felicities, 1910–1973 2021, 191).

On October 15, the violence was not yet finished despite the new Prime Minister's announcements. The movement was now divided into students calling for non-violence, and the other one, students fighting the government forces (The ten days 1973). Peace resumed in Bangkok at about 8:00 pm when it was announced that Praphat and Narong had left the country and escaped to Taiwan. Thanom and his family left the following night, October 16, and went to Boston, USA. Aside from the

civilian leadership, it was also described that another faction succeeded in a silent coup to replace the Thanom regime. This was led by General Krit Sivara, who Prime Minister Sanya appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army to bring back law and order in Thailand after the revolution. It was explained that General Krit contributed to the success of the students because he refused to carry out the order from Thanom and Praphat to suppress the demonstration (Thanom, Prapass, Narong OUT! 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 57-58) (Heinze 1974, 502-504) (Bartak 1993, 14-15) (Grossman 2009, 193) (Kongkirati 2012, 244, 246).

These significant events during the October 1973 revolution are all marked and remembered in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial. Aside from the gallery of the events during the October protests found in the area, the entire structure serves as a reminder of this historical event in the Thai student movement, politics, and democracy.

The 14th of October 1973 Memorial also reminisces the significant moment when King Bhumibol publicly inserted himself into a very tense confrontation as a democratic monarch. Aside from the power of the people, the monument became a remembrance of the King's image when he restored constitutionalism and democracy for the good of the people (Handley 2006, 212) (Marshall 2014, 85-86).

Even though the memorial remembers the narrative, people, and democracy in the 1973 student revolution, the force of the people and the urgent spirit of democracy among the Thai youth were said to be neglected in the memorial due to the contribution of the monarchical institution in ending the revolution. The images disseminated in various mediums showcasing the royal influence in the calling for peace and ending the military dictatorship stuck to the mainstream memory of the people that conformed and complemented the student movement and, simultaneously, snatched the power from the hands of the people (Prakitnonthakan, Memory and Power on Ratchadamnoen Avenue 2008, 9-10).

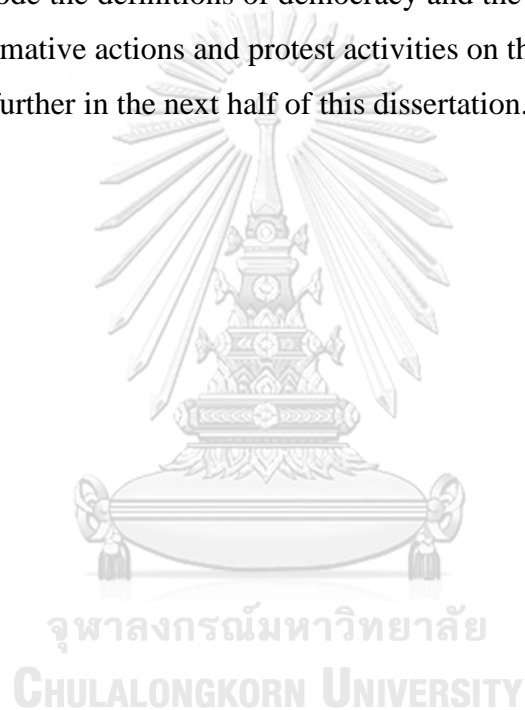
The democracy monumentalized in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial follows the traditional school of thought of Thai democracy. It was called by Prajak Kongkirati the "Royalist Nationalist Democracy" or a combination of the "Royalist Nationalism" that was prominent when Siam's independence against the European

colonial powers was maintained by the monarchical institution and “Monarchic Democracy” that argues that democracy, not originated in 1932 but can be traced back to the Sukhothai period and to the granting of King Prajadhipok of the constitution to the Thai people (Prakitnonthakan, *Memory and Power on Ratchadamnoen Avenue* 2008, 10). Having mentioned these points, there is no doubt that the Thai democracy mirrored in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial is a democracy from the traditional school.

Aside from the democracy aligned with the monarchical institution, the creation of this structure also represented the Western school of democracy through people’s participation and liberal ideas. It is a product of democracy due to the role of the people, particularly the middle class, in constructing the memorial. Like the Constitution Monuments and replicas of the Democracy Monument, the contribution of the people was evident through public donations. Various artists and groups also contributed to the art images found at the rectangular base of the memorial. These images representing different liberal values such as freedom, human rights, equality, participation, and democracy are imprinted in the tiles (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 29-30). The dedication of the students and intellectuals to build the memorial despite the challenges it received later on was testimony to the power of the middle class that wanted a share of the memory of space of the historic Ratchadamnoen Avenue (Prakitnonthakan, *Memory and Power on Ratchadamnoen Avenue* 2008, 8-9).

As a spatial structure, the memorial also serves as a vessel of a complex Thai democracy attached to the ideas of nationalism and modernization through its designs and symbols. Modernization can be seen in its architectural style. As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, its modern style approach stirred various perspectives from scholars because of how the structure was distinctive from the rest of the buildings on Ratchadamnoen Avenue. At the same time, the adornment of national flags on the entire memorial and the patriotic messages it portrayed, such as how the heroes of democracy sacrificed their lives for the country, represented Thai nationalism. Based on the stories of the 1973 revolution and the national flags and messages attached to this structure, nationalism in this memorial is attributed to the essence of “Thainess” anchored to the three pillars of nation, religion, and monarchy.

With the re-emergence of the student protests in 2020, the student activists remembered and paid tribute to the success of the October 1973 student movement. Aside from referencing themselves to the 1932 revolution, the 1973 student revolution was also incorporated into the 2020 protests. The 2020 movement continued the legacies of the memorial by honoring the people who fought for democracy in their demonstrations and commemorating the success of student empowerment in 1973. In the recent movement, the 14th of October 1973 Memorial also became one of their demonstration venues. Given the kind of democracy framed in this memorial, it is noteworthy to decode the definitions of democracy and the nuances it produced based on the 2020 performative actions and protest activities on the monument. These points will be discussed further in the next half of this dissertation.



CHAPTER V: FROM VICTORY TO DEMOCRACY: THE “DEMOCRACY” IN THE VICTORY MONUMENT

Another public monument that has a fascinating story and is associated with the development of democracy in Thailand is the Victory Monument or *Anusawari Chai Samoraphum*. At first, this monument had nothing to do with Thai democracy, unlike the Democracy and Constitution Monuments and the 14th of October 1973 Memorial. Due to spatial agency such as protest activities claiming this structure, this monument turned into one of the democratic spaces in Bangkok. Before it became an iconic landmark and democratic space for activists and student protesters, this structure once symbolized Phibun’s ideologies and program. It is a product of Phibun’s militarism, authoritarianism, modernization, and nationalism. However, these were challenged after his regime and led to the creation of various layers of meaning. This chapter traces the layering of meanings by discussing the construction of the monument, the development of its symbols and meanings, and the connection to the democratic struggles of the Thai people.



Photo 54. Victory Monument in Bangkok.
Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, February 6, 2022.

The Victory Monument shares some similarities with the Democracy Monument. First, they are both roundabouts situated along the busy roads of Bangkok. The monument is located at the junction of Phahonyothin Road, Phaya Thai

Road, and Ratchawithi Road (see Photo 54). Like the Democracy Monument, this structure was also built during Phibun's regime and inaugurated during the June 24 National Day. Its cornerstone was laid on June 24, 1941, and inaugurated the following year, June 24, 1942 (see Photo 55). Then, it was also constructed by the same people responsible for the Democracy Monument. Pum Malagun designed it, and the sculpture decorations or hero figures were created by Silpha Bhirasri and his assistants, such as Sanan Silakorn (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 83-84) (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 58) (Chua, *Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910-1973* 2012, 355). Lastly, the features and characteristics of the Victory Monument also embody ideologies such as militarism, nationalism, and modernization.



Photo 55. Thai and Japanese military officers at the unveiling ceremony of the Victory Monument and Screenshot of the NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) news report of the inauguration of the Victory Monument in 1942.

Retrieved from (Khaosod English 2018) and (NHK 1942).

5.1. Symbols and Meanings of the Victory Monument

This monument symbolizes militarism and the contribution of the military to Thailand. It was built to honor the 59 Thais and the victory of Thailand over France during the 1940 Franco-Thai War.³² It houses the ashes of the heroes who died in the war and commemorates them through their engraved names on the marble plaques of the monument. Militarism can be seen through its distinctive 50-meter-tall obelisk and masculine design (see Photo 54). The entire structure was modeled after the bayonet of a gun made of concrete and materials manufactured in Thailand. The hero figures of the monument are twice the size of an average person and were made of bronze, depicting the images of a soldier, an airman, a sailor, a policeman, and a civilian. These figures are positioned on each side of the pentagonal pedestal of the monument, clearly showcasing the idea of militarism and legitimizing the military rule to the public (see Photo 56) (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 83-84) (Chua, *Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910-1973* 2012, 355) (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 60).

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³² The war between France and Thailand erupted when France bombed the Northeast province of Nakhon Phanom in December 1940. On February 3, 1941, Japan came onto the scene by finalizing the territorial settlement, and it mediated the agreement in Tokyo on May 9, 1941, through the Tokyo Peace Convention. The victory that the monument commemorated was the re-annexation of the lost territories of Thailand in the western Cambodian provinces of Siem Reap and Battambang after the brief confrontation with France (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 58) (McGrath 2013, 81) (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 140).

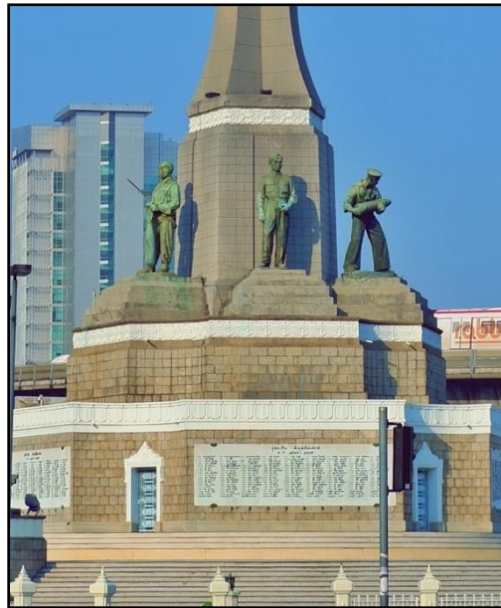


Photo 56. Hero figures of the Victory Monument in Bangkok.
 Photograph by Gil D. Turingan, February 6, 2022.

Aside from the militaristic design, Phibun maximized this structure to flex his military power. It served as a political tool for him, like the Democracy Monument. The military presence and march during the cornerstone-laying ceremony and succeeding celebrations emphasized the strong image it wanted to portray to the Thai people. He also showed empathy and support for the military by adding the names of dead soldiers from World War II and the Korean War on the monument years after its inauguration. These actions towards the soldiers and the monument during his regime solidified his military leadership, highlighted his notion of militarism, and valued the role of the armed forces in Thai society (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 84) (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 60-63, 66) (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 141).

As part of the nation-building program and development projects of Phibun, the Victory Monument symbolizes the development of Thai nationalism. The structure represented the nationalist and anti-colonial agenda of Phibun because it commemorated the victory of Thailand over the colonial power France and the reclaiming of its territories from the neighboring countries in mainland Southeast Asia

(Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 84) (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 60-63, 66) (Peleggi, *Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory* 2017, 141).

The monument convinced the Thai people of their greatness as a nation and the importance of the 1940 Franco-Thai War in claiming their lost territories. The structure also represented Phibun's concept of Thainess or *khwam pen thai*, which was far from the three pillar values of nation, religion, and monarchy. Instead, it promoted Thainess or Thai nationalism based on the principles of the People's Party, his cultural mandates, and the notion of militarism (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 62-63).

Thai nationalism without the representation of the monarchy was evident in the modernist design of the monument and due to the absence of any symbolic reference to the monarchy (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 62-63).

In addition, the intellectual leader who was influential in the anti-monarchical architectural plans of the Phibun government was also behind in the construction of the Victory Monument. Luang Wichit Wathakan, who actively promoted the constitution in the early years after the 1932 revolution, helped Phibun materialize his nationalist agenda by constructing architectural structures using the Fine Arts Department, which he headed from 1934 to 1942. Examples of these structures were the monuments mentioned in the previous chapters, such as the Democracy Monument in Bangkok and the Constitution Monuments in the provinces (Barme 1989, 90, 93). His leadership in the Fine Arts Department paved the way for the construction of monuments not just related to the kings and monarchy as the focus of veneration. He and the People's Party began to install structures showcasing abstract symbolic forms and the commoner's body connected to the ideals of nationalism, democracy, constitution, and equality (Chua, *Bangkok Utopia: Modern Architecture and Buddhist Felicities, 1910–1973* 2021, 148).

Aside from the construction of these kinds of monuments, Wichit also planned to construct a structure that would celebrate Thai sovereignty, democracy,

and progress while recognizing Thai history and values. Under his leadership, his department formed the concept of Thai Monument or *Anusawari Thai*. They planned to build it at the *Pak Nam* or the mouth of the Chao Phraya River on the Gulf of Siam. He dreamt of this structure as an important monument for Thailand and the world because of the blend between modern design and materials and Thai religion and values. It also served as his way of providing a critique against the traditional regime and monarchy by commenting on the construction of the famous Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall or *Phra Thinang Anantasamakhom* in the Dusit Palace which was commissioned by King Chulalongkorn in 1908 but only completed in 1915. Unfortunately for Wichit, his Thai Monument was never materialized because of budget concerns and material shortages due to the Second World War. Even though he was not successful in constructing this monument, he was still able to help concretize Phibun's nationalist agenda through architecture by creating other monuments, such as the Victory Monument (Chua, *Bangkok Utopia: Modern Architecture and Buddhist Felicities, 1910–1973* 2021, 141-146).

The re-annexation of Laotian and Cambodian territories further strengthened the popularity and strong image of Phibun and, at the same time, contributed to the development of national pride among the Thai people. Luang Wichit headed this re-annexation plan and justified the country's territorial claim. He even mobilized the people to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation and support his idea (Chua, *Bangkok Utopia: Modern Architecture and Buddhist Felicities, 1910–1973* 2021, 146-147).

The people, including the Thai students, supported this campaign as a result of the extensive anti-French propaganda campaign and nationalistic policy of the Phibun government after the Second World War broke out in Europe and the defeat of France by Germany in 1940 (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, *Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change* 1974, 21).

The first incidence of student activism after the 1932 revolution was related to this campaign. In November 1940, students of Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University participated in the anti-French and nationalist protests of the Thai people to regain the lost territories in the east. Students gathered first at their respective campuses and then marched to the Pramane Ground, recently known as

Sanam Luang, and supported the Thai government in reclaiming the said territories (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 21).

Building the Victory Monument to commemorate the victory in claiming the lost territories during the 1940 Franco-Thai War represented the development of Thai nationalism and the construction of the Thai nation-state that was not dependent on the monarchical institution.

Aside from the idea of a modern nation-state, modernization in terms of architectural style was also evident in the monument. Like the Democracy Monument, the construction of the Victory Monument was a milestone in Thai architecture because it distanced itself from the traditional regime and served as an antithesis of architectural structures associated with the monarchy. The style combined the human and commoner's body and the political power during this period, creating a strange combination of modern elements of realism through the bronze statues or hero figures and the abstract form of the memorial through the obelisk design (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 84-85) (Chua, *Bangkok Utopia: Modern Architecture and Buddhist Felicities, 1910–1973* 2021, 149). The structure is also an amalgam of various early 20th-century stylistic movements and Western conventions in architecture. It can be seen in the elevated radial platforms, the central obelisk, military memorials, cannons, and lanterns in the monument (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 60).

Despite the intricacies and glorification of the monument's meanings and symbols, it eventually failed to deliver its intention and message to the public. Silpha Bhirasri, the one in charge of the hero sculptures of the monument, later called this structure a "victory of embarrassment" because the territories that Thailand reclaimed after the Franco-Thai War were ceded back to the French after World War II (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 84) (Chua, *Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910-1973* 2012, 355-356).

Aside from the intended symbols and meanings of the structure, the monument also embodies the concept of authoritarianism by being a product of Phibun's policies. Bhirasri's statement about the memorial was deemed justifiable

because constructing this monument was out of Phibun's whim due to his propaganda and political interests, signifying his authoritarian rule. The settlement between France and Thailand was only signed in May 1941, and the monument's foundation was suddenly laid in June of the same year. The artists involved in the construction had limited control in creating it due to the inadequate time they had to materialize it and other possible factors, such as the domination of the Phibun administration in the construction process and the immense number of construction projects planned to build during his time (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 84-85).

These built perceptions towards the monument allowed itself to be further challenged by the monarchical and military institutions and various activities conducted in this structure. For example, the symbols of remembrance in this monument evolved significantly through time. From being purely militarist and nationalistic, a new layer was added after Phibun's term. The symbolic presence of the monarchical institution in the monument appeared. Royal festivities started to occur in this monument, and royal decorations were placed, such as images, emblems, and flags of royalty. A new sense of nationalism under the royal authority, together with the military, was generated and emphasized in this structure. The representation of Thainess in this monument also reverted to the values of nation, religion, and monarchy (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 60-63, 66).

During the time of Phibun's successors, Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn, the Victory Monument became an instrument to remind the people of the significant role of the Siamese royal elite in defending the kingdom by giving up land to prevent Western colonial aggression and of military supremacy in claiming back the lost territories. In addition, the government used the structure to stir patriotic feelings among the masses and to gather public support against communism by honoring the heroism of the military during the Franco-Thai War and commemorating the February 4 Thai Veteran's Day at the monument (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 66-68).

The Victory Monument continuously remained to become as a military memorial despite the new layer added to its meaning. However, its spotlight started to digress to other public monuments, particularly the structures glorifying the traditional heroes of Thailand.

For example, Sarit Thanarat developed a new image of militarism to separate him from Phibun. As a traditionalist military man, he wanted an indigenous symbol of power to memorialize, and he chose the figure of King Naresuan. Under his leadership, they installed the Dual Monuments of King Naresuan in Don Chedi, Suphanburi, in 1958. This monument honored King Naresuan's heroism against the Burmese forces in 1592. After this historical construction, countless memorials of King Naresuan of Ayutthaya were built throughout Thailand, overshadowing the Victory Monument, once a symbol of Thai militarism and nationalism (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 121-124).

Due to the area's development and rapid urbanization in Bangkok, the monument eventually transformed into an urban center and transportation hub. Government offices, hospitals, residential areas, shopping centers, and other commercial facilities were erected nearby. The Skytrain, van, and bus stations were installed near the monument. From becoming the symbol of Thai militarism, the Victory Monument turned into one of the busiest traffic roundabouts in Bangkok (Wong, *Visions of a Nation: Public Monuments in Twentieth-Century Thailand* 2000, 84) (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 64). In 2018, redevelopment plans in the area and renovation of the monument surfaced. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) was expected to spend about 40 million baht on constructing an underground walkway to make the monument accessible and safer for visitors. They also wanted to develop the landscape of the roundabout. However, the design was yet to be unveiled, and the quest for identifying the monument's caretaker was still a question. It was recently found that no government agency is claiming ownership of this monument, which only proves that it is neglected and not prioritized by the institution, adding to the vulnerability of this structure (Charuvastra, 2018)

(Who's responsible for Bangkok's monuments? 2018) (Hunt on for monument caretaker 2018).

5.2. The “Democracy” in the Victory Monument



Photo 57. Red Shirt protest at the Victory Monument on April 9, 2009.
Retrieved from (Adaptor-Plug 2009).

The nationalism that the Victory Monument symbolized since it was constructed did not emphasize the significance of democracy and constitution, unlike the other public monuments discussed in this dissertation. It promoted nationalism anchored to militarism and later on to the monarchy. Its association with democracy and the constitution became vivid when spatial agencies such as the Thai protesters occupied this structure.

From being a monument of the military's victory, this structure transformed into an instrumental space for democracy and against military dictatorship. The Victory Monument started to witness protests from various groups and sectors in 2009. Aside from the Democracy Monument, this structure emerged as one of the democratic spaces in Bangkok. It became an alternative space for contentious politics due to its accessibility as compared to the Democracy Monument which is situated on the Ratchadamnoen Avenue and surrounded by government and institutional edifices, its proximity to the residential areas of the Ratchathewi district, and its convenience because of the unavailability of other public spaces such as the Sanam Luang.

As a turning point, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) protesters, or the supporters of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra,

occupied the monument on April 9, 2009 (see Photo 57). They aimed to remove Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who became the head of the new unelected government in December 2008 due to the political instability of Thailand at that time. They demanded the resignation of the president of the Privy Council because of the accusation of being the mastermind of the 2006 military coup that ousted Thaksin Shinawatra and the revocation of the 2007 constitution. The UDD protesters, or Red Shirts, blocked the major intersection at the monument. About a hundred taxi drivers and a crowd of motorcycle taxi drivers participated in the protest. They parked their vehicles around the area to block and control the roads (Protesters block traffic in Bangkok during mass rally 2009) (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 71) (Sopranzetti 2012, 23-24).



Photo 58. About 1,000 anti-coup protesters gathered at the Victory Monument on May 24, 2014.

Retrieved from (Prachatai 2014).

In May 2014, the monument became a democratic space for the anti-coup protesters. It was one of the public spaces that the protesters occupied in Bangkok. The activists still claimed the area of the Victory Monument even though the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) prohibited the political gatherings of more than five people. Despite the military and police personnel's presence in the vicinity, they gathered and expressed their resistance against the military control of the government (Troop invasion heads off Victory Monument protest 2014) (Photos: Anti-Coup

Protest at Victory Monument 2014). The structure commemorating the military's greatness was turned into a space for demonstrations condemning the military takeover of the government.



Photo 59. About 1,300 soldiers and police forces deployed at the Victory Monument on May 29, 2014 to prevent the demonstrations against the coup.
Retrieved from (Wannamontha 2014).

The demonstrations benefited from the monument because the protesters could get the public attention, block the traffic, and paralyze the city effortlessly. With the help of the monument's location, the protests were able to stop the urban flows, which is considered the core of modern capitalism. They were blocked by the working class or the people supposed to facilitate the economy (Sopranzetti 2012, 24). Being a central transportation hub, protesting at the monument, like the previous demonstrations, was more of a strategic location than a symbolic representation of their demands (Noobanjong, *The Victory Monument: The Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms* 2012, 71). The monument's strategic convenience to the demonstrations allowed the activists to challenge the fragile meaning and symbolism of the structure efficiently. This monument, just like the Democracy Monument, was also contended by various protests, including the Thai student movement. The structure was not yet a democratic space during the 1973 student movement. The only narrative connected to this memorial was that it became a shortcut passage for a group of students on October 14 going to the palace, resulting in a violent encounter with the police guarding the road. They passed through the

Ratchawithi Road towards the Victory Monument and faced the violent measures of the authorities. It was reported that several students died and injured in this incident (Palanupap 1973). But when the 2020 student movement emerged, the monument was resurrected again after 2014, and it became one of the rally sites of the student groups.

The vulnerability of this monument paved the way for political groups and activists to contest the message it portrays to the public. Using this monument based on its strategic convenience and advantage also subconsciously produces a new layer of meaning. The 2020 student movement is an example of how the narratives of the monuments can be challenged through their protest activities. The re-emergence of the Thai student movement in 2020 resurfaced another layer of meaning in this monument introduced by the anti-coup demonstrators in 2009. These arguments will be further discussed in the succeeding chapter.

The obelisk design of the Victory Monument's centerpiece displays imagery aligned with militarism and nationalism. Although this monument was constructed to honor the Thai military who fought for Thailand during the Franco-Thai War in 1940, it was also associated with Phibun's military leadership, nation-building policies, and modernization programs.

Unlike the Constitution Monuments, replicas of the Democracy Monument, and the 14th of October 1973 Memorial, the public was not involved in creating this structure, and it only followed the instructions of Phibun and his swift decision to erect this monument for the sake of propaganda. It also carries the same interpretation as the Democracy Monument in Bangkok since it was also a product of the Phibun administration. The Victory Monument also emphasized the June 24 National Day because of its inauguration and laying of the stone foundation. Then, it was also constructed and designed by the same team who did the Democracy Monument. Even though it was not directly about democracy, this monument was still part of the political agenda of Phibun because of these connections.

The democracy in this monument could not be seen literally in its symbols and meanings until the people actively claimed this space and transformed it into a platform for social movement because of its strategic location. From symbolizing the victory of the military, an additional layer of meaning was constructed, representing the concept of democracy and the democratic rights of the Thai people. It only

justifies that the Victory Monument as a spatial structure that mediated the ideas of Phibun's militarism, authoritarianism, modernization, and nationalism to the public transformed into a democratic space due to the spatial agency, particularly the demonstration activities conducted here. The Victory Monument is no longer about the importance of the military. It has shifted to becoming a democratic symbol of the working class and the students, next to the Democracy Monument.

Aside from the transformation of the monument into a democratic symbol, it must also be noted that the construction of the Victory Monument, including the Democracy Monument, signified the influence of the military in Thai politics and their participation in the development of democracy in Thailand. The connection between the military and Thai democracy was clearly evident in how they were associated with the construction. From the Democracy Monument that romanticized the military through its symbols to commemorating the military's victory during the Franco-Thai war through the installation of the Victory Monument, these structures greatly underlined the military's essential role in Thailand's political landscape.

However, the military challenged the narrative and perspective on democracy when the power shifted from Phibun to Sarit and eventually Thanom. The shift in the military leadership also reflected the transformation of the public monuments' meanings and significance to Thai society. It can be seen how the presence and importance of the monuments mentioned in this dissertation were neglected and contested through the years. From following the Western school of democracy based on the military leadership of Phibun and the ideals of *Khana Ratsadon*, it returned to the traditional school of democracy, particularly emphasizing the significance of the monarchy in Thai politics. It signaled the union of the military and the monarchy in contextualizing the concept of Thai democracy.

The case of the Victory Monument showed that spatial structures such as military monuments contributed to the framing of the strong image of the military, and it emphasized their role in society as nation-builders. On the other hand, it also underscored that the spatial agency and institutions can also turn these spatial structures to their advantage. It was observed how the military and monarchical institutions treated the Victory Monument and changed the narrative and perspective concerning its significance.

In the following chapters, this imagery of the military and monarchy attached to the public monuments, and at the same time to the traditional school of Thai democracy, was later challenged by the student movements through their occupation and performative actions in these spaces, adhering to the Western ideals of democracy, fighting against military dictatorship, and pushing for monarchy reforms.



CHAPTER VI: THE 1973 STUDENT MOVEMENT AND THE STORIES OF CONTENTION

The previous chapters discussed the public monuments' different symbols and meanings, particularly their relation to Thai democracy. The stories of the construction of the Democracy Monument, 14th of October 1973 Memorial and Victory Monument in Bangkok; the Constitution Monuments in Maha Sarakham, Surin, and Roi Et; and the replicas of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum provided a glimpse of the complex notion of democracy in Thailand. The symbols and meanings of these public monuments mirrored a Thai democracy anchored to the traditional and Western schools and associated with complicated concepts of constitutionalism, monarchism, liberalism, modernization, militarism, authoritarianism, and nationalism.

The democracy in these monuments highlighted Constitutionalism and Constitutional Democracy with the Monarch as the Head of State. The emphasis on the importance of the constitution in Thailand can be seen in the centerpieces of the Democracy Monument and its replicas and the Constitution Monuments. These structures also underscored the significance of June 24, 1932 as the birth of Constitutional Democracy for the people through symbolisms, meanings, and celebrations associated with it.

Monarchy's influence in the formation of Thai democracy was also visible in the public monuments despite the changes initiated by the 1932 revolution. For example, the construction of the Constitution Monuments represented a diluted Western notion of democracy that was still influenced by the monarchy and traditional institutions due to the sacralization of the Constitution. The democracy monumentalized in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial was also allied to the constitution and monarchy because of the royal institution's role in solving the tension during the October 1973 revolution.

On the other end of the spectrum, the democracy aligned with modernization and the West, and without referencing the royal institution, was also evident in the said structures. The Democracy Monument in Bangkok avoided the architectural

styles of the monarchy and showcased modern architecture from abroad. The Constitution, Constitution Monuments, and the Democracy Monument replicas were also desacralized and emulated the visions and ideologies of Phibun. The constitution and replica monuments veered away from the influence of the monarchy and highlighted the importance of democracy through the June 24 National Day celebration activities.

Aside from modernization, democracy built on liberal ideas, particularly individual rights, was also apparent in the public monuments. The 14th of October 1973 Memorial monumentalizes the concept of democracy aligned with student empowerment and the events of the October 1973 revolution. It was also a product of democracy because the people participated in its construction, like how they also contributed to the creation of the Constitution Monuments and replicas of the Democracy Monument. It was far from the construction of the Democracy Monument and Victory Monument in Bangkok, which were products of authoritarianism because of how these structures were constructed. However, the said monuments later on became instrumental spaces for democracy together with the 14th of October 1973 Memorial due to the occupation of the activists. In addition, the memorial also represents different democratic values such as freedom, human rights, equality, and participation.

On the contrary, these public monuments also exhibited contradictions, such as the pursuit of democracy by aggressive means. The Democracy Monument and the Victory Monument symbolized the influence and power of the military. As products of the Phibun administration, these monuments served as political instruments for the military leadership of Phibun. They both asserted militaristic decorative elements and displayed imagery of militarism. While on the other hand, the 14th of October 1973 Memorial commemorates a democracy that is anti-military due to the events and demands of the October 1973 revolution.

The public monuments also reflected democracy as part of the nation-building policies of Thailand. They also evoke a sense of national pride because these grand structures showcase Thai society's cultural domain and identity.

These symbols and meanings of the public monuments mentioned in this dissertation are not just passive interpretations of Thai democracy. They are also

directly and indirectly challenged and continuously contested by the spatial agency or occupation of various social movements, particularly student-led protests. These areas transformed into democratic spaces and produced new layers of meanings and symbols, contributing to the already complicated concept of Thai democracy.

6.1. The June 1973 student protests

When the student uprisings in 1973 started to expand their protests and used locations outside their respective universities and the open fields such as Sanam Luang, the original meaning of the Democracy Monument and its association with the Phibun administration were contested.³³

One of the largest protests in the history of the Thai student movement started at Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok.³⁴ The University Rector, Dr. Sakdi Phasuknirand, who was connected to the Thanom Kittikachorn and Praphat Charusathien administration expelled nine Ramkhamhaeng students and members of the *Khon Roon Mai* group in June 1973. The students were accused of issuing an illegal magazine attacking the university administration and the government. The said magazine consisted of satirical remarks about the *Thung Yai* hunting scandal in May

³³ Looking at the geographical landscape of student activism before 1973, student protests and marches always took place in Bangkok, particularly in the universities and the open grounds of Sanam Luang. Sanam Luang is a public urban space in Bangkok which occupies an area of approximately 29.6 acres. Different buildings, universities, and institutions surround it. It is also a space for various public activities, such as royal rites and ceremonies. This public space already existed in 1782 and was initially named Pramain Grounds. Then in 1855, it was changed to Sanam Luang or Royal Grounds. After the June 1932 revolution, the supervision of Sanam Luang was transferred to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA). This transfer allowed public activities on grounds other than royal rites and ceremonies. One of these activities was political rallies. Aside from their football grounds and open spaces in their respective universities, students were allowed to use this space as one of their demonstration venues. It was accessible and convenient for the student protesters to mobilize their demonstrations, particularly the students of Thammasat University, the center of student activism, because the said university is located near Sanam Luang (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 16-21) (Piromrueen 2012, 12-13).

³⁴ Ramkhamhaeng University was established in 1971 through the efforts of liberal parliament members. It introduced a Liberal Arts curriculum and an open-admissions policy. The university did not require the entrance examination to make higher education accessible to all Thai high school graduates. Their admission policy and other liberal policies, such as the leniency on attendance, attracted many enrollees to this university (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi 1974, 35-36).

1973 (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 35-36) (Darling 1974, 13-14) (Bartak 1993, 7-8) (Kongkirati 2012, 246).³⁵

The university students launched their protest to support the students, eventually labeled as *Ramkamhaeng Nine*, from June 20-22, 1973. This historic protest started on their campus on the first day of the semester, June 20, when the Ramkamhaeng University students distributed leaflets before their classes began denouncing the expulsion of the nine students. There were reports of assault against the student activists, which triggered the students to intensify their actions and protests. It was reported that more than 400 students gathered at the Ramkamhaeng Memorial (Storm over expulsion 1973) (Students stage protest, hired thugs interfere 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 35-36) (Darling 1974, 13-14) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 23-24).

The next day, June 21, the Chulalongkorn, Mahidol, and Kasetsart University students joined the protest. They assembled at Sanam Luang in the morning and held a massive demonstration which was participated by about 10,000 students. Members from other National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) universities joined them in this battle.³⁶ Then they proceeded to the Democracy Monument and conducted a sit-in protest (see Photo 60). The protesters sang a marching song the students wrote while moving to the monument. The lyrics of these songs reflected their determination to fight for the Thai people and their democratic idealism. They chanted, “We students

³⁵ The scandal involved senior police and military officials who used army helicopters and weapons to hunt protected animals at the Thung Yai National Park or also known as the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary near the Thai-Burmese border. The pleasure hunting of the officials was only revealed when a helicopter crashed containing carcasses and hooves of rare and protected animals. The government attempted to cover the said issue by defending it as a secret mission and announcing the extension of their office for another year. As a result, this scandal triggered the public to react, particularly the student publications and organizations (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi 1974, 35-36) (Darling 1974, 13-14) (Bartak 1993, 7-8) (Kongkirati 2012, 246).

³⁶ The National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) or *Soon Klang Nisit Naksuksa Haeng Prathet Thai* was an inter-university organization formed in 1969 to promote good relationship among the university and college students, their welfare, culture, and freedom. The Center also wanted to protect the student benefits, further the educational standards, and render services for the welfare of society. It was initially composed of 11 universities and colleges, including Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Kasetsart University, Silapakorn University, Mahidol University, Chiang Mai University, Khon Kaen University, Songkla University, Prasanmitra Teachers’ College, Bangsaen Teachers’ College, and Patumwan Teachers’ College (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 28-29).

of Ramkhamhaeng can't be apathetic when the students of Thailand are ready to take action on our behalf" and "Fight without retreat, for the masses are waiting for us...we have joined together to fight for democracy" (Chaos as marching students protest 1973) (The Voice of the Nation 1973) (Thousands to join protest today 1973) (10,000 demonstrate 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 35-38) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 24-25) (Grossman 2009, 191).

The students carried placards and giant banners on their way to the monument. It was reported that students raised banners that read "Ramkhamhaeng is hot with power," "Absolutism is taking over higher education," and "Help us escape this danger" while marching to Democracy Monument (Chaos as marching students protest 1973) (Traffic grinds to a halt 1973) (The Voice of the Nation 1973) (Bunnag, A resurrection zeal amid "funeral scene" 1973, 3) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 35-38) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 24-25) (Grossman 2009, 191).

The demonstration halted the traffic flow in Bangkok during the afternoon, especially near the monument. It rained in the later part of the day, but the students continued to remain unsheltered and seated at the monument. They even stayed there overnight and refused to go home despite being wet because of the rain (see Photo 61) (Chaos as marching students protest 1973) (Traffic grinds to a halt 1973) (The Voice of the Nation 1973) (Bunnag, A resurrection zeal amid "funeral scene" 1973, 3) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 35-38) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 24-25) (Grossman 2009, 191).

In their protest at the monument, they emphasized their other demands, such as dismissing the rector and restoring the student status of the *Ramkhamhaeng Nine*. They also addressed other issues and problems of the government, such as the military constitution, corruption, and the plummeting Thai economy (Chaos as marching students protest 1973) (The Voice of the Nation 1973) (Bunnag, A resurrection zeal amid "funeral scene" 1973, 3) (Zimmerman 1974, 510) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 24-25).



Photo 60. Thousands of students gathered at the Democracy Monument on June 21-22, 1973, to protest the expulsion of the Ramkamhaeng Nine.
 Retrieved from (Bangkok's Biggest-Ever Demonstration 1973)
 (สมุดภาพแห่งความทรงจำจารึกประวัติศาสตร์ ๑๔ ตุลา, 2009).

On June 22, the government ordered the major universities to shut down in response to the demonstration, resulting in a sudden flock of students from other NSCT universities. The police barricaded and blocked routes to the Democracy Monument to prevent further students coming from the provinces from joining the protest (Police halt protest buses 1973). The uniformed men also drove away the

newly arrived demonstrators. They also dispatched loudspeakers that played government announcements, march music, and Thai songs to compete with the loudspeakers of the student protesters. However, these attempts and police confrontations failed to halt the students from gathering. The number of students swelled to around 40,000-50,000 (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 35-38) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 25-26).



Photo 61. Students spent their night in the Democracy Monument on June 21, 1973.

Retrieved from (The Voice of the Nation June 22, 1973)

(สมุดภาพแห่งความทรงจำจารึกประวัติศาสตร์ ๑๔ ตุลา, 2009).

Finally, the government announced that they accepted the demands of the students. The students started to disperse and go home on June 22 after hearing that the government agreed with the demands (see Photo 62). They also decided to meet the student representatives, including the *Ramkamhaeng Nine*, on June 23. However, the rector announced the suspension of the nine students instead of expulsion. The students were reinstated but suspended for various reasons. It further angered the

students because they thought the nine students would be readmitted without conditions. The student leaders became furious and decided to reconvene and plan a massive demonstration (Chaos as marching students protest 1973) (Govt meets student demands 1973) (A rotten deal, say fighting students 1973) (Keomongkol 1973, 1, 8) (Students go home-duped by "promises" 1973) (New student protest organized 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 38-40) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 26-27) (Kongkirati 2012, 246).



Photo 62. NSCT Secretary-General Thirayuth Boonme addressing the other student protesters at the Democracy Monument that their demands have been met.

Retrieved from (The Bangkok Post June 23, 1973).

The government continued the original agreement with the student leaders a few days later, and the rector resigned. This event was a turning point in the history of the Thai student movement and was considered another success for the NSCT. The June 1973 demonstration was the biggest demonstration organized by the students in Thailand during that time. It activated the passion and influence of the Thai students (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 41-42) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 27-30) (Kongkirati 2012, 246).

The June 1973 protest allowed Thai students to bring up their demand for a democratic constitution. This was the first time they publicly raised the issue of a new constitution (Kongkirati 2012, 246). In addition, it was clearly expressed by NSCT

Secretary-General Thirayuth Boonme, an Engineering student from Chulalongkorn University, that the protest they did in the Democracy Monument was only the beginning (Zimmerman 1974, 510). In his address to his fellow students at the Democracy Monument on June 22, 1973, he stressed the following (see Photo 61):

“We must win. If we students and the Thai public are not brave enough to fight for the Constitution, we would not be gathered here. But the fight must be won with reason. We must fight for the Constitution because the government of our country must be run by the people not the military. We want to show the government that we are not satisfied with the present government and want a permanent Constitution” (Govt meets student demands 1973) (Zimmerman 1974, 510)

Aside from being the first time to raise the issue of having a democratic constitution, the June 1973 protest was also the first time the students maximized the Democracy Monument as a venue for their grievances. Since then, the subsequent events in the history of the Thai student movement have followed to occupy this space. Months after the June 1973 protest, the students claimed Ratchadamnoen Avenue and the Democracy Monument once again as one of the venues of their protests.

6.2. The October 1973 student revolution

The demonstration about the *Ramkamhaeng Nine* propelled more massive protests from October 6-15, 1973. It was estimated that half a million people participated in this student-led demonstration. The students started the revolution by calling for immediate promulgation of the constitution and the unconditional release of the arrested activists campaigning for it on October 6.³⁷

³⁷ See Chapter 4 for the other details of the October 1973 student revolution.

On October 13, around 200,000 to 250,000 protesters joined the demonstration at Thammasat University. At noon, they started to march to the Democracy Monument, which lasted more than three hours (see Photo 63). They began the march by praying and singing the national and royal anthems led by the NSCT student leaders. The students followed it with thunderous applause and roars of “Victory!” The scouts cleared the path from Thammasat to the Democracy Monument. Then, some engineering students carried wooden or metal bars for defense. NSCT placed the “tough” engineering students, as they described it, in front of the march in case of any conflicts with the government forces. They called it the protection unit or commando unit of the march. Next to them was an all-female unit bearing flags (The ten days 1973) (How the protest drama unfolded 1973) (400,000 in march 1973) (Payakvichien 1973) (Chronology 1973) (Zimmerman 1974, 511) (Kasetsiri, From the 14th to the 6th of October: A Long Political History of Modern Siam 2019, 46-47).



Photo 63. Students leaving Thammasat University and marching to the Democracy Monument.

Retrieved from (The Nation: Sunday Nation Special 1973).

When the students reached the Democracy Monument, it became a resting point, operation center, and stage for them. It became a space and operation center for NSCT to calculate the situation and avoid a clash with the police. It was estimated that their number had already reached 400,000 at the monument (see Photo 64) (How

the protest drama unfolded 1973) (The Nation: Sunday Nation Special 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 52-53) (Heinze 1974, 498) (Bartak 1993, 11) (Noobanjong, The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms 2007, 44-45) (Grossman 2009, 192) (Wiriyasiri 2020).



Photo 64. Students protesting at the Democracy Monument.
Retrieved from (Bangkok Post 1973).

Food and water were distributed to the students, and first aid was also administered and organized by the NSCT student leaders at the Democracy Monument (see Photo 65). The geographic location of the monument made the distribution of food and crowd control easier because of its permeable street structure. In addition, the different access points surrounding the monument also helped the demonstrators to mobilize (Heinze 1974, 499) (Dovey, Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy 2001, 65-66) (Wiriyasiri 2020).



Photo 65. The Democracy Monument became a venue to distribute food, water, and other supplies to the protesters.

The distribution was administered and organized by the NSCT.
Retrieved from (Wiriyasiri 2020).

On October 14, King Bhumibol announced the resignation of the Thanom-Praphat government and the appointment of Professor Sanya Thammasakdi, Rector of Thammasat University, as the new Prime Minister. People cheered and ran into the streets after the said announcement. Then, thousands of students and other people were still at the Democracy Monument. *The Nation* mentioned that about 50,000 demonstrators assembled and conducted a rally on the night of October 14 at the said monument (Government resigns 1973) (The ten days 1973) (Grossman 2009, 193).

The monument became a space for the students who peacefully protested. On the night of October 14, the NSCT rallied more than 30,000 supporters at the Democracy Monument and pleaded for the government forces to stop shooting. On the morning of October 15, NSCT again rallied about 10,000 supporters at the monument and pleaded with the rebel students to stop. The NSCT leaders appealed to the militant students to return to the Democracy Monument. But just like what happened on the night of October 14, the groups ignored their pleas (The ten days 1973).

The monument was also a place for dispersal because the buses and army trucks returned the students to their homes. The government instructed the bus companies to provide free transport for the students to return home (Thanom, Prapass, Narong OUT! 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and

Political Change 1974, 57-58) (Heinze 1974, 502-504) (Bartak 1993, 14-15) (Grossman 2009, 193) (Kongkirati 2012, 244, 246).

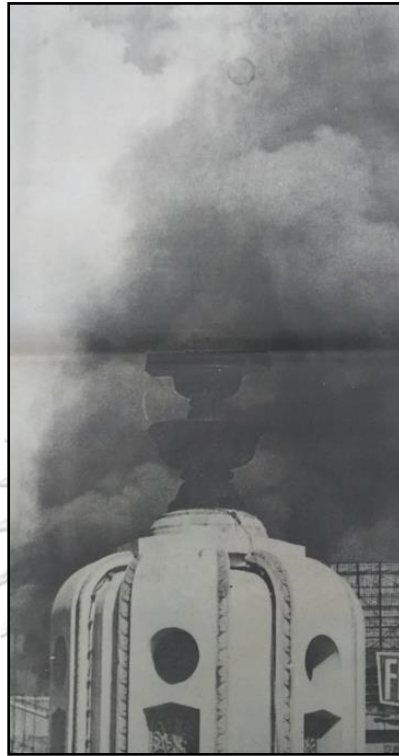


Photo 66. The Democracy Monument during the violent actions.
Retrieved from (The Bangkok Post 1973).

People from different sectors, including the NSCT students, volunteered to clean and clear away the remnants of the violent encounter between the protesters and government forces. They swept the streets and removed garbage and wrecked vehicles along Ratchadamnoen Avenue (see Photo 67 and 68) (The ten days 1973). But cleaning the Democracy Monument was not enough to forget the historic demonstrations that transpired there. Clearing away the garbage and sweeping the streets won't deny that the meanings and symbols of the Democracy Monument have been changed and contested. Its association with the 1932 revolution was replaced by the 1973 student movement (Winichakul, Thai Democracy in Public Memory: Monuments of Democracy and their Narratives 1999).

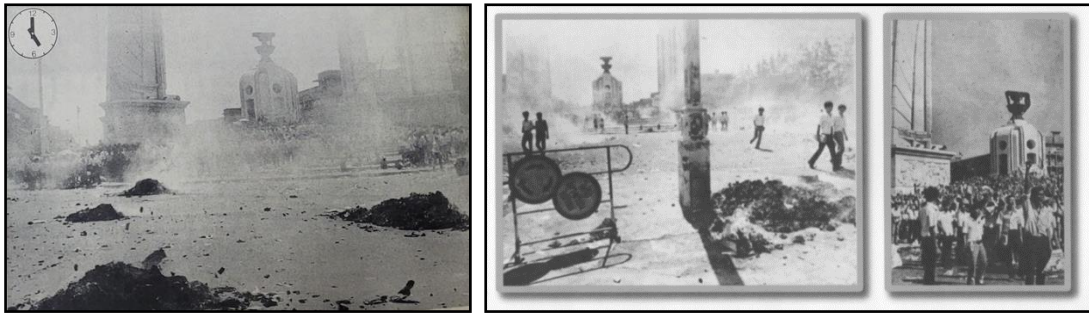


Photo 67. The aftermath of the demonstration at the Democracy Monument.
Students swept their trash and burned it after they received the news that the government accepted their demands on June 22, 1973. Retrieved from (The Bangkok Post June 23, 1973) (สมุดภาพแห่งความทรงจำจารึกประวัติศาสตร์ ๑๔ ตุลา, 2009).



Photo 68. The aftermath of the revolution.
Students and volunteers from different sectors were cleaning the Democracy Monument. Retrieved from (The Bangkok Post 1973) (Wiriyasiri 2020).

6.3. The Stories of Contention

At the beginning of this chapter, it was mentioned that the symbols and meanings of the said public monuments mirrored a young and fragile democracy associated with constitutionalism, monarchism, liberalism, modernization, militarism, authoritarianism, and nationalism. The emergence of the 1973 student movement and their occupation of the Democracy Monument paved the way for the contention of its symbols and meanings and further complication to the concept of democracy.

Among the public monuments discussed in this dissertation, the Democracy Monument in Bangkok was the only structure relevant to the 1973 student movement. The 14th of October 1973 Memorial was not yet constructed. Then the other

monuments, such as the Constitution Monuments, the replicas of the Democracy Monument, and the Victory Monument, were not yet maximized by the activists as protest venues.

6.3.1. The 1932 revolution in the 1973 student movement

The 1973 student movement made the Democracy Monument meaningful again because Phibun's successors already challenged the narrative of the 1932 revolution in the monument. Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn imposed policies that contributed to the 1932 amnesia, such as the suspension of the constitution and the change in the date of the National Day, which was celebrated before on June 24 (Winichakul, *Thai Democracy in Public Memory: Monuments of Democracy and their Narratives* 1999). The June and October 1973 student protests at the Democracy Monument allowed the students to claim the space and construct their own narratives.

This argument can be seen in how the June 24, 1932 revolution was commemorated in 1973. June 24 is significant for the Democracy Monument because it was constructed to celebrate the revolution's date and *Khana Ratsadon's* legacies. When the June 1973 protest for the *Ramkhamhaeng Nine* transpired at the Democracy Monument, the students had an opportunity to commemorate the 41st anniversary of the 1932 revolution. On June 24, a group of students conducted a symbolic protest by laying a wreath in the Democracy Monument (see Photo 69). The wreath, sent from Chiang Mai University, symbolized the death of their trust in their government leaders. Aside from the wreath, they also placed a sign that reads, "On last June 21 and 22, a public referendum pleads that the ruling power be returned to the people promptly—National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT)." The police immediately took away the wreath and the sign, which did not stay long in the monument (*The Voice of the Nation* 1973) (*The Bangkok Post* 1973).

Due to the abandonment of June 24 as an important day for Thailand after Phibun's term, this symbolic protest was far from the grand National Day activities that happened decades ago. The commemoration in 1973 was a symbolic protest in the context of the June 1973 demonstration rather than commemorating the original

essence of the 1932 revolution. Since the June 1973 protest days coincided with June 24, it can be noticed that the wreath and the signboard placed in the Democracy Monument symbolized the death of their trust in the military government and the demand to bring back the power to the people. It did not directly memorialize the meaning and purpose of the 1932 revolution. This action was a protest and response to how the government deceived them in their agreement during the June 1973 demonstration. The Democracy Monument became a space for the demands and democratic ideals of the student movement in 1973 and not to directly refer to the original meaning of June 24 as a significant turning point in the history of Thailand.

6.3.2. Militarism and Authoritarianism

It is also intriguing that the military forces who supported the commemoration of the 1932 revolution by having the military parade and other activities at the monument during Phibun's time were contrasted in 1973. It can be seen in how the government forces immediately removed the wreath and the signboard the students placed on the monument (see Photo 69). This was far from the message of the Democracy Monument and the idea of military leadership protecting democracy for the Thai people that were prominent during the Phibun regime.



Photo 69. Student leaders placed a wreath and signboard at the Democracy Monument on June 24, 1973, but the police authorities immediately took it away. Retrieved from (The Voice of the Nation June 25, 1973) (The Bangkok Post June 25, 1973).

The Thai democracy in the Democracy Monument associated with Phibun's militarism and authoritarianism was a contested narrative during the 1973 student

movement. The monument, a product of Phibun's military regime, transformed into a democratic space against the military leadership of Thanom Kittikachorn. The representations of militarism, such as the four wings surrounding the centerpiece of the monument and the relief structures depicting the story of the People's Party, were irrelevant in the context of the 1973 student protests. The 1973 student movement unconsciously disregarded these representations because the student protesters were focused on their goals and demands.

6.3.3. Monarchism

The association of democracy with the monarchy was also a contested narrative between the 1973 student movement and the Democracy Monument. The monarchy's presence in the 1973 student movement also challenged the absence of monarchy-related designs and symbols of the Democracy Monument. It was clear that the improvement of the Ratchadamnoen Avenue and the construction of the Democracy Monument were nation-building projects of Phibun to modernize Thailand and get the attention away from royal absolutism and institution. The image of *Arun*, which can be found at the turret of the monument, sealed this notion. It was interpreted as an anti-Chakri symbol the People's Party used in their architectural projects. Then during the 1973 demonstrations at the Democracy Monument, the students unfamiliarly disregarded this anti-monarchy nature of the monument through their actions.

The idea of Thai democracy with the King as the Head of the State was apparent in the 1973 student movement and how they claimed the Democracy Monument. Even though it was only officially designated in the preamble of the 1978 Constitution, the presence and influence of the royalty had already been present in the government. Under the preamble of this constitution, the King is positioned above the dirty, corrupt, competitive, partisan politics, alongside and in a symbiotic relationship with the Thai people (Tejapira 2016, 226-228). Student activists already recognized this concept in 1973 when they incorporated symbolism of the monarchy in their protests, and the King supported the revolution against the military dictatorship.

For example, in the June 1973 protest, students regularly turned and faced the King's palace and sang the King's song to emphasize that they still admired and respected the King despite their hostilities against the government (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 35-38) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 25-26).

Then in the October 1973 revolution, women volunteers carried the portraits of King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit while the rest hummed royal hymns during the march and at the monument. The areas surrounding the Democracy Monument and Ratchadamnoen Avenue at that moment were also adorned with royal images (see Photo 69) (How the protest drama unfolded 1973) (400,000 in march 1973) (The ten days 1973) (Noobanjong, The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms 2007, 44-45).

The carrying of the portraits of the King and Queen was interpreted as an alliance between the students and the monarchy, which did not last long due to the events in Thailand after 1973. The students incorporated the royal portraits in the October 1973 protests. They used them as shields against the threat of the military and police (Peleggi, The Aesthetics and Politics of Royal Portraiture in Thailand 2013, 91).

These pictures and stories of the royalty's influence on the October 1973 revolution solidified the imagery of Thai democracy and its linkage with the Thai monarchy. Then it was eventually attached and monumentalized in the Democracy Monument and later in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial.



Photo 70. Students holding the Thai national flags, Buddhist flags, portraits of King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit, protest banners demanding to bring power back to the people, and effigies of Praphat and Narong.

Retrieved from (The Nation: Sunday Nation Special 1973) (Sunday Nation 1973)
(Bangkok Post 1973) (ดับเทวดา 1973) (Bangkok Post 2010) (Wiriyasiri 2020).

6.3.4. Constitutionalism

If there were contested symbols and meanings of the Democracy Monument during the 1973 student movement, there were also symbols and meanings that were further emphasized. One of these was the concept of Constitutionalism.

The Democracy Monument reminded the people of the government's transformation from absolute to constitutional in 1932. It was constructed to memorialize this historic event, particularly the importance of the Constitution. This is the reason why the centerpiece of the monument is an image of a constitution placed in golden-stacked bowls. The 1973 student movement further highlighted this symbolism by claiming the death of democracy and the constitution in Thailand. The pink cloth planned to cover the centerpiece represents celebration, auspiciousness, and the importance of the change in the government during the inauguration of the Democracy Monument was changed to black cloth during the 1973 student movement. The covering of black cloth to the constitution image started to become a practice of the student protesters in the Democracy Monument. The meaning of pink cloth is precisely opposite from the black cloth, which symbolizes mourning and death. This was seen on the June 21, 1973 protest when the students climbed the turret and covered the constitution image with black cloth.

The June 21 demonstration looked like a funeral because the constitution in the Democracy Monument was covered with a black burial garment (see Photo 71 and 72). The heavy rain made the turret slippery, but the students still managed to climb it to cover the constitution. It was a symbolic act for the students to emphasize their demands aside from their call for a democratic constitution within six months (Chaos as marching students protest 1973) (The Voice of the Nation 1973) (Bunnag 1973, 3) (Zimmerman 1974, 510) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 24-25).



Photo 71. Students climbed the slippery wall of the Democracy Monument's centerpiece on June 21, 1973, to cover the constitution with black cloth to symbolize their protest against the suppression of freedom and mourning for democracy. Retrieved from (The Voice of the Nation June 22, 1973) (The Bangkok Post June 22, 1973) (The Bangkok Post June 25, 1973).



Photo 72. A banner was placed on the turret, which sends a message about hopelessness, power, and help. The student activists used this image of covering the constitution with black cloth in their pamphlets and leaflets published in 1973. Retrieved from (พิมพ์เพื่ออง 1973).

This action highlighted the mourning for the death of democracy of the students. It also emphasized their demands for a democratic constitution. This practice of using black color and cloth in the protest was repeated during the October demonstration at the Democracy Monument. On October 13, 1973, it was reported that students from Ramkhamhaeng University placed black flags at the monument while waiting for the protesters from Thammasat University (see Photo 73) (How the protest drama unfolded 1973) (Mighty call for freedom at Democracy Monument 1973).



Photo 73. Students from Ramkhamhaeng University at the Democracy Monument. They were waiting to join the protesters coming from Thammasat University. Retrieved from (The Nation: Sunday Nation 1973).

Aside from using black as a sign of mourning, the student activists in 1973 also started the practice of funeral rites in the Democracy Monument. This was seen in the October protest when some students raised a coffin with a dead body of a youth demonstrator inside to the top of the monument (see Photo 74). The activists raised it as a sign of their protest against the military government and to emphasize the cruelty of the Thanom regime. It was also a sign of mourning and a symbol of the students' sacrifices and democratic aspirations for Thailand. Different protests later copied this performative action at the monument. The Red Shirts or the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) also did this in their protest on April 11,

2010, by transforming it as a site for funeral rites (Chotpradit, *Revolution versus Counter-Revolution: the People's Party and the Royalist(s) in visual dialogue* 2016, 162-164).



*Photo 74. Students raised a coffin to the top of the Democracy Monument.
Retrieved from (Grossman 2009).*



*Photo 75. Students climbed to the top of the Democracy Monument and raised the Thai national flag.
Retrieved from (Wiriyasiri 2020).*

The students challenged the turret's height, which measures three meters and symbolizes the branches of government, when they ascended it during the June and October demonstrations. In the October revolution, some students climbed the turret

and raised the Thai national flag (see Photo 75). This performative action represents the students' power, perseverance, sacrifices, and unity to achieve a democratic constitution. It also emphasizes the control of the people over the government and the Constitution. No matter how slippery it was during the June protest and how chaotic the situation was during the latter part of the October protest, the students still aggressively claimed the turret as part of their narrative, which is distant from the statist notion and origin of the constitution in 1932.

6.3.5. Liberalism

Aside from constitutionalism, the ideas of liberalism were also intensified in 1973. Through the help of the Democracy Monument, the demands of the 1973 student movement were amplified. The structure represented and became the stage of the collective power of the people. It also became a platform for passionate students' speeches anchored on liberal ideas centered on their demands, societal injustices, sarcasm against the military government, and the democratic constitution campaign. It became a stage for the NSCT leaders and activists to express their sentiments and aspirations for Thailand.

Speeches from various student leaders were heard at the Democracy Monument on June 21, condemning the injustices against the students. The entire day was full of speeches, cheers, and sarcasm from the speakers that made the protesters who were listening laugh (Chaos as marching students protest 1973) (Traffic grinds to a halt 1973) (The Voice of the Nation 1973) (Bunnag 1973, 3) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 35-38) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 24-25) (Grossman 2009, 191).

The monument served as a stage for the activists' emotion-packed speeches on October 13. The students brought their amplifiers, microphones, and loudspeakers. The speakers were installed and placed in the posts around the Democracy Monument (see Photo 75). They demanded the release of the arrested activists and leaders from the military regime in their speeches (How the protest drama unfolded 1973) (The Nation: Sunday Nation Special 1973) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student

Activism and Political Change 1974, 52-53) (Heinze 1974, 498) (Bartak 1993, 11) (Noobanjong, *The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms* 2007, 44-45) (Grossman 2009, 192) (Wiriyasiri 2020).



Photo 76. A picture of a student protester fixing the loudspeaker installed in one of the posts near the Democracy Monument.
Retrieved from (Nithat and Suphap n.d.).

When people cheered and ran into the streets after the announcement of the resignation of the Thanom-Praphat government and the appointment of the new Prime Minister, about 50,000 demonstrators assembled on the night of October 14 at the Democracy Monument. The monument witnessed speeches made mainly by females in the said protest. They emphasized the death of the people and the violence inflicted by the government forces during that day (Government resigns 1973) (The ten days 1973).

The speeches delivered by the students contrasted with the speech delivered by Phibun at this monument 33 years ago. Phibun's promise of democracy for

Thailand was indirectly negated by the conditions of Thai society presented by the students in their speeches. The monument served as a silent witness for the address pledged by Phibun and the speeches articulated by the student activists. The two generations both emphasized the importance of the constitution and democracy. However, Phibun, in his address, highlighted the role of the prime minister and armed forces in a democracy and the promise of sustaining, supporting, and nurturing it. This seemed to be irrelevant anymore in the context of 1973. The context of the Democracy Monument during the 1940 inauguration was utterly different from the situation of 1973. This was due to various events that transpired after his term. The 1973 demonstrations led by the students allowed them to replace the narrative with their voices and fulfill their version of democratic goals for the Thai nation and the future.

The 1973 student movement not just challenged the Democracy Monument but also asserted the demands of the students through the protest banners they raised during the June and October demonstrations at the monument. If the 1940 inauguration adorned the Democracy Monument with balloons and decorations to celebrate the military leadership of Phibun and the legacies of *Khana Ratsadon*, the 1973 student protests raised placards and giant banners containing different messages addressed to the military government. Aside from banners, leaflets were distributed to the public during the June protest, and effigies of the government leaders were brought during the October protest at Ratchadamnoen Avenue. The students also claimed the monument when they conducted marching songs and protested chants about democracy, the constitution, and the military government during the protests.

During the June 1973 protest, students distributed leaflets to the public. Here is an excerpt taken from one of the leaflets distributed by the student activists. It was from the leaflet titled “The Voice of the Students and the People,” translated from Thai and retrieved from (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change 1974, 38) (Prizzia and Sinsawasdi, Evolution of the Thai Student Movement (1940-1974) 1975, 25):

“To fathers, mothers, and fellow citizens... Now, these incidents have indicated that we are ruled by the tyrants. They

oppress us. They want us to starve because the rice is so expensive. No one up there paid any attention to our distress. Our peaceful begging for help did not mean anything to them. Last night students all over the country joined this movement in peace to ask for the rights and freedom which are part of all humanity. We were hungry and cold, but we stayed here until the morning. However, the police surrounded us. They are now saying that they will let your children starve and walk voluntarily to the barrels of their guns.”

In the October 13 protest, some students carried effigies of the three tyrants, as they called (i.e., Thanom, Praphat, and Narong) while marching along Ratchadamnoen Avenue (How the protest drama unfolded 1973) (400,000 in march 1973).³⁸ Patriotic and democratic banners can also be seen around the Democracy Monument and along Ratchadamnoen Avenue (Noobanjong 2007, 44-45). It was also reported that some students were singing the song composed by Saeksan titled *Su Mai Thoi* or translated as “Unretreating Struggles,” which was considered as the anthem of the October 1973 revolution (Winichakul, Moments of Silence: The Unforgetting of the October 6, 1976, Massacre in Bangkok 2020, 232) (Deewarat and Phuweenaphan 2019, 21).

6.3.6. Modernization

The Democracy Monument symbolizes Thailand's modernization due to the 1932 revolution that overthrew the absolute monarchy in Siam. Many studies identify this revolution as the beginning of the modern period for Thai politics because of the introduction of societal changes, such as the constitution's creation and the emergence of political activism and representation (Hewison 1997, 11).

This context of modernization was evident in the Democracy Monument and its replicas and the Constitution Monuments. Aside from the design, layout, and

³⁸ Colonel Narong Kittikachorn is the son of Thanom and the son-in-law of Praphat. He was the Deputy Secretary General of the Board of Inspection and Follow-up of Government Operations (BIFGO) (Our Greatest Day--The People's Day 1973).

concept, it can also be aligned with the notion of democracy that was de-associated from the monarchy.

Modernization was also present in the October 1973 revolution and how student protests occupied the Democracy Monument. However, it was evident in a different context, particularly in Thai society's socio-economic and political aspects. The democracy prominent in the 1973 student revolution can be considered a product of modernization.

Using the different modernization theories, it can be argued that the economic development of Thailand contributed to the creation of a well-educated urban middle class that was substantial and accountable for the democratic campaigns of the country. Modernization theorists would argue that economic development plays a vital role in the democratization of Thailand (Englehart 2003, 253-256).

For example, one of the critical indicators of a growing Thai economy was the rapid increase of college students and the construction of universities in the 1960s. This expansion was brought about by prioritizing government funds allocated to the education sector. The vast number of students who had access to education were directly exposed to Western ideas and lifestyles, allowing them to have high personal aspirations. They became deeply influenced and enlightened by the Western notion of progress, individualism, achievement, and success (Darling 1974, 6-7).

Despite the increasing number of students who were given opportunities to make their lives comfortable because of access to education, it also became detrimental to Thai society. It paved the way for the rising activism among the students. Since the students were exposed to Western ideas, they aimed to become civil servants and contribute to the government. Unfortunately, the limited number of relevant jobs in the market failed to accommodate the students who graduated from the universities during the latter part of the 1960s. It led to frustration and disappointment among the Thai youth. Another contributing factor to the students' unrest was the declining state of the Thai economy in the 1970s. This decline reduced job opportunities and resulted in financial hardships. Many students remained unemployed after graduation (Darling 1974, 7-9).

Due to these events, the correlation of economic development with the emergence of a pro-democratic and politically empowered middle class, including the

student sector, can be justified. The emerging political activism of the students also prompted their attempt to modernize the political system of Thailand, which was ruled by a powerful and unshakeable bureaucracy and politically active and dominant military, which Fred Riggs defined as “bureaucratic polity” (Hewison 1997, 4-5). Although the modernization theory and its relationship with democracy were challenged later by different scholars, it cannot be denied that modernization in this context was evident in the 1973 revolution because of the action of the students to end this bureaucratic polity except the monarchy system and the Democracy Monument witnessed this student movement.

6.3.7. Nationalism

Aside from the anti-monarchical nature, there were also symbols and meanings of the Democracy Monument that the student protesters corresponded with during their protests, such as the ones about nationalism and religion Buddhism. Nationalism was evident in the 1973 student movement, and their occupation of the Democracy Monument symbolized the linkage between democracy and their faithfulness to the pillars of nation, religion, and monarchy.

The monument was a product of the nationalist agenda of Phibun. The structure also contains a few Buddhist elements, such as the sculpted *Naga* and the panel about religious values. The student activists underscored these representations unconsciously in their actions. Symbols of the Thai nation and Buddhism were evident in the 1973 demonstrations. The Thai flags were apparent in the June and October protests, while the NSCT leaders emphasized the Buddhist flags during the march from Thammasat University and the rally at the Democracy Monument.

During the June 1973 protest, it was observed that students raised and waved the Thai national flag, and the crowd roared in approval (Chaos as marching students protest 1973) (Traffic grinds to a halt 1973) (The Voice of the Nation 1973) (Bunnag, A resurrection zeal amid "funeral scene" 1973, 3). In the October protest, some students had the Thai national and Buddhist flags known as *Thong Dhammacak* as a symbol of loyalty to the nation and religion (see Photo 70) (How the protest drama unfolded 1973) (400,000 in march 1973) (The ten days 1973) (Noobanjong, The

Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms 2007, 44-45).

The June and October 1973 protests revealed the importance of public spaces in achieving the democratic aspirations of the students. It also exposed that the narratives of these spaces can be transformed based on contentious politics and how it was occupied. For example, Thammasat University through Sanam Luang and along Ratchadamnoen Avenue to the Democracy Monument served as a path of democracy in 1973. This democracy was far from the kind of democracy imposed by the 1932 revolution. The Democracy Monument signified the students' campaign to fulfill their version of democratic ideology. These public venues enabled the students to challenge the military regime's power and the significance of the Democracy Monument during that time. From being a political tool and military device, it transformed into a symbol of student activism, democracy, and empowerment (Dovey, Memory, Democracy, and Urban Space: Bangkok's Path to Democracy 2001, 66-67, 71) (Noobanjong, The Democracy Monument: Ideology, Identity, and Power Manifested in Built Forms 2007, 47-48).

The pictures of the students and people occupying Ratchadamnoen Avenue and surrounding the Democracy Monument have given the monument the true meaning it previously lacked—the people. Due to the October 14, 1973 student revolution, the monument and the avenue contained the memory and power of the monarchical institution, the state, and the people for democracy (Prakitnonthakan, Memory and Power on Ratchadamnoen Avenue 2008, 8).

6.4. Thai Democracy in the 1973 Student Movement

Except for militarism and authoritarianism, the Thai democracy constructed by the 1973 student movement from their occupation of the Democracy Monument was associated with the concepts of constitutionalism, monarchism, liberalism, modernization, and nationalism. The monument, a product of Phibun's military and authoritarian regime, transformed into a democratic space against the military leadership of Thanom Kittikachorn. From being a mediated built form of Thai democracy based on the Western school of democracy with different and complex

ideologies attached, this monument contained another layer of meaning comprising the combination of the traditional and Western schools of democracy due to the 1973 student protests.

The traditional school of democracy, specifically the emphasis on the significance of the monarchy in Thai society and the democracy suited to the conditions of Thailand, which was the “Democracy with the Monarch as the Head of the State,” was highlighted at the end of the 1973 student movement and embedded at the Democracy Monument. The monarchy's presence in the 1973 student movement contested the absence of monarchy-related designs and symbols of the Democracy Monument and Phibun's original plan of modernizing Thailand and getting the attention away from royal absolutism and institution.

As argued by Prajak Kongkirati, the Thai democracy that was imprinted in the 1973 student movement was a “Royalist Nationalist Democracy” or a combination of the “Royalist Nationalism” that was prominent when Siam's independence against the European colonial powers was maintained by the monarchical institution and “Monarchic Democracy” that argues that democracy, not originated in 1932 but can be traced back to the Sukhothai period and to the granting of King Prajadhipok of the constitution to the Thai people (Prakitnonthakan, *Memory and Power on Ratchadamnoen Avenue* 2008, 10).

The Democracy Monument was a product of Phibun's nationalist agenda. However, in the context of the 1973 October revolution, the nationalism that surfaced in the accounts is a nationalism anchored to the faithfulness to the pillars of nation, religion, and monarchy. Through the different performative actions of the student protesters in the spatial structure, they highlighted the linkage between democracy and royalist nationalism.

This kind of democracy was attached to the Democracy Monument through the different images produced after the 1973 revolution. However, despite the perspective on the reliance of the students and intellectuals on the monarchical institution for legitimacy (Prakitnonthakan, *Memory and Power on Ratchadamnoen Avenue* 2008, 9), it can also be argued that the Western school of democracy was also evident in the 1973 student movement through student activism and people's participation and representation. Saeksan Prasertkul even proposed towards the end of

the 1973 movement that students should become members of the parliament through the creation of another house, the House of Youth or *Yuwasapha* (Mektrairat 2020, 88-90).

In addition to the idea of the collective power of the people, the elements of constitutionalism through the constitution centerpiece and the liberal values through the principles of the People's Party represented in the monument emphasized the Western school of democracy advocated by the student movement. The student activists further highlighted these symbolisms by claiming the death of democracy and manifesting their desire for a democratic constitution. Aside from constitutionalism, the ideas of liberalism were also intensified in 1973. Through the help of the Democracy Monument, the demands of the 1973 student movement anchored on liberal ideas were amplified.

Modernization was also present in the October 1973 revolution and how student protests occupied the Democracy Monument. The structure embodied Thailand's modernization from the traditional regime to the period of constitutional monarchy. However, the modernization embedded by the 1973 student movement in the monument was in a different context, particularly the students and the middle class being the product of modernization or development in Thai society's socio-economic and political aspects that contributed to the democratic campaign to oust the military regime.

It should also be noted and recognized that the 1973 student movement consisted of various ideologies due to the factions among the students. Still, it was evident that the narrative that triumphantly emerged at the end of the revolution was the democracy anchored to the traditional perspective. The Democracy Monument serves as a reminder of the young and fragile democracy anchored on the Western school introduced during the 1932 revolution. However, due to the 1973 student movement, the spatial agency or the student protesters produced a new layer of meaning and left a democracy aligned with the traditional school. This imagery of democracy remained on this monument until the succeeding movements started to occupy this structure and claim their respective narratives.

After the 1973 October Revolution, the Democracy Monument in Bangkok witnessed various demonstrations from different political spectrums, cementing its

place in the Thai social movements. With the re-emergence of the student movement in 2020, the narratives of the 1932 revolution and the 1973 student movement were opened again for contention due to the nuances of the current movement regarding the concepts of democracy and interpretation of the structure. Nowadays, images of the Democracy Monument are becoming more visible on social media. But the question here is, how do they understand the meaning of democracy and the monument's purpose? Is it still based on the original meaning, or do they recognize it based on the layers of meaning produced through time? These are some of the points that will be discussed further in the next chapter.



CHAPTER VII: THE 2020 STUDENT MOVEMENT AND THE LAYERING OF THE DEMOCRATIC MEANINGS

The subsequent events in the political history of Thailand after 1976 resulted in several impediments to the development of Thai democracy. Despite the success of the October 1973 revolution, the student movement dealt a fatal blow after 1976. It lost its limelight and then eventually re-emerged in 2020. With their resurgence, the public monuments that were irrelevant during the 1973 student movement eventually transformed into democratic spaces due to contentious politics. Aside from the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, the other monuments, such as the 14th of October 1973 Memorial, the Victory Monument, the Constitution Monuments, and the replicas of the Democracy Monument, also became instrumental for Thai democracy by being protest venues in 2020.

As a result, the 2020 student movement and how the student activists maximized these structures further enhanced the fascinating discourse on Thai democracy. They produced new meanings and contributed to the complexity of Thai democracy as the monuments turned into democratic spaces and repositories of democracy.

This chapter discusses this complexity and the layering of the meanings of these monuments concerning democracy—from the 1932 revolution, the October 1973 revolution, and the 2020 re-emergence of the student movement. It asserts that the Thai democracy added to the narrative of the public monuments formed by the student protesters while using these spatial structures adhered to the Western school of democracy. It was intertwined with the elements of constitutionalism, liberalism, modernization, and nationalism, leaving the concepts of militarism, authoritarianism, and monarchism contested.

7.1. The Decline of the Thai Student Movement

Various events after the 1973 student movement emerged, and it caused the activism of the Thai students to wind up. The October 6, 1976 massacre marked the

end of the student movement in Thailand. The NSCT, which played an important role in the history of the Thai student movement, was already disbanded. The authorities' brutal suppression of the October 1976 protests deeply dampened the spirit of student activism (Kongkirati 2012, 250-252).

There were attempts to revive student groups and associations after 1976. An umbrella organization of students (i.e., the Student Federation of Thailand or SFT) was formed. However, it was no longer like the NSCT. Students attempted several campaigns and activities but failed to bring back their passion. They were no longer inspired to organize political mobilization (Matkhao and Sooktawee 2005, 137) (Kongkirati 2012, 251).

Some students still engaged in political and social issues, but they only aligned themselves with other sectors of society and became allies. They were no longer considered leaders of social movements (Kongkirati 2012, 252-253). For example, they were inactive allies and supporters of the democratic cause during the 1992 Black May or the Bloody May democratic movement.³⁹

The political involvement of the Thai students faded after the May uprising. The young people were more concerned with ensuring their economic well-being than addressing social concerns. The Student Federation of Thailand was still active in the social movements, but the students' general perception was mainly focused on their personal lives (Matkhao and Sooktawee 2005, 138).

Civil society groups and non-governmental organizations emerged as the new force in Thai society. They replaced the students as the prominent leader of the

³⁹ In the 1992 Black May or also called the Bloody May democratic movement, the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) opposed General Suchinda Kraprayoon and his National Peace Keeping Council that staged the coup in 1991 (Lertchoosakul, *The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests 2021*, 207). SFT supported the democratic cause by joining the Confederation for Democracy (CFD) that Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, the leader of the anti-military movement, founded. However, the SFT voted against the rally. It was noticed that the students were absent in the May 17, 1992 demonstration at Sanam Luang. The violence occurred when Major-General Chamlong was arrested, and the military attacked the protesters (Offenhartz 2006, 56-58). This movement was led by the Thai elite and middle class, who were members of the October generation or known as *Octoberists*. The term, *Octoberist*, was coined by Saeksan in the 1990s to refer to the survivor of the October 1973 and October 1976 student movements. Many of them played crucial roles in the 1992 mobilization (Lertchoosakul, *The Rise of the Octoberists: Power and Conflict among Former Left Wing Student Activists in Contemporary Thai Politics 2012*, 14-15). On May 20, King Bhumibol intervened, and the demonstrations ended. General Suchinda resigned, and the Parliament canceled the pro-military clauses in the constitution (Offenhartz 2006, 56-58).

social movements in Thailand (Kongkirati 2012, 252). During the time of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, students were able to express their sentiments against his administration through the SFT. In 2002, they collaborated with different non-governmental organizations to be part of social and political discussions. But it was evident that the SFT was not as strong as the student organizations formed before. Their role was to check the politicians and support the people's movement. Still, as the years went by, the SFT weakened because its leaders had less experience assuming responsibilities, and the student unions were no longer appropriately represented. As a result, students were mainly absent from the important issues of the Thaksin administration, and sometimes, the SFT only attracted a small following from their members (Offenhartz 2006, 126-141).

The students became symbolic and strategic allies in Thailand's polarized political situation between the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or Yellow Shirts⁴⁰ and the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or Red Shirts.⁴¹ Despite the students' participation in the demonstrations, they were not

⁴⁰ Due to controversies and corruption-related issues, the anti-Thaksin coalition called People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or *Phanthamit Prachachon Phuea Prachathipatai* launched a series of demonstrations in Bangkok and other parts of Thailand from February-March 2006. The PAD, also known as "Yellow Shirts," was a broad alliance of urban elite or conservatives, royalists, business groups not part of Thaksin's patronage system, and non-governmental organizations. Part of this coalition was the students through the non-governmental organizations and the Student Federation of Thailand. When it was agreed that the primary goal of the PAD was Thaksin's resignation and not the demand for royal intervention, the students officially launched their protests on their respective campuses, demanding the resignation of Thaksin. The SFT kicked off the first PAD demonstration on February 11, 2006. Students marched from Thammasat University to Sanam Luang. Aside from the protests, they also created a new organization named Students for Democracy. Thammasat students also launched their signature campaign for Thaksin's resignation. On September 19, 2006, the coup ended the Thaksin administration, and it intensified the polarized political situation in Thailand (Pye and Schaffar 2008, 40-44, 56).

⁴¹ The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or also known as the "Red Shirts" was created after the 2006 coup and as a reaction against PAD or the anti-Thaksin movement. An anti-coup and anti-dictatorship front was formed in 2007 as a small-scale organization in Thailand's north and northeastern provinces. Then this movement also embraced the urban working class and the urban poor. It also included a small portion of the urban middle class, including university students. Not all these urban groups supported Thaksin. Some of them were pro-democracy groups. They later changed their name to the National United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (NUDD). In 2008, they opposed and regarded the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva as undemocratic and illegitimate because the Democrat Party did not have a majority in the Parliament, and it was only backed-up by the military. They demanded that the Abhisit government return the power to the people, and Abhisit declined. His government faced major protests in 2009 and 2010 from the Red Shirt movement (Charoensin-o-larn 2013, 208-210).

considered leaders and decision-makers of the two factions (Lertchoosakul, The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests 2021, 208).

After the military coup carried out by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha on May 22, 2014, the following events provided the foundation for a more significant battle for Thai students. In the subsequent years, small-scale protests organized by the students started to become prevalent in Thailand. Student activists, disunified by the polarized political situation of Thai society, began to reunite and aimed to return democracy to Thailand (Waiwitlikhit 2020, 21).

General elections were held in March 2019, marking the supposed end of the absolute military rule of General Prayuth. However, societal discontent increased with the military because of the military-drafted constitution's political maneuvering and anti-democratic elements. Prayuth, the 2014 military coup leader, retained his post as the Prime Minister of Thailand. Under the constitution, 250 senators were handpicked by the military junta, significantly influencing the Parliament. Allegations of corruption in the military regime also added further discontent from the people. When the restrictions on expression and assembly were lifted, the Thai people started to voice their concerns against the military-backed government (#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest 2020) (Waiwitlikhit 2020, 21).

7.2. The 2020 Student Movement

The dissolution of the Future Forward Party or *Phak Anakhot Mai* was considered a turning point in the re-emergence of student movements in Thailand. The 2019 polls witnessed the Future Forward Party's popularity, attracting support from first-time voters and the youth. It became one of the largest opposition parties in Thailand and won more than 6 million votes. However, on February 21, 2020, the Constitutional Court dissolved the party because of the claim that it violated election laws regarding donations. In addition, the court disbanded the party for taking loans from its founder and banned the 16 executives of the party from politics for ten years. The leader of the said party, Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, who was also included

in the ban denied the allegation. Many students were outraged by the court's decision. As a response, the Student Union of Thailand, led by Jutatip Sirikhan, launched a protest at Thammasat University and hundreds of students and people gathered on February 22.⁴² The protesters raised their three-finger salute and lit candles during the rally. Since then, political protests and flash mobs from university and high school students erupted from February to March 2020 (Timeline: Crackdown on protests 2020) (Setboonsarng 2020) (Waiwitlikhit 2020, 21) (Phoborisut 2020, 3) (#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest 2020, 5) (Lertchoosakul, The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests 2021, 206-218).⁴³

The February protests were observed as the return of students to the streets since the 1970s. However, due to the lockdown brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, campus protests were suspended in March. Authorities imposed a state of emergency on March 26, 2020, to stop the coronavirus spread and limit people's gatherings and travel. The demonstrations of the students resumed in late July 2020. The students continued their campaign online using social media instead. However, there were still some pro-democracy groups allied with the students that launched several small political gatherings and commemorations between March and July (Timeline: Crackdown on protests 2020) (Waiwitlikhit 2020, 21) (Phoborisut 2020, 3) (#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest 2020, 5) (Lertchoosakul, The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests 2021, 206-218).

Aside from the dissolution of the Future Forward Party, the disappearance of exiled Thai activist Wanchalearm Satsaksit in June 2020 also triggered the students to launch their protests. He was abducted by armed men in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁴² The Student Union of Thailand was formed in 2018 and led by student activist Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak of Thammasat University. It aims to support Thai students in their problems and push for a democratic, equal, and fair Thai society where human rights are respected ('Penguin' sets up Student Union coalition 2018).

⁴³ The Thai student activists started using the three-finger salute in 2014 as a sign of protest against the military junta. It was adapted from the dystopian novel and adapted film series titled *Hunger Games*. The salute in the novel and film is a gesture of thanks, respect, gratitude, or goodbye to a loved one. However, the Thai activists used it as a sign of defiance because of the similarities between Thai society with the authoritarian regime in the fictional story (Cogan 2021).

After the news broke out, social media campaigns and small gatherings escalated in Thailand (#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest 2020, 6) (Sombatpoonsiri, *From Repression to Revolt: Thailand's 2020 Protests and the Regional Implications* 2021, 4).



Photo 77. The July 18, 2020 protest at the Democracy Monument.
Retrieved from (Bangkok Post 2020).

The Free Youth Movement or *Yaowachon Plot-èek* and the Student Union of Thailand led the return of student protests in Thailand after the pandemic restrictions started to ease in the country.⁴⁴ More than 2,500 people gathered at the Democracy Monument on July 18, 2020 (see Photo 77). The protesters supported the groups' initial demands: an end to the government's intimidation of critics, dissolution of the Parliament, and a new constitution. Free Youth secretary-general Tattap "Ford" Ruangprapaikitseree and Arnon Nampa gave speeches in the protest. They criticized the government on several issues, including the COVID-19 response in Thailand.

⁴⁴ The Free Youth Movement was launched during the July 18 protest by various university organizations from Bangkok and other regional campuses. Although before July 2020, the idea of the term "Free Youth" was already present. It started unexpectedly on Facebook in November 2019, and the #FreeYouth helped spark the largest anti-government protests in Thailand. The objective of launching the Free Youth Facebook page was to allow the youth to discuss and exchange ideas about Thailand's future. Then it suddenly grew into a broader youth movement that seeks to instill political and social change in Thai society. The said movement was successful in 2020 in their social media campaign because the Free Youth hashtag became popular and the second most used hashtag in the Thai Twittersphere in 2020. They also inspired other groups to launch their versions, such as Free Chiang Rai, Free Taxi Drivers, Free Monks, etc. (Sinpeng 2021, 193-194) (Sombatpoonsiri, *From Repression to Revolt: Thailand's 2020 Protests and the Regional Implications* 2021, 4).

They also gave the government a two-week deadline to respond to their demands and warned that the protests would be intensified. In addition, other youth groups eventually joined the fight against the current regime and pushed for structural change in Thai society. These are the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration or *Naewruam Thammasat Lae Gan Chumnum*,⁴⁵ Bad Student or *Nakrian Lew Nai Rongrian Saen Di*,⁴⁶ and the Democracy Restoration Group or *Glum Feun Fu Prachathipatai*⁴⁷ (Rumblings of revolt against government get louder 2020) (Dissolve Parliament in 14 days: Free Youth issues ultimatum to govt 2020) (Timeline: Crackdown on protests 2020) (Waiwitlikhit 2020, 21) (Phoborisut 2020, 3) (#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest 2020, 6-7) (Lertchoosakul, The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests 2021, 206-218).

After this youth-led street protest at the Democracy Monument on July 18, the student movement intensified in the following days and months. Based on the estimated figures compiled by the Mob Data project, the student protests in 2020 were highly scattered throughout Thailand and took place in sixty-two out of seventy-seven provinces.⁴⁸ From the 385 pro-democracy protests, 130 anti-government and student-inspired demonstrations were recorded in Bangkok. The capital registered with the highest number of protests then, followed by the provinces with major universities, such as Chiang Mai with twenty protests, Khon Kaen with nineteen, Ubon Ratchathani with thirteen, and Songkhla with ten (McCargo 2021, 10).

⁴⁵ The United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UTFD) is a newly formed group of student activists in 2020. Members are based from Thammasat University and led by Panusaya "Rung" Sithijirawattanakul and Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak (Chotpradit, Shattering Glass Ceiling 2022) (The protest leaders facing criminal cases 2021).

⁴⁶ A few high school students from different schools founded the Bad Student (in Very Good Schools) in 2020. Then, it was developed into a network of secondary students in Thailand campaigning against conservative norms and institutions such as the school, government, or the monarchy (Lertchoosakul, The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests 2021, 210).

⁴⁷ DRG is an allied group of student activists. It was established in 2017 as a response to the military coup. It is a non-profit organization and network of different sectors, including students, which aims to create a strong civil society movement, oppose authoritarian regimes, and create a democratic parliamentary political system in Thailand (Democracy Restoration Group 2021).

⁴⁸ The Mob Data project collaborates with Amnesty International Thailand and iLaw, a Thai non-governmental organization. They record the details of every significant protest in Thailand, including the 2020 student movement (McCargo 2021, 10).

These demonstrations allowed the students to adopt creative performative actions to emphasize their demands. The groups of protesters also evolved into large networks amidst the challenges and crackdown of the government forces. The students also maximized different public spaces and monuments to pressure the government. The occupation of the student movement in these structures resulted in the production of new meanings and contested narratives, which echoed the complicated concept of Thai democracy.

7.3. The Layering of Democratic Meanings

7.3.1. The 1932 revolution in the 2020 student movement

The student demonstrations that transpired in 2020 created a new layer of meaning that added to the narrative claimed by the 1973 student movement in the Democracy Monument during the June and October 1973 protests. It can be remembered that the 1973 movement occupied the monument as a space for their demands and democratic aspirations, not for observing the 1932 revolution and the legacies of Phibun's military regime and the *Khana Ratsadon*, which were the purpose of constructing the monument. The 2020 student movement challenged this narrative by making the 1932 revolution meaningful again and commemorating the People's Party's contribution during their protests.

The symbols and meaning of the public monuments, such as the relief structures in the Democracy Monument depicting the story of the People's Party, were irrelevant in the context of the 1973 student protests. However, in the context of the 2020 student movement, the contributions and legacies of the People's Party have been recognized, especially the change it brought to the Thai political system.

For example, the Democracy Restoration Group launched a protest together with another pro-democracy group, the Resistant Citizen, on June 24, 2020.⁴⁹ They gathered at the Democracy Monument and commemorated the 88th anniversary of the 1932 revolution (see Photo 78). The activists projected footage of the Thai political events and re-enactment of the 1932 revolution, particularly the story of the *Khana Ratsadon*, on a giant makeshift screen and through hologram images on the road. It also presented the reading of *Khana Ratsadon* leader Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena of the Declaration of the New Siamese State that ended the absolute monarchy in Thailand. Some activists dressed up like the military officers of the People's Party. The two groups called for a democratic constitution and highlighted the importance of democracy (Bangkok rally marks anniversary of 1932 democratic revolution 2020) (Reenactment, Model Plaque Mark 88 Years of Democratic Revolt 2020).



Photo 78. The Democracy Restoration Group and Resistant Citizen projected the story of the Khana Ratsadon on the giant makeshift screen at the Democracy Monument.

Retrieved from (The Nation Thailand 2020).

⁴⁹ The Resistant Citizen is an anti-coup activist group that was formed in 2014. It opposed the military coup of Prayuth and the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) on May 22, 2014. It aims to restore democracy, the rule of law, and the rights of the Thai people (พลเมืองได้กลับ Resistant Citizen 2015).



Photo 79. The Democracy Restoration Group celebrated the birthday of Plaek Phibunsongkhram on July 14, 2020, near the Democracy Monument. Retrieved from (The Nation Thailand 2020).

The Democracy Restoration Group also celebrated the 123rd birthday of Phibun on July 14, 2020, near the Democracy Monument. To commemorate Phibun, the group had a birthday party and ate *pad thai*, which was the Thai dish that Phibun popularized and imposed during his military regime (see Photo 79) (Field Marshall Plaek celebrated with phad Thai feast 2020).

Even though it was through the allied groups of the students (i.e., Democracy Restoration Group and Resistant Citizen) and not directly an initiative of the student protesters, the messages and the reference to the 1932 revolution were cascaded to the protests conducted by the students later. This was seen in the August 10 protest at Thammasat University Rangsit Campus when Thai student activist and leader Panusaya "Rung" Sithijirawattanakul bravely read out the ten demands of the student activists about the monarchy reforms at Thammasat University Rangsit campus. It included the call for withdrawing Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code, known as *lèse-majesté*, and amnesty for those prosecuted because of criticizing the monarchy. She also referred to the 1932 revolution as an unfinished mission (Chotpradit, Shattering Glass Ceiling 2022). This protest led to more charges of sedition and lesser crimes (#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest 2020, 7) (Sombatpoonsiri, From Repression to Revolt: Thailand's 2020 Protests and the Regional Implications 2021, 4).

As well as on September 20, the pro-democracy student leaders also placed a plaque at Sanam Luang to commemorate the 1932 revolution. And lastly, the new *Ratsadon* network group was formed in October 2020 and got inspiration from the

Khana Ratsadon of 1932. These events showed that the 1932 revolution's influence on the 2020 student movement was highly apparent. The meaning of the Democracy Monument for the 2020 demonstrations returned to its original purpose—commemorate the change that materialized in Thai society during the 1932 revolution.



Photo 80. Pro-democracy student leaders held a new plaque to commemorate the 1932 revolution at the protest in Sanam Luang on September 20, 2020.

The plaque stated the date September 20, 2020, followed by the proclamation: “At this place, the people have expressed their will that this country belongs to the people and is not the property of the monarch as they have deceived us.”

Retrieved from (Associated Press 2020) (Thai PBS World 2020).

Thousands of students and protesters assembled at Thammasat University in the morning and headed to the overnight political gathering in Sanam Luang on September 19, 2020. The police reported that around 20,000 participated in the demonstration. However, according to the organizers, the crowd reached 100,000 people. The rally demanded a new constitution and the resignation of the current government. Some leaders of the September 19 protest also pressed for the monarchy reforms initially launched last August. The rally was also attended and supported by some politicians, other sectors of Thai society such as the LGBTQIA+ community, and the Red Shirt veterans of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD). The morning of the next day, September 20, the march to the Parliament did not push through. Instead, the student protesters from the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UFTD) laid down a new round brass plaque commemorating the 1932 Revolution in Sanam Luang near the Grand Palace area. Then, they named Sanam Luang to Sanam Ratsadon to emphasize that the people owned the grounds. The inscription on the plaque emphasized that Thailand belonged to the people, not

the monarchy (see Photo 80). The demonstration ended after the protesters marched outside the Supreme Court and handed their petition letters containing their demands, including the monarchy reforms, to the Privy Council president via the Metropolitan Police Bureau. The plaque installed during the protest was removed the next day. There was an original plaque placed in the Royal Plaza before, but it was removed in 2017 and then replaced by a new one that praised the monarchy (see Photo 81) (Timeline: Crackdown on protests 2020) (Protesters ready to declare 'new People's Party' 2020) (Protesters' new democracy plaque removed overnight 2020) (The perils of protests 2020).⁵⁰



Photo 81. The missing plaque.

On the left is the former memorial plaque of Khana Ratsadon at Dusit Palace Royal Plaza. However, on April 14, 2017, the historic plaque went missing, and a new one at the right replaced it. Retrieved from (Khaosod English 2017).

Installing the new plaque commemorating the 1932 Revolution signaled the formation of the new *Khana Ratsadon*. It was revived and named People's Party 2020 or *Khana Ratsadon 2563*. The construction of the movement was formalized in

⁵⁰ The memorial plaque of Khana Ratsadon was installed in 1936 to commemorate the 1932 revolution. It was made of brass and stated the following: "Here at dawn on June 24, 1932, Khana Ratsadon brings into being the constitution for the sake of the country's prosperity." This plaque was mysteriously replaced by a new one on April 14, 2017 with the following statements: "May Siam be blessed with prosperity forever. May the people be happy and cheerful and become the strength of the country" and "The respect for *Phra Ratanattaya*, the state, one's family, and the faithfulness towards one's king will all contribute to the prosperity of one's state." The *Phra Ratanattaya* mentioned in the inscriptions pertains to the three jewels of Buddhism: Buddha, Dhamma (doctrines or teachings), and Sangha (monastic order and community) (You say you want a revolution plaque -- well, it's gone 2017) (The history and significance of the Khana Ratsadon memorial plaque 2020).

October 2020. It was described as the third phase of the network organization of the 2020 Thai student movement after the Free Youth and Free People expansion (Sombatpoonsiri, From Repression to Revolt: Thailand's 2020 Protests and the Regional Implications 2021, 4). In the same month it was formed, the said democracy group eventually renamed themselves *Ratsadon* to show that everyone is a leader in the protests and demonstrations in Thailand (Protesters rename their group 'Ratsadon', vow to rally again today 2020). The *Ratsadon* group became an umbrella movement of all anti-establishment movements calling for political reforms in Thailand. It comprises groups such as the Free Youth, Free People, United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UFTD), and Bad Student. This group was inspired by *Khana Ratsadon 2475*, who launched the democratic revolution in 1932 (Can Thailand's protest movement heal its ideological split? 2020).

The 2020 student protests outside Bangkok also recognized the contributions of the People's Party through the Constitution Monuments and replicas of the Democracy Monument. For example, the student protesters in other parts of Thailand commemorated the 88th anniversary of the 1932 revolution by conducting symbolic gestures in places related to *Khana Ratsadon* or in public spaces where their actions can be easily seen. The common activities that the students did were reciting or playing the People's Party Declaration and decorating the protest venue with a replica of the People's Party's plaque. Despite the mass gathering prohibition due to COVID-19 and the intimidation, harassment, and surveillance from the government forces, the student activists still celebrated this historical event in at least 21 places in 15 provinces (The 88th anniversary of June 24th: A National Day on which commemoration is banned, 21 events organized amidst intimidation and harassment throughout Thailand 2020).



Photo 82. Students gathered on June 24, 2020, to commemorate the 1932 revolution at the replica of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen. Retrieved from (Thai Lawyers for Human Rights 2020).

In Khon Kaen, iron barriers were installed, and firetrucks were parked near the replica of the Democracy Monument. But despite the signage stating that there was a fire drill on that day, a small number of Khon Kaen University students and the *Khon Kaen's Had Enough* group continued to protest and remember the June 24 revolution by having a cleaning activity.⁵¹ With the banner, “June 24 Apiwat Siam cleans up the dictator, big cleaning day,” the protesters read the People’s Party Declaration at the monument.⁵² They also carried brooms and cleaning materials as symbols in their demonstration (see Photo 82) (The 88th anniversary of June 24th: A National Day on which commemoration is banned, 21 events organized amidst intimidation and harassment throughout Thailand 2020) (คณะราษฎร: รวมภาพกิจกรรมอ่านประกาศ คณะราษฎร จำลึก 88 ปี ปฏิวัติสยาม 24 มิถุนา 2020).

Another surviving replica of the Democracy Monument in the Phu Kiaw District of the Chaiyaphum province was also used by the 2020 movement to commemorate the 88th anniversary of the 1932 revolution. A banner with a quote

⁵¹ Khon Kaen’s Had Enough is a group of students from Khon Kaen University and other students and groups in the Khon Kaen province. It was formed in 2020 as a response to the dissolution of the Future Forward Party. It aims to achieve change, not only a change of government but a change in the ideological foundation of Thai society (Phaholtap 2020).

⁵² *Apiwat Siam* pertains to the Siamese Revolution of 1932 where Thailand shifted from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy.

from the Declaration of the People's Party and an image of the People's Party plaque was placed at this monument on June 24, 2020 (see Photo 83) (The 88th anniversary of June 24th: A National Day on which commemoration is banned, 21 events organized amidst intimidation and harassment throughout Thailand 2020).



Photo 83. Quote from the People's Party Declaration and image of the People's Party plaque placed at the replica of the Democracy Monument in Chaiyaphum. Retrieved from (Thai Lawyers for Human Rights 2020).

Aside from the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, only the one in Khon Kaen was actively used and maximized by the 2020 student movement. Attempts were made to claim the monuments in Chaiyaphum and Surin. During the 88th anniversary of the 1932 revolution, the protesters symbolically claimed the monument in Chaiyaphum by placing it with a banner and plaque related to the 1932 revolution. Unfortunately, this was immediately removed by the government forces. While in the case of the monument in Surin, the students through the Surin Youth for Democracy planned to read the People's Party Declaration at the Surin Constitution Monument in the evening of June 24, 2020. However, their event was cancelled due to the intimidation that the organizers received from the police (คณะราษฎร: รวมภาพกิจกรรมอ่านประกาศ คณะราษฎร รำลึก 88 ปี ปฏิวัติสยาม 24 มิถุนา 2020).

7.3.2. The 1973 revolution in the 2020 student movement

With the re-emergence of the student movement in 2020, the student protesters also remembered and paid tribute to the October 1973 revolution. The 2020 movement can be considered a mixture of the influences of the 1932 and 1973 revolutions. Aside from referencing themselves to the 1932 revolution, the 1973 student revolution was also incorporated into Thailand's re-emergence of student activism through the concepts of democracy and constitution. The protesters continued the legacies of the Democracy Monument and the 14th of October 1973 Memorial by honoring the people who fought for democracy in their demonstrations and commemorating the success of the 1973 student movement.

It can be seen in how the students in 2020 used the Democracy Monument and the 14th of October 1973 Memorial to remember the October 14, 1973 revolution anniversary. The Memorial was a space for remembrance, while the Democracy Monument was a protest venue. The *Ratsadon* group led the commemoration and conducted it by protesting the current demands of the students and allied groups at the Democracy Monument and its nearby areas. Organizing their demonstration on October 14 at the said venues means they memorialized and recognized the contribution of the 1973 movement to the history of Thai student activism and democracy (Planned Event and Timeline for October 14 2020).



Photo 84. Screenshot from the Facebook Live of The Nation Thailand of the anti-government protest led by the newly formed Ratsadon at the Democracy Monument on October 14, 2020.

Retrieved from (The Nation Thailand 2020).

Thousands of protesters gathered at Democracy Monument on October 14 to commemorate the 47th anniversary of the October 1973 Revolution (see Photo 84 and 85). They marched to the Government House to ask for the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth and other demands. But this protest did not go smoothly because a group of royalists was also present near the area for the scheduled royal motorcade, and the police blocked the roads to the Government House. In addition, there were reported tensions among the royalists, protesters, and the police. But despite these incidents, the demonstration of the pro-democracy groups ended peacefully (Sattaburuth 2020) (Ngamkham and Nanuam 2020) (Nation Live Coverage: The October 14 Protest 2020) (Pro-democracy group announces details of Oct 14 rally 2020).



Photo 85. Anti-government protest at the Democracy Monument on October 14, 2020. Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

The commemoration of the October 14, 1973 revolution by protesting for their current demands is an example of contesting and layering the meanings of the Democracy Monument through time because of the performative actions conducted by the student movements. Looking at the abovementioned protests and events, the democracy that the protesters advocated for in the 2020 student movement was linked with the democracy portrayed in the 1932 and 1973 revolutions. Although there were still nuances, this combination and construction of democracy based on the demonstrations in the Democracy Monument from the past is essential in unpacking the idea and development of Thai democracy, especially in the context of the 2020 student movement.

The spirit of the 1973 revolution was also present in the performative actions of the student movement in 2020. The current student protesters revived the protest songs popularized by the 1973 student movement. For example, the song *Phuea Muan Chon* or For the People, written by Mahidol University student band Kammachon in

1973 to oppose the Thanom military government, was used by the students in 2020. This song was sung by different student groups and university campuses across Thailand, such as the protests at Mahidol University and Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai (Thaitrakulpanich 2020) (Student demonstrations continue for a 10th day 2020).

7.3.3. Militarism and Authoritarianism

Based on the demands of the 2020 student movement, the democracy that they were fighting for contested the concepts of militarism and authoritarianism attached in the public monuments. Like the 1973 student movement, the students fought against authoritarianism from the school policies up to the national government.

During the 2020 student movement, secondary students were active in the protests and campaigned against the authoritarian school policies and teachers' actions. The student protesters saw schools as their first dictatorship. This movement was led by an extensive national network called Bad Student. They resisted conservative norms, such as strict haircut policy and mandatory school uniforms, while emphasizing their rights and pushing for progressive education reforms (Sinpeng, Twitter Analysis of the Thai Free Youth Protests 2020) (Lertchoosakul, The white ribbon movement: high school students in the 2020 Thai youth protests 2021, 210-212).

At the national level, the 2020 student protests also challenged the military leadership of Prime Minister Prayuth, the military-appointed Senate, and other authoritarian policies of the military junta. These campaigns and demands against militarism from the student movement were amplified in their protests at the public monuments (see Photo 86).

Both the 1973 and 2020 student movements disregarded the representation of militarism in the Democracy Monument, such as the four wings, relief structures, and cannons surrounding the monument's centerpiece. The anti-military demands, particularly the call to oust Prime Minister Prayuth, were evident in all the students'

protests at the Democracy Monument in 2020. However, focusing on another structure that the Phibun regime installed is also amusing to discuss.



Photo 86. The Free People Movement organized the protest at the Democracy Monument on August 16, 2020.

Protesters carried signs such as "No more dictatorship in Thailand" and "I won't be silenced" while the police officers guarded the Ratchadamnoen Road and conducted security checkpoints. Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

Another public monument occupied by the 2020 student movement was the Victory Monument. From being a symbol of militarism and a product of authoritarianism during the Phibun regime, this structure was contested and became a popular and strategic space for democratic movements. The student protesters started occupying the Victory Monument as one of their rally sites in October, particularly after the government announced a severe state of emergency in Bangkok that prohibited the gatherings of five or more people.⁵³

The students occupied the Victory Monument on October 18 and paralyzed the traffic situation in the area. The government was forced to close the BTS and MRT subway stations where the demonstrations were located. Walkways or skywalks

⁵³ On October 15, the government announced a severe state of emergency in Bangkok. It was said that the protests were considered a threat to its national security. The Thai government banned gatherings of five or more people, and this resulted in the dispersal of the police, and more people were arrested in the protests. Despite the ban, people continued their protests and gathered daily in Bangkok and various locations in Thailand. Protesters also used the road intersections such as the Ratchaprasong and Pathumwan intersections. Arrests and violent dispersals of the police also continued as massive gatherings of thousands of protesters were held at major intersections, landmarks, and universities. The students played a cat-and-mouse game with the police authorities to quickly avoid a crackdown. The protest leaders implemented the late announcement of the protests. They also used social media to update people about the demonstrations easily (#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest 2020, 8-9).

were also declared off-limits because of the rally. From time to time, thousands of students and protesters were seen flashing their three-finger salute at the monument. They also sang the national anthem and filled the roundabout with light from their mobile phones. The demonstrators wore black and brought out their umbrellas and rain jackets because of the intermittent rain and possible use of water cannons with dyed water from the government forces. The activists also prepared some makeshift barricades to protect themselves and prevent a repeat of the violent dispersal that happened on October 16 (see Photo 87) (Mass protests end peacefully at Victory Monument, Asok 2020) (Khaosod English Twitter 2020) (LIVE from anti-government protest at the Victory Monument | LIVE from the Victory Monument, where protesters announced as their venue for today's anti-government rally 2020) (Protesters in Thailand Carry On Despite Police Warning 2020) (Promchertchoo 2020).



*Photo 87. Pro-democracy protest at the Victory Monument on October 18, 2020.
Retrieved from (Khaosod English 2020).*

The movement highlighted their demands during the protest: the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth, democratic amendments to the constitution, and monarchy

reforms. These were emphasized through the protesters' chants, speeches, and slogans. Examples of the chants were: "Free our friends!" "Reform the monarchy!" "Prayuth, get out!" and "Dissolve the parliament." They also shouted, "slave of the dictator!" whenever they saw the Thai police or military in the protest venue (Mass protests end peacefully at Victory Monument, Asok 2020) (Khaosod English Twitter 2020) (LIVE from anti-government protest at the Victory Monument | LIVE from the Victory Monument, where protesters announced as their venue for today's anti-government rally 2020) (Protesters in Thailand Carry On Despite Police Warning 2020) (Promchertchoo 2020).



Photo 88. Pro-democracy protest at the Victory Monument on October 21, 2020.
Retrieved from (The Nation Thailand 2020).

On October 21, the student protesters occupied the monument again and marched from the Victory Monument to the Government House (see Photo 88). They issued an ultimatum for the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth. Then the following day, the government repealed the severe state of emergency and started to ease the situation (#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest 2020, 9) (Protesters head to Government House after gathering at Victory Monument 2020).

7.3.4. Monarchism

Another contested narrative of the public monuments mentioned in this dissertation is the influence of the monarchy in the development of Thai democracy. Aside from the reference to the 1932 revolution, the absence of monarchy-related designs and the original meaning of the Democracy Monument was also emphasized by the 2020 student protests. The 1973 student movement disregarded the anti-monarchy nature of the Democracy Monument through their actions, such as showing admiration and respect for the King during their protest. It was seen in the June 1973 protest when they turned to the Royal Palace and sang the royal song, and in the October 1973 protest, they carried the portraits of King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit at the Democracy Monument. However, this was not the case in 2020. The 2020 protests were the opposite of what happened in the 1973 protests.

During the October 14 protest, the demonstrators flashed their three-finger salute while the royal motorcade of Queen Suthida and Prince Dipangkorn Rasmijoti passed them. The protesters shouted *phasi ku*, or “my taxes,” to express their criticism against the monarchy and lavish expenditure of public money. They also sprayed “Long live democracy” on Ratchadamoen Avenue (Sattaburuth 2020) (Ngamkham and Nanuam 2020) (Ganjanakhundee 2020, 2) (Nation Live Coverage: The October 14 Protest 2020) (Pro-democracy group announces details of Oct 14 rally 2020) .

In the November 14 protest, a symbolic act happened when the protesters turned their backs on the royal motorcade nearby. King Vajiralongkorn was scheduled to attend the inauguration ceremony of the MRT Blue Line Extension at Sanam Chai MRT Station. Then, it was reported that when the royal motorcade of the King passed near the monument, the demonstrators did not see him because they were facing the other side. The protesters also raised their three-finger salute and sang the national anthem (see Photo 89) (Monuments wrapped to cap dramatic day of rallies 2020) (Protesters turn backs on royal motorcade during demonstration in Bangkok 2020).



Photo 89. Protesters turned their back, raising their three-finger salute and singing the national anthem as the royal motorcade passed through Ratchadamneon Avenue on November 14, 2020.

Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

The leaders of the Bad Student group avoided causing trouble and asked the people to put down signs with inappropriate messages during the royal motorcade. After the motorcade had passed, the crowd started to shout, “The nation is the people” and “Down with feudalism. Long live the people.” The Bad Student also announced they were taking back the Democracy Monument for the people. Then they removed the metal railings around it (Protesters turn backs on royal motorcade during demonstration in Bangkok 2020).

And lastly, the August 3 Harry Potter-themed protest at the Democracy Monument emphasized the effects of excessive royal power on democracy through the fearless speech of Thai lawyer and political activist Arnon Nampa. While in character and wearing a black gown and Gryffindor scarf, he delivered a bold speech titled “The Monarchy and Thai Society.” In his speech, he mentioned the role of the monarchy and military in Thailand. He urged the Parliament to debate it and clarified that he only aimed for a legitimate constitutional monarchy. He only wanted an open discussion and not to topple the institution (Landmark demonstration calls for debate on monarchy 2020) (Yer an activist, Harry: Themed protest calls for democracy, reforms 2020) (Chotpradit, Shattering Glass Ceiling 2022).

The call for monarchy reforms in the 2020 student movement started during the August 10 protest when the ten demands were declared at Thammasat University Rangsit campus. It attracted a vast following in the subsequent demonstrations led by the Free People Movement and the Student Union of Thailand. Participation of the

protesters swelled to more than 10,000 people on August 16 at Democracy Monument (see Photo 90). The Free Youth that launched the July 18 protest expanded into a broader coalition and was named Free People or *Prachachon Plot-èek* in August 2020. This group included other sectors outside the network of student activists, such as the Red Shirts and different groups who also campaigned for democracy (#WhatsHappeningInThailand: Government crackdown on the right to protest 2020, 7) (Sombatpoonsiri, *From Repression to Revolt: Thailand's 2020 Protests and the Regional Implications 2021*, 4).



Photo 90. The Free People group and the Student Union of Thailand led the anti-government protest at the Democracy Monument on August 16, 2020. Retrieved from (Niranam Plod Aek and Prachatai English 2020).

The demands of the Free People Movement were still the same as the initial demands in July 2020. The chants of the students, such as “Down with dictatorship, long live democracy” and “Stop harassing the people,” emphasized the demands of the movement. The Free People also stressed their democratic aspirations for Thailand, “a democratic reform of government with the monarch truly under the constitution” (Pro-democracy movement draws thousands in Bangkok 2020).

The August 16 protest became an avenue for the Thai people to air out their concerns. Representatives and activists from different sectors, such as women, agriculture, and labor, were given time to speak. Criticisms against the government, particularly on the issues of education, media, and the controversial *lèse majesté* law,

were also evident during the entire duration of the protest. Violations of human rights in schools, gender equality, and the issues facing people in the Deep South provinces were also tackled in this demonstration. Aside from the speeches, a student band also played in the protest. The protesters waved their mobile phone flashlights while listening to the student band (see Photo 91) (A huge crowd of student-led protesters are closing the roads around Democracy Monument in Bangkok 2020) (Voices from the Democracy Monument dream of the future 2020).



Photo 91. The Free People group led the anti-government protest and the Student Union of Thailand at the Democracy Monument on August 16, 2020.

Retrieved from (The Nation Thailand 2020).

The manifesto was not included in the demands and protests of the Free People on August 16. It could be because of the royalist groups near the Democracy Monument, closely monitoring the activists' speeches. The ultra-royalist movement, Coordination Centre for Vocational Students and People Protecting the Institution or *Archeewa Chuay Chart* demanded the Free People movement to avoid the topic on monarchy in their protest. These groups, composed of about 60 demonstrators, also attempted to counter the protest of the anti-government groups on the opposite side of Ratchadamnoen Avenue (see Photo 92). Even though there was a bold statement from

the student activists who called for monarchy reforms in the early part of August, the Free People group asserted that they would still stick to their three demands (Mala, Students press demands 2020) (Mala, Pro-royalists disperse after countering student rally at Democracy Monument 2020).



Photo 92. The counter-protest of the royalists near the Democracy Monument on August 16, 2020.

Retrieved from (Bangkok Post 2020).

Similar to the case of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, Constitution Monuments, and replicas of the Democracy Monument in the provinces, the 2020 student movement also contested the symbols and meanings of the 14 October 1973 Memorial by producing another layer of meaning. Aside from being a space for remembering the people and the historical event, and defending democracy and a democratic constitution, the memorial also became a venue for monarchy reforms.

On the day of the Thai Constitution and International Human Rights, December 10, 2020, the 14th of October 1973 Memorial witnessed the “Cancel 112” or *Yoklerk 112* protest of the Thai student leaders and activists on the abolition of the *lese majeste* law. It became a platform for bands and music organized by the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UFTD) and Mob Fest (see Photo 93). It also became a place for the speeches of the pro-monarchy reform protest leaders early in the morning of December 10 (see Photo 94). Panusaya “Rung” Sithijirawattanakul and over 1,000 protesters convened at the memorial to oppose the Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code (Tanakasempipat, Thai protesters say royal insult law must go

2020) (Rally chiefs want repeal of lese majeste law 2020) (แต่ชื่อ 'หวยราชฎร' งด 10 ธันวาคม โควต้า คนละใบ 2,475 ฉบับ พิมพ์กำกับ 'ไม่ขายสลิม' 2020).



Photo 93. Screenshot of the news coverage of Channel News Asia on the protest of pro-monarchy reform activists at the 14 October 1973 Memorial. Retrieved from (Channel News Asia YouTube Channel 2020).



Photo 94. Screenshot of the Twitter news coverage of Khaosod English on the protest of pro-monarchy reform leaders such as Rung and Penguin at the 14 October 1973 Memorial. Retrieved from (Khaosod English Twitter 2020).



Photo 95. Screenshot of the Twitter news coverage of Khaosod English on the People's Lottery or Huay Ratsadon parody of the protesters outside the 14 October 1973 Memorial.

Retrieved from (Khaosod English Twitter 2020).



Photo 96. The design of the People's Lottery or Huay Ratsadon ticket was patterned after the government lottery ticket.

Retrieved from (The Standard 2020).

Outside the memorial, the activists from the *Ratsadon* group activated the people's historical memory of the structure by making a parody of the Thai lottery, which was named "People's Lottery" or *Huay Ratsadon* (see Photo 95). In reference to the 1932 revolution, *Khana Ratsadon*, and the long saga of the construction of the October 14 memorial, they handed out 2,475 tickets to the people and protesters as a souvenir (see Photo 96). The group told them that the prizes for the winners included Thai democracy, a monarchy truly respecting the constitution, and the resignation of

Prime Minister Prayuth (Khaosod English 2020) ('หอยราชฎกร' ของที่ระลึกสำหรับผู้สมทบท่อน้ำเลี้ยง 2020) (แห่ชื่อ 'หอยราชฎกร' งวด 10 ธันวาคม โค้วค้ำคนละใบ 2,475 ฉบับ พิมพ์ก้ำกับ 'ไม่ขายสลิม' 2020).

These protest activities at the 14th of October 1973 Memorial contributed to the contention and added more meaning to the structure. The memorial was not just a space for remembrance and commemoration of the 1973 student revolution. It was also transformed into a venue for democracy and demands of the 2020 student movement, including the influence of the 1932 revolution and the contentious monarchy reform.

The activities conducted in this memorial embodied the representations of the memorial, such as the inverted cone-shaped and stupa-liked structure that symbolizes the democratic quest of the Thai people. The 2020 student movement also memorializes the sacrifice of the names engraved at the rectangular base of the monument. The students imbibed the poems and messages of the lines placed at the structure by exercising their freedom of speech and asserting their human rights during their protests. These examples only justify that the 2020 movement challenged these symbolisms presented by the memorial by highlighting their significance to Thai society.

Except for the concepts of militarism, authoritarianism, and monarchism, the Thai democracy pertained to the 2020 movement, while using these public monuments underscored the representations of constitutionalism, liberalism, modernization, and nationalism.

7.3.5. Constitutionalism

The 1973 student movement emphasized the imagery of the turret and the constitution of the Democracy Monument by using black cloth in their protests and making it a symbol for the death of democracy and the constitution. The 2020 student movement also accentuated the representation of the centerpiece by associating it with hope and the future of Thailand. For example, this performative action was evident during the November 14 protest.



Photo 97. Screenshot from the YouTube Coverage of The Nation Thailand of the Mob Fest at the Democracy Monument on November 14, 2020. Retrieved from (The Nation Thailand 2020).

The pro-democracy groups allied with the Free Youth Movement, such as Free Arts,⁵⁴ Bad Students, and Free Women or Women for Freedom Democracy,⁵⁵ launched Mob Fest, a creative and innovative protest on November 14 at the Democracy Monument (see Photo 97). The pro-democracy groups ended their entire day of protests with a night of festivity and creativity. Aside from the political speeches, the rally was filled with live music. It mainly featured the performance and latest music of Rap Against Dictatorship titled Reform or *Patiroop*, which attacks the Thai establishment. There were also smaller booths and stages for small performances, social issues, artworks, souvenirs, food, and drinks (Mob Fest: An uprising of joy and anger with a serious political message 2020).

⁵⁴ Inspired by the Free Youth and Free People concept, Free Arts is a group of art activists based in Bangkok who are active in protest art. They believe artistic, cultural, and public expressions are fundamental human rights (Chaivaranon 2021, 120) (ศิลปะปลดแอก - Free Arts 2020).

⁵⁵ The Women for Freedom and Democracy is a group of activists leading the campaign for abortion and women's rights in Thailand. They believe that reproductive rights are crucial to achieving a fair democracy. The group was one of the sectors that joined the August 16 protest at the Democracy Monument and allied with the pro-democracy coalition of the Free People Movement ('ผู้หญิงปลดแอก' ประชาธิปไตยแห่งชาติแห่งถูกกฎหมาย กลุ่มครองสิทธิ์ผู้หญิง 2020) (Rodriguez 2020).



Photo 98. Protesters showed their three-finger salute after they wrapped the centerpiece of the Democracy Monument with a white banner during the November 14, 2020 protest.

Retrieved from (Bangkok Post 2020).

They covered the Democracy Monument with a huge white cloth containing messages against the government and calls for monarchy reforms. For the entire day, those who attended the protests responded to prompts like “What the future of democracy will be? What will tomorrow in Thailand be like? What do you hope for?” Their responses and messages were written on white cloth to symbolize that Thai society's future is in the hands of young people and citizens. Then the white cloth was placed at the turret in the evening as part of their protest culmination (see Photo 98) (Monuments wrapped to cap dramatic day of rallies 2020) (Chaivaranon 2021, 120).

The Mob Fest, which was organized by Free Arts, Bad Students, Free Youth, and Women for Freedom Democracy, was an innovative way to conduct a protest and attract young supporters. It also allowed street vendors to generate income amidst the pandemic. Like the setup of music festivals, the Mob Fest organizers divided the venue into three main stages to cater to the differences and interests of attending the protest. The attendees enjoyed K-pop dance lessons, the performances of the DJs, the debut song of Rap Against Dictatorship, and Isaan folk music (Chaivaranon 2021, 120).

The 2020 student movement explored a variety of performative actions, such as incorporating music and student bands in their protests. It was evident in the

August and November protests when the student demonstrations also became venues for the festivity and creativity of the students. The concept of having a music festival theme with different booths in the November 14 protest was an innovative way of claiming the Democracy Monument. It also allowed the students to emphasize their demands, showcase their talents, and entertain themselves after a whole day of protesting.

There was also an instance when one of the protests during the 2020 movement used black fabric at the Democracy Monument. But this was when the Democracy Restoration Group tied a black garment around the monument in one of their protests to honor a known anti-dictatorship figure.

On May 31, 2020, Arnon Nampa and the Democracy Restoration Group staged a symbolic activity at the Democracy Monument. They commemorated the 59th death anniversary of the political activist Khrong Chandawong. Khrong was a member of Parliament for Sakon Nakhon province and was known as an anti-dictatorship figure (see Photo 99). He was seen as a threat to the national security of Thailand. He was executed by firing squad in 1961 on the orders of Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat. They tied a black garment around the Democracy Monument and raised banners with Khrong's famous last words before his execution, "Dictatorship shall fall, democracy shall prosper" (Democracy Monument shrouded in black to commemorate death of anti-dictatorship politician 2020).



Photo 99. The Democracy Restoration Group tied a black garment to the centerpiece of the Democracy Monument and showed the last words of Khrong Chandawong, "Dictatorship shall fall, democracy shall prosper." Retrieved from (Prachatai 2020).

But whether it is black or white, both the 1973 and 2020 student monuments, through the performative action of climbing and covering the centerpiece with a cloth, emphasize how the students aggressively claimed the turret as part of their respective narratives. This action highlights their power and control over the monument.

The 14th of October 1973 Memorial also witnessed the performative action of the 2020 student movement on the significance of a democratic constitution. For example, an epitaph-designed gallery of Thai constitutions was paraded before the memorial during the August 27 protest (see Photo 100).



Photo 100. Screenshot of the live coverage of Khaosod English correspondent Pravit Rojanaphruk of the camping protest of pro-democracy activists at the 14 October 1973 Memorial.

Retrieved from (Khaosod English Facebook 2020).

Aside from being a space for remembrance, the memorial also became a democratic space in 2020 where the students could protest. It served as a haven for the left-wing groups from the provinces. The anti-government protesters led by former Khon Kaen University law student Jatupat Boonpattaraksa or also known as Pai Dao Din occupied the memorial and turned the memorial into a campsite on August 27, 2020.⁵⁶ He encouraged the others to join the protest campaign of his Dao Din group titled “Camp Not Jail” by installing tents around the memorial (see Photo 101). Pai led the overnight camping and proceeded to the police station the next day to respond to the summon given to him because of his presence in the July 18

⁵⁶ Pai Dao Din was one of the five members of the Dao Din group who protested in front of Prime Minister Prayuth at the Khon Kaen City Hall on November 19, 2014. They wore black shirts with printed words “We,” “do,” “not,” “want,” and “coup” while making the three-finger salute. They were arrested but eventually released with conditions such as a ban on political activities and a threat to their student status (Sripokangkul, Muangming and Vulsma, Dao Din Student Activists: From Hope to Victims under the Thai Society of Darkness 2017, 468). Then, he was jailed for more than two years because of *lese majeste* and Computer Crime Act violations in 2016 (Pro-democracy activists set up camp at October 14 Memorial in Bangkok 2020).

demonstration at the Democracy Monument (Pro-democracy activists set up camp at October 14 Memorial in Bangkok 2020).



Photo 101. The camping of pro-democracy activists at the 14 October 1973 Memorial.

Retrieved from (The Nation Thailand 2020).

The entire memorial on that day was surrounded by protest banners such as “the dictator shall perish, long live democracy” or *padetgan jong pinat prachaitipatai jong jarern* and “stop harassing the people.” The banner of the Khon Kaen protest movement named *Isaan boyander* was also placed in the memorial. It is also puzzling to point out that the symbol of anarchy was placed on the cone-shaped and stupa-like structure of the memorial (see Photo 100). This is far from the democracy that the said structure symbolizes, and the democratic message of some of the banners tied on the venue.⁵⁷ Although Pai Dao Din cleared it in his interview with Khaosod English correspondent Pravit Rojanaphruk, he discouraged violence in demonstrations (LIVE from the Oct. 14, 1973 Memorial where protesters plan to camp overnight in defiance of the government 2020).

Various stalls for food, beverages, first-aid, Red Shirt items and protest paraphernalia, mats, and airconditioned toilets were also situated on the venue. The

⁵⁷ In an interview with one of the Dao Din activists in 2021, Pang explained that the members of the Dao Din group believe in different left-wing ideals such as Marxism and Anarchism. Under this umbrella, various groups emerged, such as The Commoners Party, the UNME of Anarchy, and the Thalufah activism group (Dao Din Interview Part 1 2021).

Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw), a non-profit organization collecting signatures to amend the constitution, was also at the camping event. The memorial also served as a stage for the speeches of the protest leaders from various sectors and the movement's demands. In the evening, they also had a film-showing event. They showed the documentary film of Lauren Greenfield titled "The Kingmaker," which centers on the story of Imelda Marcos and the efforts of the Marcos family to resurrect their image in the Philippines (LIVE from the Oct. 14, 1973 Memorial where protesters plan to camp overnight in defiance of the government 2020).

7.3.6. Liberalism

Liberal ideas focusing on individual rights, equality, and liberty were present in the speeches of student activists in 2020. These ideas were further amplified because the public monuments functioned as the platform for their speeches. The monument became a space for the intense and fearless speeches of the student leaders. It highlighted the messages, demands, and prevalent issues conveyed by the movement. The different sectors of Thai society were allowed to be heard and represented in these structures.

The 1973 and 2020 student movements stressed the importance of democracy and the constitution. They also both criticized the government. Even though the influence of the 1932 revolution was evident in the 2020 movement, the protesters' speeches in 2020 were still different from Phibun's promise of democracy during the inauguration of the Democracy Monument in 1940. Even though the concept of democracy was celebrated during Phibun's term, it can't be denied that the notion of militarism was attached to it through the military faction of the People's Party. It was far from the demands of the 2020 student movement, which opposed the military leadership of Prayuth. Also, the controversial *lèse majesté* was included in the demonstration speeches at the monument. This inclusion of liberal ideas allowed the 2020 student activists to add another contested layer of meaning and representation to the Democracy Monument. The voices of the demonstrators, through their speeches, allowed them to challenge the 1932 and 1973 narratives of the

monument and add their own narratives and version of democratic goals and aspirations for Thai society.

For example, the August 16 protest at the monument provided opportunities to different sectors, such as women, agriculture, and labor, to speak and air out their criticisms against the government, particularly on the issues of education, media, and the controversial *lèse majesté* (A huge crowd of student-led protesters are closing the roads around Democracy Monument in Bangkok 2020).



Photo 102. Rainbow pride flag at the Democracy Monument during the July 25 protest.

Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

Like the November 14 protest, the activists who gave speeches at the monument reiterated their demands since the beginning of the 2020 student protests. Alongside the student movement's main demands, they emphasized some prevalent issues in Thai society. For example, the Bad Students, primarily high school students, stressed their concerns against the education system of Thailand and pressed for educational reforms (Monument wrapped to cap dramatic day of rallies 2020).

The July 25 protest at the Democracy Monument also promoted democracy and liberal values, particularly gender equality and the rights of the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, and asexual) community. The event was participated by at least 200 people and monitored by around 50 police officers. Even though the student groups did not organize it directly, the demonstration was inspired by the July 18 comeback of student protests at the Democracy Monument. The protesters supported and reiterated the demands of the

Free Youth Movement. They echoed it during their rally and pushed their community's demand to allow LGBTQIA+ couples to marry legally. The Democracy Monument heard the speeches of the group on marriage equality, problems of military conscription, and social injustices and prejudices towards LGBTQIA+ people. Equal rights for the sex workers were also campaigned during the protest. One of the attendees held a placard saying, "Legalize sex work," and expressed her demand for the same workers' rights and legal protection for sex workers in Thailand. The demonstration also showed performances such as standup comedy sketches, chants, songs, and dances. The rainbow pride flag was also waved on the street (see Photo 102) (LGBT activists call for democracy and gender equality 2020).



Photo 103. Rainbow pride flag at the Democracy Monument during the August 16 protest.

Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

The LGBTQIA+ activists were also present during the August 16 demonstration of the Free People group at the Democracy Monument (see Photo 103). Like their demands and message during the July protests, they continued their call for gender equality in Thailand (Student protest the largest demonstration since 2014 coup 2020).

Another pro-democracy group that supported the student movement in 2020 was the women's sector. The Women for Freedom and Democracy, later named Feminists for Freedom and Democracy, staged a protest at the Democracy Monument as part of the August 16 demonstration of the Free People (see Photo 104). They encouraged the people to sign their petition calling for the decriminalization of abortion. They also placed pieces of clothes in their booth, and people wrote down

their hopes and dreams for gender equality. There was also a table where the protesters could color a drawing of a vagina. It was also argued during the demonstration that democracy is connected to liberal values such as individual rights, mainly providing the women to decide for their own bodies, and this issue also reflects the state of reproductive health and the health system of Thailand. Kornkanok Kamta, a representative from the group, read a statement during the protest. The group emphasized, “We cannot claim to be a true democracy when the government still controls decisions about our bodies and reproductive health” (Women’s rights group campaigns for abortion rights at Democracy Monument protest 2020) (Student protest the largest demonstration since 2014 coup 2020).



Photo 104. Banners of the Women for Freedom and Democracy group at the Democracy Monument during the August 16 protest.

Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

The liberal ideas based on the French liberal teachings were also evident in the performative actions of the pro-democracy groups during their rallies. For example, one of the songs popular among the student movement in 2020 was “Do You Hear the People Sing?” This song was from the 1980s French musical *Les Misérables*. It encapsulated the context of the Paris uprising in 1832 and the voice of the oppressed people revolting against the tyranny of their government (Zhang 2020). Then eventually, this song became a protest song used by different social movements worldwide, including Thailand.

This song was one of the staple protest songs of the Thai social movement. It was said to be first used by the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship

(UDD) or Red Shirts in their 2010 protest to express their outrage against the military crackdown and the bloodshed that occurred (เราได้ยินผู้คนร้องไหม?: ทำไมเราร้องเพลงเดียวกันได้ แม้อยู่ต่างขั้วอุดมการณ์ [Can you hear people singing?: Why can we sing the same song even with different ideologies?]) 2019).



Photo 105. The organizers of the August 16 demonstration sang “Do You Hear the People Sing?” while raising their three-finger salute at the Democracy Monument. Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

The students also used it in their 2020 protests at the Democracy Monument. For example, the Free People Movement, which organized the August 16 demonstration, led the singing of the Thai version of “Do You Hear the People Sing?” while standing in front of banners stating their demands before they ended the rally (see Photo 105) (Student protest the largest demonstration since 2014 coup 2020).

The Thai version of “Do You Hear the People Sing?” was also heard during the November 14 protest. While a small group of students wrapped a huge white cloth containing the protesters' messages on the centerpiece of the Democracy Monument, the said song was played from a nearby truck then the protesters responded by turning on their flashlights on their mobile phones (Protesters turn backs on royal motorcade during demonstration in Bangkok 2020).



Photo 106. Volunteers climbed the centerpiece of the Democracy Monument and wrapped a huge white cloth containing the protesters' messages on November 14, 2020.

The song "Do You Hear the People Sing?" was played while this performative action was happening. Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

Aside from the French influence, the Democracy Monument also observed the Thai version of the famous Chilean feminist anthem "*Un Violador en Tu Camino*" or "A Rapist in Your Path" during the November 14 demonstration (see Photo 107). This song was performed by the Women for Freedom and Democracy Group, which changed its name to Feminists for Freedom and Democracy on that day (Protesters turn backs on royal motorcade during demonstration in Bangkok 2020).

Sida Lui Faai is a Thai re-interpretation of the song that the Chilean feminist group *Las Tesis* started in 2019. The original was written in Spanish, discussing women's voices against patriarchy and victim-blaming towards them. It became viral worldwide and used in flash mobs and protests. The Thai version of the song was contextualized into Thai society. *Sida Lui Faai* comes from the story of *Sida*, who walks on fire to prove her innocence to her beloved husband, *Rama*, in the Thai epic, *Ramakien*. The Thai version pointed out that the exploitation of women was rooted in the patriarchal system of Thai society. It also encouraged women to stand up for themselves and fight for gender equality. The song opposed oppression, sexual harassment, and violence against women (*Sida Lui Faai – Thai feminists move against oppression 2020*).



Photo 107. The Feminists for Freedom and Democracy performed the Thai version of the Chilean feminist anthem "A Rapist in Your Path" at the Democracy Monument on November 14, 2020.

Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

The Democracy Monument also became an avenue for discussing several economic issues and liberal policies in Thailand. It allowed the protesters to offer the problems at hand so that people could discuss them because of the popularity of the Democracy Monument as a landmark. During the August 16 demonstration, a protester campaigned for an open beer production law by lining up bottles of craft beer made by Thai manufacturers on the street next to the Democracy Monument (see Photo 108). It was a symbolic campaign for a liberal alcohol industry in Thailand that would help smaller breweries and promote local industries (Voices from the Democracy Monument dream of the future 2020).



Photo 108. Bottles of craft beer made by Thai manufacturers at the Democracy Monument during the August 16 protest.
Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

The replica monument in Khon Kaen also saw a series of student protests in 2020 that showcased liberal ideas. *Khon Kaen's Had Enough* started this series on August 20, and it was reported that about 1,500 people attended the rally at the structure (see Photo 109). Most of those who participated in the protest were high school students. They wore white ribbons and raised their three-finger salute to signify resistance. The student leaders in Bangkok reiterated speeches centered on the exact demands. They also included other social issues such as women's rights, gender equality, and the right to safe abortion.⁵⁸ Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak also spoke in the protest and repeated his call for an open discussion of the monarchy and its connection to Thai democracy. Some musicians also played on that night. But one of the fascinating highlights of the protest was the black magic ritual conducted by Attapon Buapat, a pro-democracy protest leader. The activist wore a Brahmanic white gown and held a mock tradition of using Red Bull as holy water to curse and drive out

⁵⁸ In February, the court ruled that Section 301 of the Thai Criminal Code that criminalizes abortion is unconstitutional. The Women's and LGBTQ rights activists spoke about it during the demonstration and argued that there had been no efforts from the government to amend the law (Black magic and calls for change at large protest at Khon Kaen's Democracy Monument 2020).

Prime Minister Prayuth.⁵⁹ He lit incense sticks in front of the prime minister's picture. Behind the picture were ribbons bearing the colors of the Thai national flag, and on the left, there were a coconut, bananas, and a wooden snake to represent the evil (Black magic and calls for change at large protest at Khon Kaen's Democracy Monument 2020) (Large Protests Hit Isaan, Major Rally Announced for Sep. 19 2020) (de Vienne 2022, 197).



Photo 109. The August 20 student protest at the replica of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen.

Retrieved from (The Isaan Record 2020).

7.3.7. Modernization

The construction of public monuments such as the Democracy and Victory Monuments was part of the modernization plan of the Phibun regime. During his term, Thailand witnessed the amalgamation of foreign influences and Thai culture in arts and architecture. Although the context of modernization when these structures were built is different from the present times, this dissertation focuses on the demands of the students to transform traditional aspects of Thai society into contemporary ones using foreign influences, globalization, and modern technologies. Following this

⁵⁹ The student protests in 2020 took the opportunity to discuss and raise various social issues, notably inequality and injustices in Thailand. One of these issues that the student demonstrators brought up was the case of Vorayuth Yoovidhya, grandson of billionaire Red Bull co-founder Chaleo Yoovidhya. He was implicated in a hit-and-run incident in 2012 where a police officer was killed because he was intoxicated. He fled abroad before he was arrested then the case was quietly dropped in January, but his legal absolution only surfaced in July 2020, which irked the student activists (Yuda 2020).

approach, these facets of modernization can be considered evident in the 2020 student movement.

The student activists provided a unique and fascinating way of occupying the Democracy Monument, contributing to the production of a further layer of meaning. Using foreign images such as Hamtaro, Harry Potter, and Hunger Games in their protests attracted local and international attention. These images made the movement famous. And with the movement's popularity, it easily conveyed the messages and demands to the public. Being the podium of these performative actions, the production of another representation of the Democracy Monument transpired, and the association of the Democracy Monument with the messages and demands became apparent. With the help of these foreign images, the students could address the elephant in the room artistically.⁶⁰ At the same time, they added their claims because of their references to the monument while doing their performative actions. It can be seen in the satirical remarks made by the protesters during their Hamtaro-themed protest at the Democracy Monument in July.

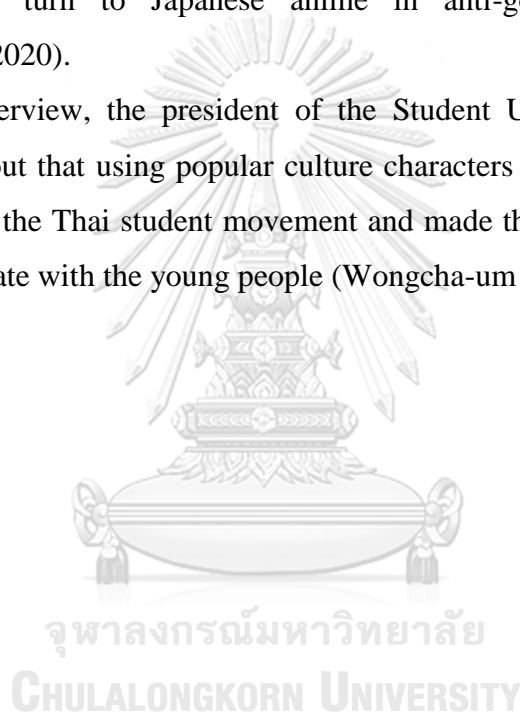
Hundreds of protesters gathered at the Democracy Monument on July 26, 2020, reiterating their initial demands to the government. The students expressed their grievances against the government through creative themes and gimmicks this time. The protesters used Hamtaro, a Japanese cartoon character, as their theme, and they walked and ran around the monument like hamsters (see Photo 110 and 111).⁶¹ They tweaked the lyrics of the Hamtaro theme song. They sang their version to mock the government and raise the issue of wasting the people's tax. They sang, “The most delicious food is taxpayers’ money. Dissolve the parliament! Dissolve the parliament! Dissolve the parliament!” while they walked and had fun around the monument.

⁶⁰ It was argued that the use of these non-Thai and popular imageries also created ambiguity than could absolve the protesters from violating Article 112. It might provide possible deniability in any *lèse-majesté* charges (Chaivaranon 2021, 112-113). However, seeing the arrests of some student leaders and demonstrators who were active during the 2020 student movement, this claim can be refuted and discussed further.

⁶¹ The use of Hamtaro in the 2020 student movement started on July 24, 2020, when dozens of Triam Udom Suksa school students changed the lyrics of the Hamtaro theme song and sang it in their school protest against the government. Like the other schools and universities, they also echoed the demands of the Free Youth Movement, which was launched during the July 18 protest (Triam Udom and Kasetsart students rally against the government 2020) (Same political cause, a new tune 2020).

Some protesters also made satirical remarks about the Bangkok officials' flowers and plants around the Democracy Monument. Their remarks fit their Hamtaro-inspired protest theme because Hamtaro is a hamster who loves sunflower seeds. According to the demonstrators, these decorations were intended by Bangkok officials to prevent them from gathering at the monument.⁶² The running around the monument emphasized their active control and claimed it as a democratic space. Red shirt activists and some LGBTQ members also joined the protest and supported the youth in fighting for democracy (Democracy activists step up anti-government campaign 2020) (Protestors turn to Japanese anime in anti-government protest 2020) (Tanakasempipat 2020).

In an interview, the president of the Student Union of Thailand, Jutatip Sirikhan pointed out that using popular culture characters like Hamtaro added to the new dimension of the Thai student movement and made their messages relatable and easy to communicate with the young people (Wongcha-um 2020).



⁶² On July 21, a group of students gathered at the Democracy Monument and appreciated the “garden” around the monument. The leader of the small gathering, Siriphob Poomphungphut, insisted they went to the monument to appreciate the garden and not to protest. He rated the flower arrangement with a score of 100 for obstructing democracy (Students to Stage More Anti-Prayut Rallies Across Thailand 2020). On October 14, the demonstrators removed the plants around the monument to symbolize the reclaiming of democracy through the Democracy Monument (Sattaburuth 2020) (Ngamkham and Nanuam 2020) (Nation Live Coverage: The October 14 Protest 2020) (Pro-democracy group announces details of Oct 14 rally 2020).



Photo 110. Students conducting the “Let’s run, Hamtaro” protest at the Democracy Monument on July 26, 2020.

Some banners seen during the event were: "I want a democracy that's not just for show," "Is taxpayers' money delicious?," "Uncle, please resign, I'm begging you," "Hamtaro, you're so good at eating," "The most delicious food is taxpayers' money," and “Louder, louder, louder.” Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).



Photo 111. A student protester held her Hamtaro soft toy during the July 26, 2020 Hamtaro-themed protest at the Democracy Monument.

Retrieved from (Reuters 2020).



Photo 112. A Harry Potter-themed protest at the Democracy Monument on August 3, 2020.

Retrieved from (Khaosod English 2020).

After the Hamtaro-themed demonstration, the student protesters also used the famous fictional character Harry Potter to fight for democracy (see Photo 112 and 113). On August 3, 2020, students from Kasetsart University and Mahanakorn Democracy Group (MDG) of Mahanakorn University of Technology launched a protest opposite of the Democracy Monument. They named it “Casting a Spell to Protect Democracy” and used the theme “Harry Potter versus You-Know-Who or He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.” The protesters, dressed like the characters from Harry Potter, discussed the most sensitive topic for the Thai people and emphasized that excessive royal power affects the democracy in the constitutional monarchy of Thailand. The students carried replicas of wands and improvised wands such as chopsticks, and they cast the spell “*expecto patronum*” to symbolize the protection of democracy and to dispel dark powers. They also called for an amendment to some rules and laws of the land that are not aligned with democratic and human rights principles, such as the *lèse-majesté* law. The right to free speech was highlighted in the protest by comparing Harry Potter and the villain, Lord Voldemort, with Thailand's political situation. A straw effigy and portrait pictures of Lord Voldemort

were also present in the demonstration (Landmark demonstration calls for debate on monarchy 2020) (Yer an activist, Harry: Themed protest calls for democracy, reforms 2020) (Chotpradit, Shattering Glass Ceiling 2022).



Photo 113. More pictures of the Harry Potter-themed protest at the Democracy Monument on August 3, 2020.

Arnon Nampa was seen wearing a Harry Potter costume, then a protester wearing a Hogwarts student costume pointing his wand to the Democracy Monument, a protester wearing a silicone mask of Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan raising his three-finger salute and beside him carries a replica of the constitution placed on a golden tray, and a protester wearing a Superman costume emphasizing a message about the rightful constitution and fair elections. Retrieved from (Prachatai English 2020).

The Hamtaro and Harry Potter-themed protests used the monument as a backdrop to emphasize their demands, including the most controversial and sensitive topic for the Thai people. These performative actions were not just a mere symbolism of the Democracy Monument but an active construction of their narrative and version of the democracy embodied in the monument. The monument becomes more visible to the public because of these eye-catching creative protests based on foreign influences and globalization, and the audience's conception of the monument is now

associated with the student movement's demands and messages. It grabbed the world's attention because of these performative actions and the Article 112 or lèse-majesté law petitioners loyal to the monarchy.

7.3.8. Nationalism

The 1973 student movement left an image of democracy in the Democracy Monument that was faithful to the pillars of nation, religion, and monarchy. However, this imagery was challenged in the context of the 2020 student movement. Except for monarchy, faithfulness to the nation and religion was still evident in the 2020 student protests but with a touch of the Western ideals of democracy.

The concepts of nation and nationalism were also underlined in the 2020 student movement. The nationalism that is usually affixed to “Thainess” and the loyalty to the three pillars have been redefined by the students and protesters in their demonstrations at the public monuments. The *Ratsadon* group challenged this concept and added a new layer of meaning, challenging the kind of nationalism that the 1973 student movement left at the Democracy Monument. They incorporated “humanness” with nationalism because Thainess was often seen as an opposition to democracy (Wongngamdee 2020). The students contested the traditional school of Thai democracy by including and emphasizing Western liberal values in nationalism.

The conservatives commonly branded the student protesters as “non-Thai” and “nation haters” because of their activism. They are frequently asked, “Are you Thai?” as a form of political intimidation and discrimination. In response, the *Ratsadon* group asked in their protests, “Are you still human?” to assert their new definition of nation. They emphasized the importance of human rights and a more inclusive ideology rather than simply protecting “Thainess.” Popular hashtags and protest slogans encapsulated this demand from the protest groups, such as “Decrease Thainess, Increase Humanness” or *lot kwaam bpen tai hai noi long perm kwaam bpen kon hai maak keun* and “The nation is the people” or *chaat keu bprachaachon*. These catchphrases refer to people not only Thais but as citizens and humans and encompass any culture and ethnicity (Wongngamdee 2020).

Humanness as a way of showing nationalism in their protests can be seen in their demands, including the monarchy reforms. The People's Party 2020 also accommodated different protest groups in their movement, such as student groups, feminists, former Red Shirts, sex workers, LGBTQIA+ people, and people from the provinces who all fight for democracy. This accommodation of different groups justifies the humanness that the network movement would like to emphasize (Wongngamdee 2020).

The protesters denied they were nation haters, but they only redefined the meaning of nation. They insisted on this by showing their love and respect for the Thai nation, standing for the national anthem, and singing it during their demonstrations (Wongngamdee 2020). This practice was evident in the different protests of the students in the public monuments.

Singing the national anthem has already been a staple performative action by the student movement. During the November 14 protest, the protesters sang the national anthem and raised their three-finger salute when they turned back at the royal motorcade near the Democracy Monument. The student protesters also did the same during their October 18 protest at the Victory Monument. They sang the national anthem, flashed their three fingers, and raised their mobile phones.

The students at the all-girls school, Satriwithaya School assembled on February 26 across the street from their school and in front of the Democracy Monument in the afternoon (see Photo 114). They carried their bond papers with protest messages, raised their three-finger salutes, expressed their grievances against the dictatorship, and sang the Thai national anthem. They stood for democracy and asserted that the Democracy Monument must not be just a place where vehicles make a U-turn (School students join rally trend 2020).



Photo 114. Satriwithaya School students gathered on February 26, 2020, across the street from their school and in front of the Democracy Monument.

Retrieved from (Bangkok Post 2020).

The religion Buddhism and local traditions were also underlined in the 2020 student movement. Despite the decree issued by the Sangha Supreme Council that banned the monks from joining political activities, it did not stop some of them from expressing their support for the student movement.

Before they marched to the Royal Palace, the student protesters convened first at the Democracy Monument on November 8 to demand reforms on the monarchical institution and the removal of the government. It was estimated that around 7,000-10,000 protesters attended the said demonstration. One of the groups seen in this protest was the group of Buddhist monks wearing their saffron robes, carrying the orange Buddhist flags and their protest banners containing statements, including about the Thai Sangha Act in 1959 (2505 BE) (see Photo 115) (Kuhakan and Tanakasempipat 2020) (เยาวชนปลดแอก-Free Youth 2020).

During the November 14 Mob Fest, young monks were also given a platform in the student protests. They appeared on stage and called for greater accountability and transparency in the monkhood (Mob Fest: An uprising of joy and anger with a serious political message 2020) (Monument wrapped to cap dramatic day of rallies 2020).

Before the November Mob Fest at the Democracy Monument, a group of Buddhist monks also actively participated in the student movement. It is interesting to

highlight the participation of six Buddhist monks in the September 19 protest at the Thammasat University Tha Pra Chan campus. They led a religious ceremony and read a sutra from the Tripitaka, which includes the line: “If a King does not reside in virtue, citizens will suffer. If the King resides in virtue, citizens will be happy.” In addition, they also prayed to the people who sacrificed their lives for democracy and blessed the protesters with holy water (Occupy Thammasat: recapping 19-20 Sept protest 2020) (de Vienne 2022, 198-199).



Photo 115. Buddhist monks during the November 8, 2020 protest at the Democracy Monument.

Retrieved from (เยาวชนปลดแอก-Free Youth Facebook Page 2020).

The active presence of the monks in the 2020 student movement and the public monuments, especially the Democracy Monument, projects an image of democracy that is far from the traditional school of democracy left by the student movement here in 1973. Seeing the Buddhist monks supporting the demands and the protests of the pro-democracy groups in these structures challenges the meaning of democracy and Thainess that are faithful to the three pillars.

Although the presence of the monks in a political demonstration was not new, their participation in the 2020 student movement can be considered a turning point because they supported the demands of the student protesters, specifically their stand on the monarchy reforms. For example, their presence in the November 8 protest at the Democracy Monument, where the student protesters marched from the

Democracy Monument to the Royal Palace, asking the king to reform the monarchy and relinquish some of his power, drew public attention. The continuous presence of the Buddhist monks in the 2020 student protests resulted in naming them the Carrot Gang or *Ai Tao* Carrot Gang. This term was crafted by the public, particularly the young generation. Carrot refers to the color of their saffron robes, while the *Ai Tao* pertains to a term of endearment for cute male characters in a *Yaoi* or Boy Love culture. It can also be translated to a gang of carrot cuties (Tonsakulrungruang 2020).

The local traditions and rituals were also highlighted during the 2020 student movement, and the spatial structure, such as the one in Khon Kaen, provided a location for the protesters to perform these rituals. By showcasing these local practices as part of the performative actions of the demonstrations in the public monuments, it allows the protests in the provinces to be heard and easily seen by the Thai public. It also represents the student democratic protests not limited to Bangkok, unlike the 1973 student movement, and the concept of Thai nationalism not confined to the three pillars and far from Phibun's nation-building program.

In Khon Kaen, the activists conducted a remarkable ritual protest on August 22. More than 300 people in the northeast region of Thailand participated in the rally of "Free Isaan, Long Live Fermented Fish" *Isan plot-èek, pla-dèek jong jaroen* at the replica of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen.⁶³ The group is a coalition of activists and student groups in the northeast. As part of the rally, Patiwat "Molam Bank" Saraiyaem, a Thai folk poet-singer and former student activist, performed his version of *Baisi Su Kwan* incantation to call the democracy spirit to come back (see Photo 116) (Prachatai 2020) (Songkunnatham 2022).⁶⁴

Then on the night of the same day, it was followed by a rally organized by a group of students and supporters of the Free People. They again emphasized the 2020

⁶³ Isaan is known for *pla-dèek*, or fermented fish. It refers to the fish marinated in salt and placed in jars. Thai activists also use this food in their demonstrations because of its stinky smell. Protesters throw this whenever violence is used against them by the police. There were instances also when the activists threw this to the car of Prime Minister Prayuth (Thai fermented fish thrown at PM's vehicle by opponents 2021) (Rojanaphruk, What We Can Expect With the Return of Political Protests 2021).

⁶⁴ The *Baisi* or *Baci* ceremony is a unique practice among the Tai and Lao cultures. It is practiced to celebrate special events and occasions such as marriages, homecomings, births, festivals, and parties. *Su Kwan* means "calling of the soul." *Kwan* is said to be a component of the soul that protects and watches over the body organs of human beings. Then, the *Baisi* or *Baci* ceremony calls the *Kwan* to secure and protect human beings (Khampradith, Inversin and Somsanith 2010).

student movement's demands. Democracy and human rights were also highlighted on that night. The protest was full of anti-government speeches from the leaders and music from the artists who played on stage (Anti-govt rally in Khon Kaen 2020).



Photo 116. The August 22 protest and the Baisi Su Kwan democracy incantation at the replica of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen.

Retrieved from (Thairath 2020).

By looking at the 2020 student protests conducted in the replica monument in Khon Kaen, the students highlighted the contributions and legacies of the People's Party, particularly the change it brought to the Thai political system. It also disregarded the representations of militarism and its authoritarian nature, just like the movement in Bangkok. The protest activities of the student movement in the northeast brought the public monuments related to *Khana Ratsadon* back to life by using it as their protest venue, showcasing local practices, activating its significance, and producing another layer of meaning based on the demands of the 2020 student movement. Then, it continues its association with democracy and the constitution, particularly its connection to the legacies of the 1932 revolution. It untangles the monument's relationship with authoritarianism and militarism and provides a venue for contentious politics in the region.

The student movement in Khon Kaen also followed the protest practices of the students in Bangkok, such as using the three-finger salute and the white ribbon movement for the high school students. They also followed the demands and societal issues that the student protesters raised in Bangkok. Even though the allied groups of students performed the rituals and traditions during the rallies at the monument, it can still be considered a unique feature of the pro-democracy protests in Khon Kaen. The 2020 student movement did not just use global and pop culture references. They also

incorporated local practices and culture in their protests, such as the *Baisi Su Kwan* and Isaan folk music. These performative actions only show how the student activists claimed the replica monument and created their narratives based on the context of their region.

Monuments as spatial structures contribute to the formation of national identity because of the symbols, meanings, and messages they convey to the public. However, the spatial agency also has the power to construct or reconstruct these structures. It was evident in the 2020 student movement's redefinition of nationalism and Thainess, challenging the traditional school of democracy and the same time, the democracy attached to the public monuments.

Many things are remembered and forgotten because memory is socially constructed (King, *Heritage and Identity in Contemporary Thailand: Memory, Place and Power* 2017, 18). If the spatial agency can construct and reconstruct these structures contributing to public memory, institutions have the power to destroy or disregard them, resulting in historical amnesia. From being the vessels of ideologies and mediated built forms, they can become irrelevant and obsolete when these structures are neglected and the associated activities are prohibited.

The re-emergence of the 2020 student movement paved the way for the reactivation of these monuments. It only proves that for people to remember and have a strong memory of these public monuments, contentious politics and taking up these spatial structures significantly contributes to shared memory. It can also lead to contention, production, or propagation of narratives. By conducting their protests at the monuments related to the 1932 and 1973 revolutions, the students exposed their meanings and symbols to the public and how they were used, represented, and interpreted. These spatial structures supported their demands by being a platform and providing a space for educating their fellow youth and the public about the nature of these monuments and their movement. As argued by historian Malinee Kumsupa, the repeated production of pictures about the October 1973 demonstration made the Democracy Monument extremely powerful, giving new life to the monument (Tangwisutijit 2001).

7.4. Thai Democracy in the 2020 Student Movement

The 2020 student movement occupation of these public monuments also gave the structures new life by adding layers of meaning and contributing to the discourse on the traditionalist and Western schools of democracy. A new layer consisting of the Western school of democracy was produced due to the occupation of the 2020 student protests, and it added to the imagery of the traditional school of democracy left by the 1973 student movement on the Democracy Monument. The Thai democracy constructed in this space, together with the other public monuments aligned with the ideas of constitutionalism, liberalism, modernization, and nationalism, contested the concepts of militarism, authoritarianism, and monarchism and overlapped with the legacies of the 1932 and 1973 revolutions.

The Western school of democracy was included in the narrative and embedded in the meanings of the public monuments through the student movement's reference to the 1932 revolution. It highlighted the Western ideals of democracy, which started during the 1932 revolution. The *Khana Ratsadon*, which overthrew the absolute monarchy and installed a constitutional rule in Thailand in 1932, favoring the Western style of democracy, became popular and meaningful again because of the 2020 student protests.

The 2020 student movement also remembered and paid tribute to the October 1973 revolution. The Western democracy aspect of the 1973 student movement was emphasized in 2020, such as the ideals of a democratic constitution, student activism, and people's participation and representation. The Western school of democracy focused on the French liberal teachings and rejection of the traditionalist school of democracy were also evident in the 2020 protests through their demands, stance on monarchy reform, and other liberal values such as freedom, equality, and separation of powers. Following the 2020 student movement, the imagery of Thai democracy that emerged and remained in the Democracy Monument and other public monuments mentioned in this dissertation is a democracy anchored to the Western school.

Based on the demands of the 2020 student movement and the viewpoint of the students against militarism and authoritarianism that were amplified in the spatial structures mentioned in this study, the democracy that they embedded in these

monuments is a Western school of democracy without military influence and control in Thai politics. From symbols of militarism and products of authoritarianism during the Phibun regime, the Democracy Monument and the Victory Monument became democratic spaces against militarism and authoritarianism. On the other hand, the 14th of October 1973 Memorial continued to become an area against militarism and authoritarianism due to the nature of the 1973 student movement.

Aside from the reference to the 1932 revolution, the absence of monarchy-related designs and the original meaning of the Democracy Monument were also emphasized by the 2020 student protests, embedding the Western school of democracy as the recent layer of Thai democracy in the structure. The 1973 student movement disregarded the anti-monarchy nature of the Democracy Monument through their actions, such as showing admiration and respect for the King during their protest. However, the 2020 protests were the opposite of what happened in 1973 due to the students' contentious politics in these public monuments.

The recent student movement also accentuated a Western school of democracy in the spatial structures such as the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, the Constitution Monuments, and the replicas of the Democracy Monument by emphasizing the monuments' representation of a democratic constitution and the principles of the People's Party, which were based on French liberal teachings. Liberal ideas focusing on individual rights, equality, and liberty were present in the speeches and actions of student activists in 2020, and these messages were deposited in these monuments and the public memory. On the other hand, through their significance, these spatial structures also amplified the demonstrators' demands, contributing to the campaign and democratic agenda of the student movement.

The public monuments mentioned in this study were products of modernization, the amalgamation of foreign influences, and Thai culture in arts and architecture. These structures also signaled the change in Thai politics brought by *Khana Ratsadon*, especially when they introduced the notion of the Western school of democracy in the context of the Democracy Monument and its replicas. Although the context of modernization when these structures were built differs from the present, the 2020 student movement emphasized a democracy aligned with the Western school

through their demand for change and the use of foreign influences, globalization, and modern technologies in these democratic spaces.

The student protests in 2020 contested the embedded image of democracy anchored to the traditional school and faithful to the pillars of nation, religion, and monarchy in the Democracy Monument left by the 1973 student movement. The 2020 student movement emphasized the three pillars in the monument but with a touch of the Western ideals of democracy and discourse on the monarchy reform.

The Democracy Monument and the other public monuments mentioned in this study are not just structures built to commemorate or memorialize their respective purposes, but they are repositories of collective memory and Thai democracy constructed by the spatial agency or the student protesters in these spatial structures. In this case, the young and fragile democracy aligned with the Western school that was represented and symbolized in the public monuments, especially the Democracy Monument, was contested by the 1973 Thai democracy that is anchored to the traditional school due to the strong imagery and presence of the monarchy in the 1973 student revolution. The recent 2020 student movement later produced a new layer of democracy to these public monuments through their demands and protests aligned with the Western school of democracy, adding to the Thai democracy left by the 1973 student movement.

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION

Monuments contain stories, ideologies, and a variety of symbols and meanings that represent a significant portion of one's history and culture. It can also serve as a political tool to assert power and influence over the people, and on the other hand, it can also instill values and remind them of their identity. Monuments also contribute to people's everyday lives and public memory. These points are all applicable in the context of Thailand's public monuments. The construction of the Democracy Monument, Victory Monument, the 14th of October Memorial, Constitution Monuments, and replicas of the Democracy Monument are examples of how monuments can be fascinating instruments for discussion, especially in Democracy discourse. These public monuments resonate with the complicated concept of democracy in Thailand. They are also repositories of collective memory and the notion of Thai democracy. It is evident in the stories of their construction, the challenges they encountered through time, the students' occupation of these spatial structures, and contention with the institutions over these monuments.

The Constitution Monuments in Maha Sarakham, Surin, and Roi Et mirrored the diluted concept and sacralized version of Western democracy because of the various events and challenges in Siam after the 1932 revolution. The struggles of transitioning from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy were apparent, and the influence of the old regime was still evident. It forced the political leaders of *Khana Ratsadon* to implement actions allowing them to stay in power, such as disseminating the constitution to the provinces and sacralizing the concept of democracy. It paved the way for the people to accept the complex ideology, resulting in Constitution worship and the construction of Constitution Monuments. These monuments became platforms of December 10 constitution activities that inculcated the traditionalist school of thought of Thai democracy to the people because of the sacred imagery it formed in their minds.

The democracy in the Constitution Monuments is a democracy that was still influenced by the monarchy and traditional institutions. These were obvious in the symbols and meanings of the structures centered on representing the sanctified image

of the constitution, the influence and principles of *Khana Ratsadon*, and the participation of the people in their construction because of the veneration formed.

The sacralized idea of democracy and the image of the Constitution Monuments were eventually desacralized when Plaek Phibunsongkhram emerged as the country's leader in 1938. Phibun's regime transferred the attention from the Constitution Monuments to constructing his new monuments, such as the Democracy Monument and Victory Monument in Bangkok.

Phibun and the *Khana Ratsadon* asserted their authority and imposed their notion of democracy and other ideologies on the people by constructing these monuments. The construction of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok influenced the installation of replicas in the provinces, particularly in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum. These spatial structures provided a new layer of meaning to Thai democracy. They depicted a young and fragile democracy associated with the birth of the constitution, the legacies of the People's Party, Phibun's military leadership, nation-building policies, and modernization programs. The Democracy Monuments underscored a democracy far from the influence of the monarchy and served as venues for the June 24 National Day celebration activities. It represented a Thai democracy aligned with Western ideals and French liberal teachings but with different and complex ideologies such as constitutionalism, liberalism, nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism, and modernization. These are marked in the symbols and representations embodied in the Democracy Monuments, such as the image of the constitution, the influence and principles of *Khana Ratsadon*, the presence of the military imageries, and the inclusion of *Arun*, an anti-Chakri symbol. The contradictions attributed to this hodge-podge of ideas depicted at these structures brought by the surface-level introduction of democracy to the people contributed to the vulnerability of the *Khana Ratsadon* monuments to be challenged and re-interpreted.

After Phibun's leadership, the military regimes of Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn disregarded the importance of the Constitution and democracy, which affected the significance of the Constitution and Democracy Monuments. The June 24 National Day celebration activities in these structures were canceled, leading to the diminishing value of democracy and these public monuments in Thai society.

Democracy in Thai society was brought to life when the October 1973 student revolution ended the military government of Thanom Kittikachorn and Praphat Charusathien, which was memorialized through the construction of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial. This structure commemorates the significance of the October 1973 revolution and honors the heroes who sacrificed their lives for democracy. The memorial monumentalizes a democracy aligned with student empowerment, and that was anti-military, pro-constitution, and monarchy allied. The democracy conveyed in this memorial mainly follows the traditionalist school of Thai democracy because of the monarchy's role and intervention in addressing the student protesters' demands and ending the protests. Aside from the democracy aligned with the monarchical institution, the Western notion of democracy can also be seen at the sidelines through the creation of this structure, the participation of the people in constructing it, and the symbols representing liberal values attached to the monument, such as freedom, human rights, and equality. It is also a vessel of Thai democracy connected to the ideas of conservative nationalism and modernization because of its architectural design and symbols. It also represented the democratic struggles that Thai society experienced after 1973 because this structure was only inaugurated in 2001. Amidst the resistance and challenges it experienced for decades, the pro-democracy groups, the October 14 Foundation, and all other allied sectors supporting the 1973 student revolution worked together to make this memorial happen.

As spatial structures, these public monuments contribute to the discourse on Thai democracy because of the symbols and meanings they portray to the public. Their mere presence in public areas constructs mental imagery of democracy and what they want to depict to the people. If these spatial structures can shape the minds and actions of the people, the spatial agency, such as demonstration activities, can also transform these spaces into political and social platforms that can affirm, contest, reconstruct, or add layers of meaning to these spatial structures. By serving as democratic spaces and venues for political demonstrations, the contentious politics and the claim-making in these spaces contribute to or further complicate the existing concept of Thai democracy in these spatial structures.

For example, the construction of the Victory Monument had nothing to do with Thai democracy, unlike the Democracy and Constitution Monuments and the

14th of October 1973 Memorial, because this spatial structure displays imagery aligned with militarism and nationalism. It once symbolized the ideologies and nation-building program of Phibun. Due to spatial agency such as protest activities claiming this structure, the Victory Monument turned into one of the democratic spaces in Bangkok. The democracy in this monument could not be seen literally in its symbols and meanings until the people actively claimed this space and transformed it into a platform for social movement because of its strategic location. From symbolizing the victory of the military, an additional layer of meaning was constructed, representing the concept of democracy and the democratic rights of the Thai people.

The Victory Monument was irrelevant to the 1973 student movement. But when the 2020 student movement emerged, the monument was resurrected again from the demonstration scene after 2014, and it became one of the rally sites of the student groups. From being a product of Phibun's militarism and authoritarianism, this structure was contested and became a popular and strategic space for democratic movements. The militarism symbols and meanings evident in the monument were neglected by the 2020 student protesters and challenged them with their demands and performative actions against authoritarianism and military leadership.

The Constitution Monuments and replicas of the Democracy Monument were also irrelevant during the 1973 student movement. They were also disregarded due to the changes in the leadership and priorities of the military government after Phibun. However, some of these monuments were reactivated by student activists in recent years. The 2020 student protests occupied the monument in Khon Kaen and did a performative action at Chaiyaphum. The students in Surin also attempted to claim the Constitution Monument located in their province. These actions from the 2020 student movement commemorated the meaning of these structures and their role in Thai society. At the same time, they added layers of meaning and memory to it because of how they claimed them. The student protesters outside Bangkok recognized the contributions of the People's Party through their performative actions and occupation of some of the Constitution Monuments and replicas of the Democracy Monument. Aside from being a space for remembering the 1932

revolution and supporting a democratic constitution, these monuments also became venues for their demands.

The replica monument in Khon Kaen witnessed student protests in 2020 that showcased liberal ideas, including various social issues and controversial monarchy reforms. It also became a platform for black magic rituals and local traditions. The protest activities of the student movement in the northeast through the Democracy Monument replica continue its association with the Western school of democracy while showcasing local and regional practices. The monument also provided a concrete avenue for contentious politics in the Isaan region. By looking at the student protests conducted in this structure, the students highlighted the contributions and legacies of the People's Party to Thai democracy, particularly the change it brought to the Thai political system. They also untangled the monument's connection to authoritarianism, and militarism, just like the 2020 student protests and the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, by performing actions and local rituals against authoritarianism and militarism.

Despite being created by Phibun and *Khana Ratsadon* as a space for their narratives, the Democracy Monument in Bangkok also experienced contention and accumulation of different meanings. The spatial agency claimed this spatial structure and turned it into a backdrop and symbol of the 1973 and 2020 student movements, contributing to the complexity of Thai democracy. Except for the concepts of militarism and authoritarianism, the Thai democracy constructed by the 1973 student movement from their occupation of the Democracy Monument adhered to the traditional school of democracy and it was associated with the representations of constitutionalism, monarchism, liberalism, modernization, and nationalism. Meanwhile, the 2020 student movement asserted a Thai democracy at the Democracy Monument geared towards the Western school and aligned with constitutionalism, liberalism, modernization, and nationalism, leaving the concepts of militarism, authoritarianism, and monarchism contested.

The student demonstrations that transpired in 2020 created a new layer of meaning that added to the narrative claimed by the 1973 student movement in the Democracy Monument during the June and October 1973 protests. The 1973 movement occupied the monument as a space for their demands and democratic

aspirations, not for observing the 1932 revolution and the legacies of Phibun's military regime and the *Khana Ratsadon*, which were the purpose of constructing the monument. The 2020 student movement challenged this narrative by making the 1932 revolution meaningful again and commemorating the People's Party's contribution to Thai democracy during their protests. Symbols depicting the story of the People's Party, such as the ones in the relief structures of the monument, were irrelevant in the context of the 1973 student protests. However, in the context of the 2020 student movement, the contributions and legacies of the People's Party have been fully recognized. It was evident in the formation of the *Ratsadon* group and the June 24 commemoration activities.

The re-emergence of the student movement in 2020 also paid tribute to the October 1973 revolution. Aside from referencing themselves to the 1932 revolution, the spirit and significance of the 1973 student revolution were also incorporated into their various symbolic protests at the Democracy Monument.

The 14th of October 1973 Memorial also experienced the same situation. With the re-emergence of the student movement in 2020, the student protesters also occupied this space, and it became one of their demonstration venues. The 2020 movement continued the legacies of the memorial by honoring the people who fought for democracy in their demonstrations and commemorating the success of the 1973 student movement. The various performative actions conducted by the 2020 student protests in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial embodied its representations, such as the inverted cone-shaped and stupa-like structure that symbolizes the democratic quest of the Thai people. The student activists memorialized the sacrifice of the names engraved at the rectangular base of the monument. They imbibed the poems and messages of the lines placed at the structure by exercising their freedom of speech and asserting their human rights during their protests. The memorial also became a venue for democracy, the demands of the 2020 student movement, and the influence and significance of the 1932 revolution. From a memorial that monumentalizes a democracy allied with the monarchical institution, it also transformed into a space for contentious monarchy reform and a haven for the left-wing groups in the provinces, such as the Dao Din group in 2020.

The concept of democracy in the 1973 and 2020 student movements echoes the Thai democracy dichotomy. The 1973 student movement viewed democracy based on the traditionalist school of thought, particularly constitutional democracy, with the monarch as the head of state. Based on their demands and protest activities, they showed a democracy still faithful to the pillars of nation, religion, and monarchy. While carrying this perspective, they fought for the democratic constitution, the removal of the military regime, and liberal ideas to address societal issues. These were all manifested in the performative actions of the movement and associated with the Democracy Monument. With the success of the 1973 student movement and the role of King Bhumibol in solving the political tension, this imagery of democracy in the Democracy Monument was attached to public memory, contesting the original image of democracy in the monument based on the Western school and policies of the Phibun administration. This imagery was also embodied in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial.

On the other hand, the 2020 student movement constructed a democracy that inclined toward Western democracy, challenging the traditionalist school of democracy. Based on their demands, they emphasized a democracy that was consistent with Western ideals and aligned to a democratic constitution (a constitution not curbed by the military junta), parliamentary democracy (a parliament not appointed by the coup leaders but elected by the people), and liberal democracy (a country where the people and the government respect liberal values such as human rights, freedom of speech, equality, etc.). Aside from these points, they also pushed for monarchy reforms and the abolition of Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code or the *lese majeste* law, contesting further the traditional school of democracy.

These were all manifested in the performative actions of the movement and associated with different monuments, not just the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. As part of their campaign to bring back the significance of *Khana Ratsadon* to Thai society, they also activated the different monuments related to it, such as the Constitution Monuments and the replicas of the Democracy Monument in the northeastern region and the Victory Monument in Bangkok. They also claimed the 14th of October 1973 Memorial as one of their demonstration venues and space for their demands, resulting in a mixture of the influences of the 1932 and 1973

revolutions. With their visibility in recent memory, this imagery of democracy in these spatial structures from the previous decades has now been contested by the 2020 student movement and replaced with Western ideals of democracy. Their presence in the news headlines locally and internationally and their manner of claiming the monuments produced an additional layer of meaning. These monuments embody Western democracy because of the active construction of the 2020 student movement in these structures, allowing the Thai public to remember this for now.

The definition of democracy has been repositioned in these public monuments by the recent student movement, and it pressures the spatial agency and how they would continue their claim-making in these spatial structures. It was already seen in the past and emphasized in this paper that discontinuing human activities on these monuments could lead to amnesia, or new campaigns and movements could produce a new layer of meaning in the future. Fighting for and defending democracy is continuous, and spatial agency plays a huge role in this endeavor.

Democracy in Thailand has always been defined from the statist perspective. In a country where it is difficult for a democracy to prosper because of the existing political infrastructures and institutions, the spatial agency can maximize these public monuments to instill and preserve in the minds of the Thai people the significance of democracy in a society. It is now in the hands of this young generation what narrative of democracy they would like to continue for Thailand and how they will preserve and protect these public monuments related to democracy.

This study can be further explored by looking at the continuation of the student protests and their use of public monuments after 2020 and before the 2023 general elections. It would also be interesting to look at how the recent student movement affected the results of the elections, how the different political parties viewed these public monuments, and what their actions would be to preserve and protect them. Lastly, this dissertation hopes that the readers will be inspired to continue fighting and defending democracy and learn from the experiences of the Thai student movement that can serve as a model or inspiration in their respective areas and contexts, no matter how complex their situation may be.

For example, in the case of the Philippines, the Thai experiences regarding the contested monuments related to *Khana Ratsadon* can inspire the Filipino youth to

defend Philippine democracy, the People Power Monument, and the legacies of the 1986 EDSA Revolution. With the changing political landscape of the Philippines, the emergence of the new administration led by Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., and the massive spread of disinformation campaigns and historical distortions, the contribution of the People Power Revolution in the Philippines has been continuously tested. It can also be argued that the People Power Monument faces a looming threat as the main symbol and memory of the February 1986 Revolution. The lessons from the Thai student movement and how they activated the public monuments through their protests provide a benchmark for their neighboring countries and democratic movements.

Aside from Thailand and the Philippines, there are also other public monuments in the Southeast Asian region that student movements occupied for democratic protests that can be explored further after writing this dissertation. In Indonesia, their National Monument, known as Monumen Nasional (Monas), built to commemorate Indonesian independence, is also a significant landmark for student protesters. In Malaysia, their National Monument, Tugu Negara, constructed to memorialize the fallen soldiers who fought for Malaysia's struggle for freedom, is also a symbolic place for Malaysian protests. These cases only justify the vital role of public spaces, such as national monuments, in social movements, public memory, and democracy, which is noteworthy to write about and continue to study in the future.

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