

The 5 D's of Thai Democracy: The “Democracy” in Thailand's Constitution Monuments and Democracy Monument Replicas

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Abstract

This article discusses Thai democracy through a different lens by proposing a summary of its development through the 5 D's (i.e., diluted, desacralized, disregarded, disappeared, and defended) and using the context of the Constitution Monuments and Democracy Monument replicas in Thailand. By looking at the historical accounts and narratives about these monuments, this work also reveals that the “democracy” conveyed in these structures follows the Thai democracy discourse (i.e., the traditional and Western schools of Thai democracy). The symbols and meanings of these spatial structures mirror the development of Thai democracy from 1932 to the context of the 2020 student protests and how the spatial agencies construct their own meanings of the monuments through time. Amidst the popularity of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok as a symbol of Thai democracy, this paper contributes to the democracy discourse usually centered in Bangkok's context. By focusing on the other monuments outside

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Bangkok, this qualitative historical study promotes historical awareness beyond Bangkok and highlights the role of public monuments in preserving Thai history and defending Thai democracy.

Keywords: Democracy, Constitution, Constitution Monument, Democracy Monument

1. Introduction

Monuments contain stories, ideologies, and a variety of symbols and meanings that represent a significant portion of one's history and culture. It also serves as a political tool to assert power and influence over the people. It instills values and reminds the people of their identity. Monuments also contribute to people's everyday lives and public memory. These are all applicable in the context of Thai public monuments. The construction of the Constitution Monuments and Democracy Monument replicas, mainly in the northeast provinces of Thailand, exemplify how monuments can be fascinating instruments for discussion, especially in Thai democracy discourse. They resonate with the Thai democracy concept—evident in their construction stories, the challenges encountered through time, the people's occupation of these structures, and their contention with the institutions.

This paper seeks to unlock the connection between democracy and the monuments by answering the following questions: (1) How do the Constitution and Democracy Monuments as spatial structures reflect the development of democracy in Thailand? And (2) How do spatial agencies such as institutions and the people view these structures in relation to Thai democracy?

2. Research Objectives

This paper proposes a summary of the development of Thai democracy through the 5 D's (i.e., diluted, desacralized, disregarded, disappeared, and defended) and using the context of the Constitution Monuments and Democracy Monument replicas. It asserts that these monuments mirrored a diluted Western democracy immediately after the 1932 revolution, then desacralized during Plaek Phibunsongkhram's regime. After his leadership, democracy was disregarded, and the military governments ignored its significance, leading to the disappearance of some *Khana Ratsadon* monuments. Recently, the 1932 revolution structures have been reactivated and defended by the re-emerged Thai student movement in 2020 through their occupation and performative actions in these areas. This study also examines their symbols and meanings and how their interpretations of Thai democracy changed from 1932 to the context of the 2020 student protests.

3. Research Methods

This qualitative historical study focuses on the Constitution Monuments in Maha Sarakham, Surin, and Roi Et and the Democracy Monument replicas in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum. It also examines Buriram's Constitution Monument and the Defense Monument in Bangkok's Laksi District.² By following the historical research design, this study aims to discuss the development of Thai democracy using the context of these structures and

² In this study, the monuments in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum will be called Democracy Monument replicas 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. This paper also 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.

the proposed analytical concept of the 5 D's (i.e., diluted, desacralized, disregarded, disappeared, and defended).

Through existing discourses on Thai democracy, such as the traditional and Western schools of Thai democracy, this study analyzes historical accounts to understand the monuments' installation, purpose, and development.² These structures, found chiefly in the provinces, are not as famous as the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. This fragile popularity translates into the dearth of references written in English about them. They were easily disregarded, proving that these monuments are less known in public memory and less valued by the institutions.

In response to this challenge, this research provides an understanding of Thai society's democratic ideals and struggles through the lens of the Constitution Monuments and Democracy Monument replicas. It also promotes historical awareness and highlights the role of public spaces in preserving Thai history and defending Thai democracy. It offers a different perspective aside from the narratives of the Democracy Monument and democracy discourses in Bangkok.

³ The “Traditionalist School of Thought” of democracy argues that democracy has long been part of Thai society. The idea of the “father-child model” or “father rules the child” (rabop phor pokkhrong luk) explains that the Thai kings ruled over the people and ascended to the throne with the consent given by the Thai political community. This concept also emphasizes that democratic institutions have traditionally existed in Thai society through this concept (Mektrairat, 2020). Under this school of thought, democracy in Thailand can be described 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, 2008). Moreover, it supports the argument that democratic institutions in Thailand have traditionally existed before and not because of the 1932 revolution alone. 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, which overthrew the absolute monarchy and installed a constitutional rule in Thailand in 1932, favored Western 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).

This study uses primary and secondary sources such as newspaper articles, souvenir programs, documentation of the structures' construction and commemoration activities, books, journal articles, and feature articles about the monuments. In analyzing the data collected from primary and secondary sources, various theories on political spaces and public memory were used as focal points to discuss the relationship between Thai democracy and public monuments. As mediated built forms, these monuments construct, transfer, and reproduce societal power relations because they are installed and designed based on specific interests. They produce meanings people can imagine and think about based on their purpose. They can also create identities and differences because of the ideologies evident in them (Dovey, 1999). The Constitution Monuments and the Democracy Monument replicas are vessels of Thai democracy because of their historical contexts and democratic purposes. In the following pages, the stories of these monuments will be untold, as well as how they were built and their meanings and symbols concerning Thai democracy. It also dissects the "democracy" manifested in these mediated built forms and highlights their development using the 5 D's of Thai democracy (i.e., diluted, desacralized, disregarded, disappeared, and defended).

4. Research Results

This study reveals that the development of Thai democracy can be explained using the context of the Constitution and Democracy Monuments and the proposed analytical concept of 5D's (i.e., diluted, desacralized, disregarded, disappeared, and defended). Through the actions of the spatial agencies, such as institutions and the people, these structures serve as a platform for democracy discourse. In the beginning, the Constitution

Monuments represented a diluted and sacralized Western democracy because of the emergence of Constitution promotion and veneration. Then, they became a symbol of a desacralized democracy during Plaek Phibunsongkhram's regime. After installing the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, these structures started representing a Western school of Thai democracy. These monuments were disregarded after his leadership, leading to a democracy vacuum that resulted in their disappearance. Recently, the 2020 student movement brought these monuments to life, and they now symbolize a defended democracy because of how they occupied these structures.

4.1 Diluted Western Democracy in the Constitution Monuments

The Constitution Monuments in the northeast provinces of Maha Sarakham, Surin, and Roi Et represented the diluted concept and sacralized version of Western democracy because of Siam's various events and challenges after the 1932 revolution, the struggles of transitioning from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy, and the influence of the old regime.

Some leaders of the old regime occupied several positions in the government. For the *Khana Ratsadon* to effectively govern Siam, they compromised with the old regime by allowing the officials from the absolute monarchy to continue their role in the new administration. Aside from the old regime leaders, the permanent Constitution promulgated on December 10, 1932 was a product of compromises between Pridi Banomyong and King Prajadhipok (Barme, 1989). These compromises showed that the political power of the monarchy did not end absolutely, and it even resulted in conflict among the government leaders.

This conflict peaked during the suppression of the Boworadet rebellion (*Kabot Bowondet*) in October 1933. The government's military forces organized by Phibun effectively crushed the rebellion led by Prince

Boworadet (Barme, 1989; Wyatt, 2004). As a result, the Boworadet rebellion marked the end of the monarchy's political influence in the succeeding years. Phibun, Pridi, and other prominent figures of *Khana Ratsadon* emerged in the Siamese political scene and society (Barme, 1989). It also prompted government leaders to implement policies that allowed them to stay in power and protect the Constitution and democracy.

Aside from protecting, 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).⁴ They promoted the constitution as a sacred entity (*saksit*) and linked it to the religious aspect of Siamese culture, which signaled the start of Constitution worship among the people. It started when they distributed miniature copies of the constitution to the seventy provinces in 1934. They organized an official ceremony where the appointed representatives of the seventy provinces received their copies on August 28, 1934. After receiving the replicas, the representatives delivered them to their respective areas, and the local authorities accepted them with sanctity, enthusiasm, and fanfare (Barme, 1989) (Fuwongcharoen, 2018). Due to this ceremonial distribution, the Constitution became popular among the people, and they started worshipping it. The people venerated it side by side with the images of Buddha and the King (Chua, 2012).

⁴ Democracy in the Thai language is *prachathippatai* and 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 (Royal Society of Thailand, 2011).

Most people interpreted the Constitution in terms of indigenous magical conceptions rather than rational and legalistic ones (Barme, 1989). It operated as a “traditional totemic object, as opposed to a modern piece of legislation” (Fuwongcharoen, 2018). A constitutional deity was formed in their minds, which was perceived as sacred and needed to be respected (Barme, 1989). It was observed as an overseeing being from above, governing the ordinary concerns of the people (Subrahmanyam, 2021). Allegiance to the Constitution was practiced and added to the nationalist pillars of the Nation, Religion, and King (Barme, 1989).

Khana Ratsadon inherited political supernaturalism, and they mixed the visual and performative culture of Thai Buddhism with Western liberalism. King Prajadhipok’s blessing of the constitution became a powerful imagery. They used his picture handing down the signed constitution during the December 10, 1932 ceremony to symbolize that the constitution was a gift from above (*khong phraratchathan*) (Fuwongcharoen, 2018; Subrahmanyam, 2021).

The government also equated it to the teachings of Buddha (*dharma*). Even how it was presented to the people also added to its sanctity. The document was written in a thick accordion-style codex (*samutthai*) like the traditional religious scriptures. This document was placed on a two-tiered golden tray (*phan rattathamanun*) and honored as a sacred Buddhist item (Fuwongcharoen, 2018; Subrahmanyam, 2021).

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 was assigned as a public holiday, but the constitution celebrations (*nganchalong ratthathammanun*) were observed not only for a day but from December 8 to December 12 each year. From 1932 to 1938, the festivities propagated the idea of a constitution and became

pivotal for the People's Party (Fuwongcharoen, 2018; Subrahmanyam, 2021; Charoenvattananukul, 2022).

This popularity of the Constitution led to the construction of monuments. Different Constitution Monuments and Democracy Monument replicas were later installed in other parts of Thailand, particularly in the northeastern region, and served as a space for commemoration. They became platforms of December 10 constitution activities that inculcated the traditional school of Thai democracy and a diluted Western democracy to the people because of the sacred imagery it formed in their minds. The democracy in the Constitution Monuments was a diluted Western democracy because the monarchy and traditional institutions still influenced it. These were obvious in the symbols and meanings of the structures centered on representing the sanctified image of the constitution, the influence and Western principles of *Khana Ratsadon*, and the participation of the people in their construction because of the veneration formed.⁵

The *Khana Ratsadon* implemented “democratic paternalism,” as Arjun Subrahmanyam (2015) coined when they popularized the Constitution and Constitution Monuments and disseminated the democratic ideology to the public. It was democratic because of their references to the Western ideals of democracy, and paternalism because they assumed the inability of ordinary people to comprehend 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 (Subrahmanyam, 2015).

⁵ The monuments represent the influence of *Khana Ratsadon* by deliberately highlighting their six principles based on the Western ideals of democracy: sovereignty, security, economy, equality, freedom, and education. They were constantly embedded and symbolized in the monuments through the hexagonal element in the structures.



Image 1. Constitution Monument in Maha Sarakham.

Photograph by the author, December 23, 2022.

Some of the surviving Constitution Monuments (*Anusawari Rattathomunun*) are found in the municipal hall of Maha Sarakham (image 1), the provincial hall of Surin (image 2), and the island in the middle of Bueng Phalan Chai in Roi Et (image 3). These monuments, Maha Sarakham (1934), Surin (1936), and Roi Et (1936), were constructed to promote the constitution and become venues of the constitution practices and adoration of the people. The structure in Maha Sarakham was the first constitution monument built in the northeast region. These monuments were installed in the middle of the provinces, where people could easily access them and conduct Constitution Day activities (Fuwongcharoen, 2018; Thepsongkroh, 2018; Lawattanatrakul, 2019).

With the emergence of Phibunsongkhram, also known as “Phibun,” as the prime minister, things started to change in Siam. They inaugurated the first National Day on June 24, 1939. This inauguration affected the worship of the Constitution and competed with the Constitution Day celebration. From December 10, the public’s attention shifted to June 24.

The National Day festivities outshined and displaced the December 10 celebration on the Thai calendar (Barme, 1989; Charoenvattananukul, 2022). The Constitution no longer became the centralizing symbol of the people because the popularization of the Constitution was abandoned. The Constitution Day activities, such as the parade of the Constitution replicas and festivities at the Constitution Monuments, were discontinued and replaced by the National Day celebration (Fuwongcharoen, 2018; Thepsongkroh, 2018).



Image 2. Constitution Monument in Surin.
Photograph by the author, December 31, 2023.

The 1940 National Day celebration, especially the inauguration of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, gained the provinces' interest. The governors sought this as an opportunity to promote National Day in their

respective provinces and attract 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 own replica or versions of the monument. The Ministry of Interior responded and sent the design of the Fine Arts Department to the provinces. Based on the policy sent to the provinces, the replica of the Democracy Monument became part of the National Day celebrations and a reminder to the citizens about the political milestone of Siam. The monument design sent to the provinces differed from what was installed in Bangkok, allowing local authorities to construct their version of the Democracy Monument (Thepsongkroh, 2018; Charoenvattananukul, 2022).



Image 3. Constitution Monument in Roi Et.
Photograph by the author, December 23, 2022.

4.2 Desacralized Democracy in the Democracy Monument Replicas

The diluted and sacralized idea of democracy and the image of the Constitution Monuments were eventually desacralized when Phibun emerged as the country's leader in 1938. His regime also transferred the public's attention from the Constitution Monuments to his new architectural projects, such as the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. After the 1940 installation of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, additional structures were added in the northeast—these are the replica monuments of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum.

The monument in Khon Kaen was inaugurated in 1943 and is located at the Prachasamran Circle or Constitution Circle roundabout. It is also close to the Khon Kaen City Pillar Shrine (image 4). The other one was built in 1941 and is found in the Phu Kiaw District of Chaiyaphum, in front of the Metropolitan Temple (*Wat Nakhonban*). Khon Kaen and Chaiyaphum monuments were constructed to commemorate the June 24 National Day. It also became the venue for festivities related to the 1932 revolution. These replicas assisted the People's Party in instilling in the minds of the people in the provinces the essence of the Constitution, the 1932 revolution, and Thai democracy (Thepsongkroh, 2018).

The diluted Western democracy in the Constitution Monuments was desacralized when the Democracy Monument in Bangkok and the replicas in the provinces were created. These replicas provided an additional layer of meaning to the already complicated Thai democracy. They echoed the Western school of Thai democracy, particularly a young and fragile democracy associated with the birth of the constitution and Phibun's military leadership, nation-building policies, and modernization programs. These replicas replaced the traditional school of Thai democracy narrative. They highlighted the importance of the Western school of democracy through the

June 24 National Day celebration activities at these monuments, veering away from the influence of the monarchy. The Thai democracy during the Phibun regime was far from the democracy linked to the sanctified Constitution and the diluted Western democracy associated with the monarchy and old regime practices.



Image 4. Democracy Monument Replica in Khon Kaen.

Photograph by the author, July 2, 2022.

The five monuments mentioned became appealing due to the 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, 2012). It is aligned with William Sewell's concepts of spatial structures and agency. The spatial structures, such as the monuments, contain symbols and meanings that shape people's thinking and actions. At the same time, the spatial agency, such as the human activities in these monuments, claims and transforms these structures according to their narratives (Sewell, 2001).

4.3 Disregarded Democracy and Monuments

Phibun's successors, Sarit Thanarat (1959-1963) and Thanom Kittikachorn (1963-1973) 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 this change in leadership, the activities commemorating the 1932 revolution, including the constitution worship and celebrations, were canceled, leading to the diminishing value of democracy and *Khana Ratsadon* monuments in Thai society. This disregard for the importance of the Constitution and democracy affected the significance of the monuments (Noobanjong, 2007; Noobanjong, 2023).

The October 1973 student movement paved the way for democracy to be installed in Thailand. Unlike the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, these structures in the provinces remained insignificant because the protesters did not occupy them.

4.4 Democracy in the Disappeared Monuments

In the case of Buriram, the Constitution Monument in this province 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. Around 1987, the Buriram governor directed the

removal of the column, changed the design into a rectangular bar depicting the Thai national flag and placed it in front of the provincial hall (image 5) (Thepsongkroh, 2018; อนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญบุรีรัมย์ คืนชีพรอบ 2 หลังเทศบาลเคยวีร์ หายไปเมื่อปี'61 [The Buriram Constitution Monument was resurrected for the second time after the municipality had dismantled it in 2018], 2022).



Image 5. Constitution Monument in Buriram Before and During the Demolition.
Retrieved from (Khaosod English, 2014).

The monument was dismantled on November 6, 2014, to address the traffic problems in the area. The space was replaced with digital traffic lights and moved back in front of the old city hall. 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. It was again installed in 2022, but this time it was placed silently in the Mueang District, specifically in Soi Khu Mueang and Soi Isaan (image 6) (Historic Constitution Monument Torn Down In Buriram, 2014; Lawattanatrakul, 2019; อนุสาวรีย์รัฐธรรมนูญบุรีรัมย์ คืนชีพรอบ 2 หลังเทศบาลเคยวีร์หายไปเมื่อปี'61 [The Buriram Constitution Monument was resurrected for the second time after the municipality had dismantled it in 2018], 2022).



Image 6. Recent version of the Constitution Monument in Buriram.
Retrieved from (Google Maps, 2023).

This structure also represented the importance of the Constitution by putting it on a pedestal. It also depicted meanings and symbols associated with Thai nationalism and the Western school of Thai democracy. Compared to the other Constitution Monuments, this structure was built late, and the existing narrative during the period was the Western democracy insisted on by the Phibun regime. These representations were challenged as this structure was quickly removed, destroyed, and reinstalled without informing the community. The convenience of eliminating and destroying this structure dramatically shows how the officials perceive this monument. The recent silent re-installment of the Constitution Monument away from the city center also sends a clear message to the public.

The monument in the Laksi District of Bangkok suffered a different fate. As of this writing, no revival of this structure has been made. The Constitution Defense Monument (*Anusawari Phithak Ratthathammanun*) (image 7) was also 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. This monument features an octagonal stupa-like obelisk with *phan rattathamanun* on top (Noobanjong, 2016; Peleggi, 2017; Noobanjong, 2019; Disappearing democracy, 2019).



Image 7. The Constitution Defense Monument in Laksi District, Bangkok Before and During the Demolition. Retrieved from (The Nation Thailand, 2019).

The democracy in this structure reflects the Western school of Thai democracy because the architectural form was 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 1933

rebellion, the government organized a state funeral at Sanam Luang on February 17-19, 1934. Despite King Prajadhipok's repeated objections, 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, 2016; Noobanjong, 2019; Remembering Khana Ratsadon: erasing historical memory and the power dynamic of architecture, 2019).

The monument also contained meanings and symbols attributed to Western democracy, such as the Constitution embodied at the top of the structure, the imagery of ordinary people, modern architectural principles such as simplicity, and the representation of the People's Party (Noobanjong, 2016; Noobanjong, 2019).

The Constitution Defense Monument was a propaganda 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.

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. This revival was short-lived because the monument disappeared from the public eye in 2018 (Peleggi, 2017; Noobanjong, 2019).

In recent years, the existence of the *Khana Ratsadon* monuments and the significance of the 1932 revolution have been challenged. It is unfortunate to emphasize that these historic structures are so easy for the authorities to dismantle 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.

4.5 Democracy and Monuments Defended

Among the *Khana Ratsadon* monuments, the one in Khon Kaen is the most active structure for democratic movements outside Bangkok. In addition, the province is also described as a hotbed of activism because 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 Din activists who actively opposed the military coup in 2014.

Since then, the replica of the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen has become a place for defending democracy, especially the ones led by the students. The students activated the significance of this monument, produced another layering of meanings, and 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.

Thailand witnessed the re-emergence of the student movement in 2020. One of the distinct features of this movement was the recognition of the student protests in the contributions of the People's Party to Thai society. The protesters commemorated the 88th anniversary of the 1932 revolution by conducting symbolic gestures in places related to *Khana Ratsadon*. The everyday 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).

In Khon Kaen, iron barriers were installed, and firetrucks were parked near the replica of the Democracy Monument. However, 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.⁶ 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.⁷ They also carried brooms and cleaning materials as symbols in their demonstration (The 88th anniversary of June 24th: A National Day on which commemoration is banned, 21 events organized amidst intimidation and harassment throughout Thailand, 2020; คณราชภูร: รวมภาพกิจกรรมอ่านประกาศณราชภูร รำลึก 88 ปี ปฏิวัติสยาม 24 มิถุนายน, 2020).

The Democracy Monument replica in the Chaiyaphum province was also used by the 2020 movement to commemorate the 1932 revolution. A banner with a quote from the Declaration of the People's Party and an

⁶ *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 (Phaholrap, 2020).

⁷ Apiwat Siam pertains to the Siamese Revolution of 1932 where Thailand shifted from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy.

image of the People's Party plaque was placed at this monument on June 24, 2020 (image 8) (The 88th anniversary of June 24th: A National Day on which commemoration is banned, 21 events organized amidst intimidation and harassment throughout Thailand, 2020).



Image 8. Quote from the People's Party Declaration and photo of the People's Party plaque placed at the Democracy Monument replica in Chaiyaphum. Retrieved from (Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, 2020).

In the Surin province, the students through the Surin Youth for Democracy planned to read the People's Party Declaration at the Surin Constitution Monument on the evening of June 24, 2020. However, their event was canceled due to the intimidation that the organizers received from the police (คณะราษฎร: รวมภาพกิจกรรมอ่านประกาศคณะราษฎร รำลึก 88 ปีปฏิวัติสยาม 24 มิถุนายน, 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. 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 their demands. They also included other social issues such as women's rights, gender equality, and the right to safe abortion. 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. However, 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 Prime Minister Prayuth.⁸ 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 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).

The local traditions and rituals were also highlighted during the 2020 student movement, and the Khon Kaen Democracy Monument provided a location for the protesters to perform these rituals. Showcasing these local

⁸ 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).

practices as part of the performative actions of the demonstrations in the public monuments allows the protests in the provinces to be heard and easily seen by the Thai public.

The Khon Kaen activists conducted a remarkable ritual protest on August 22. More than 300 people in the northeast region participated in the “Free Isaan, Long Live Fermented Fish” rally at the replica monument.⁹ 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 (Prachatai, 2020; Songkunnatham, 2022).¹⁰

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 demands of the 2020 student movement. 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).

By looking at the 2020 student protests conducted in the replica monument in Khon Kaen, the students highlighted the legacies of the People’s Party, particularly the change it brought to the Thai political system.

⁹ Isaan is known for fermented fish or *pla daek*. 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, 2021).

¹⁰ 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, & Somsanith, 2010).

The protest activities of the student movement in the northeast attempted to get the *Khana Ratsadon* monuments back to life by using them as their protest venue, showcasing local practices, defending the monuments' significance, and producing another layer of meaning based on the demands of the 2020 student movement. It untangles the monument's relationship with Phibun's militarism and provides a venue for contentious politics, including the controversial monarchy reform in the region. It emphasized and defended a democracy based on the Western school of Thai democracy.

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.

As these monuments become venues for student protests, they are also challenged by the people who are against demonstrations. The Khon Kaen monument is feared to be included in the list of disappeared monuments and legacies of the *Khana Ratsadon*. In 2020, a petition requesting the structure's relocation was filed to the local officials because the protests annoyed them (Officials weigh on proposal to move Khon Kaen Democracy Monument, 2020).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The Constitution Monuments and Democracy Monument replicas construct and convey a democracy based on the traditional and Western schools of Thai democracy. As mediated built forms and spatial structures, the Constitution Monuments mirrored a diluted and sacralized Western democracy because of the Constitution's promotion and veneration. Then, it also represented a desacralized democracy during the Phibun regime. When he built the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, it represented a Western school of Thai democracy and inspired the people to create replicas in their provinces. After his leadership, these monuments were disregarded by the post-Phibun military governments, just like how they snubbed democracy during their rule. It led to a democracy vacuum and resulted in the disappearance of some *Khana Ratsadon* monuments. Recently, the 2020 student movement defended and brought these monuments to life. The student protesters occupied these structures and turned them into platforms for their demands and Western democracy.

The demonstrations conducted in these monuments justify the potential of the spatial agency in claiming and transforming these structures into their narratives. It was already seen in the past, and it is emphasized in this paper that discontinuing human activities on these monuments could lead to social amnesia. It is now in the hands of the spatial agency to determine what narrative of democracy they would like to continue for Thailand and how they would defend it using these spatial structures. 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. Fighting for and

defending democracy is continuous, and spatial agency plays a huge role in this endeavor.

This study can be further explored by looking at the continuation of the student protests and their use of the Constitution and Democracy 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 and people viewed these monuments in the provinces, and what their actions would be to preserve and protect them so that disappearance and negligence to these structures would be avoided in the future.

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