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ชีวิตทางการเมืองของพระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคมในปี 2475  
From 24<sup>th</sup> June to 10<sup>th</sup> December :  
The Political Life of the Ananta Samakhom  
Throne Hall in 1932<sup>1</sup>

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้อธิบายบทบาทของพระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคมในกระบวนการสถาปนาระบอบการปกครองใหม่ภายใต้รัฐธรรมนูญของคณะราษฎรใน พ.ศ. 2475 ในฐานะสัญลักษณ์ของระบอบสมบูรณาญาสิทธิราชย์ พระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคมเป็นพื้นที่ที่เอื้อให้กับปฏิบัติการท้าทายทางอุดมการณ์ บทความนี้แสดงบทบาทของพระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคมในฐานะเป้าหมายแห่งการล้มล้างอุดมการณ์เก่าและพลังในการสถาปนาอุดมการณ์ใหม่ในสยาม ผ่านการวิเคราะห์นาฏกรรมสองประการของคณะราษฎรบนพื้นที่ของสถาบันกษัตริย์ ได้แก่ การอ่านประกาศคณะราษฎร ฉบับที่ 1 ที่ลานพระบรมรูปทรงม้า หน้าพระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคมเมื่อวันที่ 24 มิถุนายน และการจัดพระราชพิธีพระราชทานรัฐธรรมนูญเมื่อวันที่ 10 ธันวาคม พ.ศ. 2475 บทความนี้ยังได้วิเคราะห์ภาพถ่ายของพระบาทสมเด็จพระปกเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวในพิธีพระราชทานรัฐธรรมนูญ และการเผยแพร่ภาพถ่ายในหนังสือพิมพ์ในฐานะส่วนหนึ่งของการสถาปนาความชอบธรรมและการประชาสัมพันธ์รัฐภายใต้ระบอบการเมืองใหม่ ในที่นี้ภาพของพระบาทสมเด็จพระปกเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวกับพานรัฐธรรมนูญเป็นทั้งตัวแทนของการประนีประนอมระหว่างอำนาจเก่ากับอำนาจใหม่ และการโฆษณาชวนเชื่อทางการเมืองของคณะราษฎร



The Ananta Samakhom  
Throne Hall

**Source :** The National  
Archives of Thailand.

**คำสำคัญ :** พระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคม, คณะราษฎร, ภาพถ่าย, พานรัฐธรรมนูญ,  
โฆษณาชวนเชื่อ

## Abstract

This paper examines the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall in relation to the People's Party's Constitutional Acts of 1932. As a symbol of the absolutist regime, the Ananta Samakhom

Throne Hall provided a perfect ground for this ideological challenge. It was considered to be both a target and a productive force in the formation of the new political ideology of the Siamese state. The paper explores the formation of the new constitutionalist regime through the People's Party's performative acts in this royal space : the reading of the Announcement of the People's Party No. 1 on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932 and the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932. The photographs of King Prajadhipok granting the first constitution and the circulation of these images will also be analyzed as establishing, authorising and propagating the new constitutionalist regime. The images of the King and *phan ratthathammanun*, a Book of Constitution on an ornate double tray are considered as representative of the compromise between the old and the new power as well as part of the People's Party's political propaganda.

**Keywords :** The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, The People's Party, Photograph, Phan Ratthathammanun, Propaganda

## Introduction

Windows and ventilators were sealed with wood and nails, despite that [they] had already been protected by balusters. Cabinets, tables and chairs were reversed and placed against the wall. There was a bed, big enough for two persons to push through, mosquito net and a small pillow. The floor was extremely dirty with footprints because no one cleaned it. There was only one door for airing and in front of the door were two soldiers carrying bayonets.<sup>2</sup>

Princess Phunphisamai Ditsakul, the daughter of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab,<sup>3</sup> wrote the above quotation to describe the cell where her father was imprisoned after the People's Party (Khana Ratsadon) seized power on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932. Prince Damrong's cell was a room inside the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, Bangkok



The princess' description of his cell as dirty and untidy with the re-composition of the furniture suggested his loss of monarchical power. The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, which had formerly functioned as a reception hall and meeting place of the King Prajadhipok's Royal Council, was transformed into a temporary prison for some council members.

Before 24<sup>th</sup> June, King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII, r. 1925-1935) was on a holiday at Klai Kangwon Palace (Far from Worries Palace) in the southern seaside town of Hua Hin. On the night before the revolution, the People's Party captured the regent Prince Paribatra Sukhumbhand, Prince of Nakhon Sawan, Prince Narisara Nuvadtivongs, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab and the senior members of the administration and held them in custody at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. A message was sent to King Prajadhipok inviting him to return to the capital to rule as a constitutional King and accommodate the new regime, with the caveat that should he refuse the revolutionaries would declare a republic. Eventually, Phraya Phahon Phonphayahasena, the head of the Military Faction and leader of the People's Party declared the end of the absolute monarchy in Siam. Standing on the Royal Plaza, an open space at the end of Ratchadamnoen Avenue,<sup>4</sup> which was part of the royal residential complex, Dusit Palace, Phraya Phahon Phonphayahasena read the first

Announcement of the People's Party to give new life to Siam as a constitutionalist state.<sup>5</sup>

As Pierre Nora says, space is 'a territory in which power is exercised and, in consequence, history evolved.'<sup>6</sup> This paper elaborates the performative efficacy of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall in relation to two important events : the revolution of 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932 and the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony of 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932. The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall was not only a platform for political events but also a performative force behind them. In this way, it can be considered as a productive force in the formation of the new identity of the Siamese state. The paper analyses the People's Party's actions on this place of sovereignty and explores its role in the formation of the constitutional nation-state. It also explores the relationship between visibility and spectatorship as they occurred in the acts of 24<sup>th</sup> June and 10<sup>th</sup> December by addressing them as political plays or social dramas. This dramaturgical metaphor provides a perspective from which political actions may be understood as an intersection between performativity of place and ritual performance, whilst also transforming the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall into a liminal theatrical space or a site of passage. Lastly, the paper investigates how the press transmuted this ritual in the closed-space of the Throne Hall into a public spectacle. In particular, it examines the creation of the photographs of Prajadhipok from the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony of 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932 and their function as part of the state's propaganda machine.

### **From Palace to Place of Detention : The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall in Revolt**

The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall was built as part of Dusit Palace to mark the forthcoming fortieth anniversary of King Chulalongkorn's reign. King Chulalongkorn, who was the origin and epitome of Siam's absolute monarchy, considered the previous Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, which was built by his father in the Grand Palace, to be too old and small to

accommodate royal ceremonies.<sup>7</sup> He thus expanded the royal residential area from the walls of the inner city, known as Rattanakosin Island, to the outskirts of Bangkok. Dusit Palace, originally called Dusit Garden Palace (Wang Suan Dusit), consisted of numerous royal residences and gardens and was linked to the Grand Palace by Ratchadamnoen Avenue. This urban expansion and new royal residential area embellished the capital with Western-style boulevard and buildings and thus created a new geographical landscape. While David Harvey explains that processes of urbanisation and the flow of capital in Western capitalist cities indicates the landscape of capitalism.<sup>8</sup> However, in the Thai case these processes instead seem to reflect a landscape of Occidentalism, which the Siamese ruler built by appropriating Western capitalist cities. In this way, this was not an urbanising process under capitalism but rather the consumption of Western civilisation.<sup>9</sup>

King Chulalongkorn hired a number of Italian architects, engineers and painters to work in his court. These included, Mario Tamayo, Annibale Rigotti, Carlo Allegri, E. G. Gollo, Gallileo Chini, Carlo Rigoli and Cecare Ferro, all of whom worked in Siam under the supervision of Chao Phraya Yomraj (Pan Sukhum). The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall was built from white marble from Carrara, in a combination of Renaissance, Baroque and Neo-Classical styles, making it the first Western-style palace in Siam. Upon completion the throne hall consisted of a central dome surrounded by six smaller domes, all of which stood at approximately 49.5 metres in width, 112.5 metres in length, and 49.5 metres in height.<sup>10</sup> King Chulalongkorn died before the project was finished but King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, r. 1910-1925), his heir and the brother of King Prajadhipok, continued its construction. At the time of its completion, it became the most costly building erected in Siam.

Although King Chulalongkorn did not live long enough to see the completion of his edifice and was therefore unable to use it as the grand ceremonial theatre of his reign, the entire Dusit Palace project was symbolic of absolutist power, with the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall serving as the centre of that power.

Figure 2. The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall and Chulalongkorn Equestrian at the Royal Plaza, Bangkok



The Equestrian Statue of King Chulalongkorn, which resides in the grounds of the Royal Plaza, is a public symbol of the greatness of royal rule. The position of the equestrian as a statuary form of the absolutist King, signified his watch over the country. Furthermore, the compositional structure of the Palace complex demonstrates that it was a site of a specific political attitude : absolutism. The commanding position of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall at the end of Ratchadamnoen Avenue, with the King Chulalongkorn Equestrian in the foreground, conceptualised the Siamese state apparatus as being under the rule of the Chakri Household (Fig. 2).

However, this new royal residential area also created an overlap between royal and commoner space : firstly, Ratchadamnoen Avenue, the thoroughfare linking the old and new palaces, was also available for public use, and secondly, the Royal Plaza in front of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall acted a royal space (*khet phra ratchasathan*), as well as a public square. Hence, as a liminal space,<sup>11</sup> a space betwixt and between royal and commoner worlds, the Dusit Palace was perfectly situated to become a site that would be caught up in the class struggle. Furthermore, as a signifier of both absolutist power and modernisation, the Palace's association with hierarchical social relations stimulated the uprising of the revolt as a new

beginning for the lower classes. Dusit Palace appeared as an explicit locus and target for political organisation : an ideal place for the new power structure to be proclaimed. This royal landscape therefore became a vital component in reclaiming and defining a new phase of the Thai nation—the constitutional regime—and a form of modernity, that is, constitutionalism, which meant democracy.<sup>12</sup>

As mentioned earlier, King Prajadhipok was not in Bangkok during the time of the revolution. His absence from the administrative centre, the heart of the Chakri Household, paved the way for the People's Party to seize the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall and transform it into a place of detention. The People's Party's act of revolution turned the sacred into the profane. It transformed the status of both the Palace and King Prajadhipok's Royal Council members from superior to inferior. The royalty became a target of contestation as well as a witness to the beginning of a new political transition that would drastically lower both their power and status. The selection of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall as a place of detention for the royal custodies indicates a special bond between body and place. As an "expansive and opening-up space" (*l'espace spatialisant*), which found its origin in the lived body and bodily movement,<sup>13</sup> the bodies of the royals in custody served as a place-productive force that transformed the Palace into a prison house, which, in turn, controlled and incarcerated their bodies. In this sense, the "position" of the Palace was strictly relational and attached to parts of bodies as well as parts of space.<sup>14</sup>

The imprisonment of the royal family members generated a new status for the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall - as an anthromorphisation of the Chakri monarch. With King Prajadhipok far away in the south of the country and the monarch's representatives, the arrested princes, detained inside the Palace and presumably, isolated from the outside world, the Palace was transformed into a representational body of the royalty and therefore a witness to the revolution. This highlights the revolutionaries' intended act of defiance towards the old regime as they took control of its sacred place : a location



where royal identity had been metaphorically converted into the very landscape. In other words, the Royal Plaza's identification as royal space, a symbol of the absolutist regime and a signifier of royal sovereignty, stimulated its new status as both target and primary witness of the revolution, *as if* this place had become the monarch. Under the control of the revolutionaries, the anthropomorphised Palace and the royal captives were thus 'compulsory witnesses' to the event and they had to observe the revolution unfold as political theatre, a 'spectacle that denies the audience's ability to look away from it or equally to intervene in it'.<sup>15</sup> The royal custodies, demarcated from the events occurring outside the Throne Hall, could only be passive actors in the revolution.

The presence of these witnesses completed the act of revolution. When Phraya Phahon Phonphayahasena made his resounding address in the grounds of the Royal Plaza to "All the people", it was not only directed to the people of Siam, who had gathered around the place with curiosity, but also to members of the royal family. Yet, they were not given the chance to have a visual encounter with the moment of the new state's declaration. The only royal eyes that witnessed the proclamation of the new Siam were the artificial eyes of King Chulalongkorn in statuary form. The oratory : 'You, all of the people should know that our country belongs to the people—not to the King, as has been deceitfully claimed'<sup>16</sup> took place in a very specific position, the heart of royal absolutism, in front of the statue of King Chulalongkorn who permanently looked over the country. The act of 24<sup>th</sup> June thus created the new nation-state through a reclamation and re-sanctification of the country's territory as a land that belonged to its people, the commoners, who had been emancipated from a state of slavery, 'some called *phraj*, some called *kha*', as well as animal.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the use of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall as a place of detention reflects that while the demarcation physically set the royals apart from the event, it also took on a symbolic dimension, terminating them from ruling and administrative positions in the new system. The transformation

of the political landscape, which took place through the actual landscape, thus illustrates the spatial dimension of the revolution. Indeed, making the declaration of the new regime on royal ground signified a claim of symbolic ownership over the landscape and as such, by 28<sup>th</sup> June 1932, the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall had been converted into the site where National Assembly sittings would be held. The monarch no longer ruled the realm because ‘our country belongs to the people.’<sup>18</sup> The transformation of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall from an administrative centre of the Royal Council to the commoner government’s National Assembly illustrates the locus of State power during the political class struggle and the seizure of the State apparatus.

The marking of space through the use of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932 created a new political geography of the Royal Plaza. It exhibited the beginning of constitutionalism through the public space of the Royal Plaza as well as the private royal space of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. In these circumstances, landscape was a mode of political discourse. The revolution of 24<sup>th</sup> June, which marked a marriage between politics and geography, indicated the intervention and the defiance of the revolutionaries towards the royalists. Furthermore, in return, it revealed how the power of landscape lay in its ability to reify and reaffirm political vision. The following section of this paper continues this focus on the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall as a performative force in the formation of identity. Transformed into a National Assembly for the commoner government, the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall functioned to articulate and promote the People’s Party’s ideology. I then conclude with a discussion of the role of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall in the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932, the birthplace of the first Thai Constitution, through an examination of the images of Prajadhipok and this ritual performance.

## Constituting the Constitution : The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall and the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony

‘Bestowing and declaring and granting to his subjects so as to establish them in liberty and sovereignty completely from this day henceforth’.<sup>19</sup>

On 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932, during the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony the scrivener, on behalf of King Prajadhipok, announced the above message. While the People’s Party revolution had technically changed the Thai political system on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932, this message suggested that the liberty and self-administration of the Thai people was “granted” by royal will. This section thus discusses the royal granting ceremony as a performative ritual in which the monarchical power and its location — the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall — were employed to authorise, enunciate and announce a new political regime. In the year of the revolt, the new status of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall emerged as a space of liminality, a space betwixt and between the royal person and the commoner, the past and the future, and the imaginary and the real. The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall became the threshold for establishing the constitutional state - a site of passage where a new state of affairs emerged.

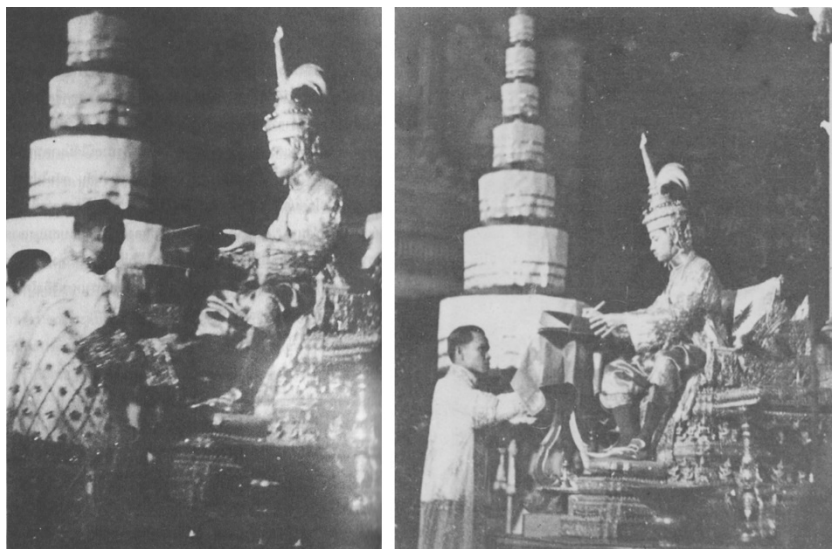
On 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932, the date chosen by the royal astrologer performing under King Prajadhipok’s command, the King arrived at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall for the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony. The photographs of the ceremony preserve the ephemeral ritual by capturing the climactic moment that brought to life the first Thai constitution. These images, Fig. 3, Fig. 4 and Fig. 5, depict how the divine status and authoritative power of His Majesty were implied and employed in this annunciation, and further highlight the theatricality of the event, in which the Throne Hall functioned as a grand stage.

**Left :** Figure 3. Phraya Manopakorn Nititada (Kon Hutasingha) presented the constitution To King Prajadhipok on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932 at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, Bangkok

**Source :** Charnvit Kasetsiri, *A Political History of Thailand-Siam 1932-1957*, 5th ed., (Bangkok : The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 2008), 112.

**Right :** Figure 4. King Prajadhipok signed the constitution on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932 at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, Bangkok

**Source :** Benjamin A. Batson, *The End of Absolute Monarchy in Siam* (Singapore : Oxford University Press, illus, 1984), 5.



How can a ritual simultaneously serve as a theatrical performance?<sup>20</sup> While the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall was not an actual theatre, nor was the 10<sup>th</sup> December ceremony a theatrical performance, these photographs sought to influence the viewer through the use of a highly formalised and deliberate setting. They depicted the setting and sequence of the ritual process as if it was a theatre scene with all actors standing in their specified positions. Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 showed that behind the curtains, King Prajadhipok was sitting on the throne surmounted by the nine-tiered Great White Umbrella of State. The King appeared in full royal attire, wearing the necklace of the most illustrious Order of Chula Chom Klao and the Maha Kathin Crown, a uniform that made him instantly recognizable as the King. His body in this dress code of honour occupies three-quarters of the space. On the left side of the pictures the seven-tiered umbrella can be seen, with a pair of the umbrellas being placed on the left and the right of the throne.

Since King Prajadhipok's appearance signified the royal dignity of the sovereign and symbolised supreme kingship, his act of signing the constitution can be regarded as a constitutional act. This was an act of approval by the supreme law of the new regime granted by the old, which, in turn, transformed the King into Thailand's first constitutional monarch. This moment was

Figure 5. Panoramic view of the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932, The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, Bangkok

**Source :** Charnvit Kaset Siri, *A Political History of Thailand-Siam 1932-1957*, 5th ed., (Bangkok : The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 2008), 120.



a definitive moment, the transfer to a new phase for the country, as the King bestowed his administrative power onto the Thai people. The 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932 constitution became in this instant the *first* official constitution of the country.<sup>21</sup> King Prajadhipok's acts frozen in the photographs highlight the active and transformative aspect of the ritual as they displayed the ritual's transformative capacity and affirmed the status of the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony as a rite of passage. By transforming the country into a constitutional state and the King into the first constitutional King, the ceremony provided

liberation from the hierarchical old regime and established a new political ideology in which all Thais were equal.

While Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 highlight the King's body, Fig. 5 offers an unbroken view of the entire palace hall and it is thus clearly evident that the royal place was highly decorative. The high ceiling, emphasised by the height of the wall and the rows of columns and vaults, gives a particular visual impact that diminishes human beings, making them appear smaller. Within the frame of the photograph, the scene of the event, which took place at the royal palace, manifests an aesthetic of ornamentation through decoration. Royal items, as well as the body of the King, were all golden, jewelled, highly ornamental and loaded with monarchical-religious connotations in order to create an aesthetic of ornamentation that related to a pre-revolutionary nationalism, which included the monarchy and religion as two of its three core pillars. It presented a monarchical-religious form of inspiration, a point of reference and an example of the embodiment of a Thai aesthetic quality. More importantly, it represents an image deeply rooted in Thailand's class ideology as a result of its portrayal of an aesthetic idea that, embedded in the country's hierarchical social structure and religion, presents the King as a semi-divine being.<sup>22</sup>

Fig. 5 provides a panoramic view of the ceremony, with the King as the focal point of the picture surrounded by the royal pages, members of the royal family, military honour guards, foreign representatives and ministers, as well as the People's Party members. The positions taken by each group in the picture signify their relationships. The King for instance, sits at the highest position while everyone else stands on lower ground, suggesting a clear hierarchy based on class, a legacy of the old regime. Sitting under the nine-tiered Great White Umbrella of State surmounting the Throne, King Prajadhipok is attributed supreme authority. The mural painting on the vault ceiling above him depicts his grandfather, King Mongkut receiving tribute from priests of different religions as well as a scientist, reinforcing the view of him as a supporter of religions, Buddhism and Christianity, as well as Western sciences. Although invisible

in this photograph, the interior of the domes and vault ceilings of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall were decorated with mural paintings depicting the royal activities and achievements of Prajadhipok's ancestors, the kings of the Chakri Dynasty, from the First to the Sixth reigns, as painted by Galileo Chini, Carlo Rigoli and Cecare Ferro.

Having images of the history of the Chakri Dynasty presented on the highest position — the ceiling of the hall — the scene of the ceremony may thus be read in two ways. On the one hand, the images of the past kings, together with the glamorous body of King Prajadhipok emphasised the existing hierarchical class ideology, rather than replacing it with equality, the new socio-political value. However, on the other hand, these images, as representational bodies of the past kings, were also a means of forcing these monarchs to bear witnesses to the transitional moment that lowered their status. These contradictory yet co-existing ideologies are clearly manifested in these photographs. This ambiguity nevertheless emphasises the liminality of the place, a limbo situated betwixt and between the past and future positions. Here, the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall functioned as a site of passage as it provided a stage that served as a sacred liminal space for a transitional process of the country's ideology. Below, I present a further in depth investigation of how the palace building served as a threshold building, where a new paradigm was formulated and established.

Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 are both portraits and emphasise the King's actions by directing the viewer's attention from right to left and from the upright position of the King to his eyes gazing down on his hands. The King's gesture guides the viewer to the focal point of the ceremony, which consists of the King's acts of taking and signing the constitution in front of representatives of the new government standing on lower ground. These photographs create a theatrical sensation; the Maha Kathin Crown on the King's head underlines the high status and sovereign power of the King. Moreover, it also simultaneously serves to direct the gaze of the viewer vertically, making the King look higher, both

physically and metaphorically as a noble man and the head of state. The form of the crown parallels the tiered umbrella on the left; while the outlines of the umbrella press down the constitution presenter and holder indicting their lower status.

Sitting on “Phra thi nang phuttan kanchana singhassana”, a high pedestal royal throne used only in special royal ceremonies, King Prajadhipok was elevated higher than everyone standing in the hall. Yet the King does not need to bow to take the book of the Constitution, inscribed on *samutthai*, a traditional document form that may contain a vast amount of knowledge relating to Buddhist discipline, traditional medicine, history, literature or customary law from the *phan waen fa*, an ornate double tray, often golden or decorated with pearls or mirrors and used to make a presentation to those who have higher status.<sup>23</sup> It was the duty of the commoner to raise this offering up to the monarch. In such a manner, the King’s power and sovereignty is clearly exercised through his gestures and thus he must not bow to anyone.<sup>24</sup> The encounter between the two types of body, the sovereign body and the commoner body, as captured in these frames, shows how their respective manners are controlled by a network of relations; the King, whose costume and seating position signify nobility and power, is revered by the politicians who stand on lower ground, a position of inferiority according to Thai tradition.

However, while the positions of the King and the politicians, their manners and the atmosphere of the entire ceremony in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 signify a royalist ideology, the photographs also contain another contrary theme, namely : the change of power and regime from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. These bodies do not act according to hierarchical tradition. That is, the acts of giving and the respectful receiving are not performed in order to maintain an absolute monarchy but to generate its subversion, a constitutional monarchy. In other words, King Prajadhipok became a liminal body serving as a threshold person, an entrance and source of power that gave birth to the new system.



As shown in Fig. 3, Phraya Manopakorn Nititada (Kon Hutasingha), Second Grand Councillor and Chairman of the Committee of the People (an early version of Prime Minister),<sup>25</sup> together with the committee and ministers who stood out of the frame, presented *phan ratthathammanun*, consisting of the *samutthai* on *phan waen fa* to the King. Fig. 4 offers a picture of an action of particular consequence- the signing moment. After this the King would pass the *samutthai* to the royal page for it to be stamped with the Four Royal Seals : the Great Royal Seal of Maha Ongkan, the Great Royal Seal of Airaphot, the Great Royal Seal of Hong Phiman and the Great Royal Seal of Phra Khrut Phah. Thai kings use this seal to authenticate the King's signature on all official documents.

Religious ritual and symbols were extremely powerful for legitimising the power of rulers. Hence, the use of these seals on *ratthathammanun* signifies the King's power as the supreme authority of the country, as well as the way in which the holy-royal dignity and sovereignty encapsulated the new constitution. The ritualised acts that took place within the religious-monarchical context, and hence represent a sort of tacit approval granted by the King's divine right. The use of traditional rites, in which the King was the centre and the head of the ceremony, was presumably inspired by the new political system's need for legitimacy. Following the granting ceremony on 10<sup>th</sup> December in which Hindu elements played a significant role in the ritual, on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December, Buddhist features and performances were employed in celebration of the new constitution. Thus, the three days of the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony and their associated celebrations involved both the monarchical and religious components of Thai traditions.

At the end of the ceremony, the power of the monarchy rooted in Hinduism and Buddhism had been established and the newly invented constitution was reinforced. The use of these age-old institutions and religious-based traditions had been employed as a deliberate strategy to help take a progressive step forward : in short, the past was used to legitimise the present and pave the way for the future. The strategy of

employing the past regime suggested the symbolic victory of the new regime as the old was used to show the favour for the new. The utilisation of tradition and religious ritual in the 10<sup>th</sup> December ceremony was a process through which the former traditional paradigm was reinvested with vitality in order to help establish constitutionalism, its counter-paradigm. This demonstrated what Victor Turner refers to as “social drama”, a rite of passage in which ‘conflicting groups and personages attempt to assert their own and deplete their opponents’ paradigms.’<sup>26</sup> As such, the historical moment of granting the constitution captured in the photographs discussed contained the King’s last noble act, the constitutional act, the moment when the old was giving birth to the new.

The constitution-granting ceremony on 10<sup>th</sup> December was a theatrical scene set up for a specific purpose. While *racha sap*, the royal vocabulary and bestowal of honours used in the ceremony suggested the illusory resurrection of the old sovereign power, it did not only serve the sovereign but also the revolutionaries because, as previously stated, the old power was employed to authorise the new. The photographs show the ceremony as a theatrical scene, firstly, in a tangible sense as a highly decorated stage where everyone had specific positions and performed specific actions. Secondly, in a metaphorical sense, as a theatrical scene of a fantasised return to royal power. Ritual is a play staged in between reality and imagination and between fact and possibility. Anything can happen in the liminality of ritual because it is a moment “in and out of time.”<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, the granting ceremony could be perceived as a time machine, returning to the moment before 24<sup>th</sup> June – that is before the regime was changed by the commoners’ revolution. Here, this impossible act of returning to the past was a performative act of imagination that enabled the smooth, non-violent transformation of the regime phantasmatically. It was therefore not only language, the *racha sap*, that phantasmatically resurrected the power of the lost sovereign but the entire ritual ceremony. Everyone in the ceremony

played their roles in this masquerade and it was disseminated to the public via the press. This was how the new story of changing the regime “by royal granting” was constructed. The dramatic lighting evident in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, as well as the panoramic view seen in Fig. 5, highlight the event’s theatrical dimensions through the visibility of the setting and further reveal the illusory quality of the entire ceremony. Within the frames is a space of projection : whereas the photographs capture an actual incident, that incident was a phantasm or a masquerade in the first place. Hence, the significance of the ceremony was profound yet illusory, owing to its fictional origin.

The latter part of the ceremony assured the public that the King had approved this new political system of constitutionalism. After the ritual had finished, Chaophraya Phichaiyat, together with other representatives, carried the signed *ratthathammanun* on the *phan waen fa* to the Royal Plaza to the south of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, while King Prajadhipok appeared at the southern Sihabanchon, a window balcony for the King to give audiences to foreign visitors. The same sequence was then repeated, the performance of music and the royal anthem followed by a salute from the military honour guards. At the end of the royal anthem Phra Borirak Krisdika, a scrivener, read the announcement of the royal constitutional granting. As the act of utterance was performed again, Chaophraya Phichaiyat raised *phan ratthathammanun* in his hands as a response. The King then returned to the Palace as the music, the salute and the royal anthem were performed in his honour.

The King’s body in this ceremony performed a constitutional justification. The presence of the King and *phan ratthathammanun* in the public eye, together with the granting speech performed by the scrivener, on behalf of the King, constructed a sort of legitimisation for the new political system and regime. The act of establishing the constitution as the new rule of law of Thailand was thus complete at this stage, as the public had witnessed the ‘coming-into-being’ process

through the King's act of approval and granting, as well as the scrivener's performative utterance made on behalf of the King.

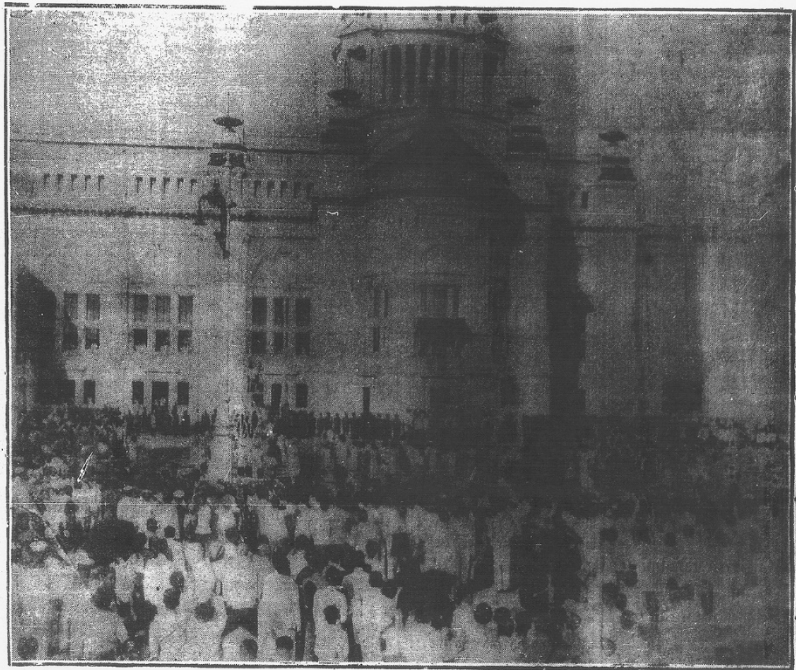
While the event at the Royal Plaza could have been the perfect scenario for propaganda, in fact it was the two photographs of the King signing and granting the constitution that became iconic and were widely distributed by the press media. Through the photographs in the news reports, the meaning of the ritual was transferred beyond the moment of performance. One scholar of medieval performance, Jenna Soleo-Shanks, noted that although two-dimensional representations of ritual performances could not fully replicate the entire relationship between the stage events and urban space, they at least allowed viewers to see these events in their intended setting and to form some connection with the sacred story in its political context.<sup>28</sup> The photographs thus transcended the division between the elites and commoners, bringing the ritual out of the sacred and into civic space. The close-up photographs of the King offered a new position to the viewer who was not capable of being there in reality; they took the viewers to an imaginary position close to the King's body, yet one that was suggested by the angle of the photograph as being lower than him. This viewing position corresponded with the position of those who participated in the actual ceremony including the people's representatives. The frames of the images reveal the position of the camera to be at the same level as other ordinary people.

In this circumstance, the photograph did not serve as mere record but as a form of media propaganda for the new regime. By transferring the King's acts from the field of ritual in the private sphere to the field of gaze in the public sphere, these photographic images turned out to be a means of persuasion. The captured gestures became a visual language delivering a particular message to the public : that the King had approved and granted them the constitution. By being signed and granted by the King, the constitution was granted the right to be : to be framed as the new constitution and legitimised for promulgation as the new rule of law in the country. The photographs that

captured these acts re-constituted them and consequently functioned as a means to establish this new constitution in the public consciousness. They became propaganda images, attempting to advocate for this new imported ideology.

Criticising the view that a photograph is an emanation and evidence of a past reality, John Tagg instead argued that the real meaning of photographs is produced by specific forces, contexts and purposes.<sup>29</sup> The photographs of King Prajadhipok indicate that the production photographic meaning, in accord with Tagg's argument, could also simultaneously relate to an actual past event. However, the use of the photographs of King Prajadhipok in illustrated newspapers determined their meaning as images of legitimisation by enabling the public audience, the members of the national community, who had no chance to take part in the actual ceremony, to see what they did not perceive in reality. Here, Michael Hatt's discussion of the photographic souvenir provides an explanation for the manner in which the photographs of 10<sup>th</sup> December ceremony acted on the viewer. Hatt stated that for the viewer, the photograph not only reminds them of the past act but also allows them to participate in that act; it functions as "a means of inclusion" that imaginatively brings the public spectator to the ritual space.<sup>30</sup> Hatt's argument may be useful in understanding the role of photographs in illustrated newspapers as a means of generating public witness. In the case of the Thai constitution, this aspect was emphasised through another photograph, which provided a panoramic view of the King giving an audience at the southern Sihabanchon of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall (Fig. 6). The Thai citizen, a notion introduced by the new regime, was included in this significant political ceremony for the beginning of a new phase of the country that concentrated on public participation in administration.

At this point, during the moment of the constitutionalisation of the constitution, the spectators were re-embodied through the newspaper photographs and re-constituted as citizens of the new constitutional regime. The body of the spectator then became a liminal site of action and reaction through which the



พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัว เสด็จออกสัปดาห์ขึ้น ทักขิณทิส ณ พระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคม เพื่อให้ประชาชนเฝ้าทูลละอองธุลีพระบาท เมื่อวันที่ ๑๐ ธันวาคม พ.ศ. ๒๔๗๕

Figure 6. Panoramic view of the King giving an audience at the southern Sihabanchon of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall  
Source : Thai Kasem 229 (17 December 1932) : 5.

<p>พระราชบัญญัติ ยกเลิกพระราชบัญญัติธรรมนูญ ประชาธิปไตย ป.ร.</p> <p>พระบาทสมเด็จพระปรเมนทรมหาอานันทมหิดล พระอัฐมรามาธิบดินทร มีพระบรมราชโองการโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้ประกาศว่า โดยที่สภาผู้แทนราษฎรด้วยคำปรึกษาว่า สมควรยกเลิกธรรมนูญแก้ไข</p>	<p>จึงทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้ตราพระราชบัญญัติขึ้นไว้ด้วยคำแนะนำยินยอมของสภาผู้แทนราษฎร โดยบทมาตราต่อไปนี้</p> <p>มาตรา ๑ พระราชบัญญัตินี้ให้เรียกว่า “พระราชบัญญัติยกเลิกธรรมนูญแก้ไข”</p> <p>มาตรา ๒ ให้ใช้พระราชบัญญัตินี้ตั้งแต่วันประกาศในราชกิจจานุเบกษาเป็นต้นไป</p> <p>มาตรา ๓ ให้ยกเลิกพระราชบัญญัติธรรมนูญแก้ไข</p> <p>ประกาศ ณ วันที่ ๑๐ ธันวาคม ค.ศ. ๑๙๓๒</p>	<p>และบรรดาพระราชกำหนดกฎหมายกฎข้อบังคับ และประกาศต่าง ๆ อันว่าด้วยธรรมนูญแก้ไข และประกาศต่าง ๆ อันว่าด้วยธรรมนูญแก้ไข</p> <p>ประกาศ ณ วันที่ ๑๐ ธันวาคม ค.ศ. ๑๙๓๒</p> <p>ผู้รับพระบรมราชโองการ พระยามโนปกรณนิติธาดา ประธานคณะกรรมการร่างรัฐธรรมนูญ</p>	<p>คำกราบบังคมทูล ผู้เริ่มพิธีการ (ต่อจากหน้า ๓)</p> <p>พระราชทานไทยแก่พวกข้าพระพุทธเจ้า โดยพระราชทานจากสมเด็จพระอริยวงศาคตญาณ สมเด็จพระสังฆราช สกลมหาสังฆปริณายก</p> <p>การที่พวกข้าพระพุทธเจ้าได้มีพระอาการประชวรใน วัน เปลี่ยนแปลง กว้างไกลด้วยอำนาจแห่งพระบารมีอันยิ่งใหญ่</p>
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creation and reinforcement of identity and power took place. Although they were not involved in the process of granting, they were, for the first time, acknowledged in the direction the country was going and, through their representatives, were capable of having a voice.

The royal granting held at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, whether it was the result of reconciliation, compromise or tension between the old and the new power, had become an

official discourse concerning the constitution of the new regime. The photographs capturing that moment had established and promoted the new regime to the public. However, they were not merely photo-reportage of the ceremonial event but instead were intended to symbolise the monarchical power in constituting the first constitution : the images portrayed the giving of life to *ratthathammanun*, the supreme law of the new political system.

The People's Party revolution on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932 and the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932 show that the beginning and the end of the absolutist regime in Siam can be conceptualised within the landscape of the Royal Plaza where the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall served as the centre of political performance. These incidents mark the moments of a shift in Thailand's political history as the identity of this landscape and royal artefacts was challenged, re-defined and re-claimed. Yet the Royal Plaza and the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall were not simply the backdrop to the 1932 Revolution but a target of defiance, since they were the representational bodies and/or an anthropomorphisation of the monarch. However, the identity of these royal legacies transformed their role into an active one, as their last breaths gave birth to the first constitution of the new power : the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall as a grand ceremonial theatre for the promulgation of the constitution and the Royal Plaza as a place for the public spectacle of that constitution. The inside and outside of the Throne Hall played a significant role in the beginnings of the new regime : first on the day of revolution and second, on the granting of the constitution day. As a site for the rite of passage, or a site of passage, the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall passed through a transformational operation itself; the Throne Hall did not die with the absolute regime but remained the national-political theatre by acquiring new political life as the National Assembly.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The paper is adapted from my dissertation “Revolution versus Counter-Revolution : The People’s Party and the Royalist(s) in Visual Dialogue” Ph.D. dissertation, Birkbeck, University of London, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Her Serene Highness Princess Phunphitsamai Ditsakul, *Sing thi Khaphachao Phop Hen [What I Have Seen]*, 2nd ed. (Bangkok : Samakkisarn, 1991), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Prince Damrong was a son of King Mongkut (King Rama IV, r. 1851-1868) and a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V, r. 1868-1910). He served his nephew, King Prajadhipok in the Royal Council. Prince Damrong was a self-educated historian and one of the most influential intellectuals of his time. He was discharged from his position after the 1932 revolution and later moved to Hua Hin and then Penang, Malaysia, after the Boworadet Rebellion (1933).

<sup>4</sup> The word “*racha*” in Ratchadamnoen Avenue or the “Royal promenade” derives from *raj* meaning royal.

<sup>5</sup> Nai Honhuai (Sinlapachai Chanchaloem), the royalist documentary writer who wrote intensively about Thai history and politics claimed that the first Announcement of the People’s Party, which was distributed to the public after the revolution was not the document that Phraya Phahon Phonphayahasena had read in the morning. The writer, whose source was the Navy Faction of the People’s Party, claimed that Phraya Phahon Phonphayahasena declared the revolution from a document written in German which was much shorter than the first Announcement of the People’s Party. See Sinlapachai Chanchaloem [Nai Honhuai], *Thahan Ruea Patiwat [The Navy Revolution]*, 2nd ed. (Bangkok : Nai Honhuai, 1978). Nevertheless, the content of the two announcements is almost the same.

This paper does not further engage with the debate about the first announcement and will consider the Announcement of the People’s Party as the first one in official discourse.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France : Les Lieux de memoire, Volume II : Space* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2006), VII.

<sup>7</sup> “The Announcement of the New Palace : The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall,” *Ratchakitchanubeksa*, Vol. 24 (8 March 1907) : 1321.

<sup>8</sup> David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore, MD; London : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Maurizio Peleggi, *Lord of Things : The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy’s Modern Image* (Honolulu : University of Hawai’i Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> For the details of the construction and the interior decoration of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, see Apinan Poshyananda, *Western-Style Painting and Sculpture in the Thai Royal Court, Vol. 2* (Bangkok : Bureau of the Royal Household, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> The concept of liminality was first introduced by Arnold van Gennep in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and gained popularity through the works of Victor Turner. Liminality, according to Turner, is a “moment in and out of time” : a threshold stage of a process. See Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors : Symbolic Action in Human Society* (New York : Ithaka, (1974). The concept of liminality has been widely used in a study of rituals, political and cultural transformations as well as in arts.

<sup>12</sup> It is evident that both the monarchy and the revolutionaries perceived Western civilisation as a mode of modernity, yet their appropriation of Western culture was designed to meet different ends : absolutism and democracy.



<sup>13</sup> The body politic refers to power relations between the human body and society; how society regulates the body and how individuals or groups struggle over the social control of the body. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

<sup>14</sup> The linkage between body and space has been widely investigated by generations of philosophers. Edward Casey offers a comprehensive survey and critical engagement with the philosophical history of place/space in relation to body through a discussion of the works of Immanuel Kant, Alfred North Whitehead, Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. See Edward, S. Casey, *The Fate of Place : A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, Calif.; London : University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (London : Oxford University Press, 1976), 11.

<sup>16</sup> The People's Party, *The Announcement of the People's Party's No. 1* [Online], accessed 7 September 2011. Available from [http://www.openbase.in.th/files/pridibook049part2\\_1.pdf](http://www.openbase.in.th/files/pridibook049part2_1.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "The Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam," *Ratchakitchanubeksa*, Vol. 49 (10 December 1932) : 533.

<sup>20</sup> A number of anthropologists have compared ritual to theatre particularly in regards to its temporal nature, its quality of in-between-ness and role in the creation of *communitas* (an alternative social form to social structure) and spectacle. See for example Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Culture System," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton, ASA monograph 3 (London : Tavistock Press, 1966), 1-39; Barbara Myerhoff, "Ritual Performance is Lucid," in *By Means of Performance : Intercultural Studies*

*of Theatre and Ritual*, ed. R. Schechner, and W. Appel (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1990), 245-249; Magaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual : Performance, Play, Agency* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1992); and Kristen Hastrup, "Theatre as a Site of Passage : Some Reflections on the Magic of Acting," in *Ritual, Performance, Media*, ed. Felicia Freeland-Hughes (London and New York : Routledge, 1998), 29-45.

<sup>21</sup> The Constitution of the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1932 was the first official constitution of Thailand. On 27<sup>th</sup> June 1932, three days after the revolution, the People's Party proposed a constitution to Prajadhipok but the King only agreed to sign it under the condition that it would be a "Provisional Constitution". Such tension and compromise between the King and the revolutionary government had started early with the new regime as the King and the royalists took part in drafting the first official constitution and adjusted it accordingly to safeguard the role and importance of the monarchy. See Nattapoll Chaiching, *Kho Fanfai Nai Fan An Luea Chuea : Khwam Khlueanwai khong Khabuankan Patipak Patiwat Siam Por. Sor. 2475-2500 [To Dream the Impossible Dream : The Counter-Revolution Movement in Siam 1932-1947]* (Bangkok : Fa Diew Kan, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> An aesthetic of ornamentation contrasts sharply with the People's Party's aesthetic, which emphasises the concept of simplicity and a desire to get rid of decoration that contains hierarchical connotations. Nevertheless, the People's Party's aesthetic arrived after this incident. The temporary crematorium for the soldiers who died in the fight with the Boworadet Rebellion in 1933 is one of the earliest examples of aesthetic of simplicity in architecture. See also Chatri Prakitnonthakan, *Khana Ratsadon Chalong Ratthathammanun : Prawatsat Kan Mueang Lung 2475 Phan Sathapattayakam Amnat [Khana Ratsadon Celebrating the Constitution : History*

and Power of Thai Politics after 1932 in Architecture] (Bangkok : Matichon, 2005); and Chatri Prakitnonthakan, *Sinlapa-Sathapattayakam Khana Ratsadon Sanyalak Thang Kan Mueang Nai Choeng Udomkan [The People's Party's Art and Architecture : Symbols of Political Ideology]* (Bangkok : Matichon, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> The report of the (extraordinary) session of the House of Representatives, on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 1932, relates that Prajadhipok suggested that the constitution being an important document should therefore be inscribed on *samutthai*. The use of *samutthai* and *phan waen fa* signifies the role of the religion and tradition, as well as the royal intervention, in legitimating the first Thai Constitution. See The National Archives of Thailand, hereinafter, Copy of the report of the 34<sup>th</sup> (extraordinary) session of the House of Representatives, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1932, The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, 357. Since then, all Thai constitutions have been inscribed on *samutthai* except for ones that stemmed from coups.

<sup>24</sup> This paper argues that the role of the King, as the head of the state, in approving and granting the first official constitution, signified a reconciliation and compromise between him and the People's Party. While the King was employed to constitute the new political ideology introduced by the revolutionary government, the People's Party, in return, honoured him by titling the event the "Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony". Prior to this event, the Royal Decree of Amnesty for the 1932 Coup was proclaimed on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1932 and on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1932 the revolution plotters arrived at the Chitralada Royal Villa to apologise for the message in the Announcement of the People's Party No. 1 declared on the revolution day that contained damaging attacks on the King and the absolute monarchy system. The King accepted the

apology and praised the plotters for doing it for the good of the country. It should also be noted that the House of Representatives additionally issued an amnesty decree for the prisoners of the Palace Revolt of 1912; a failed uprising against the absolute monarchy which took place in the reign of King Vajiravudh.

<sup>25</sup> Phraya Manopakorn Nititada was a judge but not a member of the People's Party. He was selected by the People's Party to head the government as the President of the Committee.

<sup>26</sup> Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors : Symbolic Action in Human Society* (New York : Ithaka, (1974), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process : Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaka : Cornell University Press, 1969).

<sup>28</sup> Jenna Soleo-Shanks's *From Stage to Page : Sienna's Caleffo Dell'Assunta, Spectacular Machines, and the Promotion of Civic Power* elaborated how images of ritual performance, in her case, the *caleffo dell'Assunta* in Sienna, functioned as a means to reinforce civic identity. See Jenna Soleo-Shanks, "From Stage to Page : Sienna's Caleffo Dell'Assunta, Spectacular Machines, and the Promotion of Civic Power," in *Thresholds of Medieval Visual Culture : Liminal Spaces*, ed. Elina Gertsman and Jill Stevenson (Woodbridge : Boydell, 2012), 281-301.

<sup>29</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation : Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Hatt, "Race, Ritual, and Responsibility : Performativity and the Southern Lynching," in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London and New York : Routledge, 1999), 83.

<sup>31</sup> The transformation of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall as a centre of constitutionalist administration did not last for long. Following the end of the People's Party regime in 1947, the new National Assembly, after several postponements, was built in 1970 and unveiled in 1974.

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