

The Victory Monument: the Politics of Representations of Thai Identity and Colonial Discourse in Built Forms

อนุสาวรีย์ชัยสมรภูมิ: ภัยยะทางการเมืองกับการสื่อผ่านความเป็นไทย
และลัทธิการล่าอาณานิคมในงานสถาปัตยกรรม

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Abstract

This research presents a critical inquiry of the Victory Monument in Bangkok with respect to its symbolic roles in the mediation of state power, together with the identification of the “Thai Self,” known as *khwampenthai* or ‘Thainess.’ By utilizing Thainess as a mode of problematization, the paper argues that: 1) under the ideological cover of nationalism, anti-colonialism, and democracy, the politics of representation at the memorial have lent legitimacy for governments since the Pibunsongkhram era to pursue their political agenda; and 2) the practice of colonization in Southeast Asia did not exclusively come from the West, but also took place among states within the region, as evidenced by the construction of the Victory Monument. In fostering self-reflexive dialogues on Thainess, the upcoming investigations illustrate the ways in which the built environment has been employed to represent something other than itself in the nation-building process. These topics are discussed via the themes of: 1) a political form of architecture and urban space: how the Victory Monument has been manipulated to serve politics; and 2) an architectural and urban form of politics: how politics has influenced the design and signification of the memorial.

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเชิงวิพากษ์ชิ้นนี้ได้ทำการศึกษาอนุสาวรีย์ชัยสมรภูมิทั้งในฐานะการเป็นเครื่องหมายเพื่อแสดงอำนาจรัฐตลอดจนการเป็นสัญลักษณ์แห่งเอกลักษณ์และวัฒนธรรมของชาติที่รู้จักกันในนามของความเป็นไทย โดยสาระของงานวิจัยได้แบ่งชี้ว่า: 1) รูปแบบและการสื่อความหมายทางสถาปัตยกรรมของอนุสาวรีย์ชัยนั้นได้ถูกกำหนดขึ้นและเปลี่ยนแปลงไปโดยรัฐบาลคณะต่าง ๆ นับตั้งแต่ยุคจอมพล ป.พิบูลสงคราม เป็นต้นมาเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์ทางการเมืองอันนำมาซึ่งความชอบธรรมในการปกครองสำหรับระบอบของตนภายใต้ข้ออ้างด้านอุดมการณ์ อาทิ ชาตินิยม การต่อต้านลัทธิจักรวรรดินิยม และประชาธิปไตย 2) การล่าอาณานิคมในภูมิภาคอุษาคเนย์มิได้ถือกำเนิดมาจากการแข่งขันระหว่างชาติมหาอำนาจตะวันตกแต่เพียงฝ่ายเดียว ทว่ายังเป็นผลพวงมาจากการแย่งชิงผลประโยชน์ระหว่างรัฐต่าง ๆ ในภูมิภาคเช่นกันดังที่ปรากฏจากการก่อสร้างอนุสาวรีย์ชัยสมรภูมิในประเทศไทย อนึ่ง นอกจากการเสวนาเชิงวิพากษ์เกี่ยวกับวาทกรรมความเป็นไทยแล้ว การสื่อผ่าน

ความหมายทางสัญลักษณ์สถาปัตยกรรมและที่ว่างของเมืองอันเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของกระบวนการสร้างรัฐชาติสมัยใหม่ ยังเป็นวัตถุประสงค์สำคัญสำหรับงานวิจัยอีกประการหนึ่งด้วย ประเด็นทั้งหมดที่ได้กล่าวมาข้างต้นได้ถูกเรียบเรียงและนำเสนอผ่านปฏิสัมพันธ์เชิงทวิลักษณ์ระหว่าง 1) อนุสาวรีย์ชัยสมรภูมิในฐานะเครื่องมือทางสถาปัตยกรรมที่ตอบสนองต่อการเมือง และ 2) ปัจจัยทางการเมืองและความเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมที่นำไปสู่การเปลี่ยนแปลงความหมายและลักษณะทางสถาปัตยกรรมของอนุสาวรีย์แห่งนี้

Keywords

Modern Architecture in Thailand (สถาปัตยกรรมสมัยใหม่ในประเทศไทย)

Culture and Politics in Architecture and Design (การเมืองและวัฒนธรรมกับงานสถาปัตยกรรมและการออกแบบ)

History and Theories in Architecture (ประวัติศาสตร์และทฤษฎีสถาปัตยกรรม)

Locational and Cultural Identity in Architecture and Design (เอกลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมในงานสถาปัตยกรรมและการออกแบบ)

Colonialism and Nationalism in Southeast Asia (ลัทธิการล่าอาณานิคมและชาตินิยมในอุษาคเนย์)

1. Introduction

The histories of Southeast Asian nations are framed and re-framed by their encounters with the West, as demonstrated by public monuments symbolizing struggles for national independence from colonial rule across the region. Examples of these built forms encompass Monumen Nasional in Jakarta, Indonesia; Tugu Peringatan Negara in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Viet Minh Memorial in Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam; Vimean Ekareach in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and the National Independence Monument in Yangon, Myanmar.

Unlike its neighbors, Siam—which later became Thailand—did not experience direct colonization by any Western power. However, the writing of Thai national history mostly operated within the framework of colonialism. A number of recent scholarly publications have shown that the creation of Thai nationhood during the 19th century was in fact the ruling elites' response to Western encroachments in order to preserve their authority by formulating a modern nation-state through the processes of Westernization and modernization (Sophonsiri, 1985, pp. 15-35). Nation-building efforts in both Siam and Thailand also incorporated the use of cultural artifacts to signify their national historiography. This was particularly evidenced in the design of state architecture and urban space, such as the palatial buildings and royal temples erected during the absolutist period, together with the public, religious, and monumental structures constructed after 1932 by the constitutional government.

The Victory Monument (Anusawari Chai Samoraphum) is among one of the most well-known public monuments of post 1932 Thailand. Not only did the memorial commemorate the Franco-Thai War in 1940 to reclaim lost Siamese “historical territories” from French Indochina, but it also functioned as a material manifestation of the nation-building program to represent the national and cultural identity known as *khwampenthai* or ‘Thainess’. Nonetheless,

Anusawari Chai Samoraphum has become an embarrassing reminder of Thailand's fascist expansion and wasted military endeavors after the country was forced to cede possession of these “lost territories” back to the French following the end of World War II. Despite these infamous connotations, the monument has survived whereas its meanings have changed over time (Pongrapeeporn, 1984, pp. 16-17).

By utilizing the discourse of Thainess as a mode of problematization, this research presents a critical and analytical inquiry into the Victory Monument and its role in: 1) mediating power for the state; 2) signifying the Thai identity; and 3) imposing characteristics of “otherness” onto neighboring countries to shape Thai attitudes. The study argues that: 1) the design and meanings of the memorial have been generated and transformed by successive administrations in modern Thailand to achieve their political goals. Under ideological pretexts, the monument provided legitimacy for governments through power mediation, as well as supported their colonial ambitions and interests in Laos and Cambodia by military conquest; and 2) the practice of colonization in Southeast Asia did not exclusively come from the West, but also took place among states within the region. The commissioning of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum testified that Thailand was *de facto* a regional colonial power, not just a victim of Western aggressions as widely publicized by the “official” account of Thai national historiography (Murashima, 1988, pp. 80-96; Reynolds, 1992, pp. 315-318).

In re-examining the ramifications of the colonial past that have continued to shape the present state of Thai nationhood, this study aims to further self-reflexive dialogues on cultural diversity, collective images, and shared colonial legacies in Southeast Asia, evolving around the themes of: 1) the political form of architecture and urban space: how the Victory Monument—notably during the Pibunsongkhram period—was manipulated to serve

politics under the guises of nationalism and anti-colonialism; and 2) architectural and urban political form: how politics—particularly after the demise of the Pibun regime—influenced the design and significations of the memorial via allusions to patriotism and democracy.

2. A Historical Background

The Victory Monument was built during Field Marshal Plaek Pibunsongkhram (Pibun)’s first administration (1938-1944). Its cornerstone was laid on June 24, 1941, but the monument was not dedicated until a year later. Centrally located on a traffic circle intersecting Ratchawithi, Phaya Thai, and Phahonyothin Roads, this stone-clad reinforced concrete structure became a major landmark in the urban fabric of the capital city (Figure 1).



Source: The National Archives

Figure 1. Aerial View of the Victory Monument.

Pibun was a key member of the People’s Party that overthrew the royal absolutist reign in 1932. Even though initially pledging allegiance to democracy, his rule became personified by nationalism, militarism, and fascism. In 1939, the name of the country was changed from Siam to Thailand. Aside from being “the land of the free,” Thailand denoted

a close kinship with the Tai-speaking populaces in Southeast Asia. The term further reflected the premier’s vision of creating “the Greater Thai Empire,” a *terra firma* for all Tai-speaking ethnic groups to dwell in unison (Terwiel, 2002, pp. 133-151).

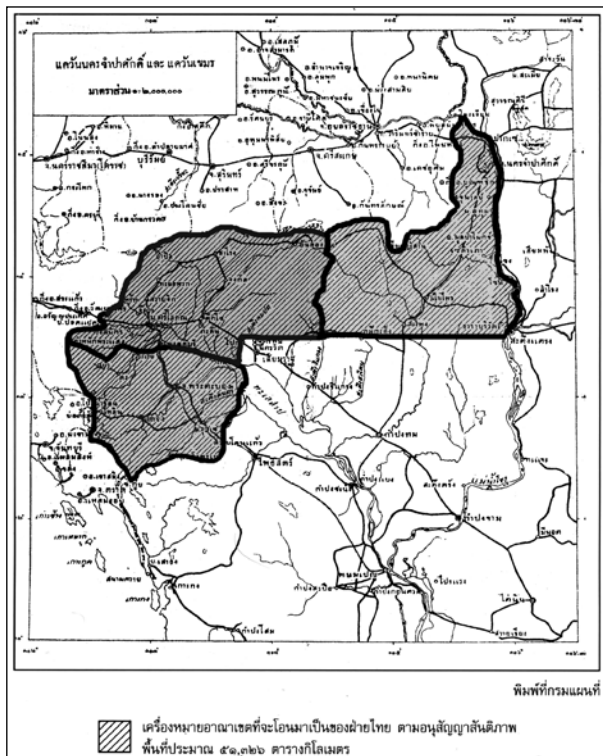
Although the executive, legislative, and juridical powers no longer rested with the monarchical institution, the ruling authorities in the post-1932 period were still traumatized by Siam’s loss of tributaries to the European colonial powers during the 19th century. The Japanese military expansion in 1937, coupled with the fall of France to Nazi Germany in 1940, enlivened Pibun’s aspirations to avenge the wrongful past. In December 1940 the Franco-Thai War in Indochina erupted, continuing until the end of January 1941 (Figure 2).



Source: The National Archives

Figure 2. Thai Troops marching, 1940.

Notwithstanding the deaths of 59 Thai troops and 321 French casualties from ground combat, the final territorial settlement was arranged and imposed upon both parties by Japan, who did not wish to see its impending War of Conquer in Asia Pacific being impeded by a prolonged Franco-Thai conflict. In spite of the Japanese intervention, concluding in the signing of the Tokyo Peace Convention on May 9, 1941, Pibun decided to celebrate the war as a great victory in reclaiming the “lost territories” that rightfully belonged to Thailand, resulting in the annexation of portions of Cambodia and Laos (Figure 3). Thereafter, Anusawari Chai Samoraphum was conceived and erected within a few months.



Source: The Royal Survey Department, Ministry of Defense.

Figure 3. The Cambodian Territories annexed by Thailand following the Franco-Thai War in 1941.

As much as Pibun and his politics shaped its design, the Victory Monument supplied the Prime Minister and the armed forces with a self-serving strategy to assert, legitimize, and preserve their power. In any case, it was widely known that the premier himself was an admirer of Mussolini and Hitler, notably the ways in which *il Duce* and *der Führer* transformed their nations through modern architectural and urban designs. The Thai autocrat's acute awareness of the importance of the built environment as the media par excellence to convey political propaganda and to mediate power was undeniably among the major contributing factors that led to the construction of the Victory Monument. Examples of other prominent projects for state architecture commissioned during the Pibun period in Bangkok included: 1) the urban renewal of the middle section of Rajadamnoen Avenue, where the handsome Rajadamnoen Edifice Group, housing several shops, offices, restaurants, a hotel and a theater, accompanied the modernistic Democracy

Monument; 2) several public memorials, including the Constitutional Defense and King Taksin monuments; and 3) government offices such as the Supreme Court and religious structures such as Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, Bangkok.

In addition, the creation of the memorial was socially associated with the “nation-building program” to modernize Thailand. From 1939 to 1942, the government issued twelve cultural mandates known as *Ratthaniyom*, outlining qualities of Thainess and behavioral parameters in all aspects of life for Thai citizens to adhere to (Figure 4) (Kromkhot-sanakan, 1936). Under the directives of Luang Wichit Wathakan, Pibun's chief ideologue and predominant cultural architect, the state employed mass media and the educational system to popularize a new history, filled with prideful ethno-national rhetoric, as well as tales of great savior-leaders, ancient empires, and glorious wars. Wichit Wathakan's historical narratives deliberately emulated contemporary Western history books, intended to provide the nation with an organic-historical link to its “golden past,” to promote a new “tradition” drawing on obscure folk customs and a variety of other practices. Regardless of their relatively recent origins, many of these so-called “national traditions,” including the verbal *sawasdi* greeting, are still accepted today as authentic constituents of Thai culture (Wright, 1991, pp. 102-104).



Source: The Department of Public Relations

Figure 4. A Page from *Handbook for Citizenship* (1936).

Corresponding to the cultural mandates inaugurated by Pibun, Anusawari Chai Samoraphum was entirely modernistic and Westernized in its appearance. Be that as it may, the “Modern Architecture” of the Pibun period was an amalgam, consisting of various early 20th century stylistic movements. Situated on elevated radial platforms, the central obelisk – designed by the architect M. L. Pum Malakul – denoted a masculine and militaristic composition of five bayonets clasped together on a high pentagonal plinth (Figure 5). The pedestal sheltered the ashes of the deceased from the Franco-Thai War, whose names were engraved on marble plaques on the walls. Iconographically, the architect followed Western convention in associating the obelisk motif with military memorials. Flanked by cannons and lanterns, the five façades were accompanied by bronze statues of a soldier, sailor, airman, policeman, and civil servant, executed by the Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci (the founder of Silpakorn University who subsequently obtained Thai citizenship under the name of Silpa Bhirasri) in the “heroic realism style” widely adopted by both fascist and communist states around the world during the 1930s (Figure 6).



Source: The Author

Figure 5. The Victory Monument, Bangkok, Thailand, designed by M. L. Pum Malakul.



Source: The Author

Figure 6. The Heroic Figures at the Victory Monument by Corrado Feroci.

Due to the aesthetic disharmony between the 50 meter-tall obelisk and the surrounding twice life-sized figures, Feroci later called the memorial “the victory of embarrassment,” which proved to be politically apposite (Wong, 2006, p. 64). The Allied victory over Japan with which Thailand sided during World War II compelled the country to return the territories gained from Indochina in 1941 to France in January 1947.

3. A Political Form of Architecture and Urban Space

Drawing on linguistic and discourse theories, an argument could be formulated that architecture signified meanings through representations, just like words and signs in languages (Saussure, 1966, pp. 14, 65, 68-69, 112-113). Buildings represented their meanings in the same way as proper names stood for the objects denoted by them. Because the meanings were given, along with the practices that created them, the uses of stylistic elements presupposed the practices aimed to provide justifications for architectural designs and significations (Goodman, 1968, pp. 1-12).

As for architecture of the state, the practice of power mediation signified its symbolic meanings.

In this respect, Anusawari Chai Samoraphum acted primarily as a “discourse” for mediating power. According to Foucault (1972, pp. 86, 140-141), discourse was a construction of subjectivity within certain historical, social and cultural systems of knowledge in a society. Just as the subject was produced by, and must operate within, the laws of language, a discourse produced a subject equally dependent upon the rules of the system of knowledge that generated it. Discourse was used to legitimate the exercise of power and therefore was always associated with desire, but these links had to be masked if the desire and power were to be manifested.

Dovey (1999, p. 15) maintained that the masking of power in built forms resulted from rapid changes in political situations, which required swift moves from one method of exercising power to another to conceal itself in the transitional process. The masking of power also derived from the fact that a naked will to power was morally unacceptable. Hence, self-deceit or hypocrisy was needed to legitimize one’s rise to power in terms of the common good of a society, which was normally carried out through an allusion to ideologies.

In architectural and urban design, self-deceit dictated the aesthetics. Buildings and public space propagating political contents usually operated under an ideological guise via the creation of identity: A projection of specific characteristics that could mobilize people to come together to express their solidarity and feeling of belonging, which could be politically exploited. Nevertheless, the identification ascribed to an ideology did not present any intrinsic quality of it, but simply represented what it created.

As for the built environment, it must be noted that architecture and urban form by themselves did not contain any form of power. As remarked by Bentley (1999, p. 16), buildings were not inherently subjugating or liberating. People utilized them to generate such meanings, and by a discursive mode of signification buildings could serve interests for

which they were not originally intended.

Regardless of the above complexities, examining the dialogue between architecture, power, identity, and ideology remains essential to understanding the mediation of power by the Victory Monument. Not only did the memorial perform as a mediator of: 1) arbitrate power for controlling and allocating; 2) creative power for founding, claiming, legitimizing, and transforming; and 3) assertive power for challenging and preserving; but also 4) destructive power for negating and subjugating. The following examination elucidates the mechanisms of power mediation embodied in the design of the Victory Monument to convey meanings, especially the identifications of “Self” and “Other” for Thainess (Dovey, 1999, pp. 9-16).

First was the method of force, which was the most overt means of exercising power by depriving its subjects of noncompliance. Nevertheless, this method offered relatively limited environmental applications, mainly restricted to assertive and destructive powers. As a consequence, force was utilized for preventative rather than creative purposes in terms of spatial confinement and/or exclusion, such as in a prison, hospital, military installation, and residential enclave.

Towering on a sizable roundabout, the assertive and destructive powers of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum’s dominant location rendered theatrically aggrandizing effects. On a corollary point, it might be construed that people were metaphorically obliged to pay tribute to the notion of the Thai nationhood by being forced to physically circumnavigate the monument. A similar kind of spatial organization, too, could be found at other public memorials erected during the People’s Party-led administrations. Obvious cases in point were the Democracy and Constitutional Defense Monuments in Bangkok, which also stood on large traffic circles.

Second, the martial features from the architectural and sculptural elements of the Victory Monument bestowed the means of intimidation to

mediate these arbitrate and destructive powers. Intimidation was an oblique method of power mediation, employing the threat of force to secure compliance under a cover of voluntarism through implied sanction, as seen by militaristic architecture such as war memorials and museums.

Albeit professing to pay homage to the sacrifices of lives by Thai troops against external threats, the allusion to the armed services at Anusawari Chai Samoraphum seemed to be directed inwardly. The monument solemnly reminded Thai citizens that it was the military that held the power and righteousness to rule. Anyone challenging the authority of the Pibun regime and by extension that of the armed forces would be regarded as being unpatriotic as well as “un-Thai,” if not “anti-Thai,” and there by a legitimate object of persecution. Third, in order to incite patriotic and anti-colonial sentiment from the masses, the Victory Monument resorted to the means of manipulation. This method operated by keeping subjects ignorant, hence unable to discern dissimilarities between facts versus fictions, reality versus myth, and so on. By lulling people into a false sense of freedom and security, the concealed intent of the manipulators directed their actions. Examples of manipulation in built forms included architecture of the state, whose stylistic identification was strategically associated with political ideologies.

At Anusawari Chai Samoraphum, nationalism and patriotism framed the terms of reference, buttressed by the notion of militarism. Through their creative power, the placement of the heroized statues around the central obelisk represented the military as the guardians of national security, thus legitimizing the despotic nature of Pibun’s fascist-oriented leadership and popularizing Thailand’s colonial quest in Indochina at the same time.

Fourth was the method of seduction, which co-operated with manipulation. This was a highly sophisticated form of power mediation, exercised through the skillful but devious management of the

interests and desires of the subjects by the construction of their self *vis-à-vis* the collective image. By depicting the Victory Monument as a material manifestation of the cultural mandates of Thai identity, the memorial became an integral part of Pibun’s nation-building program. Its allusions to the concept of Thai nationhood, endowed with assertive and creative powers, enabled the government to convince the populace that the battle against Vichy France in Indochina was conducted on behalf of their best interests and desires. Since Cambodia and Laos had historical and cultural ties with Siam, liberating these peoples from the French colonial grip and then bringing them under Thai domain would fulfill both the definition of Thainess, and that of Thailand as a great nation.

The effectiveness of seduction depended on legitimization and self-deceit or hypocrisy by claiming the self-interest or self-aggrandizement of the ruling elite as public benefits, engendering rich layers of symbolic meanings and dualism in architectural signification. In reality, the projection of ideology was simply a camouflage for masking power. Under the pretext of paying tribute to nationalistic ideology and the virtue of self-sacrifice, Anusawari Chai Samoraphum essentially performed as a conniving device to manage the interests and desires of the populace by the construction of their common cultural and national identity. The Franco-Thai war in 1940 was appropriated and then used as a cover to maintain the clout of the Pibun regime.

Fifth, the mediation of power at the Victory Monument employed the method of authority as well. Embedded in the institutional structure of a society, authority was marked by the absence of argument or contradiction, resulting in the unquestioning recognition and subjugation of its subjects. Through this quasi-overt measure, the executive authority framed the terms of references for any interpretation, and was able to circumvent any dispute or challenge by its destructive and assertive powers. Drawing on the language of civic rights and duties, its effective-

ness-similar to seduction-relied upon legitimization and hypocrisy. In the built environment, authority operated via symbolism and iconography, such as royal seals, religious symbols, and national emblems, coupled with the performance of public rites, rituals, and ceremonies.

Facilitated by militaristic symbolism and iconography, the basis for transmitting authority at the Victory Monument was Pibun's vision of the Thai nationhood. Yet, nationalism and militarism here merely acted as a hegemonic discourse for the premier and his clique to negotiate and then relegate it to a lesser position to display their authoritative status in Thai society. During his tenure in the premiership, Pibun "had played the role of kings as had no man in living memory, and as such no man could even hope to replace him" (Winichakul, 1999, p. 9). He envisioned military leadership as an appropriate model for Thailand during the unrest of wartime. The Field Marshall portrayed himself as a "strong and principled leader to whom the Thai elite had historically turned to arbitrate differences" (Wright, 1991, pp. 88-104). He had previously published articles on the global crisis in the Ministry of Defense Magazine calling for a strong leader in Thailand, as "an animal herd needs its leader" (Kasetsiri, 1974, p. 35).

Luang Wichit Wathakan popularized Pibun's cult of leadership and nationalist vision, which were shared by many of the upper class and bourgeoisie, via cultural songs, plays, dances, and novels, as well as institutionalized them through public events and state ceremonies. For instance, Pibun triumphantly reviewed a march of thousands of Thai troops at the cornerstone laying ceremony of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum. The celebration subsequently spread throughout the country as the Field Marshall sent his "warriors to parade in all major urban centers" (Wright, 1991, p. 110).

In the social arena, the memorial served as a catalyst for the promotion of the 1944 Code of National Bravery, illustrating Thailand as "a nation

of capable warriors," who were "harsh to their enemies" and would deliberately "follow their leader" (Kromkhotsanakan, 1944). Inspired by the Japanese Bushido warrior code, many paramilitary and educational organizations, such as the Yuvachon-Taharn (Militaristic Youth Movement), were established by the state. They further disseminated the warrior spirit and military gallantry, accompanied by Pibun's chauvinistic cult of leadership as propagated by the militaristic appearance of the Victory Monument (Stowe, 1991, p. 85).

Taken together, all the methods of power mediation were embodied in Anusawari Chai Samoraphum: force, intimidation, manipulation, seduction, and authority worked in concert to underline the identification processes of "Self" and "Other" in *khwampenthai* discourse. The design of this memorial signified "what is Thai," in simultaneous conjunction with "what is not Thai," by generating a binary opposition of meanings.

For the positive identification of Thainess, the old Siamese values of nation, religion, and kingship were replaced by the People's Party's concepts of nation-state, independence, racial affinity, fraternity, altruism, armed strength, and progression. This was epitomized by the modernist design, structure, and material fabric of the Victory Monument and the absence of any symbolic reference to the crown. Consequently, Anusawari Chai Samoraphum represented Thailand's ability as a culture and nation to assimilate modern ideas, processes, knowledge, and technology from abroad, while exemplifying the "Thai way" in negotiating modernity, as stipulated by Pibun's cultural mandates.

On the contrary, the negative identification of *khwampenthai* constructed the attributes of "un-Thainess," "otherness," and even the inimical attribute of "anti-Thainess" for foreigners in the collective Thai psyche. For example, whereas the militaristic overtone of the Victory Monument emphasized the autonomy of the Thai nation-state

from Western colonialism, its modernistic design differentiated Thai citizens from their neighbors who had succumbed to Western colonization and could not progress towards modernity without their colonial masters. Furthermore, the absence of any symbolic reference to the crown implicitly cast pre-1932 Revolution architecture of the state as backward and “un-Thai.” The novel qualities of the memorial stood for the new and progressive nation of Thailand, in place of the defunct absolutist kingdom of Siam.

The otherness in the design of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum obviously fell into a well-established Occidentalizing project (Said, 1978, pp. 252-253), initiated since the reign of King Mongkut in the 19th century. The Siamese ruling elite regarded the Western model of modernization as the sources of and methods for achieving a respectable status among the civilized countries. Hence, the Occidentalizing project furnished them with a new and refined identity and also shaped their worldview about the West and modernity itself, by framing historical and cultural experiences with and/or against Western powers and modern world. In a comparable fashion to several Europeanized palaces and regal buildings in Bangkok, the stylistic appearance of the Victory Monument was a conscious endeavor by the state to exercise an active and authoritative role over Thais in generating, combining, and projecting their versions of contested meanings upon the immediate world and beyond, while instantaneously asserting their self-identity through their consumption of material culture (Aphornsuvan, 2004, pp. 96-105).

At the urban scale, Anusawari Chai Samoraphum served as a propagandist tool for the state to disseminate the authority of Pibun at the expense of the monarchical institution. The development of the adjacent area to the Victory Monument in Phaya Thai district functioned in conjunction with other contemporary projects, such as the revival of Rajadamnoen Avenue and the construction of the Democracy Monument, in exhibiting the efforts of

the post-1932 government to symbolize the shift of ruling power and political legitimacy away from the deposed absolutist regime.

At the heart of the capital city, the remaking of the Rajadamnoen and its environment proclaimed the triumph of the People’s Party and the 1932 Revolution over Siamese royal absolutism. The main axis of the middle section of the thoroughfare, built in the late-19th century during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, “would be widened and lined up with handsome edifices, turning into a pride of the modern and civilized Thailand” (Pibunsongkhram, 1942).

Further afield, apart from generating and sustaining urban growth in Bangkok northward, the creation of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum along with the surrounding government offices, hospitals, and commercial facilities, represented the dawn of a new era. The memorial, therefore, became a center of all things progressive, from which Phahonyothin Road originated, linking the capital city to the upper parts of the country while at the same time expressing the sweeping authority of Pibun’s despotic rule.

Although these significant contrivances of the Victory Monument sound impressive at first, their relationships with the social, cultural, and political contexts were paradoxical in reality. For instance, because several measures taken to define the Thai identity were in many respects as much Western as Thai, Pibun’s cultural mandates on *khwampenthai* – the Ratthanियom – were indeed conceptually schizophrenic (Figure 4). Likewise, the Westernized and modernistic expressions of the Victory Monument (Figure 5) – totally foreign and alien to the Thais’ cognizance – subversively and inadvertently undermined the premier’s ideal of Thainess.

In this respect, a caution could be exercised that the design of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum reflected inherent problems in the discourse of *khwampenthai* that resulted in an intricate system and syncretic nature of the Thai identity. Whereas the Thai ruling elite normally viewed the West and

modernity as the “suspected Other” (Winichakul, 2000, pp. 40-42), Thainess could never be completed without non-Thai contributions, as evidenced by the aesthetics and creator of the memorial. The fact that Westerners and their material culture played a hand in the creation of the Thai identity emphasized the role of otherness in the identification of *khwam-penthai*.

Accordingly, the Victory Monument’s dialogues with power, identity, and ideology were complicated, dialectical, and contradictory, leading to a slippage of meanings that have been re-appropriated and exploited by Thailand’s post-1945 administrations.

4. An Architectural and Urban Form of Politics

Pibun fled abroad just before the fall of Japan. Yet Thailand was saved from losing World War II by the Seri Thai (Free Thai) underground resistance, organized by Pibun’s political archrival: Dr. Pridi Panomyong, the socialist-oriented founder of the People’s Party and a former Regent, who subsequently become an elected Prime Minister. In 1946, King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII) was mysteriously shot dead and succeeded by his younger brother Bhumibol Adulyadej, the present sovereign. Accused of being the regicidal mastermind, Panomyong ran off and lived in exile. He was demonized by the military and royal apologists as a monarchy-destroying communist to intimidate those with liberal ideas (Jeamteerasakul, 2003, pp. 34-36).

Up to the mid-1970s, notwithstanding some elections and bureaucratized civilian administrations, Thailand was ruled mostly by a series of juntas and was beset with coups and counter-coups. Under the pretense of safeguarding national security, the military regime prosecuted their critics without trial, casting them as communist sympathizers. The army restored Pibun to power in 1948, but only to be ousted by his lieutenants in 1957. During his second term in office, Pibun promoted democracy in place off fascism and ultra-nationalism as an ideo-

logical facade. While defending its forms, the premier suppressed democratic yearnings among the masses (Stowe, 1991, pp. 228-283).

By claiming to be a fervid communist fighter, Pibun became the preferred choice for the U.S. to contain the People’s Republic of China (PRC)’s influence in the Southeast Asian region. When the Korean War broke out, the Prime Minister ordered a contingent of Thai troops to join the UN’s multi-national force led by the Americans. He also implemented several discriminatory socio-economic measures against ethnic Chinese in Thailand. However, by the latter half of the 1950s, Pibun was criticizing the American’s overwhelming influence in Thai politics, and sent two of the children of his closest advisor to Beijing to establish a secret diplomatic channel. He even tried to reconcile with Panomyong to counter the growing clout of the rightist elements in the armed forces (Fineman, 1997, pp. 12-16).

After 1948, key positions in the cabinet were not occupied by the cadres People’s Party, but by military officers of the Coup Group or *khanarattaprahan*. These younger men mostly held conservative attitudes and were supporters of the monarchy. In spite of the fact that the power precariously remained in his hands, Pibun survived as a national leader by skillfully maneuvering prominent members of the ruling elite against each other and his American patrons. He abandoned the Western style of leadership and adopted a paternalistic image, harping on compassionate guidance, family values, and religious piety. Whereas the promotion of Pibun’s fascist vision for the Thai nationhood in the early-1940s miserably failed, the beleaguered premier did not lose faith in social and cultural reforms. In 1952, the Ministry of Culture was founded and headed by the Prime Minister himself. Under the rhetoric of “anti-communism” and “pro-Americanism,” the cultural policies of Thailand slipped back to preserving and promoting traditional artistic expressions and practices (Chaloemtiarana, 1979, pp. 81-91, 96).

These changes affected the politics of representations for the Victory Monument as well. The second Pibunsongkhram administration “gentrified” the meaning of the memorial by adding the names of dead soldiers from World War II and the Korean War to the pentagonal plinth. This modification gave a representational basis to depict the armed forces as the guardian of the nation’s sovereignty and democracy, which strengthened their self-justified interference in the country’s political affairs (Murashima, Mektrairat, and Phiu-nual, 1986, pp. 91-92).

Pibun’s successors, Field Marshals Sarit Thanarat (1959-1963) and Thanom Kittikachorn (1963-1973), were traditionalists. Espousing orderliness, cleanliness, and conformity, the nationalistic principles of these military strongmen reverted to the Siamese absolutist triad values of nation, religion, and kingship in place of the exotic and intangible ideas – like democracy, egalitarianism, and constitutionalism – promulgated by previous governments. Consequently, the concept of Thai nationhood along with the discourse of Thainess were reinterpreted and altered (Chaloemtiarana, 1979, pp. 161-166).

Although the juntas retained some aspects of Pibun’s nation-building program—mainly the modernization process, they abolished and/or amended most of the cultural policies and social practices of their predecessors. On the one hand, Thanarat resuscitated the role, status, and ancient custom of the *devaraja* (god-king), as well as the *lèse majesté* law, in order to legitimize and maintain his despotic rule. On the other hand, in their common efforts to relegate the influence of the preceding regimes, Thanarat and his progenies charged Pibun and the People’s Party as being anti-monarchy and hence “un-Thai.” The revival of the monarchical grounding in the discourse of *khwampentai* also instituted the omnipotent and sacrosanct position of the incumbent sovereign (Chaloemtiarana, 1979, pp. 283-293).

With the termination of Pibun’s cultural mandates, Anusawari Chai Samoraphum began to

fade into a symbolic obscurity, losing its *raison d’être* to mediate the power of the state and to signify the Thai identity. The military regime, then, re-appropriated and reconstructed meanings for the memorial by displacing the framework of representation. While the physicality of this public memorial has remained virtually intact since 1945, its symbolic content has evolved considerably.

Because any physical modification was difficult and too costly, the technique of facial decoration was adopted instead. On royal festivities, the Victory Monument was embellished with regal paraphernalia, such as images, emblems, flags, and festoons. The exhibition of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit’s portraits exemplified a calculated attempt by the junta to regenerate new meanings for the memorial, which was a far cry from the prohibition enacted by the Pibun administration on the home display of pictures of the former King Rama VII (Wyatt, 1984, pp. 253).

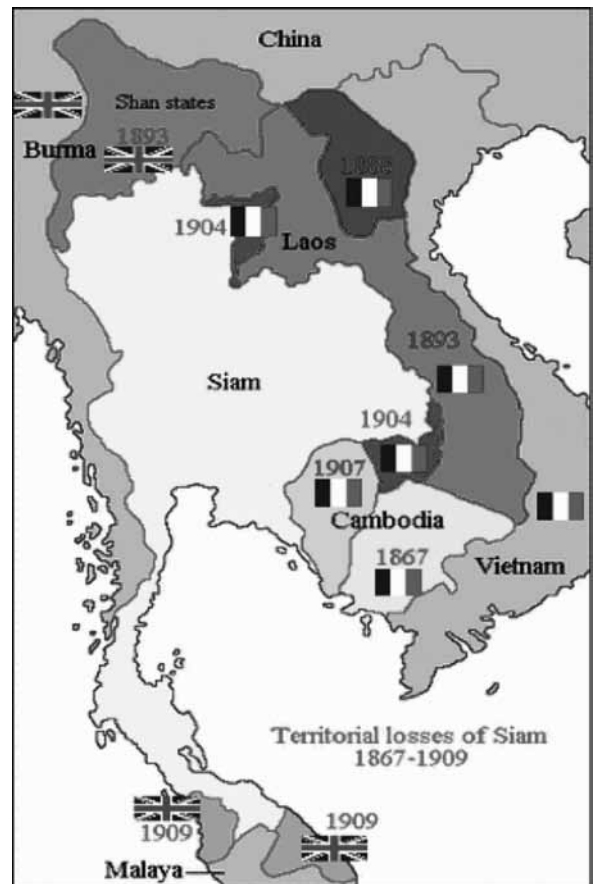
As a result, the monument was re-semanticized to propagate a new sense of nationalism under royal authority, coupled with the power of the military rule. The junta employed Anusawari Chai Samoraphum as a modernizing means to “nationalize” the public memory of the trauma from the 1893 amputation of Laos and Cambodia previously a humiliation largely confined to the Siamese royal elite. Moreover, the merits of combat valor and self-sacrifice by the armed forces in 1940 were reinterpreted as part of the long and bitter historical struggle of the Thais to overcome their legacy of colonial loss, which was crucial to the formation of the national consciousness during the 1960s (Strate, 2009, pp. 4-5).

These transformations went hand in hand with the royalists’ revisions of Thai national historiography. Under the authoritative umbrella of the royal-nation history, the Victory Monument was incorporated into the discourse of “chosen trauma” that portrayed the monarchical institution, particularly King Rama V, as national saviors by giving up large areas of land in order to maintain the indepen-

dence of Siam from Western colonial aggressions. The “lost-territories” in Laos and Cambodia ceded to France in 1893, which were a contributing factor of the Franco-Thai War, were re-commemorated. This so-called Rathanakosin Era 112 or RS 112 incident did not mark the end of Siam’s struggle for national sovereignty, but the beginning of Siam’s attempt to salvage what it could from an impossible situation. Royalist advocates normally portrayed the RS 112 incident as an example of Chulalongkorn defending the kingdom by sacrificing a finger to save the hand (Strate, 2009, pp. 10-15).

In addition, the hegemonic royal-national history rendered Pibun’s actions in 1940 as falling within the context of a history of humiliation and defeat by claiming that the irredentist drive to re-negotiate Thailand’s boundaries did not start with the Field Marshall himself. As evidenced by a newspaper interview in 1941, the former King Prajadhipok remarked that such a dream constituted a “dormant sentiment hidden in the heart of every Thai leader since the loss of certain territories to France between the years 1893 and 1907” (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995, pp. 254).

The traumatic discourse was perhaps best illustrated by a map displaying a series of territorial recessions by Siam to Western colonial powers during the reign of King Rama V (Figure 7). These areas constituted the geo-body of the Thai nationhood, being defined in terms of the territoriality of the nation and the collective concept of self for Thai people. This concrete notion was critical for the junta to manage *khwampenthai*, to distinguish concepts of integrity and sovereignty, and to exert control over internal processes. Be that as it may, contrary to its implied nature of continuity and limitless history, the geo-body was formulated by the meeting of indigenous spatial discourse with the modernizing of methods of representation, as shown by the symbolic and iconographic revisions of the Victory Monument after the Pibun era (Winichakul, 1994, p. 17).



Source: Wikipedia.com

Figure 7. A Map showing the Territorial Recessions of Siam to the Western Colonial Powers.

The semantic refashioning of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum happened through a revision of the *modus operandi* of military ceremonies as well. Until the late-1980s, Thailand was again entangled in armed conflicts with Indochina. This time, however, Thai troops did not fight for territorial gains from any Western colonial power, but battled against their neighbors under an ideological banner of nationalism and democracy. The country aligned with the U.S. and the Free World in combating communist expansions in Southeast Asia. A major milestone was reached in 1962, when the U.S. and Thailand signed what came to be known as the Rusk-Thanat agreement (named after then Secretary of State Dean Rusk and then Minister of Foreign Affairs Thanat Khoman). Under the agreement, the U.S. pledged that, in the event of aggression, it would help Thailand unilaterally.

During the 1960s and 1970s, in conjunction with the war abroad, Thailand also struggled with its internal communist insurgency, which was orchestrated by the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and assisted by China and the USSR. In 1973, Thai university and college students organized a series of massive demonstrations against the junta. The protests evolved into a bloody uprising on October 14 that eventually brought down the military regime, followed by a three-year period of chaotic democracy. In 1976, panicked by the fall of Indochina to communism, the ultra-right wing in the armed forces seized power and massacred students at Thammasat University on October 6, eliminating political activism among the country's youth and left-wing altogether. The surviving students fled and/or joined CPT to wage a revolutionary war, which intensified throughout the country. After claiming thousands of lives, the fighting and hostility finally ended in the late-1980s together with the Cold War. In order to muster public support for the deployment of the armed forces, the Thai government-both the civilian and junta administrations-utilized the annual military service at the Victory Monument on Veteran's Day (February, 3) as a rallying point to stir patriotic feeling among the masses. The Franco-Thai War was re-commemorated and reframed by extending the honor of self-sacrifice to every military campaign involving the Thai forces up to the 1960s (Figure 8).

As a consequence, the names of 742 others who had died in battle were carved on the plaques below the heroized figures. Despite its diminished relevance as a symbol of *khwampenthai*, Anusawari Chai Samoraphum remained a military memorial even after the armed conflicts in Indochina concluded. Nonetheless, as Bangkok rapidly turned into a megalopolis, the monument acquired another use as a transportation hub for the capital city, coexisting with the original function and signification (Figure 9).

The preservation of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum as a military memorial is an intriguing subject indeed, particularly considering that the monument



Source: The Ministry of Defense

Figure 8. Military Ceremony on the Veteran's Day.



Source: The Author

Figure 9. Vehicular Traffic around the Victory Monument during Rush Hour in the Morning.

served as a reminder of Thailand's fascist expansion, as explained earlier. As a matter of fact, historical records reveal that the post-People's Party administrations pondered about physically modifying or even demolishing a number of public monuments commissioned during the Pibun regime. One of the most recognized examples was the Victory Monument's major contemporary: the Democracy Monument. In 1951, the cabinet proposed a replacement of the constitutional image and central turret of the Democracy Monument with King Prajadhipok's statue (Ministry of Interior, 1952, p. 56). The plan did not materialize due to opposition from Pibun, citing as reason that there were no available funds (Ministry of Interior, 1953, p. 1). In 1979, the same idea resurfaced after the Fine Arts

Department classified the monument as “not worthy of conservation,” but the project was eventually shelved (Rojpojchanarat, 1987).

Whereas the changing public perceptions and symbolic significations of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum have been subjected to increasing examination, recent scholarly investigations have yet to publish any official document to substantiate an effort by the Thai government to raze or alter the memorial. However, it is not too far-fetched to hazard a suggestion for the reason behind the absence of such a proposal. The history of post-1932 Thailand demonstrates that the military has always been a dominant force in the country’s political landscape. Furthermore, many influential members of the ruling junta in the 1960s and 1970s once served as junior commanding officers who participated in the Franco-Thai War themselves. So, a bid to demolish the Victory Monument either by the administrative or legislative branch of government could instigate a drastic reaction from the armed forces, since it would be viewed as a hostile act of desecration to the honor of their service.

Notwithstanding the embarrassment caused by the territorial retrocession in 1947, the prestige of the military represented by Anusawari Chai Samoraphum has therefore been upheld. The memorial has continued to be the place where the present king and queen of Thailand, members of the royal family, statesmen, political leaders, high-ranking government officials, as well as visiting foreign dignitaries pay their respect to the defenders of the Thai nationhood and *khwampenthai* by laying commemorative wreaths at public ceremonies here.

In any case, the semantic refashioning of the Victory Monument contradicted the accepted convention on Thainess, namely that the Thai identity was something intrinsically genuine and fixed (Winichakul, 1994, pp. 8-9), whose innate quality could be ascertained by the binary criteria of: nature/history; stability/change; authentic/fake; identity/difference; dominant/docile; and orientation/disorien-

tation (Dovey, 1999, p. 16). In contrast, the memorial became the stage where two antagonistic forces of accommodation and resistance in the identification of *khwampenthai* competed, reflected, converged, and integrated with one another (Kessing, 1989, pp. 22-23), the subject of much appropriation and contestation, as seen by the slippage of meanings.

Taken together, these observations reiterated that both the symbolic signification and semantic refashioning of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum were outcomes of the construction of subjectivity within the confinements of *khwampenthai* discourse. As noted earlier, Thainess had been employed to legitimize the exercise of power and thereby had always been connected with desire, but these associations had to be concealed if the desire and power were to be realized (Foucault, 1972, pp. 140-141).

In sum, the transformations of meaning for the Victory Monument testified that, via a discursive mode of signification, architecture and urban space could serve interests for which they were not initially intended. Similar to language, the built environment had been in a perpetual evolution, whose signification had been caught between the polarities of: 1) a conservative force tending to preserve the existing meanings; and 2) a revolutionary force striving for the rise of new meanings. The conservative force led to the stability of meaning and institutionalized forms, whereas its revolutionary counterpart replaced old meanings and forms with new ones. The forms might remain the same, but the meanings were always in flux.

In other words, the above critical and analytical examinations rearticulate that:

“the repeated use of a signal may lead finally to its obsolescence. When a form becomes obsolete it may be ‘de-semanticized,’ it loses its meaning and its usage may be abandoned. Abandoning a form, however, is a rare event in the history of design. Once a form is established and has become familiar to a certain community, it

will tend to recur over and over again before fading, 're-semanticized' with some supplementary or metaphorical meaning, as the result of some subtle principle of economy. Changes of meaning are far more frequent than a disappearance of forms" (Bonta, 1979, p. 29).

In the final analysis, the transmutations of *khwampenthai*, inscribed and re-inscribed by a slippage of symbolic meanings at Anusawari Chai Samoraphum, revealed that the identification ascribed to the ideology did not reflect any intrinsic quality, but simply represented what it created: a discourse of power mediation. The Thai identity was made by the combined and competing effects of ideological discourses outlining and conferring its definitions. So, the essence of Thainess was an illusion produced by a temporarily discursive conjuncture (Winichakul, 1994, pp. 13-14).

To put it differently, the Thai identity was in fact a product of taxonomies mistakenly identified as methodological instead of theoretical foundations. The discourse of *khwampenthai* had been used to support an established point of view projected by the ruling authorities as a legitimate discourse about Thailand to advocate and defend certain perspectives, sentiments, constraints, taboos, alibis, possibilities and plausibilities while repressing and negating others (Winichakul, 1994, p. 173).

5. Recent and Ongoing Developments

Studies on the current political situation in Thailand dwell outside the scope of this research, but recent developments have produced a number of far-reaching effects, which could result in significant changes in the politics of representations at the Victory Monument. These incidents did not come out of nowhere, but stemmed from a long chain of events that started almost three decades ago.

Since the late-1980s, large-scale armed conflicts have been things of the past. Under the

leadership of General Prem Tinnasulanon (1980-1988), Thailand geared up toward limited political reform, as well as trade and financial liberalization. Regardless of the many failed military coups during the 1980s, the country was relatively stable and economically prosperous.

In 1991, General Suchinda Kraprayoon deposed an elected civilian administration. Fearing the return of another junta regime, the urban middle class organized large-scale protests against Kraprayoon and his cronies in Bangkok in early May 1992. Within two weeks, the peaceful political demonstrations deteriorated into savage street fighting with security forces. The killing and brutality stopped when the general, at King Bhumibol's request, left the Premiership. Similar to 1973, the monarch's intervention narrowly averted the prospects of a civil war in Thailand and re-established the regal authority as the country's supreme socio-political arbitrate force.

This so-called "Black May" also began the rise of the bourgeoisie in Thai politics. In contrast, the aftermath of the bloody uprising of 1992 brought a fifteen-year hiatus to the involvement of the military in Thai politics. The armed forces suffered a serious blow, bearing a stigma as oppressors who murdered unarmed advocates of democracy. As a case in point, many Thais today perceive Victory Monument as a symbol of ultra-militarism, fascism, racial chauvinism, and misguided nationalism or jingoism, apart from being a relic of a discredited and defunct regime (Wikipedia, 2010).

Be that as it may, on September 19, 2006, Thailand experienced a rude awakening from its false sense of democratic stability. Thai people found themselves under military rule again when the popularly elected but very controversial and corrupt Thaksin Shinawatra administration (2001-2006) was removed from office by a *coup d'état*. Although the coup leaders later installed a civilian administration, followed by an election under a new constitutional

charter, Shinawatra's supporters together with those who disagreed with the coup established a popular movement known as the National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD).

From 2008 to 2010, the UDD staged a series of large-scale protests aiming to get rid of what they deemed as a governing system dominated by the noble and bureaucratic elites. Demanding for the resignation of the president of the Privy Council and the then serving Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, along with a revocation of the 2007 constitution, the UDD public demonstrations in Bangkok in April of 2009 and 2010 turned into urban riots, lasting for days with scores of deaths and casualties (Figure 10) (MCOT, 2009; Hookway, 2010).



Source: MThai News

Figure 10. The Blockade and Seizure of the Victory Monument by UDD Protestors on April 9, 2009.

Both times, the UDD protesters blocked off all vehicular traffic and occupied the ring road around the Victory Monument, paralyzing the entire capital city for days. Their actions, however, appeared to be motivated by the utilitarian importance of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum as Bangkok's major transportation hub rather than its representational significance. The UDD leaders did not even acknowledge that their blockade and seizure of the memorial was of any symbolic connotation in terms of a subversion of militaristic iconography as a protest against the involvement of the armed forces in politics.

Following the death and destruction from the political upheavals since 2006, a general election was held on July 3, 2011. Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's youngest sister, led Puea Thai Party to a landslide victory and became the first Thai female Prime Minister. Some analysts have argued that Puea Thai's balloting success was indeed a punishment for Vejjajiva, his Democrat Party, the military and the entrenched elite for the coup of 2006 and its aftermath (The Daily Telegraph, 2011). After the election, Thailand has been relatively calm, but this tranquility may be fragile. The country is still fraught with uncertainties and potential conflicts that could lead to a recurrence of crisis and violence (Mydans & Fuller, 2011). This ongoing insecurity leaves the future of Thailand hanging in the balance once again. Correspondingly, how the politics of representation for the Victory Monument evolves still to be seen.

6. Conclusion

The preceding discussion demonstrates that both Pibun and the post-1945 Thai governments resorted to a discourse of 'Thainess'-albeit under varying definitions-to mediate power and to legitimize their politics by crafting, re-appropriating, and refashioning the meanings of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum. As shown by recent inquiries on Thai nationhood, aside from ideological deception and nationalism, the Thai people's experience with Western colonization, or the lack thereof, framed the creation and revision of *khwampenthai*. Those investigations also reveal that: 1) irrespective of their common socio-cultural heritage from the Indo-Sinic civilizations, historical ties between the Thais and their Southeast Asian neighbors were framed in terms of suzerainty-tributary power relations or *vice versa*. Except for the Kingdom of Lanna (Chiang Mai), the Lan Chang (Laos) and Khmer Kingdoms (Cambodia) were never fully incorporated into the Siamese domains, and thus were never really part of the Thai nation-state (Reynolds, 2002, pp. 19-20);

2). In fact, the nation of Siam was a concept completely foreign to Thai history, and was only invented during the 19th century as a result of the Thais' encounter with Western colonialism. By adapting to protect itself against European encroachment, Siam was significantly transformed in every aspect from an *ancien régime* to a modern nation-state via the processes of Westernization and modernization.

Building on these observations, this research would like to conclude that the Franco-Thai War-for which the Victory Monument stood-could not be justified as an anti-colonial effort to recover Thailand's lost territories, but was a colonial contest with *État Français* to conquer Southeast Asia. Notwithstanding the Siamese "crypto-colonial" legacy (Herzfeld, 2002, pp. 900-901) as a result of European expansionism, Thailand during the Pibunsongkhram period was *de facto* a regional colonial power, not a wronged victim of Western aggressions as widely publicized by the "official" account in the Thai national historiography (Kasetsiri, 1979, pp. 156-170). To put it in a more familiar analogy, Siam and Thailand were not helpless sheep being bullied by colonial wolves from the West. On the contrary, the construction of Anusawari Chai Samoraphum testified that the country was one of the wolves-even though a smaller one-competing with the bigger predators from afar, namely France, England, and Japan, in hunting colonial sheep in the region.

Moreover, the juntas' symbolic repositioning of the Victory Monument was simply a projection of their ideological predisposition to mobilize people to express patriotic feeling and solidarity that could be exploited by reciting the merits of self-sacrifice in a different milieu. So, the participation by Thailand in the war against communism in Indochina was merely a pre-emptive measure to suppress its own internal Marxist-Maoist insurgencies under a pretense of defending democracy. Plagued by military coups and counter-coups, Thailand (meaning "the land of the free") was democratic merely in name.

As for the politics of representation in built form, being a symbol of the Thai nationhood, architecture of the state and urban space as exemplified by the Victory Monument is essentially a conjugation of various discourses. However, as witnessed by the transformations of meaning at this public memorial, the Thai national and cultural identity is always in a vicious circle of contention and displacement, thus always evolving. In other words, Thainess is full of changes, disruptions, and displacements. As a consequence, a study of *khwampenthai* calls for inquiries into discursive modes of identification, encompassing ambiguities, misunderstandings, and volatilities in signification.

With regards to national historiography, the politics of representation at Anusawari Chai Samoraphum is a reminder that the narratives of national history are always abundant with stories of heroism, benevolent leaders, self-sacrifice, struggles for independence, and suffering from national enemies, etc. Yet at the same time, the same history, too, is full of embarrassing, irrational, accidental, and ironic moments, including ideological as well as psychological excuses and deceptions.

As an ending note, as all Southeast Asian nations are currently merging into a functional single politico-economic union, the task of advocating and managing cultural diversity across the region has become urgent. These goals cannot be met unless a mutual understanding is reached among the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on the writing of national history, as follows: 1) while patriotism and altruism are virtues for a nation state, national and cultural identity should not be promoted at the expense of other races, ethnicities, or countries in the form of antagonistic and xenophobic attitudes towards them; and 2) not only did the practice of colonization in Southeast Asia come from the West or other states outside the region, but also took place among the natives of Southeast Asia themselves.

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