

# **Samoson Ratsaranrom (Khana Ratsadon's Office): A Neglected Urban Heritage of the People's Party**

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Received 11/6/2021    Revised 3/9/2021    Accepted 15/9/2021

## **Abstract**

Current architectural scholarship in Thailand has witnessed a renewal of interest in built forms commissioned by the People's Party, a group of civil servants and military officers known in Thai as Khana Ratsadon that overthrew the absolute monarchy in 1932. Despite an increasing number of publications on the arts and architecture of the People's Party, its office in Bangkok remains largely absent from those investigations and public recognition. As such, this research presents a multidimensional inquiry to better understand the role of Samoson Ratsaranrom in Thai society. Once functioning as Khana Ratsadon's office, the building was examined in terms of: (1) means for power mediation; (2) reflection of the ideological views of the People's Party; and (3) expression of the modern Thai identity. Via discourse and iconographical analyses, the study revealed that apart from serving as a material manifestation of the revolutionary spirit and ideology, this modest structure acted as a social space for interactions between people through festivities, namely the annual constitutional fairs. Standing unassumingly in Saranrom Royal Garden—which has become a public park nowadays—the building was an integral part of the cultural practices during the early days of the post-absolutist regime. Owing to the said historical importance, a proposition could be put forward that not only should Khana Ratsadon's office be incorporated into DOCOMOMO Thailand's inventory, but also be registered as a national treasure by the Fine Arts Department. In addition, critical examination of this Modernist structure begged a question as to whether the academic obscurity of the building was indicative of attempts to erase the cultural legacies the People's Party by the Thai state, which had been subtly implemented for decades. Regardless of the answer, recent destruction and disappearance of the cultural heritages left behind by the People's Party make the preservation of Samoson Ratsaranrom even more urgent.

## **Keywords**

Modern Architecture in Thailand; Politics of Representations; The People's Party; Historic Preservation; National Heritage; Samoson Ratsaranrom

## 1. Introduction

During the first two decades of the new millennium, several studies produced valuable contributions to the corpus of knowledge on the historiography of modern architecture in Siam and Thailand.<sup>1</sup> On one hand, some provided alternative narratives outside the Euro-centric view of modern architecture as a deviation of Western Modernism<sup>2</sup> with adjustments to suit local climates and cultures of Thailand.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, many revived academic interest in the arts and architecture of the People's Party,<sup>4</sup> a group led by foreign-educated civil servants and military officers—known in Thai as Khana Ratsadon—that overthrew the absolute monarchy in 1932.

Based on the pioneering works that examined the politics of representations in architecture and urban space in modern Siam and Thailand by Khumsupha (2005),<sup>5</sup> Prakitnonthakarn (2009),<sup>6</sup> and Noobanjong (2013),<sup>7</sup> the built forms commissioned by the People's Party between 1932 and 1947 have become a main theme of inquiry in contemporary architectural discourse.<sup>8</sup> These publications undertaken by both Thai and foreign scholars have been supplemented by an increasing number of public lectures and exhibitions on the subject matter.<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, Samoson Ratsaranrom—once functioning as Khana Ratsadon's office in Bangkok—has been largely absent from those investigations and public recognition.<sup>10</sup>

Nurtured by the abovementioned developments, this research presents a multidimensional study on Samoson Ratsaranrom, consisting of two thematic foci. Informed by semiological theories, the discussions initially evolved around examining the building in terms of: (1) a means of power mediation; (2) reflections of the ideological views of Khana Ratsadon; and (3) expressions of the modern Thai identity. Via discourse and iconographical analyses, the inquiry revealed that this modest structure essentially operated as a social space, apart from serving as a material manifestation of the revolutionary spirit and ideology. Standing unassumingly in Saranrom Garden, it provided a venue for interactions with people through festivities—namely the annual constitutional fairs—and thus became an integral part of the cultural practices during the early days of the post-absolutist regime.<sup>11</sup>

Next, critical examination of the building begged the further question on whether the academic obscurity of this Modernist structure was indicative of attempts to erase the cultural legacies of the People's Party by the Thai state, which had been subtly implemented for decades. Regardless of what the answer might be, recent destruction and disappearance of the cultural inheritances left behind by the People's Party have in fact made its preservation even more urgent than ever. For that reason, this research emphasizes that not only should Samoson Ratsaranrom be incorporated into an inventory of modern heritage in Thailand—like that of DOCOMOMO—but should also be registered as a national treasure by the Fine Arts Department.

## 2. A Brief Background on Samoson Ratsaranrom

Few primary written accounts on the design of Samoson Ratsaranrom exist, whereas hardly any of its architectural documentation is publicly available, thus severely hampering scholarly examination of this Modernist structure. Nevertheless, one of the earliest records showed that after the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, King Rama VII (Prajadhipok, r. 1925-1935) granted permission for the People's Party to erect its office on the grounds of the Saranrom Royal Garden in late-1932.<sup>12</sup>

Situated southeast of the Grand Palace in the historic area of Bangkok or Rattanakosin Island (Figure 1), the garden was a part of Saranrom Palace, which was commissioned by King Rama IV (Mongkut, r. 1851-1868) for his retirement. However, the sovereign passed away before his dream could be realized. The construction

of Saranrom Palace commenced in 1866 and continued into the next reign (King Rama V or Chulalongkorn, r. 1868-1910) when its garden—known as Suan Saranrom—was created under the supervision of Henry Alabaster, a regal advisor,<sup>13</sup> who took part in several fields of development including survey, map making, post and telegraph, museum, library, and urban landscape.<sup>14</sup> Occupying a 3.68 ha plot of land (23 rai), this urban oasis can be accessed from the south through the main entrance on Charoenkrung Road, the first major thoroughfare in Siam—initially known as Thanon Mai or New Road—built by modern construction methods during the reign of Mongkut. A secondary entrance was located to the east side on Rachini Alley, which ran in parallel to Khlong Lot Canal (Figure 2).

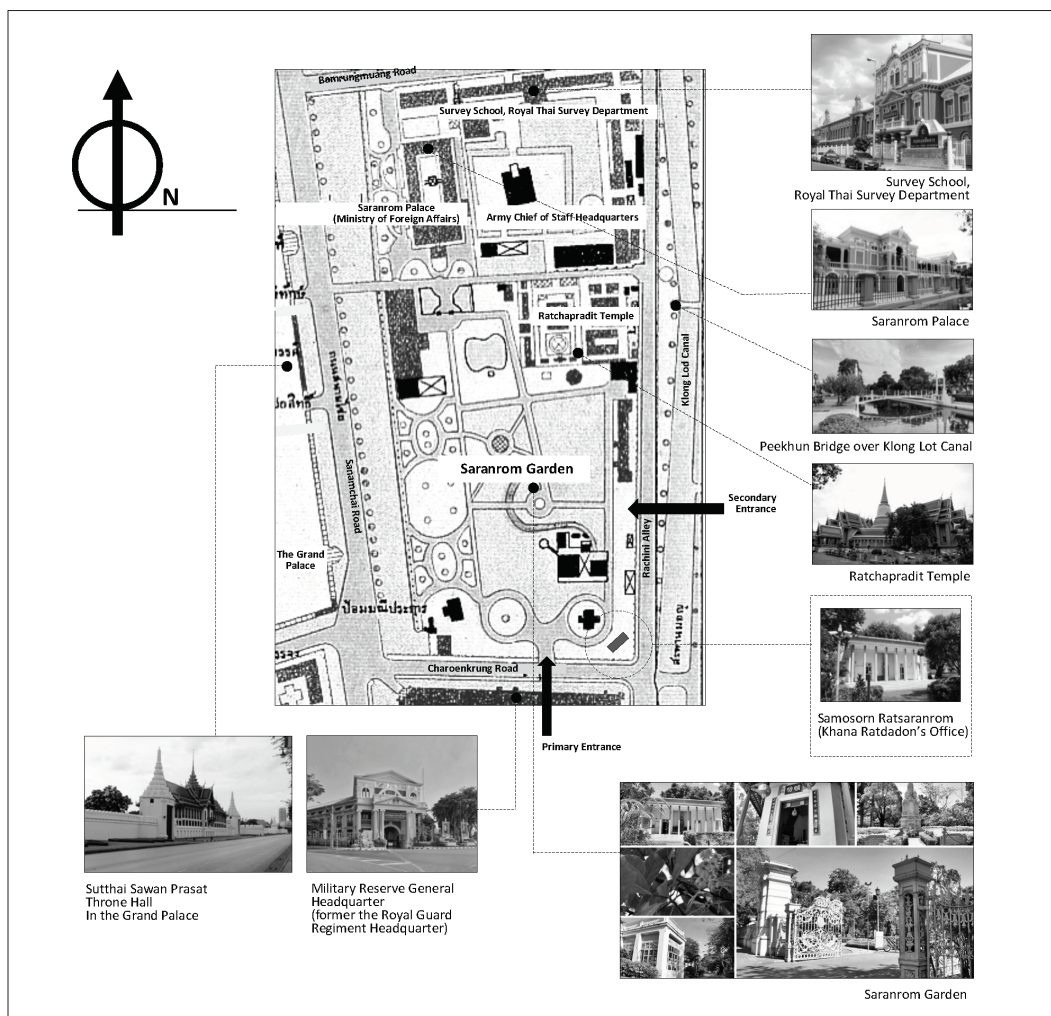


**Figure 1** Location of Saranrom Garden in Rattanakosin Island in the urban fabric of Bangkok.

**Source:** Google Map, 2020, with notations from the author.

Decorated by flowers and perennial plants, the garden featured an orderly landscape design pattern combined with the use of geometric shapes. Similar to royal gardens and parks in the West, Suan Saranrom consisted of many elements including conservatory, gothic aisle, Italian monuments, fountains, summer houses, bandstands, lawns, and a mock zoo. Even though regularly open to the public on Saturdays, it remained a carefully-controlled social space enjoyed mostly by the Siamese royal elites, wealthy merchants, and Westerners, rather than acting as a genuine public space for the local populace.<sup>15</sup> Neither the middle-class that operated in the same sense as those in Europe nor the notion of public parks as a valve to release pressure among different socio-economic statuses that could avert political turmoil,<sup>16</sup> had fully emerged in Siam during that time.

Throughout the Fifth Reign, reception parties were occasionally held at Saranrom Garden, particularly for welcoming royal guests and Westerners, whose activities encompassed strolling and viewing exotic plants and flowers, listening to the music performed by brass bands, eating and drinking, observing the royal elephant parade, as well as watching Siamese martial arts performances and traditional sports games.<sup>17</sup> Notable foreign visitors included Nicholas Alexandrovich in 1891 when he was Tsesarevich, before assuming the title of Tsar Nicholas II, the last Emperor of Russia (r. 1894-1917), three years later.



**Figure 2** Surroundings and location of Samoson Ratsaranrom at Saranrom Royal Garden, edited from Layout Plan of Saranrom Garden surveyed in 1922, 1930, and printed in 1932.

**Source:** Royal Thai Survey Department, with notations from the author.

In their critical investigations of Suan Saranrom, Navapan and Noobanjong (2014) argued that the realization of the garden was an integral constituent of the Siamese ruling elites' quest for—if not obsession with—being “civilized” according to the Western model (literally translated to Thai as *siwilai*).<sup>18</sup> The refashioning of Western design gave rise to a construction of new self-identity through a process of cultural appropriation, assimilation, diffusion, and displacement. In conjunction with modernization and Westernization, King Rama V fostered Siam's reputation as a civilized country via importation, promotion, popularization, and conspicuous consumption of Western material culture.<sup>19</sup> These activities brought to the kingdom a number of Western artists, architects, and engineers, who introduced new techniques and expanded the palette of expression, as evident from the creation of Saranrom Garden.



Nonetheless, the “civilized” image proudly adopted by the Siamese elites, in fact, indicated a peculiarity of a crypto-colony.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, the remaking of the elites’ self-image was a fulfillment of their desire to identify themselves with European monarchies. Since intermarriage with the Europeans was prohibited by a mandated separation between races and religions, the only way to become a member of the so-called “global royal fraternity” was to live a similar lifestyle and behave in the same manner. On the other hand, this very creation of a new self-identity was an affirmation of a capitulation by Siamese kings and their courts to Western hegemony, which was “mirrored, via the travelogues by the court’s foreign guests and the later visits of Rama V to Europe, [in terms of] a recognizably ‘civilized’ image back onto the West itself.”<sup>21</sup>

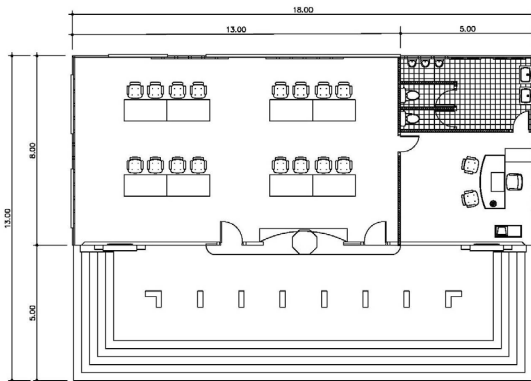
In the early years of the Sixth Reign, several structures in the garden were altered or refurbished. For instance, a theatre for khon (Thai classical masked dance) was modified to accommodate new amenities, including two billiard rooms, two reading rooms, a meeting room, a pantry, the king’s bathroom and dressing room, and officials’ bathrooms. Moreover, the glasshouse, once occupied by the Dvi Panya Club, a social organization club founded by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, r. 1910-1925) when he was the Crown Prince, was altered to be a reception room with a reinforced roof structure.<sup>22</sup> Although the landscape of Saranrom Royal Garden in the 1910s and 1920s (Figure 2) only slightly differed from Alabaster’s plan implemented in the 1890s, new activities were carried out, displaying a more civic-oriented utilization of the garden.<sup>23</sup>

After serving as a training ground for military drills of the royal guard, the Saranrom became a site for the annual winter fairs previously held at Benchama Bophit Temple when King Rama V was still alive. Being a showcase for the cultural modernization process directed by Vajiravudh himself, the fête signified a well-crafted public relations measure. During the winter fairs, it should be noted that sometimes the festivities extended beyond the Saranrom and merged with the urban space along Sanamchai Road (Figure 2). By hosting socio-economic activities where people from all ranks could mingle and enjoy together, these joyful events rendered an image of the monarch as a benign and progressive ruler who fostered the concept of national unity among his subjects.<sup>24</sup> Through royal invitations, shops sponsored by the crown and state agencies were located inside the garden, whereas privately-owned shops known as sampeng were placed outside the fences along the surrounding streets.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as exemplified by the “Our Day” festivity of the British Red Cross, international organizations could ask for regal permission to use Saranrom Royal Garden as well.<sup>26</sup>

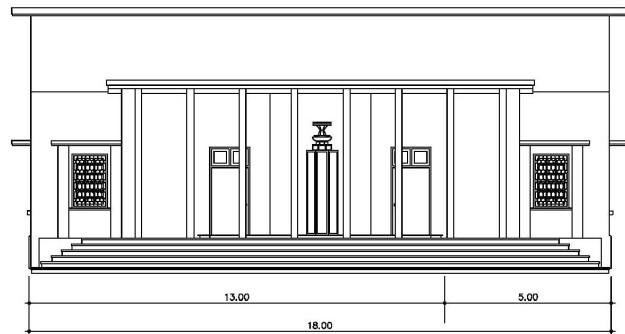
Aside from hosting Siam’s Lawn Tennis Club that was established by King Rama VII in 1926,<sup>27</sup> the garden continued to act as a venue for social events, of which examples encompassed gatherings by members of the War Veteran Organization and Siam’s Scout Corps,<sup>28</sup> coupled with the American Society of Missionaries<sup>29</sup> and Siam Red Cross Society.<sup>30</sup> Although such utilitarian functions made the Saranrom akin to public parks in Western countries as a place for social congregation,<sup>31</sup> Prajadhipok also maintained that the garden was not appropriate to be employed for profit-seeking activities, but should be reserved exclusively for those of the monarch, state agencies, and non-profit/charitable organizations. For instance, he turned down a request from a group of Chinese merchants to arrange a market fair on its ground, and recommended them to use Lumpini public park instead.<sup>32</sup> A critical observation could be put forward that Saranrom Royal Garden, in fact, operated as a “cautiously-regulated” or “quasi-public” space, where people from different socio-economic classes could interact with each other under the hegemonic authority of the monarchy.

Until the end of royal absolutism in Siam, this 3.68 ha property was looked after by the Royal Guard Regiment. As noted above, King Rama VII gave the management of the Saranrom and all accompanying facilities to the newly-formed constitutional government, while allowing the office of the Association of the People’s Party (Samakhom Khana Ratsadon) to be erected on its ground shortly after the 1932 revolution.<sup>33</sup>

Occupying a secluded corner of the garden near the intersection between Charoenkrung Road and Rachini Alley (Figure 2), the office of the Association of the People's Party was devised entirely in the so-called "International Style" of modern architecture (Figure 3–6).<sup>34</sup> A recent physical survey disclosed that the petite Modernist structure measures 18 m in length and 8 m in width, with the overall estimated height of 6 m.



**Figure 3** Current Ground Floor Plan.  
Source: Chindanai Darasawasdi, 2021.



**Figure 4** Front Elevation of the Building.  
Source: Chindanai Darasawasdi, 2021.

Based on a rectangular plan (Figure 3), the building stands on an unadorned 1m elevated plinth. Six steps of corner deck stairs form the 5 m wide front portico with eight 4 m tall columns marking the main entrance (Figure 3 and 4). The outermost columns on the left and right have an L-shape footprint, while the rest are rectangular. A series of high windows with short overhangs—together with a couple of swing doors capped by clerestories—permit natural light and ventilation. Above the front portico is a 2 m tall parapet furnished with a small overhang at the top wrapping around the roof (Figure 5 and 6).



**Figure 5** Front View of the Building.  
Source: The author, 2021.



**Figure 6** Front View of the Building.  
Source: The author, 2021.

In accordance with the Modernist principles of simplicity, massive formal composition and voluminous spatial configuration, functional and rational organization, as well as materialistic expression, the overall profile of the octastyle structure was regulated into simplified geometric shapes and straight lines to fit the structural capability of its construction material: reinforced concrete. Surface decoration is observed only at the front façade, where the representation of a folded constitutional document (samutthai) resting on a pair of golden offering bowls (phan waenfa), is supported by an octagonal wooden column exquisitely embellished with blue

mirror mosaics. At the middle of the façade, a receding wall forms a curved niche, acting as backdrop for the aforementioned sculpture whose height exceeds 2 m. Flanking the niche are two sets of swing doors and single-hung windows, one on the left and another on the right (Figure 7 and 8).



**Figure 7** (Left) and **Figure 8** (Right) Image of Samutthai and Phan Waenfa.

Source: Thayuti Promkhon, 2021.

After successfully staging the bloodless coup d'état on June 24, 1932, the People's Party ushered Siam (which became Thailand in 1939) into the era of constitutional monarchy. Whereas a permanent charter stripped the sovereign of his ancient powers and privilege, the executive branch of government was headed by Phraya Manopakorn Nititada (Kon Hutasingha)—a former Minister of Justice and Privy Councilor—who became the first Prime Minister of Siam (s. 1932-1933).<sup>35</sup> As for Samakhom Khana Ratsadon, while the exact construction date of its office has yet to be determined, some eye-witness accounts describe the building as already being erected at the end of 1933.<sup>36</sup>

The Association of the People's Party was engineered by naval officers and civilian members of the 1932-coup to coordinate a nationwide movement that would lead to the establishment of a political party.<sup>37</sup> On August 25, 1932, the Ministry of Interior officially approved the foundation of the organization, with Phraya Nittisat Phaisan (Wan Jamornmann) serving as the first president presiding over a 15-person executive committee.<sup>38</sup> The first general meeting occurred on August 30, with 124 attendees. Since the office of the newly-formed association at Saranrom Garden was still in its formative stage, the meeting was held at the Law School of the Ministry of Justice instead.<sup>39</sup> Administratively, the governmental structure of the association seemed to be a microcosm of the political system that the People's Party ideologically envisioned for the country.<sup>40</sup>

As demonstrated by the 10,000 applicants countrywide within six months and the sizable number of 60,000 supporters in the capital city—half of whom were government officials—membership of Samakhom Khana Ratsadon rapidly became popular with the public.<sup>41</sup> The delegates were organized into three groups for assisting with tasks in: (1) military affairs; (2) civic administration; and (3) intelligence service.<sup>42</sup> The speedy expansion of Samakhom Khana Ratsadon frightened some conservative nobility and royal descendants who still occupied important bureaucratic positions in the post-absolutist government. As a result, they began to organize a counter-revolution movement under the name of Samakhom Khana Chat (the National Association).<sup>43</sup> Aiming to compete against the People's Party in the upcoming general election—which was scheduled to be called a year after the end of royal absolutism—the goal was to transform Samakhom Khana Chat into the Conservative

Party (Phak Aunrakniyom).<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, subsequent political situations conspired against these objectives, thus preventing them from materializing into reality.

Following a letter from King Prajadhipok to the Prime Minister on January 31 expressing his concerns on the affairs of the state, a decree outlawing all political parties was enacted in early 1933.<sup>45</sup> In effect, not only did this legal measure pre-empt any attempt to build popular movements to support and/or challenge the new regime, but it also undermined the efforts of the People's Party to curb the regal authority.<sup>46</sup> Because of these restrictions, Samakhom Khana Ratsadon ceased to exist, and was altered to Samoson Khana Ratsadon (the People's Party Club) in 1933.

Aside from providing a place for informal gathering to members of Khana Ratsadon and their advocates, the club aimed to advance democratic ideology among Thai citizens through social and recreational activities. A year later, Samoson Khana Ratsadon was converted again to a non-political entity under the name Samoson Ratsaranrom (Ratsaranrom Society). The main purpose of Samoson Ratsaranrom was to promote charitable and recreational activities, provide educational benefits, as well as support social well-being and fraternity.<sup>47</sup> In essence, the transformation of the short-lived Association of the People's Party into merely another non-profit organization was a pivotal maneuver by the conservative Prime Minister and remnants of royalists that substantially weakened the political strength of the 1932-coup promoters. As a consequence of these developments, the creation of an office building for Samakhom Khana Ratsadon at Saranrom Garden was switched to the construction of a new structure to accommodate the Ratsaranrom Society.

In October 1933, the blood that was spared in 1932 was eventually spilled, when Prince Boworadet staged a counter-coup issuing a list of seven demands, including restoration of the monarchical power in political affairs. The constitutional government turned down the royalists' ultimatum, sending Plaek Khittasangkha (Phibunsongkhram or Phibun, who subsequently rose to his first tenure of premiership between 1938 and 1944) to lead troops in the field. Heavy fighting took a toll on both sides around the northern suburb of Bangkok before the post-absolutist regime emerged triumphant.<sup>48</sup> Although there was no concrete proof that King Rama VII supported the Boworadet rebellion in 1933, the outcome was a blow to the sovereign, diminishing his prestige and authority. In 1934, the crown departed to England and abdicated the throne after a falling out with the military. He remained in England until his death in 1940. His young nephew Ananda Mahidol—a foreign born and Western educated prince—assumed the regal title of Rama VIII. The youthful monarch did not take permanent residence in Thailand until the end of World War II. For the next quarter of a century, the monarchy did not play a visible role in Thai society.

Notwithstanding its diminishing political significance, Samoson Ratsaranrom gained a new lease on life through civic duty, particularly between 1934 and 1940 when Saranrom Garden repeatedly served as one of the venues hosting the annual constitutional fairs (nganchalong ratthathammanun) in the capital city. Covering an expansive area including the Royal Field (Sanam Luang) in front of the Grand Palace, King Rama V's equestrian plaza in front of Dusit Palace, the urban space along Ratchadamnoen Avenue to the north, and Saranrom Garden along Sanamchai Road to the south (Figure 1 and 2), the constitutional celebration was the most popular state-sponsored event.<sup>49</sup> Although the national day (June 24) was another important public holiday in the era of the People's Party, a number of contemporary investigations insisted that the spectacular celebrations on June 24 were largely attended by members of Khana Ratsadon and state officials to commemorate the coup of 1932, resulting in less involvement from private enterprises and ordinary citizens as compared to their participation in nganchalong ratthathammanun in December.<sup>50</sup>



Encompassing musical and theatrical performances, coupled with sport competitions, artistic exhibitions, and recreational activities, the highlight of the fair was the beauty pageant that started in 1934 when the first Miss Siam was crowned. From 1934 to 1938, the contests took place at Saranrom Garden, where the Ratsaranrom Society provided a working space for the pageant organizers. Acting in concert with other amenities and buildings on the property, this modest Modernist structure—together with the dressing, banquet, and dining rooms, as well as the glasshouse, pavilion, and gazebo—played a vital role in entertaining both the contestants and spectators.<sup>51</sup>

Typically spanning over a duration of two days and three nights between December 10 and 12 (later changed to December 9–11), the annual constitutional fairs attracted a sizable number of visitors per day (approximately 20,000), enabling the government to cultivate immense support from the populace through social practice and self-ascription.<sup>52</sup> By occupying significant portions of key areas in the capital city, including the urban space along the entire length of Sanamchai Road (Figure 1),<sup>53</sup> nganchalong ratthathammanun was much larger than public festivities held at Saranrom Garden during the absolutist era—such as the winter fairs—since its scope expanded much further beyond the boundaries of the site. During these festivities, the Samoson Ratsaranrom office occasionally served as a reception foyer for welcoming high-ranking dignitaries, including young King Rama VIII (Ananda Mahidol, r. 1935–1946) and Princess Mother Sri Sangwan in 1938.

While a membership in the Ratsaranrom Society required payments of annual fees plus endorsements from two existing members, the admission was open to all Thai citizens.<sup>54</sup> Functioning as a social club for the people, the Ratsaranrom Society provided a place of gathering where its members could convene to discuss the affairs of state along with democratic ideology in a casual manner.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, due to its convenient location (Figure 2) which was easily accessible from key government agencies—such as ministry of defense, foreign affairs, interior, and finance—membership in the Ratsaranrom Society became fashionable not only with senior officials and their families, but also young civil servants and military personnel in the junior ranks.

By taking full advantage of the manicured landscape in combination with well-equipped recreational facilities bequeathed to Saranrom Garden by three successive Siamese monarchs, Samoson Ratsaranrom could arguably offer comparable services and amenities—such as tennis and badminton courts, billiard and pool tables, as well as lounges, bars, banquet and dining rooms—to those of more prestigious establishments in the capital city—e.g., the Royal Bangkok Sports Club, British Club Bangkok, and Silom Club—at much lower prices.<sup>56</sup> For that reason, the Ratsaranrom Society frequently hosted ballroom dance parties, which were often attended by influential figures of Khana Ratsadon, including Phahonphonphayuhasena (Phraya Phahon or Phot Phahonyothin), during the early days of the post-absolutist regime.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the property was regularly used for hosting temporary markets to sell products at affordable prices in order to lessen the living expenses of the city dwellers.<sup>58</sup>

Within less than two decades after the fall of the absolutist rule, however, the People's Party regime met its demise following a long and bitter competition for political domination between the military circle headed by Phibun and civilian faction led by Pridi Banomyong. Although the armed forces brought Phibun back to the premiership in 1948, he was ousted from power again in 1957. The coup d'état that brought down the second Phibun administration (s.1948–1957) proved to be another crucial turning point in modern Thai history, since it bolstered the return of royalist advocates in national politics occasioned by the internal rift in the People's Party that started during World War II. Up to the mid-1970s, Thailand was mostly governed by a series of military dictators, beset with coups and counter-coups.<sup>59</sup>

The struggles within the People's Party could be noticed from a brief dissolution of the Ratsaranrom Society along with a conversion of its office to a headquarters for military police between June and August 1945 and during the Khuang Aphaiwong administration (s. 1944-1945, 1945-1946, 1947-1948) as well. Even though he was a 1932-coup promoter himself, the royalist-inclined Prime Minister felt that the association failed to serve as a citizen's club to promote social well-being and national unity, apart from neutering democratic ideology. On the contrary, it was utilized as a hub for political activities by supporters of Phibun who was forced to resign from his premiership in 1944. Khuang's trepidation was not unfounded, since the army eventually restored Phibun to power via a coup d'état three years later. As the defeat of Japan in late-1945 negated a security justification for stationing military police in Bangkok, a number of influential members of Khana Ratsadon successfully lobbied the Khuang government to reinstate the Ratsaranrom Society within a few weeks after World War II concluded.<sup>60</sup>

Following the downfall Khana Ratsadon, the architectural heritage of the People's Party-led administrations (1932-1947) faded into obscurity, with many of the buildings being adapted to new uses while some were forgotten, abandoned, and/or demolished. Likewise, several cultural policies and practices initiated by the People's Party were terminated, including the annual constitutional fairs. In 1960, the cabinet decided to place Saranrom Garden under the stewardship of Bangkok Municipality (now Bangkok Metropolitan Administration or BMA) transforming it to a public park, which is in effect to today.<sup>61</sup>

In spite of the said change in property management, the Ratsaranrom Society remained active at Saranrom Park for several decades after the end of the People's Party era, albeit with greatly reduced attractiveness as a fashionable venue for socialization. However, in 1981 the cabinet authorized the Ministry of Interior to pay the association a sum of 1,470,000 Baht to compensate for its relocation expenses.<sup>62</sup> Since then, the Samoson Ratsaranrom building has been utilized by the BMA as the administrative office of Saranrom Park (Figure 3-6).<sup>63</sup>

### 3. The Politics of Representations at Samoson Ratsaranrom

Notwithstanding the historical importance of the Samoson Ratsaranrom building, many key factual accounts—such as the date, duration, and cost of construction, as well as the architectural designers, structural engineers, and civil contractor responsible for its creation—have not been verified.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, the inquiries on this modest structure had to rely on circumstantial and/or inculpatory evidence along with other indicators obtained from corroborating and comparative studies. Although the following discussions present neither exhaustive findings nor conclusive arguments, they formulate a number of interpretative readings upon which further investigations could be built, either by disputing or substantiating them.

#### 3.1 A Means of Power Mediation

Hongsaton (2012)<sup>65</sup> poignantly pointed out that the selection of Saranrom Garden as a site for erecting the People Party's office bestowed it a vital role in mediating the power of the People's Party after the demise of royal absolutism in Siam. In other words, Khana Ratsadon's seizure of the Saranrom signified a new political era where the monarchy would no longer reign supreme. By occupying the royal garden—whose grounds were regularly reserved for regal-related activities and purposes, such as housing the Dhavi Pandya Society (the social club founded by King Rama VI, or Vajiravudh, r. 1910-1925) at its glasshouse—Samoson Ratsaranrom not only celebrated the victory of the 1932-coup promoters, but also reaffirmed their political legitimacy and ascendancy.<sup>66</sup>

In fact, the repossession of Saranrom Garden was a part of the nationalization process of palatial and aristocratically-owned structures that occurred in the early days of the post-absolutist period. Phibunsongkhram's first administration (s. 1938-1944) repurposed several residences of Chulalongkorn's progenies in the capital city. To cite some notable cases in point, the government transformed King Rama VI's Chankasam Palace into the Ministry of Education, Prince Chakrabongse's Paraus Sakawan Palace into a residence for Phraya Phahon (the second Prime Minister of Thailand, s. 1933-1938), and Prince Boriphat's Bang Khum Prom Palace into the Cultural Council of Thailand (and later the Bank of Thailand). Taken as a whole, the nationalization of these edifices demonstrated the authoritative power of Khana Ratsadon over the defunct absolutist rule in a very concrete and decisive manner.

The mediation of power occurred via architectural symbolism as well. As elaborated before, the front façade of Samoson Ratsaranrom featured the phan waenfa sitting on an octagonal column supporting a representation of the constitution carved in the form of samutthai (Figure 7 and 8). Standing on the floor of the front portico, these two sculptural elements portrayed the constitution—and by extension, the People's Party—as the country's socio-political hegemonic authority. Such symbolic meanings stemmed from a long tradition of Thais in using the same kind of bowls to present their offerings to the sovereigns. At Samoson Ratsaranrom, the gift to the crown was the folded document of the constitution, which the coup promoters forced King Rama VII to accept in 1932.<sup>67</sup>

Iconographically, the gilded bowls worked in concert with the folded constitutional document as a subversive mechanism in asserting the socio-political predominance of the People's Party, while contesting, negotiating, and subjugating the monarchy.<sup>i</sup> Both sculptural elements conjointly stood for Prajadhipok's acquiescence to the proletarian demand for a constitution, which implied the supremacy of the constitution over the monarchical institution. At the same time, their combined imagery enabled the coup promoters to depict and legitimize themselves as champions of democracy and guardians of the constitution and the Thai nation.<sup>68</sup>

Because of their crucial political implications, the combined image of the dual gilded offering bowls and folded document of the constitution (or phan ratthathammanun) was extensively employed by the People's Party not only as a symbol of the democratic ideology and new age of constitutionalism, but as an emblem of the highest authority—the constitutional charter—binding the modern Thai nation together.<sup>69</sup> In this regard, the Samoson Ratsaranrom building joined architecture of the state, works of arts, and even everyday objects created during the era of the People's Party in utilizing the phan ratthathammanun symbolism.<sup>70</sup>

Examples of phan ratthathammanun are found on the Constitutional Defense Monument and Democracy Monument in Bangkok, as well as several pavilions at the constitutional fairs throughout the country between 1932 and 1947, coupled with graphic design products, such as a lottery ticket in 1940 and a postage stamp in 1942. As a matter of fact, public monuments bearing this symbol were also erected in many provincial cities by local peoples and governments, especially in the northeastern region as seen from those in Khon Kaen, Buriram, and Nakhon Ratchasima provinces.<sup>71</sup> Even after the end of the rule by the People's Party, the same icon continued to be employed, particularly for state agencies in the legislative branch of government as shown by the emblem of the Secretariat of the House of Representatives (SHR) today.

Nonetheless, a dossier of textual records from the Secretariat to the Cabinet revealed that use of phan ratthathammanun at Samoson Ratsaranrom did not exclusively rely on architectural symbolism, but also resorted to Buddhist rites and rituals to mediate the authority and legitimacy of Khana Ratsadon, especially after the defeat of the Boworadet mutiny. In 1934, the Phahonyothin administration (s. 1933-1938) created seventy

replicas of phan ratthathammanun to be treasured nationwide. Whereas sixty-nine images were enshrined at the city hall in each province, the last copy was displayed in front of Samoson Ratsaranrom (Figure 7 and 8).<sup>72</sup>

Under the directives of Luang Wichit Wathakan—who subsequently became a chief ideologue and predominant creator of cultural works during the first Phibun government—a celebration of the replicated constitutions—known as nganchalong ratthathammanun chamlong (celebration of the replicated constitutional images)—took place in the capital city on August 28, 1934. According to the document, from 4.00 to 4.48 p.m., all seventy figures were placed on an equal number of copper bowls, while seventy Buddhist monks chanted the ceremonial scripts in Pali language. Prince Naritsaranuwattiwong (Naris), in his capacity as the Regent of Siam (s. 1934-1935), acted as a regal representative presiding over the ceremony, which was attended by sixty-nine provincial chief administrative officers and the Bangkok governor. In the following day, the offering bowls and constitutional document were revered through a circumambulatory rite performed by ordinary citizens, before being transported to their designated destinations.<sup>73</sup>

In a nutshell, the sequence of those events testified that the construction of the Samoson Ratsaranrom building was completed prior to the commencement of nganchalong ratthathammanun chamlong.<sup>74</sup> This observation engendered a dyad of related remarks. First, the phan ratthathammanun image (Fig. 8) was not an afterthought, but original to the design of Samoson Ratsaranrom. Second, in other words, this 2 m tall sculpture was not a leftover from the 1934 Constitutional Fair, but it was conceptualized from the onset to function as a key architectural element, as illustrated by the neatly-crafted niche in the front portico that was prefabricated to accommodate the follow-up installation of the constitutional figure (Figure 3).<sup>75</sup>

A number of recent studies rearticulated that the 1934 celebration derived from a well-crafted strategy in sanctifying representations of ratthathammanun through Buddhist ritualistic performances and spiritual beliefs by advocating “a cult of the constitution,” which in turn consecrated the actual constitutional document itself as a holy entity.<sup>76</sup> To put it differently, the religious ceremony for the seventy constitutional images in 1934 originated from a comprehensive effort by the post-1932 regime in reifying and monumentalizing the ratthathammanun charter.<sup>77</sup> Such a practice of constitutional fetishism then contributed a discursive framework for People’s Party-led administrations to assert, legitimize, and preserve political power.<sup>78</sup> On that basis, Hongsaton (2012)<sup>79</sup> maintained that the sanctification of constitutional images through nganchalong ratthathammanun chamlong delineated the endeavors of the 1932-coup promoters to secure the hegemony of constitutionalism in the political landscape of Siam. His position was buttressed by Prakitnonthakan (2009)<sup>80</sup> articulating that according to a mandate issued by the cabinet in 1935,<sup>81</sup> representations of the constitution should command the same level of respect from the people as those of the sovereigns.<sup>82</sup>

The 2 m tall parapet (Figure 4 and 5) presents another intriguing point of inquiry. Differing from many so-called Modernist structures erected in Thailand in the 1930s and 1940s, Samoson Ratsaranrom did not contain a low-pitched hip roof wrapped around by a reinforced concrete parapet to generate a cubical silhouette. On the contrary, the building was furnished with a flat roof. Hence, the use of such a sizable parapet here did not serve a purpose of achieving a cubical expression, but increasing the overall profile in order to make this petite office appear larger. Strengthened by the formality of the eight columns at the entry hall, such a visual illusion bestowed Samoson Ratsaranrom a stately appearance in conveying the ascendancy of the People’s Party, in spite of its modest dimensions (Figure 5).



### 3.2 A Reflection of the Ideological Views of the People's Party

Unlike other public structures commissioned by the People's Party, Samoson Ratsaranrom incorporated numerological significations in a much more ambiguous manner. In preference to a hexastyle foyer that was frequently found in edifices erected between 1932 and 1947, an octastyle portico marked its entrance (Fig. 3–6). Although the reason behind the use of these eight columns has yet to be validated,<sup>83</sup> the following discussion embodies both virtues and limitations of applying architectural semantics to investigations on the legacy of Khana Ratsadon in built form.

With exception of the phan ratthathammanun figure and supporting pedestal that were exquisitely embellished with colored glass mosaics (Figure 7 and 8), the overall design of the Samoson Ratsaranrom building elegantly represented the aesthetic attributes of International Style architecture, as demonstrated by its: (1) rational geometry; (2) voluminous interior space; (3) avoidance of multichromatic expressions, (4) uses of mass-produced industrial materials and repetitive modular forms; and (5) focus on flat surfaces, right angles, and perpendicular lines (Figure 5 and 6), as elucidated earlier. The aforementioned characteristics resulted in a visually restrained appearance that made an identification of architectural numerology somewhat problematic. Nevertheless, a closer examination discloses that the building signified numerical meanings via architectural elements and details, which sometimes appear trivial and difficult to grasp.



**Figure 9** Wrought-iron Burglar Bars on the Front Windows.

Source: Thayuti Promkhon, 2021.

As exhibited by the front façade, the six steps of the corner deck stairs forming the front portico generated an obvious device for numerological significations (Figure 3 and 6), whereas the wrought-iron burglar bars on the windows flanking the portico featured a pattern of interlocking hexagonal shapes providing a more inconspicuous numerological representation (Figure 9). Regardless of their dissimilar placements and recognizability, both architectural components could be perceived as a reference to the hexal number, symbolizing the People's Party's six ideological values known as Lak Hok Prakan. Embedded in the revolutionary manifesto announced by Phraya Phahon at King Rama V's equestrian plaza in front of Dusit Palace on the morning of June 24, 1932,<sup>84</sup> these principles could be summarized as:

- (1) Independence: upholding the independence of the country.
- (2) Security: safeguarding national interests and security.
- (3) Economy: looking after the economic welfare of the populace.
- (4) Equality: maintaining equalities among Thai citizens.
- (5) Liberty: protecting the rights and liberties of the people.
- (6) Education: providing public education for all.

Notwithstanding the link between the six steps of the stairs (Figure 5) and the hexagonal burglar bars at the Samoson Ratsaranrom building (Figure 9), connection with Lak Hok Prakan was still unsubstantiated by archival materials, but comparative studies with architecture of the state sponsored by the People's Party lent support to the abovementioned postulation. The numerical association (six) was commonly found in built forms commissioned by the People's Party, which often included hexastyle entry halls—such as the Supreme Court and Ayutthaya City Hall or incorporated the hexal number through the uses of other architectural elements, as exemplified by the six-tiered spire of the main stupa at the Democracy Temple (Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, Bangkok) and the six gates of the central turret of the Democracy Monument.

In any case, the following triad reflections should also be taken into consideration. First—with reference to Lak Hok Prakan—the notion of independence occupied the first order of all the six values,<sup>85</sup> insisting that the idea of nation-state and its sovereignty ranked among the top concerns for the 1932-coup promoters. However, the power struggles among members of the People's Party not only reflected an internal rift within the group, but proved that their ideological visions of the Thai nationhood were diverse as well. The civilian (Pridi) and military (Phibun) factions held dissimilar perspectives on the roles and purposes of the state, as well as different views on nationalism.<sup>86</sup> On the one hand, envisioning the nation and constitution as a new focus of public loyalty for Thai citizens, consisting of various ethnic groups, the socialist-oriented Pridi believed in a liberal version of nationalism. On the other hand, the fascist-oriented Phibun advocated a militarized one.<sup>87</sup> Substituting the regal institution with the notions of constitutionalism and modern egalitarianism, Phibun's faction promoted a strong military leadership to govern a well-ordered society and a civilized nation-state, populated predominantly by the Thai race.<sup>88</sup>

Second, a critical comment could be raised that the proposed interpretation of the hexagonal lines in the front windows went too far (Figure 9). It might be argued that the wrought-iron patterns presented a very minor detail in reality, whereas factual information to validate them as representations of Khana Ratsadon's Six Principles remains missing. Although such an appraisal has scholarly merits, a counterargument could be formulated by noting that the hexagonal burglar bars only existed in the front façade, and not on other sides of the building (Figure 5 and 6). Hence, the numerological meanings of the hexagonal window grills were strategically conceived and therefore were not insignificant for deciphering the architectural semantics of Samoson Ratsaranrom.

Third, the lack of primary documents and basic information on this petite Modernist structure rendered the rationale behind the utilization of the eight columns—as opposed to six—on the front porch very much a mystery. While the said observation exposed the limit of semiotic reading, it reiterated the methodological necessities for: (1) conducting a more extensive primary archival research; and (2) extending symbolic-driven inquiries beyond monumental edifices to small and obscure buildings commissioned by the People's Party—like the Samoson Ratsaranrom office—in order to expand the body of knowledge on their architectural legacy.

### 3.3 An Expression of the Modern Thai Identity

Semiology supplied a theoretical foundation to contend that like textual materials and other types of cultural artifacts, public buildings and urban space were not only tangible images of the aspirations of the society that produced them, but they were an attempt to mold social attitudes.<sup>89</sup> For post-absolutist Thailand, it was commonly known that key members the People's Party were acutely aware of the importance of modern architecture to help construct their self-image as a progressive organization.

As elaborated by examples of Modernist buildings previously mentioned in this paper, modern-style structures became objects of their aspiration that were energetic and desirable, representing symbols of pride, progress, and parity with the West, while proving a "novelty of propaganda for the new government."<sup>90</sup> At the same time, representations of the modern Thai identity and democratic ideology happened through stylistic deviations from Modernism. For instance, the so-called sathapattayakam thai prayuk baeb khrueng concrete, or Applied Thai architecture,<sup>91</sup> embraced hybridized Modernist-Thai aesthetics. As shown by a number of civic and religious buildings commissioned during the Khana Ratsadon era—such as the principal stupa at Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, Bangkok, and main auditorium at Chulalongkorn University—the traditional profile and decorative ornaments of these built forms were rationalized to explore the structural capability of modern materials, namely reinforced concrete and steel.

In this respect, the geometrical simplicity and materialistic expressions of Samoson Ratsaranrom appeared to characterize the two cardinal values of the Six Principles of the People's Party—Equality and Economic—propagating the democratic ideology along with the idea of modern egalitarianism in built forms. The use of inexpensive material like reinforced concrete, in particular, became a media par excellence to demonstrate a logical and careful management of the country's economy by the People's Party, while simultaneously criticizing extravagant, conspicuous, and irrational spending on luxurious cultural commodities during the royal absolutist period.<sup>92</sup>

In a corollary view, the stylistic affiliation between modern architecture and the notion of progress via the quality of newness coupled with absence of historical references and minimal decoration—constituting the *raison d'être* in representing the modern Thai identity—was echoed through public statements made by leaders of Khana Ratsadon on several occasions. For instance, in his speech in 1942, Phibun proclaimed that the Democracy Monument—surrounded by modern-style edifices along the middle section of Ratchadamnoen Avenue—would act as "a center of all things progressive, from which the thoroughfares linking the capital to other parts of the country would originate."<sup>93</sup> The premier further declared that the main axis of the road, constructed in the late-19th century during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, "would be widened and lined with handsome edifices, becoming the pride of the modern and civilized Thailand."<sup>94</sup> Moreover, in 1943, Phibun asserted that the creation of a modern hotel at the Ratchadamnoen in Bangkok set an excellent example for expressions of the modern Thai identity, since the building would demonstrate the refinement and advancement of the Thai people that glorified the greatness of the country and its people."<sup>95</sup>

Taken together, a proposition could be put forward that the Modernist design of Samoson Ratsaranrom offered a glimpse into, if not setting a precedent for, the aesthetic attributes that were subsequently incorporated by the Nation-building Program. Between 1939 and 1942, the first Phibun administration issued a series of twelve cultural mandates—known as the *rathniyom*—intended to "uplift the national spirit and moral code of the nation and instilling progressive tendencies and a newness into Thai life."<sup>96</sup>

Under the supervision of Luang Wichit, the edicts instructed the people in every aspect of their social life, such as communication, dress, behavior, and how to be a Thai citizen.<sup>97</sup> These parameters of the Thai identity—or khwampenthai (Thainess)<sup>98</sup>—were “necessarily in the interests of progress and civilization that the world might see that Thailand was a modern nation.”<sup>99</sup> As evident from the stylistic characteristics of Samoson Ratsaranrom—which ranked among the earliest structures commissioned by the People’s Party—the quality of newness as stipulated by the rathniyom mandates was conveyed through the Modernist concepts of: (1) simplicity; (2) massive and voluminous formal and spatial configurations; (3) functional and rational compositions; and (4) structural and materialistic expressions.

Be that as it may, another critical remark should be considered; the connection of modern architecture with ideologies and identities was neither unique to Siam before 1932, nor post-absolutist Thailand. Such a practice was in fact a global phenomenon, due to the popularity of Modernism during that time. Between the 1920s and 1940s, Modernist design principles and elements were widely adopted for architecture of the state by governments around the world, ranging from the Italian fascist, British colonialist, to American capitalist and Russian communist rules. Regardless of their ideological diversity, those regimes shared one peculiarity that served as a framework of reference for Modernist buildings, the notion of nationalism albeit operating under dissimilar definitions.

#### 4. The Politics of Representations in the Post-People’s Party Era

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 khana rattaprahan. These younger men mostly held conservative attitudes and were supporters of the monarchy. Phibun’s successors, Sarit Thanarat (s. 1959-1963) and Thanom Kittikachorn (s. 1963-1973), were traditionalists. Espousing orderliness, cleanliness, and conformity, the nationalist ethos of these locally educated strongmen embraced Vajiravudh’s concept of Thai nationhood consisting of the triple values of nation, religion, and monarchy, in place of exogenic and intangible ideas like constitutionalism and democracy, as promulgated by Khana Ratsadon.<sup>100</sup>

Politically, Sarit utilized the monarchical institution as both the focus of loyalty for the citizens and the source of legitimacy for maintaining his regime of “despotic paternalism.”<sup>101</sup> He resuscitated the role of the king along with many ancient Hindu-Buddhist royal customs, strengthened by a strict enforcement of the 1908 *lèse majesté* law.<sup>102</sup> Sarit revived royal ceremonies and maintained a very public bond of allegiance to the monarch and the royal family. By claiming to be a servant of the divine kingship, Sarit assumed the duty of a secular arm of the semi-sacral sovereign, demanding respect and obedience from the people by virtue of that connection. The restoration of the monarchy elevated King Rama IX to an omnipotent and sacrosanct status.<sup>103</sup> The regal pre-eminence also was inherited by Bhumibol’s only son, King Vajiralongkorn, the incumbent monarch (Rama X, r. 2016- present).

Historical developments in the late-1950s and early-1960s set the conditions for the politics of representations by built forms commissioned by Khana Ratsadon until the present day. Under Sarit’s authoritarian rule, the military government suppressed activities commemorating the 1932 revolution. At the same time, the junta regime resumed royal functions and restored or even exaggerated the priority of social festivities and state ceremonies within the nation. In contrast to the regal reinstatement, Sarit and his royalist collaborators portrayed the People’s Party and its members as anti-monarchist and hence “un-Thai.” Through their collective efforts, the 1932-coup promoters were depicted as a group of inept intelligentsias who prematurely brought



democracy to Thailand.<sup>104</sup> By the same token, the arts and architecture sponsored by the People's Party were denounced by several influential royalist advocates as the most degraded form of aesthetics that ever existed.<sup>105</sup>

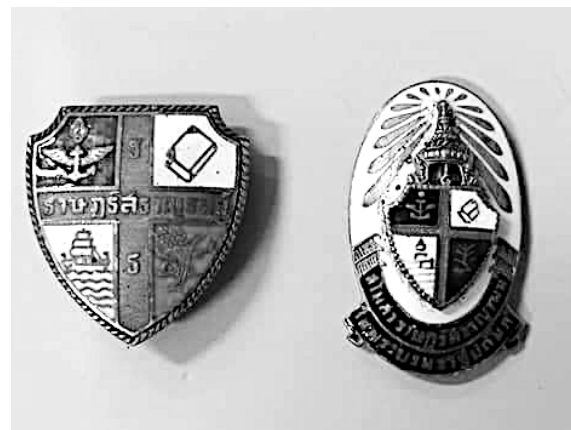
While retaining some aspects of Phibun's Nation-building Program, mainly the modernization process, the junta abolished and/or altered most cultural policies and social practices initiated by the previous administrations. With the suspension of the constitution and termination of the twelve rathniyom cultural mandates, the meaning of the architecture and other built forms commissioned by the People's Party-led administrations faded into symbolic obscurity, losing the *raison d'être* to mediate the power of the state and to signify the Thai identity. The military regime, then, re-semanticized their meanings to express royal authority and, by association, the power of the military regime at the expense of democratic egalitarianism.

To cite a couple of telling evidences, just four of the sixty-nine constitutional images sheltering in the sixty-nine provinces outside Bangkok—which were originally created for nganchalong raththammanun chamlong in 1934—have been preserved. Residing in city halls, the uncovered replicas were located in Loei, Lampang, Ranong, and Trang provinces. The constitutional image in Loei (Fig. 10) was safely kept in the office of the provincial governor, before being moved to a museum for display in 2019. The other sixty-five copies simply vanished and their fates remain unknown.<sup>106</sup> Likewise, when the People's Party lost power, constitution celebrations lost their importance and disappeared. Afterward, several public monuments in provincial cities bearing the phan raththammanun symbol fell into neglect, disuse, and disrepair and since the 1980's, many were physically modified, relocated, or demolished.<sup>107</sup>



**Figure 10** The Constitutional Image at the City Hall in Loei Province.

**Source:** Ratchanart Wanitchsombat, 2019. Available online at: <http://prachatai.com/journal/2019/10/84926>.



**Figure 11** The 1947 (Left) and 1950 (Right) Versions of the Emblems of Samoson Ratsaranrom.

**Source:** Uamulet.com, 2013. Available online at: <http://uamulet.com/AuctionDetail.aspx?bid=383&qid=214393&sortby=ASC>.

Although negative appraisals of the Samoson Ratsaranrom building do not appear to have been publicly expressed, a dyad of conspicuous changes that indicate the shifting political landscape in Thailand after the fall of Pridi from power—and thus the demise of the People's Party—could also be witnessed from an emblem of the association unveiled to the public in 1947. Heavily influenced by the Western tradition of devising a coat of arms, the logo of the Ratsaranrom Society embodied a highly stylized escutcheon (Figure 11 Left and Right). This quartering shield contained images of: (1) an integrated disk, anchor, and pair of wings (symbolizing three branches of the Thai armed forces); (2) a book (representing the constitution); (3) a sailing ship on waves (denoting the fledgling mercantile and entrepreneurial classes); and (4) a plough overlapping a bound of rice leaves (signifying civil servants and natural resource of the country) (Figure 11 Left).<sup>106</sup>

In 1950, another important revision occurred when the images of a Siamese crown and Unaloame were placed on top of the escutcheon (Figure 11 Right), whereas the title of the association was altered to “Ratsaranrom Society under the Royal Patronage,” reflecting the restoration of the monarchical institution during the post-Khana Ratsadon era. On that account, Chaiching (2021d) noted that the alterations of the name and logo of Samoson Ratsaranrom, particularly in 1950, demonstrated the efforts by the conservative khana rattaprahan to depoliticize and dissociate the association from the revolutionary spirit of its founders.<sup>109</sup>

In effect, it appears that the Ratsaranrom Society—and by extension the Samoson Ratsaranrom building, which remained physically the same since 1934—were re-semanticized to convey the regal authority and power of the armed forces. To make matters worse, the image of the constitution—which was the most visible and potent symbol—was rendered ineffective by suspension of the constitution together with termination of the rathniyom edicts by the junta, as explained earlier. As a result, the original meanings of Samoson Ratsaranrom had become a vague vestige in public memory. The building had rarely been introduced to a canonized list of case studies on modern architecture in Thailand.

The academic obscurity of the Samoson Ratsaranrom office raises a critical contemplation on whether its insignificance was indicative of the attempts to erase the cultural legacies of the People’s Party by the Thai state, which had been subtly implemented for decades. Although there may be no definite answer to this question, an action—or lack thereof—by the Fine Arts Department (FAD) implied otherwise. The agency has never considered the building as a historical structure in spite of its age and social significance. In contrast, some landscaping elements of Saramrom Park that contained royal origins as national treasures—e.g., the elegant wrought iron gates adorned with King Rama V’s royal emblems at the main entrance on Charoenkrung Road—were registered as such.

Obviously, the FAD’s disregard for this Modernist building displays that the cultural inheritances of the People’s Party had largely been overlooked by most Thai historians, who were inclined to focus on arts of older and ancient periods that represent nationalism and royalism. Being modern and unconventional, the artistic legacy of Khana Ratsadon was deemed as lacking of khwampenthai and therefore inappropriate for Thai society. Being inconsistent with the prototype of history, such buildings could be ignored or even eliminated.<sup>110</sup>

In sum, such negligence essentially testifies that the conservation of Thai cultural artefacts was based on royal-nationalist principles, of which the main objective was to value the heritages of elite culture under the framework of royalist nationalism. So, the cultural-cum-political contributions of the People’s Party—which challenged and rejected the regal authority—became something that must be discarded, as demonstrated by: (1) the demolition of several structures commissioned by Khana Ratsadon in Bangkok, namely Chaloemthai Theater in 1989 and the Supreme Court Building in 2012; in conjunction with (2) a series of physical alterations of the Constitutional Defense Monument since the 1990s.<sup>111</sup> In fact, even with increasing concerns from both Thai and foreign scholars, recognitions of the Modernist structures and cultural practices associated with the People’s Party—such as the Samoson Ratsaranrom building and nganchalong ratthathammanun chamlong—have received little or no attentions from liberal-oriented governments, including the Thaksin Shinawatra (s. 2001–2006) and Yingluck Shinawatra (s. 2011–2014) administrations. Accordingly, the indifferent and even hostile attitudes of the Thai state toward the cultural legacy of the 1932-coup promoters have persisted to the present day as evident from the following occurrences.

## 5. Recent Developments

Despite a renewal of academic interest in the arts and architecture of the People's Party, Samoson Ratsaranrom has largely been neglected by the scholarly community. However, the ongoing political developments in Thailand might affect this situation. Following a five-year rule of the oppressive junta regime (2014-2019) headed by General Prayut Chan-o-cha and members of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), the current situation in Thailand under another administration once again directed by Prayut (s. 2019- present) has yet to be settled, but indeed has become socially explosive.<sup>112</sup> Feeling frustrated and disenfranchised by the coups in conjunction with the NCPO-sponsored constitutional charter of 2017—exacerbated by what they perceived as regal interferences in politics—a growing number of Thais especially the younger generations have defied the *lèse majesté* law by openly criticizing the monarchy. Their disapproving voices have increased exponentially since 2019.<sup>113</sup>

The abovementioned incidents have occasioned widespread protests against King Rama X and the second Prayut administration alike. Throughout 2020, Thai university and high school students staged a series of public demonstrations, calling for drastic measures to be taken on constitutional and monarchical reforms in addition to Prayut's resignation.<sup>114</sup> Consequently, not only would the future of Thai nationhood hang in the balance, but also that of the Thai democracy. Nevertheless, recent occurrences in the politics of representations in architecture and urban space could illuminate what might happen to the cultural legacies of the people's Party as a whole.

Shortly after Vajiralongkorn's ascension to the throne, many built forms commissioned by Khana Ratsadon-led administrations "mysteriously" disappeared as abruptly as never before. To cite some conspicuous examples, in April 2017, the brass plaque that signposted the pivotal moment of Thailand's transformation from absolute monarchy to parliamentary democracy was removed from its location at the Royal Plaza in front of the king's main residence in Bangkok, and replaced by a new plaque.<sup>115</sup> Fit into the road surface near the King Rama V's equestrian statue, this memorial plaque marked the site where the coup promoters read their revolutionary manifesto on June 24, 1932.<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, in December 2018, the Constitutional Defense Monument was relocated from its position at Laksi Circle in northern Bangkok under circumstances controlled by the police and military. To this day, nobody knows exactly where it stood or whether it still existed.<sup>117</sup> A year later, at the order of King Rama X, the name of a Royal Thai Army artillery base in Lopburi province was switched from that of Phraya Phahon to King Bhumibol, whereas long-standing statues of Phraya Phahon and Phibun at the facility were replaced by an image of King Rama IX.<sup>118</sup>

While many scholars and activists cried foul over those missing historic artifacts, the NCPO administration insisted that it had nothing to do with their disappearance. With respect to Samoson Ratsaranrom, although the building seems secure from being demolished for a foreseeable future—owing to the fact that it is being utilized as a shelter for BMA personnel who took care of the Saranrom Park—the removals of the plaque of the People's Party, Constitutional Defense Monuments, coupled with the statues of Phraya Phahon and Phibun signify a new turn in the politics of representations in the art and architecture of the People's Party during the reign of King Rama X.<sup>119</sup> In any case, how future political and social developments might affect Samoson Ratsaranrom remain to be seen.

## 6. Conclusion

The research presented in this paper shows that aside from mediating and legitimizing the power of the People's Party, the Samoson Ratsaranrom building acted as a material manifestation of their ideological views on Thai nationhood, as well as an expression of the modern Thai identity. Yet, after the political demise of the People's Party in 1947, the very same structure had been characterized by royalist advocates not only as a symbol of ill-prepared democracy, but a relic of a discredited and defunct regime as well. As a consequence, the original meanings of the petite Modernist office have nowadays become a vague vestige in public cognizance and recollection.

While the critical and analytical discussions presented here seek to advance both public awareness and knowledge on the architectural legacy of the People's Party, a number of key factual elements are absent from their contents. As a result, some quintessential and fundamental questions remain unanswered. For instance, there is still no definitive explanation on why an octastyle portico was employed (Figure 3 and 5), as opposed to an octastyle entry hall commonly found at many edifices commissioned by Khana Ratsadon. Irrespective of these shortcomings, the methodological validity and scholarly relevance of this research were encapsulated by its pioneering interpretations on the architectural semantics of the Samoson Ratsaranrom building, which could potentially lead to further studies.

In addition, criticism might be surfaced by those subscribing to the so-called "antiquarian" mode of historical inquiries<sup>120</sup> that the above symbolic-driven probes operated on a false dichotomy of: monarchs vs. revolutionists, totalitarian vs. constitutional regimes, despotic vs. egalitarian ideologies, conservative vs. progressive architectural expressions, decorative elements vs. simplicity of forms, national heritage vs. cultural vanity, and so forth. Be that as it may, the politics of representations at the Ratsaranrom Society repudiated the said allegation by demonstrating the applicability of semiotic readings on the legacies of the People's Party in built forms, in conjunction with their impacts on Thai architectural history as well as national historiography. The rebuttal is strengthened by the fact that the political developments in Thailand since 2016 have made the polarity between the entrenched elites and less fortunate become even more extreme and violent.

As explicated by the examination of the ebb and flow of symbolic meanings of the Samoson Ratsaranrom office it became evident that the narratives of national history were always abundant with power struggles and self-glorifications and the same stories too, were full of embarrassing, irrational, accidental, and ironic moments. In other words, the waxing and waning of this Modernist structure in and out of the collective psyche of Thai people illustrates that the discourse of binary opposition was not artificial, but tangible and pertinent. On the one hand, by occupying the area once primarily used as a pleasure garden for Siamese ruling elites, the creation of the building—as an administrative hub of recreational facility and socializing space for the 1932-coup promoter—seemed to be an affront to the regal prestige and dignity, epitomizing the lowest point of authority for the House of Chakri. On the other hand, such a genesis exemplified a defining moment in the history of the Thai nation, when the era of successive absolutist rules was replaced by a new epoch of constitutional government, whose ideological views were guided by the Six Principles of Khana Ratsadon at least until 1947.

The aforementioned historical discussion—even though humiliating for the power that be in the present Thailand—should not be rendered null and void by the hegemonic power of the royal-nation historiography. Instead, it should function as a basis to recognize the values of the cultural legacies of the People's Party to be preserved as national heritages. Accordingly, not only should Samoson Ratsaranrom be incorporated into



DOCOMOMO Thailand's inventory, but also registered as an historically important structure by the Fine Arts Department, if not celebrated as a national treasure. Recent destruction and disappearance of the arts and architecture sponsored by Khana Ratsadon have made its preservation become even more urgent than ever.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, K.N.; methodology, K.N.; formal analysis, K.N.; investigation, K.N.; writing–original draft preparation, K.N.; writing–review and editing, K.N.; visualization, K.N. The author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> In this research, the term “Siam” refers to the absolutist kingdom whose monarchical rule ended in 1932, whereas “Thailand” denoted the democratic nation after the 1932 revolution, in spite of the fact that the constitutional government continued to use “Siam” as the name of the country until 1939. In addition, during the first Phibun administration (s. 1938–1944), “Thailand” signified a close kinship with Tai-speaking populations in Southeast Asia, reflecting the premier’s vision of creating “the Great Thai Empire,” a terra firma for all Tai-speaking ethnic groups to dwell in unison. See: Terwiel, B.J. (1980). Field marshall Plaek Phibunsongkhram. Master’s thesis). University of Queensland, pp. 133–151.
- <sup>2</sup> Modern architecture and Modernism, though related, are not quite the same. The term “modern architecture” (with m) primarily means a particular architectural movement originating in Europe around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Modern architecture was a critical discourse to defy the established canons of architecture. Within it lay the notion of “Modernism” (with M), emerging first in Europe during the Inter-war period, and embodying a revolutionary aesthetic canon and scientific doctrine. Claimed to be universally valid and rational, its defining features encompassed: (1) the absence of decoration, stylistic motifs, ornamental details, and traditional roofs; (2) the use of steel, glass, and reinforced concrete; and (3) the primacy of cubic forms, geometric shapes, and Cartesian grids. Generally, works of the masters, such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe are considered as not only the epitome of aesthetic doctrine of modern architecture, but also that of the 20th century aesthetic consciousness.
- <sup>3</sup> For example, see: Sirikiatikul, P. (2007). Remaking modern Bangkok: Urban renewal on Rajadamnern boulevard, 1932–1957. Master thesis, University College London, 2007); Chitrabongs, C. (2009). Cleanliness in Thailand: King Rama V’s ‘strategy of hygiene’ from urban planning to dress codes in the late-nineteenth-century. Ph.D. dissertation, Architectural Association; Povatong, P. (2011). Building siwilai: Transformation of architecture and architectural practice in Siam during the reign of Rama V, 1868–1910. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan; Chua, L. (2012). Building Siam: Leisure, race, and nationalism in modern Thai architecture, 1910–1973. Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University; Fusinpaiboon, C. (2014). Modernisation of building: The transplantation of the concept of architecture from Europe to Thailand, 1930s–1950s. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sheffield.
- <sup>4</sup> For instance, see: Chotpradit, T. (2017). A dark spot on a royal space: The art of the people’s party and the politics of Thai (art) history. *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1(1), 131–157. doi:10.1353/sen.2017.0004; and Thepsongkraow, S. (2019). People-ocracy: Politics, power and the memory of the people’s (party) [Ratsadon atippatai: Karnmuang, amnat, lae khwamsomgchamkhong (khana ratsadon)]. Bangkok: Matichon.

- <sup>5</sup> Khumsupha, M. (2005). The democracy monument and its unseen meanings [Anusaowari prachathippatai kapkhwa maithimongmai]. Bangkok: Wiphasa.
- <sup>6</sup> Prakitnonthakan, C. (2009). The art and architecture of the people's party: Political symbols in ideological aspect [Sinlapa-sathapattayakam khana ratsadon: sanyalak thang kanmueang nai choeng udomkan]. Bangkok: Matichon.
- <sup>7</sup> Noobanjong, K. (2013). *The aesthetics of power: Architecture and modernity and identity from Siam to Thailand*. Chonburi, Thailand: White Lotus.
- <sup>8</sup> Fusinpaiboon, C. (2016). The historiography of modern architecture in Thailand [Prawattisatnippon dan sathapattayakam samaimai natpratetthai]. *Najua* 13, 154-173, pp. 162-164.
- <sup>9</sup> For example, Prakitnontakan, C., and Chareeprasit, K., curators. (2018). Revolutionary Things. Cartel Artspace, Bangkok. June 24-July 19.
- <sup>10</sup> Significant progress was also made in late-2016 when *Najua*—a highly respected academic journal on Thai architecture operated by the Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University—published a special issue devoted to the architectural heritages of the People's Party and the 1932 revolution. Despite the focus of this special issue, the Samoson Ratsaranrom building was not included. See: <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/NAJUA/issue/view/6786>.
- <sup>11</sup> Hongsaton, P. (2012). The constitutional fair in a cultural-political viewpoint after 1932 revolution [Mongnganchalong ratthathammanun naingakarnmuangwattanatham lungkarnpattiwat 2475]. *Thammasat University Archives Bulletin* 16, 122-139, p. 127.
- <sup>12</sup> Samoson Ratsaranrom (Ratsaranrom Society). (1934). Regulations of Ratsaranrom Society [Kohbangkub samoson ratsaranrom]. Bangkok: Krungthep Bannakarn, p. 1.
- <sup>13</sup> Fine Arts Department (FAD). (2011). King Rama V's daily royal duties: 1877 [Chodmaihade praratchakitriwan nai phrabatsomdet phrachulachomklao chaoyouhua chulasakkarat 1239 puttasakkarat 2420]. Bangkok: Author, p. 397.
- <sup>14</sup> Smith, S. J. (2005). Siam samai archives vol. 1, 2 [Chodmaihade sayamsamai 1 lae 2]. Bangkok: Chabab, p. 207.
- <sup>15</sup> See: Child, J. T. (1892). The pearl of Asia. Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry & Co.
- <sup>16</sup> Lambert, D. (2012). Jubilee-action! A history of royal jubilees in public parks. Swindon: English Heritage, p. 6.
- <sup>17</sup> Smith, S. J. (2005). *Siam samai archives vol. 1, 2*, pp. 81-82.
- <sup>18</sup> Navapan, N., and Noobanjong, K. (2014). Saranrom garden: From Siamese royal garden to Thailand's public park. *Journal of Architectural/Planning Research and Studies* 10(2), 83-102, p. 91.
- <sup>19</sup> For instance, see: Peleggi, M. (2002). Lords of things: The fashioning of the Siamese monarchy's modern image. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press; Wong, K.F. (2006). Visions of a nation: Public monuments in twentieth-century Thailand. Bangkok: White Lotus Press.
- <sup>20</sup> Herzfeld, M. (2002). The absent presence: Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(4), pp. 900-901.
- <sup>21</sup> Peleggi, M. (2002). Lords of things, p. 20.
- <sup>22</sup> National Archives of Thailand. Ministry of Palace, Mor. Ror. 6 Wor/23. A restoration of Saranrom palace. [Karnsomsamburana wangsaranrom]. National Archives of Thailand. The Secretariat of the Cabinet, (2) Sor. Ror. 0201.69/82. A restoration of Saranrom garden's walls [Karnsomsam ruakhong suansaranrom].

- <sup>23</sup> Srisuwannakij, V. (2006). Western-style recreation of the Siamese elite, 1902-1932 [Karnphakphonyonchai beabtawantok khongchonchunnansayam por. sor, 2445-2475]. MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, p. 91.
- <sup>24</sup> Fine Arts Department. (2005). A collection of photographs from Rama IV's reign [Prachumphaprawattisat phandin phrabbatsomdet phrachomklao chaoyouhua]. Bangkok, Thailand: Author, p. 256.
- <sup>25</sup> National Archives of Thailand. Ministry of Municipal Government, Mor. Ror. 6 Nor/232. Winter fair [Ngan ruedunao].
- <sup>26</sup> National Archives of Thailand. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mor. Ror. 6 Tor/49. "Our day" British Red Cross fete [Nganchalong wankhongrao saphakachad haeng saharatcha anachak].
- <sup>27</sup> Srisuwannakij, V. (2008). Siamese elites and western leisure [Chonchunsoong sayam kubkarn phakphonyonchai khongfarang]. *Silapa-wattanatam* 29(10), p. 117.
- <sup>28</sup> The Secretariat of the Cabinet. (1994). *King Rama VII's daily royal duties: Part I (November 26, 2468-December 31, 2471)* [Chodmai hate phraratchakitraiwan phrabatsomdet phraporamin mahaprajadhipok phrapokklao chaoyouhua ratchakaenteeched phakton]. Bangkok, Thailand: Watcharin Karm pim, pp. 364-366.
- <sup>29</sup> National Archives of Thailand. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mor. Ror. 7 Tor/17. American missionary society asks for a permission to organize a centennial celebration at Saranrom garden [Samakhom missionary American khorannuyatchainsuansaranrom phueachadngan chalongkrobroab nuengroipee].
- <sup>30</sup> National Archives of Thailand. Office of the Royal Secretariat (Miscellaneous), Mor. Ror. 7 Bor/13. Fairs at the Saranrom garden for Siam Red Cross Day [Ngan wansaphakachat sayam tee suansaranrom].
- <sup>31</sup> Navapan, N., and Noobanjong, K. (2014). Saranrom garden, p. 95.
- <sup>32</sup> National Archives of Thailand. Office of the Royal Secretariat, Mor. Ror. 7 Ror Lor/46. Mr. Kimheng/Chinese merchants ask for a permission to organize market fair [Nai Kimheng/phokhacheen khaoannuyat chadngan taladnut].
- <sup>33</sup> Some contemporary sources had identified Samakhom Khana Ratsadon as the first political party in Thailand, although it was not officially registered as such. See: Wikipedia. (2020). Defunct parties. List of political parties in Thailand. Retrieved November 15, 2020, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_political\\_parties\\_in\\_Thailand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_Thailand).
- <sup>34</sup> As defined by the Getty Research Institute, the term International Style referred to a type of architecture characterized by the emphases on volume over mass, rejection of all ornament and color, coupled with the uses of lightweight, mass-produced, industrial materials, repetitive modular forms, and flat surfaces typically alternating with areas of glass. Initially emerging in Holland, France, and Germany after World War I, International Style swiftly spread throughout the world and became the dominant force in architectural design until the 1970s. See: Getty Research Institute. (2004). International style (modern European architecture style). Art and architecture thesaurus. Retrieved July 17, 2021, from <http://www.getty.edu/vow/AATFullDisplay?find=international+style&logic=AND&note=&page=1&subjectid=300021472>.
- <sup>35</sup> Stowe, J. (1991). Siam becomes Thailand: A story of intrigue. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, p. 26.
- <sup>36</sup> See: Chaiching, N. (2021e). Building of the association of the people's party at saranrom garden [Akarn samakhom khana ratsadon na suan saranrom]. My country Thailand. Matichon Weekly. June 9, 2021. Retrieved July 15, 2021, from [https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article\\_431332](https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article_431332).

- <sup>37</sup> For example, see: Fuwongcharoen, F. (2017). Political parties after the revolution in Siam: Dynamism, development, and fate of the non-party system [Khanakarnmuang lungkarnpatiwasiam: Pollawat, Pattanakarn, laechatakarn khongrabob raiphak]. Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, pp. 64-65, 71, 77; Chaiching, N. (2021a). The association of the people's party: The first political party [Samakhom khanaratsadon: Phakkarnmuangrak]. My country Thailand. Matchon Weekly. April 21, 2021. Retrieved April 23, 2021, from [https://www.matchonweekly.com/column/article\\_418570](https://www.matchonweekly.com/column/article_418570).
- <sup>38</sup> Petchlertanan, T. (2000). 1932 and one year after the revolution [2475 lae 1 pee lungkarnpattiwat]. Bangkok: Asian Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University, pp. 212-213.
- <sup>39</sup> Fuwongcharoen, F. (2017). Political parties after the revolution in Siam, p. 74; Chaiching, N. (2021a). The association of the people's party: The first political party [Samakhom khanaratsadon: Phakkarnmuangrak]. My country Thailand. Matchon Weekly. April 21, 2021. Retrieved April 23, 2021, from [https://www.matchonweekly.com/column/article\\_418570](https://www.matchonweekly.com/column/article_418570).
- <sup>40</sup> Fuwongcharoen, F. (2017). Political parties after the revolution in Siam, p. 71.
- <sup>41</sup> Petchlertanan, T. (2000). 1932 and one year after the revolution, p. 216.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 212-213.
- <sup>43</sup> Chaiching, N. (2021b). *The conservative party: The first movement to galvanize a defiant spirit of citizens against the 1932 revolution* [Samakhom khana chat: Rak kubkarn pluksamnuek chaoayothaya tortan karnpattiwat]. My country Thailand. Matchon Weekly. April 28, 2021. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from [https://www.matchonweekly.com/นักพล-ใจจริง/article\\_419621?fbclid=IwAR0QEnWdZgpO63frpLvqkbHU3Q0uGFnsYoLPF-QU12VFXz99YqYjcoL\\_pXQ](https://www.matchonweekly.com/นักพล-ใจจริง/article_419621?fbclid=IwAR0QEnWdZgpO63frpLvqkbHU3Q0uGFnsYoLPF-QU12VFXz99YqYjcoL_pXQ).
- <sup>44</sup> Sawasdiwat, S. (2000). A century of Supasawat 23 August 2000 [1 sattawat Supasawat 23 singhakhom 2543]. Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, p. 93.
- <sup>45</sup> Announcement of abdication of H.M. King Prajadhipok [Thalangarn ruang phrabatsomdet phraporamin mahaprajadhipok phrapokkiao chaoyouhua songsaratchasombat]. (1935). Bangkok: Srikrung Printing, pp. 41-42).
- <sup>46</sup> Wyatt, D.K. (1984). Thailand: A short history. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, pp. 247.
- <sup>47</sup> Samoson Ratsaranrom (Ratsaranrom Society). (1934). Regulations of Ratsaranrom Society, p. 1.
- <sup>48</sup> Chanchaloem, S. (Nai Honhuai). (1987). Prajadhipok: The exiled monarch [Chaofa prachathipok: Rachanphunirai]. Bangkok: Poh Sampand Panich, pp. 485-486.
- <sup>49</sup> Hongsaton, P. (2012). The constitutional fair in a cultural-political viewpoint after 1932 revolution, p. 126.
- <sup>50</sup> For example, see: Chaisuwan, N. (2016). Mass media and a legitimation of the people's party: The case of national day June 24, 1939-1960 [Suemuanchon kubkarnsarng khwanchobtham khong khana ratsadon: Karani sueksa wanchat 24 mithunayon por sor 2482-2503]. MA thesis, Thammasat University.
- <sup>51</sup> Jurinthorn, T. (2015). The constitutional celebration and Miss Thailand Beauty Pageant [Nganchalong ratthathammanun kubkarnpraguad nangsaothai]. *Research and Development News Letter, the Secretariat of the House of Representatives* 14(160), 1-13, p. 10. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from [https://library2.parliament.go.th/ejournal/content\\_rd/2558/14\\_160/t14\\_160.pdf](https://library2.parliament.go.th/ejournal/content_rd/2558/14_160/t14_160.pdf).
- <sup>52</sup> See: Fuwongcharoen, P. (2018). The constitutional celebration: National exposition of the people's party [Nganchalong ratthathammanun: Mahakam haengchatkhong khana ratsadon]. *Silpa-wattanatham* 38(3), 92-123.



- <sup>53</sup> National Archives of Thailand. The Prime Minister's office. (3) Sor. Ror. 0201.66.1/6. Document of the secretary of the cabinet on the constitutional fair [Eakkasan samnaklaekhathikan khanarattamontri ruang nganchalong ratthathammanun].
- <sup>54</sup> Samoson Ratsaranrom (Ratsaranrom Society). (1934). *Regulations of Ratsaranrom Society*, pp. 2-5; Deeroatchanawanich, P. (2016). *Khara Ratsadon's Club [Samoson Khanaratsadon]*. King Prajadhipok's Institute knowledge depository. Retrieved November 2, 2020, from <http://wiki.kpi.ac.th/index.php?title=สโมสรคณะราษฎร>.
- <sup>55</sup> Some contemporary investigations maintained that the main purpose of Ratsaranrom Society was not only to serve as a place of gathering for the 1932-coup promoters and their exponents, but also to provide a venue for the People's Party-led administrations to cultivate political supports from the general public through various kinds of social and recreational activities. See: Chaiching, N. (2021c). The society of the people's party: From political party to public sphere [Samoson khana ratsadon: Chak pakkarnmuang sou samoson phonlamuang sangsan]. My country Thailand. Matichon Weekly. May 26, 2021. Retrieved May 29, 2021, from [https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article\\_426957?fbclid=IwAR2e4-CrIPvTUeyeRPiIyIL4PmBUTzY1Jd1rYu6oODxYjstwzinJJfH9VPs](https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article_426957?fbclid=IwAR2e4-CrIPvTUeyeRPiIyIL4PmBUTzY1Jd1rYu6oODxYjstwzinJJfH9VPs). Their explanation was corroborated by a number of historical documents, including *Regulations of Ratsaranrom Society (1934)*, pp. 2-3, which stated that its membership was open to any ordinary citizen, whose acceptance required certifications from two existing members.
- <sup>56</sup> Chaiching, N. (2021d). Meanings of the logo of the people's party: From an association of revolutionists to a social club under the royal patronage [Khawmai khong loho phak khana ratsadon: Chak samakhom naksue sou samoson nai phraborrom rachupatham]. My country Thailand. Matichon Weekly. June 2, 2021. Retrieved June 5, 2021, from [https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article\\_429059?fbclid=IwAR21BZ-Ze5r5IRWLvEjg4sYo7-G4I1AJ9cjBFcbLKVF0Zhp6YLy089gCMk](https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article_429059?fbclid=IwAR21BZ-Ze5r5IRWLvEjg4sYo7-G4I1AJ9cjBFcbLKVF0Zhp6YLy089gCMk).
- <sup>57</sup> Ritticharoonrote, S. (2020). Ballroom dancing: Dance culture leading the way for Thailand [Lilas: Wattananatham tenrum namthai]. Museum Siam museum's core. Retrieved November 12, 2020, from <https://m.museumsiam.org/da-detail2.php?MID=3&CID=177&CONID=4169&SCID=242#>.
- <sup>58</sup> National Archives of Thailand. The Secretariat of the Cabinet, (2) Sor. Ror. 0201.69/82. A restoration of Saranrom garden's walls [Karnsomsam ruakhong suansaranrom].
- <sup>59</sup> Mokarapong, T. (1972). History of the Thai revolution: A study in political behavior. Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich, 229.
- <sup>60</sup> Chaiching, N. (2021d). Meanings of the logo of the people's party.
- <sup>61</sup> Navapan, N., and Noobanjong, K. (2014). Saranrom garden, p. 97.
- <sup>62</sup> The Secretariat of the Cabinet. (1981). *Relocation of Ratsaranrom Society [Karnrueyay samoson ratsaranrom]*. February 2, 1981. Retrieve November 13, 2020, from [https://cabinet.soc.go.th/soc/Program 2-3.jsp?top\\_serl=70627&key\\_word=&owner\\_dep=%C1%B7&meet\\_date\\_dd=&meet\\_date\\_mm=&meet\\_date\\_yyyy=&doc\\_id1=&doc\\_id2=&meet\\_date\\_dd2=&meet\\_date\\_mm2=&meet\\_date\\_yyyy2=](https://cabinet.soc.go.th/soc/Program%202-3.jsp?top_serl=70627&key_word=&owner_dep=%C1%B7&meet_date_dd=&meet_date_mm=&meet_date_yyyy=&doc_id1=&doc_id2=&meet_date_dd2=&meet_date_mm2=&meet_date_yyyy2=).
- <sup>63</sup> Navapan, N., and Noobanjong, K. (2014). Saranrom garden, p. 97.
- <sup>64</sup> Possible candidates of the architect who designed this building included Sarot Sukkhayang (Phra Sarot Rattanimman) and Jitsen (Mew) Aphaiwong. From 1932 to 1947, they received many commissions from the People's Party-led administrations to devise important public structures in a mixture of Art Deco and International Style.
- <sup>65</sup> Hongsaton, P. (2012). The constitutional fair in a cultural-political viewpoint after 1932 revolution, p. 127.
- <sup>66</sup> Navapan, N., and Noobanjong, K. (2014). Saranrom garden, p. 92.

- <sup>67</sup> Eoseewong, N. (1995). The Thai nation, Thai nationhood, textbooks and public monuments: On state-sponsored culture and forms of consciousness [Chat thai, muang thai, baebrean, lae anusawari: Waduy watthanathamratt lae rupkarnchitsamnuek]. Bangkok: Matichon, p. 117.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Wong, K.F. (2006). Visions of a nation, p. 57.
- <sup>70</sup> Prakitnonthakan, C. (2009). The art and architecture of the people's party, pp. 136-142.
- <sup>71</sup> Images of phan ratthathammanun were popularized throughout the country. Notable examples encompassed: (1) citizen-sponsored public monuments in Maha Sarakham, Surin, and Roi Et provinces; (2) architectural components—such as decorative details on front pediments of ordination halls (ubosot) and administrative offices—as exemplified by the Pong Ho San Buddhist temple in Lampang, coupled with the Wiang Pa Pao district office in Chiang Rai province; (3) Emblems of local administrative agencies, as exhibited by those of Nonthaburi, Buriram, Nakhon Sawan, and Surat Thani city municipalities; and (4) everyday objects, such as dipping bowls, ceramicwares, dining plates, memorabilia, and even commercial logos on bottles of alcoholic beverages. For further details, see: Wisaprom, S. (2014). Symbolic constitution: Cultural politics studies on the constructing the symbolic for representing the democracy after the 1932 revolution [Sanyalak ratthathammanun: Karnsuksa choengkarnmuang wattanatham naikarnsarng sanyalak tanraboab prachathippatai pailung karnpattiwat por sor 2475]. Paper presented at the *8<sup>th</sup> Thai Humanities Research Forum: Changing Humanities in a Changing World*, November 27-29, 2014, Chiang Mai. Retrieved July 18, 2021, from <https://www.academia.edu/10245016/>.
- <sup>72</sup> National Archives of Thailand. The Prime Minister's office. (3) Sor. Ror. 0201.66.1/14. Document of the secretary of the cabinet on the constitutional fair [Eakkasan samnaklaekhathikan khanarattamontri ruang nganchalong ratthathammanun]. Also see: Hongsaton, P. (2012). The constitutional fair in a cultural-political viewpoint after 1932 revolution, p. 127.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> This statement was corroborated by an eye-witness account from Songphan Bunnak who saw the building for the first time when he was visiting the constitutional fair in December 1933 at Saranrom Garden, which was approximately nine months before nganchalong ratthathammanun chamlong happened. See: Chaiching, N. (2021e). Building of the association of the people's party at saranrom garden.
- <sup>75</sup> Based on these chronological developments, it could be concluded that: (1) the official registration to found the Ratsaranrom Society; (2) opening ceremony for the Samoson Ratsaranrom building; and (3) installation of phan ratthathammanun at Saranrom Garden, occurred within the same year: 1934.
- <sup>76</sup> Techaphira, K. (2009). Making the constitution become Thai [Karnthamhai ratthathammanun klaipenthai]. Matichon raiwan 32(11598), December 11, 2009, p. 6.
- <sup>77</sup> See: Fuwongcharoen, F. (2015). Cult of the constitution in Siam during the era of the people's party [Latthibucha ratthathammanun kubsayam samai khana ratsadon]. Silpa-watthanatham 37(2), 74-103.
- <sup>78</sup> Techaphira, K. (2009). Making the constitution become Thai, p. 6.
- <sup>79</sup> Hongsaton, P. (2012). *The constitutional fair in a cultural-political viewpoint after 1932 revolution*, pp. 127-128.
- <sup>80</sup> Prakitnonthakan, C. (2009). The constitutional fair [Nganchalong ratthathammanun]. *Fahdeawkan* 5(3), 78-91, p. 82.

- <sup>81</sup> National Archives of Thailand. The Prime Minister's office. (3) Sor. Ror. 0201.66.1/17. Document of the secretary of the cabinet on the constitutional fair [Eakkasan samnaklaekhathikan khanarattamontri ruang nganchalong ratthathammanun].
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>83</sup> Even though less frequently found, the octal association could be seen from the symbolism of some built forms commissioned by the People's Party as well. For example, the Constitutional Defense Monument contained eight facets signifying the four cardinal and four intermediate directions, along which the dominant authority of Khana Ratsadon was disseminated. See: Thepsongkraow, S. (2013). The rebellion suppression and a recollection for the defenders of the 1932 revolution [Anusawari prapkabot kapkanramluek wirachon phuphithak kanpatriwat 2475]. *Silpa-watthanatham* 34(12), 112-129, pp. 115-116.
- <sup>84</sup> Khana Ratsadon (The People's Party). (1932). *The first revolutionary manifesto of the people's party [Prakat khana ratsadon chabapthi nueng]*. June 24, 1932. Retrieved 17 July 2017, from <http://www.enlightened-jurists.org/directory/84>.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>86</sup> Baker C. and Phongpaichit, P. (2014). *A history of Thailand*. Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, p. 120.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 127.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 138.
- <sup>89</sup> Kostof, S. (1995). *A history of architecture: Settings and rituals*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 19.
- <sup>90</sup> Wong, K.F. (2006). *Visions of a nation*, p. 58.
- <sup>91</sup> See: Prakitnondhakarn, C. (2004). Politics and society in architecture: Siamese era, applications in Thai designs, and nationalism [Kanmueanglaesangkhom naisilpa sathapattayakam sayamsamai thaiprayuk chatiniyom]. Bangkok: Matichon, pp. 357-404; Prakitnondhakarn, C. (2009). *The art and architecture of the people's party*, pp. 109-115.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 311; Ibid., p. 17.
- <sup>93</sup> Krom Khotsanakan (Department of Public Relations). (1942). Prime minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram's speech on the national day anniversary on June 24, 1942. *Khao Kosanakarn*, 7(5), 982; Nuan la-or, M. (1997). Thai politics during the age of symbolism [Kanmueangthai yuksanlak Thai]. Bangkok: Rungruangrat Printing, p. 83.
- <sup>94</sup> The National Archives of Thailand. 0701.22.1/7. The prime minister's speech to celebrate the national day on June 24, 1942 [Sunthonphot khongnaikratmontri nueangnai aphilaksakhitsamai haengngan chalermchalong wanchati 24 mithunayon 2483]; Ibid.
- <sup>95</sup> The National Archives of Thailand. The Prime Minister's office. (2) Sor. Ror. 0201.72/1 About naming for a hotel [Ruang tangcheu rongram]. May 23, 1943, 1.
- <sup>96</sup> National Archives of Thailand, 0701.22.1/7. The prime minister's speech to celebrate the national day on June 24, 1942.
- <sup>97</sup> The edicts required Thai citizens to know the national anthem, use Central Thai dialect as the lingual franca, eat with spoon and fork, buy Thai products, and dress in modern (meaning Western) fashion. People were also forbidden from consuming four meals per day, and from chewing betel nut. Later mandates instructed husbands to treat their wives with respect, including kissing them both before leaving for work and when arriving home. Any kind of physical abuses was prohibited as well. See: Nuan la-or, M. (1997). Thai politics during the age of symbolism, p. 83.

- <sup>98</sup> However, Phibun's rathniyom mandates on khwampenthai proved to be conceptually schizophrenic because several measures taken to define the new Thai identity were as much Western as Thai.
- <sup>99</sup> National Archives of Thailand, 0701.22.1/7. The prime minister's speech to celebrate the national day on June 24, 1942.
- <sup>100</sup> Chaloeontiarana, T. (1979). Thailand: The politics of despotic paternalism. Bangkok, Thailand: Thammasat University Press, pp. 161-166.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>102</sup> Streckfuss, D. (1995). Kings in the age of nations: The paradox of lèse-majesté as political crime in Thailand. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37(3), 445-475, pp. 445-453.
- <sup>103</sup> Mokarapong, T. (1972). History of the Thai revolution., pp. 283-293.
- <sup>104</sup> Chaiching, N. (2005). Deconstructing 1932: Genuine dreams of the true blue-blooded idealists [Kanruesarang 2475: Fancharingkhongnakutmokti namngoenhae]. *Silpa-watthanatham* 22(2), 78-117, pp. 113-114.
- <sup>105</sup> Leading the charge was Kukrit Pramoj, a conservative scholar and ardent royalist who became the Prime Minister in 1976. He lamented that there was no "Thai" arts and architecture produced during the age of Khana Ratsadon at all. As a result, the arts and architecture sponsored by the People's Party contained no value to be preserved. See: Pramoj, K. (1985). Opening speech on modern art. In A proceedings from a seminar on the post-1932 arts. Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, pp. 2-14.
- <sup>106</sup> Lawattanatrakul, A. (2019a). *A journey to the northeastern region to find constitutional monuments in remembrance of the people's party [Trawain esan tamhah anusaowari prachathippatai tamroi khwamsongcham (khana) ratsadon]*. Prachatai. October 27, 2019. Retrieved July 21, 2021, from <https://prachatai.com/journal/2019/10/84926>.
- <sup>107</sup> Lawattanatrakul, A. (2019b). *Uprooting democracy: The war of memory and the lost legacy of the People's Party*. Prachatai English. December 19, 2019. Retrieved November 1, 2020, from <https://prachatai.com/english/node/8312>.
- <sup>108</sup> See: Samoson Ratsaranrom (Ratsaranrom Society). (1959). Twenty-five year anniversary of ratsaranrom society under the royal patronage 1934-1959 [Ratsaranrom anusorn nai prhraborromrachupatham 2477-2502]. Bangkok: Prachan Orinting.
- <sup>109</sup> Chaiching, N. (2021d). Meanings of the logo of the people's party.
- <sup>110</sup> Lawattanatrakul, A. (2019b). Uprooting democracy.
- <sup>111</sup> Prakitnonthakan, C. (2009). The art and architecture of the people's party, pp. 200-208.
- <sup>112</sup> Straits Times. (2019). *Rush to disband Thai Raksa Chart party that chose princess evokes Thai bloodshed*. Straits Times: Southeast Asia. February 14, 2019. Retrieved November 30, 2020, from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/rush-to-disband-thai-raksa-chart-party-that-chose-princess-fuels-risk-in-thailand>.
- <sup>113</sup> Barron, L. (2020). *Why are Thai protesters risking up to 15 years in prison to criticize the monarchy?* Times. August 19, 2020. Retrieved December 1, 2020, from <https://time.com/5880105/thailand-protests-monarchy/>.
- <sup>114</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>115</sup> Chetchotiros, N., Nanuam, W., and Jitcharoenkul, P. (2017). *You say you want a revolution plaque – well, it's gone*. Bangkok Post. April 16, 2017. Retrieved December 2, 2020, from <http://bangkokpost.com/news/politics/1232906/you-say-you-want-a-revolution-plaque-well-its-gone>.
- <sup>116</sup> Ruiz, T. (2017). *1932 democratic revolution plaque removed*. Khaosod English. April 14, 2017. Retrieved December 2, 2020, from <http://khaosodenglish.com/featured/2017/04/14/1932-revolution-plaque-removed/>.
- <sup>117</sup> Lawattanatrakul, A. (2019b). Uprooting democracy.

- <sup>118</sup> Charuvastra, T. (2019). *Statues of 1932 revolt leaders to be removed*. *Khaosod English*. December 28, 2019. Retrieved December 3, 2020, from <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2019/12/28/statues-of-1932-revolt-leaders-to-be-removed/>.
- <sup>119</sup> Ibid.; also see: Noobanjong, K. (2019). Forgotten memorials: The constitutional defense monument and democracy temple in Bangkok, Thailand. In *Southeast Asia's modern architecture: Questions of translation, epistemology, and power*. (eds). J.W. Chang, and I.B. Tajudeen. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 193-235.
- <sup>120</sup> See: Nietzsche, F. (1997). On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life. In *Untimely Meditations*. (ed). D. Breazeale. (trans). R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3.4, 75



