

# **The Stories of Construction and Contention: The 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial and the 2020 Student Movement in Thailand<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT—**: This study argues that the construction of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial (Anuson Sathan Sip Si Tula) embodies the complicated Thai democracy and the democratic quest and struggles of the Thai people. By looking at the historical accounts and narratives of its construction and analyzing the symbols and meanings of the structure, this article reveals that from being a space for remembrance and a venue of commemoration of the October 1973 student revolution, this memorial transformed into a platform for democracy over time up to the emergence of the 2020 student movement. The protest activities, particularly the performative actions conducted by the student protesters in this structure in 2020, contributed to the contention and layering of the meanings of the memorial. This paper also asserts the significance of the 14th of October 1973 Memorial and its role in Thai democracy discourse and the legacies of student activism in Thailand.

**Keywords** : Sip Si Tula, 14th of October 1973 Memorial, Student Movement, Thai Student Movement, 1973 October Revolution

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## Introduction

October 14, 2023, marked the 50<sup>th</sup> year of a significant milestone in the democratic quest and student activism of Thailand. Known as the 14<sup>th</sup> of October (*Sip Si Tula*), this historic event ended the military government of Thamom Kittikachorn in 1973. To honor the people who died in the October 1973 student revolution, the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial (*Anuson Sathan Sip Si Tula*) was installed in 2001. Aside from remembering the people who sacrificed their lives in the name of democracy, this structure also honors the anti-military, pro-constitution, and monarchy-allied student protests of 1973.

The structure contains an interesting story that embodies the complicated concept of Thai democracy. The narrative of its construction represents the democratic struggles of Thailand because it took 28 years after the revolution to materialize because of the contentions and the challenges the pro-democracy groups had to surmount. The memorial monumentalizes a democracy mainly associated with the traditional school because of the monarchy's role and intervention in addressing the student protesters' demands and ending the protests. The Western notion of democracy can also be seen on the periphery through the participation of the people in constructing it and the symbols representing liberal values attached to the monument, such as freedom, human rights, and equality.<sup>3</sup>

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3 This paper uses the two political discourses on Thai democracy according to Mektrairat (2020, 64-93). The first is the “Traditionalist School of Thought,” while the second is the “Western School of Thought.” The “Traditionalist School of Thought” argues that democracy has long been part of Thai society through the origin and status of the monarchy. It can be traced back to the Sukhothai Kingdom’s idea of the “father-child model” or “father rules the child” (*rabop phor pokkhrong luk*), explaining that the Thai kings ruled over the people and ascended to the throne with the consent given by the Thai political community. This concept was further developed during the Rattanakosin period using the Buddhist concept of *aneknikon samosonsommut*, which justified the Thai monarchs’ existence and the political community’s mutual consent. Under this school of thought, democracy in Thailand is defined as a “Democracy with the Monarch as the Head of the State.” The other perspective regarding the discourse on Thai democracy is the “Western School

By looking at the historical accounts and the small number of references written in English about this memorial, such as documentation of the memorial's construction and narratives of the protests, this study aims to discuss the democratic quest of the Thai people using the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial, and examine the transformation of its meanings over the years and how the spatial agencies have maximized this spatial structure.<sup>4</sup>

With the re-emergence of the democratic student movement in 2020, the protest activities at the memorial contributed to the structure's continuous contention and layering of meanings. From being a space for commemoration, it transformed into a venue for democracy and the progressive demands of the 2020 student movement, including the influence of the 1932 revolution and the contentious demands for monarchy reform.

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of Thought." This aspect highlights Thailand's Western ideals of democracy, which started during the 1932 revolution or the "New Age of Hope" for the Siamese people. The *Khana Ratsadon*, or People's Party, overthrew the absolute monarchy and installed a constitutional rule in Thailand in 1932, favoring the Western style of democracy, which focused on French liberal teachings. It rejected the traditionalist school of democracy and believed in humanity's universal rationality and progress, such as freedom, equality, fraternity, separation of powers, constitutional laws, etc.

<sup>4</sup> This paper also follows the theoretical concepts of spatial structures and agencies. As a spatial structure, the 14th of October 1973 Memorial constructs a cognitive map that people can imagine and think about because of its symbols and meanings. The memorial produces meanings and frames the people's everyday lives within these spaces. It shapes and determines people's actions because it enables humans to act relative to this structure. However, these structures are not just passive warehouses of memories and symbols. People can continuously construct and reconstruct its meaning, and the spatial agency allows the memorial to turn these spaces into political and social platforms. The spatial agencies, such as the protesters and social movements, convert the spatial structures into their platform for grievances (Sewell 2001, 54-56).

## **Symbols and Meanings of the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial**



Figure 1. 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial in Bangkok.

Photograph by the author, November 3, 2021.

The 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial (*Anuson Sathan Sip Si Tula*), located at the Khok Wua intersection or corner of the middle portion of the Ratchadamnoen Avenue and Tanao Road in Bangkok (fig. 1), embodies various meanings and functions. The structure honors the people who died in the October protests, symbolizes the significance of the 1973 revolution in Thai society, epitomizes a democracy that mainly follows the traditionalist school, symbolizes modernization through its modern design, and other multifaceted meanings formed in this structure through time such as demonstrations, commemorations, projects, and programs.

The memorial primarily honors the people who died in the October Revolution. It was initially named the 14<sup>th</sup> of October Heroes' Monument (*Anusawari Wirachon Sip Si Tula*) from 1974 to 1989. Then, when the October 14 Foundation was formed in

1990, it was later called the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial to remind people of the democratic history of Thailand, particularly the memories of the October 1973 student revolution, and not just the heroes who died in the protests (Thatsanaleelaporn 2020, 73-74).

A few steps away from the famous symbol of Thai democracy and the venue of the 1973 protests, the Democracy Monument, this memorial was installed in 2001 to symbolize the significance of the 1973 revolution in Thai society. The significant events during the October 1973 revolution are all marked and remembered in the 14th of October 1973 Memorial. Aside from the gallery of the events during the October protests found in the area, the entire structure serves as a reminder of this historic event.

The memorial also epitomizes a democracy that mainly follows the traditionalist school. The structure is reminiscent of the significant moment when King Bhumibol publicly inserted himself into a very tense confrontation as a democratic monarch. The monument became a symbol of remembrance of the King's image when he restored constitutionalism and democracy for the good of the people (Handley 2006, 212) (Marshall 2014, 85-86).

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

This architectural structure also symbolizes modernization by following a modern approach to design compared to the nearby structures, which offer a different style amidst the statist and royalist layout of Ratchadamnoen Avenue due to the presence of government buildings and royalty-designed boulevards. The modern layout, designed by Architect Terdkiat Sakdikamduang, consists of a semi-circular building that aims to house a confer-

ence room, auditorium, and museum. It also includes a garden and event spaces for debates, music, performances, and a display of Thai democracy history and the narrative of the October 1973 revolution (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 27-30).



Figure 2. *The tip of the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial in Bangkok.*

Photograph by the author, November 3, 2021.

The centerpiece structure, added later and created by Surojana Sethabuttra, a known Thai ceramic and visual artist, stands out among the other buildings in the area and stresses the modernization it promotes. This inverted cone-shaped and stupa-liked structure composed of a broad rectangular base represents the democratic quest of the Thai people. At the tip of this 14-meter monument, a transparent material can be found that allows light

to shine from the structure (fig. 2). The tip's design symbolizes that the fight for democracy of the Thai people is not yet finished and completed. The height of the memorial's centerpiece measures 14 meters to represent October 14. It is divided into different parts, such as the rectangular base, which measures 5 meters. The long middle portion measures 7 meters, and the tip measures 2 meters. The monument is also a cenotaph of those who fought and sacrificed their lives for democracy. Their names are engraved at the rectangular base of the memorial (fig. 3) (Susanpoolthong 1998) (Dovey 2001, 70) (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิรัตติยา [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 28-30).

Due to its distinctiveness and modern style, the centerpiece stirred different interpretations and perspectives among the authorities and scholars. The design, which was selected in 1975 through a competition, received a backlash from the Rattanakosin Island Committee in the 1990s. It was criticized for having an inappropriate political overtone because it depicted divisiveness in society (Susanpoolthong 1998). From the architectural viewpoint, it was also considered an insufficiently powerful expression of democracy rooted in the struggles of the 1973 student movement. Based on Buddhist symbolism, the stupa invokes a feeling of peace and emptiness of mind more than a sense of the urgent and violent force of the people who fought against the dictatorship in 1973. Prakitnonthakan (2008, 9) argued that the structure failed to capture the power of the people who gathered on Ratchadamnoen Avenue to demand a constitution and democracy and oppose the power of military dictatorship because of the design. The structure still plays a significant role in public memory and Thai democracy, and it cannot be denied significance despite its criticisms.

In addition to the democracy aligned with the monarchical institution, the Western notion of democracy can also be seen at the sidelines through the symbols representing liberal values attached to the monument, such as freedom, human rights, and equality. The rectangular base of the structure, designed with terracotta tiles, features poetic lines about democracy, freedom, and human rights (fig. 3). Thai poet and national artist Naowarat Pongpaiboon wrote one. This poem, titled “Freedom” (*seripaap*),

emphasizes that humans must have freedom, particularly freedom of speech, and a genuinely democratic society must be based on equality. The concept of Western democracy which focuses on the rule by the people can also be seen in the inscription titled “14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 People’s Democracy” located at the front area of the rectangular base (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 29) (กลุ่มคนรำลึก 2017).



Figure 3. *The rectangular base of the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial in Bangkok.*

Photograph by the author, November 3, 2021.

After the installation of the memorial, multifaceted meanings of this structure were formed through time. It was not only associated with the heroes and events of the October 1973 revolution. It became a site for political movements alongside the Democracy Monument, a testament that this structure fulfills its objective of becoming a democratic space for the Thai people (Thatsanaleelaporn 2020, 74-114). As a spatial structure, the memorial constructed a concept of democracy through its symbols and meanings that transpired in the understanding and memory of the Thai people. On the other hand, the people, protest groups, and institutions as spatial agencies further reinforced this democracy through their demonstrations, commemorations, projects, and programs at the structure.

This structure became a perennial venue of protests in memoriam of Nuamthong Praiwan, who sacrificed himself for democracy and committed a symbolic suicide against the 2006 military coup.<sup>5</sup> In 2013, the 24 June Democracy group had a commemoration activity at the memorial. Aside from the speeches of the group, a poem was also dedicated to the suicide of Nuamthong (Red shirts commemorate 7th anniversary of anti-coup suicide 2013).

The memorial functioned as a platform for the state to commemorate the 1973 student revolution. Led by Uthai Pimchaichon, the National Assembly designated October 14 of every year as Democracy Day (*Wan Prachathipatai*) in May 2003. This resolution was passed on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October 1973 revolution. The declaration explicitly highlighted the significance of the student revolution and the efforts of the people who fought for democracy and opposed the dictatorial rule in Thailand. It is noteworthy to underline their concept of the traditional school of democracy in this resolution, accentuating the idea of “Constitutional Democracy with the Monarch as the Head of State.”

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<sup>5</sup> Nuamthong Praiwan is a 60-year-old taxi driver who tried to kill himself by driving his taxi into a military tank on September 30, 2006 as a protest. He was severely injured but was found hanging from a pedestrian footbridge on Vibhavadi Rangsit Road in Bangkok on October 31, 2006 (Red shirts commemorate 7th anniversary of anti-coup suicide 2013).

It followed the notion that sovereignty belongs to the people and that the country's leaders are representatives of the people. The rulers must exercise their power in the name of the King, and unrighteous use of power has no room for democracy (ສຸນດຽວມາພເທດການົ່ວ 14 ຕຸລາ: ໂກສ່າ 1973 ແລ້ວ 2001 ແລ້ວ 2003 [Photobook of October 14 Events: 1973, 1974, 2001, 2003] 2005). This kind of democracy was monumentalized in the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial and reinforced by the commemorations and various activities conducted in the structure. The National Assembly formed an organizing committee and sub-committees, and projects and programs were prepared to align with the objectives of Democracy Day and the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution. It included the grand commemoration held at the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial on October 14, 2003 (14 ຕຸລາ ວັນປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ລົກ 30 ປີ 14 ຕຸລາຄມ 2516 - 2546 [October 14 Democracy Day, 30th anniversary of 14th of October (1973 - 2003)] 2003) (ສຸນດຽວມາພເທດການົ່ວ 14 ຕຸລາ: ໂກສ່າ 1973 ແລ້ວ 2001 ແລ້ວ 2003 [Photobook of October 14 Events: 1973, 1974, 2001, 2003] 2005).

The commemoration of the October 1973 revolution continues every year at the memorial. However, it is not as grand as the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary due to the different events and leadership changes after, such as the military junta in 2006. The usage of October 14 as Democracy Day was also not used anymore. Although people still remember the October 1973 revolution because of the commemoration activities, Democracy Day rarely rings a bell as the public infrequently mentions it because it is only a national observance compared to a national holiday like December 10 Constitution Day. In recent memory, October 14 is overshadowed by another national holiday, the October 13 King Bhumibol Adulyadej Memorial Day, commemorating King Bhumibol's passing in 2016. In 2019, October 14 was a substitution holiday for King Bhumibol Adulyadej Memorial Day because October 13 was a Sunday (October 2019 Holidays 2019). Then, in 2022, since October 14 is just a national observance, the date was labeled as an additional special holiday of October 13 because of holiday economics. It was just seen as a day to bridge the gap between October 13, which was Thursday, and the weekend (4

extra holidays next year 2021). In 2023, the Thai government officially declared October 13 every year as “*Navamindra Mahraj Day*,” a memorial day and national holiday to commemorate the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Navamindra Maharaj Day: A Remembrance 2023).<sup>6</sup> The changes in the leadership and the public holidays in Thailand prove that spatial agency, such as human activities, is vital in preserving and continuing the messages conveyed in the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial as a spatial structure. The spatial agency can contribute to the Thai people’s public memory and historical consciousness by occupying this space and activating its meaning.

The memorial also functions as a platform for various purposes and multifaceted meanings. It operates as a tourist site because it is considered an important landmark featured by the Tourism Authority of Thailand and different travel and museum websites. The structure also caters to the everyday life of the people; it serves as a venue for learning because of the workshops, seminars, discussions, film screenings, exhibits, performances, book fairs, youth camps, and contests that can be organized in this memorial to stimulate the interest of young people in Thai democracy. It is also a relaxing area because of the spaces where people can sit, chat, or enjoy their pastime. People also nap, eat, smoke, hang out, and read in this place. It is also a venue for people’s income and livelihood, such as lottery tickets and food vending. The structure is also a waiting area for sex workers and motorcycle drivers and shelters homeless people along Ratchadamnoen Avenue. This memorial is also a sacred space for some, notably because of the statue in front of the structure (fig. 4). Garlands, flowers, incense sticks, and food offerings can be seen in this stone sculpture. It eventually became an instrument for worship by the people in this area, particularly the families and relatives of the fallen heroes and the lottery vendors who always pay respect to this structure (Thatsanaleelaporn 2020, 73-114).

Given the points mentioned above, the memorial as a

<sup>6</sup> *Navamindra* means “ninth great person,” while *Maharaj* means “great king” because the late King was the ninth king of the Chakri Dynasty (Navamindra Maharaj Day: A Remembrance 2023).

spatial structure amplifies these various meanings and functions in Thai society. It helps the people to memorialize the October 1973 revolution based on what was depicted and transpired in this structure. Not only is it attached to the traditional school of Thai democracy, the fallen heroes, and memories of the revolution, but it is also linked to the concept of social space where the people can claim this space for themselves to exercise their fundamental human rights and apply its meanings in their everyday lives. However, before the people could maximize this area, it first went through the eye of a needle because of Thailand's ideological rift and political situation after the 1973 revolution.

## **The Stories of Construction**

The memorial's construction encountered some complications and challenges, resulting in its late inauguration in 2001. The first issue resolved was its location, which turned out to be a government building that had been burnt down during the October 1973 demonstration. The Crown Property Bureau owned the land. Then, it was leased to the military and eventually rented by the Lottery Sellers' Association (Dovey 2001, 70) (Peleggi 2017, 147-148). The second concern was the funding for its installation. The initial plan of installing this memorial was discussed in 1974. The government approved the construction of the structure, and Prime Minister Sanya Thammasakdi and the Ministry of Finance pledged to shoulder half the cost of the memorial. Then the other half came from public donations (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 13) (Peleggi 2017, 147-148). The National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) also collected four million baht for the construction. However, due to the 1976 Thammasat massacre, the police seized the amount collected by the student organization (Peleggi 2017, 149). During this period, the military and right-wing groups started vehemently to oppose the construction plan of the memorial because it was seen as a symbol of divisiveness (Susanpoolthong 1998).



Figure 4. “Monument to the Youth Killed in October” located in the  
14 October 1973 Memorial in Bangkok.

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

Despite the concerns and pending final approval, the foundation stone of the memorial was still laid on October 14, 1975 at the Khok Wua intersection. The ceremony was presided over by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and at-

tended by Supreme Patriarch Somdet Phra Ariyavongsagatanana and Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj (พิธีเปิดอนุสรณ์สถานวีรชนประชาธิปไตย [Opening Ceremony of the Memorial for Democracy Heroes] 2001, 12). While waiting for the approval to install a memorial, a cement structure was placed on the ground in 1989 (fig. 4). This structure, with five young people tangled by a flag, continued to commemorate the sacrifices of people who died during the 1973 revolution (Peleggi 2017, 149).

With all the complications in constructing this memorial, the plans finally started to form when the October 14 Foundation was formally created and tasked to head the memorial's construction on October 8, 1990. The confiscated money from NSCT was transferred to this foundation. The construction plan of the monument resumed after the 1992 Black May protests and was resurrected by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun. He obtained permission from the Crown Property Bureau to use the said land again, leased by the Lottery Sellers' Association (In memory of a memorial 1997) (Peleggi 2017, 149).

Through the help of the October 14 Foundation, commemoration activities are conducted annually. They arrange exhibits, collect memories, documents, and testimonies of the 1973 revolution, and create materials that will educate people about democracy and the historic student movement (อนุสรณ์สถาน 14 ตุลา 2016).

After many decades of being in limbo and opposed by right-wing groups, the memorial was finally inaugurated on October 14, 2001. About 40,000 people attended the inauguration. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra delivered his speech during the inauguration and told the public to leave the past behind, which offended the pro-democracy activists. They insisted that past mistakes would likely be repeated if people moved on without bringing anyone to justice (Ruangdit 2001) (Lertchavalitsakul 2016) (Peleggi 2017, 150).

With the re-emergence of the student movement in 2020, they continued the legacies of the memorial by honoring the people who fought for democracy in their demonstrations and commemorating the success of the 1973 student movement. The

14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial became one of the venues of the 2020 student movement, which resulted in contention and another layering of meanings. Due to various factors, such as protest strategies, purposes, and alternatives, the memorial turned into one of the most memorable spaces of the 2020 student movement.

## The Stories of Contention

In 2020, Thailand witnessed the re-emergence of the Thai student movement. Many students were outraged by the Constitutional Court's decision to dissolve the Future Forward Party (*Phak Anakhot Mai*), the precursor of the Move Forward Party (*Phak Kao Klai*), which led them to organize protests on their campuses in February and paved the way for them to express their demands and dissatisfaction with the government. Since then, a series of political protests have erupted in Thailand, and the movement has caught the attention of the international stage.

The 2020 student movement produced another layer of meaning to the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial by commemorating the 1973 revolution. The movement honored the legacies of the October 1973 revolution and the people who fought for democracy in their demonstrations. The student activists commemorated the sacrifice of the names engraved at the rectangular base of the memorial. It can be seen in how the student protesters used the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial to remember the revolution's anniversary. The students designated the memorial as a space for remembrance, while the nearby Democracy Monument was a protest venue. The *Ratsadon* group, inspired by the People's Party (*Khana Ratsadon*) of the 1932 revolution, led the October 1973 commemoration by protesting the current demands of the students and their allied pro-democracy groups (Planned Event and Timeline for October 14 2020). The *Khana Ratsadon*, which overthrew the absolute monarchy and installed a constitutional rule in Thailand in 1932, favoring the Western style of democracy, became popular and meaningful again because of the 2020 student protests. The group imbued the poems and messages of the lines placed at the structure by exercising their freedom of speech

and asserting their human rights during their protests. However, this commemoration was not just a simple remembrance of the 1973 event but also signaled the combination of the influences of the 1932 and 1973 revolutions in the 2020 movement. With the occupation of the 2020 student movement of the memorial, the structure became a repository of the Western school of democratic ideals and messages of the 1932 revolution and 2020 student movement, not just the traditional school of democracy of the 1973 student movement. The Thai democracy constructed in this space, aligned with the traditional ideas of democracy, overlapped with the legacies of the 1932 and 2020 movements. The Western school of democracy embedded in the meanings of the structure at the sidelines through the symbols representing liberal values such as freedom, human rights, and equality were further emphasized by the 2020 student movement's reference to the 1932 revolution.

Aside from the democracy influenced by the 1932 revolution, the memorial also served as a venue for the Western school of democracy because of monarchy reforms. On the day of the Thai Constitution and International Human Rights, December 10, 2020, the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial witnessed the “Cancel 112” or (*Yoklerk 112*) protest of the Thai student leaders and activists on the abolition of the *lese majeste* law. Early in the morning of December 10, the memorial served as a place for the speeches of the pro-monarchy reform protest leaders. Panusaya “Rung” Sithijirawattanakul and over 1,000 protesters convened at the structure to oppose Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code. The memorial also became a platform for bands and music organized by the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UFTD) and Mob Fest. (Tanakasempipat 2020) (Rally chiefs want repeal of *lese majeste* law 2020) (ແທ້ຂໍ້ອ ‘ຫ່າຍຮາຍຄູ່ຮ່າງ’ ຈວດ 10 ຈັນວາ ໂຄງຕ້າຄນລະໃບ 2,475 ລບບ ພິມພົກກັບ ‘ມີ່ຂ່າຍຄລື່ມ’ 2020).

Outside the memorial, the activists from the *Ratsadon* group activated the people's memory of the structure by making a parody of the Thai lottery named “People's Lottery” (*Huay Ratsadon*). In reference to the 1932 revolution, *Khana Ratsadon*, and the long saga of the construction of the October 14 memorial, they handed

out 2,475 tickets to the people and protesters as souvenirs. The group told them that the prizes for the winners included Thai democracy, a monarchy truly respecting the constitution, and the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth (Khaosod English 2020) ('พระราชภูมิ' ของที่ระลึกสำหรับผู้สมทบท่อน้ำเลี้ยง 2020) (แฟ้ม 'พระราชภูมิ' จำนวน 10 รั้น瓦 ครัวต้านละใบ 2,475 ฉบับ พิมพ์กำกับ 'ไม่ขายสิ่ง' 2020).

The 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial also witnessed the performative actions of the 2020 student movement on the significance of a democratic constitution. An epitaph-designed gallery of Thai constitutions was paraded before the memorial during their August 27 protest (Pro-democracy activists set up camp at October 14 Memorial in Bangkok 2020).

These protest activities at the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial contributed to the contention and added more meaning to the structure. The memorial was no longer just a space for remembrance and commemoration of the 1973 student revolution. It also transformed into a venue for the Western school of democracy and progressive demands of the 2020 student movement, including the influence of the 1932 revolution and the contentious monarchy reform.

The memorial also became a democratic space and a haven for the left-wing groups from the provinces. The anti-government protesters led by former Khon Kaen University law student Jatupat Boonpattaraksa or Pai Dao Din occupied the memorial and turned the place into a campsite on August 27, 2020.<sup>7</sup> He encouraged the others to join the protest campaign of his Dao Din group titled "Camp Not Jail" by installing tents around the

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7 Pai Dao Din was one of the five members of the Dao Din group who protested in front of Prime Minister Prayuth at the Khon Kaen City Hall on November 19, 2014. They wore black shirts with printed words "We," "do," "not," "want," and "coup" while making the three-finger salute. They were arrested but eventually released with conditions such as a ban on political activities and a threat to their student status (Sripokangkul, Muangming and Vulsm 2017, 468). Then, he was jailed for more than two years because of *lese majeste* and Computer Crime Act violations in 2016 (Pro-democracy activists set up camp at October 14 Memorial in Bangkok 2020).

memorial. Pai led the overnight camping and proceeded to the police station the next day to respond to the summons given to him because of his presence in the July 18 demonstration at the Democracy Monument (Pro-democracy activists set up camp at October 14 Memorial in Bangkok 2020). The memorial on that day was surrounded by protest banners such as “The dictator shall perish, long live democracy” and “Stop harassing the people.” The banner of the Khon Kaen protest movement, *Isaan Boyander*, was also placed in the memorial. It is also puzzling to point out that the symbol of anarchy was placed on the cone-shaped and stupa-like structure of the memorial. It is far from the democracy that the said structure symbolizes and the democratic message of some banners tied to the venue.<sup>8</sup> Although Pai Dao Din cleared it in his interview with Khaosod English correspondent Pravit Rojanaphruk, he discouraged violence in demonstrations (LIVE from the Oct. 14, 1973 Memorial where protesters plan to camp overnight in defiance of the government 2020). Various stalls for food, beverages, first-aid, Red Shirt items and protest paraphernalia, mats, and airconditioned toilets were also situated on the venue. The Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw), a non-profit organization collecting signatures to amend the Constitution, was also at the camping event. The memorial also served as a stage for the speeches of the protest leaders from various sectors and the movement’s demands. In the evening, they also had a film-showing event. They showed the documentary film of Lauren Greenfield titled “The Kingmaker,” which centers on the story of Imelda Marcos and the efforts of the Marcos family to resurrect their image in the Philippines (LIVE from the Oct. 14, 1973 Memorial where protesters plan to camp overnight in defiance of the government 2020).

Initially, the democracy monumentalized in this memorial was associated with the traditional school because of the royal institution’s role in solving the tension during the October 1973

<sup>8</sup> In an interview with one of the Dao Din activists in 2021, Pang explained that the members of the Dao Din group believe in different left-wing ideals such as Marxism and Anarchism. Under this umbrella, various groups emerged, such as The Commoners Party, the UNME of Anarchy, and the Thalufah activism group (Dao Din Interview Part 1 2021).

revolution. The pictures and stories of the royalty's influence on the October 1973 revolution solidified the imagery of Thai democracy and its linkage with the Thai monarchy. Then, this imagery was eventually attached and commemorated in the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial. The protest activities of the 2020 student movement in this structure began to create a small crack in the imagery of the memorial due to their progressive demands and the way they occupied it. By introducing the 1932 revolution again and campaigning for monarchy reforms in this space, the students produced a new layer of meaning for the public. It constructed a new layer of democracy aligned with the Western school, adding to the traditional Thai democracy left by the 1973 student movement. The 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial is no longer a structure built to commemorate or memorialize its purpose. It is now a repository of collective memory and Thai democracy constructed by the spatial agency or the protesters in this spatial structure. With the ongoing student activism among the Thai youth, it is now in their hands how they will continue claiming the narrative and contesting the imagery of this memorial.

## **Conclusion**

Democracy in Thai society was brought to life when the October 1973 student revolution ended the military government of Thamom Kittikachorn, which was memorialized through the construction of the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial. Aside from traditional democracy, this structure commemorates the significance of the October 1973 revolution and honors the heroes who sacrificed their lives for democracy. It also represented the democratic struggles that Thai society experienced after 1973. Amidst the resistance and challenges it experienced for decades, the pro-democracy groups, the October 14 Foundation, and all other allied sectors supporting the 1973 student revolution made this memorial happen. The memorial also exemplifies modernization and different multifaceted meanings. Its mere presence in the public sphere constructs mental imagery of these functions and meanings. It also serves as a democratic space and venue for

political demonstrations, allowing the protesters to transform this structure into a political and social platform that can contest or add layers of meaning to its original nature.

With the re-emergence of the student movement in 2020, the student protesters continued the legacies of the memorial by honoring the people who fought for democracy in their demonstrations and commemorating the success of the 1973 student movement. The various performative actions conducted by the 2020 student protests at the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial embodied its representations, such as the inverted cone-shaped and stupa-like structure that symbolizes the democratic quest of the Thai people. The student activists commemorated the sacrifice of the names engraved at the rectangular base of the monument. They imbibed the poems and messages of the lines placed at the structure by exercising their freedom of speech and asserting their human rights during their protests. The memorial also became a venue for the Western school of democracy due to the progressive demands of the 2020 student movement, the influence of the 1932 revolution, and the contentious demands for monarchy reform. From a memorial that monumentalizes a traditional Thai democracy allied with the monarchical institution, it also became a space for Western democracy. The 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial transformed into a repository of collective memory and Thai democracy discourse constructed by the spatial agency or the protesters in this spatial structure.

As epitomized by the tip of the inverted cone-shaped and stupa-like centerpiece of the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial, Thai democracy and the democratic quest of the Thai people are indeed not yet finished and completed. For 50 years, the 1973 democracy faced a lot of trials, and it was an arduous battle for the Thai people. But it is also important to note that democracy is a continuous process, and with the current things happening in Thailand, the people have the power to control this narrative and define the democracy they want to have with the use of monuments such as the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1973 Memorial—no matter how challenging the existing Thai political infrastructures and institutions are.

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