

R E S E A R C H

P A P E R



THE VICTORY MONUMENT

and the Politics of Representations for the Thai Identity

R E S E A R C H
P A P E R f o r

11th International
Conference on Thai Studies

Visions of the Future

I C T S
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Mahidol University + the Research
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Bangkok, Thailand

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p r e s e n t e d b y

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Monumen Nasional, Indonesia



Tugu Peringatan Negara, Malaysia



Vimean Ekareach, Cambodia



Viet Minh Memorial, Vietnam



National Independence Monument, Myanmar



01

Introduction

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THE VICTORY MONUMENT and the Politics of Representations for the Thai Identity

The history of "the South of East Asian" nations is framed and re-framed by its colonial experiences, which can be seen from public monuments across the region as telling evidences.

Siam--which later became Thailand--did not experience a direct colonization by any Western power. However, the conventional accounts of Thai national history mostly operated within the framework of colonialism.

02

Arguments

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THE VICTORY MONUMENT and the Politics of Representations for the Thai Identity

The Victory Monument functions as a Discourse for:

- mediating power for the state
- signifying the Thai identity known as Thainess or khwampenthai
- forming the characteristics of otherness on the neighboring peoples for the Thais

03

Objectives

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THE VICTORY MONUMENT and the Politics of Representations for the Thai Identity

BY USING "THAINESS" AS A MODE OF
PROBLEMATIZATION
this paper aims to :

- foster self-reflexive dialogues among the peoples of Southeast Asia on cultural diversities, collective images, and colonial legacies
- investigate the mechanism in cultural dynamics that has been reinterpreted and used to represent something other than itself, such as nationalistic ideology and national identity
- generate debates on the repercussions from the above for the built environment



THE VICTORY MONUMENT and the Politics of Representations for the Thai Identity

A Political Form of Architecture and Urban Space

- the ways in which the Victory Monument have served as a symbolic instrument for the Thai ruling authorities to assert, legitimize, and maintain power under ideological guises, such as nationalism and anti-colonialism

An Architectural and Urban Form of Politics

- the manners in which successive administrations in Thailand have re-appropriated and revised the design and meanings of the memorial to suit their interests via allusions to ideologies, such as patriotism and democracy.



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05

L o c a t i o n s

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Panoramic View

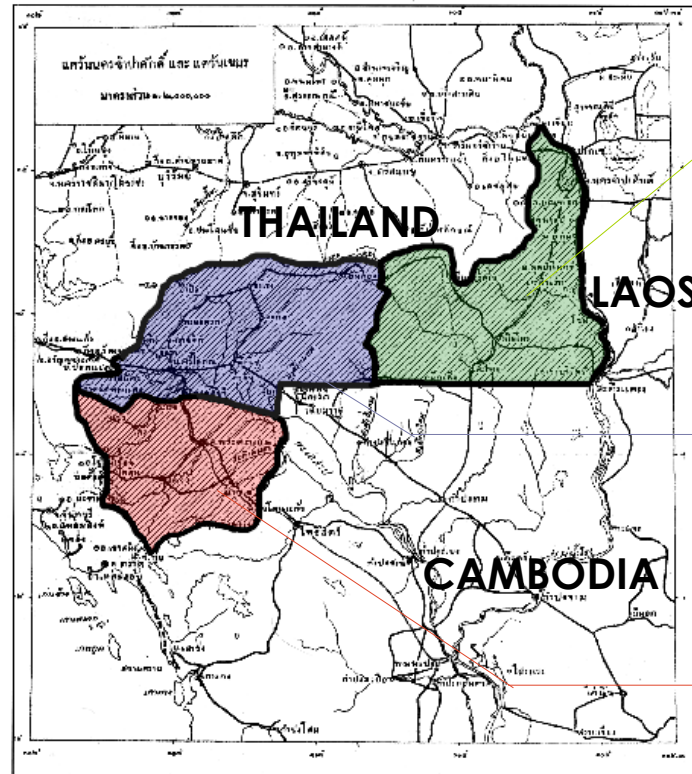


Aerial View



Field Marshal
Plaek Pibunsongkhram
(Pibun)
Prime Minister of
Thailand 1938-1944

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Thailand's Territorial Gains from
The Franco-Thai War (December 1940-January 1941)



Lanchang
PROVINCE



Battambang
PROVINCE



Pibunsongkhram
PROVINCE

06

Historical Background

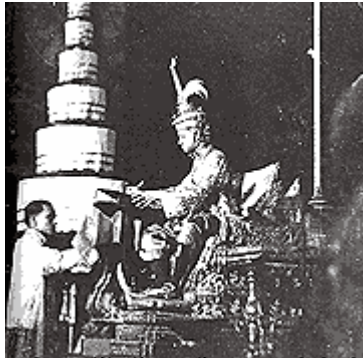
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เครื่องหมายอาณาเขตที่จะโอนมาเป็นของฝ่ายไทย ตามอนุสัญญาสันติภาพ
พื้นที่ประมาณ ๕๑,๖๒๖ ตารางกิโลเมตร





Constitutionalism 1932



Militarism / Nationalism 1938

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Handbook for Citizenship
1936

Thainess (KHWAMPENTHAI) and The National Building Program (1939-1942)

MODERN IDENTITY
MODERN ARCHITECTURE

07

Historical Background

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Democracy Monument
1939



Rajadamnoen Building Group
1940



Obelisk



Bayonet / Sword

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08

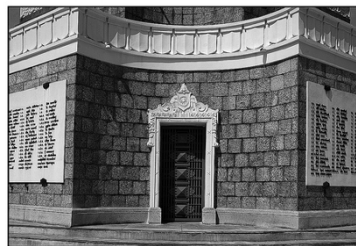
Physical Descriptions

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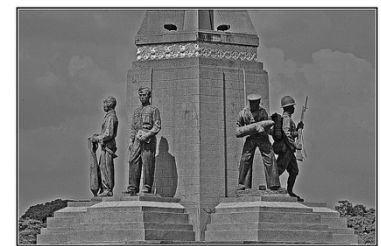
DESIGN MOTIFS AND ELEMENTS



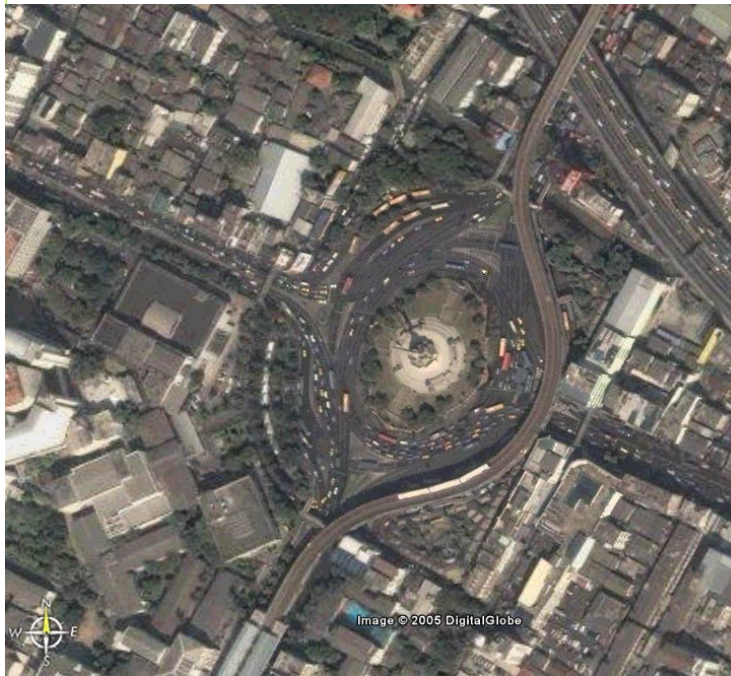
The Mausoleum



The Elevated Radial
Platforms



The Heroic Figures



Aerial View



View from Phaya Thai Road

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09

A Political Form of
Architecture and
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FORCE
1946



View from Ratchawithi Road



Aerial View



Bayonet / Sword



Obelisk

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A Political Form of
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INTIMIDATION
MILITARISM





The Heroic Sculptures

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A Political Form of
Architecture and
Urban Space

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MANIPULATION

PATRIOTISM
SELF-SACRIFICE

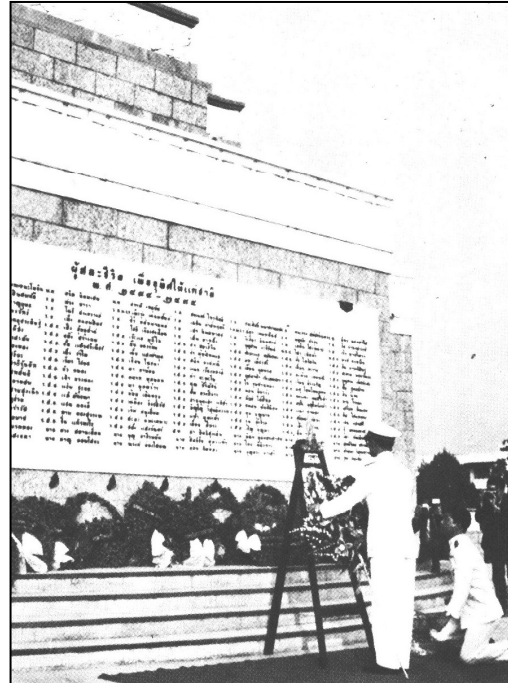
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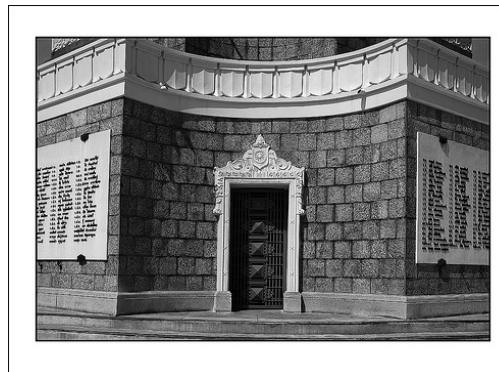
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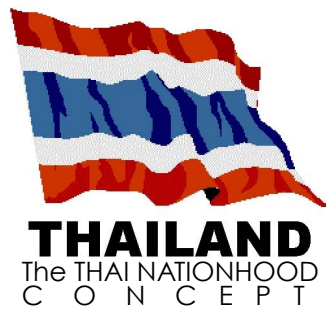
A Military Honor at the
Victory Monument

S E D U C T I O N

ANTI-COLONIALISM
NATIONALISM



The Mausoleum



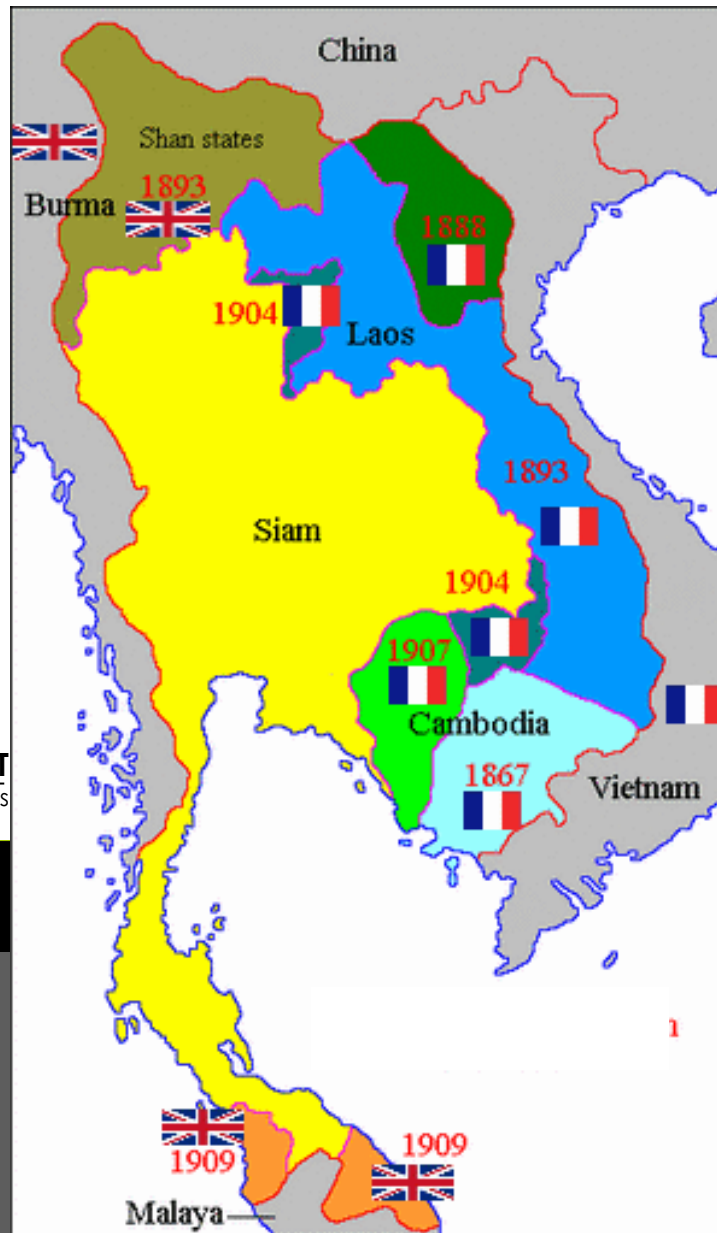
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Territorial Loses of
Siam 1867-1909



AUTHORITY

CHAVAUNISTIC CULT OF LEADER
HYPOCRACY



The Victory Monument

FORCE INTIMIDATION
MANIPULATION SEDUCTION AUTHORITY



T H A I N E S S

NEGATIVE
Identification of
KHWAMPENTHAI

What IS NOT Thai

POSITIVE
Identification of
KHWAMPENTHAI

What IS Thai

P A R A D O X

Several measures taken to define the Thai identity were in many respects as much Western as Thai, Pibun's cultural mandates on Thainess were in fact conceptually schizophrenic.

Accordingly, the monument's dialogues with power, identity, and ideology were complicated, dialectical, and contradictory, resulting in a slippage of meanings that had later been re-appropriated and exploited.

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for the Thai Identity

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RE-APPROPRIATION
RECONSTRUCTION
of symbolic
MEANINGS

FACIAL
DECORATION

1 9 5 0





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for the Thai Identity



REAPPROPRIATION
RECONSTRUCTION
of symbolic
MEANINGS
MILITARY
CEREMONY

16

An Architectural and
Urban Form of Politics

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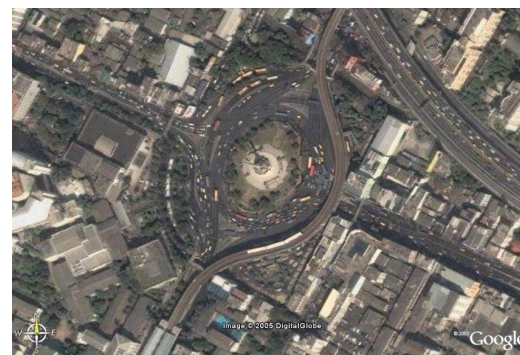
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REAPPROPRIATION
RECONSTRUCTION
of symbolic
MEANINGS

TRANSPORTATION
H U B





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



Thai Troops patrolling the pedestrian walkway around the Victory Monument as smoke from burning tires rising into the air amidst the street riot on April 10, 2010

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18

An Architectural and
Urban Form of Politics

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RECENT / ONGOING DEVELOPMENTS

A Public demonstration by supporters for the use of more Stringent measures against Cambodia in resolving the Disputed area around Preah Vihear Temple at the Victory Monument in late 2010



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and the Politics of Representations
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- Via a discursive mode of signification, architecture and urban space can serve interests for which they are not initially intended.
- The identification ascribed to an ideology does not offer any intrinsic quality of it, but simply represents what it creates: a discourse of power mediation.
- Khwampenthai is made by joint effects of ideological discourses in defining its domain, conferring definitions, and competing with each other. The essence of Thainess is an illusion produced by a temporarily discursive conjuncture.
- The symbolic signification and revision of meanings for the Victory Monument resulted from the projections of ideological predisposition to mobilize people to express patriotic feeling and solidarity that could be politically exploited.



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and the Politics of Representations
for the Thai Identity

- Besides ideological deception and nationalism, Thai people's experience with Western colonization, or the lack thereof, framed the creation and revision of the Thai identity.
- Thailand was a regional colonial power, not a wronged victim of Western aggressions as widely publicized by the **official** Thai national historiography .
- The tasks of advocating and managing cultural diversity across the Suvarnabhumi region cannot be met, unless the following mutual recognitions are forged:

20

Conclusion

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- While patriotism and altruism are virtues for a nation-state, national and cultural identity should not be promoted at the expense of antagonistic and xenophobic attitudes towards other races, ethnicities, or countries.
- Not only did the practice of colonization in Southeast Asia come from the West or states outside the region, but also take place among the natives of Suvarnabhumi themselves.

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