

# The People's Island in the Middle of the Royal's island

The History and Perception of the  
Democracy Monument in Rattanakosin  
Island, Bangkok, Thailand

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# The People's Island in the Middle of the Royal's Island

The History and Perception of the Democracy Monument in Rattanakosin Island, Bangkok, Thailand

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Rattanakosin Island in Bangkok is the most significant historical area in Thailand, as it is the centre of royal power and the location of the Grand Palace and numerous prominent government buildings. The island was founded by King Rama I in 1782, and this marked the beginning of the establishment of Bangkok as the capital city. The island is located on the eastern bend of the Chao Phraya River, and the King ordered canals to be dug to surround the area with water. With the Chao Phraya River to the west and the canals to the east, the water served as moats for protecting the new capital city. The King named it Rattanakosin Island, and significant royal palaces and government buildings were constructed. It became the stage for the monarchy to illustrate the power and prestige of the nation during the absolute monarchy period for 150 years, until the People's Party, a commoner group with the military, created the revolution in 1932 and shifted Thailand from the absolute monarchy to the constitutional monarchy.

1.

Kim Dovey, "Memory, Democracy and Urban Space: Bangkok's 'Path to Democracy'," *Journal of Urban Design* 6, no. 3 (October 2001): 281, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574800120105788>.

2.

Somchart Chungsiriarak, "Modern Architecture for a Civilized Nation: A Comparative Study of the Searching Between Japan and Siam from the Mid 19th Century to the Mid 20th Century," *The Ten Books on Architecture by ASA (Bangkok: The Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage, 2020)*, 288, <https://asa.or.th/handbook/modern-architecture-for-a-civilized-nation/>.

Rattanakosin Island remained the crucial area for the new rulers that arose from commoners. They utilised modern architectural styles and constructed new edifices on the island's Ratchadamneon

Avenue, to illustrate the new nation they had modernised and how different it was from the monarchy era. The Democracy Monument, constructed by the People's Party government in 1939, was the major structure used to represent their new political ideologies to the Thai people.

The monument was designed by architect M. L. Pum Malakul, with sculpture work by Corrado Feroci. Construction was finalised in 1940.<sup>1</sup> The body of the monument seems inspired by the form of the traditional bell-shaped stupa, but the top part of the stupa was shifted to be the Constitution book, portraying the idea that the Constitution is the highest thing to worship. This monument brought together Western architectural style and local symbolism to convey a narrative of the People's Party and commemorate the 1932 Siamese revolution. A stupa-shaped shrine is surrounded by four stylised wings that represent the prosperity of the new regime, and they are placed on massive plinths decorated on their long sides with bas-reliefs (Figure 1). Each wing, symbolising prosperity, is 24 metres high to indicate the date of the revolution on June 24, 1932. The bas-reliefs show events of the Siamese revolution and the People's Party.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1:  
The Democracy Monument, Bangkok, Thailand,  
designed by M. L. Pum Malakul with sculpture  
work by Corrado Feroci (1939–1940).  
(Photograph by Chaipat Ngambutsabongsophon,  
2022)

This pivotal landmark was located in the middle of a roundabout, surrounded by roads, historical urban areas and royal architecture, in the middle part of Ratchadamnoen Avenue on Rattankosin Island. The researcher describes how the monument is in a way an island inside the royal island. The monument had been used as a significant location for people's ceremonies and democracy-movement protests, and it was perceived as the people's public space that belonged to all people, even though it was enclosed by a royal area.

This paper explores how the Democracy Monument was perceived and used by royals and other people in ceremonies and political movements. By using documentary and social media research methods, it will investigate and seek to understand how this monument appeared in mainstream and social media, and how it was used and perceived in the contemporary era.

This study can gain new perspectives on the meaning of the Democracy Monument as the people's public space, used for protest when the Thai people called for reforms in their government. It will broaden the knowledge of studies

of Thai politics and monuments, and Southeast Asian architectural contexts.<sup>3</sup>

3.

This abstract was written with the assistance of grammar rechecking software technology. The researcher contributed and wrote initial abstract drafts, then edited the grammar using Grammarly. The software-edited sentences were reviewed and revised to ensure academic rigour and adherence to the paper's objectives.