

Collective Memories in Thai Constitutional Narratives

A. Introduction: Collective Memories – Politics of Memory - Designated Memories

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Collective Memories – identity

Politics of Memory Knowledge captured by collective memories is always related to power.

Designated Memories – memorials as their manifestation

Memorials: physical + immaterial

= Consolidated (collective) memories

In fact, memorials define the memories and thus, in the last instance, the historical event.

This is never undisputed and unchallenged, and the way how consent might be achieved or deviating opinion, interpretation or perception is handled, tells a lot about the politics of memory and the political thus the power structure of a society.

Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, subaltern interpretations

Eg.: War memorials

The memory keeping alive the many is always a representation - but who is represented? Soldiers are the first 'many' to be remembered. Thermopylae: Go tell the Spartans, passerby: that here, by Spartan law, we lie/ Go tell the Spartans, thou who passest by, That here, obedient to their laws, we lie.

Multiple possible and sometimes even several actual meanings

Notions of Death:

The meaning of "to die for" is it assigned or not

What is the focus the dead or the threat?

- The heroic death as sacrifice: "The dead embody an exemplary status: they died for a reason, and survivors are supposed to find themselves in accord with this reason so as not to allow the dead to have died in vain."
- Death as tragedy of meaningless destruction

Paradox memorial culture (sometimes the contrafactual claim is evident but nevertheless made, sometimes intertwined messages contradict each other) Dt. Wehrmacht im WW II und Kriegerdenkmäler (Erinerung an Schuld ausblenden, Erinnerung an Gefallene nur streng

kontrolliert bi shin zur Verleugnung) Thai Revolution original sin, aber tolerating it by interpreting it as a deliberate act.

Soldiers in the uniform of the victorious reinforce the differentiation of good and evil dead, worthy and unworthy. Naked bodies reinforce the equality of humanity, produce an de-differentiation of the victors and defeated. Both sides become “completely the same: there are handsome people murdering each other [...]” Goethe.

War memorials for soldiers became the signum then of modernity, of democracy and democratic armies. What, however, was represented? Nation, class, people?

“the physical memoria, previously reserved for great personages, was to include everyone and to so in the name of all.” Koselleck, p. 291.

Democratic representation of the people:

Writing the names of all the dead is most democratic form of memory where the representation of the many is replaced by those of single individual – US civil war

B. Constitutions as loci of designated memories

Constitution making – Substance of constitutions: Memories of Origin (two foundations)

Memory of Death in Constitutions

First (double) origin: Revolution (24.6.1932) – King Rama VII granting the Constitution to the Thai people (10.12.1932)

Be it proclaimed by the King that He is advised by the National Legislative Assembly that the grant of the Constitution of Thailand on 10th December B.E. 2475 by His Majesty King Prachathipok Phra Pok Klao Chao Yu Hua, His Majesty s Uncle, was the founding of democratic system of government in Thailand

Origin which is manifested in the document is relativized, devalued in favor of another, older origin which is immaterial in the collective memories and that is the past so-called constitution of Sukothai. The collective memory of this constitution has a physical manifestation, a body of reference and this is the stone inscription of Fatherking Ramkanmhaeng.

A stone slab containing what the dominant Thai doctrine would consider as the first Thai constitution 1283.

As its reference it is manifest and immaterial at the same time: The original slab is “as a national treasure in a safer” yet unknown place. Seni: “I have never seen the original slab”

But Rama VII -according to Seni - has significantly ordered the slab to be placed in Anatsmakom

Palace, which, after the revolution, was converted into the national assembly of the People’s representatives

For Seni the slab “again appears in the midst of representatives of the Thai people” as an artefact of the time of King Ramkamhaeng “a king who, out of paternal love, granted the Thai people first Constitution”.

1973

More than forty years having since passed, the changes of political situation resulted in the amendments of the Constitution and promulgation of new Constitutions on several occasions, and sometimes it was necessary that an interim Constitution was promulgated, pending the completion of the drafting of a permanent Constitution. Consequently, the country was not governed in accordance with the proper democratic system during such periods. However, as time passed, the people, who have gained wider education, and better political knowledge and thoughts, have been increasingly more alert and desirous to participate in the administration.

The people, being dissatisfied with the administration of the State affairs, therefore, demanded on 13th and 14th October B.E. 2516 that a Constitution be granted as soon as possible. Students, undergraduates, people and newspapers had a significant role in making strong public opinion in this matter. In the demonstration of public opinion at that time, many lives were lost and much blood was shed, which was a very serious political crisis resulting in the resignation of the then government and the appointment of the new government.

Further, the National Legislative Assembly is of the opinion that the administration of the State affairs in accordance with the objectives of this Constitution may be realized only when all people believe that the democratic system of government is a good system and is suitable for our country, which will bring happiness to all people. Consequently, it is necessary for the people to participate in the administration of government by truly respecting the objectives of this Constitution, to be ready to sacrifice their personal happiness for common benefit, as well as to sacrifice their lives and blood for the protection of the democratic system of government when it is necessary to, do so.

Competing memory: Tongnoi Tongyai

“fateful days of October 13-15, 1973, the government of Thailand -dictatorial, democratic or whatever - ceased to exist in the country was literally in anarchy with some policemen and soldiers having to remove the uniforms to flee for their lives.”

1976

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej has been graciously pleased to proclaim that:

Chief of the National Administrative Reform Council **that a group of persons had made an attempt at sabotaging the stability of the Kingdom, the Throne and the national economy. At last the most dangerous political upheaval had occurred on 6 October 1976 and led to both danger and destruction to the country.** The National Administrative Reform

Council had no alternative but to seize power and cancel the constitution of the Kingdom with success at 18.00 hours of 6 October 1976.

in particular the constitution of the Thai Kingdom of 1974 had been obstructed until it could not be administered in good and proper order. The persons, who had been elected into the assembly and had been part and parcel in the administration of the country, had failed to honour the aim of such constitution by the various means and their selfish gains more than the national interest with the result that the administration by democracy had fallen and laid up throughout showing thereby that the nation might end up in ruin.