
THE NATION

Focus

Sunday, October 6, 1996

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Once More Into the Basement

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As a former student activist, I still grieve over the senseless bloodshed, over the shattered lives of fellow countrymen and women, and for my activist friends who died. I both grieve and celebrate the dreams, the loss of innocence, and even the mistakes that were all a part of that hopeful, traumatic time.

Many others have expressed these same feelings, with great eloquence and dignity, and their writings have not just helped to change the way this society works, but have gone on to have an enormous influence on national literature.

Times have changed and so have writers, but it is interesting, and instructive, that many of the most fiery and most ardent radicals in the '70s, people like Naowarat Pongpaiboon, Suchart Sawadsri and Winai Boonchuay are all, today, in the vanguard of Thai literature. And while today they may no longer call for revolution, their commitment to justice, freedom, and perhaps above all, to simple integrity in private and public life, is a precious legacy.

For me, this beautiful verse quietly sums up the heart of the conflicts that wracked this country in the early '70s:

A promise astir, of nothing evil

but of grace, and beauty taking shape.

There, amid the stillness murky,

the beginning is begun.

Naowarat's poem "Mere Movement", written in the mid-'70s, shared the enthusiasm of many intellectuals for the motto "For Life, For People".

Progressive writers between the early 1960s and 1976 were penning articles about the people's struggle for freedom, peace and democracy and about the need for a voice for the voiceless, such as farmers and workers.

"For Life, For People" arose out of the frustration of decades of military control, and it was also influenced by the convulsions of the international movements and rebellion that characterised the 1960s in much of the world.

Many Thais, especially intellectuals and students, felt they had not just a desire but a duty to change the system and to rid politics of corrupt rulers. They wrote provocative articles, poems, short stories and novels urging fellow countrymen to think the same way.

The most outspoken included such respected names as Anuch Abhabhirom, an editor with *Chaiyaphruek* magazine; Suchart Sawadsri, editor of *Sangkhomsat Parithat* magazine; Khanchai Bunpan; Sathian Chanthimathorn, Sujit Wongthes, and Witthayakorn Chiangkool, author of the well-known poem "Chan Jueng Maa Haa Kwaam Maai (I go to find the meaning of life)". One verse is particularly memorable:

Chan yao, chan khiao, chan thueng,

Chan jueng maa haa kwaam maai

Chan wang keb a-rai pai maak maai

Sud thaai dai kradaat paen diaw

(Because I'm young, innocent and enthusiastic to know more, I go to university to discover the meaning of life. I hope to get many things from there, but in the end, all I obtain is a certificate - a mere piece of paper.)

By the end of 1973, it looked as though the intellectuals had won a battle - the October uprising brought down the regime led by Prime Minister Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and the Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Army, Field Marshal Prapat Charusathien.

On Oct 14, 1973, Sanya Thammasak, then rector of Thammasat University, was named the new prime minister.

The next months saw a host of young and hot-blooded writers join the veteran socialist scribes. New faces Sathaporn Srisajjang, Prasert Chandam, Visa Khanthap and Surachai Chanthimathorn along with Winai Boonchuay and Udon Thongnoi, were strong in their criticisms, and in their writings, which lobbied ordinary citizens to fight injustice. Also in the literary spotlight from 1974 to 1976 were famed leftist intellectuals of the '40s and '50s, Jitr Bhumisak, Kulap Saipradit and Issara Amantakul.

At last, it seemed as though the long awaited freedom of expression for writers and readers had arrived.

But it was not destined to last. Right-wing politicians suppressed publications by progressive writers. Students revolted and the crisis reached its head on Oct 6, 1976, when troops stormed the Thammasat campus and massacred scores of young people. Many intellectuals, writers among them, were forced to flee, and many joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT).

In the wake of the Oct 6 massacre and the appointment by the military of Thanin Kraivichien as prime minister, writers were subject to restrictions and could no longer air their views on politics. Several turned to penning romantic novels to earn a living.

The writers living with the communist insurgents in the hills were not faring much better. They were encouraged by the CPT to write only "the CPT odes" and tales of the struggles of farmers and workers striving for justice. It was, in the main, "literature for life" of a particularly dull and lifeless sort. If the writers did not comply, their work was heavily "criticised".

So for the next two years writers were trapped in the worst dilemma they had so far faced - caught between a far right dictatorship on the one side and the far left CPT on the other. This in effect brought socialist literature in Thailand to an end.

Things changed again in 1978, when prime minister General Kriangsak Chamanand promised a new constitution and elections by 1979, and also encouraged exiles from the hills and from overseas to return to the city. Many writers, fed up with their experience of communist propaganda, returned to ordinary life.

Over the two years that followed, they revealed the real face of the CPT "style" through articles and short stories. Their new writing was named "*wannakam baadphlae*" (literally: wounded literature) by Suchart Sawadsri, then editor of *Loke Nangsue* (Book World) magazine. Suchart compared the writing with the forbidden literature of China - works which described the realities of Chinese society under Chairman Mao.

The poem "Kruad Med Rao (Cracked Pebble)" by 1989 SeaWrite winner Jiranand Phitpreecha, "Thiwa Ratree (Day and Night)" by Visa Khanthap, and the short story "Nok See Daeng (The Red Bird)" by Wat Wallayangkool are good examples of *wannakam baadphlae*.

In "Nok See Daeng" Wat questioned why all birds should have "red feathers". "I am a yellow bird and I want to fly my own way. I want to fly with poor people and help them create a better world, but I don't want to change the colour of my feathers," wrote Wat.

In a 1981 interview published by *Loke Nangsue*, Jiranand Phitpreecha said: "[the] CPT and I are very different. There is a very big gap between us and we can no longer get along together".

Along the same lines, her husband, Seksan Prasertkul, a former student leader during the 1973-1976 period, told *Writer* magazine in 1992 that: "In my experience, the leaders were power-mad individuals who took advantage of people."

Seksan also said on his return home from the hills that he was nothing but "a historical wreck".

According to Suchart Sawadsri, 'wounded' literature was highly significant in terms of the Thai literary arena even though it only lasted for a short time.

Not all writers agree. Visa Khanthap and Wat Wallayangkool who penned the so-called "wounded writings" denied that they were "wounded" writers.

"What I wrote merely conveyed my feelings at that moment. Emotions change all the time," said Wat.

Visa agreed with Wat, adding that, in his opinion, there is no "wounded literature" in Thai writing.

"You can use that term about certain writings in China, because Mao and the Chinese Communist Party had very exact rules about how to write. If you didn't write literature that promoted them, you could be labelled a traitor. Here in Thailand, I for one, wrote articles and stories expressing what I felt," said Visa.

SeaWrite winner Winai Boonchuay, who also fled to the jungle during that period, agrees. He said he didn't regret joining the CPT. "Maybe it was because I didn't spend time with the CPT leaders. Most of the time I was with the villagers. So, I never felt like a 'wounded' person. On the contrary, I think I gained more knowledge about the world and its people," said Winai.

Winai has never written "wounded literature" blaming the CPT.

Socialist literature, or "literature for life" disappeared after the collapse of the CPT.

"Most writers, myself included, felt that we should look deeper inside ourselves, think more and study more," said Winai. In 1993, Winai, writing under the pseudonym "Sila Khomchai" won the SeaWrite Award for his collection of short stories *Krobkrua Klang Thanon* (The Mid-Road Family) portraying the daily lives and thoughts of the middle classes in the big city.

If writers can't even understand themselves, how can they possibly understand others, he said, perhaps hinting that understanding was more complicated than many people, caught up in revolutionary fervour, had realised. The important thing for writers is to not "fake it" he said.

Preeda Khaobor, author and owner of Ming Mitr Publishing House, isn't sorry that the old-style socialist literature is dead and buried. "Readers want quality writing, whatever the style or content."

In the last 10 years, modernisation has caused a great deal of stress, competitiveness and isolation, says Preeda. Most Thai writers are now concentrating on describing individuals and emotions. "How To" books are another sign of the times and simple romantic novels have never lost their status as top sellers.

"Now, many good writers are penning quality literature of a humanistic bent, which provokes people to think about human nature as well as about the dark side of society. Some of that writing can contribute to improving society. Examples include many SeaWrite winners - Winai Bunchuay, Mala Khamchan, Chart Kobjitti and Kanonphong Songsomphan for instance."

Neither Preeda nor Winai have concrete ideas about how to encourage people to read more stimulating writing.

The government could help, they reckon, by promoting reading among students - tomorrow's adults - reading that encourages tomorrow's adults to think more, ask more questions about life, and not to take anything for granted.

Asking questions was exactly what the best of the spirit of the activists of two decades ago was all about. They questioned the life around them, they questioned the "natural order" of things and concluded that the corruption and inequality of their society could be different. If they expected too much, too quickly, that was not surprising - they were a product of their time.

Older and wiser now, their themes may be different in emphasis, but the same sense of integrity imbues their work. It's heartening to see their influence still on many of the country's best young writers, who are grappling with similar issues in an era which - and this is a cause for celebration and hope - allows them the freedom to say what they will. [Back to the Top](#)

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It was actually not that eventful. I showed her the Tutankhamen room. "The lighting sucks," she said. "You remember when the Tutankhamen show came to LACMA? The artefacts looked a lot more convincing there."

"Roberta, darling," I said, "those were real."

"Oh, yeah. You have a point," she said. She prodded at the immense gold sarcophagus. It had a distinctly plastic ring to it. We looked around for a moment - of course, we hadn't brought any flashlights, or anything like that. It was your typical Hollywood Egyptian tomb set, with Anubises and Thothes and

Montree said the NAP will highlight the party's commitment to political reform in its election campaign, and solutions to revive the flagging Thai economy with the help of a team of economists and financial experts who will serve as ministers in key Cabinet positions if the party emerges as the biggest winner in the election, thus earning it the chance to form a government.

Many sitting MPs from other parties have defected to join the NAP, whose leader Chavalit is making a strong bid to become the next prime minister.

Earlier in the day, Chavalit said he expected no problems in the candidate selection process, even though there seemed to be more politicians interested in running on the party's ticket than available seats in several provinces.

"I also don't expect any problems arising from the many politicians joining the New Aspiration Party from other parties, because they come to us with one thing in mind - the desire to contribute positively to the country," he said. [Back to the Top](#)

Thousands solemnly remember Oct 6, 1976

THOUSANDS of Thais from all walks of life showed up at Thammasat University yesterday on the first day of a two-day commemoration of the Oct 6, 1976 massacre.

The two days of activities, including seminars, concerts, performances and art exhibits, are the largest observance of the anniversary of the bloodbath. In the past, only friends and relatives of victims joined the memorial services.

For many, yesterday's events were an eye-opener as to how a nation which prides itself on reconciliation, statehood and compassion could savagely turn on its own people in the name of Buddhism, monarchy and nation - the very three elements supposed to sustain the Kingdom's stability.

On the Thammasat campus in 1976, the military and police, along with right-wing mobs, tortured and lynched students - who had gathered on the soccer field to call on their government to grant them and the people what they considered their inherent rights - then hung their victims' bodies from the trees and fences around the fields.

Pictures of the horrific events which took place on that day, displayed throughout the foyer of the university's main auditorium, drew a great deal of attention from the thousands of spectators who attended yesterday's events.

Judging from the expressions on their faces, they all seemed to be asking the same question: Where did our nation go wrong?

Today, the innocent victims who were branded criminals on that bloody Wednesday 20 years ago are looked on as modern-day heroes and heroines.

A wall-sized comment board was provided for the public to express their feelings and opinions of the Oct 6 incident. "Who was really behind all these killings?" one spectator wrote. "Oct 6 will never die and will always be in our hearts" wrote another.

Inside the main auditorium, hundreds sat silently while many stood in the aisles, watching footage of students being dragged across the field, beaten savagely, and thrown into a pile which was set on fire by the right-wing mob.

"It's so graphic," one viewer whispered. "It's hard for me to take this kind of violence," she added.

Kanokwan Phimpimarn, a first-year law student at the university, asked how long the nation must keep silent about this unfathomable event. "The truth must be revealed so people today can learn from it," she said.

"What we see here [the memorial] comes from the people, not the state," Pote Kritkraiwan, another spectator, said. "The government should state their position and let the people decide," he added.

The government has never provided an official explanation of what happened, nor has it given any indication that it will do so. Apparently, it is hoped that keeping silent will allow the event to be forgotten more quickly.

Nineteen-year-old Thanadit Sathapornchanchai, a student at Chulalongkorn University, said people of his generation were not taught about the Oct 6 massacre in their Thai history classes.

"We never learned about this in our textbooks. We need to know the truth of what happened from both the government's and students' perspective," he said, adding, "It is frightening to see that such a brutal scene took place in Thailand."

Pranee Chingsoi, 49, brought her son to see the photo exhibition because "it is better that he see for his own eyes what I've told him about many times".

Considering that yesterday's crowd was comprised mostly of young people, it seems that those born after the event desire to know the truth about the bloody massacre.

Vendors stationed around the soccer field did a brisk business selling memorabilia, including T-shirts and a Bt200 video of the massacre.

This morning, 106 monks will arrive for an alms-giving ceremony at 6 am, to be followed by religious rites.

Activities will continue in the afternoon, including a seminar focusing on the lessons learnt from the traumatic event. [Back to the Top](#)

Parents still hoping missing son will return home

BY YUWADEE MANEEKUL

TODAY is the 7,305th day that Chinda and Lim Thongsin have awaited the return of their son, Jarupong Thongsin, who left home on that fateful day of Oct 6, 1976 to go to class at Thammasat University.

He never came home.

Although his devoted parents continue to hope that their son is still alive, they and the rest of the family know that young Jarupong was dragged across the university's soccer pitch by a rope around his neck on that dreadful Wednesday.

Thanongsak, 35, Jarupong's younger brother, said his parents saw the picture of his brother's body being dragged across the field, published in several magazines, but could not accept their son's death.

"My dad kept a diary. Every time I read it, my heart breaks into a thousand pieces. I can only read through one page before I have to stop because it is so depressing.

"We know my brother is dead, but our parents still hope he is alive. I try to tell myself that it was not my brother in the photo, but eventually I had to accept the fact," he said.

However, all Jarupong's siblings have kept up the pretence that he might still return some day.

"If we filed a lawsuit over his death, it could be implied that he was dead. We want to keep our belief that he is still alive. We have told our children they have an uncle called Jarupong," he said.

Jongdee, Jarupong's 37-year-old sister, was studying in MS 5 in Surat Thani when the incident occurred.

"I was not sure whether my brother died or not. Later on, I went to study nursing in Bangkok. During my two or three years' stay in Bangkok, I didn't want to go near Thammasat University or Sanam Luang. But once I went to see an Oct 6 exhibition. I cried when I saw the picture of my brother," she said.

Chinda blames himself for his son's death, saying he taught his son to be a good man and to fight for justice. "In return, my son died," he said.

He and his wife now live on a 23-rai farm in the southern province of Surat Thani. Since the death of Jarupong 20 years ago, Lim has given up tending the house and garden - activities she once took pride in doing.

In remembrance of Jarupong and the other students who lost their lives fighting for democracy, the coordinating committee organising the 20th anniversary of Oct 6 has allocated Bt200,000, raised during year-long activities, to build a library at Thammasat University.

The library will contain documents and pictures of Oct 6, including photographs of those who died in the tragic incident.

Of the more than 300 students reported missing after the violence, only 25 have been confirmed dead:

From Ramkhamhaeng University (8): Manu Vittayaphorn, Phumsakdi Sirasukphalertchai, Wacharee Petchsoon, Boonnak Samksaman, Pongphan Phelamathuros, Danaisak Ueumkong, Yuthana Purasirisak, Surin Thongprod.

From Thammasat University (4): Nauwat Aungkeo, Phaiboon Laohachiraphan, Charuphong Thongsidhu, Pharanee Chulakarin.

From Mahidol University (3): Abdulroseng Sata, Viraphol Opasvilai, Samphan Charoensuk.

From Chulalongkorn University (1): Vichichai Amornkul.

From Bangkok University (1): Atchariya Srisawad.

From Poh Chang Art College (1): Manas Siansingha.

Others (7): Chaiporh Amornrodchanawong, Sa-guanphan Soonseng, Wimolwan Rungthongpaisuri, Somchai Piyakulsak, Yuthchai Thaipanyamitr, Surasit Suphaphorn, Suphot Phankalasindhu. [Back to the Top](#)

Feline couple tie the knot

BY KAMOLTHIP BAI-NGERN

THE event was as complete as a wedding can be, with a big diamond ring for the bride, a lavish feast, distinguished guests and a big-name party venue.

The only unusual thing about it was that the bride and groom of the much-publicised wedding yesterday were two cats - each with a "diamond eye".

Hundreds of people crowded Bangkok's Phoebus Amphitheatre last night to witness the wedding of Phet and his bride, Ploy.

Those who did not have invitation cards were charged Bt300 admission.

Deputy Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej, a noted cat lover who has nine pets at home, took time off from the confusing political situation to preside over the wedding.

"I wish both of you a happy marriage and a lot of children," Samak told the furry pair.

The bride was given a ring studded with a six-carat diamond during the ceremony. The couple also put their paw prints on a mock marriage certificate to register their wedding.

A four-tier cake was cut and distributed to guests at the end of the ceremony, which was capped with a fancy-cat contest with the proceeds going to charity activities of the Wildlife Fund Thailand.

The feline couple were to be taken on board a motor yacht for a honeymoon cruise along the Chao Phya River today.

Five days after the wedding, the groom, Phet, will be taken to the vet to have his diseased eye treated.

Phet's owner, Wicharn Charashacha, has agreed to hand him over to the Thailand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for treatment of the ailment that makes him so special.

The cat suffers in one eye from a form of glaucoma, which causes blindness and can be extremely painful.

LETTERS

20 years later

Twenty years have passed and I still cry whenever I think about the event. I was there at Thammasat, being a first-year student from Mahidol at that time. Early in the morning I sat in the football field, adjacent to the Department of Commerce. That was where Mahidol students stayed. I was with a group of six students, all guys, all my friends. We were one of the several guard groups. I was the leader of that group.

The first M-79 mortar was fired before 6 o'clock in the morning. We were still outside. It was our duty to protect our friends in Thammasat, even when we had no weapons at all. When they started the heavy firing, I was still outside the building. Someone in my group told me to get into the building. I was the only woman in our group. I could not think. I went in. Three of our group were shot dead. They were Oh, Khiew and Abdul. Even now, I still feel guilty. Why did I survive?

In those few hours of shooting, the only voice that I heard was from my friend, Thongchai. He begged them to stop shooting. I was very scared. I held a friend's hand all the time. I was only 18 then. A young woman with a lot of dreams.

If Oh, Khiew and Abdul's parents read this letter, I want to say I am very sorry. My parents managed to get me back home after I had spent three days in jail, but you lost your beloved sons.

Sukanda Luangon

University of Wiscosin,

Madison, United States

Voice silenced

At the time of Oct 6, 1976, I was only three years old. Learning of what happened from The Nation's special articles, I feel sorry for the students who lost their lives and feel sad for their loved ones and families.

Every time I see pictures of those catastrophes, questions always arise in my mind. But they are often unresolved because the truth is always hidden from me.

One of my most asked questions is how would the killers have felt if they had their children among the protesters in Thammasat that day?

What if the victims were their children? Are they men, humans or just creatures accidentally born having a bit more wisdom than animals?

As long as the voice of the people is silenced and the nation blinded by the colour of money, such a mishap can occur again in Thailand.

Waratt Rattasiri

rattasiri@twsu.campus.mci.net

Sacrifice

Being a six-year-old boy at that time, it was rather difficult for me to appreciate how much the people who were involved in the October 1976 events had sacrificed for our democracy which are enjoying today. But when the same drama was repeated again in May 1992, the picture became very clear.

What those students had given us is so precious. Let their will be retained in our hearts and let the history they have made be told forever.

S Wattana

University of Leeds

Britain

Truth hidden

After 20 years of progress, Thailand may still have to wait another 20 years for the truth about Oct 6, 1976 to come out.

Supha Snow**Correction**

A letter printed in Friday's editorial page (Oct 4) noted that there were 2.3 million rai of mangrove forests in Thailand in 1961, not in 1987 as stated in an article run by The Nation. But the letter was changed to say that the incorrect information had originated in an article by James Fahn, when in fact it appeared in a local news story and later in a Sept 29 editorial on the mangroves situation.

We apologise for the error, and for the confusion.

Beautiful place

White sands, emerald seas, beautiful scenery, the serenity of the wat plus the gentle friendly people are just some of the things that have continually drawn me back to Thailand many times each year for the past 15 years that I have been living in Hong Kong.

During that time, my thoughts of Thailand have changed from it just being a tourist destination to that of a place that I love and feel at home in. A country's character is in its people and I have learned that Thai culture has the major fundamental and cohesive stimuli of Buddhism and the love and respect for the monarchy, both of which advocate peace and harmony.

I hope that someday I will also be able to settle in "The Land of Smiles" and, following such an example, repay all the kindness and friendship shown to me over the years.

Allen Leech

Hong Kong

No cruise ships

Thanks to Surapat Phitpattanakul for his letter on boats and ships. Finally, someone has realised that cruise ship operators have been taking advantage of host countries for too long. He is quite correct.

They don't bring in capital investment.

They don't pay any income or sales taxes.

They don't hire local people.

They don't buy local produce.

They just use your tourist attractions and, if you are not careful, they dump sewage in your harbour.

I stay well away from a cruise ship when I am on holiday.

Eric Jorgen

London

PDP policies

In the Friday, Oct 4 edition of your newspaper, I was intrigued to read the article on page A6 entitled, "Sudarut faults recruitment", in which the present Palang Dharma secretary-general reputedly condemned the Democrat and New Aspiration parties for recruiting candidates regardless of whether or not they share the same ideology.

The Longman's dictionary defines ideology as "a set of ideas, especially if typical of a social or political group", and indicates that the word is sometimes used in a derogatory sense.

I fear that Thai politics is probably one of the areas where that, indeed, may prove to be the case.

With regard to the Palang Dharma Party in particular, I would be most interested to learn about the common set of ideas that bind Khun Chamlong Srimuang and Khun Thaksin Shinawatra into the same political group. And Khun Prasong Soonsiri and Khun Boonchu Rojanasatien. An interesting and diverse cast of characters, to say the least.

With regard to the collection of political parties that are taking shape for the upcoming election, it would be even more interesting to see the ideological differences between the parties being clearly spelled out in party political platforms and policy statements that derive from a clear set of principles and careful analysis rather than simply an ad hoc enumeration of issues based more on personalities than ideas.

The Thai-based press would be doing the whole electorate a great service, not to mention long-term, deeply-interested outside observers such as myself, by devoting serious analytical time to an in-depth look

at the so-called ideologies of the political parties as they evolve, and their respective policy platforms.

Given the clear need to inject confidence into the political system in Thailand and to develop a clear set of social and economic policy guidelines, the media could play an important and constructive role in developing a greater awareness of the importance of political ideologies and work with the political parties to help them clarify their positions, whatever they may be.

Peter Brimble

Bangkok

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THE NATION

Local/Regional

Monday, October 7, 1996

Student activist paid the price for his beliefs

A united student force that had led the pro-democracy uprising against the Thanom regime in 1973 was broken up before the 1976 Thammasat bloodbath. Many vocational students turned against their university counterparts and joined the Red Gaurs. Orissa Airawanwat, a vocational student, did what he felt was right. Pennapa Hongthong reports.

Had he not been arrested after the October 1976 upheaval, Orissa Airawanwat would have fled into the jungle with thousands of other disillusioned students to join the Communist Party of Thailand.

Full Story

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Had he not been arrested after the October 1976 upheaval, Orissa Airawanwat would have fled into the jungle with thousands of other disillusioned students to join the Communist Party of Thailand.

As it was, Orissa spent almost two years of his life in three prisons while he was standing trial in the Oct 6 case. He had almost completed his studies at Bangkok Technical College when the 1976 bloodbath began.

After the Oct 14, 1973 student demonstration, in which Orissa also participated, technical students attained some power and gained public attention.

In 1974, Orissa took up the key role of secretary-general to the Vocational Student Centre of Thailand (VSCT) - the first student ever appointed to the post. But it was also during this critical year that the government started to use vocational students as a tool to counter the powerful National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT).

"The government tried to infiltrate the vocational colleges and used psychological propaganda to brainwash the students," he said, adding that the government kept telling the vocational students that

university students were to blame for the deaths of many vocational students in the bloody suppression of Oct 14.

"They said while we were suffering scores of deaths and casualties, they [the university students] were hailed as heroes of democracy," he said.

The propaganda was effective and a rift between the two main student groups widened. The split made Orissa ill at ease. Not only did he try to go against the mainstream, but he also had to put up with pressure and constant threats from higher powers.

"At the time, someone offered me a house, a car and a maid. This person wouldn't tell me why I deserved such gifts, but said only that I had been working very hard and should rest," he said. While Orissa rejected the offer, he believed that several of the leading vocational students accepted similar proposals. The division between the two student groups grew even wider after an election for a new VSCT secretary-general was held. When Suchart Prapaihom was elected to replace him, it was apparent to Orissa that he should turn his back on the organisation.

"At the time, it was clear that there were two groups of students inside the VSCT - those who accepted the offer and those who refused," he said.

After washing his hands of the VSCT, Orissa and other students were determined to create a new organisation for vocational students - the Vocational Students Front for the People. But the new organisation, spearheaded by Rama VI Vocational College, was subject to criticism. The name of the organisation was later changed to the Vocational Students for the People of Thailand (VSPT), with Rama VI students no longer being core leaders.

The VSCT was co-opted into a group called the Red Gaurs, controlled by Col Sudsai Hasdin, a right-wing officer concerned with communist suppression.

On Oct 4, 1976, the NSCT led a student gathering inside Thammasat University to protest against the return of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, a dictator overthrown by students and the public on Oct 14, 1973.

Thanom had been in exile since Oct 14 and his return was something the students could not ignore. The student protests lasted for two days.

The VSPT students, including Orissa, were also on the campus, responsible for keeping surveillance and maintaining security.

At dawn on Oct 6, while the students protested peacefully, the rightists stormed Thammasat's gates and the first hail of bullets were fired in the university. Scores of students were hit.

"Several students fell when the ultra-rightist group [the Red Gaurs], backed by the right-wing military, opened fire. All the students tried to duck for cover," Orissa said.

The memories of that tragic day still haunt Orissa, as does the fact that it was the day his life was turned upside down - the day he was arrested and jailed.

Orissa was shot during the mayhem - a bullet cut into his chin and buried itself inside his lower jaw. First

sent to be operated on at Siriraj Hospital, he and the other students were later arrested and charged with the serious offence of sedition under the anti-communist law.

"But I was the only one among the last group of arrested students who was charged with lese majeste too," he said.

Orissa was transferred to three different prisons because of his infectious wound.

At first, Orissa was denied permission to go to hospital, but Amnesty International helped him petition for the right to be treated.

"But by the time I got permission for the treatment, my wound was already seriously infected. I was finally treated at Chulalongkorn Hospital by Dr Pochanat Phumprakorbsri. She was under threat all the time while she was attending to me because [the authorities] did not want my wound to heal. But she was firm in protecting my rights," he said.

While in detention, Orissa was under considerable stress because he was constantly cold-shouldered by other inmates and the wardens, who believed that he had committed serious offences - particularly lese majeste.

"At every opportunity I tried to tell them the truth. Eventually they became confident in me and learnt my side of the story," he said.

Nevertheless, he was not accepted by everyone in Lad Yao Prison. Once a warden intentionally hit his leg when putting him in chains until he bled. "So when I walked to the court, the chain kept hurting my wound," he said.

However, when the warden did get to know him, the two enjoyed a good relationship and after he won sympathy from the wardens, Orissa was granted the privilege of writing one three-page letter per day, instead of the allotted one page per day.

"Actually, the 'October prisoners' were not allowed to have visitors, to be sick or to pay bail," he said.

His parents were also mistreated by people.

His father, who was in the military, was questioned after Orissa had been arrested.

"My father was not pleased about my activities, but he didn't approve of the two brutal suppressions of the student protests in 1973 and 1976 either. He couldn't accept that those in the same uniform as him had shot his son," he said.

On Sept 16, 1978, Orissa's painful ordeal ended when he and the other 18 October prisoners were released. Orissa returned to his studies and after he graduated started a new life and went to work in Saudi Arabia.

Five years later, he returned to Thailand and lived in Nakhon Ratchasima with Khamsing Srinauk, more well known by his pseudonym Lao Khamhom.

"However, I didn't stay for long. We didn't have much rain that year and our harvest was not good. Also,

I have to admit that I'm not much of a countryman, I'm pretty much an urban type," he said.

Orissa hopped around the job market for some time before he headed to the United States.

He returned home again in 1994 and was employed as the Service Manager of Honda Motor Co - a position he still holds.

Recalling his past experiences, Orissa said he did not regret playing such an active role in the two historic events.

"I'm glad that at least they helped shape democracy in this country - although it was a very expensive lesson," he said.

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away.

The overspill from the Nan and Yom rivers also left Bang Mun Nak and Taphan Hin districts in Phichit province under 50 centimetres of water.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of Samut Sakhon province was still under water yesterday as the Mae Klong River continued to rise.

Deputy Agriculture Minister Monthon Kraiwatnusorn, who inspected areas in the province, described it as the worst flooding in 23 years and estimated the damage caused so far had totalled more than Bt2 billion. [Back to the Top](#)

Oct 6 still a mystery to most Thais

SOME came to remember, others to learn. Some called for forgiveness, and still others demanded the whole truth - a truth which has never been told.

At Thammasat University yesterday, exactly 20 years after the campus was turned into one of the most infamous killing fields in modern history, all visitors, despite their different goals and diversified backgrounds, had at least one thing in common: Trying to come to terms with a dark, unthinkable past.

"Let this incident be the last of its kind in Thai society," wrote New Aspiration Party leader Chavalit Yongchaiyudh in a commemoration book prepared by the organisers.

Among the thousands of people who went to Thammasat this weekend to commemorate the anniversary were survivors and relatives of victims of the violence of Oct 6, 1976. They attended Buddhist ceremonies and joined in seminars to discuss the infamy of that day.

A few shed tears and others were visibly shaken as they viewed photographs, many never before seen in Thailand, of soldiers and extremists beating, burning alive and hanging students on the university's soccer field.

The victims have never been publicly hailed as heroes, unlike the students who died in the pro-democracy uprising in 1973. Their bloodbath has for most of the past 20 years been buried at the very bottom of that part of Thailand's murky history. No government has fully investigated or explained the actions that occurred that day. Official figures say 46 died, but most observers believe the toll was much higher.

Assistant Professor Thanet Aphornsuvan, of Thammasat University's Department of History, called on all Thai historians to shed light on the Oct 6 mystery. "Even the official figures clearly show which side resorted to violence. Only two policemen were officially said to have been killed on that day and no exact cause of their deaths has been spelt out," he said.

Many people are still missing. The massacre sent students fleeing to the jungles to join communists and other insurgents. Some presumably either died in combat or succumbed to disease.

Most school textbooks leave out or gloss over the carnage that occurred in the shadows of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Thailand's holiest shrine, and the old Grand Palace. These symbols of religion and

monarchy are considered the unifying forces of Thai society.

Military classes have focused teaching on communist infiltration when touching on the Oct 6 subject.

State-owned media did not mention the commemoration. Army-owned channels did report Chavalit's laying of a wreath at Thammasat University while Radio Thailand did not mention the two-day event at all.

The independent television station ITV was the only channel that offered live coverage of the commemoration and also broadcast historical footage of the tragedy over the two days.

Phra Paisarn Visalo, who gave a sermon at yesterday's ceremony, called for a "positive" commemoration of the event. "It should be remembered for the ideology and power of the young, their dream for a better society," he said.

At an afternoon seminar on how to deal with the traumatic event, several ideas for carrying on the noble ideals of democratisation were discussed.

A professor suggested that the new generation must keep the Oct 6 tragedy alive so that it will not be forgotten. Others suggested that those student activists and others who took part in the Oct 14, 1973, revolution and the May 1992 bloodshed, should take active roles in helping Oct 6 survivors come to terms with the massacre.

Speakers said those who took part in the events of Oct 6 should also write down everything they know, so that the public could learn the truth in the hope that one day there will be changes that will enable it to surface.

Timing is crucial to get to the roots of the truth of Oct 6, participants said, as is the political will of the government in power.

Future changes in the political leadership might give rise to a new situation that would allow truth to emerge, one participant said, citing Argentina as an example. [Back to the Top](#)

Commuters irate over tolls

THE official opening of the Ram Indra-Arjnarong expressway yesterday was marred by commuters' uproar over the toll charged at the Arjnarong junction.

"I've got an earful today," a toll collector said.

Ram Inthra-Arjnarong, is a 13.1-kilometre stretch from Ram Indra in northern Bangkok to Arjnarong in the south. The route was initially scheduled to be completed next January.

The Arjnarong junction links the new expressway to the First Stage Expressway. Motorists coming from the first-stage have to pay a Bt30 fee to use the new road and so do those entering the old network from the new expressway.

THE NATION

Editorial

Tuesday, October 8, 1996

Lessons of the past must not be forgotten

Remembering the Oct 6, 1976 tragedy is not about reopening old wounds. It's neither about pointing accusatory fingers, nor screaming for anybody's head.

[Full Story](#)

A strange state of semi-siege

As I have remarked often enough, life is certainly not dull for dissidents in Burma. But sometimes a little bit of dullness does not come amiss. In fact, it provides a measure of welcomed relief, time in which to stand and stare for at least a few minutes a day.

[Full Story](#)

Political abuses make their mark in Thailand

The recent dissolution of Parliament in Thailand was preceded by much betrayal and backstabbing, bringing shame and disillusionment to the country.

[Full Story](#)

LETTER

Nothing's new

In my my opinion, the House dissolution was a good decision. However, I see that politics in Thailand has not changed at all.

I am sure a lot of money will flow in the next few weeks. This practice is unacceptable. More changes are needed in the country's political system. [Full Story](#)

Lessons of the past must not be forgotten

Remembering the Oct 6, 1976 tragedy is not about reopening old wounds. It's neither about pointing accusatory fingers, nor screaming for anybody's head.

Calling to mind the young students who were massacred inside Thammasat University on that fateful day is part of a search for the truth that has never been fully told - a truth that will give the victims, who never had a single chance to defend themselves, a fair trial.

Recalling what happened on Oct 6 is about soul searching. It's about trying to know ourselves, our society and our nation. It's an attempt to understand and come to terms with our dark, mysterious past so that we can move confidently into the future.

There are many questions that need to be answered and issues that must be explored, which have been largely ignored. We are Buddhist, although the unspeakable brutality was nothing but animalistic. It took place under the shade of the Emerald Buddha Temple, our most sacred place. We describe ourselves as kind, tolerant and compromising, but what happened at Thammasat just underlines the extreme opposite.

Over the past 20 years, few Thais have shared in the grief and pain of those who lost their children, friends or relatives in the bloodbath - let alone thought about giving them justice. To most Thais, Oct 6 has been buried deep in obscurity. And yet, that is the main reason why the trauma it generated still lingers.

Remembering Oct 6 is accepting that the incident was a national defeat. It was a day when the kingdom's unity crumbled, peace was shattered and all the proclaimed characteristics of "Thainess" evaporated. All so because of ourselves, not anybody else.

Refusing to learn from mistakes is a bigger mistake. And there are so many mistakes to ponder when it comes to Oct 6. The government, police, military, politicians, the media and the students themselves all contributed more or less to the explosive political confrontation. The 1992 May crisis is solid proof that little has been learned from the previous tragedy.

Oct 6 is a major political lesson written in blood and stained by the tears of young people, who desired freedom and gave up their lives but whose ideology was somewhat marked by radicalism. It exposes the dark side of absolute state power. It shows how far rulers can and will go to maintain the status quo. It underlines the dangers of media control and extremist propaganda.

But most school textbooks still leave out or gloss over the carnage. Military classes have focused on teaching communist infiltration when touching on the subject. Authorities always cast suspicious eyes on public discussions of the incident. And over the weekend, state-owned media chose to ignore the commemoration inside Thammasat campus.

If we try to run away from the past, it will always come back to haunt us. If we confront it in a mature way, the wound will heal.

The slain students had fought against dictatorship and oppression, dreamed of social equality, campaigned for the underprivileged and ignored materialism. Of course, the young minds might have been confused by the clashing ideologies of a turbulent, deeply-divided world. But shouldn't we start acknowledging their genuine cause and tell them and their loved ones that we understand? That we want to share in their grief and sorrow? That we are sorry?

For doing so will ease not only their pain, but also ours.

Remembering October 6, 1976

The Nation on the Net has opened a photo gallery in remembrance of the 20th anniversary of Oct 6, 1976 uprising. We hope that the visitors to The Nation Homepage will write in to pay tribute to those who have lost their lives, were injured as well as those suppressed by the right wing dictatorship. These people have made sacrifices to the democracy that we have today. **Please e-mail your tributes to editor@nation.nationgroup.com**

The organisers of Oct 6 Remembrance Day will be holding two-day long special activities at Thammasat University this Saturday and Sunday. On Oct 5, the topics of discussion include **"Violence in Thai Society"** at the Law Faculty, **"Where I was on Oct 6, 1976"** by students and academics at the Auditorium, Telling Events of Oct 6 at the football field, and **"Lessons of Oct 6"** by **Sulak Siwalak**.

On Oct 6, there will be food offering to 100 monks and merit ceremonies commemorate those killed in the uprising, with after activities in the Auditorium in the afternoon. Speakers include **Thanes Aphornsuwan, Thongchai Vinichakul and Chaiwat Satha-anand**.

There is songs for life concerts in the evening starting at 8 pm with musicians such as Caravan, Kanmachon, Ton Kla, Carabao and Phongsit Khamphoe.

Mahidol University in cooperation with Thammasat University is holding the fifth annual conference on **"Quality of Life and Human Rights"** this Thursday and Friday at Dusit Thani Hotel to commemorate the student-led uprising on Oct 6, 1976.

The guest speaker is **Madame Corazon Aquino**, former president of the Philippines. The first day will focus on the development of democracy and human rights movements in the past 20 years. The topics for the second day include development in the economy, health, education and society.

The Nation newspaper will publish a special pull-out section in memory of the Oct 6 uprising with series of articles and photos this Sunday Oct 6.

The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand will hold a panel discussion on the Oct 6 Revolution on Wednesday Oct 2 at 8 pm.

We welcome your comments as always to editor@nation.nationgroup.com.

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Bangkok Postcard:

Forgetting and Remembering "Hok Tulaa", the October 6 Massacre

Bryce Beemer

Bryce Beemer is an M.A. candidate in Asian Studies where his research interests have focused generally Thai history and society. He is currently on leave from the Center for Southeast Asian Studies working in Bangkok, Thailand.

Bangkok, October 6, 1996- I met a friend, Darunii, near my house for coffee and to mull over what we would do that day. My plan for the day was to listen to the speeches and music at the 20 Year Commemoration Ceremony of the October 6 Massacre at Thammasat University (or Hok Tulaa as it is called in Thai). Thais do not normally discuss the events of *Hok Tulaa* in public. Additionally, Darunii is a village girl who had to drop out of school early to become a seamstress, so I was a little reluctant to drag her to something which might be either too dry, or too academic. I said something neutral like wouldn't it be "interesting" to go.

To my surprise she was excited to attend. "Hok Tulaa is very interesting", she agreed. "For Thais it is difficult to remember. It was so horrible it seems like it was not part of our history or our culture. Maybe it is something we would prefer to forget."

At the time I was surprised to hear this, dumb struck in fact. Darunii stated clearly and succinctly a set of ideas that were just forming in my mind. That many Thais would prefer to forget the massacre of 6 October was clear, many cultures have events and

incidents that they would prefer to forget. But what is it that makes a historical event "difficult to remember". Algebraic equations and your mother's birthday are difficult to remember, how so a historic event?

But Darunii's words would prove themselves true. For a few memorable days this October, during the country's first major remembrance of its darkest moment, many Thais were forced to struggle with their historical memory and, more importantly (and dangerously), the cultural ideas which undergird that same history.

Twenty years ago, on October 6, 1976, between four and five thousand college students and their supporters gathered inside the gates of Thammasat University in preparation to protest the return to Thailand of Thanom Kittikachorn, the dictator ousted by a student protest three years before in 1973. In the dead of night the campus was surrounded by the Thai military, police, and rightist vigilantes making exit impossible. Small arms gun fire was exchanged infrequently between the two groups in the tense hours that followed. At 5:30 AM a rocket propelled grenade and several anti-tank missiles marked the beginning of an assault on the campus.

The year or so preceding the massacre witnessed the sharp polarization of Thai society. Following the successful popular student uprising of October 1973, which established democratic rule in Thailand, an emboldened, activist left emerged on the political scene. Students, artists, activists, and other liberal groups moved throughout the country trying to organize land and labor reform in Thailand. On the international level, they worked to extricate Thailand from the Vietnam war effort and Western political influence. Still heady from their success in 1973, much of the political left felt that it was only a matter of time before major social change swept through Thailand.

The political right was also organizing and was made up of militarists, right-wing Buddhists, and anti-communists. This group inundated the Thai populace with a particularly virulent form of propaganda which played strongly on ethnic and nationalist themes. They painted the left as Marxists sympathizers and radicals (only some were). The radical reformers, they argued, were not even Thai; they were Vietnamese and Chinese in ethnic origin (particularly despised minorities in Thailand at that time) or, at the very least, completely indoctrinated by foreign ideologies. Right-wing Buddhist groups, particularly those led by a monk named Kitti Vutho, argued that killing communists was, in Buddhist terms, a meritorious act as it freed society from suffering. Thailand was a slightly destabilized country in a completely destabilized region. With news of the killing fields in Cambodia and the fall of Saigon added to this toxic mix of fear and insecurity the right-wing's propaganda fell on many sympathetic ears. When a picture, later discovered to have been a forgery, appeared in two Thai newspapers depicting college students hanging the Crown Prince of Thailand in effigy, many people believed that the students had committed an unforgivable act of lese-majesty.

The atrocities which followed the assault on Thammasat are sobering and the total number of dead is still unknown today (46 is the very low official number). The desire

of the forces gathered outside the campus was to both crush and humiliate the students and their supporters. Weapons of war were used indiscriminately; students were hung; some female students were reportedly raped. Several people, alive but unconscious were gathered into a pile and burned with tires and gasoline. Captured students were forced to take off their shirts (women included) and crawl across the campus to the awaiting police vans and buses; many were kicked and beaten along the way. As social critic Sulak Sivaraksa pointed out, the military's aim was to treat the students as if they were pigs.

Awful, unexplainable, and savage, like some primitive scapegoat ceremony, bodies of the dead were dragged to the park across from Thammasat and mutilated in front of cheering crowds. The horror of the right-wing propaganda came to fruition on that day. Those who participated in the assault seemed convinced that the students were the direct opposite of all things good and all things Thai: they were evil, Marxist, *a-dhammic* (anti-Buddhist), Chinese and Vietnamese in origin, and anti-royal. When rightist crowds, stoked as they were with the fire of righteousness, strung several corpses to trees and took turns beating and pounding them with chairs, they were not striking out at the Thai students, they were striking out in defense of the Thai Id.

The end result of the massacre is fairly well known. Survivors fled to the hills to join the Communist insurgents, went into hiding, or fled the country. Thailand itself lurched to the right and tight press control prevented public discussion of the massacre. Yet, as time has passed and press control has all but vanished, the issue of the massacre has still not been publicly taken up...

A recent review of Thai high school history and culture textbooks showed, disturbingly, that 80% do not even mention the Hok Tulaa events. Of the few that do mention the massacre most use very neutral language (e.g., there was an "uprising" that was "suppressed" and many students fled to the jungle as a result). One textbook even takes the rightist side suggesting that the students were indeed anti-royalist and infiltrated by Vietnamese revolutionaries. The only textbook which tackles the 1976 massacre in any depth is (not surprisingly) published by Thammasat University, but even that book dodges the issue of the atrocities. As tame as the Thammasat book seems to be, it still has trouble with the Board of Education censors: a group which must give clearance to all the country's schoolbooks, and whose membership and membership criteria is still, to this day, kept secret.

The Hok Tulaa Commemoration was held on the soccer field inside the Thammasat wall. As participants entered the field they came upon the commemoration's centerpiece/memorial, a 12 to 15 foot golden funeral urn. Surrounding the urn's base were pictures of students killed during the massacre. Many of the pictures would have been familiar to Western students of Thai history or politics, but most had not yet been published or displayed publicly in Thailand. The photos were gruesome and one had to step back from them occasionally and take a breath before continuing around. One elderly woman discovered the true fate of one of her children while circling the urn.

- The urn's symbolism was complex. Great pains were taken to give it, and the whole commemoration ceremony, a religious overtone. Six hours of religious rights preceded the opening of the ceremony including food and robe offerings to 106 monks and wreath laying for the dead. Having been secretly disposed of in the wake of the massacre, the bodies of many students killed at Hok Tulaa had not received a proper cremation (considered an awful misfortune in Thailand). The urn itself was thus meant to give closure to their deaths. Subtly adding to the political meaning was the urn's design: being royal in shape rather than of the commoner's design it attempted to elevate the deaths of Hok Tulaa and give them the image of noble purpose. However, the main message of the urn was to shock open memories-or plant them in the minds of those too young to remember-more like the Jewish Holocaust memorials I frequented as an undergraduate than anything I have ever before seen in Thailand. It spoke clearly to those who could bear to make a full revolution around its base. "Look at this horror and remember," it seemed to say. "Do not ever forget."

The atmosphere of the event hovered somewhere between Woodstock 2 and a college teach-in. On a large stage opposite the urn, aging political rockers and folk stars sang the popular protest songs from the 1970's era, or *dontrii pua chiwit* (music for life) as it is called in Thai. Between acts, Thammasat academics gave speeches about the importance of the day while all around the field booths sold books and video tapes about the 1973 to 1976 era. A first year Thai language student who did not know the phrases "You must remember" and "Don't forget" would have had them down cold by the end of the day. Each person who took the stage spoke these two phrases passionately and emphatically, and all about the field the words "remember" and "don't forget" were written on posters, t-shirts, and placards. One particular booth sold postcards with the face of a murdered student leader on the front and the words "Don't forget Hok Tulaa" on the back. For the price of a postage stamp a fervent rememberer could spread memory to the provinces. The event itself, and the several mini-events that surrounded it, were a great success by almost every standard. Attendance was high and the print media coverage, which lasted for several days, was excellent. For many of the victims the ceremonies were cathartic. For the first time they could share their stories publicly and talk about the events of Hok Tulaa to sympathetic audiences. Yet on the most official level of Thai society, the desire is still to forget-or to propagate forgetting. Even though the event drew both the major candidates for prime minister, Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and Chuan Leekpai, who laid wreaths and spoke to the audience, none of the three state controlled television stations ran a story on the event. Nor was it covered by the state run radio news services. Royal participation in the event was also absent.

More importantly, to date no perpetrator of the Hok Tulaa violence has come forward to discuss the days events. The right-wing mobsters, policemen and soldiers have kept their jaws clenched tightly for twenty years and, in all likelihood, plan to die that way.

So even with all the new and flourishing discussions which surrounded the Hok Tulaa remembrance, the massacre has yet to be understood as a historical event. Only the victims' stories are now known. A journalist might say that the *what*, *when*, and *where* of the story have come to light, but the *who* and *why* are nowhere to be found. More poetic

is the summary of Professor Thongchai Winichakul who stated that the Hok Tulaa remembrances succeeded in "making a loud noise at the very edge of silence."

Yet the cry of the remembrance ceremony, "Don't forget" and "Remember," begs a rejoinder that very few seem prepared to answer, and which the first historian brave enough to set the event to paper must struggle with: namely, "Remember what?"

Why have Thais so meticulously avoided discussing the massacre for twenty years? The Thai cultural emphasis on avoiding fractious debate and public arguments may serve as the Introduction to Asian Culture 101 answer to the above question. It is an answer worth mentioning, but avoids the more complex, deeper and darker issues involved in both forgetting and remembering Hok Tulaa. About one week after the Hok Tulaa remembrance, in a packed hall at the Thai Studies Conference in Chiang Mai, Professor Thongchai presented his paper on the ambivalent narratives of the Hok Tulaa massacre. His paper was powerful, direct, and bluntly honest. His whole mode of presentation seemed to be the opposite of what one might call the standard mode of Thai academic address. He named names, zeroed in on the areas of real conflict, and spoke with passion and conviction. Thongchai captivated the audience, and it was clear why he has come to mean so much to people in the field of Thai studies.

In the middle of his talk Thongchai began to list many of the unanswered questions surrounding the Hok *Tulaa* massacre: Why was ex-dictator Thanom Kittikachorn let back into the country? Who OK'd this? Why was he allowed to enter the monkhood at Wat Bowarniwet: the royal monastery? Why did the head monk of the Wat, who was the current King's private teacher and in 1987 became the Supreme Patriarchy, allow Thanom to ordain there? Who produced the doctored photos of students hanging the Crown Prince in effigy (the spark which led to the massacre), and why did the Bangkok Post and a Thai language daily choose to run them? Who ordered the shooting to begin, and did anyone at the top at all try to order the soldiers to stop? At some point in the middle of these questions (there were more which I do not recall) a number of people in the audience began crying, and most participants that I could see were visibly moved.

The gross brutality and wanton torture of Hok Tulaa strikes out savagely at a particularly cherished myth about Thailand: that a fortuitous fusion of Buddhism and culture has created a land of peaceful, smiling people. Yet, this alone does not cause the turmoil that the above questions can stir.

The finger of blame for Hok Tulaa points in all the most troubling directions. It points to a middle class, terrified by the fall of Saigon and the stories seeping out from the killing fields of Cambodia, that could acquiesce to a violent silencing of a strident left. It points to a civilian government too weak or too unconcerned to stop the violence in its midst. It points to a military more than willing to kill its own. It points to the highest religious figures who allowed themselves to be co-opted by political schemers.

And much worse, all the questions beg for another question which simply can not be asked in Thailand: Why, unlike 1973 when the King intervened on the students' behalf,

did the palace gates not open? All Thais are taught when they are young, and the vast majority believe, that the three pillars of Thai identity are belief in Buddhism, a love of nation, and love and respect for the Thai King. One's love for these three pillars is the essence of one's Thainess: it is the very thing that makes one Thai. For many people, questioning the validity of these symbols is a kind of treason and, at the very least, a badge of inauthenticity. So, just asking questions about Hok Tulaa is for many Thais a painful experience. The question of blame casts doubts on the most cherished figures and institutions in the country; figures and institutions which many people both love unconditionally and seek comfort in. To ask these questions is tantamount to shaking the pillars of Thai identity, and possibly bringing the roof down on one's head. Small wonder then that most people find it easier to forget Hok Tulaa.

In my opinion Hok Tulaa will be officially re-remembered. The twenty year remembrance seems to have been a great success in this regard. Academics, journalists, and civic leaders vowed to make the story known. And the massacre, probably one of the most pivotal historical events in the last forty years, can not, it seems, escape from the high school textbooks for too much longer. Hok Tulaa is the axis on which an entire 10 to 15 year piece of history turns; one can not hope to understand the political changes of the 1980's without at least a cursory understanding of Hok Tulaa. How much longer can it be avoided?

Yet, if I had to guess at the future (and here I can only draw on my feelings), I would have to say Hok Tulaa will remain only partially remembered in the textbooks of tomorrow. The rememberers at the Hok Tulaa ceremonies sought to pair the tragic events of 6 October 1976 with the democratic victory of 14 October 1973. Many pleaded for the victims of 1976 to be held in the same high esteem as those who died in 1973 and who are today considered great martyrs for democracy. Their desire seems to be to create a line of continuity between the two events and the present. In this structure Hok Tulaa would become the middle portion of a much larger historical trilogy. Part one of this trilogy would consist of the events of 1973 when the ideals of an egalitarian democracy struggled against the odds and eventually triumphed. The year 1976 becomes the second, and traditionally dark portion of any three-part story, in which democracy faces a terrible set back. The third portion of the trilogy, which is yet to be written, sees egalitarian democracy return even stronger than before. In other words, 1976 is the Empire Strikes Back to 1973's Star Wars in which the forces of democracy, like Han Solo, become deep frozen.

It gives one hope to interpret the events of Hok Tulaa as the nadir of an otherwise rising and irrepressible movement towards democracy. And, it may well even be true. But what is perhaps more important is how much easier the massacre becomes to understand. By contextualizing 1976 inside the event of 1973 the story becomes another (though much more violent) case of an anti-democratic military force trying to crush pro-democratic students. This view, however, minimizes the historical mood characterized by a palpable and, in view of the events in Cambodia, somewhat reasonable fear of the socialist left and the very real de-stabilization and resultant anxiety that de-stabilization was causing in Thailand. It shrinks the ideological forces at

play to that simply of anti-democratic militarism and avoids the much more intellectually troubling ideologies of right-wing Buddhism and militant royalism (both of which played significant roles in the massacre). Finally, it shrinks the roll-call of bad guys to the military alone, and avoids looking at the not-so-good-guys and the guys-who-should-have-been-good-but-weren't.

Vasan Sitthiket, a leading contemporary artist in Thailand, remembers *Hok Tulaa*. His show, entitled Blue October, hung in a small, largely political gallery hidden in the back of the Weekend Market. His series of twenty paintings recreated the graphically violent photographic images from the massacre. Painted in black and white, the nearly life-size images of violence were set over a deep blue, flat background. Three small gold-leaf offerings have been placed over the bodies of the dead as a traditional signal for reverence. The titles, block printed by the artist near the outside edge of each painting, are upside-down. Invitations to the event asked viewers to "preside" and "witness."

The use of the color blue, at first, appears to be a rather primitive artistic touch, but Vasan is much more clever than that. In Thailand, the color dark blue has two generally understood symbolic meanings: as representative of royalty, and/or happiness. By choosing this color I think the artist's work takes on a much more powerful and ironic feeling. Mechanically, the blue works to draw the eyes towards the shocking violence. And for meaning, because one always searches for a meaning in violence, the viewer is left only with Vasan's upside-down, sharply barbed commentary.

"The way to look at Blue October," a sign instructed, "bend your body, turn your head and heart upside down-then you will see."

I was first drawn to a painting near the center of the room. In the newspaper a few days before, a Thai artist described the death of his best friend, Manas Siensingh, at the October 6 massacre. Manas, also an artist, was shot to death by soldiers while trying to hide in a Thammasat building. Manas' body was later dragged from a pile of the dead and, in front of a cheering crowd of onlookers, pierced through the chest with a four foot iron rod. Vasan's painting captures this horrific scene and is titled, "Today if you still take pride in your infamous deeds, please come to take the gold necklace from me."

Other paintings lined the walls:

- a shoe being forced into the mouth of a hanging corpse titled, "For the Nation's Identity" (**Figure 1**),
- a naked dead woman and female students forced to stand in their underwear, "Whoever raped and killed, please come forward and accept a medal of courage,"
- a long row of corpses, "For the State Security" (**Figure 2**),
- three burning bodies, "For the High Culture,"
- a man beating a hanging corpse with a chair while a crowd watches smiling, "This is a Buddhist Country." **Figure 3.**

- . In some ways, viewing Vasan's work emotionally parallels the problems which surround the Hok Tulaa massacre and memory. To look at both is like looking at the dark heart of Thailand beating. You search for meaning in the paintings or the event when none is apparent. You wonder why, though all the whys are painfully difficult to consider. (You may even begin to feel a little dizzy and sick to your stomach, as I did.) In the end you leave the exhibit, and the memory of Hok Tulaa, wishing very much to think about something else. If thought about long enough Hok Tulaa will turn your head and heart upside down. This is precisely why it is an event which is so difficult to remember.

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