

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Latest novel from the Epigram Books Fiction Prize delves into Thailand's ongoing bid for democracy



SINGAPORE – Student masses gather in the streets of Bangkok to protest the government. This isn't a recap of the current events occurring in the Thai capital, but the backdrop of **Sunisa Manning's** novel, ***A Good True Thai***.

Thailand's bid for democracy is familiar to different generations of Thais. Set in the 1970s, *A Good True Thai* is a historical epic that captures one of the country's most famous periods of political unrest and artistic openness in Thai history.

It follows the story of three young people – Det, Lek and Chang – whose paths converge at a local university. Det is the descendant of royalty through his mother, the granddaughter of a king. Influenced by Lek and Chang's political fervour, Det radicalises, and the three of them venture into the Thai jungle to fight alongside the Communists. As they are embroiled in the

perils of political revolution, they must learn to tame and reconcile their love for one another.

Sunisa says she first learnt about the 1970s movement while growing up. “My mum and uncle were at the universities where the students were radicalised, but neither of them did,” Sunisa recounts. “This got me thinking: ‘could I write a story, almost alternate reality, where a character similar to my mum made a different choice?’”

“That character became Lek, whose parents—like my grandparents—immigrated from China.”

The novel is an ambitious one, but Sunisa manages to pull it off despite several hurdles during the writing process.



“The biggest challenge was getting through my own emotional block to be able to do it. The 1970s democracy movement is a sensitive subject, even today,” she confesses. “On an emotional level, living in the West gave me the distance to read, process and turn what I was finding into a story.”

With *A Good True Thai*, Sunisa hopes to shift Thailand’s narrative from one that is often dominated by the foreign gaze.

“Thailand’s a country that is spectated upon, too many foreigners come along, excited to explain Thai women, Thai beauty and Thai beaches. We don’t have enough that’s available or translated from a local perspective by someone who’s actually Thai,” Sunisa explains. “*A Good True Thai* is about a democracy movement. It’s about politics and protest and radicalisation. Nothing to do with vacation and hospitable people.”

“2020 turns out to be a year where people everywhere are deciding to stand up for their rights. We’re seeing this in Hong Kong, in the Movement for Black Lives in the US, and in Thailand, where people are protesting for democracy and freedom of expression,” Sunisa says. “I hope the book is a guide and an encouragement as people go through their own political awakening, because I wrote it to chronicle mine.”

*A Good True Thai* was selected as a finalist at the 2020 Epigram Books Fiction Prize and is the third book published from the Prize, after Joshua Kam’s Prize-winning *How the Man in Green Saved Pahang, and Possibly the World*; and Erni Salleh’s *The Java Enigma*.

It will be available at Epigram’s online store, Localbooks, Huggs-Epigram Coffee Bookshop, and all major bookstores in Singapore (September); and at Books Kinokuniya and Asia Books in the following cities in Thailand (October):

- Bangkok
- Phuket
- Chiang Mai

A fourth book, Kathrina Mohd Daud’s *The Fisherman King*, is slated for October.

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### **PRAISE FOR A GOOD TRUE THAI**

“Epic in sweep but precise in its details, *A Good True Thai* shines on all fronts. Time and again, Sunisa Manning resists easy answers, reaching for nuance, for complexity, for truth. An astounding debut from a talented new voice.”

**–Kirstin Chen, bestselling author of *Bury What We Cannot Take***

“Sunisa Manning understands deeply and innately that politics is woven through the strongest and most ambitious fiction, just as it is through life itself.”

**–Rachel Kushner, Booker-shortlisted author of *The Mars Room***

“The story of Thailand’s democracy movement in the 1970s is almost unknown in the rest of the world, but Sunisa Manning insists on recapturing and preserving it in this beautiful and astonishing novel. Read and immerse yourself in a narrative that speaks so profoundly to the condition of Thailand, and the world, today.”

**–Jess Row, award-winning author of *Your Face in Mine***

“Sunisa Manning brings to life a tortured, misunderstood nexus in the painful evolution of Thailand’s democracy with immediacy and vividness, never losing her sharply-drawn characters in the labyrinth of history. Mingling narratives of insider and outsider in a terse, swiftly-moving style, she drags the past into the present, unveiling complex truths with a remarkable clarity of vision.”

**–SP Somtow, multi-award-winning author of *Jasmine Nights***

“A vivid, thoroughly-researched account of a moment in time when everything seemed up for grabs. When youthful idealism is brought crashing down by harsh political realities, what can be salvaged for the future? Sunisa Manning’s exploration of this turning point in Thai history is clear-eyed and compassionate, and written with real flair.”

**–Jeremy Tiang, Singapore Literature Prize-winning author of *State of Emergency***

“The 1970s leftist and anti-authoritarian protests that drive the characters in Manning’s authentic and engaging novel are among the most important and controversial political events in modern Thai history. Frighteningly, the general context of conflicts that the novel covers is still very relevant today. Foreigners who want to understand the long-lasting crisis in Thai society, and the complex psyche behind the famous ‘Thai smile’, should read this book.”

**–Prabda Yoon, award-winning author of *The Sad Part Was***

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Sunisa Manning was born and raised in Bangkok by Thai and American parents. She graduated from Brown University and now lives in California. Her work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Mekong Review*, *The Rumpus* and other places.

She's been honoured with residencies at Hedgebrook and Hambidge, and awarded fellowships at San Jose State and the SF Writer's Grotto. *A Good True Thai* is her first novel.

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*A Good True Thai* will be available from the Huggs-Epigram Coffee Bookshop, Epigram's online store ([epigrambooks.sg](http://epigrambooks.sg)) and LocalBooks ([localbooks.sg](http://localbooks.sg)), as well as other leading bookstores in Singapore.

If you wish to interview the author or review the book, or if you have any other media enquiries, please contact:

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