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Communication and National Cultural Identity in Laos

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Vanthalom AKKIIARATH
I- Communication in Laos

A. Situation and role of the communication

In the revolutionary history of our country our party and government consider mass-communication as important means of spreading ideology and party’s guidelines to the masses, as sharp arms in cultural battle to fight against all kinds of plots and destruction of the enemies. The mass communication became one sector connected with the revolution, actively contributing to struggle for seizing independence, liberty for the interest of the country and to construct new life in favour of the polyethnic people.

B. Mass communication before 1975.

45 Years ago, on 13th/8/1850, in the liberated zone, the “Itsala” Newspaper was founded during the struggle against the colonialism. This Newspaper has given birth to the actual “Pasason” which is today an organ of the Central Committee Party and Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

After the “Itsala” Newspaper foundation when the Front of Neo Lao Hisala has changed its name to “Neo Lao Haksat” according to urgent need of the revolution, the Radio Station and Khaosane Pathet Lao or KPL News Agency were also founded in the liberated zone. Although the small number of media at that time, during nearly a half of a century throughout their confidential and opened activities in different periods of the Revolution, they were able to spread informations at time and in the systematic manner in the field of cultural and ideological struggle. They were one necessary sector in ideological domain of the polyethnic people and they were also an important bridge between Party and mass.

C. Mass Communication after National Liberation.

Since 1975 or after National Democratic Revolution, the “Itsala” Newspaper, after changing its name to “Neo Lao Haksat” Newspaper, KPL News Agency and Radio station have been coming into the Vientiane, founding their headquarters in the capital of Lao PDR.; then the “Neo Lao Haksat” Newspaper rechanged once again its name to “Siang pasason” (voice of the people) and Since 1982 to “pasason” Newspaper as it is at present.
Meanwhile mostly since the 4th (1986) and 5th Congress of our party (1991) different media were also founded as following: Labour Newspaper, vannasinh (Literature) Magazine, Vientiane Social Business Newspaper Weekly, Lao women Magazine, Youth Newspaper, Sunday Pasason Newspaper, National TV, TV 3 (old Lao IBC), Suksamay Newspaper, Army Newspaper, Vientiane Times (first English Newspaper in Lao PDR), Folk Theatre, Marionettes, Mobile Group of Cinema etc....

After the 4th and 5th Congress of the Lao People Revolutionary party, the above mentioned mass-communication has played an important role in spreading the guide lines of Renovation, New Intention of the Party, giving to the people knowledge about New Mechanism and New Methods of working. At the same time they have also given contribution to organisation, propaganda, agitation in order to promote Party members, combatants and polyethnic people to apply the guide lines of Renovation of the Party, congratulating the pilotpersons, underlining factors and new experiences acquired during the struggle movement, works and the education of the mass.

During the past decade, mass-communication has developed all efforts to spread informations in different forms and aspects larger than before, especially they have reflected creative opinions of the mass concerning the social reality and the mass' proposals, enable the mass-communication to be able to be free step by step from the manner of only one side of information, thus it is possible to answer partly to the population need and the mass-media has been more clearly at the same time the speaker of the Party and government and the rostrum of the mass.

Facing to the changing and complex of the world situation, the mass-media, the main means of information relating to events which were happened, explaining facts at time, helping the cadres, Party members including population in different social classes to understand very good about these events and to have a correct positoin in order to act propely according to the Party's concept. At the same time, they have also to proceed activities against the war's manoeuvres of the hostile forces to destroy us peacefully; to promote and to mobilize the solidarity and confidence among the mass in
regarding to the Party' direction and our own forces to continue the renovation causes with high determination; to maintain the political security and social order in our country.

Personal rang and cadres working for the mass-media have developed in the field of number and quality as well, a number of journalists have a clear political concept, high qualification, receiving the mass' confidence, the rang of young journalists was born and has developed its own intelligence to contribute to the renovation' causes of the country and as well as to the journalistic works.

In connection with the good points that we have mentioned above, we have also some weak points as following:

Our mass-media didn't received yet a large scale of attraction among the mass because their quality and contents were not good enough and they didn't touch directly the recipients' interests mostly in the domains of information, scientific and technical knowledges and entertainment etc....

Therefore, first of all our mass-media should have characters of struggle, education organization and leading the mass and character of reality in order to abolish step by step those weakpoints above mentioned. to realize these tasks, the mass-communication should understand the following ideas:

- The mass-media are sharp means of the Party and Government in spreading the guide lines and policy of the Party and propagating the policy and law of the Government, giving education in ideological domain to the mass, mobilizing and promoting them to contribute to apply two strategical tasks as going on with the construction and developing the People Democratic Regime, creating primary factors for progression along the ways that we have choosen.

- The mass-media is the mass' rostrum, the joining between Party and mass.

- The mass-media should have several aspects and abundant contents; should be attractive and entertaining the recipients, bring ideology, guide lines, concept of Party to the mass and at the same time, they should be also a rostrum of these latters.
II. Lao National Cultural Identity

A. National Culture before 1975 (before National Liberation)

Lao Nation is a Nation which has civilisation and good culture during long time ago. Our Nation composed by several minorities, each minority has its own custom, culture and tradition, these are united becoming the cultural identity of national Community, precious heritage, basic spirit of the society and being a principal factor which is assuring national existing. At any time, the Lao people are very proud and safeguard the national culture of the our own nation, maintaining and developing it in view to Keep it existing side by side with the Lao Nation up to now.

During the struggle for National Liberation, the culture has national, mass and progressive characters which are based on proceeding, developing the value of the National Culture in connection with taking by choosing among the human civilization. Generally speaking about culture and properly speaking about arts and literature, they have an important role in encouraging cadres, Party’s members, combatants and polyethnic people to have patriotic spirit, hatefulness to the enemies, strengthening solidarity to firmly participate and lead the heroic struggle up to the final victory of the National Liberation in 1975.

B. Lao National Cultural Identity after the Lao People Democratic Republic foundation (L DPR).

After the founding the New Regime, we have deployed all active efforts to restore and create the National Culture; have drived back and abolished strings of the backward culture which are will and adulterated of the colonialism and neocolonialism; mobilizing, promoting and developing culture, arts, litterature which have national, progressive and mass characters and transforming them in to the basic culture of the New regime. Customs and good tradition of the Nation as well as of the different minorities are restored and developed. Arts, litterature, painting, sculpture, talent and others capacities are also developed and enabling to produce different articles and products according to the need of the polyethnic population.

Beside the success above mentioned, we still have some weakpoints in the cultural domain as following: backward belief has a position to be developed, not a small number of young men and women didn’t know yet the tradition, custom of the National culture; some old objects of National
Heritage were stolen; dangerous external culture prevailing the National Cultural Identity of Lao PDR, creating will effects in regarding to Lao tradition mostly since 1986 up to now or since we have opened and developed the all field cooperation with the foreign countries.

III. Communication activities in favour of National Cultural Identity.

A. Reinforcing the communication role in the interests of the National Culture.

In the real situation of National Culture as mentioned above, the communication must play an important role in the interests of the National Culture, first of all is to proceed their activities to raise quality of the contents and make them appeared attractively to the recipients' eyes in several aspects and forms.

Continuing to apply the orientation of creation of the national, democratic and progressive characters of the culture, in aiming at improving the Lao people to have patriotic spirit, to love the people democratic regime, to get a concept and firm political position, discipline, a correct plan of living conditions and possessing good knowledge according to the demand of the renovation causes, enabling to receive the success of the progression in different domains of the epoch. To safeguard and develop the cultural tradition of the Nation in connection with taking care and assisting different minorities in proceeding art, cultural tradition endowed many aspects in view to transform them into global culture of the national community, in connection with the receiving the supreme from the human culture.

The mass-communication should know the cultural task in the years coming, the global orientation is to safeguard, create and develop the heritage and the value of the National Culture, and limiting the cultural current and the facts which creates will effects to the good and beautiful national culture.

In order to realize the above mentioned tasks, the safeguarding, creating and developing culture should be connected with the renovation causes in all fields of the Party; connecting with the accomplishing of two strategical tasks of safeguarding and construction of the country; therefore the innovation, all cultural activities should turn around this foundation and serving to the causes of independance safeguard, of creating civilisation to the country and prosperity to the polyethnic minorities.

The media must underline that the safeguarding, creating and developing national culture should be connecting with the opening relation for cultural exchanging with overseas, receiving the supreme from the human culture in order to construct the Lao National Culture.
The mass-media should also know that the creating and developing the culture must be connected with the promotion, the talents in different domains, developing democracy, liberty of invention in connection with the raising of the political responsibility, discipline of the author and innovator ranges.

The mass-communication have to know that the safeguarding, creating and developing culture should be connected with education, promoting the mass, all people and whole society to participate and to have responsibility in the cultural causes.

B. Collaboration and cooperation between communication and National cultural Identity.

The mass-communication would like to have a good success throughout their activities in the interest of National Cultural Identity, they must have a collaboration and a closed cooperation with the organisation which is responsible the National Culture in order to get some facts and events regarding to national cultural activities, for instance:

- To improve and develop basic object, technical national culture
  . Develop school, institut of research...
  . Developping and improving book-shop, National library,
  . proving the muscum, statut and club...

As every body knows already, the cultural tasks are the works of all sectors: Party organisation, mass organisation, religious organisation, army forces, business unities, including families, therefor in order to preserve our good and beautiful custom of the National culture, the mass-communication should have a closed collaboration not only with the cultural institution but also with all sectors which are responsible for National cultural Identity in order to educate the people throughout the country and help them to deeply understand and apply with success the cultural tasks fixed in the Party's resolution; tasks of gestion of the government in the cultural field; to savegard
and develop heritage and national culture in connection with the opened cooperation with foreign nations in the cultural domain. To promote the task and cultural activities in the bases, to mobilize and improve the whole society to participate to savegarding and developing culture, to create the new life in montainous area and in the zone of minorities; to develop the tasks of ges-
tion of the government in the cultural field.