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Affecting Press Freedom: Thailand's Perspective
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This paper is divided into three parts, the first part defines the scope and meaning of Thai society and culture, the second part tells about Thailand's press freedom, and the third part discusses the social and cultural impacts affecting press freedom in Thailand.

Part 1 Thai Society and Culture

**Thai society** is an agricultural society because 80% of the population work in the agricultural sector.

The important characteristics of the agricultural society is it is comprised of rural and urban social structures that conform the roles and the way of life of Thai people.

**Rural structure** is the most important social structure in Thai society because it reflects the social structure as a whole. The specific characteristics of the rural are:

1. Group gathering strength called informal primary group.
2. Each member of rural society work and live together.
3. The relationship in rural society is kinship. The youngers respect the olders because of their seniority.
4. Local villagers are willing to help each other with kindness.
5. The village headmen are chosen from those who have good behavior, high capability and seniority. They usually are respectable monks and village elders. Religion is the most effective social control in rural society.

**Urban Social Structure**

The differences between rural and urban society are the number of groups and institutions. In urban society, there are several groups and many institutions. The social class structure can be defined into 5 categories:

1. The Aristocrats who own land, money and political power.
2. The Elites who usually work as a headman of the country, high ranking government officials, politicians and business men. The elites are normally rich and own big business, and they also have high political power.

3. Upper-middle class, such as civil servants teachers, university instructors, policemen, doctors, army officers or other professions. They are well educated, skillful, and have good financial status.

4. Lower-middle class, such as technicians, workers, labors who work in the industries, try to raise the income to upgrade their social class.

5. Lower-class who is a group of workers, unskilled labor, servants, street merchants. Most of them migrated from the rural to find some jobs in the city. They live in slum areas. (Setho, 1989, pp.19-20)

The strength of the urban and affluent class which has identified more and more with the term "middle class" depends on its economic strength and power.

It can be concluded that urban social value is related to its economic strength and political power more than that of the rural social value.

Culture is the way of life in a specific society. Every culture has its own value systems which enhance all persons to act, think, and believe as social expectations. Culture tells people what to do in socialization. They can expect responses from others in a certain way which creates their confidence and safety in the society.

In this paper I will explore Thai culture through value systems. We can say that Thai people have two values in themselves. These two values are social value and personal value. The social value dominates group behavior that can be called dominant group behavior that can be called dominant value. Personal value affects personal concept and personal behavior which is considered as associate value. Both values command Thai behaviors.

Sanit Samakarn explained about dominant value and associate value in terms of personalism value and fun-loving value. (Samakarn in Setho, 1989, p.78)

1. **Personalism value** Thai people consider themselves as the most important. There are self-centred. Anything concerned with their own lives and living, they will do it first. They will accept other people on conditions that those are beneficial to them or are more powerful that can help or can punish them. Thai people are friendly to everybody. They love to have good relationships with everyone. Those are dominant values. For
associate values, which belong to individualism, are Thai people respect themself. They think they are superior than the others. They like to over rule any regulation if they can to show their peer. However, they always keep silence and try not to argue for their own benifits. They don't like conflicts. They are permisive.

2. Fun-loving value is being happy, enjoy everything and avoiding all troubles and sadness. The dominant value creates associate value; favour a person who pays for all enjoyable life. Thai people like to eat, don't like to work hard.

Anyway, Sanit Samakarn summarizes important Thai values into nine categories. (Somakarn in Setho, 1989.pp.79-82)

1. **Wealth**. Thai people like to be rich. People admire those who have more money. Thai people try to show that they are wealthy by using expensive cars, wearing gold, jewelleries, and living in big house. etc. Sometimes they prefer to dine in very expensive restaurants. They often treat there friends with good food because they want to show they are rich even though they have less money. They want to save their faces. They don't want anyone to look down upon them. Sanit Samakarn called this value "materialism"

The beneficial gain from being rich on acceptance from the society, everyone gives love and respect. Therefore, rich men have power in society.

2. **Power**. Thai people like to be powerful. The powerful groups in Thailand are government officials or the technocrats traditionally. Thai people like to have some of their relatives work in government sector.

Because it will lead their relatives to earn more power, money, followers and social status. As the result of being powerful in society brings respect and money, therefore, Thai people like to exercise their power and like to work with powerful men, and quite often they will try to refer themselves to someone powerful. But (it is peculiar that!) Thai people don't like to accept those who are more powerful than themselves. It seems that Thai people are narrow-minded. They don't accept ideas intiated from people they dislike and don't accept different ideas that are not correlated with their ideas. They belive they are the best. They are quite happy when their opponents fail or feeling unhappy. They will rapidly spread bad news of the opposite side.

3. **Respective elders**. An elder means a person who has long-term experiences, skills and knowledge, seniority and high position such as father, mother, teacher, instructor, elder relative and boss etc. In the old time, Thai people respected and praised the elders. The elders made decisions. The reason was the elders had more experiences and
responsibilities for a social group. The way of behaviors were compromised, to create peaceful environment. Sometime, the elder's judgment was to lose something to preserve peace and happiness, and the whole social group would normally accept it. This creates Thai behavior such as to keep silent, not to argue, be polite and humble to the elders. Thai people leaned to believe that "as long as you follow the elders, dogs won't bite you."

4. Knowledge or Ability. Thai people respect educated men in all perspectives. Knowledgeable men will a given status as a arjan or professor. Thai people crave for educational diplomas and certificates to show they are knowledgeable in that profession. Diploma and certificate are status symbols. Sometime, these status symbol's craze leads to malpractice such as buying certificates, or being cheated by groups that offer false diplomas. Every student must enter famous universities because it shows that they are smart. The measurement of the ability and knowledge of Thai people is usually based only on certificates or diplomas.

5. Individual Orientation. Thai people carefully select their close friends. They have some criteria to choose. Once they become friends, Thai people will concern, care for, and try to help their friends out in every situation. Individual oriented of Thai people makes them responsible for their friends individually but not responsible for a society as a whole.

6. Fun-loving. As explained before, Thai people enjoy working, living, playing and spending money. They do things for fun.

7. Peaceful and Permissive. The Thai are not aggressive people. They always stay cool. The characteristic of staying cool and not aggressive is respectable value in Thai culture. Thai people are soft minded. They help and give away their belongings to other people.

Being charitable is always be a dominant character of Thai people. Private life of Thai people are too meaningful because of those values.

8. Believe in Karma. Karma is the force generated by a person's actions. If the person does good he will get good things if he does bad he will also get bad things. Thai people believe in Karma. Good people should believe in Karma. Karma will affect individual life at present time. If Thai people do good things but receive bad things in return, it means the bad Karma in their last life affecting them. These beliefs lead Thai behave or to act in the middle way, neither too aggressive nor too permissive. Sometime they become the silent majority in public opinion.
9. **Comfortable and Easy way of living.** Thai people neither like to be in conflict with others nor others objecting their opinion. But sometime they do nothing to avoid conflicts. Thai people like to be free in all respects. Thailand means the land of freedom.

These nine values become **National Characteristics** of the Thai people which can be summarized as follows:

1. Considerate (Krengchai)
2. Like to postpone and Not punctual
3. Easy to forgive
4. Always smile
5. Informal and easy living
6. Lack of discipline
7. Eager to intrude other people's privacy
8. Self-centred group-centred
9. Egocentrist
10. Easy to forget
11. Like joking
12. Belive in superstition
13. Decision is based on emotions rather than reasons
14. Prefer to bargain in everything because they have more time
15. Eating all the time.
Part 2 An overview of Thailand Press Freedom

Press Freedom is a concept imported from the West along with concepts and ideas of democracy and civil society. The original birth of the Thai press was brought by the Westerner, an American missionary in Siam, Dr. Dan Beach Bradley. Dr. Bradley launched the kingdom's first newspaper in 1844, named "The Bangkok Recorder" in English language. In 1865 the Bangkok Recorder issued the Samese Recorder in Thai. Besides, Bangkok Recorder's 2 versions, the Bangkok Times was issued in 1866. The Siam Weekly Monitor, the Bangkok Shipping list and Daily Advertiser, and Bangkok Weekly Advertiser were the following newspapers came in 1867.

The Thai royal press started in 1851 called the Chao Phra, its content was mostly official documents. In 1858 came the Royal Gazette, sometimes called the government Gazette and the Gazette and Court Circular. In 1874, the Weekly Darunowadh considered "too spicy for the older Siamese". It started sensationalism of the Thai press. In 1907 Varasup was born in two editions, in Chinese and in Thai. The "Golden Age of Thai Journalism" came during the reign of King Rama VI of the Chakri Dynasty or known King Vajiravudh in which the King welcomed fair criticism of his government. King Vajiravudh, who took active part in journalistic controversy through the columns of the daily Bimb Dai, become owner of the English-language Bangkok Daily Mai and its Thai-language in 1914, buying it from an American publisher Philip Hoffman. King Rama VII was the last monarch to rule Thailand under the absolute monarchy system. In 1932, the country changed into a constitutional monarchy system with a peaceful revolution, by a party of high ranking military officers, and civil service officers, all commoners.

The relationship between the press and the politics

The People's Party monopolized political power, and opposition newspaper were deliberately eliminated or punished. The king insisted that full freedom of expression must be guaranteed by the People's Party (Bunnag, 1972, pp. 193-144) King Prachatipok's call however, was not answered by the members of the People's Party who continued to suppress a large number of opposition newspapers on vague grounds of legal justification (Boonsa-ad, 1974 py 104-112, in Boonyaketmala, 1982 p 339)
Since the rise of the People's Party, the press was more often than not operating under fear, while political instability was gradually transformed into a way of life for Thais. (Boonyaketmala 1982, p 333 in Lent, 1982. The political and partisan leading newspaper reported to some active politicians. The politicians manipulated two newspapers as tools of political propaganda. Newspapers must promoted the dictator.

Under the Dictatorial rule of the "strong man," Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who was Prime Minister from 1959 to 1963, the Thai press was in the so-called "Dark Age of Thai Journalism". The press was continuously threatened by the Announcement No.17., issued by the Revolutionary Party in 1958. The Announcement provided that all perspective newspapers published had to supply for a license and that any newspaper publishing statements of a certain character shall be warned, impounded, and destroyed or undergo punishment in the form of with drawal of license of its publisher, printer of proprietor statements subjected to punishment under the Announcement were those which "offend the King .... discredit the government, ..... contribute to the popularity or desirability of Communism ... or constitute communist subversive tactics, those which as vulges,... and likely to undermine the morals ... of the nation., (Moore, 1974, p.337 Boonyaketmala, 1982, p.340) Compared to all post-1932 governemt, Sarit's was much more authoritarian. Announcement No.17, to a newsman, was the symbol of the ultimate withering away of press freedom in Thailand. In Sari's days "Thailand became the weirdest country in the world because newspaper licensed turned out to be commercially profitable products..." Since no new newspaper was permitted to publish because of his repressive law, "there was a wild economic speculation of the existhing newspaper licenses, even among professional bankers. Some bought such licenses for millions of baht each for leasing to those who wished to publish newspaper" (Prachachart Weekly, 15-22 Nov., 1974, p0.341.)

After Sarit' death, Thai newspaper were carried over into different dimensions in the government of his military heir, Field Marshal Thanom Kiltikachorn from 1963-1973. Press controls under the Thamom's government were less stringent compared to the era of Sarit. Eventhough the press was allowed for the first time in five years to clearly express opinions but Thai newspaper seemed reluctant to develop themselves into an effective watchdog of the military dictatorship. Thai newspapers used excessively
exploited sex and sensationalism. Equipped with modern technology, the popular press of this era was consciously geared towards a profit-oriented industry. The increase of circulation became the prime goal for the popular newspapers, while professional excellence was almost completely ignored. (Boonyaketchala, 1982, p.342)

In October 1973, the student riots overthrew the government of Thanom Kittikachorn. Press regulations were loosened and the 1974 constitution guaranteed press freedom, denied closure of newspapers for political reasons, forbade censorship, limited press ownership to this and disallowed government financial support of private papers (Lent, 1977, pp.45-50, in lent, 1882, p.162.) However, all of that ended after the bloodshed of the October 6, 1976 coup. In 1977, the press was allowed to breathe now freely once again. The ruling Revolutionary Party, under General Kriangsak Chamanand, issued a series of orders, one of which stated that the party, mindful of the importance of the press, would allow publishing without censorship or control (The National Review, 1977, in Lent, 1982, p.163). But any action by a newspaper that creates trouble, disseminates falsehood to the public, or without justice, will be halted by revolutionary power since this is necessary for the safety of the nation. For newspapers that act as spokesmen of foreignness, doctrines that are harmful to the nation, the people or the monarchy, or try to sow disunity within the nation, whether directly or indirectly by whatever method. They will be suppressed absolutely (The Nation Review, 1977, in Lent, 1987, p.163).

Earlier in October 1978, the National Legislative Assembly, debating freedom of expression, deleted two paragraphs from Article 29 of the draft constitution which guaranteed freedom of expression.

The paragraphs read:

"The closure of a printing press or the prohibition of printing so as to restrict the liberty under this Section shall not be made except by a judgment or an order of the court closing the printing press or prohibiting the printing.

The pre-publication censorship of a newspaper shall not be done except during the time when the country is in a state of armed conflict or war, or when a state of emergency or martial law is declared, provided that it be done by virtue of the law enacted under paragraph two."
Thai attitudes toward government control of the press is the hierarchical social structure and respect for authority that promotes and encourages direction from above.

**Part 3 Discussion**

From the information discussed in Part I and Part II, it is obvious that Thai social structure and value systems are in harmony with the characteristics of the Thai press freedom.

**Social Structure**

Rural structure, which reflects Thai social structure as a whole, are informal primary group gathering, kinship relationship, kindness, consider headmen by good behavior, capability and seniority, social control by religions. Urban structure has several group which identify by its economic strength and power.

Even though rural social value are taken by 80% of the population work in agricultural sector but it is considered weakness structure. Urban social structure is stronger, even though there are only 20% of the population. People in urban society have high education, economic strength and power therefore it becomes leader and rural is follower.

Press freedom in Thailand was initiated by urban people who were riches, high educated, more political power. Those of whom asking for press freedom were the owner of press in capital city. In the past the aristocrats and elites owned the press. Freedom of expression of the newspaper were control by legal justification from political power groups. It shows that political power effect press freedom. Once political power belong to upper social class who have democratic mind and country have democratic system not dictatorship full freedom of expression of the press is possible. The urban social class lead freedom of the press possible and the rural are followers.

**The relationship between press freedom and cultural**

In my point of views, the way of life of Thai people has its own value systems. The main values dominates Thai personal behavior are personalism value and fun-loving value. For personalism value Thai people consider themselves as the most important. There are self-centred. At the mean time they love to have good relationships
with every one. Thai people respect themself and think that they are superior than others.
With this value, it is very difficult for the press to fight for it’s freedom as an organization.
Therefor, press association are weaknesses. They can’t asking for press self rule and regulation control. The press association cannot asking for self press control. The law and regulation control the press are from political power system. They cannot fight as a group or and organization for press freedom. Press freedom come from individual who have power in political party and own newspaper or individual who own newspaper and later has more political power.

The other dominant value fun-loving, make Thai press can stand under pressure of dictatorship, regim. They enjoy everything and avoiding all troubles. The value of wealth, power, liberal are main values lead through press freedom in Thailand. The owner of the newspaper and controller of newspaper are rich and powerful, Most of the time press freedom are suprass because of dictatorship controller. Thai people can stand for supression in some limitation. Since it is strong supression, Thai people will pull together and liberate themself. Once press have more freedom, it wants to become rock by reporting sex and sensational news more than news that have value for society. Why report news on individual and sensationalism. Because Thai people have national characteristic of intrude other people privacy. When newspaper report such a sensationalism on other people privacy, Thai reader like to buy. The newspapers have not response for society. They excused and express opinion with bias. At this stage, the government will come to control and regulate press again.

Conclusion

Now a day press in Thailand is control by press law and regulation. Because of Thai social and value, freedom of the press are hard to control by press self regulation. Press have loosly freedom in itself. The owner of the press will be indicated press freedom. If the owner of the press, are intellectual, rich, powerful and less personalism value more social responsible value, freedom of the press in Thailand will be glory.
Bibliography


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