



The Developmental Periods of Mass Media from the Central Region, to the Northeast Region and to the Thai-So Ethnic Group of Kusuman District

Benjapa Kaithong^{a*} and Sekson Yongvanit^b

^aDevelopment Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University

^bDepartment of Social Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University

*Corresponding author. E-mail address: benjapa.k@bu.ac.th, benjapakaithong1981@gmail.com

Abstract

The objective of this article is to study the developmental periods of mass media from the central region, to the northeast region and to the Thai-So community of Kusuman district. Purposive sampling technique was used for selecting 35 key informants. The research instrument was semi-structured interview. All raw materials were analyzed by content analysis. The research findings revealed that not only was the developmental periods of mass media from the central region, to the northeast region, and to the Thai-So community of Kusuman district at different times, but was also influenced by various driving forces. Moreover, the time scales of mass media development from the central to the northeast region and from the northeast region to the Thai-So community of Kusuman district were likely to continue to be reduced. Namely, the journey time of newspaper from the central region to the northeast region was around 116 years, followed by radio in around 10 years, television 7 years, internet 6 years, and satellite television 5 years. Similarly, the journey time of newspaper from the northeast region to the Thai-So community of Kusuman district was around 14 years, followed by television and internet in around 8 years, radio 7 years and satellite television 6 years. Therefore, this research predicts that, in the digital age, new forms of digital media—such as smart phones, tablets, Google glasses, smart watches and so forth – will become more rapidly proliferated into the northeast region and the Thai-So community of Kusuman district until there will be no difference between their arrival times. More Interestingly, all types of mass media – including newspaper, radio, television, satellite television and Internet – were available within the Thai-So community of Kusuman district but the Thai-So people are likely to be exposed to radio and television to a greater extent than other media. It was fair to say that they are likely to access mass media that requires no skills.

Keywords: The Developmental Periods of Mass Media, The Central Region, The Northeast Region, The Thai-So Community of Kusuman District, Media Exposure

Introduction

Communication is the sharing of information, ideas, and thoughts. It is a vital part of life for all of us. The different methods that allow us to communicate are called media. A postcard to a friend, a telephone call and a computer disk holding homework are all types of media. When media are used to communicate to thousands of people at the same time, they are known as mass media. According to Balley (2009), mass media began to start life in the 15th century along with the greatest innovation in communication or

known as the movable-type printing press. With this new innovation, the world's first newspaper emerged in 1609 at the north Germany. The innovation in communication was developed continually until it generated to the birth of radio in the 19th century. Many scientists and engineers contributed to the development of wireless communication, and in 1895 the Italian physicist Guglielmo Marconi (1874–1947) made the first radio transmission. In 1907, De Forest had invented a three electrode vacuum tube which boosted the radio waves which allowed any broadcast signal to be heard sound and clear. On January 12th



1910, it was regarded as the birth of radio when using wireless telephony's De Forest sent a signal from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York to listener up to 50 miles away. A few months later, the world's first radio station or known as KCBS emerged in San Francisco, United State. In the late 1920's onward, it was widespread quickly in popularity (Donald & Susan, 2015).

In the early the 20th century, radio had become most popular in Europe and America. However, it was gradually diminished when a new medium emerged. That new medium was known as television. Many communication researchers claim that TV made a greater impact on life than any other medium. It started out in 1925, in the attic workshop of a Scottish inventor called John Logie Baird (1888–1946). In 1926, Baird made the first television transmission, but his mechanical system was overtaken in 1929 when an American inventor, Vladimir Zworykin (1889–1982), built the first electronic television. In the 1930s, a number of experimental broadcast stations began producing some special television programming. In the 1950's, television replaced radio as the dominant broadcast medium and took over home entertainment. In the same decade, it was revealed that Arthur C. Clark, a science-fiction writer, imagined a communication system to be implemented in space. Many scientists worked on his ideas to develop advanced communication technology and, soon, satellite communication was born. It was revealed that SPUTNIK of the USSR was launched to become the world's first satellite in 1957 and was followed by the first USA's first satellite, Explorer I, in 1958. Satellite communication has been developing continuously and plays a very important role in world-wide telecommunications (Smith, 2015; The History of Mass Media, 2015)

After the world had witnessed the dawn of satellite communications, a new media began to emerge—that is internet: a worldwide network of millions of computers. The Internet started life in 1969 as a top-secret military project, developed in the United States. The project's aim was to create a secure computer network that could survive damage to part of its systems. In the 1980's, the Internet was established as an effective way for academics to share knowledge, and by the early 1990's, the general public was using it for education, entertainment, and business. A few years later, the number of people using the Internet, throughout the world, was growing by about one million each month (Schrank, 1994; Balley, 2009).

Based on the review of reference materials, the developmental periods of the world's mass media are indicated. Nevertheless, regarding this part of the hemisphere, it was revealed that the developmental periods of Thai mass media was rather different when compared with the developmental periods of the world's mass media. That is, worldwide, the newspaper was the first medium emerging in 1609, followed by radio in 1910, television in 1926, satellite television in 1957 and internet in 1969 while, in Thailand, the newspaper first emerged in 1844, followed by radio in 1930, television in 1950, internet in 1987 and satellite television in 1993. That is, the journey time of newspaper from the world to Thailand spent approximately 235 years, followed by satellite television in around 30 years, television and internet 24 years and radio 20 years. Hence, the researcher needs to consider whether the developmental periods of mass media from the central region into other regions of Thailand was likely to be different or not.

According to the topography of Thailand, the northeast region was located on Khorat Plateau; set away from the rest of Thailand by the Phetchabun rang; by the smaller ranges of Dong Phrayayen and



Sankamphaeng and from Cambodia by the Phanom Dong Rak. It was regarded as the biggest and most populous region of the country (National Statistic Office Thailand, 2015). It has generally been considered as a problem area of Thailand with low per capita income, environmental degradation and controversial politics. It also included a multiplicity of tribes and groups of different origins, languages and habits. Ethnological studies claimed that the 'So', also known as Thai-So ethnic group had continued to use their own language to communicate within their family and community. Their animistic beliefs had been strictly practiced and passed on from generation to generation. Moreover, those studies further outlined their unique characteristics. Namely; they had always isolated themselves from other ethnic groups. Their ways of life were easy going and simple. As a result, the anthropological researchers identified that their ways of life were changed less than those of other ethnic groups while there were some Thai-So communities that continued to be closed societies (Prince Kromphraya Damrong, 1995; Seidenfaden, 1943; Kania & Kania, 1979; Varangrat, 1981; Supon, 1990; Somboonprom, 1996; Schliesinger, 2000; Burasit, 2009). Consequently, within the unique characteristics of the northeast region and the Thai-So ethnic group, the researcher further presumed that the developmental periods of mass media from the central region, to northeast region and to the Thai-So community of Kusuman district were different. In order to the overview of the developmental periods of mass media, the study aimed to achieve the following objective.

The Objective of the Study

To investigate the developmental periods of mass media from the central region, to the northeast region, and to the Thai-So community of Kusuman district.

Methodology

The qualitative method was used for testing the above objective of the study. Four issues—area of study, sample, instrument and procedure, and data analysis—are broadly explained here.

1. Area of Study

Burasit (2009) stated that the Thai-So ethnic group was settled in several provinces of northeastern Thailand from Mukdahan to Nakon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, Nong Khai and Kalasin. The researcher reviewed both primary and secondary data that indicated Kusuman district to be an area in Thailand where Thai-So people could be found in significant numbers. Also, the Cultural Center of Sakhon Nakhon and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2013) considered this place to be an historical site of the Thai-So Ethnic group in Thailand (Kania & Kania, 1979; Prince Kromphraya Damrong, 1995; Schliesinger, 2000). Most importantly, the researcher herself conducted the survey, along with the Kusuman Mayor and government officials. It was found that almost 80 per cent of the villagers living in Kusuman district have remained as part of the Thai-So ethnic group, used 'So' language for communicating within their communities and their families, and passed on their culture from generation to generation. Therefore, this area was regarded as being representative of, and reflecting, the media development in the Thai-So ethnic group.



2. Participants

A purposive sampling technique was used for seeking key informants who could explain the media development in the northeast region and the Kusuman district of the Thai-So ethnic group. In this study, 35 key informants were classified into two groups as follows.

2.1 The Northeast Region of Thailand

According to Table 1, key informants comprises of 17 persons—that is three senior broadcast specialists of the Government Public Relations, one Director of Radio Thailand Network for Education, two voice actors in the northeast region, two newspaper distributors of Thai Rath, Daily News and Naew Nah, three reporters of Thai Rath in the northeast region, two reporters of Daily News, Dao Siam and Naew Nah in the northeast region and three satellite dish retailers in Nakhon Ratchasima, Khonkaen and Udon Thani and two executives of the computer center of Khon Kaen University. Those people were selected because they have been involved with mass media for more than forty-five years. The information gained by these interviews was quite valid and reliable resulting in maximizing the chances of uncovering insights into the overall picture of the context of media in the northeast region of Thailand.

2.2 Kusuman District

The second group was 18 key informants in Kusuman district comprising of one monk, two spiritual leaders, three local scholars, three village elders, one heads of district, and eight villagers (see in Table 2, page 20). These people were chosen as Thai-So people who were living the areas of the study for at least 25 years. Therefore, they were able to provide information regarding the history of the Thai-So villages and the context of media within those villages.

3. Instruments and Procedures

Documentary research, semi-structured interviews, and in-depth interviews were designed to seek the data concerning the development of mass media in the central region, northeast region and the Thai-So community of Kusuman district. The interviews took place during 2012–2013. Participants were interviewed in person by the primary researcher using a variety of questions. The interviewer was able to adjust the questions according to the interviewee response and was able to offer probing and follow-up questions in order to stimulate the interviewee's responses. The interview time was between 45 minutes and 2 hours. Each participant could choose the location for conducting the interviews. All interviews were audio-taped, the resulting material then used to generate transcripts. After the interview concluded, an incentive in the form of a gift was given to all participants in recognition of their participation.

4. Data Analysis

All raw materials were analyzed through a 3-step process of (1) decontextualization (identifying and coding segments or units of meaning in the data), (2) subsequent recontextualization (categorizing and thematically assembling a segment with other segments that deal with the same topic), and (3) synthesis.

Results

Based on the content analysis, it was indicated that the developmental periods of mass media from the central region, to the northeast region, and to the Thai-So community of Kusuman were clearly different. In order to understand the differences, the description of mass media development will begin in the central region, followed by the northeast region, and finally the Thai-So community of Kusuman as follows:



1. Media Development in the Central Region

1.1 Before the Siamese Revolution, the period between 1283–1931, referring back into the history of Thailand, the Thai alphabet, invented by King Ramkhamhaeng in 1283, was regarded as the first communication media of Thailand that was used and developed continuously throughout the Sukhothai period, the Ayutthaya period, and Rattanakosin period. During the third reign of the Rattanakosin period, it was revealed that western influence increasingly spread into Siam along with the setup of a printing press, using Thai script, in 1832. It was used to publish 9,000 copies of a royal decree banning opium consumption, which was the first official document printed and produced by the new printing technology (Ekachai, 2000). On 4 July 1844, during the reign of King Mongkut, Dr. Dan Bradley, an American Medical Missionary, published Thailand's first newspaper known as the Bangkok Recorder. The bulk of its content related to official news, trade news, miscellaneous stories, documentaries, and news from the United States. After the printing press, newspaper became widespread, especially in the central region. King Prachadhipok realized that freedom of expression and the introduction of democracy, for Thai people, were important. As a consequence, public radio broadcasts were inaugurated on 25th February 1930, the Coronation Day of the seventh King. Its initial mission was to provide news relating to commerce, entertainment, and education for tradesmen and commoners. Nevertheless, the Khana Ratsadon coup d'état of June 24, 1932 ended the absolute monarchy and halted press freedom (Padmatin, 1984).

1.2 After the Siamese Revolution (1932–1939), the country's administrative system changed from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy with the king as head of state. It was reported that the country

encountered a lot of tumultuous events—that is the political movements of the upper class and conservationists, the serious conflict among military and civilian members of the People Party, the house dissolution of Phraya Manopakorn Nitithada, the coup of Phraya Pholphayuhasana, the Bovorndej royalists rebellion, the abdication of King Prajadhipok and the spread of Japan's influence in Southeast Asia. Besides, there were the rumors, in the remote areas, that Constitution was the name of a son of Phraya Phahon Pholphayuhasana. All of these events greatly affected the security and survival of the People Party. Consequently, it was not surprising that the Publicity Division was set up on 3 May 1933, and tasked with these significant missions—to distribute democracy ideology, to create confidence in the government and to achieve awareness among the people of the new society that had taken the place of the absolute monarchy. It also included publicizing official and general news, propagating a good image of the country, rectifying misunderstandings from both within and outside of the country, providing general knowledge, and promoting Thai culture. Over a short period of time, the Publicity division evolved into the Publicity Office, the Publicity Department, and then the Public Relations Department respectively (Ekachai, 2000)

1.3 In the War Period (1940–1960), the systematic use of broadcast media, to publicize politics, began during the period of the Second World War and was led by Field Marshal Pibul Songkharm. It was found that radio had played a most significant role in distributing news to the general public during the wartime period. Unfortunately, most of the political media messages propagandized the slogans of nation building and its leader cult such as 'Believe in the leader and the nation will be saved from danger' and



'Have faith in Pibul Songkharm, the nation will survive'. As for culture, new trends were promoted to present Thailand as a country that was modernizing. A set of twelve cultural mandates were launched including knowing the national anthem, speaking the national language, dressing in a western fashion and so forth (Public Relations Department, 2015).

After the end of the Second World War, Television broadcasting, one of the most powerful media was introduced and affirmed on the national agenda in 1950 by the regime of Field Marshal Pibul Songkharm. The political situation became the significant factor that made television broadcasting technology become more meaningful for the Thai government. During that time, the government was unstable due to the inception of authority under the backup of a coup d'état, which caused considerable resistance from the opposition. Furthermore, the government was unable to control the press. Television, a new medium, played the crucial role in supporting the political status of Field Marshal Pibul Songkharm. However, his political power was ended when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat led a revolt on September 17, 1957 (Somkiat, 2003; Sittirak, 1990).

1.4 In the national development period (1961–1972), a gloomy age for Thai Mass Media began when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat declared martial law, suspended the constitution, and imposed press controls. Regrettably, fourteen newspapers were closed down due to extreme criticism from the Revolutionary Party. The authorities arrested hundreds of opposition politicians and journalists who were thought likely to be involved with communists. Article 17 of the 1959 Constitution authorized the prime minister to repress and suppress mass media under the discourse that it jeopardized national security. Sittirak (1990) further explained that Field Marshal Sarit

Thanarat realized that television broadcasts played the significant role in publicizing the government's policies and current affairs to the public. Also, Channel 4 'Bang Kun Phrom', established on 24 June 1955 was attracting more and more interest. Because of this, the Royal Thai Army launched Thailand's second television station, Channel 5, on Thai Army Day, 5th January 1959 and expanded Radio and Television networks to all regions in line with the accelerated development programs for the country (Ekachai, 2000).

After Sarit's death in late 1963, his successor Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn still continued the military dictatorship (Boonyaketmala, 1982). During that time, television broadcasting entered the business sector under the new policies of the privileged private concession. Channel 7, owned by the Krungthep Witayulae Thoratat of the Kanasut family, received a 56-year concession from the Royal Thai Army (1967–2023), due to their military friends. A few years later, Channel 3, owned by Bangkok Entertainment Corporation (BEC) of the Malinon family, received a 50-year concession (1970–2020) from the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand (MCOT), through a close friend, Field Marshal Sarit's brother. That is to say private concessions were given to a limited number of private operators due to a privileged patronage relationship (Siriyausak, 2006). Consequently, it is not surprising that the state and a handful of media corporations monopolized the channels, the rights, freedom of information and communication.

1.5 In the democracy movement period (1973–1992), the communication media, especially newspapers, once more obtained the Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Expression after the end of the Student Revolution of 14 October 1973. Nevertheless, its full freedom ended when the military sized power



on 6 October 1976. Under the changing political context, television broadcasting was regarded as the crucial variable of national development. Namely, on 9th April 1977, Channel 9 was established with the goal of disseminating news and information, fostering greater understanding among citizens and contributing to national development. In mid-1987, the Internet in Thailand appeared, when the Prince of Songkla University and the Asian Institute of Technology started the Thai computer Science Network (TCSNet) via an electronic mail connection with the University of Melbourne, but it was not widespread among the Thai public due to the limitations of the telecommunication infrastructure (Ekachai, 2000).

Although the internet had arrived in Thailand, television still remained popular in Thai society. The 1980s were regarded as the turning point of the television industry when the Thai government opened the gateway to media investment. New television services—such as Cable Television—emerged as a new innovation of telecommunication. In the 1990s, Thai people witnessed the dawn of the next stage of communication technology—that is Satellite Television or Direct Broadcast Satellites (DBS). In 1991, the Shinawatra Computer and Communications Company received a concession to launch the THAICOM Satellite Project. The first two satellites, THAICOM 1 and THAICOM 2, were launched into geo-stationary orbit in December 1993 and October 1994 respectively. The targeted consumers for Satellite Television focused on high income and well-educated people, due to the high price of a Satellite Dish which was approximately 10,000–20,000 Baht. Nevertheless, it was found that satellite dish prices were likely to go down due to more operators entering the market. Hence, as the researcher, I predict that satellite television may play the significant role in the

future (Executive Summary A CASBAA Markrt Report, 2015)

1.6 In the media reform period (1993–2014), although Cable and Satellite television were likely to boom, communication technology has developed rapidly until reaching a point of integration with computing, telecommunication and broadcast media resulting in a single digital environment. After the Bloody Crisis of May 17–18, 1992, the struggle for Freedom of the Press and the Right of people to know emerged among the Thai middle classes. The voice for media reform from both public and media sectors became louder and louder until it eventually generated the establishment of Independent Television (iTV) in 1996 and the guarantee of Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Press in the Constitution of 1997. In a period with a more liberal climate, there was a good opportunity for broadcasting journalists and academics to push for the autonomy of the state media. Nevertheless, the deterioration of Thai mass media has increased rapidly and drastically from the first election of the Thaksin government, to today.

Even though the Thaksin government was overthrown, by the army, on 19 September 2006, due to claims of rampant corruption, abuse of power, media interference, and non-government organization interference, Thai mass media has been interfered with continuously and drastically by a further four governments in the context of the division of political viewpoint, that is those who supported and those who opposed the Former Prime Minister Thaksin and his government. Under the deterioration of major Thai mass media, the emergence of new forms of media technology—such as teleconference, office personal communication, laptop computers, internet, MP3 technology, Apple's iPod, DVD media player, smart



watch, tablet, Google glass—became the five basic needs of Thai people.

2. Media Development in the Northeast Region

2.1 The development of modern communication media in the Central Thailand had begun to emerge in the Northeast Region prior to the Siamese Revolution of 1932. Under the pressure and stimulus of Western Colonization and the Franco-Siamese treaties of 1893 and 1904, King Chulalongkorn, Rama Five of the Chakri Dynasty, reformed the bureaucracy and provincial administrative system to be based on the concepts of the West and new technology, which linked, by modern communications and transportation networks, to the Northeast Region. The Post and Telegraph Services, a new and modern form of communication, was inaugurated officially at Nakhon Ratchasima in 1883. Concurrently, the construction of the first railway link to Nakhon Ratchasima was completed in 1900, followed by links to Ubon Ratchathani in 1926, Khon Kaen in 1933, and Nong Khai in 1955 (Keyes, 1967).

Although the modern media – such as Post and Telegraph Services—journeyed into this region, it was concentrated in particular at the government officers. Meanwhile, the majority of the northerner's communication was still tied with the oral tradition that conveyed their ideology and social value system by the use of proverbs, tales, stories, lullaby songs, festivities, rituals and celebrations. It also embraced teaching through daily life situations, such as weaving cloth, making handicrafts, and so forth. Besides, the scriptural tradition—palm leaf and stone inscriptions—had played the significant role in conveying Tripitaka, local stories, and important events since the Great Khmer Empire, during, approximately the 10th–13th Century. Seri and Kavin (1990) reported that there were two traditional scripts in this region: Tham and Khom. The Tham script was

developed from the ancient Mon script. It was used only in the inscriptions of Buddhist texts. Meanwhile, the Khom script, derived from the ancient Khmer script, conveyed the local stories through stone inscriptions.

After the end of the Great Khmer Empire in the 13th century, the Kingdom of Sukhothai spread its influence into the northeast region along with the diffusion of Sukhothai script, also known as ancient Thai script. In 1295, Sukhothai script became the role model of the Thainoi script. It was used in administrative texts and secular literatures. Henceforth, it became the main script for conveying local stories and important events in a pattern of literature, through historically important persons and historical-based events. It was fair to say that the development of the northerner's communication was not merely a matter of facts but was the spirit of their ancestors and was handed on to their children from generation to generation. Unfortunately, in 1921, when Compulsory Education arrived in the region, Thai script gradually replaced the traditional script, along with the spread of the knowledge of the culture and history of Siam, whose center was in Bangkok (A. personal communication, January 10, 2012; I., personal communication, February 5, 2013).

2.2 After the Siamese Revolution (1932–1939), the government, led by the People Party, attempted to disseminate knowledge and understanding about democracy through a wide variety of medium such as microphones, gramophones, images of the constitution, and mobile public relations units. Its main task was to reduce the lack of information in the remote areas, especially the Northeast Region, which was the first model of the operation owing to the Bovorndej royalist's rebellion on 12 October 1933. The Public Relations unit started in Khon Kaen, and moved on to Udon Thani, Nong Khai, Rot Et,



Maharakham, Ubon Ratchathani, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, Loei, Sisaket, Surin, and Buriram. According to Public Relation Department (2015), Professor Pairoj Jayanama, Chief of the Publicity Division (1943–1947), stated that,

“...During that time, we aimed to travel to all districts and reach all major sub-districts. It was hardly possible because not only was it quite harsh to travel to the Northeast, there was also very hot weather. In some places, we had to go on horseback or by ox-drawn carts...”

Although the news transmitted by the Public Relations Unit could reach the northeasterners in some places, most of them were still exposed to information that came from opinion leaders, such as heads of villages, monks and chief cattle sellers known as Nai Hoy. Similarly, B. (personal communication, 16–30 October, 2012), as a Senior Media Specialists of the Government Public Relations, said that,

“...We gain information from monks who study in Bangkok. When those monks come back to their hometown, people living in surrounding areas will be going to visit monks in order to talk to and ask what we would like to know about Bangkok and the current issues of country. At the same time, the monks conveyed the experiences to us. For example, the Bangkokians are interested in new medium or called radio because its information transmission is faster than other media...”

“...It was fair to say that, during that time, the Bangkokians began to expose the news information through media while I, as a northeastern, had never known what radio is. Soon, we heard that we would listen to the people’s sound from a box. A few years later, it became true; we see and listen to the radio at the house of the district chief officer...”

Moreover, they gave an example through their experiences. Namely, they received information about further education from monks. After they finished Secondary School, they journeyed to study at Pathumwan Institute of technology and other colleges at Bangkok. On the journey, they got on a train from Khon Kaen to Nakhon Ratchasima and from Nakhon Ratchasima to Bangkok, it took approximately 2 days (M., personal communication, March 16, 2013; W., personal communication, July 10, 2013) .

2.3 In the war period (1940–1960), according to the Publicity Newsletter issue 10, fifth year, 1942, the messages entitled Radio Broadcasting, Working, and Taking Orders dated 27 October 1942. Field Marshal Pibul Songkharm announced that

“...Radio is the most important medium for the country in crisis. In wartime, all of us in the nation could only follow the news and perform according to orders, in harmony, only through radio. Consequently, those who do not listen to radio, are shut off ideologically and refuse to communicate, to work in harmony, as a nation...”

From this announcement, radio receivers appeared in the Northeast Region, but they were in particular for the use of governor, district chief officer and schools in some provinces. Radio waves were transmitted from Ayutthaya to Saraburi and from Saraburi to the Northeast Region. The majority of programming was national news aired by the National Broadcasting Service of Thailand. C. (personal communication, November 20, 2012), as a Senior media specialists of the Government Public Relations, mentioned that,

“...If the northeasterners would like to listen to music, they should use a gramophone record. The majority of the music was more modern classical



songs than folk songs. As for print media, daily newspapers penetrated in to the Northeast Region prior to the revolution on September 7, 1957...”

2.4 In the national development period (1961–1972) led by the military government was the turning point for media exposure in major Thai mass media. It was revealed that radio was the most popular in the Northeast Region, followed by newspapers. J. (personal communication, February 20, 2013), as a reporter of Thai Rath in the northeast region of Thailand, said that,

“...Daily newspapers were first transported from Bangkok to the Northeast Region by train in 1960. After the Friendship Highway road was finished, the newspapers were transported by ten-wheeled trucks. Thai Rath was the most popular, followed by Siam Rath, Daily News and Ban Muang respectively. A Newspaper cost approximately one baht fifty satang. The majority of media content consisted of crime, sex, scandal and sport along with summaries of popular news, semi-nude pictures and entertainment news. Political news was hardly reported to the general public. This was the result of Article 17 of the 1959 Constitution that authorized the prime minister to repress and suppress mass media under the discourse that it jeopardized national security. It was found that government officials, teachers, merchants, Kamnan and Puyaiban were likely to access the newspaper to a greater extent than the general public in the remote areas...”

Additionally, the number of radio receivers was increasing continually after the expansion of the television and radio network. It was found that the radio was introduced into the villages together with mobile cinema known as Rot Kai Ya. Radio's cost approximately 50–60 baht. The northeasterners could listen to both national and

international radio stations. There were four main radio stations in Thailand being the National Broadcast Service of the Government Public Relations Department (PRD), Radio of the Royal Thai Army, Radio Broadcast Station 1, Po No of the Post and Telegraph Department, and the KU Radio Network of Kasetsart University. On the other hand, international radio stations—namely Moscow Radio, Peking Radio, Radio Hanoi, VOT, ABC, BBC, FEBC, Free Asia Radio Station, Laos Movement Radio, Radio of Kampuchea Radio and Voice of America—had been popular among the educated elite. This is because the military government presented only one sided messages regarding anti-communism through the national radio, especially the Radio Broadcasting Station 909 at Sakon Nakhon (; E. personal communication, February 3, 2013; K. personal communication; February 25, 2013).

In 1962, the television network was expanded to all regions of the country. Black and white television sets came to the Northeast Region through Chinese merchants. Very few people owned a television set because of the very high price, approximately 10,000 baht. In the Northeast Region, there was only TVT Channel 5, Khon Kaen. All of the programming was live and focused on entertainment programming such as Seeking Stars (Kon-Hah-Dow). Television programming would be aired during 18:00–21:00. A few years later, television programming changed from being live to being recorded. It was found that the most popular programming was local serial drama, Mohlam, boxing and movies from the United States, Japan and Hong Kong and also cartoons. After that, television stations increased the period of broadcast time, from 18:00–21:00 to 18:00–24:00 (A. personal communication, January 10, 2012; Z., personal communication,



August 6, 2013; N. personal communication, October 1, 2013).

2.5 In the period of the democracy movement (1973–1992), the media coverage in newspapers was more credible while the broadcast media – such as radio and television – were still a crucial mechanism of the government to publicize government policies. It was found that more than 90 percent of northeasterners could access the radio, followed by newspapers and television. F. (personal communication, April 28, 2013), as a voice actor in the northeast region, said that,

“...The Mobile Cinema was gradually vanishing in the Northeast Region due to the emergence of television. Radio programs still consisted of entertainment, government lottery, local news, national news, international news, sports news, religious and educational programs and agricultural features. After the end of the Student Revolution of October 14, 1973, television channel 7 was the first channel penetrating into the Northeast Region, followed by channel 5, channel 9 and channel 3 respectively. Since the massacre of 6 October 1976, television has succeeded, in a relatively short time, to enter every household. Its powers of persuasion and attraction seem to be supernatural. In 1981, color television came to the Northeast Region along with transistor radio...”

Approximately ten years later, computers and cable television emerged, in particular with the centralization of government officials and business men. The Internet came in 1997. Educated people – namely government officials, teachers, students and business men – were the first group to use computers and the Internet (D. personal communication,

December 25, 2012; X., personal communication, July 18, 2013)

2.6 In the media reform (1993–2014), after the end of the Bloody Crisis of May 17–18, 1992, the emergence of new forms of media technology – such as communication satellite, office personal computers, laptop computers, MP3 technology, Apple’s iPod, DVD media players and all forms of digital media – allow the northeasterners to access a wide variety of media content and media outlets. W. (personal communication, July 10, 2013), as an executives’ the computer center of Khon Kaen University, narrated that

“...In 1997, the internet began to spread in the group of the government officials, teacher and student in the northeast region while many people did not know what the internet was. This was because the price was rather expensive and was difficult to use...”

Three years later, the satellite television came to the urban areas of the northeast region. Nowadays, internet was the most popular because the government’s support for expand ICT infrastructure has enabled broader internet penetration and cheaper access information. Besides, satellite television was a popular as internet because they could watch various television channels, from both national and international stations. Most importantly, its price was not expensive and was easy to use (R., personal communication, November 11, 2013; P. personal communication, July 16, 2013).

3. Media development in the Thai–So community of Kusuman district

3.1 Before and 3.2 after the Siamese Revolution (1283–1939), the findings showed that the oral tradition was the most important channel for transmitting their ways of life, ideology and social



value system in the form of proverbs, tales, stories, festivals, ritual and beliefs. Especially, information regarding historically important people and historically-based events were passed on through this channel. A. (personal communication, October 20, 2012) and C. (personal communication, June 2, 2013) narrated an example of a historically important person and event:

“...During the reign of King Rama III, the So people led by Pra Aran Ahsah moved from Tapon and Sapon towns, Thakhek district of Khammuan province to the large inland lake at Nong Han in Sakhon Nakhon province. After the So people settled down in Kusuman district. Pra Aran Ahsah was conferred as the city ruler of Kusuman district in 1844. He was famous as a magician. It was said that he could journey from Kusuman district to Bangkok in approximately 30 minutes, upon his white horse. In fact, this was impossible because the journey from Kusuman district to Bangkok would take approximately 7–10 days...”

“...As for the historically-based events, it was found that there was one event, passed on from generation to generation – that was ‘Boxing.’ In this case, it was not a sport but a magic contest that was organized three times per year. The contest was only for members of the Thai-So ethnic group. Mostly, the players were men who had the ability to perform witchcraft. To begin, the players would sit in a circle. People playing a musical instrument known as a ‘Kan’ (a kind of reed mouth-organ commonly used in northeastern Thailand) would walk around them while the players prayed for magic. After a few minutes, some players would have blood running from their mouth. This implied that they had surrendered. The contest continued until only one remained in the

contest. The last man would be described as ‘a courageous magician.’”

Moreover, teaching about daily life and making a living had been conveyed through oral communication, so it was not surprising that the following questions were brought up among their conversations. For example; where could animals be found? Where are the fishing spots located? Where are the rivers or swamps? Which plants can we eat? (H., personal communication, July 12, 2013; E., personal communication, June 16, 2013)

3.3 In the war period (1940–1960), after the end of the Second World War in 1945, radio spread into the Kusuman district, arriving in 1947 at the Kusuman School. M. (personal communication, June 10, 2013) and L. (personal communication, November 15, 2013) had direct experience of listening to the radio during the Second World War. In this section, the interviewees’ interview is presented as follows:

“...The headmaster was the owner of the radio and in a couple of days, the advent of radio became big news within the district. The Thai-So people converged upon the headmaster’s house. During that time, the radio was considered to be most interesting owing to it being unusual. While the Thai-So were listening to the radio, many questions emerged; for example, what is it? How can people’s voices transmit through the box? Where are the people who are speaking?...”

Although radio came to Kusuman district, it was concentrated in particular groups of government officials, merchant and outsiders. During that time, the majority of villagers received the news information from their head of village. Traditionally, the head of village transmitted news information by hitting a bamboo canteen as the signal for the start of a



meeting. The sound of the signal could be heard approximately 7–10 kilometers away. When the Thai–So people heard it, they knew immediately that there was to be a meeting. After the end of their evening meal, they would walk to their leader’s house to listen to the news and information that their head of village received from the local government or sub-district headman F. (personal communication, June 25, 2013) attempted to describe the head of village announcing to the Thai–So people:

“...We would have dinner before sunset. Bonfires were put out. Everyone had to sleep in a tree as they were not permitted to sleep in the house...”

3.4 In the national development period (1960–1972), the findings revealed that the Thai–So people were likely to access the radio even more. It had achieved widespread popularity, not only in Kusuman district, but also in the peripheral villages. Because of this, it reached out to every age group and gave birth to two new stations being the Radio Broadcast Station 909 of Sakhon Nakhon and the radio Broadcast Station Kor Wor Sor 3 of the Royal Thai Army. Also, there were many programs such as news, panel discussions, dramas, I–san traditional songs and weather forecasts. Nevertheless, the radio drama was the most popular program during that time. At the same time, it was revealed about mobile cinema. B. (personal communication, April 28, 2013) and I., (personal communication, July 18, 2013) narrated that:

“...whenever we knew the mobile cinema would be travelling into Kusuman district, we were all happy, especially the Thai–So children, who would play around the car used for carrying the medicine. After the sun gradually drifted below the horizon and the evening meal ended, they would go, one by one, to

sit on a mat in front of the big movie screen. We were excited while watching our favorite actors and actresses in the movies. After the end of one spool of film, commercials were played until a certain amount of medicine had been sold...”

While the radio and mobile cinema were well-liked, television emerged in 1970. Its arrival became big news and aroused great interest among the Thai–So people. However, it did not spread greatly, due to its high price. It was also limited because the televisions used battery–power and the villagers could only receive TVT channel 5, from, Khon Kaen province. Mostly, it would be found in the temple, at the houses of government officers and at the village shop (Q., personal communication, December 9, 2013; R. personal communication, December 22, 2013).

3.5 In the democracy movement period (1973–1992), the findings reported that newspaper came to Kusuman district in 1974, being read, in particular, by teachers, policemen, the postman, soldiers, merchants and outsiders. The Thai–So people hardly looked at them at all as many did not know what a newspaper was. This was the result of limited literacy and reading skills. As a matter of fact, they had obtained the opportunity to study and avoid low literacy, but their ways of life; such as occupation, language and so on, seemed to be a barrier that restricted the development of their learning. After they graduated from compulsory primary school, it was found that some of them could still not read and write or even communicate with government officials. In addition, they hardly kept up with the current issues and events of the outside world. These phenomena emerged not only within the Kusuman district but also in all of the remote areas of Thailand. In 1989, the Ministry of Education launched a policy entitled



'Public Newspaper' aimed to cultivate a reading habit (N. personal communication, November 5, 2013; K., personal communication, July 25, 2013).

Although the newspapers came to Kusuman district, they were not as popular as radio and mobile cinema. That is to say that this period was their golden age, especially radio. J. (personal communication, July 19, 2013) stated that:

"...Its sound, especially Mohlam, was everywhere in the paddy fields, in the season of transplanting rice seedlings. The majority of the Thai-So men, who raised animals in the forest, carried the radio receiver on their shoulder. While they brought animals to eat grass, they listened to Mohlam songs. Moreover, after the end of the evening meal, the villagers would listen to the soap opera. It began at approximately 20.00-22.00 o'clock. They paid attention to the dialogue between the main actress and actor. They were very happy because it helped them relax after working throughout the day..."

3.6 In the media reform period (1993-2014), it was reported that no other medium could possibly compete with television in Kusuman district. Although television was not widespread in the early period, it was very popular among the Thai-So people. This was because it was a new type of entertainment where they could not only hear the sound, but could see images as well. Interestingly, this was when the culture of watching television emerged. P., personal communication, December 7, 2013) described the culture of watching as follows:

"...Those who wanted to watch television had to pay either money or in-kind to the television owner, 'in-kind' being such things as, illicit liquor, frogs, cigarettes etc., which could be used as the 'ticket' for watching television. These types of events would normally take place at the local shop. However,

there was 'a free of charge' way of watching television, at the temple or at the houses of the government officials..."

As for the programs, it was found that the most popular programs were movies or plays based on traditional and local stories, mythology and tales, all of which were well-known to the Thai-So people. In the late 1980s, electricity began to become widespread in the peripheral villages of Kusuman district along with the arrival of Channel 7, Channel 3, and Channel 11. It was reported that the number of televisions increased rapidly during this time. This was because the Thai-So people did not only want electricity for lighting, but especially for television and some programs just could not be missed. In the 1990s, there were no villages without television and from that time up to the present, television has become the most popular media entertainment network with the Thai-So people (D., personal communication, June 15, 2013).

Besides, non-traditional media—such as internet and satellite television—journeyed into Kusuman; in 2005 and 2006 respectively. Internet had been brought into Kusuman district as a result of a government policy. It also included the government officer's interest in Kusuman district. At present, Thai-So teenagers, and those who are less than 25 years old, are interested because they have the opportunity to study how to use the internet in their school. Moreover, the frequency of internet use was likely to be increased because of the spread of internet café and Wi-Fi in the public areas such as at temples and schools. Besides, the Thai-So people began to see and know satellite television after the coup that ousted the Thaksin government on September 19, 2006. Nevertheless, it was not popular because of the satellite dish installation cost. Also, they had still preferred their entertainment programs from free television,



especially Thai drama (O., personal communication, November 11, 2013)

Conclusion and Discussion

The goal of this study understood the overview of developmental periods of mass media in the levels of nation, region and community. The development of mass media could be studied through six periods, basing on the historical events of country. The findings pointed out that the development of mass media in the central region, northeast region and the Thai-So community of Kusuman district was indeed different, which was congruent with the research presumption. In order to understand the differences of the media development, the findings would be compared along with discussion. Besides, further analysis showed that the driving forces leading to the arrival of each medium were different; as a consequence, it is discussed here.

1. The Comparison in the Developmental Periods of Mass Media between the Central Region and Northeast Region

Long before and after the Siamese revolution, people in the central region of the country were exposed to information from both newspaper and radio broadcast while the northeasterners hardly obtained any information from outside due to geographical limitations. In the war period (1940–1960), radio broadcast was mostly popular among people in the central region while radio had just become available in the northeast region. It was revealed that radio was in particular found at the governor's house, district chief officer's house and schools in the province. Because of this, it is believed that a great number of the northeasterners, in the remote areas, did not know what radio was. In the national development period

(1961–1972), television played a significant role and was mostly popular. Meanwhile, all sectors of Thailand, especially northeasterners began to own radios. They also were aware of television broadcasts. In the democracy movement period (1973–1992), it was shown that people in the central region were highly likely to have Satellite Television, Cable Television, Computers and Internet whereas television was mostly popular among the northeasterners. In the media reform period (1993–2014), that is to say, the dawn of the digital world, very few people in the central region did not know of computers and the internet. Although the journey of all forms of digital media from the central to northeast region was faster, it was found that there were still some northeasterners who did not have access. However, at the present time, all Thai people have access to a wide variety of media outlets such as newspaper, television, radio, internet, satellite television, and cable television.

Analysis through the lens of time-line provides a bird's eye view of the developmental period of media. Moreover, the time period of each medium reflects a difference. That is, in 1844, the first newspaper in Thailand emerged in Bangkok while the northeasterners first began to see newspapers around 1960. Radio broadcasting was officially inaugurated in 1930; on the other hand, the northeasterners began to listen during 1940. As for television, the first television, Channel 4, Bang Khun Phrom appeared in 1955 whereas a television station with 6-kilowatt transmitter was set up in Khon Kaen in 1962. In mid-1991, the internet was used in the Universities in Bangkok while the northeasterners, especially the educated elite, only used the Internet from 1997. Finally, in 1993, satellite television began to proliferate in Bangkok whereas the northeasterners only received access in 1998. In other words, the



journey of the newspaper from the central to the Northeast Region took around 116 years, followed by radio broadcasts in around 10 years, television in around 7 years, the internet in around 6 years and satellite television in around 5 years.

Besides, the implication of this study pinpointed that the time scales for media developments, from the central to the northeast regions, are likely to continue to be reduced. Therefore, this research predicts that, in the future, the new form of digital media – such as smart phone, tablet, Google glass, ‘Smart watch’ and so on – will be proliferated into the northeast region rapidly until there are no differences between the arrival times.

2. The Comparison in the Developmental Periods of Mass Media between the Northeast Region and the Thai-So Community of Kusuman District

Long before and even after the Siamese Revolution, during the period 1283–1939, the mass media had not arrived in the northeast region. However, in the war period (1940–1960), the northeasterners began to be exposed to news information through the radio whereas the Thai-So people still received news information through the head of village as opinion leader. Also, their communication was still tied with the oral tradition, they had no scriptural tradition. Most of their stories related to historically important people and historically-based events. It also embraced the teaching of daily life skills. In the national development period (1961–1972), the majority of the northeasterners received television and began to own radios. Conversely, radio was widespread in Kusuman district. They were also in touch with new entertainment—the mobile cinema known as Roy Kai Ya and television. In the democracy movement period (1973–1992), television became the favorite media of the northeasterners whereas the radio was merely popular along with the arrivals of

newspapers. In the media reform period (1993–2014), the majority of northeasterners are highly likely to access the Internet and satellite television. Meanwhile, very few Thai-So people know what the Internet is. This is because using Internet requires skills and depends on economic status. However, satellite television began to spread within the Thai-So community of Kusuman district.

According to the analysis timeline of the developmental periods of mass media from the northeast region to the Thai-So community of Kusuman district, it could be summarized as follows. In 1940, the northeasterners were first touched by modern media – being radio broadcasts. On the other hand, in 1947, the radio had just arrived in Kusuman district. In 1960, the newspaper came to the Northeast Region whereas the Thai-So people became aware of it in 1974. In 1962, television broadcasting emerged in the Northeast Region while it reached Kusuman district in 1970. As for the Internet, it became available in the Northeast Region in 1997; on the other hand, the Kusuman hospital brought about the first use in 2005. Ultimately, satellite television was popular among the northeasterners in 1998 while the Thai-So people began to be aware of it in 2006. In short, the diffusion of satellite television from the northeast region to the Thai-So community of Kusuman district took around 6 years, followed by radio 7 years, television and internet 8 years and newspaper 14 years respectively.

Further analysis showed that mass media – such as radio, television, newspaper, satellite television, and internet—are diffused into the Thai-So community of Kusuman district, but very few people read newspapers and use internet. They prefer to be exposed to mass media that requires no skills. Therefore, it was not surprising that the arrivals of radio and television took place faster than other media.



Moreover, they still preferred to watch entertainment programs through free television to greater extent than from satellite television. As a result, this kind of media had not become widespread among the Thai-So people.

3. Driving Forces

Not only were the development times of mass media from the central region, the northeast region and the Thai-So community of Kusuman district clearly different, they also included the influence of driving forces. That is, in the central region, it was revealed that the western influence, during the reign of Rama III, was the driving force leading to the appearance of the first mass media-newspaper. The spread of democratic ideology within the world situation was the significant driver of the arrival of radio. Political conflict under the administration of Field Marshal Pibul Songkharm led to the emergence of television. Ultimately, the development of advanced communication technology, throughout the world, was the significant variable leading to the arrival of satellite television and internet. In the northeast region, the government policy was the main driving force behind the arrival of radio, television, newspaper and internet while the arrival of satellite television was the result of the development of advanced communication technology. In the Thai-So community of Kusuman district, government policy was the driver leading to the emergence of radio, television, newspaper and internet; on the other hand, political conflict, after the

coup on 19 September 2006, was the driving force heralding the arrival of satellite television.

Suggestion

Although the Thai-So people in the northeast region are likely to access and use a wide variety of media outlets, mass media has repeatedly conveyed misleading content. That is, the proportion of entertainment programming is likely to increase to a greater extent than news, knowledge, and commentary. The proliferation of urban-center consumer advertising and product placement in game shows, talk shows, music and sit-coms is likely to increase rapidly. Soap Operas have attempted to convey and reinforce the sense of virtual modernity through materialism such as mega-malls, cars, mobile phones and fashionable clothes. Therefore, there is a good opportunity, in the future, for the researcher to investigate the further effects of media use on the changing ways of life of the Thai-So ethnic group.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my sponsor, Royal Golden Jubilee, Ph.D. Program, for giving me a chance to pursue my study. Most importantly, I would like to extend my appreciation to my advisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sekson Yongvanit for his guidance and contributions to this article. I am indebted to Prof. Emeritus Dr. Nonglak Wiratchai for his constructive comments and recommendation.

**Table 1** The Data of Key Informants in the Northeast Region

Interviewees	Gender	Age	Social Status	Date of Interview
A.	Male	80	Senior Media Specialist of Government Public Relations	10 January 2012
B.	Male	76	Senior Media Specialist of Government Public Relations	16–30 October 2012
C.	Male	65	Senior Media Specialist of Government Public Relations	20 November 2012
D.	Male	58	The Director of Radio Thailand Network for Education	25 December 2012
E.	Male	56	Voice Actor in Northeast Region	3 February 2013
F.	Male	66	Voice Actor in Northeast Region	28 April 2013
I.	Male	80	Reporters of Thai Rath in the Northeast Region	5 February 2013
J.	Male	66	Reporters of Thai Rath in the Northeast Region	20 February 2013
K.	Male	68	Reporters of Thai Rath in the Northeast Region	25 February 2013
M.	Male	77	Reporters Daily News, Dao Siam and Naew Nah in the Northeast Region,	16 march 2013
P.	Male	42	Satellite dish retailers in NakhonRatchasrima	16 July 2013
R.	Male	51	Satellite dish retailers in Khonkaen	11 November 2013
T.	Male	45	Satellite dish retailers in Udon Thani	1 December 2013
W.	Male	62	Executives of the computer center of Khon Kaen University.	10 July 2013
X.	Male	55	Executives of the computer center of Khon Kaen University.	18 July 2013
Z.	Female	70	Newspaper distributors of Thai Rath, Daily News and Naew Nah	6 August 2013
N.	Male	63	Newspaper distributors of Thai Rath, Daily News and Naew Nah	1 October 2013

Table 2 The Data of Key Informants in the Thai-So Community of Kusuman District

Interviewees	Gender	Age	Social Status	Date of Interview
A.	Male	85	Monk	October 20 2012
B.	Male	50	Spiritual leader	April 28 2013
C.	Male	40	Local Scholar	June 2 2013
D.	Female	66	Local Scholar	June 15 2013
E.	Male	82	Village Elder	June 16 2013
F.	Female	79	Village Elder	June 25 2013
G.	Male	75	Village Elder	July 2 2013
H.	Male	53	Villager	July 12 2013
I.	Male	42	Villager	July 18 2013
J.	Male	50	Villager	July 19 2013
K.	Male	35	Villager	July 25 2013
L.	Male	60	Head of District	November 15 2013
M.	Male	66	Spiritual Leader	June 10 2013
N.	Female	32	Local Scholar	November 5 2013
O.	Male	50	Villager	November 11 2013
P.	Male	36	Villager	December 7 2013
Q.	Female	49	Villager	December 9 2013
R.	Male	30	Villager	December 22 2013



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