

**RADIO IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY:  
THE CASE OF MODERN THAILAND**

Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Leicester

by

Ubonrat Siriyuvasak  
Centre for Mass Communication Research  
University of Leicester

July 1989

### *Dedications*

For my Mum, whose precious consolation, "*take your time*", gave me strength

For my Sisters, whose correspondence and long distance squabbles brightened up the dreariness of solitude

For my Students, whose vitality and commitment is a constant inspiration

For my Friends and Colleagues, across three continents, whose affections and unfailing support saw me through some of the darkest moments

For all my Informants, whose contributions made the thesis possible and a real challenge

For my University, whose sponsorship provided for many years of modestly comfortable research career

For a superb Supervisor, whose uncanny generosity and insights turned this excruciating experience into an intellectual sojourn

For Critical Inquiries, whose power of conjoining theory and practice may assist in bringing about a just society

## RADIO IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY: THE CASE OF MODERN THAILAND

### *Abstract*

The thesis, *Radio in a Transitional Society: The Case of Modern Thailand*, is an exploratory study of radio in its total context. In arguing that it is the structure and process of the system of production, distribution and consumption of the media that reproduce social stratification and political legitimization we undertake four major areas of investigation; the structure of ownership and control of the Thai radio system which basically constrained the range and formats of output in this arena, the dynamics of the media institutions and cultural industries within which entrepreneurs and professionals struggle to achieve organisation goals and their '*relative autonomy*', the forms of representation - the '*serious genres*' of news and current affairs and official commentaries and religious programmes, and the '*popular genres*' of drama and music - through which ideological reproduction and contestation are played out, and lastly the active audience whom the state and the cultural industries must constantly negotiate for social integration and to fulfil their commercial goals.

The study shows that the role of radio in cultural and social reproduction is highly complicated and contentious. Without examining the total system in relation to the dynamics of the economy in general and the power hierarchy we would either fall into the reductionist camp or trap in the simplistic connection between control of material and mental production argued by proponents of the dominant ideology thesis. On the contrary, we have demonstrated that disruption is possible and the transmission of any '*preferred meaning*' must be negotiated. Although the notions of progress and salvation are predominant in the official programmes contestations from popular entertainment are manifested in presenting sensual pleasure as desirable whilst secularisation emerges. Nonetheless, in this dialectical relationship the arena of ideological struggle is delimited by the dynamics of the economy and political control. The thesis therefore, points the way to more detailed studies in the sociology of mass communications, particularly in the structure of ownership and control of the media industries as a whole and the tensions within them, and how alternative and oppositional discourses are curtailed, so as to better understand this complex process of representation, reproduction and contestation.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
1.1	The Media and Cultural Production: The Question of Social Stratification and Legitimation	1
1.2	An Exploratory Study of the Thai Radio System: A Critical and Holistic Approach	3
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Modern Thailand: Formation and Transformation</b>	
2.1	Introduction	6
2.2	The Social Formation Prior to the 1930s	6
2.3	Political Transformation and the Rise of Military Rule in the 1940s and 1950s	8
2.4	Modernisation and the Waves of Struggle in the 1960s and 1970s	9
2.5	Power Realignment and the Renewal of Traditional Institutions in the 1980s	13
2.6	A Chronology of Events, 1932-1985	16
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Dominant Ideologies in the Thai Society</b>	
3.1	Ideological Continuity in a Buddhist Polity	19
3.2	Nationalism and Militarism: Constituents of the Modern Thai State	26
3.3	Paternalism and the Emergence of Industrial Capitalism	34



<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Radio in Transition: The Structure and Dynamics of Political Ownership and Market Control</b>	
4.1	An Historical Outline of Radio Broadcasting in Thailand	39
4.2	The Structure and Dynamics of Political Ownership and Economic Control	45
4.3	Radio and the Contour of the Media Industry in Transition	53
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Producing News and Commentary in the Broadcasting Industry</b>	
5.1	The State and Media Production: Political Goals and Social Integration	68
5.2	The Production of News and Current Affairs: Organisation and Professional Ideology	74
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Producing Popular Culture in the Broadcasting Industry</b>	
6.1	Creative Communicators and Cultural Workers in the Production of Popular Culture	87
6.2	The Organisation of Radio Drama and Music: Four Case Studies	94
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Propagating Dominant Ideologies: Contradictions, Incoherences and Challenges</b>	
7.1	The Sunday Sermon and Buddhist Moral Ethics	112
7.2	Military Commentary Programmes and Political Legitimation	117
7.3	Popular News Commentary and Political Consensus	124
7.4	Political Drama and the Traditional Institutions	134

Chapter 8	Dramatising Masculinity and Femininity: Ideological (Dis)Continuity in a Changing Social Reality	
8.1	The Ethos of Individual Success, Love and Marriage	143
8.2	The Melodramatic Synthesis and Transformation of Roi Pa and Mia	149
8.3	The Masculine and Feminine Orthodoxy: The Secularisation of Moral Fantasies	159
Chapter 9	Privatising Sensual Pleasure and Everyday Politics: Pop Music and Cultural Negotiation	
9.1	'Pleng Luktoong': Forms of Pop Resistance and Accommodation	166
9.2	Star and Style: Images of Sensual Pleasure and Modernity	176
9.3	Luktoong Music Radio: DJs and Cultural Negotiation	187
Chapter 10	The Dynamics of <u>Audience Media Activities</u> : An Ethnography of Women Textile Workers	
10.1	From Peasantry to Working Class: Displacement and Transformation	201
10.2	Women Workers and Media Activities in Everyday Life	215
10.3	Symbolic Power: Pleasure and Solidarity in Working Class Cultural Production	228
Chapter 11	Conclusion	
11.1	The Political Economy of Mass Communications: The Dialectic and Complexities of Cultural Production	239
11.2	Cultural Mediation and The Limits to 'Ideological Domination'	241
11.3	Critical Inquiry and Future Trends for Mass Communications Research	243

## List of Tables

Table	1	Commercial and Non-commercial Radio Distributed by Region, 1981	44
Table	2	Radio Ownership Distributed by State Agencies, 1981	44
Table	3	Distribution of Advertising Expenditure by Media, 1975-1985	55
Table	4	Relation of Time Ownership and Control of Programme Production in Three AM Radio Stations, 1986	66
Table	5	A Summary of the Structures of Siam Manusati, Pua Pandin Thai and Sunday Sermon	73
Table	6	Structure of Broadcast News and Current Affairs Programmes	75
Table	7	The Structure of Programme Sequence in Kao Si Mum Baan and Kao Duan Juan Saang	80
Table	8	A Summary of the Structures of Kao Si Mum Baan, Kao Duan Juan Saang	86
Table	9	Examples of 'Standard' Music Programme Formats	189
Table	10	The Hierarchy and Gender Division of Textile Workers	204
Table	11	Average Monthly Expenditure of Shift-workers, 1986	205
Table	12	Dispositions of Respondents	216

### List of Figures

Figure	1	The Administrative Structure of the Thai Sangha (1962 Sangha Act)	25
Figure	2	The Shifting Identity of ' <i>Nation</i> '	33
Figure	3	Paternalism in the Modern Thai State, 1980-1988	35
Figure	4	The Development of Radio Broadcasting in Thailand, 1927-1985	43
Figure	5	A Comparison of Programme Content in Commercial and Non-Commercial Broadcasting	64
Figure	6	Programme Content in Three AM Radio Stations, 1986	67
Figure	7	Time as a Structural Constraint in News Production	78
Figure	8	Work Organisation in Two Radio Drama Companies	97
Figure	9	Work Organisation in Two Music Companies	106

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Media and Cultural Production: The Question of Social Stratification and Legitimation

Academic studies of the mass media in Thailand are a relatively recent phenomenon. They grew out of the surge to 'modernise' the country during the military regimes in the late 1950s and 1960s. The bulk of the research, most of it undertaken by the United States Information Agency, (USIS, as it was called then) was concentrated in two main areas; the effect of the mass media on audiences and the role of mass communications and in particular of persuasive messages, in the process of modernisation.

These concerns continued to dominate the mainstream of media studies and set the trend for research inquiries until the early 1980s. After that, Left activists and liberal social scientists began to ask different kinds of questions. Both groups saw the mass communications system as operating to maintain the system of social inequality, and based their argument on the dominant ideology thesis. At the same time, a small number of researchers began to part company with the mainstream positivists and to develop a more socially and historically oriented perspective on media studies, prompted by the intensifying international debate on cultural imperialism in arenas such as UNESCO, and by the gathering crisis of Thai '*national identity*'.

Despite these initiatives however, there are two major gaps in Thai work on mass communications and its relation to social theories. The largest is in the area of media organisations and industries. Recent works on media institutions are mostly concerned with the historical development of the press not with contemporary processes (Aiemtham, 1977, Tirawanich, 1983, 1977). In the area of broadcasting, the emphasis is still largely confined to studies of media effects. At the same time, the dominant ideology thesis has not generated any concrete analyses of the media system and except for major studies on the transnational flow of film (Boonyaketmala, 1982) and the audience's right to communicate (Supadilok, 1984) critical studies of the mass media are virtually non-existent. Moreover, at a theoretical level critical researchers, and political economists in particular, have concentrated on questions of the material base and shown little or no interest in the social and cultural role of the media.

Our inquiry therefore, is a small attempt to fill these lacunae in the sociology of mass communications in Thailand. It is the contention of this thesis that any explanation is bound to be partial without a concrete examination of the material structures and processes of media organisations and their relation to the dynamics of the economy in general. But in starting from this position, we neither exaggerate the determination of the economic nor play down the importance of ideology. On the contrary, by grounding our argument in a dialectical perspective on the relation between base and superstructure we hope to be able to come to grips more adequately with the complex process of social and cultural reproduction.

We begin, in common with virtually all critical analysts, with Marx and Engels' (1970:64) conceptualisation of the relations between material and mental production as set out in the *German Ideology* which states that;

*"The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it...Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they...among other things...regulate the production and distribution of the idea of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch."*

This famous passage makes three basic assertions; that those who control the means of material production are also in control of the production and distribution of ideas; that their views are widely publicised and become the dominant views of subordinate groups; and that this '*ideological effect*' reinforces the structure of social inequalities. Against this uni-directional view our argument is that the relationship between these key elements is contradictory and that their conflictual and unstable characteristics must be constantly resolved. By asking how the ruling class, in fact, fails to sustain its ideological domination despite its control over the economy and the state we are opposed to the proponents of the dominant ideology thesis. In its '*strong version*' this insisted that it is the ruling class's successful attempt at ideological incorporation which integrated the working class and other subordinate groups, thereby maintaining the social relations of capitalist society. However, the apparent prevalence of a set of '*dominant ideologies*' should not be taken to indicate that there is no contesting system of ideology and culture or that the transmission of dominant ideology is without tensions and resistances.

We would rather advance the thesis that it is the structures and processes of the mass media, at various levels of production, distribution and consumption,

contrained by the dynamics of the economy and the power structure that is ideological. They are the mechanisms through which the structure of social stratification is being represented, reproduced and challenged. However, as Murdock and Golding (1977:20) have contended,

*"..control over material resources and their changing distribution are ultimately the most powerful of the many levers operating in cultural production..(but) such control is not always exercised directly, nor does the economic state of media organizations always have an immediate impact on their output."*

The ownership of material resources and the power to determine contents and formats of the mass media should therefore be seen in terms of a complex and dialectical sets of relationships and not as uni-directional. This is further clarified in Murdock's (1989) more recent work where he argues that within the social spaces that economic dynamics help to create the symbolic sphere operates according to its own rules which establish their own independent determinations. According to this view then, a comprehensive approach which follows through the effect of economics on cultural production is imperative. This calls for detailed investigation of the implications of market forces for cultural production as well as for sociological accounts of media organisation and of the routines and ideologies of entrepreneurs and professionals, through which mediation takes place. This is clearly an advance over the crude assertions of a direct and un-mediated relation between material and intellectual control proposed by Miliband (1969) or by Althusser's (1971) influential view of the media as '*state ideological apparatus*'. By recognising the autonomous role of the agents in situated practice, it brings into focus the class locations of various groups and how their control of the media, in the process of production, distribution and consumption, are structured by the economy. This bridges the vacuum left by the structuralist and culturalist approaches which tend either to read off symbolic meanings from cultural products (Saussure, 1974) or to over-emphasise the creative role of the audience (Hall, 1977, 1981 and Hebdige, 1979, for example).

## 1.2 An Exploratory Study of the Thai Radio System: A Critical and Holistic Approach

The task of this thesis is therefore, to inquire empirically into the relationship between the mass media and the maintenance of social stratification and political legitimation. In arguing for a critical understanding of the cultural and social production of the mass media we employ a critical and holistic approach to the study of one particular popular medium, the radio. From the above points of departure, our investigation sets out to examine four major areas.

First we begin with an analysis of the structure of control within the Thai radio system. As we have contended, since it is the mode of social production that circumscribes state broadcasting and the cultural industries the question of economic and legal ownership and control is pivotal. Their internal dynamics and their relationships with the socio-economic structure in general set the limits of power relations and ideological struggle in this arena.

Our second area of investigation lies with the cultural industries - the producing institutions and the professionals who operate within them. Assuming the role of mediator, media organisations are neither '*state ideological apparatus*' in a crude sense nor '*empty conveyor belts*' for their capitalist owners. Both the media organisations and the professionals must negotiate between their own ideologies and the commercial imperatives, and the external political and legal controls. This raises the question of the '*relative autonomy*' of the media and how the power structure is actually reproduced and negotiated.

The third major area of investigation focuses on the forms of cultural expression. Through an analysis of both the '*serious genres*' of news and current affairs and official commentaries and religious programmes and the '*popular genres*' of drama and music we explore how the '*dominant ideologies*' are translated into specific programmes. Since these must work within given formats and with the social connotations of language, as well as endeavouring to appeal to their target audience, any forthright imposition is not only impossible but must be played out against a range of discourses from conservative to liberal and oppositional. In addition, in such a complex system of representation the cultural manifestations are invariably disrupted at various stages of programming.

The final area of interest is the audience. Despite the audience's relative powerlessness within this hierachical structure their active engagement in media consumption challenges the conceptualisation of them as '*inert and passive*' and easily manipulated and deceived (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1973 and Marcuse, 1964). Our ethnographic study of a small group of mainly women textile workers is a modest attempt to explore how members of the audience are able to contest social and cultural control in the ideological field. They are capable of both negotiating the popular forms to maximise pleasure and commandeering them for their struggle in the economic sphere. However, far from leading to an uncritical celebration of what '*emerges from below*' our analysis also points out how audience members are ambivalent about gender divisions and acquiesce to the structure of social relations in general.



Within this basic framework, the thesis is organised in two parts. It initially sketches out the dominant ideologies of the traditional institutions, the triple alliance of nation, religion and the monarchy, militarism and paternalism, predominant in the present mode of social transition. The second part, consists of a series of concrete analyses on the processes of media production, distribution and consumption, demonstrating how these '*dominant ideologies*' are reworked and transformed at various moments of the communications process. As we shall see, not only are the '*reproduction and production*' of ideologies circumscribed fundamentally by the economic imperatives and organisational goals of the media institutions, but internal tensions coupled with the uneven operation of political and legal controls from the state results in a highly un-unified system of production. In addition however, within the coalition of an unstable ruling class these '*dominant ideologies*' are not harmonious. On the contrary, the major dominant power blocs contends to define their own version of social reality. These contradictory forces and their ideologies of nation, progress, religious salvation and sexual control are examined against the emerging notions of secularisation, consumerism and shifting gender divisions in the public and private spheres. In this way, we hope to explore critically the role of radio as cultural producer and distributor in relation to the question of social stratification and legitimation central to the sociology of mass communications.

## CHAPTER 2

### MODERN THAILAND: FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION

#### 2.1 Introduction

The Social and political transformation of Thailand during the past fifty years has produced a situation which falls some way short of the idealised description of the society of '*Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong*' (Land of Peace, Land of Gold) which the government promoted in the build up to the Rattanakosin Bicentennial in 1982. On the contrary, the fundamental problem of rural poverty not only remains unsolved but has been aggravated. The industrialisation of the economy at the cost of the agricultural sector has transformed the social formation. While exacerbating problems of landlessness, tenancy and indebtedness among the peasantry, it has also created homelessness and unemployment in the urban working class. Despite the government's efforts to '*stabilise*' the political and social conditions for economic growth, peasant and worker opposition has intensified. As the people say,

*"The harsher the sky suppresses, the stronger the land resists."*

The following pages provide a brief outline of the historical formation of Thai society and of the main social and political transformations since 1932. Particular emphasis is placed on changes which have occurred since 1960, since they form the primary context for the detailed analysis of the radio system, developed in subsequent chapters.

#### 2.2 The Social Formation Prior to the 1930s

Before the reign of King Trilokanatha of Ayudhaya (1445 A.D.) the Thai production system could be characterised as subsistence economy. Villagers produced rice and other consumable products in a self-dependent system. Traditionally, all land in the kingdom was the property of the king. The peasants had no right of ownership over their means of production. King Trilokanatha reformed the administrative system, strengthened his hegemony over the regions and villages and issued laws which defined the status of all subjects in relations to land holding. These changes led to the Sakdina system.

The Sakdina class, comprises the monarch, the members of the royal family and aristocrats. They appropriated surplus value from the peasantry in the form of corvee labour, tributes in kind and slavery. Apart from the Sakdina class and the monks, all subjects or commoners were either '*phrai*' or '*slave*'. The '*Phrai Luang*' had to be registered with the king and they rendered their services in projects such as road construction and building temples for a period of 3-6 months each year until they reached 60 years of age. The '*Phrai Som*', the second category of labour, were registered with the lesser member of the royal family and the aristocrats. Those who are unable to render their services as Phrai Luang were obliged to pay tribute in kind.

Unlike European feudalism which extracted surplus value from land ownership, the central determinant of the Sakdina mode of production was labour. There was no landlord class and no feudal estates. The functionary stratum did not derive its authority to exploit from its ownership of landed property but from extracting rent in the form labour and in payments in kind (Rajakool, 1984, and Elliot, 1978).

In the middle of the 19th century, although Siam (as it then was) remained un-colonised it did not completely escape the impact of Western colonialism. The British Empire had already annexed India, Burma in the west, and Malaya in the south, while Indo-China in the east was colonised by France. The signing of the Bowring Treaty with Great Britain in 1855 and similar trade agreements with the US, Japan, and twelve other European nations, brought Siam into the international capitalist economy (Nartsupha and Manarangsarn, 1984). The country entered the world market as primarily a rice producer, exporting to the British colonies in Asia and elsewhere. Exports of other raw materials such as teak and tin also increased. Accordingly, the aristocrats, compradores and Chinese merchants, were primarily concerned with trade and commerce, not industry. As a consequence, the domestic ruling class and foreign traders, from Great Britain in particular, maintained tight control over the agricultural surplus.

Left with a certain degree of autonomy King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, undertook bureaucratic reform during his reign at the turn of the 20th century. These reforms were in seven essential areas; fiscal; communications; transportation; mapping and surveying; foreign affairs; education; and personnel administration. Taken together, they provided a more efficient administrative apparatus to manage the rice surplus and to consolidate control over its profits on behalf of the ruling class. At the same time, corvee labour and slavery were abolished in toto in 1905, and private property laws introduced. The new class of '*free*

*labour*' either worked their own land or rented land from the Sakdina landlords who were in possession of the most productive rice fields in the central plains. But the reorganisation of the bureaucracy also produced a non-sakdina fraction within the ruling class. Chinese merchants who used to be tax-farmers for the monarch were able to develop themselves into a compradore capitalist class and an emerging petty bourgeoisie. Their capital accumulation was secured by a strategic alliance with the Sakdina landlords. While these new relations of production were gradually taking root, however, royal authority was on the decline.

### 2.3 Political Transformation and the Rise of Military Rule in the 1940s and 1950s

In 1932, a coalition of civilian and military officers who called themselves '*Kana Radsadorn*' (The People's Party) took state power. The bloodless coup converted the absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy. This was the result of the antagonism between an absolute monarchy and the emerging capitalist mode of production coupled with the 1929 world depression which destabilised the country's economy. The Western-educated and newly-educated bourgeoisie, in opposing the monarchy, the property-owning nobility and the Chinese merchants who controlled internal and external trade, sought to develop a social base outside of agriculture by promoting national capitalist development and nationalism. They formed the nucleus of what would later become a mature bourgeoisie in the 1950s and 1960s.

Although the political transformation was able to introduce a parliamentary system, the attempts at economic reform based on a socialist programme proposed by Pridi Panomyong, the civilian leader, failed to materialise. The coup leaders were split into opposing factions and in the resulting struggle the military wing prevailed. They resorted to state capitalism and imposed military rule, which coincided with the Japanese occupation during WW II (1942-1945). During his military regimes in the 1940s and 1950s Field Marshal Phibun promoted a range of state enterprises while at the same time, stirring up nationalistic and anti-Chinese sentiment.

After WW II and the defeat of Japan, American influence was predominant. Field Marshal Sarit, who came to power in 1957, advocated the development of free enterprise through close co-operation with local capitalists, both Thai and Chinese and with foreign investors. This period saw the growth of a local capitalist class as well as the systematic penetration of foreign capital spearheaded

by the US and backed by their foreign and defence policies. On the one hand, the newly instituted foreign investment policy led to a massive inflow of overseas investment which incorporated both local industrialisation (aimed at import substitution) and the modernisation scheme established by the National Economic Development Board under the auspices of the World Bank. The central power bloc was extended to a triple alliance between the state, foreign, and local capital, while a new petty bourgeois stratum emerged (Permtanjit, 1982). On the other hand, Thailand became the bastion of American anti-communist policy in the region. In 1954, Thailand joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) set up on the basis of the Pentagon's 'domino theory'. American military and economic aid for counter-insurgency, which amounted to 2 billion dollars between 1950-1969, was spent on enforcing a massive campaign of repression to eliminate social radicalism among students, professors, journalists and writers and the lower orders of the society. The Communist or Un-Thai Activities Act of 1952 was reinforced and, together with the creation of a police state, was used to suppress any opposition from the peasantry and the working class. The urban left was decimated. This period could be summed up as follows;

*"The coup d'etat of 1932 brought to an end several centuries of absolute monarchism and initiated a period of virtually absolute militarism."*

(Elliot, 1978:85)

#### 2.4 Modernisation and the Waves of Struggle in the 1960s and 1970s

Since the search for a socialist economic alternative immediately after the 1932 coup had collapsed the way was left open for a rapid development of capitalism during the 1940s and 1950s. The 1950s was a period of rapid economic growth - gross domestic product grew by an average of 6 percent annually from 1953-1963. But in order to secure this growth, a social offensive was launched. This was built around a co-ordinated policy of modernisation linked to the creation of an anti-communist military bastion.

In the 1960s, productivity of the main agricultural sector, rice, increased steadily due to the application of fertilisers, pesticides and modern farm technology such as, tractors and high yielding strains of rice. The growth rate of the agricultural sector as a whole decreased however, whereas the industrial sector grew rapidly (Pattamanan, 1985, Turton, 1978). Nevertheless, the Green Revolution brought about by government modernisation schemes coupled with the penetration of agribusiness continued to proletarianise the peasantry.

In the urban areas, the US military occupation (1962-1976) that went hand in hand with Thai military rule (1957-1973) was the driving force behind the formation of a new class. Over a period of nine years (1966-1974), US military agencies in Thailand employed an average of 33,000 Thais annually, half of whom were working in the northeast, the poorest and most resistant region. In addition, there are job opportunities in the service businesses such as restaurants, housekeeping and the sex industry that catered for the US troops stationed in Thailand, numbering 44,000-47,000 at the height of the Vietnam war. These new job opportunities produced a new stratum of petty bourgeois closely tied to foreign capital and to the Thai state apparatus. The growth in the late 1960s was, therefore, partly generated by the Vietnam war. But amidst the boom, in 1968, official records showed that industrial disputes, which were banned by martial law, involved 5,000 workers and over 25,000 days of lost work (Manasphaibul, 1984).

In the countryside the peasantry rejected the modernisation programmes on the grounds that they were disrupting the established production process and being used as a source of government surveillance and control. Peasants were inundated with '*development projects*' ranging from construction and agricultural initiatives from the Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) agency, self-defense training for the Village Security Team, and research that compiled data on peasant culture and social patterns for storage in the Village Information System. Contrary to the Government's expectation, a large number of these programmes produced reverse effects and led to outbursts of mass discontent and violence. It was during this period, in 1965, that the confrontation between the state and the peasantry assumed the form of armed struggle. The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), conceived in 1942, organised its People's Liberation Army of Thailand (PLAT) and launched its countryside offensive (Bell, 1978). In the same year, the government of General Thanom, aided by the CIA and the US defence department, set up the Communist Suppression Operation Command (CSOC) as a counter measure.

The sudden inflation in the economy caused by the oil crisis in 1973 gave added impetus to student and intellectual criticism of a corrupt and dictatorial regime. The situation was exacerbated by the shortage of rice caused by rice merchants hoarding their stock and inflating prices. This prepared the ground for the political crisis of the early 1970s. The movement demanding a constitution and for civil liberties, led by students and intellectuals, was rejected by the government of the three military dictators - Thanom, Prapas and Narong - and the leaders arrested. Public discontent with corruption, repression and

the deterioration of the economy lend popular support to the student movement however, and when the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) organised demonstrations in October 1973 they brought down the military regime. The student up-rising was a watershed after fifteen years of dictatorship and the so called 'democratic era' that followed, from 1973-1976, was crammed with popular experience of open politics, as well as with reaction from the ruling bloc. As Anderson has argued;

*"The cultural and ideological consequences of October 1973 took two diametrically opposite forms. On the left, an almost giddy sense of exhilaration, iconoclasm and creativity was born. For a time it seemed that one could say, sing or do almost anything. On the right, the illusion rapidly took root that the newly established liberal regime was the cause of the sudden epidemic of subversive ideas. Democracy was quickly blamed for the consequences of the dictatorship and its complicity with American and Japanese capitalism."*

(Anderson, 1977:22)

The unprecedented growth of popular movements such as the organisation of the Peasants Federation of Thailand (PFT), the Anti-Dictatorship Front encompassing twenty student activist groups and the unionisation of workers was an indicative of the range of interests that had been suppressed under military rule. Within one year, there were 323 student demonstrations throughout the country (Kritratchatanon, 1974). But liberal optimism and the expectation that prosperity, peace and progress would be restored was short-lived. The elected civilian government was weak and constantly undermined. Programmes such as land reform, land rent reform, and social security for the poor were either not implemented or met with little success. Efforts to address the problems of rural poverty by injecting cash through the Local Development Schemes in 1975 and 1976 (2,500 and 3,500 million baht or approximately £62.5 and £87.5 million) were more beneficial to the well-to-do peasants and junior official classes than to the poor villagers. On May Day, 1975, the PFT organised the largest ever peasant rally at Thammasat University to present a nine point plan for land reform. This was rejected as illegal by the government (Turton, 1978). For workers in the urban areas, the lifting of the strike ban in 1973 led to a rash of industrial disputes. Altogether, five hundred strikes were called and a total of 177,877 workers were involved (Department of Labour, 1984). Their demands were mainly concerned with wage increases and better working conditions.

The waves of struggle during this period were both economical and ideological. The middle and petty bourgeois who had benefited from the war boom in the 1960s felt threatened as did the upper classes and capitalists whose links with foreign capital were seriously curtailed by the drying up of investment from the

US, Japan and Europe. Between 1974 and 1975 for example, Japanese investment plunged from US\$749.6m to US\$423.6m, while capital outflow doubled in the first eight months (Pattamanan, 1985:283). The US cut back its economic and military aid, from US\$39.1m in 1973 to US\$6.7m in 1975 (Bumrungsook, 1982:52). This had serious political implications. The right wing press constantly labelled strikes as '*un-patriotic*', and the Prime Minister, Kukrit Pramoj, frequently blamed workers' unrest for the decrease in foreign investment.

The ideological upheaval accompanying the economic crisis questioned established ideas of social justice, democracy, liberty and national sovereignty. Prompted by the liberation of the Indo-China states in 1975 and the US military withdrawal, the Right reacted with naked force. Organisations such as Nawapol and the Village Scouts mobilised around the ideological symbols of '*Nation-Religion-King*' using mass rallies and the military radio network. At the same time, saboteurs and assassination squad, such as the '*Red Gaur*' (a large mountainous ox of South Asia), systematically exterminated the leaders of the student, peasant and worker movements and socialist politicians. The right wing offensive, co-ordinated by the Border Patrol Police, and military and para-military units, culminated in the bloody massacre of students at Thammasat University on October 6, 1976.

The civilian led government of Thanin Kraiwichien which emerged after the 1976 coup opted for dependent and unequal development combined with socially repressive measures and the containment of armed revolt. As a result, the outlawed Communist Party of Thailand was strengthened by thousands of students, intellectuals, journalists, and leaders of the peasant and workers' movements who had fled the terror of the new fascist regime. It also increased its support among the peasants in the countryside. At the same time, international pressure mounted against the regime's widespread violations of human rights particular targets including the inhuman treatment of political prisoners; disappearance of '*communist*' suspects; the curbs on political gatherings; attacks on press freedom; and the ban on over one hundred books classified as '*subversive materials*'. The US government, in line with President Carter's human rights policy, exerted pressure through cuts in its military aid programme (Bumrungsook, 1982).

The militant anti-communist policy of the Thanin regime together with its drive to clean up corruption in the military and police departments, quickly alienated the military-bureaucracy and the Bangkok elite. Disapproving of the far right



position of the government, a group of military officer and 300 rebel troops staged a coup that was crushed almost as soon as it was hatched (Mallet, 1978). A second coup led by Kriangsak - an ex-Supreme Commander and a close US ally was successful however. It eased the political tensions and a general election was held in 1979. Nevertheless, this was a poor apology for democracy since the power structure was left basically intact, and armed confrontations between government forces and the CPT were steadily escalating into a '*civil war*'.

## 2.5 Power Realignment and the Renewal of Traditional Institutions in the 1980s

As a result of concerted military campaigns and the proposals of 1980 and 1982 (66/2523 and 65/2525) which offered an amnesty to political dissidents the '*civil war*' was gradually defused. In addition, the ideological splits within the CPT had left most of the students and intellectuals who took up armed struggle after 1976 disillusioned and unwilling to continue the struggle. The fundamental social contradictions that had generated the anti-government opposition in the first place remained unresolved however.

Although the return of the military to political power after the humiliations of the 1973-1976 period was seen as another stage in the traditional cycle of coups, the transformation of social classes and the political struggle that had taken place in the previous two decades, meant that military rule could not be restored without a realignment of power. The capitalist and bourgeois classes had formed major political parties, notably Social Action, Chat Thai, and Democrat, which became the ruling parties through the successive elections of 1979, 1983, 1986 and 1988. Their position was therefore relatively secure. In addition, the attempt to come to terms with changing political conditions generated internal rivalries in the armed forces. The traditional factions of the army staged two coups, in 1981 and 1985, but they fell short of restoring authoritarian rule. General Chawalit Yongjaiyut, promoted to Army Commander-in-Chief in 1986, entered the power sharing game with politicians, capitalists and other factions of the armed forces vowing to support democratic rule. In fact, his policies steadily undermined the relatively weak civilian government. Parliament's efforts to curb defence and security spending have been nullified. The 24% share of the budget established since 1970 has been maintained and the sector continues to be easily the largest budgeting item. In contrast, spending on health care, at the bottom of the list, accounted for a mere 4.9% in 1985 (Bumrungsook, 1982 and Bank of Thailand, 1985).

In the present era of resurgent capital, the dispossessed peasants in the countryside and workers in the urban areas continue to be exploited. The recent contraction in the agriculture sector in which 67% of the working population earn their living was hit particularly hard. Since priority is placed on the industrial sector, there are few protective measures for the wage earning and small holding peasants. On the contrary, the '*Summer Employment Scheme*' and the modified modernisation scheme, the so called '*Rural Poverty Programme*', have been extracting free labour from the peasants in a similar way to the Sakdina period, while allowing large agribusinesses to penetrate deeper into this sector. In addition, rice exports have been severely damaged beginning in the 1985/1986 season, when the US government passed its Farm Bill as part of its protectionist policy.

Neither the import substitution policy of the 1960s and early 1970s, nor the export policy that followed, was able to resolve the fundamental problem of dependence on foreign investment and international trade. Peasants are caught between a transformed agricultural sector which closes off alternative employment and an industrial sector which cannot guarantee them their livelihood. The unstable economic situation in recent years has generated fluctuations in industrial disputes, but explosive confrontations have been successfully contained, as the official record demonstrates (Bank of Thailand, 1983,1985);

year	No. disputes (workers)	No. strikes (workers)	Working days lost
1985	220 (49,073)	4 (645)	13,078
1984	86 (32,752)	17 (6,742)	n/a
1983	246 (112,193)	29 (10,957)	60,538

However, reports from the Civil Liberty Union and the Asian Workers Solidarity Links-Thailand, reveal serious breaches of the Labour Relations Law by employers. These include; closing down plants in order to hire a whole new workforce; sacking unionists; and not implementing minimum wage agreements. Although there are 444 unions and four labour congresses, at the present time union members account for only 1% of the 2.5 million strong workforce. The main concerns of the unions are economic, achieving a better standard of living for their members. Political issues are left to a small minority of union activists (Petphrasert, 1986). However, several rallies were organised in conjunction with the students, to protest against US protectionism in textiles - the Jenkin Bill - and agricultural produce - the Farm Bill in 1985 and 1986.

As unemployment has grown steadily, from 1.06 million in 1982 to 1.68 million in 1985 (Bank of Thailand, 1985) so have the figures for female and child labour and prostitution, which are estimated at 1.3 million and 500,000 respectively (Civil Liberty Union, 1985). The government's balance sheet now depends heavily on in-flows of foreign currency from tourism and remittances from Thai labour working abroad, particularly in the Middle-East. These sources of overseas earnings have now superseded rice exports. In 1983, these two categories, ranked 1st and 3rd, together made up 67% of the total inflow. Privatisation is also at the top of the current agenda but public protests and union resistance has so far slowed down the process.

In common with disillusioned students and intellectuals in the 1970s, the new generation of activists is challenging authority in a renewed effort to define the concepts of equality, social justice and democracy from an alternative perspective through their involvement in the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as those dealing with human rights, child labour, and women's rights. In response, the realigned power bloc, formed by the coalition of the military and civilian government, had re-emphasised the traditional institutions of Buddhism and the monarchy. These are the most fundamental ideological institutions in Thai society and they have proved decisive in times of political crises, for both the right and the left. Although Sarit was able to exploit the symbol of the monarchy and suppress religious autonomy, during his regime in the early 1960s, events in the 1970s demonstrated that the radical right slogan of '*Nation-Religion-King*' could not contain the waves of struggle brought about by social transformation and ideological upheaval of that period. As a consequence, modifications have been made to accommodate demand for religious reforms coming from moderates and radicals in the Sangha. At the same time, there have been incessant national celebrations of the monarchy throughout the 1980s. They include; the Rattanakosin Bicentennial in 1982; the king's 60th birthday in 1987; and the 42nd anniversary of the coronation of the longest reigning monarch of the Chakri dynasty in 1988. But despite these strenuous efforts, there remains a fundamental disjunction between the rhetoric of a peaceful and prosperous kingdom, under a righteous king, based on Dhamma - the other worldly happiness - and the daily reality of poverty and rising consumerism in a capitalist system. How this disjunction is addressed or ignored in the major mass medium - popular radio - is the subject of this thesis. But before embarking on a detailed examination, it is necessary to look a little more closely at the main elements of ideology in play in Thai society at the present time and the tensions and contradictions between them.

## 2.6 A Chronology of Events, 1932 - 1985

### A) Prior to 1932: Absolute Monarchy

Ratanakosin Era (1782 onwards)

1851 - 1868	Rama IV	Signing of the Bowring Treaty with Great Britain & similar treaties with the West
1868 - 1910	Rama V	Administrative reform Slavery abolished The emergence of free (wage) labour
1910 - 1925	Rama VI	WW I and the rise of nationalism
1925 - 1934	Rama VII	Bourgeois revolution > constitutional monarchy

### B) 1932 - 1956: Constitutional Monarchy

1932 - 1942	Parliamentary democracy instituted
	Land reform and socialist programme fails to materialise
	Internal power struggle among the new political leaders
1942 - 1945	Japanese occupation during the Phibun regime
	Resistance movements against the occupation: a) Anti-Japanese Popular Movement b) Anti-Japanese Federation c) Free Thai Movement (US support)
	The formation of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT)
1945 - 1948	Phibun prosecuted as a war criminal
	Interregnum of civilian governments
	Thai Labour Union organises first May Day celebration
1948 - 1957	Phibun's second tenure
	Suppression of opposition and build-up of a police state
	The first Communist Subversive Act, 1952 passed
	US domination in the region and in Thailand
	Creation of SEATO
	US military base on Thai soil

### C) 1957 - 1973: Military Rule

- 1957 - 1963      Sarit's dictatorial regime ushers in foreign capital  
Investment Promotion Board set up  
Worker's unionisation banned
- Modernisation schemes launched First National  
Economic Development Plan (1960-1965)
- Further suppression of press freedom and the  
elimination of political opponents
- Closer ties with the US  
Thanat-Rusk Agreement (1963)  
Secret involvement in Indo-China wars
- 1963 - 1973      Continuation of dictatorial rule by Thanom-Prapas  
(Narong)
- Modernisation schemes backfire  
Social unrest in the countryside and urban areas
- The underground Voice of the Thai People begins  
its broadcasts in 1963 followed by CPT armed  
struggle in 1965
- The decade of economic boom generated by the  
Vietnam war  
Decline exacerbated by the energy crisis
- Student led up-rising topples the military regime

### D) 1973 - 1985: Social Transition

- 1973 - 1976      '*Democratic Era*'  
Political liberalism and the growth of popular  
movements
- Liberation of Kampuchea, Vietnam and Laos  
Withdrawal of US troops
- Withdrawal of foreign investments
- Political polarisation and confrontation of the right  
and the mass movements
- Assassinations of left leaders  
Mobilisation of the tripod symbols  
Student massacre at Thammasat University on Oct.  
6, 1976
- 1976 - 1977      Fascist regime of Thanin censors all grass root  
movements and political and press freedom
- Students, intellectuals, activists, join the CPT armed  
struggle  
Serious breaches of human rights condemned  
worldwide

- US government cut military aid to a record low in contrast to the all-time high before the coup in 1976
- 1977 - 1978      1977 coup led by Kriangsak ends the Fascist regime  
 Attempts to restore human rights and the easing of political tensions
- CPT armed struggle goes from strength to strength  
 36 provinces declared '*sensitive zones*'
- 1978 -1981      A weak parliamentary system installed
- Political rivalry in the army    Young Turks' coup suppressed
- Build up of new economic development  
 Implementation of accommodation strategy towards workers and political dissidents
- Contraction of the CPT due to ideological crisis in the movement
- Militarisation policy applied to the Kampuchea problem and increase of US military aid
- 1982 - 1985      Return to traditional institutions; Buddhism and the monarchy  
 Ratanakosin Bicentennial
- Constitutional crisis leading to the dissolution of parliament
- A four-party coalition government formed after the general election
- Prem squashes the coup of 1985 and becomes the longest serving PM under a constitutional parliament (1980 - 1988)
- Both the military and civilian politicians appeal to traditional institutions - Buddhism and monarchy - in their power struggle
- Economic growth decline  
 Export of labour to the Middle East countries  
 Expansion of sex industry and wide spread child labour
- US imposes trade protection measures against textile imports (Jenkin Bill) and farm produce, particularly rice (Farm Bill)

## CHAPTER 3

### DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES IN THE THAI SOCIETY

#### 3.1 Ideological Continuity in a Buddhist Polity

Historically, the Thai notions concerning kingship and rule which took shape in the Sukothai and Ayudhya era produced a Buddhist polity that almost uniquely among the countries of Southeast Asia managed to avoid colonial domination during the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the institution of parliamentary democracy in 1932 took political power away from the absolute monarchy, it did not *"attempt any serious or permanent undermining of its cultural centrality and 'nationalist' prestige"* (Anderson, 1977:21). As a result, despite ruptures from social and political transformations in recent decades, the socio-political order of the Thai Buddhist polity, in which kingship is the articulating principle, persists as a strong link between the past and the present. In this macro-conception of Buddhist cosmology the past is used both as a sanction and a destiny for the present.

*"Thailand today (as in the past) displays its brand of aggressive nationalism, shows evidence of religious reformism, scriptualism, and revitalization; its conservative shell is subject to the irritant of democratic politics; and it wants to hitch its destiny to the engine of progress. In these aspirations and orientations both uses of the past converge, and continuities and transformations are to each other as Siamese twins."*

(Tambiah, 1976:530)

Nevertheless, in the present social and political context the coupling of Buddhism and the traditional polity is ridden with tensions, paradoxes and ambiguities.

Traditional Theravada Buddhism (Ways of the Elders) from the Sinhalese tradition (which the Thai ruling class patronised, as well as the Mon, Burmese and Laotian in Southeast Asia) is founded on the Asokan formula that the king is the patron and protector of the religion and that he must be a Buddhist himself. The king, as such, is an embodiment of Dhamma. The doctrinal resolution between the business of ruling and the practice of morality, and between indulgence in politics and the religious pursuit, is achieved by presenting the king as both a wheel-rolling Cakkravartin (universal emperor) and a Bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be) (Tambiah, 1973:58-61). Whereas this scheme justified the contradictory roles of an absolute monarch, who is a righteous and benevolent '*Dhammaraja*'<sup>1</sup> on the one hand, but uses violence in political action

on the other, it undermined the subsequent secular political structure and leadership based on a Western model of democracy. Hence, as a convention, every military leader or more recently, civilian leaders, must seek consent from the king after each change of power. His blessing is a significant source of legitimation for the ruling government.

The second tension in the Thai Buddhist polity is between the state and the Sangha (monastic order). The king who as the patron of Buddhism is invested with the right to purify the Sangha must himself seek to be legitimated by it and divinised by court Brahmins. Although Buddhism contains some progressive element as compared to Hinduism (individual progress and salvation for example are not confined by a caste system but possible through the law of Karma) its politico-religious cosmology contributes to its conservatism and internal contradictions. Hinduism does not formulate its identity through king or state but through the hierarchy of the caste system which encompasses and incorporates its minorities. Buddhism, in contrast, tends to exclude and eliminate its '*aliens*' and minorities rather than incorporating them especially during its militant conservative phases (Tambiah, 1973:59).<sup>2</sup> The assymetrical relation, between the Sangha and state, in which the state dominates, not only runs counter to the basic role of the monk, who must give spiritual and humanitarian service to all laypersons, but also to the doctrinal practice of ordination and salvation within the hierarchy of the Sangha.<sup>3</sup>

How does the Sangha resolve these dialectical tensions? Can it retain certain degree of independence while self-consciously mediating between rulers and ruled on the one hand, and between the secular world of fetters and the sacred state of deliverance on the other hand?

---

<sup>1</sup> In the Buddhist scheme, the Dhammaraja, the righteous king, unite the dhamma (moral law) and artha (instrumental action) in the religio-political space [Artha is the subject matter of Kautilya's Arthashastra and is best translated as covering some features of the domain of 'political economy' as both Adam Smith and Marx would have viewed it]. He rules with the 12 Cakkawadidhamma. But as the meritorious king he also practises the 10 royal principles, the Tasapitrajadhamma (Tambiah, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> As for women, they are marginalised in the Sangha and treated as second class laypersons in this male-dominated sphere.

<sup>3</sup> The Sangha is an institution which provides avenues for social mobility, particularly for poor peasants. Statistics show that the majority of novices and low ranking monks in Bangkok are from villages in the northeast and north.



*"In the past, the Sangha functioned as part of the social control apparatus and it also mediated between 'Raja' (king) and 'Rasadorn' (subject). We should continue to be the mediator between 'Ratta' (state) and 'Rasadorn' to provide happiness for all...The Sangha must be the intellectual and ethical leader of society. It must be benevolent to the state within its religious practice."*

(Phra Rajaworamuni, 1984:72-73)

The above statement represents the general position of the non-conformists within the Sangha who are striving to preserve the Buddhist polity on the face of critical social and political transformations.

Within the Sangha, the divisions between the establishment and the non-conformists largely revolve around questions of disciplinary practice<sup>4</sup> and the degree of permissible political involvement, rather than around fundamental disagreements on the interpretation of Buddhist doctrine. They share a common interest in guarding Buddhism and kingship, as a deeply-rooted collective value of the Thais and the ruling bloc.

More fundamental disagreements were generated by the novices and low-ranking monks for religious reform. This coincided with the up-surge of mass movements and ideological upheaval in the early 1970s and genuinely challenged the entire Sangha. The Federation of Buddhists of Thailand (FBT) and the Monks and Novices' Centre of Thailand (MNCT) defied the ruling of the Supreme Patriarch and Mahathera Samakom (Council of the Elders) on the *'Principles and Reasons for Forbidding the Involvement of Monks in Politics'* by joining the Peasants Federation of Thailand (PFT) and other left groups in the largest organised peasant demonstration in 1975. They believed that monks have particular responsibilities towards the under-privileged masses of society, proclaiming that;

*"We sympathise with the peasants because they toil to feed us. But what they receive in return is exploitation from the privileged class. The peasants are benefactors of the religion and the Sangha no less than other social classes. When they are in trouble, it is our duty to come to their aid to show our gratitude (towards them). We are children of the peasants and we are social kin, we must help them. This is not a question of politics nor of the moral code of discipline."*

(Maha Jad Kongsook, 1974)

---

<sup>4</sup> Deep-seated tensions also has a historical reason since King Mongkut established Dhammayut Nikai to purify the Sangha in 1829. Although it remains a small faction (7%), monks in Dhammayut Nikai hold influential positions in the Sangha hierarchy.

This was not the first time that the principles of equality and justice that the young monks were advocating had challenged the mainstream orthodoxy of the Sangha. Such calls were a recurrent feature of the peasant revolts of the early twentieth century (1901-1959) such as, the Holy Men revolt in the northeast, in which a vision of socialism in a new (village) society of the Sri Ariyametrai was projected (Nartsupha, 1984).

### Divisions in the Thai Sangha

#### The Established Sangha

- Militant right  
(Kittiwutho Bhikkhu,  
Chittapawan)
- Traditional spiritual  
recluse
- Dhammadhut, Dhammajarik  
projects & other modern  
isation projects in co-  
operation with the govt.

#### The Non-conformist

- Buddhadasa Bhikkhu  
(Suan Mokapalaram,  
Chaiya)
- Luangpaw Cha  
(Wat Nongpapong,  
Ubonrachatani)
- Phra Dhammakai  
(Sun Buddhajak  
Phatibat Dhamma)
- Phra Potirak  
(Santi Asoke)

In reacting to this challenge during the 'democratic era' the differences between the Established Sangha and the Non-conformists were temporary dissolved. Militant right wing Buddhism, led by Kittiwutho Bhikkhu, with other right wing organisations such as the Village Scouts, Nawapol and other para-military groups, launched a campaign of 'right kill left' which escalated into a modern 'holy war'<sup>5</sup> on the eve of the Oct. 6 coup in 1976. They argued that;<sup>6</sup>

*"...such killing is not the killing of persons, but of Mara (devil). We must kill whoever destroy the nation-religion-king. It is the duty of all Thais...Communism is an ideology. Killing communism is killing an ideology, hence, it is not demeritorious...The Buddha kills and discards. But the word 'kill' according to the Dhamma is the killing of 'impurities' (kilesa) of people.*

The radical Buddhist reformation was consequently crushed before it had really taken root. However, the period that followed saw the emergence of a new ideological campaign in which elements of the non-conformists' position together with some of the Sri Ariya vision propounded by the young monks were incorporated into a new synthesis designed to negotiate and diffuse the schisms.

<sup>5</sup> Holy wars can be found in the literature of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Kampuchea. It is the 'darker side' of a civic religion which sanctifies death and aggression (Keyes, 1978:147-161).

<sup>6</sup> Kittiwutho Bhikkhu (1976) quoted in Suksamran's *Buddha Sasana kab karn Plienplang tang Karnmuang lae Sangkom*, (1984:111).

The new official ideology of '*Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong*' (Land of Peace, Land of Gold) is based on the treatise, '*Dhammic Socialism*', laid out by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a leading non-conformist who was banned during the period of military rule.<sup>7</sup> '*Dhammic Socialism*' presented a religio-political order in which moral law, Dhamma, reigns supreme. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu believed that religion contains a spirit of socialism and that when this was coupled with Buddhist dhamma, social classes and class interests would be dissolved.<sup>8</sup> The result would be a social system, based on the common interests of the people and a righteous ruler, the king, and the principles of Buddhism, which would bring about a prosperous and peaceful society (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1974, 1986).

The foundation of '*Dhammic Socialism*' is transposed to '*Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong*', a modern Buddhist polity that on the one hand preserves both Buddhism and kingship at its core while on the other accommodating capitalist values under the banner of '*modernisation*'. As the official outline of this new position explains;

*"Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong is a land of prosperity this worldly, and other worldly, materially and spiritually. It is a land whose people are moral, live happily in a peaceful society. The nation is economically affluent.*

*Phrathepwisuthimoli (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu) expounded that Pandin Dhamma concerns the spirit, Pandin Thong concerns the body and the physical. However, body and mind are inseparable. To modernise pandin (the nation), we must, therefore, modernise both mind and body at the same time without disregarding one or the other. Dhamma means duty. Dhamma does not reside in the temple. It resides in a person. Only when everyone practises dhamma by performing his/her duty righteously and honestly can Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong be actualised...We must emphasise on the spirit because it is master of the body. In Buddhism, the spirit is the principal."*

(*Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong*, 1985:1-2)

---

<sup>7</sup> In 1987, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was promoted to Phra Dhamma Kosajarn, the highest title of Phrarajakana. He also received an honorary doctorate in the Philosophy of Religion from Chulalongkorn University.

<sup>8</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu condemns the use of violence in social revolution. He draws an example from the scripture that although the rich depend on the workers to produce surplus values, they also give generously to the poor. Wealth is thereby distributed and social order maintained (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1974:20-21).

The cardinal position of the monarch in this religio-political scheme is that of the righteous king who will promote both a prosperous society and the Buddhist religion. The Ideology of Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong (1985)<sup>9</sup> combines a new notion of the civic sphere with the deep-seated religious beliefs to produce what might be called '*the modern Buddhist ethic*'. This prescribes for dutiful, patriotic and ethical citizens in three spheres:

Spirit	Social	Economics
-Mindful of modernisation	-Good health	-Honest occupation
-Loyal to nation	-Knowledgable	-Moderation in life
-Well-cultured	-Good environment	-Thai-ism(Niyom Thai)
-Morality & discipline	-Democratic means	-Hard-working, endurance & prudence

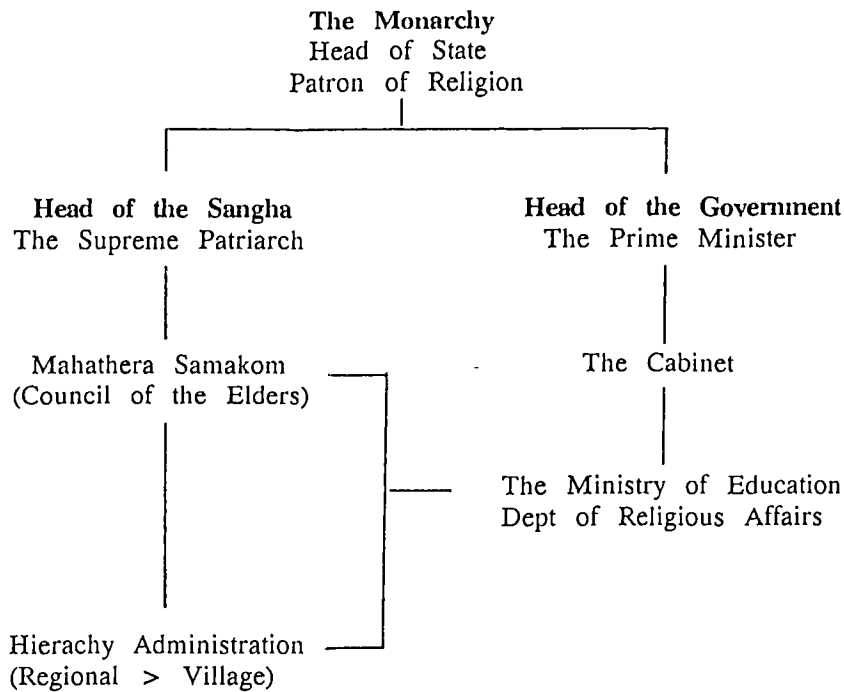
This moral utopia, with some modifications, is mapped on to the secular modernisation scheme which serves to legitimise the present as well as to connect it with the past. At the top of the contemporary power structure is, therefore, a grand triple alliance of the major social institutions, kingship, Buddhism and civil government, with the monarch as the head of the '*national*' family.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Pandin* means land as well as kingship (Phracao Pandin-Lord of the Land is one of the many titles for a ruling monarch). *Thong* refers to prosperity in the area of Suwanapum (suwan also means gold), the peninsula where mainland Southeast Asia is located. *Pandin Dhamma*, *Pandin Thong* carries both its religio-political ideology and nationalism without departing from tradition.

Figure 1

**The Administrative Structure of  
the Thai Sangha (1962 Sangha Act)\***



\*The 1941 Sangha Act, influenced by the concept of democracy, reformed the administrative structure of the Sangha by setting up; 1) The Sangha Sapha (Ecclesiastical Assembly) corresponding to the legislature, 2) The Kana Sangha Montri (Ecclesiastical Cabinet) corresponding to the administration, and 3) The Kana Winaitorn (Ecclesiastical Court) corresponding to the judiciary. However, the 1962 Sangha Act (during the Sarit's regime) has reverted back to the centralisation of power under a single administrative body, Mahathera Samakom, similar to that of the 1902 Sangha Act (King Rama V) (Suksamran, 1982: 12-51).

### 3.2 Nationalism and Militarism: Constituents of the Modern Thai State

The modern Thai state emerged out of a combination of the administrative reforms which separated the bureaucracy into military and civilian spheres and the introduction of the capitalist mode of production during the reigns of King Mongkut (1851-1868) and Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), Rama IV and V, which coincided in turn with the major thrust of the European powers of France and Great Britain into Southeast Asia. Thailand, formerly Siam, was able to maintain political sovereignty by making trade and territorial concessions, thereby avoiding the dilemma which King Mongkut saw as either *"to swim up-river to make friends with the crocodile or to swim out to sea and hang on to the whale"* (Moffat, 1961:124). However, national independence was only salvaged at the cost of *'indirect colonialism'* in the economic sphere and the institution of a colonial-style centralised administrative system. For the state, the bureaucratic reforms consolidated control over the outlying regions where state power was previously weak. By reducing problems of distance modern technologies of transportation and communication contributed to the entrenchment of absolutism in this period (Rajakool, 1984).

The territorial concession of Cambodia, Sipsong Chao Thai in North Vietnam and the left bank of the Mekhong to France in 1867, 1888 and 1893, and of the four southern Malay states to Great Britain in 1895 (Tambiah, 1976:476) radically changed Siam's territorial configuration. The old frontiers created by past interventions and absorptions were transformed into a new geographical entity bordered by; French Indo-China to the east and northeast, British Burma to the west and to the south, British Malaya. As Anthony Giddens has pointed out;

*"The nation-state, which exists in a complex of other nation-states, is a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries (borders), its rule being sanctioned by law and direct control of the means of internal and external violence."*

(Giddens, 1981:190)

Siam, in this period was an emerging nation-state with developing socio-political structures and ideologies that fundamentally contradicted the traditional Buddhist polity. Although external violence and colonial threats had not entirely disappeared they were less critical than the problem of internal unification. During the first half of the twentieth century, the state was chronically threatened with peasant revolts, especially in the northeast and the north

(Nartsupha, 1984). At the same time, the small stratum of bureaucrats within the state apparatus grew to be a direct challenge to the autocratic power of the monarch. Thus was the state of internal tensions King Vajiravudh (1919-1925) inherited when he ascended to the throne.

In response, a new ideology of nationalism was conceived in order to hegemonise the bureaucrats and ruling elites on the one hand, and to legitimise the military build-up on the other hand. Unlike Siam's border states, where nationalist sentiment was mobilised by anti-colonial movements that finally led to national independence after WW II, Thai nationalism was disseminated from the top down and looked upon the West as a model of '*progressive*' or '*civilised*' society that Siam should emulate, providing that traditional values were also preserved. The principle architect of this new nationalism was King Vajiravudh, Rama VI.<sup>10</sup>

The question was how could Siam become more Westernised and more Thai at the same time? This is a complex issue which Vajiravudh's nationalism was unable to resolve. His inculcation of nationalism as a device for preserving an absolutist state diffused a sense of nationhood that was to become a resource that both the dominant class and the subsequent nationalist movements could draw on.

In Vajiravudh's conception, the '*nation*' was to be identical with the monarchy who ruled with Dhamma and righteousness. The triple alliance of '*Nation-Religion-King*' (analogous to Britain's God-King-Country) was proposed as a way of articulating the emerging concept of nationhood with the traditional Buddhist polity. The sovereign who was already a universal emperor and a Buddha-to-be, acquired an additional role as '*national leader*' of the modern state. The centrality and sacredness of the monarchy was therefore reproduced and extended to the exclusion of other social groups. This was opposed by social critics, such as KSR Kularb and later Tienwan, who argued for including state functionaries and well-educated people in the triple alliance if the nation was to progress (Boonmi, 1985:33). But their calls went unheeded to the detriment of the throne in 1932.

---

<sup>10</sup> King Vajiravudh was educated in England for nine years during 1893-1902. He received special military training at Sandhurst Military Academy and later read history and law at Oxford (Vella, 1978:2-3).

In the Thai language the word for 'nation' - 'chat' was borrowed from the Sanskrit 'jati'. Although it meant birth or caste in old Indic, it could also mean a life span in Buddhism. But more importantly, 'chat' was used in the sense of 'race' - the Thai race of the Thai nation. Members of the Thai nation are united like a family by their Thainess - Thai history, Thai art, Thai language, Thai literature, Thai Buddhism, Thai love of royal leader and a 'jai' (free) spirit (Vella, 1978:177-178). This process of Thai-isation that strove for homogeneity in both culture and polity was more exclusivist than integrative. It created tensions among certain cultures and ethnic minorities, such as, the Laotians in the northeast, the Muslims in the south, hill-tribes in the north, and not least, among the largest group of immigrants, the Chinese.<sup>11</sup> As a result, racial divisions have repeatedly recurred, in the guise of 'Chinese problem' during Phibun's regime, or the 'Muslim problem' during Sarit's regime, or more recently, the 'Vietnamese problem' after the liberation of South Vietnam in 1975.

The military build-up during the reign of Vajiravudh was justified by the myth of origin on the one hand and by the need to defend the homeland and sovereignty on the other hand. The overall ethos was best summarised in the poem 'Siam Manusati' authored by the king himself prior to sending the Siamese Expeditionary Force to join the Allies in France in 1918.

*Love the king with complete loyalty  
Love the nation with unswerving duty  
Love the Buddhist Trinity faithfully  
Love honour to merit the world's praise*

*On all occasions show respect  
And think of your land  
As the state where Thai live in peace  
We must cherish it so it endures forever*

*Whoever invades the land of the Thai  
We will fight to the last man, to the last mile  
Sacrificing life's blood and life itself  
Rather than lose our honourable name*

*If Siam endures, survives  
Then, secure, our lives go on  
But if Siam's doom arrives, can Thai endure?  
Our family line is gone; the Thai are done*

(Translated by Vella, 1978:116)

---

<sup>11</sup> They were likened to 'The Jews of the Orient' in one of the King's newspapers article under the pen-name Asawapahu.



Among other things, the expansion of military strength involved; creating a Ministry of Marine for the Navy, separate from the Ministry of War; enforcing the Military Service Law on compulsory conscription; and the indoctrination of nationalism through the formation of the Wild Tiger Corp and Tiger Cub. These developments not only strengthened the basis of the modern military force established by Chulalongkorn. They also mobilised a new national pride based on the territorial interests that the state hoped to reclaim. Siam's participation in WW I however, did lead to the restoration of legal autonomy on fiscal and extra-territorial rights from the US, Japan and ten European nations (Vella, 1978:122-124).

When absolute monarchy was actually over thrown in 1932 the constitutional government had difficulties in broadening the concept of nationhood to encompass the small stratum of bourgeois and extending the notion of citizenship to the peasantry. The **Declaration of Democratic Principles** at the opening of the first parliament laid down the following mandate;

1. *To maintain national independence*
2. *To maintain internal security*
3. *To provide for economic prosperity by means of employment and eradication of poverty*
4. *To uphold equal rights for all citizens*
5. *To guarantee the rights to freedom and liberty*
6. *To provide education for all citizens*

Kana Radsadorn's attempt to define '*progress*' from a liberal perspective based on Western democratic principles of equal rights for all citizens and parliamentary rule in this period (1932-1940s), was interspersed with internal power and ideological struggles.

Control of the means of violence for internal pacification was decisive if the modern state was to rule effectively, and the brief constitutional period was soon brought to an end by the military wing of Kana Rasadorn. Its head, Phibun had previously put down the royalist rebel led by Prince Boworadej immediately after the political transformation in 1932. However, as one of the core leader of the 1932 coup, Phibun manipulated the symbol of '*democracy*' on the one hand while regenerating Vajiravudh's notions of '*Thai-isation*' and '*militarism*' on the other. He initially dissociated the nation from the monarchy only to replace it with his own formulation which attached the term '*constitution*' to the existing triple alliance '*Nation-Religion-King*'.

Reforms designed to '*modernise*' the populace went hand in hand with the Pan-Thai movement that promoted expansionist sentiments. From the outset radio was the ideological apparatus used most extensively to counter any political opposition or criticism.<sup>12</sup> If printing was the essential medium through which the outlying regions were integrated into the central regime during the reigns of King Rama IV and V, radio performed the same role for Phibun and the 1932 coup leaders in their attempts to diffuse constitutional democracy to the '*imagined community*' of the '*nation*'. In order to accomplish both his political and economic projects, Phibun established the Office of Propaganda modelled after Germany (Chaiyanam, 1983). At the same time the Ministry of Culture's decrees on social and cultural norms were creating enforced changes in everyday life. Beetle nut chewing was prohibited, dress was Westernised, and written and spoken language were reformed (Numnon, 1978).

It was during this period that '*Siam*' was changed to '*Thailand*' and the people of Siam, the Siamese, became '*Thai*'. Luang Wichit, Phibun's ideologue, advanced the argument that '*Thailand*' should encompass all ethnic Thais who live beyond the border of Siam, in the Shan State of Burma, northern Laos and southern China, for instance (Tambiah, 1976:477-479). There were moments of glorification when some of the lost territories, the four bordering provinces of Cambodia and the four southern Malay states were reclaimed in 1940 and 1943 (Numnon, 1978:30). In 1942, Phibun joined the Pan-Asia Pact led by Japan and as a result, cooperated with the Japanese in their occupation of Thailand during WW II. But when Japan lost the War Phibun lost his power.

Prompted by the Pan-Thai movement, the outbreak of WW II, and the Japanese occupation, populist nationalist movements, such as the Anti-Japanese Popular Movement, the Anti-Japanese Federation, and the Free-Thai Movement (supported by the US and the Allies), began to claim the role once monopolised by the dominant class. Contrary to the state's exclusivist policy, these movements were able to draw substantially from the un-unified nationals, including the Muslims in the south and the Laotians and Vietnamese in the northeast (Flood, 1977). Their anti-imperialist sentiment was utterly opposed to the '*nationalism*' nurtured by Vajiravudh and the militarist elites. Despite their popular success however, these movements were quickly dismantled.

---

<sup>12</sup> The first radio station, HSPJ, had just been inaugurated on coronation day in 1930.

The rise of the US, politically and economically, after WW II and the institution of a foreign policy based on Cold War ideology was influential in incorporating Thailand into the international military system. Thai military leaders were preferred over civilian leaders in order to secure America's strategic position in the region and to forestall the 'domino' effect. As the Pentagon Papers later put it;

*"The loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to communist control as a consequence of overt or covert Chinese Communist aggression would have critical psychological, political and economic consequences. In the absence of effective and timely counteraction, the loss of any single country would probably lead to relatively swift submission to or alignment with Communism by the remaining countries of this group. Furthermore, an alignment with Communism of the rest of Southeast Asia and India, and in the longer term of the Middle-east..would in all probability follow..."*

(The Pentagon Papers, Vol 1:83)

Thai militarism in this period however, depended neither on constitutional democracy nor on the nationalist sentiment fostered during the Phibun regimes. Sarit broke with the Western concept of democracy and reconciled his regime, ideologically, with the traditional institutions of kingship and Buddhism. His strategy was to *"overthrow Western democracy and create a democratic system suitable to the special conditions of Thailand"* and to bolster his own dictatorship by building an international image in which the monarchy symbolised the 'nation' as its moral and national leader (Chaloemtiarana, 1976).<sup>13</sup> While the king was removed from daily politics his prestige increased as Sarit promoted the aura and sacredness of the institution. This was achieved domestically, by reviving court ceremonies and internationally by arranging for foreign visits to a total of 24 countries during the period 1960-1963. Consequently, the king's pivotal role in national integration was reinstated. Political sanction of government leaders by the king became a conventional practice. This went a stage further when he personally designated the government after the student up-rising in 1973.

Sarit's regime was the strategic conjuncture in which the notions of 'Thai democracy' and 'modernisation' developed. These could be seen as transformations of 'nationalism' well suited to military rule and American Cold War ideology. The master plan of modernisation, the First National Economic

---

<sup>13</sup> Heroes in history books or stories are generally previous kings, and nobilities who were loyal to the monarchs. Journalists, intellectuals or peasants who are leaders of mass movements are not extolled (Anderson, 1977).

Development Plan (1961-1966), served to concretise *Prachathipatai baeb Thai* (the Thai way of democracy). Its economic feasibility was largely due to the American and foreign investments ushered in by the open door policy of the National Investment Board. It did however also assist local investment. The incorporation of foreign capital, local industrialisation (based around import substitution policies), and the modernisation scheme served to extend the economic formation to a triple alliance between the state, foreign investors, and local capital, out of which a new stratum of petty bourgeois emerged (Permtanjit, 1982).

However, the promotion of the new Thai way of democracy and modernisation, based on tenuous connection with tradition, went hand in hand with a massive campaign of violence assisted by American military and economic aid for counter-insurgency. The elimination of social radicalism among students, professors, journalists and writers and the lower orders of the society was justified on the anti-communism policy. Although it labelled '*Chinese and Vietnamese Communist terrorists*' as the prime instigators of social unrest ethnic exclusivism was only part of the problem. Social transformation during this period also produced an unprecedented class-based opposition led by the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and its armed forces, the People's Liberation Army of Thailand (PLAT).

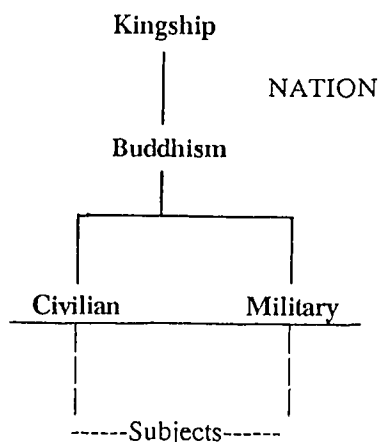
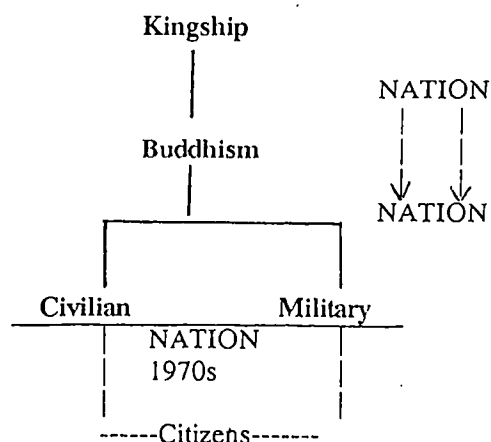
Sarit was able to mobilise a wide range of social resources in fostering his regime of '*despotic paternalism*' (Chaloemtiarana, 1979). Apart from the monarchy, Buddhism was centralised under Mahathera Samakom and the Dhammadhut and Dhammajarik projects were initiated for ethnic integration, particularly among the northern hill-tribes and border villages (Suksamran, 1982). The mass media, particularly radio and television, assumed a central role in propagating the modernisation scheme. But above all, they assisted in the internalisation of '*Thainess*' and '*Buddhistness*' among the populace. The broadcasting media were therefore firmly grounded in the Department of Public Relations and the Army as part of the ideological state apparatus. However, rapid expansion of the system and its internal contradictions accelerated commercial penetration and created spaces for the presentation of competing and sometimes subversive ideologies in a variety of forms which will be analysed in the course of this thesis.

Contrary to the pronouncements of apologists for the modernisation school, such as, Rostow (1960), Pye (1962), Johnson (1962), and Janowitz (1964), the military, despite its organisation and advanced technology was unable to

modernise Third World countries. In our case, the Thai military mainly concerned itself with its own political and economic interests backed by the means of internal and external violence at its disposal. Its economic interests, however, converged with those of the dominant class and the traditional institutions as well as with foreign capital that propped up the whole system. Their dependence on the Vietnam War boom in the 1960s and the discrepancies arising from a dual economic structure, gradually undermined the Thanom-Prapas regime, whilst escalating political repression was unable to completely contain discontent and opposition. This culminated in the student led up-rising that overthrew the regime in 1973. It had mass popular support, fuelled by the campaigns against Japanese products (1972) and US imperialism (1973) which had invoked 'nationalist' sentiments. Economic dependence on Japan was seen as the 'Yellow Peril' as opposed to the 'Green Peril' (the military) and the 'White Peril' (the US). On the other hand, the left linked the US occupation with the question of national sovereignty (Morell and Samudavanija, 1981). Nationhood was accordingly redefined to encompass the whole people. The upsurge of liberal and leftist ideology during the 'democratic era' not only threatened militarism but also the conservatism endorsed by the traditional institutions. The disjuncture had significantly dislodged the military from monopolising the state apparatus. By the same token, it created an open arena for a realignment of political and social forces.

Figure 2

## The Shifting Identity of 'NATION'

ABSOLUTE MONARCHY  
(Rama IV - VII)CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY  
(1932 - 1980s)

### 3.3 Paternalism and the Emergence of Industrial Capitalism

For the traditional Thai ruling class, authority derives from the force and social status (*barami*) sanctioned by the hierarchy of 31 categories inscribed in the Buddhist cosmology. In this system, *Amnad* or power is interchangeable with *Kamlang* (physical force) or *Phalang* (strength). However, a powerful person must also possess *bun* (virtues, wealth and status) and influence. Hence, the exercise of power involves either *Phradet* (force) or *Phrakhun* (benevolence) or both (Sucharithanarugse, 1983, Mulder, 1979).

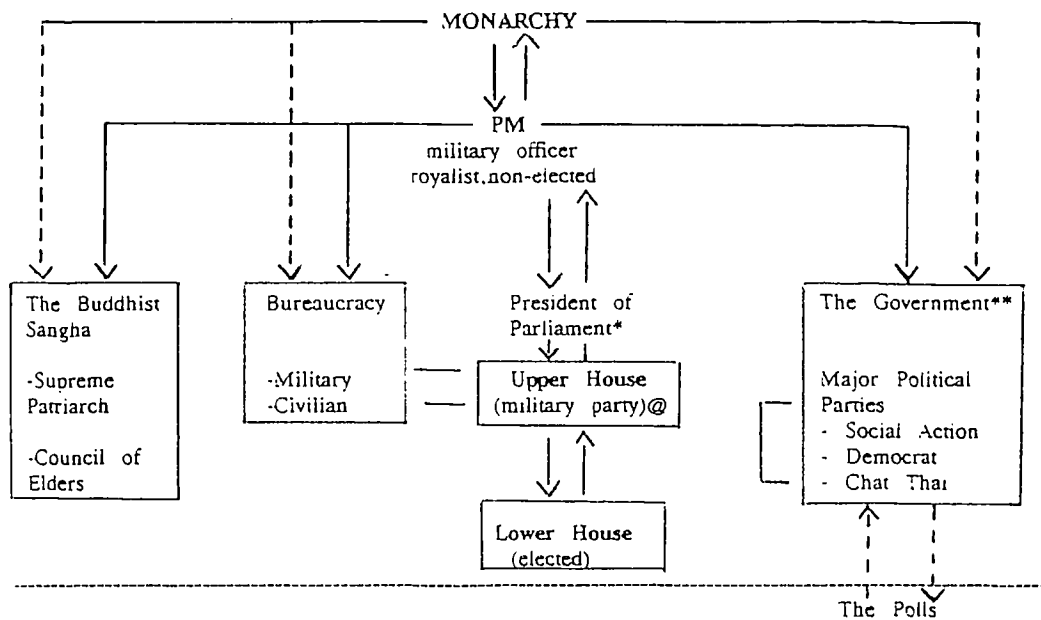
This conceptualisation of power underpinned the patron-client relations of the Sakdina period and the absolutist state in the early part of this century (Rabhibhadana, 1969, Scott, 1972). In such a relationship, the elder, wealthier, or higher ranking members of the social hierarchy, the *Pu Yai*, are seen as acting in the interests of the *Pu Noi*, the junior, weaker, poorer, and subordinate members from whom loyalty, obedience and gratitude is expected in exchange for economic support and protection.

This inherently paternalistic organisation of dominance, based on patron-client ties, remains the predominant mode of power relation in Thai society, although it has recently been modified to incorporate the emerging social forces. Consensus within the dominant classes is produced according to a formula that mediates their conflict of interests. As shown in Figure 3, the rupture of the 1970s instituted a state comprised of the traditional institutions, the military and civilian bureaucrats, and the major political parties that represent the interests of the capitalist class. Most notably, the Social Action Party, the Democrat Party and Chat Thai Party.

The interlocking of power relations in their present form can be seen as the rationalisation of paternalistic rule in the guise of liberal democracy. The system of parliamentary representation contributes to the legitimisation of paternalism and does little or nothing to erode the asymmetrical power relations. On the contrary, the 1978 constitution opened the way for the installation of a non-elected Prime Minister in which the power bloc consented to the choice of General Prem Tinasulanond as its broker. He was a royalist and the Army Commander-in-Chief when he took office in 1980, and fitted neatly with the power realignment.

Figure 3

Paternalism in the Modern Thai State  
1980-1988



\* The President of the Parliament is the Speaker of the (appointed) Upper House.

\*\* The official title of civil servant is 'Regular Bureaucrat' and politicians who hold administrative office are 'Political Bureaucrats'.

@ Appointed members of the Upper House are high ranking officers from the Armed Forces and civil servants.

With Prem as the father figure (dubbed '*Papa*' by the press), paternalism assumed a new variant, different from either the despotism of Sarit (dubbed '*Chompol Pakama Daeng*' - the womaniser field marshal) or the benevolent paternalism of Thanom. Prem's elegance, honesty and celibacy not only made him a charismatic political leader but also invested him with the status of a moral leader against material and spiritual corruption. Nevertheless, the shift of images from '*Poh Khun*' (powerful father) to '*Poh Phra*' (benevolent and charismatic father) in the context of an emerging industrial capitalism generates tensions which reflect the divisions within the dominant power bloc and between the dominant classes and the dominated.

After 1973, the patron-client relations previously centralised under a sole military dictator (who held both political and military power) began to be redistributed among a number of rival generals. At the same time, it moved outward towards new economic and political centres. Although the dispersal of patron-client groupings within the army appears to make a positive dent on the monolithic power grid that dominated the Thai political system for many decades (Boonmi, 1985), it could be argued that the gradual professionalisation and internal regrouping based on classmate ties was a necessary response to the tensions of economic and political transformations. Confronted with alternative and opposite ideologies the ideology of militarism needed to be revised if it was to retain its hegemony. The attempts at reform may, in some small ways, accommodate institutional conflicts and factionalism, but they did not transcend the fundamental social contradictions of class or gender.

As we saw earlier, traditional institutions have been striving for reform in order both to '*progress*' and to be more '*Thai*' at the same time, and the military is no exception to this pattern. But how compatible are these two concepts in the context of a new economic and social order. If '*progress*' for the dominant power bloc means industrialisation and '*Thainess*' is equated with traditionalism and the preservation of the *status quo*, how are the problems of; economic inequality among a growing wage labour sector; demands for political democratisation; and contradictions in the images of modernity, to be resolved? A large part of the answer lies with the mode of paternalistic domination. This is simultaneously self-perpetuating and essential for the expansion of industrial capitalism. As Eisenstein (1979) has suggested, paternalism and more particularly patriarchy, is a continuing and supportive component of economic exploitation and oppression. Hence, it makes more sense today to talk about a system of capitalist patriarchy rather than simply a capitalist system.



Patriarchy is used here to describe the institutionalisation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. The subordination of women, however, may derive from the collusion or voluntary acceptance of subordinate status in exchange for protection and privilege. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources (Lerner, 1986:235,239).

Patriarchy in Thai society preceded the rise of private property. It is rooted in the relations of biological reproduction and in the control of sexuality. Family law in the Ayudhya period categorised women as the rightful property and wife of a man as in the following circumstances;

1. *A woman whose parents hand her over to a man is called a central wife (first or grand wife).*
2. *A woman who is asked by a man to be his minor wife is called an outer wife.*
3. *A woman whom a man has relieved from destitution and decided to keep as a wife is called a slave wife.*

(Pramoj, 1967:35)

Sanctioned by the legal system the patriarch has absolute control over the women in his family, both sexually and in the division of labour. Despite the fact that the 1935 Family Law outlawed polygamy it is still widely practised and acclaimed. As the property of the patriarch, women serve the function of sexual reproduction as well as domestic labour. In the past, wives and children were sold as slaves to settle the family's debts. Although this is now an illegal practice the overwhelming power of the father remains.<sup>14</sup> Taken together with paternalism in the public sphere, this system subjects Thai women to a double economic exploitation.

On the one hand, their entry into the labour market has liberated women in some sectors despite the hierarchical division of labour. On the other hand, they must continue to carry domestic chores without pay. Arguing from a feminist perspective, Hartmann pointed out that;

*"The hierarchical domestic division of labour is perpetuated by the labour market, and vice versa. This process is the present outcome of the continuing interaction of two interlocking systems, capitalism and patriarchy. Patriarchy, far from being vanquished by capitalism, is still very virile; it shapes the form modern capitalism takes, just as the*

---

<sup>14</sup> Poverty stricken peasants continue to send or practically sell their children, mostly daughters, aged between 10-13 to sweat shops or small factories for cheap labour. Elder girls who are unable to get a factory job frequently end up in the sex industry (Banerjee, 1980).

*development of capitalism has transformed patriarchal institutions. The resulting mutual accommodation between patriarchy and capitalism has created a vicious circle for women."*

(Hartmann, 1982:448)

In an emerging industrial capitalist society such as Thailand intensified class antagonisms interlock with patriarchal exploitation to create a complex grid of social and political relations. The traditional institutions and the dominant power bloc may be able to rationalise and integrate some aspects of these contradictions under the all embracing concept of '*nation-religion-king*' and through institutional reforms, but the fundamental tensions remain unresolved.

At this point in time, the market is a destabilising force that collides with both traditional institutions and traditional ideologies. It accelerates the disintegration of rural communities and families and intensifies the discrepancies between the city and the countryside by forcing the pace of consumerism and secularisation in the urban areas. At the same time the '*maintenance of good and friendly relations*' is still seen as more important than '*seriousness and conscientiousness in work*' among both urban and rural Thais. Here, we see the persistence of the worldview in which achievement is not task oriented and does not derive from hard-working. The group who value hard work the least are the government employees (Komin, 1978:179-180). How then can market forces bring about a commodity mediated relation within a society in which the primary value of personal relationships still prevails? How can the equation '*time is money*' be internalised when pleasure (*sanuk*) and indiscipline continue to be central in people's everyday life and thinking as in the common proverb, "*to be a real Thai is to be able to do as one pleases*"? Is it feasible for Buddhism with its principal tenets of moral purification to accommodate consumerism and permissive sexuality, for instance?

As we have seen in this chapter there are, at the present time in Thailand, several competing ideologies struggling for dominance. The mass media are situated at the centre of this ideological process since they provide the main arena in which these struggles are played out. In an effort to come to grips with the question of ideology and mass communications the thesis sets out to explore the production, distribution and consumption of ideology in the major popular medium, radio. We begin with an analysis of the structure of ownership and control. This is followed by an analysis of the ways in which competing ideologies are handled within the major programme genres, of news, commentary, fiction, and popular music. And the thesis concludes with a case study of the ways in which a group of women factory workers negotiate the world of popular imagery and discourse.

## CHAPTER 4

### RADIO IN TRANSITION: THE STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL OWNERSHIP AND ECONOMIC CONTROL

#### 4.1 An Historical Outline of Radio Broadcasting in Thailand

The formative development of radio broadcasting in Thailand took place against the context provided by the 1932 revolution and the outbreak of WW II. Although it began as a commercial medium, it was charged, in the words of King Prachadhipok, Rama VII's inaugurating speech, with a duty to provide "*commerce and entertainment for tradesmen and commoner*" as well as education (Rama VII: 1930). Once entrusted into the hands of the constitutional government it very rapidly became a state propaganda machine. The right wing of the government in particular, strongly believed in radio's power to influence and direct public opinion. They were fascinated by the role played by radio in political mobilisation in Germany, Italy, Poland, the Soviet Union and the US (Chaiyanam, 1983). The Department of Propaganda, established in 1933, was therefore placed in charge of publishing announcements, speeches, and news to promote and legitimate the new political order and win over the silent majority. As the then Head of the Department, Luang Ronasitipichai, pointed out;<sup>1</sup>

*"...about 25% of the population are supportive and 15% are opposed to the new regime. But the rest, 60%, are ignorant of the consequences...It is the government's duty to inform them of the positive effects of this political change. Unless the government could convince the large majority to support the constitution, confrontations between the two extremes are inevitable..."*

In order to fulfill this political project Radio Bangkok was transferred from the Department of Post and Telegraph where it originated to the Department of Propaganda.<sup>2</sup> It was renamed Radio Thailand in 1941. The government's monopoly of radio, particularly in the provision of news, was opposed by the commercial press. Although the majority of newspapers welcomed constitutional

---

<sup>1</sup> Radio speech for the rationalisation of the Department of Propaganda, September, 1934 quoted in "*Krom Prachasampan mua Pi Por Sor 2477*", 1986:16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Phibun wrested radio away from the technical experts of the Department of Post and Telegraph since this was a civilian bureaucracy loyal to monarchism. Later, the Broadcasting Act BE.2498 (1955) separated technical responsibility from programming. The Department of Post and Telegraph was to oversee the allocation of radio frequencies whilst the Department of Public Relations (formerly the Department of Propaganda) was to be in charge of Radio Thailand.

democracy they were hostile to government censorship (Aiemtham, 1977:40-50). This dissension rested on notions of the press as a Fourth Estate. Newspapermen saw a state-operated or public medium as lacking in objectivity and impartiality. The tension was further aggravated when radio became a dual system made up of state-run stations and commercial stations.

During the Phibun's regimes, Radio Thailand was propagating nationalism and modernity through various popular forms. Dramas and music from the department of propaganda's big band were a regular feature of programming. With the aid of Luang Wichit, Phibun's ideologue, who wrote patriotic plays and songs, radio was rapidly popularised.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the Department of Post and Telegraph's Por Nor station was broadcasting more '*highbrow*' programmes while earning advertising revenue to cover its operational costs (Paothongsuk, 1983).

The arrival of the second radio network, operated by Tor Tor Tor state enterprise, coincided with the government's plan to launch a television service in 1952. Television was initially conceived as a state-operated medium similar to Radio Thailand. But it was opposed by both the parliament and the press. The plan was rejected on the principle that the state was unable to finance an entertainment medium (Panpipat and Tanasatit, 1983). As a result, the Thai Television Company was set up partially funded by several state agencies and by advertising revenues. Tor Tor Tor radio station became the forerunner for Thai Television Channel 4 which began broadcasting in 1955. This second state-run network was clearly distinguished from Radio Thailand in carrying out state policies. Although Tor Tor Tor was to be financed out of advertising revenues it would be run by government employees and the state would remain in full control of production.

Prompted by both economic and political imperatives, radio broadcasting proliferated through the 1950s and 1960s. The system of national capitalism had already relinquished ground to foreign capital spearheaded by the US and followed by Japan and other western nations. During this period the need for political legitimation and national integration had never been greater. Accordingly, the expansion of state broadcasting (both radio and television) aimed at nationwide coverage under the Department of Public Relations and its regional offices was accelerated. In addition, the interlocking of national capital and the

---

<sup>3</sup> Although the number of radio receivers was small, estimated at 25,000 in 1934, the government installed loud speakers in key provincial centres to reach a wider audience.

armed forces gave rise to the third network. It was a commercial network but largely operated by the military, and is commonly known as the '*military radio*'.

This third network comprises commercial stations licensed by various branches of the armed forces and other state agencies. They operate without any public accountability. Revenues are fed directly back to the military while other commercial stations must remit part of their earnings to the state treasury. By the end of 1973, two hundred radio stations were estimated to be in operation throughout the country. Of these, military radio made up approximately 80% of the total commercial network catering to the greatly increased audience that followed the deregulation of radio by the Broadcasting Act B.E.2502 (1959).

Having influenced by the American model, radio has become the essential channel for advertising and sponsored entertainment. During the Sarit's regime and the first part of the Thanom-Prapas's regime the entire radio system was commercialised. Radio Thailand and its provincial affiliates were competing with both Tor Tor Tor and the commercial network (mainly military radio in the provinces) for advertising revenue. However, this deregulated system began to challenge the state's power of control. In 1968, the government decreed Radio Regulation B.E.2511 to reinstate some degree of state control. It provided for 9 minutes of advertising per hour in addition to the existing sponsorship system. Advertising on Radio Thailand and its network was terminated. As a consequent, commercial radio in the regions was largely monopolised by the military network.

Radio Regulation B.E.2511 had also extended the objectives previously the special province of state-operated radio such as Radio Thailand. Under the new rules all radio stations were charged with a responsibility to uphold national interests, oppose socialism and communism, and promote traditions and social norms. Vetting for radio personnel was introduced for the first time. Nonetheless, neither legal sanctions nor any monitoring system was instituted.

After the trio of military dictators was ousted in 1973, the civilian government decreed the Broadcasting Regulations B.E.2517, and 2518 (1974, and 1975). These imposed censorship on advertising, particularly food and drug commercials. Advertising time was brought down to 8 minutes per hour and the National Broadcasting Authority (NBA) was established with responsibility for overall broadcasting policy and for editorial monitoring.

However, since the civilian government during 1973-1976 did not attempt any serious reform of public service broadcasting or subject the commercial network to any measure of accountability, the Left and liberals persistently called for more changes. For them, Radio Thailand and the Department of Public Relations symbolised political paternalism. It was dubbed '*Krom Kruag*' or '*The Department of Lies*' during the '*Democratic Era*'.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, military radio was seen as both a political platform and a paying proposition for the dominant faction within the armed forces. Within this dual formation, radio was inaccessible to social and political opposition. But the radical left who joined the CPT armed struggle after 1976 was able to launch an anti-government campaign via the clandestine VOPT. For a brief period until its closure in 1979, the opposition could confront the authority on the air waves, a situation which was unprecedented in the history of radio.

Calls for reform were not confined to external opponents however. They also originated within the broadcasting system itself, and not least from within Radio Thailand. The increasing tensions between the broadcasters' notions of professionalism and political imposition from the government, generated demands for an independent Radio Thailand free from direct political control.<sup>5</sup> Equally significant however, the commercial imperatives that circumscribed programme production and audience reach have also weakened the integrity of the state-run network, especially in the regions. As the staff of Radio Thailand pointed out;

*"We are not properly financed by the government for many years now...The truth is radio survives on the television advertising revenue. It is the state-run television in the regions who allocated part of their advertising revenue for our operational costs."*

(Wangpuchakain, 1983:79,81)

Although the present structure of broadcasting is the result of the military leaders' attempts to consolidate their political and economic power, with the demise of the monolithic military bloc it is becoming more difficult to sustain the established structure and the power relations in their unreformed state. The present triangular relations between state-run radio and commercial radio (shown in Figure 4) demonstrates how the state has been less than successful in its attempts to exercise complete control over radio. There are now increasing

---

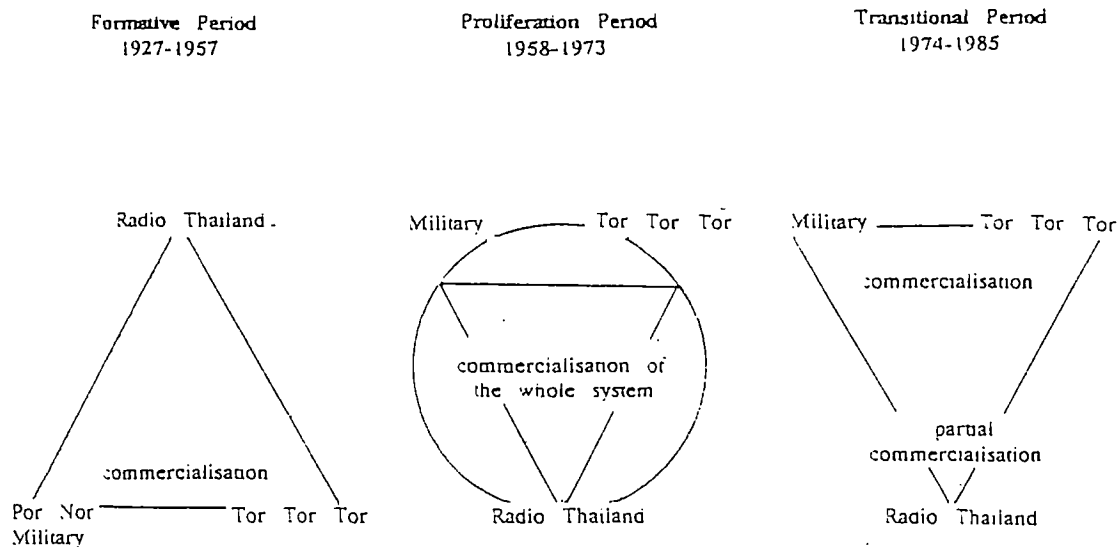
<sup>4</sup> The building that housed both the Department of Public Relations and Radio Thailand was one of the first to be destroyed by the demonstrators during the student-led up-rising in October 1973.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with the Head of Production, Radio Thailand, June, 1986. Unless otherwise stated all interviews were carried out during the field research between January - September, 1986.

economic pressures from within both the broadcasting system and the media industries as a whole, against state ownership of radio. The state has reacted by expanding Radio Thailand's national service. On the other hand, as we shall see in more detail in the following section, being more susceptible to market forces, military radio has begun to explore alternative means of maintaining both its economic and political control over radio.

Figure 4

The Development of Radio Broadcasting in Thailand  
1927-1985



The Three Radio Networks

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1) Radio Thailand, the Dept. of Public Relations           | non-commercial<br>(with few exceptions) |
| 2) Tor Tor Tor, the Mass Comm. Organisation of Thailand    | commercial<br>(state corporation)       |
| 3) Military Radio, the Armed Forces & other state agencies | commercial<br>(with few exceptions)     |

**Table 1**  
**Commercial and Non-commercial Radio**  
**Distributed by Region**  
**1981**

region	total(%)	commercial		non-commercial	
		AM*	FM	AM	FM
Bangkok	83(33.5)	27	25	17	14
Central	26(10.5)	20	1	4	1
North	48(19.4)	30	3	9	6
Northeast	47(18.9)	29	2	9	7
South	44(17.7)	15	2	16	11
<hr/>					
Total(%)	248(100.0)	121 (48.8)	33 (13.3)	55 (22.2)	39 (15.7)
<hr/>					

\* Under the same call sign, the AM and FM frequencies of most commercial stations broadcast separate programmes to distinguished groups of audiences

Source: Office of the NBA, Department of Public Relations, 1981.

**Table 2**  
**Radio Ownership Distributed by State Agencies**  
**1981**

	Total(%)	Military	Police	Others	DPR*
AM	171 (69.5)	106	7	16	42
FM	69 (28.0)	32	1	13	23
AM+FM	6 (2.5)	-	-	-	6
<hr/>					
Total	246 (100.0)	138 (56.09)	8 (3.25)	29 (11.78)	71 (28.86)
<hr/>					

\* Department of Public Relations

Source: Office of the NBA, Department of Public Relations, 1981.



## 4.2 The Structure and Dynamics of Political Ownership and Economic Control

Taking as our starting point the argument that the power to control cultural production is significantly linked to the ownership of media organisations, this section describes the complex relations between legal state ownership and the *de facto* ownership by media corporations and advertisers. Although radio began as a nationalised medium over 60% of the system is now commercialised (see Table 1). In a dual system such as this, the state not only fails to monopolise radio but must operate largely within the logic of the capitalist economy. Despite the resulting economic imperatives however, the state still struggles to maintain its objectives on the state-operated network, whilst imposing legal controls upon the rest of the system in an attempt to curb commercialism. The latter part of this section examines the dynamics which operate within this dual structure and traces their consequences.

### The question of political ownership and economic control

According to the Broadcasting Act B.E.2498 (1955) and subsequent government decrees, radio and television transmission is limited exclusively to eleven state agencies.<sup>6</sup> The two principle operators are the Department of Public Relations and the military. Between them, they run 28.86% and 56.09% of the system respectively (see Table 2). The former operates a non-commercial network while the latter sponsors commercial broadcasting, though there are some exceptions to this division.<sup>7</sup>

Three models of commercial radio have developed as a result of the contradiction between the structure of ownership and financial constraint. Although the authorised state agencies were able to start a modest radio station they quickly faced the problems of operational costs and programme production (Paothongsuk, 1983). Without the necessary financial resource how could these problems be solved? Proponents of the commercialisation of radio argued that

---

<sup>6</sup> Among them, the Office of the Secretariat to the Parliament is the only organisation that has never actually operated a broadcasting station.

<sup>7</sup> The Department of Public Relations licenses a small number of stations partially funded by advertising revenue to state agencies such as, the Bangkok Municipal Authority and Chulalongkorn University. On the other hand, the Office of the Supreme Command runs five stations, the Kor Ror Por network, located in strategic areas of the country such as Sakonakorn in the northeast and Narathiwat in the south. They are fully financed out of the government budget for the purpose of counter-insurgency.

the power of allocative control would not be undermined since stations would continue to be owned by state agencies. This has opened the way for advertising despite the fact that state agencies, on the whole, are prohibited from any commercial undertaking unless it is set up as a corporation.

In practice however, allocative control, defined as "*the power to define the overall goals and scope of the corporation and determine the general way it deploys its productive resources*" (Kotz, 1978 quoted in Murdock, 1982:122) began to slip rapidly from the legal owners into the hands of advertisers and media entrepreneurs who held economic control over the organisation. This occurred largely when the second and third models of commercial stations were proliferating in the 1960s.

Stations run on the basis of the second model contract all air-time to the highest bidder for a specified duration, which can range from five to ten years. In return, the contractor pays an initial installment and an agreed amount of monthly revenue.<sup>8</sup> At the top, the head of the station invariably claims the power of allocative control on behalf of its legal ownership. The station also, maintains a minimum level of '*operational control*'. Since most programmes are pre-recorded staffing consists of only one or two people - a sound controller and an announcer. As a result, the structural contradictions in this unequal partnership undermine the efficiency of commercialism.

The third model within the commercial network operates in the full sense of a business corporation. In this variant, the licensee not only supplies the capital investment to establish the station, but also manages long-term planning and daily operations. The financial return for the state agency involved includes a lump sum payment and a monthly share of revenue. At the end of the contract period however, the station's hardware must be handed-over to the legal owner of the station.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Interview with S. Rattananakin, Assistant Managing Director, Amex&Grey Advertising, March, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with P. Bunprong, information officer of the 2nd Region Army, June, 1986.

### Three Models of Commercial Radio

Ownership	Allocative control	Operational control	Revenues	Franchise
1.state	state agencies	state agencies	budget& advert	-
2.state	state & ad vertisers/ media entre preneur	state agencies (minimal control)	advert	-5-10 yr contract -lump sum install ment & % share of monthly revenue paid to the state agency
3.state	media entre preneur	media entrepreneur	advert	-licensee launches station, 10 yr contract -lump sum install ment&% of monthly revenue paid to the state agency
* In these arrangements neither a system of public accountability nor programme standard is instituted				

From the 1960s onwards, military radio expanded at an exponential rate by adopting either the second or third model of commercial station. Critics on the Left viewed the mushrooming of military radio in terms of instrumentalism at best or a conspiracy at worst. But this is over-simple. Clearly the influence of military leaders such as Sarit, Thanom-Prapas and their generals, has significantly facilitated the growth of commercial radio. It was their paternalistic power that underwrote the monopolistic and corrupt military radio network as the press exposed after 1973<sup>10</sup> and, as we noted earlier, militarism provided the basis for a commercial network to develop without any system of public accountability. At the same time, the proliferation of military radio cannot be explained away simply as the product of a few military leaders conspiring for their political ends. On the contrary, it should be seen as the outcome of the structural dynamics that converge with the economic forces in the early phase of the expansion of commercial radio. Let us develop the argument a little further.

During the tenure of Field Marshal Sarit in the early 1960s, the government gave priorities to establishing regional headquarters for the Department of Public Relations in the northeast, north and south with their associated regional broadcasting network (Kitiwat, 1983). But the objective of nation-wide coverage

<sup>10</sup> For example, Thanom's daughter was found to be operating three dozen stations in the northeast (Thai Rath, 21, Oct., 1973).

remained unfulfilled. There were large lacunae caused by lack of capital investment and technical deficiencies (Paothongsuk, 1983). With the help of US military aid the Thai military set up the Kor Ror Por network under the Office of the Supreme Command to partially complement the Public Relations network. However, a large part of the mountainous terrain in all regions still remained unreachable.

The open door policy that ushered in foreign investment together with the economic growth based on the Vietnam War and an expanding local capital, presented itself as alternative source of radio's development, one backed by the manufacturers of consumer goods who were seeking a mass medium on which to advertise their products. It was during this period that the first military network on the third model, the **Wor Por Tor** of the Regional Army Headquarters, was established. These stations were supposedly local (as signified by the name of the network) in contrast to the Department of Public Relations' regional network. They were therefore relatively low cost. The major US advertiser, Colgate & Palmolive for example, was able to set up 8 to 9 stations with an investment of "*a few hundred thousand bahts*" (approximately US\$10,000-15,000) and to use them as the launching platform for Miracle Fab detergent, a new consumer product.<sup>11</sup> In this set-up, the manufacturer, Colgate & Palmolive, diversifies into media ownership in order to increase the level of corporate profits. From this illustration, it is clear that it was the combination of economic and political forces that fuelled the rapid expansion of radio.

The resulting structural tension between state legal ownership and media entrepreneurship within commercial radio has created a hierarchy of power that further complicates corporate control of the system. With military patronage, contracts are primarily given to media entrepreneurs or advertisers who are prepared to meet the '*kickbacks*' requirement. Hence they do not need to have any clear station policy or proposals as to how the needs of the audience will be served.<sup>12</sup> Because it has generally evolved on this basis, commercial radio has created a system that separates the control of air-time from programme production. As one radio entrepreneur described;<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> S. Binmuin, Executive Director, Indrayuth Advertising, interview in *Media*, 2:21.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with S. Ratananakin, and P. Bunprong, March and June, 1986.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with U. Ritidirek, Unity Co., May, 1986.

*"My main job is to run the stations with highest efficiency. We have invested a lot of money in setting up each station. I must make sure that everything is always in good working condition (for transmission)... My assistants in our head office perform the routines; handling the pre-recorded tapes, monitoring the daily broadcast, for example... The bulk of programme time is sold to our regular customers, the major drama companies and advertising agencies, who produce mainly dramas for female audiences. We started off with drama twenty five years ago and found that the advertisers are satisfied with the rating. Our station is now the top drama station in Bangkok."*

The major investment for media entrepreneurs is in transmission hardware and broadcasting equipment and in the initial installment to secure the franchise, but not in programme production. As a result, there is no production department as such in these stations.<sup>14</sup> Media entrepreneurs manage the buying and selling of air-time through a brokerage system which allow for the maximisation of profit without being responsible for production. This could be described as having 'power without responsibility'. At the bottom rung of this hierarchy are the independent producers who are entrusted with programme production.

Sponsorship is central to this organisational structure. Producers are independent in relation to the station but economically dependent on the advertisers who finance their programmes. Since the objective of the advertisers is to promote their consumer goods effectively they are naturally interested in cultural products that will secure the largest number of listeners for the smallest cost. As one (female) independent producer described;<sup>15</sup>

*"I have to constantly prove to the sponsors that my (music magazine) programme is very popular. If I do not deliver the audience size expected, the contract is lost at short notice. Some sponsors give only monthly contracts. The average is three months and none are more than six months. Unless one has acquired a good reputation we are always scrambling for sponsors to keep the programme going."*

As she discovered when she decided to be an 'employed producer' with one of the leading musical instrument company, control in this situation is just as stringent with the employer insisting that the producer works within the corporations' goals. The level of 'relative autonomy' deployed in the creative

---

<sup>14</sup> Most of the medium size stations only have one main broadcast studio. A large number of local radios operate without any studio at all. Some of these are 'pirate stations' under the patronage of the military. They are not legally registered. The Department of Post and Telegraph's attempt to clean them up in 1978 was prompted by the ITU's resolution for the international standardisation of frequencies (Paothongsuk, interview, September, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Interview with S. Piyanan, DJ, April, 1986.

decisions used to secure the audience is always held in check by the marketing department and by the sales record. In this way, a 'good' programme is defined as one that produces real buyers at the end of the day.

As we have demonstrated so far, the separation of control over air-time and programme production has established a form of institutional control that favours advertisers as opposed to other actors in this system. As a consequence, radio is turned into a promotional channel for products, including the products of other sectors of the cultural industries such as, the music industry, magazines and book publishing, and feature films. This exacerbates the structural tension whilst seriously undermining radio's competitive potential in the context of the media industries as a whole. How can each station create its own identity and style of programming in a highly competitive market when a coherent policy on programming does not exist? How much '*relative autonomy*' can producers actually exercise? And last but not least, what are the effects of this situation on the quantity and quality of radio programmes?

#### **The impact of economic and political control on programme production**

During radio's '*golden years*' in the 1960s and early 1970s, the audiences were bombarded with advertising day and night. Music and chat programmes were filled with sales talk for various consumer goods. However, the new popular purchasing power that enhanced the growth of commercial radio also stimulated a moral and political backlash. Acrimonous criticisms by the press and academics were based on the premise that radio frequencies are a scarce resource which should be used for public service rather than private profit. State agencies (mainly the military) who held legal responsibility for operating and controlling the stations were therefore confronted with calls for change. They remained unmoved, and changes took place only when legal controls were imposed by the government.

In an effort to restore some order to the commercial system the military regime of Thanom-Prapas began by proscribing advertising. Several stations were closed down, especially in the military sector.<sup>16</sup> The first generation of local stations ended their contracts around the same time and ownership was transferred from advertisers to media entrepreneurs. This largely terminated the direct ownership of commercial radio by advertisers.<sup>17</sup> The drastic measure also effected the state-run network which at that time was partially financed by advertising

---

<sup>16</sup> Interview with U. Ritidirek, May, 1986.

revenue. Under Radio Regulation B.E.2511 (1968) the first regulating body for commercial radio, the National Radio Authority (NRA), was set up to oversee the general policy of radio stations and to regulate advertising time. Among the thirteen board members, seven were from the military and security agencies. Not surprisingly, the resulting regulations represented a retreat from the government's initial position. 9 minutes per hour of spot advertising was allowed over and above programme sponsorship. As a result of this redistribution of advertising time, more advertisers could have access to commercial radio.

The second wave of reform initiated by the government coincided with the 'democratic era'. The NRA was changed to the National Broadcasting Authority (NBA) to include television. However, the gist of the Broadcasting Regulations B.E.2517 and B.E.2518 (1974, 1975) remained essentially the same. The official conceptualisation that separated advertising from programming became more entrenched. Originally, Broadcasting Regulations B.E.2517 (1974) limited advertising time to 6 minutes per hour but it was quickly adjusted to 8 minutes per hour a year later. Two new regulatory bodies, the Food and Drug Authority (FDA) and the Consumer's Protection Authority (CPA), were created to "*protect the public from harmful, misleading or obscene advertisements*". Controls over the content of advertisements was imposed. Several laws followed to strengthen the FDA and the CPA, notably, the Pharmacy and Medicine Act B.E.2518 and B.E.2522 (1975, 1979), and the Consumer's Protection Act B.E.2522 (1979). Although the latter facilitates legal action against misleading advertisements on the audience's behalf its powers do not extend into the area of programme content.

Faced with strict state censorship the advertising industry swiftly lobbied for entry into the regulatory arena in order to negotiate with the state bodies. They were successful in getting representatives of the National Association of Advertising Practitioners (NAAP) on all the key official committees. These are the Committee on Broadcast Advertising, the Committee on Television Advertising, the Committee on Food Advertising and the Committee on Drug Advertising. Despite these successes however, the NAAP continue to oppose legal controls over advertising.

---

<sup>17</sup> Until the early 1980s, there remained a small number of proprietors such as, Prajuab Jampathong (later prosecuted for fraud), Uer Ari (killed in a car accident), who consolidated the roles of manufacturer, radio entrepreneur and producer, in a single person.

Restrictions on programme content was imposed after the political crisis of 1976. The government of the radical right limited freedom of speech across the whole media industry. In the case of radio, Revolutionary Order No. 15 imposed controls on all categories of programme. The main thrust was to suppress opposition broadcasting in order to further the government's own political project. The overall guidelines however, did not deviate significantly from the broadcasting regulations under which artists and professionals in the radio industry already worked. Rather they reiterated the stations' duties including their obligation to defend the '*national interest*', to relay all the main news bulletin from Radio Thailand, to preserve tradition and culture and to refrain from broadcasting any '*obscene music*'.

Legal controls were only a partial solution to the question of the quantity and quality of programme production however. Although the government was able to regulate the amount and content of spot advertising, programme production still remained largely under the influence of advertisers. The NBA, which was charged with monitoring the content of all programme types, failed to do so due to its limited resources. Instead, it instructed stations to keep copies of the pre-recorded tapes for a period of ten days in case of complaint or controversy.

Another important legal stricture concerns the qualifications of broadcasters. The NBA prescribes that all broadcasters must obtain two licenses, an announcer license and a producer license and the applicants for these licenses must be employees of broadcasting stations. By this measure, the NBA can control who is allowed to broadcast. The Department of Public Relations supported the NBA by providing training courses for broadcasters who wished to apply for these licenses. As a result, the number of station staff gradually built-up.<sup>18</sup>

In practice however, the licensing system was not as successful or as complete as it might appear at first sight. The commercial lobby was able to secure for the National Association for Broadcasters (NAB) the right to recommend '*independent*' applicants for licenses. It had already negotiated successfully with the NBA to allow a grace period concerning broadcasters' licenses after the enforcement of the Broadcasting Regulation of 1979. Then, when a number of military stations wanted to reclaim some air-time the NAB backed the producers and membership rose from 100 to 1,292 in less than two years (Prakobpol, 1979).

---

<sup>18</sup> Interview with P. Rohitoprakarn, Secretary of the NBA (1981-1983), June, 1983.



In summary then, we can say that the government's regulatory efforts in the 1970s focused primarily on advertising content without seriously reforming the structure of ownership and control or instituting any system of public accountability, leaving the fundamental question of the quantity and quality of programme production unresolved. It was however, the dynamics of the media industries and the economy in general that prompted the commercial network to change. In the 1980s particularly, military radio that had so far yielded little to any political/legal constraints embarked on a process of reform in response to external economic pressures. This is our next topic of discussion.

#### 4.3 Radio and the Contour of a Media Industry in Transition

As demonstrated in the previous section, commercial radio stations are business enterprises and as such are subject to the logic of profit maximisation. They are either wholly or partially supported by the inflow of advertising revenue. Working within this context, they compete against one another for the largest share of the market. The discussion in this section focuses on the economic constraints in the media industries in relation to the development of commercial radio. There are two main areas that we shall explore; the extent of control by advertisers throughout the industries; and the increasing control of large corporations in the major media such as, television, the press, and the music industry. How does control of the media circumscribe their content? Is the relationship a question of setting the parameters of production or is it an ideological apparatus for those who own the corporations? The latter part of this section provides a sketch of the range and direction of cultural products in the media industries resulting from structural constraints and from the dynamics of the economy in general.

##### Radio and economic constraints within the media industries

In a commercial media system advertisers are eager to have a combination of media channels at their disposal, not so much for '*creative advertising*', as the industry would have us believe, but rather for reason of cost-effectiveness. Both advertisers and advertising agencies seek the lowest cost per thousand members of the target group for the product being promoted. This can be achieved either through the national medium which holds the largest share of the undifferentiated market, or through specialised outlets which reach those with high spending power. During the 1960s and 1970s when television was still an urban medium, radio was seen as the most cost-effective medium to reach the mass audience. As Rungtanakiat, a radio entrepreneur of the 2nd Region Army (northeast) network, put it; <sup>19</sup>

*"Radio advertising is very cheap. A 30-second loose spot costs 35-40 baht (approximately £1) but would reach millions of listeners. For example, the Tor Por 2, Khon Kaen station (828 KHz) covers an area from Kalasin to Roi Et, Korat, Loei and Udorn which could reach about 9 millions listeners."*

However, none of the commercial networks constitutes a national medium.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, because audience research in Thailand is as yet insufficiently developed, it is impossible to track advertising and ascertain whether advertising expenditure represents value for money. As Kauwanich, a radio broker and producer, pointed out;<sup>21</sup>

*"We tried to do our own radio audience research once. It cost us 200,000 bht. (approximately £5,000) for a start and the result was so minimal. This kind of survey and monitoring is very time consuming, costly and localised. We can only carry out random monitoring from time to time. However, advertisers are sceptical about radio. They consider themselves lucky if 80% of their ads are broadcast. No matter how hard they try to institute some forms of control at the organisation end, ghost commercials are always sandwiched into the programmes."*

When television achieved nation-wide coverage in 1979 a new trend in the media environment was established. Advertisers quickly shifted to the visual medium. In the 1980s the discrepancies between the media become more evident as can be seen from the increasing unequal distribution of advertising expenditure. As Table 3 shows, the percentage of total advertising expenditure, accounted for by radio dropped sharply from 30% in 1975 to 19.08% in 1984. Similarly, the share going to cinema decreased from 8% to 1.39%. In contrast, over the same period, advertising expenditure for television doubled from 25% to 51.58% whilst the press increased its overall share by 2.6%.

These figures are indicative of a shift in the way advertisers use radio, with a number moving away from radio altogether and others increasingly using it as a supplementary medium. Although radio has a wider reach because it is cheaper and less reliant on mains electricity, rapid growth in TV ownership in recent years has contributed to this reallocation of advertising expenditure. In 1986, over 80% of urban households had at least one TV set. In the rural areas, 80% of households had a radio set and only 40% had TV. In the Northeast the figure is as low as 28% (Deemar, 1986).

In addition, audience research shows that the regular audience for radio is

---

<sup>19</sup> Interview in Media, 1986, 2/21:100.

<sup>20</sup> Radio Thailand's national service has only obtained nation-wide coverage with its 1,000 Kw transmitter in 1983.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with S. Kauwanich, Managing Director, 18 Track Studio, August, 1986.

predominantly poor, being made up principally of poor peasants, urban working class and other 'down market' groups. Having an average household income between 3,000-8,000 bht/month (approximately £75-200) they are classified into categories D and E by the media industries (Far-East Advertising, 1984). They are what Curran (1986) has called the '*wrong kind of audience*'. They form the masses loyal to the popular programmes on medium wave radio.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, they are not the type of audience sought by advertisers due to their lack of spending power. Advertising is therefore, withdrawn from these impotent consumers and placed with other media which promise to deliver the right kind of consumers. As a result, radio begins to stagger, especially in the popular sector, the AM band.

Table 3  
Distribution of Advertising Expenditure by Media  
1975-1985

	1975	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Television	25.00%*	47.15%	47.76%	50.07%	49.93%	51.58%	59.10%
Radio** (est.)	30.00%	24.79%	23.63%	22.23%	20.71%	19.08%	N/A
Newspaper	22.00%	16.11%	17.96%	18.47%	21.36%	20.60%	21.20%
Magazine	5.00%	5.89%	6.17%	5.38%	4.64%	7.33%	9.20%
Cinema	8.00%	5.06%	4.48%	3.83%	3.36%	1.39%	0.50%
Others	10.00%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total Expenditure	1200@	2017	2433	2712	3535	4718	3999

\*: As a percentage of total expenditure that year

\*\*: Expenditure on radio is calculated from average station rate cards since a large part is not handled by advertising agencies and the figure for 1985 was not available

N/A: Figures for outdoors advertising between 1980-1985 were not available

@: Figures are in million baht at current prices (the rate of exchange is 40 baht to £1)

Sources: -The Bank of Thailand quoted in UNESCO, *Transnational Communication and Cultural Industries*, 1982:39 for 1975 figures.

-Media Data Resources Co. Ltd., *The Thai Advertising Industry Guide 1986-1987* for 1980-1985 figures.

<sup>22</sup> Most commercial radio stations operate several frequencies under a single call sign. Their programmes on the AM and FM bands are distinctively unconnected except for the relay of official programmes.

Although the emergent music industry steps in at this point to become radio's major advertiser, previous levels of profit are not maintained in the AM sector (mostly local army radio). The FM sector, aimed at the middle and upper-classes in the cities on the other hand expands rapidly. Media entrepreneurs receive no less than 8 new licenses for FM stations in the regions between 1985-1986.<sup>23</sup> The Department of Public Relations also expands in the same direction as does the commercial sector producing a 15% increase in FM stations overall between 1981 and 1985. At the same time, the drastic drop in the military network's advertising revenues prompts reforms in the hierarchy of control in some sector of the army system in an attempt to restore efficiency and reliability.<sup>24</sup> In the 2nd Region Army, a system of open bidding for franchises coming for renewal was introduced in order to attract the most qualified media entrepreneurs. In addition, the term of the contract is subject to annual review. But despite the official policy of breaking up the existing monopolies, in practice, the small newcomers are unable to raise the capital required by the competition to create a single undifferentiated market in the entire region. This opens the way for a few large media operators to consolidate their control over military radio.<sup>25</sup>

In Bangkok where both the AM and FM bands are saturated however, a second strategy for reform has been pursued with the army reclaiming its allocative control from the media entrepreneurs. For example, Kong Pol 1, FM (1st Division Army) radio instituted its own advertising department to manage the sale of air-time. An overall policy on programming is also implemented. Although entertainment remains the main priority, producers are now required to incorporate '*useful information*' into each programme. In order to support this reform the Army has set up the Centre for Programme Production to centralise production on some military and magazine programme on a more cost-effective basis.

In the third and final mode of reform, army officers actually become radio entrepreneurs by investing capital in setting up and running the organisation as

---

<sup>23</sup> Interview with J. Limthai, Director of Programme, Nite Spot Productions, February, 1986.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with P. Bunprong, June, and M. Charoensilp, Central Army Information Unit, August, 1986.

<sup>25</sup> In each region, there are less than a handful of radio entrepreneurs. Some of these also operate in more than one region. For example, Unity Co. which operates Wor Bhor Tor, the drama station in Bangkok, has a network of 21 stations throughout the country.

a corporation. This recent experiment has been carried out in the south which has the least number of commercial FM stations.

Let us turn now to the other media industries to see how they are constrained by the dynamics of the economy and advertising. Although they are not as dependent on advertising revenue as the broadcast media, revenue from sales generally covers only a small percentage of their production costs. For newspapers, it covers only the cost of newsprint. With magazines, it covers about 30-40% of production cost. In the music, film, and book publishing industries whose main income is from direct sales of the product, at least 25% of revenue goes to the distributor, so that sales alone provide an insufficient base for such business undertakings. Advertising inflow is therefore essential for the basic survival and profits of all the media industries.

The media corporations whose products reach the mass audience tend to benefit most from this business environment because they can charge high rates to advertisers. For example, in 1982, the prime-time rate card for Channel 7 was 33,000 bht/min. (approximately £825) while Channel 3 and 9 cost 22,000 and 12,000 bht/min. (approximately £550 and £300). Channel 7 (Krungthep Toratas Jamkad) was the first channel to achieve nation-wide coverage in 1979 by using the Indonesian Palapa satellite. While Channel 9 attempted unsuccessfully to compete for a larger share of the market by introducing cable television,<sup>26</sup> Channel 5 struggled to expand its coverage in the more promising market in the north, around Chiangmai and its outlying areas. Adopting a different strategy, Channel 3 (Bangkok Entertainment Co.) attached itself to the state-run network of the Department of Public Relations and won the contract for the prime-time slot in all the regional stations in 1984.

The situation with national newspapers is similar. *Thai Rath*, the top mass circulation title, charged 132,000 bht (approximately £3,300) for a full-page ad in 1984, an 18% increase over two years (although its circulation had increased by 30% in the same period). This contrasts to the established rate of 27,000 bht/FP (approximately £675) charged by *Matichon*, the leading quality papers whose circulation had actually dropped 18% during the same period. In 1982, *Thai Rath* modernised its production process by investing in computer technology and new printing machines costing over 20 million bht (an equivalent of £0.5

---

<sup>26</sup> In 1983, Clearview Cable Co., a California based cable operator proposed a system of subscription narrow-casting television in Bangkok. Cable would be launched within five years only if the first phase was successful. However, public protests has suspended the project.

million). This enabled it to expand its market by printing two daily editions for Bangkok while still keep the price per copy level at 3 bht (approximately 8 pence). Its strategy however, effects the entire industry. To be financially viable, smaller circulation newspapers often print supplementary issues on various occasions to attract advertising. **Matichon** for example, has developed its Sunday issue into a current affairs magazine, **Matichon Weekly** to maximise readers. In addition, it has launched a semi-weekly business paper, **Prachachat Turakit**, to further expand its up-market operations.

In magazines, the mass circulation titles such as **Bangkok**, **Dara Pabayan** and **Kuan Ruan** are also able to charge high advertising rates. Their price per copy is low or moderate. The up-market specialised magazines such as **Business Review**, **Dichan**, and **Lalana** whose readers are business executives, and women of the middle and upper-classes supplement their lower advertising rate with a higher price per copy strategy.

For the music industry, book publishing and film, whose major income is from sales revenue, it is also the large corporations that control the market. They employ a strategy of concentration in order to maximise profit. In the popular sector of the music industry, the five largest companies control more than 60% of the market. Azona, one of the top five, controls its own production and distribution process through vertical integration, from producing the master tape to copy printing and sales. It also invests in studio facilities for music video production for its promotion campaigns.

The growth of television has had its most severe effect on the film industry. The Association of Film Producers was successful in lobbying for the protection of the industry against the influx of foreign films and a special tax has been levied on imported films since 1976. This measure obliged the industry to move more concertedly into the middle and upper-classes market who favour foreign films over local production. But the popular market continues to deteriorate. As a result, the film industry is unable to fully recover from the deep slump.

Radio drama also declined when television launched a ratings war based around prime-time television drama in the early 1980s. Several radio drama companies went out of business during this period, including, **Ampanyut**, **213**, and **Kanchalika**. The proprietors of **Nilikanon** and **Busapaket** companies for example, responded by minimising production costs, reducing the size of casts while acting the main parts themselves. In addition, owners of both these enterprises

are full-time employees of the Department of Public Relations and Channel 7.<sup>27</sup> Another major company, Kantana, moved into television production but still keeps a small studio for radio drama. Even the two main companies, Ketthip and Siam '81, find it difficult to operate without other sources of income and about 30-40% of their revenue now comes from the film industry who employ drama for its promotion campaign.<sup>28</sup> Ketthip did explore the possibilities of television production but was unable to compete with the large studios.

In the highly competitive media environment described above there is a growing trend in favour of large corporations. These enterprises maintain their level of growth and profits by seeking to dominate the market both horizontally and vertically. In some sectors corporations also diversify into other areas. For example, Thai Rath has begun to move into the leisure industry with restaurants and disco clubs. The media entrepreneurs of Channel 7 and 3 are major share holders of the Sri Ayudhya Bank and Asia Trust Bank as well as a range of other businesses.

The overview in this section has attempted to show the interconnectedness of the media industries and how they are circumscribed by the logic of the capitalist economy. As part of this network radio's development is necessarily related to dynamics in the surrounding media industries as well as to trends in the economy in general. However, much more work is needed to map out the detail and the real extent of corporate control in the Thai media industries.

#### **The relationship between economic constraint and media content.**

We have demonstrated that in the major media of mass communications such as broadcasting and the press, advertising revenue is the fundamental basis for their survival and growth. How does this reliance on advertising affect media content? Murdock argued that;

*"The need to attract and keep large, politically heterogeneous audiences means that popular media tend to play safe and pick up the conservative rather than the radical strands in popular culture."*

(Murdock, 1982:147)

---

<sup>27</sup> Interview with W. Nilikanon, owner of Nilikanon drama company, and R. Chantarangsi, owner of Busapaket drama company, June and March, 1986.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with A. Bunmalert, owner of Siam '81 drama company, and K. Tinnapong, owner of Ketthip drama company, June and September, 1986.

In addition, the quantity of media must be seen in relation to their quality, in terms of diversification and audience representation (Murdock and Janus, 1985 and Curran 1986). Demographic groups in the audience which do not present themselves as potential customers, such as the under-privileged, ethnic minorities and children, are excluded from the mainstream media. As a result, the trend is towards more polarisation, less plurality of media content, more conservatism and less adventurousness within popular entertainment. The following is a sketch of how the economic dynamics of the media industries limit the range and direction of media content.

In radio, there are three main categories of popular programming on the commercial network; popular entertainment, news and information and advertising (see Figure 5). A closer look reveals that popular entertainment consists largely of music, music and chat, and drama programmes. But within this range the present move is very much towards more music programmes as opposed to drama production which is on the decline. The second category of programme, news and information, is either relayed from Radio Thailand or produced by the legal owner of the station. The small number of news commentary programmes are highly popular but are constantly under pressure from state censorship. However, the popularity of these programme proves that they are worth the political risk as we shall see in more detail in chapter 7.

The state-operated sector of radio does not escape the effect of economic dynamics within the media industries. Radio Thailand started its third programme in 1974 for popular entertainment and information and although its first programme emphasises news and information, 45% of the third programme is entertainment.

In newspapers, there is a marked shift away from the traditional political papers to the more commercial papers. During the 1950s and 1960s, *Thammathipat*, *Paothai*, *Sarnseri*, *Thai Raiwan* closed with the defeat of their political patrons, *Phibun*, *Pao* and *Sarit*. The radical press, conceived after 1973 and represented by titles such as *Prachachat*, *Prachathipatai*, *Athipat*, *Siengmai*, *Pitupum*, had to fight not only economic but also political constraints. They were closed down after the coup in 1976 during which time the popular press was also heavily censored. The government's own title *Chao Phraya* was, however, a commercial failure.

For the past decade, mass circulation newspapers have increasingly adopted a similar formula in news reporting and overall presentation, whether they be the



giant **Thai Rath** or the politically vocal papers such as **Sieng Puang Chon**, **Naew Na** or **Dao Siam**. The front page emphasis is solidly crime and violence and the major political events. There are few commentaries except for the main editorial. In response to the economic imperative for larger circulation all papers now have their regional edition or regional pages. This further exacerbates the situation of a local press already in decline.

The second section of the papers is built around entertainment and consists of information from the music, television, film and the leisure industries. Together with the scripts of the daily episodes of television dramas and series, these pages make up 25% of the issue. This interlocking strategy between the press and television helps to maintain the readership. At the same time, it is part of the multi-marketing strategy of the industry. Most television dramas started in the women magazines before they are published in book form and then converted for radio or television.

In the magazine market, the greatest state of flux, from 190 titles in 1982 to 315 in 1984, occurs in the up-market segment rather than the down-market. Since most titles compete for readerships in much the same market, their contents are generally oriented around leisure, entertainment and fiction for young adults, working women and professionals. The contents of the mass market womens' magazines focus on the image of conventional housewife and mother. Significantly, among the present titles there are none for the elderly or ethnic minorities. There is however one student magazine and **Sator**, newly launched for regional interests. Children magazines are mostly comic strips. At the bottom end of the market, pulp magazines revolve around the entertainment industry, soft porn, violence, and fictions which reinforce stereotypical sex roles. General and current affairs magazines are on the decline. Literary magazines disappeared completely after the death of **Lok Nangsue** and **Tanon Nangsue** in early 1980s. The current segmentation of the market is based on demographic information that fits advertisers' classifications of target consumer groups. New titles therefore appear in categories such as business, travel, sports, automotive, home and decoration, and family and child (Prakobpol, 1983).

If pulp magazines are conservative in revolving around soft porn, violence, the entertainment industry and fictions which stereotype sex roles, special interest magazines are ambivalent in their efforts to serve the advertisers and readers at the same time. High-tech photography and printing are used to glamourise advertising copy whilst 'editorial' policy constantly blurs the line between

editorial and advertisement.

Commercial television has become an all entertainment medium since its main strategy is to produce a large, undifferentiated audience. Channel 7, the nation-wide channel, draws its audience from the evening Thai series, weekend sports and variety shows. Channel 5 appeals to the conservative sector of the middle-classes with Thai dramas as well as variety shows. Channel 3 employs a strategy of maximising the segmented audience in its early years and relies heavily on American and Hong Kong series and satellite news. The state enterprise, Channel 9, was running at a loss during the 1970s even though part of its financial support came from the flourishing Tor Tor Tor radio network (Kitiwat, 1983). Lacking an overall policy on programming, the new management turned to Japanese cartoons to boost ratings.

In the 1980s, there are indications of a shift in the direction of programme content due to the bitter ratings war. Several new forms of programme are being experimented with. The most successful ones are Thai dramas, quiz shows and pop concerts (coinciding with the growth of the music industry). There are fewer foreign programmes on the screen than in the 1970s (Supadilok, 1984). A large number of domestically produced dramas revolve around upper and middle-class romance, or are historical dramas that praise the heroic deeds of past kings. Action adventure series are rare due to high production costs.<sup>29</sup>

Channel 9 gained high ratings when it contracted news production to the Pacific Co, who comprehensively overhauled the conventions of presentation. The programme now entertains as well as informs. Although other stations have tried to follow this lead, their news content continues to lean heavily on the official sources and to avoid controversial issues. Marginal views or opposition opinions remain unheard.

Children's programme are constantly struggling for survival. They are not popular with advertisers since the audience are not seen as major potential customers. In 1983, the NBA made special requests for all stations to allot the early evening hours to children's programme. Although some stations comply they receive little positive response from the advertisers (MCPG, 1983).

As outlined above, media entrepreneurs develop only certain kinds of programme

---

<sup>29</sup> Interview with P. Tanasatit, Kantana Production, August, 1986.

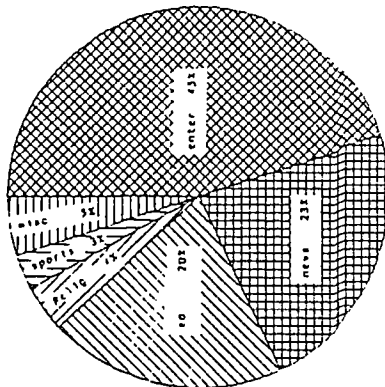
under the logic of commercialism. The changes that have taken place have not resulted in programmes for any marginalised social groups or classes nor in the growth of new genres outside the existing popular entertainment formats. On the contrary, the general trend is to seek the ideological and cultural middle ground in order to attract the widest possible audience. Commercial constraint is the main thrust behind the organisation and production of content in the media industries, not the audience's needs.

Despite the economic imperatives and rigid control by the state, the tensions within the media industries and among the power institutions produced a more complex system of representation than it appeared to be. In radio, the dual structure of state ownership and market control has delimited the diversity of programming and accessibility to the system (see Figure 5). But within this highly constricted structure the processes of cultural production and consumption are problematised by their internal contradictions and not least, by the general political and socio-economic milieu. In order to move beyond an over simplistic view on the relations between material control and ideological domination, it is necessary to examine in more detail the relations in the media organisation as well as the dynamics of cultural and programme production and the tensions these generate within the existing range of popular programme forms. The complications arise firstly out of the professionals who are actively engaged in this '*cultural reproduction*' process. They are the creative communicators - writers, journalists, actors and musicians - who make the products sell. Secondly, in producing a successful cultural product the organisational goals and the audiences' needs must be reconciled. Thus, from the small range of formats, especially popular programmes, a variety of ideologies and discourses, contradictory and challenging to the *status quo*, are at play. The next two chapters initiate this analysis by looking at how media entrepreneurs and producers negotiate between the commercial imperative, professional codes and audience's needs in both the state and consumer-oriented media organisations. These are followed by an analysis of the discourses of both the serious and the popular genres in chapters 7, 8 and 9. The thesis's final exploration is an ethnographic study of a small group of women textile workers which demonstrates how '*ideological reproduction*' is contested and re-created into an alternative form of representation.

Figure 5

A Comparison of Programme Content in Commercial and Non-commercial Broadcasting

- A) RADIO THAILAND (regular programme)      B) COMMERCIAL RADIO (average percentage)      C) COMMERCIAL TELEVISION (Channel 3&7 average %)



-Entertainment programmes are mostly Thai classical performance

-Radio Thailand's Third programme consists of 50% on music, 40% on news - traffic & public service

-Radio Thailand's Second programme consists of 64% education programme from Ramkhamhaeng Open University, and 22% news

Sources:

A)

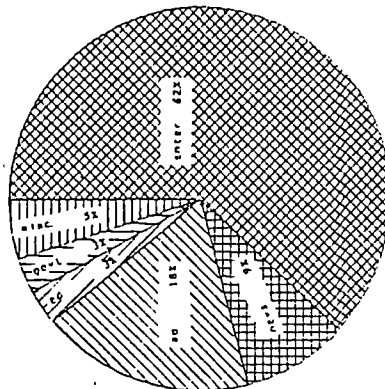
Radio Thailand, 1980.

B)

Tor Tor Tor, the military network programme schedules and Supadilok, 1984.

C)

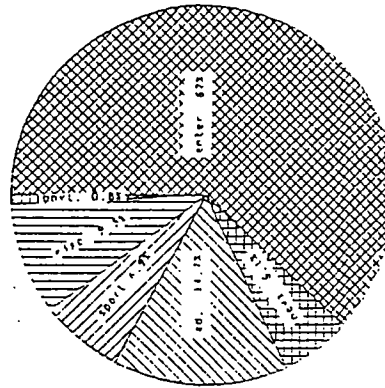
Media, July 1984 and Supadilok, 1984.



-Entertainment programmes are mostly music, music & chat, and drama

-2.20 hrs of news is relayed from Radio Thailand

-The NBA regulates for 9 min/hr spot advertising but is unequipped to monitor the actual broadcast, in practice, it ranges from 8-12 min/hr



-Entertainment programmes are mostly drama, series & film. Channel 5 & 9 broadcast nearly the same percentage of entertainment

-The NBA regulates for 10 min/hr spot advertising. If violated the normal time is deducted until a balance is reached

## CHAPTER 5

### PRODUCING NEWS AND COMMENTARY IN THE BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

This chapter offers a concrete analysis of the process of cultural production based on the general position developed in chapter 4, in which we argued that it is the dynamics of the economic and political control and relations with the rest of the media industry that shape the development of the dual system of radio broadcasting. How then are these forces translated into organisational structures and occupational practices? How do they shape media output? These questions in turn raise issues about the relations between organisational goal, professionalism, and communicator autonomy (Elliot, 1972, 1977, Murdock, 1980). How does professionalism as an occupational ideology mediate between organisation goals and practitioners' ideal for example? How do creative producers negotiate between the commercial code and artistic code in the production of popular culture?

The following analysis examines the production of both the serious genres and the major popular genres of music and drama, on three AM commercial stations. These are; Tor Or (The Royal Air Force), Sor Tor Ror (The Royal Navy), and Wor Bhor Tor (Energy Unit, Military Supreme Command Headquarter) radios. They represent the three models of military commercial stations outlined in section 4.2. However, it is not enough simply to examine practices *within* these stations since not all programmes are made in-house. The production of commentary and religious programmes are monopolised by the state and made directly by the military and the Sangha. Similarly since most of the popular programmes are produced by the sponsors or the media industries (see Table 4) our investigation must explore the dynamics of drama and music industries. These will be dealt with in the next chapter. The present chapter concentrates on actuality programming, looking in turn at; military commentary programmes; Sunday sermon; news and current affairs programmes; and news commentaries.

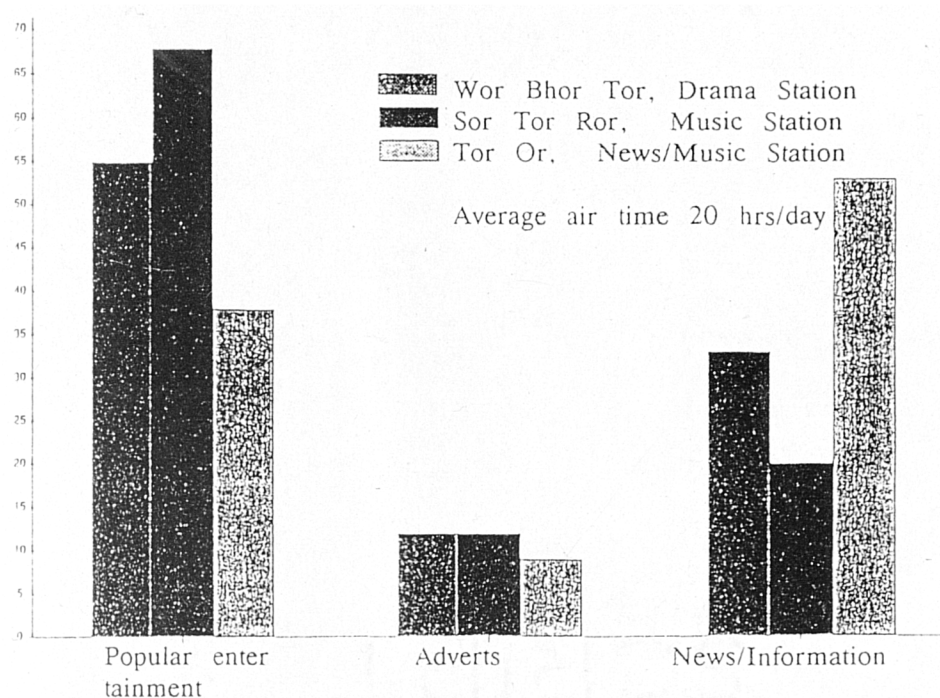
Table 4

Relation of Time Ownership and Control of Programme Production  
in Three AM Radio Stations

	a) Wor	Bhor	Tor	b) Sor	Tor	Ror	c) Tor	Or
1. Management	Unity Company (media entrepreneur)			Somchainuk Company (advertiser: cosmetics co.)			Royal Air Force	
2. Sale of time	Sales dept.			Brokerage			Sales dept. & brokerage	
3. Time occupancy								
-popular entertainment (sponsored)	-ad agencies	29.62%		-Somchainuk	44.09%		-Station	55.55%
	-drama companies	70.37%		-Azona	16.14%		-private producers	44.45%
				-private producers	39.75%			
-popular news	-private producers	100.00%		-private producers	100.00%		-station	100.00%
4. Programme production	-mediated by ad agencies or producers			-advertisers' own productions			-station's production on news & information	
				-private producers under 'payola' system			& some music programme -private producers under 'payola' system	

Source: Stations' programme logs and recordings (Mon-Fri), May 1986.

**Figure 6**  
**Programme Content in Three AM Radio Stations**  
**1986**



Source: Stations' programme logs and recordings (Mon-Fri), May 1986.

Audience: Lower to lower-middle classes in D, E and C categories

Wor Bhor Tor	-Women, all age group
Sor Tor Ror	-Adolescents, female & male
Tor Or	-Male oriented

## 5.1 The State and Media Production: Political Goals and Social Integration

Media production in the Thai broadcasting system is generally governed by the state's conception of political and social integration. As laid out in the Broadcasting Regulation B.E.2517 (1974) the principle roles of the broadcast media are:

- to promote the system of constitutional monarchy
- to promote the national interests and policies in the realms of politics, military, and economy
- to promote the consciousness and responsibility of the citizen towards the nation, religion and the king
- to promote social unity
- to propagate against any opposition ideologies
- to disseminate news and information from the government in order to establish a correct understanding among citizens
- to preserve tradition and culture

Commercial radio must comply with these guidelines in their production of both information and popular programmes. It must also surrender parts of the prime-time schedule for the three officially produced programmes - news, military commentaries and Sunday sermons. These programmes are relayed from their sources of production; the military via radio Kong Pol 1 (1st Regiment Army), and the Department of Public Relations via Radio Thailand.

### Schedules of Official Programmes

Siam Manusati	6:45-7:00	Mon-Sat	Military commentary
News	7:00-8:00	Mon-Sat	Official bulletin
National Anthem	8:00-8:03	Mon-Sat	
Sunday Sermon	8:00-8:30	Sun	Religious programme
<hr/>			
News	12:30-13:00	Mon-Sat	Official bulletin
National Anthem	18:00-18:03	Mon-Sat	
Pua Pandin Thai	18:03-18:15	Mon-Sun	Military commentary
News	19:00-19:30	Mon-Sat	Official bulletin
News	20:00-20:30	Mon-Sat	Official bulletin

### The Production of Military Commentary Programmes: Siam Manusati and Pua Pandin Thai

Both Siam Manusati (The Conscience of Siam) and Pua Pandin Thai (For the Land of the Thai) are current affairs programmes. Although they are produced



within the military hierarchy the centralisation of control takes different forms. Within their common goal of guarding the nation, *Siam Manusati* represents the view of the dominant faction within the army, while *Pua Pandin Thai* encompasses a broader ideology of the Right and the bureaucratic state. The former is produced by the army security unit, the Psychological Operation Centre in the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC), the latter by the army programme production centre.

*Siam manusati* was conceived after the April Fool's Day coup in 1981 when the Young Turks were crushed by the government of General Prem and his military supporters. However, because the military is confronted with a crisis of political legitimisation within the dominant power blocs, the programme is based around the running theme of '*political consensus*'.

The production team of *Siam Manusati* consists of a small core of script writers and two male announcers, all of whom are military officers. Scripts are written in the morning and censored by the Head of the Psychological Operation Department in the afternoon. Alterations to scripts are made on the basis of high level policy or fresh military information. The revised scripts must undergo a second reading before being recorded in the unit's studio. This final stage may be supervised or unsupervised depending on the time of the day and the importance of the issue. On a routine day, the production process is concluded within office hours. Recording might however, run into the evening.<sup>1</sup>

Since the programme deals with current affairs there are invariably political controversies and these demand longer production time and greater supervision, as in the case of the general elections in 1983 and 1986, and the constitutional amendment controversy in 1983. However, expense is not a major constraint. Since production cost is absorbed by the overall military budget there is no limit set to the over-time pay for the production team.

Thus, the production team operate as state functionaries under stringent control in order to carry out military political objectives. As they are military officers themselves, they share a common ideology with the organisation and the programme. Any day-to-day operational conflict that might occur is subsumed under the general military code of conduct.

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with the script-writer, March, 1986.

**Pua Pandin Thai** shares similar ideological constraints with **Siam Manusati** but control of the production process takes the form of collective centralisation. Its production is structured into the routine monthly meeting between various military security and information units in which a blue-print of specific objectives and contents is produced. Script-writing is generally distributed among three units while recording is coordinated by the Army Programme Production Centre. Under this collective organisational structure, the script-writers are deprived of any authority or creativity. They must follow closely the topics, direction of presentations and the narrative style previously decided on. Nonetheless, they are not pressured by time since the topics are geared to annual social and historical occasions such as religious festivities and royal events. They do however cover a wide range of current issues.

By comparison to **Siam Manusati**, **Pua Pandin Thai** draws on a wider range of social and political ideologies. In its effort to appeal to a larger audience the programme has brought in the former announcer of Radio Thailand, Akom Mokaranon. He is allowed a certain degree of autonomy in presenting the programme. Twice a week, he talks to the audience instead of using the prescribed narrative style of the lecture. In addition, Saturday programmes are sometimes opened for responses and queries from the audience.

Because the production of both **Siam Manusati** and **Pua Pandin Thai** is located within the military, a militarist ideology prevails and professionalism gives way to institutional discipline and internal censorship. Consequently, it is external constraints, and political conflicts in particular, that provide the main sources of tension that impinge in production.

Despite objections by the press, parliament and the political parties that the programmes are simply '*political platforms*' that undermine consensus, the NBA (which is responsible for regulating radio) is unable to exercise its jurisdiction over them and effective control remains with the military who justifies its partial use of radio on the grounds of '*national security*' and '*national interests*'. This presents a dilemma for the regulatory body. How can the NBA uphold the role prescribed for broadcasting and defend its impartiality at the same time? Indeed, the fact that the military commentaries and the Sunday sermon are both opinionated and biased casts doubt on the whole notion of impartiality. As we shall discuss presently, the production of news and popular news commentary programmes provides a further illustration of how impartiality is questioned and contested.

### The Production of Religious Programme: The Sunday Sermon

The Sunday sermon is produced by the Production Division of the Department of Public Relations. One producer is assigned to the programme. However, since the programme consists of a sermon given by monks of high ecclesiastical rank his responsibility is confined to ensuring coordination between the Sangha and the technical staff of Radio Thailand. Most of the recording takes place in the studio, except on special occasions when a live sermon is broadcasted. Some of the programmes are produced by the Public Relations Regional Headquarters. For example, Radio Thailand's station at Surathani produces the sermons given by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu who resides in the south.

The form of the Sunday sermon, *Phradhamma Tesana*, is a reproduction of the tradition of oral sermons given by monks on the Buddhist sabbath. The sermon is strictly didactic. Although the producer attempts to liven up the programme by selecting adroit preachers, his efforts are rather circumscribed. Control of the style and content of the programme lies with the individual monk whose authority on Buddhism is uncontested. Hence, as with production of military commentary programmes, the producer is left with little space to manoeuvre.

The producer's professionalism is further curtailed by shifts in political ideology and organisational guidelines. The political change in 1978 and the religious schisms within the Sangha for example, were immediately translated into a new guiding policy for the Sunday sermon. The programme was to incorporate non-conformists monks, whereas in the past space was only available for monks from the established faction.<sup>2</sup>

The reduction of the role of the producer to that of a programme coordinator has divided the power to control between the media organisation and the Sangha. But the programme is far from homogeneous in representing the ideology of the state. In its efforts to accommodate to change while upholding its moral ethics the Sangha is confronted with internal and external tensions. However, whenever conflicts occur the professionalism of the producer and Radio Thailand's is called into question. Like the military, the dominant position of the Sangha overrides the power of the NBA.

---

<sup>2</sup> Interview with the producer, June, 1986.

The closed form of the Sunday sermon has recently given rise to a novel presentation by Phra Phym. His '*comedy chat sermon*' which employs a popular style appeals to a wider and younger audience. Although the content adheres strictly to Buddhist moral codes, his sermons' deviation from the main stream '*moral lecture*' is seen as both subversive of the religious hierarchy and as a commodification of Buddhism. Undeterred by official censorship, Phra Phym has turned to cassette recordings as a channel of distribution. He has also gained access to the religious programme on television Channel 3.

#### Conventional Sermon

- preacher centred
- didactic,axiomatic syntax
- monologue,reading from text
- serious,authoritative, prohibitive
- verbal communication only
- abstract,theoretical, matter of everyday life

#### Comedy Chat Sermon

- audience centred
- didactic
- dialogue(close-ended) persuasive techniques
- comical,relatively open
- verbal & physical communication
- matter of everyday life

As we have illustrated so far the process that has entrusted the fundamental authority for production to institutions, such as the military and the Sangha, has relegated script-writers and producer to craftsmen and coordinators. Although they share a common ideology as state institutions their professional ideologies diverge considerably. Internal conflicts within the media organisations are contained through the routinisation of the production process, censorship and disciplinary conduct. However, the structure of production is an open invitation to criticism on the question of impartiality and professionalism. In addition, the growing concern with audience reception is a new source of pressure shaping the outcome of the production process.

Table 5

A Summary of the Structures of  
Siam Manusati, Pua Pandin Thai and Sunday Sermon

Structure	Siam Manusati	Pua Pandin Thai	Sunday Sermon
1. Target audience	-Middle strata, intellectuals, & urban audiences	-Lower middle strata, rural peasantry	-State functionary, urban & rural audience
2. Programme identification	-The military, the triple alliance	-The right, the triple alliance	-The Sangha, the triple alliance
3. Underlying theme	-Political consensus	-Social integration	-Moral purification
4. Frequency	-Daily(except Sun)	-Daily	-Sunday
5. Production technique	-Narration	-Narration,edited live broadcast	-Narration
6. Presenter	-All male	-Male; hard issues, female; soft issues	-All male
7. Presenter's role	-Narrator, reader	-Narrator	-Narrator, reader

## 5.2 The Production of News and Current Affairs Programmes: Organisation and Professional Ideology

Broadcast journalism emerged during the acceleration of commercialism in the media industries in the 1960s, but the development of a professional ideology is a more recent phenomenon. As Golding and Elliot (1979:17-18) have pointed out, the strategy of audience seeking in the commercial press provides a fit between organisational goal and professionalism as an ideology. Broadcasting however, suffers from the state-defined notion of news which prohibits the airing of opinion, extreme dissent or excessive controversy. In common with many Third World countries, broadcasting in Thailand is under stringent legislative restraints, as outlined earlier in 4.1. So how has professionalism in broadcasting developed within these complex relations between political constraints and economic imperatives? To answer this question we look firstly at how broadcast journalism evolved in relation to news making in the press and the state-run media. We then examine the production of two '*popular news commentary*' programmes, *Kao Si Mum Baan* on Tor Or radio and *Kao Duan Juan Saang* on Wor Bhon Tor radio, in an attempt to show how professionalism as an ideology must necessarily challenge the state-defined notion of impartiality in order to fulfill the broadcasting organisations' economic goals.

### Broadcast journalism, the state and the commercial press

For the first three decades of radio's development, the Department of Public Relations monopolised broadcast news production. The political goals of the new constitutional government coupled with a paternalistic view deeply rooted in the bourgeois state provided the bedrock for an '*impartial*' use of broadcasting. But as we shall see, this notion of impartiality which equates it with an uncritical view of the state, becomes problematic within the dual system of broadcasting.

News production in the state-run sector of radio is divided into two separate operations, processing and presenting. In the Department of Public Relations, news processing is located in the Domestic and Foreign News Divisions. News presentation is allocated to Radio Thailand. In its early years, the passive processing of official announcements and news releases required little journalistic skill from the practitioners/civil servants. In contrast, Radio Thailand's news announcers are now at the forefront of presentation. They are selected for their language capability and their convincing tone of '*voice*' (Huncharoen, 1983).

Table 6

Structure of Broadcast News and Current Affairs Programmes

STATE PRODUCTION

News Produced by the State  
(The Public Relations Dept)

- Official news bulletin
- Current affairs
- News magazines

News Produced by the Military  
(Various units of the Armed Forces)

- Military announcements
- News bulletins

---

COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION

News Produced by State  
Corporation  
(MCOT and Tor Tor Tor)

- News bulletins
- Current affairs

News Produced by Independent  
Newscasters  
(Independent newscasters,  
station employees)

- Popular news commentary  
(AM stations)
- Hourly news summary
- Current affairs  
(FM stations)\*

\* Most current affairs programmes on the FM band concentrate on international events

After the downfall of the military regime in 1973 news production in the media industries took on a new momentum. The commercial press has open itself to a wider spectrum of political discourses. Within this changed context, broadcasting could no longer simply serve the state and leave the audiences to migrate to the commercial media. Although news production in the state broadcasting system remained politically sensitive the previous view of news making as a means to achieve its political goals increasingly come under pressure.

The dramatisation of news, drawn mainly from the popular press, was already being developed in the Tor Tor Tor state corporation in an attempt to make presentation more entertaining. But the major innovation was a mixture of dramatisation and news talk developed by independent producers on military radio, dubbed '*newspapers on the air*' (Chanchaloem, 1982). Backed by military support, the programmes successfully married economic imperatives with organisational goals. Both these strands of programming deviated from the rigid definition of news practised by the Department of Public Relations. For the state medium, anything that departed from the reporting of straight '*facts*' fell outside the scope of news. More importantly, they were seen as an erosion of the impartiality principle.

Passive news production in radio finally became untenable when television achieved nation-wide coverage in 1979 and the press responded by reforming its outlook whilst investing in new printing technology. Change was inevitable for Radio Thailand. As one of the news announcer explained;

*"We now have a large corps of news reporters in both the Domestic and Foreign News Division. Every morning we are dispatched to various state agencies for news gathering. If it is an actuality we will bring along our cassette recorder. Each reporter works against time because we need to compete with all other news media. How can we lapse behind? When the material is gathered it is edited with great speed so that we can put it on air as soon as possible."*

(Atisap, 1983:72)

'Actuality' recordings are now incorporated into three of its four main news bulletins. Furthermore, the morning bulletin has been extended to a one-hour news magazine programme including a 15-minute segment of news analysis.

These innovations of presentational style have provided media practitioners with a sense of autonomy unexperienced in the past. But as Elliot (1977) argued, media output will only vary if new practices are approved by the organisation. On the day-to-day operational level, active reporting suits both the administrator



of the Department of Public Relations and its practitioners. But at a more complex level it is creating occupational role conflict. Practitioners must devise techniques that are in line with the canons of impartiality and objectivity subscribed to by the organisation. Those who challenge the standard practices come into conflict with their employers. For example, although 'actuality' recording is approved it must only present official sources. Vox pops are strictly forbidden since most of them are critical of the government.<sup>3</sup> In this way, self-censorship and organisational discipline are tightened as conflict on the question of professional autonomy intensifies (Kaewpan, 1983). It becomes a dilemma that further complicates the existing structural tensions in broadcast journalism.

Within the commercial broadcasting sector, the two strands of news dramatisation for entertainment and military propaganda have been modified into a new blend of news and current affairs programmes. They are commonly called popular news programmes to signify that they are a different genre from the official news bulletins. They mark a significant journalistic movement away from a politically confined broadcast system. In the search for new and larger audiences, radio moves towards an apparently neutral and entertaining terrain which makes it both more attractive and more influential. This process shares similar features with the better known transformation from a political to a commercial press in advanced capitalist societies. As described by Golding and Elliot two strategies emerge to achieve this change of emphasis;

*"The first is ideological, stressing the objective and authoritative nature of the news being supplied. The second is a matter of style and presentation, the 'new journalism'"*

(Golding and Elliot, 1979:25)

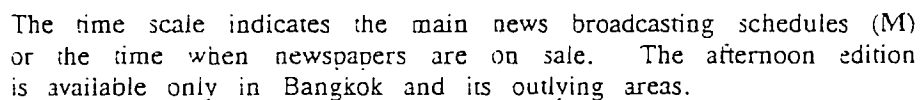
By relying on press reports popular commentary programmes can lay claim to the neutrality and authority which allows it to develop its style of mixing facts with opinion or news reports with editorial comment so as to present information in an entertaining way. Within this format, the producer/presenter takes on the roles of expert and 'star', as we shall see later.

In reacting to economic imperative and political constraint broadcasters have redefined broadcast journalism in accordance to the ideology of professionalism. This applies to both the state-run and commercial stations. News production begins to encompass a more neutral position while introducing changes in

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview with S. Plangprasobchok, Head of Centre for Programme Production, Radio Thailand, July, 1986.

## Time as a Structural Constraint in News Production



\*\* Most FM stations schedule an hourly news summary.

1. Morning slot	05:00-07:00, 08:00-10:00	before or after the official bulletins
2. Evening slot	20:30-22:00	after the official bulletin
3. Late night slot	23:00-02:00	after the TV drama series programmes

## **The production of news commentary programmes: Kao Si Mum Baan and Kao Duan Juan Saang**

### **Occupational development**

**Kao Si Mum Baan** (News Around Town) is produced by Wut Wenujan, a Royal Air Force officer. He began his career as a technician on Tor Or radio. After some years he became a stand-in for drama programmes and underwent voice training with the Tor Or drama company. Later he was promoted to station announcer. In 1961, he started a 15-minute news dramatisation programme which was the forerunner of the present news commentary programme.

**Kao Duan Juan Saang** (News Whiz at Dawn) is produced by Somying Yingyos, an independent broadcaster who began her career as a radio drama actor. In the early years, she also worked as a drama producer and script writer and in the 1960s started Prapakamol drama company. By 1973, the company was no longer viable, and Somying moved to a news talk programme. This became a success within the first two months and provided the financial support that launched her present career as a popular news programme producer. The programme which had been scheduled at 09:30 was moved to the earliest slot at 05:00 in the morning. The main emphasis shifted to news and commentary while the section on job opportunities and public announcements became optional.

### **The organisation of the programme**

#### **The production team**

The production team of **Kao Si Mum Baan** consists of one producer and one assistant. Wut Wenujan *also assumes the role of presenter. The assistant is an* Air Force employee. His job is firstly to compile the major news stories from the 11 national newspapers (in Thai), and secondly to process the material for the public announcement section of the programme. In this capacity he comes into contact with the individuals who are required to come to the station in person to place their messages.

On **Kao Duan Juan Saang**, there are two hired assistants who compile the materials for the programme. There are also two messengers who dispatch the recorded programme to the coach stations and radio stations in Bangkok. The producer assumes the role of presenter in the same way as Wut on **Kao Si Mum Baan**.

Table 7

**The Structure of Programme Sequences in  
Kao Si Mum Baan and Kao Duan Juan Saang**

<b>Kao Si Mum Baan</b> 08:00-09:00	<b>Kao Duan Juan Saang</b> 05:00-06:00/20:30-21:30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Slogans</li> <li>- Official/Public announcements</li> <li>- Hard news (political)</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Hard news (foreign)</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Hard news (economics, modernisation projects, social, education, etc.)</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dhamma (religious preaching)</li> <li>- Hard news(front page)</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Hard news(front page)</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Soft news</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Public service announcements (optional)</li> </ul>
----- 09:00-10:00	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Slogans</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Public service announcements (religious ceremonies/festivals, obituaries, lost and found, etc.)</li> </ul>	
----- 20:30-21:30	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Slogans</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Hard news (general)</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> <li>- Soft news (sex &amp; crimes)</li> <li>- Commercial break</li> </ul>	

### The selection of the materials

The first phase of the selection process is to decide on the sources of news and information to be used in the programmes. Both programmes rely mainly on the press though **Kao Duan Juan Saang** supplements these with news produced by the MCOT (the Thai News Agency) and the National Association of Broadcasters. **Kao Si Mum Baan** also receives materials from the NAB. The notion of public service has added the audience as another source of information. Furthermore, as the station is managed by the Royal Air Force channels are open for military news and information.

The second phase of the selection process is organised around the programme sequence shown on Table 7. **Kao Si Mum Baan** has a strong classification of programme contents. In the morning slot, the programme is made up of official/public announcements, hard news, public service announcements and commercial breaks. Hard news and popular news make up the evening slot. Within this sequence, news items are arranged in the same hierarchical order used in the official news bulletin produced by the Department of Public Relations. Public announcement materials are selected on an acknowledged guideline and are mainly for social events of an apolitical nature.

**Kao Duan Juan Saang** has a somewhat less rigid classification of contents although the sequence is institutionalised. The number of items in each sequence and the time allocated to them varies. Priority is given to front page news. During periods of political crisis or controversy, **Kao Duan Juan Saang** may present only one or two items in its entire programme, sometimes without a commercial break. This occurred during the Young Turk coup in 1981, the constitutional amendment crisis in 1983 and the dissolution of the parliament in 1986.

### The production routine

The daily routine of news commentary programme is tied to the broadcasting schedule. For **Kao Si Mum Baan**, there are two recording sessions; between 7:00-8:00 in the morning and 4:00-6:00 in the afternoon. The morning recording is broadcast at 9:00-10:00. The second half of the morning slot, made up of public announcements, has already been recorded the previous afternoon. The afternoon recording session is therefore, sub-divided into two. The first half for the public announcement sequence and the second half for the evening programme at 8:30.

The routine of **Kao Si Mum Baan** begins at six in the morning when the materials are being compiled, and after two o'clock in the afternoon when the afternoon editions of the papers are available. News items are organised by the assistant into the categories summarised in Table 7. The producer/presenter runs through all items before recording begins. He checks primarily on two things; the content and number of items that fit into each category, and the main news of the day. Although most front page stories are included, the producer must exercise self-regulation to meet both the organisation's goals and its commercial imperatives. Controversial news, concerning the government in particular, is presented strictly from the official point of view and in the prescribed hierarchical order.

While **Kao Si Mum Baan** works within an official environment **Kao Duan Juan Saang** operates in a business organisation. The difference is reflected in both the programme structure and the daily routine. The entire production process is carried out in the producer's studio. There are two recording sessions; the main one at 18:00-19:00 and the second at 02:30-03:30. When the programme was first conceived the second session was the sole recording session since the programme was only produced for the Bangkok audience.

In the 1980s however, **Kao Duan Juan Saang** evolved into a network programme and the recording time adjusted to the evening. Finished programmes are then delivered during the night to four local stations in the east, south and the north for broadcasting the next morning. The same programme is scheduled for broadcasting in Bangkok in two slots; as **Soon Ruam Kao** at 20:30-21:30 on **Tor Tor Tor** and **Sor Sor Sor**, and as **Kao Duan Juan Saang** at 5:00-6:00 on **Wor Bhon Tor** and **Tor Chor Dor** radios. The morning recording session becomes a supplementary session for news up-dates or for breaking new headlines for the **Wor Bhon Tor** and **Tor Chor Dor** audiences. This enables the programme to keep up with the pace of competition in both the speed and exclusiveness of news production (see Figure 7).

#### Programme presentation

The main focus of the production process in both **Kao Si Mum Baan** and **Kao Duan Juan Saang** is the compilation of news items and the recording session. Neither the assistant nor the producer/presenter is involved in script writing. Printed news stories are used unaltered. In the studio, the presenter links the news items by his/her comments or analysis without a written script. Since there is little journalistic skill involved in the organisation of material these improvised inserts become the space in which producers can exercise his/her

autonomy. In the presentation of popular news commentary programmes, dramatisation has given way to reading and brief comments. This is part of the shift towards a self-perceived professionalism. It is at the same time a means of asserting the producer's authority in this new mode of news and information programme.

The general style of presentation on **Kao Si Mum Baan** is didactic. It makes comments and draws conclusions on the popular news items but refrains from any opinionated remarks on the hard news. As the producer points out;<sup>4</sup>

*"The programme must be informative, educational as well as entertaining. Being a responsible producer and officer one should not mix facts with opinion. We should let the audience decide for themselves. Only when there is something seriously wrong then we should sound the warning."*

In contrast **Kao Duan Juan Saang** employs a dramatic and provocative style of presentation. Although it asserts that the audience should make up their own minds the producer underlines its authority by phrases such as, '*I think*' or '*I'd say*'. This unique style of authorial presentation guarantees the programme's exclusiveness.

Both programmes however, have to cope with contradictory values. **Kao Si Mum Baan** must negotiate between the commercially-defined notions of impartiality and objectivity and its own organisation goal. As can be seen from the structure of the programme sequence, there is a clear division between news (in the morning slot) and current affairs (in the evening slot). Facts are separated from opinion and self-regulation is used as a means to resolve role conflict. The situation becomes more problematic however when organisational demands are in conflict with notions of professionalism. Such was the case during the campaign to mobilise a nationalist sentiment against the students and the Left in 1976. **Kao Si Mum Baan** and other popular news programmes expressed their opinions in order (as they put it) to rectify the '*chaotic situation*'. The producer explained why it is necessary for the Free Radio Club to take action, at the same time admitting that it should only happen when there is a crisis. The club was dissolved a few months later.

**Kao Duan Juan Saang** faces a different dilemma. The success of the programme, that comes primarily from its provocative style of mixing facts with opinion, contradicts both the commercially-defined and state-defined notion of impartiality and objectivity. The authority of the producer is justified by its

---

<sup>4</sup> Interview with W. Wenujan, May, 1986.

commercial success, and the fact, as the producer put it, that advertisers must queue to get into the programme. On the other hand, by adopting a 'gatekeeper' role it attempts to legitimate the programme with appeals to notions of professionalism. This is met quite frequently by political and legislative controls as exemplified by the controversy on the reporting of the Young Turk coup in 1981, with the government insisting on more organisational control and political consensus, and Kao Duan Juan Saang arguing for its right to freedom of expression.

*"From now on, every radio station must have an editorial board. The editor should be responsible for the news broadcasts. At present, there are programmes on government radios (military radios) criticising the government based on news and articles from the daily papers. This, I believe, is not practised anywhere in the world."*

(Siam Rath, 11 June 1981)

*"If our programmes are banned it is a bad image for the government. It is not our criticism that would bring down the government. It is a matter of politics."*

(Matichon, 11 June 1981)

The government's attempt to exercise stringent controls failed to materialise. On the contrary, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) was able to negotiate for the continuation of popular news commentary programmes on the condition that they set up their own news production unit (National Broadcasting Board Order 3/2524). The call for freedom of expression also received wide support from the press.

In the following year, the 'Popular Newscaster's Club' was formed. The move away from political constraints and the claim for autonomy was clearly stated in its manifesto;

*"We have to burden ourselves with problems of the nation like other responsible mass media...We may not have a written code of ethics but we inform the public through our programmes nearly around the clock. We serve as an invaluable source of state's public relations without asking for anything in return. Our revenue derives from the sponsors with whom we mutually negotiate on commercial terms. In a sense, we finance the state and serve the state... We hold the four fundamental elements of political, military, economic and social stability in a similar way to the civil servants. But as independent broadcasters, we make honest comments on the news in order to ease the problem, and to help the rural and illiterate listeners to understand the situation. For that, we receive retributions. We are not able to support everyone in every case because we are ourselves. The public listens to us. We must stand by their side...We do not have a patron, and we are not under anyone's control."*

(Hon Huey, 12th February, 1982)



While the dual system of broadcasting is a structural hinderance to any strong measure of government control it does enable the development of a professional ideology. The formation of the *Popular Newscaster's Club* is further confirmation of the rise of a self-proclaimed professionalism. Nonetheless, sharing of the same professional ideology does not imply a homogeneous view among members of the club. Somying's provocative style of presentation very often comes under fire from fellow broadcasters for being '*unprofessional*' and '*off balance*'.

As we have argued, programmes such as *Kao Si Mum Baan* and *Kao Duan Juan Saang* have made a creed of impartiality and objectivity out of necessity. Despite differences in the sources and degrees of control they operate under, they are both legitimised by their popular success. Their innovative style of presentation is a response to new economic imperatives. But by developing it, it has called into question the notion of broadcasting as an instrument of the state.

However changes in the style of presentation do not imply a change in news values in either the state or commercial sector. What we see is a limited version of reform in the state system, while popular news commentary faces its own dilemmas. Programme contents are less important than novelty in style. As demonstrated in this section, the sources of material are limited and all attempts to expand them has so far failed since the NAB news pool is unable to compete with the well established press corps. Furthermore, in becoming a network programme it has had to opt for general coverage rather than developing specific contents that appeal to particular groups of listeners. Here generally, the pursuit of wider appeal requires a shift away from content in favour of an emphasis on the role of the '*creative communicator*'. In a highly competitive environment however, the resulting style was quickly reproduced across a number of programmes, such as *Sao Noi Foi Kao*, *Taban Fai Sab Lak* and *Ying Tai Kai Kao*. But the more provocative they become the more pressure they are subjected to, from inside and outside the media organisation. As a result, it becomes necessary to legitimise popular news commentary by appeals to professionalism in broadcast journalism.

Table 8

## A Summary of the Structures of Kao Si Mum Baan, Kao Duan Juan Saang

	Kao Si Mum Baan	Kao Duan Juan Saang	Soon Ruam Kao
TARGET AUDIENCE	Urban, rural middle, lower classes	Urban, rural middle to lower classes	Urban middle to lower-middle classes
STATION (AM)	Bangkok -Tor Or, Tung Mahamek(Royal Air Force)	Bangkok -Wor Bhor Tor(Dept. Energy,Military Supreme Command) -Tor Chor Dor(Bor der Patrol Police)  <b>Local Military Radios</b> -Tor Por 1(1st Regional Army), Pranburi -Wor Por Tor(Army Communications Dept), Nakorn Sawan -Sor Tor Ror 5(Royal Navy), Cholburi -Tor Por 3 Sor Nor (3rd Regional Army), Lampang	Bangkok -Tor Tor Tor (MCOT)  -Sor Sor Sor (Police Dept)
TIME	08:00-09:00, 09:00-10:00 20:30-21:30	05:00-06:00/ 05:45-06:45	20:30-21:30/ 21:00-22:00
FREQUENCY	Daily	Mon-Sat	Mon-Sat
PRODUCER/ PRESENTER	Military officer	-----Independent broadcaster-----	
STYLE	Informative	-----Provocative-----	

## CHAPTER 6

### PRODUCING POPULAR CULTURE IN THE BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

#### The Production of Popular Culture: Creativity and Market Forces

While the 'serious' genres produced by the state are contested by emerging notion of broadcast professionalism, struggles within the production of popular cultural forms revolve around notions of creativity and the star system. Although the music industry for example, promotes its products as the unique creation of songwriters and singers, they see the industry's requirements as an erosion of their artistic creativity and autonomy (Changyai, 1986). These tensions pose several questions. How can the cultural industries maintain their claim to 'give the public what it wants' and retain the notion of 'the artist knows best' at the same time? And how can artists enjoy a measure of autonomy in their work whilst earning a decent living? Where is the balance to be struck in this relationship?

In this section, we take a critical look at the way the concept of artistic creativity is related to the production of radio drama and music, adopting Murdock's argument that;

*"It is a matter of exploring the way in which notions of authorship operate as both an ideology and a practice in different types of production and unravelling their reciprocal relationship to organisational forms and to the pressures which shape them."*

(Murdock, 1980:20)

#### 6.1 Creative Communicators and Cultural Workers in the Production of Popular Culture

We will explore these issues by examining the similarities and differences between the two major sources of popular radio; radio drama and the music industry. Both strands originate when radio was first introduced in the 1930s, and their subsequent development is related to the particular technological innovations and to the economic and political *disjunctures of Thai society*.

In their early years, both Radio Thailand and Por Nor relied for their drama output on dramatisation of classics that were considered of high literary value by the aristocracy and the new bourgeois government. These included works by King Vajirawudh (Rama VI) and Phrya Phraklang. During this stage radio drama developed new cultural forms but not contents. Furthermore, its dependence on the published texts of the upper-class established the model of writer-as-auteur in radio drama. The actors were largely drawn from films and

the theatre as well as from the civil service (Pitipatanakosit, 1984).

The second major strand of radio drama developed during Phibun's military regimes in the 1940s and 1950s, when his cultural '*modernisation*' project added political content to the classical art forms (Buranamart, 1985). The works of Luang Wichit, the head of the Department of Fine Arts were particularly important in establishing the new genre. They employed poetry, songs, drama and prose in pieces with titles like *Luead Supan* (Blood of Supan), *Suk Talang* (The Battle of Talang), *Anupab Pohkunnramkamhaeng* (The Power of Ramkamhaeng the Great). During this period tragic or romantic stories adapted from literary works were prohibited (Numnon, 1978). This attempt to break away from the literary tradition coincided with the nationalist upsurge of the Pan Thai Movement. But Phibun's political patronage, as mediated by Luang Wichit, came into conflict with the notion of authorship already adopted by drama production personnel. Although they could experiment with dialogue and sound techniques their control over the selection of material was severely curtailed.

Consequently, when *Tor Tor Tor* was launched in 1955, some drama actors moved from Radio Thailand's politicised production system in search of more autonomy. They took with them two things; acting skill and dramatic technique, and the model of writer-as-auteur established two decades ago. Although their dependence on outside material continues the classics were replaced by the contemporary forms provided by the serious novels, the popular theatre, serials, and pulp magazines. A critical period followed during which the newer more popular drama on radio successfully established itself, whilst the traditional drama gradually declined.

In the process, the ideology of the creative communicator centred on the principal actors, the hero and heroine, developed. From the industry's point of view, it is the artistic performance of the stars who secure the compassion and emotional involvement in the audience,<sup>1</sup> a notion fully in line with the consumer-oriented character of commercial radio as well as with the commercial goals of the drama companies. The dynamic entrepreneurial organisation of the first generation of the new production houses such as Wajanaporn, Busapaket and Kaewfa, made drama production economically viable. At the same time, by consolidating creative activities, writing and acting, and ownership in one person, the notions of authorship and popular appeal entered into an apparently happy marriage.

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with R. Chantarangsi, owner of Busapaket drama company, March, 1986.

As the competition for larger audience intensified however, so the ideology and practice of creative activity in the entrepreneurial organisation became more problematic. Although script writers were installed, the owners continued to play the heroes and heroines in most major companies such as; Nilikanon, Atchawadi, Ampanyut, Ketthip and Siam '81. Moreover, in all of the present companies, except for Ketthip, directing is also done by the owners. Script writers, minor actors and sound technicians are relegated to the status of cultural workers who are hired for their skills and not for their artistic creativity. As a result, their autonomy is relatively limited as Sida Wisanupob, one of Ketthip's script writer put it;<sup>2</sup>

*"My work is confined within the original plot and the requirement of the company. In my capacity I can expand the detail or add some positive messages. But that is all."*

Although dependence on materials taken from novels, serials, and films, helps to guarantee the success of the production it also aggravates the issue of creative autonomy within the organisation. Script writers are not prohibited from creating their own stories as such. However, the compression of the production schedules coupled with a star system that emphasise the actors, constrains any significant development of original works.

The drama companies are also trapped in this dilemma. While original production is structurally constrained, reliance on other sources is no longer quite the guarantee of commercial success it was in the past. To reduce the chances of risk, stories are chosen from the more successful writers in the women magazines. This results in a predictable and uncompetitive product. The problem is further exacerbated in at least two ways. Production companies constantly come under fire from critics for basing the majority of their output on romance, the 'pollutants' of the literary world (Sivarak, 1983). Secondly, after the advent of television and its popularisation in the late 1970s, radio drama had to concentrate even more on economic success in order to survive. Unlike the music industry, it is unable to maintain a secondary sector of 'quality' production oriented to prestige and offering opportunities for artistic creativity (Murdock, 1980). The strengthening of the star system is a necessary response to these economic pressures but it deepens the division between creative activity and commercialism.

---

<sup>2</sup> Interview, September, 1984, quoted in Pitipatanakosit's *"Lakorn Wilayu"* (Radio Drama), Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

How then can a declining industry meet the mounting economic and social pressures on the one hand and handle its internal ideological conflicts on the other? To tackle the economic issue, drama companies are obliged to seek new sources of finance. Two are particularly significant. Firstly, in recent years the revitalised film industry has replaced the local drug and cosmetic advertisers as the major sponsor of radio drama. Secondly, the state has become a more important source of revenue through the works commissioned by various state agencies such as, the Ministry of Health, the Drug Squad Commission and the Ministry of Interior. These initiatives produce '*modernisation drama*' based on the ideology of '*development communication*'<sup>3</sup> and provide a new link between organisational goals and state policy.

New entrants to the industry on the other hand, must innovate in order to gain market share. The Siam '81 company for example, has moved cautiously into works that are literary more acceptable such as those by Klisana Asoksin in preference to mainstream romances. This strategy is financially secured by commissions from the film industry. Its other main source of differentiation is the company's own in-house productions. Kanitta Por for example, wrote a romantic serial with historical setting. Although it did not entirely depart from its predecessors the handling of certain political events in the story was considered subversive by the government as we shall see in more detail in Chapter 7.

On the whole though, the drama industry sees cultural responsibility as the special province of Radio Thailand and educational broadcasting, who keep the idea alive by producing a handful of classics and single plays. Restricted by these organisation's goals of social integration and political consensus the serious plays produced are neither innovative nor artistic whilst the newer modernisation dramas hark back to the military patronage era when '*creativity*' was geared towards political ends.

If creative activity is constricted by radio drama's search for economic viability how has the music industry coped with the same pressures? The short answer is '*somewhat differently*'. Military patronage worked in another way for the music industry, and prepared the ground for a new mode of music production in the Thai society. In contrast to radio drama, where creativity is curtailed, the convergence of political demands and popular appeal helped to form a new stratum of musical artists.

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview with K. Tinapong, owner of Ketthip drama company, September, 1986.

In the Thai musical tradition, the modern notion of the creative artist as separate from the skilled craftsman ran counter to the royal patronage system which prevailed in all branches of the Thai arts when radio was first conceived. While creative talent in an individual is endowed by the Hindu god Pitanes, the exercise of creativity is subservient to the aristocracy and the monarch, who is the supreme patron of the arts. The patrons are themselves artists, and as such creators on earth. King Rama II, III and VI for example, were poets and writers. In this conception, there is a rigid division between the artist-as-creator and the notion of craftsmanship. The highest title that a commoner who is a skillful craftsman can be given is '*kru*', teacher. This stems from the fact that in an absolute monarchy, creative workers must, not only serve the royal patron but must also take on students to earn a living.

Music shifted from the court tradition to military and later corporate patrons along with the new medium, radio. There were three key moments in this movement, each coinciding with particular political and economic disjunctures in the 1930s, 1970s and 1980s. These developments necessarily contested traditional Thai music in both form and content. They also significantly dislodged the royal monopoly on artistic creation. However, the social relations between the creative artists and their current patron, the music industry, is also highly problematic. But let us first look at the way in which the emergence of a whole new range of radio music in the 1940s and 1950s prepared the ground for the music industry in the 1980s. In this process, the ideology of artistic production began to shift its emphasis from craftsmanship towards creativity.<sup>4</sup>

In the beginning, both Radio Thailand and Por Nor radio encountered technical problems in producing music programmes due to the poor sound quality of Thai records and the unskillful microphone arrangements for live broadcasts. They also found that music programmes are costlier to produce than radio drama (Paothongsuk, 1983). However, while Por Nor radio continued to broadcast live performances of Thai music and the Royal Navy brass bands, Radio Thailand introduced a new range of '*dontri sakol*' or '*universal music*'.<sup>5</sup> Because this development occurred during the cultural '*modernisation*' era under

---

<sup>4</sup> This movement also occurred in book publishing when commercial printing began to accelerate. For an analysis of the transformation of the mode of cultural production in Europe since the Renaissance, see for example Wolff's (1987) "*The ideology of autonomous art*" and Murdock's (1980) "*Authorship and Organisation*".

<sup>5</sup> Because it was composed using the standard notation of western music it came to be called '*dontri Thai sakol*' while traditional music was known as '*dontri Thai derm*' or Thai classical music.

Phibun's military patronage, music incorporated political messages in a similar way to the radio drama of this period. As a consequence, patriotic songs were widely popularised alongside the love songs produced by the DPR big band (Napayon, 1983). This movement marked not only a political and social break from the courtly tradition of Thai music, but more significantly, a technical and economical watershed in cultural production. Traditional Thai music is not composed according to a standard notation. Musicians must learn and play by memory alone and as a result, technical reproduction is impossible. Not surprisingly, this proved to be a great hinderance to a capitalist mode of cultural production.

From the DPR big band the twin figures of Kru Uer, the composer/musician, and Kru Kaew, the lyricist, emerged as the paradigm exemplars of the new generation of musical artists. They produced music that met the political requirements of its military patron while successfully appealing to popular audience (Numnon, 1978). Songs bearing their names were increasingly regarded as art despite the fact that they were both civil servants. For three decades, live music programmes on radio and live performances in public venues were the main mode of music production. The Thai record industry, comprised only two manufacturers and remained small. This underdevelopment allowed the ideology of artistic creation in music to establish itself.

It was not until the late 1970s that the second significant break in music came about when the introduction of cassette tapes launched the era of music piracy. Thai music is pirated by directly duplicating the original. Western music is pirated by reproducing the music with Thai lyrics. The subsequent economic pressures on the manufacturers and traders ushered in the Copyright Law of 1979 and the formation of the Association of Record and Tape Traders and led, in the 1980's, to the emergence of an indigenous music industry based on cassette tape technology.

Within the new corporate forms of organisation, the creator-oriented ideology developed during the period of military patronage clashes head-on with the new consumer-oriented ideology. As one of the famous songwriter pointed out:<sup>6</sup>

*"A decade or so ago, the situation was completely different. Our respectable songwriters were artists, now its all commercialised. We have to put a price on our work. It is impossible not to lay ourselves at the companies' mercy since they make so much money out of our work...Businessmen usually treat songwriters badly especially in contrast to the mass media."*

---

<sup>6</sup> Interview in Changyai's *"Cholati Tarnthong: Naktang Pleng Luktoong Luednamkern"*, Baan Mai Ru Roel, 2:6, p.61.



But underneath the obvious antagonisms and ideological conflicts between the artists and the corporate owners there is an essential reciprocity. In order to be able to work and survive the artists must surrender some of their autonomy to those *'ignoramuses who insist that they are connoisseurs because they have the money'* (Changyai, 1986:62). Independent artists today cannot earn a living without selling their works to the music industry since it is also largely in control of music programmes on radio. The industry for its part, not only needs its cultural workers to turn out a certain number of songs in a definite period of time, it also needs products that are *'creative'* in the sense of bearing the unique personal stamp of the songwriter and singer, whilst still being in touch with audience taste. Consequently, successful artists are usually given more space to manoeuvre whereas minor or prospective stars are less well paid and have little control over their work.<sup>7</sup> They are coached step-by-step in the hope that they will strike it lucky and produce a hit song. Despite their protests all artists are obliged to adopt the standard formula of the 3-minute novellette in their songs. But within this framework they try to introduce variations. The music industry is able to use this pattern of creativity within constraints to its best advantage. The star system in particular, feeds the individualistic ideology of the artists whilst also *serving the consumer* orientation of the industry.

Nonetheless, the thriving music industry also needs to create an artist-oriented sector both to secure its cultural prestige and as a laboratory for possible *'hits'*. This system is put into practice differently within the major genres of popular music. In the Pleng Lukkroong/String sector aimed at urban youth, independent artists of a certain reputation are periodically supported since *'progressive'* songs attract the critical acclaim and intellectual appreciation that helps to legitimate the industry. For example, *Caravan*, the folk group which identified with the student movement in the 1970s and whose songs were banned from radio, was able to perform live, in 1985, in the music programme produced by Nite Spot Productions for Tor Tor Tor radio. It was later published by Grammy Entertainment. In contrast, Thai classical music has been revived by arranging the music according to a standard score and by playing it with a combination of traditional and new musical instruments.

The producers of Pleng Luktoong, the other major genre, whose listeners are mainly concentrated among rural peasants and the urban working class, employ

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview with L. Burirat, Luktoong songwriter and producer, September, 1986.

a more cautious strategy. Since it commands a highly fluctuated market its secondary sector is firmly grounded in the notion of '*giving the public what it wants*'. The '*quality*' products therefore, take two main forms. In the first place, the industry publishes a range of music with '*patriotic*', '*social*' and '*modernisation*' themes. This is in line with the state's policy on cultural harmony and social integration. Under a strong censorship system, the industry tactfully seeks a smooth relation with the state and its governing body by producing '*socially creative*' messages from time to time. This is simultaneously image building and self-regulatory.

The second category attempts to strike a balance between consumer and producer orientations by inserting social commentary into the existing forms of humour or tragic love songs or some of the folk comedies. As we shall see in more detail in Chapter 9, the strategy of inconspicuous social commentary allows critical messages to slip past the system's various gatekeepers.

## 6.2 The Organisation of Radio Drama and Music: Four Case Studies

In order to explore the role of ideologies of creativity in the organisation of popular entertainment in more detail, I want now to present case studies of two radio drama companies, Ketthip and Siam '81, and two music companies, Azona and Grammy.<sup>8</sup> Although the general division of labour in these organisation is based on the separation between creative communicators and cultural workers noted earlier, whereas in radio drama material must meet the requirements of the sponsors or advertisers, in the music industry the organisation itself mediates directly between consumers and producers. The organisation of work within these companies is consequently more fluid than the rigid hierarchy found in the radio drama companies.

### The production of radio drama in the Ketthip and Siam '81 companies

In Bangkok, there are two major stations for radio drama, Wor Bhon Tor and Tor Chor Dor. They schedule approximately 24 to 18 drama slots in their daily broadcasts. The Tor Tor Tor, Sor Sor Sor, Pol Nung and Ror Dor stations that were previously well known for drama have now reduced their

---

<sup>8</sup> The following data were gathered through interviews and observations of the organisations at work. Interviews with both administrators and actors/artists were carried out before and after observation of studio production. The music companies however offered less access to their production processes.

fiction slots in favour of music programming. Ror Dor however does allot a special weekend frequency for drama. Most of the dramas produced in Bangkok are broadcast on the local military network.

Ketthip used to produce up to 40-50 dramas a month in its hey day and in the late 1970s, the company invested 7 million baht (approximately £175,000) in a new recording studio. But when Atorn Bunmalert, the principal actor, left to form Siam '81 in 1981, Ketthip's monopoly was broken. The present situation is therefore a duopoly with Ketthip and Siam '81 together producing over 75% of all network drama. Ketthip produces 25-30 dramas each month and Siam '81 20-25. The increased competition for audiences in recent years has resulted in the close down and contraction of smaller companies such as Ampanyut and Siengsai.

#### Administration and organisation goals

The organisational structure of both companies is based on the model shown in Figure 8. Decision-making concerning administration and production is centralised in the person of the owner who is also the producer, director and the main actor of the company. Let us first look at administrative work relating to external business dealings and finances and to securing manuscripts for production.

The company has three major sources of finance; the manufacturers of various consumer products, advertising agencies, and the film industry. The first group, who are mostly local drug manufacturers, provide sponsorship but the drama company retains responsibility for the selection of stories and the distribution of the finished product. Business dealings are based on accepted rules and rely on the 'trust' established by past dealings.

In contrast, advertising agencies and the film companies commission productions. Agency such as SSB&C Lintas assigned a radio planner to liaise with the drama companies under contract. The policy is to match the consumer product with the audience profile. As the agency's account executive for Unilever explained;<sup>9</sup>

*"Our target group is women and housewives. We mainly produce romance from a few popular women novelists. We have quite fixed ideas of the novels we choose. They are trash if you like. But the audience listen to them as our surveys show."*

---

<sup>9</sup> Interview with S. Orawan, account executive, SSC&B Lintas, July, 1986.

The drama companies submit one-page summaries of potential scripts for the agency's approval at regular intervals. Only those selected are developed into production. Distribution is done by the agency itself and the advertising spots are edited into each episode so as to match particular advertisers with their target audience.

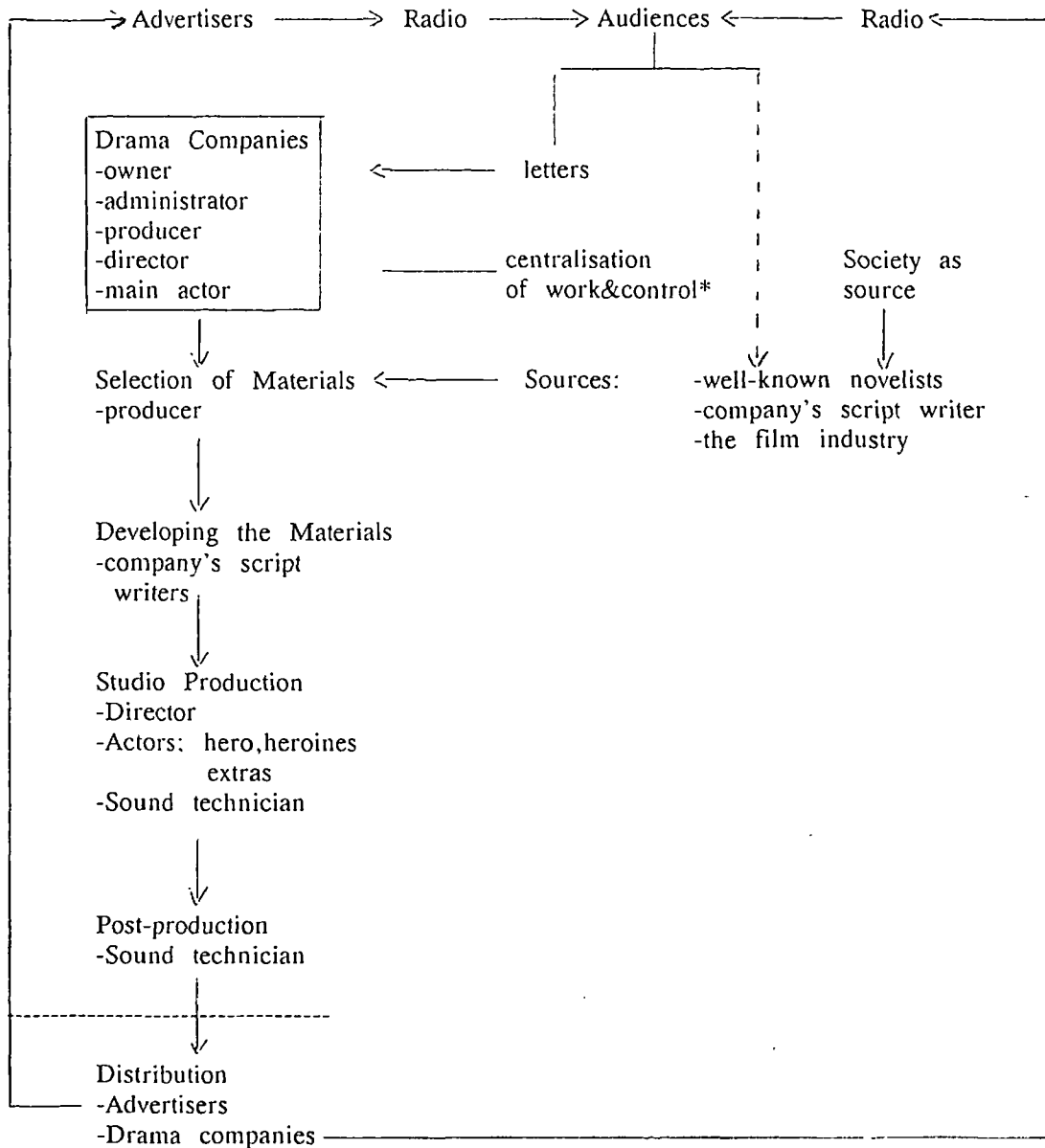
For the film industry, radio dramas are part of the promotional campaign for a new release. Film scripts are given to the drama company to be developed into a 22 or 44 episode production. The time of broadcasting is also stipulated to coincide with the cinema release in Bangkok. But contracts with film interests are hazardous. If the film is a commercial flop, the drama company may not get paid at all since most deals are done on credit.

Of these three financial sources, the first provides the greatest autonomy as regards story selection and development. The other two are patrons who specify exactly the kinds of cultural products they require. They are also more expensive to make. In the case of advertising supported products, the companies need to secure the copyright of works by well-known novelists, which can cost between 5,000-10,000 bht (approximately £125-250) for each production. In the case of the film industry, about 25% of the drama commissioned consists of action-adventure serials, which require more technical skill and production time. For the sponsored productions, the companies can sometimes produce works by their own script writers thereby avoiding copyright fees. Although the content of radio drama covers four major genres; romance, action-adventure, comedy and mystery, romance dominates and accounts for about 75% of the production. Action-adventure and comedy are almost exclusively commissioned by the film industry, while a small number of gothic and mysterious stories are now produced for the evening slot in order to compete with television drama.

In line with these economic constraints, the drama companies organise their production process around notions of cultural craftsmanship. The '*creativity*' involved in story writing is largely devolved to the novelists who supply the raw materials. The script writers' main responsibility is to turn these stories into radio scripts. Their own works are considered as fillers although they are hardly distinguishable from the mainstream romance produced by '*outside*' writers. There is no extra payment for these '*original*' works. Script writers are paid on a piece work basis in the same way as minor actors or extras. Not surprisingly, they are relatively mobile and frequently take up jobs in other drama companies or other media sectors, such as film and television.

Figure 8

Work Organisation in Two Radio Drama Companies



\* This is the general practice throughout the industry. Ketthip however, has modified it due to economic and organisational circumstances.

### Pay Differentials in Drama Companies\*

#### Monthly salary

- Main actors	5,000-8,000 (£125-200)	depending on popular success
- Director/ General manager	10,000 (£250)	apart from Ketthip other companies do not hire a company director
- Sound technician	8,000 (£200)	there are two technicians rotating on recording and editing

---

#### Piece work

- Script writer (3-6 writers in each company)	80-100 (£2.00-2.50) per script	a popular story may have between 44 or 88 episodes
- Minor actors (8-12 extras)	2,000-3,000 (£50-75) monthly average	depending on the roles and the amount of dialogue in each story

\* These are approximate figures based on information derived from the interviews. In the case of Siam '81 where the owner is also the principal actor, his salary is not known. For Ketthip, both main actors receive relatively low salaries, because the principal male is the owner's nephew and the heroine is a young student whose successful apprenticeship has promoted her to become the main actress.

#### The Production Routine

The production process in both companies is based around a daily routine geared to meeting the monthly target. Since the selection of material is decided by the owner alone there is no consultation though suggestions may come from other members of the company and from the audience. Once the manuscript is secured from the author the script writer can immediately set to work. The minimum production requirement for a script writer is one episode of 6-8 pages per day. The professional script writer would normally produce an average of 3 episodes a day. They only come to the office periodically to hand in the finished product.

The Ketthip company works a 6-day week. On Monday to Friday studio recording takes place between 6:00-12:00 pm during which time 10-15 episodes are recorded. On Saturday, production doubles to 20-25 episodes on a full day

recording schedule. For Siam '81, the bulk of the production takes place during the weekend from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm. These non-office hours are built around the availability of the actors, most of whom are employed elsewhere during weekdays. The working plan is to record the weekly episodes of each story in a single session and then move on to the next story.

The production routines in both companies are similar. There is no rehearsal. Actors are told about the plot and their parts when they begin a new story. There are two sets of working scripts, one in the recording studio and one in front of the sound technician. Actors perform as they read the script. They are guided by the producer/director or the sound technician whose authority is well acknowledged. Studio recording is normally done on the first run-through especially in the familiar roles. Re-takes mostly occur in action-adventure serials which require the sound effect to be inserted and a change of acting style on the part of the hero. The main actor of Ketthip admitted that his voice does not convey the tough image of an action-adventure hero and although the producer insisted that he needed more training, there have been no complaint from the audience so far. For the heroine, comedy is more difficult than romance since the role call for her to be witty as well as intelligent. However, the daily work load does not allow characters to be fully realised. On the contrary, actors must quickly familiarise themselves with their parts and be able to switch instantly to the mood of the new roles in the following session.

The story in each episode runs for approximately 18-20 minutes. During post-production, the sound technician edits 5-7 additional minutes containing the title and the commercials into the master tape. This takes place during the day in the editing studio. For works commissioned by the advertising agencies only the title is added.

Even from this brief description it should be clear that artistic creativity and organisational autonomy in drama production is largely subservient to the companies's economic goals. In this situation can we say that radio drama is '*popular culture*', or is it more properly described as '*mass*' culture in the sense defined by Hall and Whannel (1964). At first sight, it clearly falls into the second category since its aim is to appeal to a mass undifferentiated audience. In practice however, the line is not as clear cut as it seems, since the drama companies ability to empathise with its audiences is the key to their popular success. Hence their relationship with advertisers is a continual contradiction rather than a straight imposition of the advertisers' wishes.

## The production of popular music in the Azona and Grammy companies

This same argument can also be applied to the music industry, except that the artists and music companies need to draw on their audience as sources of material and not merely as consumers of finished products. This issue has stimulated debates in the sociology of popular music centred around the notions of authenticity versus artifice.<sup>10</sup> But it is not a question of either one or the other. As Hennion argued, the production of popular music,

*"aims chiefly at preserving and developing artistic methods which act as veritable mediators of public taste, while accomplishing a production job which must also be technical, financial and commercial."*

(Hennion, 1983:160)

As we shall show, Thai music companies have structured themselves in order to mobilise artistic creativity in the service of organisation goals. In contrast to the drama companies' 'mechanistic' style of management in which production is governed by instructions and decisions issued by superiors, work structures in music companies are 'organic' in the sense defined by Burns and Stalker that:

*"Job lose much of their formal definition in terms of methods, duties, and powers, which have to be redefined continually by interaction with others participating in a task. Interaction runs laterally as much as vertically. Communication between people of different ranks tends to resemble lateral consultation rather than vertical command."*

(Burns and Stalker, 1961:5-6)

The organisation of the Thai music industry, as observed in the two large music corporations, Azona and Grammy, clearly conforms to this description.

### Administration and organisation goals

The Azona and Grammy corporations are music publishers for different segments of the market. Azona began by producing mainly Pleng Luktoong or folk rock aimed at rural audiences and working class youth, but it quickly expanded into Pleng Lukroong or middle-of-the-road popular music as it concentrated the entire production process vertically in its 20 million bht (approximately £0.5 million) manufacturing outfit. In contrast, Grammy caters for urban youth, the middle classes and the intellectuals with their adaptations of western rock-'n'-roll music, known in Thai as 'string music'. It publishes music but does not have its own recording studio or printing facility. However, the company does produce

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Simon Frith's (1981 and 1987) "'The magic that can set you free': the ideology of folk and the myth of the rock community" and "Towards an aesthetic of popular music".



promotional materials in its own in-house video unit and editing studio. The overall division of the market between the three main genres in the Thai popular music industry is approximately 40:20:30 for Luktoong, Lukroong and String respectively.

#### The organisation of '*creative ideas*'

*"We are not only selling songs we sell our 'creativity'"*

(Lop Burirat, songwriter)<sup>11</sup>

The organisation of creative ideas is the principal activity in any music corporation. In order to foster artistic creativity an organic group consisting of the core artistic personnel, the production team, and the administrators is instituted. The production team is made up of the producer and the songwriter/composer. Their responsibility is to formulate the '*concept*' (the jargon in the trade for the theme) for the up and coming cassette and to develop it to suit the style of a particular singer.

As music publishers, both Azona and Grammy have devised a number of strategies for acquiring the creative ideas. Firstly, they rely in the the contract artists to produce one cassette every three months. Secondly, they consider suggestions from the free-lance artists and evaluate their commercial potential. These proposals may be in the form of a concept that can be developed into 12-15 songs with or without a particular artist in mind, or they may be a complete project in which the artists as songwriters-singers-musicians seek the music company's financial backing, as in the case of the folk rock group Carabao whose successful first cassette '*Tor Taharn Odon*' led to their becoming contract artists with Azona. Thirdly, the company may commission works from well-known free-lance songwriters or singers on a project basis.

In the early stages of production, the producer works closely with the administrators, the songwriter, and the singer who might be either under company contract or free-lancing. The organic structure permits the formulation, selection and development of ideas to flow in multiple directions among members of the group. When decisions are reached on certain concepts the songwriters then develop them into lyrics and tunes.

In both the formulation and development stages, artists and administrators alike draw their concepts and materials from topical issues, especially those relevant to the target audience. Cholati Tarnthong, the well-known Luktoong songwriter for

---

<sup>11</sup> Interview, September, 1986.

example, goes out into the countryside for his materials when he writes tragic love songs. Lop Burirat, known for his comical Luktoong tunes, keeps up to date with working class youth by loafing in cafes in certain parts of the city. He picks up their style and language, particularly their slangs. These are raw materials that the songwriters then rework into the images and hook-line of their songs.

The uniqueness of the artist stems largely from their ability to innovate while not departing entirely from the current trend. During the mid-1980s for example, there were half a dozen star female singers in the music industry for audience to identify with in both the Luktoong and String genres, representing either independent or romantic women. Within these boundaries the style and image of the singer combine to offer a unique personal stamp while the music itself attempts to introduce novelty within the standard forms by using a solo musical instrument such as a trombone or saxophone.

In the music industry, the notion of creativity is incorporated into pay scales as well as work organisation. While artists work together in formulating and developing creative ideas their relative power depends on their previous success or their star status. So does their pay. The company operates a two tier payment system whereby a fixed amount is agreed upon in the contract plus a reward payment depending on sales. Payments to creative artists are calculated as part of the production costs of the master tape. At present, it costs between 200,000-500,000 bht (approximately £5,000-12,500) to produce a standard 10-12 songs cassette, depending on who the artists are and the quality of the recording studio. Reward or copyright payments however, remain an unsettled issue for the music industry. They are negotiated in relation to the popular success of the artists. The second category of production cost that weighs heavily is the promotion campaign for each new release. Both companies budget this as high if not higher than the production of the master tape itself. The strategies used to maximise sales range from manipulation to open persuasion as we shall see later in this section and in Chapter 9.

#### The technical production of *'artistic creation'*

The singer is introduced to the concept by the producer. If he or she is a star they may get to express a preference for a certain song or style, but if they are a new talent or an in-house performer their autonomy is rather limited. Since most singers do not read music they learn directly from the tape recording made by the songwriter. Coaching takes place at the same time

from either the songwriter or the producer. Rehearsal begins once the musical arrangement is ready.

The actual recording takes a maximum of three days and is done either in a company studio or a hired one. This is possible because of the division of labour involved. Recording sessions are arranged according to the various parts of the music, the instruments, and the availability of the musicians. Singing is recorded without live accompaniment although on special productions, the producer may ask for well-known musicians or soloists. This however, must be agreed on during the planning stage since it raises costs.

All recordings are then mixed and edited by the sound engineer under close supervision from the producer. The post-production stage takes no more than a week. The finished product is a dummy tape that must be approved by the administrators and the production team. This is to ensure that the original concept is properly realised and to make final selections from the several recorded versions. The order of the songs on the cassette, the promotional gramophone record as well as the cassette sleeve are matched to the overall image. The master tape produced after the post-production meeting concludes the work of the publisher.

As will be evident from this description, the key person in music production is the producer whose creativity and technical skill transforms 'concepts' into successful hits. As a result, the earlier notion of songwriter-as-auteur has given way to elevation of the producer. However, the first generation of successful producers such as Raywat Bhutinan of Grammy or Lop Burirat previously with Azona, are also songwriters. The difference is that the new *auteurs* are contract members of the company whereas most songwriters are free-lance artists.

A similar trend has also occurred with the singers. Independent performers especially if they are new must now seek contracts with music companies. The star singers, whose live performances are their livelihood, are also affected by the new mode of music production as Cholati Tarnthong explained:<sup>12</sup>

*"Singers nowadays must be institutionalised. They must belong to one camp or the other. There are only 4-5 large companies who monopolise the Luktoong industry...If a singer is successful, he or she does not have to belong to any company. When you are popular the company comes to you."*

---

<sup>12</sup> Interview in Changyai's "Cholati Tarnthong: Naklang Pleng Luktoong Luednamkem", Baan Mai Ru Roei, 2:6, p.61.

A small number of singers, such as Sayan Sanya and Yodrak Salakjai, have resisted the contract system. Although the popular success of their live performances with their own bands enables them to maintain their artistic freedom, they must publish their works through the music industry if they are to keep their position as star singers.

### The organisation of 'star imagery'

In the final stage of production, the music companies seek to promote their star artists through the widest possible range of mass media channels. As the production manager of Grammy corporation put it;<sup>13</sup>

*"We are selling a very peculiar product here. The consumer must try it out before he/she decides to buy. But they may not after all even though they have tasted it. Our effort is to induce the audience to become customers."*

As part of this process the mass media, including radio, are treated largely as channels for publicity. Both Grammy and Azona operate two main promotional strategies; getting their new releases 'plugged' on the radio, and making their own media productions. Plugging is a very common practice that has bid up promotional costs and circumscribed the entire environment of radio music programming (Kukang, 1982). But as Hennion argued,

*"...success is born during the early stages of a song's production, and no amount of 'plugging' on the radio can force the public to adopt it if it was a failure on that level."*

(Hennion, 1983:190)

Nonetheless, 70% of the average promotion budget is allotted to radio and the remaining 30% is divided between television and the printed media.

The second strategy of music promotion is routinised around the master promotional campaign. Within the promotion department there are two categories of personnel: clerical and technical staff and media producers. The head of the promotion department mediates between his staff, the artists and the administrators. Media producers are cultural workers carrying out prescribed tasks such as producing music videos or music programmes, for the company. This relatively low organisation status undermines their obvious professionalism in media production. Their position is further complicated by the primacy accorded to the 'creative artists' whose authorship, sanctioned by the administration, extends to the realm of programme production.

---

<sup>13</sup> Interview with K. Chuangarun, Production Manager, Grammy Entertainment, June, 1986.

In Azona for example, promotional staff produce a whole range of media output from music videos and radio programming to live concerts and press releases. Company DJs for example, produce approximately 200 hours of music programming each week for Bangkok and the local radios. The company also produces several weekly music programmes for television on Channel 7 and 5 plus a number of promotional music videos. Because they are circumscribed by rigid organisation goals and work routine however, media producers are left with few opportunities to exercise their creativity and professionalism.

Radio programmes pose a special problems because of their active youth audience. DJs in both companies are involved in constant conflicts in their attempts to negotiate between organisational goals, audience interests and their own ideology of professionalism. On Azona weekend programme for example, the audience want more time for chit-chat among themselves and with the DJs. They also want to listen to artists from other publisher. However company policy remains firm on these points. Media time is for music first and foremost, and only Azona's own artists are allowed on the programmes. Although the DJ, Kalayani, attempts to resolve these conflict by identifying herself with the organisation's goals, pressures from the audience continues to build up.<sup>14</sup>

*"I have to explain to the audience that our programme is an Azona programme and we can't play outside artists. But they are not very satisfied with the answer...They also want more time for their letters. I don't know what to do with the big file I have at hand now...I am an employee of Azona, its public relations officer if you like.. but I also want to produce the programme according to my professional training..I want to be a responsible DJ as well as producing a programme that suits the audience's needs."*

Grammy's radio producer, Saithip, encounters similar conflicts particularly in relation to the FM audience who reject the notion of the corporate DJ altogether. They accuse the programme of being unfair to non-corporate artists. Although the audience are fans of the DJ their musical tastes do not include all Grammy's artists. When their requests are not honoured they feel that they are being manipulated into listening to certain artists only. As a result, the DJ has to segment the programme into various styles and play a wider range of music in order to retain the fans' allegiance. This is only possible with the consent of the administrator and the head of the promotion department.

As we have described it so far, media production in the promotion departments of Azona and Grammy is generally technical rather than creative. However, in

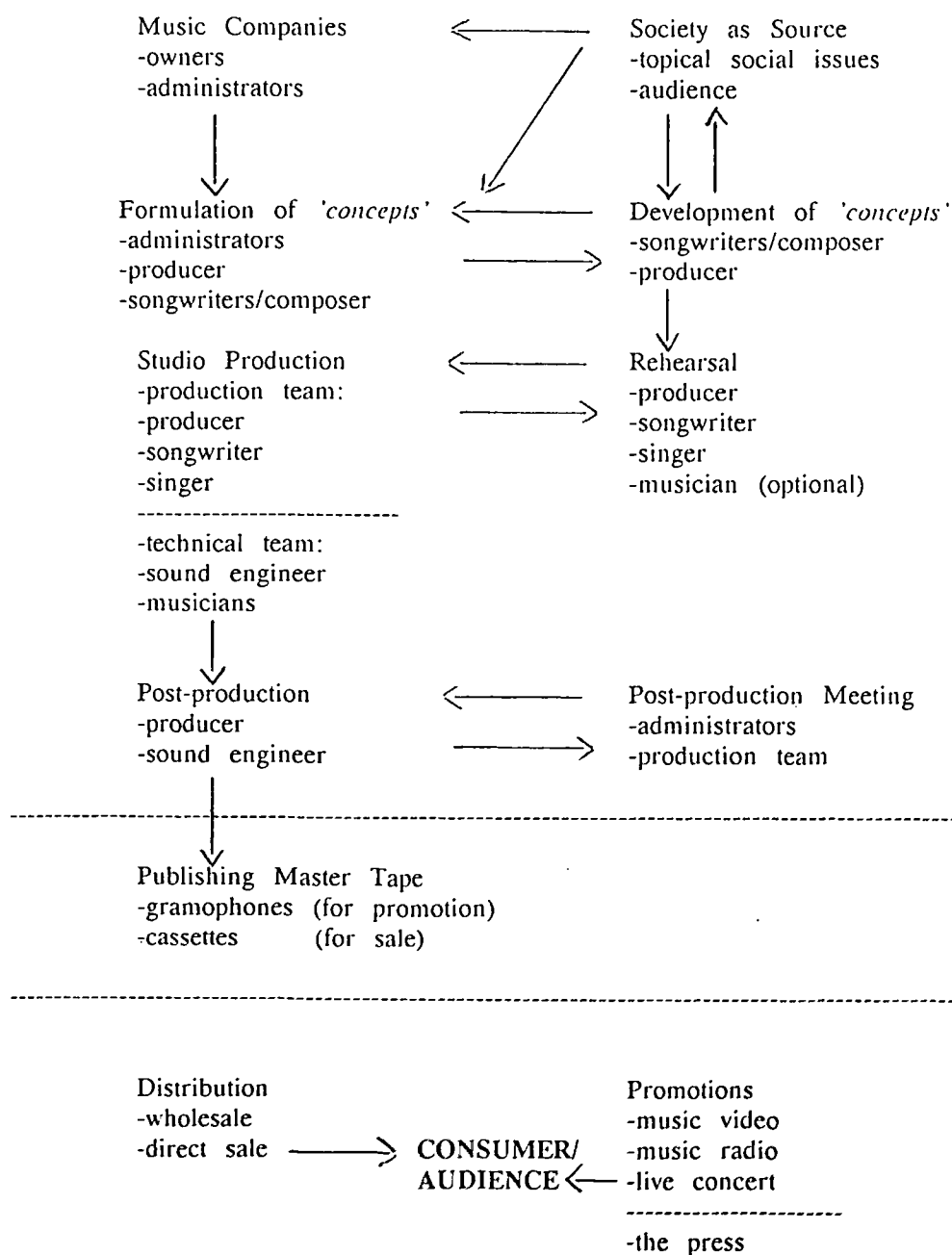
---

<sup>14</sup> Interview with K. Promjairak, DJ of Azona Company, May, 1986.

the case of Grammy we do see a more flexible and organic system at work in radio production and among members of the video unit when Raywat Bhutinan, the creative producer, takes charge of the production of music videos. But the conflict is far from being resolved and media producers are still obliged to assume the role of technical staff.

Figure 9

## Work Organisation in Two Music Companies



In these last two chapters we have attempted to explore the process of cultural production in relation to organisational and the external constraints. The discussion has focused on three major areas, the organisation of work, the strategies used to achieve organisation goals and the development of occupational ideologies among media practitioner as a consequence of role conflict. We have noted both similarities and differences between the state media and the commercial oriented organisations. However, we have also seen that the institutionalised notion of news and information production now faces new challenges from the broadcasting system and new pressures from the media industry. The emergence of the popular news commentary programme in particular has affected the structure of news production in the state media, aggravating the tension between external control and professionalism and shifting the emphasis from elite to popular discourse.

In contrast, in the production of popular entertainment, some practitioners work in a more organic system with relatively more autonomy though this is less characteristic of radio drama than of music industry. In radio drama production the prime strategy is to protect the organisation's investment as much as possible. This leads to the reliance on the writings of well-known novelists and to a star system in which the main actors are often also the owners of the company. The music industry pursues a similar strategy for reducing uncertainty, by backing artists with an established track record of popular success. However, as cassette tapes are relatively inexpensive to make the industry over-produces and has to use promotional techniques to guarantee its commercial goal. In the process, it must rely heavily on the star system and on the notion of artistic creativity both as a means of easing organisation tension and for popular appeal.

Although on the whole, authorship and control in the production of both the serious genres and popular entertainment are mainly structured to accomplish organisational goals, the occupational ideologies of professionalism and artistic creativity that evolved as a means of conflict resolution do find spaces for expression. Smaller and newer corporations such as Siam '81 or Grammy must innovate in order to gain a larger share of the market, and this has led them to nurture original radio drama and the songwriter-producer-singer.

As we saw earlier, the structure of ownership and control in radio broadcasting is based on a coalition of bourgeois political forces and commercial enterprises interspersed with militarism before and after WW II. This system has effectively confined radio to a distribution system for its major constituents. It lacks a system of public accountability and provides for little audience feedback

or diversity in programming. Nonetheless, as our exploration has revealed there is a complex and often contradictory internal relationship between the major constituents of the system. As a result, radio plays an ambivalent role as both an instrument of the state and of its capitalist owners. As we have tried to show, media practitioners form a potentially disruptive force in the process of message distribution. How these struggles are being played out in the various programme forms is the subject of the following three chapters.

In order to examine the interplay of various ideologies, and the continuities and breaks within and among them, we employ the scheme of programme classification devised by Schlesinger et al (1983). This is based on cross-cutting dimensions; *open* and *closed*, and *tight* and *loose*, which taken together, allow us to examine both the number of viewpoints on a particular issue presented in a programme and the way they are presented. The static concept of a closed or open programme space is coupled with the dynamic distinction between tight and loose formats, in which a tight format is;

*"one in which the images, arguments and evidence offered by the programme are organised to converge upon a single preferred interpretation and where other possible conclusions are marginalised or closed-off. A loose format in contrast, is one where the ambiguities, contradictions and loose ends generated within the programme are never fully resolved, leaving the viewers with a choice of interpretations."*

(Schlesinger et al, 1983:32)

Using these distinctions our sample of programmes falls into three broad groupings shown below. In the first group, the Sunday sermon and military commentary programmes are both closed and tight. As we noted earlier these programmes mainly present the view points of the official institutions and the formats they employ close off other interpretations.

These '*dominant ideologies*' are far from homogeneous however. Rather they are often self-contradicting. The accommodation of the religious schism for example, reveals the tension within the Sangha. Similarly, as we shall see, the Sunday sermon programmes have to grapple with the juxtaposition of the Buddhist moral ethic and the notion of modernisation in an industrial capitalist society. There is evidence of similar incoherences in the military commentary programmes. Political legitimisation becomes more problematic as the military is obliged to reform whilst at the same time reaching out for new allies in the dominant power bloc and the public in general. The traditional institutions are thereby engaged in ideological struggle among themselves. On the other hand, they must also attempt to maintain the hegemonic position.



## SCHEME OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Intended audience		
national >		segmented
-----		
1) Official programmes		
The Sunday sermon	Pua Pandin Thai	Siam Manusati
2) News and current affairs		
Official news bulletin	Kao Si Mum Baan	Kao Duan Juan Saang
3) Popular entertainment		
Drama serial		
Action-Adventure	Romance	Political romance
Music		
Music video	Pre-recorded music programme	Live music programme
-----		
closed >		open
Programme space		
-----		

The second group of programmes centres around news and popular news commentary. The programme space of the official news bulletin although still closed is relatively more open compared to the first group of programmes. In response to a more liberal political atmosphere and the competition on news production the official news bulletin must deal with a number of viewpoints other than their own. International news, such as the over throw of the Shah of Iran in 1979 or news from the socialist countries - the USSR and China, often poses particularly serious '*difficulties*' for selection and presentation. As a result, the programme format is tightly structured to establish the official perspective. By contrast, the popular news commentary programme, whose materials are based on the press, is relatively open but the format is tight in its effort to mobilise support for a particular viewpoint. Some of these viewpoints may coincide with the official perspective when the issue is concerned with '*national security*'. But on matters of political interest the programme often challenges the established view as we shall see later.

Within the third group, popular entertainment, music programmes are relatively more open than dramas in which there is a high degree of self-censorship. Music programmes are also looser in their formats, especially in the live programmes that invite audience participation. The images in both genres however are interconnected with the visual media of television, music video, film, and the press. The production of meaning is therefore closely related to the visual images.

Music programmes for example, are an articulation of the tightly structured music video with loose programme formats. The relations between radio drama and film works both ways depending on the film director and the order of adaptation. For example, when the novel *Mia* appeared on the screen, it allowed for a wider interpretation of the images of masculinity, whereas in the radio drama the female characters remained central to the story. The strong images of the heroine and the villain were especially constructed for the female radio audience to identify with. The constant movement of images between the visual and oral media makes popular entertainment programmes on radio significantly different from the actuality programmes in the first two groups. It increases the possibility of different interpretations as the image cuts across a wide range of media. This creates a situation in which meaning is constantly disrupted and slipping. Consequently it is primarily through popular entertainment that contestation or subversive ideas find space within the radio system as we shall illustrate in some detail in the following chapters. For the state regulatory body, censorship proves to be more problematic in this complex web of ideological interplay.

The analysis in the next three chapters is an exploratory attempt to study the major genres in radio in terms of their relation to the production and distribution of ideology. The examples I draw upon represent both serious and popular genres. By selecting from the official or '*propaganda*' programmes, news and current affairs, and popular entertainment programmes I hope to provide some insights into how images of reality are being constructed in the dominant institutions, and to show how contestations and subversive ideas are expressed despite the stringent state controls on the structure of ownership and the legal regulations on programme content. I also want to highlight the continuities and the breaks in the imagery presented in actuality and fiction. By treating programme presentation as a continuum rather than approaching it with the rigid demarcations that often operate in academic research and among the media practitioners, I hope to gain new insights into the way that ideology is translated into programmes or images. Our study suggests that the fundamental issue of media's ideological power is far more complicated than either the dominant ideology or the mass culture theses have allowed for.

## CHAPTER 7

### PROPAGATING DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES: CONTRADICTIONS, INCOHERENCES AND CHALLENGES

In this chapter we look in detail at two kinds of output; the official programmes connected to the triple alliance of nation-religion-king, and the news and popular news commentary programmes associated with the more recent institution of constitutional democracy. The official programmes generally identify themselves with the dominant power bloc and their ideologies, especially the negotiated '*Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong*' (Land of Dhamma, Land of Gold) ideology discussed in chapter 3. But since each programme is also propagating its institution's own interests, the apparent consensus on social progress based on the traditional form of Buddhist polity is fraught with ambiguities and contradictions. Take for example, the position of the army in an authoritarian state. By prioritising patriotism and the notion of national security it necessarily discredits any form of political liberalism. However, as it is on the defensive at the present political juncture it has had to make certain concessions and compromises with the dominant power bloc and the ruling government. The military commentary programme therefore becomes an important ideological arena in which it can argue its cause.

By contrast, because Radio Thailand's news bulletin represents the state, it must open its space to accommodate all variants of officially sanctioned viewpoints. But this poses serious problems for the government of the day whose position within the programme is often confined if not subverted by the dominant ideologies of the triple alliance. The endemic institutional contradictions constrain any homogeneous presentation of the official position whilst inhibiting the practice of impartiality at both the policy and operational levels. Within the limited space and tight programme format of news, the government must both attempt to argue for its own position and provide space for the dominant institutions whose views may be contentious. Not surprisingly, the programmes frequently bear the marks of conflicting relationships within the power bloc.

The dominant institutions safeguard themselves from criticism by using both their traditional status and legal regulations. The Buddhist Sangha for instance, is a sacred institution and as such beyond serious questioning. The *les majeste* law preserves the images of the monarchy as the most revered institution. On the other hand, the dictatorial power of the military which suppressed all forms of freedom of expression in the past has had to give ground to criticism as its

political power is now on the decline. Although the standard censorship measures are obligingly adhered to by the media practitioners in Radio Thailand, they do not apply as strictly to those outside the official institution, particularly by the press. In this context, the spaces available for political and social debate need to be seen across the range of the mass media as well as within the state media. On radio, the emergence of the popular news commentary programmes and political drama illustrate the limits of state control in closing the space for argument.

Our analysis of the serious genres revolves around the themes relating to debate on social transition which are the focus of the present ideological struggles within the dominant power bloc. For instance, how does each institution propose to achieve their social utopia? Are they presenting the same imagery? How is the notion of modernisation or progress defined and interpreted in different programmes? And lastly, how is the consensus on a constitutional monarchy presented? In contrast, we also look at how these discourses are translated into fictional representation in an analysis of political drama in the final section.

### 7.1 The Sunday Sermon and Buddhist Moral Ethics

*"We all have to contribute urgently in order to counter the threats and dangers that our nation, our religion and our beloved and revered king, is facing. If we do not do anything, we will be doomed. But if we see the danger, we must get up and step forward, ready to engage in battle. We are not fighting a conventional war, we are fighting an ideological war."*

*('How can monks and Buddhists help to develop the nation?', 30th April, 1986)*

Despite the schism in the Thai Sangha over the degree of institutional independence from the state, as the above quotation by Panyananta Bhikkhu, one of the prominent advocate of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu indicates, all factions recognise an urgent need to preserve Buddhist moral ethics as well as to accommodate to certain reforms.<sup>1</sup>

In the Sunday sermon programme the state provides the space for both the established Sangha and the once banned non-conformist, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, and his disciples. While the perspective of the former closely corresponds with

---

<sup>1</sup> On the role of the monks and the modernisation scheme, see for example Suksamran, S. (1977), *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: The Role of the Sangha in the Modernisation of Thailand*, and Mulder, N. (1973), *Buddhism and National Development in Thailand*.

that of the state the latter is contentious in its religious orthodoxy. The presenters of these programmes are meticulously selected from the upper echelon of the ecclesiastical community though younger monks may be chosen for their merit in leadership, as demonstrated in the rural development scheme for example. Sermons preached by monks from the established faction of the Sangha generally convey the moral virtues propounded by the King and the Prime Minister. These come in two basic forms. The '*four virtues*' focus on self restraint materially and spiritually whereas the '*five fundamental values*' emphasise work discipline, obedience and loyalty to the three traditional institutions of nation-religion-king. These abstract values are translated into practical exhortations such as; to be efficient in work, to denounce all vices, and to learn the Dhamma.<sup>2</sup>

The rhetoric of moral ethics and every day virtues is coupled with the imagery of a prosperous society in the sermon '*Economics According to Buddhism*' by Phra Srisuthipong (11 November, 1984). The vision is one in which,

- *prosperity prevails because there are good citizens who are diligent and who live well from their earnings*
- *there could be affluent consumption*
- *there is a lack of debt, no foreign loans or trade deficits*
- *there is peace and tranquility, no bandits, no crimes, no corruptions because all citizens live moderately well*

In this construction, both law and order and prosperity are deemed desirable and compatible with the Buddhist vision of a moral society. As in other sermons, poverty, crime and corruptions are presented as social ills stemming from material greed. The rich are unforgivable in their selfishness, but the poor are hungry because they are lazy, imprudent and have befriended the devil. Both the causes of social inequality and the solutions to it are seen in terms of moral ethics. How exactly wealth could be generated to reach the desired state of '*affluent consumption*' is left unexplained.

By confining itself to the spiritual realm the established Sangha does not openly criticise the prevailing socio-economic order. But it faces a dilemma in its attempt to promote moral purification and economic reform. For example, most

---

<sup>2</sup> The Sunday Sermons quoted in this section are from programmes broadcast during February-July, 1986 and from The Department of Public Relations' *Patakata Dhamma*, Vol.6 which published selected programmes broadcast during 1984 and 1985.

of the sermons dealing with social and economic problems begin by taking stock of the degeneration of present day society. Statistics on crime rates, unemployment, malnutrition and prostitution are frequently cited. To solve these and other ills so the argument goes, moral ethics must be re-established. Posing the question in this way inevitably entails a certain distance from secular power holders on questions of social justice and rising consumerism and the considerable gap between rhetoric and explanation renders the imagery of '*Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong*' ambiguous.

The attempt to maintain a traditional Buddhist state against the challenges of other forms of economic or political system is particularly pronounced in the work of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the newly instituted ideologue.

*"The more one believes in material well-being, the less morality one has. By the same token, the more one believes in freedom, the lesser morality one has."*

(Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1982:86)

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu strongly rejects all material solution to social problems and advocates selflessness and duty as the route to worldly salvation. His '*Dhammic Socialism*' is antagonistic to the present political and socio-economic transformation. In the sermon '*Religion is the Cement of the Nation*' (13 January, 1985), quoted at length below, he reiterates the centrality of the traditional institutions of religion and monarchy whilst criticising the form of bourgeois democracy signified by the constitution.

*"In Thailand, we believe we have three institutions, the nation, religion and the monarchy, which are functionally related as if the nation is the body, the religion is the spirit and the king is the nerve centre by which the body and the spirit are closely coordinated. We guard these institutions dearly for they are the flagships of our lives. We will always be saved as long as these institutions are secured... Subsequently, the political system was changed. We have the fourth institution, the constitution added to the existing three institutions. We must consider whether a constitutional monarchy would jeopardize its functional relation towards the nation and the religion. Are we certain that the constitution is well-established? If it is a legitimate institution why is it constantly being revoked and amended?...The six principles which the constitution was founded on do not contain any religious principle..The politicians did not give proper importance to religion..Should the constitution really be the fourth institution?... Whatever we may have, we must preserve a constitutional monarchy whose function would cement religion and the nation, and who remains the patron of Buddhism just as we used to have in the past... No matter how modern the political system may become..we must retain religion as our national guardian...In fact, the constitution is part of the religion or the ideal principle to bring about a moral society."*

Here the political institutions are criticised for their self-interests as opposed to the traditional institutions' concern with the '*national interest*' as a whole. In another sermon, '*Economics for Material Desire*', he defines MPs as ambitious, corrupted souls who think that they and their party dominate the nation (15 January, 1984). The people, he admonishes, also forget their duty towards the nation. Both sides must have Dhamma and perform their duties accordingly if social problems are to be solved.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's treatise on '*Dhammic Socialism*' was proposed in opposition to communism as well as to bourgeois democracy. But the accommodation of his thesis with the state's modernisation policy has transformed its central idea despite his propagation of the Buddhist orthodoxy. There is a significant break in imagery from the form of moral Buddhist polity originally envisioned.

Take for example, his selective definition of Dhamma as duty rather than truth or his assertion that the law of nature coincides with the modern value of work. He preaches that '*to work is to practise Dhamma*'. The translated version by Panyananta Bhikkhu reads,

*'work is life, life is work, thus is happiness;  
take pleasure in work, be happy in work.'*

This is very similar to Sarit's slogan when he first launched the modernisation scheme in the 1960s. The equation between work and capital then was straightforward, '*work is money, money is work, thus is happiness*'. But in the present era, the concept of work is transformed from the realm of material motivation to the sphere of salvation. With Dhamma defined as '*duty*', Buddhism and the modern economy are ideologically interwoven in order to make the new citizen. Paradoxically, by linking the careful husbanding of the present to future salvation it further contributes to the materialist values it set out to condemn, as the discourse on the notion of '*punctuality*' illustrates.

*"When working, civil servants should work like a bank. You have all been to a bank before. The banks' opening hour is at 8:30. The bank clerks arrive before 8:30, say around 8:00. They start working though business is not yet commencing. The bank clerks open the safe, get the typewriters, accounts, money, etc. ready. At 8:30 sharp, they open the door. When customers come in, they are ready to serve whether the customers want to deposit, withdraw or get a loan. All can be provided for. This is how the banks work because their time is as precious as silver and gold. Civil servants should follow the example of the bank."*

(Panyananta Bhikkhu, 30 March, 1986)

In this sermon, civil servants are equated with bank employees. The work discipline of a bank, the private enterprise par excellence of capitalism, is proposed in place of the civil servants' supposed inefficiency and lack of ambition.

Although it marries material well-being with spiritual salvation, the Sangha maintains its images of sacredness through didactic narration and the Pali citations from the scripture. The continuity of this powerful imagery is however broken by Santi Asoke, the marginalised non-conformist group and by Phra Phayom who deviates from the conventional style of preaching. Both groups are banned from radio but are able to employ other media - particularly audio cassettes - to diffuse their populist arguments against the established Sangha. In refuting the ecclesiastical hierarchy they detach themselves from the Sangha and reach out for mass support.

The secularisation of Buddhism on the radio has been brought about by member of the Sangha, Phra Phayom, and not by media practitioners. In his chat sermon Phra Phayom assumes the double identity of media presenter and preacher. His popular image is a of comedian monk. His attempt to accommodate audience needs within a modern medium of communication seriously subverts the authority of the Sangha. Despite the fact that the content of these sermons centres on questions of spiritual improvement, the audience oriented nature of their appeal contradicts the traditional principle of the eradication of sensuous pleasure.

Santi Asoke's project is to revitalise Buddhism in order to help people to lead a purified and pious way of life while at the same time directly engaging in politics to bring about social utopia. The campaign '*kin noi, chai noi*' (consume less, expend little) has been a popular success among the urban middle and lower-classes. In 1985, Major General Jamlong Srimuang, a staunch member of Santi Asoke, was elected to the governorship of Bangkok. His electoral support took the form of a religious party, '*The Kongtab Dhamma*' (The Salvation Army). The victory of Jamlong, '*the meritorious administrator*', merged religious leadership with political leadership in a way that was once confined to the monarchy.

Since Jamlong Srimuang won official status he has also gained access to the radio. His work as governor and his personal life have become regular news items. In 1986, his religious position was officially acknowledged and debated the question of '*How can monks and Buddhists help to develop the nation?*'.



with monks from other factions of the Sangha on a Radio Thailand's live broadcast.

In the process of religious revitalisation the Sangha has produced a variety of images that have transformed the conventional power and aura of spiritual leader. The official position is exemplified by the Supreme Patriarch, the symbol of Buddhism, and by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's modern utopia of '*Dhammic Socialism*'. However, in their condemnation of the present social degeneration and political corruption they have paradoxically moved closer to the state and to the political system. In response, the counter-arguments mounted by the populists have opened a space for debate and for the creation of new religious images. Jamlong Srimuang for example, has successfully proposed religious politicians as a solution, and by means of Phra Phayom's innovative style of chat sermon the Sangha is becoming more secularised. On the other hand, their approach to linking salvation with material well-being by appealing to different classes of believers rather than to the generic '*Buddhist*' category has also challenge the traditional assumption that worldly happiness is equally plausible for every Buddhist.

## 7.2 Military Commentary Programmes and Political Legitimation

The main distinction between the two military commentary programmes, *Pua Pandin Thai* and *Siam Manusati*, is in the institutional identification. Launched after the 1976 student massacre the allegiance of the former lies with the symbolic triumvirate of nation-religion-king. Whereas *Siam Manusati*'s title, borrowed from Vajiravudh's well-known nationalist poem, projects a patriotic continuation with traditional institutions. The programme began in 1981 soon after the Young Turk coup was crushed. Its underlying theme of '*kuam samaki*' (unity) is an attempt to patch up the broken political consensus that the military had pledged to uphold.

The signification of the '*nation*' is established in both form and content. Both programmes begin with the patriotic tunes *Pua Pandin Thai* and *Siam Manusati* which call for the defence of the last homeland of the Thais. In terms of form the authoritative style of narrative is prevalent. Though *Siam Manusati* is the more hard-hitting and aggressive, both reproduce the mode of militaristic communication between superior and inferior in their terse and stern presentation. Items on national security, political events or other topical social issues are consequently interpreted within this tightly confined space.<sup>3</sup>

Through these programmes the military presents a new image based on engagement in open debate instead of using violence as in the past. Its role as guardian of the realm is negotiated within the ideology of '*Taharn Prachathipatai*' or '*Democratic Soldier*'. But the gap between the rhetoric of support for parliamentary democracy and the unceasing effort to defend the *status quo* is so far unbridged. On the one hand, the military allies itself with the traditional institutions. On the other hand, it must reconcile itself with the pluralistic political regime in order to gain political legitimation, as the following quotation shows.

*"The army has announced the policy of 'political dissociation' which means we will not engage ourselves in any political input. That is left to the political parties and various pressure groups. However, we hold the power and responsibility to see to the political output. The army will protect the system of democratic rule under the monarchy, and the security of his majesty's government. These are our responsibilities. We must make clear that the army is not going to stand idly by if the political institution does not represent the interests of the nation and the people."*

(The Army Commander-in-Chief,  
Pua Pandin Thai, 23rd July, 1986)

The military however, continues to regard itself as the sole guardian of the realm and the ultimate saviour of the nation ("*What is Patriotism*", Siam Manusati, 6 May, 1986). In the past, the communist threat to conquer the Thai nation, destroy the traditional institutions and freedom of religious beliefs was the most frequently used justification for military coups (Samudvanija and Wongtrangaan, 1983:65-66). The imagery of the '*enemy*' established by the military and reinforced by the dominant institutions, was used to explain all social unrest until the early 1970s. As Kittiwutho Bhikkhu's description of the evil empire during the campaign of Right kill Left in 1976 illustrated;<sup>4</sup>

*"Killing is used as a means to attain power. Wherever communism pervades, there is massive killing...That is why over 62 millions Chinese and 7 millions Vietnamese were killed."*

The view that national security is constantly threatened by '*communist infiltration*' or '*aggression*' was also widely adopted by the press and channels for counter-arguments were limited to the universities and to one or two intellectual publications such as Sangkomsart Paritat.

<sup>3</sup> Programmes quoted in this section are those broadcast during February-July, 1986 and from Pua Pandin Thai (1985), a collection of selected programmes published by the producer.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Suksamran's *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*, (1982:153).

But when the scale of CPT insurgency grew with support from students and intellectuals who fled the terror from the Right in the 1970s, the dominant image of the '*Chinese communist guerilla*' or the '*alien communist terrorist*' was redefined. Those who attempt to instigate the ignorant and disgruntled to over take the nation are no longer Chinese nor Vietnamese. On the contrary, they are '*Thai insurgents*' or '*Thai revolutionaries*' who are as patriotic as the military themselves. The previous justification for killing alien communists was severely weakened when it was argued that '*Thais are killing Thais*'. The ensuing debates on radio, between the clandestine Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT) and the military, centred on social inequality and class exploitation, broadened the arena for counter-argument for the first time.

In 1979, Kriangsak's accommodation policy changed the prevailing terrorist image to that of political dissident. But the term only refers to those who renounce armed struggle and join the government rehabilitation programme. At the same time the government successfully negotiated with the People's Republic of China for the closure of the VOPT. With diplomatic normalisation of relations with China and the USSR in the 1980s the scare tactic based on the idea of the '*communist threat*' gave way to a rationalisation of opposition to communism. As the following narrative demonstrates, the idea of a '*free society*' is pitched against the notion of an '*oppressive communist regime*' in which neither freedom of expression nor property ownership is allowed.

*"As a Thai and a tax payer you have the right to contribute to the nation's welfare...You can make complaints about any social injustice. You can express viewpoints that will be useful to the development of the nation...These things are forbidden in a communist country. In a communist regime everyone is subject to the superior order., you must do as you are told only. You have no right to argue or refuse the order. Complaints can't be made....These are different from the Thai society in which we have every right. We are able to own anything we please. In a communist country, its people have no property right. Everything the people own is nationalised. There is only state ownership...Now we can see the positive and negative sides of these regimes. We believe that each and every Thai citizen has a clear conscience about our political system therefore consent to our regimes. Our government rule for the happiness of the Thai people in a democracy. We Thais are good citizen who are democratic and well-disciplined in respect to law and order."*

(Pua Pandin Thai, "*Good Citizen*", 1985:216)

At the same time, once the question of threats to domestic security was shifted from armed insurgency to the political sphere, the military had to concentrate on external aggressors. Hence, the most prominent threat in the 1980s, the military argues, is the People's Republic of Vietnam which has already annexed

Kampuchea and constantly ambushes villages on the Thai-Kampuchea border (*"Self-defence for National Security"*, Pua Pandin Thai, 1985:105-106). *Cold War* rhetoric from the late 1950s continues to feed this line of argument. The Vietnam War of national independence becomes the 'war of aggression' to establish the Federation of Indo-China countries. The USSR is presented as 'the super-power behind Vietnam who threatens the peaceful existence of small nations in the region', while the US continues to be 'our trusted ally whose military and economic assistance are compelling since the Asia and Pacific region is contributing significantly in international trade and security'. Hence, to avoid total destruction we must 'hope for peace, but always ready for war'. Vietnam is thus singled out as the external aggressor in order to legitimise a military build up.

The military repeatedly cited Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam as examples of 'nations without an honourable identity' contrasting them with Thailand's historical independence which must be cherished and defended with utmost patriotism (Siam Manusati, 28 May, 1985). The emphasis on unity and social integration as a means to strengthen national defence are highlighted in two related areas; the modernisation scheme and economic consumption. The military commentary programmes, Pua Pandin Thai in particular, advocate the cooperation and sacrifice of individual benefit (*"Cooperation with the State for Community Development"*, 1985), and the 'Thai Niyom' or Thai-isation of unscrupulous consumption (*"Consumption of Thai Goods: The Solution to the Economic Peril"*, *"Let Us Campaign for the Consumption of Locally Produced Products"*, 1985).

In shifting towards this 'civil function', the military legitimises itself on the basis of its legal role and in the modernisation scheme as conceived during the Sarit regime.<sup>5</sup> The assimilation of the roles of warrior and moderniser is elaborated in great detail in the current series of commentary programmes. For example, in the programme entitled *"How Can We Defend Our Homeland?"* the military claims that as citizen they must contribute to national development just as any other Thai citizens.

*"We are aware that we are ordinary citizens except only that we are in uniform and subject to disciplinary control...But if some of our actions may profess a different function it is because we are trying to defend our national survival...People may say why aren't we in the*

---

<sup>5</sup> The legal functions of the military defined in the Ministry of Defence Act, 1960 are; to counter insurgency; to patrol the border; to keep law and order; and to modernise the nation.

*battle field fighting the enemy...We want to cooperate with all the Thai brothers and sisters and every group in solving our national problems...If you survive we survive with you. But if the nation is destroyed the military is also doomed."*

(Pua Pandin Thai, 1985:9)

However, in another programme, *"In Battle We Fight, In Peace We Modernise"*, the military makes distinctive claims for its role as moderniser.

*"The dictionary of the Royal Academy defines soldier as His Majesty's servant whose primary duty is to defend the country...But in the age of modernisation the state urgently needs assistance from well-trained staff. We are suited for the job without interfering in the realm of other state agencies...The nation does not belong to any individual. It is ours. It belongs to every Thai citizen...We do not give lip-service but we show our loyalty by our action. We should not argue on matter of national interest such as this. Everyone should contribute to his/her full capacity. As for the military, we are proud to have contributed to the national development scheme, as we say, 'in battle we fight, in peace we modernise'"*

(Pua Pandin Thai, 1985:231-232)

Patriotism is also presented as the key to solving the economic problems of foreign debts, trade deficits and most of all, poverty. Many slogans are proposed for mobilising this Thai-isation sentiment, for example; *'Made by Thais, consumed by Thais, prosperity to the Thais'* or *'Buy Thai goods, the baht will not be devalued'*. Some of the military's views on the causes and solutions of economic problems converge with those of the Sangha and the ruling government. The rich should be less selfish, less corrupted while the poor should be more diligent and prudent. The military believe that the super-powers and the rich nations of the world maintain their economic power because of the quality of their people who are *'well-disciplined, dutiful, socially responsible and uphold national interests over their personal interests'* (*"To Economize and be Prudence is the Principal of Life"*, 1985:125). Its opposition to foreign goods consumption however, diverges from the current official position, and is a revival of the student anti-imperialist campaign in the early 1970s (*"Consumption of Thai Goods: the Solution to Economic Peril"*, 1985).

On the one hand, the military makes serious efforts to legitimise its *'civil role'* by presenting a cooperative image grounded in patriotism. Its professionalism is transformed into a combination of defence and development. On the other hand, it wants to advance its political role in national administration. As a result, the apparent consensus in the areas of socio-economy are converted into antagonism in the political arena.

Its constant row with the government move the debate from questions of

national security towards issues of parliamentary democracy. For example, during the general election of 1983 and 1986 the military's support for '*the election of good individuals (as MP) regardless of political party*' antagonised the entire spectrum of political parties. And during the '*constitutional amendment crisis*' in 1983, *Siam Manusati* became the platform from which the military argued against the ban on state functionaries holding political office. The Commander of the 1st Region Army even threatened to '*exercise*' its military strength if the outcome was unsatisfactory.

Although the military repeatedly pronounces its staunch support for a constitutional parliament, both commentary programmes are critical of '*politicians*' and '*political parties*'. They are labelled '*political businessmen*' whose mandate is their own interests. The military presents a highly negative image of members of parliament in which;

*"Ideals, virtues and honesty are lacking. Untruthful to the nation and the people, indulge in power and illegal conduct such as gambling. Their positions are legitimised by legal process but they are not the real representative of the people. They create chaos and problems in the parliament. They only want to fulfill their interests. They want power, prestige and wealth."*

(Pua Pandin Thai, "*To Be an Honourable Politician*", 1985:85-86)

In opposition to these '*dirty, power-seeking and un-patriotic politicians*' the military proposes the model of the meritorious ruler (*Siam Manusati*, 7 May, 1986). In this conceptualisation the paradigm of the benevolent king is conjoined with the notion of '*Prachathipatai bab Thai Thai*' (The Thai Way of Democracy). Conceived in the late 1960s, it proposes a strong state conducive to a centralised market economy (Samudvanija and Wongtrangan, 1983). Pua Pandin Thai revived it in a series of programmes prior to the general election in 1986. The incumbent Prime Minister, General Prem Tinsulanon, ex-Army Commander-in-Chief, was held up as the ideal administrative leader, '*honest, fair-minded and charismatic*', a father figure or '*Papa Prem*' who fitted neatly with the paternalistic power structure. This positive imagery is contrasted with the negative imagery of a parliamentary democracy as summarised in the following oppositions.

Desirable	Undesirable
- benevolent ruler	- (corrupted) politician
- natural power holder	- power-seeker
- national interests	- personal interests
- patriotic	- un-patriotic
- apolitical	- political
- social integration	- social diversification
- peace and prosperity	- political struggle, chaos

The military argues that it is the 'ill conduct' of the 'corrupted politicians' that problematises the consensus on the 'constitutional' form of government (*"The Political Spirit"*, Siam Manusati, 17 July, 1986). But the programmes designed to legitimise the military involvement in government affairs and parliamentary politics fail to convince the intelligentsia. On the contrary, they open the space for the press to question the incoherences of the military's rhetorics and actions.

Our exploration of the official programmes illustrates the convergence of the traditional Buddhist polity with the form of constitutional monarchy, and its presentation as the desirable model of political rule through which peace and prosperity can be achieved. In this juxtaposition the symbolic institutions of the 'Thai nation', kingship and Buddhism, resist the liberalisation of political forces and any reinterpretation of the 'nation' but given the socio-economic transformation, reform becomes inevitable despite strong resistance to change. The military for example, must argue for both a strong state and a free society. The Sangha on the other hand, is able to accommodate its internal schism in its institutional reforms as well as absorbing the emerging classes into its 'new citizen' project. Their contradictory views on progress, material versus spiritual development, are paradoxically resolved by the 'Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong' ideology. In this way, the debate on the symbolic 'nation' is moved to the all-encompassing and concrete arena of modernisation. It is in this space that the power bloc attempts to negotiate with the social classes in every sphere.

The two most contentious areas are the form of democratic rule and the social disintegration resulting from the modernisation process. As illustrated above, the official programmes are incoherent in their explanations of the causes and effects of social transition. Although there is a consensus on 'constitutional monarchy' their interpretation of the form of parliamentary democracy diverges. As the following analysis of popular news commentary programmes suggest, their attempt to disengage from paternalistic rule necessarily challenges the traditional institutions and the military, especially on the restructuring of the power hierarchy.

### 7.3 Popular News Commentary and Political Consensus

Our analysis in this section focuses mainly on the presentation of two popular news commentary programmes, *Kao Si Mum Baan* and *Kao Duan Juan Saang*. The materials collected during April-July 1986 are analysed in relation to two main areas; the daily presentation of crimes, and the imagery of parliamentary democracy. News on crime makes up over 40% of the programmes, although this can vary in relation to the overall socio-political climate. This was the case with our study period when the dissolution of parliament in May and the subsequent general election in July commanded the bulk of the space, particularly on *Kao Duan Juan Saang*.

Despite the differences in organisational goals and individual styles, our sample programmes share two predominant characters; the language of the common folk; and the ways in which they relate to the audiences. Their use of vernaculars other than the central official language is the central feature which the audience identifies with and which marks them out as '*kao chao baan*' or news of and for the common people. The second aspect is the application of serious reading for news while commentary takes the form of radio talk.

Although the newscasters empathise with the audience they continue to exemplify the top-down informative model at the same time. In so doing, the '*professionals*' locate themselves in the middle of the power hierarchy, below the state and above the audience. This unequal and conflictual relationship is negotiated by the newscasters through the programmes' discourses as we shall see below.

The use of language is part of a symbolic classification system underpinned by social divisions. In the popular news commentary programmes there are two interlocking systems of classification; the hierarchical structure that guides the selection and presentation of news items, and the division between written and oral news, '*reading*' and '*comment*'. As Kress and Hodge (1979:63-64) have argued, the classification system that the dominant classes employ as an instrument of control becomes the site of tension and struggle for the subordinate classes. In the official news for example, the hierarchy of news items is modelled after the paternalistic power structure of Thai society. Its '*written*' language establishes a bourgeois and one-way mode of information distribution over oral conversation. The scheme negates the power of the people by featuring them solely as deviants or victims in crime news.



The rigid divisions that operated in the 1960s marked off official from popular news. This was between the written reports of official events and the dramatisations of crimes, or between facts and fictions. However, this dichotomy has become blurred in recent years. Popular news programme now bring together official news and popular news in a similar way to the commercial press. But their structure is a continuation of the former lines of demarcation as well as an accommodation to political and economic imperatives. In this context, do the images in popular news commentary differ from established views or are they generally in line with those of the state? If they are different how is it possible for them to sustain the ambiguities and incoherences in the construction of their image of reality in this highly censored terrain?

Let us first investigate news reports of crimes. As Hall, et al. argued crime is news because,

*"its treatment evokes threats to, but also reaffirms, the consensual morality of the society: a modern morality play takes place before us in which the 'devil' is both symbolically and physically cast out from the society by its guardians - the police and the judiciary."*

(Hall, et al, 1978:66)

Crimes not only break the legal code they also breach the five fundamental Buddhist prohibitions on killing, stealing, lying, adultery and alcoholic drinking. The 'modern morality play' on radio is therefore strongly linked to Buddhism which legitimises the modern legal system.

The presentation generally sets the 'offender' against the 'police' in a villains versus heroes model. In the case of street crimes such as mugging or robbery, the accused is immediately labelled 'kon rai' or 'criminal', in contrast to corporate crimes where the individual's name or the term 'pu tongha' or 'suspect' is used. Criminals commit crimes because it is their 'sandaan' or innate nature to do so (Kao Si Mum Baan, 1 May, 1986). They are either deviants, maniacs, or immoral souls. The news reports are structured from the police's perspective and the comments are tightly mobilised in favour of the preferred meaning of law and order. In a case of family theft for example, the police shot a man who refused to give himself up in front of his parents. The commentary argued the police position;

*"when your son fired at the police why didn't you protest, and now you question why the police shot your son...well, your son fired first..if the police were killed what will the people say.."*

(Kao Si Mum Baan, 11 April, 1986)

In other instances the comment is attached to a moral exhortation such as,

*"people of this age (a 61-year old who killed his lover and himself because of jealousy) should concern themselves with unworldly matters.."*

(Soon Ruam Kao, 25 July, 1986)

Everyday scattered and private events are strung together case by case and then publicly staged within a symbolically identifiable structure. The resulting cycle of repetition and renewal ritualises crimes in pursuit of audience integration as well as attempting to legitimise the basic assumption of law and order (Elliot, 1980).

But despite the general convergence with official views on the enforcement of law and order, the programmes' populist stance cuts both ways. The police are also criticised for their unequal treatment of offenders or for their corruption. Take for example the occasion when the Head of the Police Department evaluated and praised the metropolitan police force. The initial report is straightforward but the newscaster's commentary marks a sharp departure from the image presented in the news.

*"It is unnecessary to display such modesty. We only ask for just and equal treatment...as it happens 'you' can do no wrong but 'we' are always in the wrong...In fact, we would live more peacefully if you enforce the law according to the letter...you arrest taxi drivers when you feel like it...it'd be all right if it is because they drive recklessly but your charge is that they dress improperly...I want to say this...how can the police drive against the traffic on a one-way street...if we do it we would be arrested but it is all right for the police to do it...I am not criticising but if the police violate the law, do you think it's wrong?"*

(Kao Si Mum Baan, 9 April, 1986)

On the notorious issue of the narcotics trade, the National Security Council charged the hill-tribes with creating a serious security problem as well as aggravating deforestation. But the commentary on Kao Duan Juan Saang is clearly opposed to the official view.

*"We all know very well who these opium businessmen are...if it is really the hill-tribes people it could be solved quite easily but there are low-land people involved...deep personal interests which inhibit any real solution to the problem....it is the tycoons or those who are in uniforms.."*

(Kao Duan Juan Saang, 17 July, 1986)

On both programmes, the newscasters' general presentation of crime and policing consent to the state's conception of 'law and order'. But on the other hand, they constantly question the institutions of law enforcement. These incoherences

are sometimes present in the same programme although they may be placed apart in the morning and evening slots. In *Kao Si Mum Baan* for example, the morning programme tends to follow the rigid hierarchy of official news. As a result, comments are selective and kept to the minimum. The newscaster described it as a professional ethic although it is also stipulated that government employees are not to comment on *'the state'*.

In the evening slot of *Kao Si Mum Baan* however, dissenting comments and news items from the perspective of the political opposition and social movements are given more space. The newscasters do not restrict their comments to law enforcer but lodge criticisms against several state agencies including the Sangha. The military however remains exempt. These social commentaries express the critical viewpoint of the audience on a range of social issues. The education system for example, is often presented as reinforcing inequality.

*"This is the season for the pawn shop...they prepare 60 million baht for the people...the rich do not have to pawn for their kids' education...the trouble is, then, what next? If they graduate will they have a job because they don't have the connection...its a pure waste of money since it all seems so hopeless...some people say it's not true about having connection but the fact is you have to pay to get into just about everything...if you don't you are out."*

(*Kao Si Mum Baan*, 30 April, 1986)

Whereas *Kao Si Mum Baan* is relatively cautious in selecting the issues and institutions it comments on, *Kao Duan Juan Saang* challenges the whole classification system that impinges upon broadcast journalism. It abandons the structure of the power hierarchy in favour of commercial definitions of news values (as shown on Table 7). At the same time, it makes serious attempts to elevate its authorship over the external constraints that impinge on the programme. In the process it deviates in both the form of presentation and the imagery it creates.

Take for example the way it presents a new image of *'political crime'* during the period prior to the general election. The newscaster contradicts the conventional definition of *'deviant'* criminals in two respects. Firstly, crimes are explained as the outcome of political conflicts. Secondly, they are seen as including political murders, and in campaigning and polling.

The programme also highlights news reports of illegal political tactics such as bribery, vote buying and falsification of the ballots. These activities the newscaster warns, *"are not based on righteousness and the voters must be*

*aware of such dishonesty*" (Kao Duan Juan Saang, 17 July, 1986). These items are placed alongside news reports on the various political campaigns in which the positive dimensions of the *'election'* are presented.

In the case of the row over different political candidates in the southern province of Sonkhla which resulted in two murders and one person being seriously injured, the comment is explicit that, *"in this case, it can't be denied that the killing is not related to the election"* (Kao Duan Juan Saang, 9 July, 1986). In another item, concerning a campaigner for the Democrat Party in Prae province in the north who was shot dead by an M16 machine gun, the newscaster stated that, *"it is confirmed that this is a political murder..."*. This was in direct opposition to the formulaic police statement; *"we believe that there is no politics involved"*. Political motivation is the first category that the police rule out when a crime is committed. But manoeuvring the meaning of these crimes within the political news and the direct commentary, challenges the orthodoxy that separate crimes from politics. The definitions presented in Kao Duan Juan Saang have reintroduced the notion of political crime that the Left attempted to argue for in the 1970s, albeit from a different position.

By pinpointing crimes related to the election, Kao Duan Juan Saang is apparently creating an incoherent image of the parliamentary system. But what at first seems to coincide with the military's conservative argument, that politicians are incapable of governance, is in fact contentious. The relative openness in the presentation of political conflicts is tightly mobilised around two central themes; the political consensus on a parliamentary democracy, and the liberal but conflictual character of a democratic system. Despite their differences in organisation and relative autonomy both Kao Duan Juan Saang and Kao Si Mum Baan, are in concert in promoting the imagery of a *'political consensus'* for democracy. The latter chooses to emphasise the positive dimension, in line with the official perspective. During the election campaign for example, the programme provided space for audience participation through their promotional slogans and poems. In contrast, Kao Duan Juan Saang displays its forceful authorship in its contradictory image creation.

For instance, the up-coming Thai election in 1986 is compared with the Japanese election on the first item of the morning programme on July 9th. While the commentary applauds the democratic tradition of the Japanese it also brings out the controversial debate on the question of the *'non-elected Prime Minister'*.

*"The Japanese PM won the election again...I admire him and their democracy...What about us?...When will we be in the clear as to who is the government, who is the opposition...then the people can decide...if the PM runs for the election and wins, you will be the perfect PM."*

At the same time, the newscaster reiterates the duties of the audience in a democracy, *"as 'dutiful citizens' you should go to the poll...intellectuals only grumble without having a better solution."*

While there is a general consensus on the desirability of parliamentary democracy and of the election on both programmes, their political positions diverge. The following analysis of the news reports on the parliamentary debate on the new financial decrees that led to the dissolution of the Parliament on May 1st 1986 illustrates how Kao Si Mum Baan and Kao Duan Juan Saang differ in their presentation of political conflict.

The objective of the government's proposal was to tighten control over commercial banks and financial institutions. Opposition to the decrees came from the opposition Chat Thai Party and from the mutineers in the Social Action Party (SAP) within the governing four-party coalition. The controversy became part of the campaign to depose the government.

**Distribution of News Sources**  
**Parliamentary Debate on the New Financial Decrees**  
**30 April 1986**

Kao Si Mum Baan	Kao Duan Juan Saang
1. The Prime Minister (non-party)	1. The Prime Minister
2. Minister of Finance(non-party)	2. Press conference, government spokesman
3. Minister of Interior(non-party)	3. Kukrit Pramoj, MP former leader of the SAP (2 interviews)
4. Press conference, Bank of Thailand	4. Koson Kraireuk, MP SAP (coalition party)
5. Press conference, Chat Thai Party (official opposition party)	5. Bunteng Tongsawas, MP (leader of the mutiny faction)
6. Minister of Communication, Prachakorn Thai Party (coalition party)	6. Jamlong Rungruang, MP SAP
7. Commentaries -newspapers -SAP mutineers	7. Werakorn Kamprakob,MP SAP
	8. Amnuay Yossuk, MP, SAP
	9. Press conference, SAP
	10. Press conference, Chat Thai Party

In identifying with the government's position, the newscaster of **Kao Si Mum Baan** selects and puts together the view points of the politicians and government officials responsible for the decrees. The Prime Minister is given the first opportunity to define the controversy. The image presented is one of fairness. He believes that *"everyone should play by the rules"* just as one would in sports. The official opposition, the Chat Thai Party, is brought in briefly to balance the government. It contends that the government has moved towards *"authoritarianism or closer to communism."* However the report concludes with an interview from Samak Suntarawej, the Minister of Communication and leader of the rightist Prachakorn Thai Party. He counter the opposition party's view by saying that *"the decrees are necessary and they are for the benefits of the nation and the people."*

The commentary on **Kao Si Mum Baan** denounces the press for sensationalising the issue in order to boost their circulation and the mutineers for power-seeking. Apart from the legitimate news sources the programme constructs a dichotomy of moral ethic versus immoral behaviour by referring to religious tradition and conventional wisdom. The fair and caring image of the government thereby reinforces its position over the contending parties.

While **Kao Si Mum Baan** highlights the PM's view of *'playing by the rules'*, **Kao Duan Juan Saang** is dominated by information from the Social Action Party and the mutineers. Seven out of the ten sources quoted are drawn from the SAP. The order of these interviews, starting with the towering figure of Kukrit Pramoj, former PM (1976) and former leader of the SAP, is carefully structured to mobilise support for the contending view. The press conference from the official opposition party placed at the end helps legitimise this political confrontation.

Although the PM's interview is the same one carried by **Kao Si Mum Baan**, the newscaster pre-empts it with the following headline,

*"Bunteng 'openly' challenges the government by dissenting to the nine decrees. The PM, General Prem Tinasulanon, remains silent on Bunteng and his team's campaign."*

After the official view is presented, the programme quotes at length from Kukrit Pramoj's interviews. The former SAP leader, whose double image associated with liberal democracy and the aristocracy, maintains a cool and rational stance against the government. He sympathises with their situation and reiterates personal support.

*"Parliament is not an arena for revenge, MPs should go to the boxing ring at Rajadamnern if they want to do that."*

But while he is critical of the mutineers he also endorses their view. By asserting his neutrality and keeping to the rules of the game, Pramoj suggests that the SAP should first withdraw from the government coalition, then the party could easily topple it without being condemned. His position for 'parliamentary democracy' is clearly antagonistic to a 'non-elected PM' as he states that,

*"The present PM has performed well but it's time he steps down. Our next PM should definitely be an elected member of parliament"*

The interviews that follow repeat that the government should resign and that the SAP is ready to propose Pramoj as the next PM. In conclusion, the programme reconfirms the SAP's position, with the Chat Thai Party's claim that,

*"The decrees are more detrimental to the people than they are to the banks."*

In this way Kao Duan Juan Saang counter-defines 'politics' in terms of power struggles in a parliamentary democracy as opposed to the established definition of an 'a-political administrative authority'. The dissolution of the parliament the following day is presented in the programme as reconfirming the 'democratic rules of the game'. It shows how an elected government could be toppled by political means.

While Kao Duan Juan Saang's entire programme on May 1st is devoted to this single item, Kao Si Mum Baan presents the news story in its routine structure. The dissolution of the parliament is the second report and the decree for the general election is the eleventh item. Although the newscaster refrains from any direct comment the implications that the event is a consequence of 'power-seeking politicians' appears in passing in other news report.

The analysis in this section has explored how the popular news commentary programmes construct different images of the present 'political consensus'. Using the examples of news reports of crimes and parliamentary debate, we have shown that despite their hierarchical structure and dependence on official sources, variations of viewpoints are in play. In asserting their 'professionalism' the newscasters reinterpret the official notion of 'impartiality' that inhibits any deviation from the state-defined reality. The 'balance' of viewpoints however, operates across the range of news programmes, between the

official news bulletin and the popular news commentary, rather than within each programme.

Popular news commentary is relatively more open in comparison to the news bulletin from Radio Thailand and the official programmes discussed in the previous section. Although the manoeuvring of meanings is firmly situated within the '*political consensus*' frame of reference, the programmes manage to generate a diversity of imagery. In their attempt to simultaneously negotiate and challenge the dominant ideologies we see a juxtaposition of imageries that both converge and diverge from the official construction of reality. The degree of incoherence is constrained however, by the type of organisation and by the socio-political contexts as the contrast between **Kao Si Mum Baan** and **Kao Duan Juan Saang** illustrates.

On **Kao Si Mum Baan**, the news' presentation of the conventional imagery of crimes runs against the critical commentaries on the institutions of law enforcement. In programmes such as **Kao Duan Juan Saang** the imagery of crime is a split between representations of the official and populist views of '*law and order*'. Although the imagery it creates continues to reinforce the dominant traditional institutions such as Buddhism and the triple-alliance, it presents '*political crimes*' as an anti-thesis to orthodox definitions.

More significant are the non-uniformed ways in which popular news commentary programmes construct reality. They pose a challenge to the dominant mode in two respects; the reversal and modification of the structure of presentation which redefines how reality should be perceived; and the abstention from comment on the military. This is due partly to tradition and partly to state regulation. The absence of comment on the military negates its powerful position in a parliamentary democracy.

**Kao Duan Juan Saang** in particular, diverges from the established system of classification in radio news by its reversal of the hierarchical structure of presentation. This enables the programme to shift away from the dominant mode of perception of reality. At the same time, it is moving closer to the emerging mode of '*liberal democracy*' which coincides with its specific professional interest. However, the asymmetrical power relation between the programme producer and the audience continues to be reproduced. The legitimisation for identifying with more challenging political views is largely anchored in the ideology of professionalism. In **Kao Duan Juan Saang** the authoritative style of presentation fits with the *auteur* ideology in creative art



forms. Nonetheless, it contradicts the objectivity and impartiality that it also attempts to claim.

For *Kao Si Mum Baan*, which is more confined in its form, the community news section provides a space in which audience members are regularly invited to participate. In addition, it is open to discourse from the audience from time to time as we noted in the case of programmes prior to the general election. Although this variation of news sources modifies the conception of news making, the distance between producer and audience is not reduced since the generally didactic stance is firmly retained.

The discontinuity or modification in forms illustrated above not only coincides with the emerging institution of parliamentary democracy it also serves to neutralise these arrangements. Both programmes allot their major share of space to politics and government affairs in which the legitimate political parties are the key players. When the military makes news in this political arena the imagery is one of '*intervention*'. This perspective is also largely reinforced by the press. The diminishing space for military news correlates with the growing importance of parliament. By challenging the linguistic structures of radio news popular news commentary has emerged as a distinctive genre in an era that hopes to build a new consensus around liberal democracy.

In the next section, we will look at the construction of politics in fiction as opposed to the non-fiction programmes we have explored up until now. Although the genre is bracketed as '*entertainment*' and located in the world of fantasy, state-censorship and self-censorship are still very much in evidence. In its normal practice radio fiction consciously avoids any open debate or reference to '*politics*'. thus, naturalising the *status quo*. But the political/romance drama *Kamsang Sawan* or *Heaven Command* is an example of a commercial radio drama that breaks with this convention. Identifying itself with the conservatives, *Kamsang Sawan* confronts the issue of social transition by mobilising positive images of traditional institutions.

In order to dramatise the dominant ideologies the author must negotiate the tension between the content and the form derived from the bourgeois novel. How is it possible to promote the traditional values of loyalty and duty against the bourgeois notion of free will and romantic love for example? We shall explore the imagery employed by the twin themes of patriotism and romance and look at how the author attempts to manoeuvre between them to secure a preferred meaning.

#### 7.4 Political Drama and the Traditional Institutions

*Kamsang Sawan* was written by Kanita Por, a screen playwright who is a minor member of the royal family. Unlike the bulk of the drama adapted from novels, the 88 episodes were expressly scripted for radio. The drama was broadcast during December 1985 - March 1986 at 8:30 - 9:00 pm. on Wor Bhor Tor radio. This was the third re-run. Its first but partial broadcast in 1978 was banned by the Special Branch Police. This censorship took place at a time when initial attempts were being made to construct a new political consensus. As a result, the fictitious political confrontation, which bears a close resemblance to events in the 1973-1976 period, was considered to be '*instigating social disorder and political dissensus*'.<sup>1</sup>

The second and third broadcasts however, have been more successful. This is largely due to the '*liberal*' climate of political reconciliation in the 1980s. But more importantly, the drama is located within the discourse of constitutional monarchy which underpins the new consensus. The full broadcast in 1982 was scheduled before the Bangkok Bicentennial in which the grandeur of the Chakri dynasty was celebrated, and the 1986 re-run coincided with the run-up to the 60th birthday anniversary of the monarch. As Sujarithanarak (1982) points out, progressive discourse has always been marginalised in contrast to the centrality of the traditional institutions. This is especially true on the state medium of radio. In the past, political dramas, such as Lauang Wichit's patriotic plays, the '*cold war*' dramas produced during the Sarit and Thanom regimes, and the more recent '*modernisation*' plays, were produced by the state to represent the official political perspective. *Kamsang Sawan* is a continuation of this tradition. Nonetheless, it must work within a different set of social relations and with a more consumer-oriented stance to presentation. But before we embark on an analysis, a brief summary of the story is called for.

*Kamsang Sawan* is set in the kingdom of Sikarin Nakorn in which the question of royal inheritance is at issue. The crown Princess Surasawadi falls in love with Teerapol during a private excursion to Australia. The hero, whose mother married an Australian, is a close friend of the princess's half-brother, Prince Sidhisakmontri. Teerapol pursues the Princess back to Sikarin Nakorn in order to marry her. He urges his students at the Department of Political Science at Sikarin University to call for the enthronement of Prince Sidhisakmontri instead of a woman monarch. This is also the wish of the prince's mother, the king's minor wife, who is a tribute from a small neighbouring state.

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with K. Por, April, 1986.

A second political problem is posed by the republican movement headed by cabinet member, Thongchai. Together with the pro-republican military faction they plot to overthrow the monarchy. The opportunity arises when two factions of students, one protesting against the unconventional royal inheritance and the other supporting it, take to the streets. However, Teerapol is finally convinced by the Princess that his move, though well intentioned, will play into the hands of the real enemies of the throne. He puts an end to the student demonstration and assists in countering the coup. The regime is thus secured.

How can this political plot be reconciled with the romance between the heroine and the hero? Teerapol makes clear that he does not want to be a consort and the Princess places her duty for the throne over her love for him. But a tragic ending would break with the expected formula of radio romance. On coronation day, a crucial incident happens. Teerapol is shot dead by Thongchai who returns to assassinate the new monarch. The queen is heart-broken. She abdicates the throne in favour of her brother and dies soon after. The romance comes full circle when she joins Teerapol in heaven.

The dual plots successfully deconstruct the opposition discourse by defeating the republican movement who are presented as 'traitors' and the real 'tyrants'. They also reconstruct the conservative argument by juxtaposing the question of royal inheritance with an imaginative love story. These provide the tension that moves the discourse forward. However, the dichotomy that divides 'us' from 'them', although parallel to the standard formula of the good against the bad, is not quite as simplistic as the author would have us believe. But we will return to this point later.

#### The Classification of Characters

THE GOOD	The Monarchy	The Subject	
- us	- honourable	- loyal	
- moral	- meritorious	- sacrifice	
- winner	- Parami (ten	- patriotic	
- rational	noble virtues)	- trustworthy	
<hr/>			
THE UGLY	The Intelligensia	The Businessmen	
- us	- loyal	- patriotic	
- negotiable	- politically naive	- self-interest	
- instrumental	- immature	- ambitious	
<hr/>			
THE BAD	The Politicians	The Military	The Aliens
- them	----- power-seeker -----		
- enemy	- tyranny	- traitor	- infiltrator
- immoral	- bloodshed	- coup	- Gail (evil)

In this scheme of character classification, the power structure of Thai society is woven into the standard romance formula familiar to the audience. The author produces a double device to close the slippage of meanings. Firstly, there is the central division between the hero/heroine and the villains. The romance plot is firmly rooted in the former. The villains are republicans who obstruct the achievement of a happy relationship. Secondly, by using naturalism as the mode of presentation it '*empties history and makes it natural*' (Barthes, 1973). Again, this assumes a common cultural stock with the audience in both actual and fictional categories and in ways of relating them to one another.

By creating a positive image for the protagonists and criminalising the antagonists the main characters are rigidly stereotyped. The primary system for the creation of imagery in this oral medium is voice association, but equally important is the mode of speech assigned to these characters. The voices of the '*noble*' royalties and their supporters are gentle, kind and intelligent. Their speech and manner are established as *the dominant mode* of communication within the narrative. By contrast, the fact that the coarse and vulgar speech of the politicians and the militia deviates from this mode, confirms their '*criminal nature*'. This system of character identification is further reinforced by the way emotions are mobilised through the contrast between the tragic feeling of love and romance on the one hand and anger and hatred on the other, thereby excluding the villains from being one of '*us*' before any real debate has taken place.

Within this frame of reference however, the author must open some space for the villains' arguments and actions to provide a dynamic to the drama. But despite the serial's potential for open argument, the presentation technique and the time allocated to dialogues are carefully manipulated to favour the protagonists' rationalisations. This closes off any possible alternative readings of the antagonists and together with the negative portrayal of their actions discredits their counter-arguments.

The following episode (25 February, 1986) on the plotting of the coup and counter-coup illustrates how this is achieved. The republicans' secret meeting in part one of the episode is pitched against the arguments for the *status quo* presented by the Princess herself in part two. The ratio of time allowed is 1:3.

## PART ONE: THE FINAL PLANNING OF THE COUP

Thongchai, cabinet minister and leader of the republican movement

*"I hope everyone is clear. From the military, I assign Lt. Gen. Wutikrai and Lt. Col. Pichit to take charge. When the political situation coincides with our plan I will inform you of the specific time so that we can launch our actions simultaneously. By the way, this will be the first time in the history of Sikarin that a coup takes place during the day, pre-empting any anticipation. We can capture the oppositions in their offices. Would you please recap the plan, General?" (music)*

Sunmei, the royal maid working under-cover.

*"(thinking) Which information shall I remember? They sit here all day and there is so much going on. Lt. Col. Pichit, oh, no, Lt. Gen. Wutikrai will capture the Commander-in-Chief, Lt. Col. Pichit will take the Prince and the plain clothes militia will round up the cabinet members. And then the tank, yes the tank with soldiers inside. They will overtake the Princes' military units. But when will they do it? Right, when the crowd is rioting."*

Thongchai talks to Sunmei after the meeting.

*"You will become the maid of the President of Sikarin, you know?"*

*"Oh, I'd like that."*

*"What do you like about it? Do you know who a President (pratanathibodi) is?"*

*"Well, you said the President is good (di) so I believe he is good."*

*"I am pleased with you. I can be sure that you won't let out our secret because you understand nothing."*

This is the only occasion on which space is provided for the republicans. They are presented here as terrorists employing violent means to overthrow the state. Elsewhere in the serial, republicanism and the 'radical left' is consistently presented as a dangerous idea that will cause 'disorder' and 'bloodshed'. This position is always seen through the mediation of one or more 'good' characters. The coup plot in the above passage for instance, is immediately interpreted by Sunmei whose 'ignorance' speaks for the majority of the audience. The author sums up republicanism in terms of a change of leadership, from the sacred power of a monarchy to a 'treacherous politician', the President.

The word *President* is novel in the classification system of the *ancien regime*. The author plays with the sounds of 'pratanathibodi' and 'di' which literally means 'good'. The words might be 'confusing' but through this mockery she attempts to negate any positive meanings of this new symbol. The opposition

discourse is brief and tightly control leaving the audience uninformed on the rationale of republicanism.

The sketchy plan of the coup d'état is further deconstructed as the Princess asks Teerapol to defuse the students' demonstration, and later through the organisation of the counter-coup.

## PART TWO: THE RATIONALISATION OF THE DEFENCE OF THE REALM, BETWEEN THE PRINCESS AND TEERAPOL

*"You must listen to me, Teerapol. What you are going to do is politically naive...You are going to create an upheaval...Whether you realise it or not your action is treacherous to the throne."*

*"But that is impossible! I have never thought of harming the throne of Sikarin, and you know very well."*

*"Yes, but time is running out...damage will be done to the people..."*

*"That's right, you are always concerned about your people...But don't you care about me at all?"*

*"Teerapol, please do not mix our relationship with my love for the people. They are not the same...I will be very sorry if you are the source of all this trouble. Please call off the demonstration..."*

*"But I don't understand what you are driving at?... If the students succeed our love will no longer be jeopardised...Or are you implying that you want to sit on the throne?"*

*"Our love remains the same but what you hope for will never happen. Instead, there will be an upheaval and the third party will seize the opportunity to stage a coup or it may be worse than that, do you understand me?"*

*"If the Prince agrees to be the Crown Prince, everything will be solved."*

*"That is the real problem. If he accepts those against him will protest and it will be more violent...Do you think Sikarin can avoid a riot?"*

*"Is it going to be that bad?"*

*"You must forget about us for the time being... Think about reality...you are creating a riot out of your naivety."*

*"My love, you have swayed my intention. Are you trying to fool me?"*

*"I am always truthful to you. If there is no interference during the demonstration I will be the first one to support your move. But as I've said it is not that simple. And you must promise me that you will call off the demonstration."*

In this rationalisation the author argues for the *status quo* and patriotism over individual interests. But there are two unresolved tensions. Firstly, the negotiation of the Princess' double role as ruler and lover, of which more presently. Secondly, the legitimisation of the defence of the realm. As the Princess argues, the people matter. Their well-being is at stake. However, Teerapol's presentation of the counter-coup shows that it is the institution of monarchy that is at risk and that all out defense must employ violent means even though damage will be done to the people (3 March, 1986).

*"The riot is set as a trap..we will attack when they move...we need the evidence to smash them... as for the clash between the people that you are so concerned about I am sure the Prince will bring it under control easily enough...I don't see it any other way...if we don't strike now they will try again and we may not be able to defend ourselves.. but if we let them off the hook the evil idea will remain rooted in Sikarin. How can we be sure that it won't grow in the future?"*

In this discourse, the previously non-violent imagery of the defence of the realm takes a 180 degree turn. A 'chaotic' or 'riot' situation is justified in order to destroy the treacherous element once and for all. As this example shows, although it appears to be consistent the manipulation of meanings often collides with the tensions in the story line or sub-plots.

The dichotomy between its 'nobility' and 'brutality' provides another example of the conflict of images surrounding traditional institution. The palace's murderous counter-coup is seen through the eyes of the royal guard. The narration invites the audience to witness the fighting at close quarters with Lt. Col. Pichit and his aides but quickly justifies it at the end of the scene.

*"What a beautiful sight! The Prince smacks them against the wall then he turns to the Colonel. His karate on his neck sends the Colonel to the wall. The Prince jumps on those men with rage. He hits them until they collapse...But the Prince is wounded by gunshot from the Colonel...now he looks really fierce...it is so brutal the way he keeps on hitting the Colonel..he smashes his neck again and again as if to revenge...it is hard to believe that the serenity and gentleness as of the God Vishnu could really turn into Kali when the Prince is enraged.. but now he looks sad..he doesn't realise that the Colonel is dead."*

As a result, the narrative's primary objective of deconstructing republicanism is constantly in danger of being negated by the very device it uses to reconstruct absolutism. Furthermore, in order to accommodate the audiences' interests in entertainment controversial elements which sometimes run counter to the strong political objective have to be introduced.

For example, the 'alien' or 'un-Thai' enemy is located within the royal family and as an 'enemy' she must be annihilated. Chao Chom, the king's minor wife, is forced to drink poison by the king himself when her assassination attempt fails. The actual 'murder' is not dramatised but narrated by the Princess. The effect of this is that the most taboo of all, the possibility of a 'palace coup', comes to the fore. The author later justifies the king's action by getting the Prince to condemn his own mother for being,

*"utterly brutal...The generosity of father for the two of us is beyond words. How can she assassinate father? What father did is rightful. I don't blame him at all."*

(18 March, 1986)

The sub-plot of the royal 'alien' has at the same time revealed the bloody power struggle within the palace walls, thereby undermining the established 'noble' and 'meritorious' imagery of the institution.

In this way, although the author is able to use the narrative to express her pro-monarchist and anti-socialist views in full, the double edge of the dramatic devices employed often forces open the closure of meanings. Equally significant is the fundamental tension between the author's autonomy and organisation goal which incessantly interferes with any perfect closure of meanings. For the drama company, Siam '81, Kamsang Sawan is a romance serial. Both its title and theme song clearly pronounce the centrality of the love story.

Title	Siam '81 Drama Company proudly presents a love story from the imagination of Kanita Por
Lead	Love may turn many a king into beggar, a poorman may turn into millionaire, and the empress may sacrifice her life for love. Our love story cherishes the eternal love between the most beautiful princess and a young man who wins her love. But he cannot win over what lies beyond love. Sikarin Nakorn, the imaginary kingdom, is burnt by the fire of love from this half-breed young man who thinks that his love is greater than any Command of Heaven.

Each day the audience are invited by this lead-in to immerse themselves in an imaginary world of romance. Consequently, the author must adapt her aims to the organisation's goals. Although the twin themes of love and politics are intertwined in a formulaic romance plot, there are unresolved contradictions in attempting to compromise between these two poles.

As required by the intimacy of the medium and the rules of the genre, the traditional institution is humanised. Hence, the Princess' sacred aura of a royalty



and her courtly speech are always shifting since she assumes a split identity. Teerapol for example, uses the noun 'Dear' when he addresses the Princess and it becomes the Princess' pet name. When they are together they are an ordinary man and woman. They converse intimately as lovers do and the audience is invited to eavesdrop on these love scenes. In this relationship the power differential between the 'ruler' and her 'citizen' is equalised. Teerapol is allowed to question and challenge the Princess. The mode is 'dialogic' instead of the top-down mode established between the Princess and the other characters.

In contrast to the 'alienness' of the king's minor wife the 'un-Thainess' of the hero, Teerapol, is rooted in the romance plot and thereby transformed into a desirable trait instead of that of an 'enemy'. This is done through his rectifying act of patriotism. The author's negotiation turns Teerapol into the 'martyr' as well as the hero of the love story.

Throughout the drama Teerapol, representing the bourgeois, acts according to his free will while the Princess insists on the principle of institutional interests. The happy ending however elevates the romantic theme over the political objective. When the *status quo* is secured the Princess chooses to abdicate the throne for individual love.

We have argued that the complex relations involved in the dramatisation of reality constantly forces open the closure of meanings. On the one hand, there is the unresolved contradiction between the author and the organisation. On the other, there are the internal tensions of the serial drama genre. The production of meanings in this situation is the result of a negotiation of these forces. In the imaginary world of fiction we find double-edge meanings and internal devices that break open the intended closure. Or as Lovell put it,

*"we are likely to find subversive, or at least unassimilable, elements within popular entertainment - what Dyer has called 'utopia' - as well as evidence of the categories of the dominant ideology, the naturalisation of the status quo"*

(Lovell, 1980:49)

We will explore more of these categories in the next chapter which looks at the images of masculinity and femininity in romance and action-adventure dramas.

The analyses in this chapter have explored the production and reproduction of meanings in both fiction and non-fiction programmes. Even in the relatively

closed and tightly manipulated Sunday sermon and military commentary programmes, we find incoherences in the propagation of the dominant ideologies. In the case of the Sunday sermon for example, the schism within the Sangha has resulted in a variety of definitions of a moral society. Although the state version of '*Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong*' is predominant, the diversity in the Sangha resists any total incorporation. Santi Asoke's popular politics and the '*comic sermon*' exemplify the recent secularisation of Buddhism. In the military commentary programmes the army finds themselves arguing for contradictory positions. On the one hand, they consent to the '*constitutional monarchy*' in the present form of parliamentary representation. On the other, they want the largest share in this new consensus and continue to promote the triple alliance as a source of legitimation for the *status quo*.

These constructions of reality are challenged in turn by both the modern political institution and the media professionals as we saw in the case of popular news commentary programmes. Despite stringent state regulation, the producers are able to assert a certain degree of autonomy based on the ideology of '*professionalism*'. Consequently, we find both continuities and breaks in content and form that indicate a shift away from the authoritarianism of the official programmes. The contradictory imagery of popular news commentary represents the liberal democratic mode of the current political consensus.

In the case of political drama we find that a predominantly conservative discourse is in play and that the author locates herself firmly within the framework of '*anti-socialism*'. However, as a form of popular entertainment, its attempt to sustain continuity with tradition is disrupted. Although the controversial issue of the form of democratic rule is tightly organised in terms that favour the *ancien regime*, there are constant slippage of meaning. The internal tension of dramatising political discourse in a love story problematises the argument rather than solving it. Consequently, the attempt to reproduce a particular ideology also produces its anti-thesis since the bourgeois form of romantic love, based on individual choice and free will, invariably contradicts the notion of loyalty and patriotism presented in the political theme.

## CHAPTER 8

### DRAMATISING MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY: IDEOLOGICAL (DIS)CONTINUITY IN A CHANGING SOCIAL REALITY

The case of Kamsang Sawan we have just described is an exception. Due to self-censorship and state control open discussions or presentations of '*politics*' are generally absent from popular entertainment. As we shall see however, this silence in the mainstream of radio drama can be seen as another way of talking about politics and politically sensitive issues. In this chapter we will examine two popular fictions, an adventure - Roi Pa (The Hundredth Forest), and a romance - Mia (The Wife). Both began as best-selling novels. The film and radio drama productions followed later. Our analysis begins by looking at this cycle of adaptations since the relation between author and audience must be renegotiated in the process of shifting from one medium to another. How then does an adaptation by a film director and a radio script-writer affect the original imagery and discourse provided by the novel?

We then move on to explore the imagery of masculinity and femininity created and re-created in these synthesised popular dramas. The analysis in this section is based mainly on the radio scripts of Roi Pa and Mia Tang (The Wedded Wife). In conformity with the forms and narrative structures of radio drama new conflicts and points of suspense are incorporated into the original story which become the sources of image diversification and discourse variation. How is the conservative discourse and the subversive elements re-presented? How successful are the authors in manipulating the narrative in favour of the preferred meanings? And how does disruption take place in this complex process of meaning reproduction and production?

#### 8.1 The Ethos of Individual Success, Love and Marriage

The two popular fictions, Roi Pa and Mia, are what Calweli (1976) has called the '*moral fantasies*'. The adventures of the characters are generally confined by the ethical code of the society. Although both examples are basically adventure stories the conventions operating within the culture industry sets them apart. The former is a male adventure story located in the public sphere of work. In this genre the ethos of individual success is paramount. The latter is written primarily for the female audience whose privatised social domain corresponds with the domestic setting of a romance which presents success as centring on heterosexual relations and the institution of the family.

The central values of individualism, competition, romantic love and monogamy presented in popular fictions are seen by critics, and feminists in particular, as a valorisation of the middle-class male ethos. The implication is that they 'naturalise' the worldview of social Darwinism in an industrial capitalist society (Fiske, 1987). These are useful starting points, but insufficient to explore the contradiction and subversive discourses in popular fictions.

As a cultural form popular fiction can potentially work both ways. A number of recent studies, such as *Televising 'Terrorism'* (Schlesinger, et al, 1983) and *"Production and Reproduction: The Case of Frankenstein"* (O'Flinn, 1983) have argued convincingly for a more complex reading of popular discourses. The former points to the possibility of presenting alternative and even oppositional discourses in certain forms of popular fiction. While showing that adventure series tend to work within the official discourse on terrorism O'Flinn's study of the transition of the *Frankenstein* story, from novel to films, shows how Shelley's subversive discourse is lost and how the film versions create a criminal monster against the author's original intention. These studies suggest that although conservative or populist worldviews may prevail in most popular fiction, there are also contradictions and spaces for the 'other discourses' and they point the way to a better understanding of these complexities. But let us start with our stories and how they are created before pursuing this point.

#### **Roi Pa: The story of the forestry guardian**

**Roi Pa** presents the biography and adventures of Sua Klinsak. He is an orphan from a small village in the northeast. Coincidentally, Luangta Bun, the abbot of a temple in Bangkok found Sua with his dying mother during a sojourn as a recluse. He adopted Sua, at the age of nine, as one of his 'temple boys'. Contrary to the aggressive connotations associated with his name Sua (tiger), he is generally gentle but a tough fighter when roused. He is also the most intelligent and obedient temple boy of Wat Tapan.

After Luangta Bun dies, Kon and To, Sua's temple mates, encourage him to further his education. He chooses to study forestry at the Agricultural College in the northern province of Chiangmai. The financial support for this comes from Kanita, daughter of an aristocratic family whom Sua has saved from a cobra when they first met. They become lover despite their class differences and Kanita's arranged marriage with Anirut.

Sua is trained in a male dominated culture at the college. The motto is tradition, unity and seniority. His adventure in the forest begins when he is confronted by the great bandit, Sua Term. Sua's daring and tact wins Sua Term's admiration. He is also persuaded to give up illegal logging. Sua graduates in the midst of WW II. After the War, he furthers his education at the Bangkhen Agricultural University in Bangkok.

At the Forestry Department, where Sua takes up his career, he is assigned to various parts of the country. His adventures bring him face to face with the tycoons in the logging industry, corrupted colleagues, police officers and local administrators, gangsters, bandits and hooligans, and a variety of women. The hero never fails his mission. His honesty, reliability and hard working personality is renowned and these virtues, coupled with his modesty and the religious principles of his childhood enable him to triumph over his enemies. From his humble origins as a country orphan Sua becomes a respected civil servant and the heroic guardian of the forest.

#### **Mia: the emotional adventure of the Goddess**

Mia is a romance story of a country girl. Arunphrapai's emotional adventure is set within her arranged marriage with the son of a bourgeois family in the capital city. The heroine's father is a local administrator in a small town in the central region. After graduating from college the heroine takes up a job in the catering department of a first class hotel in Bangkok. She agrees to marry the hero, Kongkai, as an escape from her ex-boyfriend. She also gives up her career in order to be a full-time home-maker.

Khunying<sup>1</sup> Pawan, the hero's mother manages both the family business and the domestic affairs. She re-establishes the business after her husband's bankruptcy and suicide. Although her son is the managing director she continues to be the real influence in his work and personal life.

The hero is a philanderer. He consents to the marriage arrangement to please his mother although it interferes with his love affair with Prungchat, the daughter of an aristocrat family. The complications in this triangular relationship begin when both women struggle to win the true love of the hero, and not least, the legal title of '*the wife*'. Despite Prungchat's pretence that

---

<sup>1</sup> An honorary title for the wives of aristocrats, high ranking civil servants and the *nouveau riche*.

she is pregnant and the misunderstandings brought about by a girl from a broken home, the heroine's patience and sacrifice finally wins out. The heroine and the hero come to terms with one another. Thus Khunying Pawan's belief in a good marriage is confirmed.

#### The authors: artistic creativity, professional skill and worldview

**Roi Pa** is co-authored by Orachon and Pan Bangkok, the pen names of Sri Chaiyapruk and Sompan Panatuk, both of whom work for the Forestry Department. Orachon was employed by the Department's in-house publication as well as being the literary consultant of **Bangkok** magazine. He resigned from the Forestry Department shortly after he began to write **Roi Pa** in 1957. Pan Bangkok however continued his career in the Forestry Department reaching the second most senior position before his retirement. The co-authorship is divided largely along the line of fact and fiction. While Orachon is the writer, Pan Bangkok provides inside information on forestry operation and deforestation.

The novel's first appearance as a serial in **Bangkok** magazine three decades ago launched a new archetype of the dual personality hero. Sua is both a super hero and also '*one of us*'. Like any super hero, he is a superb fighter and extremely intelligent. On the other hand, he is a humble commoner whom the reader/audience can easily identify with. Thus **Roi Pa** broke with previous super heroes, such as **Lepkrut** (The Karuda's Grip) or **Yiewratri** (The Night Hawk) who existed only in a fantasy world and pioneered a new era of '*professional*' heroes in popular fiction.

The second major break from previous models is the '*sexual purification*' of the hero. Sua Klinsak is chaste. In the formulaic adventure series or serial, although sexual relationships are secondary to the hero's moral mission, they are usually presented in terms of the macho archetype. Masculinity is defined by physical strength and sexual desirability. Pracha Punwiwat's spy thrillers for example, build the entire story around the hero's sexual relations. **Roi Pa** on the other hand, relocates paternalistic power within the religious code in opposition to the secularised imagery in the bulk of the adventure stories. As the author, Orachon, pointed out;<sup>2</sup>

*"Roi Pa is an experimentation in its own right. We combine the genre with a new setting and a new type of hero. We want to break away but we are not sure how the readers will take it. So we write*

<sup>2</sup> Interview, August, 1986.

*generally within the adventure formula suggested by Khun Wichit (the owner of Bangkok). But we are free to create our own plot and work out the themes....I strongly believe in the law of karma and I create an ideal hero for that...Sometimes I feel I am preaching you know, on Buddhism and forestation...The readers are not too enthusiastic about this type of hero but then the emotional intensity of the story compensates for it..."*

The story was conceived within the social and cultural climate of the late 1950s in which the questions of urbanisation and the secularisation of traditional institutions began to pose serious threats to the existing social formation. Roi Pa suggests a way that order could be restored and tensions resolved. While they follow the usual formula in standing for justice and the elimination of lawlessness the authors also assert views which deviate from the official ideology of the period. But more on this point later.

In contrast, the more recent novel of Mia (1984) conforms to the conventional romance formula, and follows one of the sub-genres in which the heroine's adventures begins after marriage. The main theme of Mia follows its popular predecessors such as; Ka kong Kon (The Human Value), Mia Jampen (The Obligated Wife), Mia Chao (The Rented Wife), Mia Chaloei (The Prisoner Wife), in taking issue with women's experience of patriarchy. The lasting popularity of the formula is due to its combination of pleasure with the presentation of married life from the women's point of view.

The author, Nantana Wirachon, has a college education and began her career as a bank clerk. But after her marriage to a naval officer she took up writing as a full-time career. So far she has written 50 romances. Although she has previously written 45 short stories, 6 dramas, and 55 poems her works at present are mainly novels (Department of Fine Arts, 1980). Her first novel, Niras Ponepisai, is based on her experience in the northeast border where her husband was stationed. Since then her best-sellers have all been romances set in the domestic sphere.

Nevertheless, Mia is comparatively innovative compared to its contemporaries. Despite adherence to the formula, various new themes are introduced. For example both the heroine and the hero's mother are career women. But more significantly, the role of sexual relations as an ingredient of a successful marriage is posed as an issue. As she has pointed out;<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview, September, 1986.

*"I think sex is part of a love relation...when I write I usually insert love scenes to sharpen up the story...More recently, I have experimented with a new formula. The heroine has sexual relations with the hero without falling in love with him...she seeks love from other men instead...I think a woman has very little choice today if she is to be a good wife and mother...it is more and more difficult to find a trustworthy male-being...I guess that is what I am trying to say in my novels..."*

As the author recognises, some of her readers disapprove of the presentation of sex scenes and of the heroine's liberal inclinations on sexual matters. But by working with a number of formulas Nantana is able to deal with the question of sexual permissiveness in a variety of ways. In the conservative middle-class media such as *Ying Thai* or *Kuan Ruan* (where *Mia* was first published) the struggle is between the heroine and the villainess. The discourse contrasts the archetype of the heroine with the alternative model of the modern and sexually liberal woman. But the conventionally happy ending invariably closes down this alternative in favour of the concepts of romantic love and marriage.

In the mass market magazines such as *Dara Pabhayon* or *Chiwit Rak*, Nantana incorporates an alternative model of sexual liberalism into her main characters. In *Pierng Sawad* (The Ecstasy) for example, the struggle centres on the sexual and love relations between the heroine and hero. What is at issue is the conventional middle-class claim that a satisfactory marriage can be achieved on love alone.

This emerging theme is present in a large percentage of the paperback romance, translated from other languages. Although the image presented is one of sexual relations first and love later its foreign context makes it more acceptable to the readers, who are mostly well educated working women. But some of the plots are also pirated in the mass market entertainment and women magazines where the characters are transformed into *Thais* while most of the settings and stories remain intact.

The two major strands in this sub-genre of romance therefore co-exist in a variety of combination. For the middle-class magazines for example, the serials adhere to the conservative side of the discourse. But their readers also consume the translated romances. In some of the mass market magazines both strands exist side by side. Busayamas' conventional romances for example, continue to be popular in the same magazine that publish Nantana's 'new formula'.

Unlike the majority of romance writers Nantana engages herself in the debate of sex and gender within different formulas and with a diversified audience. Her works appear in both the popular and middle-class magazines, some of



which carry the two themes simultaneously. Although the strategy works with the publishers and readers, critics are confused since most never read romantic '*trash*' or refuse that they do. Their problem is that Nantana is not only the best-selling romantic novelist of the day but also a serious novelist. Niras Ponepisai and Punokyung for example, won her critical acclaim. The latter was short-listed for the Booker Award (1977) and was later placed on the literary reading list for school children. Nantana's serious novels appear in the more prestigious middle-class magazine such as *Satri Sam* or *Sakun Thai*.

How do writers manage to reconcile their skills, creativity and worldview? The social relations operating in the cultural industries of which they are part, are the first and major constraint. For Orachon and Pan Bangkok who have other full-employment, writing is a secondary career. Supported by their professions their autonomy is highly regarded, especially in the case of Orachon who is the literary consultant of the magazine he writes for. In this situation they are able to assert their rights as authors to a large extent. Orachon for example, continues to create work based on popular Buddhism and to feature Buddhist stories in *Bangkok*.

In contrast, writing is Nantana's full-time career and the production of formulaic romances provides the main staple of her income. They generate further income when the copyright is bought for reprinting in hardback, and for film and radio drama productions (though so far they have not appeared on television). Writing popular romance for a living allows her to create the serious novel insisted on by the literary critics. However, she concedes that whereas her serious writing is '*pedagogic*', romances are self-expressive and '*pleasurable*' to write. More importantly they provide the site on which a constant dialogue with her readers on the women's experiences is possible.

## 8.2 The Melodramatic Synthesis and Transformation of *Roi Pa* and *Mia*

How then were *Roi Pa* and *Mia* transformed in the process of moving from a middle-class literary medium to the popular media of film and radio? Despite the fact that these adaptations try to remain true to the themes of the original texts, they are '*new*' productions authored by the film directors and radio script writers. They must take into account not only the shifting discursive formations of their audiences but also the specific limits and possibilities of these popular media. In the process, the productions take on a melodramatic form which mixes comedy with tragedy, and romance with satire.

**Roi Pa** was turned from a serial of over 100-episode in 1957 into a one-shot film and 22-episode drama in 1986. During the past three decades **Roi Pa** has been reprinted twice, in **Bangkok** in 1977 and **Tantawan**, its sister magazine, in 1982.<sup>4</sup> It appeared on television in 1967 and was adapted into a two-part film. Its second film adaptation in 1986 was screened on Chinese New Year holiday, the peak season of the film industry.

**Mia** first appeared in **Kuan Ruan**, a conservative middle-class womens' magazine in 1984-1985. It was immediately filmed after its publication in hardback. However, it was released under its new title, **Mia Tang** or the Wedded Wife, on May Day of 1986. The 22-episode drama was broadcasted a month earlier, in April, and scheduled in the daily afternoon slot with the addition of an omnibus edition on Saturday.

The Ketthip production of **Mia Tang** is its second radio version following the Nilikanon company's adaptation based on the original novel. This company produces the work of three women novelists; Busayamas, Chuwong Chayajinda and Nantana Wirachon and with its conservative outlook tends to adhere to the conventional romance, though innovative productions are made from time to time. Ketthip on the contrary, is more receptive to new challenges as its radio production of **Mia Tang** demonstrates. While this is confined by structures established by the film script and the novel it strives to appeal to its audience through the use of melodrama. The following analysis of **Roi Pa** and **Mia** is based on the 1986 version of film/radio adaptations. Quotations are from the radio scripts unless otherwise stated.

In this new version, Chalong Pakdiwichit, the director of **Roi Pa**, continues to argue for an evolutionary '*progress*' that does not depart from the secure terrain of religion. The three stages of the hero's biography reveal the rationale of this central discourse. As the director put it,<sup>5</sup>

*"one cannot understand the heroic mission of Sua Klinsak without looking back into his temple boy childhood and education."*

Within the framework provided by the *status quo* it is suggested that commoner can rise via religious virtues and the education system.

---

<sup>4</sup> At present, **Bangkok** has a circulation of 280,000 - 300,000 and is the top weekly serial magazine. Its readership is equally divided between male and female, as opposed to its male-oriented outlook when it started three decades ago. Although **Tantawan** began as a women's magazine it now has a sizable male readership.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in the promotional material of the film, **Roi Pa**.

TOH: *"Sua, you have succeeded...even if high society does not welcome us they can't humiliate us...an orphan temple boy can make it too..."*

SUA: *"It is unbelievable..like a dream. Who would have thought that an orphan from the forest, raised by a monk, could have a fine college education!"*

TOH: *"It is fated. Remember Luangta used to say that you will be the master when you grow up...it's true."*

SUA: *"But there is more to it...I will fight on until my final day."*

(Roi Pa, 12:1-2)

But within this optimistic scenario of individual success the tension of social differentiation remains unresolved. There is the futile romance between Sua, the temple boy/civil servant, and Kanita, the aristocrat. Their relationship is compared to that of *"dockfa kab mawat"* or heaven and earth (literally heavenly flower and temple dog). There are also the confrontations between the hero and the corrupted tycoons or the professionals and bourgeois characters with the aristocrat, Anirut, as their accomplice. On the other hand, there are the 'deviants' such as Sua Term and Nop. They are the archetypes of the criminals that must be dealt with in defence of law and order. These melodramas, of romance and adventure, are interwoven in a complex but incoherent discourse.

The film/drama is organised around the tension between the Forestry Department's primary objective of protecting the forest and its obligation to facilitate the operation of the logging industry.

SUA: *"I was born in the forest and I love it very much. I love it more when I study forestry. I think the forest is part of our lives..without it, the land will turn into desert, wildlife will be extinct, creeks will dry up, the soil will not absorb rain fall...then it will flood the village and the city, there will be calamities...the forest is such a great resource but still, there are some people who keep on destroying what little we have left..."*

BUNYING: *"(laughter) Very well, you speak exactly like the text book (logger)..but let me ask you something, if you become the top man in the Forestry Department do you think you can change it?"*

SUA: *"I don't have such far sight. I think when I come across these illegal loggers I will challenge them..."*

(Roi Pa, 9:6)

In order to achieve the primary mission of the Forestry Department, the hero and his colleagues, Thep and Lert, take the law into their own hands. However, the presentation of deforestation adopts an alternative perspective. While the hill-tribes and villagers are officially charged as the main culprits, Roi Pa highlights *'corporate crime'* rather than the *'individual criminal'*. Although he is unsympathetic to either the director presents the former as the real *'enemy'* and the latter become *'one of us'* as Sua Term, the great bandit, is won over by the hero.

SUA: *"Thank you for sparing my life, Uncle...but you must not forget your promise.."*

TERM: *"Yeh!"*

SUA: *"From now on you can't cut any tree, not in any forest."*

TERM: *"You bastard, do you mean to rid me of my living?"*

SUA: *"If you are a man you'd better keep your promise..you can't take any of these logs either..."*

TERM: *"Sure, I won't take them...but what will I do for a living, may I ask? You want me to go back to robbery, do you?"*

SUA: *"I don't care..a promise is a promise..other wise I don't think you are a man at all..."*

(Roi Pa, 11:1-2)

As the hero's formidable ally, Sua Term's role is second only to Sua himself. The image of their friendship and their respect for one another shares the populist view of the *'outlaw hero'* to be found in many popular fictions and folk tales.

TERM: *"You are such a fine man, Sua...all my life I don't think I will love anyone else as much as I love you."*

SUA: *"Apart from Luangta and my patrons, you are another person whom I respect, Uncle Term."*

TERM: *"(laughter)"*

(Roi Pa, 21:2)

When the hero and his friend are endangered by the logger tycoons for example, it is Sua Term who comes to the rescue.

THEP: *"I heard that Polieng Ithi and his gang is very powerful because they have some influential figures behind them. That's why they could take over other people's franchise or do whatever they wish to."*

LERT: *"Yes, those who resisted them are murdered.. Sua and I have both experienced it, haven't we? Luckily Sua Term was in time, otherwise..."*

(Roi Pa, 17:4)

Sua Term is depicted as the hero's counterpart even though he is an outlaw. His generosity and humour is appreciated by the protagonists. More importantly, his positive image is constantly contrasted with the vulgarity of the business crooks. Roi Pa suggests that the real dangers of deforestation are generated by the logging industry, and especially by the influential tycoons who bribe their way into the business.

ITHI: *"We will have a new partner.."*

WONG: *"Good, the more we expand the better. Our business will be strengthened...after this, the next move is.."*

ITHI: *"Yes, Polieng Tawee.."*

WONG: *"He is too arrogant..we can't buy him out, so.."*

ITHI: *"We will get rid of him..we will take over his franchise...and we will continue until we own all the franchise in the north.."*

(Roi Pa, 21:4)

Although the corporation's attempt to monopolise the industry is revealed, their rejection is based upon their evil deeds of 'bloody murder' rather than their aggressively capitalist operations. In the end however, the plot is resolved by appeals to the religious solution and the defence of law and order.

The melodramatic climax reinforces the axiomatic law of *Karma*. The 'corporate murderers' are defeated. Ithi is killed by Saengthong who avenges her father. Wong and Anirut are arrested by the police. On the other hand, Sua Term's death is more problematic.

TERM: *"Good god, it's the police!"*

POLICE: *"Oi, Sua Term!"*

SUA: *"Don't shoot, Uncle...don't shoot at the police."*

(RIFLE SHOTS)

TERM: *"(painful cries)"*

SUA/: *"Oh no, no, Uncle Term!.."*  
THEP

THEP: *"(shaken) go in peace, Uncle..you should not have drawn your gun...(crying)"*

SUA: *"(crying) Uncle Term, may you rest in peace..if we reincarnate I pray that we meet again.."*

(THE END)

(Roi Pa, 22:6)

Sua Term is shot by the police while assisting the heroes in their shoot-out with Ithi, Wong, and Anirut. In this scene and throughout the story he has always been one of the main protagonists. Despite Thep's justification for the police shooting, Sua's parting words indicates that Term dies as a martyr.

In the novel, the fate of Sua Term is left open ended. He continues to roam the forest while Sua performs his duty. The film however, is subject to censorship by the Film Censorship Committee of the Police Department. The director may be able to re-create a heroic image of Sua Term but he must comply with official regulations if the film is to be screened. The resulting discourse is incoherent in its attempt to reconcile the author's creativity based on a populist position with the official demand for a clear solution to crime.

There is however another deviant act on which the author and the director share a similar view to the established definition. This is the image of the 'crowd', represented by the elephant workers at the log site of the Saengthong corporation. The strike led by Nop is delegitimised by foregrounding his misbehaviour and '*personal dispute*' with the corporation's owner. Orachorn argues extensively against the strike as "*a malicious act that would benefit no one*" (Roi Pa, 1982:1998). The confrontation however, is triggered by Nop's contemptuous remarks on '*corrupted forestry employees*' and the strike is ended by his fatal defeat.

SUA: "(solemnly) *Now listen carefully all of you! I demand that you work according to the term of the contract with Miss Saengthong. No slow down or threats. You must abide by the agreed rate of payment. It is wrong to exploit the situation as you have done. If you were dissatisfied you should have raised it before we started. Let me remind you that any future defiance will be dealt with severely. Just as you have witnessed with Nop.*"

(Roi Pa, 19:4)

Nop is further criminalised when he joins the tycoons in plotting against the hero's colleagues, Thep and Lert. He is murdered in the shoot-out in which Lert is also killed. Nop is a stereotypical deviant whose actions are caused by rage and irrationality.

By the time the radio drama was broadcast, the issue of deforestation had assumed a greater urgency than when the novel is first written, due to the alarming decrease in forest land, from 57% in the 1960s to 30.52% in 1982 (Office of the Prime Minister, 1984). The teak industry is now on the verge of dying. To revive it the present government is planning to negotiate for

logging franchises in Laos and Burma. While the fictitious missions of the hero in *Roi Pa* are always successful the gap with reality is enormous.

In recreating *Roi Pa*, the director has carefully screened out the original presentation of corrupted police officers, local administrators and organised crimes. The presentation of deforestation however, continues to carry the alternative view. Although the argument from the '*committed professionals*' of the Forestry Department is antagonistic it has considerable popular appeal in the present social reality, reinforced by incidents such as the catastrophe in 1988 that wiped out several villages in the southern province of Nakorn Sri Thammarat after heavy monsoon rain further the aggravated deforestation.

The adaptations of *Roi Pa* sustain their argument by highlighting aspects of the original story that coincide with the author's view and populist discourse. As we have shown the original images of the pure and heroic forestry guardian is problematised by the contemporary social context. Similarly, the melodramatic synthesis of *Mia Tang* continues to argue for institutionalised marriage in its most traditional form of an arranged marriage. At the same time, the tensions of married life are explored in detail. Love is no longer the solution but part of the problem. A whole range of '*public taboos*' on sexual relations, contraception, and divorce, are invoked and discussed and a variety of discourse from conservative to liberal are brought into play. Any attempt to close the discourse around a single preferred meaning is therefore complicated by this incorporation and by the melodramatic form.

In its movement from novel to radio drama, *Mia Tang* is transformed in at least three ways. Firstly, the central theme is shifted to the legal aspects of marriage instead of the ideal qualities of '*the wife*'. As its new name, *The Wedded Wife*, indicates. "*The struggle for women dignity*" is for the little piece of the wedding certificate that guarantees a married woman her rightful status. The theme song which serves as part of the title of the radio drama repeats the following lyric,

*Oh, sweet heavenly music of wedding bell  
The bride is pretty as the radiant moon  
The groom is burning with smouldering desire*

*I can't escape you, agonising, I endure  
I hate the depth of your heart  
You are the Satan of every woman  
Married, but my heart is in doubt  
The life of a wedded wife is such a grief  
A tiny piece of paper binds me as your slave.*

The narration of the drama title reiterates the problems of the wedded wife.

It's not difficult for a man to find a wife. There are the rented wife, the temporary wife and the amateur wife. Provided with money, they will spend it freely. A lucky man may find a sexy wife or a patron. But a lady wishes to be the one and only wife. Not the first, second, third or any number. She will not care for his fortune. But she wants to be dignified as his truly *Wedded Wife* (echo)

From the outset, the deep-seated contradictions and dissatisfaction of marriage are evoked. Mia Tang's terms of reference are opposed to the traditional virtues of a wife. Submissiveness and sacrifice are played down in favour of endurance.

*"Arunphrapai burries her face upon his shoulder and closed her eyes wearily. She has a life time ahead of her to face the women's role of a wife and mother. She must have the endurance to do her duty decisively. It is, perhaps, the most worthwhile value in a female human being."*

(Mia, 2:800)

In the film, the happy ending noted earlier is transformed. The final scene shows the hero receiving a telephone call from a woman. The heroine and the others pause to listen in. What they hear is, *"Oh no, not again!"* and the receiver is quickly flung away. The visual imagery then freezes. For the heroine, the cycle of struggle begins again before the present situation is really overcome. This alteration loosens the formulaic ending of romantic fiction and suggests the continual tensions of married life.

In the radio drama, the highest authority, Khunying Pawan, is mobilised on the heroine side. Despite the hero's solemn promise the narrative also points to the disharmony that may erupt in future.

KONGKAI: *"Yes, I'll stop my reckless behaviour. I will be a good husband and father. Please take her home for me, mother."*

PAWAN: *"Arunphrapai, my child, have pity on him. Do give him another chance. If he does not behave I will disown him."*

(Mia Tang, 33:2)

The second major difference between the novel and the radio adaptation is the incorporation of emerging social issues that are relevant to the story and to the audience. The sub-plot of a girl from a broken home is changed to highlight the plight of prostitutes through the story of Jeep, for example. This draws from the popular and feminist discourse to bring economic problem and the question of women's autonomy into play. Like a large number of girls from poor peasant families Jeep is forced into prostitution. As she tells the hero,



*"...My father wants me to have an education so that I won't end up the same way they do...but we are ruined since we can't sell our rice.....American rice<sup>6</sup> has cut the price so badly...My mother's earnings from her market stall are barely enough to make ends meet...How can I enroll for the next term? Do you know how much money we have to pay to get into school these days?..."*

(Mia Tang, 17:1)

It is a sobering story for a philanderer such as the hero. His sympathy and concern shows the 'human face' of the bourgeoisie though he can only suggest that Jeep solves her problem by an act of will.

*"I want you to go back to school. Don't be too cynical about poverty and life..you are jumping into hell, you know...stop selling your own flesh. Try to forget the past and build a new future. You should save yourself for the man you really love."*

(Mia Tang, 18:1)

Mia Tang establishes an 'exchange narrative structure' that permits the presentation of opposing views. The plot sometimes develops in favour of the preferred position as in the above illustration, or on the issue of sexual relations between the married couple. For example, although the hero and his mistress take pleasure in their sexual relation (Mia,1:186, Mia Tang, 1-3) she is unsuccessful in trying to convince him that it is integral to their love and to the marriage they had envisioned (Mia Tang, 15, 18). Nor does her friend support her liberal attitude on sexual relations.

PRUNG: *"Were you raped? Or is it your own idea? Eh, are you afraid you won't catch a man?"*

KORN: *"His parents are rather old-fashioned."*

PRUNG: *"You fool!"*

KORN: *"(frustrated tone) But what can I do?"*

PRUNG: *"Why hurry? You can try him out for a year or two..if you two get along well you can marry him later..but if it doesn't suit your taste then it's goodbye..you are not tied down, you see? But once you are married, divorce is difficult..if you remain single you are free to try as many men as you feel like..don't you think it is much better this way? You can do whatever you please. Why waste a lot of money on getting married?"*

---

<sup>6</sup> This is an allusion to the US Food Security Act of 1985 which set up protective measures for American farmers and their produce. As a result, the Thai rice exporters lost approximately 25% of their revenues (Friends of Women, 1986: 4/1).

KORN: *"But I think...waste some money is better than wasting your body, my dear!"*

PRUNG: *"You think so?"*

KORN: *"Of course, I do."*

(Mia Tang, 1:2)

In contrast, the heroine is deeply dissatisfied and bitter but is unable to discuss sexual matters with any of the character. Through an internal monologue the heroine talks to the audience,

*"He seduced me again...why did he have to do it.. we have already agreed to divorce..Look at him, he is sleeping like a log (sobbing) and I lie here in agony all by myself.."*

Theme song: a tiny piece of paper binds me as your slave

(Mia Tang, 20:2)

These illustrate the highly problematic imagery of sexual relations and the tensions it generates are left unresolved (Mia, 1:319,352-353, Mia Tang, 28:2).

In dealing with the question of divorce however, the radio drama presents a split imagery based on the argument that it is an acceptable solution so long as it is ethical. Familial reproduction as a function of marriage is the first priority. When the heroine agrees to divorce the hero for the sake of his expected illegitimate child she receives overwhelming sympathy from Khunying Pawan, his mother. While everyone agrees that *"the child must be given what is right"* (Mia, 2:446) the heroine is also offered *"a fair compensation of five million bahts"* (Mia Tang, 16:4). Through Khunying Pawan, the discourse suggests an alternative imagery. Women are not to be victimised but should on the contrary, be supported so that they can be independent.

#### KHUNYING PAWAN TO CHALAM, HER MAID

*"My son is wicked..he is such a beast...He is so blind not to realise what a gem he's got...I can't help him now since Arunphrapai agrees to divorce.. but he thinks it's unfair that I give his share of the fortune to her...you just wait Chalam, I will give mine to her as well..."*

(Mia Tang, 16:6),

In the novel, through the heroine's self-reflection the author re-asserts the 'women discourse' on divorce.

*"I have probably made the right decision to divorce him...I am no longer his wife to have to tolerate his behaviour...I feel as if I've rid myself of the cancer..."*

(Mia, 2:723-724)

The final way in which the film and radio drama are differed from the novel is the articulation between the genre and the medium. In the film the director exerts his *authorship* by using a double device of alienation and identification. The middle class setting is excessively glamourised. At the same time, it is juxtaposed against the intense emotional involvement generated by the melodramatic form in which the characters, particularly the women, adopt the manner and speech of the '*common people*'. This structural contradiction produces a diversity of possible meanings and the potential for a variety of interpretations by audiences. In the radio drama particular emphasis is placed on the '*gusto*' of the verbal duels since it lacks the visual imagery of film. But as an oral medium, it is able to develop intimate and erotic sex scenes in some of the episodes (*Mia Tang*, 1-3, 22) whereas the film is restricted in this respect.

The dramatisation of the '*women discourse*' in *Mia Tang* simultaneously reiterates the value of love yet mocks and questions the harmony of love, sex and marriage. In this vein, it is similar to *Roi Pa's* '*male discourse*'. Both attempt to forge a continuity with the traditional institutions, Buddhism and marriage in particular. While at the same time suggest evolutionary change within the general socio-economic structure. But the adherence to the *status quo* is constantly challenged by the changing social reality. The notion of gender and sexual secularisation for example, must be addressed. As we shall illustrate presently. These notions are accommodated in the complex relations of the characters despite their archetypes or stereotypical roles.

### 8.3 The Masculine and Feminine Orthodoxy: The Secularisation of Moral Fantasies

In the melodramatic synthesis of *Roi Pa* and *Mia Tang* there is an emerging convergence of masculine and feminine images. Although their discourses are located on two opposing poles, the former centering on individual success in the public sphere and the latter concentrating on the domestic household, there is a cross-over as well as an incorporation of contradictory imagery within these spheres. On this shifting ground, the orthodox gender roles and the double standard of sexual relations take on new meanings which provide for potential interpretations.

In their attempt to appeal to both sexes in the audience, the adaptations must address '*male discourse*' and '*women's discourse*' at the same time. In *Roi Pa*, the synthesis provides more space for romance especially in the radio drama version whose audience is mainly female. In the process, the traditional

paradigm is diluted, although paternalism remains the predominant theme. On the one hand, the hero's sexuality is secularised. On the other, the images of women within the public sphere challenge the mutually exclusive categories of femininity and masculinity.

In *Mia Tang*, although every major female character is striving in the domestic sphere they are also career women. The heroine and the hero's mother for example, are home-makers who are perfectly capable of earning their own living. Their feminine attributes, such as beauty, gentleness, temperament and physical weakness, are consistently contrasted with the '*masculine*' features in their personalities, self-assurance, intelligence and courage for example. The co-existence of these opposing traits are also found in the main male characters, the hero and anti-hero, who are thereby domesticated. Masculinity and femininity are thus presented as two sides of the same coin.

Let us elaborate in a little more detail on this deconstruction and reconstitution of the orthodox imagery of the '*masculine*' and '*feminine*' domains. In *Roi Pa*, the film director reconciles Orachon's application of the '*religious solution*' to every sphere of social relation, with a secularised sexual imagery. The hero's chastity is presented as a '*distasteful virtue*' and is considered '*abnormal*'. Sua is constantly mocked by his colleagues and friends. He is seen as '*a sissy*' when he rejects '*alcohol, women, music and the night life*' (*Roi Pa*, 8:3). They call him '*a barbarian*' and say '*amen*' in a sarcastic way when he admits that he has never been inside a discotheque (*Roi Pa*, 7:4). When he is seduced by Saengthong, the owner and executive director of the Saengthong Corporation, they all applaud (*Roi Pa*, 18:3). Nevertheless, in the end, the hero is reconstituted as a one-woman man whose loyalty to Kanita, the heroine, is undeterred.

At the same time, the positive imagery of the sexual relation between the hero and Saengthong deconstructs the madonna/whore dichotomy, especially since her sexual liberalism is coupled with her '*masculine*' attributes. She is capable of managing her business and working side-by-side in the forest with the men, albeit with a great deal of difficulties (*Roi Pa*, 16-20).

There is an emerging convergence around a new ideal of gender relations in these popular fictions. While *Roi Pa* re-creates an archetype of male sexuality in which chastity and debauchery strike a new balance, *Mia Tang* is antagonistic to the established '*womanising*' imagery of male sexuality. In the adaptations, humour and satire are used extensively to discredit such behaviour. The '*playboy*' personality of the hero is despised by the 'entire female cast of

the story, and not least by his best friend, who is a family man, and by his lawyer, who is a dignified old bachelor. However, the strongest rejection is expressed by his mother and by the heroine. For them, he is 'beastly' and 'filthy' (Mia, 1:352, *Mia Tang*, 1:2, 20:1).

Using the same ethical criterion, sexual liberalism is rejected in both men and women. Hence, the villainess is also severely condemned. Prungchat for example, is branded as a 'tart' and a 'Mara' or devil (*Mia Tang*, 14:3, 20:4), the classic archetype of the 'whore'. Even her own mother disapproves of her 'shameless' conduct (*Mia Tang*, 12:3). She is warned by the police that kissing in public in front of a school is not only a legal offence but highly unethical.

*"...do you think you are acting? This is obscene..in the future, please do not take the road side as your hotel..(monologue)..there you are, Thai in appearance but westernised to the core..."*

(*Mia Tang*, 9:1)

Along with the resistance to sexual liberalism however, the hero and the anti-hero are 'feminised'. The imagery is both comical and ironic. Kongkai is presented as a 'wimp', and constantly makes a fool of himself. He cannot make up his mind about the divorce whereas the heroine is decisive and has no compunction about telling Khunying Pawan that,

*"It is a great merit to divorce Kongkai"*

(*Mia Tang*, 27:3)

In the radio drama, this imagery of female self-determination is heightened compared to the novel, with the heroine summoning Puchong, her ex-boyfriend, to her side at the magistrate's office.

The hero on the other hand, is unable to choose between love and the responsibility of marriage signified by fatherhood and he cannot come to terms with the divorce (*Mia Tang*, 29-30). He seeks consolation from his friend but he is fooled by Prungchat. She gives Kongkai the address of her dentist when he questions her about the pregnancy. His enquiry at the dental surgery is comical. The audience roars with laughter when the assistant tells him that it is impossible to have a pregnancy test in a dental surgery. After all, pregnancy and giving birth is not as simple as going to the dentist.

This and a series of other devices continuously shifts the audience's allegiance between the characters. The hero is both the enemy of women and also desirable. The melodramatic presentation of the climax in the narrative further

reinforces this contradictory imagery of the hero and his relation with his mistress. Prungchat follows the hero to the heroine's home intending to shoot Jeep. She storms in screaming,

*"I want to shoot the woman who snatches my husband."*

(Mia Tang, 33:1)

But Kongkai is shot instead. In the film, the visual imagery takes over from the dialogue. The action is shown in slow motion, emphasising the enraged expression and the gun in her hand. Its violent action is more provocative than the defeated image of Prungchat in the novel, walking away in acquiescence.

*"The game is over..and I am defeated..your wife's virtue overwhelmed me.."*

(Mia, 2:783)

This shift allows a move from the subdued moral ethic to a more forceful resolution. Prungchat is hysterical after the shooting, but the heroine's reaction returns to the 'female discourse'.

*"... stupid Eros, men are all the same...it is so unfair to women...men are such chauvinists and women have to suffer the consequences.."*

(Mia Tang, 33:5)

However, in its efforts to deconstruct the predominant values of polygamy and infidelity, Mia Tang is at the same time trapped in its own fictional form. It continues to reiterate the madonna/whore paradigm albeit in a more "contradictory way. In *Roi Pa* on the other hand, the alteration of the final scene shows women's solidarity and courage in overcoming the common enemy. Its action-adventure genre takes the 'masculinisation' of women a stage further, as Saengthong and Kanita, although captured, are able to shoot their way out and eventually, kill Ithi.

KANITA: *"I will untie you."*

SAENG: *"You.."*

KANITA: *"Ssh..quiet..those two may hear us.."*

SAENG: *"(monologue) Kanita unties the rope, it only takes a minute.."*

KANITA: *"(whisper) There you are..I think we'll have to do a bit of exercise..those two guards.."*

SAENG: *"(whisper) Sure?"*

KANITA: "(whisper) *No sweat, physical education is my major..*"

SAENG: "(whisper) *right then...now!*"

"(monologue) *we nod at one another and move quietly towards the guards..I signal Kanita that we must get their guns..we'll hail them and when they turn round we'll quickly grab their guns..then we can shoot at them..*"

KANITA: "(cough)"

GUARDS: "*Hey, what's this?*"

SAENG/: "(fighting) *there, there, there...*"  
KANITA

GUARDS: "(cry out) *hey, hey, hey..*(sound effect, people fall on the floor)

(RIFLE SHOTS)

GUARDS: "(cry out) *Oh no, no, don't shoot!*"

ITHI: "(panting)"

SAENG: "(calls out) *Ithi!*"

ITHI: "(exclaims) *Ah, it's you, Saengthong...this is your dying moment..*"

KANITA: "*Stand still, Ithi!*"

SAENG: "(solemnly) *You are a dead man today..*"

(RIFLE SHOTS)

ITHI: "(cries with fear and then pain)"

(Roi Pa, 22:6-7)

The prominence of the '*lone ranger*' hero is thus, over-shadowed by Saengthong and Kanita's action followed by the shooting of Sua Term by the police.

The illustrations in this chapter call attention to the contradictory process whereby meanings in popular fiction are (re)produced. Enveloped in the *auteur* ideology, the structural tension between the genres/story and commercial goals allows a variety of discourse to be incorporated. Our exploration shows that although ideological continuity is predominant it must be played out against other discourses. This relatively open arena calls into play shifting and sometimes challenging imagery in a more complex way than is allowed for in many criticisms of popular fiction, and particularly of romance. Snitow (1979) for example, contended that;

*"When women try to picture excitement, the society offers them one vision, romance. When women try to imagine companionship, the society offers them one vision, male sexual companionship. When women try to fantasize about success, mastery, the society offers them one vision, the power to attract a man. When women try to fantasize about sex, the society offers them taboos and most of its imaginable expressions except those that deal directly with arousing and satisfying men. When women try to project a unique self, the society offers them very few attractive images."*

(Snitow, 1979:149-150)

We would argue on the contrary, that changing imagery and options are constantly being generated *inside* these apparently static forms and categories. Our modest attempt suggests an approach in which the possible 'divergence' and 'convergence' of meanings can be explored. As we have tried to show, the potential of popular fiction for producing meanings is perhaps more wide ranging than either the authors themselves or the critics have imagined.



## CHAPTER 9

### PRIVATISING SENSUAL PLEASURE AND EVERYDAY POLITICS: POP MUSIC AND CULTURAL NEGOTIATION

The analysis of popular music presented in this chapter offers a further illustration of my general argument that popular culture is a relatively open arena in which a variety of discourses are played out simultaneously. Our view is that the production of meaning in pop or rock n'roll is neither the consequence of total manipulation from the music industry, nor is its cultural expressivity the sole result of historical resistance, as (sub)culturalist or commentators argue. Instead, we subscribe to Aiewswong's (1985) notion that Thai popular music, and particularly Pleng Luktoong, is the product of a complex articulation between Thai folk music and western pop/rock. We therefore, focus the analysis on the ideological interface in this innovative synthesis. The central question is, how are sensual pleasure and everyday politics accommodated or resisted within this arena? The former contradicts the religious ethos of piousness and sensual restriction, whilst everyday politics is closely regulated by both the state and the music industry.

As opposed to most commentators in the sociology of music who investigate either the lyric or the imagery of pop stars, we propose to explore both, since as we shall show, it is their *combination* which forms the discourse of pop and rock. How then, are lyrics and music juxtaposed? In the '*standardised formulas*', are they always harmonised? Or are there instances of contradictions between the forms and contents and the overall imagery? Or perhaps, there is a fragmented imagery within which several layers of encoding are interwoven. The degree of openness is crucial since it allows for differences in *appropriation* according to the cultural experiences and symbolic power of audience members.

The third dimension of interest is the mediating role of the DJs. For the majority of the Luktoong audience, music radio on the AM dial remains their basic source of access to the world of popular music. Our example, '*Pleng Hit Pua Khun*' on Sor Tor Ror radio, is one of the pop programmes made by the largest music cassette production companies, Azona. We explore how the audience is incorporated into the show and ask whether the power relations between the DJs and listeners is structured differently from the producer-audience relations of popular fiction and the official programmes.

### 9.1 '*Pleng Luktoong*': Forms of Pop Resistance and Accomodation

Before we embark on the analysis of '*Pleng Luktoong*' a brief sketch of the contemporary pop scene is called for. As mentioned earlier in chapter 6, Thai popular music was conceived largely during the era of '*cultural modernisation*' and popularised on state radio in the 1940s. In its adoption of the western system of musical scores and notation it broke with the classical court music of the *ancien regime*. This *dontri sakol* or modern music forms the bedrock of contemporary Thai popular music. However, the standard Thai form of dancing, *ramwong*, designed to accompany the new music, continues to draw from the graceful and restrictive physical movement of court dancing. This constitutes the official definition of sensual pleasure. But we shall come back to this point later.

#### The social categories of the Thai popular music

Although Thai popular music generally represents a synthesis of the western pop/rock, and folk and ballad, the emergence of the four main genres; the *Lukkroong*, *Luktoong*, *String* and *Pleng Pua Chiwit*, have allowed particular social groups to realign the power relations within this cultural field. For example, while *Lukkroong* continues to represent the official bourgeois notions of romance and sensual pleasure, the other genres align themselves with the social and political opposition to these.

The initial categorisation of Thai popular music into *Luktoong* and *Lukkroong* coincided with the introduction of television and the entrenchment of militarism in the 1960s. The folk styles of '*Pleng Chiwit*' or '*Pleng Chaobaan*', were incorporated into the new music, and the stories of the common people were presented with a romantic nostalgia for the village community and its values (Nawikamun, 1978, and Siriseriwan, 1984). Among them however, were songs depicting the harsh reality of peasant life and celebrating their class integrity; *Tung Ruang Thong* (The Golden Field) and *Klin Klon Sab Kwai* (Muddy Odour and Stinking Water Buffalo), for example. The artists' insistence on presenting the '*other*' reality of Thai society produced the dichotomy of *Luktoong/Lukkroong*, the names quite literally contrasting the country (*toong*) with the city (*kroong*). But more importantly, it refers to the social division of the audience into the poor and the elite, as much as to the contrast in musical forms.

*Luktoong's* opposition to the romantic view of the world of the elite is constituted through its synthesis of traditional popular art forms and topical and

realistic lyrics. Pleng Luktoong borrows from these lyrical structures the style of humour and satirical expression. As a separate genre, it redefines sensual pleasure by juxtaposing folk ballads and the rhythmic popular forms of Lamtad, Pleng Rua, Pleng Puangmalai for example, with the popular discourse of everyday life. A large number of the love songs mix the prominent Lukkroong and pop/rock music with folk style lyrics which talk about sex is pleasurable as well as normal. However, it is the singing which is distinctively different from Lukkroong. By slurring of their notes and words, Luktoong singers represent their class background and oppose the elite *parole* designated as the national Thai language.

'Pleng Pua Chiwit' emerged in the late 1960s among the Left. It was influenced by the anti-establishment American folk-rock represented by Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. Their social and political commentaries were mostly accompanied simply by acoustic guitar, with occasional insertions of mouth organ or Thai flute. Its celebration of the poor and the marginalised social groups on the other hand, draws from the Luktoong genre. In contrast, Pleng Pua Chiwit is highly intellectual and politically forthright. In effect, the genre is banned from the radio though distribution is possible via cassette and live performance on university campus. Caravan, the most prominent group, joined the Communist Party of Thailand along with thousands of Left students and intellectuals in the aftermath of the student massacre in 1976. Their revolutionary songs, which incorporate ethnic tunes and local instruments, are broadcast on the underground VOPT.

Although the middle-class youths who tuned in to the Anglo-American pop/rock located themselves within the Lukkroong category, they regarded the music as 'old fashioned' and 'dull'. In the 1960s and 1970s, young musicians began to mime to the rock stars such as Elvis Presley and Cliff Richard and the Shadows and 'The Shadows' became the generic name for rock bands. This was transformed into 'String', a new genre of pop/rock with Thai lyrics, in the 1980s. Within this category however, there is a wide range of music, from teeny-bopper to hard rock as well as a divergence in their discourses.

In the present milieu, Pleng Luktoong continues to be located on the AM band whilst the other three genres and the Anglo-American pop/rock are played on the FM stations, although the latter is also broadcast on some AM stations. Having said this however, the cassette industry of the 1980s is vibrant and its audience is highly sensitive to the fluidity of these genres. As will be demonstrated in more detail presently, Luktoong is moving from its established singing tradition towards the performance style of western rock stars. On the

other hand, Pleng Pua Chiwit is seeking a new identity. Its hard hitting criticism and socialist utopia has been romanticised and diluted to suit the new era of political accommodation.

In fact, the categorisation of popular music noted here can only provide a crude guideline. Any rigid conception is quickly outmoded in this shifting cultural field. The music of the group Carabao for example, is created from a number of styles. Its popularity in the mid-1980s is based on a successful synthesis of music and lyrics that cuts across divisions of form. They celebrate the common people in the Luktoong tradition but within a rock music framework, some of which is hot dancing music for the discotheques. At the same time it also combines Pleng Pua Chiwit's intellectual style with Luktoong's humour and satirical tunes.

Critics however, are unable to fit this music into any of the existing categories. Some are reluctant to call these songs Pleng Pua Chiwit, despite the fact that the band originally associated itself with this genre. Its name for instance, pays homage to Caravan, the originators of Pleng Pua Chiwit. For the more purist critics, Carabao are too sensual and commercialised. At the same time, from the Establishment point-of-view the band's political position and imagery is ambivalent and suspect. In their ragged mock-military uniforms and hippy hair styles they campaigned for the leaders of the 1983 coup in the 1984 general election for example. For the Luktoong DJs and their audiences, the style and background of Carabao diverge so far from the Luktoong genre that it is necessary to view the group as having a unique form of its own. For the state, their usage of local dialects and bold images of sexual desire, is a constant threat to the nationalist and moralist ethos. Some of Carabao's songs are therefore banned from being broadcast.

#### **Luktoong music and performance: regulation and contention**

In the age of '*mechanical reproduction*', Thai popular art forms have been transformed. On the one hand, folk music is privatised by the music and broadcasting industries. On the other, its oppositional discourse is incorporated into the new form of Pleng Luktoong. In this synthesis, the definitions of sensual pleasure promoted by the music industry and by the traditional popular art forms, converge on the notion of '*jouissance*' or bliss (Barthes, 1975). The presentation of sensual rhythms in the music or lyric or a combination of both offers '*physical*' pleasures as opposed to the '*intellectual*' pleasure of Luktoong. They require the audiences' active involvement rather than passive

consumption. The following advertisement for Azona's cassettes sums up the music industry's notion of pleasure.

*"good songs, loud music, sensual and entertaining,  
your happiness is provided by us in the tapes."*

The industry's promotion of sensual pleasure in its privatised form largely mediated by radio and television. For the Luktoong show bands and their audiences however, public performance continues to be the highlight of popular entertainment. As Prani Wongtes (1984) argued, popular festivities, be they religious or social, generally culminate in the explosion of '*sensual pleasure*'. Sexual desire and opposition to paternalism for example, are often played out in these open but socially designed arenas. During the past decades, the Luktoong show has been integrated into these celebrations and sensual explosions. But how does this new popular art form present itself in this complex matrix?

The structure of the show, a combination of glamorously staged revue and comical and sexual folk vaudeville, is designed to fulfill the ideals of pleasure demanded in popular entertainment. The rhythmic gyrations of the women dancers or '*haang kruang*' (literally the minors) in their sexy costumes, is the culmination of the show's visual pleasure. The '*haang kruang*' dance in the style of the can-can or modern western-styles which are regarded as the most sensual in the Thai social context. This presents a challenge to the official, restrictive definition of physical pleasure.

Since the Luktoong show is mostly staged in temple grounds, religious regulation ensues that the sensual explosion is confined to the vocal and visual imagery on the stage. Physical participation during these festivities generally takes the form of '*ramwong*' or dancing in a circle. It is standard Thai dancing officially designed to curtail physical contact between the dancers. As a result, the socially sanctioned sensual pleasure offers two complementary forms: the visually sensuous '*haang kruang*' and the physically restrictive '*ramwong*'.<sup>1</sup>

The imagery of the Luktoong show associated with popular festivities was dramatically transformed in the 1970s and 1980s. Although its public dimension was maintained, privatisation became far more prevalent. Shows are now staged more regularly in the secular venue of the cinema. This contributes a new

---

<sup>1</sup> The bourgeoisie and the middle class on the contrary, dance in the music hall or nightclub in the ballroom style called '*ten-ram*'. A combination of hopping and jumping, ('*ten*') with the graceful physical movement of classical dancing, ('*ram*').

quality to the sensuous pleasure. Sayan Sanya's show for example, reinvested one million bahts (approximately £25,000) in its sound system and it is now common to invest as much in the electronic sound equipment as in the revues themselves. Dancing and costumes are meticulously redesigned for this profane atmosphere. The visual pleasure is thus extended, though it remains assigned to the dancers.

The music industry on the other hand, takes the notion of *'jouissance'* a stage further. Vocal, visual and physical pleasure are all concentrated in the *'individual'* singer. The *'star'* becomes the epitome of the blissful experience. The vocal and physical pleasures which are presented on two separate planes in the live Luktoong show, are merged. This has two significant implications. The hierarchical separation between the singer and the dancers, which coincides largely with gender divisions, is challenged. Secondly, while it approximates more closely to the imagery of String and Anglo-American pop/rock, recorded Luktoong's contestation with the officially defined notion of pleasure is deepened.

As Benjamin (1970) has argued, the *'mechanical reproduction'* of the arts paves the way for new kinds of appropriations and re-creations of artistic forms. Unmediated and mediated enjoyment provides for different effects that can be complementary. For the live Luktoong show, the central problem is that their *'relative autonomy'* is severely threatened. For the music industry, the show is essential in creating the *'aura'* of artistic authenticity. The twin concepts of standardisation and uniqueness are fundamental to the industry's commercial logic. What at first seems to be an unresolved conflict of interests is in fact a reciprocal relation, though one not without tensions.

For the audience, the peasantry and the poor in particular, the annual or bi-annual access to the sensual pleasures of the show becomes an everyday experience through the broadcasting media. More importantly, it accelerates the secularisation of sensual pleasure. New references are introduced for renegotiation. Soul and disco dancing or *'din'* (literally twisting) for example, evident in private celebrations are gradually incorporated into the temple ground events. The mediation of television on the other hand, contributes to what Benjamin called absorption and distantiation in the consumption of arts. The audience becomes emotionally involved but at the same time, is made into an expert or critic through its distance from the artists.

### Luktoong lyrics: resistance and accommodation

Through Luktoong music the popular practice of sensual pleasure becomes part of everyday politics. But it is not an unrestrained field. On the contrary, resistance and alternative points of view exist in a fragile equilibrium among the social forces engaged in the encoding and decoding of pop. Stringent state regulation is imposed on top of the already tight religious and social sanction in this arena. The state in particular, closely regulates any entertainment which is in 'bad taste', or 'unpatriotic' or 'critical' of the government or its institutions. In order to thrive amidst these political and commercial tensions, Pleng Luktoong must constantly realign itself. As a result, the discourse can be apparently accommodating in its content yet remain structurally resistive.

The synthesis of humour and satire in Luktoong's lyrics however, has evaded state censorship and produced some of the classic social commentaries in popular music. Paibun Butrkan for example, wrote *Yomabaan Jao Ka* (Oh! Mephisto) after his *Klin Klon Sab Kwai* (Muddy Odour and Stinking Water Buffalo) was banned by the Phibun government. His composing career, between 1949-1972, coincided with the entrenchment of the military regimes. In response, in *Yomabaan Jao Ka*, he presents an abstract but moralistic lyric which allows for a variety of interpretations.

#### YOMABAAN JAO KA (OH! MEPHISTO)

Oh! Mephisto, please listen to me  
Why do good people die so soon?  
Oh! Mephisto, why do the wicked live?  
Devilish but they survive

The good dies one by one  
This world is intolerable yet I can't escape  
It was men who are frightened by the devil  
Now, they scare the devil away

Despite the carefully calculated ambiguity of this lyric, Paibun still attracted a charge of '*insinuating class differences*'. At the same time, he also composed a series of songs devoted to motherhood, for example; *Mae* (Mother), *Ka Nam Nom* (Mama's Milk), *Om Ok Mae* (Mother's Bosom). These were popularised on Radio Thailand and used for Mother's Day celebration. Paibun in fact, admonished Cholati Tarnthong, one of his students, arguing that "*a composer cannot write only political songs because that would mean ending up in jail...*" (Changyai, 1986:64).

In contrast, **Puyai Li** (Village Head Li), written by Pipat Boribun during the military regime of Sarit, is highly comical. Its parody of a village meeting mocks the hierarchical power relations between the establishment and the villagers.

#### PUYAI LI (VILLAGE HEAD LI)

In the year 1961, Puyai Li called a meeting  
The villagers all assembled at Puyai Li's house  
Now Puyai Li will tell you what he was told  
The state ordered, they ordered that peasants  
must raise ducks and *sukorn* (pig)

Ta Si hua klon (the drunkard) asked,  
*"What is a sukorn?"*  
Puyai Li stood up right away and said,  
*"Sukorn is nothing but a ma noi."*  
Ma noi, ma noi tammada (repeat)

The word game is based on the colloquial *mu* (pig) and *ma* (dog) which are also abusive terms. To avoid the vulgarity they are officially called *sukorn* and *sunak*. The narrator humourously depicts a surreal village meeting in which no talking back is permitted. But as it happens the contrast between the polite and vulgar vocabulary produces misunderstanding and reveals the ignorance of the village head. The link between knowledge and power is broken. More importantly, the story makes fun of authority whilst defying the newly launched modernisation scheme.

As these examples show, commentaries on militaristic power are possible but rare. They must be cautiously woven into humour or abstract satire. In contrast, ordinary soldiers are praised for their patriotism and heroic deeds. Most Luktoong stars pay tribute to the glorious warriors who are one of 'us', in songs like Yodrak Salakjai's **Rangwan Nakrob** (A Warrior Reward), Sayan Sanya's **Kampatiyan Taharn Kla** (Oath of a Warrior), and Rangsri Serichai's **Kiat Taharn** (Glory of a Soldier). Yodrak Salakjai's hits in particular, are associated with the macho but highly patriotic imagery of the defender of the realm in juxtaposing the hero in uniform with love and sex. They include **Taharn Rua Ma Laew** (Here Comes the Navy), **Taharn Sang Mia** (A Soldier's Goodbye), **Tor Chor Dor Jai Diew** (True Love of a Border Patrol) and the most recent hit, **Taharn Mai Pai Kong** (The New Conscript).

Whilst the power of the military is glorified politicians often bear the brunt of the criticism as in songs like; Kamron Sampunnanon's **Mon Karnmuang** (The Magic of Politics) and Songkroa Samattapapong's **Pak Krasob Ha Sieng** (Political Campaign of the Sack Party). Although Pleng Luktoong shares similar



worldview with the traditional institutions and the military in its presentation of those '*corrupted*', '*slick*' and '*power seeking*' politicians, their dissension does not support the '*status quo*' unequivocally. Commentaries on the bureaucracy for example, argue against the present structure of the power relations. Government officials are definitely one of '*them*' and they are presented as '*oppressive*' and '*power corrupt*', as in Kamron Sampunnanon's *Krai Taan Tan Ka* (Those Oppose, They Kill). In identifying with the common people, Pleng Luktoong constantly makes attempts to challenge the institutions of power though accommodations are imperative. We therefore find defiance as well as glorification of power in Pleng Luktoong.

Nonetheless, social comment is not confined to Pleng Luktoong as critics would have us believe. This may have been true in the past, particularly during the period of military dictatorship, but today's pop stars and rock bands in the String genre also promote alternative views in order to appeal to their audiences. While commentators such as Wongtes (1984) and Supasakorn (1979), praise Pleng Luktoong for its social commentary the love songs are often neglected. Yet the bulk of the Luktoong are love songs compared to the 20% or so of commentaries (Phutharaporn, 1985). In deed, it is in the love songs that Pleng Luktoong is most contentious both culturally and politically. There are two distinctive features, drawn basically from the folk tradition, which tie Luktoong to oppositional discourse. Firstly, its unfailing identification with the peasantry, the common people and the poor and secondly, its expression of sexual desire.

By situating lovers in the context of their material condition Pleng Luktoong connects the notion of love with the question of social differentiation. The bulk of the love stories, whether sexual or tragic, are about people who identify themselves as '*Luktoong*'. They are; the peasant lad/girl; the lorryman; the fisherman; the boxer; the taxi-driver; the factory worker; the maid; the bar girl; the prostitute; and a range of country boys and girls from Supan, Khonkaen, Isan or the northeast. These are clearly presented in either the name or the contents of the song. Equally important is the fact that the stories are told by these same '*Luktoong*' people. Nearly all the Luktoong singers come from the peasantry or have a rural backgrounds (Nawikamun, 1978). The first generation of Luktoong singers, such as Chai Muangsing and Kuanjit Sriprajan, were reputable folk singers. The present Luktoong stars are mostly from the central province of Supan (with a very distinctive accent) or the northeast. They are either self-educated, like Pumpuang Duangjan, or have minimum education, like Sayan Sanya. A number of successful songwriters, such as Cholati Tarnthong

and Wichien Kamcharoen, are from the provinces and began their career as Luktoong singers. Their biographies are not only starkly different from artists of the other pop genres but are firmly grounded in the 'popular'.

In the tragic love songs, social differentiation is constantly invoked. Suriya Rungtawan's *Sub Mun* (Ten Thousand) for example, tells the story of a poor peasant who could not afford the ten thousand bahts dowry for his marriage. In other songs the imagery of the rich and of the city are presented with a mixture of awe and distrust. The country people are presented as innocent and easily deceived. Metaphors such as AM girl/FM man, tractor/Mercedes are frequently used to signify the antagonistic relation between the peasant girl and the rich man from the city. These *rural/urban* and *peasant/elite* polarities were central to one of the top hits of the early 1980s, *Kao Wain Raw* (Waiting in the Queue) by Sornpet Sornsupan. It is based on the highly popular cliché '*pai don kao lok ik laew*' or '*you are fooled again*'.

#### KAO WAIN RAW (WAITING IN THE QUEUE)

You are fooled again, my dear will you ever learn  
 You wanted diamonds but your were heart broken  
 Now you are in tears, don't you ever learn  
 You are fooled again, why don't you try to learn  
 You are taken by his wealth but not my true love  
 Now you are in tears

You run away from this poor man  
 You want the millionaire  
 He deceives you to his heart content  
 He deceives you, he fools you  
 Ah, my dearest, ain't it just too bad!  
 Please come back to me, to my true love  
 I will be waiting in the queue  
 I will father your first born, my dear

These unresolved tragedies, enmeshed in the asymmetrical power relation of sex and class are, however, juxtaposed with comical tunes and rhythmic music. Thus, the contradiction of tragedy and comedy is simultaneously experienced and enjoyed. As Lop Burirat, the songwriter, pointed out;<sup>2</sup>

*"Luktoong must be pleasurable in all aspects...I think the music must come first...and the sound...you must keep on playing with different phoneme until you find the exact sound...these are vocal and graphic...I write comical and rather sexy songs so it's even more difficult...I have to bear in mind that if it becomes too graphic it might never reach the audience..."*

<sup>2</sup> Unless where otherwise stated, quotations in this chapter are extracts of interviews with the songwriter, Lop Burirat and the female DJ, Kalayani Promjairak in September and May, 1986.

When the balance is struck the song becomes a hit. More importantly, catch phrases from songs such as '*pai don kao lok ik laew*' (you are fooled again) or '*rak sib law raw sib mong*' (wait for the lorryman at ten) are incorporated into the oppositional discourse of journalists and the Left, who use them to criticise the government for failing to fulfil their political mandate.

Luktoong's second central feature, the expression of sexual desire, is diametrically opposed to the notion of romantic love presented in the music of Lukkroong or String. Male singers are especially forthright since the main thrust is in '*talking sex*'. Sexual puns and metaphors for sexual intercourse are abundant. But as noted above, songwriters are cautious of censorship. For the state, '*obscenity*' is defined first and foremost by the language and the sexual imagery created by the words. Chudtien (Light the Candle), Ham Tiem (False Organ), Parinya Ki Kwai (Graduate on Buffalo Back) and Law Ai Kae (Seduction) for example, are banned from being broadcast because of their '*obscene*' lyrics.<sup>3</sup> In practice however, sexual explicitness is not contained purely in the lyric. It can also be presented in the music and the '*vocal*' of the singer as well as the words or in a combination of these elements. Together with the visual imagery and the '*physical*' impact of the music they generate blissful sensual pleasure.

The niche secured by Pleng Luktoong not only compromises the state, but '*talking sex*' becomes part of everyday politics. As with the tragic love songs, catch phrases from erotic lyrics and poems are widely adopted and used in a variety of contexts. At the same time, this enables the sexual passivity of women generally presented by male songwriters and vocalists to be challenged. Diew Kaw Mum Sa Rok (Want to Have You) written by Lop Burirat and originally sung by the songwriter himself for example, was later recorded by a female singer, Chantara Tirawan and expressed in reverse. A variety of lyrics, sexual and non-sexual, are re-written to the melody of Jud Tien for example whilst textile workers sing and dance to the protest lyric they write to the same tune. These '*decodings*' demonstrate the range of divergences from the '*encoded*' imagery of the songs and suggest that a range of potential meanings can be created. We shall discuss this point in more detail in the next chapter on audience media activities.

---

<sup>3</sup> The National Broadcasting Authority (1985) proscribed the following; obscenity leading to pornography; opposition to government policies; insinuation of class differences that will lead to national disunity; and the degradation of the ethnic minorities. So far, no song has been banned because of its '*obscene music*'. But in the past, some international rock stars and groups such as, Elvis Presley and the Beatles were banned.

## 9.2 Stars and Style: Images of Sensual Pleasure and Modernity

This section takes the case of Pumpuang Duangjan, the most recent *Luktoong* superstar, as a way of exploring how the imagery of sensual pleasure is produced and presented. Pumpuang is the third Luktoong vocalist, and the first contract artist for Azona to earn the title - superstar. Her predecessors, Surapol Sombatjaroen and Pongsri Woranut, were independent artists. Their title of King/Queen of Luktoong was largely associated with their distinctive '*grain of voice*' and the popularity of their shows. Pumpuang on the contrary, merges these criteria with the industry's '*sales record*' through the consolidation of her innovative singing and dancing style. On the production side, disco music and the visual image on television become the predominant modes for generating blissful experience. But as noted earlier, neither the artist nor the music industry is able to monopolise how '*jouissance*' is defined. On the one hand, the music industry's attempt to break with Luktoong music's convention is circumscribed by its internal tensions and the audience's discursive formations. On the other hand, it is also contained by the dominant social and political sanctions. These pressures assimilate any '*alternative*' or '*counter*' cultural form into their terms of reference as we shall illustrate below.

### Pumpuang Duangjan: the making of a '*Luktoong*' superstar

Pumpuang Duangjan or Rampung Jitharn is the fifth of twelve children in a working class family from Supanburi. Her mother is a sugar cane cutter. Her father used to be a popular art performer. She has only two years of primary education. At twelve, she started her apprenticeship with one of the prominent Luktoong bosses from Supanburi, Waipot Petsupan. She learned to sing and dance in the '*haang kruang*' style as well as to stand-in for the vaudeville and comedian of the show. With her all-round talent, Nampung Muangsupan (as she was named then) began to develop a different style from previous Luktoong singers. However, the imagery remained confined by the gender divisions of the Luktoong show. Whereas male vocalists, such as Sayan Sanya or Yodrak Salakjai, aspired to be Luktoong singers from the moment they entered their music career, women must start from the bottom rung as dancers. They either remain there or if they do make it to the front of the stage they are expected to project a feminine imagery in the love songs (Supasakorn, 1979).

In some of Pumpuang's earlier songs, *Kaew Raw Pi* (Kaew is 'Waiting for You'), *Tung Nang Koy* (The Maiden Field), and *Sao Na Sang Fan* (A Peasant's Girl Goodbye) for example, the imagery of a shy peasant girl

prevails. These songs juxtapose the Luktoong vernacular with a mixture of Lukkroong music and folk tunes, while her *persona* identifies with the majority of the *Luktoong* fans. the theme of the music and lyrics is romantic not erotic. In these formative years, Pumpuang was largely enveloped within the mainstream of Luktoong's tragic love songs.

In the late 1970s, this minor recording artist Nampung Muangsupan (Honey of Supan) was renamed Pumpuang Duangjan (Pretty Boobs). The change of name shifted the sweet feminine imagery to that of a sexy woman unprecedented in the Luktoong world. This reversal of imagery was the decisive break that propelled Pumpuang Duangjan to stardom, as she pointed out in a television interview (May, 1986);

*"I actually resent the name because it represents both boob and bum...I think its indecent...but I wasn't about to give up...what strikes me is that the fans seem to like my new style very much...when I wore long hair, look lady like, my songs never really hit the chart...I like this trendy style and a bit of masculine smartness.."*

This is the point of departure from which sensual pleasure in Luktoong music is reworked into a new collage. Her *voice* and *persona* is juxtaposed with the comical and erotic style once confined to male singers. As the composer, Lop Burirat, described;

*"Pumpuang has the personality for this type of playful and sexy song...her singing ability fits in well with her style...in fact, she is capable of a variety of styles and this makes things easier for both of us..."*

Lop Burirat composed *Haang Noi, Toi Nid* (Budge a Little) using a disco beat and highlighted the music with saxophone and trumpet. Its success was followed by the second cassette, *Krasae* (Come on, Baby!), in a similar style. While the music is highly 'physical' the lyric is both sexually enticing and comical. The style of humour and satire match the beat of the city. As the composer explained;

*"I think it's about time we stopped repeating ourselves...I want to try to capture the mood of the city and the young of today...I write these rhythmic, and colourful tunes in a new style..I prefer to call it the electronic Luktoong..."*

In contrast to other reputable Luktoong stars, Pumpuang's commercial success marks a break from the present Luktoong tradition in both its musical form and its emphasis on the 'independent' artist. This leap however, was prompted as much by the commercial logic of the music industry as by rapid social

transformation. More and more of the landless peasantry, both male and female, were turned into urban industrial labour. A large number were becoming 'export labourers' working in the Middle-east, and the advanced industrial countries such as Germany and Japan. Amidst this fundamental shift in social relations, how could the Luktoong music continue to relate to and express the feelings of its audience?

#### Sex and modernity: the new 'Luktoong' musical collage

The two cassette albums, *Haang Noi, Toi Nid* (Budge a Little) and *Krasae* (Come on, Baby!) released by Azona in 1984 and 1985, marked the turning point in the new 'Luktoong' collage. These ten-track albums were both composed and produced by Lop Burirat, the comic songwriter. In each album, the disco beat was used in the two promoted tracks. *Puchai nai Fan* (The Man in My Dream) and *Haang Noi Toi Nid* (Budge a Little) in the first album, and *Ah, ha..Law Jang* (Ah, ha..Cutie!) and *Krasae* (Come on, Baby!) in the second album. The rest of the songs are tragic love songs in the familiar Luktoong style such as, *Sao AM* (AM Girl), *Jub laew La* (Kiss Goodbye), *Ja tang Pi* (When Will It Be?), *Ronghai bon Lang Kwai* (Weeping on Buffalo's Back).

The introduction of the disco beat into Luktoong music is a radical divergence from its established Luktoong forms. It is the moment when Luktoong aligns itself with the 'modern' String or pop/rock. At the same time, it is a return to the deep roots of rhythmic folk tunes and their sexual openness. In order to accommodate conventional elements along with the new synthesis in the same album, the collage does not depart entirely from its tradition. On the contrary, it attempts to reconcile these diverse trends through the persona of the presenter of the discourse - the star vocalist. Furthermore, the industry pays tribute to the official ideology in the 'extra' tracks such as *Siam Muang Yim* (Siam, the Land of Smile) which was marked out as the third promoted track in the *Haang Noi Toi Nid* album. This illustrates particularly well how Azona must comply with the dominant political and social constraints at the same time as developing strategies to widen and maintain its audience. The following shows how these contending discourses are played out.

The promoted duos in each album differ in their musical composition and their imagery of sexual relation. Azona prioritises tracks with comparatively subdued music juxtaposed with an erotic monologue, [*The Man in My Dream* (Budge a Little album) and *Ah,ha.. Cutie!* (Ah, ha..Cutie album)], over the unconventionally physical disco beat in *Budge a Little* and *Come on, Baby!*

These pre-emptions are however, overturned. The hits are the disco tracks that express sexual desire in a playful '*dialogic*' lyric. The eroticism in **Budge a Little** and **Come on, Baby!** is presented in a cock-teasing manner woven into the chemistry of the lyric and the physical impact of the music. The bliss is produced by the texture of the '*utterance*' punctuated by the '*physical movement*' of the disco music.

The following translation of these lyrics cannot do justice to the poetic quality of the songs, but will suffice as an illustration of the divergences in the sexual imageries they represent. In the first hit, **Budge a Little**, for example, the parody of the words and the tune of the saxophone create the colour and its sensual texture.

#### HAANG NOI, TOI NID (BUDGE A LITTLE)

(chorus) Budge a little, a little more (repeat)  
Na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, you innocent  
Stretching your arms, you are getting closer  
Now you are leaning on me, Uh!

Na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, mischievous grin  
Thinking about it, you signal now and again  
Wah, you jump on me  
Stealing a kiss and you won't budge, Uh! (chorus)

By contrast, **Come on, Baby!**, moves a step further in the rhythmic vigor of the music and its sexual imagery. The song is a teaser in a style similar to **Budge a Little** but concludes with an enticing invitation.

#### KRASAE (COME ON, BABY!)

(chorus) Come on, come on, yeh, yeh, come on,  
If you love me baby, don't just look on  
Come on, come closer, faster  
Be gentle to the taste of sweetness  
If you care for me, I will be yours (chorus)

So smart, so handsome, how naive you are  
If you stay cool, you won't taste the honey  
Just look on, over the corner you are shaking  
Come on, baby, if you're shy you won't get it

The sexual invitation is hidden in the pun and the metaphor of the Luktoong vernacular. Pumpuang is able to present this sexy imagery in her playful style of singing and dancing. In contrast, the intimacy of sexual intercourse presented by the erotic '*sound*' in **The Man in My Dream** and **Ah,ha..Cutie!**, although parodied by the playful tunes of the saxophone and trumpet, walk the tight rope between eroticism and pornography in their visual imagery and vocal expression.

PU CHAI NAI FAN (THE MAN IN MY DREAM)

I am a gal, looking for a pal  
 Last night I dreamed, a wonderful dream  
 I met my prince charming  
 He took me to the cinema,  
 He took me to the garden  
 He put the flower in my ear,  
 Once, twice and trice  
 He tried in vain  
 I woke up at four, he is no more  
 What a shame, Ooh, what a shame!

Oh, what a dream!  
 He is such a man, so gentle, so sweet  
 I dream of him,  
 Seducing, touching, embracing me  
 It's all in a dream,  
 Ooh, what a shame, what a shame...

The act of sexual intercourse is presented in both the sounds and the metaphors in the poem. The '*dream*' however, is used as a double device. Apparently, a self-regulatory measure, in its fantasy it reaches deeper into the reality of the sub-conscious. Pumpuang '*talks sex*' in the same way as the Lamtad or the Pleng Choi of the folk tradition in which the '*Mae Pleng*' or female singer is as witty and enticing as her male counterpart. In the past, this tradition of openness to female sexual desire has been restricted by the official definition of *sensual pleasure*. By dropping the Lukkroong musical style from the Luktoong songs the folk notion of sexual pleasure is revived.

Building on the success of the first two hits, Ah,ha..Cutie! challenges the official moral code further by emphasising the '*female gaze*' of a sexually liberal woman and her disregard of fidelity, thereby turning the conventional double sexual standard up-side-down.

AH, HA, LAW JANG (AH, HA..CUTIE!)

Ah, ha, how cute, Ah, ha, how cute!  
 Whose lover is he? So good looking  
 My eyes meet his, Ah, ha, my heart leaps

Ah, ha, so cute, Ah, ha, so handsome!  
 I want to hold you  
 Are you single?  
 Shall I take him?

He is so muscular, I want to touch him  
 I want to be closer,  
 To whisper that I am so lonely



Ah, ha, cutie, so handsome  
 Whose lover is he?  
 Is it a mystery, cutie?  
 I want to be with you tonight,  
 Ah, ha, how cute..so cute

These playful but erotic tunes present sexual desire from a woman's perspective, as both pleasurable and modern. The restrictive visual presentation on television and film however, delimit and disrupt the 'authored' meaning of the discourse. On television for example, *Ah, ha..Cutie!* and *The Man in My Dream* are presented in straight singing and dancing without the re-creation of music video. In the film *Mupun Konmai* (The New Hit Man) produced to promote these albums, *Ah, ha..Cutie!* takes on a comical imagery instead of eroticism. Pumpuang is presented as witty and boyish as opposed to the meek hero. The scene shows Pumpuang sitting by a large pond watching a young man (the hero) bathe. As she sings, the bathing images reverse the meaning of the lyrics. The macho appeal for example, turns out to be an old man emerges from the other side of the pond. With mud on his head and a frog jumping on his frail arm muscle. On the other hand, the visual imagery of *The Man in My Dream* is confined to Pumpuang singing in her bedroom. The camera concentrates on the facial expressions of Pumpuang wishing the dream would come true. However, the visual censor that closes off further slippage of this erotic tune opens itself at once to the audience potential fantasies.

In Pumpuang's singing and dancing style the established 'Luktoong' outlook is disappearing. For example, the slurring of the notes is no longer apparent in these hits although it remains in the love songs in both albums. But more importantly, the image of a modern city girl negates the association of 'Luktoong' with 'otherness' and 'low culture'. The new collage strives to eradicate these derogatory connotations, and at the same time to establish a new ground. As Pumpuang remarked;<sup>4</sup>

*"..When I perform at the Dusit Thani in front of the Duchess and her daughter the audience expect to see a 'Luktoong' show..well, what they see is contrary to their expectations..afterwards, they say it is a modernised Luktoong...it's not the real thing, they say...you must tell me how to act like a Luktoong or how not to be one...these new songs are sort of a cross between String and Luktoong..I like Michael Jackson, the way he dances...I also like the self confidence and the style of Anchali Jongkadikit (the recent woman rock star)...you know, at first Azona is not sure if I can dance but I think the point is proven.."*

---

<sup>4</sup> Interview in Rachini Luktoong, 1986:48,52.

In the past, sacred blessings were bestowed upon outstanding proponents of the Luktoong tradition. But in this new milieu, both the media and show business hasten to assimilate Pumpuang into their terms of reference. Her style is acclaimed for its 'modernity' and its high international standard. As the review by one of the most prestigious literary and popular entertainment critics, Khunying Jintana Yossuntorn, explained;

*"..how come I miss this superstar? I want to drop the prefix Luktoong and just call her the superstar of pop music...her style of singing and dancing is undoubtedly modern and in the best of taste...if someone tells me Pumpuang is from Broadway or London I would not doubt for a minute...she really has the style...is Pumpuang merely going to be the Luktoong Superstar?"*

(Yossuntorn, 1986:22)

Pumpuang's imagery is not only 'modern' in appearance. Her public *persona* merges with the liberal conduct of her private life which breaks the social norms on sexual restriction. She openly discusses her love affairs with her present husband for example. Thereby avoiding further publicity of the scandal by confronting the issue head-on.

In the midst of this new sensual explosion however, we also witness a different imagery being 'preferred' by the bulk of the Luktoong fans. They are unmoved by the exciting new music. The other hit, that emerges besides the promoted tracks, is the tragic love song, *Sao AM (AM Girl)*, on the *Budge a Little* album expressing the unresolved class differences typical of the Luktoong tradition.

#### SAO AM (AM GIRL)

We peasant dress in *patung*,  
Carry our loads, working in the field  
Speak our common language,  
Listen to the AM band, our transistor radio  
It's in our basket, in our luggage

Tune in to our pleasure  
AM and the Luktoong music  
We plough the field, we earn our living  
Our food is common, vegetables and fishes

You city lad, don't want your false hope  
It's not a good match, you listen to the FM  
Bangkokians are deceitful, they say  
Please don't fool us simple folk,  
We AM girls are fearful

Stay with your city people  
Rural folks are not your type  
Seduce me, then you will not return  
FM girls are pretty, and fair  
Soon the AM girl is forgotten

This track reproduces the style of music, singing and imagery of the mainstream Luktoong love song alongside the new collage of the sexy and modern woman. In this way, the fans are able to appropriate their preferred imagery according to their discursive formation and 'taste'.

At the other end of the sensual spectrum, the album also contains political inserts. Siam Muang Yim (Siam, the Land of Smiles) for example, clearly identifies with the dominant ideology of the triple alliance. In the words of the composer,

*"..the 'extras' are imperative for our trade...it is sort of a statement of our allegiance to the state...well, it doesn't really bother me as long as we get to do what we want to do.."*

As mentioned earlier, Siam, the Land of Smile was selected as the third promoted track on the Haang Noi Toi Nid album. Azona is cautious to temper its 'sensuous explosion' with 'patriotism'. Its imagery of the ethnic groups from 'across the Mae Khong river' - the Laos and the Khmer - is unsympathetic to the 'aliens' but converge with the 'national'.

#### SIAM MUANG YIM (SIAM, THE LAND OF SMILE)

Be proud that you are a Thai  
Uncolonised and generous  
Siam is the Land of Smiles  
We should be proud

The Thai is known for her sincerity  
Whoever your are, our nation welcomes you  
Crossing the Mae Khong, the troubled water  
We welcome you with our smiles

We are famous, we the generous people  
Caution, our settler  
For our tradition, a bowl of rice  
Must not be forgotten

We Thais love our nation and religion  
Adore the virtuous king  
Respect our rights, forever welcomed  
With a Siamese smile

The defiance of restrictive pleasures and the challenge to the sexual hierarchy in Haang Noi Toi Nid is thus, juxtaposed with the patriotism-cum-ethnic exclusivism of the dominant power bloc.

The overwhelming success of the album however, eases the tight self-regulation. It brings out the artistic creativity and autonomy of the composer. The satirical tradition of the Luktoong emerges in the 'extra' in the second cassette, Krasae. Man Yang Ngai Yu Na (That's Odd) is cynical about the 'Thainess'

incessantly propagated on the official programmes. In its comical juxtaposition of music and lyric, the song projects an imagery conflicting with the allegiance statement in Siam, *Land of Smile* in the previous album.

MAN YANG NGAI YU NA (THAT'S ODD)

Hey, Thailand - freedom land  
Think what you want, do what you want  
Yeh, some are too good, but some are too bad  
Some push but some pull  
Hey, ain't it confusing, ain't it odd (repeat)

Hey, Thai people - free people  
Sell what they banned, eat the forbidden,  
Ain't it confusing

Hey, Thai people - funny people  
Some are helpful, some are selfish  
Some are gracious, some are modest

Yeh, some bow to foreigners,  
Humiliate us Thais  
Hey, ain't it odd (repeat)

This humourous tune and self-mockery is inserted in the middle of the second album. It is a low key track that went almost unnoticed. But a modernist style of satire combining the earnesty of *Yomabaan Jao Ka* and the humour of *Puyai Li* is in the making. We shall come to this point presently.

In the album, *Takatan Puk Bow* (The Grasshopper), distributed by CBS, the music in the promoted tracks followed the success 'formula' of the previous cassette albums. *Cheui Boran* (Listen to the Old) is erotic while *Takatan Puk Bow* is a comic teaser. The co-presence of the contradictory images of a woman in control and subordinate continues, albeit with further modification. The Chinese melody, from the theme song of a Hong Kong gangster/romance soap opera, and the Carpenter's *Only Yesterday* are juxtaposed to form the 'modern' outlook. At the same time, nostalgic music is coupled with the imagery of feminine submissiveness. In the track *Atit la Won* (Once a Week) for example, the mistress pleads tragically for the opportunity to be with her lover even if it is only once a week. The visual presentation on the sleeve reinforces the image of the twin *persona*. On the front of the cassette, Pumpuang is riding on a 'motor bike' in her black leather outfit. This is contrasted with the 'feminine' image folded on the inside. The picture shows Pumpuang wearing a long white dress with a broad-brim hat, resting leisurely in the garden.

On the other hand, the disco beat is reworked and dispersed to other tracks on

the album. They are juxtaposed with humour and satire in *Oui Ter Kong Free* (Yes, It's Free) and *Ta Wiset* (The Magic Eye). Although both tracks characterise the best of Lop Burirat's compositions they are rarely played on radio. Released prior to the 1986 general election, *Oui Ter Kong Free* (Yes, It's Free) reveals the undersides of the political campaign. The one-and-a-half-minute track is both '*didactic*' and '*dialogic*'. The composer suggests that the audience,

*"accept whatever the politicians offer,  
'cause they are free of charge"*

This is counter-posed with the voters' discourse in the northeastern vernacular.

*"Ah, I will not vote for you,  
I come for your free gift,  
Ah, free of charge,  
Yeh, yeh, yeh, free gift, free gift.."*

The lyric and the foreign but comic melody of an old Chinese tune subvert the seriousness of the election ritual. It argues against official optimism about the parliamentary system. Not only are the politicians not '*honest*', the people are not '*naive*'.

*Ta Wiset* (The Magic Eye) on the same album experiments further with the city beat of rock and saxophone. The music at the beginning of the song plagiarises an old Luktoong melody before leaping into its percussion theme. The switch however, is a parody of the theme from the *Technology* album by a marginal rock band. The accompaniment of the saxophone rouses the beat to its emotional height. It ends with a return to the dialogue in the introduction.

In the latter half, the musical pastiche shifts to a comical mood. The percussion is comparatively subdued whilst the changing tone of the saxophone is highlighted. Its playfulness is used to comment on the city scene in the final verse. In this counter-position, the antinomy of music and lyric is doubled. It is presented both within the comments on the '*country and city*' and between these antagonistic polarities.

#### TA WISET (THE MAGIC EYE)

W: *Do you see?*                      M: *Yes, I do* (repeat)  
W: *Yes, hush, hush*

W&M: *The living, the dead,  
Beginning and end,  
Above, below,  
What do you see?* (repeat)

Good people are here to stay  
The bad are gone, don't you see?  
All is well, ah, ha

In the city hall, the clerks are smiling  
 Wow, the nurses are not grumbling  
 See the EAT, cheap electricity for all  
 Folks are happy, stupid they may be,  
 But have sympathy,  
 Ah, it's unreal, but ain't it nice!

Here, here, the magic eye  
 Clear, clear, clear of rubbish  
 Ah, ha, no flood, no flood in Bangkok  
 Ah, ha, no more criminal  
 Look under the tree, look in the bath tub,  
 Talking, whispering, ain't it familiar  
 Uuh, when he turns round,  
 Oi, he's my daddy

The composer also introduces a backup singer who takes the position of the audience in the dialogue. The lyric is a surreal collage which is both comical and cynical. Following the introductory dialogue is a parody of the well-known pleading with Mephisto in Paibun's *Yomabaan Jao Ka*. The title, *The Magic Eye*, is borrowed from the cleanliness campaign sponsored by the commercial banks and other financial institutions. Defying its connotations with authoritarian surveillance, *The Magic Eye* pierces into every corner of 'high and low' society, cynically and satirically. The paradox eventually, returned to reality in the final verse in which sex and the everyday politics is interwoven.

Although social commentaries are tolerated in the present age of consensus building, they are drowned when juxtaposed with the 'promoted' disco tracks and the tragic love songs. The beat of the new synthesis expresses a different source of defiance. The practice of resistance is shifting towards a new form of language which lies predominantly in the physical activity of the music.

In advancing in this new direction, Pleng Luktoong converges with the emerging ethos of secularisation, but at the same time, resists its inhumane mode of social relations, as numerous songs about poverty and urban degradation unfailingly testify. The tragic feeling of hopelessness is accelerating not receding. Nonetheless, the aggressive beat of the disco music expresses the rage, the frustration and the fear with optimism in its style of eroticism and humour. This sensual explosion not only presents an alternative to the daily drudgery, it emerges at the precise historical moment of social transition when the official ideology of the triple alliance is regenerated in the new '*Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong*' doctrine. Its call for moral ethics and work discipline comes face to face with the '*semiotic guerilla warfare*', to use Eco's (1972) term, that presents sensual pleasure as its doxa.

### 9.3 Luktoong Music Radio: DJs and Cultural Negotiation

With the emergence of the music industry in the 1980s, the privatisation of popular entertainment on radio was transformed. On the AM band, the balance between radio drama and Pleng Luktoong, the two major forms of popular entertainment, tipped towards the latter, although the advent of colour television and its nation wide coverage must also be accounted for. The trend was further accelerated by the growth of the cassette industry. Two significant implications arose from this.

Firstly, these developments reinforced the economic and social divisions in access to popular entertainment. The Luktoong performance financed by public donations diminished (Tangsongsak, 1986). As a result, the poor in both the rural and urban areas were excluded from this arena. As Pumpuang has described;<sup>5</sup>

*"before we start our concert season, we usually find out about the local conditions, about the people's income, the harvest and so on...in the Northeast, it is getting worse, a large number of our fans can't afford to pay for the ticket...we charge 30 bht (approximately 75 pence) a piece but that is too expensive, they sort of come to the back of the stage or ask if they can pay 10 bht to get in..."*

These people are also the least likely to possess a cassette player. And those that do often cannot afford the cassette releases which are priced at 70-75 baht (approximately £1.75-2.00), the equivalent of a day's wage in the Bangkok industrial zone (although pirate cassette can be bought for half or sometime one-third of the original price) For the poor then, Luktoong music radio must necessarily be their main source of sensual pleasure.

Secondly, the rise of music radio entails the tightening of this relatively open musical space. As illustrated in the previous section, the form of Luktoong music contains within it, multiple and contradictory discourses, ranging from conservative to liberal and oppositional. However, the music industry must accommodate both the dominant political and social codes and the audience's cultural expressions in fulfilling its organisation goal. The aggressive campaign for the 'promoted tracks' is one way of aligning with the dominant ideology on the one hand and of promoting sensual pleasure on the other. In avoiding any open or critical comments on authority it closes off the space available for the potentially oppositional tracks. Via the widespread 'plugging' system (Kukang,

---

<sup>5</sup> Interview in Rachini Luktoong, 1986:21.

1982, 3:23) and the corporate produced programmes, the privatisation of the Luktoong music radio is exacerbated. Nonetheless, the tightening process is problematised by the mediation of the DJs, some of whom are incessant in practising their '*relative autonomy*' whilst accommodating to corporate controls on programme content. The following is an illustration of how the '*semiotic guerilla warfare*' continue to be fought in this mediated arena.

### The privatisation and transformation of the Luktoong music radio

Two major state initiatives on the production of popular entertainment, which have contributed significantly to the transformation of music programmes on the AM band and furthered the process of privatisation. Firstly, the introduction of the State Radio Regulation (1968) which set out to control the 'unregulated advertisement also ushered in restrictions on audience participation in music programmes. Dedications and chatting for example, are prohibited. Only the voice of the DJ is permitted to go on air. This was followed by the Radio Broadcasting Regulation of 1974 which proscribed un-license producers. The '*free market*' principle of the press was narrowed down to licensees approved by the state.

Within the top three Luktoong radios in Bangkok, Por Tor Or (The Military Artillery Radio), Sor Tor Ror (The Voice of the Navy), and Yan Kroa (The Military Armoured Radio), we find three general categories of programme. They parallel the division between Luktoong show business the music industry, with the '*independent*' programmes in between. These three major sources of production/sponsorship support both '*standard*' recorded music radio and live programmes. Those produced by the Luktoong artists continue to emphasise their star image. Corporate programmes focus mainly on the promotional campaigns in which the stars and the cassette sales are interwoven whereas the large majority of '*independent*' (but '*plugged*') music programmes incorporate the sensual pleasure of Pleng Luktoong with discourses from their sponsors among the producers of consumer goods and the music industry.

Table 9 summarises the formats of the more or less '*standard*' weekday music radios. Both types of programme, whether produced by the artists or the independent DJs, play only Luktoong music. Their vernacular firmly identifies with the '*Luktoong*' audience in the city and the rural areas. Despite the distinctions between the DJs, there are points of convergence and divergence for which we shall discuss presently.



Table 9

## Examples of 'Standard' Music Programme Formats\*

Programme of Luktoong Artists		Sponsored Programmes	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Advertisement spot(s)</li> <li>-Introduction:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-DJs repeat spot(s) with improvisations</li> <li>-announcement of concert tour</li> <li>-talk and more announcements</li> </ul> </li> <li>-Songs (2)</li> <li>-Advertisement spots</li> <li>-Talk               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-letters and dedications</li> <li>-announcement of concert tour</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Songs (2-3)</li> <li>- Bid goodbye</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Advertisement spot(s)</li> <li>-DJs repeat spot(s) with improvisations</li> <li>-Songs (2-3 per 1/2 hr 4 per 1 hr)</li> <li>-Advertisement spots</li> <li>-DJs repeat spots</li> <li>-Songs (2-3 per 1/2 hr 4 per 1 hr)</li> <li>-Bid goodbye</li> </ul>
Style:	Friendly, personalised	Style:	Friendly but straightforward
Music:	New releases of one artist only	Music:	A mixture of new releases
Talk:	General issues;weather or festivities	Talk:	Minimal **
Adverts:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Concert programmes in Bangkok&amp;provinces</li> <li>-Household products, drug, electrical equipment, kindergarten</li> </ul>	Adverts:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Household and women's product</li> <li>drug, cosmetics</li> <li>Thai food, hair dressing school</li> <li>cassettes, Luk toong concert, ethnic cultural events</li> </ul>

\* These are standard formats from the late morning Luktoong programmes on Por Tor Or, Sor Tor Ror, Yan Kroa, three of the top Luktoong stations in Bangkok.

\*\* Except when the programme is in Northeastern dialect, music and adverts are in the same dialect. The woman DJ provides more time for talk and letters.

In the first category, the artist produces his/her own programme. Surachai Sombatcharoen, the son of the first Luktoong superstar, Surapol Sombatcharoen, and his team for example, produce his own programme on the *Por Tor Or Radio*. The entire programme revolves around the artist and his performing activities. For the audience, the talk is as important and pleasurable as the music. It largely consists of the schedules of the artist's current concert tour and dedications from the self-organised '*fan club*'. The format not only connects the audience with the artist but is a bridge for the various '*fan clubs*' and small groups of listeners. The mediation of the programme provides a shared identity through the imagery of the artist. More significantly, the cultural formation of these groups, made up of audience members working in the same industrial district or from certain villages or localities in the rural areas, is reconfirmed in their displaced urban conditions. The programme therefore contributes the space in which continuation as well as the creation of a new cultural motif is possible.

Circumscribed by the internal contradictions in the music industry, the number of programmes produced by the Luktoong artists, especially the star vocalists, is now on the decline. Furthermore, these programmes must seek additional sponsorship in order to compete with the media hype. Whilst transformation is inevitable the syntheses strive to retain the artist-showbiz characteristic. Surachai Sombatcharoen's '*Luktoong Ti Rak*' for example, advertises a kindergarten school along with his own performance. But the emphasis remains on his show and on the connection with the fans. A new project to compile the names and addresses of all Surachai's fans was recently introduced (11 April, 1986).

In contrast, the flow of '*sexual courting*' and sensual pleasure in '*Dontri chak Phraek Luktoong Yodrak Salakjai*' (Music from the Luktoong Hero Yodrak Salakjai) is merged with the modern image of the advertised products (5 May, 1986). In the programme, new releases of Yodrak, the sexy star, are juxtaposed with performing schedules and letters from the fans. This is interwoven with the '*fashionable*' kitchen gadgets of the '*electronic age*' such as rice cookers and refrigerators. The presentation of the '*good things in life*' is embedded within the sexual norm of marriage and family. Together with the macho imagery of the vocalist, the DJ both reconfirms the patriarchal relations and introduces material changes through consumer discourse.

The '*standardised*' and mostly pre-recorded music radio in the second category; combines the '*promoted tracks*' (in which one track is worth 1,000 baht a

month or approximately £25)<sup>6</sup> with the commercial spots and the ad-libs on the commercials. In this format, the DJs are left with a limited selection of music. Neither do they have the time to 'talk' to the audience. Programmes such as '*Pleng Dang Pratab Jai*' (Impressive Hits) on Sor Tor Ror Radio or '*Dae Fan Pleng Ti Rak*' (For Our Music Fans) on Yan Kroa Radio are turned into campaign platform for the music industry and the distributors of 'consumer' discourse.

Having said this however, the DJs of these programmes continue to exercise their creativity and their links with the Luktoong fans. This is possible in the line up of the selected tracks. In deference to the 'pluggers', the DJs usually play the hit tracks at the beginning and the end of a set of three songs. But sandwiched in the middle there is space for a social commentary, or for tracks outside of the promoted realm. In '*Pleng Dang Pratab Jai*' for example, Sornpet Sornsupan's *Kao Kai Mai Dai* (Can't Sell the Rice) is played between Sayan Sanya's *Nam Ta Sib Law* (Tears of a Lorry Driver) and Pornsak Songsang's *Kaw Mong Dai Mai* (May I Gaze?). Both of which are love songs. In the programme '*Dae Fan Pleng Ti Rak*', Pumpuang's *Sao AM* (AM Girl) is juxtaposed with the commercial spot for the cassette *Metta Dhamma* (Virtue of Kindness), which campaigns for the cause of malnutrition.<sup>7</sup> The quotation in the spot by Anchali Jongkadikit, the female rock star, is taken from the alternative discourse of the Foundation for Children's Development, a marginal non-governmental organisation.

*"Born with silver spoon, but look a yonder  
Those little starvelings are doomed,  
One baht pouring down,  
Soon the Thai children will bloom"*

The largest percentage of malnutrition is concentrated in the poverty-stricken region of the Northeast, in which the ethnic majority is the Laos. In this radio spot, the imagery of the malnourished children is contrasted with that of the 'better off'. But while the class dimension is highlighted it also appeals to the religious ethos of 'kindness'. The reference to social integration, 'Thainess', on the other hand, defuses the question of ethnicity and 'otherness'.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cassette companies provide most of the 'promoted' albums to the DJs. These are cut with the promoted tracks only in contrast to the cassette albums on sale. Azona for example, further marks out the pre-determined

<sup>7</sup> 'hits' with asterisks.

The idea of this project by the music industry derives from Geldof's Live Aid Concert in 1985.

In fact, the Laos are also the largest ethnic group of the urban poor (Changyai, 1987). It is only on the AM band that they find their cultural taste catered for. As opposed to the above example, programmes produced in 'Laos' or the Northeastern dialect, confirm ethnic 'solidarity'. They play Mohlam, the popular form of 'blues' from the Northeast.<sup>8</sup> The ethnic essence is further reinforced by news of various Northeastern cultural activities. The 'Kalaya Paplern' programme on Yan Kroa Radio for example, juxtaposes Mohlam music with details of the annual Buddhist Phabha festival of the region (13 March, 1986). The critical edge of the programme is embedded in the use of the Laos vernacular in preference to the central Thai dialect. The woman DJ, Kalaya Sarakam, speaks Laos throughout the programme except for satire or cynical comments. Despite the playful tone of her talk, comments such as 'bad manners', or 'uncivilised', are spoken in the central dialect. In marginalising the Thais as the 'other' it thus reverses the established dominant/subordinant paradigm.

This contestation is nonetheless juxtaposed with the love songs and the commercials aimed at its female audience. Most of which are anchored within the traditional institutions of marriage and family. But with the talk and the ad-libs the sexual norm is modified. The improvisation on the commercial for the Darawan School for beauty practitioners for example, emphasises self-education and the notion of career women. It presents a more ambiguous image over and against the hierarchical structure of gender divisions.

The mediation of the DJs illustrated so far shows how competing discourses are synthesised in this privatised arena. Instead of a 'coherent' flow of sensual pleasure Luktoong music radio presents a fragmented imagery of cultural representation. The identity of the audience is constantly shifting in its divergent mode of address. Within the same programme, they are one moment an individual 'listener', or 'fan', and the next moment, they are the 'consumers' or 'brothers and sisters and citizens'. These multiple identifications are however, conjoined in the corporate produced programme which will be discussed next.

---

<sup>8</sup> In recent years however, the music industry is beginning to incorporate this musical form into the mainstream of the Luktoong genre. The 'Modern Mohlam' of Pornsak Songsaeng, the new star from Khonkaen, is now played with the well-known Luktoong stars from the central region. At the same time, Azona is creating its own modern Mohlam vocalist, Somsak Duangsompong, to compete with the independent artist, Pornsak Songsaeng.

*'Pleng Hit Pua Khun': DJs and the mode of audience negotiation* <sup>9</sup>

Azona's major platform on the all-music Sor Tor Ror 2 station (The Voice of the Navy)<sup>10</sup> is shared with Somjainuk Cosmetics, the station operator. Throughout the week, Somjainuk's programmes are consistent in their live production of *'international'* music interspersed with corporate commercials. Its combination of Chinese, Luktoong, and Anglo-American pop/rock is unique on the AM band. Azona on the contrary, positions its standard weekday programmes against the half-hour Luktoong slot of the independent DJs. This is then coupled with the live programme, *'Pleng Hit Pua Khun'* (Song Hit for You), on the weekend.

*'Pleng Hit Pua Khun'* is produced by the DJ, Kalayani Promjairak, a graduate in English Literature and Journalism. She is the second Luktoong DJ, to hold a university degree as opposed to the self-taught majority. The introduction of its magazine format coincides with the surge of the new Luktoong collage in the mid-1980s. But the company also retains the original DJ, a naval officer, to anchor the programme. In this duo composition the Luktoong feature of *'Pleng Hit Pua Khun'* is largely transformed.

There are two fundamental, albeit contradictory, shifts in this synthesis. Firstly, the juxtaposition of Luktoong music with the Lukkroong under Azona's label. Secondly, although the duo form of the DJs is a continuation of the style of the Luktoong announcers on stage, its heterosexuality converges with the Lukkroong and the pop/rock music radios on the FM band. This challenge to conventional gender division is however, defused by the patronising mode of address and the style of internal dialogue of the DJs. A three tier hierarchy is instituted. In its paradigm of *'big brother and sister'* talking to the *'younger brothers and sister'*, the woman DJ is subordinated to Witaya, the male DJ. The audience are in turn located at the bottom of this relationship. Through this mode of *'pi and nong'* paternalism, the DJs and the audience become one big family. This effort at harmonisation not only hinges on the mediation of the DJs. It also draws significantly from the thematic of *'youth culture'* and a

<sup>9</sup> The information in this section is based on recordings and observations of pre-recorded production in Azona's studio and live programme in the Sor Tor Ror 2's studio.

<sup>10</sup> The station is located on the border line of Bangkok and Samutprakarn province, one of the industrial zone around Bangkok metropolis. Thus, programmes from Sor Tor Ror 2 are popular among factory workers. A 25 KWs transmitter, however, permits a wide range of coverage to the North, South and Northeast.

non-provocative sensual pleasure. But its innovative counter-position of the 'Luktoong' against the 'Lukkroong' in both the music and the vernacular, creates the internal tension and disharmony that constantly contests the authority of the DJs.

#### PLENG HIT PUA KHUN: PROGRAMME FORMAT

Saturday	08:00-18:00	Sor Tor Ror 2, 684 KHz
08:00-09:00	Songs (100% Azona's)	
09:00-10:00	From the Papers (one item only)	
10:00-11:00	Anecdote (related to the above item)	
11:00-11:30	Station's News	
11:30-12:00	Career Interview	
12:00-12:30	Songs	
12:30-13:00	News from Radio Thailand	
13:00-14:00	Letters and Dedications	
14:00-14:30	Letters and Dedications	
14:30-15:00	Songs	
15:00-16:00	Travelogue	
16:00-18:00	(Azona) Song Chart	
Sunday	16:00-19:00	Sor Tor Ror 2, 684 KHz
16:00-17:00	Housewives' Corner	
17:00-18:00	Golden Oldies	
18:15-19:00	Everyday Survival Kit	

The main programme of '*Pleng Hit Pua Khun*' on Saturday juxtaposes Azona's notions of sensual pleasure with the official definition of good entertainment. But professionalism is also a central feature in this competition as Kalayani, the woman DJ, described;

*"..I believe that our programme is more creative than it used to be..also in comparison to other Luktoong music radios...as a media professional I have the responsibility to produce a programme which is both entertaining and informative..I try my best to insert what I think is useful for our audience such as the sections on news and some anecdotes...but I also make sure that it is not too stuffy....we simplify it a little and present only one item at a time so that it would not be too boring.."*

In the morning slots, the Azona's style of 'physical' sensual pleasure is juxtaposed with the 'intellectual' form of news and information. These items are selected on three major criteria; 'non-violence, socially positive and constructive'. They are national events which sometimes identify with the 'national' and at other times, with the 'popular'. In the April programme for example, the 'information' included the annual boat-racing and boat-making, the

traditional popular sport that is being revived and promoted as a national spectacle. On the May Day weekend, the rice planting ceremony conducted by the Crown Prince for the Spring Ploughing Festival and the history of rice cultivation were presented. Although clippings from the popular newspapers, *Thai Rath* and *Daily News*, are re-written into the radio scripts, the formal mode of narrative reaffirms the asymmetrical relation between the DJs and the audience.

In the career interview section, its structured mode of conversation continues to be formal. The objective of the interview is to *"introduce the audience to various interesting vocations and to show how the common people make a living in the city."* Although suggestions from the audience are welcomed, interviews are not actually guaranteed. Some of these *'interesting vocations'* include fortune-teller, bus conductor and restaurant owner. The space is largely opened for those who have made it in his/her career. Hard-work, honesty and self-discipline are extolled but the main focus of the section is on the world of popular entertainment and leisure. Azona's artists, especially the up-coming stars, are promoted through this space. In the selection and juxtaposition of interviewees the DJs must abide by corporate policy whilst negotiating with the audience on the one hand and their own professionalism on the other. For example, Lop Burirat, whose work and image is connected to the Luktoong superstar, Pumpuang Duangjan, is interviewed. This is carried despite corporate policy to play down Pumpuang's image since she is no longer an Azona artist. The attempt to gear the interview towards Azona's new female Luktoong star, Sirintra Niyakorn, is not very successful. Instead, Lop Burirat asserts his *'balanced'* view of Azona's *'outlaw'* superstar and its up-coming artist.

The music in the morning slots is a combination of the *'promoted tracks'* in the style of Luktoong, Lukkroong and the new collage of *'electronic Luktoong'*, and *'modern Mohlam'*. This is juxtaposed with the commercial spots which focus mainly on these releases. As a rule, only those on the Azona label are played. Requests for non-Azona artists are either deterred or ignored. *'Non-promotional'* songs are generally honoured, though at a later date since they are not available on the promotional gramophone album. These highly structured sections are nonetheless, loosened in the afternoon slots in which audience participations are incorporated.

One-and-a-half-hours of un-scripted space is allocated to letters and dedications from the audience. When reading the letters, the DJs translate them into the *educated* vernacular. At the same time, impromptu censorship is also applied.

But the DJs mostly plan the programme as they go along, sometimes, with suggestions from the sound controller or from fans who either phone-in (but are not on-air) or visit the studio. Since this space is designed for the audience, they may be invited to read out the letters and dedications or to say a few words about themselves, and their favourite singers (although legally proscribed). It is in this relatively open and loosened space that the DJs' strenuous effort to create harmony is shattered. Controversial issues make their entrance. The break away of Pumpuang Duangjan for example, is constantly referred to in the audience's letters. The overwhelming loyalty from the audience not only asserts their allegiance to the artist against the corporation, it has significantly inhibited any dramatic rise to stardom of Azona's new artists.

Although the talks in this section focus mostly on the stars and the programme itself, the 'private' dimension of both the DJs and the audience is another basic feature. As Kalayani pointed out,

*"..the audience really want to know who am I, the real me..I've tried to evade these questions but somehow they find out that I am a university graduate..they are a bit suspicious..they say I am not one of them, too high up...they are not sure if they should trust me..but I think that that is resolved..it takes about six months..they talk a lot about themselves after they feel I am not a stranger..that I am their friend who they could confide in..."*

In this space, not only are the Luktoong/Lukkroong DJ/audience antinomies clearly contested but the 'agenda' and 'demands' are largely set by the listeners. The insistence that every letter is answered for example, means more time for the afternoon slot and over-flows to the programmes on Sunday and weekdays. But in order to fully comply with this demand, Kalayani has to negotiate a new agreement with corporate management. At the time of the study, the negotiation was still being in process.

The climax at the end of the programme juxtaposes the travelogue with the 'Hit Chart'. The DJs well-scripted travelogue leads the audience out of their homes via their imagination. Azona's attempt to establish its hit chart invites real participation from the audience, but in a domesticated form oriented to cassette buying unlike the independent programmes or those associated to the Luktoong show business whose emphasis is on the physical meeting of audience and artists.



It is in this final slot, where the sensual explosion and the images of youth and modernity are highlighted, that the extent of contested ground is once again narrowed. The travelogue, designed by Kalayani and her assistants from the university, presents a hybrid of middle-class and lower-class styles of leisure. Kao Yai National Park in Nakorn Rachasima for example, is a middle-class environmental sanctuary. In addition, the script is more concerned with 'information' than with the 'pleasure' of fun and music. There are long passages on how to get to the park followed by its history and natural environment. The journey is interspersed with music from the 'promoted tracks'. Despite the effort to integrate useful information with entertainment, the tensions in the form create a disharmony of discourse.

The creation of the 'Hit Chart' is carefully designed to coincide with the 'promoted tracks'. Each week the audience is invited to vote for their favourite songs. The mood of excitement in this sensual climax is however reduced, since there is little doubt which songs are entering the chart. In the words of the DJ,

*"...the result is usually predictable..I can tell by the requests that come in during the week..the non-promotional tracks rarely enter the list...in my view, most of the promoted tracks are good music anyway....the top three are generally the Luktoong music..but the Lukkroong and the mixed types are gradually recognised by our audience."*

Whilst the Saturday programme emphasises courtship and a 'youthful' image to attract the largest audience, the Sunday programme presents marriage and family as its main themes. In the opening and final sections of the programme professionalism prevails. The DJs provide useful tips on home-making for housewives. The Survival Kit section is largely concerned with procedures for dealing with official agencies in matters of everyday life. Requests from the audience are accommodated in the Golden Oldies slot. These are a combination of love songs in the Luktoong and Lukkroong genres released by Azona.

As can be seen from these illustrations, the internal contradiction of the music programme form constantly forces open any attempt to close and tighten this arena. The DJs, challenged by the audience and compelled by corporate policy, are enveloped in discursive struggles which must necessarily be played out and synthesised.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE DYNAMICS OF AUDIENCE MEDIA ACTIVITIES: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF WOMEN TEXTILE WORKERS

The argument developed in the thesis so far is critical of all those versions of the dominant ideology thesis which fail to take account of contestation from the 'dominated' and the 'mediators'. We hope to have demonstrated some of the complexities in the process of 'ideological production' in the foregoing analyses of the structure of media production and the radio discourses. In particular, we have highlighted the role of the professionals, artists and DJs and their struggle for 'relative autonomy' despite the economic and socio-political constraints. We have also attempted to illustrate how variations in the cultural forms of radio representation and their modes of address, constrict and contribute to the contest of discourses. It is the task of this final chapter to advance our argument further by exploring how ideological power of the media is further limited by the dynamics of audience activity.

Our exploration focuses on a small group of textile workers, mainly women, and is based on a total contextualisation of their conditions of work and leisure and unlike most ethnographies of audiences it looks at the ways they engage in the *consumption* as well as the *production* of various forms of representation. My account begins with a sketch of the situation in the factory and how its unionisation in 1981 introduced the oppositional discourse of the labour movement into the daily life of the workers, and opened the way for the articulation of liberal discourses. The second part investigates the workers' media activities in relation to their situated context. By connecting the workplace with the domestic sphere, the spectrum of cultural activities covered by the study is broadened. They include not only the domestic consumption of the mass media, but also leisure and social activities in which popular culture is incorporated or synthesised, and the cultural practices associated with economic struggle in which new forms of expressivity, for pleasure, and solidarity are created.

But first, it is necessary to describe in some detail on the methods used in this study. The small scale ethnography that we undertook was both experimental and exploratory. There were a number of limitations placed on the field work that constricted the ways the materials were gathered and which have a direct bearing on the organisation of the study and the subsequent analysis.

## The field research

The field study was carried out between January and April 1986 and employed an anthropological approach that combined, group discussions, depth interviews, participant observation, and casual conversation. The site of the research varies accordingly. Formal group discussions and in-depth interviews took place at the union office located approximately 2 kilometers from the factory. Observations on the workers' media activities were conducted; in the private and public spheres of everyday life; on various festive occasions; and during confrontations with the employers. The observations of the workers' daily activities covered the women dormitories adjacent to the factory, the reading room set up by the Union, visits to the cinema, and the office of the Union where the active members occasionally gathered as an in-group. Except for the annual New Year's trip arranged by the employer, the collective celebrations of the workers coincided with religious or secular festivals such as the Pabha for the village temple or wedding ceremony. All of these took place at the home village of the host or hostess. During the field research, there were several such festivities. Our observations, of a Pabha and a wedding ceremony, followed the groups who travelled to the Northeast. The final category of observations took place at the annual meeting of a textile union and at the site of demonstration during a strike. On both occasions, members of the union, our respondents included, staged their own popular plays and songs for their comrades.

Since our access to the work site was through the Union (in conjunction with the Puanying feminist group), our respondents are all either active members of the union or volunteers recruited by them. The initial group was made up of nine workers, seven women and two men, aged between 22-32, who had worked at the factory for 2-10 years. The interviews and discussions were in groups of three or four. Altogether, 8 sessions of 1-2 hours each were conducted. Whilst the feminist group concentrated on questions to do with the relations of production and the structure of control and resistance on the shop floor, our enquiries centred around the workers' social and cultural practices. Six more workers were introduced at a later stage on the recommendation of the first group of respondents. We were informed that these were '*real fans*' of popular culture.

Prior to beginning the observation stage, a preliminary survey of the media artefacts on sale in the market place near the factory was carried out, coupled with a survey of the general media consumption patterns of the workers. The forty-three questionnaires were distributed by the respondents. Together, they

provided a basic outline on which the structured and unstructured discussions and interviews on popular culture were built. Since there was no way of arranging the listening or viewing of a particular film or programme, most of the data is based on the workers' and researcher's common experience at the moment of study. This is mostly derived from regular observations in the women's dormitories at the factory throughout the entire period of the field research, supported by information collected from participating in media activities outside of the factory, such as trips to the cinema. The exception is the inclusion of accounts of past political events, such as the coups in 1981 and 1985, in which broadcasting played a significant role in the power struggle.

In the case of the unstructured discussion and interview sessions, the agenda was usually agreed in advance and information was elicited on a voluntary basis. Many times, the discussions drifted away from the original topic when one or two respondents switched to another related topic they were more interested in. On many occasions, further into the research, the respondents begin to test whether the researcher really shared their tastes in popular culture and the range of their worldviews. It was only after I was accepted, more or less as *'one of us'* that the respondents in the first group became willing to talk about popular culture. However, their deep distrust constantly surfaced in conversation or in the selection of media artefacts for discussion. We shall return to this point later.

### Constraints and contribution of the field research

There are at least two major constraints on the field study. The first arises from the sensitivity of factory research. Although the political polarisation of the late 1970s has been defused, movements within the labour community remain under surveillance and tight security. Open access is therefore either impossible or suspected by both the employers and the workers. Consequently, my illegitimate, union-sponsored entry restricted the research to a low profile, especially, during observations in the factory compound itself. Information from rank-and-file members of the union was either unobtainable or sketchy at best. This was partly due to the accommodation arrangements since supervisors and a small numbers of staff, who are not union members, also live in the same dormitories with the shift workers, conspicuous access to the general workforce was limited. As a result, I had to rely heavily on contributions from the *'active members'* of the union. Information on the workers' general pattern of media consumption for example, was mediated through our respondents.

The second problem arises from the class gap between myself and the respondents as noted above. This had a real implication for my approach to audience research. Respondents often felt that they have been '*fooled*' after they talked about their favourite stars and programmes. At other times, talks on popular culture would be interrupted by one respondent who wanted the group to return to more '*serious discussion*'. In fact, this respondent is very keen on popular culture herself and takes part in the plays produced by the Union. But despite the close collaboration established during the sessions on contradictions in the workplace and the activities of the union, the alliance established on the basis of political discourse did not extend to discussions of cultural practices. On the contrary, the division between these two spheres was interwoven and played out in the research sessions.

### 10.1 From Peasantry to Working Class: Displacement and Transformation

This section briefly outlines the way in which displaced workers were transformed through their practical experience of the contradictions of factory life. The recruitment process and the pay-scales institutionalise a particular structure of control which is co-ordinated with disciplinary measures and a specific regime of spatial and time distribution at work and in the dormitory. Taken together, these structures constrain the means of communication and transformation available to the workers.

#### The structural contradiction of the factory

Aporn Textile, incorporated in 1957, was originally a weaving factory in the eastern suburb of Bangkok. Its expansion to the present site in Samutprakarn in 1971-1972 included a 15 million baht investment for the new spinning factory. Within a decade, its assets had grown from 65 million to 151 million baht. In 1981, its net profits were 19 million baht. The major shareholders are the Jirawatwong, Maekinpan (both are ethnic Chinese) and the Wong (Singaporean and Hongkongnese) families.

The workforce is divided into 1,300 shift-workers 83% of whom are women, and 200 day-workers and staff. The majority of the workers are peasants from the northeast and the central plain. Most of the shift-workers are primary school leavers aged between 18-50. With 600 looms and 30,000 spindles it is categorised as a large factory. Recently, the workforce was reduced by one third due to the introduction of modern machinery. A weaver is now in charge of 14 machines instead of 3-4 as in the past, and those in the spinning mill work 60 spindles at a time.

Most of the locally owned textile companies, especially the medium size factories, are located in the Samrong/Phrapadaeng industrial zone in Samutprakarn. This area falls between the Rangsit and Omnoi industrial zones to the north and the southwest of Bangkok. The former is a new zone in which the modern large foreign owned textile companies, such as the Thai Tejin, the Thai Arrow, are located. The latter is where most of the sweat shops and small illegal factories are. There are smaller as well as larger factories clustered around Aporn Textile in south Samrong. Erawan on the other side of the street for example, is a larger factory. Its better working conditions are a constant source of contention at Aporn (which became clear when the workers started their protests).

The system of control in the factory is organised around the work and gender hierarchy which underpins the pay-scales and the criteria of work evaluation. As Table 10 shows, shift-workers who are fixed at the bottom of the hierarchy are sub-divided into four classes designated by their grades, A, B, C, and D. They are also segmented into three groups according to the shift they work in the 24-hour production cycle. In effect, each individual worker is positioned within a network of complex spaces precisely coordinated by the partitioning of time. The regularity and rhythm of work, rest and leisure, and other related activities are all organised into three rotating patterns to comply with the working of the machine. This is reinforced by the disciplinary system (relating to absences, negligence, disobedience, or idle chatter) coupled with the constant evaluation of the supervisors, which guarantee the correct coordination of body and machine (see chapter 4 in Naowarat, 1987). This is a complete contrast to the peasant's way of life and the associated rhythms of body and mind.

The employer has extended his disciplinary power into the domestic sphere to doubly guarantee the efficiency of production. Accommodation for approximately 500 workers is provided in gender segregated dormitories within the same compound. Most of the residents are single. Married couples either leave their families behind or live in private housing near the factory. Women workers who live in the factory dormitories are provided with communal but minimal facilities. For example, in a bedroom, shared by 12 workers, there is no electrical outlet, though several were provided in the communal ironing area in which workers spend a large portion of their domestic time ironing their uniforms. Workers are not allowed to cook or possess electrical appliances. Food must be brought in from the market, or bought from the food stall on the other side of the fence. There is a small opening, just large enough to pass the plate. The employer provides a 24-inch colour television set in the

small dinning hall (which seats about 80), but most workers prefer to dine together in their rooms or in the corridor in front of their rooms. A house-keeper, selected from one of the senior supervisors, is assigned to keep the living quarter in order.

These conditions in the women's dormitories, located at the far end of the factory, are far more restrictive than those in the men's dormitory next to the entrance. Control for example, is comparatively lax. Male workers are not only free from the surveillance of the house-keeper, but their dormitory is better equipped and more spacious. They live in double-bedrooms and cooking is permitted. In addition to the colour television in the cafeteria there are several video players and hi-fi sets in the dormitory. The gender hierarchy in the domestic sphere has a direct bearing on patterns of leisure activity and media consumption. For the women workers, they raise the costs of enjoyment as well as limiting the individual access to certain media. But we shall elaborate on this point in the following section.

The confinement of the working and living conditions is however, partly relieved by the thriving urban-industrial zone of the Samrong area, three kilometers from the factory. The factory itself is next to the local market, the South Samrong police station and the temple (though the workers rarely attend its religious activities). In the centre of Samrong there are three cinemas, two second class and a new first class, one boxing ring, and one private hospital. The workers generally shop at the market next to the factory but go into the centre for entertainment. The male workers go to tea houses and brothels in the opposite direction, in the Phrapadaeng area.

Table 10

## The Hierarchy and Gender Division of Textile Workers

Classification	Sex	No.	Education	Job description	Pay scale
1 Shift-worker (non-skilled)	F	1,049	primary (90%)	shop floor production	minimum wage plus grading
2 Section supervisor	F	33	primary	shop floor supervision	minimum wage plus management evaluation
3 Shift-supervisor	M	3	primary	shift supervision	-----"-----
4 Day-time worker (semi-skilled,skilled)	M	221	secondary, vocational	servicing production line	minimum wage plus annual wage increase
<hr/>					
5 Staff	F/M		vocational	office work	salary commensurate with education
		-20			
6 Management	M		vocational university	decision-making personnel management	salary commensurate with ed. bonus & profit
<hr/>					

- a) There is no vertical mobility in the job hierarchy especially between the worker and staff classification. There was a rare exception of promotion, however, when the shift-supervisor who controlled a large number of workers prohibited all of them from joining the strike.
- b) Day-time worker designates male workers who work during office hours only. There are a few male shift-workers in the physically demanding jobs. The gender division is primarily between skilled and non-skilled labour in workers and clerical and decision-making in staff. The trajectory of the gender division of labour confirms the general structure of social hierarchy.



Table 11  
Average Monthly Expenditure of Shift-workers  
1986

Category		Single		Married Couple
		F	M	
1	Accommodation	-	-	500 (9.5%)
2	Food	750 (31.0%)	750 (30.0%)	1,500 (29.6%)
3	Clothes	120 (05.0%)	100 (04.0%)	-
4	Friendship fund	600 (24.8%)	400 (16.0%)	-
5	Lottery	300 (12.4%)	300 (12.0%)	300 (05.7%)
6	Entertainment (cinema,tapes, concert,gambling,etc)	200 (08.2%)	200-500 (8-20%)	-
7	Personal hygiene, cosmetics	150 (06.2%)	150 (06.0%)	300 (05.7%)
8	Childcare	-	-	1,000 (19.0%)
9	Credit purchase	200 (08.2%)	100 (04.0%)	1,000 (19.0%)
10	Interests	100 (04.1%)	200 (08.0%)	250 (04.8%)
11	Other expenditures	-	-	400 (07.6%)
-----				
Total expenditure		2,420	2,500	5,250
Range of income		---1,820-3,000---		

\* In Bangkok and its outlying industrial zones, the minimum wage in 1986 is 73 bht/day (approximately £1.80)

## The creation of alternative and oppositional spaces

Within the factory the partitioning of time and space has been carefully devised to permit the surveillance and manipulation of individual activities and to avoid the formation of large groups of workers which might lead to resistance. Yet this space also generates strategies of resistance and struggle. As Giddens argued, constraints are also enabling.

*"structure is regarded as rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction...the constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena...according to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize."*

(Giddens, 1984:xxxi,25)

It is this perception of the other side or the duality of structural properties that provides the logical connection between action and power, or what Giddens calls the '*dialectic of control*'. Whilst the workers' practices are comprehensively routinised by the management they also struggle to maintain their identity and subjectivity in the domestic sphere by creating the alternative spaces for economic, social and cultural activities. The resulting solidarities, originally defined as '*apolitical*' and '*non-subversive*', provided the necessary resources for unintended actions leading to confrontation in the workplace.

The minimum wage of 73 baht/day barely covers the basic expenses of a single worker. For married couples, or those who do not get a place in the dormitories, expenditure generally exceeds the pay packet (see Table 11). To deal with this shortfall, the workers create their own alternative economic network. There are at least two major such networks; the friendship funds and the credit system. Few workers use the nearby bank or the mobile unit available on pay-day. Instead, those who came from the same areas or were recruited by the same supervisor or senior worker establish friendship funds in groups of 10-20. These provide resources for workers who plan to get married, or for those whose savings are remitted back to their families annually or at certain intervals. In case of emergency or for the purchase of durable goods, workers usually go to money-lenders for loans, most of whom are staff and supervisors.

There are other networks which form a bridge between village life and the material conditions of the factory. Social groups, such as the dining, drinking and lottery groups, largely coincide with the workers' working and domicile

positions, though some of their activities break with the social and leisure activities of the village. Drinking for example, which used to be forbidden to women, has now become a new form of socialisation for the majority of single women workers. Pools and illegal lotteries are also highly popular among the workers. The booker used to be one of the members of staff but a few years after the unionisation the (woman) president of the union became the second booker. In the women's dormitories, fan clubs for Luktoong stars are also popular. The two largest groups are fans of Sayan Sanya, the long-standing Luktoong vocalist, and Surachai Sombatcharoen, the baby-faced rising star, but due to its cost, amounting to 120-150 baht or more (approximately £3-4), going to the concerts is a special event. However, workers go to the cinema more regularly since it costs less than 25 baht (approximately 60 pence), including food and transport. For the male workers, gambling in the dormitory is a favourite pass time as is playing sports in the factory grounds.

These social and leisure activities penetrate beyond the assigned partitioning of space and time. The lines of division formed by ethnicity, provincialism and kinship, also begin to blur. Heterogeneous and complex networks of relations evolve. There is also significant common ground in popular Buddhism around which economic, social and cultural activities converge, albeit in a new synthesis. Their culmination is the annual spectacular procession of the Pabha festivity back to the home village. This alternative form of solidarity was capable of uniting the largest number of workers prior to unionisation.

The streamlining of the recruitment process by the employer as part of the structure of control has other kinds of structuring effects. The displaced primary school leavers who enter the factory *en bloc*, from the northeast and the central plain, bring with them '*the regularity, unity, and systematicity to their practices as in the conductorless orchestration*' (Bourdieu, 1977:80). Their transfer of the Pabha festival from the city to the village is at once a material and symbolic gesture. It is a festive occasion that combines fund-raising for the restoration or expansion of the local temple with public pleasure. A successful Pabha must be able to fulfill or exceed its financial target of approximately 20,000-30,000 baht (£500-750) set by the organising committee, made up of monks and lay persons. It must also cover the cost of the entertainment programme now jointly arranged and funded by the villagers and the outside participants. Thus, each Pabha reaches out to the widest possible circle of donors. Workers generally contribute to the cause as a gesture of cooperation, economic reciprocity, and merit making. As one of the respondent described,

*"...sometimes there would be half a dozen Pabha that I feel I should join..it is hard on me...I usually give 50 bht to each organiser..but if I am asked to be part of the committee I can't even say no..then, I have to donate more money, 100 bht (approximately £2.50) at least...I always jot down the names and the amount so that I can approach them in the future if I need their help.."*

The festivity usually takes place in the dry season after the harvest. The schedule of the trip however, must coincide with the official holidays in order for the workers to participate. One or two bus loads of workers (sometimes from several factories) make up the Pabha procession to the designated village. The day's events juxtapose the local form of entertainment at the reception with the religious ceremony. They culminate in the sensual explosion on the temple fair ground at night. Early in the evening a dancing session or 'ramwong' will be staged as part of the fund-raiser. But the highlight of the event is the Luktoong performance (hired from the nearby city) and the cinema that concludes at dawn. In the morning, the 'city guests' return to the temple for a more solemn ceremony before their departure. The target of the fund-raising is announced and further donations may be made prior to the final blessing.

The organisation of religious festivities such as the Pabha is legitimised as part of the popular tradition. The workers reinforce it by asking for contribution from members of the staff and the employer and vice versa with some workers made donations to Pabha organised by the employer. In this context, their conflict of interests was diffused by a common religion and by the 'paternalistic' relations predominant in the factory and in the general social structure. Significantly however, the workers and the employer no longer exchanged contributions to the Pabha festivity after unionisation in 1981.

The watershed that subverted these traditional forms of control was prompted by the social transformation in the mid-1970s, brought about by the political upheaval of the 'democratic era' and the proclamation of the new Labour Law of 1975 by the civilian government. In this new milieu, institutionalised control began to be challenged (see also 2.5). For the workers of Aporn Textile, the conflict intensified when the rate of growth deteriorated during the economic recessions of the 1970s. Lay-offs and the tightened control at work led to a spontaneous walk-out in 1975. But it is not until after a series of discontents erupted in the workplace and in the domestic sphere that the workers started to organise themselves.

### The Unionisation of the Aporn Textile Workers

- 1957      -The incorporation of the Aporn Textile weaving factory in the Klongtan area
  
- 1971-      -The expansion of Aporn Textile into a weaving and spinning  
1972      factory at Samrong
  
- The total workforce numbered 556 (320 women)
  
- 1975      -The first '*spontaneous*' walk-out led by the male technician
  
- The workers receive a 0.50 baht wage increment
  
- 1980      -Approximately 300 women workers protest against the new house-keeper for introducing stringent disciplinary control in the dormitories
  
- The employer fires the house-keeper after two successive demonstrations
  
- 1981      -Approximately 800 workers petition for a fairer contract based on the Labour Law of 1975 but the proposal is rejected
  
- The '*54-day strike*' is the first industrial dispute involving legal negotiations
  
- The workers receive a 150 baht monthly living expense as against the 600 baht asked for
  
- The system of payment is changed to a combination of wages plus production performance
  
- The success of the legal negotiation leads to the unionisation of the workers
  
- 1985      -The shift-workers demand a higher rate of increment for those with more than 5 years of service
  
- The negotiation resulted in a 3-baht increment instead of the proposed 4 baht

\* Since unionisation, negotiations take place every other year with the mutual agreement of the union and the employer, despite the legal stipulation of a yearly contract

The workers' first defiance in 1975 coincided with the general explosion of working class and peasant movements during 1974-1976. The few day-workers, male technicians, led the walk out without first informing the shift-workers. They cut the power before the lunch break and *"had to practically chase the women workers out of the buildings"*. The workers were told that it was a walk out and that other factories were doing the same to bargain for a wage increase and other benefits. While the talk was still going on the employer swiftly set up negotiations with the head of the day workers (all male). They settled for a 0.50 baht increment in the daily wage. Production resumed right away in the afternoon. The increment was however, cancelled three years later without any further protest from the workers.

The second confrontation occurred in 1980 when a new house-keeper (with a nursing certificate) was appointed to the women dormitories as a member of staff, as opposed to the previous supervisor-cum-house-keeper. Stringent controls on dining and cleanliness were instituted. Workers were prohibited from dining inside or in front of their rooms. Although a new dining area was provided the workers defied the new measure arguing that the dining area was too small to seat all the workers on any one shift. Confusion resulted in disciplinary action being taken by the house-keeper. Within their bedrooms, the workers used to dine in their own style or mix some of their authentic dishes, but constant surveillance reduced this area of *'freedom'* in their private sphere.

Discontent was wide spread. Tactics such as gossip, mockery or booing were ineffective in restoring *"human dignity against humiliation"*. With the assistance of a couple of supervisors and senior workers, 300 women workers staged a sit-in in front of the general office, but when the manager appeared, they were unable to state their case.

*"We were scared stiff. We did not know what to say or how to say it. Some of us were ready to leave when the employer said if we had nothing to say we should go back. One or two senior workers started to cry and slowly began to tell the employer what happened. Then a few more workers joined in."*

The workers' demand for the removal of the house-keeper was not met, despite the manager's promise to solve the problem within three days. Unsuccessful but undeterred, the workers resumed their sit-in and not only confirmed their original demand but set a new ultimatum. The employer was asked to *"choose between the long serving workers or the new house-keeper."* The demand was finally granted. In this incident, protest that began as simply a domestic problem was eventually connected to the sphere of work, albeit reluctantly. As one respondent recalled,

*"..we can't bear the house-keeper's contemptuous attitude..but our retaliation don't seem to get us anywhere...the thing is we decide that we must win this game, only we don't know how..we don't want to go to the manager because it might have a serious effect on our work...well, there is no other way.. some of us say it is a personal problem it should be all right..we really don't want to mix it with work.."*

Although respondents tended to down play the first walk-out in 1975, as opposed to their self-organised rebellion, both incidents provided the necessary experience for new actions. In 1981, the workers, with outside assistance, organised their first major industrial dispute. The entire workforce was united despite the hierarchical division of work and gender (with those opposing the move agreeing to take a neutral stand). On the basis of the alternative networks, a small group of leaders were able to mobilise 841 workers to sign the petition.

The industrial dispute was prompted by low wages and poor working conditions. It was only in 1980 that the employer began to comply with the legal minimum wage of 54 bht/day. But equally important was the example set by similar factories in the area during 1975-1980. Through strike actions, workers from twenty one textile factories had been able to achieve better working conditions and were subsequently unionised. The working conditions at Aporn Textile appeared particularly poor in comparison, especially when workers in the neighbouring factory were receiving a higher wage plus a 200 bht/month living expense.

Although the large majority of the women workers were dissatisfied with their conditions they felt unequipped for such a decisive move, and turned to the day-workers for leadership. Since male workers have a higher level of education the women workers felt that they could be 'depended on'. Using both insinuation and persuasion, the male workers agreed to collaborate. But they too lacked knowledge of the legal negotiation procedures as well as experience in self-organisation. Contact with senior unionists in the area was made and the whole process was guided step-by-step. The basic demand was for a 600 bht/month living allowance and reform of the payment system from piece work to a combination of wages plus production performance. The initial negotiation, lasting 15 days, failed to achieve any of the proposed demands. On the contrary, the employer used every tactic to break up the negotiations. Consequently, the workers resorted to the final option of staging a strike.

The division of labour, between male/day-worker and female/shift-worker, was apparent during the entire period of the industrial dispute including the '54-day strike'. Although the women workers made up half the representatives in the negotiating team, they relied on the male leaders for decisions. Whilst the former provided the 'brains' the latter 'organised and reassured'. There was also a sizeable discursive gap between the women representatives and the employer. However, this was overcome by emotional outburst, as one respondent described;

*"..we were at the negotiating table day in and day out..I don't understand half of what they say any way..our friends are outside giving us support but I am still afraid..one day after a very long talk I begin to feel the employer is tricking us..they want to drag it on and on..I got very angry and all of a sudden, I burst out in my dialect..I told them exactly what I think..they were completely shocked..you see, I didn't know how I did it..my friends said I was brave..but they thought it was funny to speak Laos at a negotiation..then, we broke up for the day.."*

This use of the vernacular in contesting the legal mode of address was however, delegitimised since the terms of reference for the negotiations were formed by the Labour Law of 1975. More importantly, the negotiation was presided over by the arbiter from the local labour office whose suggestion for a settlement openly reinforced the employer's position. In addition, there was no legal advisor on the workers' negotiation team whilst the employer was equipped with the company's lawyer and a battery of economic and production statistics.

The '54-day strike' that followed was strenuous for the women organisers and strikers. They attempted different means of fund-raising to top-up the donations from their comrades in the textile and other industries. Among others, the workers sought financial assistance from Luktoong singers. They were certain that their idols would not turn them down, and were disappointed when a couple of them decline to contribute. Funding was a serious problem as the strike wore on. Nearing the end, the number of workers at the site was reduced to around 200, and the others were told to rely on their families until further notice.

The male leaders educated themselves by reading and learning from their unionist friends, and most of all, from their own experience in the negotiation process. After the struggle had been won the gender divisions were re-affirmed in the structure of the executive committee and the working of the union for example, with male members taking decision-making positions whilst women act as back-up. In 1985, although a senior woman worker was elected president



after her predecessor resigned, the majority of the executive committee continued to rely on the previous president's advice and appointed him as union consultant. His influence, on the question of economic struggle and political strategies, remained strong and the role of the new president was mainly concentrated in the areas of social and cultural activities. But as we have seen, it was basically the women workers who pressed for reform. This was also true of the later dispute in 1985, in which more sophisticated strategies of subversion were used including the use of symbolic protest.

The dispute in 1985 focused on demands for a differentiation in the wages between the new shift-workers and those with over five years of service. The small annual increase of 1-2 baht, coupled with the basic rate that the senior workers were receiving, brought wages level to the official minimum wage of 70 bht/day, which by law also applied to new workers. Although opinion was divided 76% of the ballot was for action. When the initial negotiation broke down, the union, led by the consultant, devised a series of symbolic actions combined with a slow-down of production in the workplace. Although the week-long mourning deeply stigmatised the employer, negotiations were not resumed. The decisive strategy centred on disrupting the production process with spinners discreetly speeding up whilst weavers slow down. The action damaged production by 10-20%, and continued for two weeks before the employer agreed to a 3 baht increase for the senior workers.

This dispute required close cooperation from all the shift-workers. Since it was the first subversive act in the workplace itself the '*core organiser*' had to reassure as well as mobilise the workers in her specific section. The personal relations in the alternative networks were crucial in overcoming fear of authority, and producing the necessary moral support. On the other hand, counter-alternative groups aligned with the employer threatened to expose the illegitimate action. Consequently, although the successful outcome forged new solidarities tensions from the countervailing forces constantly undermined them.

### **The problems and tension of transformation**

Since the unionisation in 1981, the minimum economic rights of the workers are guaranteed and self-organisation in the workplace and the domestic sphere is legitimised. The union however, must continue the struggle on at least two fronts. Firstly, it must defend its members from any illegitimate exploitation by the employer. Secondly, it must preserve and expand the extent of oppositional space among its members. In the wake of this transformation, both tasks are

met with conflicting reaction if not outright resistance. The initial 54-day strike in 1981 was the key moment when the majority of the displaced peasantry overcome their subordination. As one respondent explained;

*"..before the strike I didn't know that we have the right to demand a fair wage or other benefits, I think it all depends on the employer, if it is too little I must spend less..I am always afraid of the supervisor..I do whatever I am told 'cause if I don't I may be punished..I have seen what happened to my friends.."*

The union's successive 'victories' in defending the economic rights of the workers and securing improvements in living conditions, especially in the dormitories, becomes the key mobiliser. Situated in the structure of control of the factory the workers are deprived of family support systems, either economic or social. As one respondent described,

*"..I don't have my family here..when I am in trouble I can't turn to anyone for help..the few friends I have are not enough to bargain with the employer..we pay 10 bht/month for membership fees and 30 bht for the strike fund..I think it's not much..the union solves many problems for us.."*

The union is now the main source of economic as well as social support for the displaced workers. Within its five year life-time in the factory, 90% of the workers have been unionised.<sup>1</sup> But the problem of class cohesiveness remains to be overcome, although the Aporn Union is known as one of the more active in the Phrapadaeng/Samrong industrial zone.

The Union has launched two programmes to achieve this task. The 'serious' programme is designed to strengthen the oppositional discourse. This mainly involves internal and external education programmes on trade unionism. Reading materials and seminar papers are available at the union office. Two newspapers, one popular and one quality, are placed in the new reading room in the women's dormitories. Committee members and active union members are encouraged to join relevant workshop or seminar organised by the Union Congresses or the Civil Liberty Union. The second programme, is concerned with social and cultural activities among union members as well as between unions. These Union sponsored activities such as sports, funerals or Pabha to selected unionist's village, are designed to coincide with popular tradition and

---

<sup>1</sup> Unionisation is legalised by the Labour Law of 1975 (its first legalisation in 1956 was short-lived) but the majority of industrial workers remain non-unionised. In the textile industry for example, there are 67 unions for a workforce of 567,765 (Termsrisuk, 1985). Among them, 36 unions, with a total membership of 22,165, are active (Patchimwet, 1986).

reinforce alternative spaces by integrating social networks into the oppositional realm.

However, these strategies must be constantly negotiated and renewed. The education programme aimed at 'empowering' the workers is received with less than enthusiasm. Sessions on the Labour Law, or trade unionism, are not well attended. By contrast, the social and cultural activities are more welcomed. As one respondent pointed out;

*"..most of the workers are willing to participate in the social and cultural events..they'd trade places with their friends to join the activities but they would not do the same or take a leave of absence to come to the education sessions.."*

As the President further described;

*"..I think our members are very cooperative..they pay the membership fees regularly which is one of our strengths..if we arrange other activities most would give their support, by contribution or participation..they generally don't like to attend to Union meetings..but that doesn't mean they don't care or are not well informed either..you see, they will have one or two people from the same room or the same section at the meeting so that they know what is going on..if we want to sound an opinion or to make a move we also get overwhelming support..the strong resistance we used to get in the early days is softened since they know we really represent their interests..but what worries me is the indifference towards finding out more on trade unionism, or self-help..the members seem to rely almost completely on the Union..it's good and it's bad..see what I mean?"*

These quotations illuminate how the workers' emerging collective consciousness co-exists with the pattern of practices formed by their prior dispositions. As we have seen, the tension between them produces a variety of actions and reactions, sometimes progressive and sometimes conservative. The structure of control in the workplace and in the private sphere for example, are at once resisted and re-structured in this transformation process. On the other hand, limiting demands for economic rewards according to the pleas of the employer, the workers acquiesce to the general structure of production. In addition, the gender hierarchy is reproduced without serious challenged.

## 10.2 Women Workers and Media Activities in Everyday Life

This section looks at the media activities of the workers in relation to their material conditions, in the factory and the suburban milieu. In attempting to understand their dynamics we focus particularly on the articulation between economic constraints and the changing cultural practices of the displaced peasantry.

Table 12  
Dispositions of Respondents

No	Sex	Family	Region	Ethnic	Education	Age	Employment@	Marital status	Union membership
1	F	P*	Central	Chinese/Thai	Secondary	28	8	S	core
2	F	P	East	Thai	Primary	28	10	S	core
3	F	P	N/E	Laos/Thai	Primary	30	10	S	core
4	F	P	N/E	Laos/Thai	Primary	22	4	S	active
5	M	W**	Local	Thai	Primary	22	4	engaged	active
6	M	P	Central	Thai	Primary	23	2	S	active
7	F	P	N/E	Laos/Thai	Primary	22	3	married	regular
8	F	P	North	Thai	Primary	32	9	S	core
9	F	P	N/E	Laos/Thai	Primary	22	2	S	active

@ = number of years of employment

P\* = peasant, W\*\* = working class

- a) All of the respondents from peasant background, except respondent 3, are middle land-holders who farm by double-cropping and hiring labour for ploughing and harvesting.
- b) Single respondents live in the dormitories provided by the employer. Married couples live in rented rooms close to the factory.
- c) 'Core' union members are represented on the collective bargaining committee or members of the executive committee. 'Active' members are section co-ordinators or organisers of union activities.

### A collective biography

All of the nine respondents (and the six extras) are shift-workers. The women live in four different rooms in the dormitories. They are spinners and weavers from two separate shifts. The respondents are mostly peasants or from a peasant background, with only primary education. There are two exceptions. Respondent (5) comes from a local working-class family and respondent (1) has secondary education. They all belong to the first generation to enter the factory, though some have followed the example of their sisters and brothers who left the villages a few years before them. Respondent (3) for instance, is the second of twelve children from a very poor peasant family. She came to the factory after her elder sister sent for her. This is also true of respondents (2) and (6). Respondent (8) from the north was recruited by her aunt, a senior worker, who is now the president of Aporn Union. Similarly, respondent (5) was accepted into the factory through the kinship system. Although most left home for economic reasons there are specific variations. For respondents (4) and (9), who decided to run away from their arranged marriage, the double standard was the compelling motivation. For respondents (2) and (6), working in the factory was an opportunity to "*broaden their horizon*".

For respondent (1) her secondary education has created problems in the village and the factory. She came to the factory because she failed to enter the teachers' training college. She is "*ashamed of her schoolmates who became local government officials and teachers*". At the same time, she is, in her own words, "*too educated to be a peasant*". She attempted suicide before deciding to leave her family and the peasant community. At the factory, she had to file the application twice since the personnel manager was suspicious of her qualifications (indicated by her wit and good hand-writing although she put down '*primary school leaver*' on the form). In her first few years there, she was chosen for special duties such as reception, along with a small number of workers. Her close relation with the employer attracted distrust when the industrial dispute broke out in 1981. During the strike, she was one of the representatives on the negotiation team, but her loyalty was constantly put to test until she was proven to be genuinely one of the workers. She became a militant member of the Union and is, more or less, an influential figure among our group of respondents.

Respondent (5) lives with his family, but has a place in the dormitory as well as spending the nights at the union office (members take turn to look after the

office). This unbroken family tie plays a key role in his decisions concerning work and his involvement with the Union. He became a union member only after receiving approval from his aunt who is a senior supervisor in the spinning room but was told to "*stay out of militant activities*". As a result, he keeps largely to his entertaining role as a guitarist. Whilst joining the Union is legitimised, the connection with external oppositional groups is not. He follows the line of division between the economic and the political struggle held in his family. His view of the student movement (as he was taught by his grandmother) for example, coincides with the conservatism of the Right. Despite the close relation of the Union and the present Student Movement, for him the political upheaval led by the student in 1973-1976 is part of the Communist plot to destroy the '*nation*'.

The political positions adopted by respondents (1) and (5) exemplifies the polarity between radicals and conservatives among members of the Union in general and, not least, within the leadership. This also overlaps with the dichotomy between serious versus entertainment in the workers' media activities. In this case however, the gender hierarchy is reversed. Although the '*radicals*' dismiss popular culture as trivial and avoid discussing the topic as much as possible, outside of the structured sessions, we observed their continued loyalty to certain forms of pop culture. They are fans of Thai films just as their colleagues are. Respondent (2) for example, goes to the Union office to listen to her favourite romance and thriller dramas in private. Respondents (1) and (3) on the other hand, listen to the prime-time dramas with one of their room-mates who tunes in on the drama station, *Wor Por Tor Radio*, most of the time.

Nonetheless, the '*radicals*' emphasised their distance from the politically indifferent pop fans by recruiting six extras respondents for me to talk to. These were either room-mates, relatives, or friends from the same alternative network. They were all enthusiastic consumers of pop culture such as Pleng Luktoong, radio drama, and women's magazines. But unfortunately, they were somewhat overshadowed by their recruiters so the discussion with them was limited to one session on general patterns of media consumption.

### The changing pattern of media activities

From the information provided by the workers and my own observations, the structural control of production and the level of income limited the range and pattern of media activities. The weekly rotation of shift work for example, hinders the *regular* consumption of certain forms of the media such as radio

drama and the prime-time soap opera. It is via the alternative networks in the domestic sphere that some of the constraints are modified. The workers fill one another in on the story-line through talking, as respondent (2) explained;

*"..of course, when I miss an episode I must ask my friends how the story goes, when it will end, and all that...I can only watch it in the evening when I work the night and morning shifts, not in the afternoon shift....my friends would do the same when they miss the programme and I'd tell them all about it (highly enthusiastic tone)...we always chat about dramas and films, you know.."*

There is however, one senior spinner who brings her transistor radio into the factory to listen to the drama when she works the afternoon shift. It happened after the unionisation in 1981. This exceptional case is condoned by the section supervisor so long as it does not *"interfere with or effect the production"*.

Another significant constraint is the lack of electricity in the women dormitories. This is modified in several ways. First of all, workers buy locally made transistor radios (with AM band only) which consume less power. Secondly, listening in with one another further reduces the cost of batteries. This is evident in the room of respondents (1) and (3) in which only a single set is usually on. Although respondent (3) has a radio cassette with a digital clock, given to her by her lover who works in Saudi Arabia, she mainly uses it as a watch. For those who own an electric radio/cassette player heavy listening is concentrated on Sunday.

In this milieu, media consumption, particularly of radio and television, becomes a public activity as respondent (1) explained,

*"..although I don't have a radio I could hear the prime-time drama from nearly every room as I walk along the corridor...some take their sets into the bath so they can bathe and listen, and chat at the same time..."*

This communal pattern of media consumption means that collective tastes take precedence over personal preference. Although it is apparently a continuation of the communal pattern of media consumption common among the peasantry, in the factory context the power over the 'choice' of programme shifts from the family and the village hierarchy to a comparatively horizontal structure. It is also more gender based, particularly in the case of television, as respondent (2) described;

*"..I used to watch a lot of television when I first came, all sorts - dramas and films...but not anymore...I am annoyed with people zapping*

*between channels and then I don't really get to watch what I want...when I try to switch channel others don't like it..I am tired of fighting over the telly...I don't like this kind of interruption...I sometimes go to the Union office to watch the weekend shows instead, or go to the cinema..."*

This does not preclude the co-existence of public consumption with private taste however. Workers may opt in or out of the arena, or she/he may participate in a media activity without sharing exactly the same taste. Respondents (2) and (3) for example, go to the cinema together with some friends as a group, although their specific tastes are different from one another. In addition, the cyclical production of the mass media is a built-in complementary system. The popular radio dramas are made into films and vice versa. For television, the scripts of the soap operas on channels 7 and 3 for example, are printed in the two major popular newspapers. One of my pop fan respondents preferred to read the soap operas in the papers provided in the reading room. Sometimes she buys the second newspaper, *Daily News*, to follow a different story. This is also circulated among friends.

Whereas drama is enjoyed largely in silence, music explodes in emotional and physical sensuality. The constrictive pattern apparent in the consumption of 'women's genres' takes on a comparatively diversified direction in pop music. It is a public activity in which personal tastes compete against one another. On Sunday, several radios or cassettes are usually on at the same time, 'blasting away' music from a variety of programmes or vocalists. The two popular Luktoong stations on the AM band that the workers tune in to most are **Sor Tor Ror Radio** (The Voice of the Navy) and **Por Tor Or Radio** (The Army Artillery Radio). By combining listening with chatting and singing, the domestic work of ironing and washing is invested with pleasure. At the same time, differences in musical taste contribute to antagonisms between fans of different stars.

*"..there are about 20-25 in our group...we go to Surachai's concert..he is our idol so we think his music is the best, and his concert is the most glamorous..of course, the other fan club thinks that Sayan Sanya is better..we are at odds with each another.."*

The availability of a wide range of media in the area around the factory compensates for some of the structural constraints inside it. This is in stark contrast to the lack of access in the rural areas. Ownership of a television set in poor peasant families is rare. One third of our respondents did not have access to a television before they came to work in the factory. In addition, beyond the Central Plain, reception is limited to a maximum of two channels.



In the factory, the workers are able to switch between all four channels to watch the soap operas. Newspapers are another rarity in the village. As one respondent recounted, *"what newspapers!..we never see or read one..it usually comes in wrapping if we get it at all.."*. Respondent (3) added that, *"peasants like us don't buy newspapers, only the village head or teachers do"*.

The provision of television (by the employer) and the newspapers (by the Union), coupled with the independent income and the relief from domestic chores for other members of the family, enable the women workers to have access to new forms of mass media. But the large majority remain loyal to the *'women's genre'* of romance as opposed to the *'serious genres'* of news and literary reading. As noted earlier, the trade union's efforts to introduce new cultural competence into the workers' discursive formation are continually blocked by the fact that the women prefer to read the entertainment and the front page of Thai Rath, the popular newspapers, which contain news of the stars and programmes of popular culture and juicy news reports of crimes. By contrast, they consider the quality newspapers, *Matichon*, as *'too intellectual'* since they are unable to match their cultural competence to its vernacular. The only kind of news the workers' tune in to are the popular news commentary programmes such as *Soon Ruam Kao*, *Ying Thai Kai Kao* or *Kao Si Mum Baan* on the grounds that they are *"entertaining, not so boring like the official news"*.

All the evidence we were able to gather suggests that the serious genres are largely ignored. Although two respondents indicated that they ~~listen to~~ Phra Payom's cassette sermons (in a comedy style), nobody tuned in to either *Siam Manusati* or *Pua Pandin Thai*, produced by the military. Male workers are more inclined to read literate newspapers and magazines, but pornography and war magazines are also highly popular in the male dormitory. They are also keen on the entertainment programmes on the broadcast media. Their preference is for the *'male genres'* including sports (boxing) and action-adventure dramas, together with variety shows, concerts and comedy.

Some women workers read the *'3 for 10 romance'* and the women's magazines such as *Kulasatri* or *Chiwit Rak*. But as one of the pop fan respondent informed me, this pattern is well established prior to entering the factory, and extends to the few who have a higher level of education. One of my respondents, a core member, has a room-mate who loves reading romance. She finds this *'individual'* mode of consumption not only a novel experience but highly fascinating. As she put it,

"..I can't understand why my friend lies there reading stacks of romance all the time..I wonder what good does it do...so, I ask her....she told me to try..well, I think I read one of them...not bad, but I still prefer radio drama or soap opera 'cause they are easier..umh, quicker for me..."

Popular entertainment in broadcasting continues to be the major form of media activities for the bulk of the workers. The significant change is the incorporation of 'modern style' of television drama and music into the consumption pattern. The public 'choice' in television drama for example, alternates between Channel 7, the popular channel, and Channel 3, the upper and middle classes channel. During the observation period, the women chose Channel 3 because it was coming up to the climax episode of *Majurat Sinampung*. Zapping to *Masya* on Channel 7 was over-ruled by shouting and jeering. For music, the women workers watch the live concerts of both the Luktoong and the String genres. Answers from the questionnaires also indicate a preference for Luktoong and Lukkroong singers in their selection of music radio programmes and cassette albums.

The general preference for the oral and visual media over the literate media, coincides with the workers' educational disposition as well as with the centrality of the 'oral tradition' of the peasantry. Talking remains the main means through which the workers exchange information, at work and in the domestic sphere. Oppositional discourse mediated largely by the Union continues to be diffused orally. This is reinforced by the fact that the alternative networks operate almost exclusively on word-of-mouth.

#### Division and cross-over in the production of meanings

Whilst the one-way representations of the dominant ideology in forms such as the official news, the military commentary and the religious sermon are simply ignored, within the forms they do consume the workers devise mechanisms that allow for the maximisation of pleasure and the variation of meanings or the multiaccentuality of interpretations (Volosinov, 1973). This is possible by traversing between emotional immersion and critical distance and between the world of fiction and reality. Or by the process of 'aberrant decoding' (Eco, 1981) in which the 'preferred meaning' offered by the text is challenged. The transmission of ideology is thus in collision with the notion of pleasure inherent in popular culture.

Most of the pop entertainment fans for example, prefer 'happy ending' stories and generally identify with the heroes and the heroines. As one respondent

pointed out, *"a tragic ending is too depressing although we must face it sometime"*. Another respondent said she rarely sided with the 'bad guys' in the dramas or the films. In the drama **Kamsang Sawan** (see 7.4 for details) for example, the political theme is subsumed under the love story. Our respondent is intensely immersed in the relationship between the Princess and the hero. Whilst she described in some detail the misunderstanding between the lovers. The political struggle interwoven into the romance is only mentioned in passing with the comment that, *"...they will surely overcome all the obstacles..."*. But as the following instances illustrate, although the women workers are inclined towards emotional immersion in their production of meanings particularly in romance, they are compelled to confront the question of the articulation between pleasure and discourse at some points within the cultural products on offer. In the process, the interrelations between the world of texts and the 'oral information network' of the workers, establish connections between pleasure and discourse and fiction and reality.

The examples I want to present are taken from discussions with our first group of respondents. In their efforts to present a 'serious' image of themselves they tended to devalue romance (in every form of representation) and to nominate 'artistic' or politically explicit films for discussion. These include; **Nampu** (the story of a teenage heroine addict); **Tongpun Kokpo** (the Thai version of *Taxi Driver*); and **Wiraburut Kongkaya** (the story of a poor Border Patrol officer). Discussion of the film **Mia Tang** (a love triangle, also a radio drama), which we attended together, was avoided. Instead, the respondents choose to discuss **Kamsing** and **The Killing Fields** in some detail. In the following discussion of **Kamsing**, respondents (1) and (2) related the story to other members of the group who did not attend the film.

**Kamsing** is a film about a poor peasant who fled his village after he assaulted his creditor. He took up boxing in the capital city of Bangkok but was arrested and imprisoned. The hero's mother entered a nunnery with deep resentment. He went back to the boxing ring after he was released from prison and finally won his championship.

- (2) *"...Kamsing worked in the kitchen while he was imprisoned..this scene, his top is naked... then he went into the shower, another prisoner came to hug him (giggling and interruption - is he a gay?)..he fought but that man said it made him felt good..the warden came and put Kamsing in solitary confinement..."*
- (1) *"...it's terrible...the police (the warden is collapsed into the same authority figure as the police) hit him in the middle of his back several times...it's not right..."*

- (2) *"They were wrong to fight in the first place."*
- (1) *"They over-did it...they did not even find out the facts...I am sure they framed him."*
- (2) *"I don't think so. Kamsing didn't speak up... even if he did do you think the warden would believe him?"*
- (1) *"But they did not even ask, remember?"*
- (2) *"Yeh, they just hit him."*
- (1) *"His mates saw what happenned but they all kept quiet...they just stood watching."*

The respondents disagree among themselves as to whether the extra penalty is justified, although both share a deep sympathy with the plight of the hero. Their emotional immersion in the story is extended into reality in two ways. Comments such as *"unfair treatment"* or *"sheer exploitation"*, made while viewing, are related to the employer/employee relation in their own immediate context. Secondly, although their opinion on the main theme converges with the *'preferred meaning'*, they add their version of the story to it. This generates pleasure at the same time as the imagined reality is fulfilled. The following discussion is on Kamsing's final championship match.

- (2) *"I think he was going to die."*
- (1) *"I think he was going to lose. I couldn't guess the ending, honestly. In the trailer he was cornered by the former champion."*
- (2) *"But I want him to win. If he lost the match, he's got nothing left in life. I heard the bloke behind me said Kamsing would win."*
- (1) *"There would be nothing left since he's already a nobody."*
- (2) *"He wanted to do something. To be famous, to be rich. And he did it for his mother's sake."*
- (1) *"I think he ought to win. Why should he die? If he lost that match there would be another match. The story would have to go on. He has to win. If he lost the first match he would win the next one. That's what I think."*
- (2) *"He has to win because he always lost. In real life I think he would win also. He has a strong will. When we are determined to win we'd most probably succeed, don't you think?"*

The Killing Fields was screened as a double bill coupled with a Thai film so that the respondents saw the film unintentionally. They had some foreknowledge

of the story however. One respondent saw part of a documentary on how the film was made. The other learned from a friend who read about it in the papers. This 'true story' is discussed in a more serious tone compared to discussions of other popular programmes. But although critical distance and emotion are tightly intertwined the former is clouded by compassion during viewing.

**The Killing Fields** is based on the story of an American foreign correspondent and his translator in Kampuchea in 1975. After its liberation by the Khmer Rouge the city was evacuated and foreigners deported. The reporter from *The Washington Post* was unable to secure a passport for his Khmer translator. The latter was sent to the 'killing fields' in the countryside. He later escaped across the border to Thailand where he was finally reunited with his American friend.

(3) *"I am so scared for the translator."*

(1) *"Yeh, the whole time."*

(3) *"Like when they were developing the photo, I can feel my heart pounding."*

---

(3) *"The film is so serious, it really makes you think..think hard."*

(1) *"We can't help them, but.."*

(3) *"I thought I would have died if it happened to me..there is no other way."*

(1) *"I think I would die many times over.."*

(3) *"I would be so frigtened..I don't think I can find a solution like he did.."*

(1) *"Remember that scene when the Khmer begged the soldiers not to kill the foreigner? He really cared for him.."*

(3) *"I cried during this scene..the film is so depressing..you know, I cried a lot.."*

Despite the fact that the respondents remember the film in great detail the 'political' context hardly emerged at all in the discussion, whereas their emotional involvement in the several escape scenes and in the friendship of the two main characters is repeatedly cited. They are totally submerged in the intensity of tragic feeling. In this case, critical distance is negated by the 'realism' of the film. But since it is established from the start that it is a dramatisation of 'facts', the audience are at once part and parcel of both the 'imagined' and the 'real', as the above dialogue indicates.

When we discussed the coup d'états of 1981 and 1985, opinions on the seriousness of the remembered reality are merged with strong feelings. The workers were clearly divided between radicalism and conservatism, hence, the dichotomies;

the coup	the government
the radicals	the conservatives
change	status quo

At the time, the women respondents had gathered round the radio sets upstairs listening to news from the coup organiser, whilst down stairs, the 'conservatives' watched the television announcements from the government of General Prem Tinasulanond. Witnessing the suspense in making and the unveiling of the coup was an intensively pleasurable experience. Our respondent described the atmosphere in the dormitories as *"hysterical"*.

(2) *"..we were all very excited, nearly hysterical I'd say.."*

(3) *"I think we were hoping the coup might win, but when they (the government) took control Sister Tiem said, bloody hell, the coup failed again.."*

By contrast, the male workers recalled that they were very quiet in front of the television set. Respondent (5) went home to follow the event. Respondent (6) read the newspapers the next day. During my discussion with them they talked earnestly and adopted a distanced position, whereas the women were totally involved. Their emotional immersion however, did not inhibit the discourse formed through this collective practice.

(6) *"I did not take side. I thought how could generals like Kriengsak and Serm do such a thing. I doubt if they were abducted as they claimed. Is it possible? Who would dare anyway?"*

.....

(3) *"We were on Serm's side (of the coup). But I really don't know why."*

(2) *"There were three labour leaders involved."*

(3) *"I think I hate Prem (the PM). Sister Tiem said let Serm be the winner. And then we put our heads together to talk about it."*

(2) *"The ones who watched the telly were on Prem's side. When Serm was defeated Prem's advocates said the coup was too violent. They said they shouldn't have shot at innocent people."*

- (1) *"I wonder if they are from Korat they seem to be crazy about him."*
- (3) *"Would Atit (former Commander-in-Chief) make a return?"*
- (1) *"Why can't anyone oust Prem?"*
- (3) *"I think Atit might succeed. He's got more soldiers."*
- (Q) *"Maybe someone changed his mind?"*
- (2) *"You mean betrayal?"*
- (1) *"Yeh."*
- (2) *"Did you ever see it in the movies? When the crunch comes they turn against one another. I think there is some truth in movies. Like in a rebellion or something, the masters would always make the plan and their henchmen work their heads off."*
- (4) *"You don't have to look very far, just here in our factory. Remember when we were trying to fight the house-keeper? Chuen and Luey were on our side in the beginning but then Luey betrayed us."*
- (3) *"Bloody betrayal!"*
- (1) *"Yeh, Luey had a row with Chuen. Chuen said Luey had changed and sobbed."*
- (2) *"I still think the coup failed too easily. There must be something wrong. They always said they'd help the working-class to get us on their side. Even if they didn't talk about (stop to find the proper word)...the economy, working-class and things like that I want to see what they'd do if they succeeded. I want to see some change. Otherwise, it's so static. No change, nothing could be done, it's bloody stupid!"*

In addition to collective confirmation, the articulation of the oppositional discourse with the workers' discursive formation contributes significantly to the ideological cross-over and the incongruity of pleasure and ideology. As respondent (1) pointed out,

*"In the last coup in 1981 I was whole-heartedly on Prem's side. After we have the union I think I begin to learn more about politics. When I was at home we were really out of touch. We don't have other sources of information so we believed what the government said on the radio (referring to the 1973 student revolt and 1976 student massacre)."*

Respondent (2) also described herself as *"better informed in politics because of the Union and the press"*.

As these examples show the divisions between the political positions adopted by the workers and their consumption of serious vs popular entertainment are capable of converging or remaining intact. The dynamics of audience activity in the consumption and production of pleasure and ideology guarantee neither mutual exclusion or synthesis. On the contrary, the cultural habitus is maintained whilst the articulation of new competences is gradually synthesised into a new formation.

### 10.3 Symbolic Power: Pleasure and Solidarity in Working Class Cultural Production

The workers' collective practices and the oral tradition central to pleasure seeking in everyday life, are taken a stage further when synthesised with the struggle in the public sphere. The workers express their class identity by disrupting and re-creating popular cultural forms, particularly music and drama. Despite the apparent divergences in the definitions and practices of pleasure in these spheres, the articulation of oppositional discourse after the unionisation in 1981 opened the way for a new cultural synthesis. The following examples contrast the mainstream with the emerging forms of alternative media. They illustrate how the incoherences complement and compete against one another in the formation of a working class culture.

#### The juxtaposition of popular forms for entertainment

Through the constant assertion of the male leadership of the Union, Carabao's music was adopted as the official definition of '*progressive*' entertainment in opposition to the bulk of hits and love songs. The ex-president, a local resident, was enrolled as a political science student at the Sukhotai Thammathirat Open University at the time of our study. His taste in popular culture and the familiarity with the literate media, reconfirmed the '*intellectual*' image of his role. His pop music preference for example, identified him with the Pleng Pua Chiwit of the intellectual and the Left. From the work of Carabao, he chooses the politically explicit songs, *Kon Jon Pu Yingyai* (The Great Poorman) or *Wanipok Panejon* (The Poor Wonderer), over the more humorous or satirical songs on the same albums. These are played on serious occasions such as Union meetings. But the incorporation of this oppositional-intellectual music as part of the attempt to establish an official definition of pleasure is far from straightforward in practice.

From our observations it was clear that the workers expressed their identity and sexual desire through pop music. The most popular hits of love and sex are



sung among the women workers and on social occasions. In a mixed milieu, love songs are the currency of sexual dialogue. Since male workers are outnumbered they are generally courted by the women. On the trip to the wedding ceremony of respondent (7) for example, the women workers sang a wide range of Luktoong love songs throughout the 7-hour journey. The handful of male workers at the back of the converted lorry were assigned the role of musicians. They beat the single drum and clapped to the rhythm of the songs. Respondent (9) and two other workers formed the core singers. Their selections were all from the hits of the day. Songs by the Luktoong superstar, Pumpuang, [from the albums *Haang Noi, Toi Nid* (Budge a Little) and *Krasae* (Come on, Boy!)], were obsessively repeated. The men attempted to play some tunes from the band Carabao but failed. When they could not finish the lyrics of *Kon Jon Pu Yingyai* (The Great Poorman) for example, the girls refused to help. The love and sex theme resumed after the men missed their chance to introduce more serious imagery. However, at the reception party on the eve of the wedding, Carabao's music was played along with other Luktoong songs (on the hi-fi set).

Music making during the Pabha procession to Kalasin on the other hand, juxtaposed Luktoong with Lukkroong songs and the northeastern popular tune of Mohlam. Although the love theme prevailed it was less prominent for a combination of reasons. The participants consisted of workers from two factories, among whom were a number of families with small children. In addition, some workers travelled with the group for part of the journey to their villages on the way.

At the start, the host (the elder brother) and hostess (the sister) working in two factories, had their separate plans for entertainment. The sister from Aporn Textile brought along a drum and her core singers (respondent 4 included) and a lot of booze for a 10-hour entertainment programme. The brother intended to present two videos, *Tekkoh* (a Thai film based on the life of a contemporary Don Juan who has six wives living together) and a Chinese kung-foo film. There was a long argument before a compromise was reached. The first part of the entertainment programme would be music and singing (and dancing along the aisle of the coach). The videos were shown after the break, half way through the journey. Workers seated at the front sang and clapped from time to time to the less physical tunes. The 'fun' was largely concentrated at the back of the coach. The singers attempted to announce their new class identity by singing Carabao's *Wanipok Panejon* (The Poor Wonderer) and *Kon Jon Pu Yingyai* (The Great Poorman), but they failed miserably as in our previous

illustration. At the temple ground the next evening however, Carabao's music was played on the hi-fi as a prelude to the Luktoong performance. Dancing or '*ramwong*' on the other hand, mixed the local music (a school band playing indigenous instruments) with Luktoong and Lukkroong music, though the hot dancing music of Pumpuang was excluded.

### Organising pleasure and solidarity in the public sphere

The disjuncture of the '*54-day strike*' at Aporn Textile in 1981, made the organisation of a new form of representation imperative. How could solidarity in the public sphere be sustained or intensified in this long and arduous struggle? Pop music became the essential medium that conjoined pleasure with the fighting spirit. The repertoire, consisting mainly of current Luktoong hits, provided the common cultural ground which all workers could easily identify with. The entertainment session in the evening was interspersed with updated information about the negotiation and '*popular rhetorics*' from the leadership and representatives of other trade unions.

Through the assistance of external senior unionists a number of protest songs and Pleng Pua Chiwit were juxtaposed with the pop music. These included; Saksri Kamakorn (Dignity of the Working Class), Su Mai Toi (No Retreat), Pleng Riekrong (Our Demand) and Sam Prasaan (The Three Coalition). But a new addition specific to the conditions of the strike was created on this occasion. The erotic song, Jud Tien (Light the Candle), was translated into the oppositional discourse.

#### JUD TIEN (LIGHT THE CANDLE)

We continue to strike for there is no settlement  
They said '*fifty baht*', we said '*peanuts*'  
They said '*we are a big family*', quite rightly,  
The children starve and stare,  
Our bald-headed Papa is coming in his Mercedes

We shall go on, fear not, my friends,  
For we shan't retreat without a fair settlement

Although the erotic content of Jud Tien was transformed, its tune continued to provide pleasure whilst being articulated with the new satirical and defiant lyric. This and other protest songs emerged as expressions of collective identity against the structure of control. However, the verse mocking the employer was later withdrawn on his request and workers were told that the insinuation might damage the negotiations.

On the first anniversary of the Union, a Charlie Chaplin sketch was organised. Respondent (2) who acted the part recalled, *"the funny looking outfit and the acting that makes everyone laugh"*. In these early years, the entertainments at various official occasions were mostly based on music and comedy. They coincided largely with the 'male genre' preferred by the male leadership. The turn towards the 'women's genres' was prompted by the new woman president elected in 1984 who assumes a social and cultural role.

The present duality in the leadership of the Union follows the division between male/intellectual and female/social, and parallels the serious vs entertainment dichotomy within media activities. Their counter-positions were clearly visible during our study, but paradoxically, the gender hierarchy in this case was fundamental to the creation of a new cultural synthesis that aligned more with the women's discourse.

The President, in her youth, grew up around the Likae theatre in which her uncle was the main performer. For a short while, she was married to a Likae actor and was an actress herself. This artistic background, that she had ran away from, was invoked during the disjuncture of the industrial dispute. It became the necessary link in articulating a popular form of representation with struggle in the economic sphere.

Likae is a form of popular theatre that juxtaposes the arts of singing, music and dancing with dialogue. Like other popular forms, it is entertainment with a critical edge on everyday life and high culture. Its semiotic excess in over-dressing and over-acting for example, is a parody of the socially cultivated. In Likae narratives, kings and queens are fools and the subject of mockery (P. Wongtes, 1984). During the military regimes of the 1960s and early 1970s, Likae was used as a form of social and political critique and it has become a convention for students and intellectuals to incorporate Likae into their opposition discourse (Hiranburana, 1977).

Given this tradition, it is not surprising that Likae was chosen as the favoured form of cultural expression at the general meeting of the Aporn Union in 1985. The resulting productions are pastiches of everyday modernism since they have to compete against as well as be compatible with mainstream popular entertainment. In the two Likae productions that we observed, there was an apparent divergence in the ways in which a variety of popular forms and techniques were synthesised. Although the dual questions of class and gender are addressed they are carefully contextualised for the particular occasion and the specific audience.

The President formed a group of workers (respondents 2 and 9 included) for the performances of the epic story *Khun Chang, Khun Pan* and the folk tale of *Jantakorop*. While respondent 2 was encouraged to try out, both respondent 9, acting the parts of the heroes, and the heroine were familiar with singing Likae. As a result of her prominent acting, respondent (9) was removed from her position in the spinning room and made into a floating replacement for absentees. Her active participation in the Union's cultural activities was seen as a serious '*breach of trust*' by her recruiter who is a senior supervisor sympathetic to the employer.

The episode from *Khun Chang, Khun Pan*, "*Saneh Soifa*", depicts the story of a triangular relationship between Khun Pan's son, Jamun Wai, and his two wives, Srimala and Soifa. The latter used black magic to win the love of her husband. She was prosecuted by the King after she lost in the '*fire of truth*' ritual. The play was staged as part of the entertainment programme at the 1985 general meeting of the trade union and repeated for the general meeting of a nearby textile union the following year. Both *Khun Chang, Khun Pan* and *Jantakorop* dramatise the double standard of sexual relations in which a sexually active woman is condemned as whore. The choice coincided with the women workers' preference for romance and the recurrent dramatisation of love and sex in the popular media.

Although the Likae adaptation of *Khun Chang, Khun Pan* followed the original story-line, the narrative was re-scripted for a working class audience. The major parts were made up of a mixture of Pleng Luktoong and simple dialogue (in place of the Likae verses or the poems from the manuscript). The actors were fully dressed in the glittering Likae costumes but the acting was sometimes perfect and at other times, improvised. The audience enjoyed this traversing between the two planes of acting. They showered the amateur actors with garlands and money in the tradition of popular theatre. In this performance, the play began with a four-verse prelude celebrating the solidarity of the working class and then proceeded with the melodrama of "*Saneh Soifa*".

In contrast, *Jantakorop* was a first attempt to synthesise pleasure with the '*popular rhetoric*' of the economic struggle. It was produced for the strike workers of Thai Arrow Textile, at Rangsit industrial zone, in April, 1986. The President of Aporn Union was concerned to stage a pleasurable performance that was, "*not too serious or over imposing because it would be improper for the audience and for us as producer*". Yet the play had to be relevant to the strike situation. Interventions from the workers' intellectual allies favouring a

realist narrative were rejected. As producer and script-writer, the President placed the central characters firmly in the context of the industrial dispute. In this deconstruction of the original story the actors had to improvise parts of the narrative in relation to the negotiation process.

The performance of *Jantakorop* juxtaposed Pleng Luktoong with a narrative in the style similar to "*Saneh Soifa*". Everyday humour and satire were interwoven into the dialogue and counterposed against the Likae costumes and the combination of '*ranad*' (the xylophone used as the main musical instrument for Likae) and the rhythmic percussion of Luktoong.

## JANTAKOROP

Original characters		Amended characters
1 Hero	Jantakorop, the prince	Jantakorop, son of a working-class family
2 Woman	Mora, creation of the hermit	Mora, the heroine, a textile worker
3 Father	The king	A worker at Thai Ole factory
4 Villain	The bandit	A factory owner
5 Hermit	The prince's teacher	Jantakorop's teacher Graduate of Law, Thammasat University

## THE STORY OF JANTAKOROP

### The original

The King sent Jantakorop to study the arts of kingship with the hermit in the forest. Upon completion, he was given a casket to be opened when he arrived at the palace. Mora emerged when Jantakorop opened it on the journey. They encountered a bandit who demanded Mora. Both men got into a fight but Mora handed the dagger to the bandit. Jantakorop was killed and Mora went off with the bandit. In time, the bandit abandoned Mora for fear of her infidelity. Mora hailed a passing eagle who would give her meat in exchange for her body. She agreed but the eagle turned into the God Indhra. He condemned Mora as a whore and turned her into a monkey.

### The amended version

Jantakorop was sent to the hermit because his father was too poor to send him to the university. He missed home so the hermit used his third eye to find out what was happening. The hermit told Jantakorop that his father at the Thai Ole Textile was on strike. Jantakorop left with the casket. Mora emerged and they became man and wife. But Mora fell for the bandit/factory owner. Both men negotiated to settle the dispute. They signed a yearly contract for the possession of Mora. At the factory, Jantakorop found his father in good spirits. He and his comrades were ready to go on striking until a settlement was reached. Meanwhile, Mora refused to leave the factory owner. She denounced him before she returned to Jantakorop. But he disowned Mora. She finally confronted the audience to ask for their conciliation.

In this production, three quarters of the performance concentrated on the courting and love scenes between Jantakorop and Mora and the bandit. Whilst pop music was used as the major currency of the narrative, the producer contrasts their class relation by reversing the vernacular. The former is courted with Lukkroong tunes as opposed to the Luktoong used by the latter. Mora sings *Puchai Nai Fan* (The Man in My Dream) by the Luktoong superstar Pumpuang Duanjan to say how much she loved the factory owner. The play was however, anchored from the start in the class locations of the peasantry and the workers by its use of love songs that identify with peasants and factory girls.

By synthesising several devices the play's pleasure is maximised. The production of meaning is forever teasing and slipping in *Jantakorop*. Its multivocality binds romance with realism, fiction with reality, whilst establishing a direct dialogue with the audience at every twist and turn of the narrative as the following abstract demonstrates.

(B = Bandit, J = Jantakorop, M = Mora, A = Audience)

(B) *"What have you got?"*

(J) *"Nothing. Only my wife."*

(B) *"I want your money, hurry!"*

(J) *"What kind of robbery is this, no gun, no weapon?"*

(audience laughs)

*"Stupid bandit!"*

(B) *"I've come to scout first."*

(the audience supplies him with a weapon, the others cheer)

- (B) *"Now, there are well wishers who gave me a knife so you'd better hand me your possession."*
- (J) *"I said I have nothing but my wife."*  
(audience laughs)
- (B) *"All right, if you say so. I'll take your wife. But not you."*  
(more laughs)
- (J) *"I'll sign a contract."*
- (B) *"Go ahead. They are all brainless. They'd sign anything without really understanding it."*  
(audience shouts with disapproval)  
*"Yearly contract, this is."*
- (J) *"I don't want her back, actually."*
- (M) *"Is this my husband? How could he do this to me?"*  
*"Well, all right."*  
(audience laughs)  
*"Brilliant, in every play my husband always has a mistress. This time I am going to have two husbands."*  
(audience laughs and applauds)  
*"Do you think it's all right?"*
- (A) *"Yes."*
- (M) *"Should I?"*
- (A) *"Yes!"*  
(strong approval)
- (M) *"They said yes. That means it's OK."*

The terms of the 'undesirable yearly contract' are made obvious in this scripted dialogue. The improvisation by the actor, the father, however, advises the workers to agree to a yearly settlement (the general practice at the time was to bargain for a bi-annual contract, a more stable term of payment). The internal logic of the play therefore contradicts the reality of the situation. But as the President pointed out later,

*"..we did not have any rehearsal and our actors were scared...so they got drunk before they went on stage..they wanted to do this improvisation because they think it's important..but she [respondent (2)] really made a blunder, didn't she?...well, I hope our friends at Arrow Textile won't mind..they know it's only a play.."*

The continuous code-breaking in this example generates immense pleasure while at the same time openly challenging the unequal sexual relation. Despite the attempt to celebrate a more liberal imagery of women it converges with the conventional gender hierarchy in the division of labour and the general social structure. In the 'popular rhetoric' scene for example, the male characters, Jantakorop and his father, are presented as natural leaders in a similar way to the male workers. In addition, their reference of the struggle is juxtaposed with the conservative symbol of the 'nation'.

(F = Father, J = Jantakorop)

- (F) *"I need your help since we are on strike."*
- (J) *"Have no fear, Father. Our comrades from Phrapradaeng will be here. We have friends everywhere. We shall win."*
- (F) *"Yes, no matter how long it takes we will go on. We must stand up for our dignity."*
- (J) *"That's right."*
- (F) *"We are Thais but the factory owners are Thai and Japanese."*
- (J) *"Why don't they sympathise with us?"*
- (F) *"How could they? A lot of Thai employees are on their side."*
- (J) *"We must fight them. We don't want them to call us dummies."*
- (audience cheers)
- (J) *"Right, Dad?"*
- (F) *"Yes, I will unite with all my friends no matter how long it takes. We will fight as long as three months or four months. We shall not be defeated."*

The above 'popular rhetoric' is directly addressing the audience in a call for unrelenting solidarity within the workers' community. The synthesis of multi-cultural forms in Jantakorop attempts to entertain as well as persuade and be relevant.



In this manifestation of symbolic power we can note two significant implications. Firstly, that the struggle in the public sphere of work is necessarily and simultaneously related to the private-cultural sphere. Secondly, that it contests the exclusion of women and popular culture from the arena of the struggle. The notions of class and gender are the twin themes in this new problematic. But although a working class culture based on mainstream popular forms and the realities in the public sphere is in the making, its emergence is not without specific problems some of which are demonstrated here.

#### **A critical and total approach to audience media activities**

Due to the limitations of the field research noted earlier, our inquiry can only be suggestive. It may however, indicate some potential lines of enquiry for future research on audience media activities.

In order to come to grips with how the audience and the notion of ideology are related to the complex and dialectic relation of transformation and formation in the economic and cultural spheres, we have attempted a total approach using a critical perspective on the audience. The study suggests that the '*active audience*' are constantly synthesising cultural practices with their situated experiences. These are circumscribed by their class location. On the one hand, the women workers remain deeply loyal to the '*women's genre*' of romance in their media activities and in their everyday life, which now co-exists with the oppositional discourse introduced by the Union. In the light of their experience in economic struggle, these elements are synthesised into a unique form of working class culture. However, in playing out these discourses the workers are at once disrupting and reproducing these contradictions.

Radway (1984) and Brown (1987) have recently argued that women consumption of romances and soap operas is an act of protest against patriarchy and a form of feminine empowerment. Our work directs attention to two other points. Firstly, these media activities are part and parcel of the consumption of desire and pleasure. Secondly, audiences are capable of re-creating, acquiescing to or resisting given meanings in the process of symbolic production. We have demonstrated in some detail the tension involved in the women workers accepting the division of labour in the workplace and reaffirming the same divisions in their self-organisation within the Union. Although these coincide with their general pattern of media consumption, the potential for contestation is also interwoven in this self-contradicting structure. As our example indicates the challenges to everyday routines are largely invoked by the struggle in the economic sphere.

Without connecting the study of audience media activities with social condition in the workplace our view would remain partial if not misleading. Far from producing an '*autonomous*' sub-culture, or total submission to the '*dominant ideologies*' as many of its promoters have suggested, the workers' symbolic power is contextualised within the general social structure. The incongruity of ideology and pleasure suggests that we should look more closely at the ways in which the ideological process is disrupted or acquiesced to in relation to pleasure maximisation on the one hand, and the discursive formation and cultural competence delimited by the economic constraints on the other. This in turn suggests that we need to rethink the conventional approaches to audience studies that tend to treat leisure and work, pleasure and ideology as mutually exclusive and to explore the plausibility of how discursive formation, pleasure and political action are and can be synthesised.

## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this study of the Thai radio system has been twofold. Firstly, it is an attempt to understand the '*ideological role*' of the mass media in maintaining the structure of social relations in a transitional society and thereby to contribute to a central debate in both social theory and the sociology of mass communications. Starting with an outline of the structure of ownership and economic control in the radio system I moved on to investigate the kinds of cultural products made by the state and the media industries, how they are produced and some of their consequences. Secondly, the study has employed a critical and holistic perspective in an effort to break with conventional approaches to media studies. As can be seen from the foregoing analyses, this approach is useful in providing fresh insights as well as in pointing towards new lines of investigation. But due to the inaccessibility of research materials and the conditions of field work, some of which have been noted in earlier chapters, there are inevitably shortcomings and limitations. The following therefore summarises the main results of the study and offers some suggestions for future research based on the findings.

#### 11.1 The Political Economy of Mass Communications: The Dialectic and Complexities of Cultural Production

From the outset, my argument about the role of the media in the maintenance of economic and social inequalities has been based on the notion that control over material resources and mental production involves dialectical and complex relations. In contradiction to a crude deterministic position, I have tried to take into account the dynamics of the economy in setting the parameters of cultural production whilst recognising how active agents struggle within these relations. By situating my study in a concrete and comprehensive analysis of the political economy of radio and its contribution to cultural reproduction I have attempted to come to grips with the fine detail of how the state and the media industries control this arena.

Historical evidence showed that the notion of '*public broadcasting*' within the Thai system was rapidly eroded by an alliance of foreign and local capital in the late 1950s. This resulted in the present duopoly whereby legal ownership is vested in the state and the Armed Forces. This in turn, provided for

complicated pattern of joint economic control between capitalist operators and the state. This structure, coupled with the impact of the advertising industry and the changing contours of the media industries, has limited the range of output and programme formats on radio to two basic groups; official programmes produced by the state and its institutions, and popular entertainment, mainly music and drama, sponsored by the cultural industries and the manufacturers of consumer products. The divisions between these two predominant groups of programmes are obvious. The former employs a top-down, didactic style in its attempt to achieve social and political integration. The latter, concentrating on the production of pleasure to attract the largest possible audience so as to fulfil its economic goals. Within this structural arrangement other social groups, the under-privileged, ethnic minorities and political oppositions, are not represented in the production process, whilst on the consumption side their low level of income exclude them from having access to certain cultural products.

As our subsequent analyses of the dynamics operating within media organisations shows, that in both the state and commercial sectors, structural constraints set limits to the range of output as well as closing off options for innovation and political dissent. On the other hand, the complexities of cultural production and the dialectic of control in these institutions also allow some space for producer creativity. In addition, programme variations are generated by the competition necessary to achieve organisations' economic goals. We therefore see challenges to the State's notions of objectivity and impartiality in broadcast journalism being developed by the popular news commentary programmes.

In the field of popular entertainment, the present trend is a shift in favour of large companies. Due to economic stringency, only the commercially successful survive whilst smaller, more adventurous companies must either close down or find other means of support, as in the case of the drama industry. In contrast, in the emerging and highly fluid market of the music industry small, companies are innovating in order to compete with large corporations.

Overall, our study suggests that there are considerable differences in the ways different kinds of media organisation operate and that significant variations in their cultural products are generated within the general confines set by the economy. But our case studies can only be suggestive. Much more work and further detailed accounts are needed for the whole range of the media industries before we can clearly understand the full complexities of their operations.

## 11.2 Cultural Mediation and The Limits to '*Ideological Domination*'

In following through the above argument on the question of the kinds of content and their impact we have tried to show that because of the internal tensions between routine operations, media ideologies of professionalism and artistic creativity both radio and the cultural industries are not empty conveyor belts of one particular set of ideas. Whilst professionals strive for '*relative autonomy*', within media organisation by negotiating with entrepreneurs, the commercial success of their programmes and products provides them with bargaining power. Finally, the process of ideological transmission is further complicated by the active consumption of the audience.

By locating my inquiries in a total socio-political context I have sought to argue that there are at least three limits to '*ideological domination*'. Firstly, the complex relations within the radio and cultural industries (mentioned above) interrupt instead of facilitating the smooth flow of the dominant ideologies. Secondly, within the ruling power bloc itself there is a contest of ideas rather than a single or unified dominant ideology. As outlined in chapter 3, coalitions are often transitory and fraught with tensions. Thirdly, there exists among the subordinated classes distinctive and heterogeneous cultures and ideologies. The articulation between these diverse discursive formations, whether within or between classes, is therefore a constant struggle and any consensus must be arrived at through a process of negotiation, not imposition.

These complexities and tensions are evident at three levels. Within the traditional power bloc, religious schisms and military factionalism are rife. In addition, they now have to compete for legitimation with the political parties formed within the newly instituted system of parliamentary democracy. Although some of these ideological divergencies are incorporated into the present version of the official view to form a '*political consensus*' the fundamental tensions have not been resolved. The contentious notion of '*Dhammic Socialism*' propounded by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu for example, has now acquired an official status through its articulation with economic modernisation. However, in the rhetoric of '*Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong*' (The Land of Dhamma, Land of Gold) not only is the amelioration of social inequalities not dealt with, but it also contradicts the basic Buddhist doctrine of enlightenment as a means to spiritual salvation by promoting the materialistic ethos and the emphasis on individual economic achievement required in a capitalist mode of production.

The social hierarchy based on the traditional '*paternalistic*' power structure is also undermined within the power bloc and challenged by contending social forces. As a consequence, the military find themselves arguing for both authoritarianism and constitutional democracy. Like the traditional institutions, they are unable to come to terms with rising consumerism and sexual liberalism expressed in the desires and sensual pleasures promoted by popular entertainment. Nor can they resolve the political tensions arising from the modern notion of '*citizenship*' produced by current social transformations.

Although in the officially produced programmes media professionalism is generally over-ruled by institutional goals, our enquiry suggests that the tensions within them have intensified and that some reforms have been attempted. This is particularly clear in the news and current affairs programmes in which broadcast journalists have challenged the established notion of objectivity and impartiality in news production. Supported by the ideology of professionalism, the move towards a more commercially-oriented presentation of news and current affairs has provided space for contending discourses, mainly from the oppositional political parties and the liberals.

In contrast, our analyses of the popular genres of drama and music showed that the artists - authors, directors, actors, songwriters, and singers - are able to secure a considerable degree of '*relative autonomy*' through which their own beliefs and worldviews are expressed. Although these are confined within the more or less '*standardised formulas*' that must accommodate both organisational goals and audience's needs. In this kind of arrangement spaces for a variety of opinions are permitted. These are then played out in the internal contradictions of the forms of representation and language. The popular genres are therefore a complicated arena through which contending ideas find public expression. As I hope to have demonstrated, although creative communicators do not openly challenge the state and its control mechanisms, they invariably subvert and resist the officially defined notions of pleasure and sexuality in their pursuit of popular appeal. As a consequence, the transmission of a '*preferred meaning*' is not guaranteed but on the contrary, problematised.

The modest ethnographic study of the cultural and media activities of women textile workers added to our understanding of how dominant ideologies are challenged or acquiesced to. In particular we have sought to show that although they allied themselves to the intellectuals and the Left in forming an oppositional discourse in the public sphere, they resisted these groups' cultural tastes. Tensions and ambiguities around issues of cultural taste and style also

occurred within the workers themselves and between the leadership of the union and their members. In this way, the workers' preference for popular entertainment, especially the '*women's genre*' of romance, over the '*serious genres*', co-existed with the newly instituted oppositional discourse.

The investigation of consumption activities has two important implications. Firstly, it clearly showed not only that audiences are capable of disrupting the transmission and the imposition of a dominant ideology but that they also re-create their own cultural artifacts based on a synthesis of the mainstream popular forms and their situated conditions. Secondly, it confirmed that the working class are structurally excluded from expressing their ideas and needs on the radio in the forms that are most relevant to their situations.

It is central to our argument that although radio is a key arena in which the conflicts between discourses are played out and negotiated, the space provided for dissension and oppositional discourse is delimited by the range of programme formats, which are in turn circumscribed by the structures of ownership and control in the broadcasting system and the cultural industries. The '*ideological power*' of the media is ultimately embedded in its asymmetrical social relations which parallel the class structure and social hierarchy of Thai society. This unequal structure of control, in which there is neither a system of public accountability or provision for wider accessibility and diversity, thereby, reproduces the system of unequal social stratification.

### 11.3 Critical Inquiry and Future Trends for Mass Communications Research

In order to understand better the role of the mass media in a transitional society such as Thailand or other Third World societies, a critical as well as a comprehensive research approach to the sociology of mass communications is imperative. Conventional approaches are deficient in at least two ways; they lack the critical and holistic perspective required in dealing with the complexities and dynamism of mass communications, and they over-emphasise the study of the '*serious genres*' of news and modernisation and educational programmes, and pay scant attention to '*popular entertainment*'. These established trends can offer only a partial understanding of the mass media. In their skewed treatment they have contributed significantly to the entrenchment of the '*dominant ideology*' thesis in developing societies of the Third World.

The continuous pace of social formation and transformation in Thai society has created deepening contradictions and their complex relations in turn, have

impinged upon the structure of mass communications and the cultural industries. Market forces now play an increasing role in cultural production. The mixed system of state and commercial broadcasting explored in this study is a case in point. At the same time, it has also indicated the growing importance of media professionals and artists, and the possibilities of disruption and re-creation of counter and alternative culture by the audience. Future studies must take these kinds of complex relations fully into account.

In order to deal more adequately with the role of mass communications in cultural production and reproduction in relation to the question of social stratification, future research needs to investigate the following areas in detail; the changing structure of ownership and control in the broadcasting system and the media industries in general; the increasing role of advertising in setting limits to the range of media output; the dynamics operating within different types of media organisations; the dialectical relations between forms of representation and everyday politics, paying particular attention to questions of class and gender; and finally, the cultural practices of the audience in their situated conditions.

These suggestions are by no means exhaustive. They may however, indicate some useful directions within the vast but yet largely unmapped terrain of mass communications research in transitional societies.



## Bibliographies

- Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (1973) *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, London, Allen Lane.
- Aiemtham, P. (1977) *Botbat tang Karnmuang kong Nangsuepim Thai (2475-2488)*, (The Political Role of the Thai Press, 1932-1945), Bangkok, Thai Watanapanich.
- Aiewsiwong, N. (1985) "*Pleng Luktoong Nai Prawatisart Wattanatham Thai*" (Pleng Luktoong in the History of Thai Culture), *Silapa Wattanatam*, 6:6, pp.94-109.
- Althusser, L. (1971) "*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London, New Left Books.
- Anderson, B. (1977) "*Withdrawal Syntoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup*", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 9:3, pp.13-30.
- Atisap, C. (1983) "*Tini Satani Witayu Krajaisieng hang Prates Thai*" (This is Radio Thailand) in *Hasib Pi Krom Prachasampan* (The 50th Anniversary of the Department of Public Relations), Bangkok.
- Banerjee, S. (1980) *Child Labour in Thailand*, Child Labour Series No. 4, Anti-Slavery Society, translated by Yamakanit, P. (1982), Bangkok.
- Bank of Thailand, The (1983) *Rai-ngaan Setakit lae Karn-ngern 2526* (Economic and Financial Report, 1983), Bangkok.
- Bank of Thailand, The (1985) *Rai-ngaan Setakit lae Karn-ngern 2528* (Economic and Financial Report, 1985), Bangkok.
- Barthes, R. (1975) *The Pleasures of the Text*, New York, Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1973) *Mythologies*, London, Paladin.
- Beer, P. (1978) "*History and Policy of the Communist Party of Thailand*" in Turton, A., et al, *Thailand: Roots of Conflict*, Nottingham, Spokesman.
- Bell, P. (1978) "*'Cycles' of Class Struggle in Thailand*" in Turton, et al, *Thailand: Roots of Conflict*, Nottingham, Spokesman.
- Benjamin, W. (1970) "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*", *Illuminations*, London, Jonathan Cape.
- Boonmi, T. (1985) "*Ideology, Patron-Client Ties and Classmate: A Study on Contemporary Thai Army*", Paper presented at the University of Bielefeld, June.

- Boonyaketmala, B. (1982) *"Influence of the Transnational Media in Thailand"* in Guback, T. and Varis, T., et al. **Transnational Communication and Cultural Industries**, Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 92, Paris, Unesco.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) **Outline of A Theory of Practice**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, M.E. (1987) *"The Politics of Soaps: Pleasure and Feminine Empowerment"*, **Australian Journal of Cultural Studies**, 4:2, pp.1-25.
- Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1986) **Dhammic Socialism**, translated and edited by Swearer, D., Bangkok, Thai Inter-Religion Commission for Development.
- Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1982) **Talangarn Suanmok Hasib Pi** (The Manifesto for the 50th Anniversary of Suanmok), Bangkok, Sukapabjai.
- Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1974) **Prachatipatai bab Sangkomniyom** (Democratic Socialism), Bangkok, Dhammabucha.
- Bumrungsook, S. (1982) **Saharat America kab Rabob Taharn nai Prates Thai** (The US and Militarism in Thailand), Bangkok, Asian Institute, Chulalongkorn University.
- Buranamart, P. (1985) **Luang Wichit Watakarn kab Botlakorn Prawatisart** (Luang Wichit and Historical Plays), Bangkok, Thammasart University Press.
- Burns, T. and Stalker, G. (1961) **The Management of Innovation**, London, Tavistock.
- Cawelti, J. (1976) **Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture**, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- Chaiyanam, P. (1983) *"Krom Kosanakarn"* (The Department of Propaganda) in **Hasib Pi Krom Prachasampan**, (The 50th Anniversary of the Department of Public Relations), Bangkok.
- Changyai, B. (1987) *"Pornsak Songsang: Tepabutr Luktoong"* (Pornsak Songsang: An Interview with the Luktoong Idol), **Matichon Sudsabda**, 7:359, pp.34-36.
- Changyai, B. (1986) *"Cholati Tarnthong: Naktang Pleng Luktoong Lueadnamkem"* (Cholati Tarnthong: The Luktoong Songwriter from the East), **Baan Mai Ru Roei**, 2:6, pp.59-66.
- Chaloemtiarana, T. (1979) **Thailand: The Politics of Despotism**, Bangkok, Social Science Association of Thailand and Thai Khadi Suksa, Thammasat University.

- Chaloemtiarana, T. (1976) *"The Evolution of the Monarchy and Government: Institutional Conflicts and Change"* in Sharp, L. (ed) *Thailand Since King Chulalongkorn*, Asia Supplement 2, pp.41-56.
- Charnchaloem, S. (1982) *Chomrom Nakchad Raikarn Kao Witayu* (The Popular Newscaster's Club), Bangkok.
- Civil Liberty Union, The (1985) *News Bulletin*, May.
- Commando Group (1986) *Rachini Luktoong Pumpuang Duangjan* (Pumpuang Duangjan the Queen of Luktoong), Bangkok.
- Curran, J. (1986) *"The Impact of Advertising on the British Mass Media"*, in Collins, R., et al. (eds) *Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader*, London, Sage.
- Deemar (1986) *The BBC in Thailand 1986*, Bangkok.
- Department of Fine Arts, The (1980) *"Nantana Wirachon (1952- )"* in *Prawat Nakien Thai (2)* (Biographies of Thai Authors, Vol. 2), Bangkok.
- Department of Labour, The (1984) *Report on Labour Relations*, Bangkok.
- Eco, U. (1981) *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, London, Hutchinson.
- Eco, U. (1972) *"Towards a Semiotic Inquiry into Television Message"*, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 3, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.
- Eisenstein, Z. (1979) *"Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism"* in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, New York, Monthly Review Press.
- Elliot, D. (1978) *Thailand: Origins of Military Rule*, London, Zed Press.
- Elliot, P. (1980) *"Press Performance as Political Ritual"* in Christian, H. (ed) *The Sociology of Journalism and the Press*, University of Keele, Sociological Review Monograph, No. 29.
- Elliot, P. (1977) *"Media Organisations and Occupations: An Overview"* in Curran, J., et al. (eds) *Mass Communication and Society*, London, Edward Arnold and The Open University Press.
- Elliot, P. (1972) *The Making of a Television Series: A Case Study in the Sociology of Culture*, London, Constable.
- Far-East Advertising (1984) *Thailand Media Handbook '84-85*, Bangkok.
- Fiske, J. (1987) *Television Culture*, London, Methuen.

- Flood, T. (1977) *"The Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand: Minority Manipulation in Counter-insurgency"*, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 9:3, pp.31-47.
- Frith, S. (1987) *"Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music"* in Leppert, R. and MaClary, S. (eds) *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Frith, S. (1981) *"'The Magic That Can Set You Free': The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community"* in Middleton, R. and Horn, D. (eds) *Popular Music 1: Folk or Popular? Distinctions, Influences, Continuities*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1981) *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism: Vol.1 Power, Property and the State*, London, Macmillan.
- Golding, P. and Elliot, P. (1979) *Making the News*, London, Longman.
- Hall, S. (1981) *"Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms"* in Bennett, T., et al. (eds) *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, London, The Open University Press.
- Hall, S. (1977) *"Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect'"* in Curran, J., et al. (eds) *Mass Communication and Society*, London, Edward Arnold and The Open University Press.
- Hall, S., et al. (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, London, Macmillan.
- Hall, S. and Whannel, P. (1964) *The Popular Arts*, London, Hutchinson.
- Hartmann, H. (1982) *"Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex"* in Giddens, A. and Held, D. (eds.) *Classes, Power, and Conflict*, London, Macmillan.
- Hebdige, D. (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London, Methuen.
- Hennion, A. (1983) *"The Production of Success: An Anti-Musicology of the Pop Song"* in Middleton, R. and Horn, D. (eds) *Popular Music 3: Producers and Markets*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Hiranburana, S. (1977) *"Pasa nai Wannakam Chaobaan (Pasa Likae)"* (The Language of Popular Culture: The Case of Likae), *Journal of Thammasat University*, 7:2, pp.2-13.

- Huncharoen, C. (1983) *"Panha karn Krajaisieng ti yu nok Tamra"* (The Problems of Broadcasting) in *Hasib Pi Krom Prachasampan* (The 50th Anniversary of the Department of Public Relations), Bangkok.
- Janowitz, M. (1964) *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, J. (ed) (1962) *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Kaewpan, W. (1983) *"Prachasampan pua Krai"* (Public Relations for Whom?) in *Hasib Pi Krom Prachasampan* (The 50th Anniversary of the Department of Public Relations), Bangkok.
- Keyes, C. (1978) *"Political Crisis and Militant Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand"* in Smith, B.L. (ed.) *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, Chambersburg, P.A., ANIMA Books.
- Kitiwat, K. (1983) *"Witayu Krajaisieng Thai"* (The Thai Radio Broadcasting System), *Wiwatanakarn Suemuanchon Thai*, (The Development of the Thai Mass Media), Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University.
- Kittiwutho Bhikkhu (1976) *Kha Kommunit Mai Bab* (Killing Communist is not Demeritorious), Bangkok, Aksornsampan quoted in Suksamran (1984) *Buddha Sasana kab karn Plienplang tang Karnmuang lae Sangkom* (Buddhism and Socio-political Transformation), Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University.
- Komin, S. (1978) *"The World View Through Thai Value Systems"* in *Traditional and Changing Thai World View*, Bangkok, The Southeast Asian Studies Program and the Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University.
- Kotz, D. (1978) *Bank Control of Large Corporations in the United States*, Los Angeles, University of California Press quoted in Murdock, G. (1982) *"Large Corporation and the Control of the Communications Industries"* in Gurevitch, M., et al. (eds) *Culture, Society and the Media*, London, Methuen.
- Kress, G., Hodge, R. (1979) *Language as Ideology*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Kritchachatanon, S. (1974) *Kan Chumnum Duernkabuen nai Tang Changwat* (Demonstrations in the Provinces), Bangkok, Ministry of Interior.
- Kukang (1982) *"Talad Tape din Sudwieng"* (Competition in the Music Industry), 3:23, pp. 1, 75-79.
- Lerner, G. (1986) *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

- Lovell, T. (1980) **Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure**, London, The British Film Institute.
- Maha Jad Kongsook (1974) **Prachatipatai**, 9 December.
- Mallet, M. (1978) "*Causes and Consequences of the October '76 Coup*" in Turton, A., et al. **Thailand: Roots of Conflict**, Nottingham, Spokesman.
- Manasphaibul, S., et al. (1984) **Siti Manusayachon kab Lukjang nai Prates Thai** (Human Rights and Workers in Thailand), Bangkok, Thai Kadi Institute, Thammasat University.
- Marcuse, H. (1964) **One-Dimensional Man**, London, Sphere.
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1970) **The German Ideology**, London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Mass Communications for Children's Promotions Group (MCPG) (1983) **Seminar on Children's Television**, Bangkok.
- Matichon, 11 June, 1981.
- Media (1986) "*Tor Por 2: Satanni Witayu Tirapsung*" (Tor Por 2: The Northeastern Radio), 2:21, pp.98-100.
- Miliband, R. (1969) **The State in Capitalist Society**, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- Moffat, A. (1961) **Mongkut the King of Siam**, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- Morell, D. and Samudavanija, C. (1981) **Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution**, Mass., Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain.
- Mulder, N. (1979) **Everyday Life in Thailand**, Bangkok, DK.
- Mulder, N. (1973) **Buddhism and National Development in Thailand**, Special Report No. 1, Northern Illinois University and Center for Southeast Asian Studies.
- Murdock, G. (1989) "*Critical Inquiry and Audience Activity*" in Dervin, B., et al. (eds) **Rethinking Communication Vol.2**, London, Sage.
- Murdock, G. (1982) "*Large Corporations and the Control of the Mass Media*" in Curran, J., et al. (eds.) **Society, Culture and Media**, London, Macmillan.
- Murdock, G. (1980) "*Authorship and Organisation*", **Screen Education**, 35:35, pp.14-34.
- Murdock, G. and Golding, P. (1977) "*Capitalism, Communication and Class Relations*" in Curran, J., et al. (eds) **Mass Communication and Society**, London, Edward Arnold and The Open University Press.

- Murdock, G. and Janus, N. (1985) **Mass Communications and the Advertising Industry**, Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 97, Paris, Unesco.
- Naowarat, N. (1987) *"Kuamsampan kong Rabob Kuabkum Rang-ngaan kab Nguenkai karn Pattana Sakayapab cherng Klum nai Krabuan karn Tamngaan: Suksa Korani Usahakam Singlaw"* (The Relations of Labour Control and Group Potential in the Workplace: The Case of the Textile Industry), Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Department of Sociology, Thammasat University.
- Napayon, Y. (1983) *"Wong Dontri Krom Prachasampan hai kuam Banterng kae Tan"* (The DPR Big Band) in **Hasib Pi Krom Prachasampan** (The 50th Anniversary of the Department of Public Relations), Bangkok.
- Nartsupha, C. (1984) *"The Ideology of the Holy Men Revolts in Northeast Thailand"* in Turton, A. and Tanabe, S. (eds) **History and Peasant Consciousness in Southeast Asia**, Osaka, National Museum of Ethnology.
- Nartsupha, C. and Manarangsang, S. (1984) **A History of Thai Political Economy up to 2484 B.E.**, Bangkok, Thammasat University Press.
- Nawikamun, A. (1978) *"Pleng Punmuang Tung Pleng Luktoong"* (From Folk Music to Luktoong) **Pleng Nok Satawas** (Music of the Past), Bangkok, Karawek.
- Numnon, T. (1978) *"Jompol Por Phibunsongkram kab karn Sang Chat Thai B.E.2481-2487"* (Field Marshal Phibunsongkram and Nationalism during 1938-1944), **Warasan Prawatisat**, 3:2, pp.14-31.
- Office of the Prime Minister, The (1984) **Thailand in the 80's**, Bangkok.
- O'Flinn, P. (1983) *"Production and Reproduction: The Case of Frankenstein"*, **Literature and History**, 9:2, pp.194-213.
- Panpipat, K. and Tanasatit, P. (1983) *"Toratat Thai: Jak Bangkunprom tung Rabob Daoliem"* (Thai Television: From Bangkunprom to Sattelite), **Wiwatanakarn Suemuanchon Thai**, (The Development of the Thai Mass Media), Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University.
- Paothongsuk, S. (1983) **Anusorn Krobrob Hasib Pi kong Karntang-ngan Sa-ngiem-Wattana Paothongsuk** (In Commemoration of the 50th Wedding Anniversary of Sa-ngiem and Wattana Paothongsuk), Bangkok.
- Patchimwet, T., et al. (1986) **Ruabruam Komun ruang Usahakam Singlaw** (Collected Information on the Textile Industry), Arom Pongpa-ngaan Foundation.

- Pattamanan, U. (1985) *"Ittipol kong Ongkarn Rawang Prates lae Rattaban Tang Prates ii mi tor Nayobai Setakit Thai: Korani Suksa wa duey Ittipol kong Saharat America"* (Influences of International Organisations and Foreign Governments on the Thai Economic Policy: A Case Study of American Influence) in Tanapornpan, R. and Siriprachai, S. (eds) *Trisadi karn Pungpa kab Sangkom Setakit Thai* (Dependency Theory and the Thai Socio-economy), Bangkok, Thammasat University Press and Thammasat Journal of Economics.
- Permtanjit, K. (1982) *Political Economy of Dependent Capitalist Development*, Bangkok, The Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University.
- Petphrasert, N. (1986) *AWSL-Thailand*, 2:6.
- Phra Rajaworamuni (1984) *Chao Buddha kab Chatakam kong Sangkom* (Buddhists and the Destiny of Society), Bangkok, Samakom Sitkao Mahachulalongkorn.
- Phutharaporn, K. (1985) *"Country Folk Songs and Thai Society" in Traditional and Changing Thai World View*, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University Research Institute and Southeast Asian Studies Program.
- Pitipatanakosit, U. (1984) *"Lakorn Witayu"* (Radio Drama), Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University, First chapter published in *Silapa Wattanatam*, 6:4, pp.108-114.
- Pongpaibun, N. (1984) *"Pleng Thai Tung Pleng Luktoong"* (From Thai Music to Luktoong) *Jak Pleng Thai Tung Pleng Luktoong* (From Thai Music to Luktoong), Bangkok, Sun Sangkit Silp.
- Prakobpol, R. (1983) *"Nitayasarn Thai"* (Thai Magazines), *Wiwatanakarn Suemuanchon Thai*, (The Development of the Thai Mass Media), Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University.
- Prakobpol, R. (1979) *"Samakom Suemuanchon nai Tana Klum Ithipol"* (Press Associations as Pressure Group), Unpublished paper, Department of Mass Communications, Chulalongkorn University.
- Pramoj, S. (1967) *Kotmai Samai Ayudhya* (The Law in the Ayudhya Period), Bangkok, Committee for the Ayudhya Memorial.
- Puanying (1986) *Friends of Women*, 4:1.
- Pye, L. (1962) *"Armies in the Process of Political Modernisation"* in Johnson, J. (ed) *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Rabibhadana, A. (1969) *The Organisation of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873*, Ithaca, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 74.
- Radway, J. (1984) *Reading the Romance: Feminism and the Representation of Women in Popular Culture*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.



- Rajakool, C. (1984) *The Social and State Formation in Siam in 1955-1932*, Un-published Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester.
- Rama VII, Inauguration Speech on Radio HSPJ, 25 February, 1930 quoted in Chomrom Nakchad Raikarn Kao Witayu (The Popular Newscaster's Club), 1982.
- Ronasitipichai, Luang (1934) *"Radio speech on the Rationale of the Office of Propaganda"* quoted in *"Krompachasampan Por Sor 2477"* (The Department of Public Relations in 1934), Wan Klai Wan Satapana Krompachasampan Krobrob 53 Pi (The 53th Anniversary of the Department of Public Relations 1986), Bangkok.
- Rostow, W. (1960) *The Stages of Economic Growth*, London, Cambridge University Press.
- Samudvanija, C., Wongtrangaan, K. (1983) *Pasa kab Karnmuang* (Language and Politics), Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University.
- Sapasangkomsongkroa hang Prates Thai (1985) *Pandin Dhamma, Pandin Thong* (Land of Peace, Land of Gold), Bangkok.
- Saussure, F. (1974) *Course in General Linguistics*, London, Fontana.
- Schlesinger, P., Murdock, G. and Elliot, P. (1983) *Televising 'Terrorism': Political Violence in Popular Culture*, London, Comedia.
- Scott, J. (1972) *"Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia"*, *The American Political Science Review*, 66:1, pp.91-113.
- Siriseriwan, W. (1984) *"Pleng Luktoong Ma Jak Nai"* (Where Does Luktoong Music Originate From?) *Jak Pleng Thai Tung Pleng Luktoong* (From Thai Music to Luktoong Music), Bangkok, Sun Sangkit Silp.
- Sivarak, S. (1983) *"Jitsamnuk tang Sangkom ti Niewrang Prachathipatai"* (The Social Consciousness that Hinders Democracy) in *Hasib Pi bon Sentang Prachathipatai Thai* (Fifty Years On: The Road to Thai Democracy), Seminar paper for the Commemoration of the Bangkok Bicentennial and the 50th Anniversary of Thai Democracy, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University.
- Snitow, A. (1979) *"Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different"*, *Radical History Review*, 20 (Spring/Summer), pp.141-161.
- Sucharitanarugse, W. (1983) *"The Thai Concept of Power"* in Boesch, E. (ed) *Thai Culture: Report on the Second Thai-European Research Seminar 1982*, University of the Saar, Saarbruecken.

- Suksamran, S. (1984) **Buddha Sasana kab karn Plienplang tang Karnmuang lae Sangkom** (Buddhism and Socio-political Transformation), Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University.
- Suksamran, S. (1982) **Buddhism and Politics in Thailand: A Study of Socio-Political Change and Political Activism of the Thai Sangha**, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Suksamran, S. (1977) **Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: The Role of the Sangha in the Modernisation of Thailand**, London, C. Hurst.
- Supadilok, B. (1984) **Sitti karn Suesarn nai Prates Thai** (The Right to Communicate in Thailand), Bangkok, Thai Kadi Institute, Thammasat University and The Foundation of the Social Sciences and Humanities Study Programme.
- Supasakorn, N. (1979) **Lompad Chaai Tung** (The Country Breeze), Bangkok, Witawas.
- Tambiah, S. (1976) **World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against A Historical Background**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Tambiah, S. (1973) *"The Persistence and Transformation of Tradition in Southeast Asia, With Special Reference to Thailand"*, Daedalus, Winter, pp.55-84.
- Tangsongsak, K. (1986) *"Wongdontri Luktoong Turakit Dernasai Kai Sieng Pleng"* (The Luktoong Show Business), Sarakadi, 2:20, pp.159-162.
- Termsrisuk, T., et al. (1985) **Komun Puntaan kong Usahakam Singtaw** (Basic Data on the Textile Industry), The National Federation of Textile, Clothing and Leather Unions.
- Thai Rath, 20 October, 1973.
- The Pentagon Papers (1971) Boston, Gravel Edition, Vol.1.
- Tirawanich, S. (1983) **Nangsuepim Thai: Jak Patiwat 2475 Su Patiwat 2516** (The Thai Press: From the Coups of 1932 to 1976), Bangkok, Thai Watanapanich.
- Tirawanich, S. (1977) **Prawat karn Nangsuepim nai Prates Thai** (A History of the Thai Press under Absolutism, 1782-1932), Bangkok, Thai Watanapanich.
- Turton, A. (1978) *"The Current Situation in the Thai Countryside"* in Turton, A., et al. **Thailand: Roots of Conflict**, Nottingham, Spokesman.
- Vella, W. (1978) **Chaiyo! King Vajirawudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism**, Honolulu, The University Press of Hawaii.

- Volosinov, V. (1973) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, New York, Seminar Press.
- Wangpuchakain, S. (1983) "*Ngaan Borikarn Toratas kong Krom Prachasampan*" (The Television Service of the Department of Public Relations) in *The 50th Anniversary of the Department of Public Relations*, Bangkok.
- Wolff, J. (1987) "*Foreword: The Ideology of Autonomous Art*" in Leppert, R. and MaClary, S. (eds) *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Wongtes, P. (1984) "*Pitikam Kabot pua Ponklai kuam Tungkriai*" (Resistance Rituals for Pleasure), *Silapa Wattanatam*, 5:7, pp.6-21.
- Wongtes, S. (1984) "*Pleng Thai Tung Pleng Luktoong*" (From Thai Music to Luktoong) *Jak Pleng Thai Tung Pleng Luktoong* (From Thai Music to Luktoong), Bangkok, Sun Sangkit Silp.
- Yossuntorn, J. (1986) "*Ter pen Nang Phaya Luktoong Taonan Rua*" (Are You Just the Queen of Luktoong?) in *Commando Group Rachini Luktoong Pumpuang Duangjan*, Bangkok.