

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

February 27, 2007, the interim cabinet under Gen. Surayud Chulanont, the Thai Prime Minister passed a resolution to take over ITV channel (Independent Television), operated by ITV's majority shareholder "Shin Corporation", after it failed to pay 100.35 billion baht or 2.8 billion dollars in fines. On April 24, 2007, the cabinet decided to change the name ITV to TITV and turned it to Public Service Broadcasting model or PSB with a similar concept to the BBC and NHK, the two most successful PSB models in the world.

Seven months later the Broadcasting Act Committee considered the most appropriate financial funding model for TITV. The operational cost for the first Thai Public Television was collected from alcohol and tobacco levy of Bt 1,700 million baht each year. The station was renamed the Thai Public Broadcasting Service or Thai PBS (องค์การกระจายเสียงและแพร่ภาพสาธารณะแห่งประเทศไทย). National Legislative Assembly (NLA) passed the draft bill to transform the TITV to the Thai PBS on Oct 30, 2007 with 106 out of 155 votes.

The government decision is another turning point for Thai broadcasting history after the first Thailand television, Channel 4 Bangkhunprom (ช่อง 4 บางขุนพรหม), was established in 1952 (สินิทร์ สิทธิรักษ์, 2543). Fifty-five years later, another five free television stations were set up namely channels 3, 5, 7, 11 and TITV (ITV). Even though the media should have its duty to protect the public interest both in social and cultural needs, unfortunately most of them progressively developed as commercial stations (Mcquail, 1987). Mcquail said media institutes (in terms of social aspects) are expected to provide knowledge to the public. People will learn more from around the world via media institutes. With this kind of thought PSB was established around 80 years ago. Currently PSB is quite a significant broadcasting system for most of the European countries. Several of them are held in favor by the public (Coppens & Saeys, 2006). The most recognized PSB in the world are BBC (British Broadcasting

Corporation) and NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation), established in 1922 and 1953, respectively

Over the past few decades, Thais have widely awakened to the liberalization of media operations and public participation rights. Therefore in the “*1997 Constitution of Thailand*” some articles relevant to the freedom of expression of people and journalists were included, namely article 39, article 40 and article 41 under Chapter III: Rights and Liberties of the Thai People (สิทธิเสรีภาพ, 2543).

Article 39 states that a person has the right to express an opinion in all forms of communication: speech, writing, printing and publicization, while Article 40 points out those transmission frequencies for radio or television broadcasting and radio telecommunication are national communication resources for the public interest. Article 41, focusing on newspaper, radio or television broadcasting businesses, states that all workers in the media have a freedom to present news and to express their opinions without any interference from state agencies or state enterprises.

The Articles led to the establishment of the National Broadcast Commission or NBC later on. To run NBC, seven committees have to be selected. Unfortunately, the selection process is now pending. The agency has as its main duties developing and protecting the nation’s telecommunications. At this stage, many academics had raised the issue of a Public Service Broadcasting and studied the possibility of its establishment.

In fact, ahead of government’s decision towards turning TITV into a PSB structure, channel 11 Television of Thailand and Radio Thailand had been mentioned as possibility for turning it into a the true PSB and freed from control by the government. However because of the complicated transformation of the huge networks operated by the Government Public Relations Department, this issue was ignored. After the failure of ITV came about, the idea of PSB came alive.

TITV was established after the “Black May” event in 1992 with primarily conceptual foundation of being an “Independent TV” without any intervention from the government or capitalists. The government under Anand Panyarachun considered the need of having Independent TV because other existing channels did not report accurate information and the situation of the bloody military crackdown.

It seems like a hope for Thai media to have such a TV station and doing its duty of being a Watchdog, exposing the real situation of society and monitoring the government. However, a media crisis had obviously emerged when former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra governed the nation for 6 years. During Thaksin's era, the government dominated most of the media in Thailand.

The most unpleasant event for Thai media happened in 2000 when Shin Corporation owned by the Shinawatra's Family took over ITV. The government under the Thaksin administration amended some regulations to change ITV's foundation policy and following Terms of Reference or TOR by adding more entertainment programs from 30% during the prime time period to 70%. Since then it seems Thai society has predominantly non-educational and non-informative programs on every channel.

Thailand faces the same critical situation of many countries in the modern world. We have many television channels but just a small number of channels meet all the needs of the people such as education, health, social values or cultural programs (Karnik, 2002). Therefore, PSB might be an alternative to guarantee the people's quality of life. PSB should treat the people as citizens not customers. (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2001)

Many developed and developing countries have already established at least one PSB television station in an attempt to improve the quality of life of the people. Unfortunately, the vision of Thailand where there are so far six television stations and one cable TV (True Vision), most of them are commercial TV stations, is still behind those countries despite being in good shape economically and democratically when compared with some other countries. Eventually, Thai broadcasting came to a crossroad when Thaksin's government was overthrown by a military coup. In Thailand, ITV is turned into the first television which is operated in accordance with PSB concept.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or UNESCO has declared that PSB plays a key role in promoting education and knowledge for the social community in *Public Service Broadcasting: A best practices sourcebook*. (Banerjee and Seneviratne, 2005)

Public service broadcasting (PSB) has an important role to play in providing access to and participation in public life. Especially in developing countries, PSB can be instrumental in promoting access to education and culture, developing knowledge, and fostering interactions among citizens.

A good concept and principle of PSB is partly a crucial idea leading the new government under General Surayut's administration to decide to establish PSB in Thailand in order to promote a brain-based society. PSB is supposed to have good content and quality programs but because of not needing to find revenue by itself, TV's crews might dismiss any attractive techniques in producing programs.

Normally Thai people favor more entertainment programs, as shown in the table below. The proportion of drama serials or soap operas, mini series and light programs were preferred much more than other informative programs such as news programs.

Programs broadcasted on commercial TV

Type of Program	Totals of Programs
Children	148
Current Affair	606
Documentary	1166
Drama Serial	308
Drama Series	3
Feature Film	56
Light Entertain	641
Mini Series	68
Music	222
News	513
Religion	106
Sports	536
Total	4373

Source: AGB Nielsen Media Research,
Thailand conducted from Jan 1, 2007- Nov 30, 2007

Metta Spenser's work conducted in 2006 "*Two aspirins and a comedy: How television can enhance health and society* " regarding entertainment-education programs showed that such programs can help people release stress from everyday physical, emotional and spiritual problems and a good program should make people happy and enjoy themselves (as cite in Brown, 2007). In the near future, more

informative and educational programs should be provided and mixed entertainment in the program for supporting a better of life for the citizens (Leonard, 1999).

This is a challenging task for the first Thai PSB Television in integrating informative and entertainment together in order to draw people's attention. Uninteresting programs might lose the audiences' attention and gratification from the program. It must elaborately enhance knowledge and information from serve society. Even though PSB attempts to present a good program, it is of no value if no audience tune in to it. Accordingly, the research aimed to study the need of the audiences as to what kind of content, programs and method of presentation they preferred.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Main Problem:

1.2.1 What kind of programs do the students of Mass Communication department in the Master degree prefer on Thai PBS?

1.2.2 What kind of factors influences the students to pay attention to and watch programs offered by Thai PBS?

Sub Problem:

1.2.3 Do respondents understand well the role of Thai PBS.

1.3 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 Main Objective

To learn the contents and programs on Thai PBS that the students of the Mass Communication department in the Master degree program prefer

1.3.2 Sub-Objectives

1. To study the techniques and factors in producing a program that influence the students to pay attention to and watch programs offered by Thai PBS

2. To evaluate the respondents understanding about the role of the Thai PBS

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Definitions of the terms in this study are the following:

1.4.1 Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is a technical term referred to television broadcasting system which pertains to high-quality and informative programs and provides to all the people. The broadcasting aims at promoting a better quality of life. Many terms are used to represent the system including Public TV. Sometime the word “PSB” can be switched over as “PBS” or Public Broadcasting Service, such as PBS in the US. and “Thai PBS”.

1.4.2 Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS) is turned from a Thai independent television (TITV) under a resolution adopted by Gen. Surayud Chulanont’s cabinet.

1.4.3 Free TV in Thailand refers to channels 3, 5, 7, 9 and TITV which we can call commercial television. Free TV, actually, does not mean to free from government, political or capitalist intervention but free of charge.

1.4.4 Students in this study refer to the students who are learning in the Master of Arts Program, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Thammasat University.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focused on conducting a survey of a specific group of respondents with some background in the Mass Communication area. The researcher used only the students in the Master of Art program, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Thammasat University. They were supposed to understand mass media process more than the general public. Moreover, some of them worked in the mass communication field and some of them were very keen about this field. As they are mass media persons, they are also audiences as well. Therefore, they are likely to give significant and creative information for the research.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.6.1 The study was conducted in order to be informed of the real need of the public in watching television and what kind of programs and content they preferred after the society has been dominated by the market mechanism and commercial television for decades.

1.6.2 The TPBS television station can adopt this study to be a guideline in producing quality programs matching the real needs of the public and serving the public interest.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of Attitude toward programs on Public Service Broadcasting Television in Thailand - A study among the students in the Master of Arts program, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Thammasat University: is divided into five chapters. The first chapter actually describes the background and situation which led to the establishment of a new television station operated under the Public Service Broadcasting concept. The second chapter gathered information of Public Service Broadcasting fundamental principles, the variety of models operating across the world, mass communication theories including related studies and research. Methodology was approached in the third chapter which consisted of the subject, materials, procedures used in data collection and analysis and data analysis. The results shown in chapter four were categorized into 5 parts with the aim of learning attitudes toward what kind of programs respondents prefer on Thai PBS, factors that influenced the students to pay attention to and watch programs offered in the channel including how well they recognized the role of the Public Service Broadcasting system. The last chapter delivered a summary of the findings, a discussion and recommendations for further studies on the Public Service Broadcasting system in Thailand.