

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Mekong is one of the world's great rivers, sustaining million of people with its rich fisheries and fertile flood plains. The Mekong River basin is home to over 60 million people from more than 100 different ethnic groups, most of whom are heavily dependent on the river's natural resources for their livelihoods. The river itself is among the richest in the world in terms of its abundance of aquatic biodiversity, supporting 1,300 species of fish.

However, ambitious development projects for the region are sometimes poorly planned. Moreover, they can become major obstacles to sustainable management of the river basin and could adversely affect the socio-economic balance of the whole region and the livelihoods of its people.

The mass media is a crucial tool for the guidance of development processes. The media both receives and sends messages. Most of the time, we see the media as the message sender, news creator or even the speaker of the issues. It's true that media has the power to draw the attention of people towards the specific issues.

The Mekong has been a "hot spot" for the news. The local, regional and international media all keep their eyes on developments in the Mekong River Basin, and this is having an impact. For example, the Mekong Rapids Blasting Project has been temporarily halted in the Thai part of the Mekong River because of public opposition to the project and boundary demarcation between Thailand and Laos.

Organisations seeking to promote sustainable development should see the media as a valuable partner. The media's contribution to project development, planning, implementation and monitoring tends to be underestimated. Not only do the media keep the public abreast of government's plans and objectives - it also provides analytical social, cultural and economic

perspectives on government policies and initiatives in ways that can be more easily understood by common people. Through the investigation and presentation of new perspectives and potential issues, the media voices public concern and opinions. Thus, the media provides a forum for exchange of opinions and sharing of information between governments and the people, allowing the public greater contribution to development plans and their implementation.

Problem Statement

Internationally, there was a high number of news coverage on Mekong Rapids Blasting Project in print, broadcast and online media. However, Mekong news coverage in Greater Mekong Subregion countries is variable depending on the importance of the issues to country. Differences in term of country context such as socio-political-economic contexts, organisational structures, policies and regulations also frame level of news presentation.

The frequency of reporting on the Mekong Rapids Blasting issue is markedly different in each country. Environmental journalists themselves demonstrate different levels of awareness, capacity, access and understanding of Mekong development issues, including the Mekong Rapids Blasting issue. While Thai media has paid strong attention to this issue and raised public awareness, the media in other countries has been less responsive. The question is: what are the different factors which influence the way journalists in each country present Mekong development issues to their audiences?

Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To study the characteristics of journalists that report on Mekong issues in support of sustainable development in the Mekong River Basin

2. To determine factors influencing Mekong Rapids Blasting news reportage by journalists in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos PDR, China and Vietnam

3. To make recommendations towards: improving journalist awareness of Mekong development issues; and increasing active journalistic involvement in these issues.

Expected Results

This research is expected to provide the following outcomes:

1. Improved understanding of the characteristics of journalists that report on Mekong related issues.

2. Improved understanding of the factors influencing Mekong Rapids Blasting news reportage by journalists in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos PDR, China and Vietnam.

3. Identification of strategies to improve journalist awareness of the Mekong development issues and gain their support for the achievement of sustainable development in the Mekong River Basin.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is set in order to specify clear frame for the study.

1. Language: Three languages (Thai, Lao and English) were used for the in-depth interviews in this study.

2. Location: Greater Mekong Subregion countries include China, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia.

3. Respondents: Sixteen journalists from Thailand, China, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar were asked to be interview subjects. All of whom participated in the Mekong Media Seminar held in Bangkok in June 2004.



Figure 1 Geographical flow of Mekong River which is started from Tibetan Plateau in China through Vietnam where it enters the South China Sea

Source: Encarta (2007)

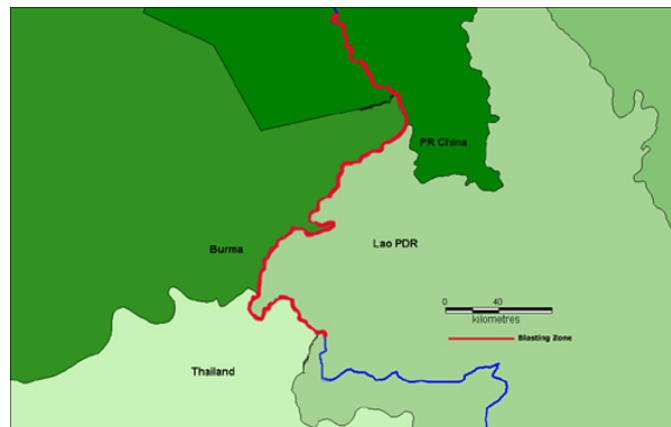


Figure 2 Mekong Rapids Blasting section of 361km between Simao in Southern China and Luang Prabang, northern Laos

Source: Australian Mekong Resources Centre (2007)

Definition of Terms

Mass media response refers to the media that will be used by the selected key informants in China, Thailand, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar

Mekong Rapids Blasting Project refers to a part of the larger *Lancang-Mekong Navigation Channel Improvement Project*, which aims to allow large ships to freely navigate from Simao, China to Luang Prabang in Laos. This project has been agreed by the government of China, Thailand, Lao PDR and Myanmar. The first stage of the project would destroy 11 major rapids and 10 scattered reefs along a 331-kilometre section of the Mekong from the China-Burma border to Ban Houayxai in Laos.

Greater Mekong Subregion refers to China, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia.

Demographic of reporters refers to age, sex, educational background and reporting experience of the respondent journalists.

Influential factors refer to respondent journalist's country context, media organisation they are working for, and access to information of each individual respondent.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review related to this research has been divided into five sub-chapters:

Mekong River

Mekong Rapids Blasting project

Mass Media in Greater Mekong Subregion

Related theories: agenda setting theory and public sphere theory

Related research

Mekong River

Mekong River Commission (MRC, 2007) explains about the Mekong River Basin that it is defined by the land area surrounding all the streams and rivers that flow into the Mekong River. This includes parts of China, Myanmar and Viet Nam, nearly one third of Thailand and most of Cambodia and Lao PDR. With a total land area of 795,000 square kilometres and length of 4,800 km., the Mekong River Basin is nearly the size of France and Germany together. From its headwaters thousands of metres high on the Tibetan Plateau, it flows through six distinct geographical regions, each with characteristic features of elevation, topography and land cover.

The most abundant resources in the Mekong Basin are water and biodiversity. Only the Amazon River Basin has greater diversity of plant and animal life. So much water flows into the mainstream Mekong from the surrounding basin area that, on average, 15,000 cubic meters of water passes by every second. In many parts of the world, that's enough water to supply all the needs of 100,000 people – the population of a large town – for a whole day. This water nourishes large tracts of forest and wetlands which produce building materials, medicines and food, provides habitats for thousands of species of plants and animals and supports an inland capture

fishery with an estimated commercial value of US\$2 billion dollars per year. Known mineral resources include tin, copper, iron ore, natural gas, potash, gem stones and gold.

There are over 100 different ethnic groups living within the basin's boundaries, making it one of the most culturally diverse regions of the world. Most basin inhabitants are rural farmer/fishers and while they may be resource rich, they are money poor. One third of the population live on less than a few dollars per day. Often lacking access to basic government services, people in the basin are, on average, less well off than their fellow citizens outside the basin. What makes life tolerable for these people are the aquatic resources provided by the basin's rivers and wetlands.

Farmers in the Mekong Basin produce enough rice to feed 300 million people a year. Demand for agricultural products from the basin is estimated to increase anywhere from 20 to 50% in the next 30 years. Agriculture, along with fishing and forestry employs 85% of the people living in the basin. The challenge for planners will be to maintain or even improve the quality of farmland soil and the forest watersheds that hold the key to a sustainable agricultural industry.

Mekong Rapids Blasting Project

Australian Mekong Research Network (2000) revealed that in the Article 9 of Freedom of Navigation in 1995 Mekong Agreement set up by Mekong River Commission indicated that:

On the basis of equality of right, freedom of navigation shall be accorded throughout the mainstream of the Mekong River without regard to the territorial boundaries, for transportation and communication to promote regional cooperation and to satisfactorily implement projects under this Agreement. The Mekong River shall be kept free from obstructions, measures, conduct and actions that might directly or indirectly impair navigability, interfere with this right or permanently make it more difficult. Navigational uses are not assured any priority over other uses, but will be incorporated into any

mainstream project. Riparians may issue regulations for the portions of the Mekong River within their territories, particularly in sanitary, customs and immigration matters, police and general security.

Mekong Rapids Blasting Project is part of a grand scheme, the Lancang-Mekong Navigation Channel Improvement Project, to allow large ships to freely navigate from Simao in China to Luang Prabang in Laos which has been agreed by the government of China, Thailand, Lao PDR and Myanmar. The first stage of the project would destroy 11 major rapids and 10 scattered reefs along a 331-kilometre section of the Mekong from the China-Burma border to Ban Houayxai in Laos. The project was divided into 3 phases for implementation:

The 1st phase is to remove 11 majors rapids, shoals and 10 scattered reefs and the setting-up of 100 navigation marks, 106 markers and 4 winches so that the waterway will be navigable for vessels at least of 100-150 DWT (Death Weight Tonnage) for at least 95% of the time in the year.

1. The 2nd phase is to remove 51 rapids and shoals, so that the waterway will be navigable for vessels at least of 300 DWT (Death Weight Tonnage) for at least 95% of the time in the year.

2. The 3rd phase, involves canalisation of the waterway so that it will be navigable for vessels of 500 DWT (Death Weight Tonnage) for at least 95% of the time in a year.

The last blasting point of the first phase is at Khon Pii Luang located between Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai Province of Thailand and Huay Sai of Lao PDR. Although all rapids upstream have been already been blasted according to plan, Khon Pii Luang remains untouched because of the opposition by local people, led by the Chiang Khong Conservation Group. They collected support from conservation organisations including WWF Thailand, the South-East Asia River Network, and Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance, Government Senators, community networks and the media at all levels.

The local “voice” was raised tremendously by all parts of society, but the media played an important role in communication of key messages. Enabled by the media, the local agenda became part of the national agenda, and has even grown to become regional agenda. In response to this pressure, the government decided to halt the project and conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Once the EIA is completed, it’s unclear whether the Khon Phii Luang will be blasted or not. Although the Chinese government announced that the project has been stopped, the Thai government announced that the project would be continued in the upcoming dry season (December 2006-April 2007) when the Mekong’s water level is at its lowest.

Mass Media in Greater Mekong Subregion

1. Mass Media in Thailand

The media are free to criticise government policies, and cover instances of corruption and human rights abuses, but journalists tend to exercise self-censorship regarding the military, the monarchy, the judiciary and other sensitive issues (BBC, 2007)

The print media are largely privately-run, with a handful of Thai-language dailies accounting for most newspaper sales.

Key media outlets are as follows

1. The Press

1.1 Bangkok Post - English-language

1.2 The Nation - English-language

1.3 Daily News - mass-circulation Thai-language daily

1.4 Thairath - mass-circulation Thai-language daily

2. Television

2.1 Channel 9 TV - operated by government agency MCOT

2.2 Independent Television (TITV) - owned by prime minister's office

2.3 Television of Thailand (TVT) Channel 11 - operated by National Broadcasting

2.4 TV 5 – owned by Royal Thai Army

2.5 Thai TV 3 – operated by the mass Communications Organisation of Thailand (MCOT), a government agency

2.6 BBTV Channel 7 – owned by Royal Thai Army

Services of Thailand (NBT), part of government Public Relations Department

3. Radio

3.1 Radio Thailand - national network and external service operated by National Broadcasting Services of Thailand (NBT), part of government Public Relations Department

3.2 MCOT Radio Network - run by government agency MCOT; operates stations in Bangkok and provincial networks

3.3 Army Radio - network owned by Royal Thai Army

4. News Agency

4.1 Thai News Agency- run by MCOT

Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai party's landslide reelection in February 2005 rightfully alarmed press freedom and democracy watchdog groups. The year brought the Prime Minister's escalating intolerance for criticism in the media to new heights with the use of emergency national security legislation and several lawsuits and business acquisitions to limit criticism in and increase state control of the Thai press.

The 1997 Thai Constitution includes strong protections for freedom of expression, yet several older laws still in force reserve the government's right to restrict the media to preserve national security or public order, and limit criticism of the Royal Family or Buddhism. In July 2005, Thaksin took full advantage of such provisions when, in response to mounting violence in the southern provinces, he issued the Executive Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations. The decree, passed without parliamentary approval (despite the party's overwhelming parliamentary majority), allows for the prohibition of media considered a threat to national security or to be "distorting the facts." Justified as an improvement upon martial law, the decree was renewed for three months in October. Access to information, also constitutionally guaranteed, has essentially been reversed under Thaksin, with the number of disclosures steadily declining as compared with the first four years after the Access to Information Law was passed in 1997. The 1941 Printing Act reserves the government's right to shut down media outlets, but this legislation has typically been reserved for blocking pornographic or separatist content. However, government concern about a surge of community radio stations prompted the abrupt cancellation of the popular "Muang Thai Rai Sapda" television program because the show "promoted misunderstanding among the public"; and in August, the Public Relations Department and police closed down a popular community radio station notoriously critical of the government.

The number of criminal and civil defamation suits filed by government officials or business affiliates against members of the press increased significantly in 2005. Several politically connected corporations filed legal charges to curb disparaging reporting on their activities and, in certain cases, suspend the careers of critical editors and journalists for many years. This tendency was largely encouraged by the landmark criminal defamation suit in July filed against media activist Supinya Klangnarong and three *Thai Post* senior editors (charged with suggesting a conflict of interest between Thaksin's public office and his family's private businesses) by the Shin Corporation, a Thaksin-founded conglomerate of which his family is a major shareholder. Although later pressured to drop them, Thaksin himself filed a series of charges against Sondhi Limthongkul, a prominent journalist and fierce Thaksin critic, for alleging that he was disloyal to the Thai monarch, and against the daily *Manager* for reporting a Buddhist monk's criticism of the government. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, monetary

damages sought in civil cases alone included some of the largest figures ever requested for libel anywhere in the world. The country's growing culture of legal intimidation and a general fear of economic repercussions have sparked a rise in self-censorship and, in certain cases, caused newspaper managers to take punitive action against critical reporters. The murders of two press members who had reported negatively on local police and officials mark an additional decline for press freedom in Thailand, where violence against journalists has typically been rare.

Radio and television remain primarily under the control of the state or state-affiliated private businesses; stations are required to renew licenses annually and to feature government-produced newscasts daily. Media ownership became even more problematic toward the end of the year with the prime minister's use of business cronies to purchase greater shares in, or orchestrate financial takeovers of, media organisations. Examples include the secretary-general of the Thai Rak Thai party, who increased his family's stakes in the Nation Group (an independent media company), and the controlling stakes that GMM Grammy PLC (a large media conglomerate dealing with both news and entertainment) maintains in *Matichon* (an independent Bangkok-based daily) as well as the publishing company of the *Bangkok Post*. The National Broadcast Commission, established in October 2005 to redistribute the country's frequencies from the state to the private sector as constitutionally mandated, was nullified just a month later for irregularities in its selection process. The government has censored the internet since 2003 and has successfully blocked more than 4,000 websites; since violence erupted in the south, it has ramped up efforts to block sites considered a threat to national security, including those of Muslim separatist groups (Freedom House, 2006).

2. Mass Media in Laos

Most print and electronic media are state owned. The role of the mass media in Laos is to reflect the policies and plans of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and government in all areas and activities, providing a link between the Party, the State and the masses. (Visiting Arts, 2006)

Key media agencies in Laos (BBC, 2007) are as follow:

1. The Press
 - 1.1 Vientiane Times – state-run, English language
 - 1.2 Le Renovateur - state run, French-language
 - 1.3 Vientiane Mai - state-run daily
 - 1.4 Pasaxon - party monthly
2. Television
 - 2.1 Lao National TV (TVNL) - state-run
 - 2.2 Laos Television 3 - joint venture with Thai company
3. Radio
 - 3.1 Lao National Radio - state-run
4. News agency
 - 4.1 KPL - state-run

Two papers that occasionally report on social and economic problems are the French weekly *Le Renovateur* and the English daily *Vientiane Times*, which are subsidized by the Ministry of Information and Culture and frame their content primarily to attract tourists, expatriates, and investors to the country. Tourism has led to the proliferation of internet kiosks with unrestricted access to foreign news sites. However, language barriers and high monthly connection fees (approximately \$300 to \$400 compared with the average monthly salary of \$20 to \$30) limit regular internet use for all but wealthy individuals, expatriates, and business organizations. Internet service providers must submit quarterly reports to the government to facilitate monitoring.

Article 6 of the 1991 constitution guarantees press freedom and civil liberties, but only in theory (Freedom House, 2006). Few citizens actually feel free to exercise these rights because there are no legal safeguards for voicing dissent in public. Article 7 requires the mass media, particularly Lao-language papers such as *Vientiane Mai* and *Pasaxon* and the national news agency, Khaosan Pathet Lao, to "unite and mobilize" the diverse ethnic groups to support the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Although central censorship is no longer directly imposed on the press, the Ministry of Information and Culture continues to oversee media

coverage and academic publishing. Editors are government appointees assigned to ensure that media function as links between the party and the people.

Military abuses against the Lao-Hmong people, as well as arrests of Christians for practicing their faith, go unreported in the Lao-language papers. To date, there are no international media agencies or journalism schools in Laos, except for UN development organizations. Thus, Lao journalists whose salaries are paid by the government are officiously guided by the editors' promulgation of the media as an instrument of the government. The media's role is to link the people to the party, deliver party policy messages, and disseminate political ideology. All editors are members of the Lao Journalists Association, presided over by Bouabane Vorakhoun, Minister of Information and Culture. (Freedom House, 2006)

3. Mass Media in Myanmar

The Burmese media remained among the most tightly restricted in the world in 2005 (Freedom House, 2006). The ruling military junta zealously implements a 1996 decree banning speech or statements that "undermine national stability," and those who publicly express or disseminate views that are critical of the regime are subject to strict penalties, including lengthy prison terms. Although several journalists and writers were released from jail throughout the year, others were arrested and a number continue to serve lengthy sentences as a result of expressing dissident views. Other laws require private publications to apply for annual licenses and criminalize the use of unregistered telecommunications equipment, satellite dishes, computers, and software.

Key media in Myanmar are as follow:

1. The Press
 - 1.1 KyeHmon - state-run daily
 - 1.2 Myanmar Alin - organ of State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)
 - 1.3 New Light of Myanmar - English-language organ of SPDC
 - 1.4 Myanmar Times - state-run English-language weekly

2. Television

2.1 TV Myanmar - state-run, operated by Myanmar TV and Radio Department – broadcasts in Bamar, Arakanese (Rakhine), Shan, Karen, Kachin, Kayah, Chin, Mon and English

2.2 MRTV-3 - state-run international TV service

2.3 TV Myawady - army-run network

3. Radio

3.1 Radio Myanmar - state-run, operated by Myanmar TV and Radio Department
City FM - entertainment station operated by Yangon City Development Committee

3.2 Democratic Voice of Burma - opposition station based in Norway, broadcasts via shortwave

4. News Agency/Internet

4.1 Myanmar News Agency (MNA) - state-run

4.2 Mizzima News - run by Burmese exiles

BBC (2007) indicated that all forms of domestic public media are officially-controlled or censored. This strict control, in turn, encourages self-censorship on the part of journalists.

The BBC, Voice of America, the US-backed Radio Free Asia and the Norway-based opposition station Democratic Voice of Burma target listeners in Burma.

Paris-based media watchdog Reporters Without Borders has placed Burma among the bottom 10 countries in its world press freedom ranking. It says the press is subject to "relentless advance censorship".

Private periodicals are subject to prepublication censorship, with coverage being limited to a small range of permissible topics. The junta's leadership took control of the censorship bureau after the October 2004 purge of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, and a new Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), under the control of the Ministry of Information, was established

in April 2005. All publications were then required to reregister with the PSRD, with each periodical expected to provide detailed information about staff, ownership, and financial backing. Under new censorship rules that came into effect in July, media are ostensibly allowed to offer criticism of government projects as long as it is deemed "constructive" and are allowed to report on natural disasters and poverty as long as it does not affect the national interest. Meanwhile, critical coverage of regional allies such as India and China was banned outright, as were op-ed pieces. Ironically, however, the junta forbade the *Myanmar Times* from publishing a Burmese translation of the new regulations, according to the Southeast Asian Press Alliance. During the year, authorities imposed blackouts on news related to the impact of the December 2004 tsunami and on the May 2005 Rangoon bombings. Several publications were banned temporarily from distributing editions that aroused the ire of censorship authorities. Both local and foreign journalists' ability to cover the news is restricted. A few foreign reporters are allowed to enter Burma only on special visas; they are generally subjected to intense scrutiny while in the country and in past years have occasionally been deported. However, some foreign correspondents were invited to cover the February and December sessions of the National Convention.

The government owns all broadcast media and daily newspapers and exercises tight control over a growing number of privately owned weekly and monthly publications. While official media outlets serve as mouthpieces of the state, private media generally avoid covering domestic political news, and many journalists practice self-censorship. A stagnant economy, increased prices for newsprint, and a limited market for advertising revenue (following a 2002 ban on advertising Thai products) have further threatened the financial viability of the private press. Authorities restrict the importation of foreign news periodicals, and although some people have access to international shortwave radio or satellite television (the main sources of uncensored information), those caught accessing foreign broadcasts can be arrested, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The Internet, which operates in a limited fashion in the cities, is expensive, tightly regulated, and censored. Bagan Cybertech, the main Internet service provider formerly owned by Khin Nyunt's son, was taken over by the government in November 2004; in 2005, authorities moved to deactivate e-mail addresses run by Bagan and block access to websites run by Burmese exile groups.

4. Mass Media in China

China's media are tightly controlled by the country's leadership. The opening-up of the industry has extended to distribution and advertising, not to editorial content (BBC, 2007).

Beijing tries to limit access to foreign news providers by restricting re-broadcasting and the use of satellite receivers, by jamming shortwave radio broadcasts, including those of the BBC, and by blocking web sites. Ordinary readers have no access to foreign newspapers.

Fears that the media in Hong Kong would lose their independence when the territory reverted to Chinese control in 1997 have generally not been borne out. Hong Kong still has editorially-dynamic media, but worries about interference remain.

The press reports on corruption and inefficiency among officials, but the media as a whole avoid criticism of the Communist Party's monopoly on power. Each city has its own newspaper, usually published by the local government, as well as a local Communist Party daily.

With more than one billion viewers, television is a popular source for news and the sector is competitive, especially in urban areas. China is also becoming a major market for pay-TV; it is forecast to have 128 million subscribers by 2010. State-run Chinese Central TV, provincial and municipal stations offer a total of around 2,100 channels.

The availability of non-domestic TV is limited. Agreements are in place which allow selected channels - including stations run by AOL Time Warner, News Corp and the Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV - to transmit via cable in Guangdong province. In exchange, Chinese Central TV's English-language network is made available to satellite TV viewers in the US and UK.

Beijing says it will only allow relays of foreign broadcasts which do not threaten "national security" or "political stability". Of late, it has been reining in the activities and investments of foreign media groups. The media regulator - the State Administration for Radio, Film and Television - has warned local stations that foreign-made TV programmes must be approved before broadcast.

The internet scene in China is thriving, though controlled. Beijing routinely blocks access to sites run by the banned spiritual movement Falun Gong, rights groups and some foreign news organisations. It has moved to curb postings by a small but growing number of bloggers.

An international group of academics concluded in 2005 that China has "the most extensive and effective legal and technological systems for internet censorship and surveillance in the world".

The media rights group Reporters Without Borders describes the country as the world's "largest prison for journalists".

Key media outlets in China are as follow:

1. The Press

1.1 Renmin Ribao (People's Daily) - Communist Party daily

1.2 Zhongguo Qingnian Bao (China Youth Daily) - state-run, linked to Communist Youth League

1.3 China Daily - state-run, English-language

1.4 Jiefangjun Bao - People's Liberation Army daily

1.5 Zhongguo Jingji Shibao (China Economic Times) - state-run, daily

1.6 Fazhi Ribao (Legal Daily) - state-run

1.7 Gongren Ribao (Workers' Daily) - state-run

1.8 Nongmin Ribao (Farmers' Daily) - state-run, agricultural and rural issues

1.9 Nanfang Ribao (Southern Daily) - Communist Party daily, Guangdong province

2. Television

2.1 Chinese Central TV (CCTV) - state-run national broadcaster, networks include English-language CCTV-9

3. Radio

3.1 China National Radio - state-run

3.2 China Radio International - state-run external broadcaster, programmes in more than 40 languages, notably to Taiwan and Korea

4. News agencies

4.1 Xinhua (New China News Agency) - state-run

4.2 Zhongguo Xinwen She - China News Service, state-run, aimed mainly at overseas China

Freedom House (2006) revealed that China's authoritarian regime continues to place widespread restrictions on freedom of the press; the constitution, although usually not enforced, affords little protection for members of the media and ensures that the Communist Party (CP) is at the apex of political power. Article 35 guarantees freedom of speech, assembly, and publication. However, other articles subordinate these rights to the national interest, which is defined by party-appointed courts. Primarily through its Central Propaganda Department (CPD), the CP maintains direct control over the news media, especially concerning topic areas deemed by the party to be politically sensitive. This control is reinforced by an elaborate web of legal restrictions. The 1990 Rule on Strengthening Management over Publications Concerning Important Party and National Leaders, for example, makes it illegal to report on any aspect of the lives of top leaders without permission from the CPD and other central government ministries. Statutes in the criminal code, such as the Protection of National Secrets Law, can also make reporting on governmental affairs an offense punishable by prison sentences. Regulations and laws are vaguely worded and interpreted according to the wishes of the central party leadership.

In a move to counter criticism that access to information in China is insufficiently transparent, the central government mouthpiece, Xinhua News Agency, announced in September that the death toll in natural disasters would no longer be regarded as a state secret. However, news of infectious diseases and man-made disasters continue to be treated as state secrets and are subject to censorship, as are a number of other topics. As a general rule, any information can be classified as a state secret if its release is believed to have harmed state interests or state security. In March, the new Regulations on the Administration of Book Quality came into effect, requiring

publishers to refrain from reprinting books of questionable political correctness and authorizing the government to confiscate banned books that had already been sold. In August 2005, the CPD issued a new order restricting popular access to foreign films and television programs. Nonetheless, with vigorous foreign media operating in China, the regime's task of suppressing information has become more difficult; for Chinese with foreign language ability, foreign news reports present an "alternate" truth to that available in the official media. A growing number of Chinese travel abroad, telephone friends or relatives overseas, and watch a plethora of pirated media products available in urban areas.

In 2005, journalists who reported on controversial issues, criticized the CP, or presented a perspective contrary to state propaganda continued to suffer harassment, abuse, and detention. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that for the seventh year in a row, China had jailed more journalists than any other country in the world, with 32 in prison, half of whom were there on account of internet-related cases. For example, Zhang Lin was arrested in January and found guilty of "inciting subversion" after publishing six articles on the Internet criticizing the CP. Foreign correspondents were also not immune from government intimidation. *New York Times* reporter Zhao Yan remains in prison after his arrest in 2004 for releasing state secrets following an article predicting the retirement of Jiang Zemin. In April 2005, Ching Cheong, a Hong Kong correspondent for the Singapore-based *Straits Times*, was detained in Guangzhou on suspicion of harming state security by working as a spy for Taiwan. According to Ching's wife, he was working on a story involving Zhao Ziyang, the purged general secretary of the CP.

Media reforms have allowed the commercialization of media operations without the privatization of media ownership. All Chinese media are owned by the state, but the majority no longer receive state subsidies and now rely on income from advertisement revenue, which some argue has shifted the media's loyalty from the party to the consumer. The CPD disseminates directives to media nationwide concerning mandatory use of state propaganda and indicating topics to be barred from reports. To avoid the risk of running afoul of the CPD, journalists often engage in self-censorship, a practice reinforced by frequent ideological indoctrination and by a salary scheme that pays journalists only after their reports are published or broadcast. When a journalist writes a report considered too controversial, payment is withheld, and in some cases the

journalist must pay for the cost of news gathering out of pocket. A small number of elite media combat such deterrents to aggressive reporting by paying journalists for reports that are subject to censorship. This has resulted in a few media outlets championing popular causes and printing embarrassing exposures of official malfeasance. Nevertheless, media personnel who do so are too often fired or arrested.

The China Internet Network Information Center estimates the number of internet users at 111 million, large in absolute terms but calculated to be less than 10 percent of the country's population. The Chinese government regularly blocks or shuts down websites it deems politically threatening, such as those that report on incidents of rural unrest. In July 2005, government agencies shut down over a quarter of China's 573,755 websites after their operators failed to register with the Ministry of Information Industry. In September, new regulations were issued that increased the ability of the government to restrict internet news sites, web logs, and cell phone text messaging, which is also subject to monitoring by the government. The same content restrictions applied to print and broadcast media also apply to internet content. Foreign internet companies have largely cooperated with the Chinese government on censorship enforcement. A prominent example of this was the role played by Yahoo! in providing information leading to the conviction of Hunan journalist Shi Tao for leaking "state secrets," which resulted in a 10-year prison sentence.

5. Mass Media in Vietnam

The Communist Party has a strong grip on the media. The Ministry of Culture and Information controls the press and broadcasting (BBC, 2007).

The government has shut down several publications for violating the narrow limits on permissible reporting. Under a 2006 decree journalists face large fines for transgressions which include denying revolutionary achievements and spreading "harmful" information or "reactionary ideology".

There are hundreds of newspapers and magazines, but television is the dominant medium. Vietnam Television (VTV) broadcasts from Hanoi and is available via satellite to the wider region. There are many provincial stations. Some foreign channels are carried via cable.

State-run Voice of Vietnam (VoV) operates national radio networks, including the VoV 5 channel with programmes in English, French and Russian.

Key media outlets in Vietnam are as follow:

1. The Press

- 1.1 Nhan Dan - Communist Party daily, English-language pages

- 1.2 Vietnam Economic Times - English-language pages

- 1.3 Le Courrier du Vietnam - French-language

- 1.4 Vietnam News - English-language daily

- 1.5 Quan Doi Nhan Dan - People's Army daily

2. Television

- 2.1 VTV - Vietnam Television

3. Radio

- 3.1 Voice of Vietnam - operates national networks and an external service

- 3.2 Dai Tieng Noi Nhan Dan - Ho Chi Minh City

4. News agency

- 4.1 Vietnam News Agency

Although the 1992 constitution recognizes the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, and association for all citizens, the propaganda and training departments of the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) control all media and set press guidelines. In addition, a 1999 law

requires journalists to pay damages to individuals or groups found to have been harmed by press articles, even if they are true. Reporting considered to be against the national interest can be charged under the criminal code and antidefamation provisions. Nguyen Thi Lan Anh, a staff reporter of *Tuoi Tre*, was indicted on the charge of "appropriating state secrets" after her investigations into leaked allegations of manipulations of the drug market by the multinational pharmaceutical company Zuellig Pharma, which had a contract with the Ministry of Health. However, after Lan Anh received unprecedented support from major media outlets, the charges against her were dropped (Freedom House, 2006)

The party's general secretary, Nong Duc Manh, called on the media to help fight corruption and facilitate economic reforms during the party's Ninth Congress in January. However, on January 10 the government closed down *Tintucvietnam.com*, a website dealing primarily with economic and cultural issues, for publishing readers' letters that alleged corruption among high officials. Instances of harassment or assaults against reporters attempting to cover the news by police or other assailants have increased in recent years. Trang Dung, a reporter for *An Ninh The Gioi*, was beaten by security guards and had his camera destroyed even after he displayed his press credentials. The story of the incident along with a photograph of his wounds was later published in the paper to call attention to the brutality and systematic nature of violence toward the media. Although journalists cannot cover sensitive political or economic matters or openly question the CPV's single-party rule without fear of such violent reprisals, they are allowed to report on crime and official corruption, and such reports have become increasingly common. Foreign journalists based in Vietnam are monitored closely, and their movements within the country are restricted. Internet dissidents such as Pham Hong Son and Nguyen Vu Binh continue to remain in jail on charges of espionage. Although authorities did release prominent writer Nguyen Dan Que, he remained under strict surveillance and was subject to some harassment.

All print and broadcast media outlets are owned by or are under the effective control of the CPV, government organs, or the army. As in other Communist systems, the party and the government fund most of the publications in Vietnam, although several newspapers, including *Thanh Nien*, *Nguoi Lao Dong*, and *Tuoi Tre* (owned by the Youth Union under the CPV), have

attempted to become financially sustainable and to stop relying on state subsidies. Local journalists are generally optimistic that private ownership of the media will improve sooner rather than later, particularly with regard to the internet, though competition for advertising among the more than 500 newspapers and 200 digital news sites remains stiff. Foreign periodicals, although widely available, are sometimes censored, and the broadcasts of stations such as Radio Free Asia are periodically jammed. However, access to satellite television broadcasts and the internet is growing. The first online news site, vietnamnet.vn, publishes in Vietnamese and English, while vietnamjournalism.com, a blog run by a local journalist, discusses professional and ethical issues. Use of the internet has grown sharply, with more than 5 million new users in the last five years. Website operators continue to go through internet service providers that are either public or part public owned, like Vietnam Data Communications, which is controlled by the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications and caters to nearly a third of all internet users. It is required by law that service providers block access to designated websites that the government considers politically unacceptable. Radio Free Asia reported in December that *Tieng Noi Dan Chu*, a website founded by dissident writer Tran Khue to lobby for democratic reform in Vietnam, was hacked into 19 days after it launched.

6. Mass Media in Cambodia

Many Cambodian newspapers and private radio and TV stations depend on support from political parties. Prime Minister Hun Sen and his allies control several broadcasters.

Although press freedom is not guaranteed, Hun Sen has declared his support for press freedom, publicly praising the benefits to society of an unfettered media.

There are no restrictions on satellite dish ownership and foreign radio broadcasts can be received easily from neighbouring countries. The BBC, via its BBC 100 FM service, and Radio France Internationale are available in Phnom Penh (BBC, 2007)

Key media in Cambodia are:

1. The Press

- 1.1 Reaksmei Kampuchea - pro-government daily
- 1.2 Kaoh Santepheap - pro-government daily
- 1.3 Cambodia Daily - English-language
- 1.4 Phnom Penh Post - English-language

2. Television

- 2.1 National Television of Cambodia (TVK) - state broadcaster
- 2.2 TV3 - commercial, jointly-run by Phnom Penh Municipality
- 2.3 TV5 - private
- 2.4 CTN - private
- 2.5 Bayon TV - private
- 2.6 CTV9 - private
- 2.7 Apsara TV - commercial

3. Radio

- 3.1 National Radio of Cambodia - state broadcaster
- 3.2 Radio FM 103 - commercial, jointly-run by Phnom Penh Municipality
- 3.3 Radio FM 97 - commercial, operated by Apsara Radio and TV
- 3.4 Radio FM 95 - commercial, operated by Bayon Radio and TV

4. News agency

- 4.1 Agence Kampuchea Presse (AKP)

Although local journalists generally see the government as being relatively tolerant of the media when compared with Cambodia's neighbors, restrictive legislation and a highly politicized media environment continue to hamper the Cambodian press. The constitution guarantees the

right to free expression and a free press, and while the 1995 Press Law also theoretically protects press freedom, the government has used it to censor stories deemed to undermine political stability. Under Article 12, the employer, editor, or author of an article may be subject to a fine of 5 million to 15 million riels (US\$1,282 to US\$ 3,846). The law also gives the Ministries of Information and the Interior the right to confiscate or suspend a publication for 30 days and transfer the case to court. Article 13 states that the press shall not publish or reproduce false information that humiliates or is in contempt of national institutions. A continuing concern is the number of defamation cases filed during the year against journalists. On August 31, the Supreme Court upheld a guilty verdict against *Cambodian Daily* reporter Kay Kimsong, charging him for writing a "defamatory" article about Foreign Affairs Minister Hor Namhong. In October, Prime Minister Hun Sen filed defamation charges against radio journalist Mam Sonando and seven human rights activists who criticized him for signing a special border treaty with Vietnam. Other journalists had fled the country for fear of being charged.

Although the threat of arrest has reportedly led to a slight increase in self-censorship, press coverage in Cambodia remains vigorous, and journalists regularly expose official corruption and scrutinize the government. However, on several occasions during the year, the government attempted to fetter journalistic coverage and access. In October, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, authorities imposed restrictions on reporters' ability to cover news from law courts in the capital, Phnom Penh. On November 23, the Ministry of Information ordered all radio and television stations to cease reading and editorializing the contents of newspapers over the air. The Ministry said the commentaries were "in addition to the contexts of those stories, contrasting the ethical code of the journalistic profession and affecting Khmer tradition and social order." Journalists remain subject to some intimidation and harassment at the hands of authorities, and reporters in the provinces, particularly those who cover issues like illegal logging, face additional dangers such as physical attacks; several instances of assault were noted during 2005.

Journalists from more than 20 publications aligned with or subsidised by various political factions are unbridled in criticising their adversaries and public officials but generally do not criticize the king. The ruling Cambodian People's Party, its coalition partner the Royalist Party (Funcinpec), and the opposition Sam Rainsy Party each has its own newspaper. However, the

government dominates both radio and TV, the main media sources for the two-thirds of the population that are functionally illiterate, and broadcast programming generally reflects official viewpoints. Independent broadcast outlets' operations are constrained by the refusal to allocate radio and television frequencies to stations that are aligned with the opposition. In addition, the economy is not strong enough to generate sufficient advertising revenues to support truly neutral or independent media. Access to foreign broadcasts and to the internet is generally unrestricted.

Related Theories and Concept

1. Agenda Setting Theory

The agenda-setting function of the media refers to the media's capability, through repeated news coverage, to raise the importance of an issue in the public's mind.

Agenda-setting studies typically concern themselves with 'information' media: news magazines, newspapers, television, and radio. In a sense, newspapers are the prime mover in agenda setting. They play a great role in determining what most people will be talking about, what people will think the facts are, and what most people will regard as the solutions (Norton Long, 1958).

Much of the research on agenda setting was conducted during political campaigns. There are two reasons for this. First, messages generated by political campaigns are usually designed to set agendas (politicians call this tactic "emphasising the issues"). Second, political campaigns have a clear-cut beginning and end, thus making the time period for study unambiguous.

The type of topic being covered influences the extent of its impact on agenda setting processes. Coverage of concrete issues (e.g. drug abuse, energy) has a more pronounced effect than coverage of abstract issues (e.g. budget deficits, nuclear arms race). Moreover, a person's experience with a topic also influences the agenda-setting effect. Stories about inflation, a topic that most consumers experience directly, have little impact on public perception of its importance.

On the other hand coverage of foreign affairs, where most people lack direct experience, has been found to have a considerable agenda-setting effect.

Recently published reviews note two new directions of research interest. The first pertains to the notion of framing, the general way a news topic is treated by the media. This line of research posits that the media not only tells us what to think, it also tells us how to think about it by the way the story is framed. A second direction concerns agenda building. (Dominick, 2002)

The use of media can direct public attention to certain issues, thereby putting them on the public agenda. The media builds up public images of political figures by constantly presenting themes suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about (Lang and Lang, 1959).

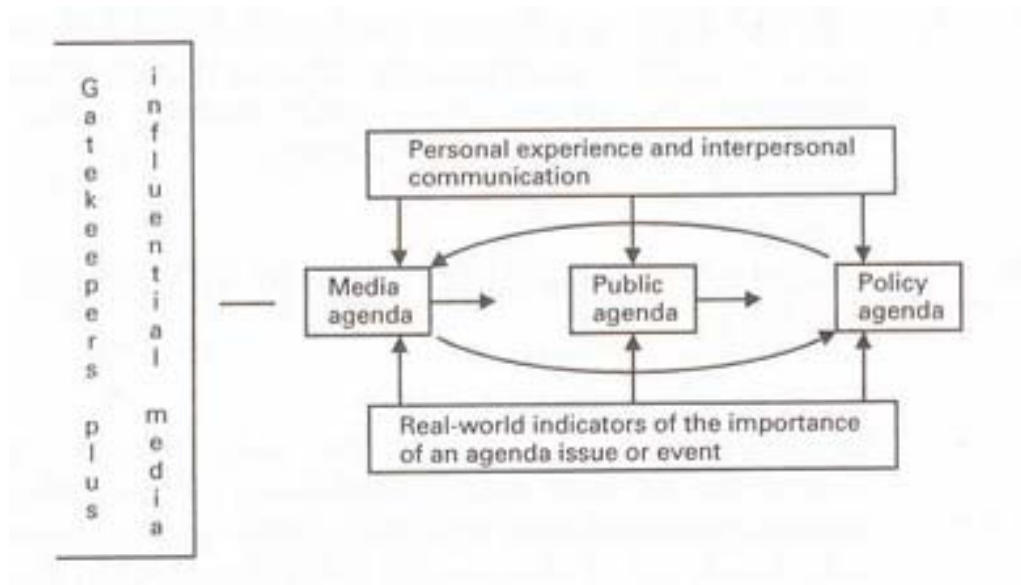


Figure 3 Agenda Setting

Source: McQuail & Windahl (1993)

Noam Chomsky provided interesting description on media and agenda setting during his talk on *What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream* at Z Media Institute, June 1997:

You look at the media, or at any institution you want to understand. You ask questions about its internal institutional structure. You want to know something about their setting in the broader society. How do they relate to other systems of power and authority? If you're lucky, there is an internal record from leading people in the information system which tells you what they are up to (it is sort of a doctrinal system). That doesn't mean the public relations handouts but what they say to each other about what they are up to. There is quite a lot of interesting documentation. Those are the major sources of information about the nature of the media. You want to study them the way, say, a scientist would study some complex molecule or something. You take a look at the structure and then make some hypothesis based on the structure as to what the media product is likely to look like. Then you investigate the media product and see how well it conforms to the hypotheses. Virtually all work in

media analysis is this last part—trying to study carefully just what the media product is and whether it conforms to obvious assumptions about the nature and structure of the media. Well, what do you find? First of all, you find that there are different media which do different things, like the entertainment/Hollywood, soap operas, and so on, or even most of the newspapers in the country (the overwhelming majority of them). They are directing the mass audience.

There is another sector of the media, the elite media, sometimes also called the **agenda-setting media** because they are the ones with the big influence and resources (e.g. Associated Press, Reuters, the *New York Times* and CBS in the US). They set the framework in which everyone else operates, and other media use elite media content for large proportions of their own reportage. Their target audiences are mostly people who are either wealthy or part of what is sometimes called the political class—that is, they are actually involved in the political system in an ongoing fashion. They are basically managers of one sort or another. They can be political managers, business managers, corporate executives, doctoral managers, university professors, investors, researchers or other journalists who are involved in organising the way people think and look at things.

What about the institutional setting? The media is a doctrinal system, and media institutions interact closely with both themselves and other institutions. That is, the media provides input to itself through the outputs of its component organisations and institutions, each part influencing the other. For example, newspaper reports influence organisational behaviour, thus generating media releases and announcements which are then used for newspaper reports. That is, institutions are very similar to, or even a part of, the media (Chomsky, 1997).

2. Public Sphere Concept

The concept of public sphere as expressed by Habermas (1989) has existed in its true sense in the UK since the 18th century. The coffee houses in London society at this time became

the centres of art and literary criticism, which gradually widened to include even the economic and the political disputes as matters of discussion. In French salons, as Habermas says, "opinion became emancipated from the bonds of economic dependence". Any new work, or a book or a musical composition had to get its legitimacy in these places. It not only paved a forum for self-expression, but in fact had become a platform for airing one's opinions and agendas for public discussion.

Habermas is optimistic about the possibility of the revival of the public sphere. He sees hope for the future in the new era of political community that transcends the nation-state based on ethnic and cultural likeness for one based on the equal rights and obligations of legally vested citizens.

3. Social Responsibility Theory

Social responsibility asserts that media must remain free of government control, but in exchange media must serve the public. The core assumption of this theory are a cross between libertarian principles of freedom and practical admissions of the need for some form of control on the media (McQuail, 1987):

- Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society.
- Media can meet these obligations by setting high standards of professionalism, truth, accuracy, and objectivity.
- Media should be self-regulating within the framework of the law.
- Media should avoid disseminating material that might lead to crime. Violence, or civil disorder or that might offend minority groups
- The media as a whole should be pluralistic, reflect the diversity of the culture in which they operate, and give access to various points of view and rights of reply.

- The public has a right to expect high standards of performance, and official intervention can be justified to ensure the public good.
- Media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to their employers and the market.

In rejecting government control of media, social responsibility theory call for responsible, ethical industry operation, but it does not free audiences from their responsibility. People must be sufficient media literature to develop firm yet reasonable expectations and judgments of media performance. But ultimately it is practitioners, through the conduct of their duties, who are charged with operating in a manner that obviates the need for official intrusion. (Baran, 2004)

Related Research

Related research collected and presented in this thesis is paying more attention on research conducted by institutions in Thailand. However, during the period of data collection, no single research specifically on Mekong and media. Therefore, following research papers in relation to media are mostly collected.

Methom (1996) found from his research *Front Page News' Selection of Thai Newspapers: Comparative Study Between Thairath Daily and Daily News* that The news selection processes of Thairath and Daily News are similar. Each begins with reporters from the different sections bringing in stories and submitting them to the Heads of the News Desk. The Heads consider which stories will be published and, if the Heads see that the story is news worthy for the front page, then that story will be sent to the Front Page News Desk. The Head of Front Page News will make the final selection of which stories will be published in the front page.

Two factors influencing the selection of front page news for both Thairath Daily and Daily News were the 'importance' and 'interest' values of news items. Importance value of news carries a higher weighting for both Thairath and Daily News. However, the interest value of news

items was relatively more important for Thairath than for Daily News. Thairath was relatively more concerned about news which relates to the readers' interests, unusual things or events, sensationalism, conflicts, sex, and progress than Daily News. Daily news was relatively more concerned about the impacts of news.

Other factors influencing of front page news reports for both papers are their readers' interests, relevance to former news, and governance. Daily news pays more attention on readers' interest than Thairath. For the former news reported has similarly influence on both papers.

Chartprasert (1996) found from his research *A Study of the Exposure to News about Thailand of Thai Students in Japan* that Thai students in Japan who are highly exposed to the media will know more about Thai news more than Thai students who have low exposure to the media. Thai students in Japan who are exposed to the media through many channels will know more about Thai news than those exposed to the media through less channels.

Bunyaratabhandhu (1996) found from her research *Information Exposure and Attitude of the Business Reporters towards the Bangkok Bank Ltd: A Case Study of Print Media* that business news reporters have a high level of exposure to information about Bangkok Bank. The highest level of media available to business reporters is information disseminated directly by the bank (e.g. press releases, bulletins and announcements), followed by newspapers and magazines respectively. Beside, business reporters have high level of understanding about the Bangkok Bank. Business reporters generally have good views towards the Bangkok Bank, except regarding its service which the respondents suggested should be improved. Business reporters mostly prefer to do personal interviews in order to get a story, however most of their stories are sourced from information formally disseminated by the Bank, or from newspapers. The three most important elements of Bangkok Bank's good public image are good and speedy service, convenience, availability of modern services, and having CEOs that are accountable.

Woraphan (1989) found from her research *Television News = Thai Contexts, Modes of Emission and Reception* that the most influential political and economic news TV news programs

are broadcast at 8.00 pm. Audiences spend about 1.45 hrs watching TV per day. TV news content includes more national news than international and local news; more hard news than soft news; and more real than fake news. There is less news on development issues than on politics. When responding to new reporting on political issues, people prefer to read or give comments through newspaper. Some audiences think that TV has no press freedom.

Sukprakarn's (1999) research *Influential Factors Toward the Thai Daily Newspapers' New Reporting on Fuel Energy Conservation*, was conducted among respondents i.e. news editors, heads of news desk, and reporters of Thairath, Daily News and Khao Sod newspapers. The study found that the respondents paid little attention to fuel energy conservation. This may be because their editorial policies place a low value on reportage of fuel energy conservation. It may reflect a belief by the news editors that such issues are not close to their readers' daily life, and that it takes time to see the impacts.

Even so, the respondents agreed that conservation of fuel energy was important because: Thailand's energy problem is in crisis; continued economic and industrial expansion of the country will lead to higher demand of fuel energy; and the government doesn't seriously support energy conservation. The respondents realised that the newspapers have important roles to play in raising public awareness of energy saving, and should act as a tool to disseminate information regarding energy conservation issues.

Yamjinda (2000) studied *Roles of Thairath Newspaper in Presenting News and Information on His Majesty the King Bhumiphols New Agricultural Theory* analysed Thairath newspaper's content from 5 December 1997 to December 31, 1998. A total of 187 issues of Thairath newspaper containing news and information about the New Agricultural Theory were coded using a coding sheet. Content analysis section was presented in frequency, percentage and chi-square tables, using SPSS/PC+ program to compile. The level of significance was set at .01. She used depth interviews with 44 samples consisting of 3 persons from Thairath's agricultural news section, a village chief, 12 farmers who practiced the New Agricultural Theory and 28 farmers who did not. The interview results were presented in the descriptive format using the

Thematic Analysis method. The study found that Thairath performs an informing role in presenting news on the New Agricultural Theory.

Thairath uses news format to present information on the New Agricultural Theory. Thairath presents information on the New Agricultural Theory by reporting about visits to demonstration locations, budget management and contests. The prominence of news figures, and significance to the New Agricultural Theory itself, are the agricultural news section's main criteria in selecting a news item to publish. Other factors for news selection include relevance to the agricultural and economic situation of the country.

The opinion leader in the community accesses information on the New Agricultural Theory in Thairath newspaper, and disseminates it to the villagers in both formal and informal community gatherings. Community farmers receive information on the New Agricultural Theory via Thairath newspapers, and family, group and interpersonal communications.

Suwankantha's (1999) research *Political Investigative Reporting in the Thai Press and Its Effects on Social Awareness* found that political investigative reporting in the Thai press impacts social awareness, builds up political support and participation, and facilitates political change. In the Chiang Mai Muang District, people's views after receiving political news from TV is most similar to the views of people that receive political news from newspapers. However, the daily newspaper proved to be the most efficient means of political communication. Thairath was the most read newspaper, followed by Matichon, Daily News and Khao Sod respectively. However, Matichon is generally considered the best political investigative reporting of the four daily newspapers, followed by Krungthep Turakij and Phoo Jadkan respectively. A persistent obstacle to investigative political reporting in the Thai press is the threat of political interference.

Research by Jomechanturong (2001), *Presentation of Economic News Responding to Social Classes of the Qualitative and quantitative Newspaper, Case Study of Thairath and Matichon* found that in the economic news pages of Thairath presented news on social classes the most, and gave priority to upper class rather than middle or lower class social news. Matichon

was the same. Thairath and Matichon gave different levels of importance to economic news. Thairath provided more space and articles for economic news than Matichon. When presentation of economic news responding to social classes, Thairath and Matichon were different. Thairath also presented more economic news which was relevant to all social classes than Matichon, the latter mostly reporting on news relevant to upper classes.

Arunmart's research (1997), *Role of Three Major Newspapers in Reporting the Issue of toxic Industrial Waste during January 1 and June 30, 1996*, found that among 3 major newspapers (Matichon, Thairath and Krungthep Turakij), news relating to toxic industrial waste occupied only 0.351 per cent of the total news space (excluding advertising). Toxic industrial waste news was reported in Krungthep Turakij the most, followed by Matichon and Thairath respectively. The frequency of news reportage was not consistent. Protests in January 1996 against the construction of a hazardous toxic industrial waste station at Pluak Daeng District, Rayong province, generated the most frequent news reports. The news reports were mostly in form of news rather than articles. The content of toxic industrial waste news was more negative than positive. However, the newspapers tended to report the situation by following the stream of events rather than to acting as knowledge provider to create better understanding of industrial toxic waste issues.

The research of Piemjai (2001), *Public Relations on Forest and Wildlife Conservation of Seub Nakhasathien Foundation*, provided a case of the tale; Bok Lao Kao Sip Project No. 1. is based on the study of document research together with the information from interviewing public relations staffs of Seub Nakhasathien foundation. The study on documents and multimedia materials of the foundation are also essential elements to this research. The field study on survey research took part on the sampling group which was the students who were set to do some activities. The survey depended on the interview and the descriptive statistic chart of frequency, percentage, and average. The purpose of this research is to study the public relations process of Seub Nakhasathien foundation, and to assess the mass media of the tale: Bok Lao Kao Sip Project No. 1.

The consequence of this study reveals that the major purpose of public relations is to publicise the biography, chronicles, and intention of Seub Nakhasathien in order to encourage Thai people to realize how important our natural resources are. This Foundation aims to promote conservation activities, and receives public donations to support these activities. Making people aware of how to conserve natural resources is one of the keys to leading people to participate in conservation.

The distinguishing element of this presentation strategy is the use of a symbolic person, Seub Nakasathien. Other things used to deliver the messages are mood, appeal, supporting evidence, and logic. Various Public Relations materials are utilised e.g. person media, mass media, print media, mobile media, electronic media, etc. to target people who live within the Western Forest Complex areas, and also others who live outside the forest area.

The result found that Map game and Puppet are most interesting and memorable of the messages among the target groups. The mobile exhibition attracted no interest and the target groups could not read it. From the evaluation on knowledge, understanding and value of Western Forest Complex found that most of the target groups are in high level.

Achasripetch (2001) mentioned in *Foreign News Production Process of the Radio Thailand Station*, conducted for the Department of Public Relations, analysed the production process of foreign news broadcasted by Radio Thailand Station. The study found that the key sources of information were from Reuters News Agency, Associated Press, and AFP. News selection would be done base upon the value of the news, determined by criteria set by the Department of Public Relations. Selected news would be translated and rewritten for radio broadcasting. Finally, scripts are typed for broadcast.

Wilawan (2001) presented documentary research with *Methodology in the Evaluation of the Environmental Public Relations Campaign: A Case study of Theses and the Campaign Evaluation Reports of the Government Sector*, which examined the areas of graduate study and research methodologies applied at the Faculty of Communication Arts Chulalongkorn University

and the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication Thammasat University, and also in evaluations of government sector campaigns.

The study analysed research data from general contents, research areas, and methodologies of twenty thesis proposals between 1989-2002 from the Faculty of Communication Arts Chulalongkorn University and the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication Thammasat University; and ten evaluation reports of the environmental campaign conducted by the Pollution Control Department and the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion between the year 1992-2002. A data recording form was developed and utilised as a data collecting instrument.

The study shows that the environmental public relations campaigns found in this study were mostly implemented by the Royal Forest Department and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. The concepts and theories employed in the studies are mostly related to communication exposure, knowledge, attitude, satisfaction, and participation behavior towards public relations campaigns. Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University theses relevant to environmental public relations campaigns utilise more diverse methodology than the campaign evaluation reports conducted by the Pollution Control Department and the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion. The Master's theses and campaign evaluation reports studied mostly explore primary data using over 300 samples from populations within Bangkok and vicinity. Multi-stage sampling technique is frequently used and questionnaires are the key instrument used in data collecting. Percentages, means, and inferential statistics were applied to describe relationships between variables. The findings regarding communication exposure, knowledge, attitude, satisfaction, and participation behavior revealed in the evaluation studies of the Pollution Control Department and the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion were practically applied to future action planning and activity implementation.

A study by Anuraktipan (1997) in *Effectiveness of Using Public Relation Media for Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) with case study: Fish Ladder Project at Pak Moon Dam, Ubon Ratchathani*, had slightly more female respondents than male. Most of them

are farmers of ages 40 years and up, with a primary education and with income less than 5,000 Baht per month. Most respondents were exposed to the television daily, to radio 3-4 days per week, and to newspapers and radio towers 1-2 days a week. The respondents conveyed information received to other villagers through discussions at least 1-2 days per week. The respondents sought media exposure to keep themselves up to date, and so that they could communicate message to other local people.

The respondents received information on the Fish Ladder Project at Pak Moon Dam mostly from television, especially the “Krajok Hok Dan” (6-side-mirror) programme on Channel 7. They saw programs about the project but found them hard to understand. Therefore, some respondents only remembered pictures and phrases. After TV, radio and newspapers provided exposure to relevant news by the respondents. Finally, heads of the sub-districts, villages, and Buddhist monks relayed information to respondents.

Respondents over 40 years old, especially house wives who seemed to gain less impact from the project, thought positively about the project and support the project. Villagers in Khong Jiem Sub-district, where the project is based, also have positive views about the project and a good understanding of the usefulness of the fish ladder, including the reasons for the fish ladder’s construction and support for the project.

Khanthavong (1999) said in *Transition Telecommunication Policy in Lao PDR* by following Lao telecommunications policy moving from a monopoly to allowing open investment from abroad. The study found that during 1986-2000 Lao PDR’s monopoly communications policy was not able to effectively support the country’s development. In order to solve this problem, Lao PDR is transitioning from monopoly to a liberalised industry environment in which investment from aboard can fit in. It is hoped that telecommunications will provide a strong foundation to support the country’s development. This change will also facilitate global pressures from organisations supporting telecommunications liberalisation (such as APEC, WTO).

Boonpap (1998) studied *Thai Television Vision After the Year 2000 AD* found that between 2000 and 2005 there may not be a change in the number of television stations, as Thailand's economy is slowing down. But when the economy gets better, there is a trend to increase the number of television stations in Thailand (e.g. Free TV and Subscription TV). Competition among television stations is expected to be more serious in the future, and television are beginning to play a greater role in serving the needs of local viewers, with increased air time for local programmes. Plans for deployment of signal transmission infrastructure and technology and signal transmission system in Thailand, from 2000 to 2005, were not be changed by poor national economic performance as investments were committed for the long-term. However, as the economy improves, new television system technology would be expected to be introduced in the future e.g. digital system, web television, open television, digital MMDS, and interactive television (pay-per-view and video on demand).

In conclusion, the above mentioned researches have some similar results in term of identifying influential factors and the way that media organisations present news. There are a many people involved in the news presentation process, from journalists up to several decision making levels like news editors. Organisational structures and policies also influence the way they select or present news to their audiences. Most select news by considering if it is a hot issue already being discussed, or otherwise of high interest among the public. Political and economic news is usually seen as being of interest to the public, but environmental news is not covered to the same extent by the press.

Conceptual Framework

There are many factors to consider about news reporting on the Mekong Rapids Blasting issue. One important factor is that the frequency of reporting on the issue varies considerably between different countries. For example, from December 2002 until now (when is now?) Thai journalists provided a tremendous amount of coverage to the Mekong Rapids Blasting story, while in other countries coverage was relatively low. In order to explain and understand this important phenomenon, a study of the factors influencing reportage on the Mekong rapids

blasting issue is necessary. The influential factors considered in this study can be divided into 2 major groups:

1. Demographic data about reporters, including age; sex; educational background; reporting experience; and level of awareness towards the issue.

2. Influential factors including media organisation; country political/social/economic contexts; and access to information.

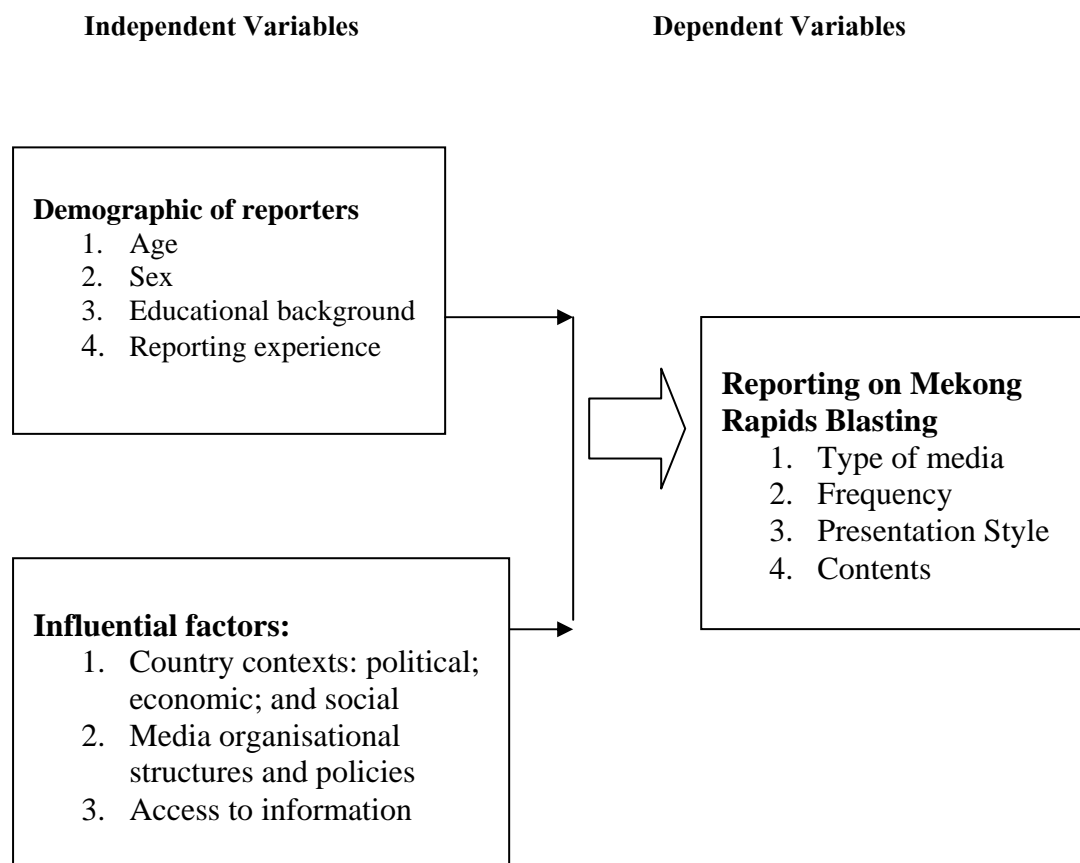


Figure 4 Conceptual Framework showing variables under this study

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research entitled “A Qualitative Analysis of Mass Media Response to the Mekong Rapids Blasting Project and Factors Influencing in the Greater Mekong Subregion” largely draws on qualitative data collected by in-depth interviews of journalists working on environmental and developmental issues in the Mekong region. Data from in-depth interviews and collected news articles are employed for the analysis.

Population

For this research, interviews were conducted with sixteen journalists who attended the Mekong media seminar Bangkok, Thailand in June 2004 organized by WWF Thailand, IUCN and UNESCO Bangkok. Journalists interviewed are all from Greater Mekong Subregion countries (Thailand, Vietnam, Lao PDR, China, Myanmar and Cambodia), and work on Mekong region environment and development issues.

Sampling Technique

Journalists were invited to participate in the study through announcements made at the Mekong Media Seminar; various media channels such as websites of WWF, IUCN and UNESCO; emails to the group mail of Asia-Pacific environmental journalists; and by sending letters to leading news agencies in Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, China, and Vietnam asking them to nominate their qualified journalists to attend the seminar.

The following text was used in invitation letters and announcements:

Nominees must be environment/development reporters or editors who are also actively involved in media associations in their respective countries. Nominating authorities are encouraged to nominate women reporters. As English is the working language of the seminar, nominees must be fluent in the language.

Participants will be each required to prepare a **short paper** regarding their perspectives on the way in which Mekong-related issues are presented in the media in their country. Highlighting issues of concern, including participation of local communities, in relation to development programme planning and implementation, as well as gender and youth-related issues. The papers may include examples of news reporting from each country which form the basis for the assessment in the paper, and will be shared with other participants at the seminar serving as a basis for further discussions on future media actions.

Seminar candidates were selected on the basis of their expressed interest in Mekong River development issues, including their published works. Participants sponsored by the organisers were asked to prepare and submit a country assessment paper. Sixteen journalist participants were selected from Thailand, China, Myanmar, Laos PDR, Viet Nam and Cambodia to attend the Mekong Media Seminar.

These sixteen journalists were interviewed for this study.

Data collection was conducted through:

1. In-depth interviews (face-to-face, telephone and e-mail).
2. Data compiled from their papers and news coverage on Mekong Rapids

Blasting published by Thai media during January 2002-December 2004

3. Direct observations during the seminar.

Research Instrument

A seminar, interview and compilation of news articles during January 2002-December 2004 are used as part of this research in order to help collect relevant data from respondents. Information gathered included:

1. Background information of respondents.
2. Media organisational data and country context.
3. Access to information regarding Mekong Rapids Blasting Project.
4. News content analysis.

Data Collection

Data is collected by organising the seminar, conducting in-depth interview and analysing news articles on the Mekong Rapids Blasting Project during January 2002-December 2004.

Data analysis

Data used in this research is qualitatively descriptive and content analysis.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of “A Qualitative Analysis of Mass Media Response to the Mekong Rapids Blasting Project and Factors Influencing in the Greater Mekong Region” can be presented as follows:

Background information of respondents

Media organisational structure

Access to information on Mekong Rapids Blasting Project

News content analysis

Background Information of Respondents

Table 1 List of respondents and their background information

No.	Name	Sex	Nationality	Position	Organisation	Education	Years of Experience (as of 2004)
1	Chhay Sophal	Male	Cambodian	Editor	Cambodia News	University	10
2	Khieu Kola	Male	Cambodian	Freelance Reporter	VOA, BBC, ABC, etc	Secondary School	19
3	Anonymous	-	Burmese	-	-	-	-
4	Anonymous	-	Burmese	-	-	-	-
5	Anonymous	-	Burmese	-	-	-	-
6	Li Liang	Male	Chinese	Senior Journalist	South China Weekend (Nanfang) Zhoumo)	University	8
7	Yin Jie	Female	Chinese	Assistant of Editor-in-Chief	Chinese National Geography Magazine	University	9
8	Le Hung Vong	Male	Vietnamese	Senior Reporter	Vietnam News Agency	University	17
9	Nhu Anh Tu	Female	Vietnamese	Reporter	Voice of Vietnam Radio	University	5
10	Bounlert Louanedouang chanh	Male	Lao	Chief of the Foreign News Service	Lao News Agency (KPL)	University	20
11	Souvanh Vilayseng	Male	Lao	Journalist	Lao National TV	University	13
12	Somsack Pongkhao	Male	Lao	Journalist	Vientiane Times	University	5
13	Doungkhe Bounyavong	Female	Lao	TV Producer: Growing Up in the Mekong Project	Independent	University	5
14	Pramote Thitiwongrit	Male	Thai	Reporter	Thai News Agency	University	5

Table 1 (Continued)

No.	Name	Sex	Nationality	Position	Organisation	Education	Years of Experience (as of 2004)
15	Wachira Chutichusanapong	Female	Thai	Deputy News Editor	TV Channel 9	University (M.A.)	23
16	Sukanya Chaipasi	Female	Thai	News Programme Producer	The Nation TV	University (M.A. Communications)	12

Data collected from 16 respondents (6 women and 10 men) shows that most of them have more than 5 years working experience in media arena. Their educational backgrounds are all at least bachelor degree. They are considered as senior journalists in their organisation, some of them are in the management level. The group of respondents represented different media sectors: TV; radio; newspapers; news agency; magazine; and freelance correspondent. Although most would produce news for only one media agency, a few of them produced news for multiple agencies. For example, independent journalists would write for more multiple agencies. Where a journalist's employer serviced more than one media channel, they would often feed news through multiple channels. For example, they could produce news for both TV and radio to save costs.

All respondents acknowledged Mekong related issues as important. However, not all of them demonstrated a good understanding about Mekong Rapids Blasting Project. They were more familiar with other Mekong related issues such as development in general, tourism and environment.

1. Access to information

As we can see from the previous discussion, there is a variety of approaches to reporting about the Mekong Rapids Development issues. The complexities of Mekong development issues

creates a barrier to many regional journalists. Most of the journalists covering Mekong issues were senior journalists with significant experience in development issues. Age doesn't guarantee quality of reportage, but in many cases age is correlated with experience and qualifications for the job. Experienced journalists will know how to deal with difficult and complicated issues (Sukanya Chaipasi, The Nation TV). Therefore, their reports will contain more investigative aspects. Sukanya also mentioned that we can tell whether journalists have done the homework.

As an example, if ten journalists from various news agencies came to interview the Prime Minister at Parliament House, only the well prepared journalists would ask insightful questions relevant to issues of the moment. Those who don't do their homework, and just run to put a microphone to the Prime Minister's face, would usually ask simple questions of little relevance. In the worse case, they may just copy down responses to other journalists' questions. A journalist's role includes that of investigator. He or she must build upon existing knowledge and research information, question people, recheck information gained, and present it accurately, within a short time frame, for their readers or viewers.

2. Gender issue

Gender doesn't significantly impact on reporting patterns. However, there are more men in decision making level than women and seniority clearly influences the flow of news production within media organisations.

People in higher-profile positions have greater authority to decide how and what to report, and have authority to approve the release of stories. In addition, it's easier for them to get closer to sources of information (person and non-person). For example, Wachira Chutichusanapong from Thai TV Channel 9 said that with her intensive experiences in this field, she knows how to make news interesting. Sometimes she doesn't have to edit the news she produced because it's already completed piece of work from the field. As she gains trust from her editor, she knows that the news she produces will always be broadcasted.

Lao journalists noted that in Laos it's relatively easy for them to get interviews with high ranking government officials as the media is part of the government.

Respected senior journalists such as news editor and TV programme producers can easily have "exclusive" interview. Sometimes, they don't have to run around but just ring some high ranking policy makers and ask for verification of information they have. This is not easy for young journalists because they don't have yet credibility. In addition, those exclusive people they know that which journalist they should speak to in order to get their message across smartly and accurately. (Sukanya Chaipasi, The Nation TV)

3. Language Barrier

English proficiency is also important factor for accessing to information. Even if it's not all case that English speaking journalists will produce better stories than non-English speaking ones but it's absolutely give more opportunities for journalists to access more sources of information such as interview native English speaking experts, search through English websites, read through reports written in English. Mekong Rapids Blasting Project is a good example of this since it's a regional or trans-boundary project for which all documents are in English, involving policy makers and international experts from different sectors.

4. Reporting on Mekong issues

All of respondents have produced reports on Mekong related issues, but not all have covered the Mekong Rapids Blasting issue in particular. They gained more knowledge on the issue from attending the Mekong Media Seminar workshop held in June 2004 in Bangkok, visiting the project site in Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai Province, interviewing Thai senator, community leaders, fishermen and local NGO members.

It appears the media in Laos is interested in reporting news about the national development, which is naturally one of the country's priorities. But it sometimes fails to focus on the need to balance development with protection of the environment. Some media still do not realise what they should report about the Mekong. (Somsak Pongkhao, Vientiane Times)

In Myanmar, power is highly centralised with few involvements of the citizens in policy-making. As a consequence, people and media have little information about domestic policies and development decisions. Mekong issues within Myanmar are no exception. There was little coverage in local media about Mekong River. Most of the articles were written by journalists who participated in Mekong Seminars and Workshops in neighboring countries. Even in those articles they have to point out the positive aspect of economic and not the negative consequence if it concerns with Myanmar. (Anonymous, Myanmar)

Yin Jie from Chinese National Geography Magazine (CNG) said that she did cover Mekong stories several times but not specifically cover the Mekong Rapids Blasting issue. Approximately once a month, there will be river story published in CNG. However, mostly it's about the part of the river in China.

Although not many of the respondent journalists have published articles about the Mekong Rapids Blasting project, notably a few from Thailand have. This is because the Chiang Khong part of the project was being conducted in Thailand, and considered a very hot issue at that time.

I am interested in Mekong River problems and have learned more on its development during my coverage on environmental and social affairs news. There have been a controversial issue of rapid blasts along the river here and it should even be a big problem among countries in Mekong River region. This sparked my interest to pursue on

the issue. My experience to visit countries in this region, including China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, gave me a feeling of special relationship to the areas. (Pramote Thitiwongrit, Thai News Agency, Public Relations Department)

5. Mekong through TV

Duangkhe Bounyavong, a producer of TV programme “Growing up in the Mekong” mentioned that she heard about Mekong Rapids Blasting through information exchange between groups of Thai activists, Thai friends and Thai TV which is widely broadcasted in Laos. For example, there was a group of Thai activists organizing “Mekong Pilgrimage”, a boat trip started from Chiang Khong of Thailand to Vientiane of Laos aiming at observing the Mekong River and raise awareness of people along the river of the two countries. They lastly stopped at her house in order to have group discussion on the issue between the Thais and Laotians including journalists. Her mother Duangduen Bunyavong a very respectful person who is well-known as a cultural and environmental conservationist has strong connection with Thai intellectual and senior journalists such as Sulak Sivalak and Sujit Wongthes, the owner of Matichon Group. So automatically Duangkhe is familiar with the issues. This inspires her to produce the TV programme entitled “Growing up in the Mekong” aiming at enhancing better understanding on Mekong in Laos, China, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia. Target audience is Lao youth.

6. Mekong issue and competition for getting stories published

Respondent journalists usually found themselves unable to cover only one subject in an article. For example, they can't report only on an environmental conservation story. The limitation of company's resources (manpower, budget and time) doesn't allow them to do so. Therefore, they must cover stories as assigned by the editor which may cover a wide range of topics such as economic, tourism, culture, youth, even entertainment.

The mass media has paid attention to Mekong-related issues, particularly the participation of local communities in the development programme planning and implementation, as well as gender and youth- related issues. The media regularly reports the participation of local communities in the development planning and implementation, which is considered one of efforts in social-economic development with the aim to drag Laos from the list of least developed countries. Both print and electronic media has encouraged the people to participate in tree plantation and land allocation to conserve forests, aiming to protect water sources. (Bounlert Louanedouangchanh, Chief of the Foreign News Service of the Lao News Agency-KPL)

Nonetheless, all respondent journalists demonstrated a high level of awareness and interest in Mekong and related development issues. Each respondent's level of knowledge on Mekong related issues varied upon the agenda and priority set for media report in each company. Obviously, interest of their audiences shapes media agenda. If they find that people would like to know more on specific topic, then there would likely be more articles covering such topic because, at the end of the day, this will lead to increased sales of their newspaper or on-air time of TV channel.

In 2003, I became the writer of Southern China Weekend (SCW) and paid more attention to the environment and development report. SCW has been unremittingly focused on reporting hot issues of environment and development for more than 10 years. In 2003, our newspaper made reports about almost every hot issues of environment, including the flood of Huai river in Anhui Province, the miserable flood of Wei River in western China's Shaanxi Province, and the dam building on Dujiang Weir, the most famous water project in ancient China. Our reports covered not only the situation of the disaster and the miserable living state of victims, but the errors of government policy, and mankind's unwise behavior toward nature. Also our report covers lots stories about illegal hunting, abducting of children or woman, juvenile delinquency, community development and especially the activities of NGOs in China. (Li Liang, South China Weekend)

In case of China, the journalists pay more attention to large rivers in the country such as Yangtze and Nu rivers. Chinese journalists will provide some coverage relating to the part of the Mekong in China, but rarely link to Mekong downstream. This is not a point to blame but it shows that in a huge country like China, there are many issues available to report. To cover story which seems to be far away from Chinese daily life would require financial and other support. This partly explains why there is gap of understanding on the Mekong Rapids Blasting issue between upstream and downstream countries.

In Vietnam, the focus would be more on Mekong Delta related issues. As an example, let us look at Nhu Anh Tu, a reporter from Radio Department of Voice of Vietnam who has more than 5 year experience in writing about environmental and developmental issues of the Mekong Delta. She has published many reports on forest preservation and wild animal protection, as well as rice planting, irrigation and aquaculture. She has also completed many study tours in the Mekong Delta. (Nhu Anh Tu, Voice of Vietnam Radio)

All of the respondents could communicate in English with varying levels of proficiency, from passable to very good. Only some of respondents produce news in English. Mostly, the stories are produced in local language. From time to time, news from local media can be bought by other (regional or international) news agency and re-published in English.



Figure 5 Chinese National Geography



Figure 6 Laos National TV



Figure 7 Vientiane Times



Figure 8 Laos News Agency



Figure 9 Nation (TV) Channel



Figure 10 Thai News Agency-TNA



Figure 11 Vietnam News Agency



Figure 12 Radio Voice of Vietnam



Figure 13 Southern China Weekend

7. Media ownership

Most of the respondents represented private owned or state owned media. In this analysis, state own media comprises Laos News Agency (or Khaosane Pathet Lao-KPL), Lao National TV, South China Weekend, Voice of Vietnam Radio, Vientiane Times, Viet Nam News Agency, TV Channel 11 (Thailand) and Thai News Agency (Public Relations Department). Private owned media such as China National Geographic Magazine, Colour Magazine (Myanmar), Nation TV (Thailand) and the Cambodia News newspaper.

There were also three independent journalists and a TV producer who weren't registered with any media agencies. They would be commissioned from media agencies to produce news; or make their own decision on story selection, production and sale to the media agency as they see appropriate. The three freelance journalists will not be analysed under this sub-heading.

The state owned media not only get funding to run the agency from its national government, but the government also supervises them on "what to be reported?" or "what is to be news?" Influential people in the government can also give guidance to editors whether to pursue

or stop investigating the story. Then the editor will transfer that message to reporter. In this case, it can be explained that national policy is guiding media policy and practice differently in each agency. Obviously, the strictest case is Myanmar. However, the state owned media in China, Vietnam and Laos and Thailand also experience the same thing. Press freedom is controlled by the political body. Even if it seems like state owned media in Thailand would have more freedom of expression compared to others, self-censorship is the norm. After working many years, journalists know how to pick up the story and “do and don’t” in order to get story published, on-air or broadcasted. Like all people, they wish to maintain their career and life in a relatively smooth path.

On the other hand, private owned media seem to have more freedom to set their own media agenda. However, this is not the case for Myanmar. Before getting stories published, the editorial team will have to submit those stories to a nationally authorised body for approval. The Thai private media don’t have to do that, but they have indirect self-censorship. Despite this, the Thai media generally has more room to speak than media the other Mekong countries. Also, the pressures or interests of people in the society is takes a part in shaping media agenda.

Media organisational structure

Each media organisation has similarities in structure but differences in details. In term of size and structure, bigger organisations will be more complicated than smaller ones. Some examples of how media organisations set up their structure are as follows.

MCOT

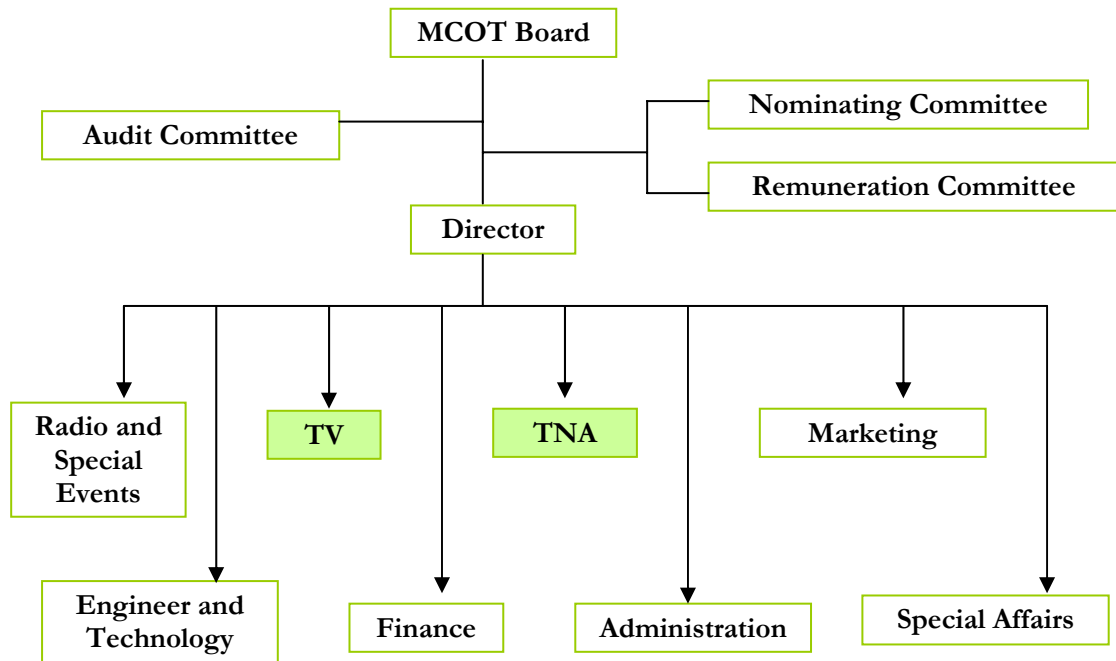


Figure 14 Organisational Structure of Mass Communications of Thailand where houses
Channel 9 and Thai News Agency

Source: MCOT (2007)

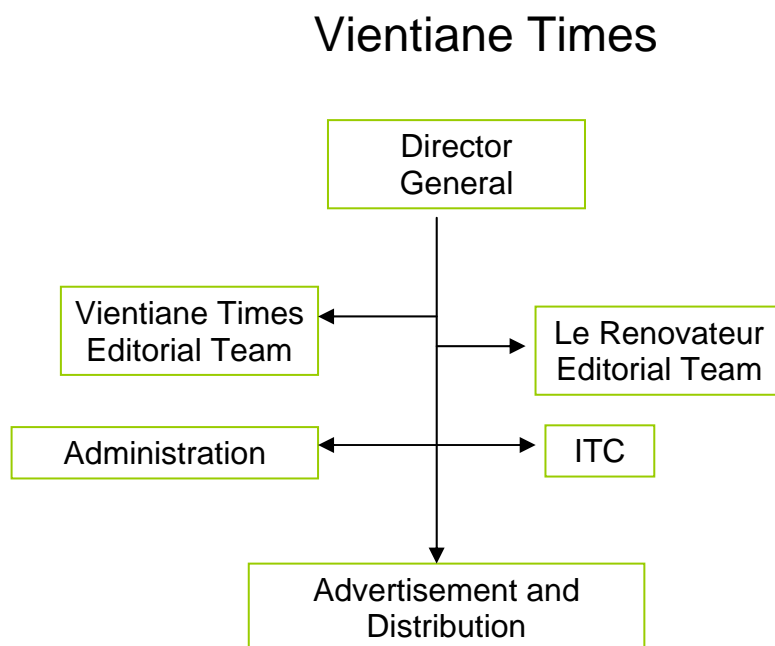


Figure 15 Organisational structure of Vientiane Times

Source: Vientiane Times (2007)

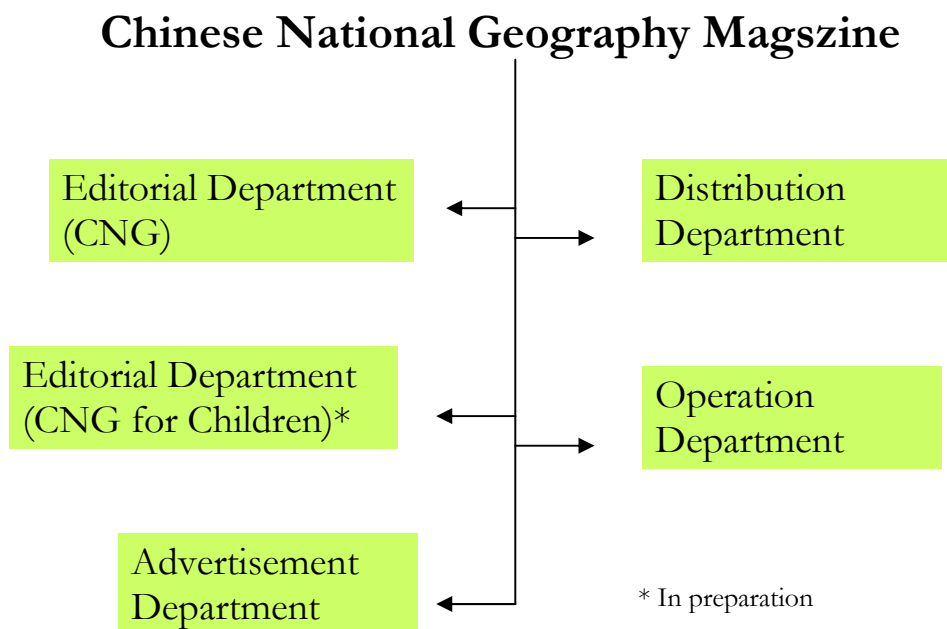


Figure 16 Organisational structure of Chinese National Geography Magazine

Source: Chinese National Geographic (2007)

Nation Multimedia Group Plc.

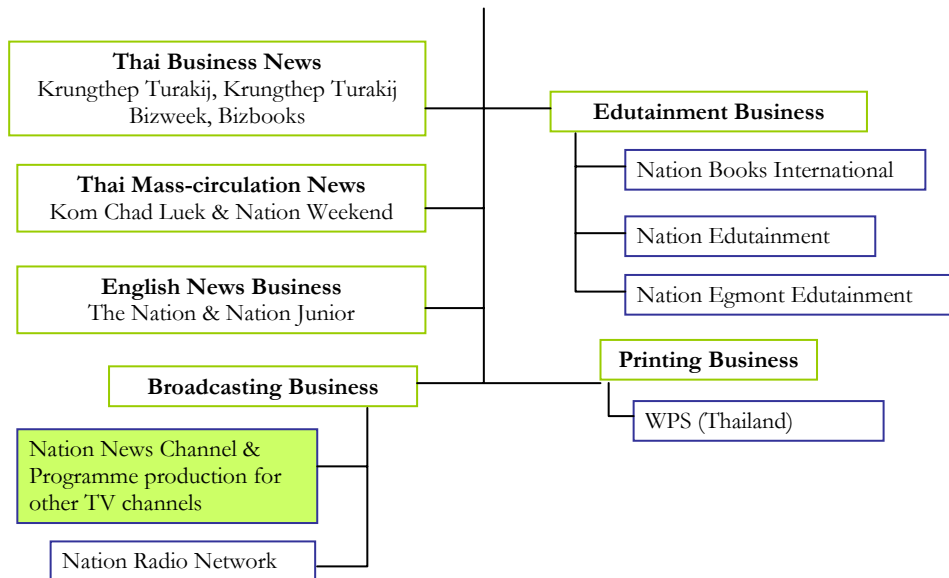


Figure 17 Organisational structure of Nation Multimedia Group where houses the Nation TV

Source: Nation Group (2007)

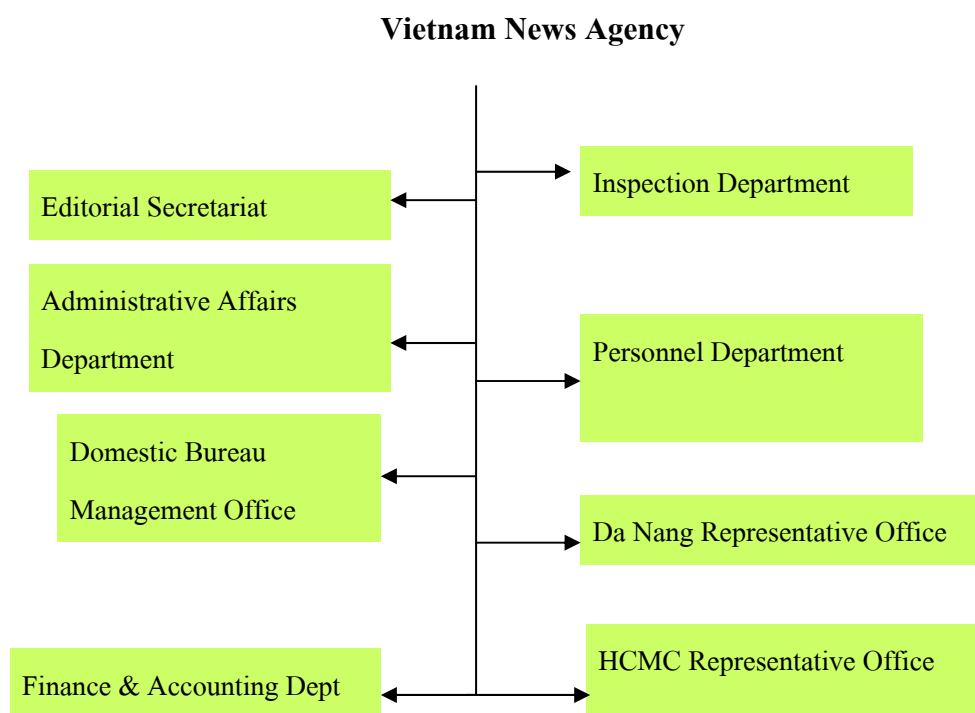


Figure 18 Organisational structure of Vietnam News Agency

Source: Vietnam News Agency (2007)

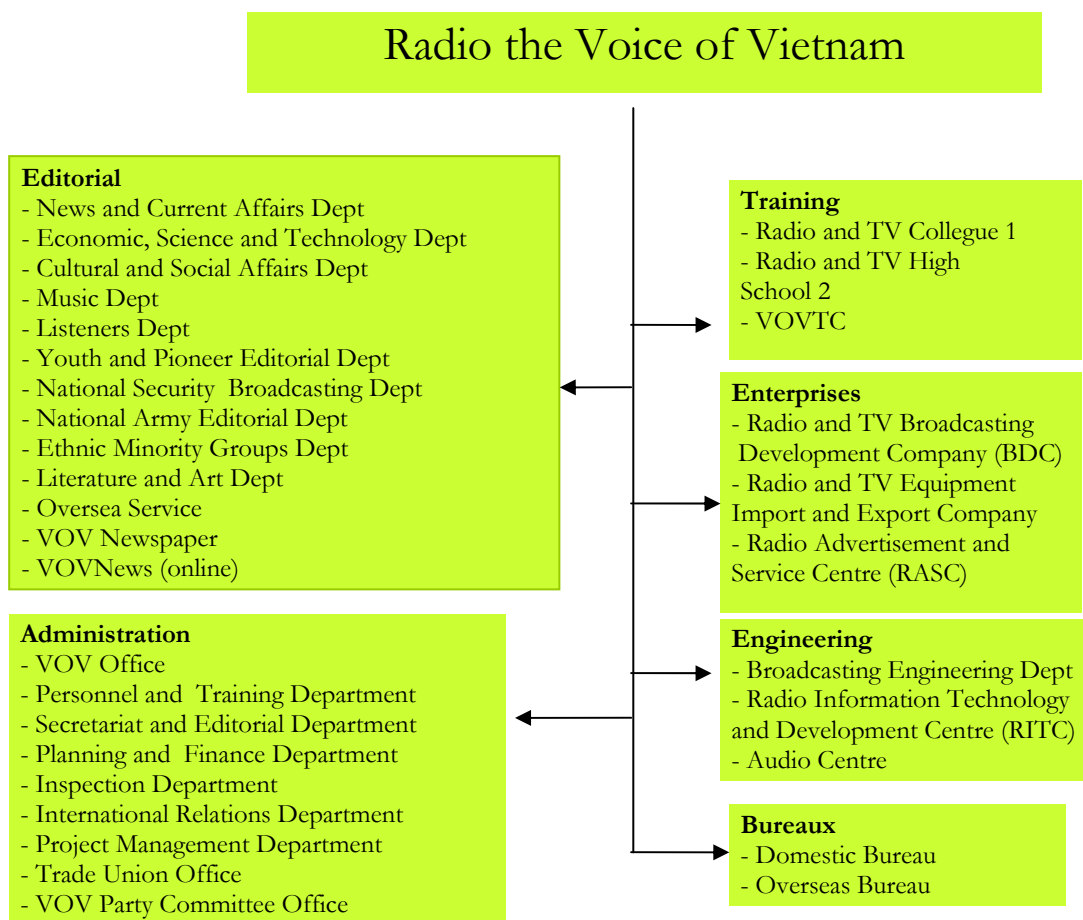


Figure 19 Organisational structure of Radio Voice of Vietnam

Source: VOV (2007)

Only the news production at the Radio Voice of Vietnam, there are 17 units include Domestic News Department, World News Department, News Department for Foreign Service, Photo Service Department, Economic News Department, Database Center, Vietnam Pictorial Review, Daily News, Sports and Culture Magazine, Viet Nam News Daily, Le Courier du Vietnam Newspaper, Science & Technology Bulletin, Vietnam Law and Legal Forum Magazine, Chan troi UNESCO Magazine, News and Photo Bulletin for Ethnic Minorities, VNA Publishing House and VNA Audio-Video Center.

Other news products and services of Radio Voice of Vietnam are:

Internet and Print Daily News Bulletins

1. Domestic News Bulletin
2. World News Bulletin
3. Flash News Bulletin
4. Special Reference Document Bulletin
5. World News Bulletin for Reference
6. International Economic News Bulletin
7. Vietnam and International economic news Bulletin
8. English Language News Bulletin

Internet and Print Weekly, Monthly and Quarterly News Bulletins

1. Sunday Vietnam and International Economic News Bulletin
2. Documentary Information (3 issues per week)
3. International Economic News for Reference
4. Sunday World News for Reference
5. Reference Document in Focus (monthly)
6. World Affairs
7. Science and Technology Bulletin
8. News and Photo Bulletin for Ethnic Minorities (in Vietnamese, Bana, Ede ,

J'rai, Khmer and other special reports).

Newspapers and magazines

1. Daily News
2. Sunday News
3. Sports and Culture
4. Viet Nam News newspaper
5. Viet Nam News Sunday
6. Outlook Magazine
7. Le Courier du Vietnam (Daily)
8. Le Courier du Vietnam (Sunday)

9. Vietnam Pictorial Review (in four languages: Vietnamese, English, Laos, Spanish. Distributed via Internet in 6 languages: Vietnamese, Chinese, Russian, English, French, Spanish).

10. Vietnam Law & Legal Forum

11. Official Documents and Regulations Gazzetta (in English)

12. Chan troi UNESCO Magazine.

Audio-Video Products and Products by VNA Publishing House

1. Products that publicize the policies of Vietnam's Government and the Communist Party.

2. Photography books and journalism publications.

3. Publications that serve international audiences and for international relations.

News bulletins delivered via Internet only

1. French language news bulletin

2. Spanish language news bulletin

Photo Service

Graphic News (Vietnam News Agency is the first media organisation in Vietnam that provides this service)

Access to information on Mekong Rapids Blasting

Journalists use different ways to access into information on Mekong especially the Mekong Rapids Blasting issue.

People learned about blasting of rapids along Lao- Myanmar border by listening radio broadcasting from abroad, not from local media. Local environmental journalists who want to get latest information on Mekong have to use Internet connection. Even using Internet cannot overcome the State's information control. They can't access web sites of

ethnic minorities, for example, www.shanland.org, which expresses their condition and concern about Mekong development. (Myanmar)

All of respondents use internet for both accessing primary information and in-depth search. Information moves faster on the internet than other media channels. However, even though people would say that there is a lot of information on the net, they also found difficulties getting “accurate” information.

The reporters also learn from each other. Among traditional media, (TV, radio, newspaper and magazine); radio will move fastest because it has a short production period. Reporter can be on-air at real time. However, radio news “life” is shortest as well. Newspapers have longer life and been more accountable among the readers. TV producer will check with daily newspapers for a “hot story” and do more analysis based upon the newspaper report before getting it broadcasting.

Attending meetings, trainings and workshops are also ways for journalists to gain access to information and contacts. This gives them opportunities to create networks and linkages to topical experts for insightful views or exclusive interviews when needed. Capacity building programmes available for journalists such as

1. Media fellowship programme entitled “Our Mekong: A Vision amid Globalisation”, implemented annually by Inter-Press Service (IPS) Asia-Pacific, funded by Rockefeller Foundation. Components in this programme include indoor workshop and field practices. Newspapers journalist, photojournalists and/or film producer participants will be on the field to produce the work on their selected topics. Results from this will be presented in various format based upon their expertise such as documentary, new articles, and photographs. Dissemination of products is done through IPS website (<http://ipsnews.net/mekong/index.shtml>), books, events organized by IPS and also participation in Mekong and/or media related events organized by other institutions. Eligible participants are from 6 Mekong countries. Workshop is conducted in English.

2. Mekong Media Memorial Foundation (IMMF) provided several workshops and trainings to journalists with supports from SIDA, Reuters Foundation, AusAid, The Asia Foundation, and UK based Thomson Foundation. IMMF is established in a memory of the journalists of all nationalities who died covering the conflicts in Indochina since 1945 (<http://www.immf.or.th/>). It was registered in Great Britain as a charitable trust in 1991 and subsequently as a separate foundation under Thai law in Thailand with the aim of improving standards of professional journalism in the region. Thailand based IMMF has provided training to journalist since 1994 covering various sectors of media e.g. photojournalism, radio, print journalism and so on. Recent training organized was radio editors training held in March 2007, in Laos. In 2007, IMMF plans to organize three training courses for journalists. Participants must have good English efficiency.

3. Earth Journalism Network (EJN) operated by Internews also provides training courses to journalists. Their goal is to empower and enable journalists from developing countries to cover the environment more effectively (www.earthjournalism.org). EJN in Thailand is based in Chiang Mai, directed by James Fahn, former environmental journalist of The Nation newspaper, who has long been living and working in this region. Training organised included:

- a. Environmental reporting workshop held on October 2005, Indonesia.
- b. Radio journalism workshop held in February 2005 in Mexico.
- c. There are three workshops on pollution and environmental law planned for China for 2007.

4. Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) offers fellowship programme to provide opportunity for journalists to a second country to develop and write/produce an in-depth investigative story on set theme (www.seapabkk.org). Eligible participants are mid-career journalists in Southeast Asia. Theme set for 2007 is on human rights versus a culture of impunity.

However, access to Mekong-related information at the regional level is not possible for many journalists in Mekong countries. This is because English is not the native language of any Mekong country, and therefore, information available in English can't be transferred to many

local journalists who want to know. Anecdotally, whenever regional workshops, meetings and trainings are arranged, the “same faces” of journalists can be expected.

Looking at it other way around, the complexity of Mekong issues creates a barrier to those who want to learn about them. The respondents of this study all have more than 5 years experience working in this field, and all at a senior level.

News content analysis

The news articles on Mekong Rapids Blasting collected during January 2002-December 2003 were mostly found in Thai media. The explanation for this is during this period, the project was conducting in Thailand area and the movement of local group with strong link to senators, academic, media and key national and international NGOs lift up “local agenda” into “public agenda”, through “media agenda”.

Reasons are huge coverage on Mekong Rapids Blasting are that it’s the,

Versus of,

- Localisation – Globalisation
- One community – Transboundary
- Scientific/academic - Belief & traditional knowledge
- International agreement - Non-written fishery agreement among villagers

And,

- Strategic location in river politics
- Link with trade (coming of FTA)
- Good guys – bad guys
- Life, blood, tears & spirit of small people
- Touching emotion
- Newsworthy

Although there was considerable media covering on Mekong in China, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia, there was very little about the Mekong Rapids issues. Where there was, it was presented differently by comparison to the Thais. In Myanmar, and Cambodia, the story would only say that four governments signed an agreement to improve Mekong navigation channels for commerce. Lao media would say more about the situation, but not in an aggressive way (e.g. who is doing what, and where). Although Laos has direct involvement in this project, the state controls media content and that is all the Lao media would or could say. Interestingly, it's found that many hidden and strong messages were found to exist in soft tone-presentation of Lao media. China media coverage of the project took a totally different perspective - highlighting that the project would bring "huge benefits" to the people, and is a good act of a "big brother" like China to help "younger brothers" (downstream countries) by investing US\$5 million alone for navigation channel improvement to help boost better transport, economic and cooperation between china and other downstream countries.

Research practices and news content presented by Thai media changed across three phases or periods. Firstly, in 2002 when the situation was hot, journalists worked ad-hoc. They would only report on the situation and the movement on the ground. They have to work very quickly in order to get quickest "on board" or "on top" of the issue. Secondly, in 2003 they moved from presenting villagers or local groups/movements to presenting key social and political figures such as senators, academic and issue experts. Thirdly, by 2004 journalists had developed a deeper understanding on the issue. This allowed them to expand on in-depth linkages between Mekong Rapids Blasting issue and other social issues such as gender, tourism, agriculture with "scientific" supports.

It was also found that most of the Thai reports took the villagers' side. Samples of news headlines supporting this are:

- Activists oppose reef-clearing effort (Bangkok post, 4 May 02)
- ค้านระเบิดแก่งลำน้ำโขง ชี้ส่งผลกระทบต่อวิถีชีวิตชาวบ้าน (คมชัดลึก, 26 June 02)

- รายงาน: ระเบิดแก่งหินน้ำโขง ความผิดพลาดที่รัฐต้องทบทวน (กรุงเทพธุรกิจ, 17 Aug 02)
- เดินหน้าคัดค้านระเบิดแก่งโขง เตรียมพาก้าวลงพื้นที่พิสูจน์หายนะ (สยามรัฐ, 29 Nov 02)
- ชาวบ้านร้องจีนระบับระเบิดน้ำโขง ผู้ประกอบการง จีนไม่แจ้งปิดเขื่อน หวั่นกระทบการค้าน้ำโขง (กรุงเทพธุรกิจ, 12 Dec 02)
- Villagers protest blasting of the Mekong by China (Business Day, 13 Dec 02)
- Fight to save the Mekong Rapids (The Nation, 21 Jan 03)
- ชาวเชียงของร่วมประกอบพิธีกรรม ขึ้นจม. ถึงรบ.จีนค้านระเบิดแก่ง (มติชน, 25 Apr 04)

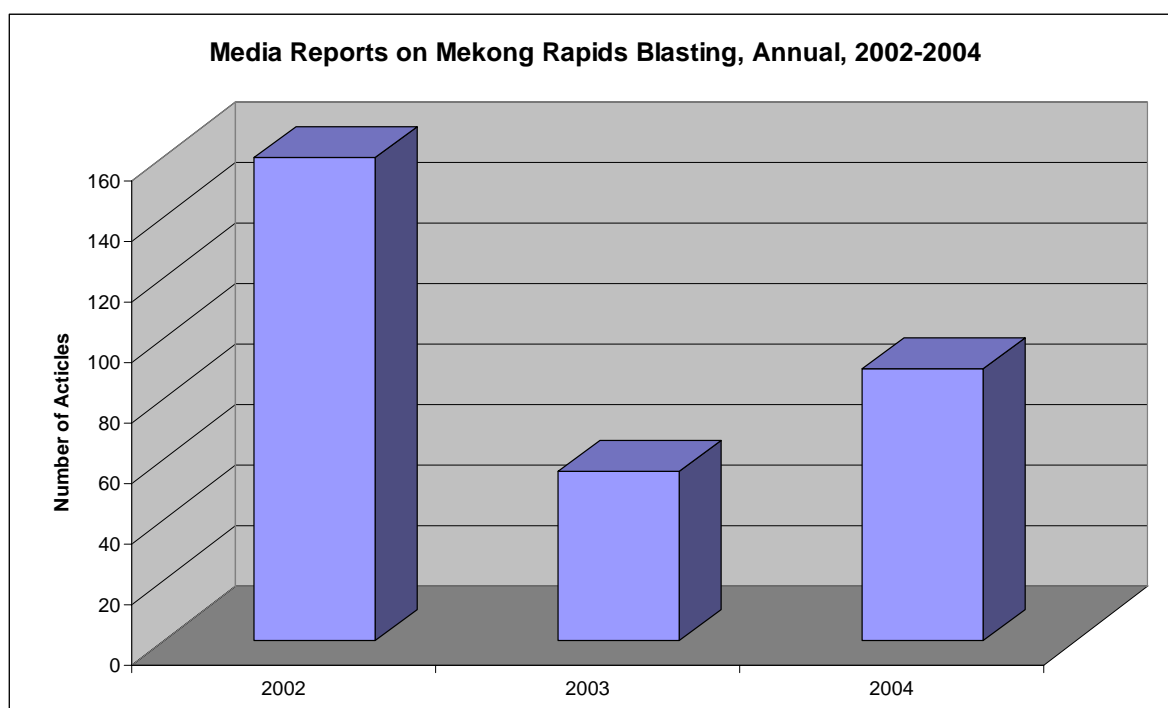
In fact, the project was undertaken before 2002, but it occurred in China and Myanmar. Therefore, level of interest or awareness of people and journalists in this issue was still limited. It was not until 2002, when the plan called for blasting the rapids in the Chiang Khong district of Chiang Rai, that the opposition started to strengthen and the issue engage Thai journalists.

Between 2002-2004, 306 pieces of news articles related to Mekong Rapids Blasting were presented in Thai newspapers. There was a higher frequency of reporting in the dry season of each year, which is the only period of year that the blasting could be conducted. High peak of report in 2002-2004 is December, January and November respectively. This is related to the dry season which Mekong water level reaches its lowest in the year and in which the blasting activity is planned to conduct. (See Table 2)

Table 2 Number of news articles published per year during 2002-2004

Year	News pieces	Percentage
2002	160	52.28
2003	56	18.31
2004	90	29.41
Total	160	100

Note: N/A refers to no data found during data collecting period. This could mean that the data is available but can't be found, or data don't exist.

**Figure 20** Media Reports on Mekong Rapids Blasting, Annual, 2002-2004

Source: Weerapong (2007)

Table 3 Number of news articles published per month during 2002-2004

Month	Year			Total	Percentage
	2002	2003	2004		
January	N/A				
February	3	3	13	19	6.21
March	5	7	11	23	7.51
April	4	7	8	19	6.21
May	13	1	3	17	5.56
June	12	5	9	26	8.50
July	22	3	5	30	9.81
August	9	5	7	21	6.86
September	8	8	2	18	5.88
October	6	1	1	8	2.61
November	38	2	14	54	17.65
December	40	1	9	50	16.34
Total	160	56	90	360	100

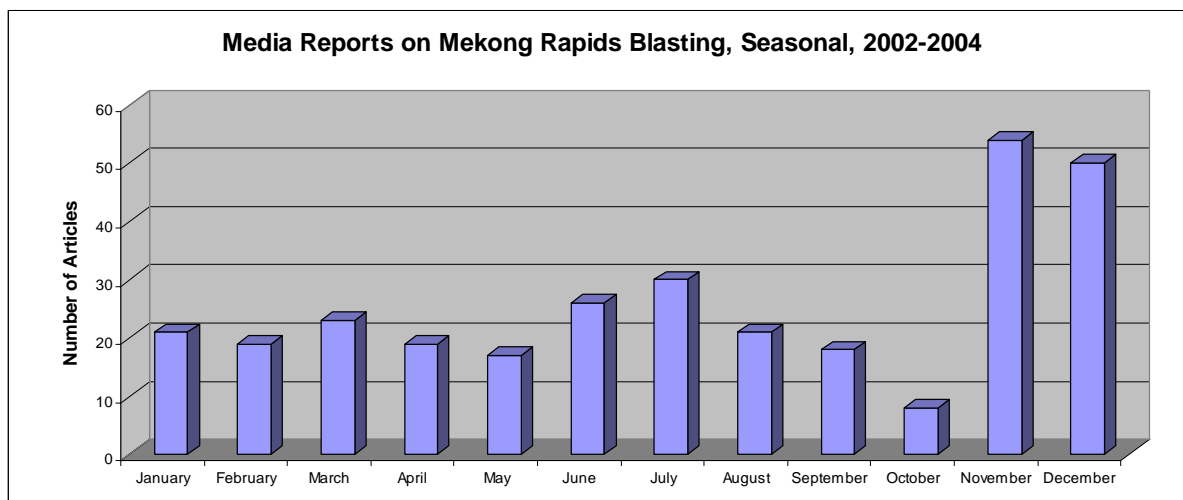


Figure 21 Media Report on Mekong Rapids Blasting, Seasonal, 2002-2004

Source: Weerapong (2007)

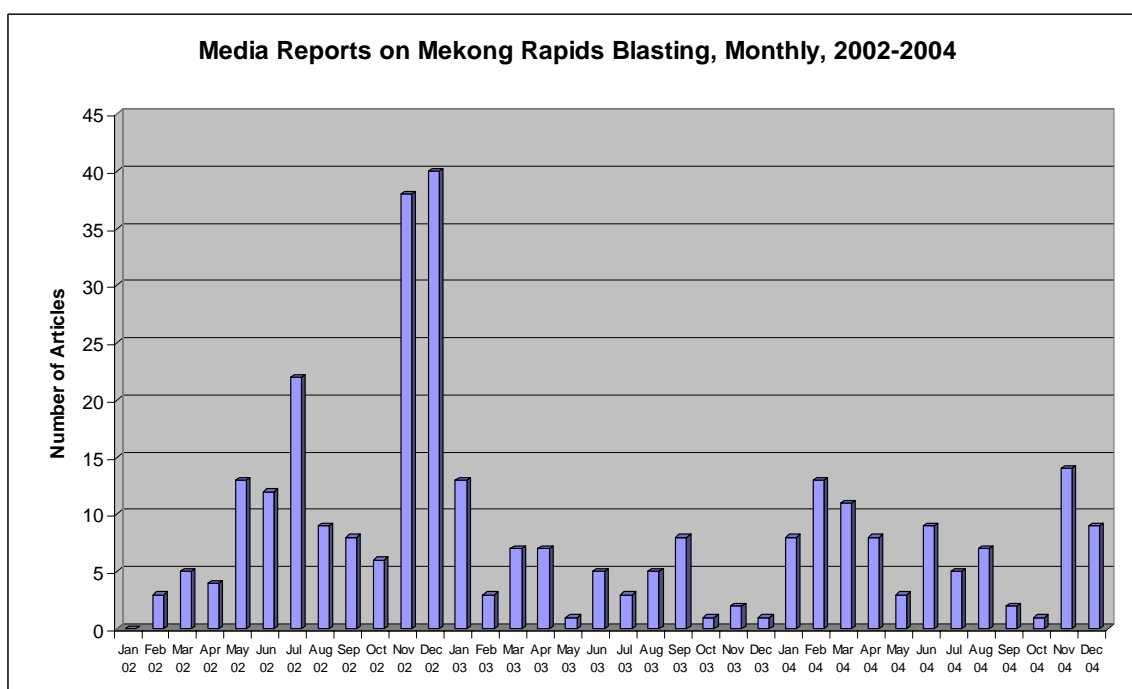


Figure 22 Media Reports on Mekong Rapids Blasting, Monthly, 2002-2004

Source: Weerapong (2007)

Media agencies who most produce reports on this issue in 2002-2003 are Bangkok Post while Khao Sod, a Thai language newspaper, produced most in 2004. (See Table 4)

Table 4 Number of news articles divided by news agency

News Agency	2002	2003	2004	Total
Bangkok Post	35	11	5	51
Ban Muang (บ้านเมือง)	1	N/A	N/A	1
Business Day	1	N/A	N/A	1
Daily News (เดลินิวส์)	12	5	3	20
INN	N/A	1	1	2
Kra Sae Hun Online (กระแสน์ออนไลน์)	N/A	1	N/A	1
Khao Sod (ข่าวสด)	10	6	23	39
Khom Chud Luk (คมชัดลึก)	2	N/A	2	2
Krungthep Turakij (กรุงเทพธุรกิจ)	26	7	11	44
Nation Weekend (นัชนัสดุสัปดาห์)	3	1	N/A	4
Manager Daily (ผู้จัดการรายวัน)	17	8	19	44
Matichon (มติชน)	12	2	7	21
Prachachart Turakij (ประชาชาติธุรกิจ)	2	3	1	6
Public Relations Department (กรมประชาสัมพันธ์)	2	1	4	7
Post Today (โพสต์ทูเดย์)	N/A	N/A	1	1
Siam Rath (สยามรัฐ)	17	3	2	22
Thai Rath (ไทยรัฐ)	1	N/A	N/A	1
Thai Post (ไทยโพสต์)	N/A	N/A	4	4
Than Sethakij (ฐานเศรษฐกิจ)	2	N/A	3	5
The nation	13	4	4	21
Total				306

Note: N/A refers to no data found during data collecting period. This could mean that the data is available but can't be found, or data don't exist.

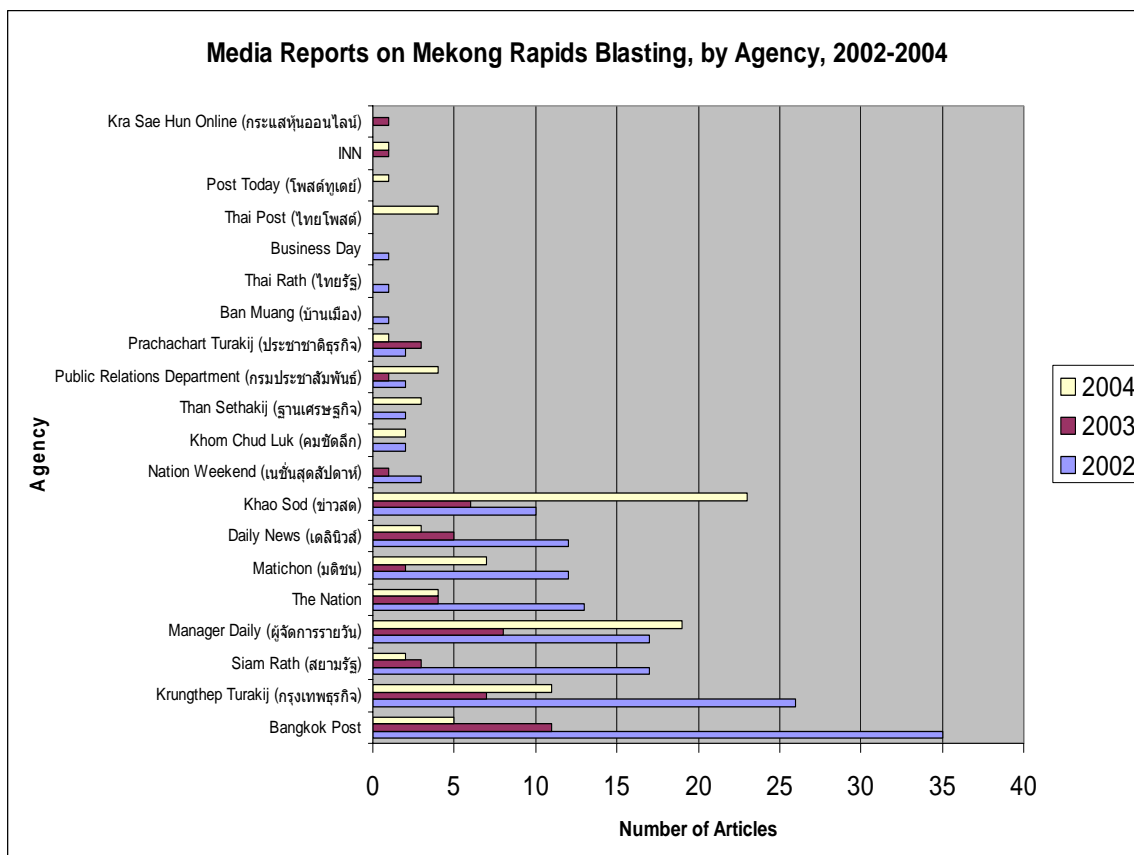


Figure 23 Media Reports on Mekong Rapids Blasting, by Agency, 2002-2004

Source: Weerapong (2007)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

From the study on “A Qualitative Analysis of Mass Media Response to the Mekong Rapids Blasting Project and Factors Influencing in the Greater Mekong Region” which mainly used agenda setting as a main theory when other social theories are as additional related theories. Data collection is undertaken through purposive sampling technique. According to this, a number of 16 journalists from the Mekong Media Seminar are selected to be respondents for this study. Additional means to get data are by telephone interviews, journalists’ papers during the seminar, news articles collected from Thai media and communications through emails. The framework for analysing data looks at 4 parts including background information of respondents, media organizational structure and country context, access to information regarding Mekong Rapids Blasting Project and news content analysis.

Generally, it can be concluded as following:

1. Characteristics of journalists that report on Mekong issues in support of sustainable development in the Mekong River Basin

The majority of journalists reporting on the Mekong Rapids Blasting issues are mid-career professionals with more than 5 years working experience in journalism. Although most of them have educational backgrounds related to journalism and communications, work in this field exists for people with other backgrounds. Interestingly, sometimes people with non-journalistic backgrounds such as education, political sciences and environment are preferred because they have a greater level of understanding of the issues. Journalism skills can be improved through training courses. All of them are able to communicate in English and know how to find information from various sources. Most of the respondents have freedom to report what they see

“valuable” to the readers/viewers. However, with their long experience in the job, they know how to “package” their story appropriately within the context of their profession.

2. Factors influencing Mekong Rapids Blasting news reportage by journalists in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos PDR, China and Vietnam

There are factors influencing the ways journalists from Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and China report Mekong Rapids Blasting stories. Those factors include their qualifications and the environment they operate in. In addition, it's also found that journalists took the Mekong rapids blasting issue into their agenda during 2002-2004, not only because of their own initial interest but also from social movement against this project. When different players strongly pay attention to this project ranging from local communities, local and international non-government organisations, senators and international newswire services, it forms part of the national media agenda. (Diagram 2)

One observation is that the main factors influencing media reports are: the skills and interests of journalists themselves; and the political context in which they work and live (at organisational and national levels). This means that, if the journalist is not interested in the issue, or doesn't understand it, there is less chance for them to publish stories for people to read about it. Decisions to cover stories are partly influenced by their background, experiences and level of understanding to the issues. If they are interested in it, they will start researching it and may propose coverage to the editorial team. While most respondent journalists have the freedom to cover stories they see appropriate, the policy context (at organisational and national levels) will shape actual news presentation.

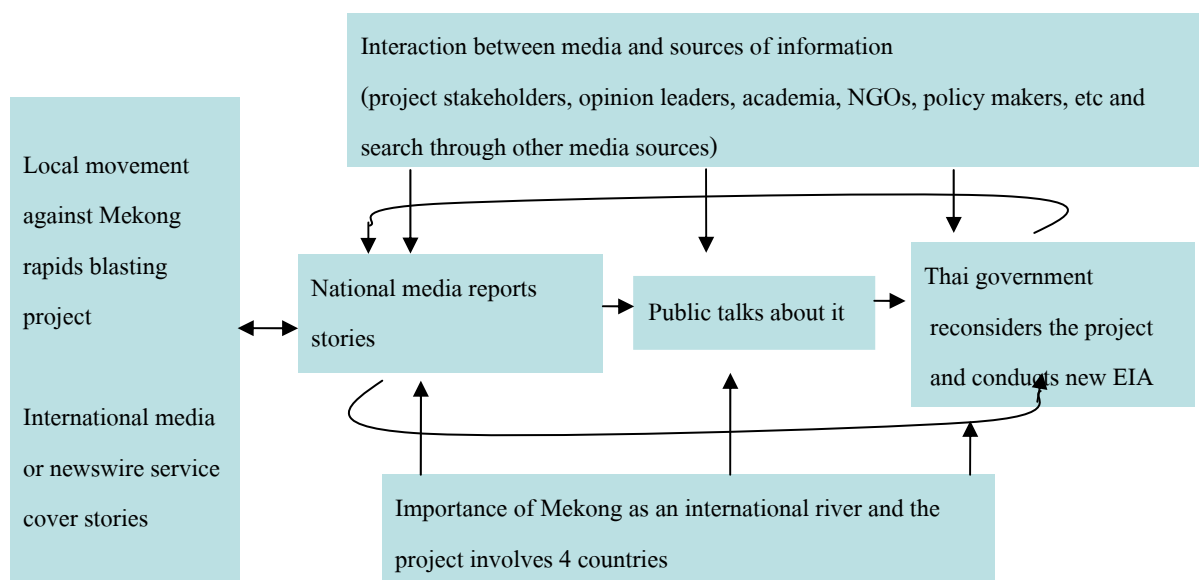


Figure 24 Formation of media agenda on Mekong Rapids Blasting Stories

Source: Weerapong (2007)

The Mekong Rapids Blasting issue is a good case study of how media agendas are set. From this observation, we can see that the media agenda can be set by both top-down and bottom-up influences. In this case, it has been more of a bottom-up process. Although media agencies often have their agenda set by influential people in the government, big business sector, it also often happens that the interests of ordinary people (but many of them) is a key factor to set or change the media agenda as well.

The voice of local villagers or local groups in Chiang Khong alone would not have been enough to draw attention of the media and policy makers. Strategically, the local groups made strong links with key players in civil society, including national and international NGOs, academic institutions, and importantly the senators and the media. The Mekong is a regional “hot spot”, which helps to lift the attractiveness and appeal of the Rapid Blasting issue from local to regional level. These elements make the perfect combination for a good story, and the journalists

know that. In most news articles, the sentimental messages are presented alongside political views. The losses of local fishermen can be shown at the same time as national security (boundary dispute between Thailand-Laos).

Even if there is a lot of information available nowadays, journalists still feel that they lack “necessary” information. Lots of information available is not useful and out of date. They are still struggling to find “accurate” information from “accountable and credible” sources.

Language is a key barrier for accessing to information. Most of the information available on the Mekong is in English (both in documentation and resource persons or issue experts), and there are only a limited number of journalists who are sufficiently competent in English to access it.

Encouragingly, some organisations are investing in building the capacity of journalists considered key players in sustainable development. More capacity building efforts should be provided on a regular basis at the national level.

Recommendations

Recommendations towards improving journalist awareness of Mekong development issues and increasing active journalistic involvement in these issues:

1. Organise training regularly to build journalistic capacity, especially young professionals, and create a platform of information exchange

2. Although there are a number of websites covering various aspects of the Mekong and its development, only a limited number of journalists can access to this information. The main reason is lack of English language proficiency. Where the Mekong information is available in local language, it is often not up to date.

3. To make best use of updated information, the English content should be translated into local languages. As a result, a larger number of local journalists can have access to that and make best use for reports.

4. There should be more cooperation among organisations that wish to build capacity of journalists in the Mekong countries. Each year, there are quite a number of workshops, seminars, and trainings conducted for journalists in Mekong countries. However, information sharing among organisations is limited and there is some duplication. Sometimes, the same journalists attended workshops on the same issue but organised by different organisations/agencies.

5. In addition to building journalists' capacity through regional trainings and workshops, capacity building should also occur at the national level. Increased use of local language as a means of communication will help journalists who are not strong in English.

6. It would be useful to establish a central Mekong media directory. A database of participants from various workshops, training courses and seminars (such as mentioned above) could be collected and maintained. Currently this data is not utilised to its full potential.

Recommendations for further research

1. New articles presented in local language (Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, Burmese and Khmer) could also be collected and analysed.

2. Increase the number of respondents by identifying key media actors who are seriously covering the story in-depth.

3. In-depth study of media by sector (such as radio, TV, online, print) and/or a comparison between sectors.

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