

The ambiguity of the 'emerging' public sphere and  
the Thai media industry

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## **Introduction**

In this paper I want to demonstrate the struggle between the capitalist and the bourgeoisie classes on the one hand and the working and the new middle classes on the other hand over the question of access and control of the mass media in Thailand. The rise of the new middle classes during the past decade is largely due to the high rate of economic growth. But as Preecha Piempongsan (1993) and Nithi Aewsriwong (1993) argued the Thai middle classes linked themselves economically and culturally with the capitalist class, nationally and internationally. Their income, their professional security and the way they manage information are all interconnected with the economy of the advanced industrialised countries in the West and in Asia, Japan in particular. In a sense, they are closely allied with the capitalist class of the global economy.

From this point of departure the paper discusses how the new middle classes exercise their economic freedom vis-a-vis freedom of expressions. The wealth generated by the economic growth in the late 1980s to the early 1990s have provided for the rapid commercialisation and, to a lesser extent, the industrialisation of the Thai media industry. The media sector, similar to other services and industrial economic sector, depended directly and indirectly on Western media technologies, production paradigm and content. Hence, we see a booming consumerist society, not a democratic society.

The open space in the Thai social system since 1992, at first, appeared to be an open arena which would contribute to the empowerment of the masses and the expansion of a civil society (Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, 1996, 1994). But with the influence of the advertising industry over the media industry we are witnessing more corporate expressions than citizen expressions. It is not a public space or public sphere which opens the expressions of the rich and the poor alike, the Thais and the indigenous peoples, the urban and the rural people nor does it include the voices of children and the disadvantaged in the society. The question is are the new Thai middle classes building a new social spaces in the media for their own? Is the media industry also enjoying the economic freedom and leaving the question of democratic expressions aside?

## **Economic growth and socio-political transition in the 1980s and 1990s**

In the 1980s the economic growth rate and the wealth generated by such rapid growth seems to indicate that Thailand and her ASEAN neighbours have crossed over the threshold of the newly industrialised economy (table 1). But the economic crises in these countries in the 1990s and the collapsed in 1997 reveal the weaknesses of a society without neither solid economic foundations nor social and political basis for an industrialised capitalist economy.

**Table 1 : Economic Growth of the NICs in Asia 1990**

Country	Population 1990	Per Capita in baht * 1990 (US \$)	Economic Growth Rate (%GDP)	
			1965-1980	1980-1990
Hong Kong	5.8 m	287,250 (11,490)	8.6	7.1
Singapore	3.0 m	279,000 (11,160)	10.0	6.4
Taiwan	20.0 m	147,596 ( 5,904)	8.9	7.3
Korea	42.8 m	135,000 ( 5,400)	9.9	9.7
Malaysia	17.9 m	58,000 ( 2,320)	7.4	5.2
Thailand	55.8 m	35,500 ( 1,420)	7.3	7.6
Philippines	61.5 m	18,250 ( 730)	5.7	0.9
Indonesia	178.2 m	14,250 ( 570)	7.0	5.5

\* In 1990 the exchange rate of 1 US \$ is equal to 25 baht

Source : Pasuk Phongpaichit (1993) "The middle class of Asia NICs and Thailand", p.110.

While the intense economic growth rate of Thailand between 1987-1991 grew at 9.5, 13.2, 12.2 and 10.0 it did not reflect a positive trend on the income distribution in the Thai society. Neither does it signify any real change in the social and political power of the rural and disadvantaged people. On the contrary, they affected the structure of production and employment in the various economic sectors (Voravit Charoenlert, 1993).

Two significant economic indicators demonstrate how unequal development is taking place in Thailand during this period of economic growth. First, the income distribution between 1976-1986 showed that the top 20% received the largest and a growing share of the total income which were 49.26% in 1976, 51.47% in 1981 and 55.63% in 1986. On the contrary the bottom 20% of the population received less than 4.55% of the income distribution in 1986. The share dropped from 6.78% in 1976 or a 2.23% dropped (table 2). However, the middle classes (2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 20%) received a larger share between 1976 to 1981, from 41.74% to 44.12%, but fluctuated to 39.82% in 1986. They resume a larger share of the income distribution in the 1990s since their work reside with the service sector and in the non-manual and managerial class of the industrial sector (Voravit Charoenlert, 1993, pp.134-135).

**Table 2 : Thai Income Distribution 1976-1986**

		1976	1981	1986
Top	20%	49.26	51.47	55.63
Second	20%	20.96	20.64	19.86
Third	20%	14.00	13.38	12.09
Fourth	20%	9.00	10.10	7.87
Bottom	20%	6.78	5.41	4.55
Total income		100.00	100.00	100.00

Source : TDRI in Voravit Charoenlert (1991) "Setakit Thai nai Rabob Setakit Loke"

(The Thai Economy in the Global Economy), p. 36.

When compared with Taiwan the top 20% received 38.2% and the bottom received 8.3% of the income distribution in 1986. During the 1980s the gap between the rich and the poor has decreased compared with the 1960s (table 3). If compared with Korea her top 20% received 42.3% of the income distribution and the bottom 20% received 18.9% in 1984. Between Thailand, Taiwan and Korea the bottom 20% of the Thai population received the least share of wealth and is getting poorer as the economy grows larger.

**Table 3 : Taiwan Income Distribution 1964-1986**

		1964	1970	1975	1980	1986
Top	20%	41.1	38.7	37.9	36.8	38.2
Second	20%	22.0	22.5	22.3	22.8	22.6
Third	20%	16.6	17.1	17.3	17.7	17.4
Fourth	20%	12.6	13.3	13.6	13.9	13.8
Bottom	20%	7.7	8.4	8.9	8.8	8.3
Total income		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source : TDRI in Voravit Charoenlert(1991) "*Setakit Thai nai Rabob Setakit Loke*"  
(The Thai Economy in the Global Economy), p. 37.

**Table 4 : Korea Income Distribution 1965-1984**

		1965	1970	1975	1980	1984
Top	20%	41.8	42.6	45.3	45.4	42.3
Bottom	20%	19.3	19.6	16.8	16.1	18.9
Total income		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source : TDRI in Voravit Charoenlert (1991) "*Setakit Thai nai Rabob Setakit Loke*"  
(The Thai Economy in the Global Economy), p. 37.

The second indicator of unequal development is the contrast between the growth rate of the agriculture sector and the industrial and service sectors. The industrial and service sector grew steadily in the 1960s to 1980s while the agriculture sector is on the decline (table 5). Statistics showed that in 1960 the large majority of the people or 84% are employed in the agriculture sector while 4% are employed in the industrial sector and 12% in the service sector respectively. In 1990 there is a sharp decrease in the agriculture sector. The employment ratio dropped from 84% to 67% or a 17% decrease. Employment grew by 8% in the industrial sector and by 9% in the service sector between 1960 to 1990. The GDP of the agriculture sector also dropped from 40% to 12% or a 28% decrease while the industrial sector grew by 20% and the service sector grew by 7% during the same period. Taken together, the industrial sector and the service sector generated 87% of the GDP

employing 33% of the total labour force. In 1990 the agriculture sector generated a mere 12% of the GDP employing 67% of the total labour force. Hence, the gradual collapse of the rural or agricultural sector saw the rise of the industrial and the service sectors and the middle classes within these two sectors.

**Table 5 : The growth rate, ratio of GDP and employment distribution by economic sectors 1960, 1990**

	growth rate			% GDP		employment distribution	
	1960s (average)	1989	1990-1995	1960	1990	1960	1990
agriculture sector	5.5	4.1	3.5	40	12	84	67
industrial sector	10.8	17.0	11.3	19	39	4	12
service sector			7.5	41	48	12	21

Source : Voravit Charoenlert (1991) "*Setakit Thai nai Rabob Setakit Loke*" (The Thai Economy in the Global Economy), p. 38 for figures on growth rate.

Pasuk Phongpaichit (1993) "*The middle class of Asia NICs and Thailand*", p.111-112 for figures on GDP and employment distribution.

As Sungsidh Piriyarangsarn and Pasuk Phongpaichit (1993) pointed out the large labour force in the service sector provided for the making of the new middle classes whose works are being linked to external capitalist, the global economy and high technology. The 'educated' segment of the new middle classes - the professionals, managers, technologists, skilled technicians, white collar/office workers and non-manual workers, etc. - grow at an exponential rate. Sungsidh and Pasuk believed that the new middle class wants not only economic liberalism but also political liberalism. And they see this growth as part of the democratisation process. Their question is whether the new middle classes in the Thai society would contribute to building a new democratic system when they have gained their economic security.

There was positive trend when the middle classes joined with the workers and other lower classes as the prime mover of the 1992 demonstration against the non-elected Prime Minister, Suchinda Kraprayoon. As an army general Suchinda was seen as the sign of political authoritarianism amidst the growing economic liberalism set out by the previous government. The demonstrators were seeking an openness in the political system and in the flow of information in order to continue the process of economic growth. Right after the May 1992 event questions were asked if these newly politicised middle classes would advocate democracy and not only liberalism for their own classes (Sungsidh Piriyarangsarn and Pasuk Phongpaichit, 1993, Anek Laothamathas, 1993).

I want to extract from Preecha Piampongsanti and Nithi Aewsriwong's analyses of the Thai middle classes and their role in the democratisation process before looking critically at the media. Preecha's work is a theoretical exposition of the role of the middle classes in Western industrialised economies. And the latter is a historical analysis of the role of the Thai middle classes. These would provide the necessary ground work for my own argument on the relationship between the middle classes and the media.

Preecha Piampongsanti (1993) defined the new middle classes as social collectives made up of civil servants, corporate employees, intellectuals, office workers, business people, managers, executives and other white collar workers and some small producers. The new middle classes are separated from the capitalist but they are not the real producers or labour force. On the political dimension the new middle classes are in control of the working class who work on the production line. On the ideological dimension the new middle classes monopolise the knowledge on production and the economy. The new middle classes are non-manual workers of all professions. They work with information, manage and control the production system. From their social formation their class consciousness is starkly different from the working class consciousness. In short, the new middle classes are part of the capitalist class and they work to assist in the legitimisation of the capitalist system in the political and ideological realm.

Preecha investigated the Marxian concept of class analysis and the Weberian social stratification categories within the German theoretical articulation of the new middle classes prior to the rise of Nazism. The traditional and mainstream Marxian analysis of Karl Kautsky argued that there was no middle class as such. There were only the capitalist class and the working class while Eduard Bernstein held a reformist view of the middle classes. He expounded that in a modern capitalist society the classes between the capitalist class and the working class would expand rapidly and they do not belong to the working class. The new middle classes have their own economic, socio-political and cultural identities. They have their particular way of life and their own ideologies. They are the intermediary between the capitalist and the working class. But since they have formed their own identities and ideologies they would most probably not ally themselves with the working class politically.

While Nithi Aewsriwong (1993) saw the importance of the historical role of the middle class in Thailand at this particular juncture. He searched the Thai history to demonstrate the culture of the middle classes, of the young intellectuals, civil servants and journalists. His point is the Thai middle classes have always looked up to the monarchy who initiated the socio-cultural role model for the Thai society. But ultimately, the role model was drawn from the West. This was due to the fact that the Thai monarchy often appropriated from Western culture since the early Rattanakosin period. What is interesting is that the Thai middle classes shared the ruling ideology which is firmly grounded on the concept of merit, patronage and power. Both the middle classes and the ruling class believed in benevolent dictatorship as an ideal state.

Taken together, Nithi Aewsriwong asserted that the Thai middle classes basically do not believe in democracy nor egalitarianism. In recent times, the new middle classes are linked directly to the West themselves via modern communications and information link-up, education abroad and travel, etc. They are culturally more dependent on the capitalist and the middle classes' influences from the West. Individualism and consumerism are the key cultural values drawn from the West. Nithi argued that the middle classes are more concerned with their class interests. They are not committed to freedom, equality nor democracy.

Both Preecha Piampongsanti and Nithi Aewsriwong saw the central role of the new middle classes in the Thai society in moving the capitalist economy forward. But both were rather pessimistic on the 'democratic role' of the new middle classes. For Nithi, if the present rising middle classes follow the path of history they would not side with democracy nor the majority of the peasantry in the rural areas and the working classes. This is because they are alienated from the peasants and their culture. The peasants are the real 'other' for the Thai middle classes. For Preecha, he believed that the capitalist ideologies would permeate deeply into the consciousness of the new middle classes to the detriment of democracy. They would embrace individualism which means competitiveness in business dealings. They would compete to seek power in their organisation and would focus on accumulation, be they materials, income, profits, knowledge or resources. And finally, the new middle classes would seek economic freedom in the name of democracy. Embedded with these ideologies it would not be far fetched to foresee the new middle classes, allying themselves with the capitalist class, and become the new priest of ideological producer for the capitalist economy.

From the above analyses I would like to follow the line of argument on the role of the media and the middle classes in the present democratisation process in the Thai society. It is quite clear that the recent economic boom have brought about structural changes in the social formation of new classes. On the other hand, the media industry also mushroomed during the boom period. We have seen new media spaces in the entire range of the media industry - books, magazines, newspapers, television - both cable, satellite and over-the-air broadcast, radio and music, films and videos, etc. Our question is to inquire if the mushrooming of the mass media signify freedom of expressions and cultural formation for the new classes. And also to inquire further into the relationship between these expressions, the capitalist ideologies and democracy. The inquiries would be carried out by way of investigating the penetration of the global media and consumerism in the Thai society on the one hand and the globalised form and content of the local (Thai) media vis-a-vis the present democratisation process.

### **The extension of the global media market and the growth of consumerism**

This section attempts to examine the relationship between the advertising industry and the media industry and their connection with the global media market and consumerism. In demonstrating the expansion of advertisement on consumer products through the penetration of international advertising agencies we would be able to see how the global economy reaches out for new markets in this part of the world. We would, at the same time, be able to understand how these agencies sell their products along with consumerism. In addition, we would be able to show some examples on the close relationship between the advertising producers and the way they advertise the ideologies of the new middle classes.

Looking at the advertising industry during the economic boom period in the 1990s advertising expenditure for television tripled. It grew from 6,502.1 million baht in 1990 to 20,771 million baht in 1996. This is also true of radio, newspapers and magazines (**The Advertising Book, 1997-1998**). Between 1980s-1990s the advertising industry grew at a steady rate of 25% per annum. However, statistics show that 7 out of the top 10 advertising agencies in Thailand are international advertising agencies, 2 are Thai agencies and 1 is a joint venture company (table 6). Together they have a 58% share of the total advertising revenue in the industry or 22,124 million baht out of the 38,295 million baht revenue in 1996.

**Table 6 : Top Ten Advertising Agency in Thailand 1994-1996**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	unit : million baht		
		<u>1996</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1994</u>
1	Lintas	4,553	3,820	3,500
2	Ogilvy & Mather	4,137	3,395	2,772
3	Spa Advertising *	2,000	1,540	1,000
4	Prakit & FCB **	1,900	2,000	1,500
5	J. Walter Thompson	1,850	1,520	1,512
6	Leo Burnett	1,824	1,600	1,400
7	Far East Advertising *	1,700	1,600	1,450
8	Dentsu, Young & Rubicam	1,500	1,300	1,200
9	McCann-Erickson	1,500	1,440	1,400
10	Dentsu (Thailand)	1,250	1,100	1,000
Total of Top 10 agency		22,214	19,315	16,734
@ Total advertising revenue		38,295	34,024	30,608

\* Thai advertising agency

\*\* Joint venture between Thai and international agencies

@ Radio and outdoor advertising not included

Source: **The Advertising Book 1997-1998**, p.53.

When we follow closely at the kinds of products advertised in the media we find a mixture of consumer goods and luxurious/status products as the major categories of advertisers. The media are also included among the top 10 advertising category (table 7).

**Table 7 : Top Ten Advertising Category 1996**

Unit : million baht

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Product category</u>	<u>television</u>	<u>papers</u>	<u>magazine</u>	<u>films</u>	<u>bill board</u>	<u>Total</u>
1	real estate	332.56	2,362.20	237.64	-	2,529.87	5,462.27
2	alcoholic drinks	1,830.80	284.15	124.82	4.78	48.74	2,293.29
3	automobile	759.52	840.46	135.76	-	56.54	1,792.28
4	office equipment	407.88	1,017.20	62.45	1.57	94.98	1,584.08
5	the media	459.75	854.86	54.81	0.17	13.34	1,382.93
6	cosmetics	1,091.42	39.46	227.62	1.30	2.08	1,361.88
7	hair shampoo	1,181.67	4.95	19.71	0.43	3.25	1,210.01
8	cooking oil	886.73	198.94	51.62	-	31.48	1,168.77
9	social campaigns	816.20	202.05	9.74	-	0.20	1,028.19
10	computers	117.18	633.84	249.08	0.01	23.15	1,023.26
<b>Total 10 categories</b>		<b>7,883.71</b>	<b>6,438.11</b>	<b>1,173.25</b>	<b>8.26</b>	<b>2,803.63</b>	<b>18,306.96</b>
Total 97 categories		22,962.48	11,433.05	3,876.09	24.08	3,695.71	41,991.41

Source : **The Advertising Book 1997-1998**, p.143.

If we examine the above categories in more detail we can see that the top 10 advertisers share 16% of the total advertising expenditure in the industry (table 8). Out of these, six are international corporations. They are the world (Western) major consumer product producers, namely, Lever Brothers, Procter & Gamble, Nestle, Colgate and Palmolive and one Japanese automobile company, Toyota Motor. These global brand names are the market leader which dominate the local market with their products. But furthermore, they produce the symbolic product of the 'modern' images in their presentation of the characters wrap in the new middle class setting, life style and languages in the ads. The modern city estate with green surroundings, big living rooms and kitchens, luxurious shopping malls, bars and pubs are the general backdrop of these advertisements. Consuming these modern products are, therefore, the key to a successful life and a happy family for an individual.

In products which deal with the sphere of work and production the advertisements show the images of modern office with hi-tech office and communication equipment. It is the ideology of efficiency, speed and reliability of the information technology at work.

Similar kind of concept is used with advertising cosmetics such as shampoo, body and skin care product as well as detergent and other cleaning agents. Scientists presenting the product in the laboratory under the microscopic lens and chemical formula is a guarantee of the high quality of the scientifically proof product. These global advertisers are selling not only the goods but the new ideology of the power of information and knowledge, and professional-ism in modern production. It is evident that these images are selective and representing the life and work of the new middle classes whose works deal with the production of information and services in the service and industrial sectors of the economy.

**Table 8 : Top Ten Advertisers 1996**

unit : million baht

<u>rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Advertising expenditure</u>
1	Lever Brothers (Thailand)	1,764.19
2	Procter & Gamble (Thailand)	754.43
3	Nestle (Thailand)	612.57
4	Boonrod Brewery	527.51
5	Toyota Motor (Thailand)	478.66
6	Osothsapha (Teck Heng Yoo)	441.90
7	United Winery & Distillery	421.47
8	Colgate-Palmolive (Thailand)	410.95
9	T.C. Pharmaceutical Industrial	404.38
10	Land and House (Property)	350.72
Total		6,166.78

Source : **The Advertising Book 1997-1998**, p.140.

Advertising is part of the media structure in a capitalist economy. Its first function is to sell the product by speeding up the flow of goods. Its second function is selling the ideology of capitalism (Garnham, 1979). But in addition, the advertising industry has direct impact and control on the media industry (Murdock and Janus, 1985). This is a more subtle relationship between the media and the global capitalist economy for which advertising is the key mediator. In the Thai milieu the media industry rely heavily on the advertising industry. While television and radio depend entirely on advertising revenue newspaper and magazine receive 60-80% of their income from advertisement. The content in these media is, therefore, circumscribed by the marketing strategy of advertisers. Popular programmes

on television prime time, for example, are confined to 2-3 genres. These are news, drama and game show. For magazines, general magazines for women and men are the most popular ones supported by the advertising industry. The target viewers and readers are the new middle classes and lower middle classes. But we shall examine in more detail later on how the media industry under the influence of the advertising industry promote consumerism and individualism in the mainstream media genre and content.

Let us now look at the Thai media industry and its connection with the ideology of the global economy through the direct sale and consumption of media product. Examples will be drawn from three major media - magazines, films and cable television - which saw the rapid rise of imported product since 1994. Our point of inquiry is that although it is clear the Thai middle class audiences are consuming more global media product what kinds of symbolic construction of the capitalist ideology are they consuming ?

**Table 9 : Examples of Thai Version of International Magazines 1994-1997**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Reader</u>	<u>Thai Publisher</u>	<u>International Publisher</u>	
Penthouse **	Men	May Media	General Media International	US
Esquire ***	Men	May Media	Hearst Magazine International	US
Cosmopolitan *	Women	Pacific Group	Hearst Magazine International	US
Cleo *	Women	Post Publishing	Hachette Filipacchi	French
Elle *	Women	Post Publishing	Hachette Filipacchi	French
Seventeen **	Women	Golf Digest	-	US

\* Joint Venture    \*\* Franchise    Penthouse and Seventeen closed down in 1998  
 \*\*\* Esquire's copy right fees is lifted for the time being

Source : **Nation Sudsabda**, 19-25 March 1998, pp. 20-21.

Since 1994 several international magazines have launched the Thai version to attract the young and modern working men and women in the city. These are printed on luminova paper imported from Finland in order to keep the standard and the look of the magazines. Elle, for example, declared that it would lead the fashion trend and life style of Thai women. The publisher was certain that the Thai market was ready for such an international magazine and it would broaden the worldview of the Thai readers (**Puchadkarn Daily**, 3 October 1994). Penthouse and Esquire were also expected to be the leader magazine amongst the same group of men's magazines published locally. Penthouse folded in March 1998 due to the heavy copyright fees (400,000 baht/month but was increased to 800,000 baht/month after the economic crisis in July 1997). However, since Penthouse has become one of the major popular soft porn magazine, May Media, the Thai publisher, put out For Men which is exactly the same with Penthouse instead.

Most of these imported titles carry between 60-80% of the content from the original magazines including advertisements. The attractive columns in these magazines are fashion, entertainment news, celebrity interviews, sex stories and columns, and most of all advertisements of international brand name cosmetics, leather goods, clothing, watches and jewelry. And the indirect advertisement of CD and films through the entertainment columns. The consumption of these products is to acquire the status symbol which formed the identity of the new middle classes.

The second example is the expansion of Hollywood and Hong Kong film exhibition vis-a-vis the decline of the local film industry. For nearly two decades the Thai film industry has been able to produce over 100 films a year. It provided for the debut of new film directors and a variety of genres. One of the reasons was due to the high tax rate levied on imported films in 1976.<sup>1</sup> The tax rate was set at 30 baht/meter and the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) boycotted the measure for 5 years before making a return in 1981 (*Puchadkarn Daily*, 16 August 1993). During the 1980s, the MPEAA and the American film studios came back to test the market while Thai politics during this period began to stabilise and the economy resumed its constant growth. The significant change, however, was in the 1990s when the Thai government negotiated with the US government for special export rights on agricultural products under Section 301 over the imported film tax. Hence, the film tax was lowered in 1993 (*Puchadkarn Daily*, 26 August 1993). Hollywood and Hong Kong films began to flow in by the hundreds as opposed to the number of Thai production which went down dramatically from 113 in 1990 to 32 in 1996 (table 10).

**Table 10 : Number of Thai Films and Foreign Films 1990-1997**

unit : million baht

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Thai films	113	107	91	64	53	42	32	(17)
Foreign films *	n/a	n/a	293	242	n/a	200	n/a	n/a

\* The majority of foreign films come from Hollywood and Hong Kong and a small number come from Europe.

Source : Sutakorn Santithawat, 1997 and **Thai Film 1993**.

<sup>1</sup> This occurred at the time of the 1970s political crisis in which the student movement and the Left were suppressed by the military and the Rightist government. There was no freedom of expression and the media was strictly censored. It was interesting to see that all other forms of media expressions were suppressed while the film industry received special treatment. This might be an open response to US sanction on human rights in Thailand. And secondly, the privilege of the film industry on production did not cancel out government measure on censorship of political and social commentary in the film.

The rapid decline of the Thai film industry has at least 3 major effects. The first is on the diversity of the genre. If we look at the genres of the Thai productions there are five major genres - real life drama, comedy, action, ghost and pornography. Among these, ghost movies and pornography disappeared. Comedy and real life drama are the two major genres which survived with a small number of action movies. The second is on the size of film producer. Only the major production studios and big productions could weather the storm. These are Sahamongkol Film, Five Star, Nakorn Luang, Grammy and R.S. Film. The latter two are affiliated to the largest music corporations in the country. Small producers of grade B movies whose films are popular in the country side are completely wiped out in 1995. Hong Kong films and smaller productions from Hollywood take their place (Sutakorn Santithawat, 1997, pp.129). The third effect is on the revenue of the industry. During 1991-1992 Hollywood films marketed in Thailand were worth around 100-120 million baht. Critics saw 1994 as the watershed year when Spielberg's Jurassic Park alone made over 74 million baht in Thailand and the major American studios together made 334 million baht.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, the Thai film industry in 1997 made a total of 310.8 million baht (*Thai Post*, 17 January 1998, p.8). The trend in 1998 shows an even rougher competition when Titanic already reaped 200 million baht from Thai viewers over its three months exhibition. Its global revenue, in March, was recorded at US \$ 10,000 or 40,000 million baht.

Our investigation, so far, shows three important changes in the film industry and the socio-economic context in the 1990s. First, the tax rate on imported film was lowered as an exchange for other export tax privileges. Second, the growth of the economy and the rise of the new middle classes and the elite and the upper classes who are seeking information and entertainment from within and from abroad in order to form their new class and cultural identities. These are the people who have the financial capability and consumption power who make up the significant part of the new media market. This is also true on the consumption of imported magazines exemplified above and the information and news media such as CNN, BBC, NHK, ABC, etc. Third, the large cinema theatres in Bangkok have been replaced by multiplex theatres in the new shopping centres and total replacement is expected by 2000. This means a large increase in the number of cinemas to ensure exhibition capacity in order to accommodate the deluge of foreign films.<sup>3</sup>

The change in the size of the cinema theatre came with the new sound technology of the multiplex cinema, the SRD, SDDS, DTS, THX systems. In 1993 there were 100

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<sup>2</sup> There are two large agencies which import films from the major Hollywood studios; Major represents Disney, Twentieth Century Fox, Columbia/Tri Star and Warner, and UPI represents Paramount, Universal and MGM.

<sup>3</sup> In order to draw the largest number of movie-goers for this growing influx of films advertisements and promotions are the key to business success. Some of the promotion strategies of the foreign film studios are; increasing the number of radio and television programmes and the print media on film review, introducing special news section on film and entertainment on television, and launching new programme such as the Movie Game on the most popular tv channel on prime time (beginning in April 1998). Hand bill is used to attract film buffs. And in March, a pre-Oscar party for film critics and the media was held, for the first time, to predict the outcome of the Oscar winners.

standard cinema theatres with seating of 1,500-2,000 in Bangkok. These are renovated into groups of 3-5 mini-multiplex theatres of 200-300 seats. In 1997 there were 250 cinema theatres in Bangkok. Outside of Bangkok there were 700-800 cinema theatres of standard and medium to small capacity seating. Among these, there are 270 standard and multiplex theatres (**Puchadkarn Daily**, 26 August 1993 and **The Advertising Book 1997-1998**, p.203). Over half of the cinemas in Bangkok show Hollywood films and the rest show Hong Kong and Thai films while the majority of the cinemas in the country side show Hong Kong films and Thai films with Hollywood films taking a smaller share of the rural market.

The final example is on satellite and cable television. During the 1990s, satellite and cable/subscription television also came in vogue in Bangkok. In 1997 there were around 230,000 subscribers to IBC, Thai Sky and UTV cable television. These are the middle classes and upper classes who can afford the 400-890 baht/month subscription fees plus 5,000 - 9,000 baht installation fees. These new media channels are the direct link up with the global information and media centre and the global economy. There are news, focusing on economic and politics, and current affairs programmes from the major international news services, sports, documentary and most of all, Home Box Office which is one of the most popular channel on cable television (Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, 1996).

At present, the economic crisis in 1997-1998 is having serious repercussions on the quality and quantity of the media industry. This means restructuring the industry one way or the other. Cable/subscription television, for instance, must down size its organisation or close down in order to survive. IBC and UTV already announced their merger at the end of 1997 (**Krungthep Thurakit**, 14 October 1997). This is due to the decreasing number of subscribers and the high cost of copy right fees on imported programmes. In the process, IBC is inviting AIA Insurance to become its new major shareholder while CP the holding company of UTV is negotiating with Microsoft to invest in CP's Asia Multimedia for technology transfer and development in optic fiber and cable transmission (**Thai Post**, 27 February and 28 March 1998).

The examples of the imported magazines, films and cable programmes discussed in this section indicate the kinds of information and entertainment consumption of the new middle classes in the 1990s. While they seek freedom of information and entertainment and the content which relate to their new economic contexts and aspirations they move closer to the global media and information centre. It is clear that the media industry was prepared to mediate these marketable products for the rising Thai middle and upper classes. What happened shows a quick and growing liberalism in media consumption. This means greater consumption of the media product themselves and at the same time, consuming the ideology promoted in the programme content and columns and in the advertisement of these media products. Questions still remain whether these global media bring along political liberalism, equality and democracy in their content or are they essentially the instrument of global consumerism ?

### **The localisation of globalised media content and the middle class worldview**

In the areas where direct link up are not suitable in terms of languages, market, production technology and economy of scale the media industry devised the 'localisation' of content as a means of appropriation of the globalised media. We will investigate three important areas of the media which are related to the life and work of the new middle classes. These are; family and child care magazines, computer and IT magazines and business handbooks. They form the core of information for modern living and professional development of the rising middle classes. It is interesting to find that the majority of information are appropriated from sources in the US and Europe, to a smaller extent. While all of these media introduce new information and technology to the readers they also portray the desirable worldview of the yuppie generation of material abundance, good education, happy family, and well-paid professions.

We take a look first at the mother and child care magazines. There are six monthly magazines which aimed at readers who are young working mother. These magazines started off as handbook for pregnant mothers. Most of the editors said that young mothers of today read more and want to get the right information for themselves and their family. They are providing information and knowledge for human resource development.

**Table 11 : Family and Child Care Magazines 1996**

Name	Year	Publisher	Readership	Focus
1 Rak Luke (Loving Children)	1983	Plan Publishing, Co.	Young, pregnant mother/ with pre-teen children	child care & new outlook
2 Duangjai Paw Mae (Heart of Dad & Mum)	1995	Plan Publishing, Co.	Young, pregnant mother/ with pre-teen children	child care & accessible to mass, rural readers
3 Life & Family	1996	Plan Publishing, Co.	Family with teenage modern living children	home&family
4 Mae Lae Dek (Mother & Child)	1977	Nung Jed Karn Pim	Young, pregnant mother/ with pre-teen children	additional reading for mothers
5 Bantuk Khun Mae (Mother's Diary)	1993	Family Direct, Co.	Young, pregnant mother/ with children < 12 year	child care
6 Luke (Children)	1992	Lunar International, Co.	Young, pregnant mother/ with pre-teen children	child care

Source : **Puchadkarn Daily**, 8 August 1996, p.10.

Mae Lae Dek (Mother & Child), the first magazine of the group, monopolised the market for nearly ten years during a period when the middle classes were still quite small. Rak Luke (Loving Children), the second magazine which started in 1983, struggled to survive for the first few years and then took off in 1987 coincided with the growing number of

the new middle classes. The rise of the new middle classes in the late 1980s and 1990s made it possible for the industry to expand this segment with four new publications. In 1995, Plan Publishing extended its new publication, Duangjai Paw Mae (Heart of Dad & Mum), to the mass readers in the provinces and rural areas. In 1996, Life and Family was launched for the upper middle classes in the city. The market value of this entire segment is estimated at 100 million baht/year.

The signification of the family and child care magazines is on its break with local knowledge on child rearing and health care for the family, particularly mother and children. The symbol of modern child rearing and health care is the doctor. Child rearing and health care are combined into one whole system that rely mainly on modern medicine, doctor and the hospital. The worldview reinforced by these magazines is that modern family must be looked after professionally. Knowledge on child care from the previous generations is not reliable and are no longer valued. Doctors and academics become expert columnists and consultants for the readers. But in raising children with modern knowledge there are certain formula which must be followed and special health care products to go along with. These are milk, nutritious drinks and food, pampers, skin care products, toys for children and health products for mothers, etc., most of which are imported goods. In addition, this new worldview is centred on the physical health of the mother and child and the child's intelligence. The mother is designated as the main carer of the child. There is little emphasis on role sharing between father and mother in child rearing. And there is a lack of social dimension in this 'new' concept of family and community and society. The worldview is firmly based on the individual family and its well (best) being.

Stepping out of the family into the modern office and we find computer and IT magazines providing the bulk of information and knowledge for the managers, professionals, technicians, and office staff. In the 1980s, information on IT and computers were popularised in new technology and IT sections in both Thai and English newspapers and IT magazines. According to the survey carried out by Karnjana Karnjanatawe there are three major categories of IT magazines (**Bangkok Post**, 16 April 1997). These are; the hardware oriented IT magazines, the software oriented IT magazines and the newly launched Internet magazines. The cover price of the magazines ranged from 40-180 baht. A large number of these magazines are market guide for computer buyers and game users. There are information on new hardware and software products, pricing as well as articles on step-by-step usage of various software and information on technology trends (table 12). These magazines came on in the 1990s except for Office Technology which started in 1983. While they meant to expand the IT market they are also transmitting the 'hi-tech' worldview and experiences to students, young office workers, technicians, managers, professionals, etc. The consumption of these products is part of the new middle classes' professional advancement which would lead to both higher income and higher social status.

**Table 12 : Thai IT Magazines 1997**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Content and main focus</u>
<b>Hardware oriented</b>		
1. <b>Com Plus</b>	40 bht	Hardware & software news & reviews for beginners and how-to articles
2. <b>Computer</b>	40 bht	an academic journal of the Computer Association of Thailand. Focus on reports & analysis of computer technology
3. <b>Computer Review</b>	70 bht	Hardware & software product review & info on new technology & products with Home Computer Buyer's Guide
4. <b>Microcomputer Magazine</b>	60 bht	New trends in IT technology & how-to articles on software applications. For advanced readers.
5. <b>Micro Computer User</b>	50 bht	Special features on product review from particular disk manufacturers & in-depth stories on PC products
6. <b>Office Technology</b> (stated in 1983)	50 bht	IT news & trends, interviews, section on Apple Macintosh software & price index
7. <b>Communication Technology Magazine</b>	50 bht	For technical reference on new technology such as EDI, Tele-medicine.
8. <b>PC Magazine (Thailand)</b>	75 bht	Most articles are translated from the English edition of PC Magazine. Offers in-depth news & articles on PC technology
9. <b>Shopping Computer</b>	65 bht	Popular guidebook on computer prices for users. News & articles on product testing
<b>Software oriented</b>		
1. <b>Business Computer Magazine</b>	50 bht	Business usage of IT technology; Cyber banking, telephone banking, World Outlook on technology trend, Mac software review
2. <b>Byte Thailand</b>	60 bht	News & analysis on computer products in Thailand written by Thai and foreign author Features on Windows NT software & state-of-the-art hardware
3. <b>Computer Time</b>	50 bht	Information on new software & how-to guide on software usage on work & entertainment for beginners
4. <b>Computer Today</b>	50 bht	Information on new software & how-to guide on software usage. Buyer's guide

<u>Name</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Content and main focus</u>
5. <b>How.DTP</b>	125 bht	For digital publishing professionals on Macintosh & Windows. Some software review
6. <b>IT.Soft</b>	60 bht	News summary on latest IT technology & events in Thailand. Translated articles from Information Week & Fortune Magazine. Infor on Internet & interesting Web sites
7. <b>Multimedia Guide</b> (started in April 1997)	120 bht	For home users with free CD ROM Infor on games, software for kids, new products, Web sites, Windows.
8. <b>Computer Gamer</b>	180 bht	For computer game users with free CD ROM. Infor on how to play the latest games from the US, etc.
9. <b>Windows Magazine</b>	50 bht	Articles translated from English edition of Window Magazine. How-to articles on using Microsoft Office 97, Page Maker for beginners.
<b>Internet magazines</b>		
1. <b>Internet/Intranet Magazine</b> (started in 1996)	50 bht	Infor on Internet Phone, Network Computer, Java language, interesting Web sites
2. <b>Internet Today</b>	40 bht	Internet guide book on Thai Web pages, music, movie, travel & new technology

Source : Karnjana Karnjanatawe, **Bangkok Post**, 16 April 1997, p.3.

Another area which localises the globalised media content is in the translated books. The most popularised titles are on business management, office and technical how-to such as computer and information technology, and the global economy. The manager of Chulalongkorn University Book Centre pointed out that during the last few years book consumption has increased tremendously in the areas of information technology, computer, business investment and stock exchange, and the economy in general. This is due largely to the globalised economy which new information and communication technology played a key role in linking the Thai society with the world economic and political centres. It has become a necessity for the Thai readers to keep abreast with the latest trends and development (**Puchadkarn Daily**, 8 September 1994, p.10). The editor of Praew, one of the leading publishing house, gave an analysis on the trend in book publishing that novels and all forms of fiction have a much smaller market share when compared with books on business management and technical handbook. The 30-year up book buyers who make up the bulk of consumers are more interested in their professional development and in the trends in world affairs. Books on Globalisation by Sondhi Limthongkul and Globalisation 2000 by Tienchai Wongchaisuan are examples of best seller titles in 1993-1994 (**Puchadkarn Daily**, 10 January 1995, p.10). Before the economic down turn in 1997 book publishing and book stores have mushroomed in Bangkok and in the provinces. Se-Ed Book who specialises in

science and technology, for example, has been expanding rapidly in recent years while Brain Centre of Manager Media Group planned to specialise in computer, business management and academic books but folded due to the present economic crisis. These are all aimed at the new middle classes who can afford to buy books on a regular basis and whose lives and work are connected with the global economy and the development in new technology one way or the other.

Our examples in this section and the previous section have attempted to demonstrate the kind of media environment surrounding the new middle classes. On the one hand, the Thai media industry connect itself with the global media industry, such as the advertising industry, the film industry and the publishing industry, in order to import the globalised media content for the Thai consumers. These media are primarily concerned with entertainment. On the other hand, it appropriated other types of the globalised media and reproduced them in a localised form for the consumption of the new middle classes. These are in the areas of child rearing and professional development, which directly linked to the lives and works of the new middle classes.

But does the growing import of the globalised media and the quantitative consumption of these products signify the interiorisation of the global ideology of capitalism and consumerism? Kasien Thechapira (1997) argued in his "*Consuming Thainess*" that the process of production and consumption (and reproduction) of mass culture have consequently deconstructed the self identity of being Thai or Thainess and created the desire to be un-Thai. Hence, the media have un-leashed our desire to become global consumers of the symbolic and identity commodities. In the twin process of the sublimation of un-Thainess and the sublimation of Thainess which he explicated from a selection of advertising campaigns and the official campaigns on the Thai Culture Years (1993-1997), our cultural subjectivity, as consumers, have become fragmented and finally alienated from the very Thainess for which the state was desperate in promoting. Once the self identity or the Thai cultural subjectivity has been purged by turning our consciousness inside out or the exteriorising of Thainess takes effect the interiorising of the global cultural subjectivity could readily penetrate into our consciousness. In "*Consuming Thainess*" Kasien has expressly analysed the process in which the Thai media turned the Thai consumers into global consumers. If we apply his analysis to the media consumption of the new middle classes we could argue, then, that a similar process is at work in turning the cultural subjectivity of the new middle classes into consumers of global media products and constructing a global cultural subjectivity along the process.

### **The 'emerging' public sphere, civil society and citizenship**

In this final section, I want to investigate the emerging media spaces I explored in "*Limited Competition without Re-regulating the Media*" (1996) in parallel with the expansion of the globalised media space exemplified in the previous sections. In "*Limited Competition without Re-regulating the Media*" I have identified the structural changes of state monopoly in the broadcast media to one in which the large media corporations and the advertising industry are competing fiercely to break this monopoly. The important area is in the production of news and information, and current affairs programmes on radio and television. Evidently, the economic boom and liberalisation in recent years have put serious pressure on the state to liberalise the broadcast media economically and politically. There are at least five independent news agencies producing radio news as opposed to the state's Public Relations Department and the Mass Communication Organisation of Thailand (MCOT). The rights to information and freedom of expressions have been extended as a result despite the state effort to control the news content. It appeared, then, that a 'public sphere' is emerging and the audiences are addressed as 'citizens' not mere consumers of products. But over a short span of time the media spaces created after the political confrontation between the democratic forces and the state on instituting a non-elected prime minister in 1992 have been on the decline. The expectation of a growing civil society based on the strength of community based groups and the democratic forces, especially the middle classes and the progressive media, expounded by several social critics and theorists such as Prawes Wasi (1995), Tirayut Bunmi (1997), Chuchai Supawong (1997) and Chai-anand Samutwanit (1997), has become more ambiguous.

Drawing from Anderson's **Imagined Communities** (1995) that the media, photograph and print, especially, played a key role in constructing nationalism and a nationalist consciousness in the former colonised nations of Southeast Asia I would like to explicate its signification on the making of a new imagined community for the Thai people. In his revised edition of **Imagined Communities** Anderson traced back to three institutions of power; census, map and museum invented by European colonisers since the mid nineteenth century. He showed how census's abstract quantification/serialization of persons, map's logoization of political space and museum's 'ecumenical' profane genealogization interlinked to form the colonial state imagined dominion (for more detail see chapter 10, pp.163-185). But for 'un-colonised' Siam Thongchai Winichakul's study on "*Siam Mapped*" (1988) inquired into how the monarchy appropriated from the Europeans the technology of mapping and thus, created her geographical domain during the reign of King Rama V. Although Siam was un-colonised by the Western powers her borders were colonially determined. Hence, the emergence of a new state-mind within a 'traditional' structure of political power. The establishment of a special mapping school in 1882 and the compulsory subject of geography, *Phumisat Sayam* (Geography of Siam), at the junior secondary level in 1892 came after print-capitalism swept into Siam during the reign of King Rama IV (King Mongkut). Thongchai saw the vectoral convergence of print-capitalism with the new

conception of spatial reality presented by these maps changed the traditional visual images of *krung* - sacred capital, and *muang* - population centers, into a new invisible term - *prathet* - country, of bounded territorial space. In Thongchai's words (p.310),

*"a map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa...a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent...The discourse of mapping was the paradigm which both administrative and military operations worked within and served"*

While maps mark out geographical borders census marked out racial, ethnic and religious borders among the local population or the ruled. The census, therefore, is the demographic triangulation which filled in politically the formal topography of the map.

Borrowing from Anderson's and Thongchai's metaphor of the 'imagined communities' and the mechanical reproduction of powerful institutions of census, map and print-capitalism and language I would like to take a short cut from its colonial genealogy to the modern electronic/digital reproduction of present day local, national and global media discourse. My assumption is that if the territorial borders of the old map is a model for the spatial reality of Siam for the rulers, the coverage areas marked out by the modern day electronic media (and satellite link-up) offer a concretised and bird's-eye view of that spatial reality. Each station would have its logoised map determined by its coverage area. Some might overlap with the others. This media map is interconnected by the relay stations and local electronic networking enabling home television and radio receiving sets to hook up with the transmitting stations. The inter-linkages of programmes from the national studios, regional and provincial studios enable the audiences/citizens to visualise and audioise the modern nation state in split seconds. The imagined geographical space is being concretised through the extension of the mass electronic media.

Let us investigate further on how the media industry organises its imagined communities in the new political economic and cultural arrangements. If census signified the political, ethnographical and religious groupings of the population the market economy classification of media audiences into category A, B, C and D according to their household income, socio-economic status, sex and age represent the typologies of imagined communities within the media territorial space (**The Advertising Book 3**, 1989, p.360). These categories exclude or marginalised ethnic groups and their religious affiliations from the main categorisation. The Hill Tribes, the Muslims, for example, are usually collapsed into low income, rural audience category. The Indians, Sikhs, Khmers, Burmese are unaccountable for unless their income or socio-economic status put them into one or the other of the income and socio-economic categories. Hence, the media map and audience categories, based primarily on economic classifications, sit uneasily with the reality these models purported to represent. They turn the political citizens of the official census into depoliticised market consumers.

If the broadcast coverage areas of both state and commercial radio and television could be taken as the electronic map or modern political/cultural map we would see the official political vis-a-vis the new political economic/capitalist space competing against each other. Within this new map there is a complex combination of media actors with different modes of interpellation constructing the cultural subjectivity of the Thai people. While the state national media broadcast news and information from the government and the centralised bureaucracy the private national media (television and radio) addressed the audiences as citizens in their news and current affairs programmes, and as consumers in their entertainment programmes and in their advertisements. In essence, it is in the 1980s, when Channel 7, the most popular private television station, gained nationwide coverage, and in the 1990s, when private radio stations, linked up via satellite, were able to broadcast nationwide that the 'imagined community' of the Thai nation state in its modern form began to materialise. The Hill Tribe people or the indigenous people in the north and northeast and the Muslims in the south are able to watch and listen to the same nationwide programmes and simultaneous national and regional news reports from both the state and private stations. Hence, the new electronic map represents the political geographical domain while juxtaposing it with the economic domain of the global market economy.

But if the new electronic map is in the process of making and shaping the 'imagined communities' or the 'imagined Thai state' it is, at the same time, breaking this very community at the same pace if not speedier. Our previous examples showed that the globalised media such as films, international news, imported magazines, translated/localised media content and most of all, advertisements have been penetrating deeply into the national and mainstream media which meant that it is cracking into every grain of the new media map. Audiences at the centre as much as those at the periphery are imagining the Thai nation state and an un-Thai nation state or a globalised state concurrently. They are being politicised as Thai citizens and depoliticised into global consumers at the same instant.

Two examples are given below to demonstrate the conflicting juxtaposition of the 'citizens' during the political election period against the 'consumers' of drama and advertisement on prime time television. This puts into sharp focus the notion of a fragmented subjectivity and the ambiguity of the public sphere created by a media industry closely connected to and dependent on the global economy. The election campaign is selected on the basis that it represents mass democratic movement and civic participation. And drama is chosen as the ultimate form of daily mass entertainment of the large majority of the people.

During the election periods in 1992 (22 March 1992, 13 September 1992) and 1995 (2 July) Poll Watch, a concerned citizen organisation, financed by government budget, was set up to monitor the election. One of the main mandate of Poll Watch was to promote citizens' rights and freedom and their responsibility and participation in the election. The Campaign Section of Poll Watch was responsible for campaigning for popular involvement in

the election process or for participatory democracy. Poll Watch mass media programmes include poster, banners, leaflets, audio cassettes, videos, television and radio interviews and television drama, civic education at the local level such as schools, factories, villagers and open democratic forum for dialogue between politicians and their constituencies. Callahan's study on "*Poll Watch, Elections and Civil Society*" (1995) found that the media programmes of Poll Watch 3 have been able to organise a broad network of people's organisations, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions (universities and teachers' training colleges in all regions) and 60,000 volunteers to monitor the poll on the election day. During this short period of time, between 4-6 weeks, the civil society is extended and activated in the centre and the periphery, inside the top social and political institutions and between the grassroots organisations, women's groups, district and village authority and the media. They rallied to campaign for 'good and un-corrupted MPs' and they questions the candidates on local issues and to press for their inclusion in the Party platform. As Cohen and Arato (1992) pointed out,

*"The political role of civil society in turn is not directly related to the control or conquest of power but to the generation of influence through the life of democratic associations and unconstrained discussion in the cultural public sphere"*

(Cohen and Arato, 1992, ix)

In "*The Media Campaign during the 2 July 1995 Election*" (Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, et al., 1997) the study found that the mass media were extremely active in the election campaigns since 1992. On the one hand, the media co-ordinated with Poll Watch for information on election monitoring, civic education and the open democratic fora. On the other hand, the media produced new programmes and columns to cover a range of issues on the competition tactics and strategies of political candidates and parties, vote-buying, political policies and past performances, etc. prior to polling day. On election day, the Public Relations Department re-organised its programmes and devoted the entire day on Radio Thailand national service for news and analysis on the election. There were open telephone lines for regional reports, voters' commentaries and complaints as well as professional commentaries on the election. On television, most of the television stations set up its newsroom to report on the election results. The programmes run from 4 o'clock to mid-night or there after until the official results are announced. The active channels are Channel 9, 3, 11 and 7. These special programmes are organised in conjunction with the print media, banks (using their nation wide computer network) and some large corporations. Channel 3, for instance, joined with **Matichon**, **Khao Sod** and **Prachachat Thurakit** papers, Pacific Intercommunication (radio news agency and documentary producer), U & I Corporation (one of Channel 3's affiliated company) and the Bangkok Bank. And Channel 9 joined with the Nation Multimedia Group and Krung Thai Bank for its special election day programmes.

During the election campaign and on the election day the electorate are constantly interpellated as citizens or politicised subjects by both the state media and commercial private media. There were some advertisement spots and music programmes which supported voting - signifying democratic participation, and campaigned against vote-buying and corrupt politicians. On this kind of occasion, the usual corporate speech and discourse shifted its articulation in order to participate in the politically open space of the public sphere. It is also on this very occasion that the media map merged with the political map of the state. The Poll Watch local democratic fora, the Travelling Poll '95 of Channel 9 and the regional reports and phone-ins on election day, for instance, converged the political and media map with the visualisation of a modern nation state. They have placed the citizens into this 'imagined public sphere' as the spatial reality of the 'imagined communities'.

Now let us turn to the prime time drama on television (18:30-19:30 and 20:30-22:15) and their advertisers which are the most popular daily television fare. Among the 5 national television stations 3 out of 5 indicated that drama programme is their marketing strength.<sup>4</sup> The other stations, Channel 9 and 11, place their focus on news and current affairs and edutainment programmes (**Krungthep Thurakit**, 24 January 1997, p.2). Television is the medium which gets the largest share of the advertising expenditure. Between 1992-1996 television alone received 57%, 56%, 54%, 54% and 59% of the total advertising expenditure respectively compared with print - newspapers and magazines, radio and films (**The Advertising Book 1997-1998**, p.184). The most expensive advertising rate is the prime time drama slot followed by the evening news bulletin, game and talk shows, variety programme and Chinese dramas (**The Advertising Book 1997-1998**, p.204-208).

Kanjana Kaewthep (1993) pointed out that there are two basic features central to Thai television drama. Firstly, they meant to appeal to the women audiences so they choose to present love and romance and family saga in which the stories are built around the family and their sexual relationship in the confine of the domestic sphere. In these kinds of drama the majority of the characters are not grounded in any occupational role. We could translate this in two different ways. Either the major characters belong to the elite class (the property class who live on rent and inheritance) or that the stories are so engrossed in the domestic and individual relationship that the world outside the family does not matter whatsoever. Secondly, they are the construction of the media industry which reinforce the myth of the unequal gender relations in the Thai society. Although the patriarchal relation is reflected in the drama the happy ending of the story usually closes off any alternative decoding or criticism on the unequal relationship.

In the mid-1980s to 1990s, the prime time dramas developed two additional features. One is on the un-Thainess of the major characters and another one is on the 'foreign setting' of the drama. This is when the twin process of sublimation of un-Thainess

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<sup>4</sup> ITV the newly established station does not have a nation wide coverage. It's main strength is in news and current affairs programmes.

and sublimation of Thainess became intertwined at the same instance as Kasien (1997) would have it. In 1985 the Miss Thailand pageantry awarded its nomination to Miss Pornthip Nakhirankanok, a Thai girl who grew up in California. She became Miss Universe and set the tradition of the globalised beauty in the Thai cultural spirit. Miss Pornthip is tall, pretty and intelligent. Most of all she speaks good English. Her Thai, on the contrary, is poor. But she proudly represents Thailand in the juxtaposition of Thainess and un-Thainess. This seems to provide Thai society with a sense of psychological security in competing successfully in the global arena.

Since then, a new tradition of an 'imported Miss Thailand' for the pageantry was introduced. And it orchestrated this new cultural subjectivity and identity on to a whole range of personna in the entertainment world and the media industry. Actors and actresses, singers and fashion models, television hosts, etc. now have a combination of Western appearances. They are tall with light complexion, having a prominent nose and light colour eyes and hair which reflected the desirable images of un-Thainess. In addition, the names and the pet names are all Westernised, such as Ann, Pete, Johnny, Sam, Bird, Tata, etc. The exteriorisation of un-Thainess is, thus, completed. Some of these celebrities are half Thai who can speak perfect Thai. They have Scottish parents, some Italian and some American parents. But a large number of these actors/actresses and singers who grow up abroad and join the entertainment industry in recent years could not speak nor write Thai. Some perform as the key characters despite their inability to read the scripts nor speak properly.

A good majority of the prime time drama during this period are set in foreign locations such as Switzerland, New York, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, France and England. The stories are mostly about the lives of middle class teenage students studying abroad or family travelling for sight seeing or fictionalised tales of foreign land. They became one of the more popular genre despite heavy investment on production. The middle classes are well represented in the prime time drama with overwhelming support from advertisers. This means that most of these dramas are the kind of 'cultural commodities' which is both profitable and ideologically desirable.

It is not surprising that the prime time dramas together with the advertising industry work to reinforce the media and the middle classes' desire for un-Thainess and their fragmented cultural subjectivity (see detail explication on advertising campaigns in Kasien's *Consuming Thainess*). They are happily being made into a new class of global consumers. When we contrast this daily fare with the periodical media campaign on election and democratic participation we find a deep imbalance. The irregularity of the open public sphere which produced the kind of politicised subjectivity needed for the inter-action between economy and state in a civil society is thus, lacking. This is evident during the present economic crisis in 1997-1998. The media industry have been seriously effected and a large number of media practitioners are unemployed. Since their lives and works, and their mind-set depend on the well being of the economy similar to other groups of middle

classes they become depoliticised, not politicised, by the whole economic crisis. In their effort to seek information to regain the lost economic status they have lost the sense of direction and their mission of watch dog and critical commentators for the civil society.

If we take a close look at the regular media fare of news and current affairs we find that the media report less on the plight of the economic crisis affecting the agricultural sector, the rural poor and the protest by the Forum of the Poor. They are more concerned on reporting the money market, export figures and the international economic fora which expect to bring in foreign currency to prop up the economic crisis. The media are not only less interested in the welfare of the majority of the people but they are openly biased against them. The reports, advertorial and advertised news on the recent controversial issue on energy consumption on the one hand, and the conservation of the environment and the people's way of life at Huay Kayeng, Kanjanaburi is a case in point. The Petroleum Authority of Thailand's (PTT), a powerful state enterprise, contracted the Burmese government on the Yadana gas pipeline project which runs from the Andaman sea to the western border of Thailand. It cut through 50 kilometers of national forests in Kanjanaburi province and a number of villages along the pipeline. Conservationists and villagers protested against the project and its environmental assessment report. But few of the media report on both sides of the issues and there were little investigative reporting to inform the public. On the contrary, a large number of the print media reported and printed special features by PTT while radio and television ran short features and commercials supported by PTT (Tirayut Yuwanimi, 1998).

From the above explication I have demonstrated how two major contradicting forces are juxtaposed through the media representation during the election period and the representation in the daily fare of prime time drama on television. Combining this with the previous examples on the expansion of the global media and the localisation of the globalised media content by the Thai media industry (the majority are the new middle classes themselves) I hope to have shed some lights on the inquiry on the ambiguity of the public sphere and the role the middle classes play in constructing a democracy for the Thai society.

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