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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN THAILAND

THESIS

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Freedom of the press in Thailand fluctuates greatly, depending upon the government in each period. Newspapers have been suppressed since the monarchy political system was changed to democracy in 1932. Several kinds of suppression were imposed in each period which showed that the country, in reality, was under a military dictatorship.

This study is a summary of the government control of the press since 1932. The study was divided into five chapters, including the introduction, background of the press and politics in Thailand, style and characteristics of Thai newspapers, government control from 1932 to 1963, and the conclusions and recommendations for further study.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Economic and social conditions have greatly hindered the development of the press in Southeast Asia. Low literacy, multiplicity of languages, poor transportation facilities, and lack of sufficient revenue are barriers to newspapers' development. The most severe barriers, however, are government restrictions, such as strict censorship, suspension of newspapers, harrassment and imprisonment of journalists.<sup>1</sup>

Thailand is one of the countries in Southeast Asia whose press has undergone much suffering from the government's suppression. Before the revolution of 1932, press activities were under royal direction<sup>2</sup> and there was no need for the throne to take notice in terms of legalistic control.<sup>3</sup> There might be criticism of specific royal actions, but no criticism of the system as such was allowed. News presented in

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<sup>1</sup>Joanne M. Lopez, "The Press in Southeast Asia: Its Problems and Functions," unpublished master's thesis, Department of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, California, 1971, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>All power belongs to the king under the absolute monarchy.

<sup>3</sup>John D. Mitchell, The Asian Newspapers' Reluctant Revolution, edited by John A. Lent, (Iowa City, 1971), p. 215.

newspapers depended on whatever the government wanted the public to know. Most of the news the newspaper got was usually dated. Newspapers in the early days were not as effective and interesting as today. Virginia Thompson described the press role during the monarchy period:

Often the king's speech reached the press a week after its delivery, and notice of the arrival of foreign emissaries came to the paper some time after their departure. Obviously, in the early days, public opinion was so embryonic, and the press so insignificant a vehicle, that the government did not bother to keep it either informed or suppressed.

The first and only press law before 1919 was a libel law that provided for jail sentences of up to three years and fines of up to 1,500 baht (\$75) for publications judged to involve defamation of the royal family, contempt of the law, or incitement to revolt.<sup>5</sup>

During the period of King Rama VI (1910-1925), an attitude toward the press in Thailand as a means of disseminating the official and authoritative words had changed because of the educational expansion. The king himself would write articles in his newspaper to castigate any opinions of which he disapproved. The Thai press during this period was very free and became more aware of its functions in informing the public on international and national news.

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<sup>4</sup>Virginia Thomson, Thailand, The New Siam, (New York, 1941), p. 791.

<sup>5</sup>Mitchell, p. 215.

Its political role as a watchdog of government increased after the country joined the Allies in World War I.

Newspapers in Thailand were very much concerned about the inflation that struck Thailand and other countries all over the world. The Thai newspapers became critical of the government's decision and the luxurious life of the king while the rest of the country was suffering from inflation. The government became more concerned about the power of the newspapers; they could endanger the government because the public tended to pay more attention to newspapers than before.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the government promulgated the Newspaper Act of 1919 which required that all military news be cleared by the censor and forbade all criticism of the government. But the Newspaper Act of 1919 was considered mild because journalists had been able to develop devices of indirect attack on the government to avoid censorship. Virginia Thomson said:

In application, this censorship was gentle, and the journalists managed to get around it by means of satiric verse in which animal symbolism was used as in the medieval allegories. Thus, when a newspaper wanted to ridicule the provincial

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<sup>6</sup>Ponpirom Iamtham, "The Political Role of Thai Newspapers from the Revolution of 1932 to the End of the Second World War, unpublished master's thesis, Department of History, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, 1972, p. 14.

government, whose conferences were always held during the rainy season, it ran poems on water buffaloes. The Siamese language was well adapted to such indirect attack.<sup>7</sup>

During the reign of King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, 1925-1935), a newspaper was accused of being irresponsible in reporting the government news. Therefore, the government promulgated a more stringent press law in 1927 which had directly and indirectly institute controls.

Direct controls included refusing publishing licenses to persons who had not been permanent residents of Thailand and providing for revocation of licenses at any time for reasons of public security or for publication of articles tending to undermine relations between Thailand and nations with which it had treaties. All editors had to be educated through nine years of formal education.<sup>8</sup>

After the press law of 1927 was promulgated, the newspapers were always under both censorship and stringent controls until the revolution of 1932 headed by Pridi Panomyong<sup>9</sup> which brought the absolute monarchy to an end. The civilians supporting Pridi were mostly young, Western-educated liberals who saw themselves as modernizing the government.

Press freedom was part of that modernization, and the

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<sup>7</sup>Thomson, p. 792.

<sup>8</sup>Mitchell, p. 216.

<sup>9</sup>Pridi Panomyong, now a law professor at Chulalongkorn University, was a key person in the revolution of 1932.

censorship law was abolished in July 1932. But by September, four newspapers had been closed for criticising the government. This action showed that the government, even though it favored the press freedom, had no intention of letting the press take the lead in its new policies.

Moreover, as a result of the revolution in 1932, which took place so abruptly that the public could neither understand nor adapt to the situation, the criticism and dispute about the revolution by the monarchist newspapers made the government feel insecure. Therefore, the government promulgated the Press Act in 1934 which raised the required educational level for editors and established penalties. All stories about government and the military had to be censored, and more newspapers were closed under the new law.

The press continued to fight for its freedom until the military dictatorship began in 1938 when Field Marshal Pibul Songkram came into power. Following the military coup by Marshal Sarit Thanarat in 1958, press freedom seemed to be completely suppressed for the first time until his death in 1963.

It can be concluded that controls of the press in Thailand fluctuated between freedom and repression, depending on the particular view of the individuals in power at any given time.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to examine the history and development of the Thai press and its freedom from its birth in 1886 to the time when severe suppression ceased in 1963 in order to show the struggle of the press freedom in Thailand and indicate the nature of the Thai press during this period.

### Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were:

1. To provide a historical perspective of the nature and current problems of the Thai press.
2. To show the development of the Thai press from its birth to 1963 when the period of severe suppression ceased.
3. To show the development of press freedom in Thailand to 1963.
4. To show reasons why Thai newspapers are called a political instrument of propaganda.

### Significance of the Study

The nature and problems of the Thai press have been written by both Western and Thai scholars, but freedom of the press in Thailand has not been discussed in detail. This study discussed in detail how the Thai press was suppressed by the military dictatorship that ended the monarchy in 1932. The study will be of value to researchers, journalists, and students who are interested in the press system of

Thailand and will help explain how the weak point of the Thai press can be eliminated.

The time frame of the total study is significant because it is the period of transition from the monarchy to a military government. The roles and freedom of the press changed rapidly during this period. The press had to operate in a climate of political uncertainty.

#### Related Studies

Previous studies of the press in Thailand include "A Comparative Content Analysis of Thai Newspapers in 1960 and 1969," a systematic quantitative study of Thai newspapers' contents by Pongsak Payakavichian, a graduate student at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin in 1971 to provide more accurate and useful evaluation of the Thai press. The study indicated that the Thai newspapers, even though they played their role as the watchdogs of government, could hardly concentrate on the news of national development because they would lose their audience if they gave up the lighter side of their reporting.

Joanne M. Lopez, a graduate student in journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, wrote in her master's thesis in 1971, "The Press in Southeast Asia: Its Problems and Functions," that, because of the governmental and social restrictions, the newspapers in Thailand were to be considered sources of entertainment rather than sources of

information. The study showed that the Thai press was cowed by the many coups and that, after each coup, tight control of the press was introduced, leading the press to exploitation of sex and sensationalism.

"The English-language Press in Thailand: Post World War II History and Development," a master's thesis written by Catherine Anne Kekoa, a journalism graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. She concluded that the English-language Thai press was unable to inspire or help set public opinion in Thailand because of a small readership. Most of the Thais could not read or speak English.

Albert Pickerell wrote "Journalism: A Happy Game in Thailand" for IPI Report in 1955 and "The Press of Thailand: Conditions and Trends" for Journalism Quarterly in 1960, describing the history and nature of the press in Thailand.

Alexander MacDonald, founder of the Bangkok Post, published a book, Bangkok Editor, in 1949. He described his journalistic work in Thailand and the political atmosphere in Thailand after World War II.

Ponpirom Iamtham wrote "The Political Role of Thai Newspapers from the Revolution of 1932 to the End of the Second World War" for her master's thesis when attending Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok in 1972. She described historically the political role of Thai newspapers between the revolution in 1932 and the end of World War II in 1945.

### Limitation of the Study

This study was limited to the period between 1886, when the newspapers in Thailand began, and 1963, when the era of Field Marshal Sarit's dictatorship ended. The study was mainly concerned with the government's control of newspapers, since the newspaper is the only medium not state-owned in Thailand.

### Methodology

This thesis was approached by means of historical method. It described chronologically the history of the press and politics in Thailand in order to show development of the press and politics that affect freedom of the press in Thailand.

The information on the history of the press and its freedom was gathered from such secondary sources as books, theses, Thai magazines, IPI Report, and New York Times. No Thai newspapers were used in this study because they are difficult to obtain for research and they are not readily available even in Thailand. Since this study was not a content analysis of Thai newspapers, the use of Thai newspapers was not considered crucial for the study.

### Organization of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I consists of introduction. Chapter II provides the background of the Thai and politics in order to enhance understanding

of the nature and conditions of the press in Thailand. Besides general history of the press and politics in Thailand, there is some emphasis on the development of Thai political system and training of journalists in Thailand. Chapter III discusses the nature and conditions of the press in Thailand, discussing many factors that hindered the press development in Thailand. Chapter IV discusses the government's control of the press in three periods: (a) a transition period, 1932-1938; (b) the Pibul Songkram period, 1938-1958; and (c) the Sarit Thanarat period, 1958-1963. Various forms of governmental control of the press in each period are discussed in this Chapter. Chapter V presents conclusion and recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND

#### Press

Before the printing press was introduced to Thailand, hand-written newsletters were the only means of communication between the government and the people. Each proclamation would be sent first to the Ministry of Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defense who would then send orders to the local authorities to call for a meeting and inform the people about the proclamation.<sup>1</sup>

In 1662, the first printing press was brought to Thailand by members of the French Catholic Mission. The press, set up in Ayuthia, printed in Roman alphabetic characters a number of religious tracts, a grammar and a dictionary.<sup>2</sup> The operation expanded from Ayuthia to Bangkok, but still used Roman characters.

In 1835, the first Thai-language printing press was

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<sup>1</sup>Ponpirom Iamtham, "The Political Role of Thai Newspapers from the Revolution of 1932 to the End of the Second World War," unpublished master's thesis, Department of History, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1972, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Virginia Thomson, Thailand, The New Siam, (New York, 1941), p. 788.

established in Thailand by an American missionary, the Reverend Charles Robinson, who bought the Thai-language type from James Low, the British captain who had developed Thai-language type. Robinson printed a number of tracts for use by American missionaries in propagating their religion in Thailand.<sup>3</sup>

Soon Robinson had a competitor. In 1837, Dr. Beseh Bradley, an American missionary, designed new types, which remain in use even today.<sup>4</sup>

The first use by the Thai government of the printing press occurred on April 27, 1839, when 9,000 handbills containing a royal proclamation banning opium smoking and trade were printed on Bradley's press. But the bulk of printed materials still was confined to the religious publications of the missionaries.<sup>5</sup>

#### English-language Newspapers

In 1844, because of the availability of the new types, Bradley started the first newspaper, The Bangkok Recorder, both in English and in Thai. The fortnightly newspaper's purpose was to inform the Thai people about their community. This first venture was not particularly successful and the

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<sup>3</sup>Thailand Official Year Book, (Bangkok, Thailand, 1968), p. 451.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Bangkok Recorder folded after two years, only to be resumed as a monthly newspaper on March 12, 1865.

In the following year, however, a libel suit was brought against Bradley by the French Consul in Bangkok because of his criticism of a French official.<sup>6</sup> The case was found against the American missionary, who was forced to print an apology and pay an indemnity. Two years later, perhaps as an after-effect of the adverse court decision, he discontinued the publication, thus ending the short life of the first newspaper in Thailand.<sup>7</sup>

Following the death of the second Recorder, Bangkok was without a newspaper for four months. But on May 22, 1867, the Siam Weekly Monitor, owned and edited by S. d'Encourt, made its appearance. Bradley printed the paper and was one of the staff of the Siam Weekly Monitor.<sup>8</sup>

Because d'Encourt was a heavy drinker, Bradley stepped more and more into the breach as writer and editor. But the paper could not survive the weakness of d'Encourt. It died in September 1868.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Iamtham, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>John D. Mitchell, The Asian Newspapers' Reluctant Revolution, edited by John A. Lent, (Iowa State University Press, 1971), p. 212.

<sup>8</sup>Thomson, p. 788.

<sup>9</sup>Mitchell, p. 212.

Other publications during this period were The Siam Times, Bangkok Press, and Bangkok Summary, all weeklies and all short-lived, dying within a year.<sup>10</sup>

The element of competition had entered Thai journalism by this time. Interest in publishing newspapers had spread to the Thai people. As a result, several daily newspapers, both Thai and English language were begun.

The first English-language daily newspaper was the Siam Daily Advertiser. It began as a joint enterprise by Englishmen, John Smith and Thomas S. Andrews, on September 1, 1868.<sup>11</sup> Its earlier editions consisted of only one sheet that gave daily shipping and export-import news.<sup>12</sup> Within a month of publication, it began to insert in Thai, advertisements, obituaries, and items about foreigners. The newspaper later ran parallel columns in English and Thai. It survived for seventeen years, making it the longest-lived paper in this period.

The Bangkok Times, the next English-language newspaper, was begun in 1887 by T. Lloyd Eilliamese as a small weekly journal. It later became a daily in 1896.<sup>13</sup> Of all the

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<sup>10</sup>Official Year Book, p. 452.

<sup>11</sup>Thomson, p. 779.

<sup>12</sup>Official Year Book, p. 453.

<sup>13</sup>Thomson, p. 789.

English-language papers, The Bangkok Times was the dullest and most conservative newspaper. It still was read, however, by most of the educated Siamese and foreigners.<sup>14</sup>

In 1891, The Siam Free Press was founded by J. J. Lillie, an Irishman, as a rival to the prospering Bangkok Times. In 1898, Lillie was expelled from the country for having insulted the sovereign, the government, and the people of Siam, and for having sent false and alarming communications to foreign countries.<sup>15</sup> However, the Siam Free Press was continued for a few years by Francis McCullough, who eventually sold it to an American, P. A. Hoffman. Hoffman sold his holding to Siamese interests, and the editorial staff rechristened the newspaper, the Bangkok Daily Mail. The paper continued to be American-dominated until its demise in 1933.<sup>16</sup>

The Siam Observer was the politically oriented English-language newspaper that appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, published by the Tilleke family. It took over the Siam Directory, which appeared in 1878. The Observer's circulation was not large, and, although it received a

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<sup>14</sup>Thomson, p. 789.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

government subsidy, it finally closed in 1933.<sup>17</sup>

#### Thai-language Newspapers

As mentioned, the interest in publishing newspapers was not confined to foreigners. The Thai started to show interest in the press in 1858 with the Royal Gazette printed by King Rama IV. Its purpose was to inform the Thai of royal proclamations and important public announcements. It disappeared and was re-established in 1876 during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910).<sup>18</sup>

The Gazette has been published continuously since then, but it usually is omitted from the list of the kingdom's newspapers because of its special role.<sup>19</sup>

However, Thai newspapers by Thai people came into their own during King Chulalongkorn's reign, a reign in which many progressive steps were taken to a new way of life in Thailand. The old feudal system was gradually abandoned and a civil service was organized for the administration of the nation. Slavery was abolished and an educational system was set up. As a result, people were more educated and enthusiastic to know and to be informed about national and international events. Newspapers became more important

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Mitchell, p. 213.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

than ever and were read by greater numbers of people.<sup>20</sup>

The first Thai language daily newspaper, in 1875, Court, was published by a group of eleven princes led by Somedej Chao-fa Grom Phya Panupanwongwaradej. Its purpose was to inform the public of royal activities, proclamations and important announcements.<sup>21</sup> It contained no criticism or political news. It was discontinued after 552 issues.<sup>22</sup>

The Weekly Darunawadh, the next Thai newspaper, was begun by young members of the royal family in 1874 as the first radical Thai newspaper. It struck out against the old conservatives, calling their ideas dull.<sup>23</sup> One commentator has typified Darunowadh as "too spicy for old Siam," a comment quite at odds with the later sensationalism of the Thai press.<sup>24</sup>

In the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910-1925), the interest of the people toward the press increased, and the number of Thai, English and Chinese newspapers totalled 133.<sup>25</sup> This period was called "The Golden Age of Thai

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<sup>20</sup>Kenneth P. Landon, Thailand in Transition, (Chicago, 1939), p. 6.

<sup>21</sup>Supapan Boobsaad, History of the Newspapers in Thailand, (Bangkok, 1974), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup>Official Year Book, p. 453.

<sup>23</sup>Mitchell, p. 213.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Iamtham, p. 13.

Journalism." The king himself took an active part in journalistic controversies, especially through the columns of the famous newspaper of that time, Nung sue Bim Dai, to which he frequently contributed leading articles. He welcomed fair criticism of his government but reacted with vigor against what he believed to be unfair or groundless attacks on his administration.<sup>26</sup> The newspapers of his period flourished under this freedom.<sup>27</sup>

Because of its important role, journalism encouraged people to start their own businesses. Thus privately owned newspapers sprang up. The privately owned newspapers that should be mentioned were Siam Prapet, Tulwipak Pojanakit, Nung Sue Bim Dai, Bangkok Daily Mail, Varasup, Bangkok Politics, Yamato, Wayamo and Observer.<sup>28</sup>

Siam Prapet was founded in 1897 for educational purposes. It presented readers with historical knowledge that had been kept exclusively for Royal members in the Royal Palace. Thus this newspaper has value as historical literature.<sup>29</sup>

Tulwipak Pojanakit, a radical and political-leaning newspaper, was founded in 1900. It presented the public with national and political information that readers should know.

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<sup>26</sup>Mitchell, p. 213.

<sup>27</sup>Iamtham, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

Criticism of the government administration was too strong, however, to influence people effectively.<sup>30</sup>

Yamato was the newspaper run by a Japanese, Imeya Kawa. This best seller, founded in 1922, favored criticism of government officials rather than the government body.<sup>31</sup>

Wayamo was the radical paper of a group of retired officials. Founded in 1921, it had a better opportunity than other newspapers to report facts and criticize the government.<sup>32</sup> Because of its radical operation, a libel suit was brought by the government, saying it had gone too far in criticising the king for his luxurious life.<sup>33</sup>

Varasup, a Thai daily newspaper, was founded in 1907 by a Chinese, Seao-Hud-Seng Sriboonruang. It started out in both Thai and Chinese, but the Thai edition was dropped in 1921 and the Chinese-language edition survived until 1930 as Hua-Hsien Jih-Pao. The paper aimed to enhance relations between Thai and Chinese and to inform people of democracy.<sup>34</sup> Sriboonreang was not only a journalist but also a politician who favored Sun Yat-sen during the revolution in China.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>31</sup>Iamtham, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 27

<sup>34</sup>Mitchell, p. 213.

<sup>35</sup>Iamtham, p. 24.

Nung Sue Bim Dai was a well-known newspaper founded by the government officials in 1908. It was the newspaper that spoke for the government. King Vajiravudh always took an active part in journalistic controversies through the columns of Nung Sue Bim Dai, but the paper came to an end in the early days of the 1932 revolution.<sup>36</sup>

The Bangkok Daily Mail contained some of the best news commentating at that time. It was founded in 1908 by an American, Phillip Hoffman, and was run by educated Thais with many years of journalistic experience, such as Pya Winaisoontorn, Phya Udompongpensawat, Louise Keereewat, and Luang Saranuprapan. Its editorials and articles were highly influential with the government because of these people. The government had to keep an eye on this political newspaper.<sup>37</sup>

After World War I, King Vajiravudh became the owner of the Bangkok Daily Mail. Hoffman could not support the paper during the depression. In 1925, the king's brother, Prajadipok (Rama VII, 1925-1935) succeeded to the Daily Mail as well as to the throne, but removed himself from direct involvement by selling the paper to a group headed by his father-in-law, Prince Svasti.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Thomson, p. 702.

<sup>37</sup>Iamtham, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup>Mitchell, p. 214.

Although direct involvement of the monarch in Thailand journalism ended with king Prajadhipok's sale of the Daily Mail, royal journalists continued into the 1940's. Especially prominent was Prince Wan Waithayakon. His Prachachat, founded in 1932, was a training ground for many who went on to become leading journalists in the post-World War II years. The paper became a leading voice, too, for the new political consciousness embodied in the coup of 1932, and remained a thoughtful and respected voice until its publication ended in the mid-1940's.<sup>39</sup>

Contemporary with Prince Wan and Prachachat as leaders in the post coup royal press were the British-educated, Prince Pithya and Pramuanwan. The prince owned, actively published, and regularly contributed to the paper, which was printed on the prince's palace ground.<sup>40</sup>

He used his regular foreign affairs commentary column to consistently present pro allied views before and into World War II. The paper, however, was stopped after its plant was severely damaged by Allied bombs.<sup>41</sup>

In 1932, the paper played an important role as political educator and watchdog for the government. The People's

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<sup>39</sup>Mitchell, p. 214.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

Party revolution had just occurred, ending the absolute monarchy, and accelerating modernization in Thailand.<sup>42</sup>

Newspapers, however, came and went on the eve of the sudden coup; the political atmosphere was tense and set for transition. In the brewing political storm, both the Royalists and the coup group manipulated the press toward their ends. The climate was one of political uncertainty for the press.<sup>43</sup>

The Bangkok Daily Mail supported the Royalist faction, so the democratic regime blacklisted the paper and the Mail sold out from political pressure. Keereewat, an editor, was arrested and held as a political prisoner.<sup>44</sup>

The Siam Chronicle, a pro-American newspaper run by Thais, was launched as an English-language daily in May, 1936, for international readers. The first issue was edited, published and printed at the Thai Commercial Press by Sivaram Madhven for proprietor Phya Trijanusasana. This paper gathered news through European and Japanese wire and radio services: British Broadcasting Corporation, the British Official Wireless (BOW), Domei, and Ringo Imperial Service.<sup>45</sup>

In 1944, The Bangkok Chronicle advertised itself as

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<sup>42</sup>Kekoa, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup>Thomson, p. 797.

<sup>44</sup>Iamtham, p. 47.

<sup>45</sup>Kekoa, p. 17.

"Thailand's National Daily." Local and international news were about equal in number, but the Chronicle gave definite priority in headline size, story location and space to local releases.<sup>46</sup>

The Bangkok Chronicle, begun in 1939, later launched Siam Nikorn, a Thai-language edition, but both went out of business in 1969. It was the oldest continuously published paper in the country.<sup>47</sup>

Lak Muang, one of the oldest Thai newspapers in Thailand, was founded in 1926 by Boontien Anginant, a Thai-Chinese merchant. It was credited as the first Thai paper to use the combination of illustrative cartoon and satirical verse to comment on public officials and issues.<sup>48</sup> This device, especially the verse, was carried frequently by M. R. Kukrit Pramoj, an editor of Siam Rath in 1950.

Chao Thai appeared in 1949 as the semi official voice of the police department and General Phao. It was a pro-Thai and anti-communist newspaper. Chalerm Vudikosit, Chao Thai's able and respected editor and publisher, made Chao Thai into a prosperous and respected paper even after its supported General Phao was sent into exile in 1958.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Kekoa, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup>Mitchell, p. 221.

<sup>48</sup>James N. Mosel, "The Verse Editorial in Thailand Journalism," Journalism Quarterly, XXXIX (1962), 71.

<sup>49</sup>Albert G. Pickerell, "The Press in Thailand, Conditions and Trends," Journalism Quarterly, XXXIX (1960), 92.

Other newspapers were Sri-Krung, Thai Radsadorn, Thai Mai, Pramuan Wan, Bangkok, Warasup, Prachachat, Ying Thai, Thai Ekrrarat, Thai Num, Pramuan Kao, Pracha Korn, Prachamit, Supabburut, Supabsatree, Nikorn, Thai Seri, Suwannapum, Bangkok Time, Kong Nguan, Thai wan, Bangkok Nippo, and Kao Pab.<sup>50</sup>

After World War II, newspapers tended to fight against such government suppression as strict censorship. The Pibul's government finally allowed free criticism and reporting on government activities. As a result, several governmental newspapers appeared. Government officers supported many newspapers and had these newspapers talk for the government.<sup>51</sup> Prachatippatai, owned by Field Marshal Pibul Songkram, was a prominent newspaper that supported the government strongly with distorted news, slogan and articles.<sup>52</sup> These newspapers were called "prostituted newspapers" because they would print or report anything for money.

#### English-language Newspapers after World War II

During World War II, the Japanese, who temporarily occupied Thailand at the time they attacked Pearl Harbor,

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<sup>50</sup>Iamtham, p. 73.

<sup>51</sup>Boonsaad, p. 123.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

suppressed English-language publications in Thailand. After the war, four English-language newspapers appeared.<sup>53</sup>

Liberty, national paper for international readers, began on September 5, 1945, by Manit Vasuvat, chairman of the publishing enterprise, Sri Krung Company. The paper's goal was to bridge the gap between foreigners and the Thais while refraining from becoming the propaganda organ of either the government or of a foreign country. It also tended to represent the viewpoint of British-educated Thais in the analysis of both domestic and foreign news. The paper was conservative and well-written, but not stimulating enough or widely enough read to significantly affect either its audience or the Thai press.<sup>54</sup>

Liberty offered an interesting service to Thai students of the English language: Several times weekly a supplement to the regular edition provided a Thai translation of some editorial content, a vocabulary list and grammatical hints.<sup>55</sup>

But, in 1957, General Phao purchased Srikrung to be a mouthpiece and organ of his political party, Seri Manangkasila. He also acquired Liberty, known later as The Bangkok World under the new American editor, Berrigan.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Kekoa, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>56</sup>Pickerell, p. 93.

The Democracy, an English-language morning daily, was begun by Luang Damrong Duritarskh in January 1946. It covered local and international news gathered from Reuters, U. S. Information Service, and the United Press. The format was broadsheet, American style, with poor photography and about 20 per cent advertising.<sup>57</sup> It survived for only one year and disappeared January 31, 1947.<sup>58</sup>

The Bangkok Post was founded by Alexander MacDonald, an American ex-navy lieutenant, August 1, 1946. It was backed by many Thais such as Phya Prija and Luang Damrong, Royalists; Thawi and Prasit Lulitanon, sympathizers with the coup of 1932; Somboon Supandit, a young lawyer; and Achit, responsible for the job-printing side of the firm.<sup>59</sup> It was a Siamese-American venture representing a cross-section of Siamese business and politics. It was a very successful newspaper read mostly by educated Thais and foreigners in Thailand.<sup>60</sup>

The Bangkok World was founded in February 1957 by Darrell Berrigan, a United Press correspondent in Asia, and Far East correspondent for the Saturday Evening Post. The World replaced Liberty after the September 1957 coup in

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<sup>57</sup>Kekoa, p. 23.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>59</sup>Pickerell, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

which General Phao fled the country. Berrigan, an editor of Liberty, relinquished his 35 per cent of the stock in the publishing company in return for the name of Bangkok World.<sup>61</sup>

Berrigan's daily column "The Wonderful World," was a light and well-written treatment of life in Bangkok. Once a week, he wrote a local news summary that, prior to the imposition of martial law, was an important and reliable source of political intelligence in Thailand.<sup>62</sup>

#### Chinese Newspapers

The Chinese newspapers after World War II tended to concentrate on the revolution by the Kumintang headed by Sunyatzen in China. Chung Kuo Ken Pao, launched September 21, 1945 by the Kumintang supporters, which had links with other papers, Min Sheng Jih Pao and Cheng Yew Jih Pao, both appearing in January 1, 1946.<sup>63</sup>

On October 10, 1945, the Communist entered the lists with the daily Chuan Min Pao, and, in May 1946, the Thai branch of the non-Communist, anti-KMT China Democratic League was represented by Min Chu Hsin Wen. Eleven months

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<sup>61</sup>Albert Pickerell, "The Press in Thailand, Conditions and Trends," Journalism Quarterly, XXXIX (Winter, 1960), p. 92.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>63</sup>Mitchell, p. 226.

later, the leaders of the Thai branch financed the daily Manku Pao, which soon became a Chinese non political press leader by concentrating on Thai-centered opinions and the welfare of the kingdom's Chinese community rather than political matters linked to the mainland.<sup>64</sup>

In January 1950, Hsien Jih Pao and its evening companion were launched by tiger balm ointment millionaire, Hu Wen Hu. They were pro-Peking papers but became neutral by the end of 1951 and by mid-1953 they were vigorously supporting pro-nationalist policy.<sup>65</sup>

There was a sharp drift of the Chinese press from 1955 to 1957 to a position strongly neutral and to some extent pro-Communist. At the time of the September coup, only one Chinese-language daily was persistently anti-Communist and it was fourth in circulation.<sup>66</sup>

Generally speaking, the Chinese papers were more stable financially and less sensational than the Thai-language press. They provided more foreign news and gave fuller coverage to business affairs, for in Thailand, as in other areas of Southeast Asia, the commercial and financial community was controlled by Chinese.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>65</sup>Mitchell, p. 227.

<sup>66</sup>Pickerell, p. 94.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

### Newspapers in Field Marshal Sarit's Period (1958-1963)

In 1958, the revolution by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat closed eighteen newspapers, including six dailies, and abolished political parties that reduced financial support and forced most of the newspapers to become self-supporting.<sup>68</sup> As a result, the Thai press became less politically inspired and appeared to be more stable than when it depended more on political parties support. Although the small newspapers with weak circulation had declined, the Thai press as a whole, had to rely upon income from advertising.<sup>69</sup>

In the administration of Field Marshal Sarit, there were 20 daily newspapers: 14 in Thai-language (4 morning papers and 10 evening papers), two in English and four in Chinese (all from Chinese-language papers produced separate morning and evening editions.) All daily newspapers were published in Bangkok.<sup>70</sup>

The Thai press during this time seemed to be more sensational because of governmental suppression. Journalists were limited in their writing and they tended to avoid censorship and any kinds of suppression from the government.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Pongsak Payakavichian, "A Comparative Content Analysis of Thai Newspapers in 1960 and 1969," unpublished master's thesis, School of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1971, p. 23.

<sup>69</sup>Payakavichian, p. 23.

<sup>70</sup>Official Year Book, p. 454.

<sup>71</sup>Boonsaad, p. 151.

Pim Thai was one of the leading-circulation newspapers in the early 1960s. It was owned initially by Chaiyong Chavalit, manager of Thai Panichakarn company. It presented readers with sensational news, stories of murders, accidents and natural disasters.<sup>72</sup>

Pim Thai was credited with originating wooden letter banner headlines carved of wood and usually printed in color. Its trade mark headline color was purple.<sup>73</sup>

Kiattisak was a small circulation newspaper edited by an experienced and capable writer, Sala Likhitkul. It was an anti-Communist and pro-Western newspaper. After Field Marshal Sarit's death in 1963, it became one of the leading newspapers in circulation, along with Pim Thai and Thai Rath, because of its sensational news.<sup>74</sup>

Thai Rath was a very influential newspaper because of its wide circulation. It concentrated on sensational news and on speaking for the government. It was first owned by Air Marshal Chalermkiat Vadhananghir and, later, was transferred into the hands of Kampol Watcharobol.<sup>75</sup>

Sarn Seri, a morning newspaper, was founded in 1956 by former Prime Minister Marshal Sarit as a sister paper to

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<sup>72</sup>Mitchell, p. 222.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Payakavichian, p. 81.

Thai Raiwan. In the time of Pibul's regime, Sarit used these newspapers as political tools. Before 1958, Sarn Seri was anti-West. After Sarit became the head of revolutionary group and Prime Minister in 1959, Sarn Seri was regarded as a mouthpiece of government and it became pro-West and anti-Communist China.<sup>76</sup>

Sarn Seri was closed by Thanom's government in 1965 because of its criticism of the government's action in searching the misappropriation of public funds by the late Prime Minister.

Khao Panit, the daily trade news, was the only newspaper owned by the government, by the Ministry of Economic Affairs.<sup>77</sup>

Other newspapers were Chao Thai, Lak Muang, Pleon Chit Daily, Prachatippatai, Seri Thai, Siam Nikorn, Siam Rath, Thai Raiwan, and Siang Ang Thong. Two English-language newspapers at this time were The Bangkok Post and Bangkok World. The four Chinese dailies, each having a morning and afternoon edition, were Hsing Hsien, Sakon, Sri Nakorn (Chin Hua) and Tong Hua.<sup>78</sup>

#### Provincial Newspapers

The newspapers in Thailand under the period studied were concentrated in the capital city of Bangkok. There

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>77</sup>Wandell Blandhard, Thailand, Its People, Its Society, Its Culture, Human Relations Area Files, Inc., (New Haven, 1958), p. 209.

<sup>78</sup>Iamtham, Appendix I.

were 20 dailies in Bangkok and none in the provinces. Most of the provincial newspapers were published once every ten days to coincide with the announcement of the results of the state lottery.<sup>79</sup> These results were picked up from the radio broadcast from Bangkok, and provided the main story of a provincial newspaper. But legitimate news stories of local events were presented as well, and, in this respect, the publication was no different from any other established provincial newspapers.<sup>80</sup>

There were 49 provincial newspapers. Only two newspapers, Kon Muang of the northern city of Chiangmai and Thai Taksin in the southern city of Had Yai, graduated to the daily rank. They could well illustrate a pattern of development in provincial newspapers. When a newspaper becomes well established in the community, when social and economic conditions permit, when literacy grows or, in short, when the community is ready, a provincial newspaper will likely advance from once-a-week to a daily.

#### Training of Journalists

The majority of active newspapermen in Thailand probably had their training on the job or drifted to journalism from other careers. Academic training was likely in fields other

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<sup>79</sup>Official Year Book, p. 453.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 454.

than journalism.<sup>81</sup>

Academic training in journalism in Thailand began in 1939 when Chulalongkorn University offered a one-year diploma course for students who had had two years of university education in arts. There were nine students in the first group under this program and only one of these failed to graduate at the end of the year.<sup>82</sup>

The next year, the University switched to a night program to suit the needs of those who worked during the day. It began as a two-year course, and later extended to four years. The program continued until November, 1944 when Chulalongkorn was forced to suspend all of its operations owing to frequent World War II allied air raids.<sup>83</sup>

In 1948, the University once again opened a two-year journalism night course for those who had completed secondary education or were certified by their respective editors to be genuine working newspapermen.<sup>84</sup> This last venture by Chulalongkorn University ended in 1954. A total of 416 graduates was produced under this program.<sup>85</sup>

Next to offer academic training in journalism was

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<sup>81</sup>"The Institute for Thai Journalists," Mahachon, (November 15, 1974), p. 20.

<sup>82</sup>Official Year Book, p. 456.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

Thammasat University, when it began a four-year course leading to a bachelor's degree in 1954. Students had to study liberal arts for one year, and then take specific journalism courses. By 1960, the university had produced about 200 journalism graduates.<sup>86</sup>

Substantial advances were made in communication training in Thailand from 1961 to 1966. Four permanent training projects were instituted to give training in the fields of journalism, public relations, and mass communication.<sup>87</sup>

In 1964, mass communication was offered as a course at the Faculty of Humanities, Chiangmai University. There were 39 students in its first group and they studied for four years for a bachelor of arts degree. It was the only training in journalism outside Bangkok.<sup>88</sup>

In 1965, Chulalongkorn University inaugurated the Department of Mass Communication and Public Relations with a first enrollment of 78 students. It admitted 252 more students in the following years, bringing to 330 students the total working three years for a pre diploma graduation. This class admitted men and women from the newspaper profession as well as high school graduates.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 457.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

In 1966, Thammasat University launched a three-year evening program in addition to its ordinary degree program. All working journalists were qualified to take the class upon production of a letter of recommendation from a newspaper editor or a director of an organization concerned with the newspaper or other fields of mass media. This first program attracted 354 enrollees.<sup>90</sup>

Even though journalism training in Thailand had been developed, journalism standards remained low, probably because not enough practical training was offered. Most of the academic courses studied in universities did not make students efficient journalists. Courses studied were:

1. History of Mass Media.
2. Theory and Process of Communication.
3. Fundamentals of Feature Writing.
4. News and Reporting.
5. Photography.
6. Theory of Printing.
7. Public Relations.
8. Creative Writing.
9. Technique of layout and illustration.
10. Laws on Mass Communication.
11. Research Methodology.
12. Public Relations in Business.

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 457.

Other courses were English, history, psychology, sociology, economics and political science, while little emphasis was placed on professional training.<sup>91</sup>

Teaching followed the lecture method almost completely. A normal lecture load was 20-29 hours per week. Students graduated after reading no more than four books during their graduate years.<sup>92</sup>

Dr. Albert G. Pickerell, who spent 10 months in Thailand to help establish a department of journalism at Thammasat University, believed that the only practical way in which journalism education could be improved was education through professional training.<sup>93</sup>

Finding teachers was a major problem journalism in Thailand faced. Teachers and professors were limited because most educated persons in Thailand seek government positions, adhering to the standard belief that patriotism and service to the country were achieved only through politics. Little prestige was attached to other activities, such as teaching or the fine arts. As a result, the journalism profession, with few exceptions, was in the hands of persons of limited education and experience.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Chulalongkorn University transcript, 1972.

<sup>92</sup>Kekoa, p. 66.

<sup>93</sup>Pickerell, "Journalism: A Happy Game in Thailand," Journalism Quarterly, XXXIX (1955), p. 7.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

## Politics

For centuries, the government in Thailand was autocratic in form and authoritarian in spirit. Power had the privilege of a small elite based partly on heredity and partly on appointment and in no way accountable to the people for its conduct of office. At its highest levels, this ruling class comprised people attributed semidivine status and considered in every way superior to common mortals.<sup>95</sup> Even lower officials were regarded as a class above mere citizens, although, at any time, a citizen with ability or influence could be appointed to office. There were, then, two distinct classes: those who ruled and those who obeyed.<sup>96</sup>

Until 1932, the government of Thailand was an absolute monarchy with official positions monopolized by members of the Thai noble families. Young Western-educated Thais, however, became discontented with this situation, and, in 1932, led by Pridi Banomyong, upset the government in a bloodless revolution. These men were impressed with the ideas of liberal government and political freedom that permeated Europe after World War I.<sup>97</sup> They believed that the supreme power should be in the hands of the people with the following privileges instituted:

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<sup>95</sup>Blanchad, p. 11.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Kenneth, p. 7.

1. The privilege of having an assembly or committee of the people exercise power over the nation, said assembly to receive power to act from the will of the people.

2. The privilege of choosing representatives to make the laws.

3. The privilege of demanding to know what the government is doing and what it is planning to do.

4. The privilege of demanding that representatives pass certain laws.

5. The privilege of living in the country. The government has no right to expatriate anyone, although it has the right to confine troublesome individuals to restricted areas in the country. This meant that the government had the responsibility of providing everyone with a place to live and work.<sup>98</sup>

On June 24, 1932, the end of absolute monarchy was proclaimed. The constitution of 1932 placed strong restrictions on the power of the monarchy, stripping it of its absolutist character. It removed the power of senior members of the royal family to engage in political activities.<sup>99</sup>

Three separate branches of government were established: executive, legislative and judicial. The National Assembly

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>99</sup>Saul Rose, Politics in Southeast Asia (St. Martin's Press, 1963), p. 125.

(Parliament) was given two categories of members: those elected for a four-year term by village and district representatives, and those appointed by the government in power.<sup>100</sup>

At its first meeting, the Parliament elected Pya Mano the respected chief judge of the Court of Appeal, as the Prime Minister. He chose the members of the executive committee. It was Thailand's first step toward democracy. Political parties, however, were still not permitted and the press was censored by the government.<sup>101</sup>

The rapid coming of the revolution was hard for the royalists to accept, resulting in unstable politics. On October 1933 the People's Party regime was threatened by a rebellion of provincial army and civil officials led by Prince Bowaradej, a former Minister of Defense. The uprising was squashed and the power of royalty sank to its lowest level. Prince Bowaradej and many high princes were exiled, and many supporters put in prison.<sup>102</sup>

A tense political atmosphere reigned after the revolution. Coup and counter coup rocked the country with the military playing a vital role. As a result, military dictatorship replaced democracy in Thailand.

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<sup>100</sup>Blanchad, p. 156.

<sup>101</sup>Donald E. Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia (Ithaca, 1966), p. 32.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

The major failures of democracy were as follows:

1. The Western-educated civilians who wished to modernize Thailand, called some of the military leaders to their aid in a revolution. However, these officers, once having tested power, soon discovered that they could get along quite nicely without the backing of the civilians and became independent political actors.<sup>103</sup>

2. The revolution had no roots in the people as a whole. In no sense was it a response to or a result of popular pressures or demands. It was made from on high and could be seen as being a mere substitute for the traditional governing elite.<sup>104</sup>

Sir Josiah Crosby concluded that liberalism never had a chance:

Looking back upon the past, it is now easy for the impartial observer to see that the democratic revolution of June 1932, lacking as it did the basis of any valid public opinion, was doomed to failure from the very start. The moral to be drawn to from what happened afterwards is that in any country where the traditional form of government has been weakened or destroyed, and where there is no effective public opinion to supplement or replace it, the existence of relatively powerful Armed Forces must represent a standing menace to the growth of democratic institution.<sup>105</sup>

In June 1933, Phya Mano's government were dissolved by

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<sup>103</sup>Rupert Emerson, Representative Government in Southeast Asia (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955), p. 161.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>105</sup>Sir Josiah Crosby, Siam, The Crossroads (London S. W. 1, 1945), pp. 90-91.

the coup headed by Phya Pahonponpayuhasena, Army in Chief, because Phya Mano seemed to entrust power to the royalist and governed the country as it was before the revolution.

In November 1933, after Phya Pahon took over Mano's government, the first election in Thailand to fill the seats in the assembly was held. The vote was light, and the elections produced little enthusiasm among the polity. Most of the elected deputies were respected civilians, many of them were lawyers and retired officials. The appointed half of the new assembly was composed largely of military officers. There were fifty-two of seventy-eight members who were military men or the police.<sup>106</sup>

Still, political parties were refused for the reason that the country was not ready for them. The chief effect of this policy, however, was to make it impossible for civilians to establish a base of power in popular support and, conversely, to bolster the already strong power of the military. The attempt of Prince Bowaradej, the deteriorating international conditions, and the achievements of militaristic Japan, Germany and Italy in the late 1930s provided even more opportunity to make military expansion a patriotic policy.

In 1938, Phya Pahon's government lost a vote of confidence by the assembly on a budgetary issue. The liberal assemblymen,

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<sup>106</sup>Nuechterlein, p. 39.

even though they were strong enough to undo the old government, were too weak to build a new one. It was believed that only the military leaders could do that.<sup>107</sup>

Colonel Pibul Songkram, leader of a group of energetic young officers, military aide of Phya Pahon, and Minister of Defense, immediately set about the task of turning support within the army into control over it.

#### Government under Pibul Songkram (1938-1958)

Field Marshal Pibul became Commander in Chief of the army at the same time he became Prime Minister. To consolidate his position, he introduced such measures favorable to the military service in the form of increased military expenditures and increased pay for military personnel.<sup>108</sup>

Moreover, he appointed his supporters within the military establishment to positions of prestige and power. In 1941 alone, 8,000 decorations were awarded and 30 generals appointed.<sup>109</sup>

Unlike his predecessor, Field Marshal Pibul had policy ideas of his own. He had written in 1936 that Thailand needed a dictator. In 1939, he announced that the interests of the nation would advance only as its military strength grew as modeled by Japan, Germany and Italy. In effect, he

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<sup>107</sup>Blanchad, p. 22.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

proposed a policy of national glorification and armed might.

Thailand entered an era of ideological politics. The Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense and the Department of Fine Arts introduced many measures of culture and political nationalism. Numerous parades, tournaments and books glorified the armed forces. The armed forces received even larger funds, and officers in increasing numbers were given political positions.<sup>110</sup>

As the Pibul's government became increasingly fascist in character, its policy became more and more pro-Japanese. Under Japanese aegis, it succeeded in obtaining a considerable area of Indochina, and, with Japanese consent, it annexed four Malay States and two Shan States from Burma. Thailand offered only token resistance to the Japanese when they demanded a military right of way through the country for their land attack on Malaya and Burma. A few days later, Marshal Pibul entered into an alliance with Japan and shortly thereafter declared war on the United States and Great Britain.<sup>111</sup>

The British and American governments ignored the Thai declaration of war because of the absence of the Thai people's consent.

During the war, however, some Thai people did cooperate

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Amy Vandenbosch and Richard Butwell, The Changing Face of Southeast Asia (Lexington, Kentucky, 1966), p. 286.

with the Allies. A Free Thai Movement was organized among the few Thais abroad, which, with the help of the United States and Britain, gave aid to an underground resistance movement led by Marshal Pibul's long time rival, Pridi. In August 1944, while Japanese troops were still in the country, Pibul's regime was overthrown by civilian politicians under the leadership of Pridi.<sup>112</sup>

After the collapse of the Japanese war effort, the new Thai government issued a "Peace Declaration" in which the declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain was proclaimed null and void because it was made against the will of the Thai people.<sup>113</sup> Field Marshal Pibul was arrested but was released after spending a few months in jail.

It appeared to many observers at this period that Thailand was about to begin a new era of democratic growth and liberalism in politics because the new civilian government permitted voting in elections, and more freedom to the press.<sup>114</sup> The constitution was again revised and finished in 1948. There were, however, too many factors militated against this progress. Waddel Blanchad concluded as follows:

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>David A. Wilson, Politics in Thailand (Ithaca, 1962), p. 27.

Enthusiasm for democracy and progress, rather than penetrating to the mass of the population was felt only by a relatively small segment of the new civilians leadership. A combination of internal maladies, especially the economic dislocations of the war and the political turmoils resulting from the death [presumably Pridi's name became associated with the death of the King] in July 1946 of popular young King Ananda made it impossible for the government to pursue long-term policies. Perhaps the most serious weakness of the new civilian regime was the prevalence of corruption among its leaders. Officials high and low, elective and appointive, became involved in the pattern of personal enrichment. Before the coup of November 1947, the strongest force holding the civilians together was their mutual desire to share in the spoils of office. Questions of national welfare were secondary to schemes for personal gains. The civilians rapidly lost their moral cohesion and popular support, and government disintegrated into personal and functional of pursuit of gain.<sup>115</sup>

On November 8, 1947, a group of officers led by Pibul seized the government and removed the civilian leaders, imprisoning some and forcing others to flee. Pridi was driven out of politics and sent to Peking in exile.<sup>116</sup>

The coup was justified on the ground that corruption had to be eliminated from the government, that the government was concealing the real facts of King Ananda's death, and that the civilians were weakening the armed services and permitting the Communist threat to reach dangerous proportions.<sup>117</sup>

Pibul became Prime Minister again. His policies

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<sup>115</sup>Blanchad, p. 123.

<sup>116</sup>Wilson, p. 25.

<sup>117</sup>Blanchad, p. 124.

generally followed the lines of economic expansion, military growth, promotion of nationalism, and full support for the status of the West against Communism.<sup>118</sup>

The Armed forces, again, particularly the army, received large appropriations, and army officers were installed in influential positions throughout the government and the economy. The police force began to gain power during this period and was given large funds for equipment reservation, including tanks and armored cars. It controlled all police powers and exercised a fundamental influence on production.<sup>119</sup>

General Phao Sriyanon, one-time secretary to Field Marshal Pibul and son-in-law of the Commander in Chief of the army, increased the power of the police as soon as he became head of the Department in 1947 by staffing the positions of responsibility and power with coup supporters and re-creating the police as a political force. Corruption permeated the police system. Policemen dealt in smuggling, prostitution, and gambling. If they found it inconvenient to enforce particular laws, they would not do so.<sup>120</sup>

Hired thugs were used by police to threaten Chinese businessmen, to frighten political opponents of the government, to influence elections and to silence unruly newspaper

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Wilson, p. 28.

<sup>120</sup>Blanchad, p. 194.

editors and reporters. During this time, four opposition members of the Assembly were reported by the police to have been shot by Malayan bandits when the Assemblymen tried to escape; and a newspaper editor disappeared without a trace. In each case, the public and the Thai press had first implied and, later, stated outright the police were responsible.<sup>121</sup>

The political power in the latter part of Pibul's regime was believed to be in the hands of four men, all of whom possessed military and police positions. These men, in the order of their importance, were: Field Marshal Pibul, Prime Minister; Police Director General Phao Sriyanon, the youngest of the four and head of pseudomilitary organization that truly rivaled the army; General Sarit Thanarat, the Army Commander in Chief; and Field Marshal Phin Chunhawan, Phao's father-in-law and Sarit's predecessor as head of the army. However, it was Sarit and Phao, younger than the other two, who increased their strength between 1950 and 1957 because of their positions and strong supports. Marshal Pibul, this time, appeared to survive as premier only because he was able to balance between the two chief factions. However, late in Pibul's period, it began to appear that Sarit and his followers had definitely gained at Phao's expense and that the internal balance was breaking down.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>122</sup>Blanchad, p. 125.

During the period of political insecurity, Pibul tried to find a way to build himself a base of power in the general public. In 1955, on his return from a tour of the United States and Great Britain, he began to introduce experiments of democracy in Thailand in the hope that he could swing public opinion behind him.<sup>123</sup>

The establishment of political parties was permitted from September 25, 1955 in preparation for the 1957 elections. Two channels of public information were begun, including regular press conferences with the Prime Minister and the Hyde Park discussions that gave the politicians opportunity to speak publicly in the central park of Bangkok.<sup>124</sup>

During the years from 1952 to 1957, as freedom of expression was allowed, it became apparent that Pibul and Phao were going all-out for popular support.<sup>125</sup> In the election of February 1957, Pibul's government was unstable because of the public's strong reaction against electoral malpractice in the government party victory.<sup>126</sup>

Corruption at the polls was the strong charge against the government. The public and students demonstrated to protest the irregularities in the voting in February. Sarit

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<sup>123</sup>Rose, p. 134.

<sup>124</sup>Wilson, p. 29.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

played a significant role in handling the public's protest. This opportunity, as a result, provided the rise of the political opposition to arouse popular interest.<sup>127</sup>

On March 2, a state of national emergency was declared. Sarit was named commander of all Thailand's military forces, including the national police, headed by his chief rival, Phao Sriyanon.<sup>128</sup>

Under the political tension, when Pibul's government lost popularity with the public, Sarit delayed until September 16, 1957, his military coup, with the result that Pibul and Phao left the country. The conventional Thai way of changing government had once more expressed itself, and, again, it was neither constitutional nor democratic. It had, however, good reception in the press, including the liberal newspapers. Hope for better things was the prevailing tone.<sup>129</sup>

Elections were held in December 1957, ostensibly to right the wrongs of the voting in February. The results were a foregone conclusion, however, and pro-Sarit elements won. General Thanom Kittikachorn became Prime Minister and Field Marshal Sarit, after one year of physical operation in England, took over on October 20, 1958. Martial Law was

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<sup>127</sup>Vandenbosch and Butwell, p. 291.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>129</sup>Rose, p. 135.

declared, the Assembly dissolved, and the constitution abrogated.<sup>130</sup>

Field Marshal Sarit had ruled through an interim constitution promulgated on January 28, 1959 to replace the one he overthrew in 1958. Special powers in matters of state security and for the dismissal of members of the ministerial council were reserved for the Prime Minister.<sup>131</sup>

A constituent Assembly of appointed members was set up with a quasilegislative function. Its duty was to draft a new constitution.

However, its function was not independently discharged, because it had to follow Sarit's directions. Legislative and executive functions were separated. Members of the Council of Ministers could not also be members of the Constituent Assembly. This seemed to limit the latter to a mainly advisory role.<sup>132</sup>

The political change was in the new emphasis on good and competent government, which brought the regime the support of both the bureaucracy and the army. The Sarit regime was stable as he had ruled the country with absolutism. Suspected Communists and arsonists, for example, were summarily shot. Unlicensed street stalls were rudely dismantled by police

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>131</sup>Rose, p. 136.

<sup>132</sup>Vandenbosch and Butwell, p. 294.

on orders from Sarit if warnings to their owners to remove them were ignored. Sarit decided that the stalls were an eyesore and had to be eliminated. Dissatisfaction with his policies or the way he ran government were almost nonexistent because of the lack of organized opposition.

Sarit's era ended within five years when he died in 1963 at the age of 55. Even though a dictator, Sarit considered his policies democratic due to the setting up of a university in the northern city of Chiangmai and development of many schools throughout the country. These had potential in laying the groundwork for a politically more liberal Thailand.<sup>133</sup>

Political movements in Thailand since 1932 showed a number of important features:

1. Many of the original "promoters" of the 1932 coup remained active in politics.
2. Major changes of personnel and policy usually were made by coup or shifting factional alignments rather than by electorate methods.
3. The police and armed forces were important in politics.
4. Bribery, graft and related practices persisted as a cohesive force in the formation of power coalitions.
5. Political change was increasingly violent.
6. Political activity was gradually extending beyond

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

Bangkok.

7. Popular interest in government affairs was growing.<sup>134</sup>

It could be concluded that Thailand's political system was still underdeveloped because it lacked mass opinion formation. It had been ruled by an elite neither chosen by the people nor responsible to them. The revolution of 1932 changed that pattern only in theory and not in reality; behind the screen of constitutional and parliamentary forms, the elite still ruled.

There were still, however, a few channels for the expansion of political discontent but there was very little popular experience in registering political demands. Discontent existed, but most of it could not reach high officials and influence major policies. The result was a growing gap between popular feeling and public policy. The old style of Thai politics irresponsible elite rule, however, was still dominant. As education expanded, signs appeared that a larger number of participants wanted a place on the political stage.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Blanchard, p. 121.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

## CHAPTER III

### STYLES AND CHARACTERISTICS

As education expanded and the influence of American journalism increased, newspapers in Thailand improved their quality in writing style, format, size and technique.

#### Size

Thai newspapers were printed in several sizes, such as eight-fold pages (magazine size), tabloid and broadsheet size pages.<sup>1</sup> Until the period of King Rama VII, newspapers were printed on a tabloid size ( $9\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $14\frac{1}{2}$ ") because of paper shortages after World War II. Later, newspapers were printed on broadsheet size pages ( $21\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $15\frac{1}{2}$ " with eight columns) and today, newspapers average ten to twelve pages per issue.<sup>2</sup>

#### Pictures

Advertisement drawings were the only pictures printed in the Thai newspaper until the period of King Rama VI when

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<sup>1</sup>Supapan Boonsaad, History of the Newspapers in Thailand (Bangkok, Thailand, 1974), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>Joanne M. Lopez, "The Press in Southeast Asia, Its Problems and Its Functions," unpublished master's thesis, Department of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, California, 1971, pp. 49-50.

news photographs were introduced.<sup>3</sup> Three kinds of pictures were used: photographs of important people and events both in the country and abroad, satire drawing pictures, and cartoon pictures.<sup>4</sup>

However, in the period of the 1960s, photographs and pictures in the newspapers tended toward the sensational for the purpose of increasing circulation. Newspapers tended to indulge in trial by publicity, for example. Photographs of the re-enacted crime scene were captured with the help of police.<sup>5</sup> Plenty of photographs, color and drawings helped in boosting circulation.<sup>6</sup>

#### Formats

Up to the reign of King Rama VI, the first page of newspapers were reserved for advertisements. International news, national news and local news were printed on the next pages. No specific page or column format was set up for specific articles or news. However, by the period of King Rama VI, newspaper format was found with specific pages and columns for certain news and articles.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Boonsaad, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Lopez, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup>Opening Up in Thailand, Impressive Start at Workshop, IPI Report (October, 1965), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Boonsaad, p. 88.

International news was sparsely reported, earning only one page in the Thai newspapers. A lot of space was given to local news and to feature stories.<sup>8</sup> Serialized fiction of love and violence was a common offering. Most papers usually had at least one daily editorial and a cartoon with a political slant. Comics were not carried regularly.<sup>9</sup>

### Writing Style

In the 1940s, headline writing was introduced to Thai newspapers to attract readers.<sup>10</sup> During this time, because of the influence of American journalism, Thai journalists began to get accustomed to the idea of using a "lead" and of organizing facts in a story in order of decreasing importance.<sup>11</sup>

The unique development in Southeast Asia to Thai newspapers was the use of editorials written in verse, with or without additional prose material. The poem often was accompanied by a montage type cartoon depicting a series of scenes that were uninterpretable without reference to the poem. Its purpose was not to settle issues or to recommend solutions, but to raise doubt, to introduce aspects of a

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<sup>8</sup>Wandell Blanchard, Thailand, Its People, Its Society, Its Culture (New Haven, 1958), p. 212.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Boonsaad, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup>Albert Pickerell, "The Press in Thailand, Conditions and Trends," Journalism Quarterly, XXXIX (Winter, 1960), 84.

problem (such as sentiment, pathos, or moral qualities) that would be self-conscious if handled in prose. More latent functions were to entertain, arouse public interest in an issue, and avoid censorship. The language employed was clever, and full of double entendres, word plays, metaphor and allegory.<sup>12</sup>

Verse editorials are extremely effective because they have popular appeal and are easy to remember and easy to repeat. Editorial comments acquire an oral, face-to-face value.

Mosel, an associate professor of psychology at the George Washington University who spent 1954-1955 in Thailand conducting a nationwide survey of attitudes and communications habits, and 1958-1960 conducting research on the Thai elite, explained:

From an anthropological viewpoint, the Thai verse editorial represents an excellent example of cultural innovation and "cultural drift" (the emergence of a new cultural form from the existing cultural predispositions). The verse editorial is not a traditional device which is dying out under the impact of modernization; it is a recent innovation with strong traditional roots, which has actually been precipitated and strengthened by such modern forces as governmental censorship and the economic pressure on newspapers to gain readership. The quixotic nature of Thai censorship has encouraged editors to develop devices for evading censorship, while the strenuous competition for readership occasioned by the presence of too many newspapers,

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<sup>12</sup>James N. Mosel, "The Verse Editorial in Thailand Journalism," Journalism Quarterly, XXXIX (Fall , 1962), p. 70.

make it necessary for the editorial page<sup>13</sup> to develop its own special form of popular appeal.

The Thai people have always been good story tellers, from formal poets to folk yarn spinners, who sacrificed grammar for their art. However, they were bad reporters.<sup>14</sup> Newspaper articles often read like fiction.<sup>15</sup> It mainly presented straight news, human interest stories of just literary ramblings.<sup>16</sup>

The press was considered to be a happy sort of game rather than a profession.<sup>17</sup> The public was content to enjoy the press and seemed to consider it a fun press that can air its dirty linen, attack each other, and scandalize the elite.<sup>18</sup> The standard of the press in Thailand was very low. The reasons for low quality are many and complex. First, public indifference hindered the development of the press in Thailand. The newspapers' only purpose was to entertain average Thai people. These people had never

<sup>13</sup>Mosel, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup>Lopez, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup>Catherine Anne Kekoa, "The English-language Press in Thailand: Post World War II History and Development," unpublished master's thesis, Department of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, 1972, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup>Marvin Alisky, Carter I. Bryan and John C. Merrell, The Foreign Press: A Survey of the World's Press (Louisiana, 1973), p. 271.

<sup>17</sup>Alexander MacDonald, Bangkok Editor (New York, 1949), p. 54.

<sup>18</sup>Pressure on Asian Editors, It's the Tide Swinging Against Us, IPI Report (November, 1962), p. 5.

been cold and hungry (which caused them not to be interested in day-to-day events), had low purchasing power, and possessed an extreme degree of political apathy. Most of the criticism of the Thai press came from the government or the press itself and very little came from the public.<sup>19</sup> Thais were skeptical about what they read in their newspapers and often warned others not to believe in what they read.<sup>20</sup> The public did not accept the press as being serious in any way.

Second, when a person wanted to read a newspaper he could often find one without having to buy it. In the cities, many tea shops and restaurants displayed paper for their customers.<sup>21</sup> In the villages, radio is the quickest way to get important news.<sup>22</sup> Thus, little revenue was going to newspapers.

Third, Thailand had a low literacy rate. Only 60 to 64 per cent of the people could read; and even the better-educated Thais did not have a habit of newspaper reading. They were not newspaper-minded.<sup>23</sup>

Fourth, the concept of responsibility of the press was weak in Thailand because of little journalism training.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Lopez, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup>Pickkerrel, p. 85.

<sup>21</sup>Lopez, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>23</sup>Kekoa, p. 65.

<sup>24</sup>Merrell, p. 271.

Journalism had little prestige as a profession. The salaries of reporters were very low. University graduates aimed solely for prestigious government jobs.<sup>25</sup> New reporters generally can expect to receive no more than about \$40 a month, and editors do well to earn much over \$100 a month.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, corruption among poorly paid journalists was unavoidable in Thailand. Each reporter had to work for two or even three newspapers to make a living, thus decreasing the efficiency in their reporting.<sup>27</sup>

Fifth, and probably most important in hindering the standard of the press in Thailand, was the government's control over the press. The many coups had intimidated the Thai press. After each coup, tight control of the press existed for a while. As a result, the press turned to excessive exploitation of sex and sensationalism. Some newspapers seemed almost to lose their ability to handle political issues. Some people have called the Thai press the least serious press in Asia.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Nathan B. Blumberg, "In Bangkok, The Antenna Are Up," *Montana Journalism Review*, (1962), p. 12.

<sup>26</sup>Merrell, p. 271.

<sup>27</sup>Pickerell, p. 85.

<sup>28</sup>

Louise Lyons, Home Thoughts From Abroad of Foreign Agencies Impose Special Responsibility, IPI Report (October, 1951), p. 8.

## CHAPTER IV

### GOVERNMENT CONTROL

Official government control of the press began in 1922 during the reign of King Rama VI with the passage of the first comprehensive publications act, the Books, Documents and Newspapers Law, B. E. 2465. Since that time the press has always been under a form of censorship, . . . a system marked by considerable fluctuation in the degree of freedom of expression.<sup>1</sup>

General censorship has always been imposed following a coup d'etat but, otherwise, government officials and the press operated on a loose, informal understanding of what the limits of criticism were. Following the coup of 1932, which brought an end to absolute monarchy, a new press act was put into force to control criticism of the government.<sup>2</sup> It became the basis of a more detailed law adopted in 1941 and remains in effect.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Pickerell, "The Press in Thailand, Conditions and Trends," Journalism Quarterly, XXXIX (Winter, 1960), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Pickerell, p. 86.

## Press Control Since the Coup of 1932 (1932-1938)

When the coup of June 1932 ended the monarchy, press freedom was part of that modernization. The press censorship law was announced to be at an end. But the press would not enjoy its freedom long because Pya Mano was appointed by the National Assembly Prime Minister. Pya Mano, a conservative, tended to be pro-royalist. His administration was conservative as before. He later announced to the newspapers that nothing would be written against the king or the princess (that might destroy the new entente) and requested all editors to consult the People's Party before publishing any confidential news.<sup>4</sup>

A week later, the Thai Num accused Prince Parabatra of having accepted a bribe of 50,000 baht (\$2,500) in connection with the contract for the Memorial Bridge. Soon afterward, another vernacular paper published article with the gay headline "Prince Greedy of Sexual Intercourse." Both were comments unallowable in the old days of monarchy.<sup>5</sup> And such freedom was so liberally used in agitating for the removal of unpopular officials, and by officials in aiming their views.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the government issued an order that all such communication be sent directly to the interested department

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<sup>4</sup>Virginia Thomson, Thailand, The New Siam (New York, 1947), p. 795.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 795.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

and no longer to the press.<sup>7</sup>

The first newspaper to be suppressed after the government announcement was Lak Muang. A letter was published from the Thai in China to congratulate the new democracy, and to attack the disadvantages of the monarchy system. Lak Muang was closed for three days on the ground that it was agitating the order and peace of the country.<sup>8</sup>

The government of Pya Mano showed that it had no intensions of letting the press take the lead in its new policies. Although censorship was formally abolished in July 1932, four newspapers were temporarily closed in September for publishing criticism of the government.<sup>9</sup> It was simultaneously decided not to admit the press for the time being to the meetings of the Senate or to permit any officers to write or give to the press any news regarding the army or navy.<sup>10</sup>

This ignoring of civil liberties by a supposedly democratic government drew ironical jabs from the Daily Mail. As a result, the new press law was promulgated in September 1932, which formally censored all political and military

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ponpirom Iamtham, "The Political Role of Thai Newspapers From the Revolution of 1932 to the End of the Second World War," unpublished master's thesis, Department of History, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1972, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup>Wandell Blanchard, Thailand, Its People, Its Society, Its Culture (New Haven, Connecticut, 1958), p. 224.

<sup>10</sup>Thomson, p. 795.

news. A few days later, a fifth newspaper was suspended.

At the ceremony of the promulgation of the constitution in December 1932, only six reporters, chosen by lot, were allowed to be present. The rest had to depend upon such information as was contributed by their rivals.<sup>11</sup>

In March 1933, Pya Mano inaugurated a Press Bureau to certify a list of approved news sources; publications of news from unapproved sources were made illegal. This move was accused of making newspapers a propaganda instrument.<sup>12</sup>

In the same month, Pridi presented his economic plan to the government. It was considered communistic. Dispute about this plan could not be concluded, and Pya Mano prorogued the Assembly. All newspapers were warned not to publish anything regarding or advocating communist theories, and an anti-Communist law was promulgated.<sup>13</sup>

#### Press Control under Pya Pahon Government (1933-1938)

When Pya Pahon staged his second coup d'etat in June, 1933, he proclaimed his belief in the freedom of the press. He promised that in the future the government would welcome constructive criticism; and that before a paper was suspended,

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 796.

<sup>12</sup>John D. Mitchell, The Asian Newspapers' Reluctant Revolution, edited by John A. Lent (Iowa State University, 1971), p. 216.

<sup>13</sup>Kenneth P. Landon, Thailand in Transition (Chicago, 1939), pp. 35-36.

its offense would be thoroughly investigated. Although political articles still had to be submitted before publication, he asked editors as a favor to refrain from mentioning Pridi's scheme. He said that he would do his best to get the press admitted to Assembly meetings. This was effective until September.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, censorship increased with the government's feeling of insecurity. The Daily Mail, Krung Theb Daily Mail, and the Liberty were suspended because of publishing news that caused displeasure to the government. A new warning against the publication of military news was issued in late July. Investigation was begun to stop the leakage of confidential information to the press.<sup>15</sup> This trend toward suppression finally came to a head during the October revolt.

In this revolt, both the liberals and the conservatives made use of the written word to win over public opinion. Strict censorship was immediately imposed.<sup>16</sup> The government's attitude toward the press was harsh. Louise Keereewat, editor of the Daily Mail, a newspaper that served as Bangkok headquarters for Prince Bowaradej, was given a life sentence.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Thomson, p. 796.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Iamtham, p. 66.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

A new regulation forbade the publication of news harmful to good morals, to treaty powers, or to the government.<sup>18</sup>

From May, 1933, to April, 1934, there were seventeen occasions on which the government found it necessary to close newspapers. Four were closed for three days, one for seven days, and the rest were either closed absolutely or for an indefinite period of time.<sup>19</sup>

Three were closed because they were considered unfriendly and destructive of the peace of the country; three for minor infractions; one for insolence and an unsatisfactory attitude toward the government; one for criticising the military; one for failing to submit its subject matter for censorship; one for not submitting pictures for censorship; one for failing to submit the original copy for inspection; one for printing censored material; one for a story about the flights of rebels; one for being in the trio of Siam Free Press papers that aroused the displeasure of the government; and one for its unsatisfactory attitude.<sup>20</sup> As a result, newspapers became sensational and unobjective and, naturally, fewer were closed down.

In 1934, a new Press Act was passed to render newspapers harmless to the government. Section 18 (a) and (c), forbade

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Landon, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

the press to publish articles detrimental to public order and good morals, or which are aimed against foreign powers that had treaty relations with Thailand. Section 26 added that, in time of war, or when there was danger of internal disorder, the government would require all newspapers to submit publishable material to the official censor for his examination. Section 39 stated that the Press Office was empowered to publish in the Government Gazette an order prohibiting the importation of any of newspapers specified by name in the order. Appropriate fines and punishments were listed.<sup>21</sup>

The Thai newspapers were so strictly censored that the Thai people turned to the foreign press for information about their country. In one instance, only the foreign press published the story of the King's abdication. The story once leaked in Thailand, went wild, forcing the government, after much hesitation to print the abdication documents with slight modification.<sup>22</sup> The press was admonished not to publish extracts from the report but was permitted to publish the whole 465 pages in serial form.

Throughout 1935-1936, the Assembly, stronghold of the liberal wing of the People's Party, increasingly indicated unhappy awareness of the gap between the press freedom

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>22</sup>Thomson, p. 797.

principle and practice in Thailand. The government continued to tighten its control of the press. News and criticism concerning foreign countries with whom Thailand had treaties were strictly censored. The government was afraid that the anti-foreign newspaper might harm the country's interests. Pridi, who was in charge of administration of the Press Act, publicly warned the Thai press in May, 1937. In June, a number of newspapers were suspended for not heeding his warning.<sup>23</sup>

Press Control Under Field Marshal Pibul Songkram  
(1938-1958)

In December, 1938, adverse Assembly elected a new prime minister. The ensuing period became subject to the wildly fluctuating conditions in press freedom and control.

At the beginning, Field Marshal Pibul promised the press more freedom. For instance, in April, 1940, he told a group of editors that the government wanted to give the Thai press more freedom, allowing Thai editors to publish national news without the permits that would still be required of the foreign language press.<sup>24</sup>

But a year later, when the war in Europe began, the Press Law of 1941 imposed stiff restrictions. The minister

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 798.

<sup>24</sup>Mitchell, p. 217.

of the interior was given wide power of censorship, becoming the sole judge of whether a given article offended public order and morals. He was given complete power to decide whether the offending paper should be merely suspended or confiscated by the government. This press law was justified on the grounds that the press was too inaccurate and was not being operated in accordance with the requirements of the national interests.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the government required newspapers to have 50,000 baht (\$2,500) in funds in order to decrease the newspaper amount. Only 12 out of 25 newspapers could produce this money. These newspapers were: SriKrung, Thai Radsadorn, Thai Mai, Bangkok Chronicle, Prachamit, Nikorn, Kao Pab, Kong-Nguan, Supabsatree, Suwannapoom, Bangkok Nippo, and Thai Poa Sieng Por.<sup>26</sup>

This provision law the government reasoned, would seem to enhance the standard of the Thai newspapers. However, many observers believed that the government intended to decrease the amount of newspapers for the purpose of efficient control.<sup>27</sup>

The strict control on newspapers in Thailand came under Pibul's government at the time Thailand joined Japan in World

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<sup>25</sup>Mitchell, p. 217.

<sup>26</sup>Iamtham, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

War II; The newspapers acted like a propaganda media to the government when a state of emergency law was declared in 1942. All newspaper activities had to report to Field Marshal Pibul and all newspapers had to publish the government's slogan to help make the public believe the government's efficiency.<sup>28</sup>

Under the atmosphere of political uneasiness, many radical newspapermen who refused to obey the government were arrested, including Kulab Saipradit, Kachorn Sawatchinda, Chawiang Sewatatat, Damri Pattamasiri, Ampan Boonyaput, Tep Boonyaput, M. L. Charn Isarasak, Aree Leeweera, Lek Sirisampan, Saad Chayonun, Suree Tongvanich and Trien Pateepasen. Damri Patamsiri and Suree Tongvanich were sentenced to life.<sup>29</sup>

Press law and strict censorships were not the only means the government used to control the newspapers. During the time of paper shortage, the government sold paper only to the pro-government newspapers. Other newspapers had to find their own way to survive.<sup>30</sup>

When the liberals led by Pridi came to power in the wake of World War II (1944-1947), the new government lifted censorship as part of a general reinstatement of democratic

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Iamtham, p. 77.

<sup>30</sup> International Press Institute, IPI Survey, Government's Pressure on the Press, The International Press Institute, 1955, p. 83.

conditions. Only during 1946, after the mysterious death by gunshot of King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII), was censorship reinstated. The newspapers were asked not to publish any news about the King's death which was suspected to be assassination. It was feared the news would do more harm than help to the government.<sup>31</sup>

In 1948, Field Marshal Pibul returned as Prime Minister as a result of the frequent coup crack downs. The press again had entered the era of control under dictatorship government. This time, a fatally heavy extra-legal control was exercised by General Phao Sriyanon. As Deputy Minister of Interior, he was chairman of the Board of Censorship, and as General in Command of the national police, he was in command of a great deal of extra-legal power that resulted in death by police guns for Aree Leevera, editor-publisher of Siam Weekly, an important afternoon newspaper.<sup>32</sup> Leevera was the publisher and founder of Bim Dai, the kingdom's first morning newspaper. He was very radical and wrote articles attacking government corruption. The article that resulted in his death concerned the corruption in Food Drive Organization.<sup>33</sup> The case was never brought to court and the Police Department ordered the press to forget about it.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Mitchell, p. 217.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>33</sup>Alexander MacDonald, Bangkok Editor (New York, 1949), p. 57.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

The police had great power in Field Marshal Pibul's period, and since then its power became unlimited. Unlicensed brothels and opium dens were allowed, depending upon who financed the establishments and whether the payments to the police were adequate. The same was true of illicit gambling. Hired thugs in Bangkok were known to work for the police, being used at times to threaten Chinese businessmen, to frighten political opponents of the government and to silence unruly newspaper editors and reporters.<sup>35</sup>

The Press Control under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat  
(1958-1963)

After seizing power from Prime Minister Pibul in September, 1957, Field Marshal Sarit flew to Great Britain for surgery. General Thanon Kittikachorn, the Deputy of the Revolutionary Group, took the office. Without his presence, party organization became highly unstable and the administration often had difficulty getting its legislative program accepted by the Assembly.<sup>36</sup>

The press was quite free under the government of Prime Minister Thanom, and without restriction, the press was accused of irresponsibility.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Blanchad, p. 198.

<sup>36</sup>Pongsak Payakavichian, "A Comparative Content Analysis of Thai Newspapers in 1960 and 1969," unpublished master's thesis, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin, 1971, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

On October 20, 1958, Sarit flew back home and, in a so-called revolution, took over the Thanom's government that he already controlled. He proclaimed martial law, suspended the constitution, dissolved the National Assembly and outlawed political parties.<sup>38</sup> He became dictator and again the government was completely run by the military.

The press was immediately controlled. Fourteen newspapers were closed on grounds they had engaged in subversive activities. Four others were closed because of excessive criticism of Sarit's Revolutionary Party.<sup>39</sup> Sarit re-enacted the Press Act of 1941, which empowered the Director General of the Police Department to prohibit any material considered contrary to public interest or jeopardizing friendly relations with foreign countries.<sup>40</sup>

Sarit released the Proclamation of the Revolutionary Party which assumed power after the coup. These proclamations pertaining to the press were numbers 3 and 17. Proclamation number 3 in part read:

The revolutionary group [has] still not imposed censorship on the press. All newspapers may publish without first submitting their news to the censors. Any fact which tends to increase disturbance, offer falsehoods to the people or is unfair, will be made

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<sup>38</sup>Catherine Anne Kekoa, "The English-language Press in Thailand: Post World War II History and Development," unpublished master's thesis, Department of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, 1972, p. 39.

<sup>39</sup>Pickerell, p. 87.

<sup>40</sup>Kekoa, p. 39.

to cease . . . newspapers which act as the mouth-piece of aliens arguing for or advocating dangerous doctrines such as Communism, or which try to incite disunity in the nation . . . will be absolutely suppressed.<sup>41</sup>

Proclamation 17 was an amendment declared by Sarit on October 27, 1958, to the effect that:

1. Whoever wishes to act as printer, publisher, editor, or owner of printed papers . . . may proceed only upon being licensed by the authorities . . .

This statement suggests that anyone could establish a newspaper by applying for a license. The officer, however, never gave a license to anyone, refusing applications on the basis that there are already enough newspapers to serve the nation satisfactorily.<sup>42</sup> There were, therefore, no new publications appearing during Sarit's period.

2. If any paper publishes matter of the following nature:

- (1) any matter infringing upon His Majesty the King, or defamatory libelous, or contemptuous of the Queen, royal family heir, or Regent;
- (2) any matter defamatory or contemptuous of the nation or Thai people as a whole, or any matter capable of causing the respect and confidence of foreign countries in regard to Thailand, the Thai government, or Thai people in general, to diminish;
- (3) any matter ambiguously defamatory or contemptuous of the Thai government; or any ministry, public body, department of the government without stating clearly the fault and matter;

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Payakvichian, p. 29.

- (4) any matter ambiguously showing that the government or ministry, public body, or department of the government has deteriorated, is bad or has committed a damaging offence without showing in what matter and particular;
- (5) any matter promoting approval of Communism, or apparently a Communist plot to disturb or undermine national security;
- (6) any false matter of a nature tending to panic, wary, or frighten the people or matter tending to incite or arouse disorder, or conflict with public order or morality, or prophecies concerning the fate of the nation which might upset the people;
- (7) any matter using coarse language tending to lower national morals or culture;
- (8) any official secrets; if any publisher publish any such matters, the competence authorities shall have the power to give warnings or seize and destroy such paper, or order the revocation of the license of the printer,<sup>43</sup> publisher, editor or owner of the paper.

The martial law that had been in effect since the October 1958 revolution, the Revolutionary Proclamation, and Article 17 in the interim Constitution of 1959 that stated "all orders or steps taken by the Prime Minister would be considered legal," gave Sarit full power and enabled him to become an absolute dictator. After he seized power, Sarit used absolute power to control the country. On several occasions during his regime, he used powers set forth in Article 17 of Interim Constitution, to kill and arrest people suspected of being Communist leaders, heroin traders or arsonists.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Kekoa, p. 40.

<sup>44</sup>Payakvichian, p. 30.

Sarit's dictatorial conduct created an atmosphere of fear. The press was completely suppressed and the opposition journalists who criticized the government were arrested or attacked. For example, on July 21, Sanka Kittipan, one of the several editors of a Bangkok newspaper whose office had been wrecked the week before, had been jailed by the police on charges of inciting rebellion against the Thai government. His newspaper had used strong language to fight.<sup>45</sup>

October 7, 1958, Trushin, a correspondent of Tass, the Soviet press service, was arrested and ordered expelled for activities dangerous to Thailand. This charge tended to prevent any improvement in Thai-Soviet relations.<sup>46</sup>

On October 22, fifty-three editors, writers, labor-leaders, teachers, students and businessmen were arrested, and ten newspapers, two of them Chinese, were closed for being suspected of being Communists.<sup>47</sup>

On October 20, 1959, Uthorn Balakula, one of the famous editors in Thailand who fought for freedom of the press by his radical editorial, wrote "Sarit has become Hitler of Thailand." His charge: suspected communism. Moreover, anyone who read radical newspapers was a suspected Communist.

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<sup>45</sup>New York Times, July 22, 1958, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup>New York Times, October 8, 1958, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup>New York Times, October 22, 1958, p. 2.

According to Balakula, he was asked by the police, "Why does a farmer read a newspaper unless he's a Communist?"<sup>48</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Thai press under Sarit's government was under absolute restraint. Editors and publishers had to obey and try to save their newspapers by following the guidelines of the Revolutionary Group. Not even the mild criticism appeared.<sup>49</sup> All news and editorials seemed to serve the government's policies. Editors generally steered clear of controversial issues. They wrote fewer editorials, and, in general, presented straight news, human interest stories, or literary ramblings.<sup>50</sup>

The legal provision established in 1959 to control the press were as follows:

1. Martial Law.
2. The State of Emergency.
3. Revolutionary Proclamation No. 17.
4. The Press Act of 1941, which is restricted by Proclamation No. 17.
5. The Communist Act.
6. Revolutionary Proclamations No. 12, 21, 30, and 43 which widely give power to the officer to confine suspected Communists and gangsters without going

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<sup>48</sup>New York Times, October 20, 1959.

<sup>49</sup>Payakvichian, p. 31.

<sup>50</sup>Marvin Alisky, Carter I. Bryan and John C. Merrell, The Foreign Press: A Survey of the World's Press (Louisiana, 1973), p. 272.

through the courts.

7. Criminal Law.
8. Civil Law.
9. Juvenile Court regulations.<sup>51</sup>

As a result of these legal provisions controlling press freedom, several books and printed materials were not allowed to be imported, sold, published and read. Those books, both Thai and English, were:

1. นิติศาสตร์ ฉบับประมวลสามัคคี
2. ชุมนุมนิทานพื้นเมืองของจีน
3. เสียงประชาชน
4. รัฐไทย
5. หลักการทอเสียงของประชาชน
6. สังคมสามัคคี
7. หลักฐานศึกษา
8. ไก่น้อยสีขาว
9. เพื่อนอีสาน
10. ข่าวพม่าจีน
11. วารสารธรรมศาสตร์ ฉบับประมวลสามัคคี
12. แลไปข้างหน้า
13. ชุมนุมนิทานพื้นเมืองของจีน เล่มที่ ๑
14. ชาตินิยม
15. กองหน้าว่าถึง
16. ความเห็นที่ต่างกันของระหว่ง สหภาพไทยเสียงตา ตักขนา

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<sup>51</sup>Payakvichian, p. 31.

17. นักชาตินิยม
  18. จงให้พระเจ้า เป็นพระ องค์ผู้ตั้งจริง
  19. ข่าวพระ เศรษฐี เจ้าเมืองราชอาณาจักกรม
  20. ขบวนการก่อกำเนิด
  21. มัดขะ มอตะหมานัด รบมกกลิ่ง
  22. กงจัก มีตาค
1. China Pictorial.
  2. Chinese Literature.
  3. Chou En-Lai Report on the Question of Intellectuals.
  4. Reconnaissance Across the Yang Te Story.
  5. First Five Year Plan For Development of the National Economy of the People's Republic of China in 1953-1957 Illustrated.
  6. China Workers.
  7. Communist China 1956.
  8. The Devil's Discus.
  9. Thailand: The War That Is, The War That Will Be.
  10. Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse Tung.
  11. Mao Tse Tung.
  12. Red China Today.
  13. Source Book on Buddhism, in Mainland China 1949.
  14. Kim Il Sung the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Is The Banner of Freedom and Independence for Our People and the Powerful Weapon of Building Socialism and Communism.
  15. Kim Il Sung, Report On Work of Central Committee to 5th Congress Party of Korea.52

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<sup>52</sup>"Press Law, Instrument of Dictatorship," Mahachon, (November 1, 1974), pp. 25-26.

These books are valuable to readers in the way that they gave perspective ideas of public opinion's systems in several societies. The Thai government prohibited these publications because they would endanger and agitate the security and peace of the country.<sup>53</sup>

Despite his dictatorial philosophy, however, Sarit showed a desire to improve the social status of the press. He appointed four newspapermen to the 240-member Constituent Assembly in January, 1959. Among the four were his brother and the editors of his own newspaper, Sarn-Seri.<sup>54</sup> Sarit's administration had under a consideration but never established a government-sponsored "Press Council" which would have as its purposes of the promotion of the newspaper profession. It would be stable, have freedom and provide good living conditions for working newspapermen. Another goal of the council was to establish standards of qualifications for journalists to enable them to fill the role of respected professionals in the public.<sup>55</sup>

In September, 1963, the government and the Journalist Foundation of Thailand were co sponsors of the Seminar of the National Press of Thailand. The seminar was attended by 204 participants from newspapers all over the country.

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Payakvichian, p. 32.

<sup>55</sup>Pickerell, p. 87.

Field Marshal Sarit opened the seminar and announced that its purpose was to listen to the newspaper's needs. The seven-day seminar allowed the participants to speak and discuss freely.<sup>56</sup>

The proposal to establish a Press Council was one of the topics of discussion. The proposal would have placed a number of government's officials in the Press Council, and empowered the Press Council to punish the newspaper that violated the regulations. But it was rejected by the participants for fear that the Press Council would be a device of the government to put more control on the press. However, this objection was countered by the principle that if the Press Council would be established, its committee would be free from the government's control, a real organization with self-control and self-responsibility.

However, many resolutions were sent to the government after the end of the seminar. The press asked the government to revoke Revolutionary Proclamation No. 17 to allow for new newspapers to help in transportation of newspapers to provinces, long distance telephone and postage, and to ask the government to be helpful to newsmen in order to seek and report governmental news.<sup>57</sup>

These resolutions were sent to Field Marshal Sarit,

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<sup>56</sup>Payakvichian, p. 32.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

the head of government, but nothing was done because of his illness and subsequent death in late 1963.

Since 1963, the military dictatorship government continued under Prime Minister Thanom Kethkachorn. Newspapers under the new government were still suppressed and continued to fight for freedom.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

This study showed that although the government was aiming at modernization and popular participation in each coup since 1932, the country still remained indifferent to the power of the press. When the new government assumed power after each coup, press freedom was decreased rather than being developed into a positive factor in the creation of a national self-image. The press in Thailand, therefore, had little influence on the people.

The government was very sensitive to press criticism. Usually when press criticism began, regulations like the Censorship Law, the Press Law of 1942, the Press Law of 1952 and the Anti-Communist Activities Law were imposed on the grounds that journalists did not have sufficient knowledge, background and judgement in criticising governmental issues as to endanger the security of the country.

Restrictions the government put on the press in Thailand showed that the government did not respect the freedom of expression as guaranteed in the Constitution. The Press Laws of 1941 and 1952 widely empowered police officers to judge whether an article offended public order or morals and whether

the newspaper should be suspended or seized.

Indirect restrictions included unfair arrests and imprisonment of critical journalists, and the destruction of their offices.

The press, in order to survive, had to conform its operations and ideas to prevailing government policies. It is not hard to see why the Thai press became a political instrument of propaganda and turned to the exploitation of sex and sensationalism.

Other problems the press confronted were a lack of journalist training, low literacy rates, public apathy and low income; and governmental control seemed to be the most severe factor hindering the standardization and development of the press in Thailand. Without freedom, the press could not function as an informer, entertainer and activator. Without freedom, the press could not assist public understanding of national and community problems and promote public cooperation. Without freedom, the press could not lead the public to speak back to the government, nor could it become the link between the people and authorities.

Freedom of the press in Thailand was guaranteed in theory only. In reality, expression of thought, the fundamental factor of human right, was severely suppressed, depending on the ruler of each period. Since its birth, the Thai press struggled toward better quality and toward becoming an important force in education and national development. However,

its freedom seemed to decrease especially under the military government from 1938 to 1963.

The study is a summary of the government control of the press during the period under study, and no attempt was made to determine the influence of Thai press on the people or the reaction of Thai press to government suppression. Future researchers will no doubt want to know more about Thai journalists of this period, who they were, and whether they actively opposed government suppression of their newspapers.

Although many of the newspapers of this period no longer exist or are not readily available, some attempt should be made to analyze the content of newspapers to determine the role that Thai newspapers played during this period. A content analysis study will reveal more about the true nature and role of Thai newspapers during the period and might shed some light on the influence of Thai press in the modernization of Thailand.

A footnote to the story of Thailand's freedom of the press was written on October 6, 1976, when a military coup seized power and imposed strict censorship on the press which enjoyed absolute freedom under a civilian government with the "People's Revolution" in 1972. What lies ahead for Thai newspapers and their freedom no one can tell.

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