

REFERENCES

- Braga, Giorgio. (1974) *La comunicazione Sociale. 2a edizione ampliata*. Torino: RAI.
- Fiedler, Klaus. (ed.) (2007) *Social Communication*. New York: Psychology Press
- Otto, Rudolf (1923) *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*. (First original German edition: 1917). London: Oxford
- Roegele, Otto B. (1964) *Das Konzilsdekret 'Ueber die Werkzeuge der sozialen Kommunikation'*. In: *Publizistik (Bremen)*. 9(4). pp.305-347
- Stout, Daniel A. (2012) *Media and Religion. Foundations of an Emerging Field*. New York: Routledge

**Communication Technology Impacts Thai Culture
and Buddhist Way of Life**
Samran Khansamrong

Introduction

In the past two decades, the development of communication technology has tremendously changed human lifestyles all over the world. A totally new environment has been created¹ through satellites and information superhighways.² Rapid changes in the information society are affecting cultural identity and creating a massified society.³ Moreover, technology and popular culture are cultural elements spread through the media that fuel both cultural integration and cultural change. Both elements are integrated more quickly than the values associated with them, creating cultural lag.⁴ Technological advances such as the automobile, the television, more recently, the computer and the cellular phone have brought striking changes in our cultures, our patterns of socialization, our social institutions, and our day-to-day social interaction.⁵ Many people are simply connecting to each other through online devices such as e-mails, websites, forums, chatting programs and social networks. The internet has become an essential elevator to change the standard and lifestyle of message senders and receivers.

Thailand is a developing country which plays a recipient role in mass media transfer from the United States and Western European countries.

¹ McLuhan, Marshall.(1964). *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, New York: McGraw Hill, pp.7-16.

² Canter, A. Laurence and others. (1995). *How to make a Fortune on the Information Superhighways*, Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers.

³ Tofler, Alvin. (1980). *The Third Wave*, Pan Books,

⁴ Linda L. Lindsey & Stephen Beach. (2003). *Essentials of Sociology*. New Jersey. Person Education. p.48

⁵ Richard T. Schaefer. (2004). *Sociology*. New York. McGraw-Hill.p.411.

Asst. Prof. Dr. Samran Khansamrong is a professor at the Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus, Thailand.

News, films, TV programs, magazines, and music are examples.⁶ A main reason why the foreign mass media are growing so rapidly is the open, absorptive, and adaptive nature of Thai society.⁷ These mass media have an impact on Thai society in several ways: new lifestyle, new fashion, and new leisure activities⁸ (National Identity Office, 1984); or as expressed by another study, the imported media affect Thai society in terms of social structure, traditional values, and lifestyle changes (Virasi, 1981).⁹ Mass media from foreign nations act as cultural representatives capable of creating change in the social structure of Thai. Generally, the impact of foreign mass media may have both negative and positive influences on social change. Viewed positively, mass media provide Thais with entertainment and knowledge which is necessary for national development. Foreign media can also reinforce cultural identities and reconcile diverse values in society. However, the negative consequences are also tremendous: social problems, conflict, and unnecessary political, economic and social dependency. The negative impact of foreign mass media stems from their unsuitable content for many recipients.¹⁰

For centuries Buddhism has established itself in Thailand and has enriched the lives of the Thais in all aspects of their lives. Indeed without Buddhism, Thailand would not be what it is today.¹¹ Looking back on our history, we can see clearly the close relationship between Buddhism and the Thai Nation. The history of the Thai Nation is also the history of Buddhism. The Thai Nation originated over 2,000 years ago. Also in that same period Buddhism came and has played an important part in Thai history ever since.¹² The roots of the traditions and cultures of Thailand lie

⁶ Boonchan T and L. Brooks Hill. (1996). U.S. Mass Media and Thai Society Intercultural Communication Studies VI: 1

⁷ Indorf, H.H. (Ed.).(1982).Thai-American Relations in Contemporary Affairs. Singapore: Executive Publications, PTE Ltd.

⁸ National Identity Office, Office of the Prime Minister.(1984). Thailand in the 80's. Bangkok: Rung Ruang Ratana Printing.

⁹ Virasi, B. (1981).Thai Society in Transition. Asian Culture Quarterly, 9 (2), 28-32.

¹⁰ Mowlana, H. (1986). Global Information and World Communication: New Frontiers in International Relations. New York: Longman.

¹¹ <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/kusalasaya/wheel085.html>. Accessed on 2 October 2013.

¹² Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A.Payutto). (2001). Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist world. Buddhadhamma Foundatin, Bangkok, p.14.

firmly within the family structure and Buddhism. Once Buddhism spread throughout Thailand, the *Wat* or temple became the centre of village life. It was the place where people received an education, attended ceremonies and held feasts and festivals. For many Thais, Buddhism is closely associated with traditional values and cultural activities. But the cultural scene itself is fast changing in urban Thai society. Though Buddhism still plays a very important role in the day-to-day life of the vast majority of Thais today, with the rapid increase of modern communications, it is inevitably impacted upon by communication technology.

Communication Technology

In Thai society today we use technology and receive more information from the outside world without realizing that it makes a change little by little to our traditional way of life. Changes are happening at a rapid pace due to many factors, among them - the increasing dominant commercial mode we now operate in and the spread of communication tools (TV, mobile phones, computers, internet, cars and airplanes). We like to see things move very fast, and speed is usually regarded as power and progress. Culture has changed with the new IT revolution. We value immediacy. We have a high regard for simultaneity.¹³ We will feel upset if our electronic machines work slower than our mind. We have less patience. This seems different from the Buddhist way of life that the mindfulness or reflection should be always practiced. A word "*Chuk-Kid*" that can approximately be expressed by the English term "to stop and think" is almost neglected. Many Thais, especially in the city, tend to absorb westerners' concept "Time is money". Thailand which is known as "the land of smiles" is continuously overshadowed by that concept. The scene of the family going to the temple, making merit and listening to the Dhamma talks in the past is replaced by the scene of children playing games, chatting on internet, watching movies or TV program etc. while their aging people making some meritorious activities. The progress of communication can make people who differ both in language and culture communicate conveniently.

¹³<http://fs.libarts.psu.ac.th/research/journal/journal-52-1/1-Language%20and%20cultural%20change.pdf>. Accessed on 2 October 2013.

Mobile phones have become one of the major requisites for Thais everywhere, even for children in primary school. About ten years ago, the scene of a reluctant old woman dressed in rags, led by a girl who is supposed to be her daughter, directing to a mobile phone shop, is still in my mind. According to National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) data in 2011, the number of mobile phone subscribers in Thailand is 74.59 million, or more than 100 per cent penetration rate.¹⁴ The “smart phone boom” has strongly encouraged Thai mobile phone consumers to purchase new smart phone models. All Thai major mobile operators have various special data packages for iPhone, iPad, Android and BlackBerry phones so as to increase non-voice revenue. In the past Thai people used to walk or cycle to chat and share some kinds of food and opinion with their relatives or friends who lived one kilometer or more away from their home. It was good for them for doing exercise as well as having a close relationship with their people. At present they use telephones to communicate with the people who live even 100 meters or less than that. Face-to-face contact has been replaced by telephone conversation, as it saves time, and most people do not think that there is any difference between an actual conversation and mediated conversation.

Facebook is one of the most popular social media in the present time. In Thailand, Thai Facebook users with the ages between 18-24 years old (38.5%) have hit the highest rate of Facebook profile registration with the amount of 237,960 profiles while the ages between 25-34 years old (36.6%) are in the second rank with the amount of 26,460 profiles whereas the ages between 35-44 years old (10.1%) are in the third rank with the amount of 62,180 profiles and the ages between 14-17 years old (8.9%) are the least rate of Facebook registration with the amount of 54,940 profiles.¹⁵ In 2012, there are about 14.2 million Facebook users who have selected their location as “Thailand” (16th in the world).¹⁶ Bangkok is even the top city in the world in terms of Facebook user numbers (8.68

¹⁴ NBTC, Telecom market Report Q2/2011, page 2.

¹⁵ <http://www.hrmars.com/admin/pics/59.pdf>. Accessed on 5 August 2013.

¹⁶ Facebook, Facebook Advertising Tools, <https://www.facebook.com/ads/manage/adcreator>, accessed on 2 February 2013. using location: Thailand filter with all ages and genders.

million).¹⁷ At the time of the writing of this paper, Facebook users are still continuously increasing. Some parents use Facebook or Line in calling their children to get out from their individual rooms in order to have a meal together even though they live in the same house. Many times it is used as a tool to violate the basic Buddhist principles of the lay people, the five precepts; to abstain from killing, stealing, committing adultery, telling lie and taking intoxicants. The word ‘face’ can be ‘fact’ or ‘fake’, if only one alphabet is replaced. A week ago, it was on a popular Thai newspaper headline that a young Thai girl was lured and killed by an old male guard, who tried to rape her after denying having a relationship with him after knowing that he was different from the person on his Facebook photo. The question is always asked as to why these kinds of incidents occur in a Buddhist country like Thailand. There is no doubt that if more people earnestly practiced the *Dhamma* (the Buddha teaching), many of the problems Thailand now faces could be satisfactorily solved or ameliorated. For example, if people really observed the five precepts, there would be less violence, fraud, and corruption. Even if only one precept of the five was adhered to, it would surely contribute tremendously to society. Indeed, it is not Buddhism that is a problem to society, but not following it in the proper way. Communication technology, like Facebook and other social media, is a two-edged sword; we can use them with our loving kindness to other people as well as harming them through it.

Cable and Satellite TV & Community Radio

Satellite TV as well as community radio influences the way of thinking of the Thai people. Since the revolution of the Council of National Security (CNS) took place in Thailand on 19 September 2006, the national conflict has spread all over the country. Although there are many groups involved in the conflict from that time up to the present time, the main ones are the Yellow Shirt movement and the Red Shirt movement. The conflict between these two main groups of people has continued to become more

¹⁷ Socialbakers, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/cities>, accessed 3 March 2013.

and more deeply rooted. Satellite TV is used for political mobilization. To avoid government censorship, its ASTV sends broadcasting data to Hong Kong via fibre optics and airs programmes from a Hong Kong satellite instead of Shin Corporation's ThaiCom satellites. The Red Shirt movement later started their own satellite channels including D Channel, which changed its name to PTV and then to Asia Update. The Democrat Party started their own channel BlueSky after a defeat in the 2011 General Elections. Since 2005 these political channels have played a crucial role during Thailand's political turmoil. The political turmoil since 2008 and the anti-competitive behavior of the broadcasting industry accelerated the number of political related radio stations mainly created by the Red Shirts. The Yellow Shirts also have community radios in the Bangkok area and other provinces.¹⁸ Those satellite TV and community radio said above were mostly not used for the reconciliation of the people in the country, but for putting blame and spreading hatred on the opposite sides instead. This is against the Buddhist teaching that we should radiate loving kindness out to all beings.

English Words borrowed into Thai Language

Language, as a part of culture, is an important tool for social interaction. It allows much more than communication; it is the key to cultural transmission, the process by which one generation passes culture to the next.¹⁹ All cultures are represented through language. Language exerts such a strong influence on culture that it is often as a key marker for determining the number of world cultures.²⁰ Advances in technology have also brought about changes in language. Meanwhile, the rapid progress in technology and education inevitably leads to linguistic globalization. Many linguists today would regard language change as a natural process, which is neither good nor bad. But in fact, people do pass value judgment on language and do speak about the degeneration of a language. They often go further in finding a correlation between socio-cultural decadence

¹⁸ Manager Radio, <http://radio.manager.co.th>, accessed June 2013.

¹⁹ John J. Macionis. (2009). *society*. Pearson Education. p.56

²⁰ Linda L. Lindsey & Stephen Beach. 2003. *Essentials of Sociology*. New Jersey. Person Education.

and language. A change of Thai language is also influenced by mass media communication, especially English. Moreover, a style of using a spoken and written Thai language itself also changes in accordance with Cyber Media. The influence and effects of English on Thai language have thus been accelerated and more widespread than ever. Despite the completely different roots of the Thai and English languages, there are some words and phrases which have been relatively recently borrowed from English. Many loan words from English have entered the Thai language and some grammatical changes in Thai have been fostered by English. *Hello* has been adopted as the common way to answer the telephone, although the Thai version of this is more commonly a *⟨Hallo⟩*, with the second syllable extended and given a rising intonation. In a restaurant it is quite common to hear the phrase *cheque bin*, to ask for the bill.²¹

The Thai language, like other languages such as Japanese, Indian and Singaporean, have borrowed words so extensively from English language. English loan words have an influence in Thai language in both written and spoken language. We usually use English loan words to describe new concepts, which may not have been in existence earlier, for example, casino, wreath, necktie, office, free, care, game etc. Some English words have been adopted and adapted until they sound like Thai words. For example, the English word "number" has become "ber" in Thai. The Thais just do away with its first syllable. Similarly, "tutor", the verb, has become "tu" and "racing" has become "sing". Many of information and technology terms have been adopted and used in Thai. Nowadays the volume of English loan words in Thai language has been increased. Yuphahann used the term "E-Thai" to bring out in the search of Thai Language in the New Millennium. "E-Thai" is used to refer to both novel variety of Thai- the Thai "Netspeak" used in "electronically-mediated communication", and the English influenced Thai in contemporary Thai society. According to Yuphahann's study, the characteristics of Thai net speaking including abbreviation and condensation of words and phrases; pronunciation spelling; international deviant spelling to

²¹ <http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/MED-Magazine/April2006/37-Thai-English-false-friends-print.htm> accessed 7 August 2013

avoid censorship; international deviant spelling to get attention; and orthographic strategies to show paralinguistic features and gestures or emotions. Yuphahann also pointed out that, for Thai, the noticeable impact on the language is that some deviant spellings and pronunciation spelling of some words that used to be the in-group jargon of chat room.²²

Advantages of ICT according to Buddhist views

After the Buddha attained enlightenment, he spent the rest of his life teaching people all over central India. The Buddha spent forty-nine years barefeet wandering from place to place in India to spread his doctrine to other people. The dissemination of Buddha's teachings was slow due to the limitations of ancient transportation and communications. It took the Buddha's teachings (Dharma) several centuries to reach other countries. Furthermore, it took the Dharma five hundred years from India to reach the East Asian countries. But time was not the only issue. In the target country, the teachings should also have been able to adjust itself to the new society and its culture to become a form of 'localized Buddhism'. In the process of adapting itself to the culture, the Dharma would be transformed and became slightly different from the original. The practice of Dharma was divided into different sects to adjust to the particular culture and tradition of the local people. For example, Theravada follows the original method of practice based on the Buddha's time and the Mahayana tradition a reform of the original. Countries that follow Theravada are Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Burma and so on. Mahayana is more popular in countries like China, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, Korea and Mongolia. Today, the Dharma has found new ways to re-transmit itself to the Sangha, the Buddhists communities and the world. The acceptance of Buddha's teaching does not depend on whether it can accommodate to new cultures or societies, but in the way it presents the core teachings. Media theorist, Marshall McLuhan stated that "The 'content' of any medium is always another medium, the content of writing is speech, and the content of speech is the actual

²² Yuphaphann, H. (2005). Thai language in the New Millennium. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Manoa Press

thoughts or itself nonverbal. The content of written word is print and the print is the content of the telegraph."²³

Buddhism has now existed amongst the changes in the world for almost 2,600 years to the era of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). This technology has been linked to global unity. Humanitarian access and obtaining information was very quick. It is a matter of fact that ICT has both positive and negative impacts on Buddhism. For example, the positive impacts such as using ICT for Worldwide Buddhist dissemination via the Internet, which is very quick. People can reach Buddha's teachings through ICT with ease anytime anywhere. The use of the Internet and World Wide Web is an important form of religious dissemination. They can use websites to further their mission of spreading their religion to serve their members and the communities in various ways. For example, monasteries, and Buddhist Institutions are important organizations in maintaining the Buddhist cultures and traditions. They use websites to display the Buddha's scriptures, images, audio and sometimes spiritual rituals so that they can show the presence of Buddhism or the virtual of Buddha to promote their faith. According to Stevenson "whether we live our lives permanently in the village where we were born or restlessly travel the globe, media cultures are almost certainly present" (1995, 178). Thus Buddhist institutions cannot escape the use of new media especially by the Internet because of its convenience. Secondly, the use of websites in Buddhist institutions is also creating new bonds and communication networks between the Sangha, Buddhist communities and the world.

Before the Internet was introduced to the public, Buddhist monasteries or institutions were mostly known by local people its communities.²⁴ Now they can also be well known by overseas people via the World Wide Web. The use of the Internet to post temple's scenery, services, and activities attracts visitors within the country and overseas who may

²³ McLuhan, Marshall. (1964). Understanding Media: The Extension of Man, New York: McGraw Hill. pp.7-16.

²⁴ http://www.quangminh.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=182:the-use-of-the-internet-in-buddhist-institutions&catid=1:latest-news Accessed 13 August 2013

visit the temple when they have a chance. Furthermore, visitors are attracted by the exposition of Buddhist cultures through images that are posted on the websites. More and more high school students now visit temples on school excursions instead of other places. The internet has expanded internationally and globally for the benefit and convenience of those seeking spiritual places and tourism destinations.

Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto said in his book *Advanced ICT, But the Need to Develop Wisdom and Discipline of the People*, which can be summarized as: "...In the current era of Globalization, let us examine the effects the globalization has on religion beliefs. What is the future of our beliefs? How can religious beliefs be integrated into the ever changing progress? It has long been focused solely on the religion. In this discussion, I would like to discuss 'Religion in the Era of Globalization'. Let us set religious beliefs on one side and globalization era on the other. Each side has effect on the other. How is globalization effect the religion beliefs and how can religious beliefs aids human in this era?..."

... The importance of technologies is not only seen as a tool that helps us save time and energy. It should also be viewed as a miraculous discovery. Technologies represent human ever-growing visions. They enable us into achieving something that our previous generation has not even dreamt of....

...For example, our scripture, *Tripitaka*, has been downloaded onto CD-ROM. We are now able to search the lengthy *Tripitaka* containing 22,000 pages approximately. To find out word 'Sabha' manually, previously took weeks or even months to obtain, but now can be achieved at an unheard of speed. With just one click of a keyword, all information of that keyword will appear within seconds on the computer screen. Technology provides easy and convenient access in the study of Buddhism. I consider this a miracle. It expands human visions...

...Thais should try to fully understand the capabilities of Information Technology. We must utilize its capacities. We must realize the Pros and Cons of this new tool. We then must select the beneficial outcome of technology. We should not focus solely on the commercial benefits. We must also focus on the effects of its output to society as a whole. The output should be identified as favorable or harmful. Least of all, we should be able to identify which outcome of the new technology we can adapt into our society and which to avoid..."²⁵

The Buddha's message "No piece of technology will be intrinsically good or bad. What will matter is how we use it. It is up to use". Technology itself does not harm and value anyone, but we, as the users, do it. For the young children, they have to be guided or educated by the adults who understand its advantage and disadvantage.

REFERENCES

- Thongprayoon, B. & Hill, L.B. (1996) *Intercultural Communication Studies* VI: 1
- Boonchan T & Hill, L.B. (1996). *U.S. Mass Media and Thai Society Intercultural Communication Studies* VI: 1,
- Canter, A. Laurence et al, (1995). *How to make a Fortune on the Information Superhighways*. Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Indorf, H.H. (Ed.) (1982). *Thai-American Relations in Contemporary Affairs*. Singapore: Executive Publications, PTE Ltd.
- Macionis, John. J. (2009) *Society*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Lindsay, Linda L. & Beach, Stephen (2003). *Essentials of Sociology*. New Jersey: Person Education.

²⁵<http://www.facebook.com/notes/noratus-thossaphol/ict-and-buddhism/552209701472611>
Accessed on 25 August 2013

