

The Meaning Creation Process of Realism Media in Lao PDR Under the New Economic Mechanism

Akra Masena, Burin Plengdeesakul and Souneth Phothisane
Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, Nai Muang Sub-District,
Muang District, 40002 Khon Kaen, Thailand

Abstract: The objective of the thesis on the meaning creation process of realism media in Lao PDR under the new economic mechanism is to investigate the background of realism media in Lao PDR and the meaning creation process of realism media in Lao PDR under the new economic mechanism concept. This is a qualitative research work and the research tools included surveys, observations, interviews and group discussions. Data were analyzed by structural functional theory, representation theory, semiology theory and communication theory and then presented by descriptive method with images. According to the study, it was found that the realism media had occurred and developed continuously in Laos. The development could be divided into 4 phases: Phase 1 during 1893-1950 when leaflets were first used according to Marxism and Leninism, Phase 2 during 1950-1975 when the first realism media was produced in Lao PDR which was an independent Laotian newspaper, Phase 3 during 1975-1986 when the admiration was changed to socialism and realism media acted as the main medium for the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and Phase 4 from 1986-present when Lao PDR has implemented a new policy. According to technological and cultural factors which played a more important role in realism media in terms of meaning creation for realism media in Lao PDR under the New Economic Mechanism (NEM), it was found that there were 3 meaning creation processes meaning in the component of communicator coming from 2 groups of people-government news sources or political parties or mass media, meaning in the text which created an accepting image to make the people trust the government and meaning in the context which included images or messages conveyed in the media representing certain circumstances and social environment at that period of time. Society and communication guided each other and arts and cultures had been increasingly embedded in the media.

Key words: Meaning creation process, realism media, Lao PDR, new economic mechanism, communication, political

INTRODUCTION

In 1975, a significant phenomenon took place in Lao PDR when it changed the administration to socialism like Vietnam, China and Soviet. The objectives were to entirely change the old regime and to erase all the causes of exploitation and misery as well as creating a new society where everyone could live their life abundantly in terms of material and mind (Putichoti, 2004). Another thing which was concretely influenced by the change was Laotian culture which was associated with the era when the communism was in power. Such image was combined in Laotian original art reserach which were influenced by the communist countries-the one that was apparent was the realism. Realism was related heroism and it had deeply been rooted in Russian arts, since, the late 19th century before spreading to China, Vietnam and Laos. Realism was

officially adopted into Laos in 1975 with the influence of Vietnam through Houaphanh and Phongsali Province. After the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in December of the same year, realism arts was widespread to all over the country and became the only art form that had officially been recognized and used by the government under socialism.

The power of socialism later declined and the eastern European socialist countries suffered a great deal of crisis which dramatically affected Lao PDR and other socialist countries. Leading socialist countries like China decided to implement the "open-door policy" and vietnam announced the Doi Moi policy. Laos also announced the economic reform policy "renovation" or "new economic mechanism" in 1986 emphasizing the importance of business administration. Academic exchange with international countries was more influenced by the

outside world which adhered to liberal democracy and promotion for the private sector to run its own business or jointly with the public sector. In addition, the policy encouraged Foreign investors to invest in Laos and business competition based on advertisement on the media followed. The implementation of the new economic mechanism policy of the Laotian party and government was in accordance with circumstances both regionally and globally (Sompawong, 1999) and such measures inevitably resulted in a change in the media in Lao PDR. The new economic reform or “The new economic mechanism” allowed liberalization and expansion of capitalism focusing on economic interests rather than political ideologies. More importantly, it was also an important time for Laos to amend the national development strategy called the “New economic mechanism” policy which was to open the country and change the economic development from the socialist system to the market system. This was an important step in linking Laos with the world (Putichoti, 2004). As a result, new perspectives, knowledge and interests were formed. Originally, Laos was frozen in terms of politics and stability but it now focused on the significance of learning economic, social and cultural aspects and promotion of new cultures (Jantajorn, 2008). It was important that Laos implemented a policy to lead the country and its people to civilization and good well-being. The implementation of the new policy was to create a new image and effect a change in every component of the society, especially, the media which was used for communication.

At present, images of praise for the battle to bring back the independence from the colonists have disappeared but instead they have been replaced with creativity and imagination of the government that communicates with the people. However, the mass media in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic are under the direct control of the Laotian government. Communication in Laos has changed according to the advancement of technology. Access to the media is easier and the meaning creation process exists in the media as well. As a result, the media can reflect truths and what actually happens according to the set policy. Such form of media is useful for and directly adopted by humans. Therefore, the meaning creation process of realism media is considered to be interesting to study.

For the above reasons and significance, the researcher realized the importance of realism media, especially that of Lao PDR, since, the Laotian government has changed the economic system to the new economic mechanism policy, hence, the background of this study on the meaning creation process of realism media in Lao

PDR under the new economic mechanism in order to point out the background and forms of message conveyance through realism media in Lao PDR.

Objectives of the study: To investigate the background and history of realism media in Lao PDR. To investigate the meaning creation process of realism media in Lao PDR under the new economic mechanism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research on the meaning creation process of realism media in Lao PRD under the new economic mechanism is a qualitative research. The target group in the study included advertisement billboards of political parties/government and military, public newspapers and literature journals from 1986-2016. The scope of area was Vientiane capital. The target group were the people selected from experts in realism media in Lao PDR which included gurus from the public section, practitioners and related persons. The tools used for data collection were surveys, observations, interviews and group discussions. Data were collected from documents and field surveys and then analyzed with the method of agreement. Such method consisted of accuracy check in terms of concept and theory. Field data were analyzed by data collection tools in order to make a summary based on 3 analytical approaches concrete analysis, analysis by using theories as classifiers and analysis by not using theories and analysis to compare data based on events or occurrences. Results were analyzed with descriptive analysis and presented in the forms of table and figure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the study on the meaning creation process of realism media in Lao PRD under the new economic mechanism, the researcher analyzed data from documents and field data obtained from surveys, interviews, observations and group discussions which were analyzed according to the specified objectives. The following are the findings.

Background and history of realism media in Lao PDR: The background and history of realism media in Lao PDR were gradually developed according the technological advances, political climate, public policies on the public relations of the government. Realism media was originated from the necessity to convey messages or to build beliefs and trusts among people, so that, they had a concept or common sense to protect the country. In terms of technology which was another variable playing an

important role in the media field, it facilitated the evolution of media according to the social conditions and spread of news. However, what was significant and adhered to by the people was to be under the rules and regulations regarding peace and order. Therefore, there were limitations for story and news presentation for the mass media. In this regard, the development of realism media can be divided in 4 phases as follows.

Phase 1 during 1893-1950 was the era when Laos was colonized by France resulting in opposition against France by Laos. In 1945, Laotian people rose up to claim the power from France and Japan by using realism media in a form of leaflet for the first time. Leaflets were scattered throughout the city of Vientiane, Savannakhet and other cities to advertise and incite the people to fight for their independence.

Phase 2 during 1950-1975 was when the first realism media of Lao PDR took place in the name of Lao Independent Newspaper which was the first revolutionary media of the country. Later, the General Assembly from the representatives of the free Laos and the 3rd General Assembly agreed to change the name to "People's Newspaper" and played a role as the central media of the people in the official Laotian revolution. In addition, there was Wannasin Magazine which was launched on November 5, 1979 pursuant to the Minister of Advertisement, News, Culture and Tourism's resolution and advertisement billboards were originated around 1975 as well. The government led by Kaisorn Pomwihan used realism media in a form of public relations billboard to communicate with the people, the composition of which consisted of images of the military, labors, farmers and general people. The advertisement propagandas can be divided into 5 types economic propaganda, cultural propaganda, agricultural propaganda, trading propaganda and propaganda to encourage people to protect and preserve the peace and order.

Phase 4 during 1986-present was the era in which the Laotian government announced the implementation of the new economic mechanism using realism media in the forms of poster, advertisement billboard, newspaper, magazine, etc. and it was accepted and improved rapidly. The factors concerning technological advances came to play a more important role in increasing the quality and potential of the media in Laos. As a result, a media change which aimed to be improved according to the social and economic structure to connect to the outside world became more distinctive. Therefore, the development of realism media as appeared in Lao PDR could reflect the social background well and it resembled a tool used to record phenomena occurring in the society in each period of time as well as acting as an indicator for such society.

Meaning creating process of realism media in Lao PDR under the new economic mechanism:

In 1986, Lao PDR by Lao People's Revolutionary Party changed the country's direction with the new economic mechanism focusing on the change and ease of tension in the economic policy to link the country with the market. As a result, it expanded the relationship originally with the socialist countries to other countries to facilitate the development and investment to improve its economic status and to embrace the national development in all aspects. The purpose was to become an advanced country equivalent to others. After the implementation of the new economic mechanism policy for 30 years, Laos improved its economy, education, society and culture to be international in all aspects, an example of which was that Lao became a member of almost all international organizations. The progressive and physical changes were taking place in both the capital and major cities as a result of economic growth. In terms of tourism, Lao opened the country to welcome international tourists, improved its natural areas, art and culture resources and made its tribes become tourist attractions until it became the main source income of the country. According to the policy to open the country to adopt new cultures for development (Plengdeesakul, 2013), realism media was considered as the main media of the government which was used as a means of communication between the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the people. The main media included billboards, newspapers and magazines. In order to see the meaning creation process of realism media in Lao PDR under the new economic mechanism, the researcher used the concept of Kaewthep and Hinwiman (2010) in which 3 components of media were defined meaning in the component of person or communicator, meaning in the text and meaning in the context.

Meaning in the component of communication in realism media included large billboards, newspapers and magazines by considering the news sources or message conveyors who were political personnel as the representatives of political institutions such as the authorized persons of the government or the leader. These people had an opportunity and a channel to deliver political news which was associated with power relation. For the power of political institutions, it is clear that this power came from the legitimacy of playing a role as the shared interest appropriator of the society. It consisted of two groups of people, the news source group including the government, political parties, government officials and the media acting directly with the government under the leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party which wanted to communicate with the people to make them trust in its leadership and to create stability and

righteousness in the country. Thus, the communicator or government was a person who had the power to only create meanings for the people which was one-way communication.

In terms of meaning in the text, it was found that it consisted of a signifier which was an assumption of a person without using a real image in the presentation, except for important persons or country leaders whose real images were used in the media. Signified meaning appeared on most realism media and conveyed a positive attitude or encouraged people to love and cherish their nation and unity as well as the government. The administration of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party aimed to bringing about a peaceful society and becoming a completely socialist country with civilization in the future. Mythological meaning referred to a creation of strong image for the government to make people trust in the government which would lead the country to become the Rechtsstaat by the people and for the people. In addition, the society was more in peace and order, respectively and the economy continued to expand. Everyone including tribes lived in unity and harmony. The results of these operations were concrete, certifying that the government was serious about the national development.

In terms of meaning in the context, it was found that realism media was a tool used to express and represent a social situation or environment at a particular time. Society and communication worked hand in hand. Lao PDR's society in each period of time was different, affecting the meaning creation process which acted as the medium between the government and the people. For example, during 1975-1986, it was the period of complete socialism. Powerful images of the leader and military using weapons were presented in all kinds of realism media rather than other cultural traditions. However, in 1986 after the change to the new economic mechanism, images conveying messages related to the military diminished. Cultural and national images played an important role in the communication. Therefore, it is apparent that the images in the media represented the social situations at that time well.

The origin of realism media in Laos came from the need to incite the people to chase away colonist countries which was followed by continuous development. Until 1950, a newspaper was born to act as another weapon used to fight for independence and peace. The contents in the propagandas during that time were related to spread of peaceful strategies. Wannasin Magazine was also initiate. Realism media in Vientiane was gradually developed. Therefore, realism media resembled a tool used to record certain events happening at each period of time as well as acting as an indicator of the society. It was also used to record national histories. The background and

development of realism media in Laos was originated from disputes and the fact that people cohabited in society because of material and power reasons. In the past, there were stories of disputes and changes. Nonetheless, such disputes arose from issues related to natural resources, society and even administrative power. In fact, it was the need to possess the "Rights and power over everything". This was in accordance with Jantawanich (2012) who was mentioned in Ralf Dahrendorf (1928-present) that in the book entitled "Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (1967)", society stood among conflicts as a result of interests including pressure from the power. Conflicts and consensus were basic variables which made the society exist. He stated that conflicts did not arise from being or not being the owner of production factors but they arose from authority which a group of people had over another. The fact that people cohabited for the power reason was cohabitation in times of social conflict and changes. Thus, these conflicts needed to be resolved one way or another in order to preserve the society, so that, the people were able to cohabit.

Realism media was the creation of images representing meanings in order to make people trust the government by using images of people, images of unity and harmony with the people as the center, images of strengths of the government to make people trust that the country was led to civilization and modernity in the future. This was in accordance with Hartley (2002) who stated that a meaning was the product of culture including products from communication process. In other words, objects did not have any meaning by themselves but meanings were created by men for communication. Furthermore, this finding was in accordance with the concept by Pipitkul (2008) who stated that representing images were the products of meaning in the thinking, believing and feeling processes and ideologies through communication which was linked to reality or imagination. Sharing the same culture allowed people to realize the meaning of the same image and so did realism media in Laos. It was found that meanings could be created by messengers or communicators, texts, contexts or even receivers. These were all involved in giving meanings. Thus, the meaning creation process in realism media had the need to make people aware and understand. During the implementation of the new economic mechanism policy, changes were quite apparent and were reflected in various forms in Lao society.

The meaning creation process of realism media in Lao PDR under the new economic mechanism had significance in terms of communicating process which was political consisted of ownership and power of media control. The government closely monitored the media which was consistent with Satavetin (1998) who stated that mass communication was based on the Soviet Communist

theories derived Marxism including the importance of maintaining the political power of the authorities in the communist party. The media in the country performed its duties as a tool of the authorities. Hence, the media was a tool of the state and the people behind the media were government staff. However, the sudden change in the media due to the policy to open the country and focus on the importance of maintaining good cultures and adoption of technology into the development of media realism was to allow the people and the nation to have a permanent and stable future.

CONCLUSION

According to the study on the meaning creation process of realism media in Lao PDR under the new economic mechanism, it was found that realism media in Lao PDR had originated, since, the era when Laos was colonized by France in 1893. Leaflets were used to incite people to fight against the French in 1945. During 1950-1975, the Laos Independent Newspaper was the first revolutionary media of the country and later changed its name to "Laos Hak Chat Newspaper". Wannasin Magazine and billboards appeared, most of which presented the media which promoted 5 types of propagandas, economic propaganda, cultural propaganda, agricultural propaganda, trading propaganda and propaganda to encourage people to protect and preserve the peace and order. During the time when the new economic mechanism policy was implemented in 1986, the media was improved to have more potential and quick. Factors related to technological development played a more important role in Lao's quality and potential of media. In terms of the study on the meaning creation process of realism media in Lao PDR under the new economic mechanism, it was found that the meaning creation process of realism media consisted of 3 main types of meaning creation. The first was the meaning in the component of communicator coming from 2 groups of people-government news sources or political parties or mass media in order to make the people trust the government administration according to Marxism-Lenin principles which were the important foundation of socialism in Lao PDR. The second was the meaning in the text which created an accepting image, so that, people trusted the government by using images of people, unity and harmony with the people as the center and images showing the strengths of the government in order to make the people trust that the country was lead to civilization in the future. The third was the meaning in the context which included realism media used as a tool to represent certain circumstances and social environment at that period of time. Society and communication worked hand

in hand in Lao PDR, nevertheless, there were different characteristics which affected the meaning creation process by which the media used to act as the medium between the government and the people.

SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions for application of research findings: The background and history of realism media in Lao PDR is valuable for publication to the next generation, so that, they realize its value. The meaning creation process of realism can be in various form of research depending on appropriateness to be applied in the future.

Suggestions for future research: Realism media is of variety which can be developed according to technological advances such as electronic media, new media, etc. which should be further studied in the future. The meaning creation process of realism appears on many of the government research in Lao PDR which are suitable for future research.

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