

The Synthesis of the Previous Research on Peace and Conflict Communication Related to the Southernmost Thailand

Phirakan Kai-nunna

Faculty of Communication Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, Thailand

Email: phirakan.k@psu.ac.th

Abstract

The conflict between the Thai government and armed groups has increased dramatically since 2004. The political conflict to establish Islam Melayu Pattani is a new surge in internal conflict for Thailand. Consequently, there is limitation in the body of knowledge of communication as a tool for conflict reduction in Thailand. Thus, this research aims at the examination of current studies related to this conflict with three major focal points on relevant topics of communication about the conflict in Thailand's southernmost provinces by scholars and graduate students in Thai universities from 2004-2015, and suggestions for further areas of study that would support the peace process. The results of the study are as follows. First, there are 48 research papers on relevant topics from 2004 to 2015. Second, the topic mostly studied is the use of mass and personal media. The majority of mass communication focuses on media and peace building, landscape of media in conflict area, criticism of newsroom culture, and new media in the conflict area. Although, there is slight knowledge on communication of supporting the peace process before the conflict in 2004, the situation has positively affected the body of knowledge on communication in the peace process and conflict resolution to progress rapidly and vividly especially in the last 10 years. Many research findings show that media of Thailand have played an illuminating role lately to nourish the peace process in the southernmost Thailand. Third, the areas of study should cover cross culture communication, leaders' opinions on peace building, roles of media in peace process, and the criteria and indicators on war and peace journalism in Thai media context.

Keywords: *Peace and conflict communication; journalism; Southernmost Thailand; insurgency; body of knowledge*

1. Introduction

The siege in the southernmost Thailand since 2004 has drawn the attention of both internal and external organizations, especially the Thai government, as a key party of conflict reduction. On January 4, 2004 the unknown armed group fighters invaded the military camp in Narathiwat province. From the insurgency, 4 militaries were killed, 413 guns were robbed, and 19 schools over the southernmost provinces were destroyed. The situation like this has still been occurring and caused 6,543 dead and 11,919 injured from 15,374 situations (Jitpiromsri, S. & Panatnachee, S. 2016). Later, the conflict parties consisting of the representatives of Thai government and the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani (B.R.N.) reach their agreement for problem resolution negotiation

under the mediation of Malaysia government representative.

Over 12 years, Thai media have widely distributed the conflict news to the audience across the country. However, they are criticized by the local in the violent areas that media coverage presents misinformation about the area. This leads to misunderstanding of the real situation in the area such as Islam, Muslim, background history and cultures (Thapthiang, N. 2007). In addition, the media are also blamed for making the conflict even worse.

A study of Changkamon W. (2007), who investigated the 232 news from Thai qualitative and quantitative newspapers published at the early stage of the conflict reveals that most news is the war journalism and peace journalism respectively. This encourages people's interest in the role of

Thai media on the southernmost Thailand conflict. But few research papers on conflict and peace communication are conducted in the Thai society, and this reflects the lack of problem resolution knowledge.

The first article about conflict and peace communication was written by Kaewthep, K., a popular scholar on communication area from Chulalongkorn University (CU), and published in 2002 as a part of peace study handout for Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University's students. The article includes 4 chapters: communication, peace and war relationship; the previous study through communication and peace, peace communication on new context, and the elements of peace communication. However, most body of knowledge in the book is illustrated under western context with not many contents and case studies over Thai society.

The above mentioned emphasizes that the body of knowledge on peace and conflict is limited regarding complicated conflict situation in Thailand and new for the society with not much interest from scholars and graduate students in Thai universities.

In fact, the continuous insurgency in that area is quite an important and interesting issue for research doing. Over 40 research topics on peace and conflict communication are completed by the scholars and graduate students in the universities over the country. These practical studies help support and improve the peace process as well as enlarge the body of knowledge.

People expect that Thai media will play a vital role in supporting peace process between the Thai government and the anti-Thai government groups (gathering in early 2016 under the name of *Majlis Syura Patani* or *MARA Patani* with the Malaysia government representative as a negotiator) because typical professional journalism, in terms of objectivity, accuracy and balance reporting, can reduce conflicts. Howard, R. (2003) emphasized that good journalism can gather different parties, educate people on peace and conflict, encourage confidence in peace solutions, decrease misunderstanding or misperception of conflict area, make people more human, explain the situation of all parties, reduce negative emotions, diminish the conflict, save image of all parties, search for conflict solution, and balance power of different groups. From the previous statement, communication is an important factor that can reduce conflicts in the southernmost Thailand. However, despite varied conflicts in the last years, knowledge revision on the area is limited. Up-to-date knowledge landscapes based on research findings concerning new conflict era in the southernmost Thailand should be in parallel with real situations. This research, therefore, is

conducted to provide clarification of the conflicts over 12 years.

The objectives of this research are to 1) review the previous studies on peace and conflict communication related to the southernmost Thailand in terms of titles, research sorts, published years, institute owners, keywords, levels and types of communication, and theoretical framework, 2) explicate the landscapes of knowledge from research findings from 2004 to 2015, and 3) suggest scholars and graduate students for further research dealing with the conflict in future.

The research questions are as follows: 1. What is the number of research conducted by scholars and graduate students in Thai universities from 2004 to 2015? 2. Which landscape of knowledge on peace and conflict communication is found from that research? 3. Which research topics related to conflicts in southernmost Thailand should be further explored for conflict reduction?

2. Method

This qualitative research is conducted through the synthesis of previous research on communication regarding conflicts in the southernmost Thailand from 2004 to 2015. The sampling is derived from three different sources: Thai Library Integrated System (ThaiLIS), JKF Library of Prince of Songkla University, and open online sources including university websites, public organizations and NGOs.

There are different sorts of research such as research or theses of graduate students in universities of Thailand. The synthesis process covers 1) defining keywords in searching for research published on those different sources, 2) using those keywords in searching for the research from the selected sources, 3) gathering and selecting the research related to the keywords, 4) analyzing those research and classifying the research findings, and 5) synthesizing the data relevant to the research objectives. Percentage is used to analyze quantitative data while the qualitative data are carefully classified and described in accordance with this research framework.

3. Result and discussion

The results and discussions from the synthesis of the previous research on peace and conflict communication related to the southernmost Thailand are divided into 3 parts.

3.1. The state of research on peace and conflict communication in the southernmost Thailand

There were 48 papers on peace and conflict communication from scholars and graduate students in the universities of Thailand over the year 2004 to 2015. Even though there was no paper in the first year of the conflict, there were 3 papers in 2005 (6.25%). The highest number of research paper was 7 in 2006 (14.58%) followed by 6 papers in 2007 and 2011 (12.50% each), 5 papers in 2009, 2012 and 2013 (10.41% each) and 4 papers in 2008 and 2014 (8.33% each).

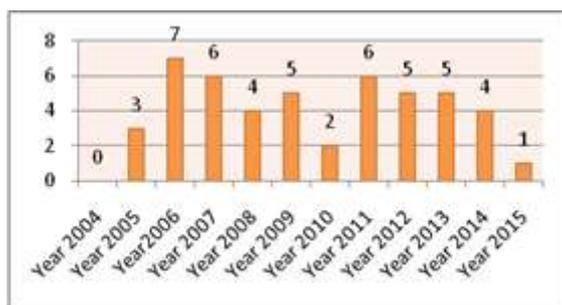


Figure1: Number of research and thesis papers on peace and conflict communication related to conflict in southernmost Thailand during 2004-2015

The sort of all research was the applied one. Examples are as follows.

“The Transformation of Authority into Power through Radio Broadcast: the Prime Minister's Talk to the Thai People: A Case Study of the Violent Crisis in the 3 Provinces of the Southern border of Thailand.”

(Chareondej, J. 2005)

“Audience Decoding of Radio Thailand News Report on Kru-Sae and Takbai Case.”

(Nilaphatama, S. 2006)

“News Values during Crises: A Case Study of the Crisis in the Southern Border of Thailand” (Nindum, S. 2007)

“Peace Journalism: Ethics, Management and Suggestions for Development.”

(Changkamol, W. 2007)

“Cross-Cultural Communication: A Case Study of Buddhist and Muslim in the Southern Border of Thailand (Yala Pattani and Narathiwat)” (Kaewseenuan, L. 2009)

“News Reporting of Stringers in Insurgency in the Southernmost Provinces of Thailand (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat)”

(Kai-nunna, P. 2012)

“Political Communication through the Books about Problem in the Border Provinces Southern Thailand: A Case Study during the year 2547-2553” (Saikuea, C. 2012)

“Media Discourse on Peace Process in Southern Thailand 2013” (Chalermripinyorat, R. & Nilaphatama, S. 2014)

“D-Slatan Na Dan Tai Program: Encoding Meaning of the Southern Provinces of Thailand on Television.” (Jeh-Oh, F. 2015)

The data show that the papers were published by the universities around the country including. The highest number of papers was those of Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Thammasat University (TU) and Chulalongkorn University (CU) (17, 7, and 6 papers respectively).

The keywords used in the studies during that time were “southernmost Thailand” or “southern border provinces” (14.50%) followed by “news reporting” or “journalism process” (7.30%) and “communication” (5.80%). Research methodology was classified into quantitative (32.70%), qualitative (15.40%), and mixed methods (51.90%). All quantitative research used survey method while 58.80% of qualitative research was content analysis

and the in-depth interview (41.20%). Mixed methods research employed different methods such as in-depth interview (40%), content analysis (30.90%), survey (27.30%), focus group (16.40%), and observation (12.70%).

The first three communication types consisted of mass media (52.70%), intrapersonal communication (23.60%) and public communication (7.30%). Sorts of media that were studied included personal media (43.60%), newspaper (16.40%), radio (14.50%), television (10.90%), websites and books (9.10% and 3.60% respectively) and cable television (1.80%). The philosophy of social sciences used to view the research was structural – functionalism (80%) and critical philosophy (20%).

Not only does the repeated occurrence of the conflict in the southernmost Thailand over 12 years significantly influence scholars and graduate students in different universities of Thailand to focus their interest on communication topic related to the crisis of southernmost Thailand, continuously, widely, and differently, it also moves the landscape of knowledge forward to decode the situation and support conflict resolution. It can, therefore, be said that the period is the glorious era of communication research on southernmost Thailand conflict.

3.2. Landscape of knowledge on peace and conflict communication

3.2.1. Media and peace building

Journalism can be a tool of conflict resolution (Lynch, J. & Galtung, J. 2005), so scholars and students in the universities put much interest in mass media topics. They acutely aware that mass media have impact on three tracks of public related to the conflict: track one, Thai government and the anti-Thai government armed groups; track two, civic organizations, and track three, the grassroots people, the roles of which are preventing conflicts and supporting peace process.

The angles, in terms of media and peace process, landscape of media, criticism of the newsroom culture and mainstream media, and new media have been widely examined by researchers over 12 years. The first research on peace

journalism in Thailand was presented in 2007 by Walakkamon Changkamol, an Assistant Professor from the Faculty of Communication Sciences, PSU, Pattani Campus. She investigated the news from mainstream newspapers that presented the conflict in the area and analyzed them based on war and peace journalism indicators of Johan Galtung (1998). The data showed that most news is in the scope of war journalism rather than peace journalism. After that, researchers moved on to other platforms of studies, especially broadcasting journalism which has the greatest impact on Thai people and reported that after the MOU for peace talk between a Thai government representative and B.R.N. on February 28, 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, broadcasting journalists have significantly changed the way to present the conflict news. They report the progress of the peace, open their space for all parties, search the alternative ways for peace and make a sensitive topic such as autonomy or decentralization to be publicly discussed (Chalernsripinyorat, R. & Nilaphatama, S. 2014). This change in broadcasting journalists is an important example for media to learn how to deal with the conflict.

Although, there is quite a small number of research on cross-culture communication in Thai society before the southernmost Thailand conflict in 2004, the studies concerning cross-culture communication in media and personal communication have been increased over the following 12 years. Concerning the media, there is a study of local television in the area that is not allowed to present the reconciliation program efficiently because of the centralized system, limited budget, and risky workplace (Ranumas, S. 2006). For personal communication, there is a study of personal communication under the conflict context by Kaewseenuan, L. (2009). She revised the paradigm of cross-cultural communication suitable for the area: “DO IT RIGHT” (D: Development of relationship, O: Openness to cultural differences, I: Information sharing, T: Trust building, R: Respects for individualism, I: Integration, G: Government fairness and policies, H: Harmony, and T: Team unity). However, the armed groups use different ethics and religions of people to call for Muslim people’s support. This causes disharmony and suspicion between the Buddhists and the Muslims in the conflict area. However, at least two studies confirm strong

relationship between both groups who have visited each other continuously, participated in community activities despite different languages cultures as well as suspicions from misinformation of the media (Thiangwong, A. 2005, Kaewseenuan, L. 2009).

3.2.2. Criticism of newsroom culture

Over 12 years of the siege in the southernmost Thailand, mainstream media have been complained about their actions on the situation because their news negatively affect the audience's attitudes in terms of the southernmost area, Muslim, Islam, and conflict as well as blinded the people with crisis resolution signifying that Thai media have the same paradigm as western journalists who perceive the situation like they do to the middle east war despite different conditions of internal conflicts in the southernmost Thailand (Wasi, P. 2004). Researchers interested in the conflict have also searched the alternative guidelines for Thai journalists to deal with the situation. Classical news value of newsroom such as consequence, conflict, proximity, timeliness, prominence, mystery, human interest, unusualness, sex, and progress, is a barrier of appropriate news reporting creation to deal with the conflict different from the aforementioned.

Nindum, S. (2007) tried to find the alternative news value paradigm for Thai newsroom in her research. The findings presented the news value criteria and indicators for the crisis. There are 5 criteria related to the southernmost crisis including timeliness, exhaustiveness, supportive evidence, appropriateness of the sources, and origin of the information. There are 8 indicators indicating the conflict information which are problem solving by the government, peace, inspection, impacts, feelings, daily violence, background of the crisis, and conflicts. Moreover, the research by Changkamol, W. (2007) also suggested Thai journalists change their paradigm from war journalism to peace journalism and suggested media organizations to educate or inform their journalists as this is a new issue in the society.

Research on news reporting guideline for local reporters working in the violent fields is also

crucial since the classical news reporting process is not practical in complicated conflicts. Reporters are injured and dead while reporting news. The findings showed that local reporters who have worked under pressure in the southernmost Thailand should prepare themselves before going to the field, and when traveling to the violent fields, they should be careful along the road trip. For example, reporters have to keep a distance between their cars and those of the militaries because military vehicle is a target of the violence makers. Or, the reporters should drive fast and stay in the middle lane when traveling at night. When parking, they should park their car in a ready-to-depart position (Kai-nunna, P. 2012). These cases are not concerned in the normal news reporting guideline, but it is vital in the violent area.

3.2.3. Media landscape in conflict area

The conflict in the southernmost Thailand forces people especially civic groups to have used media increasingly for public expression of their opinions on the issues. There are two major factors supporting people's taking action on the media. First, community organizations can ask for permission from the National Broadcasting Telecommunications Commission (NBTC). Second, people can access the media from mobile phones and computers, so they can share their stories and opinions over the situations to the public. This trend of communication is in people's interest. The top-down to vertical communication aspect makes a balance between voices of the grassroots and the key parties. This issue is also interested by researchers. The finding of research in 2011 revealed that there are 61 radio stations for around 2.8 million people in the 5 southernmost provinces. Most radio stations are in Songkla (22 stations), followed by Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and then Satun that have 14, 12, 9, and 3 stations respectively. Around one-third of the stations are set up by communities. Although the number of radio stations has increased over 7 years since 2004, the main role of radio broadcasters is to entertain rather than to inform or to educate the audience. Peace content is hardly mentioned in radio programs owing to the lack of funding, information, equipment, and especially knowledge on peace and conflict in the area of the broadcasters,

so they are not convinced to speak out the issue (Buaneaw, A. & Somlok, A. 2011).

Cable television is important for people who live in the urban of the provinces. There are 13 stations of cable television. Four stations are in Songkla, while there are 3 stations in Yala and 2 stations in Stun, Pattani, and Narathiwat. The entrepreneurs of cable television do not have professional skills in program production due to their lack of mass communication background. Most entrepreneurs graduated in other fields such as business, education, engineering, commerce and etc. Their principal role is to serve the program channels rather than create local program for their viewers (Kai-nunna, P. & Tuannoi, S. 2011).

3.2.4. New media in the conflict area

The usage number of new media has increased dramatically because it is a top five of the most popular media of the southernmost Thailand according to the survey in early 2016 (Kooyai, K. 2016). Three powerful sorts of new media consist of websites, social media, and web blogs.

Local journalists use websites for publishing news which cannot be coverage in mainstream media. For example, the Aman News

Agency founded in 2009 by local journalists reported different issues on their website. In 2011, new Muslim generation as a representative of Muslim in the southernmost Thailand established the WARTANI as a multimedia tool for both communication and movement in the conflict area. Civic organizations need to promote their actions on websites as well. Unfortunately, some local news agencies cannot do this work efficiently because of insufficient professional staff, interactive system, and funding (Phetmongkon, D. & Theppaya, T. 2011).

Social media are a powerful tool for political movement in the conflict area. The leaders of anti-Thai government groups always deliver their peace process messages via YouTube from Malaysia to the audience in the southernmost Thailand. After posted, the issue is made coverage by journalists of the mainstream and local media.

Web blogs are used by scholars, youth, and civic organizations. The most popular web blog in the area of conflict is the DeepSouthWatch's blogs of the Deep South Watch website. The web blog has been used to express political matter, cease the sensitive issues, debate the ideas, report news, share information, and announce hot issues. This sort is not only a popular virtual community but it also provides bloggers with convenience and safety.



Figure 2: A clip of Mr. Abdulkarim Khalid, a leader of B.R.N., expressing his political opinions on peace process with Thai government via Jabatan Penerangan-BRN channel of youtube

3.3. The further research under peace talk context

3.3.1. Roles of media on peace talk process

There are 2 out of 47 papers on peace talk context since the two parties have talked together on peace in Malaysia in February 2013. The extremely poor symptom of research on peace and conflict communication in new context is that the research is not relevant to real situations. Thus, the researchers should increase more studies of peace process topic to bring about the body of knowledge useful in solving communication problem and supporting peace.

3.3.2. Monitoring the media roles

There have been some obstacles over 3 years of the peace process between the Thai government representative and MARA Patani. When the process is in difficulty, most mainstream media frame the situation negatively. Even though typical peace process can be fluctuated, there is not enough research suggesting Thai media dealing with rising and falling situation of the peace process. To do research under this situation, media monitoring tools should be applied for the change in media roles. Long-term studies should be conducted in order to move forward the roles of media. However, research around the area is still limited.

3.3.3. Peace and war journalism criteria and indicators

The criteria and indicators of peace and war journalism reflected through research over 12 years are from western perspectives which are different from Thai media in terms of newsroom culture. Those criteria and indicators will be probably not relevant to real phenomena of Thailand. Hence, Thai

researchers should revise and explore new flexible criteria and indicators for society so that the research data will be acceptable for stakeholders.

3.3.4. Cross-culture communication skills

Although mass media research is very important to support peace process, the research on relationship between people of different ethics and religions in community is very important as well. Previous research over 12 years confirms that people's relationship depends on straining situations in the conflict area. They may live doubtfully under conflict occurrence. So studies on cross-culture communication are a good tool for monitoring the villagers' relationship in fluctuation of conflict. It is also a good way for the government, civic society and the local with different cultures to immediately diminish misunderstanding and suspicions between them. Definitely, searching for indicators of cross-cultural communication skills is necessary for measuring communicative abilities of people in different cultures or societies. The aforementioned is the suggestions for further research in the area of conflicts in the southernmost Thailand. It is clear that there is limitation of knowledge that can reduce conflict of all levels.

4. Conclusion

The number of research and the number of insurgency events over 12 years in the southernmost Thailand are not significantly correlated in terms of statistics although the conflict remains happening every day. On the other hand, the peace process of both parties is still discussed openly and closely. This long-term process takes time and pace. Research, especially, in communication perspective is expected to reduce conflict and support peace. So researchers and graduate students should focus on this perspective closely so as to present appropriate answers for

public under difficult situations. This article exhibits the landscape of knowledge on peace and conflict communication and recommends researchers study more topics in the future to keep the knowledge timely.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Wanpichit Srisuk, a lecturer of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Pattani campus and the head of the research projects for his invaluable advice to improve my research that is a sub-topic of the research project. I also would like to thank the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) that supports funding for the project until this research comes to a perfect end.

References

- Buaneaw, A. & Somlok, A. (2011). *The Status, Role of Operation and the Empowerment of the Radio to Create Peace and Unity in the Five Provinces of Southern Thailand; Satun, Songkla, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat*. Pattani: Prince of Songkla University.
- Chalermripinyorat, R. & Nilaphatama, S. (2014). *Media Discourse on Peace Process in Southern Thailand 2013*. Retrieved from http://www.cscd.psu.ac.th/files/file_pr/peaceprocessdiscourse_samatcha_rungra_wee.pdf
- Changkamon, W. (2007). *Peace Journalism: Ethics, Management and Suggestions for Development*. Pattani: Prince of Songkla University.
- Chareondej, J. (2005). *The transformation of authority into power through radio broadcast: the Prime Minister's talk to the Thai people: a case study of the violent crisis in the 3 provinces of the Southern border of Thailand*. Bangkok: Thammasat University.
- Galtung, J. (2016, Jan 4). *Media: Peace Journalism*. Retrieve from <http://www.cnetwork.ca/programs/PeaceJournalism.htm>
- Howard, R. (2003). *Handbook on Conflict Sensitive Journalism*. Copenhagen: IMPACS and International Media Support.
- Jitpiromsri, S. & Panatnachee, S. (2016, Jan 4). *The DSID Database: the southernmost Thailand incident information analysis in 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/node/7942>
- Jeh-Oh, F. (2015). *D-Slatan Na Dan Tai Program: Encoding Meaning of the Southern Provinces of Thailand on Television*. Pitsanulok: Narasaun University.
- Kaewseenuan, L. (2009). *Cross-Cultural Communication: a Case Study of Buddhist and Muslim in the Southern Border of Thailand (Yala Pattani and Narathiwat)*. Bangkok: Suan Dusit Rajabhat University.

- Kaewthep, K. (2002). *Peace Communication*. Nonthaburi: Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University.
- Kai-nunna, P. & Tuannoi, S. (2011). *Statuses and Roles of the Local Cable Televisions in the 5 Provinces of the Southernmost, Thailand (Songkla, Stun, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat)*. Pattani: Prince of Songkla University.
- Kai-nunna, P. (2012). *News Reporting of Stringers in Insurgency in the Southernmost Provinces of Thailand (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat)*. Pattani: Prince of Songkla University.
- Kooyai, K. (2016, Mar 5). *Peace, Moving Forward*. Retrieved from <http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/dsj/8200>
- Lynch, J. & Galtung, J. (2005). *Reporting Conflict: New directions in Peace Journalism*. Queensland: University of Queensland.
- Nindum, S. (2007). *News values during crises: a Case Study of the Crisis in the Southern Border of Thailand*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.
- Phetmongkon, D. & Theppaya, T. (2011). *Study of online news reporting and its efficiency in the five southern border provinces (Songkhla, Satun Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat)*. Pattani: Prince of Songkla University.
- Ranumas, S. (2006). *The Presentation of Programs Aied at Nation Reconciliation of Television of Thailand Channel 11, Yala Province*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.
- Saikuea, C. (2012). *Political Communication through the Books about Problem in the Border Provinces Southern Thailand: a Case Study during the year 2547-2553*. Bangkok: Krirk University.
- Thapthiang, N. (2007). *Effects of Mass Media: Attitudes of People in the Three Southernmost Province towards News Coverage on Violent Crises*. Pattani: Prince of Songkla University.
- Thiangwong, A. (2005). *Communication between Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslim in Rusamilae Community Pattani Province in the Period of Crisis of the 3 Southernmost Provinces*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.
- Wasi, P. (2004). *Patani State: the older state than Sukhothai in the history*. Wongthes, S. (Author). Bangkok: Matichon Publishing House.

