EMERGENCE OF ETHNIC PRINT MEDIA IN DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION PERIOD (SHAN STATE)

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Abstract

There is widespread recognition that the media has an important role in sustaining and nurturing democracy for the media in all forms can reflect the diversity of society to fulfill its democratic potential. As ethnicity is an important is an important element of social diversity media organizations can report the concerns of every group in society and enable diverse groups to access information. The ethnic print media in Shan State reflects the Shan, Pa-O and Palaung nationals' diversity of voice and multiculture. Among the three parts of Shan State, only the Southern Shan State has a flourishing ethnic print media, especially news journals. However, they are still facing the common challenges of access to information, few capable and trained journalists due to lack of professional training and difficulties in distribution system. Ethnic print media delivers content in local languages. Ethnic and linguistic diversity can be a challenge for media reach in ethnic areas of Myanmar. While some ethnic media reflect the State government position, some are focus on coverage of social news, conflict news and public issues in the ethnic areas. Emerging ethnic print media could serve as the bridge between the State government and majority and minority ethnic groups. Ethnic media addresses community issues that are often overlooked by mainstream media. These ethnic media are of different models because they have different aims and interests. Ethnic print media outlets face struggle for survival. The research question is that "Why is it necessary to enhance ethnic media development?" Henceforth, proper policies of the government are needed for the survival and sustainable development of ethnic media outlets. Ethnic print media in Shan State play a key role for preservation of indigenous literature and enabling the national reconciliation process in the democratic transition period.

Key word: ethnic, print media, Shan, Pa-O, Palaung.

Introduction

Myanmar is now witnessing an emerging new ethnic media landscape, mainly in the print sector. This is important in ensuring ethnic communities have a voice in political and socio-economic affairs that affect their life. Since

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March 2011, the new government led by President U Thein Sein embarked on sustainable democratic reforms including media freedom. In one of the significant changes was the abolition of censorship in the print media on 20 August 2012. The print media were no longer required to submit their products to the Press Scrutiny and Registration Department prior to publication. Further progress was made with the introduction of the ethnic media in 2013. This was followed in 2014 by certain measures that allowed newspaper to become editorially independent.

As a consequence, a greater number of weekly journals and newspapers were published in a freer media environment. According to the data of the Printing and Registration Department of the Ministry of Information, 219 news journals were published in Myanmar in the end of 2016. Among them six news journals were published and two news agencies in Shan State. Of these three journals were registered for publication in indigenous languages. While the largest numbers of 153 journals are published in Yangon Region, the lowest number which was fewer than ten journals were published in other States especially in the ethnic region¹. It is obvious that Myanmar is now witnessing the emergence of new ethnic media outlets in the regions mainly in the print sector.

The Shan State is located in eastern Myanmar and is organized into fourteen districts and five self-administrative regions. Then the entire Shan State which is composed of 83 townships and sub-townships is again classified as Eastern, Southern and Northern Shan State for administrative purposes.² Yet from the print media aspect the publication circulation and access of the people to such news media is unequal and uneven. While five news journals are published in Southern Shan State, only one news journal has been published in the Northern part of Shan State which is based in Lashio. There are no ethnic print media publications in the Eastern part of Shan State. Ethnic people have to rely on the publications of the main stream media which are mostly situated in Yangon. Ethnic print media are important because they

¹ List of Publication Permitted by Printing and Registration Department, (11-8-2016), Printing and Registration Department, Ministry of Information.

 ² (a) The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, Shan State, Census Report Vol. (3), Ministry of Immigration and Population, Myanmar, May 2015.
(b) Taunggyi Magazine (2016), Myanmar Writers Association (Taunggyi).

fulfill the needs of their community; contribute towards preservation of their indigenous literature, culture and tradition and to reflect the ethnic voice on social and political issues through the media.

Materials & Methods

Research was conducted in Shan State, based mainly in Southern Shan State. Most notably ethnic news journals have emerged and developed in Taunggyi, Southern Shan State,³ and only one typical news journal in Lashio, Northern Shan State⁴. Therefore, the research location was chosen in Southern Shan State in order to grasp the majority of readership and diversity of ethnic voice. The key interviews were also conducted in ethnic print media outlets at Taunggyi and some ethnic media organizations based in Yangon. A total of 14 key interviews were conducted for data collecting process in Taunggyi.

The research paper aims to illuminate the emergence and development of ethnic print media industry from the ethnic people perspective and shed light to the bridge between ethnic nationals and government. This study is based on a survey of quantitative method based on the views of 500 respondents in many townships of Southern Shan State. The survey questionnaires are measured on media development indicators of UNESCO; how ethnic people have easy access of print media in rural and urban areas of Shan State, what is their preference language for ethnic print media and to what extent they read ethnic language print media, the extent of information and knowledge they get and what is their preferred ethnic language in reading newspapers and journals daily. Survey locations are especially focused on Taunggyi and surrounding townships of Hopone, Kalaw, Naung Khar, Pinlaung, Naungtayar, Sesaing, Panlong, Loilan and Mauk-mai.

Findings

The findings of the research is that ethnic print media outlets cannot afford large expensive printing presses which are only available in Yangon

³ The Golden Gong Journal, *Kahamsae* Voice Journal, Voice of *Hsan Loi* Journal, The Voice of Shan Ni Journal, Kandawza Tai Journal, *Hsenpai* News Journal, Shan Herald Journal.

⁴ Marlagar Journal

and Mandalay so that printed copies of journals have to be sent back to Taunggyi and Lashio which is time consuming and costly. Publishers encounter the common challenges of financial difficulties, which make producing a good quality and distribution difficult. These ethnic print media outlets will probably have to struggle for survival, until peace is established countrywide together with socio-economic development. In the meanwhile all stakeholders continue these efforts for ethnic media enhancement.

At present even in the media content, the aspect of pluralism is not visible perhaps due to the absence of ethnic diversity in newsrooms. This issue can lead to the escalation of misunderstanding among different ethnic communities in the region. Conflict is a key factor behind the development ethnic print media especially in Northern Shan State⁵. Interviews with ethnic print media outlets in Shan State said that there has been an increase of ethnic print media after 2012 due to the political change and media reform process in Myanmar, but that they still face difficulties in sustainable development of ethnic media. One of the common challenges is distribution problems and transportation costs.

The main aim of publishing ethnic journals in the Shan State is to preserve indigenous literature and ethnic language so that Shan and Pa-O ethnic media can play a critical role in peace process of Myanmar. They can establish linkage between the ethnic groups and government. Shan State government should try to improve easy access of information for local journalists, and the ethnic print media could provide coverage of local and regional news to disseminate the information to the whole country. The government should expand the space for ethnic media, including guaranteeing access to information for all journalists.

Journalists from minority ethnic groups are fairly represented across the media industry including at senior levels. The emerging ethnic media outlets are providing opportunities for ethnic journalists. But the readership level is low because ethnic print journals publish their own literature which reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of the target area. Journals and newspapers with the largest readership are journals and newspapers printed in

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⁵ Interview with Editor of Marlagar Journal

the Myanmar language. As a result, township reporters are faced with poor supporting from main media outlets than those working in media outlets in big cities.

For nurturing qualified journalists media training programmes are provided by the Peoples' Voice media house in collaboration with the Development of Ethnic Minority Organization (DEMO) and Southern Shan State Media Network (SSSMN). Mostly rely on the training given by *Internews*, Yangon Journalism School and Myanmar Journalism Institute. Some media outlets have close networking and linkage with the Myanmar Journalism Association (MJA) and the Myanmar Journalists Network (MJN) although there are still some that have no connection.

Concerning the issues of gender and women's participation in media, ethnic women encounter more stereotypical gender norms in the media field. Moreover, the ethnic men who hold on to outdated ideas that place of ethnic women is to preserve traditional cultural norms and disapprove of their working in the news media. Thus, women's participation is still low in the ethnic media due to outdated social norms of the region.

Discussion

Challenges of Ethnic Print Media

After the independence period, many news journals were published in Taunggyi. Those were Peoples' Journal, *Shan Pyay Aung Than*, *Shan Pyay Hittaing*, Capital Taunggyi, *Shan Pyay Forward*, and *Rays of Shan Pyay* (Information Department). Under the Revolutionary Council Government, the *Shan Pyay Forward* weekly journal was renamed as the *Rays of Shan Pyay* and published in tri-languages with Pa-O, Shan and Myanmar by the Information Department of the Shan State⁶. After 1988, there were no more private news journals, but only state-owned newspaper.

By 2011, the Eastern *Yoma* Journal was published but it was no longer to exit in Taunggyi Township. In 2012, President U Thein Sein opened the door for small media organizations and the ethnic media obtained a place

⁶ (a) Than Wai (Taunggyi) History of Periodicals in Taunggyi Township, *Taunggyi Magazine*, Myanmar Writer Association (Taunggyi) 2016.

in the country. With this turning point of the Myanmar media environment, six ethnic news journals stared publication in Shan State after 2012. These are the Golden Gong Journal, Khamsae Voice (People's Voice) Journals, Marlagar Journal, the Voice of Hsein Loi (Yoma Athan), Shan Herald and Kambawza Tai Journal. Although the Voice of Shan Ni and Hsenpai News Journal are Shan language news journals, they are based in Mandalay and Yangon. Currently, the Golden Gong and Khamsae Voice have been publishing in Pa-O and Myanmar languages. The Shan Herald Journal and the Voice of Hsan Loi Journal are bi-lingual publications in Shan and Myanmar. The Kanbawza Tai News Journal publishes in the Myanmar language. The Voice of Shan Ni and Hsanpai News journals are also published bi-lingual in Shan and Myanmar Languages as well as the Marlagar journal which uses the Palaung and Myanmar languages. The Southern Shan State Media Network (SSSMN) published the Than Lwin Thway Chinn journal in Myanmar language as a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in May 2017.

At the time when this research was being conducted the print media could not adequately provide information needs to all parts of the country, most notably for the rural population in ethnic areas. Due to the country's weak communication and transportation infrastructure, print media circulation is difficult and limited especially for distribution to remote and far-flung areas. In a country with a population of 51.5 million people, the state-owned newspapers, *Myanmar Alinn* and *The Mirror*, have the largest circulation of all print media with 138,756 and 180,000 copies respectively⁷. In most parts of the Shan State, the majority of the people read the newspapers and journals which are distributed by main stream media of Myanmar, especially those based in Yangon.

Ethnic print media outlets are beginning to gain momentum in Shan and Pa-O languages in Southern Shan State and Palaung language in Northern Shan State. But they still face many obstacles in publication and circulation and although they are regular monthly issues, distribution is possible only on a bi-monthly or tri-monthly basis. As a result there are many left over copies and the publishers therefore face financial loss. Some have a circulation of

⁷ Data from records of Newspaper House (Distribution Department)

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2000 to 3000. Due to budget and capacity constraints, it is a common practice for ethnic print media to re-publish translated news stories from mainstream journals rather than produce their own content. Some journals can cover diverse news and can reflect current social issues and political news. Although ethnic media outlets represent a source of information to an ethnic readership, their content is not necessarily diverse nor is it always catered to a particular ethnic group. For instance, the news contents in Pa-O news journals are mainly focused on the news of Pa-O nationals⁸. Thus, other ethnic people are not interested enough to read this or also are not be able to read because of language difficulties. These are the main reasons for the limited market of ethnic print media.

All ethnic print media of Shan State are published in bi-lingually in Pa-O and Myanmar or Shan and Myanmar or Palaung and Myanmar. But, the circulations of ethnic journals could not overcome the publication of main stream media. The urban populations in Shan State have easy access to publications of main stream media in their environment⁹. The state-owned newspapers and newspapers and journals of main stream media have quite a wide readership in Shan State.

The survival of ethnic media is still challenging. Most ethnic media outlets print their copies in Yangon and Mandalay although some are printed in Taunggyi. The high printing costs and transportation charges are some of the difficulties for the ethnic media. Their circulation is limited and they cannot overcome the well-known journals of main stream media. The market constraint is that there are no big companies in rural areas to do marketing and advertising. Therefore, they are dependent on transportation, which is in itself a big problem.

⁸ Survey results shown in Table-1

⁹ Survey results shown in Table-2

400 350 300 250 200 150 100 50 Myanmar Pa-O Language Shan Language Language

Table 1: Readership on audience preference language

Source: questionnaires survey on reading language in Southern Shan State

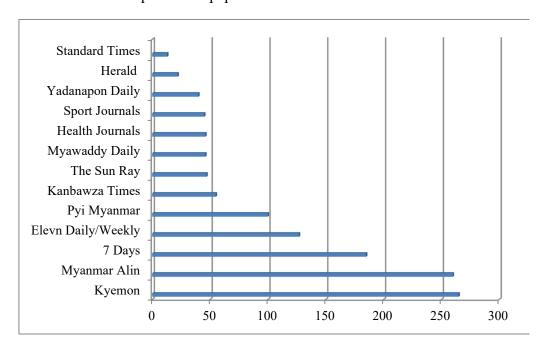


Table 2: Readership on Newspaper and Journals in Shan State

Source: Survey on *Taunggyi* Township, Southern Shan State

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These eight ethnic print media used door-to- door distribution system to Shan and Pa-O subscribers. Some media houses use township sale representatives and ethnic volunteers for distribution. Although these ethnic print media are still faced the highest printing cost and transportation difficulties, they are trying to extend their distribution network to their target areas. Marlagar Journal which is based in Lashio distributes its journals not only in Northern and Southern Shan State but also to Bamaw and Hpa Kant in the Kachin State¹⁰. However, conflict in some ethnic areas has caused hindrances to their distribution system. The Golden Gong Journal is published by the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) and mainly distributes to Pa-O community the majority of whom live in the Pa-O self-administered region; and to Hopone Township, Sesaing Township and Pin Laung Township, in Southern Shan State. The Voice of Shan Ni is based in Mandalay and its circulation is mainly to Kachin State and Sagaing and Mandalay regions. The Voice of Hsan Loi and the Shan Herald which are based in Chiang Mai (Thailand) are distributed to most parts of Shan State. The Kanbawza Tai news journal which publishes in the Myanmar language has the largest circulation. It is obvious that the rate of readership depends on the use of a common language of the majority population in the region and easy access of publications.

For these reasons, the government and media stakeholders need to actively support and strengthen the ethnic media in creating a free and safe environment for media workers especially in the conflict areas of ethnic regions. The ethnic media can play a crucial role in the peace process of Myanmar. They can bridge mutual understanding between the government and ethnic communities. The development of the ethnic media needs the support of the regional governments as well as the people.

With the drastic changes in the Myanmar media landscape, regional media associations such as the Burma News International (BNI), Chin Media Network, Shan Herald Agency for News, Southern Shan State Media Network (SSSMN), Independent Ethnic Media Alliance, Southern Myanmar Journalists Network and Taunggyi Media Network have been established in the ethnic regions of the whole country. The support and assistance provided by

¹⁰ Interview with Editor of Marlagar Journal

international media organizations such as UNESCO, Internews, DW Akademie, International Media Support, FOJO: Media Institute, FHI 360 play a crucial role in Myanmar media development especially for professional and technical training in journalism and other media sectors.

With the freer media environment, the first ethnic media conference took place in Mawlamyaing, Mon State in 2013; the second conference held in Taunggyi, Shan State in 2014; the third conference was in Hakha, Chin State in 2015; the fourth conference took place in Mrauk-U, Rakhine State in 2016; and the fifth ethnic media conference was held in Loikaw, Kayah State in June 2017 respectively. These conferences help to explore issues encountered in ethnic media development in Myanmar as well as help to find solutions. In addition, the government should draw up and lay down proper policies to strengthen the ethnic media and for further media development in Myanmar. As mentioned earlier there has been an increase of several regional print publications in the whole country. On the other hand, the ethnic media outlets themselves should try to be balanced and fair by disseminating accurate and impartial news to the ethnic people. Dissemination of objective and impartial news by ethnic media can sow the seeds for development in the ethnic regions of Myanmar and thereby accelerate the peace process.

Conclusion

There are over 100 national races residing in the Union Republic of Myanmar. Indigenous language, custom and social practices, vary from place to place and region to region. Ethnic media reflect these cultures especially the language and literature. Strengthening ethnic print media could be promote national reconciliation and could play a crucial role in the peace process. An important point to be noted is that there is a need three languages; Myanmar, Shan and Pa-O languages for the ethnic media in Shan State. So, each ethnic journal should have editors and reporters who have proficiency in these languages. News and items of interest to the Shan or Pa-O must be reported in their own language but translations into Myanmar would reach a wider circle of readers. Different ethnic nationals would then learn more about each other's culture and traditions and there by achieve greater understanding among them. Balance coverage of ethnic print media for the public can bring

the peace and development of State and Regions. In order to promote media in Myanmar as a platform for democratic discourse, the media must provide information for all segments of society. One way to fulfill this need is evolving community and ethnic media for the media plurality and diversity. It is important to give right to information and easy access of information to the ethnic media. Therefore developing and strengthening ethnic media needs support and assistance from the government and from all media stakeholders in the country.

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Taunggyi Youth Center

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APPENDIX (1)

Data of Ethnic Print Media Publications in Shan State¹¹

No.	Journal	Publication Year	Publication Type	Main Language	Main Distribution Area
1	The Golden Gong	2011	Monthly	Pa-O and	Shan State
				Myanmar	
2	Khamsae Voice	2013	Bi-weekly	Pa-O and	Shan State
	(The People's Voice)			Myanmar	
3	Marlagar	2013	Bi-weekly	Palaung and	Shan State,
				Myanmar	Mandalay
4	Hsenpai News / Shan	2013	Bi-Weekly	Shan	Shan State
	Voice				
5	Voice of Hsan Loi	2014	Monthly	Shan and	Shan State
			-	Myanmar	
6	The Voice of Shan Ni	2014	Bi-weekly	Shan Ni-	Kachin,
				Myanmar	Sagaing,
					Mandalay
7	Shan Herald	2014	Monthly	Shan and	Shan State
				Myanmar	
8	Kanbawza Tai	2015	Weekly	Myanmar	Shan State

¹¹ (a) Data collected by interviewing with responsible persons of respective ethnic media outlets in Taunggyi and Yangon.

⁽b) List of Publication permitted by Printing and Registration Department, Ministry of Information.

APPENDIX (2)

List of Interview

No.	Persons	Organization	Date
1	John Chit Nyein	7 Day News Journal (Taunggyi)	7 May 2017
	(Reporter)		
2	Sai Kyaw	Voice of <i>Hsan Loi</i> Journal	7 May 2017
	(Manager)	(&dkrtoH*sme,f)	
3	Shan Ma Lay	Shan Herald Journal	7 May 2017
	(Reporter)		
		(oQrf;oHawmfqifh*sme,f	
)	
4	Khun Than Aung	Khamsae Voice /	8 May 2017
	(Chief Editor)	The People's Voice Journal	
		<pre>(crf;om;aigif;*sme,f)</pre>	
5	Khun Yar Zar	Khamsae Voice /	8 May 2017
	(Editor)	The People's Voice Journal	
		<pre>(crf;om;aigif;*sme,f)</pre>	
6	U Soe	Kambawza Tai Journal	8 May 2017
	(Editor)	<pre>(uarÇmZwdkif;owif;*sme</pre>	
		(, f)	
7	Hta Man Thi	Kambawza Tai Journal	8 May 2017
	(Reporter)	<pre>(uarÇmZwdkif;owif;*sme</pre>	
		(,f)	
8	Daw Mya Wun Yan	Southern Shan State Media Network	8 May 2017
	(Secretary)	(SSSMN)	, J
9	U Than Wai	Chairman of Myanmar Journalist	8 May 2017
	(Taunggyi)	Association (Taunggyi)	
10		The Golden Gong Journal	8 May 2017
	(Chief Editor)	(a&Tarmif *sme, f)	
		Secretary of Pa-O National Organization	
		(PNO)	
11		The Golden Gong Journal	8 May 2017
	(Reporter)	(a&Tarmif*sme,f)	10 May 2017
12	Sai Aung Myo Lwin	. •	
	(Editor)	(wdkifvdkif; &Srf eDtoH	
		*sme,f)	
13	Mai Kaung Sai	Marlagar Journal	10 May 2017

		(rm;v*g;*sme,f)	
14	Dr Sai San Pe	Voice of <i>Hsan Loi</i> Journal	13 May 2017
	(Editor)	(&dkrtoH*sme,f)	





The Peopel's Voice





ပြည့်ခိုင်ဖြူးပါတီ မှတ်ပုံတင်ထုတ်ပေးပြီး မဲဆွယ်စည်းရုံးလုပ်ဆောင်နေ တိန်းစွဲယာက်ျားရိုက်နက်မခံနိုင်မန်တုံအမြီးသမီးတစ်ဦးဆွဲကြ









စုသောင်းခြင်းမရှိဟုဆို



300:3000

Interview with Editors, Manager and Reporters in Shan State



Chief Editor of Khamsae Voice Journal



Edior of Kamsae Voice Journal



Manager of Voice of *Hsan Loi* Journal **Interview with Editors, Manager and Reporters in Shan State**



Editorial team of The Golden Gong Journal



Editorial team of Kanbawza Tai Journal



Township Reporter of the 7 Days Journal

Interview with Editors, Managers and Reporters in Shan State



U Than Wai (Taunggyi), Chairman of Myanmar Journalist Association



Reporter of Shan Herald



Southern Shan State Media Network (Taunggyi)



Conducting a survey to readership on ethnic journals



Voice of *Hsan Loi* Journal House



Advertisement of Voice of Hsan Loi Journal