

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This chapter consists of two main parts: Summary of The Main Results and Conclusion And Suggestions.

6.1 Summary of The Main Results

The objectives of the research were as follows:

6.1.1 To study the images of Thaksin Shinawatra in two leading English language daily newspapers of Thailand.

The study found that in each of the seven periods analysed, image of Thaksin was depicted with both positive and negative features at the same time. This shows the fact that the two newspapers have been free forums for both favourable and critical ideas. Though in each period, his characteristics are shown through different concrete actions, in general, Thaksin can be understood as a person with both good and bad characters: He is a capable leader who is decisive, creative, self-confident, able to delegate, able to choose suitable people for certain jobs. He has a good vision, especially in new technology. He is a good husband and a good father; He is outspoken and self-criticised. Though being a rather wealthy successful businessman, Thaksin cares much for the poor. At the same time, Thaksin is seen lacking basic criteria for legitimacy needed for a good leader: integrity, morality, honesty and self-sacrifice. He is impatient, incautious, arrogant, immodest, stubborn, impulsive and selfish. He nurtures corruption and cronyism and disregards human rights and democracy.

6.1.2 To study whether there is a trend in covering Thaksin in both newspapers from the beginning towards the end of his ruling time (February 2001-September 2006).

The study found out that there was a trend but not a dramatic one. He appeared better at first, especially in October 2003 period, when Thailand hosted Apec, and worse at the end, when the wave of protests against him reached the climax in a coup d'état. Thaksin's prestige was at its peak when his government succeeded in recovering the country's economy after the Asian economic crisis. However, in each period studied, Thaksin's images appeared with both positive and negative features.

6.1.3 To study whether there are any differences in covering Thaksin between the two newspapers.

The study found that there are different levels of criticism in the two newspapers. *Bangkok Post* was very critical at the beginning, even more critical than *The Nation*. But then tended to be more temperate, measured and keep softer, neutral voice since early 2004. *The Nation*, on the other hand, has been more consistent: hard-hitting, criticising Thaksin on every issue from the beginning till the end of his ruling time. *The Nation* even turned to crusade at the end.

6.1.4 To study why there is such a trend or such differences.

The study found out that at the beginning of his first term, when Thaksin emerged as a modern politician with fresh ideas on improving lives of grassroots people, journalists tended to give him a chance. Journalists covered him mostly neutrally and even positively highlighted his capabilities but at the same time expressed doubts over the feasibility of his projects and his ethics. In the middle of his first term, many of his drawbacks became obvious. Thaksin appeared to care little for human rights, which led to the deaths of more than 2,000 people in the war-against-drugs. Then he continuously dealt with the South by wrong policies. He turned to be more and more dictatorial ignoring criticisms. He kept nurturing corruption and cronyism, etc. Media started to echo criticisms of him and keep him checked. Over the time, there have been more and more criticisms against Thaksin among the media, especially English language newspapers.

There have been different levels of criticism between *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* because while *The Nation* has followed its principle from the early day of the

newspaper: quite independent, quite free to criticise the government. Under Thaksin, though they have been affected by the limited source of advertisement revenues controlled largely by Thaksin and his cronies, they still managed to raise the loudest voice against Thaksin. *Bangkok Post*, on the other hand, has been affected much by the business profit of its owners. One of the owners of *Bangkok Post* Suthikiati Chirathivat, who had majority shares from Central Department Store group, had problems with the concession of Central Latprao, which was not built according to the contract: it was too high, the parking space was too large... Thaksin government used the case as a tool to control *Bangkok Post*. Though *Bangkok Post*'s news department has been always independent, most of the journalists in *Bangkok Post* had to more strictly self-censure and also endured more strict censorship from the editors.

6.2 Conclusion And Suggestions

6.2.1 Conclusion

In summary, the study shows that the two English-language daily newspapers in Thailand, *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* have hold quite critical views on Thaksin. The ousted PM has been portrayed with both positive and negative characters. Though *Bangkok Post* has to some extent been interfered to soften their criticism, both newspapers still lead the country's press and even the region's press in practising free journalism.

6.2.2 Suggestions

This study may inspire other scholars to conduct further researches. Below are some suggestions.

- A comparison between the image of Thaksin in *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* and that in Thai newspapers.

As mentioned before, the image of Thaksin in English-language newspapers is different to that in Thai newspapers.

- A comparison between the image of Thaksin in *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* and that in other English language newspapers in the world.

For *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*, though in English, most of the writers and contributors are Thai people or English speakers residing in Thailand. Their views on Thaksin will surely be different to that by foreigners outside the country.

- A study on the image of Thaksin in Thailand's TV and radio channels.

Television and radio have their own strengths and weaknesses when covering political figures in comparison with newspapers. More over they may be under different influences by Thaksin government as mentioned earlier in this research.

- A comparison between the image of Thaksin in English newspapers in Thailand and English broadcasting channels in Thailand.

Though they share the same audience – English speaking people in Thailand – the image of Thaksin may be different due to the difference in communicating methods.