

THE POLITICAL ROLE OF THAI OVERSEAS CHINESE NEWSPAPERS DURING THE PERIOD OF CHINA'S XINHAİ REVOLUTION

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Abstract- The objective of “The political role of Thai overseas Chinese newspapers during the period of China’s Xinhai Revolution” aimed to study the history of Thai overseas Chinese newspapers during the late 19th century to the early 20th century, which was the period of before and after the Xinhai Revolution occurred in China. Also, this paper would give a bird’s eye view of how Chinese newspapers which mostly printed about the revolutionary contents affected an absolute monarchy system of Thailand. It is qualitative research based on historical documents compilation of Thai overseas Chinese daily news and other types of overseas Chinese publication in this period. The research revealed that the Xinhai Revolution had deeply effected to Thai overseas Chinese society in many factors, especially in term of Chinese printed matters. The overseas Chinese newspapers became a main political tool of the revolutionary team in Thailand to excite the political thought in Thai overseas Chinese, or even let them having the China patriotism idea. The Chinese newspaper enterprises in Thailand had received a good feedback from the readers who were mostly Thai overseas Chinese because Thai Chinese overseas were obviously awakened from the articles about political ideas in newspaper. The political ideology was separated into two groups; the revolutionary party led by Sun Yat-sen and the constitutional monarchy party led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao Chinese modern reformers. Two political ideologies were intense debated each other through the letters in many copies of newspapers. As a result, although the revolutionary party got a great success at last, but this event led a great development in Chinese publication. The golden age of Chinese publishing and presses positively raised up cultural education including social position of Thai overseas Chinese. Apart from political thought publication, Chinese newspaper also became a platform for political thought debating between the Thai overseas Chinese revolutionists and King Rama VI (King Vajiravudh) who was the highest leader in country. The revolution thoughts were obviously converse to the Thai monarchy’s system, it also caused many conflicts among Chinese and Thais. King Vajiravudh was known for his effort to promote Thai nationalism through many books and articles in newspaper. Apparently, the gold age of Thai publication was generated from Thai overseas Chinese publication activities as well.

Keywords: The political role, Thai overseas Chinese, newspapers, the Xinhai Revolution

I. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to study the political role of Thai overseas Chinese during the Xinhai Revolution in 1911. The revolution which led by Sun Yat-sen had successfully overthrown the Chinese feudal autocratic monarchy of Qing dynasty. The Xinhai Revolution got victory because of many supports from overseas Chinese all around the world. The revolutionary also directly affected to the overseas Chinese society in Thailand or namely “Siam” at that time.

Sun Yat-sen and his people came secretly to establish the revolutionary alliance in 1906 for running many revolutionary activities in Thailand. The revolutionary party was forming overseas Chinese schools and presses for expanding the concept of revolutionary ideology to Thai overseas Chinese. Chinese newspapers became a main political tool of the revolutionary party in Thailand to publish many articles about the suffering that common Chinese had to face with in China mainland. These have raised the patriotic feelings in Thai overseas Chinese, they wanted to eliminate all suffering in China which generated by Qing government ruling. During the beginning of the revolutionary preparing, Thailand was in the last period of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V). An unprecedented number of newspapers and presses in Thailand began to flourish in this period, especially Chinese newspapers. Chino siamese daily news was the first one of the most influential overseas Chinese newspaper in Thailand. The revolutionary party has published the newspapers for the revolution propaganda, to strongly promote Sun Yat-sen’s political ideology and opposed to the constitutional monarchy thought of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, two famous reformers who still had their loyalty to the absolutist Chinese monarchy. Chino siamese daily news received a good feedback from readers of both Thais and Chinese. It had caused the political role of revolution propaganda by using newspapers which was highly affected to Thai society. However, the patriotism idea which came from revolutionary thought in overseas Chinese was totally different from Thai’s absolute monarchy system, it possibly brought about conflicts to Thailand. The Xinhai Revolution was occurred during in the period of the new Thai king inheritor, King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI) inherited the supremacy from King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V). After the revolution achieved fully success, the overseas Chinese newspapers were accused to be the enemy of the state. King Vajiravudh was known as one of the famous writer and journalist. He published in a Thai newspaper articles about the Chinese immigrants opposing against Chinese revolution thought, he also tried to tell Thais that Chinese immigrated to take benefit from Thailand. The King’s articles in newspaper caused a debate the Chinese newspaper writer who tried to oppose his idea. Until the middle of the King Rama VI period, Thai authority provided legislation to control the contents inside Chinese newspapers. However, it could be said that period was the real golden age of popular press of daily newspapers.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To study the political role of Thai overseas Chinese newspaper during the period of China’s Xinhai

Revolution. Emphasise on how the Chinese newspapers become the political ideology stage including how it run the political activities in Thai overseas Chinese through newspapers.

2. To study how Thai overseas Chinese newspapers affect to Thai society, whether in terms of the feedbacks from Thai society or Thai authorities.

III. METHOD

This research using the documentary research method according to books, related articles, materials and past newspapers reviewal. The scope of research specify on timer, during late 19th century to early 20th century which was the period of the Xinhai Revolution occurrence in China.

IV. FINDINGS

According to the historical research method by materials collecting such as books, academic articles including some contents in past newspapers, the research findings were mainly as follow:

A. *The political ideology war through Thai overseas Chinese newspapers*

In the late 19th century to early 20th century, this era was the first beginning of the Xinhai Revolution period. There were two political ideologies strongly debated to each other on the China's political stage. The first one was led by Sun Yat-sen, one of the famous chief Chinese revolutionist who aimed overthrow absolute monarchy system of his motherland and set up the Republic of China. Another one was the political ideology of Kang Youwei and Liang Qicao two Chinese political reformers who supported to advocate constitutional monarchy after the founding Republic. Obviously, the concept of two political ideologies were totally oppositional, two parties opposed against each other and attempted to prove each other wrong. At that time, the Republic setting thought was illegal and became forbiddance in China, thus each party sent their team to overseas Chinese communities in foreign countries for supports seeking. Two Chinese political parties got through the overseas Chinese communities by secretly contacting with overseas Chinese secret societies. Since the Chinese immigrates came for seeking a new life in foreign countries, various overseas Chinese secret societies and underground organisations were generally set up for helping and protect benefits of Chinese immigrates in that region. Sun Yat-sen got a great supports from Xiao Focheng or Seow Hood-seng who was leader of "Three Harmonies Society", one of the powerful overseas Chinese secret society in Thailand. Kang Youwei and Liang Qicao got another supports from Zheng Zhiyong, leader of "Hong Men" another Chinese secret society which highly influential to Thai overseas Chinese communities, he also owned the largest sweepstake business of the country. Xiao Focheng was the famous editor in Thailand, he also owned overseas Chinese presses and published his own daily newspapers. Thus, his revolutionary works were quite successful due to the revolutionary newspapers publishing. Firstly, Xiao Focheng, Chen Jing and Shen Qingchi, the main revolutionary team in Thailand, ran the revolutionary newspaper named "Mei Nan Daily News" in 1906 for expanding the political ideas of Sun Yat-

sen. But in 1907, the constitutional monarchy team in Thailand took over the publishing place of the revolutionary newspapers "Mei Nan Daily News", and changed to new issue as "Qi Nan Daily News" the newspaper for supporting Kang Youwei and his party. Then, Xiao and Shen put attempting publish a another new issue of the revolutionary daily news named "Hua Xian Daily News" to show the strong opposing opinion to the political idea of "Qi Nan Daily News". These two newspapers became the most influential daily Chinese newspapers to Thai overseas Chinese society. In addition, the revolutionary team has decided firstly publish another newspaper as Thai language version named "Chino Siamese Daily News" or generally known as "Jinnosiamvarasup". Contents inside Chino Siamese Daily was not only support the revolutionary idea, also about the good relations between China mainland and Siam (past name of Thailand) for many long years. Many of Thai readers have known more about the story and ideas of the revolution in China from Chino Siamese Daily News. For the Thai overseas society, there were two separated groups; support Sun Yat-sen and support Kang Youwei. This was the first generation of Chinese political newspapers movement which fully impacted to both Thais and overseas Chinese in Thailand. Later, the constitutional monarchy party in China was losing their popularity which directly affected to the supporting team in Thailand. Qi Nan Daily News had to be shut down the business in 1911 that was the same year of the Xinhai Revolution got success and establishing the Republic of China. Zheng Zhiyong was one of the most powerful Chinese leader in Thailand, he had continually supported Kang Youwei's idea and he also was the one who was the main shareholder of Qi Nan Daily News. After the Xinhai Revolution, he turn his side to support Sun Yat-sen. The constitutional monarchy party in Thailand was finally abolished, it also caused the two political ideologies war through Thai overseas Chinese newspapers went to the end. However, Chino Siamese Daily News and Hua Xian Daily News, two newspapers for the revolution still continued doing the publishing and became the most influential overseas Chinese newspaper in Thai society.

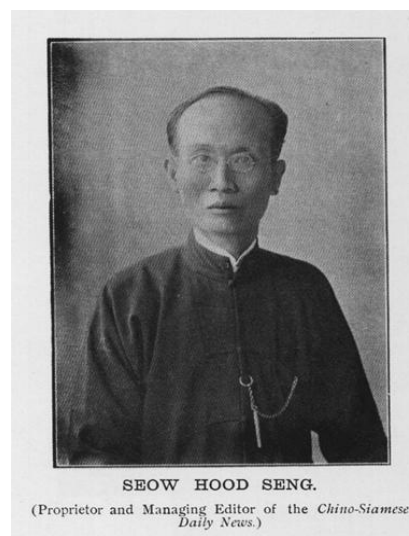


Figure 1. Xiao Focheng or generally known as name Seow Hood Seng, the main editor and the owner of the revolutionary press. (Penpisut, 2004)

B. The main political role of the revolutionary newspapers

After losing their own popularity of the constitutional monarchy party, apparently, Chino Siamese Daily News and Hua Xian Daily News took the political role instead. Xiao Focheng was one of members in the Chinese Revolutionary alliance Siam branch. The Chinese Revolutionary alliance also known as the Tongmenghui, it was an underground resistance movement founded by Sun Yat-sen for doing the revolutionary works, they were formed in many countries where the overseas Chinese reside. Xiao was a Chinatown publisher, and he played an important role publishing newspapers by using his writing talent in both Thai and Chinese languages. Xiao had been born in the Straits Settlements and whose British citizenship afforded him protecting from Thai authorities. He was a smart person, he was also good at the political knowledges including country's ruling. That's why he was kept an eye on by Thai authorities all the time. But he still was the most powerful overseas Chinese editor, publisher and writer in the era of King Vajiravudh. Hua Xian Daily News and Chino Siam Daily News were firstly published in May 15th 1907, one copy with two languages, in Chinese eight pages and in Thai four pages. After 4 years since the first published, the newspapers were absolute separated in two copies two languages, each copy published eight pages. Hua Xian Daily News and Chino Siam Daily News became a mouthpiece for the revolutionary party's political views, and helped Sun seeking for fund raising. Many overseas Chinese donated money for the revolution and some applied for any volunteers, they gave an active helping to the revolution that was breaking out in China. Xiao was responsible in duties both of being the revolutionist leader and being the main editor of two newspapers. Hua Xian Daily News regularly published in contents of the revolution and Sun's political idea as Chinese language version, and Chino Siam Daily News was about the revolution contents as well but printed in Thai language. Xiao wanted Thais to be aware of the revolutionary movement in China and making spread out the revolution idea to Thais. About the main contents inside newspapers were mostly related to the politic in Thailand and China. The newspapers published the articles regarding Thailand ruling, some articles criticised King Vajiravudh's state policies but some gave an admired opinions to the Thai authorities. After the successful overthrow of the Qing dynasty in China, the newspapers attempted to praise to the Xinhai Revolution by the publishing. The articles about the revolutionary idea in newspapers inspired the group of seven Thai army officers. They decided to overthrow the king in the same way as China. These seven army officers attempted overthrow the government by making revolt and setting up the Republic. However, the plotters were quickly arrested and imprisoned. This uprising against the Thai king was finally failed. But nevertheless, King Vajiravudh did not trust in this situation any more. He believed that the political idea of overseas Chinese would be harmful to his position. The first uprising against the absolute monarchy of Thailand was known as "The Palace Revolt of 1912", it was one of the important event in Thai political history.

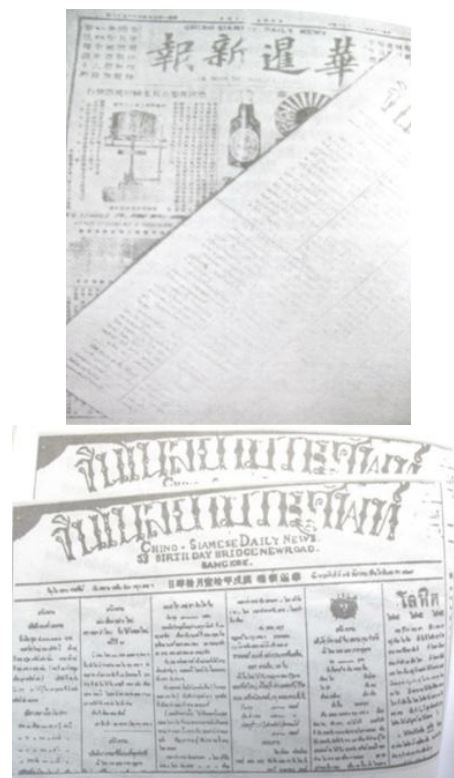


Figure 2. Left: Hua Xian Daily News Right: Chino Siame Daily News (Penpisut, 2004)

C. The political debated among the revolutionary party and the King Vajiravudh through newspapers

King Vajiravudh's period was marked as the age of popular press of daily news and weekly magazines. Due to the amount of newspaper copies, the newspaper businesses was rapidly growing up. At time time, there was approximately 52 copies of the newspapers which officially published during the late of King Chulalongkorn's period and up to 133 copies in King Vajiravudh's period. This was the golden age of presses in Thailand. The freedom of the newspapers was granted to an enormous extent. More newspapers took up political theme, some was playing as the political role instead of people. Frequently, the authorities and the publishers used newspapers to represent their opinions and agued each other even among the publishers themselves. King Vajiravudh or King Rama VI was one of Thailand's highly famous artists, writing novels, short stories, newspaper articles and even poems, he was particularly known as a famous journalist. He wrote many of articles in newspapers to show his political ideology and to tell people about the government's policies. During the age of the revolution, "Thai News" was the only one press which was royally owned by the king. Thus, most of the contents inside Thai News was about what the king wanted to communicate to Thai people. Except Thai News which owned by the government and Chino Siam Daily News which owned by overseas Chinese, the non-government party also published their own press namely "Bangkok Daily Mail" to mainly oppose the government's policies. Clearly, Chino Siam Daily News was the Chinese newspapers which published as Thai language and the Bangkok Daily Mail trenchantly criticised the government policy including the existing social and economic. And the king also retorted to these newspapers that accused him by

using the area of his newspaper as well. These three newspapers became the most influential daily news to Thailand at that time. After the Palace Revolt of 1912 that the group of army officers attempted imitated China's Xinhai Revolution to overthrow the absolute monarchy of Thailand, King Vajiravudh put more efforts to create and promote Thai nationalism. Due to the revolutionary works of overseas Chinese, these made the king was unpleasant for the situation, thus, he wrote many articles to showed anti-Chinese ideas on the newspapers. In 1914, King Vajiravudh published in Thai News an article titled "The Jews of the East" as the pen name "Asvabuhu". The main gist of this article was to compare that Chinese in Thailand were like the Jewish. Chinese were united by loyalty to their motherland but not to their adopted country, they seemed immigrate to seek a new life but actually they were out to make money as possible and then depart. The main content seem quite excessive for the overseas Chinese in Thailand to admit, but the king just urged Thais to take more active role in their own economy and be faithful in the nationalism. At that time, no any newspaper writers criticised his writings, except Chino Siam Daily News whose edited by Xiao Focheng that tried to debate the king's articles. Xiao was the main journalist of Chino Siam Daily News as the pen name "Padung" and "Batkunchon" strongly opposed against the king's anti-Chinese ideas, especially in article of "The Jew of the East". King Vajiravudh had published many other anti-Chinese articles related which let some of overseas Chinese felt displeasing, but at the same time some of Thais perceived the nationalism, all of these were the impacts of the newspapers during that time. Although the Palace Revolt of 1912 was not successful, but King Vajiravudh still believed that it caused from the overseas Chinese and their newspapers as a political tool. Subsequently, in 1922, Thai government officially enacted legislation the Chinese newspapers for controlling the urge of political ideas in foreign newspapers which possibly be the social harm in the future. Since that, the revolutionary ideology became forbidden for Thailand. Chino Siam Daily News was shut down business in 1923 which was the year after the press legislation, and Hua Xian Daily News was also went out of business in next 1924.



Figure 4. "Thai News" The press which was royally owned by King Vajiravudh.
(<http://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/ไทย> (หนังสือพิมพ์))

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of the research obviously show that the first flourishing age of daily newspapers in Thailand was originally occurred during the China's Xinhai Revolution. The coming of two political ideologies including all of the revolutionary works to urge Chinese for giving supports were particularly showed that Thai overseas Chinese enjoyed follow-up the situations in China and Thailand through newspapers reading. It indicated to the life-style, reader characteristics and even the value of educated culture of Thai overseas Chinese. Although the revolutionary party of Sun Yat-sen became the most influential political thought to the overseas Chinese, but the revolutionary team which led by Xiao Focheng still using newspapers as their mouthpiece to communicate to the readers and it greatly worked. Xiao was the chief of the revolutionary team in Thailand and also taking duty on newspaper's editor. He was the main force who driving the revolutionary works, surely, his newspapers got the great feedbacks from readers, he attempted to use his talents running his works. Xiao was the first Thai-Chinese tried to shift out from the traditional role by publishing Thai version of overseas Chinese newspaper, to make Thais knew more about what the Thai overseas Chinese were being. This was the new changing age of Thai press industries. We could not reject that the revolutionary newspapers inspired some group of people wanted to reform Thailand as the same way of the China's Xinhai Revolution. The impact of the Palace Revolt of 1912 was directly related to King Vajiravudh's responding. The king also using the newspapers area to show his expand his political's thought, tell the readers his opinion including debate with publishers who tried to criticise him. It was the new trend of Thai presses which affected to the entire state. People enjoyed follow the world situations by reading newspapers, this was not usual for the state that never belong to any western countries. After the Xinhai Revolution got victory, the Thai overseas Chinese

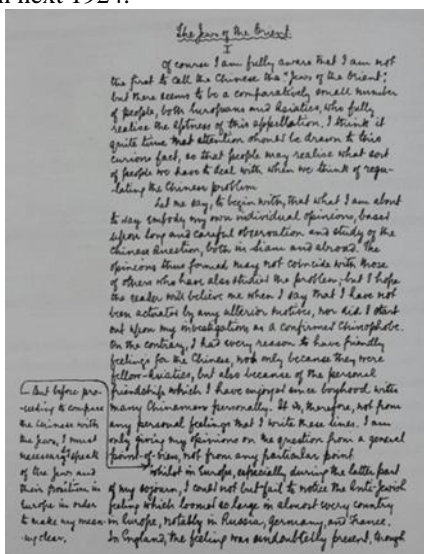


Figure 3. The King Vajiravudh's original handwritten copy of "The Jew of the East". (G. William Skinner, 1986)

newspaper tried to reduce their political role and aimed to emphasise on the business role instead, it positively relaxed the pressure between Chinese and Thais. Historical events on this day imply to the lifestyles and habitants of both Thais and Chinese that the compromising habits of people who lives in Thailand can eliminate all conflicts in the society. Although the overseas Chinese and Thais are grew up in the different atmospheres, having a different communities, different opinions, but they all still living in the same roof under the centre of the Thai king of majesty.

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