

# Quality of Thai Media: Empirical Proposals on “Prime Minister’s Eggs” Discourse

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## Abstract

This study aims to point out the issue of media “quality”, another flaw that has scarcely been acknowledged or discussed while “freedom” of the press is repeatedly debated, through the “prime minister’s eggs” discourse that the media have created and reproduced extensively from remote past to present days in Thai society to justify the government’s competency in economic management when egg price rises or drops, by means of advanced quantitative methodology. Hence, time series data on the egg price, minimum wage, and core consumer price index have been employed in the advanced statistical analyses, regression analysis and Johansen’s cointegration test, for that purpose.

The regression analysis show that the two pairs-egg price and minimum wage, and egg price and core consumer price index-both have positive correlations at statistical significance of .01, but Johansen’s cointegration test indicates no cointegrating relationship between the pairs either at .05 or .01 level. This implies that bringing the egg price issue to justify the government’s competency in economic management is the media’s major misconception, which in reality may be a more pressing concern to be reformed than freedom.

**Keywords:** Thai media, prime minister’s eggs discourse, government’s competency

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Current Trends of “Media Reform”

Media are expected to be “watchdogs” (Fog, 2004, p. 1), reporting news and information that are true, factual, comprehensive, appropriate (Trirat & Chaiwat, 2004, p. 50) and non-scandalous (Chaisang, 2009, p. 182), and self-regulating fairly towards equality, liberty, duty, and integrity, as well as subject to the laws (Vejjajiva, 2010a).

However, in practice, the media have been severely criticised contrariwise as being organisations without actual freedom (Phongpaichit, 2006) and full of conflicts of interest while conducting public administration duties and businesses with the government party, which has mass communication business groups as a bridge to political power. It has been so since Pheu Thai Party was elected in early 2001, but become apparent in 2003 (Phiphitkul, 2004, p. 137-138), yet still has a tendency to get worse (Phongpaichit, 2006).

For that reason, they have been severely criticised on inequality by a veteran politician that “during the past three years, the mainstream mass media of Thailand played a very big part in de-democratising the country” (Chaisang, 2009, p. 181).

Abhisit Vejjajiva, the 27<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Thailand, is another person who has also criticised on how the media operated during the nation’s chaos in the recent years in a serious manner, notably on the programme

“Confidence in Thailand with Prime Minister Abhisit” aired via the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand and Radio Thailand on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2010 as follows:

“Fractions of the media have become a part of the political dispute, stirring up animosity and violence. And sometimes, these mediums are exploited, put it simply, as a command centre for provocation, for fomentation. This needs to be sorted out”

Subsequently, Abhisit Vejjajiva (2010b) thus cited “media reform” as an important task on Thailand’s national agenda according to his five-point roadmap to national reconciliation, together with forming a “Working Group on Media Reform” as one of the five committees after Red Shirt protests.

### *1.2 Not Only “Liberty” But Also “Quality”*

Under such pressure, there were at least three conferences and seminars among the relevant parties conducted:

Firstly, a joint seminar “Media and Democracy in Crisis: What Roles and Responsibilities for the Thai Media?” of the Commission on Human Rights, Rights and Liberties Consumer Protection, the Senate, Thai Broadcast Journalists Association, and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Thailand on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2009;

Secondly, a joint national conference on mass communication “Media Reform towards Social Reform” of Thai Journalists Association, the National Press Council of Thailand, Thai Broadcast Journalists Association, ISRA Institute Thai Press Development Foundation, and Sripatum University on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2010; and

Thirdly, a public joint seminar “Media Reform: Discuss the Problems and Reach for Resolution” of the Commission for Mass Media Liberty and Responsibility Promotion, Second Generation of Middle-Level Mass Communication Management Course Educators, and Thai Health Promotion Foundation on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

Yet the “freedom” of the media was still the main theme of the three conferences/seminars. There was a mutual agreement on the fact that the government should and must stop threatening, controlling or even telling the media to reform, because the lack of media liberty would make us become slaves to ignorance as a result, and some even went as far as saying “freedom [of the media] is the only thing that can progress the society” (Thai Post, 2010).

Meanwhile, the issue of “quality” on whether the news and information that the media reported to the society were factual or not was scarcely mentioned, just as in the observation Chaturon Chaisang (2009: 182) has made;

“The mass media in our country have their existing fundamental problems. Our Thai people do not give much importance to whether the news and information that the media report are factual or not. Hardly heard someone says that he likes any press because it presents only facts, or does not like one because it always contains false or inexact news.”

### *1.3 Prime Minister’s (Competency) + (Price of) Eggs = “Prime Minister’s Eggs”*

With the role of reporting information to the voters to accompany their decision makings (Fog, 2004, p. 1), the media thus have a critical role of ascribing political meanings to the affairs that are in the people’s interests (Gamson & Stuart, 1992, p. 55), or linking “eggs” to “politics” (Turakij, p. 2010) in Thailand’s case.

It is said that Thai media use the term “prime minister’s eggs (Note 1)” to mock and compare in a sense of whose eggs are more or less costly than the other prime ministers’ for many terms of office (Prachachat Thurakij Editorial, 2006); e.g., “Chuan’s eggs” are cheaper than “Anand’s eggs” or “Thaksin’s eggs” are pricier than “Banharn’s eggs” (Pinthong, 2010).

As understood in the present, the linkage between the price of “eggs” and the names of “prime ministers” has originated since the term of Mom Rajawongse Kukrit Pramoj (Turakij, 2010), as evident in the article “Thailand’s Era of (Mark’s) (Note 2) Pricey Eggs” (2010), which has surveyed on the names and prices of eggs in each term, as follows:

“Noble’s Eggs” of M.R. Kukrit Pramoj priced at 1.50 bath; “Kriangsak’s Eggs” of General Kriangsak Chamanan at 1.60 baht; “Papa Prem’s Eggs” of General Prem Tinsulanonda at 1.26 bath during his first term and 1.80 baht during his fifth; “Uncle Chat’s Eggs” of General Chatchai Choonhavan at 1.90-2.00 baht; “Mr.Chuan’s Eggs” of Chuan Leekpai at 1.65-2.70 bath; “Maew’s Eggs” of Thaksin Shinawatra at 2.40-3.20 baht; “Big Add’s Eggs” of General Surayud Chulanont at 3.00 baht; “Samak’s Eggs” Samak Sundaravej at 3.00 baht; and the recent “Mark’s Eggs” of Abhisit Vejjajiva at 3.30 baht (Manager Daily, 2010). It is noteworthy that only Anand Panyarachun, Somchai Wongsawat and Yingluck Shinawatra have managed to evade such naming tradition (Turakij, 2010).

It appears that there is only “Thai Rath” newspaper that have reproduced the “prime minister’s eggs” notion to the public for three consecutive years from 2008 “Samak’s Eggs Index 1 Dares Thaksin’s”, 2009 “Mark’s Eggs overtake Samak’s” and 2010 “Mark’s Blue Flag Eggs Crack Thaksin’s!” with a description says, “The fluctuation of egg price does not only have significant effect on the government’s popularity, but also can be used to indicate economic conditions, as well as competencies of each government in addition” (Rath, 2008, 2009, 2010).

That is because “eggs are a cheap protein source compared to protein-to-weight-to-price ratio of meats. So, it is a type of food affordable to a wide range of consumers. From kitchens of the poorest to millionaires’ tables, there certainly are eggs included” (Rath, 2008, 2009). Hence, “the then-serving prime minister is usually associated with the price of eggs” (Rath, 2009).

Upon considering the repeated assertions that the media used together with the ascription of political meanings to the fluctuating egg price, insofar as using the fluctuation as an indicator of many indexes from food price and cost of living index (Pinthong, 2010) to consumer affordability index (Matichon Weekly, 2010), political conditions and problems (Prachachat Thurakij Editorial, 2006, p. 105), good governance (Eoseewong, 2011, p. 6), and the government’s economic competency, it is observed that these are superficial statements without adequate reasoning, evidence, or any empirical studies to support whatsoever.

#### *1.4 Objective of the Research*

Therefore, this research on “Quality of Thai Media: Empirical Proposals on “Prime Minister’s Eggs” Discourse” aims to achieve at least two objectives:

First, to identify the relationships amongst egg price, core consumer price index and minimum wage, since it would further lead to an understanding whether the fluctuation of egg price, either upwards or downwards, is related in terms of causation to economic conditions, that is, the minimum wage and core consumer price index; and

Second, to validate and verify the political meanings that the media have introduced to relate the egg price to the economic conditions and government’s economic competencies as “prime minister’s eggs” and reproduced for many eras, as such would be a quality indicator for the media seeing how capable and attentive as well as how responsible they are in reporting news and information to the public.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### *2.1 Data and Variables*

The researchers selected a time series data gathered from relevant organisations and authorities, covering a period of 148 months from January of 1999 to April of 2011, on the following variables:

- 1) Egg price (EGGS), specifically based on the retail price of #3 eggs, as they have the highest amount of consumption and their price tend to be used as base price in studies, from Department of Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce (2011), herein defined as an independent variable of the minimum wage and core consumer price index.
- 2) Minimum wage (LABOUR), specifically the minimum wage of Bangkok, to represent the flows of goods and services in the economy, as such are the outcomes of production systems (Matichon Daily, 2010, p. 2), as well as the economic conditions of the country (Labour Economics Bureau, Office of the Wages Committee, 2011, p. 1-2) from the Ministry of Labour (2011), herein defined as a dependent variable of egg price.
- 3) Core consumer price index (CORECPI), to represent economic conditions and inflation rate, as the media have claimed that they are influenced from the egg price, from the Bureau of Trade and Economic, Ministry of Commerce (2011), herein defined as a dependent variable of the egg price.

### *2.2 Data Analysis*

The data were analysed by means of advanced statistics, regression analysis to identify the relationships amongst variables and Johansen’s cointegration test (Johansen, 1988, 1991) to verify whether the relationship is spurious or not, if any, via computer application software.

## **3. Research Results**

The researchers have divided the results of this research into three sections, where the first presents the descriptive data analysis on each variable of the time series data along with the relationship analysis between time and the three variables to illustrate changes over time.

The second section is the regression analysis between the variables, presented in respective order: the

relationship between egg price and minimum wage; and the relationship between egg price and core consumer price index.

The last section is the Johansen's cointegration test on the relationships between the variables, presented in respective order: the cointegrating relationship between minimum wage and egg price; and the cointegrating relationship between core consumer price index and egg price.

### 3.1 Egg Price and Relationship between Egg Price and Time

The egg price from January 1999 begins at 2.33 baht and fluctuates over time, but in overall it has a tendency to increase, with the lowest of 1.62 baht in February 2001 and the peak of 3.35 in April 2011.

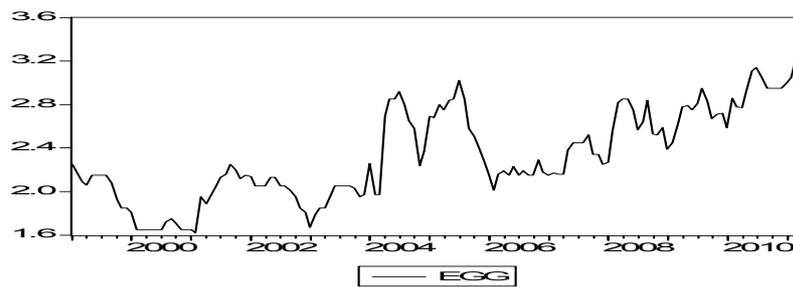


Figure 1. Egg price

Table 1 indicates that time has a positive relationship with egg price at statistical significance of .01. For each month that progresses, the egg price would relatively shift by 0.008 bath in the same direction.

Table 1. Regression analysis on egg price and time

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	1.753519	0.083615	20.97142	0.0000
T	0.007765	0.000864	8.987786	0.0000
R <sup>2</sup>	0.614182	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)

### 3.2 Minimum Wage and Relationship between Minimum Wage and Time

The minimum wage since January 1999 has been rising gradually from 162 baht until reaching a peak of 215 baht in January 2011.

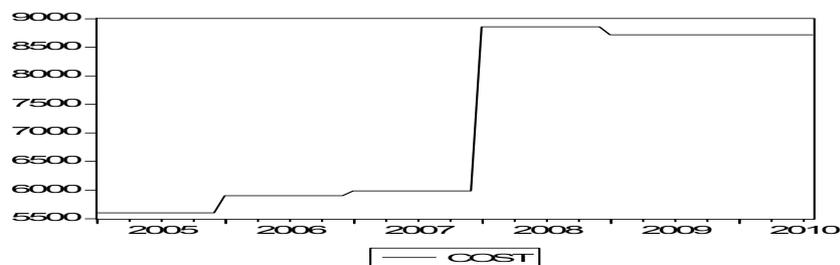


Figure 2. Minimum wage

Table 2 indicates that time has a positive relationship with minimum wage at statistical significance of .01. For each month that progresses, the minimum wage would relatively shift by 0.37 bath in the same direction.

Table 2. Regression analysis on minimum wage and time

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	152.3955	1.758856	86.64464	0.0000
T	0.367991	0.019063	19.30439	0.0000
R <sup>2</sup>	0.926607	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000
Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)				

### 3.3 Core Consumer Price Index and Relationship between Core Consumer Price Index and Time

The core consumer price index starts at 82.5 point in January 1999 and fluctuates over time, but in overall it has a tendency to increase, with the lowest of 97.2 point in June 1999 and the peak of 111.5 point in April 2011.

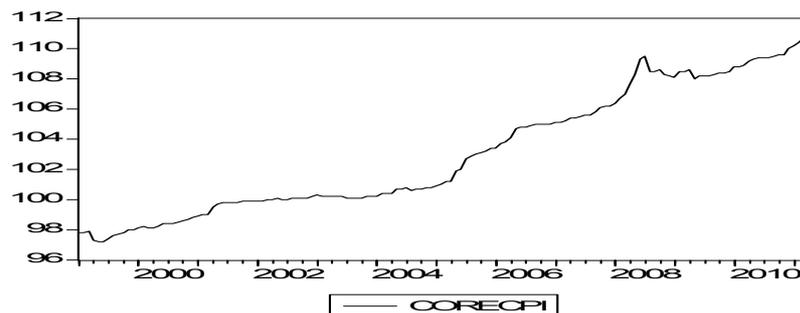


Figure 3. Core consumer price index

Table 3 indicates that time has a positive relationship with core consumer price index at statistical significance of .01. For each month that progresses, the core consumer price index would relatively change by 0.09 point in the same direction.

Table 3. Regression analysis on core consumer price index and time

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	96.06784	0.296994	323.4677	0.0000
T	0.094174	0.003048	30.89255	0.0000
R <sup>2</sup>	0.948635	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000
Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)				

Upon analysing each variable of the time series data above together with their relationships with time, it shows that all variables have a tendency to increase in general.

### 3.4 Relationship between Minimum Wage and Egg Price

The relationship analysis between minimum wage and egg price is to validate if the minimum wage has any relationship with the egg price, as the media have claimed that the minimum wage is an indicator of the flows of goods and services in the economy as well as influenced by economic conditions which are indicated by the egg price, and to what extent if so.

Table 4 indicates that minimum wage has a positive relationship with egg price at statistical significance of .01. For each 1 bath change in the egg price, the minimum wage would relatively shift in the same direction by 29.09 bath.

Table 4. Regression analysis on minimum wage and egg price

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	111.9646	8.131677	13.76895	0.0000
EGG	29.09322	3.898006	7.463615	0.0000
R <sup>2</sup>	0.568609	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)

### 3.5 Relationship between Core Consumer Price Index and Egg Price

The relationship analysis between core consumer price index and egg price is to validate if the core consumer price index has any relationship with the egg price, as the media have claimed that the egg price is an indicator of the food price and cost of living index as well as economic conditions, and to what extent if so.

Table 5 indicates that core consumer price index has a positive relationship with egg price at statistical significance of .01. For each 1 bath change in the egg price, the core consumer price index would relatively shift in the same direction by 7.33 point.

Table 5. Regression analysis on egg price and core consumer price index

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	85.98303	1.961350	43.83871	0.0000
EGG	7.332999	0.930423	7.881358	0.0000
R <sup>2</sup>	0.564693	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)

The results of relationship analysis between minimum wage and egg price and between core consumer price index and egg price via regression analysis concludes here that the egg price has relationships with both the case of minimum wage and the case of core consumer price index in the same direction at statistical significance of .01.

Hence, such analysis implies that egg price is related to economic conditions as well as the government's economic competencies. However, such analysis has not yet determined whether the identified correlations are true or spurious.

### 3.6 Cointegration between Minimum Wage and Egg Price

Cointegration between minimum wage and egg price verifies the result of regression analysis if the minimum wage has a true or cointegrating relationship with the egg price by means of Johansen's cointegration test.

Table 6 indicates that minimum wage has no true or cointegrating relationship with egg price at statistical significance of .05 and .01, that is to say, the relationship between minimum wage and egg price identified by the regression analysis is, in fact, spurious.

Table 6. Johansen's cointegration test on minimum wage and egg price

Hypothesized		Trace	5%	1%
No. of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Statistic	Critical Value	Critical Value
None	0.047699	11.67247	15.41	20.04
At most 1 *	0.032221	4.683429	3.76	6.65

\*(\*\*) denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 5%(1%) level  
Trace test indicates no cointegration at both 5% and 1% levels

### 3.7 Cointegration between Core Consumer Price Index and Egg Price

Cointegration between core consumer price index and egg price verifies the result of regression analysis if the core consumer price index has a true or cointegrating relationship with the egg price by means of Johansen's cointegration test.

Table 7 indicates that core consumer price index has no true or cointegrating relationship with egg price at statistical significance of .05 and .01, that is to say, the relationship between core consumer price index and egg

price identified by the regression analysis is, in fact, also spurious.

Table 7. Johansen's cointegration test on core consumer price index and egg price

Hypothesized No. of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Trace Statistic	5% Critical Value	1% Critical Value
None	0.058050	9.794399	15.41	20.04
At most 1	0.008651	1.242530	3.76	6.65

\*(\*\*) denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 5%(1%) level  
Trace test indicates no cointegration at both 5% and 1% levels

The results of cointegration test between minimum wage and egg price and between core consumer price index and egg price by means of Johansen's cointegration test conclude here that neither minimum wage nor core consumer price index has any true or cointegrating relationship with the egg price at statistical significance of .05 and .01.

Hence, it implies that egg price has no actual relationship with economic conditions nor the government's competency.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

##### 4.1 Conclusion

The study in overall has found that the egg price, core consumer price index and minimum wage all have a tendency to increase relatively with time.

The results of relationship analysis between minimum wage and egg price and between core consumer price index and egg price show that the two pairs both have positive correlations at statistical significance of .01. Every 1 bath change in the egg price would relatively shift the minimum wage in the same direction by 29.09 baht, as would the core consumer price index in the same direction by 7.33 point. Nevertheless, the regression analysis has not concluded whether such connections are true or spurious.

Consequently, the tests for cointegration between minimum wage and egg price and cointegration between core consumer price index and egg price reveal that the two pairs do not have any true connection or cointegration at statistical significance of both .05 and .01.

In conclusion, the result has primarily shown that the egg price, economic conditions as well as the government's competency do not share any causal relationship with each other. So, bringing the issue of egg price to justify the economic conditions or the government's competency in economic management would prove to be the media's major misconception. Apart from defining incorrect political meanings for the egg price, the lack of confirmation on the information they have been reporting to the society for almost four decades is even worse in terms of quality of Thai media, which in reality may be a more pressing and immediate concern to be reformed than freedom.

##### 4.2 Recommendation

This empirical data analysis on the discourse of "prime minister's eggs" would be a useful tool to remind every sector or part of the society, whether it is the media themselves or the people, to be more cognizant of the "quality" of the media.

For the media, such act of verifying the materials about to be reported as well as reviewing what they have already reported to the society for accuracy by empirical approach beforehand, rather than putting faith on beliefs and traditions like they have been doing, seem to be scarcely acknowledged but of a paramount importance. With this reformation opportunity, in addition to the issue of "freedom", this study also would like to urge the media to be more considerate on their "quality" which is still "defective".

As for the people, perceiving any news with consideration, introspect and verify for its exactness, seems to be a responsibility everyone should take into account, as Suthep Thaugsuban, a deputy prime minister during Abhisit Vejjajiva's term, has stated, "will not let anyone use the presence of the media to harm this nation" (Khaosod, 2010: 1). Such does not only seek preciseness for oneself but doing so would also pressure the media to improve their quality accordingly as a consequence.

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## Notes

Note 1. In Thai culture, "eggs" (lit. "Khai") can be used as a slang term for male's private parts

Note 2. Nickname of the former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva

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