

## The Philippines mass media

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# **The Philippines Mass Media**

**by**

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The Philippine Mass Media:  
Challenge and Performance

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I

The problem of credibility confronts the mass media today, particularly in Asia, which is the main battlefield in the continuing ideological war. China's admission into the United Nations in the wake of the Peking-Washington detente does not make the problem any less easy to resolve. Rather, the so-called credibility gap would seem to be as wide as ever since it would take time for the world to shed, and forget, the myths that the Cold War has spawned since World War II ended. And myths, as we know, die hard.

For many years, the journalist Philippe Devillers wrote in 1966

. . . Washington has presented the background of the war in Vietnam in a way to suit its own interests. Orwellian rewriting of history, which twists or obliterates every significant event between 1954 and 1960, is now accepted by millions of well-meaning but uninformed people in many parts of the world. The official American version is so powerfully financed and widely spread through the mass media

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-2-

that millions of people all over the world are now unable to know the truth.<sup>1/</sup>

But now, with the disquieting revelations of the secret Pentagon papers in June 1971, these uninformed millions should at least know that they had been deceived.

We cannot, as communicators and educators, ignore the serious implications of these disclosures on the integrity and credibility of the mass media themselves in Asia, since, with few exceptions, they have unwittingly been used, or served, as instruments for what a disenchanted American congressman<sup>2/</sup> had termed "deliberate deception and obfuscation of fact and policy judgment" to which not only the American people but the rest of the uneasy world were entitled.

If we did, we would betray a trust. We would turn our backs on reality and renege on our duty to inform and serve the ends of truth and justice. What right then would we have to pretend to an objectivity or an independence of judgment that we are neither prepared nor willing to assert?

This has particular relevance in the case of the Philippine mass media because of what we like to call our "special relations" with the United States which have compelled our

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<sup>1/</sup>Preventing the Peace, The Nation, New York City, December 5, 1966.

<sup>2/</sup>Odgen Reid, former editor of the defunct New York Herald Tribune, UPI dispatch from Washington, The Manila Chronicle, July 17, 1971.



-3-

leaders to hold on to power by pursuing a foreign policy closely attuned to that of Washington but hardly beneficial to our national interests since Filipino and American interests, by the very nature of our divergent economies, often conflict with, rather than, complement, one other.

## II

In this context, let us discuss briefly the serious problems facing the mass media in the Philippines.

The key problem, for the communicator as well as for the educator, has to do with the re-education of the alienated Filipino so that he may discover his true identity which he had lost during more than four centuries of Western colonial rule. All other problems stem from this one crucial problem, or are conditioned by it.

To illustrate the Philippine experience more candidly, let me quote from Gandhi: "I don't want my door and windows sealed," he once said. "I want the winds of all cultures to blow into my house - but I refuse to be swept off my feet by any."

If I may paraphrase Gandhi, we have flung open our door and windows to the pervasive winds of America's mass culture, shutting off other cultures and neglecting our own, so that, our minds fettered and our sinews weakened, we have been swept completely off our feet.

Therein lies a challenge our mass media cannot ignore: to help the Filipino deflect the thrust of those gusty winds

-4-

of an imposed alien culture so that he can secure the foundations of his house. He can then begin in earnest to mend also what the beguiling winds have wrought in his being.<sup>3/</sup>

That is how we view our task - those of us in the Institute who, like the informed minority in the mass media, have long realized what has happened to our people and are deeply concerned how best to accelerate the process of Filipinizing the Filipino.<sup>4/</sup>

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<sup>3/</sup> Claro M. Recto, who played a Gandhi-like role in the awakening of the complacent Filipino, put it bluntly in this way:

The education of our people for more than half a century has been based on alien standards with complete disregard of our idiosyncrasies and indigenous habits. Cultural channels have been crowded with American best-sellers, American movies, American music, and American comics.

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. . . We are indeed like strangers in our own country - in our appearance, our customs, our economic life, and our language - even many of our shortcomings appear to have been imported.

. . . It is well that we follow the march of progress and civilization. We can imitate and adopt the laudable usages and customs of other peoples; . . . but we can do all that without having to surrender what is peculiarly our own. (Nationalism and Our Historic Past, February 27, 1960).

<sup>4/</sup> For a description of the Institute of Mass Communication see Annex I.

-5-

The task is formidable and would even seem insoluble, considering the prohibitive odds. It calls no less for a revolutionary change in our still basically colonial society in which change is resisted by the very people who will most benefit from such a change - especially the three-fourths who live in the countryside. The key is, and has always been, education. A problem we have in common with most of Asia and the rest of what is euphemistically called the third world, plagued by poverty, ignorance and disease.

## III

Most foreign observers, unused to the peculiarities of present-day Philippine society, with its glaring contradictions and contrasts, tend to overrate the impact of mass media on what social scientists call the mass mind.

In this respect, the findings of a special American University study on the Philippines are pertinent.<sup>5/</sup> The Philippines, it said, is "one of the most advanced" of the Asian nations in "both the quantity and quality of its information effort."

This is an accurate conclusion, even with the study's qualified statement that poverty and the fact that the Philippines is an island nation have "limited the effectiveness" of newspapers, radio and television. The "greatest factor"

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<sup>5/</sup> Area Handbook of the Philippines published in Washington, D.C. by the Foreign Area Division of the American University.



-6-

limiting their impact, the study showed, is their "disproportionate concentration" in the Manila area, which accounts for 85 percent of all publication facilities and 65 percent of the total circulation of daily and periodic publications although it contains only ten percent of the population.

Moreover, the study said, the "upper class elite" own most information media and are the "moulders of opinion." Again, this is only partially correct. The important fact about the Manila press is the concentration of ownership in a few hands, who are, at the same time, the owners also of other mass media like radio and television. Except for the business interests, publishers of the Times-Mirror-Taliba newspaper chain, and related magazines, the owners of the other major city dailies control sprawling business empires to whom publishing may be considered only secondary to their larger, more vital interests.

One characteristic of the Philippine press, which it has adopted from its model and parent, the American press, is that editorial policy is a prerogative of the publisher or owner. Under the existing setup, the unwritten law is that the publisher or owner "calls the tune" and editors and members of the editorial staffs of Manila newspapers accept that reality - grudgingly, to be sure, but are powerless to do anything about it.

Actually, ownership of both print and sound media is in the hands of only five families or groups belonging to



-7-

the privileged ruling oligarchy, with interlocking or complementary financial interests, who at the same time exert powerful influence in politics and government. Under this hierarchical framework public interest takes a low priority. But while it has built-in advantages for the owners in economic terms, such a setup has obvious drawbacks.

A case in point is the break-up early in 1971 of the political team of President Ferdinand E. Marcos and Vice President Fernando Lopez of the ruling Nacionalista Party and its repercussions in the mass media.

The Lopez brothers (the Vice President, Fernando, and his older brother, Eugenio) are factors to reckon with in Philippine politics. They own the biggest radio-television network in the country which is operated jointly with their outspoken newspaper, The Manila Chronicle, by the elder Lopez's son. The dominant Lopez interests, formerly based on sugar, are now centered in Meralco, the primary supplier of electricity in the country.

President Marcos broke with the Lopezes in January 1971 when he openly accused them of instigating, and even financing the series of anti-Marcos student demonstrations that have rocked Manila (and sparked a massive popular protest that found expression in the rejection of the Marcos senatorial ticket in the November 1971 mid-term election). A Marcos-Lopez cold war has been raging ever since, with the Lopez-controlled sector of the mass media raking the Marcos Ad-

-8-

ministration over the coals for its "litany of misdeeds" and Mr. Marcos, through his press staff and paid publicists in the media, slugging it out toe to toe.

#### IV

Under Mr. Marcos the government information service has in fact been so organized as to counteract adverse criticism from the mass media, notably the Lopez-operated media and, to a lesser degree, those of the Roces interests. Mr. Marcos, however, has the support of the other major publishing interests - Soriano, Menzi and Elizalde - which are the beneficiaries of an economic policy that has favored "friendly" interests.

The Marcos Administration has tried since 1968 to create a centralized information agency at the cabinet level, under a separate department or ministry. However, vigorous opposition from the mass media and other concerned sectors has thwarted its plans.

Nevertheless, the Administration has been able to consolidate the various government information agencies under a Central Office of Information which functions directly under the Malacañang Press Office, headed by the Press Secretary, who is the Administration's official spokesman.

The Central Office of Information takes charge of the day to day propaganda work of Malacañang (the Office of the President) and plays the principal role in the entire propaganda machinery of the Administration. Under its supervision



-9-

are two major channels: the National Media Production Center (NMPC) and the Philippine Broadcasting Service (PBS).

The Marcos government has been compelled, according to its official spokesman, to engage in an extensive information campaign in order "to present its side to the people." The government's media network is so organized and its activities so extensive that it may correctly be said that there exists a twin press in the Philippines: there is, on the one hand, the real press that performs the watchdog function; and there is, on the other, the government's own "lapdog" press.

The government now publishes a weekly newspaper, Government Report, known simply as GR, with a circulation of 30,000 copies which are distributed free mainly to state personnel. GR takes issues with critics of the Marcos Administration, from student activists articulating the people's grievances in mass rallies to the "high priests" of the mass media, because the government's voice, GR claims, "has very little chance of being heard" through the media.

The Malacañang Press Office utilizes the full resources of the NMPC and the PBS to project the Marcos government's voice which otherwise must pass through, in the words of GR, the "various distorting filters of hysteria, inaccuracy, fault finding, prejudice, and - pardon us - venality" of the mass media "if it is (to be) heard at all."



-10-

## V

The NMPC is the central state agency for the production and dissemination of government information materials through the mass media, its main functions being performed by the press and publications division, the radio-tv division and the motion picture division. The NMPC, by the very nature of its work, has become the main propaganda arm of the Marcos government.

The press and publications division, for instance, has produced an anti-communist pamphlet, So the People May Know, which it has widely distributed, as well as other anti-communist posters, most of which were prepared by the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The radio-tv division operates the Voice of the Philippines (VOP), which combines the facilities of the defunct Voice of America and PBS station DZRP. Most of the documentaries and newsreels produced by the motion picture division project the good image of the First Family.

On paper an independent government agency, the Philippine Broadcasting Service was attached to the Central Office of Information (formerly known as PIO - Public Information Office) in 1970. PBS operates three radio stations in Manila and five in the provinces, all of which broadcast news as released by Malacañang and are staffed by commentators who survey the Malacañang line.

-11-

PBS is still partly commercial, but it operates closely with the NMPC's Voice of the Philippines, while one of its stations, DZCP, broadcasts the radio version of Government Report weekly. The PBS newsroom has been abolished, and with its abolition, PBS has dispensed with the services of the Philippine News Service and the Agence France Presse. News now comes from NMPC handouts.

It may thus be seen that the Marcos government has ample resources with which to counter the adverse publicity it has been receiving from influential sectors of the Philippine mass media represented by the Lopez and Roces interests. In this respect, the government can take comfort from the fact that other sectors of the mass media, like those controlled by the Menzi, Soriano and Elizalde interests, have generally supported its policies.

## VI

Besides monopolistic control, there are related problems facing the mass media. The publishers of newspapers and magazines also own the radio-television networks. They are organized into an association, the Philippine Newspaper Publishers Association. Politically, the publishers may be identified with opposing parties or partisan groups, but, as management, they speak with one voice in dealing with labor.

The publishers subsidize the Philippine Press Institute, a professional institution intended to help foster the develop-



-12-

ment and improvement of Philippine journalism.<sup>6/</sup> They also finance the country's only nationwide news-gathering agency, the Philippine News Service. For over a year, 1965-1966, they helped underwrite the Philippine Press Council which tried earnestly to make the press regulate and reform itself, to no avail - largely because of the publishers' own indifference. The council last met on October 24, 1966. It has not been called to a meeting since.<sup>7/</sup>

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<sup>6/</sup> The Philippine Press Institute was organized on May 15, 1954. In line with its objective of helping foster the development and improvement of journalism in the Philippines, the PPI sponsors long and short-term courses, seminars, workshops, consultation visits to the provinces; conducts studies on the state of the press, its relationship with the government, the people and other media, its professional and ethical performance, possibilities of development, market and readership surveys as well as the special problems of the provincial press. Research projects include those on readability, crime reporting, women's news, case study of a press crusade, data-gathering, economic reporting in the Chinese press. PPI is financed by the Philippine Newspaper Publishers Association, with modest assistance from the Asia Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, through the IPI. PPI is the Philippine counterpart of the American Press Institute and the Nihon Shimbun Kyokai.

<sup>7/</sup> The Philippine Press Council was organized in April 1965. Its members are two former justices of the Supreme Court of the Philippines, one representative of newspaper publishers, one editor representing the working press, the Director of the Institute of Mass Communication and a Secretary, a professor of the Institute. The Council, like the PPI, also got a modest assistance from the Asia Foundation in the form of a grant.



-13-

The members of the working press, on the other hand, are not only disorganized but are splintered into some 15 press clubs according to their regular beats. These include the National Press Club<sup>8/</sup> and the Manila Overseas Press Club<sup>9/</sup> which are intended to promote and protect the interests of the working press as a whole but are really no better than mere social clubs.

The working press thus speaks with many discordant voices. This precludes its organization into one strong union - the one voice the poorly-paid Filipino pressmen need in bargaining collectively with their united employers. The union idea has yet to find acceptance among the rank and file.

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<sup>8/</sup> Membership in the National Press Club is open to the working press, whether they are in Manila or on the staffs of provincial newspapers and periodicals. The officers serve one year, but may seek re-election, except the president, who is limited to a one-year term. It maintains a clubhouse in Manila on property donated by the government through legislation. The Club charges modest fees from its members to maintain normal operation. The Club follows a strict non-partisan policy on local issues. Organized in 1957 to serve the interests of the working press, the Club has functioned as a social club rather than as a union, limiting its activities to soliciting blood donations and contributions to charitable causes, honoring visiting journalists, holding an annual Gridiron Dinner when the working press pokes fun at the powers that be, and similar affairs. Lately, in the wake of student agitation for change in society, the Club has offered its facilities for the airing of grievances and the discussion of national issues.

<sup>9/</sup> The Manila Overseas Press Club is the social club of the more affluent pressmen, both local and foreign, and includes members from advertising, promotion and public relations agencies, and the mass media. Like the National Press Club its sets aside an annual dinner with the President of the Philippines as guest. The Club roster includes the press and cultural attaches and similarly-placed personnel of the foreign embassies and legations.

-14-

Most so-called newspaper unions in Manila are company unions and are therefore ineffectual in guaranteeing a pressman's tenure. He <sup>is</sup> thus left to fend for himself. More often than not, he turns journalism into a lucrative sideline by selling his talent to whoever is willing to pick up the tab for him.

The weaknesses of the Philippine press I have alluded to are reflected in the quality and content not only of the print media but also of the sound media which the press largely serves. As recently as July 1971, a knowledgeable official source had this to say of our newspapers:

A perfunctory reading of our newspapers will clearly show that the emphasis is strictly on local news and then stateside (US) news. There is almost nothing about Asia, Europe and Africa. If we read about Asia, it is still through Western eyes.<sup>10/</sup>

It is to correct this imbalance in the flow of news and information that our program in the Institute for research, instruction and training has been geared and is being implemented. Our curricular offerings undergo constant revision and updating to relate them, or make them relevant, to the needs of a rapidly changing Philippine society. Researches probe into the social ills and the root causes of our national problems to find the basis for rational solutions. Agencies charged with the implementation of government programs for development get the benefit of these studies.

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<sup>10/</sup> Alejandro R. Roces, Chairman of the UNESCO Commission of the Philippines, in his column, I Write as I Write, in The Manila Chronicle, July 27, 1971.



-15-

Our faculty assesses and re-assesses its broad functions and its work in the fulfillment of the Institute's long-range goals and objectives. Individual members keep in the mainstream of contemporary thought. The faculty sees in student activism a driving force for change and is for encouraging its healthy growth rather than for containing it. To this end, the faculty has opened the membership of its working committees, including the key Academic Advisory Committee, to student representatives on an equal basis. Policy-making in our Institute has now become a joint faculty-student effort. This innovative approach to a sensitive problem has set a precedent on the campus.

In a modest way, we are trying to perform the task we have set for ourselves as educators and as communicators: to help the alienated Filipino discover who he really is so that he will free himself from the mental prison in which decades of mis-education under imposed foreign cultures have left him to rot.



Annex. I

The Institute of Mass Communication<sup>+</sup>

The U.P. Institute of Mass Communication was established by Republic Act No. 4379 on June 19, 1965. The U.P. Board of Regents authorized it to function as an academic unit of the University on August 23, 1965.

Objectives and Functions

The Institute exists primarily to provide the student undergraduate and graduate training in the various media of communication, including the press, radio and television, which rests on a broad general education base and which treats communication as a science, an art and a service. It also trains the students in the theory and practice of communication research. Moreover, it provides a continuing education program for practitioners in the field.

Specifically, the training program aims to inculcate and foster awareness of the ethical and social significance of, as well as responsibility in, the use of the mass media.

Admission Requirements

High School graduates intending to pursue the A.B. Journalism and the A.B. Broadcast Communication programs must satisfy the requirements for entrance in the College of Arts and Sciences. Completion of all the courses prescribed in the first two years of the A.B. Journalism and the A.B. Broadcast Communication curricula, or their equivalent is a requirement for admission to the Institute.

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<sup>+</sup>University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

The Instructional Program A

Undergraduate Studies

The Institute offers undergraduate degree curricula within the general education and the arts and sciences majors program of the University.

The student may work for a Bachelor of Arts in Broadcast Communication or a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism with concentration in either the humanities or the social sciences.

The broadcast communication curriculum carries a total of 146 units, 14 of which are in required communication subjects, 27 in required broadcast communication subjects, 9 in mass communication electives, 6 in language electives and 21 in the social sciences/humanities electives.

The journalism curriculum carries a total of 146 units, 14 of which are in required communication subjects, 18 in required journalism subjects, 6 in mass communication electives, 6 in language electives and 30 in the social sciences/humanities electives.

The first two years of these programs are taken in the College of Arts and Sciences and the third and fourth years in the Institute of Mass Communication.

## The Instructional Program B

### Graduate Studies

The program of study aims to provide advanced training in the theory and practice of mass communication based on an undergraduate specialization in either the social sciences or the humanities and the arts. Fields of study include communication research, journalism, broadcasts communication and film. The student may work on a program of study leading to the degree of Master of Arts (Journalism), Broadcast Communication), (Communication).

A student who has not previously taken courses required in preparation for graduate work is expected to make up for his deficiencies. The amount of such additional work shall be determined in each instance by the Graduate Studies Committee.

### Admission Requirements

1. The applicant must be a holder of a baccalaureate degree from an accredited university or college, and his applications shall be evaluated by the Graduate Studies Committee.

2. The applicant must have obtained an average grade of "2.5", or its equivalent, in his undergraduate studies. The applicant must submit to an English proficiency examination before admission unless such a requirement is waived upon the recommendation of the Graduate Studies Committee.

3. The application form must be submitted four (4) week



-4-

before the beginning of the semester and will consist of the following: application form, transcript of records, two letters of academic recommendation from his dean/professors, and two character references.

#### Degree Requirements

1. The candidate must earn a minimum of thirty (30) units, and must have been enrolled as a major in his area of specialization for at least two consecutive semesters. He must maintain an average grade of "2" or better during his entire degree program.

2. Of these 30 units, 12 must be in the area of specialization, 6 units of electives under the Institute's graduate program, 6 units in the social sciences, 6 units for the master's thesis.

3. The candidate for the master's degree, after completing the required courses of study and residence, must have passed an oral examination in defense of his thesis; and a written comprehensive examination.

4. Candidacy for the M.A. degree expires three years after admission to the graduate program. Reapplication is required after the end of the three years.

-5-

### The Research Program

The Institute of Mass Communication implements a continuing, three-pronged research program.

1. The staff and students build up basic data in communication for use in teaching, research, and public service.

2. The Institute staff conducts short-term projects geared to the needs of the practitioners and government policy-makers.

3. In collaboration with other state and private agencies, the staff conducts long-term projects tied in with national development.

This program calls for studies on the history or development of various mass communication media, the availability and use of mass media in government information and other offices and on the communication process which includes cross-disciplinary studies on communicators, messages, audiences, media and media effects.

The emphasis in communication research at the Institute is reflected by the presence of a Communication Research Committee which functions like a department. This Committee, is composed of both faculty members and students and in charge of the research activities of the Institute.

In the academic program, graduate and undergraduate students are given training in communication research. Undergraduates, for instance, are required to submit an undergraduate thesis as a requirement for a research course. In addition, there are nine courses which deal with communica-

tion research.

The Institute sends faculty members abroad for advanced training in communication research. A UNESCO consultant in communication research assists the staff in the research program. This commitment to communication research manifests itself in the quantity and quality of research projects and publications of the Institute.

Such studies are initiated and conducted in the belief that the mass media, if used properly, can contribute to national development, hence the orientation towards:

1. urban development such as the Manila Complex Study, the first report of which is published in the maiden issue of the Philippine Journal of Communications Studies.
2. rural development such as the forthcoming family planning training and research project or the study of the first "green revolution" published in the same journal.
3. institutional development of the mass media such as a recent study known as The Philippine Radio and Television Factbook.

An interesting development in the Institute's research program is the shift from a non-theoretical study to theoretical studies dealing with practical problems in the field. This trend is guided by the premise that practical problems could be studied within a theoretical framework.



-7-

### The Public Service Program

The Institute provides a continuing education program to media practitioners in the community and in the Southeast Asian Region by means of short courses, seminars, conferences, workshops and symposia in addition to press, radio-TV and publication services.

The local program is coordinated by the Institute through various University units and governmental and private agencies. The Asian program is undertaken with the support of UNESCO, UNDP, ECAFE and other international agencies.

### UP Public Affairs Television

The UP PATV (Public Affairs Television) under the supervision of the Institute of Mass Communication began in 1963 with a written agreement between UP President Carlos P. Romulo and the management of the Inter-Island Broadcasting Corporation (IBC). This educational television (ETV) project was envisioned to create interest in the potential of television as an educator's tool -- "a vigorous force in furthering the social, political and economic life of the country." The educational television series was therefore an opportunity "to render greater service to the nation; to explore new possibilities in developing knowledge and understanding of the educational process and to bring the University closer to the people."

Specifically the objectives are:

1. To help develop intelligent public opinion through informational and cultural broadcasts.
2. To provide a continuing education for out-of-school adults;
3. To upgrade the standards of television viewing; and
4. To exploit the potentialities of television as an educating medium.