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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
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The Press System in Malaysia: Some Exploratory Ideas
Of Its Role Within A Functional Context

By

Syed Arabi Idid
THE PRESS SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA: SOME EXPLORATORY IDEAS OF ITS ROLE WITHIN A FUNCTIONAL CONTEXT

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Paper presented at
CONSULTATION ON PRESS SYSTEMS IN ASEAN

August 23-26 1988
Sahid Jaya Hotel
Jakarta Indonesia
THE PRESS SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA: SOME EXPLORATORY IDEAS OF ITS ROLE WITHIN A FUNCTIONAL CONTEXT

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This paper aims to raise several issues relating to the press system in Malaysia. It will initially forward several perspectives of media systems in other parts of the world in an attempt to highlight the peculiar aspects of the Malaysian press system. Discussing the press system per se will not provide the significance of its functions. Therefore, the objectives of this paper are to discuss:

(a) The kind of press system that exists in Malaysia;
(b) The functions that the Malaysian press system provide, and
(c) The problems affecting the press system.

To discuss the Malaysian press system, it is appropriate that we have a look first at what we mean by system(s), and how we have come to apply the concept in studying and analysing the mass media institution.

The study of systems has been much influenced by "systems theory." Krippendorff (1977) points out that there are three systems approaches to mass media, all borrowed from systems theory, namely:

(a) Technological determinism, which assures that communication as a technology has developed laws and life of its own and should be studied as a semi-autonomous organism;

(b) Functional approach, which assumes that all ongoing social processes, including technology, fulfill some vital function of society as a whole; and
(c) system design, which deals with the complexity of the system and its structure.

Various scholars have given their definition on what a system is. For instance Pool (1976) defines a system as any continuing entity capable of two or more states.

The interdependence or the interrelationships of units or elements within a given system has been alluded to by other scholars. Systems as bounded sets of interrelationship between units are most useful as dynamic organisations in constant change (McLeod and Blumler, 1987). Units within the system perform specific functions yet develop interdependence with others. Mutual interdependence means that a change in one unit causes some corresponding change in the other units.

The system maintains an equilibrium state when the units within it mutually adjust themselves toward maintaining some degree of constancy. In this equilibrium state, the units in the system are constantly tending towards a particular steady state.

A social system has been analytically defined as any number of units (of people) who have relatively more interactions with one another than with others (Cohen et al., 1980). Therefore any system may exist as a subsystem in a larger system as the system is determined by the relative number of interactions that take place between or among units.

An analysis of a system indicates that it can be a process formed by the action or reaction of units enjoined within a given boundary. Systems can be viewed either as closed (where over time all causal influences are present) or opened (where new variables exert influence at different times).

Media System or Media Systems?

Scholars have also accepted the notion of a media system but have defined or understood it in varied ways. Some scholars take the position that in any given country, one should contend with two or more separate media systems. Some refer a media system to a particular media organisation (e.g. the New Straits Times, Radio and Television Malaysia), while others would think it as a set of organisations within a medium (print media) or across media (news media), or a
lingkage of media within one common language (Chinese or Malay media system).

The electronic media are often run on similar lines because of their technological similarities. The newspapers, on the other hand, often operate under a different set of principles.

Whatever the definitions of media system or systems, we have to acknowledge that the media system(s) has (have) to operate within a given communication system. A communication system exhibits several characteristics but we can accept a given communication system to differ along six dimensions, viz:

(a) they may differ in the number of objects in the population;
(b) they may differ in the message capacity of these links;
(c) they may differ in the volume of message flow through these links;
(d) they may differ in network structure;
(e) they may differ in type of messages carried; and
(f) they may differ in triggering mechanism.

Within a given communication system, Pool (1973) defines a mass communication system as a lingkage pattern of few transmitters to many receivers. Any media system is capable of the following characteristics:

(a) Messages in a mass communication are packaged together in regularly published vehicles such as newspapers or books.

(b) Message vehicles are not disseminated as random, independent events. Usually there is a pattern of periodical appearances of each medium.

(c) Initial decision by an audience member as whether to expose or not to expose himself is a decision about the medium, not about the message, or even about the individual vehicle.
Mass media systems are inter-related and interdependent. Media systems make contact with an extraordinary variety of external systems. Depending on what position we take, we have to contend with one media system or several media institutions simply based on organisational factors, language or technological matters. Whatever decision we shall make later on this matter, we cannot however, overlook another concern, namely that whatever press system or systems, we have to view it (them) in relationship with other institutions within a bigger societal system.

Even if we accept that of a print press system and an electronic system, yet we cannot see them as being separated. They are always found to be interacting and interdependent. Individually or together they (the two systems) will then interact with other institutions in society.

Is the modern communication system a plural set of media outlets, serving the differential needs of a pluralal society or a set of conformist institutions conveying the ingredients of a socially conservative consensus? To answer this let us take a quick review what past researches have found out.

Previous Studies on Press Systems

Scholars have been fascinated and inquisitive in their attempts to derive some theoretical perspectives in studying media systems. Their main aim is to highlight notable features in order to explain, to understand or to predict particular press systems given the presence of certain variables.

A classic classification of press systems based on political and legal features is given by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) in which the authors discuss four different models: Soviet, Communist, Libertarian, Social-Responsibility and Authoritarian (See Table 1). The typology has been criticised as being inadequate in covering all press systems. The authors also fail to differentiate the styles of press systems even as they occur within a given typology, as for example the differences that exist within various authoritarian regimes. Despite the apparent weaknesses, the typology remains a classic and is debated keenly by scholars.
Table 1

The Siebert-Peterson-Schramm Typology*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Name</th>
<th>Control of Media</th>
<th>Programming Policy</th>
<th>Representative Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soviet-communist</td>
<td>Government, Communist party</td>
<td>Emphasis on transmitting communist doctrine, mobilizing support for government, raising cultural tastes of masses.</td>
<td>Soviet Union, other communist countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libertarian</td>
<td>Nongovernment</td>
<td>Emphasis on freedom from restraints on programming</td>
<td>Anglo-American and other western countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>Organization responsive to public</td>
<td>Emphasis on transmitting public information and discussion of social issues, avoidance of harmful material</td>
<td>Anglo-American countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>Public and private, subordinate to state</td>
<td>No criticism of government; censorship of programming</td>
<td>Early European countries, less developed countries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (Source: Alan Wells, 1979)

Other scholars have tried to come out with more elaborate systems. Hachten (1981) looks at the divergent political philosophies and historical traditions to come out with five political concepts of the press, namely (1) Authoritarian Concept; (2) Western Concept; (3) Communist Concept; (4) Revolutionary Concept and (5) Developmental (or Third World) Concept.
Hachten’s typology differs from Siebert et al’s only in his Revolutionary and Developmental concepts. In the Revolutionary Concept the media are illegal and not controlled by the government. The press exists with the intention to overthrow a government or to wrest control from alien rulers.

The revolutionary press is a press of the people who believe strongly that a government that does not serve their interests should be overthrown (Hachten, 1981: 72). In the Developmental Concept, all the instruments of mass communication are mobilised by the government to achieve nation-building. The media are supportive of authority and must adopt a didactic, even ideological, role of explaining to the people their part in forging a new social order (Hachten, 1981:74).

Other scholars have postulated media systems based on control. In looking at the control of the electronic media, Namurois (1964) provided a typology of (a) State operated (b) Public Corporation (c) Public Interest Partnership and (d) Private Enterprise (See Table 2). He linked the concept of control to the questions of finance, programming, target audience, and audience feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Control of Media</th>
<th>Representative Countries</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>State-operated</td>
<td>Operated by government ministry, department, or administrative agency</td>
<td>Most communist countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public corporation</td>
<td>Operated autonomously under state charter</td>
<td>Britain (BBC, ITA) France, West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public interest partnership</td>
<td>Operated by legally private corporations with state stock interests</td>
<td>Italy, Sweden, Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private enterprise</td>
<td>Operated by private corporations with weak government regulation</td>
<td>United States, Japan’s private stations, Luxembourg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (Source: Alan Wells, 1979)
Not all scholars, however, classify media systems in terms of categories. Some even postulate a linear growth or progression of media system. One scholar posited a bipolar view of a press system beginning from a totalitarian system on one continuum of the scale to a U.S system. Such a system is purely ideological in nature and remains unacceptable among developing societies. Merrill and Lowenstein (1971) talk of elitist media, beginning as mass, then becoming popular and going to specialised audiences. Their classification can be dismissed as events have shown that some media forms like the newspapers continue to have a mass appeal, while magazines develop specialised audiences. Yet newspapers are never supplanted by magazines.

Halloran, (1981) however, sees the system in terms of the medium. He views the system as being elitist, operating vertically and serving only the people in power.

Whatever the differences, in terms of typology or viewed in a continuum, some primary questions are pertinent in discussing press systems such as:

(a) How is the medium controlled?
(b) How is it financed?
(c) What is its purpose?
(d) Whom does it serve?
(e) How does it ascertain the effect it is having?

Malcolm MacClean (1977) suggests that several questions can be asked in studying media systems:  
(a) Who are the key persons in the media institutions?
(b) What is the relationship of the media with other governmental systems; and
(c) What are the general goals, purposes, aims of a media institution as seen by its key members.

What is evident here is that a typology alone is not enough in ascertaining a particular press system. Discussions should go beyond simple classifications to understand how best the system has served the public. Questions of control and purpose are also vital.

It is also evident that there is no hard and fast rule in accepting any of the classifications. Scholars and even professionals have their own ideas of what a press system should be. A broad-based classification of media systems is based on an analysis derived from two levels of analyses.

**Level of Analysis on Media systems**

Studies on media systems have been conducted at two levels. One level of analysis is done at the macro and the other at the micro-level (Al-Usmani, 1984).

Macro-level analyses of media systems use aggregate data from several political entities. Scholars using this level of analysis endeavour to compare the different media systems that are found in various countries. Examples of such works are found in the book edited by Martin and Chaudhary (1983) or by Al-Usmani (1984).

Analyses at the micro-level have investigated the operation of media systems in nation-states. Researchers have attempted to identify the variables that influence the media systems existing in individual countries. Using this approach they have been able to isolate the variables that are more critical than others in determining a particular media system.

These two levels of analyses have enabled scholars and professionals to come out with their own categories or classifications of media systems.

There is, however, another concept that has somewhat crept, consciously or unconsciously, into researches when media systems are analysed, namely on the concept of mass media itself. A different definition has lead researchers to adopt varying positions on media systems.
Characteristics of Mass Media

It would be pertinent at this juncture to discuss what is meant by the concept of mass media. Generally we accept it to mean any mechanism by which messages are packaged and conveyed to the audience instantly. Feedback from audience members to the sender is very much delayed, unlike interpersonal communication where feedback is immediately gauged.

Another characteristic of the mass media is that they provide channels to enable people to relate to other people, as well as facilitating contact between government and people. In Third World countries, governments use to their advantage these channels of communication to reach their citizens.

The mass media also operate in the public domain. They perform a public service. The general public can participate in the mass media operation as audience members, i.e. to be listeners, viewers or receivers, depending on the form of the channels.

The mass media, as an institution, is linked to other institutions in society. It depends for its support from allied institutions for finance, marketing, technology and the government. As an institution, the mass media, is never able to operate independently or be in a vacuum. The political, legal, and security institutions set the limit for its operations. The curbs and restrictions may be open or/and they may be subtly exercised. The credibility and strength of the mass media as an institution go a long way in assisting it to meander its way through along such constraints and restraints.

The mass media institution is also characterised by the presence of paid workers who make the functioning of the mass media possible. Some would regard the reporters and editors as professionals as they owe their bread and butter (nasi lemak, roti canai and teh tarik) by slogging through the dreary hours, to make possible yet another issue or programme. It is obvious that mass media can only operate within an organisation with its bureaucracy, and non-editorial sections (marketing, advertising, security, etc).
THE MALAYSIAN PRESS

History and Media Profile in Malaysia

Given such a picture, let us therefore look at the press situation in Malaysia. Hopefully we will then be able to identify what the system is. First allow me to present a brief history of the Malaysian press and then to provide a profile of the Malaysian mass media.

The first newspaper to be published was the Prince of Wales Island Gazette in 1806. It was then followed by other newspapers in Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

In the following paragraphs, a trend in the growth of the mass media rather than a record of the growth of each media form by chronology would be given. That would be boring and irrelevant to the issue of this paper.

The newspaper that existed during the British Colonial times were printed to cater for the expatriate or the British educated class. The news items were mainly foreign events.

The Chinese and the Tamil newspapers were similar in their alien orientation. The Malay newspapers and newsmagazines raised social and religious issues that were germane to Malay interests. These issues later germinated anti-British sentiments in the country's fight for independence.

On the whole the British took a not-too-caring attitude toward the newspapers after 1958 (Boon Siew Wah, 1986).

All were to change when the Japanese occupied Malaysia. The Japanese assumed control of the newspapers and for the first time in Malaysian history, the newspapers were used to explain and advance government (Japanese) policy.

When the British returned, they learnt what the Japanese had done to the Malaysian media. They set up the Public Relations Office (later to develop into the Ministry of Information) to explain and advance government policy. The government has entered directly into the mass media world.
When radio and television came, the government (radio under the British) placed them under government control as part of its information machinery.

Malaysia is a society of various races, religions, and languages. The Malays and other bumiputras constitute 50 percent of the total population, the remaining being Chinese (32%), the Indian (8%) and other communities (1%).

The linguistic diversity has lead to the growth of different media. The Malays have their own newspapers, so too do the Chinese the Indians, and the Punjabis.

Radio and television programmes have also allocated time to cater for the tastes and demands of Malaysia’s plural communities. News over Radio Malaysia are given in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese (Cantonese, Hokkian, Mandarin), Tamil and various other bumiputra dialects.

There are 35 dailies in Malaysia, 20 of which are published in Mandarin, eight in English and three in Bahasa Malaysia. In terms of sales the combined circulation of Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian (the two biggest Bahasa Malaysia dailies) is about equal to the total circulation of the Chinese newspapers. They surpass the eight English language dailies in terms of sales.

Because of historical reasons, the newspapers are widely distributed in the Malaysian Peninsular or in Sabah or in Sarawak. Only the Berita Harian, Utusan Malaysia, the New Straits Times and the Star have sales distributed nationwide. Among the Chinese language newspapers, the Nanyang Siang Pau, The Sin Chew Jit Poh, the Shin Min Daily News and the Malayan Thung Pau are available nationwide.

Other newspapers are provincial in character. There are about 19 other dailies published in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak.

The Mandarin, Tamil, Malayali and Pubjabi newspapers cater mainly for readers from the same racial groups. The Mandarin newspapers are read by the Chinese, the Tamil and Punjabi dailies by the Indian and Punjabi respectively.

The English language newspapers have a readership that transcends racial groupings. They are however patronised by town residents as the newspapers are mainly urban-oriented.
The Bahasa Malaysia newspapers are slowly attracting a sizeable number of non-Malay readers. The government's education policy of promoting the use of Bahasa Malaysia in schools have produced citizens who are well versed in the national language. It is expected that the circulation of Bahasa Malaysia newspapers will continue to grow at an accelerated pace in the future.

On the whole, (except for the English language newspapers) newspapers carry news items to cater for their readers (who are from the same racial background). A Malaysian Editor-in-Chief, Rejal Arbee, was quoted as saying that the presence of such diverse language papers do not help in forging a united and integrated nation.

The orientation of editors and reporters have influenced them in the selection of news reports. Previously Chinese and Tamil newspapers gave prominence to reporting events in Hong Kong or Taiwan in the Chinese dailies, and about India in the Tamil, Malayali and Punjabi newspapers.

When external events were given less emphasis, the Chinese and Tamil language newspapers continued to give prominence to issues pertinent to racial interests. Events of other racial groups were not given due attention or were only provided space insofar as they affect Chinese and Indian interests.

The establishment of BERNAMA (Malaysian National News Agency) on May 20, 1969, have made a great impact in bringing about an acceptable definition of what is national news. This has brought changes in how the provincial press, and the national press, (in Chinese, Tamil, and also English) view events within a national context.

For the provincial newspapers, especially those in Sabah and Sarawak, the editors can now subscribe to BERNAMA and obtain extensive news coverage of events from all parts of the country. State coverage has given way, in terms of coverage, to national concern. On the other hand newspapers published in the Federal Capital and in Peninsular Malaysia have also been influenced to give coverage to events in Sabah and Sarawak so as to educate their readers of events happening in these two Eastern States. It is hoped that information will kindle interest and bring out greater integration among all the Malaysian states.
Discussion of newspapers should not obscure us to the existence of magazines in the Malaysian market. They are available in all languages, with quality levels that cater for the least educated to the most sophisticated class.

A recent survey among youths found that entertainment magazines were highly prized, followed by education related magazines (Idid, 1988). Women magazines (Wanita, Jelita, Her World) are among the top sellers.

The Education Policy of promoting the use of Bahasa Malaysia in schools have also influenced the growth of Bahasa Malaysia language magazines.

There are more than 250 magazine titles on sale in Malaysian stores, the majority being imported. This reflects the diverse taste of Malaysians. It also indicates a market that is specialised in terms of certain news commodity. Thus what the newspapers as a mass circulation vehicle are not able to offer are compensated for by the magazines.

There are several big organisation in Malaysia that produce and print newspapers and magazines. Among the biggest are the New Straits Times Group, the Utusan Melayu Group, the Star Publications, and the Karangcraft Group.

The New Straits Times Group publishes the daily The New Straits Times, the Malay Mail, Berita Harian, and the Sunday editions of New Sunday Times. Sunday Mail and Berita Minggu. Besides that, its allied group, Berita Publishing publishes Jelita, Her World and Malaysian Digest. The Utusan Melayu Group publishes the daily Utusan Malaysia, and Utusan Melayu and the Sunday editions of Mingguan Malaysia and Utusan Melayu. The group also publishes such magazines as Utusan Kiblat, Utusan Pelajar, Mastika and Wanita. The Star Publications publishes the daily Star and magazines such as Shanghai and Kuntum.

The video industry is fast booming. In 1986, 1611 video licences were issued. Video programmes that are popular among Malaysians are imported, namely from Hong Kong and Taiwan (mainly Kung Fu), U.S.A., India and Indonesia.
The film industry is making attempts to make a comeback. Cinema halls have dropped to 200. Attendance figures have dropped from one million in 1984 to 300,000 in 1987. The indigenous film industry is more in the doldrums compared to the imported films from Hong Kong, Taiwan, India and the United States.

Forms of Constraint

No media forms can exist independently on their own. The degree of freedom is therefore relative. Different societies exert constraint and control in numerous ways, some being subtle, others directly.

Legal Constraint

There are ample provisions in the Federal Constitution that guarantees freedom of expression but subject "to the extent to which ordinary laws are passed restricting them" (Mohamad Ariff Yusof, 1987:2). Examples of such laws are the Printing Presses and Publications Act, 1984, the Sedition Act, 1984, the Official Secrets Act, 1972, and the Internal Security Act, 1960.


A media operator needs to apply for a new publishing permit every year. There are other provisions that require compliance with the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, during the time the media are in operation (e.g. untrue reports with malicious intent are an offence, etc.).

PPAPA is designed "to regulate the use of printing presses and the printing, importation, production, reproduction, publishing and distribution of publications and for matters connected therewith."
Despite the existence of these laws the press in Malaysia is able to operate in fulfilling its objectives. The Chief Justice of Malaysia, Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Omar was quoted by Rejal Arbee to have said that in Malaysia, the press enjoys a very substantial degree of freedom nevertheless subject to certain restrictions and restraints by way of legislative imposition.

Extra Legal Constraints

The sensitivities of communities in a plural society are also factors that have an inhibiting effect on media operations. Jaafar Kamin and Lowe (1984) indicate the numerous pressures RTM have to contend with in selecting programmes so as to please as wide an audience as possible.

The mass media have to weigh and consider the various implications of raising issues that might affect the stability and well-being of the nation. The Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in his address to the World Press Convention in Kuala Lumpur in September 1985 said that while the press has the right to inform, monitor and advocate human rights issues, it also has the responsibility to ensure the continued stability of the nations, given the ethnic situation (Rejal Arbee, 1988).

Cost is another constraining factor. Small newspapers find the costs of printing, electricity, salaries as prohibitive. BERNAMA itself found that the introduction of new technologies need not necessarily mean a reduction per cost in unit of (item) output, albeit in the given period of time.

Malaysian Press System

The press forms that exist in Malaysia can be described in several dimensions. It is not prudent to say that Malaysia has one press system. The country has several press systems.

If we take technological variables, then the country has the electronic media and the print media systems. Radio, television, video, films and the new electronic newspapers can be included as electronic media. The print media
system will include newspapers magazines and books.

A Malaysian press system cannot be viewed within a continuum from an authoritarian to a Western model. In this instance the Western model serves as an ideology that has to be achieved, which can be contrary to what Asian journalists and scholars have agreed. They have suggested that the nation's press system should reflect the national character, culture, traditions and laws (AMCB, 1988).

The other dimensions is to categorise them in terms of ownership, either being directly government controlled or in private ownership. In Malaysia, radio and television Malaysia are controlled directly by the government through the Ministry of Information. The other television channel, TV3, is private owned. BERNAMA was set up by an Act of Parliament. The print media are in private hands.

Privately-owned can also be further categorised into party-affiliated control and non-party-affiliated control. Thus Utusan Melayu Sendirian Berhad is affiliated closely to UMNO, Malaysia's largest political party. STAR, the English daily, is owned by the Malaysian Chinese Association through Huaren interests. Tamil newspapers like Tamil Osai and Tamil Thinamani, are controlled by active politicians. The Fleet Communication Group which has interest in TV3 and the New Straits Times are reported to be closely associated with UMNO. In Sarawak, the Sarawak Tribune is controlled by an active veteran politician, and in Sabah, The Sabah Times is controlled by the BERJAYA party and Daily Express by PBB.

The opposition party Pan Islamic Party, publishes a weekly newspaper called the Harakath while the Democratic Action Party comes out with a weekly newspaper called the Rocket.

WATAN, a newspaper that is published three times, a week, is owned by a publishing company Karangcraft that is not affiliated to any political party.

If we take the Namurois Typology in terms of control we are going to get the following:
## Control of Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Representatives Media</th>
<th>Operations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government-owned ministry</td>
<td>RTM</td>
<td>Operated by Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory organisation</td>
<td>BERNAMA</td>
<td>Operated under Act of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party owned</td>
<td>Harakah, Rocket</td>
<td>Operated by Political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interests and Private Interests</td>
<td>TV3, newspapers, magazine</td>
<td>Operated legally by private corporations with interest from politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Enterprise</td>
<td>WATAN, some newspapers and magazines</td>
<td>Operated by private corporations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Namurois obtains his typology by viewing media systems on a state-by-state basis. The case in Malaysia indicates that the typology is applicable within a given country, given some modifications.

If we take Siebert et al and Hachten's typologies, the media system as they exist in Malaysia can also be slotted in one of the models. Thus under the Siebert et al's four models, Malaysia's press system can be included as falling within the "Social Responsibility Concept" (Umithevi Nathan, 1986). Under Hachten's typology, the Malaysian press system fits well with the Developmental (Third World) that plays an important role in forging national unity.

Another dimension is to view the press in terms of media origins. By law all the media printed in Malaysia must be owned by Malaysians. Yet there are magazines and newspaper that are imported. Examples of magazines are the news magazines (Asiaweek, Far Eastern Economic Review, Time), Sports Magazines (Golf), Women magazines, literary magazines, etc. Foreign imported newspapers include the New York Times, USA Today, LaMonde. Videos and films are mainly imported because the local video and film industry is still at the sunrise stage.
The Malaysian press system can be classified as "imported" and "indigenous". A closer look however indicates a more positive social system because the press system is open. The system allows a free entry of ideas and outlook from abroad and allows external transmission of news to the outside world. The Malaysian press is therefore linked with other press systems. It is therefore part of the international media system.

Having discussed the press system in Malaysia, let us now turn to the functions that the press system provides.

**MEDIA FUNCTIONS**

All in all, one can also accept the notion that the mass media as an institution fulfill certain roles and functions in society. If this is not true, the mass media would have ceased to exist several decades ago. The types of functions provided by the media change according to changes brought about by technology and also by habits and tastes of the audience. For example, at one time radio was a major source of entertainment but another form of technology, television, replaced this function. Yet radio continues to be popular among the teenagers for music programmes. Another example is the rise of video usage, that now forces cinema and television to respond in an appropriate manner in light of what radio had done when meeting the challenge posed to it by TV.

Forms or characteristics of mass media would not help us to understand what types of press systems we have. The technology and the organisation that stand behind the mass media are only symptoms of a greater iceberg tip in understanding the press system and its antecedent roles and functions.

We would have to fall on previous research to help us understand things better, perhaps we would start by looking at two perspectives, one a functional perspective and the other a critical perspective to provide us with two insights. The functional perspective investigates the various needs met by and provided for by the institutions and audience members while the critical perspective views the relationship of the media institutions within the bigger context of social system, relative to other institutions.
Press System from the Functional Perspective

One approach by which media systems and media operations have been studied is from the functional perspective.

Functionalists or those who positively subscribe to this approach, have been described as "primarily concerned with maintaining a stable, integrated and harmonious social equilibrium (Hield, 1954). Functionalism is commonly said to "relate the parts of society to the whole and to relate one part to another " (Davis, 1959).

Critics of functionalism point out it is "unscientific" and that consensus on the definition does not exist (Davis, 1959).

Proponents of functionalism have pointed out to weaknesses in several other theories and approaches, yet it has been extensively used and investigated. One should therefore accept a functional approach insofar as it enables an explanation of events.

The functioning of press operations have been used by several scholars (Merton, 1957, DeFleur, 1970).

A functional analysis focuses upon some specific phenomena occurring within a given social system. It then attempts to shed how this phenomenon has consequences that contribute to the stability and permanency of the system as a whole.

Media are seen as social systems operating within a specific external system (DeFleur, 1970). As a social system, the media system is a complex of stable, repetitive and patterned action that is in part a manifestation of the culture shared by the actors.

Functional Analysis of Mass Media Functions

The underlying premise of functional analysis is that mass media exist to meet certain needs or requirements among members in society. Senders or receivers of
of media messages have a purpose or intention to transmit or receive messages. They derive certain gratifications from such transactions.

Functionalism as an underlying theoretical thrust is popular among Sociologists and Anthropologists and Political Scientists, although admittedly, like other forms of theory, it has its merits and demerits. We will not dwell with the strengths and weaknesses of functional analysis, but suffice it, at this moment, for us to recall the works done by communication scholars that have used this theoretical perspective to enlighten us on mass media functions.

When we categorise the actors that fulfill media functions, we come to view them from two perspectives; one from the perspective of the institution (sender), and the other from the perspective of the audience (receiver).

Institutional Perspective

This perspective assumes the perceptive functions that are performed by the media system(s). We consider the functions as perceived because studies have yet to be conclusive of the actual functions media are said to serve. The functions are summed up rather neatly by Lasswell (1948) in his statement of "who says what, in which channel, to whom with what effect."

Lasswell provides three perceived functions served by the mass media, as follows:

(a) Surveillance of the environment (information)

(b) Correlation of parts in society (for integration); and

(c) Transmission of the cultural heritage (for social continuity).

Media are said to be functional in society by providing information, by uniting the diverse communities, and finally by passing on cultural values from one generation to another.
Wright (1964) adds another perceived function afforded by the media, namely entertainment. Media are said to entertain the general public.

McQuail (1983) forwarded another function served by the mass media, namely to act as a social mobiliser. In this aspect, the mass media are said to campaign for societal objectives in several spheres (in politics, war, economic development, religion).

Some scholars have distinguished the role performed by media practitioners while others (McQuail, 1983) maintain that generally they do similar functions. The practitioners act in consonance with the institutional objectives as enunciated by Lasswell, Wright and McQuail.

There are those who have at one time or another advanced various functions that the press should perform. We would analyse some of these statements and see whether we could slot them into the five categories of functions that we had alluded to.

Information/Surveillance

In many developing countries mass media have been advocated to widen the mental horizon of the citizens by bringing into society beneficial information.

Information in this context refers to the building up of a climate of modernization among the people (Pool, 1973) as for example by introducing new techniques and new ideas. The information function can be elaborated as follows:

* the learning function: by indicating alternative and better ways of doing things, or by learning the (newspaper) language.

* political participation: when people are informed, they can weigh and consider the options when exercising their rights of voting (Lerner, 1958).

* relating with other people: with information readers are able to relate to other people. They may be able to empathise with the grieved ones (victims of accidents) or share in the glory of the victors.
relating with other countries: audience members receive news from other countries and likewise Malaysia also transmit news about herself (through BERNAMA and other news agencies) to other countries.

Integrative Functions

Deutsch (1966) was one of the early scholars to discuss the importance of communication in national integration. This integrative function of mass media is given high priority by leaders of Third World countries, especially after the advent of independence. The need to build a viable nation from diverse ethnic groups was a paramount national objective.

In Malaysia, this integrative function becomes the more important when race relations during the achievement of independence was a very fragile and sensitive issue. The editors have been very co-operative in not unduly highlighting issues that would hurt the sensibilities and sensitiveness of other races. This would be at the expense of national unity.

Editors could easily sell their newspapers by championing on sectoral or racial interest. Sentiments could easily be fanned, and readers would flock to buy the newspapers. Yet by and by editors have taken it upon themselves to blunt racial issues in favour of national integration.

This, however, does not mean that editors are not responsible to their readers. Where editors of sectoral media feel that their rights within the national context are threatened, they have taken up the issue seriously.

Transmission of Cultural Values

There are two aspects in this function. One is the building up or the introduction of suitable cultural values. One also takes the definition of "cultural values" to mean a broader issue than just music, dance-forms and the likes. "Cultural values" can also refer to the introduction and sustainence of cultural commitment to excellence (corporate culture), of social and industrial discipline
(in line with the quest of the country to develop itself industrially) and to advance with new ideas and attitudes.

The second aspect is the handing down of appropriate cultural values to future generations.

Entertainment Function

Some forms of the mass media perform this function. In the print media, comic-strips and light news are entertainment items. Entertainment forms have specialised channels, namely movies, videos and also, somewhat, television and radio forms.

The local entertainment programmes over RTM are, however, portrayed with a given objective, namely to promote national culture.

Mobiliser

Papers have at one time or another participated in mobilising the readers towards a certain course of action. To collect fund for a needy cause is one example.

In Malaysia, the mass media have voluntarily participated among others in the following campaigns:

(a) to achieve independence;
(b) national unity;
(c) Bahasa Malaysia;
(d) cleanliness programmes;
(e) Tourism or to sell Malaysia abroad; and
(f) National culture
The objectives of these campaigns are in line with the country's need for national integration.

Philosophy

Often enough we have heard scholars and professionals asserting that the press system in Asia is different from the Western system. The question is: what is the difference?

We have adopted Western technology but it is never been at the expense of Eastern values. When the printing press was introduced in Malaysia, the Malay press began to use it.

Several news organisations now are very current in adopting the technology to print their newspapers or to transmit news. BERNAMA uses a computerised system to ferry news from the branch office to headquarters.

In terms of news writing, the style adopted is Western in nature. Cadet reporters (and even journalist students in tertiary education) are taught the techniques of writing the Associated Press or Reuters style.

Despite all the technological forms and style, the news content and presentation are not wholly dictated by western values. Veteran Malaysia journalists have been guardians in coaching young reporters to report in the context of Malaysia values.

The problem inherent in yesteryears resurfaces yearly in the Malaysian press. Readers are not satisfied with the coverage of certain issues, with the emphasis given to particular personalities. Newspersons are criticised for not being "objective". Opposition parties are never happy because the newspapers give them limited coverage, and alleged that government and party leaders are highlighted even on trivial matters. Government members also express disappointment because they are never given the coverage that are due to them. The complaints go on endlessly.

News presentation is never accepted in standard form in any country. The concept of news differs from country to country. Merrill (1983) points out that in
Communist countries, newspapers highlight party leaders over events. In other Third World countries newspapers are likely to portray unity and stability.

In a plural society in a developing country like Malaysia, not all Malaysians accept the role of the mass media. Some Malaysians would prefer the mass media to play a different role. Entertainment programmes on television are not acceptable in toto. Some have accused the Ministry of Information of promoting yellow culture or decadence when certain programmes are shown over television. The Ministry of Information, however, is of the opinion that the television can be used to bring about a Malaysian cultural identity. Such controversies will go on as long as different perceptions continue to exist between different sections of the population and the government authorities.

Audience Perspective

Uses and Gratifications Perspective

This perspective takes the standpoint of audience members who perceive several functions that media are useful to them. This is a shift from a sender to a receiver perspective.

Research utilising the uses and gratifications perspective has uncovered several dimensions of functions fulfilled by the media. The uses and gratifications perspective provides a model for analyzing audience media orientation. The uses and gratification model states that people have needs, which are in part, gratified by the media. It assumes an active audience that is able to choose the right medium, select the proper programmes and interpret them to meet his purpose.

Empirical findings from gratification studies have suggested several functions that media or content serve audience members. Generally three approaches have been used in identifying them. One approach looks at the functions served by the media, another at specific programmes and a third at gratifications from programme types.
The uses and gratifications approach has widened the functions that made are said to provide. Numerous studies using the approach have come out with several functions that audience members have derived from the mass media or content. After a thorough literature review, Levy (1978, 1977) and Becker (1976) have suggested that three types of motivations would be inherent in the gratifications that people seek in attending to the mass media, namely surveillance, communicating utility and avoidance.

In an analysis of a media system one should investigate the relationship between the institution and the audience in terms of the functions provided or derived. Questions uppermost to be posed would be whether the two "actors" perceive that they provide or derive similar functions from the media activities generated. Do audience members obtain the information that they require if the institutional actors say they have dished out information to their listeners (viewers/readers)? Are audience members entertained by the programmes provided for by the institutional actors?

Of course one would not expect a perfect match between what the institutions can provide and what audience members want. In fact one of the criticisms levied against the uses and gratifications approach is that audience members can only indicate their perceived needs of existing or derived programmes and not those that had not been provided for. Therefore in a system where certain issues are not given, audience members would not be able to know whether their needs have been met or not.

Another criticism of the uses and gratification approach is to view the media institution and audience members in isolation from other institutions in society. The approach determines the functions of the media system per se without the involvement or interactions with the other institutions as for example the political, legal or financial institutions.
Critical Theory

If functional analysis assumes a cordial relationship of the media system with other institutions in order to maintain an equilibrium system, the critical communications perspective seeks to examine the relationship among the media and communications systems with social power.

The critical perspective focuses on the production of media content and institution in the context of examining how the media develop a specific ideology supportive of the power that be. Critical researchers focus on the production and content of media messages and raise issues about the relations between media and society. The objective is to account for the manifest and latent meanings. Media content injected into the audience is assumed to be "the result of an ideological effect, namely the shaping of individual consciousness in accordance with the ideological properties inherent in the text" (Schroder, 1987:16).

Like functional analysis, the critical analysis is not free from weakness. It is seen to be too literary in its approach, and is not concerned with measuring media effects. If ever media effects are dealt with at all they are subsumed under the general heading of ideology and hegemony (Fejes, 1984). Media are said to have an impact on the audience by maintaining and creating a hegemonic order since the analysis is placed at a structural level, it is not placed operationally in terms of discrete variables open to ordinal or higher levels of measurement (Fejes, 1984).

One form of research is to investigate the relationship of media institutions and the political institutions. One premise is to view mass media as subordinate to the power holders, whose interests and ideologies are systematically reinforced.

Others assume the adversarial role of the press against the powers that be. Under this premise the media are power bastions on their own right, powerful enough from the institutions it bargains with other institutions to come to terms. Eventually however, the political and social institutions predominate over the media institutions.
Summary and Discussions

We need to use several approaches to understand the characteristics of the press system, the functions that the press system(s) provide(s), the functions that audience derive form the press system(s), and the relationship the press system has with other institutions in society.

There are too many variables involved in determining what categories we can make of the press systems in the world. If some scholars have labelled press systems with particular categories there are other press systems that have not been drawn in closely in any of these categories. In fact a country may have several press systems existing within its political structure.

Despite the numerous press systems available, and labels given the functions that media institutions provide and what the audience obtain from the media to meet their needs should also be considered.

The relationship of media institutions and other institutions in society is considered imperative for deeper investigation. The relationship of the institution with the political and legal institutions merit special considerations as previous studies on the relationship of these three institutions have led scholars to postulate the existence of different press systems.

The press system interacts with the other institutions in society. The Malaysian press system also interacts actively with the international press system. With the developed country's international press system, the flow is uneven and at most times negative against Malaysia's favour. The Malaysian press system can act in concert with the ASEAN and other regional press systems to rectify this imbalance. It is part of the effort to restructure the inequitable flow of international communication between developed and developing nations.

The paper has indicated the applicability of several typologies of the Malaysian press system based on the factors of language, technology and media origins. The Malaysian press system can also be included in one of the models with the Siebert et al's typology (Socially Responsible), or within Hachten's typology (Developmental Concept). This paper has also indicated another typology to reflect the peculiarity of the Malaysian press system, rather than slotting the
current system within any of the categories given by Hachten or Siebert et al.

The Malaysian press system (like other press systems in other parts of the world) is influenced by several variables, notably by government policies and actions. The present press system is different if compared to the system that existed several decades ago. At that time BERNAMA did not exist and hence there was no category given for "statutory body." The press system will continue to change, albeit not radically, in the years to come.

Several institutions inevitably shape the Malaysian press system, namely the government (legal, political) the people and the market forces (the sponsors or advertisers).

Government policies are crucial in determining the form of the Malaysian press system. Examples would be the setting up of BERNAMA as a statutory body or allowing private individuals or organisations or political parties to own or to publish newspapers, magazines or to participate in operating the electronic media.

The present context of the government’s privitisation policy has lead to the establishment of TV3 by non-government interests. Even now some programmes on RTM are privitised. Attempts are being made to turn BERNAMA into a privately-owned company and there are also talks to allow individuals or companies to operate radio stations. All in all if the privitisation policy bears fruit, the Malaysian press system will see a larger category of mass media organisations being run privately.

With privitisation comes influence of sponsors and advertisers as companies and individuals need the revenue to sustain their media operations. It would be interesting to study how far the sponsors and advertisers will shape the tastes and habits of the Malaysian audience. Competition in one sense will bring out the best in oneself. An example given was the changing role of radio when television was introduced. Movies and even television face a similar challenge from videos. Datuk Dr. Mohd. Nor Ghani calls this a competitive system within the electronic media system. The individual medium competes to provide the best for its audience.
In the final analysis, the mass media must be seen to function for the audience (listeners, readers and viewers). The audience members must be active enough to be discerning in their choice of programmes, critical enough to evaluate the programmes and issues presented and be forceful enough to demand quality.

The press system within a bigger social system is active. It interacts with other systems as much as other systems consider it imperative to do likewise. The press is said to be the conscience of society. It must extol the virtues of its integrative functions, its functions of surveillance and cultural transmission for the betterment of society. It cannot remain subservient to the dictates of undue interference that would debase its purpose and function. The press system owes that to itself and to the society as a whole.

1. Interview with Datuk Dr. Mohd. Nor Ghani, Secretary-General Ministry of Information in August, 1988.
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