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Nurturing Community Service News Values
As The Core Of Asian-Centred Journalism

By

Eric Loo
Nurturing community service news values as the core of Asian-centred journalism

Abstract:
This paper attempts to assimilate into mainstream journalism education an alternative conception of news as a communication tool in facilitating community development in the Asian setting. It adopts a relativistic position that there are mutually dependent conceptual components in the Asian and Western journalistic traditions which educators can exploit in their teaching. The key issues are: Is there an identifiable operational component in the Asian-centred journalism alluded to by Asian leaders? What are the dimensions of Asian and Western journalistic traditions that both professional cultures can use constructively? What approaches can Asian journalism educators explore to operationalise the concept of an Asian-centred journalism? This paper concludes with a few pedagogical strategies to facilitate the teaching of community service oriented reporting as one of the pragmatic avenues towards an identifiable genre of Asian-centred journalism.

Conference Paper By:

ERIC LOO
Senior Lecturer
Graduate School of Journalism
University of Wollongong
NSW 2522, Australia

E-mail:
e.loo@uow.edu.au

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"Why can’t you tell the truth for once? Why do you care about our elections? It is none of your business. You never tell the truth. You come here to record this, then you go and tell lies. You know I have never had any good recording from you, you are going to twist it."
- Dr Mahathir, telling off an ABC reporter in Kedah when he was asked if Malaysia was a one-party State.
(ABC news, 7.00pm, April 23, 1995)

"The ABC always has and will continue to report the facts .... it is a regrettable outburst but not that surprising. Perhaps Dr Mahathir has trouble grasping the idea that the ABC is an independent organisation and not an arm of the Government."
- Max Uechtritz, ABC acting network editor, reacting to Dr Mahathir’s statement.
(The Australian, 24 April 1995, p.3)

Introduction
Dr Mahathir’s outburst at “Australians to keep out” of Malaysian politics and challenge to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to “tell the truth without twisting facts about Malaysia” is one of a series of periodic standoffs between Malaysia and Australia which go as far back as 1975 when then Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, while on an official visit to Canberra, was harassed by student demonstrators protesting the detention of Malaysian political activists. Other media frictions stem from Bob Hawke’s labelling of Malaysian laws as “barbaric” after the hanging of two Australians in Penang for drug trafficking in 1986; the ABC television series, Embassy (1991) and movie, Turtle Beach (1992), both of which were alleged to have grossly misrepresented Malaysian social-cultural systems; and the media run on the child custody dispute in November 1992 between Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah, a nephew of the Sultan of Terengganu, and Jacqueline Gillespie, an Australian freelance television journalist from Melbourne.

Australian media focus on Malaysia was sustained by the Malaysian Film and Censorship Board’s ban on the movie, Schindler’s List on March 23, 1994 for its allegedly pro-Jewish sentiment. Events which further stereotype Dr Mahathir’s government as anti-Western and a law upon itself was Malaysia’s downgrading of commercial relations with Australia and its adoption of a buy-Australia-last campaign in retaliation to Keating’s ‘recalcitrant’ remark from Nov 24 to Dec 12, 1993. Second was Malaysia’s boycott of British goods and companies on Feb 25, 1994 following British media claims of corruption in Anglo-Malaysian trade in Dr Mahathir’s administration. Third, was Dr Mahathir’s plan for an East Asian Economic Caucus, a regional trade group of Asian nations only, excluding Australia and New
Zealand. (The Australian, 4 July 1995). Fifth, was the ASEAN ministers meeting in Brunei early August where Malaysia was the only country which objected to Australia’s and New Zealand’s participation at next year’s ASEAN-European summit in Bangkok.

The continual media spats between Malaysia and Australia in retrospect reflect the NWIO rhetoric of the early 1970s where Western news agencies were accused of being ritually negative and conflict driven in their coverage of Third World issues. "Responsible reporting" was defined from two culturally absolutistic frames. Third World leaders framed it in terms of appropriate positive media contents. Western news agencies framed it on the basis of "Kantian obligationism" (Merrill, 1974, p.5) with its emphases on duty, self-esteem, rationalism and self-motivation. Premised in the NWIO debates and Dr Mahathir’s rationale that Western journalistic standards and news values are never, nor should they be, seen to be universal but instead should be tailored to work in different cultural and political systems. Intrinsic in this argument is the issue of journalism training and education in Third World countries.

Though a bit dated, according to Adhikarya’s survey of transnational knowledge utilisation process in communication studies (1980), about 60 percent of communication scholars in the ASEAN region were US-trained. Being US-trained himself, he said more than 75 percent felt they had been strongly influenced by US communication scholars, for example Schramm, Rogers, Lerner and Berlo, and relied heavily on US communication models, theories and concepts for their communication teaching and research activities. In other words, Asian journalist is brought up in what might be broadly called a Western and in that sense a non-Asian educational and cultural stream. (Chopra, 1981). At present, a very high percentage of university graduates in journalism in the ASEAN region had studied in the West. Those who have not have probably would have used textbooks written by scholars and journalists from the West. Available mass communication and journalism texts in the national language used by Malaysian students at for instance, the National University of Malaysia (UKM) and Mara Institute of Technology (ITM) are mainly translated in toto from American books by local academics who had graduated from American universities.

In reacting to Third World criticisms of Western news values, Merrill (as cited in Lent, 1979) observed that Third World journalism would only take on their own characteristics when Third World nations intensify their own development journalism and communication schools, departments and institutes and stop sending streams of students to American universities for their education. Although a sizeable portion of Third World students do remain in the United States and other Western countries after they have received their degrees in communication or journalism, there are many who return to their countries to teach or work in the mass media. Perhaps these returnees to the Third World will be creative or insightful enough to write textbooks and develop university programs which will help allay much of the present criticisms of the West for imposing Western values on the communication system of the developing nations.
This paper recognises that the inherent characteristics of news (e.g., immediacy, unusualness, social significance, human interest) and the Western conceptions of news from a commercial laissez-faire paradigm and middle-class liberalism (Cohen and Young, 1973; Tuchman, 1978) are certainly shared by many Asian journalists. It also recognises that this dominant paradigm is, from the perspective of Dr Mahathir for instance, inadequate in covering social economic, cultural and political issues in an Asian setting. It attempts to stretch this dominant paradigm and assimilate an alternative conception of news as a communication tool in facilitating community development. It adopts a relativistic position that there are mutually dependent conceptual and pragmatic components of Western and Asian journalistic traditions that Asian journalism educators need to recognise in their teaching. The related questions thus explored in this paper are: Is there an identifiable operational component in an Asian-centred journalism alluded to by Asian leaders? What are the relative dimensions in Western or Asian journalistic traditions that both professional cultures can use constructively? What pedagogical approaches can Asian journalism educators take to operationalise the concept of an Asian-centred journalism? This paper concludes with a few pedagogical perspectives to facilitate the teaching of community service oriented reporting as one of the pragmatic avenues towards an identifiable dimension of an Asian-centred journalism.

An Asian-Centred Perspective of Journalism?

Speaking to journalists at the World Press Conference in Kuala Lumpur on Sept. 18, 1985 Dr Mahathir clarified the region's conceptual position on the functions of the press one of which was that the media need to educate society and itself be educated with the rest of society. In delineating the responsibility and prerogatives of the press, he said:

"So long as the Press is conscious of itself being a potential threat to democracy and conscientiously limits the exercise of its rights, it should be allowed to function without interference. But when the press obviously abuses its rights, then democratic governments have a duty to put it right. Just as it is right in saying that a government has no monopoly on constructiveness and wisdom, the media must recognise that it too has no monopoly on constructiveness and wisdom. Just as the public servant must be prepared to accept criticism, so too must the media be prepared to accept criticism. Just as government is not above the law, the media too is not above the law. It simply will not do if a public is subject to the laws on state secrets but in the name of freedom others are not. Just as the media is not to be made subservient to the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, in the same way and to the same extent the executive, the legislature and the judiciary are not to be made subservient to the media. Just as the government cannot be allowed to have the freedom to do exactly as it pleases in society, so too the media cannot be allowed to do exactly as it pleases in society." (Far Eastern Economic Review, 10 October 1985).

Dr Mahathir's linear logic questions the libertarian model where the press has cast upon itself the 'watchdog' role of an adversary to governments on the theoretical assumption that all governments are
necessarily corrupt and therefore must be kept in check. This adversarial role, by Dr Mahathir's rationale and that of many Third World leaders, can only lead the press to naturally focus their resources on unearthing negative news and contentious issues while developmental activities and achievements are consequently overlooked. The intrinsic questions raised are: why should the press always see negative news of government activities as 'investigative scoops' and positive news as 'government mouthpiece'? Is this contentious journalistic operational framework the most effective mode to gather the news and inform the people? Why should the press feel it must be an adversary to government all the time? Why not just as well be a friend and work together for the common good?

These questions hark back to the ambiguous partnership-in-development journalistic genre in 1963 when journalists Juan Mercado and Alan Chalkley floated the idea of "development journalism" which was vaguely defined then as a form of journalism that deals with the process of development in developing countries. Other Asian scholars specifically from India (Chanchal Sarkar, Amithaba Chowdury, Pran Chopra, Narinder Aggarwala, et al.); the Philippines (Nora Quebral, Cesar Mercado, Gloria Feliciano, Victor Valbuena, Juan Jamias, Crispin Maslog, et al) and Indonesia (Mochtar Lubis, Jacob Octama, Edward Sinaga, Abdul Razak, et al.) have contended that alternative conceptions of news are necessary to reporting in an Asian setting. This contention mirrored parallel attempts by Asian communication scholars in formulating an Asian perspective of communication theory in the early 80s.

Reflecting on the need to develop culturally-appropriate communication models, Dissanayake (1986:6) said Asian communication scholars must replace the 'Aristotelian model', which admittedly, serves the West but does not fit in with the cultural characteristics of Asian societies. However, Chu (1986:5) cautioned that "... a total rejection of the Western perspective is unnecessary. Asian scholars can elicit what is useful from the West and incorporate it such that the Asian perspective becomes relevant and addresses the important communication issues of Asian nations." Yap (1994:70) in his conceptual paper on an Asianised media concluded "... it is pertinent that in pursuing the Asian-centred perspective, the Asian media avoids entering into an antagonistic relationship with the West and its media industries as it will only sabotage the region's bid to ensure a fairer representation."

Casting aside the narrow dichotomistic views of Asian and Western journalistic practice, both professional cultures for a fact do share the inherent characteristics of what makes news. Human curiosity and demand for 'news' and information transcends culture and politics. Where Asian and Western journalism do diverge is the journalists' individual perception of their social, economic, political and cultural role in the society they are reporting for. This departure can be gleaned from the journalistic operational values of Western and Asian journalism. Western journalists will commonly articulate their operational values in terms of: We report the news as it's happening; we don't take sides, a good story - that's all that matters; we're
independent; we let the facts speak for themselves; and we know what interests our audience. While not disputing the market-oriented, altruistic democratic values of Western journalism, Asian journalists have also imbued the value of using the press as a catalyst of education, economic growth and national development - a value not necessarily shared by journalists trained in the Western libertarian tradition.

As Lee Hsien Loong, Deputy Minister of Singapore, said in a speech to the Singapore Press Club in February 1988: "You must educate Singaporeans - not just with facts, but also in terms of national education and values. One way or another, the press moulds the perceptions of Singaporeans. It should do so constructively - both supporting national campaigns and also day to day, in the way the news is presented, analysed, emphasised". (Birch 1993:20).

Likewise, Lee Kuan Yew, after winning a libel case (together with Lee Hsien Loong and the Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong) against the *International Herald Tribune* in early August said that press freedom in the Western tradition was not only unwelcome but were also responsible for the decline of Western countries, namely the United States. "I have explained to American correspondents that perhaps one of the problems that America faces, one of the problems that political leaders in America face is that their credibility is destroyed by scurrilous (media) allegations, which do not have to be proved ... I say we do not subscribe to that system," he said. (*Time Magazine*, 7 August 1995, p.43).

The contentious nature of Western journalism was similarly rejected in March 1994 by 100 Malaysian journalists when they reacted to British media criticisms of the docility of Malaysian press in their coverage of alleged government corruption. They declared that they "make no apology for being supportive of the government elected by the people - a position we have adopted at our own free will". They said the Malaysian media had fully supported Dr Mahathir's decision to refuse government contracts to British companies "so long as this campaign of slander and falsehood against our leaders continues." (AFP/Bernama wire copy, 23 March 1994).

In contrast to the Western approach to reporting, Indonesian editors likewise generally believe in the effectiveness of an indirect and allusive style of criticism rather than in the confrontational streak. A senior Indonesian editor once remarked that Indonesian journalists differ from Western journalists in that the former knows when to throw its punches and when to pull them back. This throw and pull momentum gives rise to a unique Indonesian approach to reporting and writing in between the lines. Journalists depend on the readers ability to read beyond the text. Since the press is ambiguously regarded to be "partners" in national development, it is assumed that journalists do not only report and interpret the facts but also to promote them to the readers and help the government open the public's eyes to possible solutions of problems facing the country - an antithesis to the Western tradition of dispassionate reporting.
Against this background, a working definition of an Asian-centred journalism can start at its variance from Western liberal tradition - that is, the former is guardedly contentious, constructively adversarial and critically supportive. In simple terms, Asian-centred journalism is qualified to be more constructive, consensual and development-oriented. These descriptors are derived from political rhetoric directed at the media on the importance of promoting national consciousness in a multiracial society and the need to "always recognise the cultural context within which ASEAN societies develop, with a view of utilising the culture both as background for understanding, and as a base for change". (AMCB, 1988:9). The functions explicitly delineated for the press in the ASEAN region are: a) to support efforts at nation-building and to be a partner in national development; b) to help mould a national identity; c) to help explain public issues and policies to facilitate their implementation; d) to inform and educate; e) to exercise self-restraint and good sense so as not to cause misunderstanding/tension between different ethnic, racial and religious groups (ACMB, 1988:9).

The collective articulation of the press as a tool of national development is accepted as a media reality by both the industry and academy. Abdul Razak (1985) observes in his study that the three main tasks of the Malaysian media as reflected in the NUJ code of ethics, which embraces the essence of the Rukunegara, are to: promote unity among the people in a multiracial society; to mobilize them for the development process; and to promote and ensure the survival of the Malaysian parliamentary democratic system.

Likewise, the core of mainstream Indonesian journalistic practice stems from the essence of the Pancasila which commits the nation to "a belief in God, just and civilised humanity, a united Indonesia, democracy and social justice". (Sinaga, 1988) The essence of the Pancasila press is that a free and responsible press apart from disseminating truthful and objective information is to channel the people's aspirations towards "national goals" through "constructive social control". (Sinaga, 1988). The official attitude of the press is that it must safeguard the good name and authority of national leaders, refrain from slandering and insulting them. Sensationalism in the tabloid genre is naturally considered to be aggressive, professionally insensitive and crude.

Whether Asian journalists are a homogeneous group or willing allies of change and national development, as subsumed by Mercado's and Chalkley's definition of development journalism in 1963 and foisted upon journalists by the government, is open to debate. As Shafer (1990:129) in his study of provincial journalists in the Philippines observes in one of his conclusions that, "within the profession there are conflicting views on the efficacy of the mass media in promoting social change and national development .... some believe it is effective and others believe it is not." In another conclusion, he said: "(Provincial) journalists believe they have high psychic mobility between classes, mediating between the rich and the
poor, the powerful and the powerless. This makes them powerful as individuals in their local communities, but whether this power is utilised with the intent to promote positive change and development is uncertain. (ibid:130)

**Community Service Reporting: An Asian-Centred Trait?**

I have borrowed from the philosophy of development communication introduced by Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) in their diffusion of innovations theory to explore an alternative conception of news as a communication tool in facilitating community development as one of the identifiable components of an Asian-centred journalism. The mass media was viewed as a tool in the urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation - thus national growth of developing countries. Development communication, which stressed on participation by and interaction of communicators with the local people, was tailored to mobilise the people towards greater self-reliance and openness to technological innovations. In the mobilisation process, it continually pays credence to traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and experience. Its basic principle is that only through sensitivity to the cultural and political factors, as seen through the eyes of the local people themselves, can a development communicator hope to understand a community and its needs. The basic assumption is that the mass media has a great effect on people's cognitive processes, and thus is of vital importance to boosting development.

In the context of this paper, community service reporting encapsulates the development communicator's philosophy of purposive attitude change. The concept of community service reporting is characteristic of development communication in that it is community-based, ethnographic and does not make pretenses about its subjective and advocative approach to the reporting of community issues. An example of a community-service oriented feature can be gleaned from this blurb in an Australian tabloid:

"Tomorrow marks the beginning of National Homeless Persons’ Week. It’s a time to spare a thought for the estimated 60,000 Australians who live at ‘no fixed abode’. Where do they come from? Do they have families? Are they depressed to be homeless? Telegraph Mirror journalist Sky Yates, who works as a volunteer among Sydney’s homeless, asked some of her street friends to share their story."

(Daily Telegraph Mirror, 5 August 1995).

The distinctive elements of this story are the personal interaction between the journalist and the homeless, the personal experience the journalist has with the daily survival and idiosyncracies of the homeless, and the journalist’s advocacy of community and government involvement in alleviating the welfare of the homeless. This is not done through a spot feature but a series of narrative write-ups and editorial commentaries accompanied by candid photographs of the homeless in their community. The story is narrated from the perspective of the homeless and the disenfranchised.
Another example is this narrative feature by The World Paper and published in The Jakarta Post (Harry Surjadi, 25 June 1995). Under the headline “City haven for farmers: Jakarta benefits from urban agriculture” the first four paragraphs of the 1200-word story reads:

Every day from 7am to 5pm, Tarmidi works at his routine farming tasks: watering, clearing weeds, doing pest control, fertilising and harvesting the vegetables.

He does not grow vegetables on a big farm in the countryside. Instead, to earn his living, he has turned 1,400 square meters of unproductive land owned by the government into profitable farmland. For five years the land, on the banks of the Ciliwung River in front of Jakarta’s five-star Shang-ri-la Hotel, has yielded Tarmidi an income of 200,000 rupiahs (US$90) a month. He spends the money on school fees for his five children.

Wearing a black T-shirt, black pants and a black hat, he waters his small farm with two big watering cans. It is easy to get the water. He just dips his cans into the river. By the time he has taken five steps, the cans are empty, the water poured on two rows of young spinach plants.

He is very careful as he yanks out weeds. “After I put urea (on the crops) the weeds grow very fast. If I use compost or manure, there are no weeds,” says Tarmidi, who uses manure, green manure and chemical fertilisers such as urea. A wheelbarrow of manure and 25kg of urea is enough for one harvesting cycle, which lasts about 30 days; a cycle’s worth costs him about $11.35.

The last two paragraphs read:

There is a kind of mutually beneficial relationship between farmers and landowners. For example, the farmers who use the land near the horserace track have to clean horse dung off the track for an hour a day, five days a week. They are not paid, but they are given permits to farm the land and they can use the manure to fertilise their crops.

No one can say how long the farmers can survive as Jakarta is becoming a mega-city. But they do not care. They think only about how they can earn enough money to make it through another day.

Community service journalism clearly does not involve so much a change in news production techniques or mechanics of reporting as a fundamental change in the journalist’s operationalisation of news values; attitudes towards sources and issues; critical construction of what the journalist sees, hears and understands; and a redefinition of the journalists social political legitimation process. The foci of this reporting genre are the physical and spiritual needs of the community, their self-empowerment, their well-being, their group identity and freedom. Translated into communication, it means that this reporting genre steers the journalist away from the commodification of news to treating news as processed information with change-oriented value-added objectives. These objectives can range from alleviating the welfare of the homeless in the cities to supplying electricity and clean water in isolated villages. Current scepticism with the narrative, change-oriented, value-added and advocative form of this reporting genre is not so much concerned with its alleged professional heresies. It has more to do with the perceptual block among mainstream journalists in leaping from the conventional objectification of news as a market-driven commodity to viewing news as an element which can be used to aid community development efforts.
Journalists ideally should be learners as well as teachers who identify with the needs and aspirations of their communities. Despite what have been theorised about professional objectivity operationalised by corroboration, information verification and source attribution, journalists have in reality never been dispassionate observers or recorders of events who remain unmoved or unchanged by what they see and write. They do not write a story on a blank slate but with a range of assumptions, values and moral standards. Publicly they may want to appear unprejudiced, thorough, fair and completely honest in what they do. Personally they are, because of the nature of their craft, caught in the endless trap of subjectivity in the construction of the story, selection of sources, editing of information and priming of story angle.

The nature of journalism is such that the journalist must select, organise and 'manipulate' the facts. It has always been a subjective market-oriented enterprise. While community-service journalists do not deny the market-oriented nature of journalism they make no pretenses about their subjective reporting inclination. They relate to the sentiments of the people in social situations and are themselves through their stories open to change to some degree as well as changing the situation in which they are a participant.

The elements of community service reporting can be simplified to provide a basic conceptual framework:

1. Recognition of contribution and validity of minority view to mainstream issues.
2. Critical assessment of community interests, expression of concerns, problems and achievements.
3. Participant-observation of events and issues.
4. Full cognitive and experiential knowledge of issues reported.
5. Awareness of the impact of story on development of community resources.

To bring the concept into a clearer practical discipline, the reorientation can be identified as follows:

1. A shift from a narrow news source emphasis on official policy makers to an wider focus on those affected by the policies, i.e. the immediate community. Evident from diverse grassroot sources used in the stories.
2. A shift from focus on economic statistics and facts to concrete personal life experiences of the community. Evident from the story angle, narrative construction and humanising of statistics.
3. Wider interconnectivity with a cross-section of the community. Evident from source diversity, personal participation of the journalist in the community issue through first person accounts.
4. Treatment of community as a group of people with legitimate concerns and needs rather than as an information market. Evident in greater emphasis on educational and development functions of the news as opposed to crass entertainment.
5. Open access to the media by the community. Evident of greater community feedback channeled to the powers-that-be from the community through the journalist in the story, letters and comments.
The operational traits of a community-service oriented journalist can be identified as:
1. Capacity to inspire trust in sources across cultures, age, education, gender, and class.
2. Acute ability to empathise with the community.
3. Critical research and cross-cultural communication skills.
4. Strong conviction on community issues.
5. Commitment to the social development of the grassroots.
6. Flexible approach to judging newsworthiness.

The general working attitudes of a community-service oriented journalist can thus be articulated as:
1. My articles should lead and influence public policies and not vice versa.
2. I see my profession as a tool of social change and development.
3. I am not a dispassionate observer of events. I involve myself in the issue so I can understand their processes and impact on the community.
4. I favour a fair and diverse community involvement in and reactions to local and national issues.
5. I believe more in the collective good rather than narrow individual gains.
6. I exercise my editorial prerogative of self-censorship when necessary to be fair and just.
7. I explain the context of my story when necessary so that the community issue will be read accurately.

I should point out that by comparing the impressionistic theoretical difference, with some overlaps, between Western traditions of journalism and community-service oriented reporting, I am not claiming that one form is better than the other. I am merely pointing out the distinctive characteristics of community-service journalism and how they can systematically be operationalised in teaching news values and practice for a clearer genre of an Asian-centred journalism.
## A Comparison of Conventional and Community Service Journalism

### Conventional Journ

**News Contents**
- Official source oriented.
- Entertainment-oriented.
- Human interest, unusual, odd events and conflict.
- Personalities.
- Snobbery, lifestyle of the rich and famous.

**News Process**
- Ad hoc reports on random events.
- Focus on 'what' and 'why' dimensions.
- Priorities given to immediacy, timeliness and short term impact of news on mass market and ratings/circulation.
- Weights news against criteria of objectivity, verifiable facts, fairness, interests of dominant market and opinions of the well-known.
- Balance in terms of giving fair comments to both sides.
- Dispassionate observer.
- Story is descriptive and analytical. Occasionally provides solutions to problems with minimal consultation with people.
- Communication is vertical from dominant elites to grassroots. Ad hoc feedback from grassroots to elite group.
- Follows prescribed and tested rules journalism. Formulaic reporting.
- Assumes role of objective information provider in the community.

### Community Service Journ

**News Contents**
- Community-source oriented.
- Education and change-oriented.
- Human interest, achievements out of adverse conditions.
- Policy issues.
- Life experience at the grassroots and people-behind-the-scene.

**News Process**
- Follow-up reports on causes and processes of selected events. Focus on what, why and how dimensions.
- More concerned with consequences, implications and long-term impact of news on development of specific communities.
- Weighs news against criteria of community development, growth, diversity of opinions and giving a voice to the silent majority.
- Balance up towards community and giving fair comments to many sides. Participant observer.
- Story is prescriptive and analytical. Elicits alternative solutions to problems identified by people.
- Communication is horizontal. Actual views of grassroots group affected by policies given priority. Continual two-way feedback.
- Tries out new methods and procedures, takes risks, has more ways of info gathering and reporting.
- Assumes role of mediator and leader in the community.
News Values & Philosophy

Objective factual reporting, market consumption oriented.

Crusader of truth and free press. Governments and press are necessarily adversaries. Politically center-Left and idealistic.

Responds to community needs if it serves the profit-making objectives and has popular mass appeal.

Timeliness, proximity, personality, unusual, odd events, human interest and conflict.

Interpretative reporting, subjective, community growth oriented.


Responds to needs of community it serves, education for change and has less mass popular appeal.

Development, community growth, social responsibility, communal and national integration, education.

Journalist’s Public Image

Insular and contemptuous of audience. Audience has low opinion of journalists’ ethics, honesty, sensitivity and community roles.

Egoistic, arrogant and elitist.

Highlights individual achievements and accomplishments.

Inclusive and respectful of audience. Audience has high opinion of journalists’ contributions to community education, concerns and welfare.

Conscientious and egalitarianistic.

Highlights “community power” as source of self-reliant community.

Some Pedagogical Perspectives

Starting from foundation conceptual course like Media and Society, students must be shown that there are other ways of framing operational questions regarding the news stories they are assigned to write. Instead of habitually asking “Will this story interest my readers?” students should also be taught to ask socially-responsible questions such as “How will this story affect my readers?” “How will this story improve the social conditions of my readers?” “How will this story impact on my community?” What if newspapers are viewed as vehicles for social change and development instead of being primarily a profit-making enterprise?

Few will deny that journalism students will only benefit from the exposure to the concept of community service reporting. Some, however, may question if by teaching students to be part of the issue they are reporting on we are not being subjective and thus exposing our professional objectivity to criticisms.
There is abundant literature which argues compellingly that professional objectivity can only come about through dispassionate journalism. Likewise, there is abundant literature which supports the view that journalists do interpret social reality and re-present their observations through set values.

Following are some questions we can use to ponder the significance of community service reporting values and its place in local journalism courses.

1. Do journalism course materials and assignments recognise the relativity of news values and critically explore comparative media systems among the First, Second and Third Worlds?
2. Does the library collection on media studies, journalism research and reporting techniques reflect the relevance of exploring alternative news paradigms?
3. Do local journalism educators generate a critical and comparative research agenda in the department and among students?
4. Do journalism reading list and references reflect developmental and intercultural dimensions of media practices and issues?
5. Are attempts made to source critical, historical and comparative journalism texts from non-Western scholars?
6. Are efforts being exerted to provide students and staff with up-to-date information on research, texts, media and curriculum materials in the area of alternative media?
7. Do reporting and feature assignments encourage or demand students to talk to people from diverse community groups? Are students encouraged to participate in community activities and voluntary organisations?
8. What communication and journalism journals are students required to read?
9. How recently has there been a workshop or class discussion where community members are invited to talk on inter-cultural and community relations, class, race and gender issues? When was the last time a dialogue was held with the industry to discuss ways to improve the reporting of community issues?
10. Are journalistic objectivity and traditional news values in reporting overemphasised while development-oriented news values are overlooked?
11. Are students encouraged to critically monitor the media’s reporting of community issues?
12. Are the mechanics of reporting emphasised at the expense of conceptual courses, such as media and society, media development issues, comparative media and communication issues.

I have simplified a few pedagogical perspectives, which are not systemic nor exhaustive by themselves, to prompt the teaching of community service reporting principles in journalism classes. They are:
1. Redefine the concept of news away from the dominant news paradigm. Reframe conventional news values and news judgement on the premise that journalists do play a social developmental role.

2. View issues and events in a wider societal context with a deeper concern for the human relationship between different cultural and community groups and not just as a matter of political and economic necessity.

3. Elevate students' consciousness of harmony in diversity and foster students' proactive perspectives and involvement in community development.

5. Recognise the need to continuously develop journalism curriculum in line with the changing cultural milieux of local media consumers.

6. Bring students' attention to reactive and confrontational reporting as they are practised along Western journalistic traditions and how they can provide alternative coverage to the story in question.

7. Encourage students to reflect on the concerns and views of their immediate communities who are equally affected by national issues and events.

8. In the coverage of “deviant and sensational” news on ethnicity, information should be placed into context.

Conclusion
Western journalism education in the ‘watchdog’ tradition is commonly perceived as an American phenomenon where values are focused on the people's right to know, right to information, and protecting the people against bad government. Underlying this tradition is the classical democratic notion of the role of a free press in providing diverse information to the market place where enlightened public opinion is formed. This tradition continues in Australia with several politicians over the years being forced to resign after media reports of allegations of rortings and sexual harassment in government departments. The investigative ‘watchdog’ tradition may not find a comfortable place in some Asian settings for predictable reasons.

The primary justifications for the teaching of community service reporting in the Asian setting is the growing public concern with the lack of transparency in the power relationships between the media and government in some Asian countries and, thus, attracting broader external controls on critical media practices. Instead of lobbying for broader liberalisation of the media to be more in line with the Western
tradition, a more pragmatic approach is to figure out how journalists can be trained to report accurately, fairly and honestly within the political parameters in the Asian setting. The fact is governments and media be they in the West or Asia do not always see eye to eye on any issue. It is as natural as sunrise that governments want public and media support for their policies and the press is often the willing critic. Whether democracy is better served by an adversarial press or a 'consensual-driven' press is open to debate. However, I believe the press should not be ritualually adversarial nor should it be consistently cooperative. In reality, the relationship between the press and government is in constant flux. Paradoxically, the relationship need to be seen to be ambiguous to reflect its independence - sometimes contentious, other times cooperative. This is clearly evident in the tone of Australian media coverage of the plights of East Timorese (contentious), protests against French nuclear test in Murorua (cooperative), and Keating-Mahathir 'recalcitrant' spat (critical).

Past records in India and the Philippines had shown how effective a community-service oriented approach to reporting, without necessarily being overtly 'pro-government' or adversarial, could bring the problems of a community to the notice of the public and the government and result in concrete steps being taken to change things for the better in the villages. Community service journalism can also be seen as an attempt to take journalists out of its low public image, at least in the context of Australia, as muckrackers and self-centred opportunists to a position where they can be seen to be deserving of community respect for their altruistic commitment to just social causes and change.

Industry and faculty apathy is the greatest attitudinal barrier to operationalising a community service oriented genre of journalism. The commercial laissez-faire paradigm prevails as the dominant approach to journalism instructions in journalism schools. Next is the lack of appropriate research literature and teaching resources. What can be done in the short term, with the ubiquity of the Internet and the World Wide Web, is to initiate a network of scholars and journalists in the region to share intellectual and professional resources. This networking, which need not be exclusively Asian, will pave the way to a clear operationalisation of the concept of community service reporting and help build up a distinctive body of literature. An academic and professional mechanism also need to be worked out to help achieve a degree of credibility in community service reporting. The pedagogical perspectives explained earlier are directed towards this end.

We cannot teach students to be willing agents of community development. Nor can we moralise to them to be civic-minded communicators with a bag of social-change ideals. What we can do is to teach by example, inspire students with a role model, draw upon our experience as journalists and development communicators and bring the skills and concepts to class. I have used case-studies, hands-on experiences such as field trips and internships with community papers, conferences and directed workshops in my
reporting classes with varying successes. Some of these approaches are obvious and may already be used by many journalism educators. Their obvious simplicity points to a theory that the most effective way to expand the dominant commercial laissez-faire news paradigm in journalism courses is often the most logical and simplest.

Endnotes:

1 & 5. See "Recalcitrant or keros kepala: A cross-cultural study of how the Australian and Malaysian press covered the Keating-Mahathir spat," by Eric Loo & Martin Hirst, Media Information Australia, No.77, August 1995, pp.107-119

2 & 6. The Sunday Times in London on February 23 that a British construction firm, Wimpey International was prepared to offer a $US50,000 bribe to Dr Mahathir's government to win a £615m contract for the Pergau Dam project in 1985. The allegation was tied in with Britain's £234m development aid with arms sales and other trade. Dr Mahathir had flatly denied the allegation. The arms deal and the agreement to fund the dam followed successful efforts in that year by Margaret Thatcher, then Prime Minister, to improve relations with Dr Mahathir after his "Buy British Last" policy. (The Independent, London, 29/2/94, p.I)

3. One of the most succinct explanations of news values is by Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge (1973). They said that events would be more likely to be covered if they fulfill any of the following criteria: Frequency, Amplitude (the bigger the better, the more dramatic); Unambiguity (the more clear-cut, uncomplicated the events, the more they'll be reported); Familiarity (that which is ethnocentric, of cultural proximity, relevant); Correspondence (the degree the events meet our expectations, predictions, consonance); Surprise, Continuity (that which already has hit the headlines, news peg). Composition (the need for a balance in a news-spread leads the editor to feed in contrasting elements - some home news if the predominant stories have been foreign; a little good news if the news has generally been gloomy.


5. See Eric Loo & Martin Hirst, ibid, (1995)


8. Community service reporting lessons should look into the application of narrative form of story writing and new journalism approaches to their stories. The inverted pyramid news structure and straight reporting need to be supplemented by fresh innovative reporting styles such as narrative and point-of-view news journalism techniques. The American Society of Newspaper Editors Literacy Committee (ASNE) has found that the inverted pyramid, although it has its strengths in short news stories, has more weaknesses with people who are less likely to read papers today. ASNE concluded in its recent
study of readers of St Petersburg Times in Florida that the narrative story telling techniques offer great potential because "they simply were better read, and they communicated information better". The study pitted the inverted pyramid against narrative, which tells a story; point of view, which approaches the news with a clear viewpoint, more like a column; and radical clarity which explains every bit of information. (Editor & Publisher, as quoted in Panpa July 1993:21). It concluded that no one technique worked best with all readers. Each was best for certain stories and certain readers. Thus newspaper editors should consider a creative combination of the four approaches and to treat readers as plural, rather than 'the' reader, and remember that reading is an interactive process. In other words, dispassionate reporting should be revised to combine with other creative writing among which community service reporting is one which is both pragmatic, purposive, and clearly subjective in its approach. For a comprehensive account of the origin of the inverted pyramid, read David Mindich's essay on "Edwin M. Stanton, the Inverted Pyramid, and Information Control" Journalism Monographs, AEJMC August 1993.


11. According to a Morgan Poll published in The Bulletin (May 9, 1995, p.30) in Australia the lowest public rating for honesty and ethics among 24 professions was car salesmen, followed by newspaper journalists, federal MPs, advertising people and union leaders. The poll was conducted face-to-face Australia wide among 1132 people aged 14 and over on the weekend of April 8-9, 1995. Nurses, doctors, pharmacists, dentists and teachers are seen among the most honest and ethical in the community.

12. I have with a group of graduate journalism students at Charles Sturt University successfully produced an "Alternative Country Monthly Reporter" in the country town of Bathurst in New South Wales. This paper which is in its fifth issue (circ: 10,000 copies) is produced by desktop computers and distributed free to households in the central west region. It is self-supported by community and commercial advertisements.

Other References:


Lee, Kuan Yew, "The price of freedom". Time Magazine, 7 August 1995, p.43


