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Country Report On The Philippines

By

D Y Caparas
SEMINAR: MASS MEDIA AND SOCIO- ECONOMIC CHANGE

MARA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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PAPER COUNTRY REPORT ON THE PHILIPPINES

BY

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The beginnings of mass media in the Philippines is deeply rooted in the country's history.

The Spaniards came in 1521 and later, in their attempt to propagate their faith, printed Doctrina Cristiana or Christian Doctrine.

Tomas Pinpin, considered the first Filipino printer, published in 1637: "Sucessos Felices (Happy Successes) a 14 page newsletter on current events.

But the colonizers were strict, thereby arresting the growth of publishing by Filipinos.

Nonetheless, the first real newspaper, Del Superior Gobierno (The Goco Government), hit the streets of Manila on 8 August 1811. Understandably, it was the mouthpiece of the colonizers which also satisfied their need for European news affecting overseas Spaniards.

Soon other newspapers came out the most prominent of which included the intellectual La Solidaridad (Solidarity) and the revolutionary, Kalayaan (Freedom). These newspapers gave impetus to the 19th century propaganda movement, a national agitation for reforms and freedom launched by Filipino patriots.

AMERICAN ERA BEGINS

When the Spanish era ended with the Treaty of Paris on 10 December 1898, English newspapers were introduced by American soldiers, teachers or missionaries.

In 1900 the Manila Daily Bulletin was founded, followed by the Manila Times two years later. The Philippines Free Press, the first national weekly magazine in English, hit the streets in 1907.
Soon both Filipino and American newspapers saw themselves serving their respective interests. Until 1916 when the Jones Law -- the first formal and official commitment by the United States to grant independence to the Philippines -- was passed. It provided for freedom of speech, of the press and peaceful assembly.

The Constitution of 1935 advocated freedom of the press from government censorship notably the requirement of a license before any printing or publishing was done.

**JAPANESE PERIOD**

The war broke out in 1941 and the American regime was interrupted as the Japanese occupied Manila on 2 January 1942. Of all the newspapers before the war, only the English daily Manila Tribune was allowed to continue under Japanese control and supervision. Liwayway (Dawn) was the only Tagalog weekly allowed to continue publication.

There was no freedom of expression and writers were limited in their themes, usually to rural scenes. There were of course, underground publication to unite the Filipinos for independence and fight Japanese propaganda.

Despite the inauspicious circumstances, however, the occupation period produced some good writing especially short stories. The Japanese civilian authorities themselves were impressed and published in 1944 an anthology entitled Ang 25 Pinakamabuting Maikling Kathang Filipino ng 1943 (The Twenty-Five Best Filipino Short Stories of 1943).
TAGALOG RE-DISCOVERED

Historians Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Milagros C. Guerrero described the situation in this manner:

"The writer's hands were tied and he could move them barely enough to portray or depict harmless subjects, for example, a rural scene, in the manner of Fernando Amorsolo. But a searching criticism of life, of which literature is the purveyor, there was none. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that the Japanese, more than the Americans encouraged the development of Tagalog and gave to it an impetus never before witnessed. Whether this purpose was selfish or not is immaterial. The fact remains that the Japanese helped the writer in Tagalog re-discover the beauty and the potentialities of his native language."

The end of Japanese rule in 1945 saw the rebirth of pre-war newspapers, including the Herald—El Debate—Mabuhay chain, one of whose editors was journalist-soldier-diplomat Carlos P. Romulo, who is now Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Other prominent chains of publications included that of the Manila Times, Manila Chronicle, and the Manila Daily Bulletin.

Meanwhile the move to enhance professionalism in mass media continued. In the 1950's journalism and public relations became collegiate courses leading to a degree or diploma.

The Philippine Press Institute was founded in 1964 to protect print media and provide ethical standard for its practitioners.

Private media firmed up as individual or corporate undertakings. To strengthen freedom of the press, the Philippine Congress passed two laws in 1965 restricting the venue for libel cases and allowed newspapers and magazines to use mail service.
The number of mass media outlets increased reaching the staggering number of 1,402 publications circulating throughout the Philippines as of 31 January 1971 with a total circulation of 12.3 million.

MEDIA CONGLOMERATES

The late sixties also marked the emergence of the so-called "tri-media" or "multi-media" networks, where print publishers own a string of radio and television networks, concentrating immense power of mass media in the hands of a few.

With such a situation, where the rich few was more powerful than the government in influencing public opinion, abuse became the order of the day.

Prestige and credibility of some newspapers sank to a new low so that it was not unusual for some of them to be caricatured as the Manila Crimes, The Evening Noise and the Daily Errors.

To worsen the situation, subversives seeped into the editorial staffs sowed anarchy and fanned dissension against the government.

MEDIA SITUATION

Francisco S. Tatad, press secretary to the President (now Minister of Public Information in the Philippines) described the media situation in an article published in a 1972 year-book as follows:

"In the past it was possible to speak only of mass media that belabored our divisions, our antagonisms, our differences and promoted hysteria on peripheral issues while neglecting fundamental ones."
"We had a mass media that tried to govern that tried to seize government from the government... A media that invaded the privacy of lives, homes and reputations in order merely to satisfy curiosity rather than serve a cause. At a time when they thought the advocacy and espousal of violence and subversion was the most disturbing single menace to our Republic and people, they parroted this line with great dedication and with great precision, too.

They attacked corruption without themselves giving it up, and within the temples of this institution the media tycoons demanded the privileges that they denounced while their subalterns demanded to be corrupted by those whom the media, as an institution, denounced and vilified as corrupt.

"They spoke of justice and indeed cried against injustice, but in so doing, they forgot that the small mechanical man in the mechanical department of their shops, who made sure that their words got to their audiences, was among the most exploited of all the workers...."

MARTIAL LAW

Martial law on 21 September 1972 changed the situation.

In compliance with the first letter of instruction issued on 23 September 1972 all publications automatically ceased to circulate.

The Mass Media Council — headed by the Secretary of Public Information and the Secretary of National Defense — was immediately formed to assume the functions of screening media facilities and practitioners.

Department of Public Information Order Nos. 1 and 2 required newspapers, radio and television to print and broadcast accurate, objective, straight news reports of positive national values, consistent
with the effort of the government to meet the dangers and threats that occasioned the proclamation of martial law and the efforts to achieve a new society.

Presidential Decree 191 was issued creating the Media Advisory Council in place of the Mass Media Council. The Bureau of Standards for Mass Media was created by Letter of Implementation No. 12 on November 1, 1972.

These two bodies devoted their efforts in promoting a responsible press freedom conscious of the objective that "all media are duty bound to help in the supreme goal of national development in education, in people's habits and attitudes, in agriculture, in industry, in all other areas in the life of the nation."

CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEE

Meanwhile, the Filipino people approved the 1971 Philippine Constitution in January 1973 whose Article IV (Bill of Rights) guarantees the freedom of the press as follows:

"Section 6. The right of the people to information on matters of public concern shall be recognized. Access to official records and to documents and papers pertaining to official acts, transactions, or decisions, shall be afforded the citizen subject to such limitations as may be provided by law.

"Section 7. The right to form associations or society for purposes not contrary to law shall not be abridged.

"Section 8. No Law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever be allowed. No religious test shall be required for the exercise of civil or political rights.
Section 9. No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the Government for redress of grievances.

In a paper presented by Secretary Francisco S. Tated before the One-Asia Assembly in New Delhi in February 1973 he pictured the media situation at that time in these words:

"The Philippine Government, having now cleaned up society, reorganized the bureaucracy, organized reform, infused a new morale among the people seeks a press that responds to the needs of development. Where previously the press was wild and licentious there will be for sometime at least a tendency for newspapers to be timid and dull, as indeed some of them now tend to be. Because of a new consensus on positive journalism, there will be a tendency for some of them to praise rather than censure, even when this is neither deserved nor necessary.

"These are to be expected outside of a normal situation, but my view is that this can only be short-lived. Censorship has been lifted, detained journalists have been released, and the media guidelines now in force are nothing more than a restatement of what has been inscribed in our laws. The public expects the press to use its freedom to procure more intelligence and responsibilities, rather than use it to shield mediocrity. With all these considerations, there is little doubt that we should be able to develop a press that will, according to modern prescription, contribute to the feeling of nationness, act as the voice of national planning, extend the effective market, help prepare people to play their new parts in society, teach the necessary skills for development, and teach people to play that role as a nation among nations!"

Presidential Decree 576 issued on 9 November 1974 abolished the Media Advisory Council and the Bureau of Standards for Mass Media and authorized the organization of regulatory councils among and by media leaders and practitioners.
Hence, the creation by the same Decree of the Philippine Council for Print Media and the Broadcast Media Council.

The Philippine Council for Print Media is a professional body that places on the Publishers Association of the Philippines and Outdoor Advertising Association the roles of self-governing their respective ranks and staff members as well as enhancing excellence in their efforts.

The Philippine Council for Print Media adopted the following general principles:

"Print media in purveying information of public interest and general concern play a vital role in the realization of the country's goals and development plans. In exercising this task, certain norms of conduct are essential to elevate the profession's standards of excellence.

"Freedom with responsibility underlines this vital task. The need for constructive endeavor, enhancement of professional conduct, and self-regulation should go hand in hand with print media's allegiance to truth.

"The Publisher must assume final and full responsibility for everything printed in his publication. He must be guided by the knowledge that press freedom is a public trust and should not be used to serve personal anti-social, and divisive interests. The attitude should be one of moderation and sobriety, rather than sensationalism. Sensationalism detracts from the accepted standards of decency, invariably, resulting in the unwarranted invasion of an individual's privacy.

"Advertising in print media must be truthful and how closely to good taste. It is a partner in media's struggle to promote the country's goals. A relationship based on mutual respect will help advance this partnership."
EDITORIAL CONSIDERATIONS

"The Government has handed over to media the complete control and supervision of all publications. This clearly indicates the government's recognition of media's maturity. Publications will enjoy greater leeway in the discussion of issues confronting the government, the community, and the entire social structure. While this means that the public can look forward to more enlightenment, it does not mean the end of vigilance. The publishers must remember that license is not freedom.

"In other words, the Government expects media to exercise self-censorship. The standards for excellence will be drawn up and enforced by the publications themselves.

ADVERTISING TRADE RELATIONS

"A trade relationship established on a basis of mutual respect is the goal of the Philippine Council for Print Media. A code of ethics regulating the relations between print media and advertising agencies will be enforced by the Philippine Council for Print Media. While the advertising agency is basically an agent for the advertiser, it also serves simultaneously a fiduciary function for print media. In the light of this, the Council will expect all advertising agencies to accept certain responsibilities towards print media.

BANE OF INDUSTRY

The Council also audits the circulation of publications not only to stop false claims -- which before was the bane of the advertising industry -- but also to make sure that excellence in journalism is a daily goal of mass media."
For its part, the Publishers Association of the Philippines, Inc. - in accepting the task handed to it by the Council defined its stand on freedom of the press and the journalists as follows:

"Journalists should uphold the basic right of press freedom. Unfortunately, the greatest drawback of the profession is not the lack of effort, but mediocrity. It is the mediocre journalist who fails to balance right with concomitant responsibility. He camouflages his shortcomings with untruths, innuendoes, sensationalism or licentious discussion. His irresponsible exercise of press freedom opens the way for government to intervene in order to protect the rights of others and the public. The journalist, therefore, should improve himself constantly and remember at all times his responsibilities as a member of a free press."

By the end of 1976, mass media was aware of its being an integral part of society, and is involved in priorities usually determined by society itself.

Media continued to comment on the conduct of government officials who were not immune to criticism and must at all times be held accountable for their actions.

Of course, in criticizing, media was also aware that there is a "serious distinction between the newspaper and the courtroom, between what is private and what is public, and between what is public nuisance and what is private well-being."

NORMALIZATION

The normalization of mass media operations in the Philippines saw 1,401 publications throughout the country as of 30 June 1975. Total circulation was 9,170,698, not including 388 publications which failed to submit their statistics to the bureau of post on time.
Of these publications 792 or 56.53 per cent were in English; 164 or 13.13 per cent in English-Pilipino; 162 or 11.56 per cent in English Tagalog; 59 or 4.21 per cent in Tagalog; 19 or 1.36 per cent in Pilipino; and the rest trailed behind.

Out of these media there were 12 daily newspapers, 8 in English, 2 in English-Chinese, 1 in English-Hiligaynon and 1 in Filipino.

Most of these publications were privately owned, either as a single proprietorship, partnership, corporation or cooperative.

Government participation in print media is limited to a few trade journals or house organs and a national news agency.

M E D I A T O D A Y

Aside from publications, mass media in the Philippines today includes 30 television stations, five of which are nationwide, based in Manila and have a capacity to telecast in full color. Of the five, one is operated by the government.

At the same time, 2.5 radio stations are spread out all over the archipelago, connecting remotest areas not reached by print or television to the centers of population.

The Philippines inaugurated its first earth station in 1967. Another earth station with direct access to Europe via INTELSAT III (International Communications Satellite Consortium III) over the Indian Ocean was completed in 1971.

This year the Philippines will inaugurate domestic satellite television to coincide with the 25th anniversary of television in the country.
At this juncture, it should be noted that mass media cannot be independent unless it is self-liquidating. Hence the need for advertising support. In a way, mass media and advertising are Siamese twins, which are to work hand in hand for...later can exist successfully without the other.

In the Philippines today there are 140 advertising agencies with billings that increase in the vicinity of 15 to 20 per cent annually. There is also an Association of National Advertisers. Unifying all sectors of the industry is the Philippines Board of Advertising.

This year has been declared by our Prime Minister, H.E. Ferdinand E. Marcos, as "The Year of Developmental Advertising and Communications." Next month, from 15 to 18, the 11th Asian Advertising Congress will convene in Manila simultaneously with the formation of the Asian Federation of Advertising Associations.

To size up the latest media situation in the Philippines, it appears fitting to hear the words of Teodoro M. Valencia, the Philippines leading columnist and radio commentator who has been in the writing profession since the pre-war.

Writing in the Fookien Yearbook of 1977, Valencia evaluated the Philippine media thus:

"Philippines media have undergone painful self-examination and self-evaluation during the first four years of the martial law. Today, we find an awakened media community eager to improve their news, willing to share the national responsibility to progress and ever conscious of their role as the conscience of the nation.

"The Philippine press remains timid but economically better off than at any other time in our history. Radio and television have made strides to rediscover the commercial possibilities of Filipino music with astonishing results. Cinema has found relevance not at all alien to the profit motive. Media Philippines have accepted self-discipline..."