



## BRIDGING THE CULTURAL GAPS IN JOURNALISM TRAINING AND EDUCATION IN ASIA

BY ERIC LOO



Konrad  
Adenauer  
Stiftung

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung  
Singapore

Media Programme Asia

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## About the author

**D**r Eric Loo has worked as a financial journalist, features editor, production editor, and media educator in Malaysia and Australia. He currently lectures in journalism at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia, and writes a column for an online news portal, Malaysiakini, and a financial weekly, The Edge Malaysia. He has conducted journalism training workshops in Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Papua New Guinea, India and Laos. Eric's research interests are in development journalism, best practices of journalism in Asia, and reporting about race and religion. He is founding editor of the refereed journal Asia Pacific Media Educator, and has authored and co-edited books in international journalism and cross-cultural communication.

## Foreword

**A**s part of their curriculum, most students from the “Master of Arts in Journalism” programme at the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism (ACFJ) at Ateneo de Manila University, review courses and seminars on “ethics in journalism” as particularly valuable and helpful. This was the result of a recent survey among the alumni of the programme. During a three-day journalism training of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in Myanmar in February 2013, the discussion again focused predominantly on a variety of questions referring to ethics and credibility in journalism. Given these examples, the issue seems to be back on the rise not only locally, but also on the regional or international level, given the fact that students at ACFJ come from various countries in Asia. Aside from classical crafts related skills, many journalists appear to be looking for orientation and a better understanding of the underlying standards for professional journalism. Apart from that, not only job seekers or beginners like to learn more about ethics, but also journalists with some years of professional experience.

Yet, how do we train them? What are the standards of ethics and credibility that journalists need to know about? What should be the “common ground” for teachers and media experts for their lessons? How can journalism trainers bridge the gap between various cultures and media landscapes so that students can apply the findings to their individual job situations? Is there even a need to bridge the gap between different cultures and media systems or do the basic values and virtues of journalism apply to all surroundings?

In order to find out, Eric Loo suggested in-depth interviews with trainers and journalists, both from “the West” as well as Asia. In his publication, “Western” and “West” refer to English-speaking democracies - specifically to the United States - since BBC, CNN, Reuters and Associated Press, amongst others, set the standards for credible journalism also in Asia, and reputable journalism schools in the U.S. characterise or at least influence the syllabus for their counterparts in many Asian countries. The “Western” notion of reporting “without fear or favour” therefore dominates the journalism curricula in Asia. In this respect, journalists in “the West”

and in developing countries (in Asia) share the same basic values, or, as Doug Cospers depicts in Chapter 4: “Good journalists will recognize good colleagues anywhere.” Beyond the basic standards, journalism differs, however, from country to country.

With regard to Australia, Padma Iyer argues: “There are practices that work and there are others that don’t. There are things ‘we do’ and there are things ‘we don’t do’, and we define the former as common sense.” (Chapter 6) In Asian journalism schools, these “do’s” and “don’ts” are often defined by culture. “For instance, there is a tendency among students to maximize harmony and minimize conflict as a strategy”, as Dr. Violet Valdez explains in Chapter 6. “This is hypothesized as an Asian trait and one that is manifested in cultures characterized by collectivism rather than individualism.” Based on these social values, “journalists in parts of Asia may take the ‘softer’ approach, mindful of the importance of ‘saving face’ in their field of questions to their sources”, concludes Eric Loo. Yet, although many countries in Asia share certain social values, the media systems differ significantly from India to China and even among neighbouring countries.

With numerous interviews and his own analysis, Eric Loo describes not only the differences between Asia and “the West”, but also within the region. On the one hand, the various viewpoints in this publication stress the fact that journalism education in Asia needs to recognise the realities of the different media landscapes. On the other hand, however, the author describes the balance between the tenets of reporting “without fear or favour” and “the reality of tentatively holding back on particular issues” as “delicate”. Apart from a few exceptions like Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong, *Reporters Without Borders* ranks most countries in Asia in the bottom half of its “Press Freedom Index 2013”.

Based on his long and extensive experience as a journalism trainer in parts of Asia and “the West”, Eric Loo’s recommendation is what he calls “alternative development-oriented journalism pedagogy”, a perspective which, among many other prerequisites, also requires that journalists “continually reflect on their profession and its position in dominant social and economic structures”. In times of evolving media landscapes, new media technologies and shifting user habits, the same requirement applies to journalism trainers, perhaps more than ever. With its various



viewpoints and suggestions both from the author himself as well as from his interviewees, this publication will hopefully contribute to the reflection on the future of journalism education.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Eric Loo and hope that all readers find lots of interesting new information in the following pages!

**Paul Linnarz**

Director Media Programme Asia  
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

## Preface

**N**o kidding, I mused when I read that the Malaysian mainstream media had blacked out the former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad's relentless criticism of his successor, Abdullah Badawi's administration.<sup>1</sup> I was then flying back to Sydney on May 24, 2006 after a week of meeting with veteran journalists in Mumbai and Delhi. Mahathir now vents his political angst, and dissatisfaction with the mainstream media, through his blog with the slogan 'Blogging to unblock'.<sup>2</sup>

Censorship in the Malaysian mainstream media shows how the media-government nexus is as entrenched today as it was when Mahathir was prime minister from 1981-2003. The partnership-in-nation-building ideology, carried on by Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and his successor, Najib Abdul Razak, has practically framed the daily staple of politically and socially correct news in the mainstream media, which operate on the principle "If you're not with us - and our political master - then you're against us". The Malaysian media culture reflects the top-down editorial structure of the media in parts of Asia where journalists have learned how not to step over the line of editorial acceptability.

This 'news paradigm' works on two forms of censorship - salient self-censorship in which texts deemed as a threat to the national interest, as defined by the government for the media, are omitted; and, proscribed censorship in which discourse - even that of a former Prime Minister - which conflicts with the state's position is blacked out somewhere along the news production chain.

The threat to a free ethical press in the Malaysian context stems less from punitive media laws than a learned sensitivity by rank and file reporters to political correctness in the newsroom, and, the vocational security that

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1 *Malaysia: Mahathir uses online news site to air views*, Asia Media, May 24, 2006, <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=46513> (Accessed October 20, 2012)

2 'Openness', Dr Mahathir Mohamad blog, <http://chedet.cc/blog/?p=39#more-39>

comes with reporting for the corridors of power, than getting down to the grit of uncovering issues of public corruption, poor governance and community issues as monitored by the Centre for Independent Journalism and Aliran, a social reform movement<sup>3</sup>. With a history of compliant journalism, how can journalists in Malaysia - and Asia in general - be educated and trained to practise their profession in the adversarial form and investigative style of the West? Or is it too short-sighted to assume that the watch dogging journalism methods and practices of the West can be transplanted in parts of Asia with its diverse media systems, history of state authoritarianism, array of coercive media laws and death threats that affect the journalists' daily work?

The allusion to a form of journalism that is reflective of Asian cultural values - commonly attributed to a cultural preference for consensus rather than confrontation, the value for 'face', deference to authority, respect for elders, communitarianism rather than individualism - underlines the many attempts by Asian leaders over the decades, notably Mahathir and former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, to question the notion that the West is necessarily the best<sup>4</sup>.

One of the aims of this book, however, is to eschew the 'Asia versus the West' differentiation of journalism practices. Instead it defers to the fundamental principle that bridging the journalistic cultural gap relies less on asserting how one form of journalism is superior to the other, but more on how journalism as understood, conceptualised, taught and practised in Asia and the West can be richer through a blending of the essence that makes each form unique and good.

### **Where journalists in Asia and the 'West' converge and diverge**

Having taught and practised journalism since 1988 in Asia and the West (Australia, and for a short stint in the US), I have seen and experienced

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3 Centre for Independent Journalism Media Monitor (<http://cijmalaysia.org/newsroom/media-monitor/>) and Aliran Media Monitoring (<http://aliran.com/category/malaysian-media-monitors-diary>) (Accessed February 28, 2013)

4 Wyne, Ali (2013) *The Worldview of Lee Kuan Yew*, article in *The Diplomat*, February 7, 2013. <http://thediplomat.com/2013/02/07/the-worldview-of-lee-kuan-yew/2/>, and Elgin, Molly (2010), 'Asian Values: A New Model for Development?' *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Summer 2010, pp.135-144. (Accessed February 28, 2013)

the best and worst in academia and the media industry. In this book, however, I will focus on the positives of high and low context cultures and attempt to cross-fertilise the values for hard work, filial piety, loyalty, self-reliance and responsibility, respect for elders, holistic approach to science and technology, with the values for rule of law, empiricism, human rights, meritocracy, democratic institutions, and equitable opportunities to achieve one's full potential. A good place to start in hybridising these values is in one of the most accessible cultural resource of human learning - the media and its educated journalists. Hence, this book provides a space for journalists and media trainers from Asia to reflect on their experiences and working knowledge.

Having worked as a journalist in Asia and the West, I am convinced that journalists generally contend with similar professional issues: lack of money, lack of time, lack of training, and in some cases, perceived lack of journalistic integrity.<sup>5</sup> Where journalists in Asia and the West may diverge, is in how they see their profession, their functions and moral obligations in their respective societies. Journalists trained in the Western libertarian tradition commonly articulate their work as: We report the news as it's happening; we don't take sides, a good story is all that matters; we're independent; we let the facts speak for themselves; and we know what interests our audience. Journalists in parts of developing Asia, at the behest of the state, and trained in local universities are, however, more inclined to see themselves as part of the state apparatus to frame their reports and stories that are supportive of the country's economic development plans and national interest.

Often at media conferences, academics present the familiar message that the socio-economic imperatives of countries in political transition and post-conflict are different from the rich West. Thus, the form and purpose of journalism are different, or should be different, which essentially means that the media in developing countries ought to work with the state as 'partners of development' - a value seen by Western media as antithetical to the watchdog function of the press based on the assumption that without

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5 Television reporters and newspaper journalists are ranked 22nd and 24th in a list of honesty and ethical standards with 30th the lowest ranking (car salesmen). Source: Roy Morgan Image of Professions, Annual Survey 2012. <http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2012/4777/> (Accessed September 14, 2012)

checks and balances and without public accountability, governments inevitably become absolutely corrupt.

The dominant notion that Western-style media freedom is quintessential and thus provides a benchmark of 'best practices' consequently places 'Asian-type' journalism as less than ideal. However, a cursory look at the award-winning journalistic work in Asia (particularly India and the Philippines) shows that the professional values and goals overlap with the Western deference to investigative journalism and exposé of government corruption and malpractices. Where these values diverge are in the contexts, forms, contents and purpose of journalism.

The interpretation of what constitute 'best media practices' in the Asian context, with its diverse media systems, is ideologically polarised. For instance in Malaysia and Singapore, the governments see the media as a facilitator of economic development. In Laos, Burma, China and Vietnam the governments see the media as an integral component of the state apparatus designed to promote the party policies, interests and ideologies. Civil societies, however, primarily see the media as an advocate for the people, closely watching those who govern. 'Best practices' are judged according to the state and civil societies' expectations of what the media ought to be. This question prompted my research in 2006, which identified the characteristics of award-winning journalism in Asia - for instance the Ramon Magsaysay Award in the Philippines,<sup>6</sup> Developing Asia Journalism Awards<sup>7</sup> sponsored by the Tokyo-based Asian Development Bank Institute - and whether they do differ from the 'Western' type which is more widely known and taught in journalism schools in Asia.

My research suggested a typology of personal, cultural and professional attributes of award-winning Asian journalists operating in countries noted for its 'press freedom' (such as India and the Philippines) and those noted for its restrictive media laws (such as Malaysia, Singapore and parts of

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6 Ramon Magsaysay Foundation categories of awards at:  
<http://www.rmaf.org.ph/?id=2&page=category>

7 <http://www.adbi.org/journalism.awards/>

Indochina).<sup>8</sup> The elements of best practices in reporting identified by Asian journalists were:

- Impartiality and integrity in presenting the stories.
- Context in clarifying the bigger picture.
- Trenchant analysis of the past to understand the present.
- Journalist's enthusiasm and conviction in the subject matter.

The common traits of "award-winning" journalism in Asia were:<sup>9</sup>

- Write for the oppressed and confront the oppressor.
- Empathy for the people.
- Clear understanding of consequences of the stories on the people.
- Focus on the task of transforming community.
- High ethical sense of right and wrong.

Public perception of journalists' ethical practice and conviction of what is right and wrong is understandably low in an environment where the media are seen to be caught in excessive commercialism and, consequently, falling short of meeting their public service functions. In academia, journalism educators are likewise continually faced with the task of working out effective and engaging techniques in teaching and inspiring students on how to reclaim the public service function of journalism. What then should journalists - and journalism educators - in Asia be doing to evolve clear benchmarks of best practices in the profession in the Asian context? What are the "best practices" of journalism that media educators should be teaching, that professional journalists should be attempting to attain?

In-depth journalism is a product of empirical enquiry, contextual interpretation of issues, sourced interviews, thorough research and verified information. Good journalism essentially relies on one's capacity for keen observations, critical reasoning, and credibility to write for an audience and explain in simple language the complexities of their environment. Good journalism generates informed public conversations on community issues. This means good journalists are not mere transcribers, but translators and interpreters of issues and events. This encapsulates what I see as the

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<sup>8</sup> Loo, Eric (2009), *'Best Practices of Journalism in Asia,'* Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Media Asia Programme, Singapore.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

multi-layered dimensions of “best practices” in journalism - to an extent drawing out the essence of good journalism from the ‘West’ and ‘East’ (Asia). As Doug Cospser, media trainer based in Colorado notes: (see Q&A in this book): “A journalist is a journalist and a story is a story everywhere. The collegiality of journalism across borders and cultures is extraordinary, so long as journalists work for their readers and audiences and not their governments.” Cospser is right about the ‘collegiality of journalism’, although it should be recognized that during times of crises, governments expect journalists to work with the state in the national interest, such as during the Asian financial meltdown in 1997, SARS epidemic in 2003, and the war against terrorism.

### **How this book is structured**

Fundamental to the Asian journalistic identity search is its tendency to see itself through the frames of Western media discourse – much of it focused on issues of human rights, political corruption and freedom of expression. Hence, for a conceptual framework, this book first takes a broad look at the crucial issue of human rights and press freedom that underpins the dichotomy of Asian (a term used interchangeably with ‘Eastern’ and ‘Third World’) and Western media practices. The issue is examined in the context of the New World Information and Communication Order debates, which began in the 1960s. Chapter 2 then looks at the various concepts of the press and how they are relevant to an understanding of the diverse media systems in Asia explained in Chapter 3.

To place the theoretical explanations in more concrete terms, Chapter 4 provides a case study of journalism in Malaysia, which, as I will explain, embodies the dynamics of the East-West differentiation of media cultures. This chapter also looks at the constraints of politics and culture on journalism in Malaysia with reference to numerous journalism workshops I had conducted in parts of Asia. The chapter draws from the methodologies of training and pedagogy used in these workshops and situates them in the academic environment to provide readers with a picture of how the essence of Asian and Western media practice can be interpreted.

Chapter 5 provides a compilation of reflection by Asian journalists whom I had worked with in numerous media workshops. This chapter essentially aims to show how the values and views of Asian journalists reflect those of their ‘Western’ counterparts, although they recognise that the notion of

reporting 'without fear or favour' needs to be contextualized to the political realities in parts of Asia. Chapter 6 concludes with examples of how I have attempted to 'acculturalise' the teaching and training of journalism in Asia.

Interviews with Asian journalists who graduated from the Master of Arts (Journalism) programme offered at the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism at Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines; and journalism trainers from the US, UK, Australia and the Philippines are included as backgrounders on journalism education and practice in different cultural settings. I would like to thank all the journalists and media trainers who gave their time for the interviews. Finally, thank you to Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Media Programme Asia in Singapore for supporting this book.

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## CHAPTER 1

# Human rights and press freedom through coloured glasses

This chapter looks at the issues of press freedom and how human rights issues are perceived and interpreted across cultural and political systems. First, a clarification of terms used throughout the book. 'Third World' refers to countries that have chosen their independent road to socio-economic and political development, but which still lack a dominant middle class. These countries are characterised by unstable governments and high levels of poverty. They stand between the worlds of the 'Western' capitalist and socialist (formerly Communist). 'Third World' is hence used as a convenient descriptor for the diverse collection of former colonies that form the base of the global capitalist pyramid. 'Third World' is used interchangeably with 'Asia' and developing countries in the 'South'.

'Asia' refers specifically to Southeast Asia on the premise that the pluralistic ASEAN region represents the spread of newspapers in Asia. The geography spans across the least developed countries - such as Burma, Laos and Cambodia - to the 'newly industrialised countries' such as India, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, and advanced economies such as Singapore, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

'Western' and 'West' refer particularly to the English-speaking democracies - specifically the United States, where the major transnational media institutions, and reputable journalism schools - are located. Reuters headquartered in the UK, Agence France Presse in France, and Inter Press Service in Rome are structurally, ideologically and commercially comparable to other Western or American media institutions.

'Information', as in the concept 'free flow of information', refers to news delivered globally through conventional media and the internet. 'Media' is used as a generic term that refers to the multi-faceted institution and its diverse functions as described by different metaphors (mirror of society, change agent, public servant, public surrogate, vanguards of the people, government tool). 'Journalism' takes on a narrower functionalist definition,

that is, the gathering and processing of news of events and issues that are timely, accurate and fair and distributed to a mass audience. Journalism describes society to itself. Hence, journalism is seen in this book as a producer and product of the environment it operates in. "Press freedom" refers to the journalists' and public's right of access to information, right to report, and freedom to express dissent in the public sphere.

The universality of the liberal-pluralist notion of media freedom as a basic human right, however, has been challenged by conservatives in the Third World, notably the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad<sup>10</sup>, and former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew. The Third World position on media freedom is also shaped by a reactionary stance against cultural and ideological hegemony from the West. One of the prominent critics was Malaysian political scientist, Chandra Muzaffar, who in 1992 founded the International Movement for a Just World.<sup>11</sup> Muzaffar's position reflects the criticisms by Third World leaders of the global dominance, neo-colonialist and 'hegemonic' foreign policies of Western media and corporate institutions. This line of argument defers to Johan Galtung's (1971) 'centre-periphery' model of international power relations,<sup>12</sup> which essentially says that the resources of the majority poor (the periphery nations) are continually exploited for the economic benefits and strategic interests of powerful rich nations (located in the centre).

Muzaffar notes that according to the 'centre-periphery' model, those who occupy the dominant centres of power in the West do not want the rest of the human family (that is, those on the periphery) to:

"... discover this terrible truth about them who strut the world as the purest and holiest apostles of human rights. After all it is these centers of power - specifically, the mainstream Western media and

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10 See Mahathir Mohamad's blogsite (<http://chedet.cc/>) for his critical views of the West and Eurocentrism in general.

11 <http://www.just-international.org/>

12 Galtung, Johan. (1971) 'A structural theory of imperialism,' *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.8: 2, pp.81-117

certain Western governments - who decide which human rights violations should be highlighted and which human rights violations should be downplayed. It is these centers of power who set the human rights agenda for the world. They mould our consciousness on human rights issues. They shape our thinking on human rights."<sup>13</sup>

Muzaffar's observation more than two decades ago is still making its rounds in today's academia. It reflects the theoretical notion that media and journalists tend to view human rights through ideological frames that the media ownership and media system determine the contents, which are transmitted to a mass audience, and then read and interpreted according to the agenda set by the producers.<sup>14</sup> This media-centred communication model assumes that the audiences are passive consumers of media constructed texts. This view is complemented by the alternative user-centred model that sees the media public as comprising critical and intelligent users who filter and process media texts and redefine it to their individual needs - significantly so in today's digital communication environment.

From this alternative perspective alluded to by the uses and gratifications theory (which says that media users play an active role in using the media for specific purposes), one ought to consider the experiences of media audience - and journalists - from within their cultural and political settings. This is because media messages are produced, read and interpreted against different cultural experiences and a complex set of social, personal and political values and needs. Prescribed meanings of foreign media products and the purposes of its production thus vary across culture. It is plausible that media messages and contents, although homogenised to an extent in

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13 Muzaffar, Chandra. 1996, 'Introductory Remarks to the International Conference on Rethinking Human Rights,' In *Human Wrongs: Reflections on Western Global Dominance and its Impact Upon Human Rights*, JUST World Trust, Penang, August 1996 (p.2) <http://www.bandung2.co.uk/books/Files/Law/Human%20Wrongs%20-%20Just%20World%20Trust.pdf> (Accessed April 27, 2012)

14 For a summary of Muzaffar's views of the 'new world order' and its impact on international media coverage of human rights issue, refer to Johnston, David L. (2006), *Chandra Muzaffar's Islamic Critique of Globalization: A Malaysian Contribution to a Global Ethic*, Working Papers Series 2006, No.3, LaTrobe University, Melbourne. [www.latrobe.edu.au/dialogue/assets/downloads/WP2006-3.pdf](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/dialogue/assets/downloads/WP2006-3.pdf) (Accessed April 27, 2012)

online news sites through hyperlinks, are differentiated and contextualised in their production by media organisations and its journalists for a global audience in different political and cultural settings. For example, the different interpretation of the facts and issues in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by CNN and Al Jazeera,<sup>15</sup> or the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir by the Indian and Pakistani media.<sup>16</sup>

### Looking at the world through coloured glasses

One of the outspoken critics of the coverage of Third World issues by Western media (and 'Western democracy') is former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad - who since his retirement in 2003 after 21 years in government continues to write a political blog at: <http://chedet.cc/blog/> with the slogan 'blogging to unblock'. Even in retirement, Mahathir sees himself as speaking up for the Third World.<sup>17</sup> At the core of his stance against the West is his persistent attack on how the Western media and NGOs have carried on where the colonial governments had left in pursuing their economic interests. Mahathir has maintained his stance that Malaysia, and developing countries in general have continually - and intentionally - been misrepresented by the Western media.<sup>18</sup>

Mahathir's anti-West views reflect the unresolved debates over a New World Information Order in the early 70s when Third World nations, under

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- 15 See: (a) 'Gaza and the US media narrative,' *Al Jazeera Inside Story Americas*, Nov.22, 2012 <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmesinsidestoryamericas/2012/11/201211226854665661.html> (b) Hossam Mohammed (2007), 'Media Matters: The Arab portrayal of the United States.' In *Do We Hate America? The Arab Response*, World Security Institute, Washington DC. pp. 33-48 (Accessed November 26, 2012)
- 16 *Conflict, Media and Human Rights in South Asia: Report from a Roundtable*, International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2011. [www.ichrp.org/files/assets/260/south\\_asia\\_roundtable\\_report.pdf](http://www.ichrp.org/files/assets/260/south_asia_roundtable_report.pdf) (Accessed November 26, 2012)
- 17 Wong, Kok Keong (2006) Mahathir and CNN's 'dirty tactics', *Aliran Monthly*, Vol.26 [aliran.com/archives/monthly/2002/6a.html](http://aliran.com/archives/monthly/2002/6a.html) (Accessed April 27, 2012)
- 18 See a commentary of Western reactions to Mahathir's speech, *OIC Summit, Mahathir's speech and post OIC reverberations*. South Asia Analysis Group, by J. Gajendra Singh, Paper No.823 <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers9%5Cpaper823.html> (Accessed June 20, 2008). A similar speech by Mahathir delivered at the International Conference on Rethinking Human Rights, Kuala Lumpur, Dec.6, 1994 can be read at: <http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=mahathir&id=1206> (Accessed April 27, 2012)

the UNESCO umbrella, demanded that Western media provide a more balanced reporting of Third World countries and a fairer exchange of news and information. There are many places in the world that fail to make the news today because they do not connect with the economic and geopolitical interests of the West. Sometimes stories are not reported in the Third World media because journalists lack the resources or professional commitment to investigate further. They would then rely on the better-resourced Western media to cover the stories - such as the Tibetan human rights issues in China, the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle-East, political reforms and revolutions in Burma, Iraq, Egypt and Bahrain, the tribunal of Pol Pot's generals, and the Iraqi war.

The obstacles to the information flow can be formal (legal) or informal (such as inaccessibility to sources, lack of resources to report and investigate) as was foreshadowed by Sean MacBride in his report on the NWIO debates to UNESCO in 1980. The arguments over a New World Information Order remain unresolved today on a practical and conceptual level, with the West focused on media freedom, and information and news as a commodity in an open market while Third World governments are focused on seeing the media as tools of national development, and thus, the rights of governments (and its national news agencies such as Bernama in Malaysia, Xinhua in China, and Vietnam News Agency) to regulate and control the media in the national interest.

To Western journalists working in parts of Asia, human rights are often gauged by the country's level of press freedom, free and fair democratic elections and equal opportunities regardless of race, gender, sexuality and religion. Former Singaporean diplomat, Kishore Mahbubani, professor of public policy at National University of Singapore, in his paper '*Asian Perspective on Human Rights and Freedom of the Press*', noted in 1993 that the "aggressive Western promotion of democracy, human rights and freedom of the press, held up as ideals in developed countries may not work so well in the Third World".<sup>19</sup> He pointed to the double standards and hypocrisy of the US in particular when it comes to serving their own political interests through their utilisation of the media.

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19 Mahbubani, Kishore. 1993, An Asian perspective on human rights and freedom of the press, pp. 159-166, *Media Asia*, vol. 20 no. 3.

Mahubani suggests that instead of perpetuating the ideological difference, Asia and the West need to locate a middle ground - the Golden Mean - to conduct a dialogue as equals with equally legitimate points of view. He notes five principles that should guide such a media discourse: show mutual respect; promote equitable global economic development; work with existing governments; establish minimal codes of civilised conduct; let the free press fly on its own wings.

Writing in the *Harvard International Review* (2010), Mahubani alluded to the US's dominant media worldview in the context of Asia's emergence as a global economic force to be reckoned with.<sup>20</sup> Commenting on the US media coverage of President Barack Obama's visit to Cairo and Shanghai in 2010, Mahubani said:

The gap between US and Asian media reporting on Obama's visit to Asia showed clearly how out of touch key US minds are with Asian cultures. Obama was criticized in the US media for being soft and sensitive, especially in handling China. Yet understanding and showing respect for other cultures' customs is considered de rigeur in Asia (ibid, p.72).

At the core of the Third World criticisms of Western global media dominance and perception of the world is its selective 'Western-centric' discourse on events in the Third World - such as coverage of the 'Asian tsunami' in December 2004. British academic Tracey Skelton in a working paper noted that *The Guardian* covered the tsunami from the angle of how many foreign tourists were killed in the tsunami, while the locals were accorded to lesser significance as 'actors' in the stories. She notes: "... the Guardian's discursive practice is very much framed by hegemonic representations of us and them, and weaves aspects of the discourses of topicality, development and vulnerability through its pages".<sup>21</sup> She added:

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20 Mahubani, Kishore. 2010 'Beyond the Universal: The Cultural Myopia of US Social Science,' *Harvard International Review*, Winter 2010, p.72

21 Skelton, Tracey (2004) *Representations of the 'Asian tsunami' in the British media*, Asian MetaCentre Research Paper Series, No.21, National University of Singapore. p.12. <http://www.populationasia.org/Publications/RP/AMCRP21.pdf> (Accessed Feb 02, 2012)

"The tsunami-affected countries are represented as defenceless, vulnerable and misruled. There is evidence that aspects of these representations are accurate, especially in the context of Indonesia and the government's treatment of Aceh. However, the factors relating to defencelessness, vulnerability and misrule are also linked to the position of these nations and their citizens in the global economy. The devastation of the affected 'Indian Ocean' countries has a great deal to do with the West. That is a story that should also have been told."<sup>22</sup>

Where then does one draw the line between the kind of stories that Third World countries would consider fair and accurate, and those that they would consider as perpetuating the 'vulnerability' of developing countries, and thus, further damaging their international standing? Given that media operations in the Third World are heavily circumscribed by laws and regulations, what is considered to be fair coverage takes on another level of political complexity. Media ownership, demographic spread of the media and the audiences, communications technology, literacy and purchasing power of the people primarily determine the fundamental format and contents of the media. Third World and Western media deal with roughly similar operational factors. However, interference and controls of the media by governments in the Third World has naturally shaped the West's perception of the lack of media freedom in the developing world.

Underpinning the above observations is the question of value system. Asian commentators like Muzaffar, Mahathir and Mahbubani are essentially saying that the political, cultural and media values of the West and Asia, and their respective interpretation of what constitute fundamental human rights vary. This notion can be better understood from a cross-cultural communication discipline. Myers and Myers note that:

'Values are fairly enduring conceptions of the nature of good and bad, of the relative worth you attribute to the things, people and events of your lives. Values are usually embodied in complex moral or religious systems that are found in all cultures and societies. Values indicate to those who share them what is desirable, to what

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22 Skelton (ibid) p.25

degree it is desirable, and therefore what one should strive for. They also provide people with a guidance system, which is supposed to enable them to choose the 'right' alternative when several courses of action are possible ... Values differ from place to place. They are fairly enduring and resistant to change because they are tied to fundamental human needs and because they are learned very early in life in a somewhat absolutistic way. However, many values that are held by a given group of people can be, and often are, conflicting. In order to act, people must decide which of the conflicting values is more important or more basic, which takes over the other.<sup>23</sup>

Values represent shared attitudes within social groups and society at large, of approval and disapproval, of favourable and unfavourable judgments towards other individuals, ideas (for example, freedom), objects (such as the value placed on property), social action and events. Like norms, values vary from one social group or society to another; and they change over time and in different circumstances. This is pertinent to international journalism and journalism training across cultures where human behaviours and drama is continually observed, interpreted and re-constructed by journalists for a dynamic global audience in an environment of information overload. Hence, in training journalists in the Third World, these circumstances need to be considered in designing the training modules and methods.

Edward S. Herman, who co-authored *Manufacturing Consent* (1988)<sup>24</sup> with Noam Chomsky, both of whom developed the 'propaganda model' of the media,<sup>25</sup> provide a framework to understand the 'Asian' view that 'freedom of expression', and thus, media freedom, is not an absolute concept nor can it be used as a universal yardstick across political and cultural

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23 Myers, Gail E. & Myers, Michele T, (1998), '*The Dynamics of Human Communication – A Laboratory Approach*,' McGraw-Hill International, NY, 1988, p.91

24 Herman, Edward S & Chomsky, Norman (1998): *Manufacturing Consent – A Propaganda Model*, Pantheon Books. For excerpts of the book, see [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Herman%20/Manufac\\_Consent\\_Prop\\_Model.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Herman%20/Manufac_Consent_Prop_Model.html) (Accessed April 27, 2012).

25 For a review of the book 'Manufacturing Consent' and the propaganda model, see: [http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Propaganda\\_Model](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Propaganda_Model)



boundaries which has implications for journalism training and education across cultures. As Doug Cospser, a journalism trainer based in Colorado, notes:

...‘do no harm’ should be the number one rule of journalism training. In all things, the safety and identity of trainees is paramount. Depending on time and place, a journalist’s mere participation in a training course can be sufficient cause for arrest. Being photographed at a restaurant table with the wrong people can result in harsh interrogation. The foreign trainer is rarely in danger. The local journalist, if he or she is doing the job right, is always at risk.”<sup>26</sup>

Herman and Chomsky’s thesis highlights that ‘self-censorship’ inevitably occurs across political and cultural systems due to an array of political, structural and organisational constraints. While in the Third World, restraints on press freedom are usually overt in the form of restrictive media laws, in the Western world the controls are more covert in the form of a symbiotic relationship between the media and the interests of political parties and corporations. Cospser notes in his observations of journalists he had worked with in the Third World:

Journalists in developing democracies often feel hopeless, so far behind the developed world. They need to hear that journalists in the United States (and every other developed country) once invented stories to suit their publishers’ or their patriotic purposes, that politicians including US founding fathers Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton owned or controlled newspapers for the main purpose of attacking their political enemies. They need to hear that American journalists and cops and city officials once took bribes as often as not. They need to know that journalism development is a process, that this is perhaps the most important period for journalism in their countries’ histories, and that they have a critical role to play.<sup>27</sup>

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26 Cospser, Doug (2012) *Training Philosophy: A Brief Philosophy of Journalism Training and Development*, [www.dougcospser.com](http://www.dougcospser.com) (Accessed April 27, 2012). See Q&A with Doug Cospser in this book.

27 Cospser, *ibid.*

In acknowledging that the Western media has its share of journalistic inadequacies as with the non-Western media, Herman suggested (in 1994) that it is “urgently important that the Third World . . . tries to maintain and encourage an indigenous media and Third World press networks that can reflect local and Third World interests. This is in fact essential to the preservation of any kind of national and cultural independence and integrity”.<sup>28</sup>

What then can journalists and media organisations in the Third World do to improve their coverage of regional affairs to strengthen their journalistic output and identity? Jeremy Seabrook in a paper '*The Onslaught of the Western Media on the Third World*'<sup>29</sup> expands on Herman's views. While the title connotes the Third World's vulnerability to the consumerist, ideological and cultural dominance by the Western media, Seabrook believes that to 'save' itself from the media onslaught, the non-Western world needs to be “clear about the nature of the (Western media) assault, and of where we may find the strength, the resourcefulness, the conviction and the energy to stand and fight”.<sup>30</sup> He adds:

“To what traditions and practices can we turn, how can we renew and revalidate, popularise and propagate confidence in our own cultures, raise self-esteem of those who now bow down before the heroes and icons and super men and women of the global media, the stars and celebrities whose prodigious wealth and power, and occasionally even talent, are paraded before us in order to diminish our faith in ourselves and those people we associate with in our daily lives?”<sup>31</sup>

The challenge for Third World media and its journalists today is to look within their own traditions of story telling and delve into the history of

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28 Herman, Edward S. 'Freedom of Expression in the west: Myth and Reality.' In *Human Wrongs: Reflections on Western Global Dominance and its Impact Upon Human Rights* JUST World Trust, Penang, August 1996 (p.178)

29 Seabrook, Jeremy (1995), '*The Onslaught of the Western Media on the Third World*', Just World Trust, Penang, Malaysia. p.21.

30 Seabrook, *ibid.*

31 Seabrook, *ibid.*

how the Western media came to dominate the global media scene, study its reporting methodologies and journalistic practices, draw out the 'best practice' benchmarks and adapt it to work in the diverse political, socio-economic and cultural environments in Asia. This could be attained through journalism training and education that takes into account that although there is an 'Asian' and 'Western' way of doing things, the ideal is to develop a model where the best practices of journalism in 'Asia' and the 'West' can be integrated. A plausible model is provided by Inter Press Service (<http://www.ips.org>) news agency, established in 1994, which proclaims its 'Asian' perspective in the coverage of regional issues. The IPS mission states:

"Information is an agent of change. IPS has believed in the role of information as a precondition for lifting communities out of poverty and marginalization. This belief is reflected in our historic mission: "giving a voice to the voiceless" - acting as a communication channel that privileges the voices and the concerns of the poorest and creates a climate of understanding, accountability and participation around development, promoting a new international information order between the South and the North."<sup>32</sup>

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32 IPS mission statement, <http://www.ips.org/institutional/get-to-know-us-2/our-mission/> (Accessed April 27, 2012)

## Q&A WITH MEDIA TRAINER:

### David Brewer

*Media Helping Media, London, UK*

**D**avid Brewer is currently involved in media development work in Africa, Asia, CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), Balkans and Caucasus. His journalism career spans newspapers, radio, TV, and online. He has worked as a political journalist and political editor with the BBC. He was one of the editors responsible for the launch of BBC News Online in 1997 and became the managing editor of the site. He moved to CNN in 2000 as managing editor to set up CNN.com Europe, Middle East and Africa (now CNN International) and CNNArabic.com in 2002, and was editorial consultant for the launch of Al Jazeera English in 2006. He set up Media Helping Media (<http://www.mediahelpingmedia.org>) to support media in transition and post-conflict countries and areas where the media is still developing.

**Eric Loo: In your LinkedIn profile, under Education, you wrote 'Not qualified yet, still working at it ... in the University of Life'. Indeed, you did voluntary work in Laos, Vietnam and India. Even lived with Native American tribes. How have your life cultural experiences shaped your journalism?**

**David Brewer:** When I was a teenager I left a small technical college in Liverpool halfway through the course to travel and to do voluntary work. It changed my outlook on life. I think that having travelled the world and lived in other cultures meant that I could never view issues in the same way as those who had not been lucky to have my experience. This didn't make me feel in any way superior, but it did give me a different slant on stories and their importance and on what issues really matter. I returned home and became a journalist working in print, radio, TV and online. Now I seem to have come full circle and have been travelling the world for the past 12 years, offering media strategy training in some of the countries I first visited as a young man in the 70s.

**What personal philosophy/principles drive your journalism?**

My personal philosophy is that to be a journalist is a privilege because we have a unique role which is to work on behalf of the audience to discover the facts required to inform the public debate so that the audience can make educated choices. And we have to do that with fair, accurate, objective and impartial journalism. All the rest is PR or propaganda.

**How significant was university education as a requirement to work as a journalist when you started in 1977 with Southport Visiter Newspaper in England?**

I don't remember it being an issue. I started as a junior reporter and was sent away to do my NCTJ (National Council for the Training of Journalists) course, where we learnt about essential law for journalists, how to report, how to take shorthand, cover courts and council meetings and how to touch type. Nobody ever asked me for a degree. If they had, I would probably be working as a market gardener or stacking shelves.

**What were the essential skills and attributes that news organisations looked for in junior journalists at that time?**

A news sense, sometimes called a 'nose for news'. They wanted someone who knew the community, understood the local audience's needs, could pick up on the stories that most concerned that audience, had excellent contacts, was reliable (punctual in every respect - meetings, deadlines etc.), understood editorial ethics of fairness, accuracy, objectivity and impartiality, and knew how to write a cracking headline and intro and construct a news story in a way where it could be cut just in case a late advert opportunity arrived and the piece had to be shortened (inverted pyramid journalism). If you can do that, you probably don't need a degree - particularly one in media (but I am not sure there were media degrees in those days).

**In 1981 you left newspaper journalism to work with BBC radio, television and BBC News Online before venturing into media consultancies and finally setting up Media Helping Media to help 'journalists where the media is still developing'. What are the personally rewarding experiences in running MHM?**

I set up MHM because I realised that there were not many free, online training resources available for journalists living in countries where the

trainers were never sent. So I decided to write a series of random modules based on the most recent training I had delivered. They are released under Creative Commons and have been translated into many languages. IREX, the US media development organisation, has recently used 100+ in an online learning resource called Moodle (moodle.org), and translated the material into Azeri to be used in nine universities across Azerbaijan. Last week I was in Baku, training the university lecturers how to use the free tool. That was a particularly rewarding experience, to know that what I had written and made available for anyone to use, would be taken up as a learning resource for journalism school students.

### **What skills in journalism are more effectively learned in the newsroom than in a university journalism programme?**

Practical skills. Theory is great. Even role-playing can be great. But nothing beats turning up for the morning meeting with a story and fighting to convince the editor to let you do it. Then lining up your interviews, gathering the facts, checking those facts, producing those facts and then presenting them to the audience. When I started in print, I learnt all my lessons through public humiliation. The news editor, a stern army type, would call each reporter to his desk, situated at the head of the newsroom, and point out any mistakes in your copy. This humiliation helped me learn from my mistakes. It makes you determined never to make the same mistake twice.

### **As a strategy consultant for media organisations in the West and a media trainer in transition and post-conflict countries, what are the critical differences in the training needs of media organisations in the rich West, and journalists in the poorer countries?**

I think the difference is urgency. In transition and post-conflict countries, journalists appear eager to learn and apply. They are open to new ideas. They experiment. They listen and they value any input. Sometimes, not always, but sometimes, journalists in the West can give the impression that they think they know it all. They might, but I doubt it. I can see the day, when journalists in the developing world are far ahead of those in the West in every department.

**In what areas do you see 'journalists in the developing world' forging far ahead of those in the West? Why do you think so?**

In realising that they must produce content for every device the users turn to for information from existing resources and, where possible, by using free, open-source and social media tools. In understanding that the views of the audience are an integral part in storytelling and that it is important to see diverse perspectives and feed them back into the story telling process. In picking up on a revenue-generating idea and doing it that day, rather than forming a project plan and working party to first analyse the likely risks and benefits and then taking six months to reach a decision.

**Based on your decades of experience in media training, what have been the significant changes in how journalists in developing countries are trained today compared to the 1990s before the Internet became part of the newsroom setup?**

It's still developing. Some media development organisations get excited about so-called 'new media' training. That is so lame. We built BBC News Online in 1997. It is now more than 15 years ago. Is that 'new media'? No, of course it's not. But some training about online journalism is called 'new media'. What we should be looking at is training in digital media. Similarly, some training is about investigative journalism. That is important. But if you introduce an investigative journalism course into a transition state with a fledgling independent media you will stimulate revenge journalism, which can further polarise the media landscape. Transition and post-conflict countries need to be offered the basics first. And, of course, all journalism is investigative. If your story is not investigative, it is PR or propaganda.

**You've worked with journalists from Asia to the Middle East, Europe and Africa. Your next training session is at Dak Lak in Vietnam. How do you prepare yourself to engage with the journalists who work in environments and circumstances that are so different from what you have experienced in the West?**

I think it helps that I have travelled so much and I am comfortable in other cultures. I visited Vietnam before unification, and have been a regular visitor for the last six years. Before visiting any country I research, and what is most important is that when I arrive I tell them at the start of the

sessions that I come as a colleague, not as a lecturer, trainer or expert. I have as much to learn as them. And I always rewrite all my material and try to keep it fresh by subscribing to the latest newsletters on new developments in journalism and, in particular, social media. Too many trainers presume they can reuse training material. They can't. You have to continually rewrite and refresh. And if you can add some data that is less than a week old, those attending appreciate it. So I would say keep informed, keep the material fresh and relevant, and go in the spirit of being a colleague and prepared to learn.

**How do you train journalists to report the 'truth' and be 'an independent monitor of power' in developing countries, where media owners who are affiliated with those in power appoint the editors?**

I do a lot of training in editorial ethics, but the honest answer is that you can train them in how to report the truth, but you have to realise that they may not be able to because of circumstances beyond their control. All you can do is talk about what is ideal and then use tried, tested and proven case studies. But it's important to be honest and open that the media in the West, and journalists in the West, can be as corrupt as anywhere. It's just that we are better at hiding it. Most important of all is to be realistic. In some countries, if you don't write what you are told, the best you can wish for is to lose your job. In other countries the cost is much higher. I grew up as a journalist in a cushy democracy where the journalists are taken out and wined and dined by the rich and powerful; I now work in countries where journalists are taken out with bullets and bombs by the rich and powerful. I have nothing to offer other than being there as a colleague and sounding board and helping them negotiate the ethical difficulties they are facing with sensitivity and realism.



**In your article, 'What it takes to be a media trainer'<sup>33</sup> among the tips you listed are: (a) 'All skills offered need to be transferable both culturally and locally.' (b) '...don't try to apply Western values to their lives' (of journalists in the developing countries). Can you please explain how you have worked on these principles in your training of journalists in post-conflict countries?**

I think it's important to ensure that all training is regionally and culturally sensitive. That is not a signal for compromise. It just means that we have to be realistic. Trainers must not step off a plane and start to roll out methods that may work for the BBC and CNN but have absolutely no relevance to the people on the ground. To roll out methodology that worked under totally different conditions is pointless. We need to work with those we are engaging with in order to help them find solutions that are fitted to their environment and circumstances.

**It's said that in the West, the media is in the grips of corporate influence and balance sheets. In developing countries (for example in the Indochina region), the media is in the hands of government control and censorship. Issues of human rights abuse and public corruption, however, happen across political and cultural systems. How do you address these issues in your training workshops while at the same time being culturally sensitive and aware of the consequences on the journalists who expose the issues in for example Vietnam and Laos?**

You don't. My job is not to change anything. I have no solution to any political situation. And I am certainly not into activism. I don't believe it is possible to be an activist and a journalist because journalism requires objectivity and impartiality. All I can do is try to transfer skills in order to build local capacity so that the journalists I am working with are better prepared to work out for themselves how they should behave and exercise their journalism. My role is to give the media leaders of the future the skills and values they need, both in technical and ethical terms, so that when media freedom is more relaxed they are prepared to respond and deliver journalism covering the needs of the whole audience.

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33 <http://www.mediahelpingmedia.org/training-resources/tot/596-the-essential-qualities-for-a-media-trainer> (Accessed October 25, 2012)

**How can journalism schools better prepare students for the industry?**

I think it's hard to teach journalism if you haven't been a journalist, and it's hard to continue to teach it if you stop learning yourself. I often do visiting lecturing. Recently, I spoke, from experience, about newsroom convergence and integration and the workflows and roles and responsibilities required. At the end, the lecturer took me to one side. We don't teach that, he said. We teach them platform specific skills. We discourage talk of convergence. He had been lecturing for six years. I pity his students. Another lecturer interrupted one of my talks to take exception at a point I had made about using Hootsuite for newsgathering from social media. He said that social media was a distraction. The students appeared to be suppressing giggles. At the end a few told me not to worry about the lecturer, and that he was old and out of touch. Perhaps in that case I should pity the lecturer - the students were way ahead of him and I doubt he had much to teach them.

## CHAPTER 2

# Media across cultures – charting the middle path

This chapter looks at the philosophical and practical variance and similarities among media systems across political cultures. It concludes that with the Internet coming of age it is impractical to consider international journalism as a divergence of media values and practices between the West (liberal-pluralist) and Asia (authoritarian). A more constructive approach is to draw from good media practices and media values from the West and Asia to develop an integrated cultural form of journalism, and from there, to consider how this form can be taught and practised in the Asian setting.

### Different yet similar

Authoritarian governments treat the press as a state apparatus to promote their policies, and to an extent, justify their actions. The press extends the state's control of access to information. The state confines the media discourse and journalistic investigation to what the government deems are in the national interest. The press in authoritarian regimes thus functions from top down. The government decides what is worthy of media coverage, and what should or should not be published or broadcast. Political dissent and opposing views are considered to be contrary to national interest, and in the extreme, subversive. Consensus and standardisation of media contents is prescribed as the primary goal of mediated communication. Hence, journalists are obliged to report and function for the national interest and collective good of the community. This philosophy prevails in countries where the press is categorised as "not free" by press freedom monitoring organisations such as *Reporters San Frontieres*, *Committee to Protect Journalists*, and *Freedom Forum*.

On the other end of the spectrum is the liberal media, free and autonomous, unshackled from any form of government control. The people are seen to possess inalienable rights to information, and the media is obliged to confront and challenge those in power. Governments are not permitted, under the law and constitution, to interfere with how journalists carry out their work, how news organisations produce, package and distribute their

contents. The press exists outside of the government's direct control. The press serves as an independent representative of the people, a watchdog of the government, a vigilant tracker of human rights abuse, corporate accountability, political corruption and persecution. The main criticism against the libertarian press system by governments in developing countries is that an unregulated media given a free rein will result in excessive commercialism, sensationalism, triviality and infotainment at the expense of reportage that helps to grow the nation's economy.

A variation of the libertarian concept is the view that the press should be socially responsible to the community. This position holds that the media have definitive public service functions that transcend commercial objectives. The press is morally obliged to primarily represent the people, to provide a channel for feedback from the people to the government and vice versa. The government has a limited role in intervening in media operations and regulating the journalists' work if public interests are not adequately served.

Ancillary to this social responsibility concept is the 'democratic participant' position where the media's fundamental role is to protect and represent the rights of citizens. Central to the democratic participant position is the element of 'people power' and the 'right of reply'. This position charts a middle path, as described by Watson (1998) that "it stands for defence against commercialisation and monopoly while at the same time being resistant to the centrism and bureaucracy so characteristic of public media institutions."<sup>34</sup>

McQuail, as quoted in Watson, notes that the democratic-participant position carries a 'mixture of theoretical elements including libertarianism, utopianism, socialism, egalitarianism, localism'.<sup>35</sup> This concept underpins public journalism (also known as civic journalism), as trialled, and later

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34 Watson, James D (1998), *Media and Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Process*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, pp.92-93

35 *ibid*, p.93

adopted as a legitimate form of journalism, by numerous provincial newspaper organisations in the US in the mid-90s.<sup>36</sup>

Rights of access to information and the media by citizen and minority groups are fundamental constituents of the 'democratic-participant' theory - the right to voice their opinions and be heard and represented by the media. Thus, the theory opposes the concentration of media ownership and rejects the view that media audiences are passive receivers of news. The rights, needs and aspirations of the receivers (the people) are as important as the rights of the media to report and distribute their stories.

The Communist (Lenin) concept of the press overlaps with the authoritarian position except that while under the Communist concept (also known as the Soviet press concept), the press is controlled and owned by the Party. The press is oriented towards serving the interests of the working class via the policies as promulgated by the party leadership.

Lenin proposed that if the media did not meet the needs of the people, the revolutionaries have a right to establish a nationwide, legal newspaper to fulfil that function. One may interpret Lenin's conceptualisation as vaguely reflective of the libertarian values that underpin the press in Western democracies, except that in Lenin's case, the difference is that in order to protect the people's interests, it has to come under the direct control of the Party leadership. This implies less faith in a privately owned newspaper where profit-maximisation objectives overshadow the public service functions of the press as interpreted from the social responsibility position.

A variation of the authoritarian concept is the development-oriented press system. This recognises that development communication is central to the achievement of national integration and economic development. This concept was a point of contention between Western news agencies and developing countries during the debates for a New World Information and Communication Order in the 60s and 70s. The concept looked at the press as partners of the government in developing the nation's economy

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36 Ford, Pat (1998) *Don't Stop There: Five Adventures in Civic Journalism*, Pew Centre for Civic Journalism, Washington. <http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/pubs/stop/index.html> (Accessed September 18, 2012)

- which, to the interpretation of the West is a euphemistic phrase to mean writing positive stories to attract foreign investments and eschew reports deemed to undermine the government's legitimacy. Instead of being an adversary of the government, ascribed as a distinct feature of Western media traits, the development concept says the press is an agent of social change - hence its inclination for positive (achievements) rather than bad news (conflict and controversies). Freedom of the press should hence be restrained and shaped by socio-economic development imperatives. This position favours media contents that oppose dependency on the West. It challenges the centre-periphery model and rejects foreign ('Western') cultural and economic hegemony. It works towards establishing a national identity, accepts and reports on development efforts and achievements by democratically elected governments. Western media and communication scholars have since the 1960s labelled the development-oriented press as being a government mouthpiece.

However, few of the world's media fit squarely into these normative media concepts, which describe the ideal situation, and theorise what are to be expected of the media rather than what necessarily happen in reality. Nonetheless, these normative concepts are informative to the extent that they define how journalists ought to carry out their obligations in relation to the state, and what the state expect from the media. The usefulness of the normative press concepts is in clarifying the divergent perceptions of the nature of the news process and how news ought to be constructed and disseminated, and how the media should relate to the state under different political and economic circumstances. The main element that binds these normative concepts is the notion of freedom, which, regardless of the political and cultural settings, is fundamental for the professional functions of journalists. The notion of freedom, however, opens up another grey area where its interpretations likewise vary across cultures. Which implies that the one-size-fits-all (that is, the press should be an independent and vigilant watchdog) approach to journalism training and education underpinned by the tenets of a free press needs a broader framework to be workable in the circumstances that journalists in Asia work under.

### **Where the notion of a free and unfettered press began**

Wherever Europeans settled - in North American territories, India, Asia or Africa - they initiated and nurtured a media system modelled on the libertarian platform and left much of its legacy of free expression and a liberal media in the colonies. One of the oft-cited literature in the study

of the history of press freedom is the '*Areopagitica: A speech of Mr. John Milton for the liberty of unlicensed printing to the Parliament of England*' (1644). Milton posed the following arguments for a free press in Britain. First is the theological argument that a free press is indispensable for the love of God, truth and the 'free and knowing spirit' to flourish. Censorship is rejected because it stifles the individual's freedom to think, to exercise discretion, and to opt for a 'Christian' life based on the precept that everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. How news was to be reported should be left to the professionalism of journalists and the choice of news consumption left to the tastes and desires of the people.

Second, is the idea that the rights of individuals to voice dissent should guide the conduct of the press. The natural right principle stems from the theological approach. This principle extends its arguments to the political sphere - that is individuals have the right to disagree with the views of governments. And governments should be accountable to the people. Third, is the utilitarian argument that state censorship of public opinion inevitably gives birth to despotic governments. Press freedom is the exclusive check against corrupt governments. A free press increases the probability of good, open, accountable and honest governance. Press freedom is necessary for attaining truth through unrestricted public discussion among citizens.

Milton's arguments paint a media environment in an ideal situation. They provide the basis for the normative theories of the press. However, in reality, the liberty of journalists to practise their craft is better understood within the context of more complex and differentiated notion of freedom of communication and journalists' responsibilities across cultural and political contexts. As McQuail noted, "The philosophical traditions of India and the communication values of China and Japan, with their stress on harmony, solidarity and empathy are reminders of alternative prescriptions for judging media performance and guiding media practices."<sup>37</sup>

The libertarian approach to journalism practice in Western democracies is often applied to the developing world in gauging the level of press

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37 McQuail, D (2000), Some reflections on the western bias of media theory, *Asian Journal of Communications*, Vol.10, No.2, 2000, AMIC, Singapore

freedom, for example, the indicators used by Reporters San Frontières and Freedom House's annual survey of global press freedom that focus on the principle of non-interference by governments, by laws, regulations and the Constitution, in the work of journalists to report, investigate, confront and challenge the state and corporations in the interest of the people. Notwithstanding the principles of press freedom, one may argue that given the vast differences in political, economic, cultural, technological and social circumstances in the West and Third World countries, it is necessary to complement the libertarian model with the partnership-in-development journalistic genre of the early 60s, when the notion of 'development journalism' was floated and remains today as a form of journalism that focuses on the history and context, causes and effects, processes and solutions of development-related issues. Which makes it peculiarly 'Asian' in its features and functions.

Hence, the theories of the press, which were largely conceptualised by scholars from within the media environment in the West (primarily the US) are useful to the extent that they provide a comprehensive framework for studying the world's media systems - but from the 'Western' perspective. From the 'Asian' perspective though, the media in parts of Asia had travelled on a different path dotted by traditions and customs, centuries of struggling for independence from colonial rule, followed by struggles for press freedom from authoritarian post-colonial states, and where press freedom was legislated - such as in the case of Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, and where private media ownership has led to excessive commercialism and corruption to this day.

### **The many faces of media in Asia**

Media in Asia have gone through phases of fundamental change since the mid-1990s spurred by the forces of global commercialisation, the internet and political reforms, such as in 1991 in the post-Khmer Rouge regime when the country came under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC); in 1997 with the handover of Hong Kong to China; in 1998 with the fall of Suharto in Indonesia, and the sacking of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia which led to the birth of '*Reformasi*' movements; in 2001 in Thailand when business tycoon and media owner Thaksin Shinawatra became Prime Minister until 2006; and in February 2012 an emerging democracy in Burma with Aung Sang Suu Kyi elected to parliament as leader of the opposition National League for Democracy,



after being released from 21 years of house arrest in November 2010. Amidst the chaos, India and the Philippines remain as the beacons of media freedom - and to an extent, media commercialism, in the region.

While the free press philosophy is founded on Euro-American libertarian media traditions and philosophies, in post-colonial Asia the libertarian principles may not necessarily apply as they do to the media in the West. Press freedom in parts of Asia is acknowledged in principle, even in the Constitution. But the notion is manifested in various shades across the social and political structures. For instance, in the Philippines, the press was prominent in its struggles against colonial rule under the Spanish (1521-1898) and the Americans (1898-1946). The press is a product of its time, molded and shaped by prevailing political, social and economic conditions. Tuazon (2007) noted that the 'bourgeois press' (corporate theory of the press)<sup>38</sup> could be traced back to the US-colonial period where newspapers owned by American entrepreneurs, notably William Randolph Hearst, were used to perpetuate American rule, protect American corporate interests and suppress anti-colonial struggles. In the post-colonial era after the Second World War, the 'pro-corporate bourgeois press' system was continued by wealthy Filipino families.

Filipino elite families who began to monopolize the media industry considered their ownership of press establishments as a private enterprise - indeed, along the lines of American capitalism - and appropriated for themselves the civil libertarian doctrine of "freedom of the press" and "freedom of expression." In fact, however, the elite ownership of major newspapers, radio and TV networks basically had nothing to do with press freedom. What they were after was to use media ownership to promote their corporate interests as well as the vested interests of politicians or the political elite.<sup>39</sup>

Since the colonial era, the 'bourgeois press' has been opposed by the 'progressive' or 'alternative press' (Tuazon, *ibid*), which peaked during

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38 Tuazon, Bobby (2007), *Bourgeois Journalism vs Alternative Journalism in the Philippines*, *Bulatlat*, Vol.7:10, April 15-21, 2007, <http://www.bulatlat.com/news/7-10/7-10-journ.htm> (Accessed September 21, 2012)

39 Tuazon (*ibid*).

the martial rule by President Ferdinand Marcos (1972-1986) when the bourgeois press, owned by Marcos cronies, were used as a government mouthpiece. The bourgeois press remains as strong today as it was during the colonial period. Where today's media proprietors in the Philippines use their newspapers, radio stations and television networks to control their commercial interests, the 'bourgeois press' has given rise to rampant media commercialism, corruption and excesses. This has also given rise to the growth of the alternative progressive press, many of them operating on the internet, such as publications by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism and VERA Files ([verafiles.org](http://verafiles.org))<sup>40</sup> that focus on issues overlooked by mainstream media. Tuazon notes:

In contrast to the bourgeois theory, the alternative press sustains the tradition began by the revolutionary press during the period of colonialism by publishing critical and investigative reports on poverty, social injustice, political repression and human rights violations, and other sectoral and multi-sectoral issues. Moreover, the alternative press is born out of a society that is torn by social conflicts between the rich and poor, between those struggling for change and a few small elite resisting social transformation in all its aspects. The alternative press is alternative, because it reports on issues and people who have been consistently ignored, nay, rejected by the bourgeois press and articulates the sentiments and aspirations of the poor; it is radical, because it commits itself to social change and social responsibility. In a sense, it continues the revolutionary tradition of the Filipino press by its constant search and struggle for change and for siding with the voiceless and powerless majority.

Journalism in the Philippines has strived and thrived under the bastion of press freedom. Arguably, the archipelago is recognized as one of the pioneers of development communication and development journalism in the 60s and 70s where the Press Foundation of Asia established its news agency, Depthnews (Development Economics Population Theme News).<sup>41</sup> Journalism in the Philippines, which reflects much of the libertarian and

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40 See Q&A with one of VERA Files's founders, Yvonne Chua, in this book.

41 Loo, Eric (2009) *Best Practices of Journalism in Asia*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Singapore, p.19-20.

development-participant action press system as explained earlier, is the exception rather than the rule in Asia. Sunanda Datta-Ray (1998) writing in *'Press Freedom and Professional Standards in Asia'*<sup>42</sup> notes that press freedom varies widely across Asian countries, where each nation has its own characteristics and definitions of self-censorship, media manipulation and media responsibility.

Syed Arabi Idid (1998) takes up the issue of social responsibility across cultures by examining the realities of local laws and new communication technologies affecting journalism methods and practices in Malaysia. He identifies four factors influencing the level of press freedom in Malaysian society: the system of government; the makeup of society; the history of the press (including ownership); and the country's economic development level.

The common theme in the arguments of Asian media scholars is that press freedom should be exercised in the context of social responsibility, which is defined, in the case of Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and China, by the state and exercised in the form of government monopoly of the broadcast/print media such as in North Korea, China, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar. The second form of control is by licensing (mainly via the Ministry of Information) and self-censorship exercised by journalists through fear of persecution or costly defamation actions for 'false' reporting of state matters and government leaders. The ultimate means of indirect control of the media is through acts of violence against journalists, such as in the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Which leads to learned self-censorship and its consequence - restrained and overly cautious journalism, which pose as one of the weaknesses of journalism practice in parts of Asia.<sup>43</sup>

It is also a fact that media in modern Asia is significantly shaped by the legacies of Western colonial rule, which continues today in the form of popular culture and media texts. P.B. Sawant (2003), president of the World

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42 Latif, Asad (ed) (1998), *Walking the Tightrope. Press Freedom and Professional Standards in Asia*. Singapore: AMIC.

43 Syed Arabi Idid (1998) 'Malaysia' in Latif, Asad (ed) *Walking the Tightrope. Press Freedom and Professional Standards in Asia*. Singapore: AMIC, p.122

Association of Press Councils (of India) notes in his paper 'Accountability in Journalism' that the media in Asia should provide an avenue for open public engagement to be effective in its function as an informer and educator of the people.<sup>44</sup> Language, race, culture, nationalism and media laws have traditionally weighed heavily on the work of journalists in parts of Asia. A series of articles on the Asian media published by Harvard University's Nieman Reports (1996)<sup>45</sup> reflect the many 'ideological' positions on the issue. From the West, we get the 'American-centric' perspective where press freedom is deemed to be a universal right - hence, the liberal-pluralistic critique of the Asian media. From Asia, press freedom is deemed as not an absolute value, but one that needs to be contextualised to the diverse socio-economic, cultural and political environments in Asia - where state censorship and control of the media is perceived as a politically-justified practice in the 'national interest'.

While true to an extent - such as in the Indochinese countries and Burma - self-censorship by journalists is built into the media production process in countries like Malaysia and Singapore through the lessons of history whereby the states have continued to contain the diversity of critical discourse on public issues via the array of media laws and the political patronage system where editors and media owners are affiliated with the government. For many journalists in the ASEAN region, the real threat lies in the extreme caution taken by journalists in their reporting as a consequence of a history of defamation suits by politicians, unexplained sackings for challenging the political status quo, closure of news organisations under the media laws (such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act in Malaysia). One of the most cited cases is that of Singapore, where the government has consistently succeeded in numerous multimillion dollar libel actions against local journalists and foreign correspondents from the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *The Economist* and *International Herald Tribune*.<sup>46</sup> And in Malaysia, an increasing trend for corporate leaders to sue online journalists

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44 Sawant, P.B. (2003). 'Accountability in Journalism.' *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 18 (1):16-28.

45 The Asian Media - From Kashmir to Taiwan, *Nieman Reports*, Harvard University. Vol.L No.3, Fall 1996.

46 'Prime Minister and his father sue Far Eastern Economic Review for libel', IFEX/SEAPA report, September 14, 2006. [http://www.ifex.org/singapore/2006/09/14/prime\\_minister\\_and\\_his\\_father\\_sue/](http://www.ifex.org/singapore/2006/09/14/prime_minister_and_his_father_sue/) (Accessed February 28, 2013)

for their critical reports - the most recent being *The Malaysian Insider*, an online news portal, sued by Malaysia Airlines executive chairman, Tajudin Ramli, for its report on the airline's loss of RM8 billion.<sup>47</sup> This learned apprehension is extended to the people where critical information on 'sensitive issues' is generally withheld from the media. Consequently, Malaysian and Singaporean newspapers tend to offer their readers a staple of safe business news and soft features.

In a nutshell, the Malaysian government expects the media to: (a) support efforts in nation-building and to be a partner in national development; (b) help mould a national identity, for instance the '1Malaysia' campaign by the Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak; (c) help promote policies to facilitate their implementation; and (d) exercise self-restraint and good sense to avert misunderstanding or cause tension among ethnic, racial and religious groups.<sup>48</sup>

Since the sacking of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in 1998, the people have emerged to be a political force, mobilising their collective views via the online media such as *Malaysiakini* and *The Malaysian Insider*. The freedom to write and report, however, is tempered by the realities of race and religion being sensitive areas of reporting in Malaysian mainstream media. Journalists are mindful of the religious and racial sensitivities of the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities. As far as taking a more assertive role in their interactions when the government is concerned, Malaysian journalists generally defer to an indirect and allusive form of criticism rather than directly confronting the authorities as commonly adopted by journalists in the West. Malaysian journalists differ from journalists in the West in that the former knows when to throw its punches and when to pull them back. This throw-and-pull momentum represents the Malaysian approach to reporting and writing between the lines as a consequence of

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47 'Former MAS chairman sues Malaysian Insider for RM200 million,' *Bernama*, August 26, 2011, <http://my.news.yahoo.com/former-mas-chairman-sues-malaysian-insider-rm200-million-050116018.html> (Accessed July 27, 2012)

48 '1 Malaysia - a work in progress, not a failure, says PM,' *The Malaysian Insider*, September 17, 2010. <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/1-malaysia-a-work-in-progress-not-a-failure-says-pm>; and 'H.Hasan, H.Habil & NA Ibrahim (2013), *The Roles of Media in Realising 'Unity in Diversity'*, 'Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. <http://www.ipedr.com/vol42/035-ICKCS2012-K10045.pdf> (Accessed February 28, 2013)

government control of the mainstream media - as akin to what Kompas journalist in Jakarta, Ratih Hardjono (1998) described as "indirect writing style of invoking allegories and figures of speech that we used when Suharto was in power".<sup>49</sup>

Likewise in China, while the tightly controlled media see themselves as standing on the threshold of major reforms as the government opens its economy to foreign competition after its entry into the World Trade Organisation in 2002, the little leeway the media have to critically report, or write in between the lines, on the state is couched in a history of state-controlled journalism. In his address to the National Peoples Congress in 2002, former Premier Zhu Rongji said that as part of regulating the market economy, the media might be given to perform a watchdog role. Frank Chin, columnist for the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong, pointed out that regardless, the Chinese media remained the official mouthpiece of the ruling Communist Party. How can it be the "watchdog" and the "lapdog" at the same time, Chin asked.<sup>50</sup> The answer, perhaps, lies in the notion that journalism reflects the communication traditions of the cultures that journalists operate in. In any form of reporting, it is the journalists' knowledge base, sensitivity to diverse sources and experience in the societies they are reporting about that determines the factual and contextual accuracy of their stories. While journalists in the West are wont to confront and challenge directly, journalists in parts of Asia may take the 'softer' approach, mindful of the importance of 'saving face' in their field of questions to their sources.

In Indonesia, during President Habibie's short rule (May 1998 - October 1999), his government issued hundreds of publishing licenses, most of them to tabloids so that each city or town in the vast country of 200 million people could have its own newspaper. Many of these licenses were issued to former journalists, some of whom had fought for press freedom during the Suharto era. But, novice newspaper owners discovered that getting the

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49 Ratih Hardjono (1998), 'Indonesian media still censoring itself,' *Nieman Reports*, Harvard University, Fall 1998. <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102330/Indonesian-Media-Still-Censoring-Itself.aspx> (Accessed September 21, 2012)

50 Chin, Frank (2002) 'Mainland media: government watchdog or lapdog?' *China Post*, April 19, 2002, Taiwan.

license was the easy part, setting up and maintaining a credible newspaper was harder. Most did not have the required financial backing to hire good journalists. Hence, inexperienced journalists who ended up working for these newspapers wrote mainly sensational unsourced stories. Setting up distribution networks was also expensive. Indonesian Information Minister Yunus Yosfiah (1998-99) who was instrumental in issuing the licenses and who had a strong reformist outlook, told journalists during his tenure that the government would no longer close down the media for its criticism or being outspoken. "I promote freedom of the press. But please make use of this freedom for your own good. The government will no longer close down the media for its criticism or being outspoken. But the public will intelligently know which media deserve their trust and appreciation. If you rely only on emotion or your personal mood, readers will throw away newspapers or magazines," he said.<sup>51</sup>

Some of the new licensees soon found a niche where they could make money in the fast liberalising society - essentially, trading in smut. Before the end of the first year of media reforms, there was a thriving X-rated press in Indonesia.<sup>52</sup> There were dozens of publications, which bordered on pornography (*pesona* in Indonesian) that tested the tolerance of the predominantly Islamic society. This attracted calls from community groups for some controls on the publication licenses given out by the Habibie government.

In November 2002, the passing of a new controversial broadcasting bill by the government of President Megawati Sukarnoputri alarmed media freedom advocates, because they feared it might lead to curbs on media freedoms. Ironically, pressure applied by the United States on Megawati's government to control rising Islamic militancy in some parts of the country led to the government imposing restrictions on the Indonesian media, particularly the newspapers' partisan coverage.

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51 Kafil Yamin (1998), Indonesian media: *A free press but an irresponsible one?* Interpress Service, December 17, 1998, <http://www.ipsnews.net/1998/12/indonesia-media-a-freer-press-but-an-irresponsible-one/> (Accessed September 21, 2012)

52 'Jakarta sees rush of new X-rated tabloids,' *Straits Times*, Singapore, June 29, 1999, p.23

In the Philippines, a similar reformist era in media freedoms followed the 1986 overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship. As in Indonesia, the newfound freedom in the Philippines led to excesses in commercial journalism. Coronel (1998) notes that threats to media freedoms comes from intense commercialisation, especially in television, and the concentration of media ownership in the hands of the Filipino elites.<sup>53</sup> Big local companies collaborating with big foreign players and new technologies made it harder for independent small players to compete. The problem that journalists in the Philippines face today is not a lack of media freedoms, but how to access the media to get their voices heard.

In Thailand in the 1990s, the country broke free from the shackles of media control. By the end of the decade, Thailand came close to be declared a free-media environment by *Reporters Without Borders*. Though the military and the government still have major interests in the media sector, the private media industry thrived - newspapers, radio and television. The result is a glut of information in the public arena rather than a lack of diversity in media discourse. In early 2002, Thaksin Shinawatra's government alarmed free-media advocates when he moved to censor the broadcast media's criticism of his government. At the same time, his government also moved to deport two foreign journalists in the country for reporting an apparent rift between Shinawatra and the King. The government argued that the journalists were a threat to national security. The issue was later resolved with an apology from journalists and the government withdrew deportation proceedings.

In India, for many decades, the media have enjoyed greater freedoms than other developing Asian countries, but it was only in the 1990s that private local radio and television channels started to be established in the subcontinent. The growth of Indian press was constrained by low literacy rates in the country especially in rural areas. Thus, the Indian press was mainly urban-based with most of the better known publications printed in English. That started to change in the mid-90s following the economic liberalisation in the country with literacy rates increasing in the countryside, which led to the growth of vernacular newspapers. Today, Hindi press accounts for more than a third of the newspaper market in India, and the English press about a fifth. With television now reaching

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53 Coronel, Sheila. 1998. 'Media ownership and control in the Philippines', from [www.oneworld.org/wacc/media](http://www.oneworld.org/wacc/media) (Accessed September 10, 2012)



most of India's rural population, this has also created a significant market for the vernacular media.

### **Functions of the press from the Asian perspective**

Governments in developing countries have consistently asked why should the press feel that it must inherently be adversaries of the government? Why should the press not be expected to work with the government in the national interest? These questions could be asked of the media in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and India. Notwithstanding the contrasting views of journalism practices and priorities in developing Asia and the developed West, journalists generally share a common view of what makes news in the context of the dominant news values as theorised by Galtung and Ruge (1965)<sup>54</sup> and revisited by Harcup and O'Neil (2001).<sup>55</sup> In the political settings in Asia, though, the press is ambiguously regarded to be 'partners' in national development.

In view of the coercive controls on the media, it is hard to see how journalists working in a regulated media environment in parts of Asia could operate otherwise. A working definition of 'Asian' journalism can plausibly start at its variance from Western liberal tradition - that is, journalism in Asia is guardedly contentious, constructively adversarial, and critically supportive. As editor-in-chief of *The Jakarta Post*, Endy Bayuni, in an interview with me in April 2006 on the topic of best practices in journalism noted:<sup>56</sup>

Some norms in journalisms (accuracy, clarity, comprehensive and engaging reporting) are universal, and some are cultural or time specific. The former don't change because they are universal, the latter change with geography and time. But while the norms may be universal, their applications may differ from time to time and region to region. The quest to get to the truth as close as possible, the desire to tell or narrate stories are some of the norms that don't change through time or geography. They are universal.

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54 Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The structure of foreign news: The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64-90.

55 Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2001). What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited. *Journalism Studies*, 2(2), 261-280.

56 Bayuni, Endy (2009), *The Jakarta Post: Forging public service values*, in Loo, E (2009), *Best Practices of Journalism in Asia*, Konrad Adenauer Media Programme Asia, Singapore. p.209

## Q&A WITH JOURNALIST:

### **Syed Nazakat**

*Special correspondent, The Week, New Delhi*

**M**y love affair with journalism began early. I was still in school when I used to carry newspapers and magazines with me everywhere I went. It was a turbulent time in my hometown - Kashmir, a disputed region on the world map, which is claimed both by India and Pakistan. After an election was rigged by the government, the armed insurgency erupted in 1989. I was in school when the first bomb exploded in the valley.

What followed was a vicious cycle of violence and killings. Our world was shrunk to the four walls of a house. In the evening, the people would sit together and huddled around a radio set to hear what had happened in the day. Back then, the news programme of the BBC Urdu Service was very popular in Kashmir and was considered an authentic source of news. The news would trigger random discussion. My motivation to become a journalist, somehow, stemmed from those late evening experiences. I was a kid and instead of being an active participant in the discussion, I would sit in the corner and listen.

Few years later I found my love for journalism working for a local newspaper in Srinagar. Apart from writing mostly news briefs and a column for children, I started going out to conduct interviews. My early exposure to human suffering and the sad events in Kashmir also generated the impulse to listen and tell the stories behind the story. It was somehow also a desire to understand myself. As I completed my graduation, I couldn't think of a second profession.

Next couple of years saw me working as a reporter, a field producer, sub-editor and news editor in Kashmir. The idea of not being at anybody's beck and call was very attractive and I'd get turned on by what was happening around. My stories attracted attention in and outside India and I was invited, in my earlier career, to speak at the number of conferences including one at Nanyang Technological University of Singapore.

In between I started contributing for a Delhi-based Sunday newspaper, Sahara Time. For a year or so I reported from Kashmir. My editor, Bino John, a prolific editor, liked my stuff and he poached me. I had a great time in a new job, and then a round, after I'd covered different stories - from politics to human rights violations to gun battles between Muslim insurgents and Indian soldiers in Kashmir and border tension between India and Pakistan over the next few years, I moved to Bangkok to join Asia News Network (ANN) as assistant news editor. At ANN it was all about multi-tasking. A day would start at 7.30 in the morning. We would gather stories and pictures; and edit them and subsequently upload them to our website. In the afternoon we would work on ANN's weekly news magazine, AsiaNews. ANN introduced me to new perspectives and places as I reported from many Southeast Asian countries.

I returned to Delhi in 2008 and joined *The Week*, which is India's leading news magazine. At *The Week* I've been following important stories in India and abroad. I've produced stories that revealed fault-lines in the Afghanistan war, India's secret torture chambers, the country's rendition program in Nepal, Al-Qaeda's rehabilitation camp in Saudi Arabia and arms trafficking in Bangladesh. In the last ten years of my career I've reported on a range of stories from the Middle East, Europe and Asia. My work has earned recognition and number of awards and fellowships. When someone asks me whether this profession has been a fulfilling one? My instant reply is journalism has never given me time to think about other things. It remains my deep passion and a constant curiosity to know why things happen and out of that curiosity, to do something to let the public know. My stories have come from my identification with humanity and the truth. I believe for a journalist there is nothing more important. I constantly reflect on my practice and improve upon my skills. I remain indebted to the profession for lots of things it has introduced me to including my partner. I met my wife, Sabba through journalism. She first saw me in a newspaper.

**Eric Loo: Journalists in India and Kashmir operate in environments that are very different from those in the West. To what extent has your academic training in the MA Journalism programme tackled the politico-cultural contexts of journalism?**

**Syed Nazakat:** Yes, when we speak of Indian contexts the working conditions are definitely unique. We face our own market pressure, cultural and political discourse and we do have our own editorial thresholds

and freedoms. In Kashmir, the situation is altogether different. It is a conflict zone. My academic training first in India and later at the ACFJ in Philippines provided a broader professional and academic perspective, which complemented my newsroom experience. Notwithstanding the different political and social environments, the aims and objectives of our profession remain the same. Our job, as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel have beautifully said, is simply about providing the people with the information they need to be free and self-governing. Our first obligation is to tell the truth and our first loyalty is to the citizens. In that context, the ACFJ provided a variety of routes to recognise the role of journalists and news and their impact on the society.

I was one of the very lucky guys who could go and read subjects like media cultures and ethics, international reporting and visual literacy and at the same time work as a full time journalist. The course introduced me to the different media cultures and discourse, and all of the things I needed to work as a professional journalist. The stint at ACFJ provided me guidance and clarity about my profession and myself as a journalist. My academic days with the ACFJ, I am proud to say, have been a great success for the candidates like me. It has opened me up to new stories and new ways of writing and reporting.

### **What aspects of journalism in India are more effectively learned in the newsroom than in an academic journalism program?**

There is this ongoing debate whether a journalist needs an academic degree or just newsroom grooming. It may be true that one can pick up essential skills and tools more effectively in a newsroom than in the classroom. But given the role and responsibility of a journalist in a society, it is essential that a journalist is academically sound and well educated about his profession and its challenges and responsibilities. The crises of ill-informed journalism have exposed us to a situation today where entertainment and yellow journalism rules, because we have not sufficiently invested in knowledge-based journalism. I think university education is far better for journalists - and for journalism. It expands perspectives, intellectual growth and personal transformation.

## **What type of continuing education – and training - is most relevant to your work in the Indian context?**

We don't need to invent a new journalism course or academic programme here in India. The fundamentals remain the same. I, however, believe that there are some specific areas where there is a genuine scope for further improvement. In India, we are passing through a transitional period of our history. Among the many challenges India faces today is the issue of food security to its people, better healthcare facilities and the good quality education to children. It has challenges on the good governance and human rights front too. Media has played an active role by reporting on these diverse challenges. But it often diverts the attention of the people from the real issues to non-issues.

There are stories that get unreported. We need programmes to help journalists recognise these important stories. We need to train them in news writing. We need to train them in exposing wrongdoings. We need to imbibe in them the concept of verification and originality. Media is not an ordinary profession or business that deals with commodities. Journalism deals with ideas. While some are choosing multi-media and Internet to accommodate the interactive platform, it is important that we maintain a curriculum to teach journalists solid research, interviewing, investigating and editing skills; critical thinking and analysis, and high ethical standards. Given the change in media landscape, it is important that we develop courses for media management for future journalists so that they can build skills to work as a strategic planner with complex budgets, and multimedia environment. Today India needs journalists as news entrepreneurs too.

**Syed Nazakat** is a Delhi-based award-winning journalist currently working with THE WEEK. Prior to this posting he was based in Bangkok, Thailand with Asia News Network (ANN) as an Assistant News Editor. Over the last 11 years of his career, he has reported on politics, defence, security, terrorism and human rights related issues from 17 countries. In addition to political and developmental news, Nazakat has done major investigative reporting which include an expose on India's secret torture chambers, India's rendition program in Nepal, arms trafficking in Bangladesh and inside report on the Al-Qaeda rehabilitation camp in Saudi Arabia. He graduated in 2008 with an MA (Journalism) from the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center of Journalism, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines. Nazakat is a member of the Washington-based media watchdog body, International Center for Investigative Journalism.

## Q&A WITH JOURNALIST:

### **Germelina Lacorte**

*Correspondent for Philippine Daily Inquirer, Mindanao*

#### **Eric Loo: What led you to journalism?**

**Germelina Lacorte:** The impulse to write and to make sense of events, the excitement of covering the news and writing it as it unfolds; of being an active observer in these historical moments, were among the things that first attracted me to journalism. It was only much later that I began to see where my work as a journalist is taking me: to the other world where factory workers toil in long, hazardous jobs for measly pay; to grieving families where promising young women left their homes with high hopes for the future only to return in a coffin two years later, to the bodies of children buried and retrieved from the landslide site, to people taken from their homes in the middle of the night and disappeared to nowhere because of their political beliefs; to a little boy who watched soldiers peppered his father's body with bullets. It was only then that I understood what journalism is all about. It's about telling the world their stories. It's about giving voice to the voiceless.

#### **What personal and professional values shape your work as a journalist?**

My idea of justice is at the core of how I define my work as a journalist. I believe that journalists, through the stories they write, can help bring about that turning point, which can move people into action, and bring about justice, economic, social, or otherwise, in society. So, I constantly strive to give justice to the stories I write; to the people I'm writing about and the issues affecting them. I believe that it's only in giving justice to the story that a journalist can give justice to her profession, in its role as watchdog of power, and in its mission to serve the public interest. How I fail or succeed in this regard is only how far I fail or succeed in my story.

## **How has your journalism changed over the years?**

My journalism now may be quite different from the journalism back when I first started, but basically, some things remain the same. I began as a business reporter, where my editor first taught me the basic ethical values in gathering and reporting the news, and in verifying facts. But what changed the most in my years of journalism work has something to do with the perspective in which I write my stories. No longer satisfied with just reporting them, I find myself adopting a questioning eye, making me see details I used to overlook; the highest officials of the land wearing expensive designer clothes while mouthing solutions on how to help the poor; a pastor holding a pistol, and then, firing it bullseye in the firing range before saying a prayer for the protection of journalists.

In the Philippines, where there is a dearth of formal training for journalists, a training program that can blend theory and practice, and provide interaction among leading journalists and emerging ones will be ideal to supplement the field experience of working journalists. Journalism has the potential to bring about change; first in the minds, and then, in the lives of people.

## **Journalists in the Philippines - and parts of Asia - operate in environments that are very different from those in the West. Looking back on your academic training in journalism, to what extent has it tackled the politico-cultural contexts of journalism?**

My academic training in journalism from the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism in 2010 tackled in very significant depth the role that journalists play in a free society; and even inspired practising and aspiring journalists to pursue this role with greater fervour. I regard this as extremely important because this is the kind of journalism needed in the existing politico-cultural realities in the Philippines, pushing a step further the existing democratic space to make it serve the public good. Part of the academic training even conditioned us, working journalists, to deal with dilemmas we often encounter in actual practice, so that, to a certain extent, we feel rather confident in dealing with them.

But nothing has prepared, and perhaps, nothing could prepare, working journalists in dealing with the actual threats in the profession, threats that are built in the country's politico-cultural context, where the big landowning and capitalist class dominates the country's economy and politics, the

same class that is onion-skinned to criticisms; and whose members can afford not only guns and goons for hire but also gold to buy, corrupt and stifle critical minds.

I quite agree that journalists in the Philippines - and parts of Asia - operate in an environment that is quite different from the West and I'd like to mention two particular aspects: first, the continued killing of journalists and the prevailing impunity in the Philippines, which is making the work of journalists, especially in the provinces, very difficult and very threatening; and second, the low level of understanding or perhaps, the refusal of a certain segment of the population (particularly the powers-that-be) to understand the critical role journalism plays in a free society. At times, I'm still jolted by some local technocrats telling me not to write certain issues they deem critical for fear, these might anger some powerful politicians - a reminder that I'm no longer in a journalism class but back in the real world.

Looking back, I feel we failed to really give this a very serious thought: that there is a gulf of a difference between the conditions where journalists operate in Metro Manila and the conditions of journalists in the Philippine provinces, where the threat is real. In the country where political activists, peasants, lawyers and priests are being killed, why not journalists who write stories about them? Perhaps, no academic programme could prepare working journalists to deal with such madness.

**What aspects of professional journalism do you think are more effectively learned in the newsroom than in the academic programme?**

Interacting and dealing with sources, even the art of interviewing, itself, are some of the aspects of professional journalism best learned in the actual newsroom than in an academic programme. Finding leads and following the trail of the story can be studied in class, but actually learning how to do the story all the way to the finish line, I believe, are best done in the newsroom.

But the academe can hone students' basic skills to prepare them for the demanding work in the newsroom; and from time to time, practising journalists need a break from work and reflect on what they have been doing. This, I believe, is where academic programmes can best come in. Supplementing theory with actual practice, and actual practice with theory can make the journalism profession more enriching and more dynamic to answer to the needs of the times.



**What type of continuing education is most relevant to your work in the Philippine context?**

Journalists in the Philippines are faced with issues that, apart from their grave socio-cultural impact, demand some understanding of science and technology: issues such as climate change, mining, energy and power, to name a few. In Mindanao, for instance, there has been an ongoing debate between coal-fired power plants against renewable energy sources to sustain the island's power needs; and in the past, before the Japan tsunami that destroyed Japan's nuclear power plants came about, a Congressman at the House of Representatives had made the rounds in Mindanao agitating for the revival of the mothballed Bataan Nuclear Power Plant. He gave a very convincing speech that had journalists been not too careful to check on actual facts, they'd end up convinced they can actually store in their garage the rod used by the nuclear reactor for years and let their children play with the nuclear waste. Without a working understanding of these issues, journalists can easily end up mouthing what their most vocal proponents (or opponents) say. Hence, it is always relevant for Philippine journalists to pursue continuing education on pressing science and technology issues that could spell the difference between life and death of the people; and the type of training that combines online and on campus interactions is the method most relevant to working journalists in the Philippines.

**Germelina Lacorte** was associate editor at *Davao Today*, and *Panglantaw Mindanao*, a multimedia project focusing on Mindanao stories by the Asian Center for Journalism at Ateneo de Manila University. She currently writes from Mindanao for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*.

## Q&A WITH JOURNALIST:

### **Kurniawan Hari Siswoko**

*Jakarta Post, Indonesia*

**L**ike many Indonesian journalists of my generation, I took up this profession without any sound knowledge of journalism. We completed our university education, but we didn't attend any journalism classes. For me, the only journalism training I attended was a one-day popular writing course organized by *Intisari*, an Indonesian version of *Reader's Digest*, in my campus.

Despite my limited knowledge, I applied for a reporter position with a national daily soon after graduation. I loved to get information about anything. I liked to find out about anything that caught my curiosity. That drove me to journalism. For me, journalism was about meeting people, writing articles and giving them to the editors to vet for publication. Journalism was about travelling to different places and meeting new people. But it turned out that journalism was more complicated than that.

A few days after becoming a journalist, my editor sent me to cover a gathering organised by the pro-government faction of a political party. That instantly gave me a new perspective on journalism. Later, I learned about politics, pro-government and opposition groups, black campaigns, backroom deals and many other phrases commonly found in politics.

It was during this period that my understanding of journalism began to develop. My perspectives broadened and my passion in journalism strengthened. It became clearer to me that journalism was not simply about reporting, writing and publishing articles. Journalism is about power and responsibility. Journalists have the power to help create an accountable government - one that promotes democracy, respects the rights of others and brings prosperity to its citizens.

Journalism also means being responsible for what you write. Those who carry out this profession must be held responsible for all the stories and

information they produce. Thus, the information published in the media must be accurate, factual and objective. It means that the articles must never be produced with any malicious intent.

When I started my career as a journalist in early 1997, Indonesia was under the autocratic leadership of President Suharto. The government fully controlled the media. Press freedom had far to go. In this period, a good article was one that criticised the undemocratic policy of the government. To avoid government persecution, such criticism was made as subtle as possible. So subtle was the criticism that often it was hard to understand.

Following the downfall of Suharto in 1998 and the coming of the *Reformasi* era, the main challenge for journalists in Indonesia was to help promote democracy and human rights values. Media workers were responsible to ensure that the foundation of democracy take root. Until 1998 when Suharto stepped down following popular pro-democracy protests, Indonesian journalists had worked in a repressive atmosphere where they could not exercise their right to criticise the government. There were a few publications that published articles criticising government's policies. The Information Ministry quickly revoked the "publication license" known as SIUPP, banning the publishers from continuing the publications. It was a dark era for the Indonesian press.

After the 1998 pro-democracy movement, the lawmakers enacted laws to guarantee freedom of the press. However, these laws do not necessarily mean that the press no longer faces threats. The threats used to appear in form of revocation of the publication license by the Suharto government. Today, the threats come from the wealthy people, the mobs and the unqualified newsmen themselves.

The wealthy people, usually businessmen, can easily spend money to hire lawyers and sue any news organisation that publishes articles they think are damaging their business or reputation. Mobs were often used by political or religious leaders who did not like how they were reported in the media. The political or religious leaders often hire mobs to intimidate journalists or even attack the news offices. With the political transition, the number of publications grew. Publishers didn't have enough money to recruit qualified journalists, which resulted in inaccurate news reports published without verification. The threats from wealthy people and the mobs are external; the unqualified newsman is a threat from within.

**Eric Loo: Journalists in Indonesia operate in environments that are very different from those in the West. Looking back on your academic training in journalism, to what extent has it or has it not tackled the cultural contexts of journalism?**

**Kurniawan:** I did not have a formal journalism education when I began my career. My understanding of journalism was mostly learned on the job. I attended the MA programme at the Asian Center for Journalism in Manila only after almost 10 years working as a journalist. From a journalistic perspective, we had to be responsible in producing fair and balanced articles. Bipartisanship should also be the core value in journalism. Unfortunately, the liberalised economy produced businessmen with strong interest in politics who try to build partnerships with political leaders. Media owners began to join different political parties creating political competitions ahead of the 2014 general elections. The media organisations may have proclaimed their independence. But when media owners work in cahoots with politicians, the independence of the media is questionable. This may be the biggest challenge Indonesian journalism faces today. I believe the MA program gave me a foundation to look at my work more critically, especially my function in Indonesian society.

**What aspects of journalism in Indonesia are more effectively learned in the newsroom than in an academic journalism programme?**

Compared to other countries, press freedom in Indonesia is a relatively new concept. Even though we already have freedom of information law, the bureaucratic officials are still reluctant to give out information about government spending or other issues related to public service. I think this aspect of reporting in Indonesia is more effectively learned in the newsroom than in an academic journalism programme. We can't learn in a classroom environment as well as in a newsroom about reporting in a country where information is controlled by the government. This is learned through experience and exposure to the environment of an authoritarian regime where there is little transparency. Indonesian journalists face this challenge everyday in their work.

**What type of continuing education is most relevant to your work in the Indonesian context?**

I think investigative journalism, creative writing, op-ed writing and multimedia journalism will still be relevant in the Indonesian context. Investigative journalism will result in exclusive and in-depth stories that will educate the readers. Combined with creative writing it will produce easy-to-read and enriching articles. Multimedia journalism is the demand of the industry. We need to provide the news stories in different platforms. Otherwise, we will be left by the younger gadget-minded generation.

***Kurniawan Hari Siswoko*** is co-editor of the national desk at *The Jakarta Post*. He has reported on political, social and cultural issues in Indonesia, the World Media Summit (WMS) Training on Reporters' Safety in Beijing in June 2012 and the International Film Festival in Hong Kong. He has reported on the political transition in Indonesia from the authoritarian rule of President Suharto to his successor BJ Habibie and the turmoil in 1998-1999. He graduated with an MA in Journalism from the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism at Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines in 2010.

## CHAPTER 3:

# 'Asian' media practice: A case study of Malaysia

Compared to the early 1990s, online media today have provided significantly more accessible space for political dissent among Malaysians, including the diasporas, who together have been protesting for fundamental political reforms<sup>57</sup> since 1998 when the then Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim was arrested on alleged corruption charges.<sup>58</sup> The Malaysian journalism scene today arguably reflects the dynamics of competition between mainstream media and online news portals in parts of Asia where the media are closely monitored by the state such as in Singapore, Laos, Vietnam, Burma and China. This chapter defers to the Malaysian media practice to sieve the critical ethical issues confronting the media in Asia in general.<sup>59</sup>

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57 Notably the call for free, clean and fair elections in Malaysia, initiated by the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections. The coalition comprises NGOs, civil society groups, leaders of opposition political parties. Since the first Bersih (translated 'Clean' in English) mass protest was held in Kuala Lumpur on November 10, 2007, the movement has garnered mass support at home and among the Malaysian diasporas. Bersih 3.0 was held on April 24, 2012 in Malaysia and overseas, with more planned every year until fundamental political reforms are instituted. See official websites at: [www.bersih.org](http://www.bersih.org); and [www.globalbersih.org](http://www.globalbersih.org)

58 For a picture of how the pro-government Malaysian mainstream media portrayed the reformasi movement sparked by the arrest of Anwar Ibrahim, see Manan, Shakila (2001), 'Re-reading the media: A stylistic analysis of Malaysian media coverage of Anwar and the Reformasi movement,' *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, Issue No.11, July-December, pp. 39-54. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss11/4> (Accessed October 7, 2012)

59 I have worked as a journalist with the Malaysian newspapers in the late 70s, and currently writing a column on media and politics in Malaysia for the online news agency *Malaysiakini* and *The Edge Malaysia*, a business weekly. Hence, my rationale in focusing on the Malaysian media is based on my intimate knowledge and experience of the opportunities and constraints that Malaysian journalists face daily in their work.

Malaysian journalism today is being reshaped by competition for the public mind between mainstream media<sup>60</sup> and alternatives such as *Malaysiakini*, *Malaysian Insider* and *Malaysia Today*. Based on this scenario, the Malaysian media scene provides a plausible case study of the structural, political and economic factors that affect Asian journalists in their work as they attempt to serve two audiences - their editors who are beholden to the government and their readers who expect fair, accurate and truthful reports. There's a third audience - the journalists themselves and their commitment to their professional code of practice.

Malaysian journalism embodies the paradoxes of a 'free-yet-not-free'<sup>61</sup> media environment where journalists are 'free' to report and investigate into issues of public interest as long as they do not contravene the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, which requires all printing presses to apply for and renew their annual printing licence from the Home Affairs Ministry. This means staying clear of 'sensitive issues' as determined by the government. These issues are race, religion, special rights of the Malays and privileged position of the Malay rulers. Politically critical online news sites such as *Malaysiakini* and *The Malaysian Insider* raise another paradox given that the internet is not covered by the PPPA, but the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998,<sup>62</sup> which provides that the internet shall not be censored - as long as the contents are not deemed to be a threat to national security interests or stoke racial and religious conflict, which since May 13, 1969 has been delicately maintained through the various

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60 See Mustafa K. Anuar's (May 9, 2012) review of the book 'No More Bullshit: We're all Malaysians' by Kee Thuan Chye (2011), <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/197371> (Accessed, May 19, 2012)

61 In 2011 Malaysia ranked 122nd out of 179 countries (Eritrea ranked 179th) in the press freedom index by Reporters Without Borders. It was given a "Partly Free" status on the Freedom in the world report by Freedom House in 2008. On the Freedom in the World index, graded on a scale of one to seven, with one being the most free and seven being the least, Malaysia obtained four points for both political rights and civil liberties.

62 The Printing Presses Act 1984 replaces the PPPA 1948 and the Control of Imported Publications Act 1958. Under the Act, the Home Affairs Minister has absolute discretion to renew or revoke printing licences, ban or restrict publications if they are deemed by the government to have published materials that are a threat to national interest or create social unrest. The PPPA has been used in the past to close down newspaper organisations; the most significant was *Operation Lalang* in 1987, when Mahathir Mohamad was Prime Minister.

ethnic-based media, each serving the interests of their particular ethnic groups yet mindful of the imperatives of maintaining the social order. Amendments to the PPPA (1984) in April 2012, however, is seen by media advocates, opposition political parties<sup>63</sup> and civil society groups to be mere 'baby steps' in providing the media with a 'longer leash' to operate<sup>64</sup> - thanks to the internet.

Senior Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, speaking at the Los Angeles World Affairs Council on October 29, 1998 presented his take on the Internet:

The Internet is as much a purveyor of truth as it is of outright lies. Although it may take some time, morality and wisdom must find a way to control and tame the new technology to preserve the fundamental values of society by which parents bring up their children to be good citizens. In responding to this challenge of new technology, Asian societies will seek solutions different from those of the West...Asian societies strike a different balance between the rights of the individuals and those of the larger community. There is a need to have an established official position known to its people. Asian governments will use whatever is the latest media technology for this purpose.<sup>65</sup>

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63 See commentary by leader of the Democratic Action Party, Lim Kit Siang, 'Call for repeal of PPPA as amendments to draconian press law are "baby steps" if Najib is serious about wanting Malaysia to be world's best democracy' <http://blog.limkitsiang.com/2012/04/20/call-for-repeal-of-pppa-as-amendments-to-draconian-press-law-are-baby-steps-if-najib-is-serious-about-wanting-malaysia-to-be-worlds-best-democracy/> (Accessed September 10, 2012)

64 The amendments passed in Parliament in April 2012 remove the Home Minister's "absolute discretion" over the issuing of printing press licences, and allows Singaporean newspapers to circulate in Malaysia. Media are also not required to renew their annual licences unless the Home Minister revokes it. However, journalists are sceptical if the amendments, rather than an outright repeal of the law, will usher in fundamental change in the entrenched political patronage culture where the mainstream media are publicly deemed to be government mouthpieces. For news report, see: 'Still a long way to freedom, say NUJ and CIJ,' *Free Malaysia Today*, April 18, 2012. <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2012/04/18/still-a-long-way-to-freedom-say-nuj-and-cij/> (Accessed September 21, 2012)

65 Lee, Kuan Yew (1998), *The Media and Asia*, speech delivered at the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, October 29 1998. Speech text available from the council's archives at: [lawac.org](http://www.lawac.org) (Accessed September 10, 2012)



In a speech to the Global-Asia Confluence summit in Singapore, the Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2012) alludes to the double-edged sword of the Internet:<sup>66</sup>

We have to exploit fully, the Internet and social media, but institute safeguards against its misuse. And do our best to strengthen our cohesiveness and sense of identity, because it is fine to be an avatar in cyberspace, but you need to be a human being in real life, and make that connection with other human beings, and other fellow Singaporeans in order to form a society and a country with an identity, able to hold its own, in a very porous and very rapidly changing world.

The above quotes reflect the attempt by governments to negotiate and frame the 'Asian' way of doing things, which include the state's relationship with the media and its expectations of journalists to do the right thing in the national interest, which is to "strike a different balance between the rights of the individuals and those of the larger community" (Lee Kuan Yew, *ibid*) in their reporting of national issues. In reality though, the way journalism is practised in the West (watchdog journalism, for instance, along the lines of CNN, BBC and New York Times) and parts of Asia, are not that significantly dissimilar in the technical area, in the journalists' daily task of finding stories that interest their readers, finding and talking to the right sources, researching and verifying information for factual and contextual accuracy. What may differ is in the journalists' moral judgment of good and bad stories, interpretation of the facts, deciding what stories are in the public interest, what is worthy of investigating and what is not, their journalistic methods of relating to their sources from different strata of society, interpretation of the many layers of their responsibilities (to the profession, sources, their editors, their organisation, the government, their readers), and ultimately their functions as socially responsible journalists in their respective communities.

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66 Lee, Hsieng Loong (2012), *Harnessing the global Asia confluence*, Speech delivered at the inaugural Singapore Summit, Singapore, September 21-23, 2012. <http://www.mas.gov.sg/en/News-and-Publications/Monetary-Policy-Statements-and-Speeches/2012/Harnessing-the-Global-Asia-Confluence.aspx> (Accessed October 7, 2012)

This raises critical issues of how media values and practices are interpreted across cultures. In the absence of a clearly defined code of 'Asian' media values, the binary judgment of good and bad journalism, acceptable and unacceptable media practices across cultures and political systems raises two related questions. Can media standards and practices in the Asian setting be fairly and accurately gauged from within the framework of Western libertarian values where journalism 'without fear or favour' rules regardless of the consequences of the stories on the sources, where stories if published will put lives at risk?<sup>67</sup> Or can journalism practices and values be better understood from within the socio-cultural and political environments where they operate in Asia, for instance from the teachings of Buddhism (Sri Lanka and Thailand),<sup>68</sup> Hinduism (India), Confucianism (Singapore), and post-Communism (Indochina) to the tenets of the Pancasila (Indonesia) and Rukunegara (Malaysia)? This means breaking out of the "narrowly Western, male-biased and parochial' interpretation of communication ethics and values (and media practices).<sup>69</sup>

As David Brewer, media trainer based in the United Kingdom, and founder of Media Helping Media ([www.mediahelpingmedia.org](http://www.mediahelpingmedia.org)) notes of his approach to training journalists in transition and post-conflict countries:

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- 67 For a guide on ethical decision making, readers might want to refer to Immanuel Kant's categorical imperatives, which theorises that whether an act is immoral or moral, good or bad, right or wrong depends on whether the act is based on a rule or maxim that could be applied universally. For instance, if one were to consider stealing, one would first have to formulate a maxim based on this planned action: 'It is good to steal.' Would it be good for humanity if this maxim were to be applied to everyone? If not, then this act should be considered to be immoral. For detailed explanation, see *Stanford's Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/> (Accessed October 7, 2012) For an exposition of Kant's categorical imperatives' application to ethical journalistic decision making, see this chapter (author unknown) at [ftp://ftp.pearsoned-ema.com/HPE\\_Samples/SampleChapters/9781405835367.pdf](ftp://ftp.pearsoned-ema.com/HPE_Samples/SampleChapters/9781405835367.pdf) (Accessed October 20, 2012)
- 68 Gunaratne, Shelton (2010), 'Reflections on journalism from a Buddhist's perspective', *The Guardian*, November 22, 2010. <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2010/11/reflections-on-journalism-from-buddhist.html>
- 69 Christians, Clifford G & Traber, Michael (eds) (1997), Christians, Clifford and Traber, Michael (eds). *Communication Ethics and Universal Values*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. <http://www.waccglobal.org/en/20073-media-and-terror/460-Communication-ethics-and-peace.html> (Accessed October 7, 2012)

I do a lot of training in editorial ethics...and report the truth, but you have to realise that they may not be able to because of circumstances beyond their control. All you can do is talk about what is ideal and then use tried, tested and proven case studies. But it's important to be honest and open that the media in the West, and journalists in the West, can be as corrupt as anywhere...most important of all is to be realistic. In some countries, if you don't write what you are told, the best you can wish for is to lose your job. In other countries the cost is much higher. I grew up as a journalist in a cushy democracy where the journalists are taken out and wined and dined by the rich and powerful; I now work in countries where journalists are taken out with bullets and bombs by the rich and powerful. I have nothing to offer other than being there as a colleague and sounding board and helping them negotiate the ethical difficulties they are facing with sensitivity and realism.<sup>70</sup>

Hence, this chapter is premised on the notion that journalism's textual production process is largely influenced by the journalists' value system, which is primarily nurtured by the familial surroundings and subsequently internalised through adulthood via the educational process, socio-cultural influences, and political environments. This value system is then extended to the occupational dimension, which goes through another phase of reconstruction in the newsroom environment via-a-vis the definitive code of ethical practice.

### **Shades of media values**

Media cultures in the ASEAN region range from the free (Philippines and Thailand) to semi-controlled (Singapore, Malaysia) and authoritarian capitalism (Laos and Vietnam). Liberal market reforms have also led to the spread of tabloid rags in Cambodia and Indonesia. In the unregulated commercialised media industry, media pluralism as a consequence of the Internet has led to anarchic competition and tabloidese where truth and falsehoods, facts and rumours, news and gossips converge - reflective of

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70 Personal email on October 2, 2012. See full interview with David Brewer in this book.

media products in the West.<sup>71</sup> The absence of a strong history of crusade and sacrifice for media freedom in Malaysia and Singapore, coupled with a public culture that views journalism as a job with salaries that are on average lower than in other communications professions such as public relations and advertising, has created an environment of uncritical and politically correct reporting than investigative journalism as practised in the Philippines where journalists' wages are among the lowest and media corruption is common. This ranges from "envelopmental journalism" (Philippines, Cambodia and Indonesia) where reporters are slipped envelopes of cash to make sure their stories are slanted to interest groups, to partisan reporting abetted by warlords and provincial politicians to propagate their self-interests such as in the Philippines. The minority of "ethical" journalists who refuse to comply with the practice are quite often killed.<sup>72</sup>

What value yardsticks then can one consider to be appropriate in gauging the region's media standards and practices? If it is by the dominant paradigm of investigative journalism for the public interest without fear or favour, the Asian media will fall short. However, media practices are theoretically derived from the cultural value system and political imperatives of the countries concerned. Journalists are the products of the cultural systems they work in, their narratives and interpretation of issues and events are influenced partly by internal factors such as their value dispositions, education, newsroom culture; and extraneous factors such as the media laws, media ownership structure, and the culture of public discourse.<sup>73</sup>

Given the centrality of value systems to one's interpretation of issues and events, and how this interpretation is manifested in one's narrative,

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71 Indonesia Press Council Guidelines on Responsible Online Journalism, *Jakarta Globe*, December 23, 2011. <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/media/indonesia-press-council-guidelines-on-responsible-online-journalism/486415> (Accessed August 6, 2012)

72 Refer to Reporters Sans Frontiers [www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org) monthly reports on journalists killed in Asia.

73 See Chomsky, Noam (1997) for a comprehensive discussion of the socialization process of journalists across cultures. 'What makes mainstream media mainstream,' Z Magazine, [www.chomsky.info/articles/199710--.htm](http://www.chomsky.info/articles/199710--.htm). A list of Chomsky's articles on the same theme can be read at: <http://www.chomsky.info/articles.htm> (Accessed October 7, 2012)

discussions of ethical media practice can be viewed interchangeably from two lenses: from the Western libertarian perspective of truth being a product in the marketplace of ideas debated and guided by the values of free expression, responsibility and accountability; and from within the context of the authority-centred socio-cultural and political environments in parts of Asia. This cultural integrated perspective will open the doors to what Mahbuhani describes as a 'two-way flow in the passage of ideas between the East and the West ...where the world will be a much richer place when Western minds stop assuming that Western civilisation represents the only universal civilisation. The only way that the Western mind can break out of its mental box is to first conceive of the possibility that the Western mind may also be limited in its own way.'<sup>74</sup>

### **Cultural stereotypes and journalism: plausible connections**

Media discourse on politics in Malaysia often centres on the country's multiracial demographics and how each racial group perceives another. With a total population of about 23 million people, of which more than 17 million live in Peninsular Malaysia, the country's political history has been shaped by race and religion. In peninsular Malaysia, there live 10.6 million (57.9%) Malays and other natives, 4.9 million (26.9%) Chinese, and 1.3 million (7.6%) Indians. Considering the multi-racial makeup, and in the field of journalism where more than half of working journalists and close to all of the editorial policy makers in the mainstream newspapers, television and radio are predominantly Malays, the question arises as to what extent do cultural attributes and inclination for stereotyped perceptions manifest themselves in the media textual production process. To shed light on this question, I summarise below a study by Mark Loo, a management consultant and academic at Multimedia University in 2002, of how Malaysian business people view each other, how cultural attributes may indirectly influence the way Malaysian journalists interpret and construct their narratives on events and issues,<sup>75</sup> and why journalism trainers from

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74 Mahbubani, Kishore (2001), *Can Asians think: Understanding the divide between East and West*, Times Book International Singapore (1998) and expanded for the US market in 2001 by Key Porter Books, Toronto in 2001. P.11.

75 Loo, Mark (2003), "Negotiation characteristics of Malays, Chinese and Indians: implications for doing business with Malaysians". In *Outer limits: Reader in Communication and Behaviour Across Cultures*, James Leigh & Eric Loo (eds), Language Australia: Melbourne.

the West will find this cultural phenomenon to be relevant in their approach to training journalists in Malaysia.

An attitudinal study of 600 business executives (Loo, 2003) aged between 25 and 40 from the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities notes that Malays are generally seen by other communities as gentle and peace loving by nature with their motives and expressions governed by Islam. Indian expressions are most animated and their motives riddled with ambiguities;<sup>76</sup> the Chinese are single-minded, utilitarian and direct in negotiations.<sup>77</sup> Follow-up focus group discussions registered that “the Chinese are generally more direct in their business dealings and comfortably adapt to ‘Western’ or ‘Asian’ standards of negotiation. They share their business intentions openly as they seek to gain trust from the other negotiating party. The process seems a little longer but in reality, they are accelerating the pace towards a long-term mutually rewarding relationship.”<sup>78</sup>

Loo’s study alludes to a “Malaysian way” of doing business. Relational nuances are preferred over a binding contract, leaving the options open to renegotiate if conditions change. Sustaining long-term relationship precedes the perceived need for a formal contract where the legal rights and obligations of each negotiating party are precisely worded.

On the cultural attitudes towards ‘time’, Loo’s study notes that Malaysians tend to view time as non-linear, repetitive and to an extent, inconsequential - thus the concept of “Malaysian time” compared to, for instance, Australians who tend to view time as sequential, absolute and prompt. A meeting that might take three days to conclude in Australia will probably take three weeks in Malaysian time with a preference to nurture trust and friendship

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76 For an insightful look at the Indian mind and intellectual history, see Sen, Amartya (2005), *The argumentative Indian – Writings on Indian culture, history and identity*, Penguin Books, London.

77 Bo Yang (1992), *The ugly Chinaman and the crisis of Chinese culture*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Australia.

78 Loo’s study (ibid) reflects the thesis of Mahathir Mohamad’s book *The Malay Dilemma* (1970), published a year after the May 13 race riots in Malaysia. While the book has been widely criticised for its generalised assumptions, it remains the most controversial book about race relations in Malaysia, particularly about the inter-racial perceptions. The book was reprinted with a new Preface in 2008 (Marshall Cavendish International, Singapore).

before real negotiations begin. Add on the group-oriented multi-layered decision making process, and one understands the barriers to effective speedy information gathering by journalists in the Malaysian context.

The attitudinal study echoes Hajime Nakamura's (1997)<sup>79</sup> study of the "worldly ways" of the Chinese, in which he noted that the Chinese habits and customs were usually based on "practical common-sense utilitarian ways of thinking", their philosophical traditions "centred on practical subjects which had direct relations with everyday living" and their teachings of Taoism "dwell on the art of self-protection, on the method of attaining success, or on the right way of governing" (p.234), hence, the cultural stereotype of the Chinese being a materialistic, pragmatic and to an extent Machiavellian community.

With the Indians, Nakamura noted in a study of their language and philosophy that they "tend to pay more attention to the unknown, to the undefined than to the known and the defined. This attraction for the unknown resulted in a fondness for concealing even the obvious; their way of thinking tended to prefer the dark and obscure over that which was clear. As a result the Indians "like expressions in the form of a difficult riddle" (p.57).

And with the Malays, in a study of their social hierarchy, academic Tham (1977) alluded to their "agrarian character" and deference to *budi* in the family, public and social life. "This personality ideal (*budi*) is structured of such concerns as kindness, character, common-sense, breeding, good disposition, doing good, gratitude, and social sensitivity. One's social standing is measured in terms of the amount of one's *budi* (which) stresses not social ascent or material plenty, but nobility of character obtained through a conscious acting out of those concerns that are socially integrative and individually attainable irrespective of status or economic position"<sup>80</sup> (pp.7-8). Tham notes:

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79 Nakamura, Hajime (1997), *Ways of thinking of Eastern peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan*. Columbia University Press, New York.

80 Tham, Seong Chee. (1977). *Malays and Modernization: A Sociological Interpretation*, Singapore University Press.

“To give, to empathize, to compromise, and to give way are distinctive traits in traditional social behaviour revolving round the concept of *budi*. Consideration for others and the reciprocal receipt of consideration is given high premium in the scale of values shaping behaviour...the social concern for correct behaviour and kindness is extended further to the realm of human competition, where ‘defeat’ is considered to be honourable so long as one’s ‘opponent’ shows greater *budi*. Thus *budi* ensures that the individual is other-directed, and is sensitively responsive to social comments and rejection. Rarely therefore is there a need to resort to the extreme. However, should circumstances warrant, there should not be half-hearted measures or faint-heartedness. Similarly, a promise made should be binding forever.” (ibid:7-8).

To what extent do these ethno-cultural attributes peculiar to the Chinese, Indian and Malay people translate to the Malaysian media practice and ethics? The empirical enquiry does not preclude the possibility that racial and cultural values, in the context of Malaysia’s multiracial setting, could shape the way Malaysian journalists respond to and report on community issues - particularly in a newsroom where journalists come from different racial backgrounds, and where socialisation in the newsroom is influenced by racial affinities. The dynamics are further complicated by the segmentation of Malaysian media by language groups catering to its respective communities - Chinese, Tamil, English and Bahasa Malaysia – each in turn carrying its respective ideological and communal overtones.

Besides the learned form of self-censorship among mainstream journalists as a consequence of the country’s array of media laws, is the form and contents in Malaysian journalism characterised by the journalists’ cultural reverence for authority, respect for elders and class (especially to government ministers, corporate leaders and dignitaries) and conformity to the status quo? A common sight at press conferences is to witness Malaysian and Singaporean journalists jotting notes without overtly critical questioning or challenging pronouncements by ministers and government spokespersons. From a Western libertarian media practice, the compliant transactions at press conferences would seem to be lacking in professional standards, and thus, failing the public interest test. From the “Asian” perspective, however, the journalist’s role as a public scribe rather than a public investigator could be seen as culturally appropriate.



Despite the shades of differences in their perception of journalistic functions and purposes among journalists in the West and parts of Asia, a review of a professional code of practice ascribed by the media from Asia to Europe (Venkateswaran, 1996) indicates a general agreement that it is essential that ethical media practice should adhere to the following principles:

1. Accuracy and fairness.
2. Honesty and integrity in gathering the news.
3. Allegiance to the “public interest” defined as “involving a matter capable of affecting the people at large so they might be legitimately interested in, or concerned about, what is going on, or what may happen to them or to others” (Australian Press Council News, November 2001: p.8).
4. Non-discrimination in the reporting of race, gender, religion and class issues.
5. Respect for the privacy and sensibilities of individuals, although there is a need to respect the balance between privacy with standards that recognise freedom of the press.
6. Differentiation between commentaries, conjectures and facts.
7. Social responsibility and accountability.

The above principles are universal in its applications. Underpinning these principles in the ideological positions is a core value that freedom is:

- Necessary for cultural development and national progress.
- Crucial to investigative news coverage and discovery of truth.
- Crucial for private media ownership, competition and information diversity.
- To be free from government control and direction.

However, Asian governments take the line that unfettered media practice that relentlessly criticise the government would be counter-productive to “nation building” efforts, that journalists are obliged to represent public moral values, that what is good for the West is not necessarily good

for Asia. Here, I defer to Singapore's shared values framework<sup>81</sup>, which reflects how Asian governments generally view the media's responsibilities, which as prescribed, are to:

- Place the nation before community and community before self.
- Uphold the family as the basic building block of society.
- Resolve major issues through consensus rather than contention.
- Stress racial and religious tolerance and harmony.
- Regard community support for the individual.

This framework effectively de-emphasises individualism, journalistic competition, and editorial self-determination, while stressing the value of connecting the media with the community to generate consensus. Just as Singaporean media practice and texts are framed by a consensual driven ideology, so too are the general perceptions of the media in Malaysia (via its *Rukunegara* principles)<sup>82</sup> and despite the demise of Suharto's rule in 1998, the *Pancasila*<sup>83</sup> in Indonesia. But, with the authority-centred, consensual driven, conflict-averting media culture in Singapore and Malaysia, the consequence is an overly subservient media, and thus, by logical deduction, questionable media standards and ethics. Here lies the imperative in drawing the essence of good practices and discarding the bad in the training and education of future journalists in Asia, which will be examined in the chapter following the Q&As with two former Malaysian journalists.

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81 Tan, Charlene (2012), 'Our shared values in Singapore: A Confucian perspective,' *Educational Theory*, Vol.62, August 2012, pp.449-463. Online abstract available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2012.00456.x/abstract> (Accessed February 27, 2013)

82 To live by the *Rukunegara* principles, Malaysians are urged, right from primary schools, to pledge themselves to the five principles of the *Rukunegara*: belief in God; loyalty to King and country; upholding the Constitution; upholding the rule of law; and building good behaviour and morality. To date, there are no systematic studies as yet have been conducted, to examine if tenets of the *Rukunegara* have permeated through every aspect of Malaysian society. What is commonly acknowledged is the *Rukunegara* does provide the media a salient ideological framework and philosophical foundation to work from.

83 The *Pancasila* embodies the basic principles of an independent Indonesian state in 1945 and reflected in the Constitution. The *Pancasila* principles are: belief in one supreme God; humanitarianism; nationalism expressed in the unity of Indonesia; consultative democracy; and social justice. Source: US Library of Congress, <http://countrystudies.us/indonesia/86.htm> (Accessed October 7, 2012)

## Q&A WITH MEDIA TRAINER:

### **Vanitha Nadaraj**

*Journalist and media consultant, Malaysia*

**I**t was 1985 and there was a rumour going around the campus of a government university that one of the undergraduates was raped by her three course-mates at the campus bus depot in the wee hours of the morning. I was studying there back then and our journalism lecturer asked what we were doing about it. He said that as journalism students, we were obliged to report everything that went on in our campus weekly and not ignore the matter.

That was when I started thinking seriously about the weekly. It was part of the journalism coursework and all the while writing stories and doing the layout for the weekly was a chance for me to play journalist. All that changed.

After a couple of days of work, we got the story. It was to be our second lead story in the front page. We submitted a dummy copy to the vice-chancellor's office for his approval as per procedure.

The vice-chancellor told us to spike the story. That was my first taste of censorship and certainly not the last.

As a journalist, I have been told many times to not pursue a story or to change the angle or drop certain quotes so as not to offend the government or the big advertisers.

I have killed stories about corrupt officials allowing poorly-built roads and irrigation systems that resulted in flooding affecting hundreds of people; developers corrupting officials to worm their way out of building low-cost homes for the poor; about development projects that lined the pockets of community leaders and brought hardly any development to the community.

The list is endless.

I was taught about the Four Theories of the Press, the communication theories, ethics and so much more in journalism school, but I was not taught how to be streetwise.

Journalism education focuses on the ideals and rightly so. We need to know what journalism ought to be for the betterment of society. These ideals work in political systems that allow the freedom of speech, something that does not exist in most Asian countries.

We need a curriculum that shows students what the ideals and principles are and at the same time teach them how to act or carry out their duties upholding these principles the best that they can without getting into trouble with the government or authorities.

Journalism students need to know how to slip in “sensitive” information, how to dig for information without setting off the alarm, how to get government officials to comment on a controversial issue, etc.

We need streetwise journalists for Asia. Not just principled ones.

**Eric Loo: In hindsight, to what extent was the type of journalism practice and concepts you learned in university relevant to your practice in Malaysia?**

**Vanitha Nadaraj:** What I learnt in university showed me what were the standards, the concepts in journalism, the styles in writing and such, but not what really took place in the newsroom, what ethical issues I would be grappling with, or how to narrow the gap between theory and practice and how to cope with frustration that came from that. I had to re-learn journalism. That is, how to write stories that protected the government and big advertisers, write between the lines, choose which journalism principle to violate to uphold another deemed more important at that point in time.

**As a media trainer now, how is your approach to teaching journalism similar or significantly different from what you were taught at university?**

The core of the subject remains the same - that is principles, ethics, the writing. Apart from this, everything else is different. I tell of my personal newsroom experiences and show issues journalists grapple with. I give the students and trainees situations and get them to respond and show them

that there are no black and white solutions. I get them think on their feet like conducting mock interviews under crisis situations. Journalism is a practice-based course and the practical part should not be confined to only writing intros and stories.

### **What mindsets and skills do Malaysian journalists urgently need to internalise to improve the standards of journalism in the country?**

A drastic change in mindset is what is needed more than skills development. The most important change in the mindset of the Malaysian journalist is to stop thinking of themselves as tape recorders. Only when they realise the role they play in society, will they realise how they are meant to think and what they are meant to do. There has to be hunger for stories / scoops, and friendly rivalry among journalists to get the best story. This is sadly missing because almost all journalists prefer to take the safe route, rather than offend the powers that be.

### **How can local journalists be trained or educated to internalise these mindsets and skills?**

The key to this is seeing the experiences of other journalists. When I did my masters programme, I saw how my course mates, journalists within the region, operated in their countries. The experience opened my mind. When I showed a group of young adults from Central Asian countries, many of which still practise the propaganda style of journalism, what the inverted pyramid was and how news stories report facts and do not carry opinions, I could see how their minds opened up and they saw that facts should do all the talking and this was the way to remain objective. Exposure to the style and quality of journalism in other countries are one of the best ways to get the journalists to open their minds. With revelation comes change.

***Vanitha Nadaraj** spent more than 18 years in journalism. She then became a senior corporate communications manager at a multinational corporation. Vanitha has been involved in teaching and training. She taught journalism, public relations and other communication subjects at two private universities in Malaysia. She now organises and teaches journalism and social media advocacy at media camps for youths and also conducts training in corporate communications, crisis communications and social media advocacy. Vanitha graduated with an MA (Journalism) in 2006 from the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines.*

## Q&A WITH PR PRACTITIONER AND FORMER JOURNALIST:

### **KY Pung**

*Writer/publisher, where2.com*

**I**knew I was going to be a journalist during my secondary school days. I read *The Star*, but being more interested in sports like football and badminton, I would read the newspaper from the back pages. I read foreign news of happenings in the world and was especially delighted with articles on science and discovery.

Although I graduated with a degree in mass communication majoring in broadcasting, I always knew I would be a newspaper journalist. Often I would tell my friends that I would like to work in a job that keeps me abreast with news when others can only read about them in the newspaper the next day.

Well, the above statement was true in the 1980s. Certainly I can't boast about it in this age of globalisation and digital communication when news organisations delivered or beamed breaking news live into your office or home.

#### **Values that defined my journalism**

I graduated with a belief in democratic principles and the crucial role of the Fourth Estate as the watchdog of the government. So the first task I did shortly after leaving university was to apply to work with *The Star*. I was full of conviction then. I saw myself ready to apply the rigours of academia in seeking the truths out there. I always thought it was my duty to repay the opportunity of obtaining a tertiary education by influencing the agenda through my writings in a quest to change the world to become a better place to live in.

At work as a journalist, I remembered incurring the wrath of a Minister who was then the president of a political party in the National Front coalition with an article he deemed offensive, which I wrote and was published in *The Star*. He was so irked by the story that he lodged a police report against me.

On another occasion, a Chief Minister of a state in Malaysia was not amused with the tough questions on local politics I had asked in a press conference that he did not hide his displeasure by not returning my greetings later on.

I was unfazed by all these inconveniences I called “occupational hazards” as I ploughed on in my career. And when I moved up as the Regional Associate Editor to manage a news desk with 65 staff comprising editors, subeditors, journalists and photographers, I was always mindful of pitfalls that would bring up concerns of editorial integrity and ethical journalism. Are we, when filing our articles, being fair and objective? Have we crossed the fine line that can expose the newspaper of being accused to be unethical? And, of course, keeping an eye on “harmful and unverified” content in articles filed by reporters that invite legal actions had always been one of my key performance indicators.

### **How my journalism has changed over the years**

I left *The Star* in 2007 after 25 years as a journalist and moved on to public relations. Complacency had seeped in after my transfer back to headquarters. Thanks to my decision to pursue the MA program at the Asian Center for Journalism at Ateneo de Manila University three years earlier (in 2004), which I completed within two years, I found a fresh courage to risk a change in career. It was a life changing experience. I found my bearing at that time in my life - a self-awareness of my core competency and renewed self-confidence.

The current mainstream media landscape is skewed to say the least - the typical political bosses know it all. Day in and day out, the newspaper I once worked for could not breathe without running news articles and photographs of the newspaper’s political master. Instructions to play-up news are standing instructions. Editorial direction was more subtle than during my time there. Now it has become an unwritten agenda as if the very existence of the news section of the newspaper has taken on the life and character of a political party organ.

Figuratively speaking, *The Star* that I knew is now a different animal. It is an open secret that newspaper resources are purposely directed to unearth “negative” issues and publicise them to disparage opposition politicians and states under opposition control.

Nowadays the media landscape has changed radically. I cringed reading the politically motivated and agenda driven articles in *Utusan Malaysia*, a Malay language newspaper that is anything but racist. Personal political views are printed in articles couched as opinion pieces. The “errant” editors are unashamedly unrepentant of the political spin in the paper.

I know what good spin is all about. As a public relations practitioner, I often seek out opportunities to project my client’s corporate image, but not at the expense of being downright dishonest. To keep my passion for journalism, I now write as an editor /publisher of *where2*, a bimonthly travel and lifestyle magazine.

**Eric Loo: Now that you’ve gone over ‘to the other side’ in public relations, how has it influenced your interaction with journalists from the mainstream media?**

**KY Pung:** I am closer to the local media now than before. Former colleagues are still friends. Those whom I don’t fraternise with before, I have come to know them better. This is because doing PR, I need to go out to cultivate their friendship, knowing they will lend an ear on the few occasions I needed to call on them to help out. I spent time to get to know them. Doing so has made me whole and unassuming as I get to interact with them on a personal level. Being able to get them to attend a press conference I organise for my clients is a bonus and has made my work easier.

**In hindsight, to what extent was the type of journalism practice and concepts you learned in university relevant or irrelevant to your practice in Malaysia?**

At the first degree level, journalism that was taught in university was about how a newspaper works. We learned fundamentals and theories that helped to provide a better insight into the practice of journalism. Journalism as we know in school did not adequately prepare us to do a job well. A good command of English does speed up the process. Neither would it make one an ethical journalist per se. Journalists are duty-bound to inform and educate so that the members of the public will have the necessary information to help them make an informed choice. There are senior editors I know who moved up the ladder by doing the biddings of their bosses, not by virtue of their competency. Sad to say, it had happened.



## **What mindsets and skills do Malaysian journalists urgently need to internalise to improve the standards of journalism in the country?**

Journalists must search their conscience and act accordingly. Professional associations in the country such as the Centre for Independent Journalism, National Union of Journalists, National Press Club and Press associations at the state-level should raise their standard to push for press freedom. IoJ is the Institute of Journalists, a nascent initiative to promote professional journalism in Malaysia. Spearheaded by veteran journalist Gobind Rudra, it seeks to return journalism to the good old ethical days.

Quoting from its website <http://iojmalaysia.wordpress.com>, “the proposed Institute of Journalists will work to bring all journalists, from all parts of Malaysia, and from all language streams, and all media, to work together to raise the quality of journalism, defend and protect the reputation and professional interests of journalists. The IoJ will reunite the whole journalism fraternity to prepare the new generation of journalists for a new Malaysia.” I think IoJ’s mission is a noble ideal that should serve the journalism fraternity and the country well.

## **How can local journalists be trained or educated to internalise these mindsets and skills?**

There is an urgent need to come up with a Code of Conduct for journalists and the setting up of a media council to self-regulate. We need to educate journalists on the importance of upholding the virtues and tenets of journalism. It will help if local journalists could apply for fellowship or internship in vibrant foreign press to gain exposure with the workings of the media. This will provide a good bearing for them to re-assess themselves as a professional. Local media laws must be reviewed while press freedom and freedom to information upheld.

**KY PUNG** was a journalist for 25 years before leaving to be a public relations consultant. He reads online news, alternative websites and blogs to sift through what is fluff and propaganda and what is truth. He is dismayed at the extent mainstream media in Malaysia has tried to hide/distort the truth, manipulate/sensationalise issues and pander to the political dictates of their owners/masters. To keep his interest in writing, he works as a writer/publisher-cum-editor of *where2*, a travel and lifestyle magazine.

## CHAPTER 4:

# Training journalists in context

This chapter maps the professional development needs of journalists in parts of Asia from within the environments they are working in, while acknowledging the contributions of Western agencies<sup>84</sup> from the US, UK, Germany, Netherlands and Canada in providing media development and training programmes in developing countries. Despite the professional objectives of not-for-profit media development programmes, the question that usually crops up is how can these programmes be more adequately conceptualised, designed and delivered to suit the legal, political, economic and cultural circumstances that Asian journalists operate under, particularly in countries where the media are controlled by the state, where journalists are sometimes killed for their stories, where journalists do not have access to formal journalism studies and training. As the Center for International Media Assistance notes in its special report on *Making Media Development More Effective* “the idea that Western-style, top-down mass media would transform developing societies in ‘modern nations’, along the same path as their Western counterparts, seems to be still unconsciously driving much of contemporary practice even though the (modernisation) theory itself has been long discredited”.<sup>85</sup> The Global Forum for Media Development based in Belgium notes: “Media development should be approached holistically,

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84 Among the well-known agencies are: Internews Europe ([www.internews.eu](http://www.internews.eu)); Center for International Media Assistance ([www.cima.org](http://www.cima.org)); Global Forum for Media Development ([www.gfmd.info](http://www.gfmd.info)); International Federation of Journalists ([www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org)); The Communication Initiative Network ([www.comminit.com](http://www.comminit.com)); Thomson Reuters Foundation (<http://www.trust.org/trustmedia/journalism-training/>); BBC-World Service Trust ([www.bbcworldservicetrust.org](http://www.bbcworldservicetrust.org)); Knight Foundation (<http://www.knightfoundation.org/what-we-fund/innovating-media/>); Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung media programmes (<http://www.fes-asia.org>). In the Middle East, Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Center based in Doha provides training - by Western trainers - for Arab journalists. In Asia, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism ([www.pcij.org](http://www.pcij.org)) is arguably the main training institution.

85 Center for International Media Assistance (October 9, 2012), *Making Media Development More Effective A Special Report to the Center for International Media Assistance*. <http://cima.ned.org/publications/making-media-development-more-effective>, p. 1 (Accessed October 11, 2012)

going beyond journalism training to encompass the broad set of issues - legal, regulatory, economic, political, infrastructural that influence the development of independent media within the specific context of each country."<sup>86</sup>

Hence, with the delivery of journalism training programmes in transition and post-conflict countries, particularly in the Balkans, and the Middle-East (Iraq and Syria in particular) becoming a growing industry in the West, where governments and media foundation underwriting the training programmes, or news organisations from developing countries requesting for training providers from the West, the pertinent question is what code of practice should guide the training of journalists in countries where values and needs (such as the value for cohesion and harmony, 'nation building' and economic development) are different from the US, UK, Canada, the Netherlands or Germany (where freedom of expression, freedom of information and an 'independent' media are the benchmarks of professional journalism)? What are journalists in developing countries really taking away from these short-term training programmes conducted by well-meaning trainers from the West, but whose cultural intelligence and familiarity with local conditions may not be as well grounded? For instance in the case of Iraqi journalists, Robison (2005) notes that "after so many years being cut off from the outside world, (Iraqi journalists) tended to view training courses more as vacations than as professional development opportunities."<sup>87</sup> How are training programmes gauged for its effectiveness in equipping journalists with the necessary skills sets and competencies - as defined by Western trainers as 'best practices' of journalism?

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86 Point 11 in *Mission of the GFMD The 19 Points of the Amman Conference 2005*, Global Forum for Media Development. [http://gfmd.info/index.php/about\\_gfmd/gfmd\\_mission\\_the\\_19\\_points\\_of\\_the\\_2005\\_amman\\_conference/](http://gfmd.info/index.php/about_gfmd/gfmd_mission_the_19_points_of_the_2005_amman_conference/) (Accessed October 12, 2012)

87 For a picture of how editors in the Middle-East view the minimal benefits of short-term training provided by Western media trainers, see a report by Gordon R. Robison (May 2005), *Tasting Western Journalism: Media Training in the Middle East*. University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy. [http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/Robison\\_Tasting\\_Western\\_Journalism\\_May05.pdf](http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/Robison_Tasting_Western_Journalism_May05.pdf) (Accessed October 12, 2012)

David Brewer, founder of *Media Helping Media* and a journalism trainer based in London, notes on how he adapts his training modules and approaches to situations in developing countries:

I think it's important to ensure that all training is regionally and culturally sensitive. That is not a signal for compromise. It just means that we have to be realistic. Trainers must not step off a plane and start to roll out methods that may work for the BBC and CNN, but have absolutely no relevance to the people on the ground. To roll out methodology that worked under totally different conditions is pointless. We need to work with those we are engaging with in order to help them find solutions that are fitted to their environment and circumstances.<sup>88</sup>

Doug Cosper, American media trainer based in Colorado, who has provided training in developing countries since 2000, said of his interaction with journalists in Burma in 2010<sup>89</sup>:

If there was one training assignment that stands out as exceptionally rewarding, it would be a five-month gig with the US State Department holding workshops for Burmese journalists in the run-up to the 2010 elections. The results and new president, both unsurprising at the time, are turning out to be changing everything there after 50 years of dictatorship. It was the first time that a Western journalist had ever trained in the open, with the blessings of the state censors and under the nose of the state security apparatus. It was, to my knowledge, the first time a group of Burmese journalists had ever discussed the provisions of their own constitution, the principles of democracy at play during an election, and how to cover (and by extension conduct) a fair election. The experience proved that real journalism could be taught in a non-political way so that it does not threaten oppressive authorities. That good journalism mitigates for freedom will be a lesson the regime will most likely learn only in hindsight, after democratic changes have become irreversible (Personal communication, May 2012. See Q&A in this book).

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88 See complete interview with David Brewer in this book.

89 See Q&A with Doug Cosper in this book.

### **Training and teaching in context**

After having taught journalism in academia and conducted training for journalists in Asia since the mid-90s<sup>90</sup>, I see the importance of integrating the critical and practical dimensions of journalism with media realities across cultures. This cultural integrated approach focuses on adapting media concepts and theories developed in the days of old media (newspapers, television and radio) to inform on journalism practices in parts of Asia. While explaining and demonstrating how journalists in the West report and write about issues of public interest is central to training workshops, I believe the learning outcome would be richer, intellectually and professionally, if journalists are also educated on the “why’s”, “why not’s” and critical aspects of media practices in the West and in parts of Asia - thus the relevance of understanding the various normative media systems as explained in Chapter 2. Only when journalists are capable of reflecting on their practice and examine their personal values in the context of who they decide to speak to and how they frame their stories, will they be more effective in carrying out their journalistic work with a purpose - which is to generate informed public conversations and influence public opinion on issues and actions that hold governments accountable and that which benefit the people.

As Kamini Sabnani (2012), a media teacher and freelance writer in Jakarta, notes: “What makes the field (journalism) special is not only how words should be placed together or how reports should be structured, but also to understand why (certain) events need to be reported.”<sup>91</sup> Derrick Vinesh, journalist at *The Star* in Malaysia, notes: “Mainstream journalists should also be trained to be analytical in their reports instead of the mundane ‘he said’ ‘she said’ style of reporting that they are so used to. While analytical reporting might give rise to biased opinion reports to a certain extent, it

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90 Since I graduated with a mass communication degree from University of Science Malaysia in 1977, I have worked as a journalist, a teacher and a journalism trainer. Since 1996, I have taught journalism and conducted journalism-training workshops in Malaysia, Australia, India, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Dubai, Hong Kong and for a short stint taught journalism at Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama.

91 Email correspondence, August 2012. Kamini Sabnani completed two non-award subjects in the MA Journalism program at ACFJ – Advanced Reporting; and Media Law and Ethics.

generally promotes creative thinking and provides an opportunity to look at an issue from various angles and perspectives."<sup>92</sup>

Likewise, Syed Nazakat (2012), special correspondent for *The Week* in New Delhi notes:

Given the role and responsibility of a journalist in a society, it is essential that a journalist is academically sound and well educated about his profession and its challenges and responsibilities. The crises of ill-informed journalism have exposed us to a situation today where entertainment and yellow journalism rules, because we have not sufficiently invested in knowledge-based journalism. I think university education is far better for journalists - and for journalism. It expands perspectives, intellectual growth and personal transformation.<sup>93</sup>

My approach to journalism training is guided by the principles of 'reflective practice',<sup>94</sup> which essentially means that journalists, as media practitioners, should continually be engaged in finding out better ways to inform their audience. This means taking time off from their daily work to reflect on their practice, recapture their experience at the coalface of investigative reporting, and think of better ways to engage with their audience. Specifically, the reflective process involves:

1. Self-evaluation of the journalists' motivation and attitude towards their profession.
2. Reflecting on their "professional" journalistic values in cross-cultural contexts.
3. Developing awareness of their journalistic functions in their respective society.
4. Challenging the journalists' dominant news values with alternative criteria.

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92 Email correspondence, August 2012. Derrick Vinesh completed his MA Journalism program at ACFJ in 2009.

93 See Q&A with Syed Nazakat in this book.

94 Schon, Donald (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books.

5. Applying media concepts and principles to economic, political and social realities.

The general learning objective is to heighten participants' awareness of their journalistic functions in their respective society; and to provide them with a comprehensive framework that they can use to reflect on and improve in their practice in today's digital media environment. As Edi Utama, former editor at Indonesia's news agency, Antara, and former president of the Society of Asian Journalists<sup>95</sup> commented:<sup>96</sup>

News gathering and dissemination that had been the exclusive domain of the journalist ever since Benjamin Franklin edited and published his newspaper *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1729 in America, was decisively hit by the advent of the internet in the mid-1990's and the onslaught of social media in the mid-2000. Thus, the exclusive domain was shattered and, in the process, also gone is the pride of being the ladies and gentlemen of the press. Deep down in my heart, though, I still cling to my old belief that journalism has helped to make me a better person who would continue to fight for the downtrodden. My academic training in the MA program of ACFJ has definitely helped in my work at *Antara*. It elevated my journalistic competency from one that was learned on the job to one that helped me reflect on my practice. Media ethics was one of the core elements in the academic programme. When I started my first job in reporting, what I knew about ethical practice was learned by trial and error on the job. In the MA programme, I was exposed to the essence of ethics by understanding the more philosophical side of the discipline. Ethics is a most essential part of journalism in any democratic environments. My academic training introduced me to various media laws governing journalism in different Asian countries. By getting a solid understanding of the strength of the

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95 The Society of Asian Journalists was launched in August 2011 in Beijing by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Media Programme Asia during its 6th Forum of Emerging Leaders in Asian Journalism. SAJ comprises senior journalists in Asia who had completed their MA Journalism studies at the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism at Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines.

96 Email correspondence, August 2012. Edi Utama graduated from the MA Journalism programme at ACFJ in 2009.

law in enabling journalism to operate as it is responsibly supposed to be, I have gained more confidence in performing my profession.

Commenting on the need for journalists to reflect on their practice, Padma Iyer, special projects editor at *The Australian*, a national broadsheet, and online media trainer, notes:

Good journalism practice is a result of effective use of the active and the reflective capabilities. Teaching, coaching, mentoring, doing a course in journalism and writing about practice for academic purposes help a practitioner reflect. Reflection is as important as doing. If I had not taken the time to reflect through my involvement in academia, I would not have developed as a journalist. Equally, if I had chosen the educator's path as a fulltime job I would have missed the practical, "doing" side of journalism. Every journalist must find a way of combining newsroom and classroom experiences. Newsroom and classroom represent the dichotomies that must be balanced during a career in journalism.<sup>97</sup>

Brewer alludes to the importance of reflective practice in journalism training instead of the straight 'how-to' mechanics of reporting without considering the local settings.<sup>98</sup> His pre-workshop guidelines are to work out:

- **Benchmarks:** Many (journalists in transition and post-conflict countries) want benchmarks. These are examples they can examine, both successful and unsuccessful, so they can measure themselves against them, assess the implications and copy and improve.
- **Signposts:** Some want signposts that they can use to avoid going down the wrong route and with clear directions as to the route they should take.
- **Frameworks:** And some want frameworks so that they can work out their own solutions around some firm concepts.

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97 See Q&A with Padma Iyer in this book.

98 Brewer, David (2012), *What it takes to be a media trainer*, Media Helping Media, June 17, 2012. <http://www.mediahelpingmedia.org/training-resources/tot/596-the-essential-qualities-for-a-media-trainer> (Accessed October 3, 2012)  
See Q&A with David Brewer in this book.



Brewer adds that if trainers “offer benchmarks in a country where they (journalists) are seeking signposts or frameworks you will fail”.

Herein lies the challenge of providing adult learners with culturally relevant benchmarks, signposts and frameworks in media training by complementing experiential learning (knowing how) with cognitive illumination (knowing why), which I apply to training workshops as explained in the next section.

### **International Journalism Fellowship in Malaysia**

In November 2011, I proposed a training workshop on ‘*Reporting Religion and Conflict*’ to the Malaysian Press Institute in Kuala Lumpur for its annual International Journalism Fellowship, which hosts journalists from developing countries for a month of training and reflective studies. The journalists come from countries where conflicts can be traced back to perceived differences between religious and racial groups, political factions and a history of tribal wars.

I proposed that part of the one-week training workshop would involve field trips to religious institutions in Kuala Lumpur where the journalists would engage with religious leaders and witness how Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and Hindus profess their faith. As most of the Malaysian journalists who participated in the fellowship are Muslims - and given that at that time (November 2011) there were news reports of Christian workers in Kuala Lumpur proselytising to Muslims, which is a criminal offence in Malaysia<sup>99</sup> - the institute suggested that I cancel the field trips because it could place the Muslim journalists in a difficult situation - with their faith and the Islamic authorities. It was suggested that the workshop should take the conventional approach of combining short lectures, case studies, story construction and story packaging projects. Such was the sensitivity of race and religion issues in Malaysia - and other Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore and Indonesia - that journalists are socialised to practise self-censorship and limit their reporting of race and religious issues to social and cultural events. Given the religious and political circumstances

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99 *International Religious Freedom Report 2011*, US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/192853.pdf> (Accessed October 20, 2012). See also news report by BBC on January 11, 2010 “*Malaysia church attacks continue in use of ‘Allah’ row*” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8451630.stm> (Accessed October 20, 2012).

in Malaysia, I re-designed the training modules within the framework of 'community service reporting', which was subsequently accepted by the Malaysian Press Institute.

The reworked modules aimed to show that while reactive reporting of religious issues with its accompanying visceral imageries had been the standard practice, reporters could take a more proactive approach, which meant studying and anticipating trends rather than routinely reacting to events. Journalists could explore more creative ways of researching, reporting and telling their stories in written and audio-visual formats that better represent the diverse faith expressions in the community.

Journalists selected to participate in the IJF were required, before they arrived in Kuala Lumpur, to write a summary report on the state of the media in their respective countries, the ethical and professional issues they face in their work and how they were able or unable to address these issues. The 1500-word 'state of the media' reports were submitted to me via email a week before the workshop began in Kuala Lumpur. The briefs provided me with a framework to tailor the contents and scope of workshop discussion during the weeklong training period. The briefs also helped in my pre-workshop research on the state of the media in the journalists' home countries.

In talking about the standards of journalism in their respective countries, besides the Philippines and Indonesia, the journalists' reports generally indicated that it was less about their lack of conviction in their public service functions and professional creed, than their discontent with their editors' ambivalent leadership and their respective government's control of their news organisation that frame the type of journalism we see today in parts of Asia. This is particularly evident in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.<sup>100</sup>

During the workshop, the journalists took time to reflect on the issues they had alluded to in their reports and contextualise the issues to what they faced daily in their respective newsroom. Short video clips of journalism

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100 Selected country reports written by the journalists at the IJF workshops in Kuala Lumpur are provided in Chapter 5.

and interviews with newspaper editors are presented to facilitate dialogue among the participants.<sup>101</sup> The dialogue is geared towards examining who is saying what, to who, for what purpose, and on the basis of what claim to legitimacy the journalist has in reporting for an audience from diverse political and cultural backgrounds. Information acquired from my academic and professional experience with media systems in Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Hong Kong, Laos and Australia provide the framework for the workshop discussion. The academic nature of the initial part of the workshop is, for intended purposes, to provide a platform for participants to reflect on their practice.

As the participants came from diverse cultural backgrounds with different levels of English language fluency, I anticipated different learning processes and outcomes. Thus, embedded in my training approach and contents were varying degrees of flexibility for adaptation to the workshop environment, which changes as the days progress. The practical components focus on research and writing exercises in English. Where the journalists do not work with the English-language media, they are assigned to work with their colleagues and provide critical input to the story angles, story frames, interviewing methods, story packaging, and how to approach difficult sources. Much time is also spent in working out different ways to interview sources in different cultural settings. For instance, publisher of Kompas in Indonesia, Jakob Oetama, coined the term 'crab journalism', peculiar to journalism in Indonesia. It refers to a journalistic tact that "waits for an opportunity to pincer (sic), but motionless if exposed to a threat...know when they should firmly and completely utter the belief and the truth, or when they have to be careful, cryptic, symbolic and vague, especially in the modern era of New Order which claimed many victims."<sup>102</sup>

In conducting training workshops in Asia, I am also inclined to assume that the journalists come from different media systems with varied levels

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101 For example, see the 45-minute video recording of interviews with award-winning journalists in Asia in *Best Practices of Journalism in Asia* (2009), KAS Media Asia Programme (Singapore). The video clip can be viewed at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/creartspapers/42/>

102 Herdi Sahrasad & Dhuha Hadiyansyah (2011), *80 years of Jakob Oetama, Founder of Kompas: Journalism that Knows the Map and Itself*, Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs, October 5, 2011. <http://m.rimanews.com/read/20111005/42810/80-years-jakob-oetama-founder-kompas-journalism-knows-map-and-itself> (Accessed October 12, 2012)

of media experience, but low awareness of critical media concepts and theories. The training objective is to provide the adult learners (journalists) with a framework to reflect on their practice through an informed understanding of ethical issues, media concepts and theories, and how when applied to their work they may be able to examine their work in the context of their professional code of practice and moral obligations to the community.

After a week of case studies of award-winning journalism from the 'Western' (US and Australia) and Asian (India and the Philippines) media systems, reflection on their practices, and exploration of alternative models of reporting, the journalists were assigned to draft a set of guiding principles to remind them of the values and principles they once held, but had overlooked in their practice. In an International Journalism Fellowship workshop I conducted for the Malaysia Press Institute in November 2010, 20 journalists from Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Mongolia and Uzbekistan drafted the following principles on reporting about religion.

### **Principles of Reporting Religion**

As journalists actively participating in the IJF 2010 programme, and fully aware of our responsibilities to the public in our respective countries, we hereby resolve to carry out our daily work according to the principles and values outlined below. These are written to remind us of the standards of reporting that our communities, peers and authorities hold us to. In declaring our commitment to honest, fair and responsible conduct in the gathering, transmitting and disseminating of news, we resolve to:

1. Pursue meaningful stories beyond the mundane, sensational and trivial without regard for ratings or revenue.
2. Push for greater freedom of the press in our respective country and access to information by overcoming bureaucratic red tape, and practise investigative journalism without fear of threats.
3. Practise honest and corruption-free journalism by resisting the temptation to accept gifts, junkets or money to write public relations oriented stories for any parties that mislead the public.
4. Pursue fair, accurate and truthful stories that improve society's lot, and which ensure the safety and security of our sources and informants.

5. Strive to develop best practices in reporting through compelling and well-researched stories that inspire and educate the public.
6. Bring the focus of our stories back on the people who are directly affected by issues so that their voices will be heard.
7. Unite as a network of journalists sharing a common objective of delivering stories that readers want and need to know.
8. Open accessible channels for the public to provide feedback and criticisms to our stories, and thus, to improve our standards of reporting.
9. Maintain our objectivity in reporting while recognising the need to empathise with the plights of the people.
10. Preserve our primary role as a critical monitor of governments, civil societies, corporate and public sectors, and those whose actions, statements and policies affect the life of the common people.
11. Encourage tolerance, respect and sensitivity towards peoples of all religions, beliefs, race, culture and traditions.
12. Practise conscientious photojournalism with sensitivity and thoughtfulness, and which captures the joys and plights of society.

The above principles were drafted after a workshop based on the following modules:

### **Day 1: Reporting on Religion 1**

*(To raise awareness, interest and appreciation of religion in the media).*

TIME	ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES
9.00 am	<p><b>Reflection:</b> Explain workshop objectives, warnings of offensive videos, and limitations.</p> <p>Work in pairs. List 2 critical questions related to reporting about religion. Then present to class. Questions listed to be addressed throughout the day's workshop.</p>	<p>A warm-up session to set a framework for journalists to reflect on their reporting methods, news practice, attitudes.</p>

TIME	ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES
10.30am	<i>Tea break</i>	
10.45am	<p><b>Engaging with religion reporting</b> Quizzes on knowledge about Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism</p> <p><b>Comparative religion quiz online at:</b> <a href="http://www.quia.com/quiz/1135579.html">http://www.quia.com/quiz/1135579.html</a></p> <p>Symbols of world's religion: <a href="http://www.sporcle.com/games/MagsYoLove/religion_by_symbol">http://www.sporcle.com/games/MagsYoLove/religion_by_symbol</a></p> <p>Show headlines from news clippings in Australian and US newspapers.</p> <p>FAQs on religion reporting: <a href="http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/faq">http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/faq</a></p>	<p>To self-evaluate knowledge of comparative religions.</p> <p>To understand concept and practice of religion reporting.</p> <p>To set the tone of workshop – reporting to foster interfaith dialogue.</p>
12.30pm	<i>Lunch</i>	
1.30pm	<p><b>Short lecture</b> Feedback on content analysis of religion reporting.</p> <p><b>Group activity</b> Participants present their views on state of religion reporting in their respective country's media based on their content analysis. Identify issues, constraints and opportunities for religion reporting.</p>	
3.00pm	<i>Tea break</i>	
3.15pm	<p><b>Review question</b> How do you see yourself as a journalist and as Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, agnostic, atheist?</p>	To continue with writing exercise.
4.30pm	Write a personal statement on religion reporting.	

**Day 2: Reporting on Religion 2***(To apply principles of ethical journalism to reporting of religion)*

TIME	ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES
9.00 am	<p><b>Recap:</b> Recap discussions so far - ORACLE (observe, reflect, analyse/amplify, contextualise, theorise, source); FACTS (factualise, analyse, contextualise, theorise, source); ABCDEF (accuracy, balance, contents/context, depth, educate/explain/expose, fairness).</p> <p><b>How would you report:</b> The installation art <i>Piss Christ</i> (1987) exhibition in the national gallery. The photo won the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art's "Awards in the Visual Arts" competition,[1] sponsored in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, a United States Government agency that offers support and funding for artistic projects. (Details: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piss_Christ">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piss_Christ</a>)</p>	To challenge journalists to go beyond their comfort zone.
10.30am	Tea break	
10.45am	<p><b>Case study: Piss Christ</b> Pair to pitch story on 'Piss Christ' – apply ABCDEF principles of ethical reporting.</p>	To apply principles of ethical practice in religion reporting.
12.30pm	Lunch	
1.30pm	<p><b>Short lecture</b> Feedback on Piss Christ story pitch.</p>	
3.00pm	<p><b>Case study</b> Camden Islamic school controversy. Show video. Then pair up to consider how to report and package a story based on the ORACLE, FACTS and ABCDEF models.</p>	
3.15pm	Tea break	
4.30pm	<p><b>Case study</b> Stories that foster interfaith dialogue. Pitch as a pair.</p> <p>Write a personal statement on religion reporting.</p>	

**Development Journalism Training Workshop in Papua New Guinea**

In August 2010, I was invited by the Media Council of Papua New Guinea Press to conduct a one-day workshop on 'Advocacy and Development Journalism' for its members in the lead-up to the Papua New Guinea Media Conference 2010 on "*Advancing the Millennium Development Goals in PNG*". The workshop was aimed at preparing the PNG journalists to cover the conference and other assignments during the course of their work. Journalists who attended the one-day training had an average of 10 years professional experience.

The workshop underlined a growing need for development reporting and advocacy journalism in PNG, particularly in the rural communities. Since PNG is one of the least developed countries, it was essential that media practitioners also report on pressing development issues and advocate for change to bring about desirable development outcomes in the country where, according to United Nations Development Program report on PNG, only 4 in 10 Papua New Guinean children enrol in school, 5.5 percent of babies born will die before they are two years old and average life expectancy is just 57 years. The workshop covered specific areas of advocacy journalism including the MDG targets of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, ensuring all children complete primary school, promoting gender equality, improving the health of mothers and children, reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and communicable diseases, protecting the environment, and creating a global partnership for development. I was assigned the task of equipping the journalists with essential skills in reporting, identifying development stories, research, story angling and story packaging.

I defined advocacy journalism in these terms during the workshop - that is, reporting with a clear but transparent purpose in generating public discussion on how to bring about significant improvements in the living conditions and welfare of the people, the majority of whom are living in the rural areas. Advance development reporting skills are those that research, investigate and produce stories that influence government policies and programmes to improve human conditions. These stories are slanted to represent the people's concerns and targeted at policy makers. Journalists who attended the training were reminded that their tasks at the end of the workshop were to be able to differentiate between development reporting, and advocacy journalism; to acquire the skills and competencies in using the media to advocate for an improvement in the living conditions of Papua New Guineans.



The module adopted for the workshop is as follows:

<b>Professional Skills Improvement Workshop: Development &amp; Advocacy Journalism</b>		
VENUE : The Pacific Gardens Hotel, Goroka, Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea		
DATE : 09 August 2010		
TIME	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
8.30am	Welcome Remarks	
8.45am	Reflection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journalists' perception of their critical functions in PNG society, their professional goals and personal values.</li> <li>• Peer assessment of strengths, weaknesses, obstacles and tasks in the reporting of development issues.</li> <li>• How journalists understand the concept and practice of 'development journalism', 'advocacy', 'public', 'civic', 'citizen' - how similar and different from 'traditional reporting'.</li> <li>• Principles of development and advocacy journalism.</li> <li>• What journalists in India and the Philippines say is 'development journalism'?</li> </ul>	A warm-up session to set a framework for journalists to reflect on their existing reporting methods, news practice, attitudes and knowledge of development issues in PNG. Journalists to rethink their approach to reporting, to move beyond their comfort zone.
10.30am	Tea break	

TIME	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
10.45am	Engaging with the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities and constraints of 'development journalism'.</li> <li>• Showing and telling 'new' insights to 'old' issues.</li> <li>• Identifying and pitching stories with 'development' angles in the PNG context.</li> <li>• Packaging and presenting 'development' oriented stories focusing on the MDGs.</li> </ul>	Journalists to pitch story ideas with 'development' angles and brainstorm 'creative' ways of sourcing, researching, gathering information, interviewing and presenting stories with a 'development-oriented' goals in mind. Focus will be on MDGs
12.30pm	Lunch	
1.30pm	Case Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasons for success and failures of development and advocacy journalism.</li> <li>• Possible remedial steps to take in the PNG context.</li> </ul>	Group discussions on examples of past and present development and advocacy journalism in PNG covering both broadcast and print.
2.30pm	Development-oriented story writing exercise focusing on the UN MDGs in PNG.	Based on journalists' knowledge of and experience with development issues in PNG, they will compose a story in a 'development journalism' format. For the purpose of this exercise, journalists will work in pairs, and will need access to a computer to write their stories – for feedback by the trainer.
3.00pm	Tea break	
3.15pm	Development-oriented story writing exercise focusing on the UN MDGs in PNG.	Continue writing development advocacy story.
3.50pm	Concluding remarks	
4.00pm	END	

## Q&A WITH MEDIA TRAINER:

### **Doug Cosp**

*dougcosp.com, Colorado, USA*

**D**oug Cosp has conducted training for journalists and media development programme managers in South East Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa. He has trained both working journalists and taught journalism as a Fulbright scholar and Knight International Press fellow in universities in the US and Europe.

**Eric Loo: You started your journalism career reporting for a country paper in Colorado, moved on to being a UPI correspondent in Europe, then returned to Boulder. Your stories won a few awards from 1995-99. Until 2009, you also taught journalism at University of Colorado and in parts of Africa, Asia and Europe. What were the rewarding experiences in your academic and professional career?**

**Doug Cosp:** As would most teachers of anything, I'd have to say that my most rewarding experience is defined by every student or journalist I was fortunate enough to encourage or help develop in some significant way. Sounds prosaic, I know. But we journalism trainers have the opportunity to shape the future of journalism, and in part of budding democracies, by giving journalists and students the tools they need to carry out the task they already are bound by heart to do. I've been training in developing democracies for 11 years, and I'm happy to say that some of my students and trainees now occupy pivotal positions in their nation's media. Those dedicated journalists, through their work and their inspiring of others, are doing the critical work of giving the people the information they need to improve their lives, and to have played even a small role in that feels pretty darn good.

If there was one training assignment that stands out as exceptionally rewarding, it would be a five-month gig with the US State Department holding workshops for Burmese journalists in the run-up to the 2010 elections. The results and new president, both unsurprising at the time, are turning out to be changing everything there after 50 years of dictatorship.

It was the first time that a Western journalist had ever trained in the open, with the blessings of the state censors and under the nose of the state security apparatus. It was, to my knowledge, the first time a group of Burmese journalists had ever discussed the provisions of their own constitution, the principles of democracy at play during an election, and how to cover (and by extension conduct) a fair election. The experience proved that real journalism can be taught in a non-political way so that it does not threaten oppressive authorities. That good journalism mitigates for freedom will be a lesson the regime will most likely learn only in hindsight, after democratic changes have become irreversible.

During my reporting career, I had the most fun when I was able to uphold the time-honoured journalistic creed of comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. It's not easy for reporters working under oppressive regimes to do this, but at least I was able to show them that they had something to look forward to.

### **What led you to become a journalism trainer?**

Journalism training was an opportunity to marry my three main passions: journalism, the developing world, and the desire to somehow make a difference. A former dean at the University of Colorado, Del Brinkman, recommended me for a Knight International Press Fellowship, and I ended up spending nine months in Romania in 2002-2003. There was pretty much no looking back after that.

### **What have been the significant changes in how journalists are trained today?**

If you mean how journalists are trained at universities today, I'm not a very good source on that. I haven't taught at an American university in some years, and the changes there, as you know, have been mind-boggling.

Regarding international training, I'd say the biggest changes mirror those in Western journalism schools. First, it's important to understand that international journalism training is funded primarily by various government and foundation grants. Those grantors are always looking for the newest trend in journalism and journalism development, like citizen journalism and news delivery by cell phone, etc. The big journalism training outfits, naturally, adapt to meet the demands of the money. This is probably

mostly a good thing, but my concern is that the core values of journalism can be lost in the pursuit of the sexiest new delivery systems. I can say with absolute confidence that it is the core values of accuracy, fairness and service to readers and audience that builds democracies, regardless of what new technology delivers the news. In the interest of full disclosure, I have always considered myself a maverick in this field, and have, for one reason or another, never worked for a big training organisation.

**How can journalism schools, as an institution of higher learning, better prepare students for the industry?**

Basically I'm sympathetic with the notion that the best way to learn to be a reporter is to report. I think the best journalism schools would agree. They include practical work, either at the student newspaper or local media internships, early into their programmes. I took a master's degree in journalism 10 years after I graduated with a BA in liberal arts. I probably would have caught on fairly quickly in a newsroom provided I was lucky enough to have an attentive editor/mentor, but my degree gave me the additional benefit of a background in journalism history, law and ethics that are not so easy to come by on the job. When my own university, the University of Colorado, became so top heavy with academics to the exclusion of professional faculty, I began recommending that students go elsewhere to learn the craft.

**Do you think there are certain skills and values that are more effectively learned in the newsroom than in a university journalism programme?**

It's entirely possible to be a great journalist never having set foot in a journalism school. Some of America's best journalists of the 20th century proved that. Some people are insatiably curious and driven to speak truth to power. Journalism comes naturally to them, and picking up the skills of the craft on the job seems almost a formality. There's no better place to learn how to get a story on deadline than the newsroom.

Most journalists I know benefited from their journalism degrees. Good journalism schools, and by that I mean those with a faculty with deep newsroom experience, offer the serious student the benefit of the full attention of mentors and the luxury of a training ground where making a mistake may cost them a few grade points, but not their jobs. It is a time

for prospective journalists to test themselves, to learn whether they are cut out for journalism or not. Journalism students also have the added benefit of learning the history of the craft, to appreciate how much has been sacrificed to free and strengthen the press, which they soon will be entrusted to safeguard. History, ethics and media law can be self-taught or learned in the newsroom as well, but as we know, the newsroom is a very busy place.

**You've worked with journalists from Burma, Botswana and Baku to Sarajevo, and Timor-Leste. How do you prepare yourself to engage with the journalists who work in environments that are so different from yours?**

When I started training in developing democracies, I probably did a lot more preparation than I do now. These days, I try to suppress the urge to form preconceptions of journalistic conditions in a country and expectations of what I hope to accomplish there. I have the benefit now of 11 years of training materials on my laptop that are adaptable to most situations I'm likely to run across. Now, I do as much research on the country and culture as I can before I leave so I won't look like a complete idiot. I try mostly to listen and observe for about the first week on the ground. I like to interview a representative swath of editors, reporters and media consumers early on. Only then, if I've done that well, can I identify the strengths and weaknesses of the local media and hope to draft a plan with expectations of good results.

As for engaging with actual journalists, this has never been a problem. In a world of such dizzying differences, I am comforted by the fact that a journalist is a journalist and a story is a story everywhere. The collegiality of journalism across borders and cultures is extraordinary, so long as journalists work for their readers and audiences and not their governments.

**How do you train journalists to report the 'truth' and be 'an independent monitor of power' in countries where editors are appointed by the media owners who are in turn affiliated with those in power?**

Of course, reporters and editors in many places can't practice journalism at the level of standards we teach. Trainers know that, the journalists know that, and certainly the media owners know that. I have found that,

in most cases, the journalists have never considered that there might be another way to practise the craft other than doing exactly what he or she is told. In those cases, I start by helping the journalists understand how important journalism is to a democracy, how important they are in their society. We talk about the importance of all of the people knowing what is going on around them, including how their government is governing, so that they can make good decisions to improve their lives. I tell them that people can't care about what they don't know about. I ask them, "If a journalist doesn't tell people what is going on, who else will?" The answer, of course, is always no one. Many journalists working for less-than-independent media outlets often have never thought of themselves as particularly important, and this revelation can be powerful.

Second, I spend as much time as necessary throughout the training to drive home the fact that they as journalists work for their readers and audiences first, thus serving their careers, bosses and country. Just this simple concept can change the way some journalists see their place in the world, and many have never heard it before.

During this discussion in a Yangon workshop that included reporters for the government newspaper and television station, as well as two special branch (political) police officers there to keep an eye on the proceedings, a young reporter stood before his 50 or so colleagues and asked, "My editor sometimes tells me to put things in my story that I know are not true. What should I do?" This being Burma two years before it began to open up, I advised the reporter to keep his job and feed his family, and that maybe one day he could ask that question again. But just the fact that this young reporter had the courage and integrity to ask that question in public showed that change, if only in heart, was afoot.

**Looking back to your first training workshop, how have your methods AND contents changed? Or have they fundamentally remained the same?**

My message has changed very little over the years. Journalism in most of the places where I work is just learning to walk and talk on its own. I have found myself devolving the craft, thinking through concepts I'd always taken for granted, seeking to give the journalists a critical, basic understanding of what journalism is good for. For example, when was the last time you thought about why accurate information is better than

made-up information? I get that question sometimes. My stubborn focus on the basic values and skills of journalism makes me either a steadfast defender of the faith or a journo dinosaur oblivious to the wave of new media sweeping over the land. Sometimes I'm not sure which to believe.

**To what extent is your take on journalism and its functions shaped by your interaction with journalists in the 'Third World'?**

As much as I have loved journalism since I became a reporter 30 years ago, I think I hold it in even deeper reverence now after working with colleagues who risk their freedom or lives for a story and \$30 a month. My students have taught me a lot about courage and humility. This makes it all the harder to see the craft in my own country losing hard-fought objective ground with the advent of the likes of Fox News and CNBC. In many countries where I work, journalists would give anything to have the freedom to write objectively and fairly. In my country, the money is flowing to those who choose not to.

**What set apart journalists from the 'Third World' from their counterparts in the 'West'?**

Nothing. Good journalists will recognise good colleagues anywhere.

**What do you see are the urgent training needs of journalists in the poor developing countries where the newsroom culture is often resistant to change?**

If every newsroom in a country is resistant to change, that probably means they're all aligned with the authorities and their owners enjoy the profits that relationship brings. In countries like these, journalists have very few choices or incentive to do better work. I believe that skills workshops infused with the dual message of the importance of journalists to society and that we work for our readers and audiences can help encourage a long-term shift in values. That said, I confess that some places, like Azerbaijan, where government largesse with oil revenues seems effectively to have anesthetized public opinion, can be most frustrating. It's hard to get the message of the Fourth Estate across when journalism professors and students want so earnestly to help you understand why it's sometimes



acceptable to beat or jail opposition journalists if it's for the good of the country. But in every country, Azerbaijan included, there are journalists who want to practise high standards, and there are people who want accurate, unbiased news. We have a duty to support them.

If there are media outlets that truly strive to be independent, then we should do everything we can to help them develop their news content and their ability to make a profit from the news. Readers and audiences everywhere will support independent news outlets if they have something to offer. Given a choice, very few readers will pick up a government newspaper if they have options.

## Q&A WITH JOURNALIST:

### **Mon Mon Myat**

*Co-founder, Yangon Press International, Burma*

**B**eing raised in a country where there is virtually no press freedom, I never learned what good journalism is until 2003 when I studied for an MBA in Thailand. Then, after completing a 10-month basic course in journalism in Chiang Mai, I decided to take up journalism as the truth-seeking career. My first experience in reporting beyond Burma was when I received a Mekong media fellowship in December 2004. There were many things going on then in a small little border town where humans, wild animals, drugs, gemstones and trees were being trafficked from Burma to China.

I witnessed drug users injecting themselves on the street, under-aged Burmese sex workers in brothels and street children selling drugs in many places in town. What I saw fired me up to find out more about what was happening in my country and the criminal cross-border activities between Burma and China.

Finally I picked up the most engaging story idea about two ethnic street children involved in the drug and sex market on the street. What I did not consider was how the story would impact the two young ethnic girls from Burma. The story went viral online through Burmese publications in exile to regional media outlets. Later I heard from a friend living in the border town that the Chinese police had cracked down on the drug and sex trade in the street. But I never heard about the two ethnic girls or what happened to them. I'm still asking about them, but so far have not come across anyone who knows about the two girls.

I have carried that experience with me throughout my journalism career while writing for Agence France-Presse (AFP), Inter Press Service (IPS), Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), NyTid (Norwegian News Agency) and Yangon Press International. I decided to return home in April 2007 before I completed my MA Journalism at Ateneo de Manila University to work with AFP as a stringer. Working with the AFP, I have covered the

monk protests in 2007 and Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Mostly, I worked as a freelancer for other news agencies such as IPS, IRIN and NyTid magazine. With a group of freelance Burmese journalists, I set up a news group called Yangon Press International (YPI) in 2010 to cover Burma's controversial elections. From coaching by an independent trainer, we have produced many reports for the international media outlets during the election. Today our news group stands as an online news publication to provide uncensored daily news and feature stories to Burmese media entities and online audience with the aim to give Burmese an outlet to express themselves freely and promote press freedom.

We have now recruited about 20 staff and covered the whole country including different ethnic areas in Burma. We are representing the voiceless individuals from far remote places in the country to report what is going on there. We are seeking the truth. We have reported the visible truth, but one question that shadows me is "Can we really find the invisible truth?"

**Eric Loo: How has your academic training in the MA programme at ACFJ helped your journalism?**

**Mon Mon Myat:** There were two important things I learned from the MA programme as well as from classmates from different countries during my studies at ACFJ: concept of media ethics, and coping with media restrictions in South East Asia. Those are the basic things that always help my journalism in a way of thinking not to focus only on one country, one religion or one person, but to think from the broader regional or global context.

**What type of continuing education - and training - is most relevant to your work with the YPI group?**

The most relevant is a passion for my job. Although there is no regular income as a freelance journalist, I think I have a responsibility to work for my own country as a watchdog to expose the wrongdoings of the authorities. Together with four other freelance Burmese journalists, the YPI group was established in 2010 to work as a watchdog for the 2010 elections in Burma. YPI fellows are coached by a journalism trainer. We have contributed many stories and photographs to international press agencies in which we could report to the world that the 2010 elections were not free and fair. After the elections, the YPI carried on its news delivery service from different parts of the country through Facebook to reach Burmese audience anywhere in

the world. Among the audience, more than 50 percent of our readers are from within the country.

**How are the fellows at YPI trained to report on the elections? Can you comment on the contents in the training programme?**

The fellows at YPI were given two training courses by a local journalism trainer for basic journalism course (before working with YPI) and reporting on elections (two weeks before the elections). As most of our stringers cover ethnic area, contents in the training programme mainly focus on the election issue related to the ethnic states and voters in the ethnic areas. As the training was funded and mentored by a media NGO, Internews, the training guideline reflects Internews' policy to strengthen the capacity of ethnic stringers. The contents in the programme also include lessons learned from the previous general elections in 2010. The following are included in the training:

- Monitoring voting tricks of the election commission and government proxy party.
- Monitoring election campaigns for both opposition parties and government proxy party.
- Finding out vote buying and imposing threats to the voters.
- Collecting voters' voice and concerns.
- Observing vote counting and advanced ballots.
- Following up voting results.

**I understand newspapers in Burma are allowed to publish only once a week. With the slow political reforms happening in the country, the media today is freer than just five years ago. Online news sites, such as the weekly *Open News* and *YPI* are among those able to report stories that previously would be censored by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Department. What opportunities and obstacles will journalists in Burma face now that the April elections are over and the military-backed civilian government is slowly opening up?**

Except for three daily newspapers run by the state, the other papers are weekly news journals and entertainment journals and magazines. Weekly news journals are required to submit to the Press Scrutiny Board (PSB)

before publishing. Most of the weekly papers in Burma today set up either online pages on Facebook or its own websites. Besides, there is no scrutiny system yet in Burma to censor online news. Moreover, the Facebook site is not yet banned in the country although it has been banned in neighbouring China.

News delivery service on Facebook is very popular among Burmese users in the country and overseas. Readers can get updated information including text, photos and video clips every second. Even exiled broadcasting stations such as Radio Free Asia (RFA), VOA Burmese service, DVB Radio and TV News and BBC Burmese Service opened Facebook pages to attract readers' attention, so did the popular Burmese news websites such as Irrawaddy online magazine and *Mizzima*. So far the authority or the PSB have not interfered with online news delivery.

As interfering with information flow to the local audience is the top priority of the authority, restriction on local news media remains unchanged. Government continues to use daily newspapers and broadcasting stations as propaganda tools. Although there is some flexibility on local media in terms of censorship policy, the authority still controls news media and journalists with the specific legal system such as libel law and defamation. Until today, article or news that expose or criticise government's wrongdoing are not allowed to be published. The editors are often warned by the PSB for possible action. The actions usually are a suspension of the publication for a week or two or a legal action, which can land journalists in prison for many years. As long as the poor legal system exists in the country, the life of journalists in Burma will be at risk at anytime.

**A story published by 'Mizzima' based in New Delhi said 36 people attended the first journalism training course conducted by the National League for Democracy in Rangoon in Bahan Township from May 16-22 (<http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/5310-nld-concludes-first-journalism-training-course.html>). Drawing from your academic background, what do you think are the immediate training and education needs for journalists in Burma?**

I think the NLD provided the journalism training for party members at that time because they planned to publish a weekly paper called *D.Wave*, which is the party's propaganda journal. That turned out to be one of the

best selling papers in the country and could make a good fundraiser for the party. In my opinion, the more the media industry is developed in the country, the need of professional journalism will be more necessary for journalists in Burma because political parties and media tycoons have started to use media for political and commercial interests.

## Q&A WITH MEDIA TRAINER:

### Yvonne Chua

*VERA Files.org, Philippines*

A journalism trainer and educator since 1995, Yvonne T. Chua teaches journalism at the University of the Philippines in Quezon City and is a founding trustee of the non-profit news organisation VERA Files. Yvonne developed the detailed syllabus on In-Depth Reporting for UNESCO's Model Curricula for Journalism Education (2007). An investigative report on public health<sup>103</sup> that Yvonne co-wrote with Avigail M. Olarte was included in UNESCO's *The Global Investigative Journalism Casebook*,<sup>104</sup> launched in September 2012. Yvonne has authored numerous books on journalism and current issues on the Philippines. Her reporting awards<sup>105</sup> include the annual Jaime V. Ongpin Awards for investigative reporting and the National Book Award for Journalism.

Commenting on the personal risks of investigative journalism in the Philippines, Yvonne acknowledged that the Philippines was one of the "most murderous" countries for journalists. "A lot of the killings occur in the countryside where the rule of law is weak and many journalists do not have access to the kind of protection that journalists in the capital have. At PCIJ, we make sure that our investigative reports are airtight, accurate, fair and balanced. That's one of the best ways of protecting ourselves: good journalism. As a rule, we get the side of the target of the investigation before releasing it - alas, not with success all the time. So

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103 For a report on 'Stealing health in the Philippines', refer to the *Global Casebook for Investigative Journalism* Casebook (pp.95 - 105) at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002176/217636e.pdf> (Accessed October 25, 2012)

104 UNESCO launches the *Global Casebook for Investigative Journalism*, Media Services, September 17, 2012. [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco\\_launches\\_the\\_global\\_casebook\\_of\\_investigative\\_journalism/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco_launches_the_global_casebook_of_investigative_journalism/) (Accessed October 25, 2012)

105 *Yvonne Chua named Aquino awardee for journalism*, ABS-CBN News, August 11, 2010, <http://rp1.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/metro-manila/08/10/10/yvonne-chua-named-aquino-awardee-journalism> (Accessed October 25, 2012)

while we do get threats of libel suits, only one case has ever been filed in the prosecutor's office and none has made it to the courts. Other subjects of our investigation try to downplay our findings by casting credibility on the institution."<sup>106</sup> That was in 2006. She was then the training director of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. The risks of investigative journalism in the Philippines remain today.

In 2008, together with a team of female journalists, Yvonne started an independent investigative news agency, VERA Files ([veraffles.org](http://veraffles.org)), while continuing to teach journalism at the University of the Philippines, and conducting investigative journalism workshops - the last one for the International Journalism Fellowship organised by the Malaysian Press Institute in Kuala Lumpur (October 2012).

**Eric Loo: What led you to start VERA Files? What gaps is it attempting to fill in Philippine journalism?**

**Yvonne Chua:** While we (VERA Files) do put out investigative reports, it would be presumptuous of us to call ourselves an investigative journalism agency. We're not in the league of organisations that have made investigative reporting their primary or sole mandate. We really consider ourselves as just a non-profit news media organisation.

Our slogan declares that "Truth is our business" and our boilerplate states that the organisation "takes a deeper look at current issues" in the Philippines. That sums up the commitment of VERA Files when it was founded in March 2008 by six of us - all middle-aged women, good friends at that, in search of an outlet for pieces we'd like to write. Back then we felt there was still room for a group that would do "serious journalism." At the time, a media monitoring group had cited the paucity of investigative reports. In our case, we had no illusions we could do what other investigative journalism agencies have been doing, but we believe we could offer in-depth reports in multi-platforms (all of us have experience in several mediums, including online), especially in under-reported areas.

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106 Coping with hazards of investigative journalism', p.107 in Loo, Eric (2009), *Best Practices of Journalism in Asia*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Media Programme Asia, Singapore. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/creartspapers/42/> (Accessed October 25, 2012)



We also strongly believe in the rights-based approach to reporting a range of issues. This conviction is reflected in the special projects we have pursued, our latest being reporting on persons with disabilities. Since all of us have been editors or producers, we decided it should be among our missions to help fellow journalists as well as non-journalists interested to do good journalism through, among other means, training. Our bias is for journalists from small resource-starved media organisations, especially those from the provinces. We prefer partnering with them; some of us call it the “coalition of the small but willing.” We swear by mentoring. When we put up VERA Files four years ago (2008), we didn’t have any external funding and didn’t know how long we could keep it going. We had each plunked down a thousand pesos (roughly US\$25) to get incorporated and then plunged to work using what one trustee jokingly called our unique business model: a “no-income” business model.

**You have trained journalists from Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal and Mongolia. What are the critical differences AND similarities in the training needs of journalists from these countries?**

The training I’ve done in these countries ranges from basic journalism and elections reporting, to investigative reporting and training of trainers. So the specific needs vary from training to training. My own belief is training programmes should, beyond imparting skills, untiringly emphasize the role of journalism in a free society - which nearly all countries claim to have - so journalists can live up to this role and assert their rights, including pushing the limits of press freedom.

Of course, I know the media landscape across the globe is highly uneven, brought about by the diverse political, social and economic milieus that we work in. But the right to freedom of expression - and of the press - is fundamental. There appears to be a low awareness among many journalists themselves even of the international guarantees of free expression (Article 19 in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) and what it truly means to them. It also saddens me when it is unclear or unknown to journalists that they owe their allegiance to the public and not government. When you think about it, it is ironic that while many journalists defend the rights of other people, they themselves don’t know their own rights and thus cannot defend these.

In training journalists, especially on investigative reporting, I always feel the urgency of developing critical thinking skills among them, so they would “challenge” information, particularly spins, from sources - more so with journalists in emerging or new democracies.

Helping journalists acquire what we call the “documents state of mind” continues to be a challenge I face as trainer. Usage of documents is minimal, even nil, for some journalists for various reasons such as the lack of appreciation for document analysis, dearth of training on this, or a question of access.

Because investigative reporting turns up voluminous reams of information, many journalists I’ve come across have problems organising and analysing the data, and then transforming this into powerful, compelling stories. Many journalists are weak when it comes to long-form journalism, regardless of the medium, so the wealth of data they have amassed is, alas, lost in the poor storytelling. Many also have difficulties visualising data, which is much needed in this day and age of data journalism.

### **What are some of the positive and frustrating experiences in conducting training for journalists in developing countries?**

The language barrier can sometimes be frustrating. I’ve done training where there was simultaneous translation from English to three other languages. Most overseas training I’ve done requires consecutive translation from English to the language of the country I was invited to. We rely on the interpreter to translate the output and feedback to and from English. Even when I send my training materials ahead of the course for these to be translated, I have been told that the translation was not that accurate, especially if it’s done by a non-journalist who doesn’t know our jargon. So all the time, I worry about what gets lost in translation. I often wonder how much more the participants would have gained had I spoken their language or had they been more proficient in English.

In the 17 years I’ve been a journalism trainer, one of the most satisfying experiences I’ve had is the training I did in Mongolia. I was first invited

by Zorig Foundation<sup>107</sup> to conduct a five-day course on the basics of investigative reporting to a mixed group that included professional journalists, journalism educators and journalism trainers. Along with the inputs it got from other resource persons, the Press Institute of Mongolia developed and implemented an eight-month programme in which four teams of journalists from different news outlets worked on investigative reports, specifically on corruption. As they neared the last phase of their investigation, the Press Institute and Zorig Foundation brought me back to evaluate the teams' findings and help them write the story. The stories were eventually published, save for one that had certain legal issues. You'll find a short account of the programme on UNESCO's website.<sup>108</sup>

In many instances, journalism trainers don't really get to know what happens to scores of their trainees after the course ends. There is little or no attempt at follow-up meetings, even online. Or if there are, the post-training discussion trails off at some point when everyone becomes busy or loses interest. The Mongolian experience demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive training programme to ensure that learning indeed takes place.

### **What have been the significant changes in how you train journalists in Asia today compared to the 1990s before the internet became part of the newsroom setup?**

Your question brings to mind what it was like in the mid-1990s when I first put together a course that included computer-assisted reporting (CAR). Windows '95 had just been released, and one of the things we had to teach journalists was how to use a mouse. We used computers with the Unix operating system to access the Internet. Seems like ages ago. Years later, we would look for Internet cafes or schools willing to lend us their

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107 A non-governmental organisation in Mongolia established in October 1998 to "spread democratic values in Mongolian society; strengthening human rights, political freedoms and social justice; and improving the system of transparency and accountability of the state and government to the public". See, *Zorig Foundation The 10th Anniversary*. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/90903967/Zorig-Foundation-The-10th-Anniversary> (Accessed October 25, 2012)

108 *Investigative Journalism in Mongolia*, UNESCO Communication and Information, February 21, 2007 [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/news-and-in-focus-articles/all-news/news/investigative\\_journalism\\_in\\_mongolia-2/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/news-and-in-focus-articles/all-news/news/investigative_journalism_in_mongolia-2/) (Accessed October 24, 2012)

computer lab with LAN so we could run the sessions on the Internet and CAR. Nowadays with WiFi, you don't need an off-site venue for this type of training.

Since journalists are now familiar with the Web, I can proceed to deep research for most groups. But that's not the case with the other aspects of CAR where I find myself still spending time walking them through spreadsheet basics, database managers, statistical software etc. I suspect that the lack of familiarity with these tools has to do with their aversion to numbers.

In the case of multimedia journalism, my lament is some training programmes emphasise the technology and production techniques at the expense of substance. This happens even in academe. So I give a lot of thought on how to strike a balance between form and content in training.

The upside about the Internet is the ability of journalists to undergo online training - some free, others fee-based - on a host of topics from a host of training groups. Getting training is a lot easier these days. I've gotten into a number of distance-education or online training courses myself, and what I appreciate the most, besides a well-structured training module, are tutors who take their work seriously: those who plan and effectively manage chat sessions, make themselves available as mentors; and send back prompt, detailed feedback for the required activities, among other things. They're my models when I use a virtual learning environment for my classes.

**How do you prepare your training workshops to engage with the journalists who work in environments and circumstances that are so different from what you have experienced in the Philippines?**

I bone up on the countries where the journalists will be coming from by reading, reading and reading. I'd research on their Constitution (assuming it's available in English), a little of their history, and their political and press systems. I recall I was once invited to train journalists in one country where - would you believe? - I ended up telling them what their Constitution says about their form of government, elections, freedom of expression and other items. It was bizarre. I also consult trainers, not necessarily journalism trainers, who've worked in these countries to get an idea of how things operate there.

And yes, I scour the Web for training materials that have been used for these journalists, even those that are off-topic, and accounts of trainers' experiences with journalists in these countries to mine ideas on how to fashion and run my course.

**How do you train journalists to report the 'truth' (as practised by VERA Files journalists) and be 'an independent monitor of power' in developing countries where editors are appointed by the media owners who are in turn affiliated with those in power?**

I would urge them to report the truth as much as they can, that is, after thorough verification; to not exercise self-censorship; and to instead let their editors/producers and media owners do the snipping or killing. That way, they remain true to their obligation to engage in truth seeking and -telling as much as possible. I know it's easier said than done, but that was what I used to do as a neophyte journalist when the dictator Marcos was in power - you know, let the censor not be me - in order to keep my sanity. I would remind journalists that editors and media owners don't watch all fronts, their main preoccupation being the politically sensitive stories. There are areas where they could report the truth as fully as possible. At the same time, I'd encourage engaging editors/producers in dialogues to provide reporters more leeway in their work.

**It's said that in the West, the media's in the grips of corporate influence and balance sheets. In developing countries (for example in the Indochina region, Singapore and Malaysia), the media's in the hands of government control and censorship. However, social justice issues, human conditions and public corruption happen across political and cultural boundaries. How do you address these issues in your training workshops while recognising the consequences on the journalists who investigate and expose these issues?**

Because you can never tell what might happen to the journalists who dare (to investigate), I'd also tell them to learn to keep safe not only from physical but also legal harm and, as important, network with journalists within and outside their country for their protection.

Lastly, I make it a point to tell journalists that they probably can't do at the moment what we do but to never despair. There would hopefully

come a time when democracy is restored, or the democratic space widens, in their country and they'd be similarly situated as journalists in a truly free society - just like what happened to the Philippines and elsewhere. Then they'd know how to navigate the new environment and apply the knowledge and skills they've acquired. When I trained a group of Burmese journalists years ago, little did we imagine that democracy would dawn on that country - sooner than we thought.

**You currently teach journalism at the University of the Philippines and have authored several books on investigative journalism. You also continue to practise as an investigative journalist with VERA Files. How do you adapt your experience in teaching journalism in a university undergraduate programme with training of working journalists in a newsroom environment?**

I've done a number of investigative reports, but I dare not call myself an investigative journalist. I've consistently said the label is reserved for those who have tirelessly dedicated the large part of their career to investigative reporting. There are quite a number of them.

I began training working journalists in 1995 when I joined the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism as training director. That was the same year I began teaching journalism at the University of the Philippines on a part-time basis (I went full time in November 2006). I believe that having journalism for an undergraduate degree and being a practising journalist who worked her way up the newsroom, from junior reporter to managing editor at a newspaper and editor of a magazine, helped me a lot in deciding what I ought to bring up among journalism students and among professional journalists. I try to fill the learning gaps in the classroom to prepare students for the real world and hopefully help bridge academe and industry my own small way. As early as the introductory course in journalism, I try to get my students' works published. For practitioners, thematic training courses, including beat-based ones, work better than general courses like news writing and feature writing taught in the undergraduate programme.

**What are your guiding principles each time you design a journalism training programme?**

I believe in the outcome-based approach. Meaning, I think first of the learning outcomes before I craft my training objectives. It makes course development easier. I look at modules as learning blocks that should

be built on top of one another. Activities serve as strong links between modules, and as vehicles to integrate learnings from the various blocks.

I also value module and course evaluation designed in different ways, including pop quizzes that trainees enjoy a lot. Lastly, I tend to over-prepare because I always tell myself I should expect the unexpected. I just discard stuff I no longer deem necessary, when the training gets under way.

## CHAPTER 5:

# Asian journalists reflect on their practice

This chapter provides a compilation of commentaries written by journalists who participated in the International Journalism Fellowship in 2009 and 2010 in Kuala Lumpur, where I conducted training workshops on advanced reporting, development reporting, and reporting on religion and conflict. The common thread that runs through their reflection is: journalists in Asia should not only attribute the inadequate standards of journalism in their respective countries to the restrictive media laws. Journalists should also examine their purpose for taking up the profession, their professional practice and their loyalties. As one of the journalists noted, not all issues of public interest demands one to confront the government or breach the media laws. Journalists working in the Asian political environments, they note, should develop a form of 'restrained boldness' where one should know when to punch and when to hold back their punches - until circumstances change - in their investigation of controversies in national politics and racial and religious issues.

This chapter aims to show that journalists, whether they operate in Asian society or the West, share a fundamental principle - which is to report accurately what they hear and see. Where they diverge is in how they relate and respond to their sources, their evaluation of what should be reported or, given the country's media laws, what should be given more cautious journalistic treatment but without compromising the journalistic obligation to serve their readers. It's a delicate balance between the tenets of reporting 'without fear or favour' and the reality of tentatively holding back on particular issues, waiting for circumstances to change before the 'truth' could be revealed, or if all else fails, passing on the information to external media outlets for a full exposure. The journalists' reflection could provide media trainers from the West invited to conduct journalism workshops in parts of Asia with a broader cultural framework to tailor their training modules and methodologies to the realities as experienced by these journalists.



# WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE FREE AND INDEPENDENT IN JOURNALISM?

## Ghaz Ghazali

*The Star, Kuching, Sarawak*

**K**UALA LUMPUR: Every comic-lover knows Superman. They know his alter ego Clark Kent and his counterpart Lois Lane, both reporters for The Daily Planet. In their quest to uncover the truth and to be in the frontline of breaking news, both characters apply investigative reporting techniques.

Throughout the years, both Kent and Lane have become pop icons in defining the role of journalists in modern society. They corner politicians, moguls, industry leaders and even criminals to get the best scoop. They put on disguises to seek the real story behind each scandal. All these are done in the name of truth.

Perhaps Clark Kent and Lois Lane are the most recognisable comic icons, but they are not the only ones. There are Peter Parker aka Spiderman the photojournalist, Brenda Starr the 'star' correspondent of The Flash, and Hergé's young Belgian reporter, Tintin in the namesake comic strip.

But do they really represent the freedom and independence in journalism? How far does one go? Certainly, these characters are American. They represent the American spirit of media freedom and independence.

What about journalism in Asia, where media freedom is still restricted compared to North America, Europe and Australia?

Tom Rosenstiel and Bill Kovach said in their book *'The Elements of Journalism'* that journalism does not pursue truth in an absolute or philosophical sense but it can - and must - pursue truth in a practical sense. As such, self-analysis is vital in attaining that goal. Journalists have an internal moral compass, which influences what they write.

According to the book, the 'journalistic truth' is a process that begins with the professional discipline of assembling and verifying facts from reliable sources. Hence, journalists must report the issue as accurately and fairly as they can and subject to further investigation.

Building up on self-analysis, journalists may then decide how far they can maintain their objectivity when dealing with the subjects of their story. The issue may or may not be on morality or bias, but eventually it comes down to the journalists' standpoint on the matter. This is their freedom and independence. For instance, some journalists may abhor the idea of accepting gifts from their interviewees, while others think it is acceptable as long as it does not cloud their interpretation of the story.

Any angle one may look at it, the principles of media freedom and independence should guide every journalist's work. In today's media world, however, journalists are increasingly being hampered in their work. Journalists in Malaysia, for example, face the stranglehold of the ruling government and the challenges of surviving through the tough economic environment as dictated by the power of capitalism.

Media freedom in Malaysia, Brunei, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are still subject to state regulations. Hence, journalists do not have the freedom such as their counterparts in India, Indonesia and the Philippines where the freedom to report, confront and challenge are as perhaps unencumbered as that in North America, Europe and Australia.

However, no country has absolute media freedom for its journalists, even in the 'land of the free'. If not the government, then it could be other parties that interfere with free and independent reporting. This is the reality. Media companies have to rely on advertisers to remain viable and profitable. Thus, the question: how can journalists maintain their freedom and independence to investigate and report amidst these constraints? The answer ultimately rests on the shoulders of journalists.

For instance in the coverage of issues related to poverty, race, religion and socio-economic injustices, journalists must be creative in their approach to skirt around the array of media laws. One way to do this would be to interweave the issue into the main story. For example, the issue of poverty can be slipped into a story about a new government project to develop an

industrial area, by which the project is expected to create a number of job opportunities and encourage other value-added enterprises along the way. By doing so, the issue can be played along with the main story and it can also lead to follow-up stories.

Another method is for journalists to build up an important issue through other channels. With the advent of the new media phenomenon, journalists can start off a story that might hurt the big advertisers through blogs, networking channels and independent online news, or even to rival newspapers or media stations. The issue will gradually gain momentum, and by the time it becomes big, all media channels will want to have the issue as their front-page news. This is how journalists capitalise on opportunities in certain situations to be free and independent in their work.

Whatever methods journalists choose, they should always base their stories on facts, instead of hearsays and stereotypes. As stated in the American Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics, professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Journalism is seen as a watchdog over those whose power and position most affect citizens. Moreover, journalists have an obligation towards protecting their freedom to report by not demeaning through frivolous sensationalised reporting. Serious journalists take great care to establish and maintain their reputation among readers. They also seek to tackle their stories from all angles. It is only through their reputation for ethical reporting that journalists can earn the audience's trust and loyalty, thus together reinforcing the imperative of freedom and independence for journalists to do their work.

Other than building up credibility, journalists should always push themselves towards becoming free and independent in their writing. Although it might sound clichéd, journalists should never give up. Many of the world's revolutionary icons such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King never gave up fighting for what they believed in.

Journalists should also fight for their welfare and rights. There are cases in developing countries where journalists are not being fairly paid. As such, these journalists have to resort to accepting favours from their sources, which consequently compromise the objectivity of their stories. Therefore, providing for better welfare of journalists means averting the pitfalls of 'envelope journalism' and compromising the principles of ethical journalism.

Additionally, journalists should be ready to take risks in order to be free and independent. Even in countries where media freedom is controlled by the government, journalists should push boundaries to report what they believe to be right. Again, it is up to the journalists to apply whatever methods as mentioned above to produce their stories. Journalists should have the bird's eye view of certain subjects, rather than focusing only on one or two facets of the matter. This will aid in providing a thorough assessment of the story.

Taking risks also means persistence. Certain issues are tightly controlled either by the government or media advertisers, but these issues are the ones that are significant. Therefore, journalists should continue to look for evidence, data and sources to back up their stories and provide better understanding of the issues they want to write about.

Even with all the data and information, journalists need to present their stories in ways that can capture the attention of their readers. As such, innovative reporting is key. Journalists should look for different ways to convey the data into a much more interesting presentation. This is where the new media phenomenon comes in. Journalists should acquire new skills and equip themselves with the latest technology. However, it should be noted that new media technology can only help so much - the rest depends on the journalists to present the stories as accurately and in the best light possible.

Still on the subject of risks, it is also up to the journalists to ask themselves whether they are prepared to face intimidation or attacks by those angered by their stories. In such cases, journalists should assess when is the best time to provoke and when to hold back. Although there are cases of casualty among journalists during times of turmoil such as wars, natural disasters or catastrophes, no news awards is worth a journalist's life, not even a Pulitzer. To literally walk into a sea of fire just to get that scoop, is simply reckless. At least, they should have some sense to wear fire-repellent clothing.

Clark Kent and Lois Lane do, to a certain extent, represent the ideals of being a free and independent journalist. They embody the responsibilities of all good journalists to obtain the truth from every angle. Massoud Ansari, correspondent for Newline Pakistan in an interview with Eric Loo

(*Best Practices of Journalism in Asia, 2009*) sums it up quite well. Ansari said, "As a journalist, you are a critic of society. And when you criticise either society or any organisation or for that matter any individuals, you tend to create enemies. The challenge is to stick to your commitment, and keep doing the work that you think will ultimately benefit society in the long run."

So, what does it really take to be free and independent in journalism? Is everything fit to print, regardless of where you are and who governs you?

Restrictions do not limit a journalist's ability to be free and independent; rather, they enable one to view an issue in an alternative, often different, light. Not all issues require one to defy the authority. Focus on different ends of the spectrum. As ironic as it sounds, masterpieces are almost always borne out of limitations. This is what journalistic freedom and independence is about - to be able to choose wisely the means to have that story out.

**Ghaz Ghazali** worked as a business and economics reporter for *The Borneo Post*, Sarawak's largest English daily in September 2009 until 2012 when he joined Malaysia's largest English tabloid daily, *The Star*. He writes a column "Tauk Sik" every Monday for the Sarawak edition.

# WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO ADVOCATE FOR WHAT'S RIGHT

**Tan Su Lin**

*Bernama Radio 24, Malaysia*

**Kristiana Anissa**

*SWA Magazine, Indonesia*

**A**s journalists we encounter situations that call for immediate reaction and decision-making. This is part of the daily news routine. Many, however, place us in a dilemma. Our personal beliefs and values are challenged, placing us at odds with what we were trained to do.

What is right? And what is wrong? Journalists are often caught between reporting 'objectively' and making subjective decisions, especially when there are no definitive laws to govern what is ethical or right, although what is legal is quite clear. Most of the time our actions as journalists in the field depend on our respective media organisation's policies and our faith and conscience in taking the 'right' action.

Reporting for a government news radio station, for instance *Bernama Radio24*, at times it is a struggle to provide 'unbiased' news coverage of the government and the opposition party. Basically, you cannot go wrong with any news coverage that portrays the government in a good light. However, if the tables are turned, we are reminded of our primary function as reporters for a government-owned media. Any coverage on the opposition is kept at minimal. Negative remarks on the government are omitted in the reports. These are the unspoken rules.

(Tan Su Lin) I was once sent to cover a pre-examination workshop for students in an opposition-governed state. "Why am I doing this? This has no news value," I thought. My editor rationalised the value of the assignment in this way: the government had been in a pretty bad light lately. The "bigger" boss was making noise. Thus, we had to portray the 'good things' the government was doing in the community.

The common dilemma faced by journalists in most media organisations is termed as MCMU - "Must Cover Must Use" - and advertorials. Which is a mockery to journalism's role to bring "news" to the people, but also a waste of resources as there is plenty more important news to cover. But then again, media organisations need advertisements to continue operating. "They are our clients, so we MUST cover." The questions I often ask as a journalist are: "What am I doing here? Is this even newsworthy?" That could be a sign that the event is just another MCMU.

Likewise, working for a business magazine, such as SWA Magazine in Indonesia, our news assignments focus on positive coverage of major corporations. SWA usually covers the achievements of young Indonesian entrepreneurs. However, equally critical stories such as illegal logging, financial manipulation and corporate accountability are seldom covered. And as a reporter in SWA Magazine I have to work to the company's editorial guidelines, although at times I can see other crucial business stories that need to be reported. Amidst the constraints and opportunities at our workplace, we outline below what it would take us, as journalists, to advocate for what is right.

**Be proactive.** Reflect on issues and take a stand on what is right. However, understand that one's opinion of what is right may be another person's concept of what is wrong. Therefore journalists need to be highly conscious of how they come to decide what is right or wrong in the context of their own prejudices before taking the further step - which is to advocate, in their stories, for what is right and confront what is wrong.

**Journalism's fundamental task is to report the truth and its context.** The essence of good journalism is the discipline of verification. Therefore, journalists must serve as an independent monitor of power. Journalism is ultimately a public service, a profession that serves as the people's watchdog.

**Journalists' loyalty** is to their readers, viewers, their listeners and the community rather than their editors. Whatever a journalist does, exercising one's freedom to report must ultimately be for the benefit of the wider society. Therefore, journalists working in developing countries where poverty is widespread and politics are driven by racial and sectarian interests, have a major role to play in reporting constructively for the greater good.

What we **should do** to advocate for what's right:

1. Self-analysis - we need to ask ourselves what is our objective as a journalist and what are our responsibilities.
2. Build a reputation by practising good journalism - multiple check sources and be unbiased in news reporting.
3. Be professional - do not accept any money or gifts. Do not take sides or let emotions influence your reporting of the truth.
4. Do not get personally involved with organisations or sources to maintain objectivity.
5. Never make assumptions - always base your news reporting on facts.
6. Never give up - keep pushing the boundaries in reporting the truth. Maintain the fight for journalistic independence.
7. Fight for welfare of journalists - this will minimise the risks of bribery by sources and special interest groups.
8. Educate the society about press freedom - until society is highly aware of the need for critical news reporting that is free from political and corporate interventions.
9. Cover as many sides of the event or issue.
10. Contextualise the reporting with empirical data.

As journalists, however, our advocacy for what is 'right' is essentially tied to what the editors deem to be 'right'. Editors have the power to tell their journalists what to report and edit [or rather 'censor'] our stories. There are, however, ways that journalists can take to advocate for what is right despite the newsroom constraints. It boils down to us drawing on our conscience and sensitivity to report truthfully what matters to our immediate communities.

Reporting the truth often places many journalists at odds with what the sources - especially public figures or major companies - prefer to keep hidden. It gets worse when the party involved is a major shareholder or advertiser. The reality hits you and your editor is opposed to such coverage to protect the company's interest. The worst case scenario is you will be out of a job if you persist in going against the editor.



To tackle the problem such as this, journalists can take a softer approach. Sit and discuss with the editor on the significance of the story to the readers. Offer plausible alternatives to spiking the story, such as writing the story in less harsher tone, but focusing on the facts.

Perhaps the best angle would be indirectly pointing towards the news object by getting comments from experts, people who are affected, sources that are relevant to the issue and able to answer many questions that can reveal the truth. When all else fails, look elsewhere for other mediums to tell your story - online media sites being the most sensible alternative. With the emergence of internet and the World Wide Web, one can easily set up their own website or their own online news portals. Reporters can also make use of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, or blog about the truth.

### **Conclusion**

It takes courage to stand up for what is right. As surely when it comes to advocating what is right, you will tend to rock some boat in the organisation. First, ask yourself if you are willing to do that. It really depends on how strongly you feel about the issue and how much you want to see change in your organisation. Second, practise what you preach and be confident that what you do is right. Believe in yourself and it is much easier to gain confidence from your fellow colleagues and boss.

Apart from that, one has to sacrifice time and effort in championing what is right. Sit in discussions with your boss and colleagues to express your opinion. Walk the extra mile and make a conscious effort to show others what are the right actions in view of good journalism so that they may have examples to follow. Take the lead and others will follow.

Bear in mind, however, that ethical issues may receive varied responses based on the individual's background and upbringing. Therefore, it might seem hard to change their perceptions. But do not lose hope. It will not happen overnight. Over time when society demands honest and truthful reporting from journalists, there would be a need for a paradigm shift.

# FREE AND INDEPENDENT: FIGHTING FOR WHAT IS RIGHT

## **Bima Marzuki**

*Presenter/Producer, BeritaSatu TV, Indonesia*

It was five minutes before I went on air, the producer said:

“The national police had denied it, we cannot risk our network with them. Our deputy editor in chief has confirmed it with the police, and the result is negative. So you have to drop the report, OK?”

I was shaking. My heart was racing. I had never felt so pressured. My brain was reeking in pain as I thought about what would happen if I resisted the producer’s directive. “One minute...” the cameraman said - either as a last warning or I would be fired. So, let it be.

I believed my viewers should know that the national police did not do their job in securing the bomb’s crime scene; that the national police had allowed two Australian journalists to enter the crime scene, that the national police had blundered, and yet they continued to lie to the public.

“Five...four...three...two...one.....CUE.” The camera lights came on.

“For the sake of my viewers, for the sake of press independence, and for the sake of my idealism. What the hell,” I thought.

“The police have secured the crime scene at Ritz Carlton hotel as their investigation is still ongoing. However, around nine this morning, two Australian TV journalists managed to penetrate inside the crime scene. We have confirmed this issue with Ritz Carlton’s public relations officer, and she admitted to the presence of two Australian journalists at the crime scene. She stated that the Australian TV journalists had some kind of recommendation letter from the Australian embassy and the police officer in charge permitted them to enter the crime scene ...”

**The victim**

One day in January 2009. Those days were probably one of the hardest for journalists in Jakarta. Media owners occasionally intervene in the daily news production.

"Bim, can I see you in my room now?"

"Sure"

"I just want to tell you that I'm going to resign starting from next month."

"Okay ... why?"

"There is no more room for me in here. I don't belong here. The board of directors is way out of control by always trying to interfere in our editorial policy. One or two cases are fine. But more than that?"

[Sighing]

"It won't be any use if I continue to push the boundaries. I am only creating conflict among us. That is why I have to go."

My chief assignment editor was one of the most experienced journalists I have met. He is probably the only TV journalist during my time who managed to expose major public corruption cases. In living up to his principle of being the "good guy" in journalism, he decided to resign - to be free in his mind to maintain his independence and conscience.

**Free and independent**

It has never been easy to be a 'good' journalist in Indonesia with excessive commercialism taking over the newsroom since the fall of Suharto in 1998, which led to a free-for-all overnight profit-making media market. Good journalists have left amidst the rising conflicts with media owners who are driven by profits and in the process have neglected the public service functions of the media.

However, as a young journalist I believe that I can still make a difference without having to leave the profession. Changes must start from within the person. A journalist's character, values and knowledge will determine the mindset on how to become a good journalist.

The benchmarks of good journalism are defined by a discipline of verifying facts, checking stories for fairness, and journalists knowing their responsibilities when writing their stories. Journalists must realise that they are responsible to their audience. This is one way to build integrity and earn the public's trust, and thus, their reputation within the industry.

### **Is it acceptable to take a gift?**

Indonesian journalists accepting gifts - in money form or other intangibles - has long been a contentious issue since Suharto's time in government. It's called 'envelope journalism'. Personally, I consider this issue to be a grey area, although I wish it can be as simple as black and white. Journalist organisations strictly prohibit a journalist from receiving any kind of gifts while doing their reports. The main problem is journalists are not given full financial support by their organisations in doing their coverage. We often see journalists being given airplane tickets, transportation costs, even paying the reporter's accommodation.

Occasionally sources also give daily allowance to reporters who are invited to cover stories outside their home base. This is often considered to be "acceptable" because the reporters need the subsistence allowance to travel beyond their home base. What is considered to be 'acceptable' is daily allowance to have three meals a day and transportation costs. But as a journalist, one must remember not to sell idealism and trade them with money. If the purpose of giving something is to influence the editorial contents, or as in return to buy one published / airtime, then it is unacceptable.

### **Maintain objectivity**

One of the hardest thing to do as a journalist is to build and maintain a network of contacts. A journalist can be very close with their sources, thus sometimes losing their 'objectivity' in their stories. In other cases, some journalists even receive a regular second income or other material benefits from their sources. There is no grey area in this case. A journalist should abstain from personal relationships with their sources to avoid a conflict of interest.

### **Investigate issues through social media**

Many journalists have probably experienced a situation when the editor or producer refuses to publish an investigative report on an important

issue. In this situation, try to publish the issue through other social media, such as blogs, group discussion forums and mailing lists. Write about an issue, and analyse the possible consequences. Invite public comments to your stories. Keep a record of the responses, trace the logic of the readers, verify the information received and develop the stories further for distribution on social media.

### **Always focus on the facts**

Verifying information to differentiate between facts and opinions, and getting reactions to what you have found are the main elements of good journalism. Journalists should not be too quick to jump to conclusions based on stereotypes. Stereotypes will influence journalists' outlook on a problem, and end up with misleading stories.

### **Strive for the welfare of journalists**

The safety and welfare of journalists in Indonesia and the Philippines is one of the most threatened in the world. As a result they are sacrificing their independence and investigation of public affairs in exchange for money. The idealism of a journalist quite often is sacrificed just to make ends meet. This should stop. Journalist trade unions and associations play a crucial role in protecting journalists' safety and in improving their welfare. This will not be easy in Indonesia, but we still have to fight.

### **Prepare for maximum risk**

Journalists must be prepared for a worst-case scenario. It is not easy living as a journalist, much more as a good journalist. Taking risks is part of the life of a journalist in Indonesia. For me it is a matter of choice - I can write and report truthfully and risk being fired by my media organisations, or in some cases, put my life at risk. Or I can be content in just reporting to please my sources and editors for personal rewards and sacrifice my integrity as a journalist. But this I know: As journalists in Indonesia, we will not be doing our job if we don't try to make a difference.

**Bima Marzuki** worked as a journalist with *Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI)*, the oldest private television station in Indonesia, doing live investigative reports on public corruption, thesis mafia and children trafficking. He left RCTI after six years to join *BeritaSatu TV* in 2007 as presenter and producer of business and technology news.

## CHAPTER 6:

# Educating journalists in context

This chapter explains the methodologies I have adopted in teaching journalism to undergraduate and post-graduate students in parts of Asia, Australia and for a stint in the US. The chapter also looks at the pedagogic divide between vocational-oriented and critical theory-oriented journalism programmes. It explains how the divide can be bridged by drawing from the essence of journalism practices in Asia and the West, and blending it into an 'alternative development oriented journalism pedagogy', which I believe is highly relevant to the socio-cultural, economic and political conditions in developing countries as well as complementing, rather than replacing, the Western libertarian press model.

Drawing from the fields of cross-cultural communication and ethnic studies, the cultural differences between East and West are commonly cited as:<sup>109</sup> Eastern culture is more collectivist, it emphasises group harmony, it avoids direct confrontation, it communicates from the general to the specific, hence the circumlocutory way of negotiation, and it thinks in a more holistic way. They pay attention to all the elements of a scene, to contexts and to the relationships between items. Valdez (2008) notes that in a survey of 77 journalists and 25 faculty members teaching journalism online from 2003 to 2007 at the Konrad Adenauer Asia Centre for Journalism in the Philippines:

“...the Asian journalists tend to use learning strategies that are consistent with their cultural values. For instance, there is a tendency among the students to maximize harmony and minimize conflict as a strategy. This is hypothesized as an Asian trait and one

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109 This cultural differentiation is derived from readings of Eastern and Western culture, e.g. the seminal work by Nakamura, Hajime.(1981). *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*, East-West Center, Honolulu. See also, a news report on research on brain activities conducted by the Centre for Brain Health at the University of Texas in Dallas in 2008 which summarises the fundamental difference between Western and Eastern thoughts. News report by The Tech, online newspaper at MIT, *Differences Between East and West Discovered in People's Brain Activity*, by Carey Goldberg at *The Boston Globe*, reprinted in The Tech, MIT, Volume 128, Issue 9, March 4, 2008. (<http://tech.mit.edu/V128/N9/culture.html>) (Accessed August 9, 2012)

that is manifested in cultures characterized by collectivism rather than individualism”.<sup>110</sup>

‘Western’ culture, in contrast, theoretically emphasises personal autonomy and formal logic. Hence, Westerners are generally assumed and perceived to be more analytical, direct and confrontational, forthright in their negotiation, more focused on specifics and particularise information and occurrences into categories. This differentiation between Eastern and Western mode of thinking is only cited in this chapter for a theoretical context rather than as a simplistic statement of fact. This is because sociocultural systems and discourse change over time.

Given that the Asian accumulated knowledge of the history of journalism stems from journalism as it was practised during the days of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer in New York in the 19th century, it is understandable that the benchmarks of professional journalism bear more definitive ‘Western’ (American) cultural traits than the form of ‘journalism’ practised by public scribes, oral historians and messengers in the East (Asia). Thus, the dominant theme of a fourth estate, the people’s representative, a free and independent watchdog press operating on its natural duty to hold government’s accountable for their policies, and thus the critical, questioning and adversarial relationship with governments. This philosophy is embedded in journalism curricula taught in universities around the world ever since the first undergraduate journalism programme began at Columbia University in New York in 1912 with a grant awarded by Joseph Pulitzer - and in 1935 to become the first graduate journalism programme in the United States. Today, it is reasonable to think that journalism schools around the world tend to look towards journalism education in the US as a benchmark of ‘best practices’ - besides the UNESCO Model Curricular for Journalism Education in 2007.<sup>111</sup>

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110 Valdez, Violet (2008), *Bridging the distance in learning: How Asian journalists build a community of learners and what graduate studies mean to journalists*, Paper delivered at a Joint Conference of the Korean Press Association and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Media Programme Asia Seoul, Nov. 2008, p.4

111 The UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education (2007) provides a comprehensive overview of the rationale, needs and approaches to teaching journalism in developing countries. The document can be downloaded from the UNESCO website at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001512/151209E.pdf> (Accessed September 27, 2012). However, this chapter aims to add to the UNESCO model by drawing from my experience in teaching journalism in universities in Australia, Malaysia and India, and training journalists in parts of Asia since 1996.

Journalism education has historically taken two distinct pathways. One is the vocational road taken by universities offering undergraduate and postgraduate journalism programmes, which in the case of Australia were mainly former technical institutes. The second is taken by traditional universities that emphasise on broad-based liberal arts education and critical media studies than skills-based subjects taught in vocational-oriented programmes.

The current trend in journalism programmes is to integrate practical journalism work with media criticisms and international studies where students are exposed to a new world of information and interpretations of realities via the Internet. For instance, theoretical notions of news and digital media effects are taught in the same programme as those dealing with practical news construction and production techniques. Besides the ability to string words into simple sentences, student journalists are expected to be well informed and culturally educated of global issues when they take up entry level reporting positions.

A symbiotic approach to critical theory and practice in vocational-oriented journalism courses, as illustrated in Figure 1, is achievable despite the divergence in its learning objectives and outcomes. The pedagogic emphasis can be categorised into two conceptual areas: (a) orientation, which provides students with subject matters that are wide-ranging and integrative rather than specialised and atomised; and (b) utilitarian, which provides students with the knowledge and skill sets in news writing, media management, production, technology, law and ethics.

<b>Figure 1: Pedagogic emphasis on vocational-critical journalism education</b>	
<b>Practical vocational model</b>	<b>Theoretical critical model</b>
<b>Orientation</b>	
News contents reflect social, economic and political realities.	News contents construct social reality and shaped by personal biases and backgrounds of reporters.
News contents driven by journalists' autonomy, investigation and media independence.	News contents limited by social and institutional pressures within and outside the media.
Newsworthiness is inherent in predetermined events and issues.	Newsworthiness is determined by journalists' subjective individual values and beliefs.



Practical vocational model	Theoretical critical model
<b>Orientation</b>	
Dominant news paradigm provides an operative tool and rationale of reporting.	Dominant news paradigm challenged and supplemented by an alternative interpretation of news values.
Objective empirical approach to news analysis.	Subjective ethnographic approach to news.
Elements of reporting: news objectivity, value free, episodic events.	Ideology and stereotypes affect news construction.
News defined in terms of primacy of facts, impact on readership, level of appeal to public interest, expected consequence of story on mainstream readers.	News defined in terms of primacy of facts, accuracy in social, cultural and political contexts.
Standards of journalism dictated by popular demands and tastes. Values the attention of the elites, the wealthy and the powerful.	Quality of journalism set by critically educated journalists. Sensitive to the values of the grassroots in society.
<b>Utilitarian</b>	
News contents dictated by presumptions of market demands and mass consumer appeal.	News contents controlled by ideology of social elites and used as a tool of social control.
News selection based on logical market forces. Theory of 'uses and gratification'.	News selection based on normative forces of positive change. Theory of news as an element of social and cultural orientation.
Source concentration on elites, public figures, experts and authorities.	Source concentration on people directly affected by the events and issues.
Focus on immediacy, the 'here and now' of events and issues.	Focus on the historical and contextual aspects of events and issues.
Teaches how to identify 'news', how to write, report, structure and organise information. Production norms and reporting skills and knowledge.	Teaches discourse analysis and language of news construction and representation. Philosophical and methodological norms. Citizenship skills and knowledge.
Reporters taught to be 'detached observers'.	Reporters encouraged to be 'fair-minded', and occasionally advocate for the weak and oppressed.

Absent from practical/vocational and theoretical/critical media studies discipline, is a cultural integrated approach which requires students to synthesise the critical and applied specialities such as communication research methodologies, media discourse analyses, media performance, development studies, and audience studies with the practical side of news production. The integrated approach through a blending of the 'best of the East and West' could serve to address the academic criticism of the media for often being generally reductionistic in their coverage of complex issues because of the nature of media production where speed, immediacy and broad appeal defines what is worthy to be reported for a mass audience.

As Mike Richards (1996), former editor of *The Age* in Melbourne, in criticising the narrow theoretical and practical instruction in the technologies and skills of journalism offered by journalism schools notes:<sup>112</sup>

My sense is that we need to go beyond specifically vocational arrangements to provide broadly based education at the highest level in disciplines which are fundamental to understanding and interpreting the modern world. As a centre of excellence, such a school of journalism could provide an Australian focus for the profession, and produce graduates familiar with their culture, its institutions and history, conscious of the values of Australia and of the Asia-Pacific, intellectually disciplined as well as imaginative, committed to the highest professional and ethical standards, and accepting an obligation to uphold the values of openness, fairness, balance and democratic principle ... In my views, attending to the professional standards of our journalists is somewhat overdue. An institution of the kind described might offer an opportunity to recognise the importance of our cultural communicators and to raise the professional standards of our journalists. At its best, such a venture would offer the prospect of making a valuable and enduring contribution to our national life.

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112 Richards, Mike 1996, 'In pursuit of journalistic excellence', *Panpa Bulletin*, September 1996, p. 67.

Man Chan (1996) in noting the primacy of analytical and critical components of journalism education clarifies:<sup>113</sup>

[T]he basic goals of communication (journalism) should aim at raising (1) the students' general analytical and critical capability; (2) knowledge of the subject which they will work with; (3) understanding of the communication process and effects; and (4) proficiency in expressing themselves with one or more media. While the first two goals are common to other liberal arts and social science disciplines, the goals of achieving expressiveness and the understanding of the communication process are unique to communication (and journalism per se). Expressiveness is often served by the professional curriculum that provides training in the uses of media. Analytical training and subject knowledge are acquired through the theoretical curriculum in communication, social sciences, and other disciplines. Knowledge about the communication process is derived from theoretical courses on communication.

Likewise, Padma Iyer (2010), special projects editor at the national broadsheet *The Australian*, notes:<sup>114</sup>

Classroom exercises, group discussions, simulated newsroom practices, production of a student newspaper or website ... contribute to the task of embedding skills. But journalism education needs to go beyond the ability to create content. Interviewing, background research, writing and editing are activities that need to be practised. They can be perfected until the student-originated content gains instant publishability. But these activities do not constitute the core of education. These are the very skills that journalism trainees pick up from the newsroom merely by being there. The industry can justifiably claim to be able to impart these skills within a few weeks to anyone who has not had the privilege of undergoing a journalism course. The academic component that underpins the

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113 Man Chan, Joseph 1996, 'Whither mass communication education in Asia', *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, vol.1:1, September, pp. 16–27.

114 Padma Iyer (2010). 'The intellectual component in best practices of journalism,' *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, Issue 20, December, University of Wollongong, Australia. pp.23-33

skills - debriefing, reflective discussion and the ability to justify and improve upon the activities - is the most significant aspect of university education. This intellectual engagement provides the would-be journalists with a methodology that can be adapted to changes in the industry. It gives them endurance. With sufficient application, it can lead to excellence."

Resistance among vocational-oriented journalism courses to include the more academic media studies and communications theory components in their curriculum is caused by their apprehension that it may dilute the professional orientation of the courses. The apprehension may be due more to the traditional perceptual differences between the vocational-oriented journalism educators and their critical media academic counterparts than any inherent pedagogical or epistemological divergence between theory and practice. The next section explains how the division can be bridged and blended into what I term as the 'alternative development oriented journalism pedagogy', which I believe to be highly relevant to the conditions in developing countries as well as constructively complementing, rather than replacing, the Western libertarian press model.

### **Towards an alternative development-oriented journalism pedagogy**

This section shows how a blended form of practice drawn from my experience working with journalists in parts of Asia and the West could contribute to the professional development of journalists. I defer to the reporting of race issues - one of the most contentious issues in the West and Asia, but which are not as widely reported as it should be - as a case study of how a community-oriented development model can be applied.

Afro-American journalism educator, Martindale<sup>115</sup> has suggested that alternative pedagogic approaches to the teaching of ethnic minority news reporting need to: re-evaluate and re-think the application of traditional news values to ethnic affairs; place due emphasis on stories of

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115 Martindale, Carolyn 1985, 'Coverage of black Americans in five newspapers since 1950', *Journalism Quarterly*, 62:2, pp. 321-328, 436; Martindale, Carolyn (1986), *The white press and black America*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut; Martindale, Carolyn (1988), 'Sensitising students to racial coverage', *Journalism Educator*, 43(2), pp. 39-41; Martindale, Carolyn (1991), 'Infusing cultural diversity into communication courses', *Journalism Educator*, 45(4), pp. 34-38.

cooperation/harmony with stories of controversies and conflict; focus on stories of cooperation and progress among different cultures; seek out the voiceless among the masses to reflect “mass reality”; actively establish and sustain contacts with disenfranchised minority groups; avoid over-reliance on official sources and public opinion polls without questioning their validity and contextual accuracy. Martindale’s recommendations foreshadowed the measures implied in the UNESCO model curricula for journalism education (2007) and generally highlight the fundamental point that journalists reporting in a multicultural society should ideally possess diverse worldviews and insights into the communities they are reporting for.

The pedagogic significance of cross-cultural components in journalism education is supported by research which recognises how cross-cultural literacy can effectively broaden journalists’ understanding of their influence on society and culture, and likewise, of the immense diversity of world views through which their readers filter news and information.<sup>116</sup> Atkins and Rivers note:<sup>117</sup>

(R)eporting with understanding includes a professional imperative not only to go into the minority communities to report their news, but to go into the dominant community and reveal those structures that continue to perpetuate racism, sexism, homophobia - biases of all kinds that interfere with the struggle by different people for respect and acceptance.

As P. Sainath, an award winning journalist and rural affairs editor at The Hindu, said of his experience in covering the stories of India’s untouchables, the *dalits*:<sup>118</sup>

If you have not been in the hut that has no electric power, not a single bulb, how will you understand why the children in that home

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116 Bramlett-Solomon, S. 1989, ‘Bringing Cultural Sensitivity into Reporting Classrooms’, *Journalism Educator*, 434(2) pp. 26–28.

117 Atkins, Gary & Rivers, William 1987, *Reporting With Understanding*, Ames: Iowa State University Press, p.232

118 *Journalism is for people, not shareholders*, P.Sainath in Loo, Eric (2009), *Best Practices of Journalism in Asia*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Singapore. p.38

can never do well in studies? It's not important to merely 'see' the hut, but to be there when there is no power...I think it's a bit fraudulent to write knowingly about their lives if you have never done so. Even if you do it several times and not every single time, you'll be astonished at the depth it brings to your perceptions. For instance, we know that the average rural woman in India spends a third of her life on three chores: fetching water, firewood and fodder. But 'knowing' this is one thing. Walking with her, trying to live her day as she does - would that be the same thing? Try it once. It will give you an insight into the quality of her life that you will never forget and that will inform your work thereafter.

The impetus for change has to come from both formal journalism education and informal education with emphasis on the intellectual and ideological definition of ethnic newsworthiness. A critical attitude towards the facts, context and sources of ethnic stories could be a step towards better journalism. If trainers and educators are to succeed in fostering this social concern, it is essential that journalists are exposed to diverse reporting approaches that present a pluralistic view of society, that recognise the experiences of ethnic minorities and which teach future journalists the developmental functions of news in a multicultural society. As Shah and Thornton (1994:153)<sup>119</sup> noted, this perspective requires that journalists continually reflect on their profession and its position in dominant social and economic structures.

They must interrogate their own position as cultural producers within the social nexus of race, power, and knowledge...(because) journalism and journalistic practice are rooted in specific values and assumptions about social organisation, social mobility and political participation - it is structured by specific ideological orientations.

Shah and Thornton's view underpins an alternative development-oriented approach to journalism where the primary function is to provide readers with

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119 Shah, Hemant & Thornton, C. 1994, 'Racial ideology in US mainstream news magazine coverage of Black-Latino interaction', 1980-1992, *Cultural Studies in Mass Communication*, 11. pp. 141-161.

a contextual understanding of ethnic minority issues within a multicultural environment. This alternative need not necessarily amount to framing politically correct stories; and journalists need not expend extraordinary energy either to improve the coverage of ethnic minority communities without compromising their journalistic fairness and balance. Traditional tools of quality reporting and concise writing can be applied with a critical level of understanding of complex differences among ethnic cultures and language groupings. Training journalists to ask the right questions, respect and understand their sources and learn more about cultural variations in perceptions should go a long way toward an attitudinal change with regard to judging the newsworthiness of ethnic minority affairs.

### **Training needs**

This concluding section identifies the training needs of journalists in Southeast Asia, and then describes a plausible cultural integrated approach to the training of journalists in the region.

A survey of 183 journalists in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (Loo & Hang, 2007)<sup>120</sup> found that nearly all (90%) hold at least a university degree, and an equally high proportion (77%) speak and write English, apart from their native language - Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer. About 42% also speak and write a third language - Thai and French for journalists from Vientiane; Chinese (*Putonghua*); and French and Russian for journalists from Hanoi and Phnom Penh.

Vietnam had the highest number of journalists who hold a university degree (45%) followed by Laos (35%) and Cambodia (20%). For journalists with only a high school qualification, the majority (63%) come from Cambodia - which highlights the historical spectre of how the Khmer Rouge's four years of atrocities had destroyed the country's education system together with a generation of intellectuals and their families in 1975-79. Two-thirds of the generally young population above 15 years of age are illiterates.

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120 Loo, Eric & Hang Dinh T (2007), *Effects of ICTs on media transformation, education and training in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos*, IDRC, Canada and Asia Media Information and Communication Centre, Singapore.

The majority of the journalists surveyed have had some form of (conventional) journalism training at short-term workshops (39%) or during their university studies (32%). The rest were trained on the job (23%). The extent of formal training is mainly in news reporting (82%), feature writing (81%), interviewing skills (68%), photography (60%) and sub-editing (44%).

The majority (from 80% - 90%) of the journalists have not received any formal training in using the Internet for research and journalism-related work, such as on-line discussion, blogging, crowd sourcing, multimedia production, or web design for online news delivery. Of those who received internet-related instructions, 16% were trained in-house, followed by 14% during their university studies; and a minority (10%) who have attended online research training workshops - mainly held in Bangkok and Hanoi. Interestingly, close to 78% of all the journalists have their own email addresses (mainly Yahoo, Gmail and Hotmail accounts).

In Laos, education and training in ICT-related subjects were hampered by the lack of qualified staff. The country's only public university, the National University of the Lao PDR (NUOL), set up in 1995, mainly relied on foreign help, mainly Japan, to develop the IT education sector.

In-country training avenues are scarce. Whatever training there are, Western trainers mainly conduct them with the assistance of overseas aid organisations in collaboration with local universities. For instance, in Vietnam, the *Independent Journalism Foundation* (<http://www.ijf-cij.org>) based in Eastern Europe has worked with *Vietnam News Agency*, *Vietnam Investment Review*, *the Saigon Times Group* and *Vietnam Economic News* in providing training to journalists in developing specific editorial skills - research, writing, editing, photography and design, to use modern technology effectively - digital cameras, design software and on-line publishing.

In Cambodia, a one-year diploma and four-year degree level journalism studies are available only through the Cambodia Communications Institute (CCI) established by UNESCO and the Danish government in 1994. In 2001 CCI was absorbed into the Department of Media and Communications at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, which offers a four-year Bachelor of Arts in Media Management, including internships and scholarships for undergraduates.



As professional course offerings are limited by the availability of expert staff at RUPP, most radio and television companies offer basic in-house training in radio and TV production to their own staff. For example, *National Radio Kampuchea (RNK)* and *National Television Kampuchea (TVK)* have hosted occasional technical training programmes conducted by media consultants from Europe (particularly Germany) and Asia (Japan, Korea, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka). The Media Training Center based in the Ministry of Information also provides training for both government and private media.

An organisation involved in providing graduate level education and training to journalists in Asia is the Konrad Adenauer Asia Center for Journalism at Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. ACFJ started in 2000 and has graduated about 650 journalists from 22 countries in Asia including the Pacific Islands. A survey of its graduates in 2007 notes the following profile: From June 2003 up to June 2007, the Master's programme attracted 101 students from 11 Asian countries, 88% of whom were working journalists, and a majority, 52%, women. Most of the students (79, or 83%) were from Southeast Asian countries: the Philippines (55, or 59%), and the others from Malaysia (11), Indonesia (7), Burma (2), Cambodia (2), Vietnam (2) and Thailand (1). Gradually students are also coming from South Asia: India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.<sup>121</sup>

With regard to the positive outcomes that the journalists derived from their education and training at ACFJ, 46 of the 51 respondents indicated the following:

Courses	%of respondents
Ethics	67
Writing skills	51
Innovations in the newsroom	38
Using online resources	36
Research	31
Media law	27
Newsroom management	16

121 Valdez, Violet (2008), Bridging the distance in learning: *How Asian journalists build a community of learners and what graduate studies mean to journalists*, Paper delivered at a Joint Conference of the Korean Press Association and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Media Programme Asia, Seoul, November 2008, p.3

Other professional competencies acquired by the journalists are:

Effect	% of respondents
Promotion to a higher post	19
Assigned to train colleagues	17
Higher salary	9
Foreign trips	8

The data point to the respondents' promotion in professional status and recognition in the newsroom as "they were brought into the decision-making circle of their organisation, were consulted regularly on ethics issues, their opinions were taken more seriously, they got job offers".<sup>122</sup>

One of the conclusions of the ACFJ survey of its alumni journalists state: "Learning is a key motivating factor for journalists who pursue graduate studies, by inference, a drive for excellence motivates them. Third: the ethics and writing courses they took were most useful, and fourth, a sense of empowerment was a key effect of the graduate program".<sup>123</sup>

Surveys of training and education needs by ACFJ (2007) and Loo & Hang (2007) point to the challenges for trainers from the West and Asia to blend the essence of best practices in journalism training and education to suit the media environment in Asia with all its constraints and opportunities.

The lack of culturally relevant materials on community service journalism (or 'development-oriented journalism') in developing Asian countries poses one of the drawbacks in training local journalists and journalism educators. I have simplified a few pedagogical perspectives to provide a framework for teaching community service reporting in local journalism programmes.

1. Redefine the concept of news beyond the dominant news paradigm derived from the media history and experience in the West. Reframe conventional news values and news judgment on the premise that

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122 Valdez (2008), *ibid*, p.6

123 Valdez (2008), *ibid*, p.7

journalists can and do play a community development role. An alternative to the entrenched dominant news paradigm cannot evolve directly from the newsroom with its deference to 'traditional' news values. The alternative paradigm has to evolve from the source of training in journalism schools where media operations, concept and philosophy can be extended beyond the traditional free-market model of news operations to recognise, understand, embrace and put into practice the values of public service journalism. As Galtung and Vincent<sup>124</sup> in their study of the structural flaws of the conventional news reporting with its focus on econometrics, elite sources and nations observed:

"It would be perfectly legitimate for a journalist to ask people around the world strange questions such as 'What according to you is the meaning of life?' 'Do you feel life is worth living?' 'Would you live it again?' These are not questions that should be posed by social scientists alone. To have people reveal their inner agenda, not only their striving for material benefits, or at least for a minimum material basis, is already drama. Doing so journalistically, newspapers would become more similar to literature. There would be more truth, more realism, and less superficiality. Development must ultimately be human development."

2. View cultural diversity and ethnicity in a wider societal context with a deeper concern for the human relationship between different cultures and not just as a matter of political and economic necessity. Elevate journalists' consciousness of harmony in diversity and foster a proactive perspective and involvement in community development issues.
3. Recognise the need to continuously revise journalism curriculum and training programmes in line with the changing socio-cultural milieu of media consumers. Bring journalists' attention to good and bad practices of reporting in the mainstream commercial media, and provide examples of how they can provide alternative coverage to the story in question.

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124 Galtung, Johan & Vincent, Richard (1995), 'The media, world-wide well-being and development', in *Global Glasnost – Toward a New World Information and Communication Order?* Hampton Press, NJ, pp. 145–168.

### **Globalising journalism education and training**

Ways to 'internationalise' the teaching and training of journalists were tested at a pre-convention AEJMC workshop on August 3, 2004 in Toronto, which I chaired and acted as a resource person in the print media stream. The workshops were guided by the principle that global media literacy should come less from pedantic textbook teaching than through experiential reporting assignments, and active direct engagement in cross-cultural (or global) encounters by both teacher/trainer and student. The learning and training objectives of a global-oriented teaching strategy were to:

1. Provide journalists with learning opportunities to look at community issues and affairs in a 'global' context;
2. Motivate journalists to reflect on the impact that local, regional and global forces have on themselves and their readers,
3. Develop in journalists an aptitude for interpreting and, thus, contextualising issues from a cross-cultural, thus, 'global' perspective.

The ways to 'internationalise' the teaching and training of journalists are outlined in a booklet '50 Fabulous Ways to Internationalise Your Journalism and Mass Communication Courses' (AEJMC International Communication Division, Toronto, Canada, August 2004). I have extracted some of the ways that are relevant to this concluding chapter.

1. Avoid bias of the English language while evoking the global. It notes: "History of mass communication is rarely examined in a global context. Origins of the alphabet, ink and the printing press and the role of present-day Iraq, India and China respectively in these crucial inventions do not receive more than a passing reference, if any. Similarly, the rising power of newly wealthy nations such as India and China as hotbeds of innovative media, software programming and computer usage are not recognised in the material being used in the teaching of mass communication. This aspect can be addressed by a conscious injection of new material from around the world that serves to revitalise the courses, lectures and discussions. In this regard, we recommend the use of Media Education Foundation ([www.mediaed.org](http://www.mediaed.org)) resources that critically examine our existing knowledge of issues from around the world."
2. Listen to Voice of America, BBC, Deutsche Welle, China Radio International, Voice of Nigeria and other programmes. "Have students

(and journalists) listen to various radio programmes and analyse the news content and broadcasting formats and styles. This also allows them to hear the various languages (and English with accents) spoken around the world.

3. Tape or obtain television news broadcasts to show in class (and during journalism training workshops) - for example CBS, NBC, CNN, BBC, China Central Television, Doordashan, Radio Televisyen Malaysia, Al Jazeera. See how different stations cover the same global event (for example, earthquakes in China; the sectarian conflicts in Syria; Palestinian-Israeli conflict; the Arab Spring Uprisings; India-Kashmir conflict; the London 2012 Olympics; nuclear reactor meltdown in Fukushima; HIV-AIDS epidemic in Africa; asylum seekers and boat people heading towards Australia).
4. Introduce cross-cultural and global themes in reporting assignments. Motivate journalists to interview international sources - face-to-face or via emails and Skype. This experience will extend journalists' interpretation of global issues beyond the dominant cultural frame they have routinely relied on in producing the news. This aims to show journalists that perspectives and interpretation of issues and its impact do vary across geographical, political and cultural boundaries.
5. Assign journalists and journalism students to analyse code of ethics of local and overseas media organisations. Identify the core common values and those that are culturally differentiated and defined. These codes of ethics are available from the Internet.
6. Become bilingual or multilingual. "Besides being a resource and translator of news and information for others, one can also gain insight about some of the colloquialisms used by the locals to understand the whole message."
7. In a plural society, journalists need to firstly understand the cultural framework of issues in order to portray a situation in its proper cultural context. Reflect the rapid changes in communication technology and global migration patterns in the subject contents and reporting assignments. It is beyond argument that journalists should be taught new tools to observe, describe, analyse, interpret, and explain their world from a local and global perspective. The question is how can journalism educators develop a more global-outlook in their subject contents?

## Q&A WITH JOURNALIST:

### **Khawaza Main Uddin**

*The Daily Star, Bangladesh*

**I**began journalism almost 18 years ago with no formal training. The only experience I had was writing post-editorials in Bangla-language newspapers. I had to rely on my knack for creative writing and enthusiasm for becoming a journalist. My initial struggle was to learn how to write a news story and edit it for accuracy and clarity of meanings. I used to read numerous stories every day to improve my vocabulary. I followed my gurus in the profession and replicate the samples of Associated Press stories available to me.

As a student of international relations, my task after joining journalism was to familiarise myself with Bangladeshi perspectives where in-depth knowledge of the Cold War or reading of *The White House Years* by Henry A Kissinger had little value to the general readers. Pains, stress and frustration gripped my mind sometimes. I even thought of quitting journalism. What prompted me to stay strong was when I found satisfaction and pride of integrity for upholding the truth.

As Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a Colombian journalist and Nobel laureate for literature, notes in his article "*The Best Profession in the World*": "The practice of this profession requires a broad cultural background, which is provided by the work environment itself...persons who are self-taught are usually avid and quick learners." Today, I feel proud to be a journalist when journalism has yet to be recognised as a profession in Bangladesh.

#### **Looking back to move forward**

As a young journalist I was desperate to gain experience and knowledge about issues relevant to Bangladesh. I lacked the confidence that journalists need to do a good job. "Why am I a journalist and am I worthy?" I wondered. "What should I do to transcend my self-doubts? Do I pursue journalism to promote self-interest?"

I soon realised that my moral obligation is to serve and speak up for the poor in Bangladesh. I realised that I should look at the world with an open mind, inquisitive eyes and a kind heart, a critical reflection of the facts without bias to anyone. I try to attain 'perfection' in presenting the news, but can never be complacent in any way. As I was taught, I write to express, not to impress. My thoughts about my daily work were reflected in the words of Marquez: "Journalism is an unappeasable passion that can be assimilated and humanised only through stark confrontation with reality."

I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to pursue an MA in Journalism fellowship at the ACFJ after spending significant time in the profession. This is opposite to what Marquez pointed out, "Students who graduate from academic institutions with unrealistically high expectations...seem to be out of touch with reality...and attach greater importance to self-promotion than to the profession and innate ability. This is particularly true with respect to two key attributes: creativity and experience."

In my case, it is experience that came before I took up graduate studies to learn the basics of journalism and benefit from the wisdom of great writers and veteran journalists.

### **Attainments so far**

One of the things that prompted me to resume formal study of journalism as an academic discipline is the necessity to broaden my worldviews, correct my flaws and prepare myself as a competent leader in my profession. I am thus saddened by the arrogance of some journalists who think that whatever they write, produce or present is of the best quality. That perception perturbs me as we continue to face a serious shortage of experienced journalists to run English media organisations in Bangladesh.

The subject Advanced Reporting and Writing has broadened my understanding of journalism. It has given me guidelines to think about how to reflect and improve on my practice. For example, the prerequisites for journalistic writing, summed up as the 3As (aptitudes, attributes and attitudes), provided me with a clear framework on how to reflect on my practice. All the reporting models presented a theoretical basis for quality reporting and instilled in me the confidence I need to move forward. This is another new journey.

I have also been impressed by what the rural affairs editor at The Hindu, P Sainath, said about process reporting, which does not end with “what”. It digs into “why”. Sainath inspires me, as a reporter working in a poor country, to report for the people when he says, “If you have not been in the hut that has no electric power, not a single bulb, how will you understand why the children in that home can never do well in studies?”

I have come to understand the value of Bangladesh news that could matter to an international readership. The course in advanced reporting emboldened my ‘ambitious thinking’ about journalism. Also the inputs from interactions with my classmates from other parts of Asia showed me a more sophisticated path of journalism. The most striking lesson for me from reading this course is the focus on the commoners.

I see in Bangladesh many issues and stories yet to be told - the plights of the poor, what climate change means to the poor people, micro-credit as a ladder out of poverty, threats to Sunderban’s livelihoods, investment opportunities in the green fields, uncontrolled population growth. The course has encouraged me to turn my eyes to micro issues instead of the excessive focus on macro issues devoid of human dimensions.

### **Rekindling the spirit**

My MA Journalism course had rejuvenated my reporting career as I had found ways and means to overcome fatigue in deadline reporting. Indeed, the thinking mind of a journalist must be kept active. One should try to acquire wisdom of the profession through high quality, ethical practices. Marquez suggests that all journalists “be research-oriented” and let ethical standards be “the constant companion of every journalist”.

Yes, sometimes I do become tired. Why do I sacrifice tranquillity to a different life as a journalist in Bangladesh? It is for a greater cause, I suppose. As Marquez notes, “[Journalist’s] work ends after each news run, with seeming finality, only to start afresh with even greater intensity the very next moment, not granting a moment of peace.”

I was attracted to reading newspapers at an early age. I could listen to radio but television was not there until my teenage years. I struggled with reading textbooks, but had a longing for writing. I concentrated on learning and communicating my feelings and disorganised thoughts with words.



I still could not restrain myself from continuing to write and to earn fame one day. Which led me to apply for university studies. I was thrilled when the opportunity came along to write for Bangla newspapers.

On completion of my Master in International Relations, I took up journalism to avoid unemployment before firmly deciding which profession to take up for a bright career. I was yet to discover any satisfaction in the painstaking work as a reporter. A few friends encouraged me to settle down to the 'noble' profession while more discouraged me by describing journalism as a socially secluded work. That was the beginning of soul-searching to justify becoming a journalist. But I could not accept that I should work without a mission.

I wanted to see myself as a life-long learner. I felt a necessity to inform people about the truth. I reckon the saying - 'write to express' - to be the key objective of the profession because I believe an informed society can make critical decisions in changing circumstances. I regard journalism as a medium that fights against the evil forces in a pluralist society, especially in Bangladesh. There is nothing wrong in making hell for corrupt people if we protect the helpless and innocent men and women.

Journalism is a process of one's metamorphosing into a *Bidogdho Jon* (person of burnt mind), which actually means a man of sharp conscience and wisdom. Such burning has brought certain change in my approach to life. Becoming a journalist is meaningless unless there is a purpose, which is to serve my readers.

**Eric Loo: How has your academic training in the MA programme at ACFJ helped your journalism?**

**Khawaza:** My academic pursuit overseas has helped me to look at journalism in Bangladesh from various standpoints, which I seldom thought of. Every country has its distinct forms of journalism and I found both similarities and dissimilarities while applying the learning and knowledge acquired from training in Bangladeshi journalism. Of course, the Western perspective has something to offer to countries like Bangladesh, which, too, has adequate scope to criticise the practice of journalism in the West. But capacity constraint is something that media in Bangladesh suffer from.

There is no better alternative in improving the standards of journalism in Bangladesh than academic training of journalists. The MA programme has helped me understand the opportunities and constraints of professional journalism in Bangladesh. The programme has enhanced my understanding of reporting and editing with lucidity, clarity and perspectives. It has instilled in me more confidence to take up challenging tasks of research-driven journalism. I started writing a weekly column after completing a course in Editorial and Opinion Writing in the programme. It has certainly supported my dream of becoming an enterprising journalist and helped me become a team leader in the newsroom.

**Do you think there are aspects of journalism in Bangladesh, which are more effectively learned in the newsroom than in an academic journalism programme?**

I had studied journalism as an academic discipline many years after I had worked as a journalist. So, I could already judge many issues of reporting and editing. This training has clarified my thoughts. However, there are certain things that are learnt more effectively in the newsroom. I heard and saw for myself that students coming from journalism schools are struggling with day-to-day affairs in the newsroom. In fact, the newsroom is the laboratory where a complete journalist is produced because of its mood of serious business, presence of experienced colleagues who act as mentors, the pressure of news deadlines, quick thinking and the newsroom culture. Bangladesh is a vibrant society, which has in-built passion for education and knowledge. The newsroom in Bangladesh reflects much of Bangladeshi thinking.

**What type of continuing education - and training - is most relevant to your work in Bangladesh?**

Newsroom practice and academic training complement each other. Training is sometimes a foundation, sometimes a breathing space and sometimes refreshment. The newsroom remains a second-most favourite house for a true journalist after his/her sweet home. I think self-criticism is the most important aspect of training a Bangladeshi journalist always needs. Upgrading and updating one's knowledge of subjects in journalism, defining and redefining various issues of public interests for pursuing journalism, focusing more on in-depth reports and research on journalism itself and

repeated efforts to kill one's ego for sake of freedom from arrogance of the profession are some of the issues that a good journalist should follow to remain on track.

***Khawaza Main Uddin*** has been working as a journalist in Dhaka for 18 years. He is currently the Planning Editor of Prime News online newspaper and also Consulting Editor of ICE Business Times magazine. He graduated with an MA from the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism in 2011. He has received two UN awards and two Pan-Asian awards for journalism.

## Q&A WITH JOURNALIST:

### **Parista Yuthamanop**

*Bangkok Post, Thailand*

**I** held a strong grudge against injustice since I was a child. And that mentality perhaps stemmed from my poor family background. My father is a government official. He completed his master's degree from a local prestigious university because of my grandfather and my aunt's backbreaking jobs. I recalled my aunt's and uncle's stories about how my grandfather worked very hard to save money for our family and to send my father to the best education they could. I wondered then about the wide gap between the poor and the rich in Thailand.

My sense of social injustice and the poor got me interested in my college years in journalism. I preferred to read Thai and English newspapers than textbooks. It was the columnists' analytical thinking, persuasive writing and their stories about abuse of power and corruption that inspired me. I felt that someone had to take care of this. I started work with the Bangkok Post in 1996 covering the economy. It has been my only full-time job so far. The economic crisis in 1997 forced Thailand to accept the IMF loans and its radical conditions. The crisis brought about a profound change in the Thai economic, political and social landscape. I was in the eye of the storm, although I had little experience and scarce knowledge about world economics. I learnt quickly on the job.

Dealing with sources in the beat and colleagues in a competitive newsroom were the challenges in my early years in journalism. My understanding of journalism increased with the difficulties I faced on the job. I learnt that to succeed, one needed to be quick, accurate and ensure one is ahead of the pack in terms of news development. I had earlier thought that my job was only to inform people. And in informing the people, I know that people don't read just stories, but they also read the writers. This is because stories tell the character of the writers and the news organisation. But with experience, I realise that journalism forms the backbone of people's civic life no matter what form of democracy each country has adopted. This is

important given the volatility and complexities of Thailand's political and economic environment. I believe that I can influence public discussion of national issues even if I am still uncertain in its outcome.

**Journalists in Thailand operate in environments that are very different from those in the West. To what extent has your academic training in the MA programme at ACFJ addressed the political and cultural contexts of journalism?**

In the eyes of the world, Thailand's tough *lese majeste* law restricts the workings of journalism. Thai journalism is viewed as being docile because of the law. However, Thai media has a wide scope of work to do within the boundary of the *lese majeste* law. I think the two main enemies of Thai journalism are the incompetence of the practitioners and excessive commercialisation of news outlets. The main cause of incompetence is journalists' failure to fully understand the role of journalism in Thai society. Many Thai journalists see themselves as merely messengers of news, rather than interpreters or storytellers. This causes them to work under the shield of being "objective". Many senior journalists, editors and columnists have disenfranchised their readers because of their failure to understand and explain the issues for the increasingly educated readers.

Insufficient knowledge and education among the Thai people have increased the social division in Thailand as people have different understandings of politics, for example the meaning of democracy, egalitarian and capitalism. I think that journalists are partly to be blamed for being not up to the task of reporting these issues.

Hence, I think academic training is critical to the future of Thai journalism. Thai journalists need to know that their role is not just to inform the public, but also to influence public opinion. Journalists must abandon the notion that the most important character of a journalist is being "objective" or "neutral". Whether journalists should be neutral or not is debatable. But Thai journalists should recognise their important role as social change agents in a developing country.

My academic training has helped me find answers to an important question I have asked myself: "What am I doing?" I have improved my understanding of my role and responsibility in Thai society. It has helped me to work more effectively in stirring the people's thoughts and public debate of national

issues. The change can be quick or slow. An academic training is different from a training course as in the latter you know the tools, but in the former you know the meaning. Hence, I will need to further my studies in political sciences to learn about power relations and political economy to know about the motives behind and the flaws of power play in Thailand.

**What aspects of journalism in Thailand you think are more effectively learned in the newsroom than in an academic journalism programme?**

Cultural issues are best learnt in the newsroom. Issues like knowing characters, personalities, and background of sources can be learnt from nowhere but more experienced or senior journalists. How journalists handle trivial issues such as competitors in their beats or persistent public relations persons can't possibly be learned from textbooks.

## Q&A WITH JOURNALIST:

### **Nguon Serath**

*Political Editor, Rasmei Kampuchea  
& Editor-in-chief of Cambodia Herald*

**I** have never expected that I would become a journalist. Poverty had forced me to find a job as a translator at Rasmei Kampuchea newspaper to support my study at the faculty of medicine, pharmacology and dentistry. At that time, I thought that I just needed some money to support my medical study and I would stop working as a journalist when I graduated from university. I had no idea about journalism and I worked for *Rasmei Kampuchea* just as a means of living and supporting my study as I come from a poor family, which is supported by my beloved widow mother. However, after a decade in journalism, I find it more important than I have thought especially in a fledgling democracy like Cambodia. To my understanding, a democracy will not work without a strong media or active professional journalists who are committed to working for the public interest.

I was involved in the media in 1998 as a news translator for *Rasmei Kampuchea*. Later on Pen Samitthy, editor-in-chief of *Rasmei Kampuchea*, decided to send me to Japan for a study tour. There, I spent most of my six-weeks with Kyodo News Agency. Upon my return to Cambodia, he encouraged me to work as a political reporter. He explained to me about how important it is to me and Cambodia.

It was the same year when I graduated from the faculty of medicine, pharmacology, and dentistry. I came to a crossroad and had to decide whether to continue to work in Rasmei Kampuchea or start my work as a fresh graduate doctor. I chose to become a journalist, because I was sent to work in a province where I had not been provided any accommodation even though the Ministry of Health decided to send me to work there. More importantly, I had to look after my widow mother in Phnom Penh.

At that time, I thought that I could work in the media for a while. However, when I came to understand its core values, I decided on journalism. I know that one of journalism's roles is to educate the people. I decided to study for a master's course in journalism at the Asian Center for Journalism to broaden my knowledge.

Today, I have the freedom to write about what I think is in the public interest and which affects the people. It is my belief that as a journalist I can contribute more to the future of Cambodia such as writing about the Cambodian people's need for more doctors and better health care.

Journalism suits those who like writing and have strong commitment to serving the public interest. It is important for the young generation to understand the core value of journalism, which is to serve the public interest and they should not just find it as a job to earn a living because they cannot earn much as a journalist. But they can contribute a lot to the country.

**Eric Loo: Journalists in Cambodia operate in environments that are very different from those in the West. Looking back on your academic training in journalism, to what extent has it or has it not tackled the political and cultural contexts of journalism?**

**Nguon Serath:** Indeed, Cambodian journalists work in different environments from those in the West. For instance, they have to work in poor environments with low pay and no proper training. Most of the media companies do not have in-house training. Access to information is a problem in Cambodia as government officials are never held responsible for failing to give documents to the journalists when they asked for it. The academic training has helped me to think about journalism from a broader context. Before the training, I thought that journalism is just to report the truth as it happens. But studying journalism at the graduate level showed me that journalists do not only seek out the truth but they should also analyse the issues and come up with some resolutions to help the audience make better-informed decisions.



**How has your academic training in the MA programme at ACFJ helped or not helped your journalism?**

I can perform better as a political editor of *Rasmei Kampuchea* and I am now also the editor-in-chief of two popular online news portals: [www.cen.com.kh](http://www.cen.com.kh) (in Cambodian language) and the Cambodia Herald: [www.thecambodiaherald.com](http://www.thecambodiaherald.com) (which is the only English website run by Cambodian journalists). I can do better journalism as the training course at ACFJ has improved my skills in analysing issues, doing online research to gather necessary information to support my reports. It should be noted that online research is much more important in a country where there is no or only limited access to documents which are kept by the government. Thanks to the advancement of information technology, we can hold the government more responsible by telling the truth to the people through online research on using the Internet as a way to reach wider audience. Technology is democratising the world. Those who run the country by suppressing the information will fail.

**What aspects of journalism in Cambodia are more effectively learned in the newsroom than in an academic journalism programme?**

I personally think that reporting about events and trends may be learned in the newsroom as we have to report as they happen. However, investigative journalism and development journalism will need academic training to sharpen the investigative skills and analyzing the issues. In development journalism, we shall not only report the facts but also investigate the possible solutions to the issues. Thus, it requires journalists to have broader knowledge and perspectives.

**What type of continuing education - and training - is most relevant to your work in Cambodia?**

I think that investigative journalism and development journalism are very important in Cambodia. Online journalism is also important as it can help me more effectively to do online research to dig out the hidden truths from the government. Access to information is one of the biggest obstacles to Cambodian journalists compared with their colleagues from other countries.

## Q&A WITH EDITOR:

### **Padma Iyer**

*Special Projects Editor, The Australian, Sydney*

**P**adma Iyer has been a journalist for over two decades now. He has held responsible positions in the media for leading publishers in India (*The Times of India*), the Middle East (*Khaleej Times*) and Australia (*Fairfax and News Ltd*). He has initiated, edited and overseen the growth of magazines, newspaper sections and a daily newspaper website. He is currently Special Projects Editor and Weekend Professional Editor at The Australian (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au>), a News Ltd daily national broadsheet published from Sydney. Iyer has conducted media relations workshops for the Department of Fair Trading in New South Wales and the Malaysian Press Institute in Kuala Lumpur. He has participated in professional training sessions at the Poynter Institute in Orlando, USA, and taught journalism part-time at the University of Wollongong, Australia.

**Eric Loo: What defining moments in your journalism career can you recall - beginning from your first assignment in India, then in the Middle East, and finally in Australia?**

**Padma Iyer:** I have spent a substantial portion of my three decade-long journalism career in print media newsrooms of major newspapers in Australia, the UAE and India. I spent a few years writing HTML codes and developing a website for a mainstream newspaper in Australia.

“Defining moments” seems to imply a process of revelation, which I don’t think is what happens in the newsroom. Journalism is not a series of epiphanies. Newsroom learning is constant, contextual, adaptive and incremental. One could dwell on each of these epithets, but without banking too much on one’s own very limited experiential capital, it could be stated that a journalist learns different things at different stages of the media industry and in different contexts.

They do not necessarily cohere, nor are they so inter-related as to make a unified meaning that can be universally applied. The takeaways from working in a news or lifestyle magazine are quite different and often contradict the experience of working in a mainstream daily newspaper, where deadlines are shorter and news is interpreted in a fragmented and unplanned manner within a much shorter frame of understanding. The magazine versus daily newspaper differentials can be seen in other experiential dimensions represented by format (tabloid v broadsheet); geography (the relative freedom of Australian newsroom v the vastly restricted scope available in the Middle East); competitive pressures (the half a dozen or more metro-focused daily broadsheets in Mumbai v the category monopoly enjoyed by metro broadsheets in Sydney and Melbourne); delivery platforms (print v online or print v radio or radio v television or similar inter-relational differentials); audience maturity (the growth and confidence of print media in India v the vulnerability of print in Australia); and personal factors such as the education, training, belief systems and background of the journalists participating in these journalism contexts.

As a consequence of these differentials, journalists are largely shaped by their own particular combination of experiences. They are quite likely influenced by their mentors, who may themselves have their own highly individualised experiential combinations to thank for their take on journalism. The consequence of these non-repeatable strands of experience has to be acknowledged as a key contributor to the mind maps carried by journalists about their profession and professional values.

Let me provide an example: a newspaper editor I have worked with believed the key points in every story needed to be provided in a text box of dot points alongside. He believed the attention span of audiences had been eroded considerably by the increasing popularity of news websites. Another editor I worked with responded to the phenomenon by excluding the news breaking style of writing with analytical and behind-the-news style of writing.

The practices and news instincts of journalists in the two contexts were no doubt shaped differently. The first editor reinforced the belief that audiences are time poor and need a very brief engagement with news and the second was convinced audiences sought out print media for a longer

and deeper engagement and we would be remiss in our responsibilities if we denied them “customer satisfaction”.

Another example, this one about a micro-level issue in journalism: a section editor in the Middle East whom I was urged to look up to routinely chopped off the first two or three paragraphs of news feature stories (analytical and longer news stories) because he was convinced feature writers invariably beat about the bush trying to get into a story. It was amusing to see how often he was right: news journalists embarking on longer stories often took 200 to 300 words to warm up to the topic. It would be disastrous to apply the same logic to editing news feature stories in Australia where the awareness journalists bring to their craft is different.

Journalists, thus, tend to emphasise news values differently and describe their own practice differently. It is somewhat like the story of the four visually impaired people who touched an elephant and described the animal differently but with equal vehemence. The one who touched the leg was convinced the animal resembled a pillar. The one who touched the ear and felt it flapping believed it was thin and flaky. The one who touched the belly believed it was lumpy. The fourth, who touched the trunk, thought it was snaky. The question one must ask in journalism is whether there is any practitioner who is not “visually impaired” (that is, one who can rise above his or her own experience). One must also ask whether the “elephant” (here implying an objectively derived single mode of best practice) exists at all. The element of individualism in journalistic practice cannot be underestimated.

It is vital for a journalist who moves between contexts (from one format to another or from one geography to another or from one platform to another) to realise the ephemeral and transitory nature of the lessons derived from any single context or person. It is important to not be defined by a few moments. Journalists need to be open, willing to change, evolve, refit and retrofit frameworks in their understanding. A complete transformation of the mind map that guides them in their profession is warranted from time to time.

If this interpretation appears nihilistic or dismissive of traditional wisdom, it is comforting to know that within a given context (within print or within a geographical location or within a given time frame), familiar “text-book” traffic rules apply. A journalist working for 10 years in the newsroom of

*The Sydney Morning Herald* or *The Australian* will most likely be a believer in a particular kind of journalism - the one that works within that context. There is no place for nihilism here. There are practices that work and there are others that don't. There are things "we do" and there are things "we don't do", and we define the former as common sense.

### **How have your philosophy and practice in journalism changed since your first journalism job in India?**

Then as now, journalism is still about:

1. Consequence: the effect of phenomena, trends, decision-making, actions and events on communities and individuals within.
2. Observing and verifying things (these may be facts or sensory experiences) that others can relate to.
3. Talking to people, extrapolating key statements from conversations with those who realise the consequence for other people of what they say and collating viewpoints that are inaccessible through a single person's experience.
4. Identifying the smaller details relating to an event or phenomenon that can fit into a framework of understanding. This is the micro-level view.
5. Dismissing irrelevant details in order to gain a helicopter perspective of events and trends. This process of selectivity provides the macro view.
6. Describing to others within the space and time available the micro or macro-level view you have pieced together.

The knowledge-gathering aspect of journalism has not changed. Nor has its surrogate nature - the fact that this knowledge is not for one's own benefit, but for other people's use. However, many aspects of journalism have changed. Technology has changed the processes involved in journalism, making it possible for fewer people (than in the early 1990s) to do more tasks in less time in the newsroom. With the advent of computers, several layers of people in the production process - copy-takers, typists, printers, compositors and proofreaders - have been dispensed with. While the computer-enabled processes are easier, there is greater responsibility for error checking for the people who are still part of the production team. It is debatable, however, whether the margin of error has increased or decreased with fewer people dealing with copy.

Online news has dramatically changed the time frame in which journalism occurs. It is now a 24/7 process. Within a day, news websites update the news so many times that journalists have less time to focus on the consequences of events, and audiences can easily miss key developments if they have not been looking at websites constantly. In this sense, news can slip through the cracks and not get the attention it deserves. Fragmentation of news (lack of sustained focus on relevant topics from one day to another) and focus on the dramatic elements (through video and audio) may increase as well but this could be an impressionistic view of online journalism.

**You have taught journalism at the University of Wollongong in Australia. Today, besides working full time as special projects editor at The Australian, you're also involved with the News Ltd in-house training programme. How has your involvement in academia and the industry shaped your approach to journalism training?**

Good journalism practice is a result of effective use of the active and the reflective capabilities. Teaching, coaching, mentoring, doing a course in journalism and writing about practice for academic purposes help a practitioner reflect. Reflection is as important as doing. If I had not taken the time to reflect through my involvement in academia, I would not have developed as a journalist. Equally, if I had chosen the educator's path as a fulltime job I would have missed the practical, "doing" side of journalism. Every journalist must find a way of combining newsroom and classroom experiences. Newsroom and classroom represent the dichotomies that must be balanced during a career in journalism.

***The Australian* reported in April 2012 about the inadequacy of journalism schools in preparing students for the industry because editors think students know more about journalism theories than journalism practice.<sup>125</sup> How can journalism schools, as an institution of higher learning, better prepare students for the industry?**

All journalism schools are not offering the same curriculum and they don't offer it with the same effectiveness. So there are major differences in course content and delivery. Those in touch with the industry are obviously doing a better job of it. Keeping in touch with the industry is, of course, easier said than done. Many universities run a simulated newsroom, but there are aspects of the real newsroom that cannot be simulated. For example, the real newsroom can decide to publish - or not publish - a news story submitted by a reporter and thus send a strong message of affirmation or rejection to the journalist. The learning experiences within a newsroom and within a simulated newsroom or classroom are quite different. The imperative is for universities to keep pace with the industry and for newsrooms to reflect on their practices. Reflection may happen through industry-provided training sessions, lectures or through individual journalists undertaking educational courses in journalism-related topics. Courses - and newsrooms - will improve only through a two-way osmotic process.

**Do you think there are particular skills and mindsets that are more effectively acquired in the newsroom than in a university journalism programme? Please explain these skills and mindsets.**

Newsrooms would like to believe they can create journalists out of people who have never done a journalism course. They believe they have all the knowledge that goes into journalism courses - and it is their unstated conviction that "theory" (books, documents and articles on journalism) comes out of journalism practice. Ideally a newsroom is a university. In the view of many practitioners, it is the only university that journalists require to attend. Ironically, they are a bit short in the communication stakes. If only the newsrooms could figure out how to communicate what they knew, they would be perfect teaching institutions. By definition, practitioners are

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125 Video discussion at <http://video.theaustralian.com.au/2223702673/Journalism-schools-investigated> (Accessed October 25, 2012)

not the best people to explain why they do what they do. They barely manage to explain the “what” and “how” bits. Universities fill this gap in communication. University courses aim to - and the better ones often manage to - deliver a lot more. They create students who understand what journalism is about, how it is done and why it undertakes to do what it does. They create the inquiring mind that goes further and asks the question, “why not?”. The philosophical underpinnings of best practice are established at the university.

**You are currently researching for your PhD on the competencies that are crucial to the newsroom of the future. What are your assumptions?**

After a few decades in the newsroom, and after going back and forth between the university (to study and to teach journalism courses) and the industry, I believe newsrooms need to supplement what they do with some more documentation.

They need to assess and note down their capabilities. This may sound like a routine audit of what individual journalists in the newsroom can and cannot do. But this is precisely what other professions do - such as nursing and information technology. It’s a human resource function that is conspicuously absent in the newsroom. Journalism will benefit from adopting a capabilities (or competencies)-based approach. Newsrooms can figure out how ready they are to accept challenges posed by the adoption of new content delivery platforms. They can discover their training needs. They can identify capability gaps and tailor their recruitment to fill the gaps. Newsrooms need to know - just as individual journalists do - what they can and cannot undertake when the industry is changing. An audit of newsroom competencies is a good starting point for building the newsroom of the future.

**What are your preliminary findings from your interviews with newspaper editors?**

1. Newsrooms are changing. Declining advertising revenue and audience migration is forcing traditional media - such as print, television and radio - to re-evaluate what they do and how they do it. They have major decisions to make about what they should keep and what to throw away in terms of activities, sections, news beats, and key talent.



2. They are not about to perish. There is increasing demand for news, but not for the format they have had a monopoly over in the past three or four decades. Print will most likely settle for a diminished existence. This means that most print media newsrooms - along with other traditional media newsrooms - will become multimedia newsrooms. They will produce news across many media platforms. Despite production platform change, there is no assurance of viability. Online journalism is yet to find the revenue streams to compensate for the loss being endured by print.
3. Newsrooms need to manage their talent. They need to look at their capabilities closely and align them with their strategic decisions about where they want to go. They will benefit from a capabilities compass that tells them where the talent shortages are.

### **What makes an effective journalism educator?**

Journalists do not find the time or place to reflect on their practice. And journalism educators do not have adequate opportunity to “do” journalism. One is all practice and the other is all reflection. They should ideally meet and change places occasionally. But in the absence of the ideal circumstances in which to achieve this, they could keep in touch. Educators need to realise that the rationale for practice - a particular practice - is never the same. The context changes as do content platforms and audience behaviours. The reason for a specific story or a kind of journalism is no longer generic. It is highly individualised. Educators will have no way of knowing what caused a story or even a genre of stories unless they interact with practitioners regularly. The journalism of journalism needs to evolve in order to keep pace with practice. This is an exercise in self-observation. But it can be done very well by educators, who are the trackers, keepers and disseminators of knowledge about journalism. Journalists will benefit by communicating with the educators to find out where the industry is going, how and why.

### **What makes an effective journalism trainer?**

Trainers - like university educators - collate, codify and impart knowledge. Their remit is more platform or organisation-specific. Like paramedics, they rush to repair a capability area in the newsroom that requires urgent attention. Although they specialise in providing a short-term fix, they need the broader understanding of the scope of journalism that university educators have.

Governments in parts of Asia and media scholars have alluded to a form of journalism that should reflect 'Asian cultural values' rather than defer to media practices and media cultures of the West. These are commonly attributed to a cultural preference for consensus rather than confrontation, order and stability versus chaos and conflict, community good rather than individual rights, deference to authority, and respect for elders. This book premises that journalism is a product as well as a producer of the environment where it operates. Bridging the perceived journalistic cultural gap between Asia and the West, relies less on asserting one form of journalism is better than the other, but more on how journalism as understood, conceptualized, taught and practised in Asia and the West can be richer through a blending of the essence that makes each form peculiar to its environment. Theoretical explications are complemented by reflective commentaries from Asian journalists and interviews with media trainers. This book aims to show how the values and views of journalists in Asia reflect their counterparts in the West, although the notion of reporting 'without fear or favour' needs to be contextualised to the political realities in Asia.