

THE UNITED DAILY NEWS

# Bridging the gap

There is more than just a grain of truth in the message of a poster: "People are lonely because they build walls — not bridges."

Take the case of the local Chinese. Ever since one cares to remember, they have always been in the Philippines. Time, however, has not battered down the Great Walls they seem to have brought with them and which even to this day separates them from the mainstream of Philippine society. For centuries, they have kept to an exclusive enclave, rarely coming out to mix with Filipinos except to trade. On the other hand, Filipinos have also maintained a wall of detachment, distrust and even disdain between the Chinese and themselves.

But the walls may yet crumble. Under the new Philippine Constitution, for instance, a Filipina who marries a Chinese — or, for that matter, any foreign — national retains her citizenship and by jus sanguinis their children will henceforth be considered natural-born Filipinos. For another, the ban on exclusive foreign schools which would affect the Chinese more than any other foreign community is so designed as to help in their assimilation.

It is also to tear down the barriers of isolation that the United Daily News was conceived. Born out of the

merger of two, now-defunct Chinese dailies — the Kong Li Po News and the Great China Press — it has for a major objective the promotion of closer Filipino-Chinese relations. "It is going to lead its Chinese readers to be law-abiding residents and eventually to be integrated into the Filipino way of life," says Ralph Nubla, the Filipino corporate chairman of the board.

For a start, the United Daily News published Chinese translations of Presidential decrees, orders and letters of instruction. Following the pattern set by other dailies, it stresses the positive in its news reports — a reflection of the mood of reconciliation that now marks the relations between what was once "Asia's angriest press" and the Administration. In fact, Nubla says, "It is both our commitment and our policy to support the New Society."

Understandably, news items that are of direct concern to the local Chinese community are played up more prominently in the United Daily News than in other newspapers. Otherwise, in terms of content, the news that it carries is no different from that in other dailies. Similarly, space is provided for movies, entertainment and human-interest stories. But in place of the comics page found in most other dailies, it digs deep into the rich Chinese cul-



tural heritage of myths and ancient romances for regular features.

As if to underscore its objective, the paper itself is a product of Filipino-Chinese cooperation: Filipinos and Chinese write, edit and print it. It even lays rightful claim to being the first daily owned and published by a Filipino corporation that caters to the local Chinese community and which contains an English section. Editor-in-Chief Chua Kee explains: "There are readers who know both English and Chinese. There are also those who only know one or the other language. United Daily News serves them all."

This unique arrangement somehow adds up to a peculiar package: "PM Views," for example, is all that one who cannot read its Chinese text gets to understand of Primitivo Mijares' Daily Express column on its front page. The bilingual reader, though, has the option of either the Chinese or English text to fill him in on business, foreign and other news developments.

Says one of its editors: "For our Chinese readers who are limping their way to learning English, we provide the crutches." Chua adds that the English pages are being read too by Filipino employes of Chinese firms and household in Chinese families.

Page for page, the United Daily News (at an average of 12 pages an issue) is perhaps the most expensive local daily. Yet, even at 35 centavos (in Greater Manila), some 16,000 copies find their way into the hands of Chinese, Filipinos of Chinese descent and, occasionally, a natural-born Filipino.

This circulation figure is 16.7 percent of the 96,000 or so Chinese registered with the then Bureau of Immigration (now the Commission on Immigration and Deportation) as of 1971. It is just a drop in the bucket, though, when one considers the entire Chinese-speaking community, estimated at half a million. This includes those who have become naturalized Filipinos or are of Chinese descent, but who, with some exceptions, still have to be fully assimilated into the mainstream of Filipino life.

The homogeneity of this group serves to underline the difficult task that the United Daily News has set for itself. Like one big family, the local Chinese community is bound by deep, ingrained customs and traditions. It may therefore take the proverbial patience, perseverance and strength of an ox to move them out of the walls they had built around themselves. Fittingly enough, in the Chinese calendar, this is the "Year of the Ox."

JORGE V. ARUTA

THE COMMUNITY PRESS

# Alive and still kicking

If one may single out a recent seminar of community journalists to gauge the status of the community press under the new order, there is no reason to be pessimistic.

Unlike many of its counterparts in the metropolitan press, a wide segment of the community press is still alive, willing to meet the challenge posed by Proclamation 1081.

As of this writing, some 45 community newspapers have received permit to operate from the Mass Media Council and are now enjoying a level of readership that has helped sustain them before martial law. Although many factors have to be considered to get a clearer view of what's going on in the community press all over the country, a look into the papers that have resumed publication reveals that all is quite well.

"We have not really stopped operating," says Diogenes Fallarme, editor of the weekly Sierra Madre Post in Isabela. "We were almost immediately given permit to resume publication and everything is back to normal."

The Sierra Madre Post, now on its third year of operation, has a circulation ranging from 1,000 to 1,500. Its editor says the paper did not encounter difficulties coping with the new guidelines. "Although we were taken by surprise, we immediately accepted martial law as something needed."

Fallarme considers his paper con-

servative and does not miss the "freedom" suspended after martial law. "I never went with the sort of commitment many papers espoused before martial law. I know my paper is conservative, but at least I am sure it is respected. Under the new order, I am concerned about the new responsibility. I welcome it. In fact, I find it a big challenge. If the community press can widen its roles, it can help itself rise to a very responsible level."

Gabriel Visaya, editor of the Cagayan Mail, feels that nothing has changed in the role played by community journalists — or the responsibility ones among them, anyway. Cagayan Mail comes out weekly and claims a circulation of 2,000. Asked about the future of the community press under the new order, Visaya answered: "I think it has a bright future."

Bright the future may be, but one still cannot be overly optimistic. Much of the community press, as everyone knows, comes to life because the men (overworked, underfed, understaffed) believe it should. If some papers have continued to exist, it is because the more responsible community journalists have done their bit.

For decades now, one stultifying factor in the growth of community newspapers has been the matter of finances. It isn't enough, it seems, that

an editor is his own reporter, copywriter, and proofreader. Quite often, he also attends to subscription and circulation problems, not to mention the printing bills the paper cannot pay on its own income. It is this predicament that often forces some community editors to find "other ways." "Other ways," of course, means compromising themselves with local politicians and businessmen, and heaven knows how a paper reads when publicity hounds and secret financiers come into the picture.

Commenting on the problems of the community press before Proclamation 1081, a metropolitan journal predicted: "Community journalism faces slow death. High costs, low revenues, danger to life and limb and getting too close to politics and politicians are the factors contributing to the sad fate of the provincial press."

A report on the state of the pre-martial law community press by Eduardo Sanchez, director of the Philippine Press Institute, stated:

"It is impossible to compile a complete list of community newspapers because of the transitory nature of many of them. But a rough quantification would place the situation this way: there are 35 community newspapers which are financially stable, regularly published, editorially independent and professionally competent in some cases . . .

"On top of this, there are anywhere from 60 to 100 community newspapers which come out every election year to either help the candidacy of some people or to take advantage of the political ads that come with the campaign. These . . . papers have an average circulation of about 3,000

copies although one of them has a circulation of 17,000."

Despite their comparatively small circulation, community newspapers reach far-flung places. Sanchez's report continued: "The community newspapers supplement the dailies reaching the provinces. Although their circulation is small, the community newspapers offer better penetration in areas outside Metropolitan Manila where about 60 percent of the circulation of the Manila-based dailies are sold."

Sanchez cited the fact that in Jolo, the combined circulation of the Manila-based dailies was only 500 while the local community newspaper had a circulation of more than 2,000 copies.

Facts and figures vary from one community to another. In terms of popularity, some community newspapers deserve the reputation they have built through the years. Baguio Midland Courier, despite the journalistic lapses community journalism is heir to, manages to live up to an acceptable standard (fairly good editorials, wider news coverage and good proofreading).

Regardless of the matter of technical proficiency, some community newspapers, and journalists, have met far grimmer fates than a rap on the knuckles for their crusading efforts.

One courageous community journalist named Ermin Garcia (Dagupan's Sunday Punch) paid with his life for not coming to terms with certain local powers-that-be.

Such were the moral and physical risks many community journalists found themselves in. In some cases, they turned out to be more determined crusaders than their metropol-