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Abstract	Looks into the presence of foreign news media in some countries in Southeast Asia. Data indicating the informational malnutrition in global staffing of journalists; Attention given to Thailand by the news media; Rank of Malaysia as a foreign newsgatherer; Characteristic of the news interaction in the region.

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By Ralph E. Kliesch

News Media Presence and Southeast Asia

Only a handful of nations are involved in gathering news from most of Southeast Asia, and region's representation abroad is equally thin.

► In the last world census of U.S. foreign correspondents, published by the Overseas Press Club in 1975, Asia ranked second only to Europe as the prime focus of American news organizations.¹ Asia's 23% of full-time foreign-based journalists exceeded the 16% posted in the next-ranking region, the non-U.S. Western Hemisphere. Yet the Asian percentage fell woefully short of the 51% committed to Europe. The number of staffers assigned to Asia in 1975 by U.S. editors had dropped to 160, far below the 1972 total of 228 and the even higher 1969 total of 235.²

¹ Ralph E. Kliesch, "A Vanishing Species: The American Newsmen Abroad," *1975 Overseas Press Club Directory* (New York: The Overseas Press Club of America, 1975, p. 19).

² Russell F. Anderson, "News from Nowhere, Our Disappearing Foreign Correspondents," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. 34: 10-12, 80, 81, (Nov. 17, 1951) p. 10-12, 80, 81; John R. Wilhelm, "The Re-appearing Foreign Correspondent: A World Survey," *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY* 40: 147-68 (Spring 1963); John Wilhelm, "The Overseas Correspondents: 1,376 People in 93 Lands," *1966 Directory of the Overseas Press Club of America*, (New York: Overseas Press Club of America, 1966), pp. 42-43; Ralph E. Kliesch, "The Press Corps Abroad Revisited: A Fourth World Survey of Foreign Correspondents," paper read at the International Division Session of the Association for Education in Journalism Convention in Berkeley, California, August 1969, and John R. Wilhelm, "The World Press Corps Dwindles: A Fifth World Survey of Foreign Correspondents," paper read at the International Division of the A.E.J. Convention in Carbondale, Illinois, Aug. 22, 1972.

³ A new census of American-media representation abroad is now in process by the author. The results should reflect whatever efforts have been made by American media managers to correct, in response to Third World criticism some of the imbalance shown in earlier staffing patterns.

⁴ Jonathan F. Gunter, "An Introduction to the Great Debate," *Journal of Communication*, 28: 142-56 (August 1978); Narinder K. Aggarwala, "A Third World Perspective on the News," *Freedom at Issue*, No. 46, May-June 1978, pp. 13-20; and Clayton Kirkpatrick, "A Western Perspective of the Free Flow of World Information," *International Educational and Cultural Exchange*, Winter 1978, pp. 15-18.

The understandably large press contingent based in Saigon to cover the Vietnam War had, of course, disappeared. Foreign newsgathering budgets, already crushed in the vise of a weakening national economy and global inflation, bore the additional brunt of the shrinking worth of the American dollar on the world's money exchanges. Thus, even the size of the Japan-based press corps, at 46 the third largest (after 101 in England and 78 in France), had fallen from prior census figures of 51 and 56, respectively, for 1972 and 1969. Only Japan and Hong Kong remained on the list of the top 10 nations with U.S. correspondents, whereas the earlier surveys included Vietnam as well.

Thus, although Asia fared better than her African, Middle Eastern and Latin American counterparts, clearly a case can be made that the American journalistic staffing of Asia has been disproportionately light vis-a-vis Europe. Within Asia, too, uneven distribution has prevailed, heavily focused on Japan and Hong Kong, which hardly typify developing countries.³

Few persons today would deny that the imbalance evident in world staffing patterns of American news media has helped fuel the fires of Third World demands for change. Fanned by Unesco's widely publicized recent debates on "a free and more-balanced flow of news," their flames have brightly illuminated that agency's call for a "New International Information Order."⁴

► The author is a professor of journalism at Ohio University. This study was supported in part by an NDEA travel grant from the Southeast Asia Studies Program at Ohio University and through faculty research grants from the university's Baker Fund and its Research Committee. Some of the findings were reported at the East-West Center Communication Institute's Advanced Summer Seminar in Honolulu, July 5-Aug. 4, 1979.

However justified, criticisms of U.S.-media international staffing imbalances have to date lacked the benefit of investigation into the context in which they occur. The American media, of course, comprise only a fraction of the world's journalistic establishment. They are balanced not only by other Western news institutions, but also those of East Bloc countries and of Third World nations themselves. Little attention has been devoted to the coverage imbalance question in the broader context of media presence on a global basis.

This study takes an in-depth look at four neighboring Southeast Asian countries, the presence of all foreign news media therein, and the countries' own journalistic outlook on the rest of the world. The study asks the following questions of international newsgathering vis-a-vis Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia:

1) Who are the journalists resident in these countries gathering news for media headquartered abroad?

2) Where are the journalists from this region posted to collect news from abroad?

3) How do staffing practices of the First, Second, and Third Worlds compare in this part of Southeast Asia, and how do they measure up with regard to Third World criticisms of news coverage afforded to the Third World?

Methodology

To elicit data to answer these questions, field research was undertaken in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia in the summer of 1978. In all four countries, personal interviews were conducted with senior correspondents of international media, as well as with information officers of both national governments and foreign embassies. From information obtained through these interviews, lists were compiled of all known resident correspondents—full-time as well as part-time, local nationals as well as foreigners. Similarly, senior editors and news executives of journalistic media in these four countries were sought out to build lists of all news personnel operating on their behalf outside their own national borders.

Along with name, organization and location, information was gathered as to job level, sex and nationality of each journalist. In total, 405 persons were identified, in almost all cases with all aspects of demographic information complete. (In comparison, the more narrowly focused 1975 census of U.S.-media representatives showed only 18 full-time news employees in these four countries. No effort was made in 1975 to count stringers or news representatives based by these countries in the United States.)

Findings and Discussion

The findings clearly suggest an informational malnutrition in global staffing of this part of the Third World. Furthermore, these Southeast Asian nations' own gaze on the rest of the world appears similarly undernourished. And the findings strongly imply that anemic journalistic attention afflicts much of the Third World with regard to the people primarily responsible for both outgoing and incoming information—the resident foreign correspondents.

Table 1 makes painfully clear that only a relative handful of the world's nations are directly involved in the international collection of news, even at the most modest of levels. Along with Table 2, it also documents the perhaps most damning finding of the study, that vast regions of the Third World have little or no direct news-seeking contact with one another.

Totally absent from the lists are any of the numerous nations of Africa or Latin America. Not a single journalist, not even a marginal stringer, located anywhere in these two sweeping Third World regions, could be found among the 274 journalists gathering news in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia. Nor does this area's press corps, as could best be determined to number 131, include anyone based anywhere in all of Africa or Latin America—again, not even a single part-time local national.

As can be seen from Table 3, the "drawing power" of the four countries under study ranges far more widely than their separate levels of attention give to the out-

TABLE I

Countries with Journalistic Representation

<i>Representation in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore & Indonesia</i>			<i>Representation Abroad by Media of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore & Indonesia</i>		
<i>Country</i>	<i>Total Jours.</i>	<i>No. Full-time</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Total Jours.</i>	<i>No. Full-time</i>
Japan	54	50	United States	25	3
United States	53	35	United Kingdom	18	7
United Kingdom	34	20	Japan	13	5
Hong Kong	32	14	Hong Kong	10	3
France	17	14	Malaysia	10	1
Malaysia	14	7	Singapore	9	6
Australia	13	10	India	8	2
Singapore	12	3	Thailand	6	2
West Germany*	10	5	Indonesia	6	2
U.S.S.R. ¹	9	9	Philippines	4	1
Philippines	6	3	Netherlands*	4	1
India	5	4	Australia	4	1
Thailand	3		Taiwan	3	1
People's Rep. China*	2	2	Sri Lanka*	3	
Yugoslavia*	2	2	France	2	
Switzerland*	2	1	South Korea	1	
South Korea	1	1	Pakistan*	1	
Taiwan	1	1	Nepal*	1	
East Germany*	1	1	Burma*	1	
Indonesia	1		Egypt*	1	
Sweden*	1		Saudi Arabia*	1	
Italy*	1				
22 countries	274	185	21 countries	131	39

TOTAL

29 countries (21 with full-time correspondents)

405 correspondents (224 full-time)

*countries represented on only one list (15)

side world. By far the most heavily covered country of the region, both in terms of total correspondents and in number of full-timers, is Thailand. Yet Thailand's perusal of the outside world is among the weakest of any country of the region—and dead last in terms of full-time correspondents dispatched abroad: one.

The heavy attention to Thailand is primarily explained by its role as a window to Indochina. The major wire services, for example, are set up with sizable operations that carefully monitor Radio Hanoi and other broadcasts coming from across the Bamboo Curtain.

On the other hand, several factors tend to conspire to keep Thai foreign correspondent presence abroad low. First,

although a parallel condition doesn't keep Singapore from maintaining the region's largest foreign press corps, Thailand does not have a true national news agency. A sub-unit of the government information ministry distributes news internally, but it maintains no Malaysian-like Bernama, no Indonesian-like Antara. In addition, coupled with the fact of Thailand's relatively poor economic condition, is an historical tradition responsible for a generally sensational daily press, giving little attention to foreign news. All in all, editors in Thailand rely mainly on foreign-based government officials, students and other low-cost stringers to supplement the international news agencies which are their main source of foreign news.

TABLE 2

Journalistic Representation Broken Down by Regions and Subregions

<i>Representation in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia</i>			<i>Representation Abroad by Media of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia</i>		
<i>Area</i>	<i>Total Jours.</i>	<i>No. Full-time</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Total Jours.</i>	<i>No. Full-time</i>
East Asia	90	68 (76%)	Southeast Asia	36	12 (33%)
Southeast Asia	36	13 (36%)	East Asia	27	9 (33%)
South Asia	5	4 (80%)	South Asia	13	2 (15%)
ASIA	131	85 (65%)	ASIA	76	23 (30%)
West Europe	65	40 (62%)	West Europe	24	9 (38%)
East Europe	12	12 (100%)	East Europe		
EUROPE	77	52 (68%)	EUROPE	24	9 (38%)
NORTH AMERICA	53	35 (66%)	NORTH AMERICA	25	3 (12%)
OCEANIA	13	10 (77%)	OCEANIA	4	
MIDDLE EAST			MIDDLE EAST	2	
AFRICA			AFRICA		
LATIN AMERICA			LATIN AMERICA		
	274	185 (68%)		131	39 (30%)

Lack of a national news agency, however, does not keep economically healthy Singapore from maintaining its relatively large overseas press contingent. A significant share of the full-time overseas staff is comprised of correspondents for Pan-news, a Singapore-based feature service, and elements of the *Straits Times* organization, publisher of several other journals along with its flagship paper, one of the leading newspapers of the region.

Singapore's strong second position as a base for foreign newsmen needs little elaboration. One of the leading communication and shipping centers of all Asia, Singapore offers excellent travel connections in all directions. Further, in the words of one correspondent, "Singapore is simply a country that works." Hence it serves the needs of a diverse range of correspondents. An economic reporter described his beat as "226 square miles": Singapore proper. On the other hand, a generalist, working out of the same island city-nation but ranging over much of

South and Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand, said he was pressing to get the Greater Pacific added to his beat.

Also economically strong, and with the most outward-looking news agency of the region, Malaysia understandably ranks a strong second as a foreign newsgatherer among the four countries studied. Less understandable is its bottom ranking as a base for correspondents from abroad. A big part of the problem is simply the journalistic appeal of the countries north and south of it to editors usually forced to spread their limited resources far more thinly than they would like. One Kuala Lumpur correspondent, reflecting on the nature of international affairs, expressed a willingness to be patient to enter the big time. Offering a "domino theory of foreign correspondence," he observed that if Thailand were to fall behind the "Bamboo Curtain," K.L. would replace Bangkok as the regional focus for the world's press.

Called the "most undercovered news story in the world" by one of its resident

TABLE 3

Correspondent and Stringer Distributions Within Southeast Asia

<i>No. of Journalists Based in Region</i>			<i>No. of Journalists Of News Media from Region</i>			
<i>Total</i>	<i>No. and Percent Full-time</i>		<i>Country</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>No. and Percent Full-time</i>	
115	76	66%	Thailand	25	1	4%
36	16	44%	Malaysia	40	11	28%
71	57	80%	Singapore	51	18	35%
<u>50</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>66%</u>	Indonesia	<u>15</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>33%</u>
274	182	66%		131	35	28%

foreign correspondents, Indonesia ranks third in attention from the outside world and could be viewed as either third or last as one of the region's foreign newsgatherers. The fifth most populous nation on earth, it is also one of the most geographically spread, and one of the poorest, though it has great reserves of oil. Not helping its potential as a post for foreign journalists, Jakarta may be the most difficult of the four capitals in which to work—and it is certainly the most expensive, not an asset to already overstretched news media budgets.

Indonesia has two national news agencies, the well-known Antara and the newer K.N.I., which serve as the sole conduit for news entering Indonesia from the world's international news agencies. Yet neither, as is also a fact of life with Indonesia's other news media, has the economic wherewithal to mount much of an international news-gathering effort itself.

Overall, it is apparent that the strongest journalistic relationships of these four Southeast Asian nations are, first, with a select few countries of the First World, whose attentions tend to be reciprocated, and, second, with relatively immediate neighbors.

For example, all contact with North America is with the United States alone, in both directions. Ditto for Oceania, with Australia. Eighty percent of the contact with Western Europe is with the U.K. and France (89% if one includes West Germany). Total interaction with the Socialist countries comes in the form of 14 journal-

ists from just four nations, the U.S.S.R., Yugoslavia, East Germany and the People's Republic of China, but with no contact at all in the other direction.

Interaction within Asia is also very lopsided. Forty-two percent of all correspondents (59% of the full-time staffers) covering these four countries comes from Japanese and Hong Kong media. Of the journalists of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia assigned to Asia, nearly half (48%) are posted in Southeast Asia proper.

Interestingly, four countries (Japan, Hong Kong, the U.S. and U.K.) top both lists of Table 1, although their orders differ somewhat. Foreign attention to the subject region comes most intensively from Japanese and American news media, with the Japanese much more heavily committed in terms of full-time correspondents. If there is a giant among the international press corps of Southeast Asia, it is the Japanese.

Together, the media focus of these four countries on foreign lands tends to fall reciprocally on the same nations that look in most heavily on the region. The numbers are of course much smaller, especially regarding full-time staffers. But the generalization is less valid when the distribution patterns of the individual Southeast Asian countries are viewed singly. The generalization also tends to break down when one looks only at full-time reporters' distribution, where Singapore, probably the most "developed" nation within the region and obviously an immediate neighbor, shows up very favorably with the industrial giants.

TABLE 4

"Saturation" Representation among Region and Other Countries

Number of Journalists in						Full-time	Outside country	Number of Journalists from						Full-time
Thai.	Mal.	Sing.	Indo.	Total				Thai.	Mal.	Sing.	Indo.	Total		
30		10	14	54	50		Japan	4	4	3	2	13		5
30	7	11	5	53	35		U.S.A.	10	7	6	2	25		3
10	6	13	5	34	20		U.K.	2	8	7	1	18		7
10	10	6	6	32	14		Hong Kong	2	1	6	1	10		3
9	2	3	3	17	14		France							
4	1	3	5	13	10		Australia							
2	1	4	2	9	9		U.S.S.R.							
3	1	1	1	6	3		Philippines							

Contributing, of course, to the distributional imbalance described above is the fact that the entire, two-way news collection effort under investigation is comprised of only 29 countries. Weakening this figure even more, beyond the obvious fact that four are Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia themselves, is the reality that of the remaining 25 countries, 15 represent news-gathering in one direction only.

Yugoslavia, for example, collects news in Southeast Asia, but none of the four subject countries has representation in Belgrade. Conversely, Southeast Asia has a man posted in the Netherlands, but there is no Dutch-employed journalist in the region. Thus, there are only 10 non-Southeast Asian countries which collect news in one or more of the four subject countries, and are themselves the news-gathering object of one or more of them.

Table 4 shows that only seven countries, other than themselves, have what might be called "saturation" representation of the region, that is, in all four subject nations. Oddly enough, Japan fails to make the list, since no Japanese-media journalists were uncovered in Malaysia. Overseas representation by all four subject countries is limited to only the U.S., U.K., Japan and Hong Kong. Thus only the U.S., U.K. and Hong Kong have completely mutual ties with Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, and some of that is limited to part-time status.

This is more than can be said, as Table 5 shows, for the subject nations' attention to one another. Only Malaysia and Singapore have representation in all three sister nations. Only Indonesia and Malaysia are covered by all three of their fellow countries. Thus only Malaysia shows full mutual attention with its regional neighbors, and it is likely that part of that attention is on stringer level only.

The already-seen-as-sparse figure of 29 countries journalistically involved in the area is compromised in yet another way. Most serious students of international reporting would question a figure of as many as 400 persons meaningfully engaged in some element of international newsgathering pertaining to these four countries. Indeed, many aren't. Full-time correspondents make up only 54% of the total.

That is not to say, certainly, that all stringers are lightweights. Kohe Hak Lip, for example, a Singapore-based Indonesian stringer for the Jakarta-published magazine *Tempo*, among other clients, is a seasoned professional journalist. American Raphael Pura, the highly respected Jakarta correspondent for the *Asia Wall Street Journal*, earned that job because of his reputation as an Asia-based stringer and temporary staffer for other American publications.⁵

But too many people on the lists of part-timers include such as a restaurant operator in Paris stringing for a Chinese-

⁵ Pura has since been moved to Tokyo by the *Journal*.

TABLE 5

Southeast Asian Media Foreign Correspondents in Southeast Asia

Journalists' Location and Job Status

<i>Employer's location</i>	<i>Thailand</i>			<i>Malaysia</i>			<i>Singapore</i>			<i>Indonesia</i>			<i>Total</i>			<i>Grand Total</i>
	<i>F-T</i>	<i>P-T</i>	<i>Unk</i>	<i>F-T</i>	<i>P-T</i>	<i>Unk</i>	<i>F-T</i>	<i>P-T</i>	<i>Unk</i>	<i>P-T</i>	<i>P-T</i>	<i>Unk</i>	<i>F-T</i>	<i>P-T</i>	<i>Unk</i>	
Thailand		n/a		0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	3
Malaysia	1	3	0		n/a		6	1	0	1	1	0	8	5	0	13
Singapore	1	1	0	1	7	0		n/a		1	2	0	3	10	0	13
Indonesia	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1		n/a		0	1	2	3
Total	2	4	0	1	8	2	6	2	1	2	4	0	11	18	3	32
<i>Grand Total</i>	6			11			9			6			32			

language weekly newspaper in Kuala Lumpur, a rarely heard from Thai coffee shop owner in Los Angeles who strings for the Bangkok *Daily News* and a number of students attending universities abroad.

Finally, the total number of journalists is further adulterated by many persons employed by what might be considered informationally insignificant media. Examples include travel, high fi, auto and fashion papers, as well as minor newspapers seeking coverage of, or for, expatriate ethnic communities and the like.

In terms of regional and subregional distributions, another look at Table 2 shows the heavy interrelationship between Southeast Asia and three other areas: East Asia, West Europe and North America. Except for Southeast Asia's own interest in its member nations, the above three areas clearly dominate both representation in Southeast Asia and the area's journalistic concerns elsewhere. Somewhat surprising

is the relatively light mutual concern between South Asian and Southeast Asian news media, involving a total of only six full-time correspondents.

Even there, however, the light attention is reciprocal. In fact, the only non-reciprocal coverage is that of a dozen, significantly full-time, correspondents from East Europe based in Southeast Asia, and the much less significant two Southeast Asian stringers posted in the Middle East.

It is clear from the foregoing that numerous shortcomings are part and parcel of international news media presence and Southeast Asia. Notwithstanding these deficiencies, however, it remains a hard fact that a sizable aggregate of journalists is constantly scanning the Southeast Asian news horizon for interested observers elsewhere, and that, to a lesser extent, the consumers of Southeast Asian media have their own diverse network of journalistic sensors abroad.

Haley to Speak at Writers Conference

►The Fourth Annual Writers' Conference, "Writing to Sell," co-sponsored by the American Society of Journalists and Authors, South California chapter, and the Institute for Communications and Professional Studies (ICAPS), California State University, Northridge, will be Saturday, Oct. 18, 1980, on the C.S.N. campus. Featured speaker will be A.S.J.A. member Alex Haley. For further information, contact ICAPS, 18111 Nordoff St., Administration 504, California State University, Northridge, Calif., 91330.

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