

Factors Contributing to the Cultural Values and Ethical Standards in Party newspapers

Assoc. Prof. PhD. Huy Phuong HA

Abstract: ‘Culture’ refers to the material and spiritual values created by nature, society, and individuals which is acknowledged, preserved, and promoted by humans. ‘Ethic’ are standards set by society to regulate the activities of individuals with themselves and with the community. ‘Party newspapers’ are defined as the media agencies of the Communist Party of Vietnam at both central and local levels. Culture and ethics within Party newspapers constitute the values and standards established to serve as motivation, guiding the journalistic workforces in creating media products that are effective and influential in communication. This article discusses the factors that contribute to the cultural values and ethical standards in Party newspapers, aiming to make the press truly the voice of the Party, the State, and the democratic, public forum of the people.

Keywords: Party; Party newspapers; culture; ethics; factors; values; standards.

1. Historical traditions, professional journalistic workforce, high-quality media products - the factors shaping the cultural values of Party newspapers

There are various approaches and explanations to define the concept, but for the purposes of this essay, ‘culture’ can be understood as the values of material and spiritual nature created by nature, society, and individuals, preserved and promoted by humans.

Our Party highly regards cultural issues and always sees culture as the foundation and the driving force for the development of the country in all aspects. Eighty years ago, in February 1943, the Party issued the “Vietnamese Cultural Outline”. Nationalization, massification, and scientification are three principles that have become the motto, the action goal, and the consistent viewpoint throughout the revolutionary process and the construction of a new cultural foundation. The 1943 cultural outline laid the groundwork, opening the way for the construction of revolutionary cultural theory in Vietnam, serving as a rallying point, encouraging intellectuals and domestic

artists to actively participate in the revolutionary cause led by our Party. Since its inception, many important directions of the Vietnamese Cultural Outline have been inherited, supplemented, and developed by our Party, especially during the renovation period. Culture truly serves as the “torch lighting the way for the people”⁽¹⁾.

Vietnam’s press is a revolutionary press, founded by President Ho Chi Minh. In the system of Vietnam’s revolutionary press, alongside central media agencies, ministries, departments, political and social organizations, professional associations, we also have a system of Party newspapers. At the central level, there are the People’s Newspaper, the Communist Review, and some newspapers and magazines under the Central Party Committee. At the local level, there are 63 Party newspapers for the 63 Provincial Party Committees, City Party Committees nationwide.

Each Party newspaper of the Communist Party of Vietnam has clear principles, purposes, functions, and tasks. The People’s Newspaper is the largest Party newspaper in the system of Vietnam’s revolutionary press. The Communist Review is the political theoretical agency of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Local Party newspapers clearly state in their masthead: “Organ of the Party Committee... the government, and the people...”

For Party newspapers to truly fulfill their roles, principles, purposes, functions, and tasks, the issue of culture in journalistic activities must be prioritized. In 2022, the CPV Central Committee’s Publicity and Education Commission, the Ministry of Information and Communications, the Vietnam Journalists’ Association, and People’s Newspaper jointly launched the movement “Building a cultural environment in Party media agencies.” The launching ceremony aims to enhance the awareness and responsibility of Party committees, Party organizations, and leadership of media agencies, as well as journalists about the position, role, and importance of culture in the country’s development. The launching ceremony also aims to enhance the development of each media agency, the value of media products, and the honor and reputation of journalists, helping to build a cultural environment in Party media agencies with the focus on developing cultural media agencies and cultural journalists. By promoting and spreading active participation and creating a practical and meaningful emulation movement for Party media agencies to fulfill the roles and missions of the revolutionary press it is possible to preserve, build, and develop Vietnam’s advanced, nationally

characterised culture. Ultimately serving as the “spiritual foundation” and the “development momentum”, cultural values and the strength of the Vietnamese people can be promoted, arousing strong patriotism, national self-reliance, and the desire for the country’s prosperous development and happiness.⁽²⁾

Therefore, what constitutes ‘cultural values’ in Party newspapers? It can be affirmed that they are the historical traditions of glorious development of Party newspapers; they are the professional, ethical, resilient journalistic workforce; they are the quality and effectiveness of the media products created by Party newspapers. More specifically:

Firstly, the culture within Party newspapers derives its value from the rich historical tradition of glorious development. Most of our Party newspapers have a long-standing history of development.

People’s Newspaper (Nhân Dân) (the central organ of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the voice of the Party, State, and Vietnamese people) was first published on March 11, 1951, in the Viet Bac resistance zone during the anti-French colonial struggle. People’s Newspaper continues the tradition of Thanh Nien newspaper, founded by President Ho Chi Minh on June 21, 1925, and other newspapers such as Tranh Dau, Dan Chung, Co Giai Phong, and Su That. People’s Newspaper maintains friendly relations, cooperation, and exchange of professional experience with many newspapers worldwide. In the two national liberation struggles, the reunification of the country, and in the renovation and building of Vietnam for “Prosperous People, Strong Nation, Equal Society, Democracy, and Civilization”, People’s Newspaper has always been present on the frontline to defend and build the homeland, serving as the voice of the Party, the State, and a trusted forum for the people. In over 35 years of renovation initiated by the Communist Party of Vietnam from the 6th National Party Congress in 1986, People’s Newspaper has disseminated and encouraged the implementation of the Party’s lines and policies, state laws, and reflected the aspirations, initiatives, and will of the people, also participating in summarizing practical experiences, perfecting the renewal path.

The Party founding conference, held from the 3rd to the 7th of February 1930 under the chairmanship of comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc, decided to publish a general theoretical journal for the entire Party and three communication newspapers in three regions. In accordance with that decision, the Red Journal, founded and initially edited by comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc, was first published on August 5, 1930. Since then, through revolutionary periods,

the Party's theoretical journal has been continuously introduced to readers. And through the development stages, the Party's theoretical journal has continuously matured, making significant contributions to the application and development of Marxist-Leninist ideology and Ho Chi Minh's thoughts, as well as in communication work, political education, and ideological and theoretical education of the Party.

Other media agencies under the Central Party Committee such as the Communist Party of Vietnam's electronic newspaper, Party Building Magazine, Communication Magazine, Inspection Magazine, People's Movement Magazine, etc., also have a rich history of development, assuming clear functions and tasks; they have made and are making significant contributions to the revolutionary cause of the Party.

The 63 local Party newspaper agencies across the country all boast a proud history of development. Local Party newspapers in the North emerged during the resistance against French colonialism, starting a clandestine publication until going public. In the Central and Southern regions, though established later, they too originated from party publications, with local party units operating covertly in occupied areas, before transitioning to public dissemination, enhancing, and expanding during times of unity to construct and develop the nation.

Two notable local Party newspapers are Hanoi Moi and Sai Gon Giai Phong. They are among the largest local Party newspapers out of the 63. Hanoi Moi is the organ of the Hanoi City Party Committee, honored to have been established by Uncle Ho. Currently, Hanoi Moi is published daily, with weekend editions and supplementary papers such as "Hanoi Thousand Years" and daily updates on its electronic platform. Sai Gon Giai Phong, the organ of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, began publication immediately after the complete liberation of the South and the reunification of the country. As a Party newspaper developed in the forefront city of the nation, Sai Gon Giai Phong is one of the newspapers chosen by the public in Ho Chi Minh City and neighboring areas for daily news consumption.

Reviewing the developmental history of our Party newspaper agencies reveals not only their high values and pride in their illustrious traditions, but also (more importantly) the cultural significance they embody. The glorious historical values of Party newspaper agencies are intertwined with the history of great national defense wars and the nation-building and development process, contributing to the sustainable development of Vietnam.

Secondly, the culture within Party newspaper agencies is crystallized from the credibility of a professional, ethical, courageous journalistic workforce, and style. The journalistic workforce plays a decisive role in the existence and development of a newspaper agency. The leadership and management team of the newspaper agency serves as the helm, with the Editor-in-Chief acting as the “conductor”, guiding the journalistic orchestra to create captivating public products. The professional journalistic workforce, like diligent bees, tirelessly gather daily news to serve the public.

Journalistic work in Party newspapers is a creative endeavor aimed at producing products that reflect high collective spirit, including the personal imprint of each journalist as the author of journalistic works.

Party newspapers belong to the category of political-social newspapers. The journalistic workforce in Party newspaper agencies at both central and local levels have their own principles, requirements, and characteristics of their professional labor. Among these, the foremost priority is political integrity, trust, and loyalty to the Party’s leadership. Consequently, the majority of journalists working in Party newspaper agencies are members of the Communist Party of Vietnam. The standard for appointing leadership and managerial positions in Party newspaper agencies is being a Party member, possessing high political literacy, knowledge, skills, and professional experience in journalism.

Journalists working in Party newspaper agencies always take pride in their profession as journalists affiliated with the Party’s newspaper agencies. This sense of pride drives them to deliver news promptly, accurately, truthfully, and with a humanitarian approach.

Beyond their sense of professional responsibility, many journalists working in Party newspaper agencies, both past and present, have become beacons in their profession, with strong political integrity and a unique creative journalistic style, thereby contributing to the personal branding and reputation of both themselves and their respective newspaper agencies. Notable journalists have made significant contributions to the reputation of the People’s Newspaper, the official newspaper of the Central Communist Party of Vietnam, include Hoang Tung, Thép Moi, Quang Dam, Ha Dang, and Huu Tho. Similarly, many journalists in local Party newspapers such as Hanoi Moi, Sai Gon Giai Phong, and many others have also gained prominence, enhancing the revolutionary press of Vietnam.

Thirdly, the quality and effectiveness of journalistic works, the products

of Party newspapers, constitute the cultural value of the Party newspaper agencies. A journalistic work is a composition, comprising content elements (topics, themes, events, issues, phenomena, characters, details, and journalist's opinions) and forms (genres, structures, and languages) created by individuals or groups of authors (journalists). It is protected by copyright, related rights, and remuneration (writing fees) as prescribed, while also being widely disseminated in society.⁽⁵⁾

Works are crucial materials constituting the products of journalism. Each journalistic product created by the journalist team through creative forms include field reporting, editorial activities, reviewing, production organization, and distribution. Depending on the nature of the type of journalism, journalists produce different journalistic products. For live broadcast programs reporting on unusual events, predetermined program frames may be disrupted and replaced by live reporting. For electronic journalism, (a non-periodic, non-linear type of journalism) the production nature of the product is not dependent on pre-determined scripts or product frames. The nature of collective production processes in traditional newspaper making is disrupted. The editorial offices empower individual journalists to actively create, publish, and disseminate news.

Although they are Party newspapers, the creative nature of producing journalistic works and organizing the production of journalistic products does not deviate from the characteristics, principles, and common processes in publishing journalism. However, Party newspaper agencies at both central and local levels also have differences in the scale of editorial activities, publication frequency, types of products, and different standardizations in each step of the production process. For example, Nhan Dan is a major Party newspaper, one of the leading multimedia journalism units, hence it almost converges with all types of journalism, including print media (daily newspapers, Sunday editions, monthly editions, Thoi Nay publication), Nhan Dan online, and Nhan Dan Television.

The Communist Review magazine mainly produces printed products (regular monthly publications, specialized event files published every half month), in addition to publishing the Communist Review electronic magazine. The publishing process for the magazine products (both print and electronic) and specialized publications also differs from the publishing process of Nhan Dan newspaper due to the different nature of magazine production compared to newspaper production. The production of magazine products

under the Central Party Committees mostly includes printed magazines and electronic versions (mostly re-publishing content from the printed products, with only a few news items, reflections, or sections produced separately). As for the electronic newspaper of the Communist Party of Vietnam, it produces products similar to other independent electronic newspapers.

At the local Party newspaper editorial offices, the organizational model is organized similarly. The main products of local Party newspapers are printed newspapers and electronic newspaper editions. A few local Party newspapers publish daily newspapers, while the rest publish infrequently during the week (2-3 issues per week) and additional weekend editions or supplements. Party newspapers in mountainous, border, and island areas often publish additional photo newsletters to serve specific audience groups.

It can be affirmed that the works and products of the Party newspapers at both central and local levels have a place in the hearts of the nationwide public, making significant contributions to the ideological and cultural front of the Party; they fulfill the correct principles, purposes, and functions of communication, mobilization, and organization. In recent times, many journalists working for Party newspapers at both central and local levels have won high awards in competitions such as the National Press Awards, the Golden Hammer and Sickle Press Award, the Editorial Writing Award defending the Party's ideological foundation, the Foreign Information Press Award, and the Anti-Corruption Press Award. Many Party newspaper publications have been awarded prizes for design and cover presentation at annual Spring Press Conferences and National Press Conferences. These achievements partly contribute to the cultural value of Party newspaper agencies.

2. Standardizing professional activities establishes ethical standards within Party newspaper agencies.

Nowadays, when we talk about journalism, we're referring to professionalism in journalistic activities. So, what constitutes professional journalism? Professionalism in journalism can be understood as standardization in knowledge, skills, techniques, and creative journalistic labor processes, as well as the cultural norms of behavior and communication of the journalist team within each newspaper agency. Specifically:

Firstly, standardization of knowledge among the journalist team in Party newspaper agencies. Journalism is likened to diplomacy. A good journalist is someone who can "talk" to various types of people. A journalist might chat

with a farmer in the morning about farming, then engage in a discussion with a politician in the evening about national affairs. To do this, there's nothing more crucial for a journalist than knowledge. Knowledge that journalists acquire through diligent study from books, classrooms, peers, accumulating into their own intellectual assets to serve the journalism profession. The talent of a journalist is only a very small part, the rest largely comes from diligent training.

When Party newspaper agencies recruit reporters and editors, in addition to qualifications (preferably graduates from journalism and communication schools), they often prefer individuals with deep knowledge and understanding of social issues. Recruiting someone with deep knowledge to work in a newspaper agency is like choosing a promising journalist for the future of the newspaper agency.

Secondly, standardizing professional skills of journalists means standardizing ethics within Party newspaper agencies. Besides having extensive knowledge, every journalist needs to excel in professional skills. Journalists' skills include hard skills (creative writing skills, editing, organizing newspaper publication, leadership skills, newspaper management, and editorial-business management skills) and soft skills (notably, the ability to handle professional situations).

Journalism training schools all teach and guide practical skills in journalism that any learner can execute to create a basic journalistic work. However, the dynamic and ever-changing nature of journalistic activities, especially in the current digital environment, demands that every journalist acquire additional new skills. Newspaper agencies often "retrain" newly graduated individuals from journalism schools according to their own standards.

Media organizations often standardize the skills and processes of creating journalistic works in steps such as: Research, immersion in reality, topic discovery, creative themes; data-information collection; expression of the work; editing, completion of the work; organization of the work on the newspaper product; distribution of the product and monitoring, handling feedback information. Each step in the creative process of journalism has principles, requirements, and specific actions. Each step in the creative process is associated with specific ethical standards.

Thirdly, standardization of the ability to master the technical and technological aspects of journalism is also the basis for establishing ethical professional standards within Party newspaper agencies.

Working in the digital age, if journalists do not meet standards in terms of technological proficiency, they are like not being part of the same moving wheel. A journalist working in a multimedia newspaper agency must be versatile and proficient in various types of media - they must be able to use multiple languages to convey journalistic messages, capable of organizing interactive multidirectional interactions with the public, and able to master multi-platform technology and multi-skilled journalism. Each modern journalistic skill has clear professional ethical standards, in which each journalist must prioritize national, ethnic, community, and people's interests above all else⁽⁶⁾.

Most Party newspaper agencies at central and local levels quickly adopt modern journalism techniques and technologies. Nhân Dân (People) is the largest Party newspaper, leading in innovating editorial activities, maximizing the use of digital platforms, the internet to create journalistic works, and organize the production of newspaper products. Printed newspaper products have QR codes for readers to read detailed sections through mobile devices. The online newspaper has successfully organized the production of postcards with the idea of one short story per issue, which is unique and attracts public attention. The quality of Nhân Dân TV's television products has also significantly improved.

Take the Communist Review, for instance; it seemed challenging to embrace the digital transformation, but it also made a remarkable breakthrough. Now, the public can access the electronic version of the Communist Review with a user-friendly interface on mobile devices, presented in a multimedia language.

The Communist Party's electronic newspaper has transformed from a static news website to an independent Party newspaper with attractive sections, columns, beautiful and vibrant interfaces, multi-platform, multimedia, appealing to the public, with high access rates and interaction.

Local Party newspapers are showcasing their prowess on digital platforms. Hanoi Moi, Saigon Liberation's electronic version boasts a sleek, convenient interface. Printed products have also been improved in content organization, layout design, resembling modern printed newspapers. From Ha Giang in the far north to Ca Mau in the extreme south of the country, local Party newspapers have been and are transforming in the digital revolution to reach the public. Achieving modern journalistic technical standards and technology is creating cultural values, ethical standards in Party newspaper agencies in Vietnam today.

Fourthly, standards of behavior, communication culture contribute to the ethical standards in Party newspaper agencies. The values and standards created become cultural and ethical values in Party newspaper agencies. But that alone is not enough. Standards of behavior and communication culture are an important element in making Party newspaper agencies truly a Party cultural environment.

Those working in Party newspapers must first be people with cultural communication, possessing collegial behaviour with fellow staff, superiors, with family and the community. Words, speech, gestures, and even dressing well enhance the image of Party newspaper workers.

Recently, some have abused the name of journalism to intimidate, extort, and blackmail businesses and individuals, distorting and tarnishing the image of Vietnamese revolutionary journalists. Genuine journalists, especially those working in Party newspaper agencies, have not been corrupted, affected by the dark side of the market mechanism, therefore, they are not entangled in legal issues. The image of journalists working in local Party newspapers is always close to the people, trusted by the people, cooperating to help in their daily work.

In summary, discussing the factors that constitute the cultural values and ethical standards in Party newspaper agencies have many facets. The common point is that Party media lead in propagating Party culture, building the Party ethically, and so must the media organizations and each journalist themselves always be of a cultural and ethical standard within their environment - only then can they achieve effective and convincing communication.

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