



NUMBER 1 SHIMBUN



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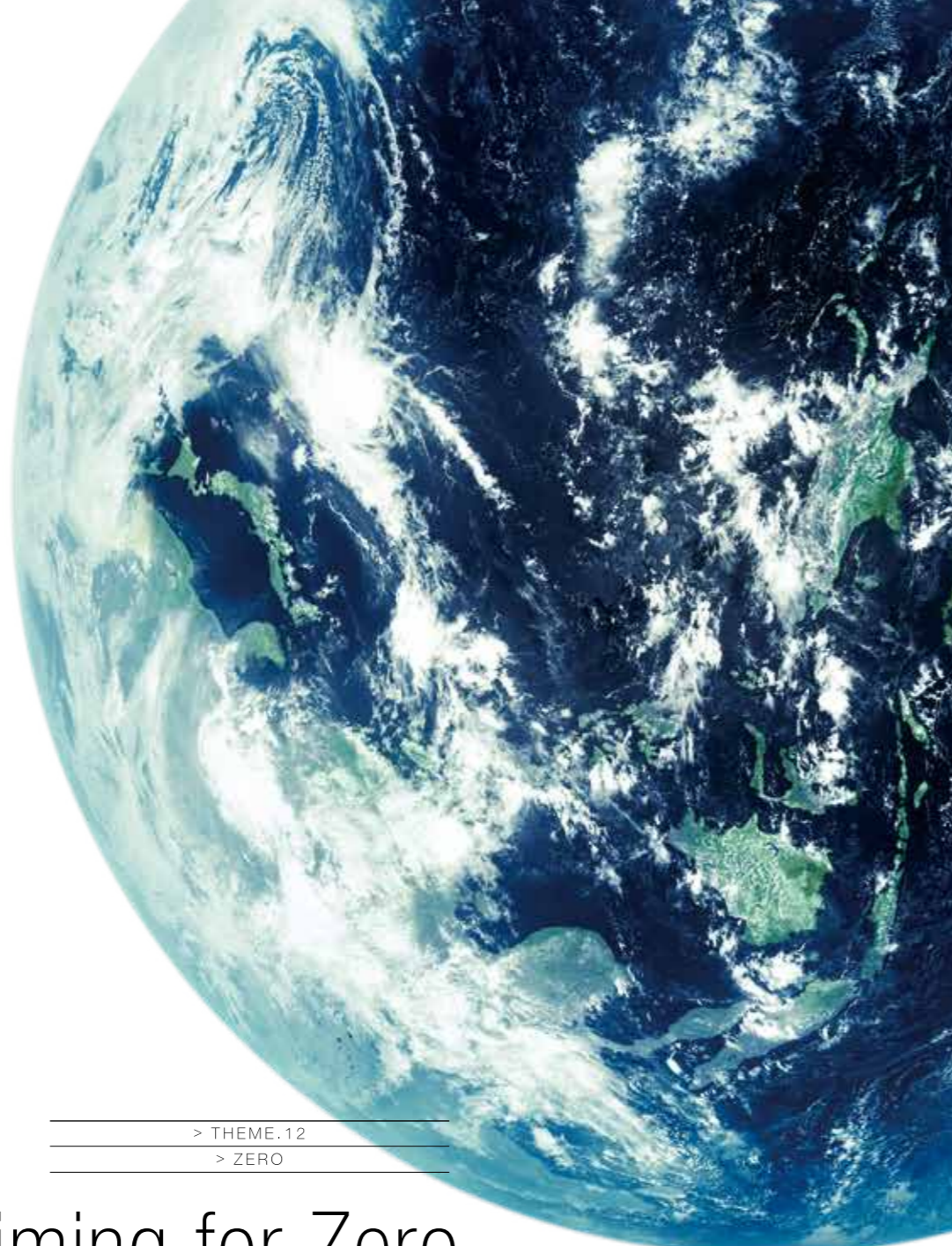
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*Behind the success of
the Tokyo Reporter
tabloid website*

5 comments

The
Japan Times
slims down

Asger Røjle
Christensen
profiled



> THEME. 12
> ZERO

Aiming for Zero... and not a nanometer more

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TAKASHI AOYAMA



From the President

IT WAS A GREAT pleasure to see the many Associate Members at their General Meeting on April 13. One 40-year Member quietly told me that it was his first time to attend. Clearly, interest has increased now that Associates are finally able to decide Club policy.

The meeting highlighted the great contributions Associate Members – especially the three Board Members – are making to the Club. Their business knowledge and insights have been invaluable.

Treasurer Yuichi Otsuka answered numerous questions about the Club's accounting methods and various investments. He is revising our convoluted financial statements and welcomes suggestions on investing. Some information connected with the move is still confidential per our agreement with Mitsubishi Estate. For details on the Club's FY2014 finances, with figures finalized this month, please attend the town meeting Otsuka-san will arrange at the end of the month.

A food poisoning claim was also discussed at last month's BOD meeting. We take this very seriously and have since set up an emergency hotline so that IRS (our F&B outsourcer), the Food & Beverage Committee, General Manager and board, are all informed and can take fast, proper action.

Our inaugural "Meet the Press" seminar on April 21 with William "Billy" Mallard, Japan Deputy Bureau Chief at Reuters, was also well attended, revealing great interest in the event. The one-hour networking period after Billy's talk and Q&A allowed everyone to mix and mingle with him. Don't miss our next "Meet the Press" session on Tues. May 26 with Martin Fackler, Japan Bureau Chief for the *New York Times*.

This month we'll also be launching our Membership Recruitment Incentive program that will run until

Dec. 31. F&B vouchers from ¥5,000 to ¥20,000 will be given to FCCJ members who introduce a new member to the Club. For details, please see the website, as well as posters in the lobby and handouts available at the Front Desk.

I would like to urge everyone to make their opinions heard and their votes count in the upcoming election. As this has been my fifth consecutive term on the board (the limit decreed in the bylaws), I will not be running for director. I've thoroughly enjoyed my years serving the Club, and I would like to thank everyone for the privilege of being president over the last two years.

Now with April showers behind us, I wish you a May full of gorgeous flowers.

— Lucy Birmingham

Important dates for the upcoming Board of Directors election

For Regular Members:

May 20: Deadline for accepting nominations and campaign statements

TBA: "Great Speak Out" candidates debate

June 10: AGMM (Annual General Membership Meeting)

For Associate and Professional Associate Members:

May 1 – 18: Associates nomination ballot period (ballots handed in person must be brought to the 19th floor FCCJ office during business hours only. No ballots will be accepted at the Front Desk)

May 19: Associate Candidates Meeting

May 19/20: Nominations passed to Election Committee

June 10: AGMM (Annual General Membership Meeting)

From now until our 70th anniversary in November 2015, we will turn these pages over to the history of the Club, both of the many esteemed and important guests who faced us – and the world – from the FCCJ dais and of the many Members who have made the Club such a fascinating place to be.

FROM THE ARCHIVES



MAX AND "MR. CLEAN"



Deputy Prime Minister Takeo Miki, the "Mr. Clean" of Japanese politics who would succeed Kakuei Tanaka as Prime Minister the following December, being introduced by FCCJ president and photographer Max Desfor (AP) at an FCCJ luncheon on July 31, 1974. Max was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his photo of refugees scrambling over the remnants of a destroyed bridge that spanned the Taedong River, taken on December 4, 1950. Another photo in which Max appears (page 49 of the Club's history book) shows what it was like covering the Korean War at that time.

1967 to celebrate the completion of the Club's renovation in which he was our guest of honor.

Takeo Miki's appearance at the professional luncheon on July 31 was special, however. He had just resigned from the Tanaka Cabinet over alleged financial irregularities by the Prime Minister, igniting a chain of events that led to Tanaka's downfall (in which a major link was his appearance at the FCCJ on October 22). Miki succeeded to the post of Prime Minister in December, but his attempts at reform of the LDP ended in failure and two years later, in December of 1976, he resigned to take responsibility for the LDP's loss of power.

As for Max Desfor, his fame did not end with the Korean War photos, which followed his recording of other historic events, including the landing of the Enola Gay after the bombing of Hiroshima and

the Japanese surrender on the USS Missouri. He went on as a widower to remarry in 2011 at the age of 98 to a widowed lady of 92. Max turned 100 in 2013 and is still going strong, living in the Washington, D.C. area.

— Charles Pomeroy

TAKEO MIKI WAS NO stranger to the FCCJ or to politics. Educated at both Meiji University and the University of California, he served in the Diet from 1937 until his death in 1988, even winning a seat during the war years when he opposed Tojo's military government. Although he had held

ministerial posts from 1947, it was after he became Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1966 that his relationship with the Club blossomed – as he became "our official godfather" (the Foreign Ministry was the sponsor of the FCCJ). The highlight, no doubt, was a reception on the evening of May 25 of

TALES FROM THE ROUND TABLES



HERDING THE ALLEY CATS

THE FCCJ FOUNDERS WHO came ashore with MacArthur were a sturdy bunch of war correspondents, with a pronounced propensity to speaking their minds (very loudly and with infinite faith in libation to enhance the process). Their legacy lends tremendous color and unique substance to our annals, but one can only surmise the difficulties managers had even

attempting to herd such a colony of feral cats over the years.

Opening the Club in what was a bombed-out shell of a city meant there was no ready pool of managers to oversee Tokyo's sudden internationalization under the Occupation. An advertisement for staff in 1945 brought a line of 2000 jobseekers that stretched all the way to the Central Post Office, most of whom had little

other than enthusiasm to show on their resumes with not a stitch of English.

Among the hires in the first year was young Kotaro Washida. Freshly discharged from the Japanese Army in the Philippines, and with a few language lessons behind him, Washida was hired as a night switchboard operator, but quickly moved up the ranks to become the senior Japanese manager. Another manager who worked his way up to the top was Hajime "Jimmy" Horikawa, who started as a night elevator boy in 1949 while still in high school for a salary of ¥330.

One manager who didn't have to start at the bottom was Al Stamp, who served from 1988 until 1996. Thanks

to his gruff demeanor and short temper as the well-known proprietor of the extremely popular Mr. Stamp's Wine Garden, Stamp may not have struck most as the first choice for being the welcoming face in a membership club. But newly elected President Andrew Horvat's priority was to introduce professional practices to save the Club from the years of cost and inventory control abuses that were bleeding it to the point of extinction.

Stamp's credentials were indeed impressive: master's degree in hotel management from Cornell University, graduate studies in constitutional law at University of Tokyo, excellent Japanese and a proven restaurateur.

Highly respected as a wine advisor, Stamp was also widely credited with sowing the seeds of Japan's wine boom – through his restaurant and by introducing the likes of fabled Chateau LaTour to a fledgling market. He most certainly didn't need the GM post to claim further bragging rights.

Though there was predictable resistance at the outset, results were almost immediately tangible. Former GM and current advisor Akira Nakamura remembers Stamp introducing a game-changing structured management, with a personal style that was extremely demanding but always fair. He taught F&B staff to read spreadsheets and engaged them in a collective pursuit of

excellence. He raised the benchmark for food and service, introduced fine wines, started a sushi bar in the Club and restored its financial viability.

Members' favorite Mohammed Hanif has many a good Stamp episode to share, and enthusiastically credits the manager's willingness to listen as a reason for his not quitting at a time of dissatisfaction.

He also brought professional civility with a display of great charm to his interactions with members that surprised even his most ardent fans from his restaurant. It seems he not only knew his wines, but had an equally honed ability to herd cats.

— The Shimbu Alley Whisperers



TAKASHI AOYAMA

Kabukicho Confidential

I'm in a dive bar in Kabukicho, Japan's largest red-light district, drinking beer with a man who devotes much of his free time to writing headlines like "Japan's taxi drivers rate raunchiest rides on their peter meters."

Brett Bull is a muckraking writer and translator, a connoisseur of Japan's gutter press and the juicy smorgasbord of immorality it serves up. We're discussing the fate of a 26-year-old hostess whose body was fished out of the Sagami River. There was a boy-

Brett Bull serves up tales of vice and iniquity every week on Tokyo Reporter.

by TIM HORNYAK

friend who began stalking her. A nasty breakup. And signs of head trauma on the corpse.

True-crime cases like hers are Bull's stock in trade. His online alias, Tokyo Reporter, is also the name of his website that chronicles all manner of Japanese vice and crime. The site overflows with titillating articles about corrupt politicians, small-time hoods, fallen porn stars, gangsters and a seemingly endless parade of businesses getting busted for prostitution – typically for pimping out

Brett ♥ scandal . . . the Tokyo Reporter photographed on the mean (or is that clean?) streets of Kabukicho.

joshikousei, euphemistically "JK," or underage girls.

Tokyo Reporter mostly consists of news translated from Japanese sources – straight news and material from weekly tabloid magazines. Some of the posts are truly stranger than fiction. In April, *Tokyo Reporter* ran a story from the *Kanagawa Shimbun* newspaper about a former Yokohama school principal who was arrested for child pornography in the Philippines. What made the bust extraordinary, though, was this: "A search of the suspect's home by investigators revealed approximately 400 albums containing 147,600 photos showing him performing sexual acts with more than 12,700 females."

Like much on *Tokyo Reporter*, it boggles the mind.

But there's huge appetite for such lurid tales from Japan's seamy underworld. The website, the only one of its kind in English, regularly draws about 70,000 unique visitors a month and has over 38,000 followers on Twitter.

Its success can be attributed in part to Bull's choice of material. As its editor and chief writer, he relies on a mix of mainstream Japanese news sources and tabloids such as *Shukan Jitsuwu*, *Shukan Taishu* and *Shukan Asahi Geino*. As faithful readers of the *Number 1 Shimbun* know, however, stories in Japanese weeklies can be pure hokum (see Mark Schreiber's August 2013 cover story on the fictitious eyeball-licking craze). So Bull ensures there are multiple sources confirming most of the serious news he posts.

"I try to pick stories that I think are based on reality," says Bull. "I try to avoid stuff that's ridiculous, and I try to focus on stories where I can link back to an original Japanese article."

The tabloids sometimes break news, he says, but mostly embellish stories from mainstream press such as the *Asahi*, *Mainichi* or *Yomiuri* newspapers. He points to the murder of the hostess as an example – the weeklies added detail to the story after it broke.

"The fact that she was found floating in the river was covered by all the major news outlets. The tabloids just take that and build it up by talking to some investigator."

Bull does sometimes indulge in some of the more outlandish tales from the tabloids, but these tend to be the kind of material that the magazines recycle: stories, for instance, about Chinese tourists visiting soaplands in Yoshiwara, Korean prostitutes flooding into Japan or the antics of drunken foreigners in Kabukicho and Roppongi.

"The tabloids have certain themes that recur every year, such as taxi drivers who take out the fare in trade from female customers," he notes wryly. Another example is recurring tales of erotic hijinks among *hanami* revelers during spring cherry blossom season.

The tabs are often completely derivative of one another. As Bull thumbs through an issue of *Shukan Jitsuwu*, pausing to chuckle at the ads for artificial vaginas molded from the genitals of famous porn stars, he notes that the magazines he reads all ran stories on the centenary of the Yamaguchi-gumi crime syndicate. Yakuza, like porn stars, are often treated like heroes by the gutter press, which seems to elevate them as rebels who have freed themselves from the strictures of orthodox Japanese society.

Nearly everything is fair game in the magazines, but one taboo is AKB48, he notes. Such is the economic and political power of the all-girl band, which had revenues of over \$200 million in 2011 from CD and DVD sales alone, that few media outlets will run muckraking stories on them.

It boggles the mind

In 2013, for instance, *Tokyo Reporter* posted a story based on a *Shukan Jitsuwu* article which stated that AKB48's management agency was trying to cover up the arrest of the mother of an AKB48 member for sex with a minor. The scandal received limited coverage due to pressure from the management company, *Shukan Jitsuwu* alleged.

Bull is well aware that his risqué translations might incur the wrath of Japanese nationalists who bristle at perceived insults to Japan's honor. After all, an online campaign by zealots forced the now-defunct Kodansha International to pull from the market its highly amusing *Tabloid Tokyo* series of books of translated gems from the weeklies. But he hasn't been the target of any pushback so far.

Tokyo Reporter stories end with a disclaimer that says in part: "Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of the translations. However, we are not responsible for the veracity of their contents. The activities of individuals described herein should not be construed as 'typical' behavior of Japanese people nor reflect the intention to portray the country in a negative manner."

Bull, 46, is a native of Newport Beach, California. Surprisingly, journalism is only a part-time avocation; he has an office job with a Japanese construction company that often takes him on over-

seas trips. Regardless of where he is, he manages to write a *Tokyo Reporter* newsletter and update the website every week, while microblogging on Twitter.

Bull has no formal background in journalism, but he has done freelance articles for the *Japan Times*, *Variety*, *The New York Times* and other media. He has interviewed ex-gangsters, right-wing extremists and porn stars on set.

Oddly enough, it was his day job that got him interested in Tokyo's demimonde of vice. His colleagues would bring him out to hostess clubs, where he got to chatting with the girls. He found them surprisingly down to earth, and became interested in who they were as real people. That sparked his passion for reading more about those who inhabit those strata of Japanese society. He began writing for a friend's website and eventually decided to launch *Tokyo Reporter* in 2008.

"I really like reading news, and I do this kind of news because I think nobody else is doing it in English," he says. Collaborators have come and gone; currently Bull works with two other translators on the site, which earns enough in ad revenues to cover the server bills.

Recently, Bull has focused on the cleanup of Kabukicho, a slow but ongoing process that echoes the sanitization of Times Square in New York. The establishment of Robot Restaurant, a family-friendly eatery with over-the-top mechatronic attractions, and the recent opening of the Shinjuku Toho Building, topped with a giant statue of Godzilla, have injected a Disney element into sin city. Developers are keen to banish the seedy image and aggressive touts; "safety" is the new watchword. Meanwhile, fewer and fewer Japanese are patronizing its nightspots. Kabukicho has totemic value for Bull, and he views its changing character wistfully.

"All the old theaters have closed. There is a push to clean it up, and I assume more blocks will be demolished. I do think part of it is economic, but Japan seems to be getting less tolerant of this kind of stuff. The Internet has changed things too. Many people around here have said to me, 'If you clean up Kabukicho, you remove the reason to come to Kabukicho.'"

Shinjuku's fabled fleshpots may dwindle, but vice will never fade from Japan. And *Tokyo Reporter* will be there to chronicle it. ●

Tim Hornyak is Tokyo correspondent for IDG News Service, a global information technology newswire.



Can the country's most prestigious English-language daily survive and retool for the global marketplace?

The Japan Times' slimming program

by DAVID MCNEILL

Japan's premier English-language newspaper appears to have gotten lighter. In April, *The Japan Times* shrunk on some days by nearly 15 percent, going from a skinny 14 pages to an anemic 12. For the same price (¥210), readers got more wire copy and less content written by the newspaper's journalists and contributors. Features, the community pages, stage and movie reviews have been trimmed.

Some *Japan Times* staffers have greeted the changes with dismay. Following its redesign and decision to tie up with the *International New York Times* in 2013, a rare bout of optimism broke out at the paper. But that seems to have dissipated as some editors are now questioning the wisdom of reducing original content to help the 118-year-old title survive. "It seems to smack of desperation, and fly in the face of the strategy announced only 18 months ago," said one.

(Full disclosure: I am a contributor to *The Japan Times*.)

Edan Corkill, one of the paper's two managing editors, rejects such criticism. While admitting that the last few years have been "really tough," Corkill insists that the size of *The Japan Times* has always fluctuated. (For the record, the average page count, excluding Sundays, has gone from 13.84 in January to 12.3 in April; all but three of the papers – 23 of the 26 – have been 12 pages.)

Even Corkill admits, however, that print circulation is unlikely to grow "particularly strongly." That may be an understatement: The paper's website cites 45,000 print copies a day, down from 74,000 in 1991. The real circulation, minus giveaways, may be significantly smaller.

The same trend, needless to say, is being seen across most of the developed world. In the five years leading up to 2014, newspaper circulation fell by over 10 percent in North America, 20 percent in Australia and Oceania and nearly 25 percent in Europe, according to the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers. Print advertising worldwide declined 13 percent over the same period.

British newspaper sales shrunk by 8 percent last year; in the once lucrative UK Sunday market, total circulation was down by nearly half, to 6.7m from about 12.8m a decade ago. The picture is similar in the United States: Print-ad revenue at the iconic *Washington Post* slumped by a head-spinning 61 percent between 2007 and 2013.

The print bloodbath in the more affluent countries is slightly counterbalanced by newspapers' popularity else-

where: Print circulation actually rose 2 percent globally in 2013 – mainly thanks to rising circulation in Asia. And once online readers are factored in, overall readership is growing: Globally, around 2.5 billion people read newspapers in print, another 800 million of them on digital platforms.

Digital editions gaining weight

This, of course, means that digital is increasingly driving strategies. Newspapers have learned to retool for their online readership, creating some unlikely winners and losers. Three years ago the *New York Times* was toppled from its perch as the world's biggest newspaper website (according to Net analytics company comScore) by Britain's right-wing *Daily Mail*, with its frothy diet of celeb pictures and human interest stories.

The battle to survive is increasingly hard-shouldered, with the most successful publications outgrowing their national roots. Two-thirds of the *Guardian's* readership is now outside the UK, thanks to its expanding online presence. In fact, in 2012, the once crusty daily became the world's third-most-read newspaper website (after the *New York Times* and *Huffington Post*) with over 30 million readers.

There are other reasons for this success. The *Guardian's* decision to adopt a "digital first" strategy in 2011 contributed to its exploding online readership. The British online news sites have proved particularly popular in America, where what *The Economist* calls their "po-faced" rivals tend to be more skittish about political leanings. As Fox News discovered, many "Americans like their news sources to have a political slant," said the London weekly.

The economics of going global are not hard to figure out. With so much news now available for free, and print sales plummeting, the alternative is to cast the online net wider for readers of the same content. But here the biggest problem, notoriously, is how to monetize all those millions of eyeballs. Online income is a fraction of its hardcopy alternative: about one-fifth of total revenue for the most successful titles; in most cases far less. The ones that are doing well have established a distinctive online identity. U.S. readers of the *Guardian* know they'll be served a serious, left-leaning view of the world.

So whether the *Japan Times*? The paper still easily outshines its main print rival, the *Japan News*, reborn two years ago from the former *Yomiuri* and widely seen as an unabashed cheerleader for the Liberal Democratic Party. Virtually all the con-

tent is translated from the staid parent paper, and its coverage of historical issues may be unpalatable to foreign readers.

Last year, for example, the *Yomiuri* parent apologized to its 10 million readers for using the term "sex slaves" in dozens of articles about the so-called comfort women since 1992.

The *Japan Times'* more critical distance from the government could plausibly give it a better chance in the global-brand stakes. And indeed, like its far bigger British rivals, readership abroad is growing: 60 percent of the total traffic to the website is now from outside Japan. The newspaper says 30 percent of digital subscribers pay in dollars; the remainder pays in yen. It's safe to say that, like most news titles, more people are reading than ever before – even if they're not paying for it.

The newspaper's management accepts that the web is key. Last year it adopted a digital-first policy, following a major design overhaul of its website so that it can now be viewed on mobile devices. This year it hired a full-time employee to handle social media.

Mobile traffic to the website has tripled since the overhaul, says Corkill. "We're hoping the website will become a platform for revenue right through to 2020." He adds.

While the newspaper claims eight million page views per month, it is cagey on the number of subscribers who have signed up since it introduced a metered pay-wall in November 2013. Corkill says paying subscribers doubled in the last fiscal year, and is growing month-on-month. Subscription rates dipped slightly for a few months after the pay-wall was introduced but rebounded and "are now higher than they were during the period Jan-Oct 2013."

Staying more attractive than competition

The online paper may soon have some serious domestic competition. In April, a subsidiary of Fuji Media Holdings bought GPlus Media Co., the company that operates the *Japan Today* website. As I write, it's unclear what changes the powerful new owners (overseers of the Fuji TV network and affiliate of the Fujisankei group) will bring, but it will almost certainly

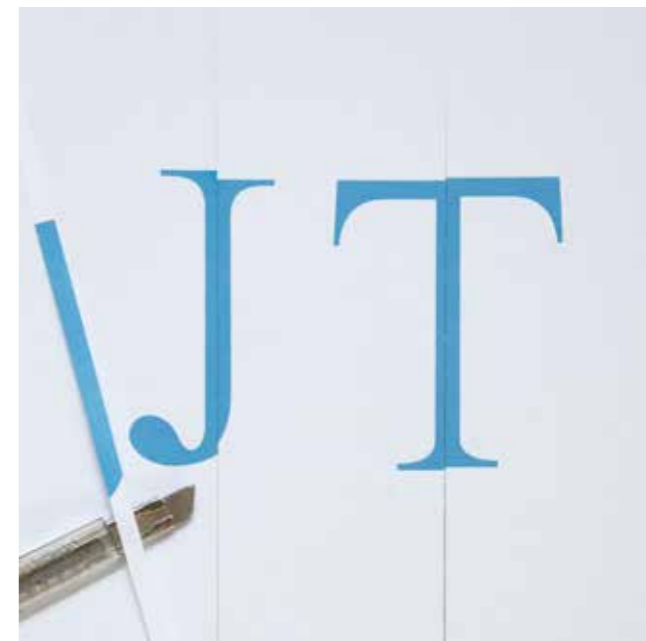
More people are reading it – even if they're not paying for it

mean a grab for the sort of readers who hang out on the *Japan Times* website.

The April editorial changes at the struggling paper, however, have brought mixed reviews among staff. Critics say the online service suffers when print copy is cut. "People were quite upset by the cuts but they don't want it to get any worse," said one. "We're just worried about what will happen down the road." On the features side, the impression of many at the paper "is that a lot of those [original content] stories attract readers on the web as well," said the source. "Cutting those pages may hurt readership."

Given that the paper comes bundled with the *INYT*, and that the *Japan Times'* strongest suit is its "Japan-focused original content," said another former staffer, "it does seem a shame to cut sections with original content rather than the pages of foreign news wire copy." The content that is being cut is largely generated by freelancers, however, "which is obviously more expensive to produce, so the motivation is pretty clear to see."

A third source agreed, saying the newspaper's management had an "obsession" with running large amounts of for-



ANDREW POTHECARY

eign news wire copy. "Bending over backwards to satisfy a dwindling number of older readers of print . . . and embassy types" with outdated national-day features was also a mistake, said the source.

Corkill calls the assumption that people buy the newspaper for original content, however, "flawed." He cites a readers' survey last year that found world news was the second-most popular section. "We have a wide variety of readers and we respond to what they tell us," he says. "Stock pages were very unpopular so we cut them." He points to the last financial year as a "turning point" in the newspaper's history. "We were not in a place that was sustainable. But we are now laying the foundations for the future."

The newspaper has been a subsidiary of Nifco, which makes plastic parts for cars and homes, since 1996. The chairman of both, Toshiaki Ogasawara (84), has never publicly wavered in his commitment to the *Japan Times* stable, which includes a book publisher, a weekly, a tabloid targeting English learners and several new titles.

The market verdict on the April changes has yet to be seen, but not everyone is unhappy. "The thinking is that younger readers don't buy newspapers, and I'm not sure that's an incorrect assumption," said the former staffer. But he also suspects that older readers will be more sensitive to the perception of shrinking value, "and so it could backfire quite badly."

"Some members of upper management are actually very smart and resourceful," he continues. "But other key management members unfortunately don't seem to understand much about quality journalism, nor business for that matter. They're also not very good at drawing on the ideas of their staff, effectively bringing in outside help or making changes to struggling departments such as sales."

"It's sad to see them repeatedly making bad decisions, especially as *The Japan Times* really is a special and important publication, with a very strong niche and the potential to fill it brilliantly."

That seems to represent the dominant view. Most associated with the venerable newspaper wish it the best, while hoping that it is not fluffing its chance to become a global brand. ●

David McNeill writes for the *Independent*, the *Irish Times*, the *Economist* and other publications and is a coordinator of the electronic journal www.japanfocus.org.

Asger Røjle Christensen

by GAVIN BLAIR

“Journalism has swallowed me up.”

Once an idealistic, young student with dreams of changing the world, Asger Røjle Christensen says his chosen profession, for better or for worse, has left him with very few political opinions, subjugated by his passion to “observe and communicate what I see.”

Growing up north of Copenhagen, he spent five years “studying but not finishing a degree in history,” before taking the entrance examination for the school of journalism in Aarhus, then the only one of its kind in Denmark. Those five years spent with history books were not wasted, however. Christensen describes much of the work that has been close to his heart, including two books, as being “in the field between history and journalism.”

“I began to think that if I wanted to continue to work full time in journalism, I should go back to doing something that only I can do.”

His long connection with Japan was triggered by “one of life’s accidents” in the summer of 1984. When he and some friends travelled to China, the country that had originally captured his imagination, they bought cheap air tickets that came with a two-and-a-half-day layover in Tokyo. Worried about the cost of the notoriously expensive city, he got an introduction to a young, Danish-speaking Japanese woman who could help him navigate Tokyo on a budget.

“I met her and I’ve been married to her now for almost 30 years,” says Christensen. “Since then I made Japan my focus, both working here as a correspondent, and back in Denmark working as a foreign editor and at other positions for 18 years.”

He first began working as a correspondent in Japan in 1989, primarily for the liberal broadsheet *Politiken*, and joined the FCCJ that same year. Surrounded by experienced foreign correspondents and “still young and easy to impress,” Christensen says he was inspired by the atmosphere at the Club, “the discussions and the access to the pool of ideas here. It gave you the sense that this job we do is serious and important.”

Covering the last months of the bubble economy, and its subsequent painful unraveling, Christensen says the 1993 political reforms garnered surprising amounts of interest at home in Denmark, where he found himself making a presentation on the subject to a packed, excited room. Within a couple of years, however, a sea change occurred. In the aftermath of the Kobe earthquake and the sarin gas subway attacks, he recalls, “the whole discussion became very pessimistic, and Japan began to disappear from the headlines around the world.”

Concerned that he might find himself jobless in Japan, he elected to head back to Denmark, where he found a position as foreign editor at *Aktuelt* newspaper, followed by a post at the Ritzau news agency. This was fol-



Gavin Blair covers Japanese business, society and culture for publications in America, Asia and Europe.

lowed by a stint editing radio at the public Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) and then as an online news editor for the same organization from 2006 to 2013.

“Although I felt I was doing my job well,” he says, “I increasingly found myself wondering, ‘What am I doing here?’ I was watching all these young people coming out of journalism school who were very conscious of using content across the various platforms. I began to think that those with journalistic sense would be able to do my job in three months’ time, so if I wanted to continue to work full time in journalism, I should go back to doing something that only I can do.”

In November 2013, Christensen decided to do just that: he returned to Tokyo to once more cover Japan for Danish-language media, including various DR platforms. With renewed

global interest in Japan driven by geopolitics, pop culture, the upcoming Olympics and the aftermath of Fukushima, Christensen believes he picked a good time to be back.

An enthusiastic user of social media, Christensen launched his own pay-site six months ago, offering analysis of Japanese news to those Danes interested enough to pay 500 krona (about ¥10,000) annually for the service. While he emphasizes that it doesn’t generate an income large enough to live on, it makes a little more money than he’d expected. Since coming back to Japan he has also led study tours for Danish journalists and business people, utilizing the knowledge of the country he has built up over three decades.

Christensen has written one book on the way Japan has handled its wartime past, which was used at universities in Denmark, and another on the Japanese woman kidnapped from Copenhagen by North Korean agents; to Christensen’s regret, neither has yet been published in English or Japanese. He says the first book (the title of which translates as ‘Apologies in Japanese’) is now out of print, though due to the Abe regime’s revisionism, it is now also out of date.

Interpreting what is happening in Japan for readers and listeners back in Denmark remains his true passion. He cites recent articles he has written trying to explain the popularity of Abe among a certain section of the Japanese population as a good example of this challenge, despite provoking some angry reactions accusing him of being a supporter of the current government.

“There are many interpretations and nuances, but as a journalist you have to choose one angle. So take one that is well-researched, that you are certain about, but that is different from what your readers or your listeners believed about this country or this issue when they got up this morning. From a journalistic standpoint, that’s much more interesting.” ●

ANDREW POTHECARY





The Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club

A nomadic affair

Advocating for members or hosting politicians, this Taipei-based Club's lack of a home is more than made up for with its energetic programs.

by JANE RICKARDS

On the first Thursday of each month, a small group can be seen huddled in one of the many bars dotted across Taipei. It may be in the glitzy surrounds of a five-star hotel. Or it may be a tiny one hidden in one of Taipei's many winding back alleys, amid Chinese apothecaries, hawkers' stands and hordes of motorcycles. But the crowd is always more or less the same – including a smattering of academics and Sinologists, journalists from Taiwan's English-language media, public relations executives, economists and the odd politician pressing the flesh.

But the most important component of these gatherings is the group of foreign correspondents whose Club hosts these events. Their aim is to foster intelligent discussion about events in Taiwan, a tech powerhouse in a strategic regional location and yet one of Asia's most under-reported nations.

The Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club is a largely nomadic affair, formed in 1998, and armed only with a charter, a tiny budget and a list of members. Unlike the foreign correspondents' clubs in Hong Kong and Tokyo, the TFCC lacks a clubhouse and other lavish assets. Taiwan's diplomatic isolation means the Club will never be a hub for correspondents across the region.

Many TFCC members have complained that with China's spectacular economic rise and new status as a world power, Taiwan continues to drop off the mental radar of foreign editors, even though it still remains one of the region's most dangerous flashpoints and its vibrant multicultural democracy deserves attention in its own right. Taiwan's status in Beijing's eyes as a renegade province to be retaken – by military force if necessary – makes the island a freelancer's paradise when cross-Strait tensions rise.

One of the reasons why the Club cultivates the foreign correspondent community is to help ensure that Taiwan's story is told accurately with reporting that is set to international standards. But Taiwan's existential concerns are not the only concerns of Club members. The vibe of the Club is casual in

the extreme and annual membership is relatively inexpensive: it only costs NT\$3,000 (almost US\$100) to purchase individual membership. It is also relatively easy for expatriates to become associate members.

Currently the Club has 28 correspondent members. Although many of them have full-time jobs, they tend to be either with wire services such as Bloomberg and Reuters or Asian English-language media, such as Kyodo News and Channel News Asia. There are also 26 associate members and eight corporate members that include the Australian Office Taipei and the British Trade and Cultural Office, the de facto embassies for the two countries.

TFCC members are relatively young, with most correspondent members under the age of 50. Taiwan may not be a top posting for experienced correspondents, but it is often a place where Mandarin Chinese speakers get their first break in journalism or where young reporters in wire services start their climb up the career ladder before eventually moving to China.

Lloyd Roberts, PR manager for the Eiger law firm and the current TFCC Activities Chairperson, has served on TFCC committees for around seven years and has resided in Taiwan for over two decades. He notes that the gender and ethnic mix of the Club have both slowly changed. When the Club was founded in 1998, it consisted mostly of white men. "Even though it was the 1990s, it was a man's game," Roberts says, adding he thinks this was not due to overt sexism, but more because there were not many Western women in Taiwan at the time.

Women's participation has since increased. Last year, for the first time in the Club's history, women were elected to all three of the TFCC's top committee posts only open to correspondent members: treasurer, vice president and president. Localization is another trend. A few of the Club's original founders possessed no Asian language skills but now it is rare to encounter correspondent members who are not fluent in Mandarin Chinese. "You see a lot more Taiwanese American and Taiwanese reporters than before," Roberts says. Despite

Club together Opposite, left to right, Club treasurer Debra Mao, Taichung mayor and vice chairman of the ruling Kuomintang Jason Hu, the author Jane Rickards, Club activities chairperson Lloyd G. Roberts. Below, Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou speaking to the Club earlier this year.

this, the lingua franca of the Club has remained English.

The five-member TFCC committee headed by the President uses the Club's tiny budget from membership dues to organize various events, including Happy Hour – usually held on the first Thursday of each month – and press events with speakers that recently have ranged from Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou to the White Wolf, a former leader of the Bamboo Union, one of Taiwan's most notorious triads.

Government officials, business leaders and other speakers rarely use TFCC events for breaking news or communicating establishment policies. But it is still relatively easy for the Club to obtain speakers from the highest levels of Taiwanese government. Foreign correspondents are respected and officials like to use any opportunity they can to raise the island's international profile.

While there is an abundance of information available in Taiwan's freewheeling democracy, much of the Chinese-language print media tends to be parochial, shamelessly sensationalistic and often given to scurrilous rumor-mongering. Frequently, as was the case when President Ma spoke to the Club a few weeks ago, correspondents use these TFCC press events to ask speakers questions of interest to the international community that are rarely addressed in press briefings with local journalists. For example, at the recent briefing President Ma was asked by a Reuters reporter to clarify Taiwan's claims in the South China Sea.

Roberts points to the arduous and unpaid work of the committee members as the reason the Club has continued to flourish all these years. "It says something that we have got this far without fancy clubhouses," Roberts says. (As Vice President of the TFCC and then President, I can also personally confirm the responsibilities involved in a TFCC post are close to becoming a full-time job.)

The Club also advocates for its members. Some vestiges of the former martial law regime still remain in the form of over-regulation and other minor forms of government interference. Martin Williams, Asia Editor for the industry publication *Gambling Compliance* and TFCC President from 2012-2013, says one of the biggest challenges of his presidency was maintaining a cordial but effective relationship with the government while defending members' rights.

One issue he recalls involved government discrimination against journalists from greater China. The Club's loose definition of a foreign correspondent is any journalist who writes for publications outside Taiwan. So while the TFCC defines journalists who work for media organizations from Hong Kong, Macau or China as foreign correspondents, the Taiwanese government, officially known as the Republic of China, defines them as Chinese compatriots. During Williams' tenure, the government refused admission to journalists from Greater China at an event it sponsored for introducing correspondents to Taiwanese Cabinet ministers and their staff. Williams successfully negotiated at length for their admittance. Over the years, there have been other battles with the government over red tape issues.



Jane Rickards was Vice President, then President of the TFCC in 2014. She is a stringer for the *Economist*.

Relations between correspondent members and associate members are cordial. Roberts notes several reasons why associate members join the Club. First of all, he says, social networking is a draw. The Club's membership fees are much more affordable than other expat organizations, such as the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei, where joining fees stand at almost US\$500 and annual dues US\$900.

And one other social event the TFCC organizes, the annual Christmas party, has now become "legendary," Roberts notes. There are expensive raffle prizes galore, including the latest smartphones and other gadgets donated by Taiwan's tech companies. "It's the only expat party in town that is kid-friendly . . . with a Santa," Roberts adds.

Associate members may also be aspiring journalists wanting to make industry contacts, and Roberts notes that diplomats like to join the Club "to keep abreast of Taiwan's political situation." Associate member Michael Boyden, the managing director of Taiwan Asia Strategy Consulting, says the Club's speakers give him ideas for finding speakers to address his company's own forums.

The challenges the Club faces are the same as nearly every other FCC in the region. Journalism is in a considerable state of flux, media organizations are cutting budgets and the numbers of correspondent members have been slowly but steadily dwindling over the years. The *Financial Times* eliminated its full-time Taiwan correspondent at the end of 2013, for example, and the Associated Press eliminated the position of Taiwan bureau chief and two correspondent positions, leaving behind a few stringers, photographers and local news researchers. This in turn corrodes the Club's tiny budget needed for organizing social events.

Meanwhile, there are increasing numbers of bloggers, stringers and other part-time journalists who mingle writing with other occupations. The TFCC's charter defines correspondent members as those that satisfy the committee that their professional duties are representing the foreign media in a journalistic capacity. The Club's charter also says it will be

dissolved if numbers of correspondent members fall beneath 15. The TFCC's future challenge will be broadening its definition of a foreign correspondent sufficiently to keep the Club alive without deprofessionalizing the industry.

The dwindling correspondent numbers are also due to Taiwan's unique political situation. After the fiercely confrontational pro-independence President Chen Shui-bian was voted out in 2008, tensions with China subsided.

President Ma then sought economic integration with China, signing 21 cross-Strait agreements. The resulting calm seems to have convinced many foreign editors (fortunately not my own) that in terms of regional political news, Taiwan is much less important.

One Taiwan bureau chief a few years ago even told me he thought I should go home as Taiwan and China were heading towards a convergence and there would be far fewer opportunities to write for the international press. Now that President Ma's KMT has been drubbed in municipal elections last year at the hands of the pro-independence DPP, a DPP presidential victory seems probable. Tensions with China could rise again, attracting the attention of foreign editors once more. "The irony is that if the cross-Strait situation

deteriorates dramatically, the Club could find a few more members," Williams concludes. ●

Fitting its perception as a young, forward-looking district of Tokyo, Shibuya ward and its mayor lead the way in giving rights to the LGBT community.

Pioneer or destroyer of traditional values?



by SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI

DESPIITE A WEDDING HELD in 2013 that announced to friends and family their commitment to each other – as couples have done for centuries – Hiroko Masuhara and Koyuki Higashi say their union remains on the social fringes. Though they live as a lesbian couple, “We yearn to be recognized legally as a married couple. Because that is what our relationship is,” said Masuhara in an interview.

A giant leap toward their long-held dream took place when Tokyo’s Shibuya ward announced a landmark ordinance to issue “proof of partnership” certificates that would register unions between members of gay couples. Spurred on by plucky Mayor Toshitake Kuwahara, the law passed in the local assembly on March 31, making the ward the first in Japan to officially accept registration by non-heterosexual couples.

There is still a long way to go in terms of reaching equal legal status with heterosexual counterparts on such rights as family inheritance or adoption of children. Yet the move has been widely celebrated by Japan’s lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

“We are absolutely delighted with the new legislation. It is a step towards legal acceptance and a symbol of hope for sexual minorities that makes Japanese society more tolerant and diverse,” explained Masuhara.

As Mayor Toshitake Kuwahara explained at the FCCJ in March, the

Join together Masuhara (l) and Higashi (r) and Fumino Sugiyama, a transgender man planning on marrying, celebrate the ruling.

motive for the change he has ushered in is simple – he is working to meet the needs of the rapidly changing population of Shibuya ward as well as Japan. “Sexual minorities face painful discrimination, such as not being able to rent accommodations. They are viewed as different in a Japanese society that wants to believe it is homogenous. As a result these people are seen as a threat to a carefully protected status quo,” he told the press.

Kuwahara has been mayor since 2003 and obviously seen first hand the social transformation through the years. “Shibuya is now a diverse community that includes foreigners and young people who seek a change from the monolithic standards of the older generation. To cope, there is a vital need to build empathy in order to make Shibuya a peaceful and vital place,” he said.

Shibuya ward promotes its official image as a youth- and fashion-centered area in Tokyo; it is also home to a large gay bar district. The mayor believes the new certification extended to the LGBT community – which includes special consultation services and penalties for companies that do not cooperate – will facilitate badly needed public understanding to support the legislation.

But, as expected, lining up against him are Japan’s influential conservatives. The Liberal Democratic Party is leading the pack, with party members opposing the proposal during the voting in the Shibuya assembly elections last month. Sadakazu Taniguchi, a powerful politician and secretary general, referred to his own value system as he declared that Shibuya ward is encouraging social disorder by eroding Japan’s traditional family values. Other revisionist groups issued statements pointing out that legally accepting same-sex marriages will reduce Japan’s birth rate because these unions will not procreate.

Social experts point out that the embattled mayor’s situation epitomizes the deep-rooted contradictions in

Japanese society. “What is notable in Japan is that opposition against the rights to sexual minorities is not based on religious beliefs as has been the case in Western or other countries,” says Professor Kimio Ito, who teaches gender at Kyoto University. “In fact, television regularly features popular gay or transsexual personalities and there are also sexual minorities in politics.”

But this does not mean Japan is progressive, says Ito. He describes the resistance from conservatives as a clash between cultural diversity and a nationalist ideology that promotes the racial homogeneity myth that is carefully propagated by the government through education. “Japanese society is built around this nationalist psyche and that has made it difficult for the country to accept differences and a true sense of modernity,” Ito says. “Our so-called tolerance is superficial.”

Indeed, LGBT rights proponents view their fight to bring change as linked closely to the national debate about how to develop a dynamic Japan, something that is also championed by the current government as imperative to maintain global competitiveness.

For example, Maki Muraki of Nijiro Diversity says that the advocacy NPO supporting LGBTs focuses on education programs, which she says is the key to bring change. “An educated public that is aware of the issues can foster understanding and empathy,” she says. “This is the best way to combat harassment and develop the concept of diversity.”

Currently her clients include Japanese companies where employees are made aware of the social discrimination issues faced by people such as transvestites, who might be afraid of using public toilets because of being identified. “Our study programs reveal that the Japanese have not been exposed to close discrimination,” she said. “These issues are invisible in Japan because nobody dares to discuss them. Television features only humorous cases.”

Meanwhile, other wards in Tokyo are also becoming emboldened to take steps to accept sexual minorities. Transgender assembly politician Ai Kamikawa is leading the way to recognize gay relationships through certification in Setagaya ward, one of Tokyo’s largest. Whether the momentum from Shibuya’s legislation will have an effect has yet to be seen. ●

Suvendrini Kakuchi is a correspondent for the UK-based University World News, with a focus on higher education issues.

Former bureaucrat Shigeaki Koga throws light on the cozy relationships between government and the media industry.



Shigeaki Koga at the Club

The first steps on a dangerous road?

by JULIAN RYALL

SHIGEAKI KOGA WAS ON the fast track at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry until he spectacularly stepped out of line. Watching his press conference at the FCCJ on April 16, one can only wonder why he ever had the notion that he would make a good straight-laced, toe-the-line bureaucrat.

This is a man who appears determined to be the nail that sticks up, and he has long been persona non grata at the ministry since making his opinions on the government’s personnel policies quite clear. Now – refreshingly – he wants to stub the toes of both sides in the growing debate over the government meddling in the media and the fact that large parts of that industry roll over to have their tummies tickled in return.

“I believe very strongly that Japan has a fairly high degree of freedom of expression and freedom of the press,” Koga said. “I also believe that democratic values and democratic systems are fairly well-rooted in Japan.”

And you just knew that a “but” was coming. “Having said that,” he continued, “I am always concerned about what might happen in the future and, even given these freedoms and principles, it is possible that a dictatorship or something approaching a dictatorship could emerge in Japan in the future.”

Koga fears that the first step on that disastrous road would be for the government to build close working relationships with the media, which

they have largely done in recent years. “On the one hand, they can apply pressure, which could be in the form of a threat to take away a broadcaster’s license, and on the other they can offer rewards if a media company is cooperative,” Koga said. Yet any media that gives in to pressure so easily or is effectively bribed is not providing much of a service to the public, he believes.

“Another thing that I have seen in recent months that causes me great anxiety is the fact that top executives at the very large mass media companies seem to be coming very close on a personal basis to members of the

“I think we are very fast reaching a crisis situation in the media.”

government,” he said. “They seem to be cozying up to the people in power.

“This seems a rather immature way to do business, but some of these executives now feel very proud of themselves and their close ties with members of the government,” he added. “They feel as if they are at the heart of power.”

The problem, of course, is that while the executives are playing golf or having dinner with members of the Cabinet, their journalists might hesitate to ask the tough questions on a story if the answers might ruffle political feathers and, by extension, cause problems for the people who pay their wages. “Unfortunately, we are not seeing the media fight back,”

Koga added. “We are basically seeing the media trying to accommodate the pressures and the system of rewards that are being directed their way.”

The third nail in the coffin of a free and fair press, Koga believes, comes when the media is not even aware of the stories they should be chasing. “I think we are very fast reaching a crisis situation in the media,” he said.

Japan has already experienced the application of government pressure and provision of rewards, followed by the media pulling its punches on the sensitive stories. The third step, which is under way, is “frightening,” he said.

After talking to reporters and producers at television companies, Koga realized that the media is “not even aware that it is exercising self-restraint” in what it reports. “This goes to the very heart of what a journalist is,” he said. “The most important ability or function of a journalist is to be aware that something is wrong, that there is an issue, and then to have the courage and ability to follow up and do investigative journalism. I think that ability to be aware of important issues and to follow up on them is being lost.”

And while broadcasters rely on the government for their licenses – a system hardly designed to encourage a campaigning and free broadcast media – Japanese newspapers and magazines are equally not immune from official pressure. The government is presently re-examining the resale system, under which papers and magazines are sold at a fixed price and cannot be discounted.

Being too vocal in their criticisms of the powers-that-be might encourage the authorities to abolish the resale system; and not all the newspapers and magazine might survive the subsequent shakeout across the industry.

Inevitably, a public that is not informed of the important issues of the day is not equipped to make informed decisions when elections come around, Koga insists. “The government cannot apply direct pressure to the public, but if the public is not given access to a great deal of information by the media, which is exercising self-restraint, then eventually the information that the public does receive will be the information that is convenient for the people that are in power,” he said. “Without even knowing it, the people are going to be brain-washed,” he added.

That is when the specter of a dictator could hang over Japan, he said. ●

Julian Ryall is the Japan correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*.

All that glitz!



Reon Yuzuki
in "Dear
Diamond!!"

by HARUKO WATANABE

One of Takarazuka's top otokoyaku stars calls it a day with an extravagant good-bye show.

COOL JAPAN COMES IN many forms. Its unique content includes traditional Kabuki, where all the actors are male, Bunraku puppet theater, the drama of Noh, modern manga, the culture of anime and cosplay. Also included is the spectacular, glossy Takarazuka all-female revue, where some of the girls will be boys.

Now in its 101st year, the Takarazuka Company has been running a special double bill in their Tokyo Theater featuring 16-year veteran top *otokoyaku* ("male" star) Reon Yuzuki, taking her final bow with her *musumeyaku* female partner of six years, Nene Yumesaki. Running from March 27 to May 10, the unique double production features spectacular stagings of an historical drama, "Like a Black Panther" and a gorgeous musical review "Dear Diamond!!" Like all recent Takarazuka productions, all the shows have been sold out.

The Yuzuki-Yumesaki duo took the leading roles of Napoleon Bonaparte and Josephine in "Napoleon, the Man Who Never Sleeps" in March, 2014, a specially commissioned musical commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Takarazuka's founding. Demand for tickets was intense.

The origins

In 1913, Ichizo Kobayashi, founder of Hankyu Railways, was looking for a way to bring more visitors - by Hankyu trains, of course - to the newly established Takarazuka hot-spring resort near Osaka. It seems that hot spring water alone was not enough to bring in the public, so the Kansai entrepreneur sought another solution - and hit on the idea of all-female musical review. He emptied the swimming pool, installed seats, started the Takarazuka Review and never looked back. Since then, the

Review has grown in stature to become a domestic theatrical giant and has traveled far afield. The Tokyo Theater opened in 1934.

A unique characteristic of Takarazuka Review is that all the performers are graduates of the Takarazuka Music School. They study ballet, dance, singing and other cultural programs for two years. The entrance examination is more selective than Tokyo University's as the success ratio is one in every 26.6 applicants.

Currently there are five troupes comprising the Hana (Flower), Tsuki (Moon), Yuki (Snow), Sora (Cosmos) and Hoshi (Star) troupes. Yuzuki has been the top star in the Hoshi (Star) troupe for six years with Nene Yumesaki as her *musumeyaku* partner. (In addition to the five troupes, there's an elite squad of veteran performers in a special division who join any troupe as needed.)

With 400 performers and directors, composers, musicians and back-stage technicians for lighting and set changes, the total company includes

1,000 professionals. The quick set changes for which the Review is famous are only possible with such a professional team.

The sayonara show

"Like a Black Panther" is an extravaganza written by Yukihiko Shibata, a veteran in-house director/writer. Directed and choreographed by Tamae Sha, a former *otokoyaku* performer, it is a dramatic vehicle to present the sleek and dynamic image of Yuzuki, whose character has been described as "black panther-like." There is spectacular dancing, passionate singing, sinister intrigue and unrequited romance in the classic Takarazuka formula. The plot features Yuzuki in the role of Count Antonio de Odalys, a Spanish naval hero, who - upon returning from a three year mission, finds Caterina, his former lover - played by Nene Yumesaki - and is caught up in romance and political intrigue. Yuzuki also portrays the king of all gems in "Dear Diamond!! The Eternal Brilliance of 101 Carats," written and directed by Daisuke Fujii.

Japanese women love Takarazuka for its brilliant stage presentations and the sleek, charming and handsome *otokoyaku* actors, who - although female - represent the ideal male in comparison to the reality of less sexy boyfriends or dull husbands. Yuzuki's sayonara performances showcase the talents of this star performer and also provide an outstanding example of the typical Takarazuka glitzy style.



Yuzuki and
Nene Yumesaki

HARUKO WATANABE

When I asked her what her plans were after graduating - whether would she take a break before tackling female roles, she was non-committal. She replied that since she has been playing male roles so intensively she could not think of tackling other roles right now. ●

Haruko Watanabe is former Tokyo Bureau Chief of the Press Foundation of Asia and producer of "the Women Pioneers" video series.

FCCJ EXHIBITION

Tombo by Hiroshi Tanaka



THERE ARE OVER 200 species of *tombo* (dragonfly) in Japan. The popular insect is the subject of children's songs and is considered good luck because it only flies in a forward direction. The theme of photographer Hiroshi Tanaka's series is "the view from a child's perspective." "Instead of using a net," Tanaka says, "I capture *tombo* with my camera." ●

Hiroshi Tanaka spends his weekdays as a businessman and his weekends as a photographer. He has exhibited at the Kashiwazaki City Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. More of his work can be seen at www.tombo-tanaka.com



MEET THE PRESS

William Mallard, the deputy bureau chief of Reuters' Tokyo office was the guest at the first "Meet the Press" event at the FCCJ on Tues., April 21. Some 50 attendees showed up to listen to Mallard's description of his work leading one of the most vibrant and influential foreign newsrooms in Japan. After his address, he stuck around to answer a barrage of questions, ranging from how to deal with unconfirmed information to the monetary value of up-to-date news items.

This was the first of what will be a series of such events meant to throw light on the cutting edge of the journalism industry from the men and women on the frontlines.

(Photographs by Martin Hladik)



JOIN THE FILM COMMITTEE ...



... at 7:00 pm on Thurs., May 7 for a sneak preview screening of *Miss Hokusai*. This breathtakingly beautiful evocation of 1814 Edo brings to life the extraordinary story of eccentric artist Katsushika Hokusai and his outspoken daughter O-Ei, who is now recognized not only as an essential contributor to his later work, but as a groundbreaking artist in her own right. Marking the first collaboration between Anecny-winning director Keiichi Hara (*Colorful*) and the acclaimed animation house Production I.G (*Ghost in the Shell, Giovanni's Island*), *Miss Hokusai* is a revisionist history that literally animates the process of creation in ways that are by turns lyrical, lush, magical and startling. Already scheduled for distribution throughout Europe and sure to be a perennial favorite, Hara's new work is an enthralling tribute to one of Japan's iconic artists – and the assistant who, given different circumstances, might have one day surpassed him.

(Japan, 2015; 90 minutes; Japanese with English subtitles.)

– Karen Severns

HEARD AT THE CLUB

“Some people, including Prime Minister Abe, may say there’s no evidence, but I’m alive. I’m the evidence. To say evidence doesn’t exist is absurd.”

Former “comfort woman” Bok-tong Kim, responding to deniers of official involvement in the sexual slavery system at the FCCJ, April 24, 2015



REGULAR MEMBERS

KATSUHIRO ASAGIRI is President of IPS Japan, a member of the Inter Press Service Group. Asagiri obtained his Master's degree in Development Administration from Western Michigan University. In 1992, he was appointed staff writer and editor on development related issues for a monthly magazine. From 2002-2004, he was Deputy Secretary General of the WYPS Japan office, organizing international symposia on themes such as interfaith dialogues and preparing to launch IPS Japan. He is also president of Global Cooperation Council for Asia-Pacific and Tokyo correspondent and Bureau Chief of InDepthNews Asia-Pacific.



SHINICHI HISADOME is the director of the International News Desk at the *Tokyo Shimbun*. He joined the paper in 1984 and started his career as a reporter on city news. He mainly worked in the Economic News Desk before being transferred to the International News Desk with posts to Washington from 2005 to 2008, and once again from 2011 to 2013. Upon returning to Tokyo in 2013, he was named Deputy Editor at the International News Desk.



KAORI HITOMI manages the TV operations of AP Tokyo since last November. She has been with the TV section of Associated Press for over 17 years, first as a field producer based in Tokyo, then overseeing news planning of the TV operation in Asia and Pacific region – based in Bangkok and covering the world from Antarctica to Afghanistan – covering such news stories as the late 90's Asian economic crisis, the World Cup held in Japan and South Korea, Japan-North Korea abductee related issues, the 3/11 disaster in Japan as well as various political events.



ITSUO KUMAKURA is an editorial writer for the *Chunichi Shimbun* and *Tokyo Shimbun*. He joined the *Chunichi Shimbun* in 1982 and worked as a journalist in branches in Hamamatsu, Gifu, and Nagoya, before joining the foreign news department of the *Tokyo Shimbun* in 1994. He was posted to Bonn, Germany, between 1995 and 1998, and returned to the foreign news department before a second posting to Germany, this time to Berlin in 2004. From 2010 to 2014, he held a position in the foreign news department.

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