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The Nippon Foundation

No.1(1)

GFRS ISSUES SERIES

Rethinking the Dynamics of Japanese Media

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PREFACE

This booklet is the text of the first media seminar, one of the Issues Series conducted as part of the activities by Global Foundation of Research and Scholarship. The series is supported by Nippon Foundation.

The Issues Series is designed to shed light on various problems which Japan faces, through discussion and debate among members of the public, with the aim of improving society.

This seminar focusing on reform of Japanese media was held at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan on February 24, 1998.

Under the general theme of "Rethinking the Dynamics of Japanese Media," seminar participants also discussed as sub-topics "The Changing World Media Context," "Japanese Mass Circulation Newspapers: Journalistic Triumph or 'Grotesque' Thought Machines?," "The 'Japanese Model' of Newspapering vs. the 'American Model' vs. the 'Asian Model'" and "What is 'Press Freedom? What is 'Press Responsibility?'"

Mr. Edward Neilan was invited as a moderator of the seminar which was attended by 13 foreign and Japanese reporters and magazine editors and media-related experts.

The first seminar was very successful with heated discussions and candid opinions from the participants.

February, 1998.

EDWARD NEILAN PROFILE

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Former Foreign Editor, the Washington Times, and Bureau Chief, Northeast Asia.

Foreign correspondent assignments in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong for Copley News Service and Christian Science Monitor; White House correspondent.

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Books:

“The Future of the China Market: Prospects for Sino-American Trade,” American Enterprise Institute-Hoover Institution, 1974.

“One Korea: Prospects and Problems for Reunification,” Si-sa-yong-o-sa Inc., Seoul, 1992.

“Asia EXTRA!: Asia’s Dynamic English Language Press” (under preparation).

Magazine and professional journal articles:

Far Eastern Economic Review, The Atlantic Monthly, Harper’s, Parade, The New Republic, Asia Journal of Communication, Quill, Editor & Publisher.

Awards:

Overseas Press Club of America, Citation for Excellence, Reporting from China.

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1. KEYNOTE SPEECH

Edward Neilan: These are extremely interesting times for journalists and journalism. I am very glad to meet you tonight. Thank you for your participation in the seminar.

I happened to see an article when I was reading a newspaper this morning. To my disappointment, another US old daily newspaper went bankrupt. The newspaper was named *the Nashville Banner* with 120 years of history.

I would like to make a small comment on the incident.

The city of Nashville where this newspaper was located has just become a National Football League Franchise. The city has considerable finance to buy the franchise, however, it did not want to support the prestigious newspaper.

Traditional approaches to gathering the news are being challenged by the internet, whose online services are envied for their 24-hour ability to report but whose veracity and sourcing are still suspect.

The situation is being played out dramatically on the public stage in the United States in the case of the White House intern who supposedly had an affair with the President who allegedly asked her to lie about it.

The lines between news and entertainment and tabloid gossip have become blurred. Questions of privacy and prudence are raised.

What is news anyway?

One, journalist, Mort Rosenblum of the Associated Press, has written a book titled "Who Stole The News?" which provocatively examines the state of affairs in the so-called CNN age.

Against the backdrop of changes generally we are narrowing our focus tonight to "Rethinking the Dynamics of Japanese Media." Believe me, there is plenty to talk about on that subject.

I won't apologize for my presumptiveness as a foreigner in raising some points of criticism about the Japanese press. I hope to enrage you sufficiently to lead to some spirited discussion later on.

Going back to President Clinton's scandal, when Paula Jones steps forward to charge American President Bill Clinton with making improper sexual advances, newspapers from Washington D.C. to Honolulu to Tokyo run the story. There are

denials, explanations, embellishments and finally the case is taken to court or dropped.

When a Chinese woman spy is linked directly to Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and causes near-panic among Tokyo security agencies not so much on sexual promiscuity grounds as on the possibility that national security has been compromised, Japan's "kisha clubs" go into action and agree to suppress the story.

That's what happened recently when the *Shukan Bunshun*, of the prestigious Bungei Shunju group, conducted a new investigation that confirmed old rumors that Hashimoto had a long-time acquaintance with a Chinese foreign ministry female interpreter. She was in fact a well-trained spy agent working at the second division of the Beijing City Security Bureau.

The magazine ran the results of its investigation in its September 11 issue and demanded that Hashimoto clarify accumulated evidence. The magazine appealed for an explanation on the grounds that the Japanese people needed to be reassured that national security with regards to China had not been breached.

The trouble with the magazine's argument is that most of the Japanese people didn't even know about the case. The "kisha club" of reporters assigned to each ministry and important office—in this case the Prime Minister's office—"agreed" not to publish the story.

So much for freedom of the press in Japan. Or is it a case of Asian values vs. Western values?

All the talk of reform in Japanese political and public life misses a prime target: the press.

From the kisha clubs to the fact that in Japan you can't buy a newspaper at a convenience store—you either subscribe or buy it at a railway station kiosk—the press is crying to be deregulated from controls imposed by the industry itself.

Japanese Mass Circulation Newspapers: "Journalistic Triumph" or "Grotesque Thought Machines?"

It was from Professor Keiichi Katsura of the University of Tokyo's Center for Communications that I first heard the descriptive "grotesque" to describe the implications of the massive circulations of the leading Japanese daily newspapers;

particularly *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun* each with over 10 million circulation daily counting morning and evening editions.

“Grotesque” because such large circulations tend to inhibit rather than encourage variety of thought and opinion, supposedly a hallmark of democracy.

Japan has about 120 daily newspapers and the United States has about 1,500. The largest circulations in the U.S. are one or two million for *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*, maybe *Los Angeles Times*.

Besides being massive opinion machines, these mass circulation papers in Japan are wonderful business operations.

As I mentioned earlier, by emphasizing subscription sales rather than single copy sales, daily returns are reduced, cutting costs. I once suggested to a Tokyo English-language daily that it sell copies in convenience stores. Can't do it because of regulations.

There are nearly 400,000 workers in the newspaper delivery system and they have a lot of clout in the industry. The tail wags the dog, you could say.

The whole weird concept of “newspaper holidays”—said to be designed to give these delivery personnel a day off—is for the benefit of the delivery man not the reader or customer.

Does the news stop on a newspaper holiday?

Television news delivery continues. Internet news delivery continues.

Who stole the news? Perhaps it was the delivery people through their newspaper holiday.

By the way, *The Japan Times* costs 160 yen per copy if you can find a place to buy it. That's about US\$1.25. *Washington Post* costs 25 cents and most papers cost 50 cents. Why? *Japan Times* uses the *Asahi Shimbun* delivery system.

This pricing system overall is under review and we may find some small change soon.

The Japanese Model of Newspapering vs. the American Model vs. Asian Model

The kisha club system whereby reporters on a beat get together and decide what should go into a story is the most obviously questionable part of the Japanese news flow.

Foreign agencies have fought their exclusion from certain ministry press conferences and there have been some improvements, but not enough.

By some calculations, one could say that China's government is running Japan's approach to foreign correspondents. Japan's major newspapers each have more than 30 foreign correspondents based in news centers around the world.

But none in Taiwan. (Except for Sankei Shimbun) Why?

Beijing said if you want to have a bureau here, in you can't have one in Taiwan.

Lately Japanese papers have tried to get around the "deal" by basing an extra man in Hong Kong who travels frequently to Taipei.

Back home, another way to loosen up Japanese journalism would be to promote the "byline" system to show who wrote the new story.

And eliminate management interference in editorial decision-making. One paper banned any reporting of activities of "all NGOs" (non governmental organizations) because someone "upstairs" thought NGOs were too much bother.

What Is Press Freedom? What Is Press Responsibility?

In its latest report on the press freedom situation, the New York-based Freedom House said there were five nations in Asia with a free press (Japan, South Korea, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Taiwan). It listed 12 others as partly free and 19 not free at all.

The definitions of press freedom vary widely and basically the ratings have to do with killings or journalists' imprisonment.

Lately there is a phenomenon seen around the world of "insult laws" where government officials sue a reporter and his paper if they feel they have been insulted. Many of these countries claim they have a free press, but then permit legal action against journalists indiscriminately.

An editor of Singapore's leading newspaper said he has never been told what and what not to print. He just "knows" what will keep him out of trouble. Carried to its fullest extent, this is rampant self-censorship.

Many are watching the situation in Hong Kong to see if press freedom there will be affected by last July's handover to Chinese administration.

There seems to be a creeping self-censorship but so far little direct crackdown or suppression.

Conclusion: Japan's Media Can Improve

The problems craving solution in Japan's media mix are mostly institutional. Neanderthal regulations inhibit development of better reporters and editors, more newspapers, more variety of opinion and better news judgment.

What is needed is for more people in the business to think about the problems and their possible solutions.

Technically, Japanese newspapers are in the front rank. You can buy a same-day Japanese newspaper in San Francisco and New York through the wonders of satellite technology. More such advances are on the way.

The Washington Post bought its newest printing presses from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. That's a story in itself.

2. DISCUSSION

A: I would like to make a comment on several issues which Mr. Neilan has raised in his earlier keynote speech.

Mr. Neilan's remarks on kisha clubs were mild and handled the issue in a gentleman-like manner. He said that there was some improvement for foreign news services to obtain news by attending kisha clubs. My basic question is why do kisha clubs need to exist?

Why can't individual reporters have access to the Ministry of Finance for his own reporting and interviewing officials in charge? Almost all reporters have known that Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto has been involved in the housing loan institution's scandals. Even though it is fact, none of reporters can be able to interview him, nor investigate into the scandal, even not been able to reach the kisha club at the ministry. We are frustrated with the system.

Besides this incident, there are many disadvantages of a kisha club. I would like to question Japanese reporters whether they ever tried to obtain their own information and investigate into questionable acts which involved leaders in government and industries. Or have they worked together to shed light on scandals?

I am not intending to blame the Japanese government for the kisha club system. I understand that it is the responsibility for the government to protect its interest by keeping negative information confidential and protect high-ranking administrators for its sake. Blame should be on reporters. Why have not reporters demanded to discard the kisha club system to preserve their freedom in reporting? Why have not they walked away from the system for individual reporting? No challenge from Japanese reporters makes me frustrated and question their credibility.

Further on this issue, through my talks with several Japanese reporters, I feel that all of them are opposed to the kisha club system, however, there have been no actions taken by them to correct or abandon the system.

This is another episode to tell you my reporting experience on the Gulf War. I was in Iraq to report the Arab Summit one month before Iraq invaded Kuwait. I met a group of six Japanese reporters who were actively in discussion in a working press room on what issues should be reported for their newspapers by sorting out materials obtained at the summit. Every reporter wanted to follow the guideline of

reporting formed by the group. These reporters on one hand are opposed to the kisha club system.

It is my question that any official protest has not been raised against this collusion. I might miss the point of the notion of Japanese harmony which is different from one in my own country. I guess that Japanese harmony means that everyone has to do the same thing as others.

Neilan: I would like you to make your comments on the kisha club system. Is this system a result of customs or casual form, or culture and institution? Does this system benefit or not? Any comments?

B: My comments will not directly refer to the kisha club system. I am not opposed to the fact that reporters want to share ideas with other counterparts and follow the same ideas. Looking into American reporting, we can see the similar situation. Take an example for US presidential campaigns, there is a widely known episode. All reporters in the campaign are very concerned about choosing right leads of their stories. In this case, reporters are nervous of not being on the right track in issues. I can say that there are complicated situations where reporters are placed.

The reality surrounding Japan's newspapers is intensive competition for scoops among them. Looking at the handling of scoops or exclusives in Japanese leading newspapers, they hold them back until the final moment of deadline while carefully monitoring competitor's reporting on the issue. We should not ignore the scoop competition besides they share some information with competitors through kisha clubs.

I would like to refer to US President Clinton's sexual scandal; Japan's media reporting on this incident treats it as a merely sexual scandal. Results of reporting by American journalists have come up with a similar viewpoint even though there was no prior discussion on the matter. In some occasions, we have seen some questionable reporting without clear responsibilities placed.

Neilan: It was a very interesting view to Japan's media reporting. My experience tells that the White House Press Corps serves very similar in some situations as Japanese kisha clubs. There is certain competition seen among the reporters, at the same time they try to keep on the same track more or less to avoid any serious

mistakes. Basically, it seems the purpose of the systems are different between Japan and the US. Can anyone explain the need of a kisha club?

A: Personally, I do not necessarily think of the US reporting method as a good model. Take *The Washington Post* as an example. The newspaper tackled various issues including Nixon and Clinton in hope of winning the Pulitzer Prize. The public is gaining better capability to recognize good and useful reporting and junk reporting. A *Washington Post* reporter shattered his reputation with a forged report, and some ten years were taken to recover from the scandal.

A problem which Japan faces is that the functions of legislation, administration and judiciary are not working independently. This is an institutional shortcoming. Regulations for approval of membership for kisha clubs are not clear. Journalism does not fulfill its role of social guard. I did not mean that no reporting was based on investigation.

There are many problems remaining unsolved in connection with the suicide of Shokei Arai, Diet member. In another incident, a sarin gassing in Matsumoto, an innocent local man was accused as the prime suspect of the sarin gassing. Without solid evidence to establish his crime, media attacked him in every aspect and ruined his life. He and his family members have been stripped of human rights by the media.

Neilan: A serious problem of the relations between media and public prosecutor emerged over the Arai suicide. Handling of the incident was one-sided and no further investigation was undertaken by the media. Is there anyone who would like to make a comment on this issue.

C: My comments will not connect to this issue. I would like to give what I think of the kisha club system from a reader's view point. The kisha club does not only restrict foreign media organizations but also Japanese people from obtaining more information from different view points. As mentioned by Mr. Neilan I fully agree with him that there is insufficient investigative reporting in Japan. All newspapers report incidents in the same way unless they are feature stories. Angles of writing articles are standardized and provide the same analysis to the Japanese readers.

I will tell my experience in analyzing all news accounts reported in Japan and the USA in connection with the sexual harassment case which Mitsubishi Motor US subsidiary was involved. I saw a variety of news accounts reported by US journalists who apparently obtained the information by getting around. Meanwhile, some 500 news accounts written by Japanese reporters provided the same tone. The unified report on the sexual harassment affected Japanese readers to conceive their opinions.

In analyzing the Japanese news accounts I found that those reports had never mentioned what happened at the factory. Japanese reporters wrote their reports based on the materials provided by Mitsubishi Motor Company. A variety of American reports indicated how serious problems were involved in the incident. While in Japan, media reports switched the incident to Japan-bashing by twisting the fact which misled Japanese readers. In my conclusion, the nature of kisha clubs with one-way flow of information gives adverse influence to the Japanese public.

D: This is my personal response to why we need the kisha club system. I, myself, am not fully supporting the present kisha club system. I will try to give you a clear view of mine to this issue.

Firstly, it is very convenient for me since a media corner is given by the government. The ministry and agency of which I am in charge are located at a walking distance from the kisha club and I can reach those officials through my kisha club privilege. I have worked at several kisha clubs where I enjoyed great convenience in these aspects.

Secondly, we can avoid competition with magazines which are not allowed to become a member and the members are given advantages to various off-hand information. I can think there are many more advantages for a member of kisha clubs beside those points. I have to admit to justify most parts of criticism on the kisha club system.

However, I would like to draw your attention that it is not always true that all news accounts are written in the same way just because of using the kisha club.

The scene of Japanese reporters' consultation in Baghdad, the reporters' gathering served to help some reporters with little background knowledge of the event from straying from the right track. I have never colluded with my competitors

on what issues should be reported through my several assignments as a foreign correspondent. Collusion is a shameful act as a journalist.

E: I would like to make a comment on the kisha club system. While working as a foreign correspondent in Europe, I have experienced the similar situation as the kisha club system. Journalism society in Europe seems to have local reporter circles, rejecting outsiders.

At a NATO meeting, I attended a press conference given by the Secretary of State of US along with American reporters. The press conference was over and American reporters were taken to another room for further briefing for the background of their issue and cultural aspects from a US government spokesman.

Through these experiences, I think that there are similar systems in Europe and US as Japan's kisha club.

On reporting from Japan by foreign media, I believe there is a certain way that they can approach to the Japanese government for comments. Foreign media are given the opportunities to attend news conferences by the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and even interview those officials.

Regarding a lack of investigative reporting in Japan, this is an issue for the newspaper management to look at, not for reporters. We need enormous funds and time to carry out investigative reporting. Unfortunately, we do not have enough resources—time, personnel and budget.

I understand this problem should be resolved. The most effective way to change the situation is to be given a pressure from outside (Gaiatsu). Even though a weekly magazine did a tremendous job in investigative reporting on Hashimoto's alleged affair with a Chinese spy, it will not be enough to change the prevailing environment where Japanese journalists look at themselves as company employees, not as an enthusiastic individual journalist.

There are many reporters working at kisha club who want to report based on their intensive investigation activities. However, they are restricted from doing so because of tight working schedule and limited budget.

As a reporter, I do not intend to evade my responsibility in the issue: the newspaper industry is not independent, part of the social system. Without outside pressure, nothing will be changed within the industry.

However, Mr. Neilan's remarks on reporters at the kisha club that they were suppressed and lazy are not really true since there are many reporters who wanted to shed light on the scandal.

In my conclusion, the Japanese newspaper industry is not fully independent. The industry would be influenced by active magazine media, which will lead the newspaper industry to reform.

Neilan: Here is my question: Magazines like *Shukan Bunshun* appear to have scooped many issues and they reported with different and fresh angles from those of the newspapers. Do those magazines have more resources than the newspapers in reporting?

E: I think they have more resources than newspapers.

A: I have a different opinion from a previous speaker on the kisha club system. What I wanted to know if executives of newspapers have met to discuss the kisha club system.

It is not a right thing for kisha club reporters to have so easy access to the ministries and agencies for comments. This is a serious question that the kisha club system gives newspapers much advantage in reporting compared to magazines who are not allowed to become members.

The Japanese Embassy seizure by Peruvian terrorists in Lima reminded me of an incident which involved a reporter of Asahi TV Network in Peru. Asahi TV president made an official apology to the Japanese government when its reporter was accused of putting Japanese hostages at risk due to irregular act of leaving behind a tape recorder. In my personal opinion, the reporter should not have been criticized because he tried to gather as much information as possible for the interest of the Japanese public in a scarce reporting environment.

There are no national broadcasting networks in democratic countries which apologized over reporting to the government. In this incident, the Japanese government position of holding back much information for the hostage crisis should be questioned.

This incident has revealed the basic idea of Japanese media toward the government. Important information on the issue seemed to have been controlled by

the government. However, I did not mean by that that Japan is a communist country.

Neilan: Any other opinions on kisha clubs or other matters?

F: It is inappropriate for me to make a comment on this issue since I am not a newspaper reporter, but an editor of a magazine. I agreed with a speaker who denied the accusation of reporters at the kisha club to collude for topics to report for their newspapers. Besides reporters and management, there is an editorial board which has authority to decide its own editorial policy. It is a serious mistake if foreign journalists in Japan think the four leading newspapers in Japan carry articles with the same viewpoint.

We have a good example of recent covering positions on Japan-US defense guidelines by them. Even inside *Asahi Shimbun*, there are many different ideas and viewpoints over the reporting of China's military drill off the Taiwan Strait. Even among *Asahi* reporters, there are pro-China and pro-Taiwan reporters. A reporter flew to Taiwan to interview President Lee Teng-hui. I do not think that Japanese newspapers stand so backward as in the Neanderthal age.

Culture could influence the decision of reporting as well as journalistic ethics. People have different ideas. Is it good to carry a sexual scandal in the front page of influential newspapers? Did it enhance Japanese national interest that a Japanese reporter left his cellular phone to gather further information happening inside the Japanese embassy when the embassy was occupied by Peruvian terrorists? Journalists need to have moral standards as professionals.

Speaking of a sexual scandal, French media ignored that late president Francois Mitterand had a child out of his marriage. Is there a good reason for Japanese newspapers to report Hashimoto's scandal like American media reports everything about its president's sexual allegations?

A: I could think that Japanese journalists are required to report in line with its social standards. French and American reporters should have their own social and moral standards in reporting. However, the Clinton scandal does not only involve a sexual scandal, and also possible law violation and law suit.

Prime Minister Hashimoto could have relations with a Chinese woman. Japanese people have right to know how thoroughly his relation with the woman was conducted.

Since he is head of Japan and was accused of possible risk of the national security. This matter is not in comparison of reporting of sexual scandals between Japan and the US. This incident could threaten Japan's leading national strategy.

Neilan: Reports on China's missile drills off the Taiwan Strait by *Asahi Shimbun* were highly evaluated, in my opinion. Coverage of foreign affairs by Japanese newspapers is better than on domestic affairs. In particular, reports on China appear straight forward. China was stunned with Japan's bold media covering, which caused China to cancel the bilateral annual media exchange program between the two countries. We can see some signs of improved Japanese media reports.

D: I would like to explain how the China program was cancelled. The cancellation was initiated by the Japanese party, not by Chinese counterpart. China refused to accept a Japanese reporter as a delegate, who was actively reporting Taiwan-China affairs.

Neilan: I got the information about the incident in a newsletter which was published by *Nihon Hoso Kyokai*, the Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association. The information could be confused at some point.

D: I would like to know whether you believe that the reporters at Prime Minister kisha club had agreed not to report the Hashimoto involvement with the Chinese woman. In fact, the incident had not been reported. Has it really been agreed by them?

A: Not referring to the Chinese woman's case, I have been puzzled that intensively covering incidents like a crime involving in a corporate racketeer and a security company suddenly disappeared from media. Any further follow-up stories are not available. Please explain to me this strange circumstance in media.

Neilan: Responding to this (Chinese spy) matter, I tried to seek an explanation from the spokesman in charge of the Prime Minister kisha club and no comment was received. We are not quite sure what no response meant since no further inquiry was made. We should not have ruled out no response as indication of confirmation of the allegation.

The Hashimoto scandal was widely covered by foreign correspondents in Japan. This issue is expected to become an agenda for question at the Diet committee. We have to admit that there are insufficient follow-up stories on this issue. Readers are not generally willing to see sexual scandals on the front page, however, the nature of the story contains the seriousness of leak of Japan's national interest. How can we treat this matter which should be reported as a low key news account?

G: Japan has no national secrets. Mr. Hashimoto was a diet member when his relation with the lady was started, not a cabinet member.

Neilan: Official records have been filed about her job in the court in China. Her responsibility was that of an intelligence agent monitoring foreign embassies in Beijing. This is a good piece to cover her contact. It is difficult to understand why *Yomiuri Shimbun* did not cover it. I would fire a reporter who did not cover such valuable news.

H: I have been assigned in Japan for four and a half of years. Strange enough, I have not seen any coverage on ultra-rightists propaganda activities in the street. The noise and aggression is scaring and violence disrupts social peace. Is there any restriction to cover the activities?

Neilan: I have read some feature stories about their activities. Does anyone else have a comment on this?

J: I do not think we have any restriction to cover their activities. Street propaganda by rightists is a daily matter. Nothing special to cover.

This is another issue. I am working at the editorial research department of *Yomiuri Shimbun* I can see the principal problem lying with Japanese journalism,

which is that Japanese journalists are rather part of a company's function than full-fledged journalists.

Their achievements are seldom considered by the management into promotion and salary. Reporters who have many scoops are not paid more than 1,000 yen (US\$8) more compared with reporters who seldom write articles annually. The institutional personnel system does not encourage reporters from actively involving in intensive reporting with new angles. They are more likely to act like bureaucrats who try not to make basic mistakes of missing major news which their competitors are following up.

A life-time employment system still prevails in Japanese newspaper industry although the system seems to start collapsing in other industries.

On the contrary, American journalists are changing their employers according to their achievements. The difference of personnel systems between Japan and the US could affect the independence of journalists. So-called free lance writers bring their unique stories to magazines in exchange for good payment. That stimulates them to work harder to come up with good stories.

I mentioned negative aspects of institutional Japanese newspaper industry, however, all reporters work very hard to meet their responsibilities.

Neilan: Mr. E earlier said that his company did not have as much resources as magazines, enabling them to conduct investigative reporting. Are reporters who had a scoop awarded with a cash present from the management?

J: Practically, we do not have the award payment except those official awards from the editorial director and the president. Cash from those awards are gone with one dinner.

K: I missed the earlier discussion since I joined late. Would you kindly tell me the reason why Hashimoto's involvement with a Chinese woman was not reported in Japanese newspapers even though the story was prominently carried in *Shukan Bunshun*. I am very much interested in this story and the development of reporting decisions of different media.

A: The issue was much discussed and we have not found the reason why the story was not reported in Japanese newspapers.

K: Newspapers had not reported the story. Are there good reasons for that?

G: As I explained earlier in this seminar. Firstly, Japan has no national secret. Secondly, Mr. Hashimoto was not in the prime minister's office when his relations started with her. It is a custom that the governments such as China and Russia to offer women to Japanese politicians for their diplomatic advantages.

A: Mr. Hashimoto met the Chinese woman in 1991 and their relationship started in 1992. Looking at Japanese political world, it is a custom that the constituencies of senior diet politicians will be handed over to their children. Foreign governments analyze who will assume influential posts long in advance and they try to establish advantageous relations with them.

G: You got my point. I think that those foreign governments aim to obtain financial aid by blackmailing them to reveal personal relations rather than obtaining national intelligence.

Neilan: This issue certainly has high news value from a journalist's viewpoint since solid information is available while the reporting could violate regulations which protects dignity of leaders.

Thank you for attending the first series of the GFRS media seminars and for making valuable opinions. I will expect more discussion on media issues in the future.

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