Middle East to Far East: the Washington Post's Anna Fifield profiled

Are journalists losing their jobs for not being pro-government?

The Essential Cinema Club: and you're already a member

Journalism and TWITTER ...

... For better or worse
At 400 kilometers above the Earth, failure is not an option

Orbiting the Earth at an altitude of 400 kilometers since the 1980s, the International Space Station surely ranks among the supreme technological achievements of humanity. And NSK is proud to be aboard with a variety of components that continue to meet exacting standards of performance that are literally out of this world. In orbit, failure is not an option. To make it in space, components must be able to function for decades in a zero-gravity vacuum while withstanding extreme swings in temperature. It’s just the kind of tough spec we love at NSK,
THE MONTH OF APRIL heralds spring and a new fiscal year in Japan. The positive sentiment of this season represents the mood in the FCCJ following the March General Membership Meeting, when Members overwhelmingly voted to approve the Board’s settlement ending the four-year-long lawsuit by union staff members. In addition to this good news, the Board also received GMM approval for the fiscal 2016 budget, the continued services from Meiji, a company that will direct our scheduled Club move to new premises in 2018, and a new set of regulations on accepting donations under our kokki status that has paved the way for financial contributions under tax-free conditions for the donor.

I would also like to take this opportunity to mention, with some pride, the unprecedented response of the almost 200 votes and proxies from Members collected at this GMM. Perhaps this was the result of my last column that whined about the lack of interest about Club affairs among Regular Members or maybe it was the hard work of our staff and Board Members who resorted to calling to alert voting Members about their participation. Regardless, the outcome was indeed very impressive and, obviously, journalist Members do care about the FCCJ.

I strongly believe this season also marks a decisive turn towards a positive future. As this Board’s term winds down over the next few months, I can say this year has been a roller coaster ride that we have faced with gusto. During the last few months in office, as president, I would like to target a few other important goals, with my priority being to find realistic solutions. Key committees led by the Board Members will continue to devote much of their time in these directions: tackling the organization’s shaky financial health by embarking on finding solutions; participating in an ongoing membership debate to protect our traditional journalist character based on accountability and transparency; and, high on our agenda – looking more closely at the organization’s shaky financial health by embarking on finding solutions. Key committees led by the Board Members will continue to devote much of their time in these directions: tackling the organization’s shaky financial health by embarking on finding solutions; participating in an ongoing membership debate to protect our traditional journalist character based on accountability and transparency; and, high on our agenda – looking more closely at the conditions of the scheduled Club move.

I have made a special promise to meet more of the Associate Members who play an important role in this organization. As their numbers increase, I would like to ask these Members to make their voices heard. Requests for change, especially on issues such as increasing the amount of information in Japanese, for example, would be most welcome for consideration by the FCCJ management.

In closing, I would like to invite all our Members to attend some of the many international events at the Club – plans for the calendar now include library book breaks featuring foreign authors writing in Japanese. In addition, with keeping in the spirit of bringing a more Asian atmosphere to the FCCJ, please keep May 27 open for an upcoming South Asia entertainment event. Later this fall we will also hold a much-awaited Taiwan Night.

Enjoy the heady days of spring!

– Suvendrini Kakuchi

THE NUMBERS

The number of international visitors to Japan in 2015

19.73m

Estimated number of international visitors to Japan in January 2016

1.85m

Estimated number of Chinese visitors to Japan in January 2016

475,000

The number of nights spent in Japan by foreign tourists as a fraction of the number of nights spent in hotels and inns by all tourists

7.7

Comparison of hotel occupancy rates in Osaka Prefecture and Tokyo

Hotel Chany

85.2%

82.3%

Hotel Tokyo

80%

77%

Spending by foreign visitors to Japan in 2015

¥3,480,000,000

¥32,100,000,000

2014 duty-free revenue of the 27 airports run by the central government

Sources: Nikkei Asian Review, Asahi Shimbun, Japan Tourism Marketing Co., the Japan Times

FROM THE ARCHIVES

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

“...one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind,” were the unforgettable words uttered by Neil Armstrong as he stepped onto the moon’s surface on July 21, 1969. He recounted that moment at our Club on Aug. 5, 1971, and no doubt faced questions about the inaudible article “a” before “man,” which NASA’s transcript continues to show in brackets. Then president of the FCCJ, Pierre Bisaud (AFP) is seated to his left; to his right is Bill Shinn (Sino News Agency), who was a key negotiator in our move to the Yurakucho Denki Building in 1976 and Club president in 1976-77.

Neil Armstrong was born in Ohio on Aug. 5, 1930. As a U.S. Navy pilot, he flew 78 missions during the Korean War, and went on to become a test pilot, aerospace engineer and astronaut. It was on Armstrong’s second and last space flight, as commander of Apollo 11, the first manned mission to the moon in July 1969, that he and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon. They spent two-and-a-half hours outside the spacecraft while colleague Michael Collins remained in lunar orbit. All three were highly honored with numerous awards after their safe return to Earth.

Armstrong retired from NASA in 1971, after which he became an educator and business spokesman. His visit to Japan and to the FCCJ came a bit more than two years after his walk on the moon and soon after his retirement.

Unlike several other former astronauts who went into politics, with John Glenn being the best known, Armstrong spurned overtures from the major political parties. However, he reportedly favored states’ rights and frowned upon the U.S. becoming the “world’s policeman.”

He died on Aug. 25, 2012 at the age of 82, as a result of complications following coronary artery bypass surgery. A quote from his family sums up the man: “For those who may ask what they can do to honor Neil, we have a simple request. Honor his example of service, accomplishment and modesty, and the next time you walk outside on a clear night and see the moon smiling down at you, think of Neil Armstrong and give him a wink.”

[In a personal note, an overseas trip prevented me from attending the professional luncheon for Armstrong, something I truly regret. I felt a certain kinship, since I had flown with pilots like him during my years as an aircrew member in the U.S. Navy (1947-1956). My Korean War experiences, although not comparable with Armstrong’s as a fighter pilot, had us flying over much the same terrain during my 79 missions as a radioman, radar operator, and aerial gunner.]

– Charles Pomarey

Source:
Japan Times
As a tool for journalists, tweeting has as many good points as bad. But it’s definitely not for the faint of heart.

I tweeted last October along with a link to a 10-minute YouTube clip of a commercial.

The video I linked to starts with the scene of a high school auditorium, where a teacher: Her dreams have been answered, he proudly announces, and from now on those breasts will be produced to improve the user experience have not always worked. And the platform’s other roles, including its use as a distraction from work, have led to a more realistic idea of what Twitter can do and what it is for. Twitter remains essential for journalists. "It’s useful during breaking news stories because it is faster than other news sources," says David McNeill, a writer with the Economist and Irish Times. "The most obvious example was following the earthquake. But I also used it during the Japanese hostage drama last year, and it does put you at the heart of a story." The Washington Post’s Anna Fifield, one of the more prolific tweeters, says that she uses it for following what other journalists are writing. "I focus on Japan and the Koreas, but my territory extends to Southeast Asia and Australasia," she says. "Twitter means I can keep good use of all the eyeballs that are watching the news in these various countries."

At the beginning of the year, we saw those breasts for the first time, and from now on those breasts will be produced to improve the user experience have not always worked. And the platform’s other roles, including its use as a distraction from work, have led to a more realistic idea of what Twitter can do and what it is for. Twitter remains essential for journalists. "It’s useful during breaking news stories because it is faster than other news sources," says David McNeill, a writer with the Economist and Irish Times. "The most obvious example was following the earthquake. But I also used it during the Japanese hostage drama last year, and it does put you at the heart of a story."

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FIFIELD IS ONE OF the many who also use the media as an output platform — both to distribute links to their own stories, and draw attention to stories, topics and events that they believe their followers are interested in. That’s where things can get complicated, as there’s the potential for things to end up unexpectedly and dramatically amplified. One story that you’ve worked on for a few weeks might disappear into Twitter oblivion without even a puff of smoke. Something else that you’ve just tossed out there... well, isn’t that what you’re on a recent trip to Fukushima for?

One tweet that went viral was a shot from TV that showed 'Why has this exploded now?' The caption read: ‘Blender CM’, according to Twitter data, was for a few hours among the top five phrases tweeted in Japan.

An article about the viral activity was published in the weekly Soap, and also appeared on the Yahoo News website. The headline screamed: ‘Why has this exploded now?’ A Blendy ad campaign, from a year ago is currently a huge conversation topic.” It pointed to me as ground zero for the online storm, and its conclusion was: Beware of foreigners. But my contribution was something more than that tweet. The commercial itself was produced and released by Dentsu in the autumn of 2014, and then entered in a creative festival in Singapore a year later. Around the same time, it was uploaded without authorization to YouTube. (Dentsu later removed the video, claiming a copyright issue.)

The credit (or blame) for the commercial going viral has to be shared with Shihoko Fujisawa, who first told me about it and whose anti-trafficking organization Lighthouse helped push the Twitter debate. “The reason it bothered me and all my staff at Lighthouse is that it clearly sexualizes underage girls,” Fujisawa said. “Only Japan makes these kinds of ads.”

THAT THIS BIT OF online anger stemmed from an advert for coffee that’s probably the most controversial image of the nature of Twitter. Says Tom Hornyak, a freelance journalist: “My tweets with the most legs tend to be about some bizarre, funny or controversial event such as the demolition of the Hotel Okura or a funeral for Aibo robot dogs or the Fukushima nuclear disaster. These are usually original or from news sources that haven’t been seen in many other media."

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companies represented included the media executives at the company's headquarters in central Tokyo. According to reports by people who attended, the companies represented included the Yomiuri Shimbun, Sankei, Asahi, and Yomiuri's sibling network along with the nation's biggest broadcaster, NHK.

Writing in the Asahi Shimbun a few days later, journalist Yomiuri's evening news show, "Hodo wa. All told, the prime minister has met on dozens of occasions with the country's top media executives.

Security legislation might lead Japan to becoming embroiled in other countries' wars. By the standards of the sometimes spittle-flecked political clashes on British or American television, the encounter was tame. But Suga's handlers were reportedly furious.

KUNIYA HAS DECLINED TO discuss her removal – though she did provide an off-the-record comment about her resignation lamenting that "expressing things has gradually become difficult." The show had been aduit for years, say insiders; the audience was aging and the format stale. One of Abe's first moves after he returned to power in 2012 was to appoint conservative media allies to NHK's board. Kazuto Momii, the broadcaster's new president, subsequently raised eyebrows by questioning its independence. This new environment encouraged some censorship at the broadcaster and left little space for the kind of critical journalism Kuniya represented, says Yasuo Onuki, a former senior reporter at NHK. "Of course, it is difficult to prove that she has been fired. The government is very good at keeping his decision to quit. Producers connected to the show and who have spoken anonymously, however, relate months of pressure against Furutachi's on-air criticism of the Abe government. A cli-max of sorts came after Shigesaki Koga, a former industry minister bureaucrat, famously held up a sign saying "I am not Abe" to show his disagreement with the government's handling of a hostage crisis involving Japanese citizens.

A few months later, Koga provided one of the year's television highlights when he claimed live on-air that his contract was being terminated because of pressure from the prime minister's office. His aim, he insists, was to rally the media against government interference. Instead, the show's producer, TV Asahi, apologized and promised tighter controls over guests. "It shows that if you repeat a lie often enough people will believe it," he says.

Kishi used his nightly spot on News 23 to question legislation last year expanding the nation's military role overseas. His on-air fulminations prompted a group of conservatives to take out newspaper advertisements accusing him of violating impartiality rules for broadcasters. In January, he announced he was stepping down. When his contact ended in March, "Nobody said directly I was going because of my comments – that's not how it works," says Kishi. He blames a whispering campaign by Suzuki. He gives off-the-record briefings to journalists containing some criticisms of me," he says. "These comments are relayed back to the management and it goes from there. Nothing is left on the record."

Backroom political pressure on the media is as old as prime ministers and prime ministers, says Michael Cook, a political scientist at Temple University in Tokyo. "You cannot pretend that there is a media watchdog," he says. "There is no concept of conflict of interest at all." It seems only sensible to speculate, then, if they are related to the disappearance from the airwaves this month (March) of Japan's most outspoken liberal TV shows. Ichiro Furutachi, the salty presenter of evening news show "Hodo Station," Shigeru Kishi, who had a regular slot on rival TBS, and Hiroko Kuniya, who helmed NHK's flagship investigative program "Close-up Gendai" for two decades.

The weekly press weekly blamed Kuniya's downfall on last summer with Yoshihide Suga, the government's top spokesman and a close aide of Abe. Kuniya had the temerity to ask an unsolicited question on the possibility that the new government of trying to destroy the free media. At the FCCJ on March 24, however, some were equally as critical of broadcasters and newspapers for failing to stand up to the government. "There has always been political pressure," said Tabara, a veteran reporter with TV Asahi, responding to Torigoe's criticism of government intimidation. "It's not so much about political pressure, it's about deterioration of the media. To me, the most serious problem is self-restraint by higher-ups at broadcast stations."

Producers at TV Asahi and NHK say the impact of the meetings between Abe and their bosses has been to weaken their organizations’ ties to a political party with the government. The Asahi's critical coverage of the Abe government arguably climaxed, for example, on May 20, 2014, when it published a story based on the leaked tape of Masako Yoshida, the manager of the Fukushima Daiichi plant during the 2011 meltdown. The scoop claimed that 650 panicked on-site workers had chased reactors and radioactivity into the crisis.

The Asahi's claim, challenging the popular view of the workers as heroes who risked their lives to save the plant, was strongly contested by the industry, the government and Asahi rivals, particularly the right-leaning Sankei Shimbun, which blamed the confusion at the plant on March 15-16, 2011 on misinformation. Finally, on Sept. 11, 2014, Tada-kazu Kimura, the Asahi's president announced the retrac-tion of the article, the dismissal of the paper's executive editor Nobuyuki Sugura and punishments of several other editors. The highly damaging announcement pleased Asahi critics and stunned journalists at the Asahi who say they were kept in the dark beforehand.

LAWYERS, JOURNALISTS AND ACADEMICS expressed puzzlement at Kishu's retraction. While the former head of the Yoshiida testimony were open to interpretation, there was little doubt that despising on-site plant workers had undermined their duties during the worst of the crisis. "The content of the article and the headline were correct," insisted Yuichi Kado, a lawyer who blames the retraction on political pressure. An independent press monitor might have settled the controversy but the Asahi relied on its in-house Press and Human Rights Committee to probe the story and discipline those behind it.

The Asahi's media watchdog might have been a trigger, but another even more damag-ing retraction a month earlier, over a series of articles in the 1990s on "comfort women," Seiji Yoshida, the source for some of these stories, had long been discredited. But the Asahi's retraction was years overdue. Yet, the reaction on the political right was not only to question the newspaper's entire reporting but to blame it for damaging Japan's reputation abroad and poisoning ties with its neighbors. It was notable that throughout the Asahi's difficulties, Abe sided with Kishi's critics and denounced the media as a broad, pluralist media – including those that don't always agree with the government line. That's because the govern-ment has little tolerance for criticism. Seiji Koga, a former senior reporter with the Asahi, a political commentator and colleague of Kishi's, "They view it as a nuisance," he says. "They have a goal and they're going to get there, and the media just gets in the way."

"To me, the most serious problem is self-restraint by higher-ups at broadcast stations."

Koga puts it more bluntly. The government is playing chicken with the media, he says, and winning.
Anna Fifield

A
nna Fifield, the Washington Post's woman in Japan, specializes in reporting from fringe societies, sequestered communities that are cut off from the mainstream. In her distinguished career as a foreign correspondent, Fifield has tried to reveal the inner workings of the two Koreas, Iran, Washington, D.C. and, now, Japan. The focus is a natural fit for the New Zealander, born and brought up in an isolated town “at the bottom of the world.”

Fifield, the first in her family to go to university, covered her bedroom walls with posters from travel agencies instead of pop stars. “I always had an interest in the outside world and wanted to get out,” she said.

After a period working for wire agencies and her local paper, the Rotorua Daily Post, Fifield headed to London in 2001, aged 24. She got work experience at the Financial Times and then a job uploading articles onto the website. “I worked hard and volunteered for all the unpopular jobs on bank holiday weekends.”

A theme that stands out in Fifield’s early career is her formidable work ethic. After a year, she applied for the position of Belgrade correspondent, knowing she “didn’t stand a chance,” but with her eye on an interview with the foreign editor. “I read the Economist Intelligence Unit’s reports on Kosovo and I studied really hard and got an interview.” When the job of Australasia correspondent came up shortly afterwards, she got the nod. Typically, she “worked really hard and wrote as much as I could,” and was rewarded with a staff position in Seoul.

“This was August 2004 and I couldn’t even say hello in Korean, I had never eaten kimchi, I had never been to Asia. It was scary and exciting, and very hard, but I really loved it.” Fifield spent three years covering everything from Samsung to K-pop to human rights, and made several investigative trips to North Korea.

HER NEXT POSTING WAS Tehran. She found it impossible to get a resident’s visa under the Ahmadinejad regime, which was notoriously hostile to foreign journalists, so found herself commuting between Seoul and Tehran. “It was their way to keep me on a short leash, to make me censor myself so that I would always be conscious of the need to get the next visa.”

After a year of the punishing schedule, Fifield moved to Beirut as Middle East correspondent, responsible for Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Iraq. If that beat sounds a little punchy today, back in 2008 it was an easy posting. As soon as she arrived, Lehman Bros collapsed, “so it was very hard to get anything non-financial crisis-related into the FT.”

Blacklisted by Tehran (“I guess I failed the self-censorship test”), Fifield found herself “living on the Med, visiting wineries and writing the occasional story about Hezbollah,” thanks to an unusual period of stability in the Middle East. Lebanon had a stable government, “which it almost never does, Syria was coming in from the cold, everyone had Iraq fatigue, and I couldn’t get into Iran.”

After a year, the FT took notice, and dispatched her to Washington to cover the White House. Fifield missed the Arab Spring by a few months. “I would have felt pretty sorry about that,” she said, “except that I had this little person who was exponentially more fun.” That was her son, born in 2010, and soon a veteran of political campaigns.

U.S. POLITICAL REPORTING, HOWEVER, did not appeal. “I enjoy getting out and talking to real people – dust on boots reporting,” she said. “There are no real people and no dust in Washington.” After four years, fed up with a regime of several daily deadlines to cover all the FT’s global editions, Fifield won a year-long Nieman Fellowship at Harvard, studying how change happens in closed societies, a topic inspired by her experiences in North Korea and Tehran.

“But over the course of that year I realized that I really did love being a foreign correspondent and I needed to get back out in the world,” she said. In 2014, she was back in Asia, this time as Tokyo bureau chief for the Washington Post.

She is supported by translators in Tokyo and Seoul, and her mother, who moved from New Zealand to help Fifield take care of her son. “She enables me to travel at the drop of a hat – I feel very lucky.”

Being a mother has helped Fifield explore a part of Japanese society that would otherwise have been inaccessible. “I am part of a working mum’s group at the school,” she said. “I get to talk to women working in Japanese companies, and hear how difficult it is for them. The kind of changes PM Abe is trying to make doesn’t really address the problem – which is how Japanese men work. How can a mother do a full-time job if her husband is out 17 hours a day? You can open all the day care centers you like but you need to deal with the structural changes, and that is really hard.”

The challenge of change is a perennial theme in Japan, which, while no longer a closed society in the sense of North Korea or Iran, still has strong tendencies towards insularity and isolationism. This is exacerbated, says Fifield, by the shift in focus towards China, which has left Japan “undercovered.”

She intends to fill that gap, with “stories about Japanese people, culture and life – not just politics.”

Lucy Alexander is a freelance journalist and correspondent for the Times.
Rewind: Looking back with our favorite local cinema

2015 was a stellar year for the FCCJ Film Committee, with an impressive lineup, provocative Q&A sessions and appreciative audiences.

by KAREN SEVERNS

The Film Committee (FC) hosted 18 sneak preview screenings last year — 12 narrative films and six documen-
taries, each followed by a Q&A session with the filmmaking team — attracting an audience of over 1,500. The extensive coverage of our Q&As helped raise the profile of several independent features, and many of the titles became box office draws in Japan. Many also went on to receive inter-
national attention, appear on Top Ten lists and reap awards. Some even prompted valuable public dialogue.

The big story in 2015 was the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, and the FC lineup included five directly related works. We also highlighted films about such topics as nuclear energy (Masako Sakata’s Journey Without End) and globalization’s impact on rural populations (Pico de Eíllia’s La Frontera). The Japanese filmmakers who made these films are seeking ways to address the challenges the world faces.

Through film screenings, we can participate in conversations about the future, and I’ll work hard at being the patriarch. “ The film’s star, Koji Yakusho, added, “This is the last film I will make, and I feel this type of thinking was able to save Japan a war, but it is a very, very difficult to end one. ” The film’s director, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, said, “I think the era of the world’s dominant countries is over, and we have to work hard to create a new world. ”

Another Oscar nominee, Joshua Oppenheimer, Skype’d into our Q&A session after The Look of Silence screening in July. This follow-up to his 2013 juggernaut The Act of Killing views the Indonesian genocide of the 1960s from the victims’ point of view. “I realized the soldiers in the Philippines didn’t have any capacity to think about their actions. They were so pressed, so desperate, that they were unable to address this moral dilemma. ”

Across Japan for half a year, and to win the prestigious Bunka-Chou Award for Best Documentary. Oscar-nominated documentarian John Junkerman headed up our June screening of Okinawa: The Afterburn (Okina-
wa:竖裂を在しめ), whose groundbreaking illumination of the island’s continued occupation, violations of human and civil rights, and resistance efforts. The director lived on Okinawa in the mid-1970s, and was struck by “the pervasive and abid-
ing rejection of war among the Okinawans. ” The documentary provides essential historical context for the ongoing U.S.-Japan Flashpoint, and later earned Junkerman the two most important recognitions in Japan for a nonfiction work. Best Documentary awards from Kinema Junpo and the Mainichi Film Awards.

Looking back with our favorite local cinema

APRIL 2016

FCCJ

FCCJ APRIL 2016

Karen Severns is a writer, educator and filmmaker who chairs the FC. See her blog for more on the FC screenings: www.fccj.or.jp/events/calendar/film-screenings/movie-committee-blog.html
The open society is something that we foreign correspondents epitomize, and this threat to openness is what makes foreign correspondents more important than ever,” Emmott said. “The point of foreign correspondents has always been that to better understand foreign countries is to better understand our own. This craft is under attack and we must defend it.”

Defending press freedom can come at a cost, however. William Horsley, the BBC’s bureau chief in Tokyo from 1983-90, said defensiveness and secrecy were common to all governments, but added that more journalists were working in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

“The new normal in journalism is to be watched and to be under attack from you-know-where,” said Horsley, who since retiring from the BBC in 2007 has become an advocate for journalists working in dangerous places.

HORSLEY, THE AUTHOR OF The Sun Sobers Up: The 24-Year Hangover of Journalists Guidebook to Co-operation in Europe’s 2014 Safety of Journalists Guidebook, said about 150 journalists were killed last year worldwide. “But more sinister than that is why journalists are being killed and attacked,” he said. “It’s not only Syria, but also South Korea and, yes, Japan, find themselves up against increasingly illiberal governments.”

Last month, the FCCJ was fortunate to host former Tokyo correspondents with experience from both ends of the digital age and in postings all over the world. They can recall a time when they had to file to a daily deadline, but who would probably never see their work in print until the arrival, weeks later, of an envelope of cuttings kindly collated by a newsroom colleague; and when disgruntled readers had to put pen to paper in a letter to the editor.

But they are familiar, too, with the ever-changing work environment that has forced “print journalists” to become multiskilled – reporters, bloggers, videographers and photographers – all the time under pressure from a growing number of new players and shrinking editorial budgets.

BILL EMOTT, THE ECONOMIST’s Tokyo correspondent from 1983-8, said the globalization of information had, perhaps counter-intuitively, made the role of the foreign correspondent more important than ever. “The world is more transparent, we face more competition in the provision of information, it is harder for politicians and other power holders to say different things to different audiences at home and abroad – as was common in the 1980s – but some things have stayed the same or gone backwards,” said Emmott, who in his book, The Sun Also Sets, predicted the hurting of the Japanese stock-market bubble.

Emmott cited the Eurozone crisis, migration and refugees, Russia and Ukraine as stories that demand cross-border coverage, and added that for much of the media to have been found wanting. “In Europe in that time, our media has, if anything, become more nationalistic, more nation-centered. Far too little “Cross-border and cross-cultural reporting and analysis has happened,” said Emmott, who as editor-in-chief of the Economist oversaw its emergence as the world’s most widely read international news magazine.

Emmott blamed the 2008 financial crisis for placing the media under much more pressure than could have been expected from the collapse of the digital media alone. The very existence of the open society was under threat, he added, from rising xenophobia and nationalism, evident in prevailing attitudes towards migration, trade and security, and embodied by the growing cloud of potus such as Marine Le Pen in France, Nigel Farage in Britain and Donald Trump in the U.S.

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... on April 11 at 6:45pm for I Am a Hero, Japan’s first major movie about an outbreak of the undead. Based on the blockbuster manga series of the same name, the film version is that rare big-budget commodity that manages to be gruesomely frightening, darkly funny and hair-raisingly realistic. It’s anchored by an astoundingly committed star turn from Yo Oizumi, whose everyman character winds up saving the day – maybe. Oizumi will join director Shinsuke Sato and manga originator Kengo Hanazawa for the Q&A session. The film has swept awards at major fantastic film festivals around the world, proving that zombie-film fatigue doesn’t apply when the work is as clever and entertaining as this. Also starring Kasumi Arimura, Masami Nagasawa and an unforgettable high-jumper, the film recasts Mt. Fuji as the last refuge for the living.

(Japan, 2016; 127 minutes; Japanese with English subtitles.)

Color Harmony
Kataezome Art by Fusa Sakamoto

KATAEZOME ART IS A traditional kimono-dyeing technique used on special Japanese paper, which has the feature of allowing the colors to grow deeper and warmer over time: as the years pass, the strong Japanese paper absorbs sunlight and the colors grow clearer and softer, adding to the charm of the works. It’s an effect unique to this Japanese craft.

My work is based on adding color to black-line drawings, creating feelings of depth. The tones and dynamic forms are a characteristic of these modern images.

The subjects of my work are old cities, drawn freely from imagination, in simplified aerial views. And using traditional techniques, modern images featuring motifs such as plants, animals and festivals are also constructed.

Fusa Sakamoto is an artist, illustrator and editor. Born in Tokyo, she was an editor at Frobel-kan Publishing before leaving to become freelance. Her work has been inspired by the more than 30 countries she has visited since 1992. Every year she has held solo exhibitions on these subjects. She has exhibited in the Ukraine, Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Her publications include The Four Seasons of Switzerland in collaboration with Tokyo Shoseki, and Kataezome Art and Kataezome Book, as well as many book cover designs.

By commuter ferry and high-speed launches, a group of FCCJ journalists went island hopping in March to observe the exhibits of the 2016 Setouchi Triennale in a tour organized by Kagawa Prefecture.

Launched in 2010, the Setouchi Triennale – also known as the Setouchi International Art Festival – is a contemporary art festival held every three years on a dozen islands in the Seto Inland Sea.

The exhibition is held over three sessions during the year. The spring session runs from Mar. 20 to Apr. 17; the summer session from July 18 until Sept. 4 and the autumn session from Oct. 8 through Nov. 6.

Clockwise from left: “Olive Island 2” a 360 degree panoramic picture inside an air-dome; “Dream of Olive” – 5,000 locally gathered bamboo sticks by artist Wong Wen Chih; FCCJ members in front of “Red Pumpkins,” by Yayoi Kusama 2006.
LEO LEWIS joined the Financial Times as Tokyo Correspondent in May 2015 after more than a decade reporting in the region for the Times (of London). Most recently, he was the Bureau Chief in Beijing, covering China in the rancorous, scandal-riven years that saw the downfall of Bo Xilai, the rise of Xi Jinping and the spectacle of 20,000 dead pigs floating down the Huang Pu river. Born in the UK, the digital twinkle of video games drew Lewis to Japan from an early age. He later channeled that passion into a degree in Oriental Studies, and first came to Japan as a student in 1994. He has tried his hand at potato, avocado and ginger farming, but has yet to grow anything edible.

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