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THE FOREIGN
CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB
OF JAPAN CLUB
日本外國記者會
The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan

NEWS 360°

**How the media is making use of
the latest camera technology –
from in-the-round to VR**

Around and around: pregnancy struggles continue

Circle the wagons: DeNA scrambles to fix “news” sites

Well rounded: Bloomberg's Andy Sharp profiled

Wheeler dealer: Trump and the Japanese auto industry



> THEME.09
> THE BEARINGS ON THE "BULLET TRAIN"

At 200 km/h, the proudest moment in Japanese technology

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p8

In this issue

The Front Page	
From the President by Khaldon Azhari	4
Collections: Tokyo February weather numbers	4
From the archives	5
Journalism enters the Matrix	6
by Michael Penn	
Difficult conceptions	8
by Sonja Blaschke	
Profile	
Andy Sharp	10
by Gavin Blair	
The "kabuki" of Donald Trump and the auto industry	12
by Roger Schreffler	
Welcome to the post-truth world	14
by Ayako Mie	
Olympic press center plan under fire	15
by Julian Ryall	
Club News	
Exhibition: Dojo Giga	16
by Bujinkan Dojo Sōke, Masaaki Hatsumi	
Join the Film Committee/Last month's screening of Silence	17
New Members/New in the library	

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SONJA BLASCHKE

From the
President

PLEASE ATTEND THE EMERGENCY GMM.

The FCCJ Board of Directors has decided to hold an emergency General Membership Meeting (GMM), seeking Members' votes on a crucial issue facing our Club, which is the proposed move from the current building to a new building three blocks away.

It is possibly going to be the most important GMM in the Club's 71-year history, and I strongly urge all Regular Members to attend.

I urge those unable to attend to give their proxies to a Member whom they trust to listen carefully to arguments presented at the meeting, and to use careful and considered judgement in voting.

I also urge all Members to research the facts for themselves and not rely on the opinion of others. All Members should understand the situation as the wrong decision could potentially place the long-term survival of the Club at risk.

The issue we are facing is that some Members of the current Board and committees believe that the Club faces risks to its financial soundness as a result of increased costs incurred by the proposed move. Furthermore, they feel the character and professional identity might undergo some change because of membership augmentation measures that might result from the move.

In addition, the Food and Beverage Task Force committee says there are "issues" over the proposed new premises from the point of view of design and functionality of the kitchen and service area, although the House and Property committee has been working in extensive meetings weekly with our partner, Mitsubishi Estate, to develop the best designs for our operation.

We have been discussing all of those issues and have explored every possible analysis with legal advice from professionals. I am calling on our membership of the FCCJ to be fully involved as the Club's Articles and Bylaws require it to be in authorizing spending decisions relating to the proposed move.

All issues facing the Club will be discussed at the meeting, and I again urge all members to attend and give attention to the discussion if they want to have a say in the future of the Club. It is essential that the GMM – which is the "sovereign body" of the FCCJ – be fully apprised of and fully debate what is involved, and then make appropriate decisions so we maintain the core mission of the Club.

Since its establishment in 1945, the FCCJ has served as the oasis for generations of foreign correspondents in Japan. Our job is not to compromise our founding principles and values, but to continue our mission as a shining light of freedom.

- Khaldon Azhari

COLLECTIONS

TOKYO FEBRUARY WEATHER NUMBERS

Monthly mean air temperature (°C)

3.6	(1876)
4.3	(1956)
7.2	(2016)



Monthly mean relative humidity

73	(1876)
55	(1956)
56	(2016)

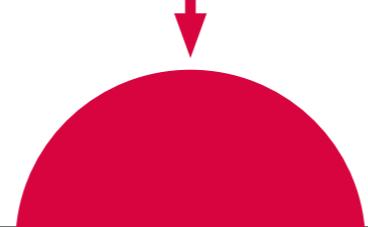
Monthly mean daily maximum temperature (°C)

7.3	(1876)
9.8	(1956)
12.2	(2016)



Monthly mean daily minimum temperature (°C)

-2.6	(1876)
-0.3	(1956)
3.1	(2016)



Monthly mean percentage of possible sunshine

57	(1876)
55	(1956)
51	(2016)

Record maximum temperature in February (°C)

24.9 (1930)

Record minimum temperature in February (°C)

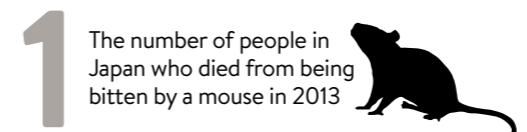
-7.9 (1945)

Deepest February snowfall

1: **33cm** (1951)
2: **27cm** (2014)

+ TRIVIAL DIGITS

1 The number of people in Japan who died from being bitten by a mouse in 2013



24 The number of people in Japan who died from contact with hornets, wasps and bees in 2013



Sources: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Japan Meteorological Agency

FROM THE ARCHIVES

THE MAESTRO WITH THE BATON



Famed conductor/composer/pianist Leonard Bernstein, cigarette in hand, addresses Club members on Sept. 5, 1974. Seated immediately to his left is FCCJ President Max Desfor (AP), who celebrated his 103rd year on this planet last year, and Jack Russell (NBC News), whose death in 2007 made the cover of this magazine. To his right is Bela Elias (Hungarian News Agency), FCCJ 1st VP. Bela, as Acting President while Max was on home leave, would introduce Japan's Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka on Oct. 22 at a controversial event that resulted in Tanaka's eventual resignation (see pages 206~210 in our history book).

Multi-talented, prodigious and versatile, Leonard Bernstein was an early paragon of American-born and educated talent who achieved worldwide acclaim as a pianist, composer, conductor and music lecturer. A long-time director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra who conducted concerts with leading orchestras around the world, he is perhaps best remembered for *West Side Story*, a musical written in 1957 that bridged the gap between classical and popular music. A half-dozen musicals were to flow from his pen.

Eclecticism was characteristic of Bernstein, who drew on Jewish, theatrical and classical works for musical inspiration. Phenomenally creative, he wrote symphonies and other orchestral works, film scores and music for theatrical performances, operas, ballets, chamber music, choral music and music for piano as well as a wide range of incidental music. His lectures on classical music, which appeared regularly on television from the mid-1950s until his death, also reflected his eclecticism.

Bernstein's prolific creativity won him over 20 major awards, including the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Art Association in 1990. He donated the \$100,000 prize to an international project for combining arts with education that took the form of a school in Tennessee some two years after his death. That same year, Bernstein was the key man in establishing the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo as a hands-on prep school for musicians. (His Japan connection had started much earlier, however, when he boosted the career of Seiji Ozawa in the 1960s by appointing him as assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic.)

Bernstein was noted for his long-time social activism, including a 1970 event in his Manhattan apartment to raise money for the legal defense of the Black Panthers. Although that event gave rise to negative press coverage, and the derogatory term of "radical chic," he maintained his intent was to preserve civil liberties, and his career did not suffer.

Two years after his Tokyo visit, he came out of the closet, announced his bi-sexuality, and left his wife to live with a male musical director in San Francisco. However, within a year or so his wife was diagnosed with lung cancer and he returned to her side, caring for her until her death in 1978.

"Lenny," as he was known, after a long and successful career, retired from conducting on Oct. 9, 1990. Five days later, at the age of 72, he died of a heart attack, bringing an end to a most interesting life.

- Charles Pomeroy

From the development of the printing press, radio and television to the computer and mobile phone, technological advancement has often reshaped what it means to report the news. Each of these media has opened up new possibilities for mass communication as they have impacted the content and the very definition of the news itself.

An entirely new generation of media technologies is now clearly destined to reshape the news industry once again – at a minimum adding new dimensions and new methods to journalists' storytelling. At the head of the list are two quickly developing technologies – 360° video and virtual reality, commonly known as VR.

The terms “360° video” and “VR” tend to be used interchangeably in many cases, but while they are, indeed, related concepts, there is an important distinction between them. As the name suggests, 360° video allows the viewer to observe a scene in all directions from the axis of the camera. This includes not only the entire horizontal view but up-and-down as well – the full 360°.

Simple versions of 360° video are already available. YouTube began hosting 360° video in March 2015, and Facebook followed suit in September that year. Last April, YouTube became capable of live streaming such video, with Facebook again playing catch-up in a December 2016 launch. Other platforms, such as

sung. Many of the videos they produce are human interest stories, such as “Daybreak Around the World,” “52 Places to Go: Canada” and “Basking in Butterflies.” But their recent stories also include hard-hitting reportage on subjects such as “Fleeing Boko Haram and Food Shortages,” “Sleeping on Denver’s Bitterly Cold Streets” and “Still Living with Bottled Water in Flint.”

“Part of the *Times*’ core mission is to bear witness to on-the-ground to events as they happen, in order to inform our readers,” says Hopkins. “We see powerful benefits to allowing the viewers to bear witness with us, whether it be a war zone or the site of a protest.”

AN EVEN EARLIER INNOVATOR was the news start-up RYOT, launched in 2012 and later bought out and made a division of the *Huffington Post* in April 2016. By that time, they had already attracted considerable attention for presenting the first 360° news footage of the Nepal earthquake in May 2015 and of war-torn Aleppo in August that year.

RYOT was one of the very first to attempt to grapple with the special technical challenges of dealing with a technology in its infancy, in which entirely new problems crop up and workflows must be created from scratch. Overcoming these difficulties requires a new generation of skilled innovators

The news business is just beginning to react to new advances in 360° video and virtual reality.

Journalism enters the Matrix

by MICHAEL PENN

Twitter and Periscope, are now in the process of joining them.

Presently on the YouTube and Facebook versions of 360° video, one can view a scene in any direction simply by clicking a mouse or using a trackpad. Yet this is neither very impressive nor how the technology is actually meant to be used. Rather, the genuine experience is to view 360° video while wearing a special headset, with the field of view changing as one turns one's head. One is transported, so to speak, into a different world in which one's eyes and mind are experiencing a remote scene.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN 360° video and VR is that, in the former, one may simply observe the scene in all directions, while in the latter, one may in some manner interact with and affect the remote scene which is being perceived. Today's VR thus usually involves some form of animation. For all intents and purposes, 360° video may be considered a transitional technology, and is in fact sometimes referred to as “the gateway to VR.”

News organizations are already employing 360° video on their digital platforms. Internationally, the most aggressive pioneers are the *New York Times* and *Huffington Post*. The *New York Times* launched its full “Daily 360” series on Nov. 1, 2016, with a statement “that 360° videos offer a new way to experience the journalism of the *New York Times*. These immersive videos put you at the center of the scene.”

Marcelle Hopkins, the executive director for 360° video for the *Times*, says that “dozens of reporters” are currently using the special 360° video gear provided to them by Sam-

like Maria Fernanda Lauret, a VR “stitcher” editor.

Most 360° video today is shot with multiple cameras simultaneously – often five or six of them – whose images must then be “stitched” together at the edges in order to create the illusion of a single scene occurring in all directions around the viewer. Lauret’s job is to make those stitches as seamless and unobtrusive as possible. “Depending on the distance between the Virtual Reality rig and the subject of your scene,” says Lauret, “the intersection of cameras is noticeable – especially if there’s an object in motion around the camera. My job as a stitcher is to make these lines invisible for the viewers.”

REPORTING IN 360° ALSO has its own set of challenges, such as the location of the person shooting. The camera must be set up in the center of the action with the shooter then hiding somewhere out of view, controlling the recording by means of a remote device – or become part of the shot. In the meantime, they must hope that a passerby doesn’t abscond with expensive camera gear, or simply accidentally knock over the rig while it is filming a dramatic news event.

Some basic 360° cameras have now become relatively inexpensive and are within easy reach of the journalist. The Ricoh Theta S is among the most popular and easy-to-use of these consumer-level cameras, and this is precisely what the *Japan Times* has been using in its own initial experiments with 360° photography and video. (Development has been much more sluggish in the Japan-based news media.)

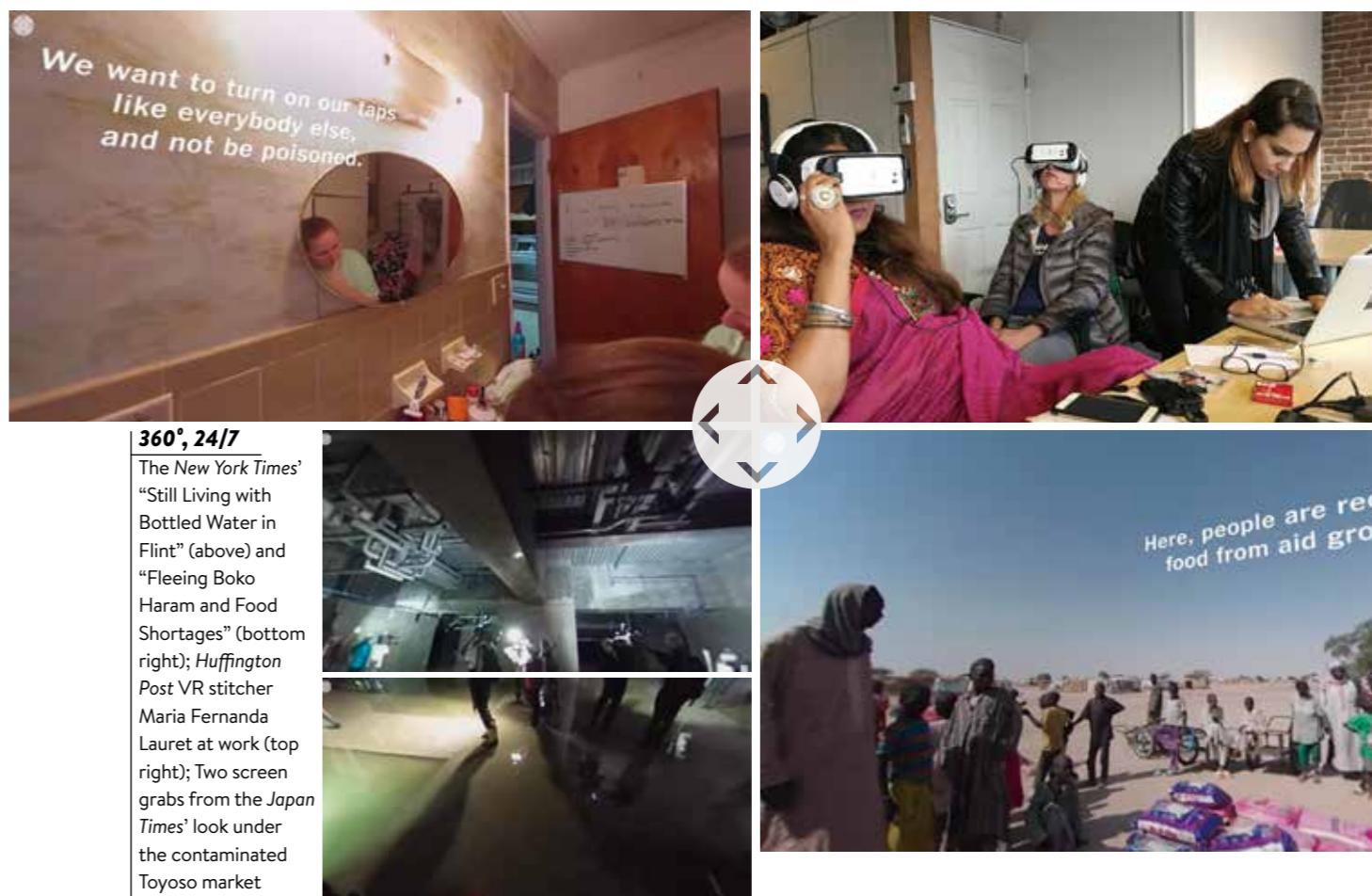
“I had seen what the *New York Times* was doing,” says Mark

Thompson, the deputy managing editor and senior web editor of the *Japan Times*. “I was more excited about the Virtual Reality stuff, and this seemed to be kind of a stepping stone to that. [We started] just to kind of get our feet wet.”

Thompson found a subject that was both newsworthy and ideal for the new media. “I saw the potential for news when we got invited to check out the basement of the new Toyosu market, the first time for the public to actually see the basement,” he says, referring to the controversial move of the Tsukiji Fish Market, which has been delayed by Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike due to potential contamination issues. “We did a video of that and I thought that was a perfect application. You could see with your own eyes how high the water was in the basement.”

The gaming experience already demonstrates that VR can be very intense for participants. As Masaki Tsukakoshi of Sony’s Corporate Communications department says, “Many people using Virtual Reality can be seen to be physically reacting to the environment and scenes that they are experiencing within it.” Being surrounded by a frightening or dangerous environment – such as war zones or disaster areas – could be a traumatic experience for some viewers.

Along these lines, some of the pioneering uses of VR for journalism have been created by Nonny de la Peña, who has produced content taking participants to such places as the streets of Los Angeles as a man collapses due to hunger, or to Aleppo where children are playing when a rocket lands nearby. De la Peña describes her work as “immersive jour-



360°, 24/7
The *New York Times*’ “Still Living with Bottled Water in Flint” (above) and “Fleeing Boko Haram and Food Shortages” (bottom right); *Huffington Post* VR stitcher Maria Fernanda Lauret at work (top right); Two screen grabs from the *Japan Times*’ look under the contaminated Toyosu market (right).

TRUE VIRTUAL REALITY IS a realm that journalism has yet to penetrate, but it is assuredly just around the corner. Despite many outstanding issues, its use will likely grow as the technology develops and the necessary equipment, such as Virtual Reality headsets, becomes standard household items.

Its main advantage will be allowing journalists to create “empathetic” responses to events and issues in the news more effectively than ever before. Viewers can be imaginatively transported to places – or even to hold “face-to-face” meetings with other people – that are in fact far away.

Though games on the Sony Playstation 4 are, like most video games, centered on action, such as gunfights, etc. there are a few, like *Ocean Descent* – in which the viewer is slowly lowered down in a diving cage to view an underwater world – that are more suggestive of the potential uses for journalism.

nalism” which conveys “the sights, sounds and feelings of news.”

But in its greatest strength also lies its most fundamental danger: The realities experienced within the headsets will be “virtual” realities, often designed to elicit certain responses. This means that concerns about “fake news” and public manipulation are likely to become even deeper and more complex in the coming era.

Indeed, commenting on YouTube to one of De la Peña’s presentations, journalist Heyley Longster wrote, “The only way to ‘accurately’ represent a scenario is to record events as they happen, and then play them back. Any element of ‘reconstruction’ by someone, journalist or no, involves an element of narration and projection that is extremely subjective. In other words, this isn’t journalism, it’s art.”

This is likely to become a recurring criticism of VR journalism in the years ahead. ●

Michael Penn is the President of the Shingetsu News Agency.

Japan is desperately in need of a higher birth rate and more working women. But the stresses of getting pregnant later in life are not making it easy.

Difficult conceptions

by SONJA BLASCHKE

An elderly woman in a traditional cream-coloured kimono and elegantly upswept hair is asking questions. "When we talk about a normal sex life, how often does sexual intercourse take place? Please raise your hand if you think that once a week is normal."

Her audience in a nondescript hotel seminar room in Tokyo consists of several dozen couples, many in their thirties, and a few solo women. A few hands go up. "Does anybody think that twice a month would be enough?" No one raises their hands, but she does not relent: "Or would three times a week be better?" Again, a few hands go up.

Shoko So nods in agreement. A trained midwife, she heads a birth clinic in Tokyo, and her talk this Sunday afternoon is on *ninkatsu*. The word "*ninkatsu*" was coined relatively recently, consisting of *nin* from *ninshin* (pregnancy) and *katsu* from *katsudo* (activity) – meaning the efforts women make to prepare for a possible pregnancy. Despite, and because of, persistently low fertility rates and fewer births, the pregnancy business is booming. Various stakeholders – seminar organizers, health service providers, yoga teachers, pharmacies, clinics and the like – are benefiting from the rise in the average marriage age and the resultant late start to attempt conception.

Ninkatsu services largely target only women, although usually both partners wish to have children. And the pressure on women, not only from the industry, but also from politicians and from society as a whole, is increasing. In this age of "Womenomics," despite women being encouraged to enter the work force and attain management positions, one thing has not changed: To be a "true" Japanese woman, one must become a mother.

GETTING PREGNANT IN JAPAN is mainly a woman's job, says former nurse Kokoro Sano. "That is the culture here." Sano advises participants in popular *ninkatsu* cooking seminars at Tokyo's ABC Cooking Studio on how to eat healthily to prepare their bodies for future motherhood.

A teacher is showing 70 participants how to make spinach pancakes. Spinach, she says, has a lot of folic acid. It is good for the female body and can help them become pregnant. The participants, mostly women between the ages of 25 and 45, listen attentively and take notes. They learn that nowadays many women have too much fat in their bodies from too much meat, too many sweets and too little physical activity. The result is a lack of energy and a higher hurdle to pregnancy. The teacher tells them to consume a wide variety of healthy foods, to eat enough and to encourage their partners to do likewise. Further advice includes plenty of sleep, sports, stress reduction and keeping warm.



Pregnant with ideas Left to right, midwife Shoko So in front of acupuncture information; former nurse Kokoro Sano gives healthy eating for pregnancy advice at her cookery class; Dr Yuichi Nishino, trained in Western and Chinese medicine, at one of his presentations; advisors at Dr Nishino's presentation.

Men, although welcome, rarely attend the seminars, Sano says, but she has the impression that most women prefer it that way. Although the seminars exclusively deal with food-related facts, *ninkatsu* is still a sensitive topic, perhaps due to the lack of sex education at school. "It is not discussed as openly as in other countries," she says.

Sano criticizes Japanese women for being too extreme. "Either they work like crazy or they concentrate exclusively on *ninkatsu*," she says. Some women even leave their jobs. Husbands, however, continue as before, despite the fact that in 50 percent of the cases inadequate sperm is the reason for a couple being unable to conceive. "It is still the women who are held responsible for infertility," Sano says.

Having children in Japan is closely linked to marriage: Only two per cent of Japanese children are born out of wedlock. The year 2015 saw 635,000 marriages, the least since WWII. At the same time, the average marriage age is on the rise. In 2015, men were on average 31.1 years old when they first tied the knot, their female counterparts were 29.4. Accordingly, the age of women when giving birth to their first child has been rising as well: While in the 1970s Japanese women were on average 25.6 years old, that figure went up to 30.7 in 2015.

Sano also attributes the small number of children to the lack of childcare facilities, especially in major cities. Young people also move to the cities for work while leaving parents behind in the country, too far away to help with childcare. Then there is the lack of money. For over two decades, with the economy faltering, salaries have been stagnant. Still, many young women aspire to find a husband who can support a family on his salary alone, which, considering the state of the economy, is increasingly unrealistic.

WHILE BECOMING A MOTHER has become more difficult, women strive to conform to the expectations of society, Saori Nishibe Yamamoto says. That is why they go to such lengths to become pregnant: "They don't leave the house, they don't go shopping, they don't go to work. They turn their whole life upside down."

Yamamoto, a slender woman with shoulder-length hair, wants to have children, too. In early 2016 she quit her job with a big advertising agency to have a child – a brain child, that is. As she and her husband had yet to conceive, Yamamoto decided to help other women in a similar predicament. Together with a friend, she founded a small company

to develop a *ninkatsu* mobile phone app. Its purpose is to establish a community of women who have become pregnant and are willing to share their advice, and those who are still trying to have a child. Currently, the application is in its trial phase.

Not being able to have a child can have a huge impact on a woman in Japan. The status of a woman dramatically changes in a positive way with motherhood, Yamamoto says, though she would love to see Japanese society being more accepting, whether a woman has a child or not. Ironically though, once a woman has become a mother, her status as an employee sinks dramatically, as cases of maternity harassment have repeatedly shown.

In Yamamoto's case, her reasons for wanting to become a mother are personal. She wants to know what it is like to be pregnant, and is curious about seeing the result of her DNA combined with her husband's. Her husband is relatively relaxed about having children, as his sister has a child. "That is good for his parents," Yamamoto says, but not being able to conceive after trying for over three-and-a-half years has put a strain on her. She has been undergoing fertility treatment and doing *ninkatsu* yoga, meant to warm the belly in order to make the body more receptive to pregnancy. Yamamoto has also been taking *kampo* medicine, based on herbal and animal extracts.

KAMPO IN COMBINATION WITH acupuncture is a *ninkatsu* treatment Dr. Yuichi Nishino swears by. In a sober Tokyo hotel room in central Tokyo he is standing in front of a dozen couples and several solo women seated in front of him. Nishino first trained in Western medicine before traveling to China to learn traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) from a famous doctor a few years later. "Western medicine treats a cold, Eastern medicine wants to prevent someone from getting a cold in the first place," he says about the core difference.

Behind the listeners are several whiteboards with some posters. On one table is a toy panda bear with acupuncture

While becoming a mother has become more difficult, women strive to conform to the expectations of society.

needles sticking in its back. On two other tables are trays with small cups filled with a brownish liquid. During the break, the participants gather, asking questions. "This is an extract from swine placenta," a female advisor in a white lab coat is explaining. By the window, several more advisors are seated behind other tables, measuring the participants' pulses and checking their tongues.

Nishino says he has treated hundreds of women trying to become pregnant. Many are low on energy and self-esteem, so he tries to restore their courage and power. Getting older, blood sugar and blood pressure rise, the doctor explains, and blood circulation deteriorates. One result is that no matter how many hormones a woman takes, they don't reach the desired location in her body. As an experienced Kampo practitioner Nishino says he can recognize imbalanced blood circulation, for example, by the hardness of the skin behind the ears or the temperature of the belly. His advice to women is to take care of themselves first before thinking about becoming pregnant.

Nishino also invites men to join the seminars: "This affects both partners, of course," he says. While women often ask him about the aging of the ovules, men usually consult him about stress-related issues in their marriage or at work, or a lack of physical activity. Modern life, with a mobile phone in one's trouser pocket, a laptop on the knees until late at night, can cause bad blood circulation, Nishino warns. Getting older, the body's ability to heal itself decreases. Many believe Kampo and acupuncture can help prevent these health issues, and even slow down the aging process.

BACK AT THE HOTEL seminar room, midwife So is telling the attendants that people no longer make enough time for the essentials – good food and enough sex. In a country that prizes slimness more than anything, many women fail to eat properly, skip meals or only eat junk food. She suggests a gluten-free diet – still rather unusual in Japan.

Men, So warns, should reduce their stress levels, as stress can affect the quality of their sperm. However, in the end, it all comes down to the quality of the couple's relationship and their sex life. "For many, sex has become a duty, to be performed around ovulation," says So. "But it's about feeling!" Her advice to those listening is to at least once a week take time for each other. Instead of spending money on the latest mobile phone they should go travelling together on the weekend. "Do something regularly, like going swimming or for a walk. And take your sex life seriously." ①

Sonja Blaschke is a freelance journalist and TV producer dividing her time between Japan and Australia.

Andy Sharp

by GAVIN BLAIR

Now Japan and Korea politics editor at Bloomberg, Andy Sharp first arrived on the archipelago in 1999, and spent a couple of years teaching English in Fukuyama, Hiroshima. His interest in Japan had been piqued by stories of working in the country he heard from colleagues in Izmir, Turkey, where he had gone to teach for a year after graduating university in Britain. Realizing the advantages of language proficiency during his time in Turkey, he was determined to master Japanese.

His language skills helped him land a position at Rorze Corporation, a maker of robots for the semiconductor industry, in Fukuyama. "I was the one gaijin among 300 employees and they didn't really know what to do with me. So I ended up doing international sales, translating manuals and teaching the employees English, whatever they could find for me to do," recalls Sharp.

After 18 months of "trying to sell robots to Germans who were much smarter than me, and doing a pretty terrible job of it," Sharp was offered voluntary redundancy during a post-internet bubble downsizing. He returned to the UK and worked for a Japanese firm dealing in semiconductors and chemicals, but found London prohibitively expensive and yearned to return to Japan and further develop his language ability.

Back in Japan in 2004, Sharp again worked at an English school, picking up translation work on the side, before moving into the field full time, beginning with translating a soccer manager video game. A year of long hours and poor pay led him to apply for a job at the *Daily Yomiuri*, translating articles for the English edition. "After a while I began to think I could do a better job than this... and began to think I could be a journalist," he says.

As well as writing for the *Yomiuri*, he freelanced for other publications during his four years at the paper, where he also became the union rep for its foreign employees. "We tried to get equal conditions for foreigners, but were laughed out of the room," Sharp says. "'We don't have mutual understanding' was a phrase I remember management bounced around for weeks."

After switching to freelance full-time in 2010, Sharp found the translation work he used to supplement his journalism drying up in the aftermath of the March 2011 disasters. Having just become a father, and in need of financial stability, he took a job copyediting the English online edition of the *Nikkei*, while also acting as an editor of the *Number 1 Shimbun*. Though he describes the *Nikkei* as

"a great place to work," the lack of potential career progression led to him to apply for a position at Bloomberg covering the Japanese economy.

Flashing headlines to Bloomberg's terminals immediately after events are a crucial part of its operation, putting pressure on reporters to be both fast and accurate with words that can move global markets. Sharp points to the Bank of Japan as a pressure-packed example of the need for speed. "You're locked in a room and not allowed any phones or electronic devices when it's making announcements," he says. "We have signs with numbers that correspond to the various actions, like more quantitative easing, and as soon as the meeting is finished, you open the door and show the number to another guy who is waiting outside with an editor in the office on the phone."

The information appears on traders' screens between one to five seconds later, according to Sharp.

Circumstances can make such real-time reporting even more challenging. Sharp recalls a trip to Myanmar with finance minister Taro Aso and a small pool of reporters in the early days of the Abe administration that was mostly devoid of news. On the last night, the journalists ate dinner together and "had quite a few drinks," when they unexpectedly received word that Aso would host them in his room. After a few more drinks with the minister and some off-record stories, Aso suddenly announced he would take on-the-record questions.

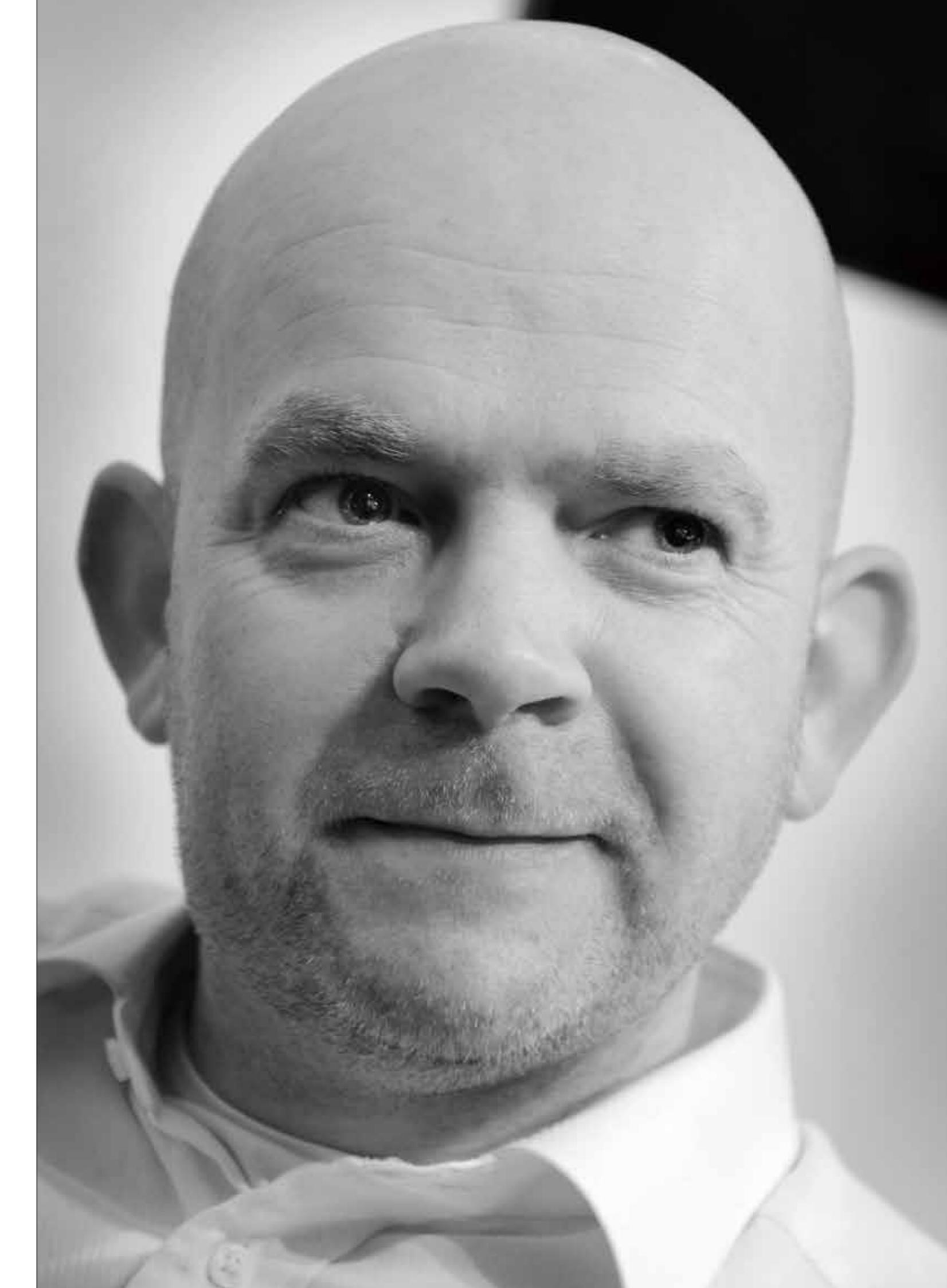
"I was frantically trying to contact editors in London in case he said anything interesting, when he started talking about the yen," says Sharp. "Aso is not the easiest person to understand at the best of times and he'd had a few as well. I managed to flash headlines on to our terminals faster than Bloomberg's rivals, but I spent that night sweating about whether I'd accurately reflected what he'd said."

Sharp was appointed to his current position in 2014 and leads a team of reporters covering politics in Tokyo and Seoul, as well as doing TV and radio hits for Bloomberg's in-house channels. An active member of the Club, he is co-chair of PAC, which he describes as, "a bunch of journalists around a table talking about the news and what's important, which can spark ideas for stories."

With three young boys, the most recent of whom arrived last month, balancing family life and work is now one of his major challenges. "Last night I was watching the Abe press conference from Hanoi while reading my son a Yokai Watch book," he says. "I was literally balancing the two." **1**



Gavin Blair covers Japanese business, society and culture for publications in the U.S., Asia and Europe.



The “kabuki” of Donald Trump and the auto industry

The new U.S. president has been making a lot of noise about reining in automakers’ moves to foreign soil and saving domestic jobs. But the numbers tell a different story.

by ROGER SCHREFFLER

Over a two-week period in late December and early January, then President-elect Donald Trump threatened to impose 35 percent tariffs on two of the biggest names in the auto industry, Ford Motor Co. and Toyota Motor Corp., if they went ahead with plans to invest in Mexican production. Soon after, the U.S. president issued a similar warning to BMW AG, the iconic German maker of luxury and performance cars.

Trump’s Twitter outbursts came as no surprise. He’s been using Twitter to articulate policy positions since announcing his run for president with a populist message to “make America great again” and bring back jobs lost to countries like Mexico because of “horrible” trade agreements like NAFTA.

On Jan. 23, his third day in office, President Trump announced by way of a presidential executive order that the U.S. would withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, signed last February by 12 Pacific Rim countries including the U.S. and Japan, and declared, through a second order, that the U.S. would renegotiate NAFTA.

NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, created a free-trade zone between Canada, Mexico and the U.S. when signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1993, but it has been a target of Trump’s “pro-America” message since the early days of his campaign. He has declared it to be the “worst trade deal in history.”

Unwittingly, perhaps, Trump did Ford a favor. The automaker, according to multiple sources, wanted to back out of its \$1.6 billion investment in a new Ford Focus plant in Santa Luis Potosi. Paul Eisenstein, publisher of the *Detroit Bureau*, a website news service devoted to the auto industry, said the decision was made well before the election.

“Ford was already second-guessing itself when it formally announced it would move small cars to Mexico last April,” Eisenstein reported. “The reason is simple: Demand for passenger cars – and small sedans and hatchbacks in particular – has been collapsing. Ford recognized it didn’t have enough demand for the products going into Potosi.”

In the case of Toyota, Trump apparently named the wrong plant in his tweet. He reported Baja, Mexico, which actually is Baja California, a state in northwestern Mexico, and the plant is in Tijuana, the largest city in Baja California, which again is in Mexico.

Sound confusing? It is.

Toyota’s Tijuana plant builds Tacoma pickup trucks and truck beds. The truck beds are shipped to the automaker’s San Antonio plant in Texas, which also builds Tacoma trucks. The planned investment, around \$150 million, is for a line expansion, not a new plant, thus not a big deal in the grand scheme of things.

Trump’s tweet appears to have targeted a second Toyota investment: \$1 billion for a new plant 1,300 miles southeast of Tijuana in Celaya, Guanajuato state, to produce Corollas.

The bottom line: Toyota is a minor producer in Mexico. It ranked last among major manufacturers last year. And even when the new Corolla plant comes on stream in 2019, it will still be a minor producer.

DAMAGE CONTROL WITH REVERSE SPIN

In early January, reacting to Trump’s threat,

Ford CEO Mark Fields announced that the U.S. automaker would cancel its \$1.6 billion Focus project and invest \$700 million in a new production line in Michigan to build advanced-technology cars, including hybrids. Highlighted in the announcement: plans to create 700 new jobs.

The administration declared victory.

But substantially underreported, Ford is still moving the Focus to Mexico, diverting the car’s production to its 30-year-old Hermosillo plant which is currently the North American base for the Ford Fusion and Lincoln MKZ, both sedans – the MKZ a luxury sedan.

An informal survey involving two of my neighbors, both Trump supporters, was greeted with angry disbelief. I suspect that much of the public is unaware that Ford hasn’t given up on Mexico or that it takes time, sometimes years, to make these decisions. But the fact is that Ford’s decision to replace the Focus at its Michigan Assembly Plant with a pickup truck and shift small car production to Mexico – and do so without cutting jobs – is sound. And it is also supported by the numbers.

The Focus, if it remains in the U.S., will face mounting pressure from the transplants – Hyundai, Kia, Honda and Toyota in particular. The margins are just too small, ranging from an estimated \$1,000 to \$2,000 per car.

Meanwhile, Toyota President Akio Toyoda, speaking at the North American Auto Show last month, declared that the automaker would invest \$10 billion in the U.S. over the next five years, roughly matching its investment over the past five years.

Details of the investment have not been disclosed, although a substantial portion is expected to be for upgrades of existing plants as models and powertrains undergo changes, rather than for new plants. The late January announcement of a \$600 million investment in Toyota’s 18-year-old Indiana plant to expand capacity for Highlander SUVs is an example. Also included: building a new U.S. headquarters in Plano, TX, north of Dallas.

But those investments are not normally counted when



Geared up

A Mexican employee at JATCO’s large transmission plant in Aguascalientes. JATCO is 85 percent owned by Nissan, Mexico’s largest auto manufacturer.

LIGHT VEHICLE PLANTS IN MEXICO

- 1 **Audi** (San Jose Chiapa)
- 2 **BMW** (Toluca)
- 3 **Fiat Chrysler** (Satillo)
- 4 **Fiat Chrysler** (Toluca)
- 5 **Ford** (Cuauhtitlan)
- 6 **Ford** (Hermosillo)
- 7 **GM** (Ramos Arizpe)
- 8 **GM** (San Luis Potosi)
- 9 **GM** (Silao)
- 10 **Honda** (Celaya)
- 11 **Honda** (El Salto)
- 12 **Kia** (Monterrey)
- 13 **Mazda** (Salamanca)
- 14 **Nissan** (Cuernavaca)
- 15 & 16 **Nissan** (Aguascalientes x2)
- 17 **Toyota** (Tijuana)
- 18 **Volkswagen** (Puebla)
- 19 **Daimler-Nissan** (Aguascalientes in 2017)
- 20 **BMW** (Santa Luis Potosi in 2019)
- 21 **Toyota** (Celaya in 2019)

discussing job creation in manufacturing, research and engineering. And Toyota has a very positive story to tell. Since the mid-1980s, when the automaker committed to building cars in Georgetown, KY, it has invested some \$17 billion in the market while creating 34,000 jobs, second to none among foreign automakers.

In fact, Japanese automakers as an industry have invested nearly \$50 billion in U.S. manufacturing since 1981 when the former Ministry of International Trade and Industry ordered them to restrain exports to preempt Congress from introducing hard quotas to protect the American industry, which was bleeding due to fallout from the 1979 oil crisis. Establishing a U.S. manufacturing base was an unintended consequence. Counting suppliers of components and materials, total investments well exceed \$100 billion.

Note that Nissan Motor Co. and Volkswagen AG have been exporting compact cars from Mexico for more than a quarter of a century. Annually, Nissan exports more than 200,000 Mexican-built Sentras to the U.S. Honda Motor Co., the first Japanese automaker to venture into the U.S. market, built its first Accord in 1982 in Ohio. Honda is the least exposed to tariffs, producing nearly 70 percent of U.S. sales in the U.S., second only to Ford.

DON’T LET THE FACTS GET IN THE WAY OF THE (MEXICAN TRADE) STORY

It remains to be seen if tariffs, assuming they are more than a negotiating ploy, will have an adverse effect on the economy. Analysts seem to think they will.

Dave Andrea, executive vice president of the Center for Automotive Research, warns that a “wholesale, large application of tariffs would hurt not just auto manufacturers, but suppliers that support those assembly plants and dealers that sell Mexican assembled vehicles.”

And who are those auto manufacturers? Not counting truckmakers, there are 11. They come from the U.S., Germany, Japan and South Korea. A twelfth, Daimler AG, will start soon by way of a joint venture with Nissan.

Nissan is Mexico’s largest automaker, accounting for one out of every four vehicles produced, some 3.5 million last year, making Mexico the seventh largest auto-manufacturing country in the world. America’s Big Three – Ford, General Motors Corp. and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV, assuming

Fiat Chrysler still is included though it is now owned by Italy’s Fiat – accounts for nearly half of the total.

Trump’s NAFTA criticism, echoed by Wilber Ross, his nominee to head the U.S. Commerce Department, concerns exports not production, 70 percent of which goes to the U.S. To quote Ross: it’s about whether or not Mexico “plays by the rules of the road.”

It is a fact that Mexico’s automotive trade surplus with the U.S. is really large, having ballooned to \$70 billion last year. Then again, possibly undercutting the Trump narrative, more than half comprises vehicles built by GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler and components fed from Mexico to their U.S. plants.

“DÉJÀ VU” ALL OVER AGAIN

We are not supposed to report the news before it happens. But it is predictable that once the administration realizes that renegotiating NAFTA and imposing penalties could hurt American companies, at least American automakers, more than their foreign competitors, it will look for someone else to blame.

The big picture is that the U.S. registered an estimated \$170 billion automotive trade deficit with the world last year. Mexico accounted for nearly 40 percent, the single largest share. Again, more than half was generated by the Big Three and their suppliers.

But if one digs deeper into the numbers, Japan could easily become a target as happened twice in the 1980s and again in the 1990s. Japan’s automotive surplus with the U.S. last year totaled \$44 billion, double that of South Korea and Germany, each around \$20 billion, while Canada, almost forgotten in this discussion, posted a \$5 billion surplus. (A substantial portion of Canada’s exports to the U.S. are Toyotas and Hondas.)

It doesn’t help that GM and Ford sold a combined 4,247 vehicles in Japan last year, all imports, compared to nearly 1.5 million cars, trucks and SUVs exported from Japan to the U.S. Total sales by Detroit’s makers, mostly Jeeps, fell to 13,546 units and accounted for only 4 percent of imports. It also doesn’t help that Ford, the first foreign automaker to establish a beachhead some 90 years ago in Yokohama, pulled out of the market last February, claiming that Japan is the “most closed” market in the world, according to AP’s reporting.

It won’t matter that Ford didn’t offer a right-hand-drive car in Japan’s right-hand-drive market or that GM’s dealer network hasn’t improved appreciably since “gray market” sales of converted Astro vans, its best-selling model in 1995, accounted for an estimated 85 percent of sales. Nor will it matter that Germany regularly runs up surpluses of \$1 billion with Japan.

The focus will again become, and this is a personal prediction, “nontariff barriers” and “structural impediments.”

Their existence is undeniable, such as offering tax breaks to owners of *kei* mini cars powered by 660cc engines. But then every major country around the world that sells cars has their own nontariff barriers: low gas prices in the U.S., which make it possible for 2,270 kg trucks like Ford’s F Series or 3,225 kg SUVs like the Cadillac Escalade to own the highways, or a regulatory environment in Europe that offers advantages to diesels.

And the prospect of quotas, harkening back to the early 1980s? It would seem highly likely, at least as a threat. And almost certainly by way of a tweet. ❶

Roger Schreffler is a veteran business journalist who has been following the auto industry for more than 30 years. He is a former president of the FCCJ.

Fake news, presidential tweets and irresponsible website curating. What's the media world coming to?

Welcome to the post-truth world

by AYAKO MIE

IT SEEMS LIKE THERE'S an entire industry dedicated to explaining Donald Trump's ascent, with any number of reasons: the anger of those in the Rust Belt left behind by globalization; the frustration against the establishment; and last but not least – fake news, which churned out negative and false information about Democratic Nominee Hillary Clinton.

Across the Pacific from Trumpland, I thought Japan was a safe distance from the fake news movement. After all, even liberal satire such as the U.S. comedy show "Saturday Night Live" and the Onion website have yet to find fertile ground here, perhaps out of fear of political backlash. Yet the recent quasi fake news scandal surrounding DeNA, one of the most respected and innovative social networking and

websites, using writers with little or no background in professional healthcare writing. Buzzfeed also revealed that WELQ gave contributors a manual that all but encouraged plagiarism, instructing writers how to paraphrase already published articles without attribution. It did attempt to dodge liability by running a disclaimer that it was not responsible for the accuracy and efficacy of the information and that readers should be held accountable for any action taken based on their stories.

AFTER BUZZFEED'S REPORT AND the following public outcry, DeNA, founded by Harvard-educated, visionary business entrepreneur Tomoko Namba, announced the temporary shutdown of WELQ and nine other of its media websites on Dec. 5. The company admitted it lacked understanding as to what it takes to be a responsible media and that its control over accuracy and

the media business. Unfortunately, Murata, who reportedly lives in Singapore, has yet to comment on the scandal nor was she present at the DeNA press conference.

While it is true WELQ's false information wasn't politically motivated like much of fake news, DeNA did prioritize a monetizing scheme over newsworthiness, including using click-bait tactics. The DeNA manual also encouraged writers to focus on often-searched issues, and told them to write longer so that the search engines would highlight the content.

Of course, Japan, with its history of anonymous posting, has many websites whose information accuracy is dubious, such as Naver Matome, another curation media, let alone "2 Channel," a rumor mill and the ground zero of slanders. But I'm beginning to wonder if anyone can be trusted as accuracy may be taking a back seat to sensationalism in the race to gain more clicks. Yutaka Hasegawa, a former announcer at Fuji TV, came under fire after he wrote a blog with a sensational title, "People who need dialysis due to their fault should entirely pay on their own. If they cannot, kill them."

Hasegawa, who quit the network after alleged expense account fraud, had been a blogger popular for controversial statements. In a recent *Asahi Shimbun* interview he said he was advised to use extreme words to gain page views, adding that he became numb as he escalated his rhetoric. At its most popular, his blog claimed 33 million page views. But he lost all his TV contracts and other writing jobs after the scandal.

Does a solution exist? Shigenori Kanehira, a journalist who travels to places like Iraq and Afghanistan for his weekly news program on TBS, told me that technology is the culprit. He said that the amount of information has become so massive that journalists are overwhelmed and readers cannot tell what's true or false. Some might not even care.

It's easy to say professional journalists have to do a better job at setting an example in spite of budget cuts. It's hard to be optimistic in a world controlled by tweets from President Trump. ●

Ayako Mie is a staff writer for the *Japan Times*.

The company admitted it lacked understanding what it takes to be a responsible media and that its control over accuracy was lax

online gaming companies in Japan, was a reminder that all media, anywhere can be manipulated.

Buzzfeed Japan was the first to report last October that the popular healthcare information website called WELQ, owned by DeNA, had run many stories touting medical programs that were not based on scientific facts. The site had stories that claimed that black seeds were a panacea that could cure anything but death, featured headlines that linked allergies with certain restaurants and once even stated that ghosts cause stiff shoulders.

WELQ was one of DeNA's 10 curation platform services, which gather and present information on specific topics. The information can range from links to news mashups, but the sites generally do not create new content. There are no rules, of course, but for a healthcare site, one would expect the curation to be selective.

It was found, however, that the content was uploaded without any proper editing or attribution. Articles were also outsourced to crowdsourcing

copyrights issues was lax. (What was ironic during DeNA's three-hour plus news conference in December was that Namba, who stepped down as the CEO to take care of her cancer-stricken husband, admitted that she herself had turned to academic papers and books when researching the disease rather than relying on web information.)

But why did DeNA, which had started as an online auction site before branching out into social media and gaming, decide to tap into the media business? The answer is easy: more money and growth. During the news conference, DeNA CEO Isao Moriyasu said that the company's gaming business peaked in 2012, and the company had been searching for other areas such as media-related businesses.

It bought curation media sites, such as iiemo – a mobile service for custom home improvement and interior design – and another media site called MERY from serial entrepreneur Mari Murata reportedly for ¥5 billion in the fall of 2014, and gave Murata an executive position at DeNA to oversee

The city government's plan to turn Tokyo Big Sight into a media center has the exhibition industry seeing red ink.

Olympic press center plan under fire

by JULIAN RYALL



MORIO/WIKIPEDIA COMMONS
Tokyo Big Sight

AFTER WEATHERING ALLEGATIONS OF brown envelopes changing hands, massive cost over-runs, plagiarism and breaches of contract over the construction of facilities, the organizers of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games might have hoped that the bad news was behind them. Now the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) finds itself at the center of a three-way collision pitting the city against the lucrative exhibitions industry and the world's media.

The TMG decided to close Tokyo Big Sight, the city's prime exhibition and event venue, so it can serve as the international media center before and during the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics. The exhibitions sector claims that the decision is "insane" and will cost the city dearly in the long run.

Speaking at the annual meeting of the Japan Exhibition Association (JEXA) on Jan. 12, Chairman Tad Ishizumi compared the decision to the disaster wrought on the industry by the earthquake/tsunami/nuclear disaster of March 2011, which hit the industry hard as exhibitors and visitors stayed away from the country.

"For enterprises, especially small and medium-size enterprises, this is nothing less than a matter of life and death," he said. "Even when exhibitions were cancelled for just one month in 2011, many companies were on the verge of bankruptcy. Imagine what the impact will be if Tokyo Big Sight is unavailable for seven months."

The industry says the decision means that the largest purpose-built venue of its kind will be unavailable

for exhibitions between April and October 2020, forcing the cancellation or significant down-sizing of 170 exhibitions that are held at Big Sight during that period. It will cause an estimated ¥1.3 trillion in financial damages, they claim, with exhibitors losing out on ¥1.2 trillion and service companies forfeiting some ¥100 billion. They add that there are insufficient purpose-built alternatives, with Makuhari Messe also earmarked for sporting events and to provide support to the organizers of the Games.

THE DECISION BY THE city government – which owns Tokyo Big Sight – also threatens the survival of 38,000 small and medium-size exhibitors that rely on events for a large portion of their annual revenue. It "guts" a 1,000 company-strong local service industry that creates booths, signage, staffing, food and beverage facilities and a host of other services and depends on exhibitions for its existence.

"We organize Comiket, the largest manga and anime event in Japan, at Big Sight every August and many of the companies that take part rely on that exhibition for as much as 50 percent of their annual revenue," said Hajime Okada, president of Hiroshima-based publisher Eikou Co., Ltd. "To not be able to use the venue for seven months is going to be absolutely devastating to these companies."

Remarkably, the city government initially proposed to close Tokyo Big Sight for 20 months to carry out

upgrades and improvements on the facilities. The exhibitions industry has at least managed to avoid that scenario.

The exhibitions industry is working with the metropolitan government and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and is marshalling the assistance of a number of friendly members of the Diet to fight in its corner, but the only solution to emerge so far is a plan for the construction of a temporary exhibition hall one quarter the size of the facilities at Big Sight.

"They say this is the solution," Ishizumi said. "But it's not. A simple calculation shows that with a temporary venue one quarter the size of Big Sight events can only be one-quarter of their previous scale. That means a loss of more than ¥1 trillion in sales."

A spokesman for the metropolitan government issued a statement confirming that a 23,000m² facility will be made available nearby between April 2019 and November 2020, but declined to comment on why Big Sight had been selected as the media center, the anticipated scale of economic losses or the possibility that exhibitions will be lost to the city forever because of the decision.

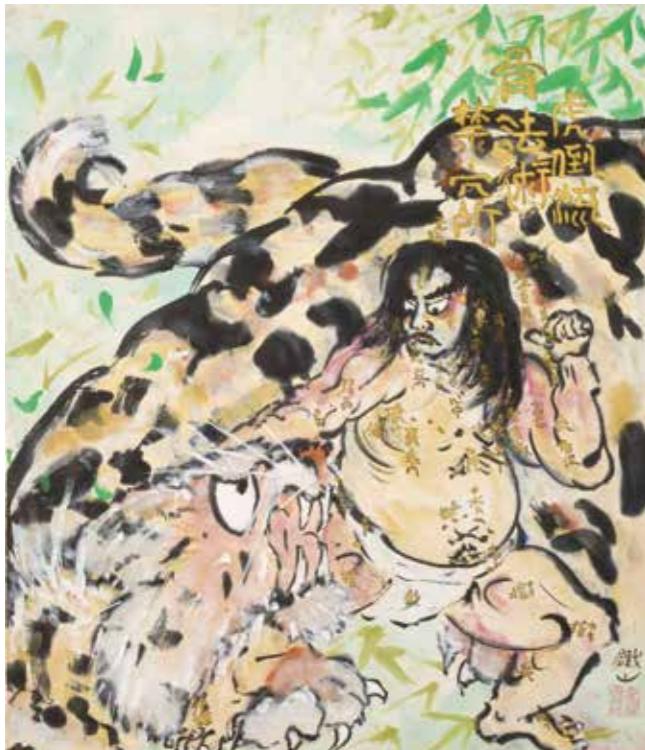
Yuichiro Nishida, director of the Planning and Public Relations Division of Tokyo Big Sight Inc. and presently on secondment to the metropolitan government, also declined to comment on whether the authorities are open to the idea of reviewing the selection and Gov. Yuriko Koike's position on the matter.

"It is a nightmare," said Christopher Eve, managing director of UBM Japan Co., which organizes trade shows, and a director of JEXA. "We are a big company so we will survive, but a lot of these companies rely on events at Big Sight, so if there are no trade shows, they have no income, they have to lay off staff and, ultimately, they could go under."

He added: "And organizers of events that have been using Big Sight for years will find out that they have no venue in 2020 and will probably look at Shanghai, Hong Kong or Singapore as an alternative. And some of them might not come back." ●

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

FCCJ EXHIBITION



Dojo Giga paintings by Bujinkan Dojo Sōke, Masaaki Hatsumi

IN THE MARTIAL ARTS there is an essence – a feeling beyond training and knowledge and skill.

Performance at this intuitive level is beyond description. So how does a master martial artist teach this indescribable feeling? Through his art. ❶

Masaaki Hatsumi is an 85-year-old sōke (head instructor) of Japanese martial traditions. He has worked as a professional osteopath, acted in a popular television series and written many books on ninjutsu and budo. He has previously visited the FCCJ as a guest speaker. About 30 years ago, Hatsumi Sensei made a series of colorful paintings of concepts which are essential to his dojo. Until now, Hatsumi has kept this collection private for the education of his students, but now feels it is the time to share these paintings.

JOIN THE FILM COMMITTEE...



... at 7:00pm on Thurs., Feb. 23 for an alluring, elliptical retelling of a haunting tale: Kiki Sugino's TIFF Competition standout, *Snow Woman*. The writer-director-star leads a stellar cast (and crew) in her gorgeously lensed reinterpretation of the oft-told "Woman of the Snow," from Lafcadio Hearn's 1904 anthology *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*. Shot in Sugino's home prefecture of Hiroshima, but set in a timeless era when mountaineers sleep in huts under straw mats while factory workers engage in the production of electrical products, Sugino's stylized, enigmatic work is daringly short on dialog and long on metaphor. There are scenes of such trancelike beauty and mesmerizing mystery that the viewer soon stops puzzling over the many riddles, and succumbs to the film's stately pace and poetic power. Sugino will be on hand with her costar, Munetaka Aoki, for the Q&A session following the screening. (Japan, 2016; 95 minutes; Japanese with English subtitles.)

– Karen Severns

LAST MONTH'S SCREENING OF SILENCE

Film Committee chair Karen Severns addresses the audience before the screening.



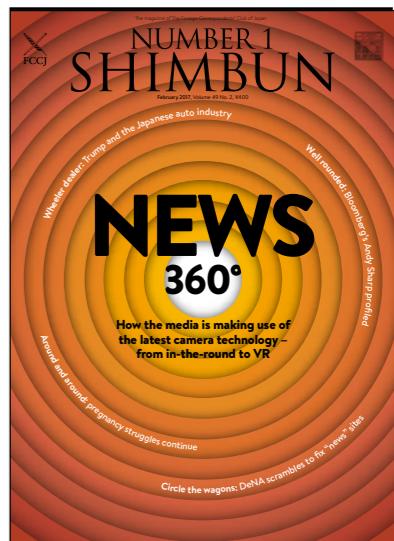
"I TRIED READING SHUSAKU Endo's novel when I was young, and only got halfway through," admitted Issey Ogata, one of the Japanese stars receiving critical accolades for his role in Martin Scorsese's *Silence*. He was joined by co-stars Tadanobu Asano and Yosuke Kubozuka for a rousing Q&A session at FCCJ, following the Club's

sneak preview of the film on Jan. 12. A crowd of close to 200 had the privilege of watching Scorsese's masterwork at the nearby Human Trust Cinema.

For more photos, a full transcript of the Q&A and more, read Film Committee Chair Karen Severns' blog: <https://goo.gl/YckD8f>



Left to right, Tadanobu Asano, Yosuke Kubozuka and Issey Ogata at the Club.



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Present members can also benefit. A ¥20,000 restaurant voucher will be given to those who introduce successfully approved new Associates. For more information, or to pick up an application form, go to the front desk.

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JOHANN FLEUR is a correspondent for daily newspaper *Ouest-France* which has a print and web version. She also regularly contributes to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Causette*, *Sept Info* (Switzerland) and other magazines. In Japan, she covers politics, the economy, culture and travel. Johann has been working as a journalist for almost 10 years, including six at a daily newspaper in France. She spent one year in Japan in 2009 and visited often before deciding to settle in Tokyo in 2015. In 2013 she won the Robert Guillain prize for her work on Tohoku reconstruction.



MOTOKO RICH is the Tokyo bureau chief for the *New York Times* after spending 13 years at the mother ship in New York, where she covered the housing market, book publishing, the U.S. economy, and education. Since graduating from Yale and Cambridge universities, her career began as a reporter at the *Financial Times* in London. She has also worked as a staff reporter at the *Wall Street Journal*. She lives in Tokyo with her husband and two children, aged 12 and 10.



REINSTATEMENT (REGULAR)
AYAKO MIE covers Japanese politics and policies for the *Japan Times*. She started her career as a reporter at Tokyo Broadcasting System in 2001. In 2008, she went to journalism school at the University of California, Berkeley, as a Fulbright scholar. On returning to Japan in December 2010, she worked for the *Washington Post* as a special correspondent. Ayako was also awarded with the Wall Street Journal Asia Fellowship at NYU in 2014 and spent 18 months at the NYU's Stern School of Business, and the Economic Reporting Program.

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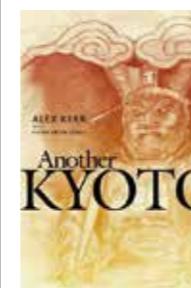
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Eco-progress driven by local insights: Heating and cooling with forest waste

Seventy percent of Japan is forested – but there's a problem with much of it. Decades ago, a national timber self-sufficiency plan replaced biodiverse native bush with vast monocultural stands of *sugi* (cedar) and *hinoki* (cypress). Sadly, these now-tall trees shut out sunlight from the forest floor and their timber isn't worth the cost of cutting and transport. But the forest needs thinning – so what to do?

Ricoh's Eco Business Development Center has found one solution: a biomass boiler that uses wood chips to generate heat and drive compressors for district heating and cooling.

Located at Gotemba, near the forested slopes of Mt. Fuji, the Center's pilot plant began in December to use wood chips from local forest-thinning operations to heat and cool its facilities. The key word in viability here is "local." Given the cost and carbon intensity of trucking, the biomass source must be nearby. So by using wood cut within two kilometers to replace an existing kerosene boiler, the Center estimates annual fuel costs can be cut by ¥4.7m and CO₂ emissions reduced by 237 tons.

From here, the challenge will be to find other large facilities around Japan close enough to the forest to realize similar benefits.

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