



The magazine of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan



NUMBER 1 SHIMBUN

May 2021 · Volume 53 · No. 5



FREEDOM



**Frontline journalism
and the climate of fear
in the Asia-Pacific**

FIGHTERS



(BREAD) BREAKING NEWS

Four do lunch at the FCCJ

Kantaro went for the Sautéed Pork Shoulder Loin with tomato sauce. Jessa had the Spaghetti Carbonara, Randy the Cheeseburger. Isabel chose the fish of the day with an Arugula and Baby Leaf Garden Salad and split an Apple Pie à la mode with Randy. The others chose from Creme Brûlée, Chiffon Cake and Tiramisu to go with their coffee.

When Kantaro, Jessa, Isabel and Randy had lunch at the FCCJ, it was the least they could do. They could have watched the news being made at a PAC event, or caught an author presenting his or her latest work at a Book Break – next up is Robert Whiting with *Tokyo Junkie* on May 12 – or gone for a sneak Film Preview. The FCCJ is so much more than a dining club, but the latest Main Bar menu is not to be sniffed at.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. Home from home for the curious and hungry.

[Check menu online](#)

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In this issue

JUSTIN McCURRY

From China to Myanmar, few can recall a time when governments in the Asia-Pacific had so little compunction in attacking journalists and the independent media. As we prepare to mark World Press Freedom Day on May 3, this month's issue of the *Number 1 Shimbun* is putting journalists working in challenging parts of the region front and center, starting with an overview from our colleagues at Reporters Sans Frontieres, whose 2021 global press freedom index appeared last month. Ben Dunant explains how the Myanmar coup has led to a crackdown on media organizations that oppose the military junta, while a reporter in the region explains the exodus of Western journalists from China. Anthony Rowley reminds us of the role the world's oldest professional association for journalists continues to play in protecting media freedoms. Elsewhere, Kaori Kohyama, author of the winning essay in this year's Swadesh DeRoy Scholarship awards, looks at how cults and new religions have sought to exploit the coronavirus pandemic, and David McNeill finds the journalist Takashi Uemura in no mood to abandon his reporting on the "comfort women" issue, despite intimidation from the Japanese far right. We are delighted to be able to run a translated extract from Asger Røejle Christensen's new book about Svend Nyboe Andersen – whom some current members will remember from his time in Tokyo several decades ago – as well as a selection of arresting black-and-white photographs by Masanori Kamide.

THE FRONT PAGE

04 **From the President**

ISABEL REYNOLDS

COVER STORY

05 **Censorship and disinformation in the Asia-Pacific**

Daniel Bastard & Cédric Alviani

FEATURES

08 **Beijing's media exodus**

Regional reporter

10 **In the junta's crosshairs**

Ben Dunant

13 **Protecting press freedom**

Anthony Rowley

15 **'I am not a fabricator'**

David McNeill

BOOK BREAK

17 **Nyboe's Japan**

Asger Røejle Christensen

FCCJ SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

22 **Preying on a pandemic**

Kaori Kohyama

CLUB NEWS

25 **New members, Join the Film Committee,
New in the library, Regular by eggs**

EXHIBITION

28 **888Zenya photo exhibition by Masanori Kamide**

THE FRONT PAGE

From the President

Dear members,

Last December, when the world's coronavirus vaccine rollout was just beginning, I wrote in my column about the faint signs of light at the end of Japan's pandemic tunnel. We recently heard from government vaccine chief Taro Kono that he plans to have Japan's immunization program completed by February next year at the latest. That's a lot later than many of us had hoped (and far slower than some other countries) but it does at least give us a firm timeline to work with. The Club's Board and Committees can start planning for events and gatherings in person to restart around that time. That's not to say that we don't have a whole lot of hurdles to overcome before then – not least the third state of emergency in Tokyo, which is due to last until May 11. The restrictions are much stricter than under the previous emergency declaration. We'll keep you posted on any change to operating hours for the Club's facilities.

After introducing our new food and beverage vendor in the Main Bar, we're trying to make more improvements so that the Club will be even better value for our members. From next month, we are planning to open the balcony leading off the Main Bar for al fresco coffee and drinks. Please take advantage of this outdoor space as the weather gets warmer. Another decision the Board recently made is to cut the fees charged for members to rent rooms at the Club for their own events and parties. We'll be uploading the new price schedule on the Club website as soon as possible.

We're also heading into election season at the Club, so please put the June 23 General Membership Meeting in your diary. The Associate Members' Liaison Committee is already looking for candidates to run for the three associate positions on the Board. Please do consider putting your name forward, if you haven't done so already. We would love to benefit from the wealth of wisdom and experience that we know our Associate Members have to offer.

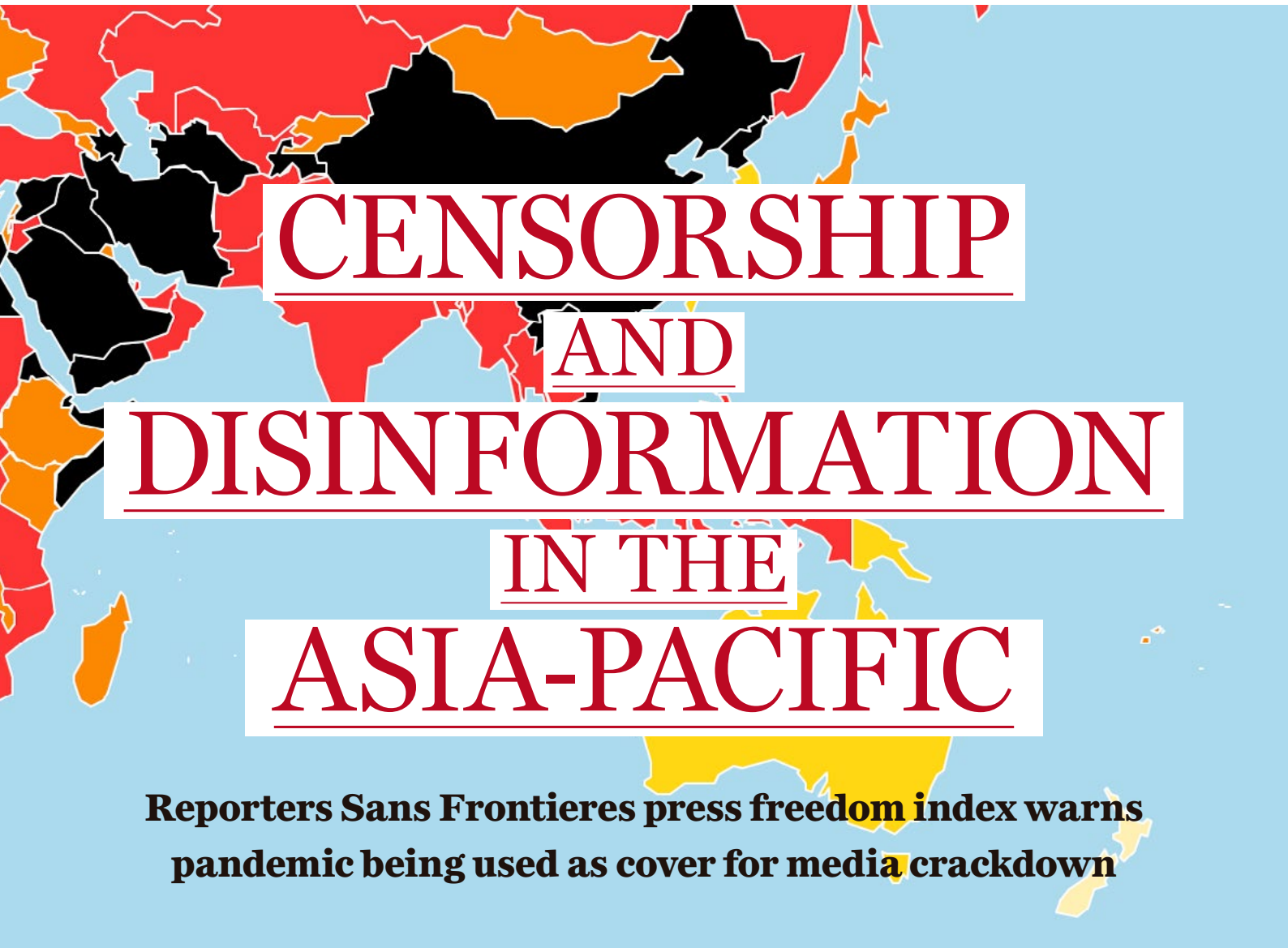


©FCCJ / JULIO SHIKI

We have a number of interesting events coming up, but I'd like to single out one in that may be particularly relevant as the pandemic looks set to drag on, affecting everyone's state of mind. On May 13, we have a panel of experts talking about the mental health effects of Covid-19, as the latest in our Deep Dive series.

Finally, you may have heard that NHK recently spent a day filming in our main press conference room for a scene in a new drama starring the popular actor Tori Matsuzaka. The drama, *Ima Koko ni Aru Kiki to Boku no Kokando*, was scheduled to air at 9 p.m. on Saturday nights from April 24. If you're interested in seeing the press conference scene, it will be shown either May 1 or May 8.

● Isabel Reynolds has been reporting for Bloomberg in Tokyo since 2012. She has lived in Japan for more than 20 years and been a regular member of the FCCJ for most of that time.



CENSORSHIP AND DISINFORMATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

Reporters Sans Frontières press freedom index warns pandemic being used as cover for media crackdown

DANIEL BASTARD & CÉDRIC ALVIANI

The region's authoritarian regimes have used the Covid-19 pandemic to perfect their methods of totalitarian control of information, while the "dictatorial democracies" have used it as a pretext for imposing especially repressive legislation with provisions combining propaganda with suppression of dissent.

The behaviour of the region's few real democracies have meanwhile shown that journalistic freedom is the best antidote to disinformation.

Just as Covid-19 emerged in China – placed 177th in the 2021 index – before spreading throughout the world, so the censorship virus, in which China is the world's undisputed specialist, has spread through Asia and Oceania and gradually taken hold in much of the region.

Starting with Hong Kong (80th), where Beijing can now interfere directly in this semi-autonomous "special administrative region" under the national security law it imposed in June 2020, which poses a grave threat to journalism.

Vietnam (175th) also reinforced its control of social media content, while conducting a wave of arrests of leading independent journalists in the run-up to the Communist Party's five-yearly congress in January 2021. They included Pham Doan Trang, who was awarded Reporters Sans Frontières' Press Freedom Prize for Impact in 2019.

North Korea (up 1 at 179th), which has no need to take lessons in censorship from its Chinese neighbour, continues to rank among the Index's worst performers because of its

CENSORSHIP AND DISINFORMATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC



▲
A teen protesting against the military coup in Yangon

totalitarian control over information and its population. A North Korean can still end up in a concentration camp just for looking at the website of a media outlet based abroad.

Blocking journalism

At least 10 other countries – all coloured red or black on the World Press Freedom map, meaning their press freedom situation is classified as bad or every bad – used the pandemic to reinforce obstacles to the free flow of information. Thailand (up 3 at 137th), Philippines (down 2 at 138th), Indonesia (up 6 at 113th) and Cambodia (144th) adopted extremely draconian laws or decrees in the spring of 2020 criminalising any criticism of the government's actions and, in some cases, making the publication or broadcasting of "false" information punishable by several years in prison.

Malaysia (down 18 at 119th) embodies the desire for absolute control over information. Its astonishing 18-place fall, the biggest of any country in the Index, is directly linked to the formation of a new coalition government in March 2020. It led to the adoption of a so-called "anti-fake news" decree enabling

the authorities to impose their own version of the truth – a power that the neighbouring city-state of Singapore (down 2 at 160th) has been using for the past two years thanks to a law allowing the government to "correct" any information it deems to be false and to prosecute those responsible.

In Myanmar (down 1 at 140th), Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government used the pretext of combating "fake news" during the pandemic to suddenly block 221 websites including many leading news sites in April 2020. The military's constant harassment of journalists trying to cover the various ethnic conflicts also contributed to the country's fall in the Index.

The press freedom situation has worsened dramatically since the military coup in February 2021. By resuming the grim practices of the junta that ruled until February 2011 – including media closures, mass arrests of journalists and prior censorship – Myanmar has suddenly gone back ten years.

Pakistan (145th) is the other country in this region where the military controls journalists. The all-powerful military intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), continues to

CENSORSHIP AND DISINFORMATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

A new prime minister in Japan (down 1 at 67th) has not changed the climate of mistrust towards journalists that is encouraged by the nationalist right, nor has it ended the self-censorship that is still widespread in the media.

make extensive use of judicial harassment, intimidation, abduction and torture to silence critics both domestically and abroad, where many journalists and bloggers living in self-imposed exile have been subjected to threats designed to rein them in. Although the vast majority of media outlets reluctantly comply with the red lines imposed by the military, the Pakistani censorship apparatus is still struggling to control social media, the only space where a few critical voices can be heard.

Throttling information

Instead of drafting new repressive laws in order to impose censorship, several of the region's countries have contented themselves with strictly applying existing legislation that was already very draconian – laws on “sedition,” “state secrets” and “national security.” There is no shortage of pretexts.

The strategy for suppressing information is often two-fold. On the one hand, governments use innovative practices often derived from marketing to impose their own narrative within the mainstream media, whose publishers are from the same elite as the politicians. On the other, politicians and activists wage a merciless war on several fronts against reporters and media outlets that don't toe the official line.

The way India (142nd) applies these methods is particularly instructive. While the pro-government media pump out a form of propaganda, journalists who dare to criticize the government are branded as “anti-state,” “anti-national” or even “pro-terrorist” by supporters of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This exposes them to public condemnation in the form of extremely violent social media hate campaigns that include calls for them to be killed, especially if they are women. When out reporting in the field, they are physically attacked by BJP activists, often with the complicity of the police. And finally, they are also subjected to criminal prosecutions.

Independent journalism is also being fiercely suppressed in Bangladesh (down 1 at 152nd), Sri Lanka (127th) and Nepal (up 6 at 106th) – the latter's rise in the Index being due more to falls by other countries than to any real improvement in media freedom. A somewhat less violent increase in repression has also been seen in Papua New Guinea (down 1 at 47th), Fiji (down 3 at 55th) and Tonga (up 4 at 46th).

Censorship virus

In Australia (up 1 at 25th), it was Facebook that introduced the censorship virus. In response to proposed Australian legislation requiring tech companies to reimburse the media for content posted on their social media platforms, Facebook decided to ban Australian media from publishing or sharing journalistic content on their Facebook pages. In India, the arbitrary nature of Twitter's algorithms also resulted in brutal censorship. After being bombarded with complaints generated by troll armies about *The Kashmir Walla* magazine, Twitter suddenly suspended its account without any possibility of appeal.

Afghanistan (122nd) is being attacked by another virus, that of intolerance and extreme violence against journalists, especially women journalists. With no fewer than six journalists and media workers killed in 2020 and at least four more killed since the start of 2021, Afghanistan continues to be one of the world's deadliest countries for the media.

A new prime minister in Japan (down 1 at 67th) has not changed the climate of mistrust towards journalists that is encouraged by the nationalist right, nor has it ended the self-censorship that is still widespread in the media.

The Asia-Pacific region's young democracies, such as Bhutan (up 2 at 65th), Mongolia (up 5 at 68th) and Timor-Leste (up 7 at 71st), have resisted the temptations of pandemic-linked absolute information control fairly well, thanks to media that have been able to assert their independence vis-à-vis the executive, legislature and judiciary.

Although imperfect, the regional press freedom models – New Zealand (up 1 at 8th), Australia, South Korea (42nd) and Taiwan (43rd) – have on the whole allowed journalists to do their job and to inform the public without any attempt by the authorities to impose their own narrative. Their good behaviour has shown that censorship is not inevitable in times of crisis and that journalism can be the best antidote to disinformation.

● Daniel Bastard is Asia-Pacific director at Reporters Sans Frontieres. Cédric Alviani is director of the organization's East Asia office.

FEATURE



BEIJING'S MEDIA EXODUS

Foreign journalists in China are leaving the country amid mounting government harassment

REGIONAL REPORTER

Operating in China, never straightforward for foreign correspondents, has grown much harder. A year ago, the problems might have appeared confined mainly to American media organizations, part of tit-for-tat moves feeding increased tensions between China and the United States. In February 2020, the administration of then-President Donald Trump said employees of five state-run Chinese media organizations, including Xinhua, the state wire service, would have to register with the State Department when operating on American soil, just as foreign embassies and other diplomatic missions must do. In March, it slashed the number of journalists allowed to work at the American arms of major Chinese media outlets, from 160 to 100. In June, four more Chinese media outfits were designated as foreign missions, including the state-run network, China Central Television (CCTV). The overseas branches of Chinese media organizations are routinely used as bases for state intelligence-gathering.

The response was swift, with the government in Beijing saying that it was revoking the accreditations of correspondents with *The Washing-*

ton Post, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. At least 18 journalists with these papers were expelled in the first half of last year. It was made clear that none would be welcome in Hong Kong. Several have relocated to Taiwan. Think of it for a moment: America's three leading dailies are prevented from covering from the ground the world's second biggest economy and this century's most consequential story of a rising power.

As for Australian media, with an impressive record of China reporting dating back more than a century, not a single correspondent remains in China. The last two, Bill Birtles of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Mike Smith of *The Australian Financial Review*, flew home in September. They left amid worsening bilateral relations following accusations of Chinese interference in Australian public life and academia, and a call by Scott Morrison, the Australian prime minister, for an international inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic, a topic about which China is highly sensitive. Both reporters were interrogated by police and both allowed to leave only following interventions by Australian diplomats. A Chinese-born Australian, Cheng Lei, a prominent news anchor with China Global Television Network (CGTN), has been detained since August, allegedly on the grounds of "endangering China's national security". The International Federation of Journalists calls her detention "without cause or reason".

And now the BBC's Beijing correspondent of nine years, John Sudworth, has followed American and Australian colleagues in moving to Taiwan, along with his wife, Yvonne Murray, a reporter with RTÉ, Ireland's public broadcaster, and their children. Sudworth's ground-breaking reporting, among other topics, on the treatment

BEIJING'S MEDIA EXODUS

One in six journalists surveyed by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China are forced to live and work in China on short-term visas of between one and six months. During the pandemic, the weaponization of visas has grown, including with a near-total freeze on new approvals for journalists seeking to relocate to China.

of ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China's westernmost province, has long angered the authorities. Vitriol directed at the BBC more generally has increased since February, when Britain revoked the UK broadcasting licence of CGTN because of its being politically controlled. Sudworth said that intimidation, surveillance and threats of legal action had made it increasingly hard for him and his colleagues to film.

The growing threat of detention in China has increased journalists' vulnerability, providing motivation enough to seek to leave. An opposite dynamic operating during the pandemic has kept many other foreign correspondents in place. Various categories of foreigners resident in China are allowed to leave and return, provided they submit to quarantine regulations upon landing. Journalists, however, remain the only group of resident permit holders refused re-entry. Nor are the authorities allowing family members abroad to travel to China. Some foreign correspondents have not seen their close family for over 15 months.

The Chinese authorities have long used the threat of visa revocation, or the withholding of approval for new visa applications, as a tool for seeking compliant behaviour from foreign media organizations. One in six journalists surveyed by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) are forced to live and work in China on short-term visas of between one and six months. During the pandemic, the weaponization of visas has grown, including with a near-total freeze on new approvals for journalists seeking to relocate to China.

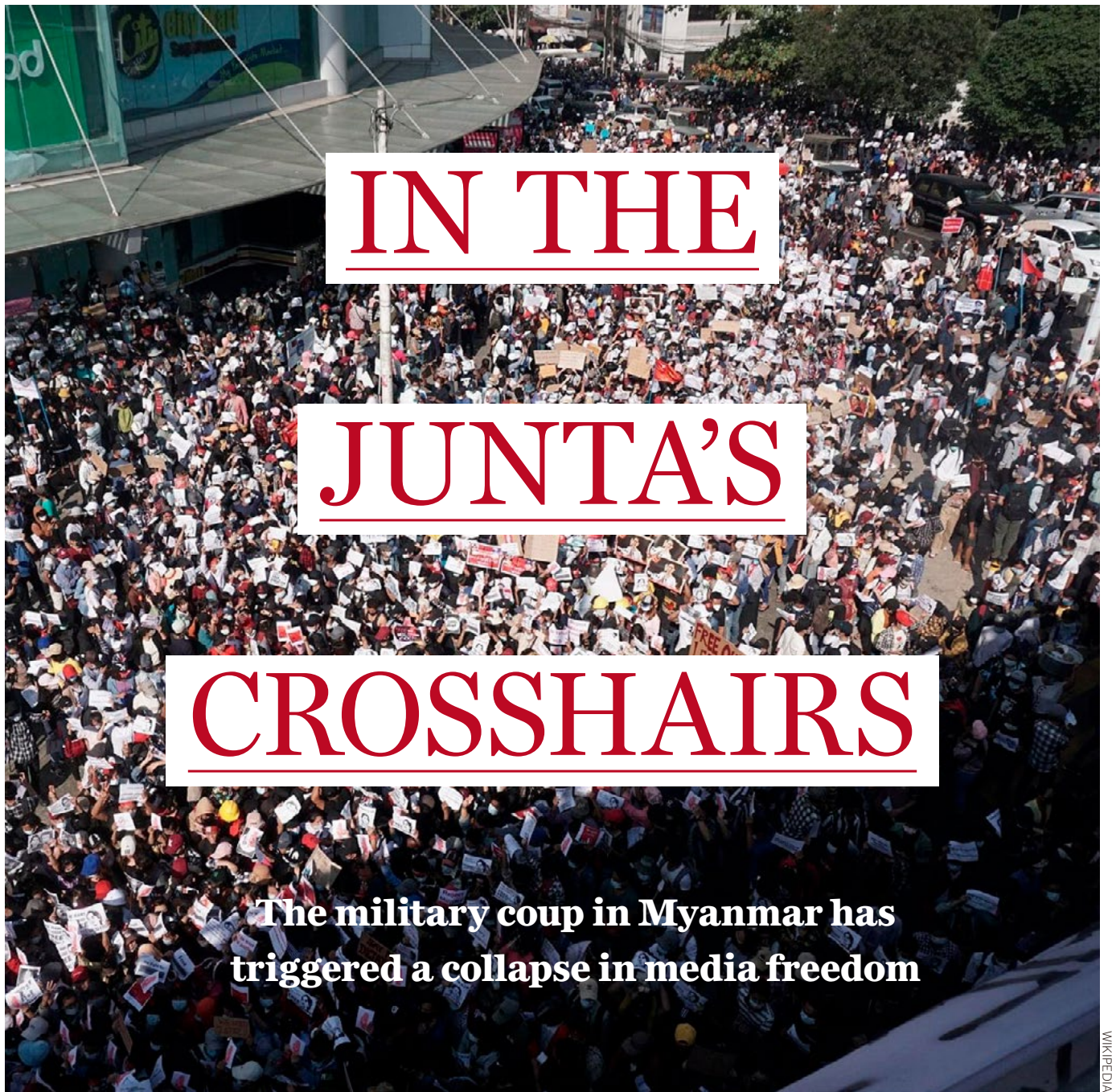
The pandemic has provided cover for other, largely unprecedented, moves to frustrate foreign journalists' efforts to do their job. New surveillance systems and controls on movement have been used disproportionately on foreign correspondents. Many have experienced local goons telling them to leave an area or be quarantined on the spot. Provincial propaganda or public-security departments often force local entities to cancel planned interviews with foreign media, even for light stories such as those about food. In the [FCCC's annual survey of media freedoms](#), published in March, nine in 10 respondents had experienced interviews cancelled by subjects barred from speaking to foreign media. Nearly every journalist travelling to the border regions of Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia last year experienced harassment.

Many of these experiences are not new. What is new, the FCCC reports, are "dramatically stepped-up efforts" in 2020 to constrain the work of foreign correspondents. Previously, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with which all foreign media have obligatory relations, offered a window into the dynamics among the various institutions of state. Relatively cosmopolitan, it understood the value to China of good foreign reporting on the country; often, its officials would distance themselves from the more thuggish treatment of correspondents by other arms of the state. No longer. The ministry has upped its attacks on foreign media organizations and individuals as part of its new "wolf warrior" diplomacy.

Perhaps most chilling of all are new risks to the Chinese colleagues of foreign correspondents. By law, Chinese news assistants, researchers and translators must be approved by the Diplomatic Service Bureau. The advantage to foreign bureaus is the level of protection this stipulation was once presumed to give Chinese colleagues. That can no longer be taken for granted. On April 23, plainclothes security officers detained a Chinese news assistant at Bloomberg in Beijing whom the authorities subsequently said was suspected of endangering national security – a catch-all term that can lead to lengthy detention without legal recourse or assistance. Researchers and news assistants, a brave and committed group of mainly young, highly motivated Chinese, are an invaluable resource to media outlets. Their safety is now in question, and bureaus are struggling to find ways to protect them.

These mounting obstacles and risks come at a time when foreign coverage of China grows only more important. China's own media landscape has been severely constrained under President Xi Jinping. Meanwhile, the hounding of individuals who last year attempted to use social media to report the pandemic and its consequences has underscored how citizen journalists are not to be tolerated either. That the foreign media have led on the crucial stories of recent years – from the wealth amassed by Communist Party leaders, to the detention camps in Xinjiang and China's assertiveness abroad – is testament to their skill and persistence. In the past year, the dangers to such reporting and to those who carry it out have grown markedly.

FEATURE



WIKIPEDIA

The military coup in Myanmar has triggered a collapse in media freedom

A protest in the Hledan area of Yangon

BEN DUNANT

A colleague delivered the news of the coup to me in a 5 a.m. phone call. “The state counsellor and president have been taken by soldiers,” she said, referring to Myanmar’s top civilian leaders, Aung San Suu Kyi and Win Myint.

The message was easy to understand but hard to digest. Myanmar’s military had hit a switch on February 1 and the country had changed tracks, heading towards a future that many of us preferred not to think about.

Journalists braced for the worst as rumors

flew of plans for mass detentions. Editors hastily arranged safe houses for their reporters and abandoned their offices. However, in the days right after the coup, arrests remained limited to a small number of elite politicians and well-known associates of the ruling party, the National League for Democracy. The military had evidently planned their takeover as a swift decapitation of Myanmar’s democratic leadership. The calculus seemed to be that, bereft of “Mother Suu”, any ensuing protests would lack direction and quickly fizzle out.

IN THE JUNTA'S CROSSHAIRS

► A Yangon newsstand that once heaved with publications was by mid-March stocking only a couple of obscure weeklies, thanks to the banning and collapse of Myanmar's main private newspapers.



BEN DUNANT

The protests were indeed hesitant at first, with several NLD leaders urging caution, but they spontaneously grew to hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of participants in towns and villages across the country. With security forces initially showing restraint, these demonstrations were like street parties. Whole families took part, and young people turned up in fancy dress and placards pasted with caustic, often bawdy jibes aimed at the military and its chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

When the protests failed to fizzle out, the military's patience snapped and from March onwards, anyone bold enough to protest risked sniper fire and arrest, with the likelihood of torture in detention and multi-year prison sentences. The Thai border-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners has counted more than 750 civilian deaths at the hands of security forces since the coup, and more than 3,000 arrests.

Journalists, too, have become prey to the junta. What at first seemed like a decision to leave the press alone, and to concentrate instead on taming social media with website blocks and internet blackouts, morphed in early March into a widespread crackdown. Five prominent media organizations were banned on March 8 and journalists continue to be detained. [The Reporting ASEAN website says](#) that, as of April 26, 43 remain behind bars out of 77 arrested since the coup. Some have been dragged from their homes at night, others bundled roughly into police vans while covering protests. While no journalists are among the dead, a reporter at the publication I work for, *Frontier Myanmar*,

was [shot in the hand](#) while covering a protest in Mandalay on March 27.

Media outlets have responded in different ways to the crackdown. Myanmar's biggest-circulation private newspaper, *7Day News*, immediately folded when it was named among the five banned organizations and even took down its website and Facebook page with millions of followers. Conversely, the four other banned outlets — *Democratic Voice of Burma*, *Khit Thit News*, *Mizzima* and *Myanmar Now* — have continued publishing online, with their staff in hiding or in exile. Other well-established organizations such as *Myanmar Times* and *The Voice* have stopped publishing voluntarily, though poor finances likely loomed large in their decisions.

For those, like myself, who have worked in Myanmar newsrooms over the past decade, the collapse of press freedom has been hard to bear. Few of us know it at the time, but we were living through a charmed chapter in Myanmar's media story.

When I began working in the country in 2014, every month seemed to bring a fresh publication to the newsstands of the commercial capital, Yangon. Some of the new titles were worthy additions to Myanmar's public sphere, though many more were obscure vanity projects and brash commercial ventures from businesspeople who saw independent media as virgin territory. Although quality was at a premium, the November 2015 election that installed the NLD in government was accompanied by an unprecedented level of coverage, debate and scandal, to the public's benefit.

IN THE JUNTA'S CROSSHAIRS

Right: A demonstration in February outside a cinema on central Yangon's Sule Pagoda Road demands the release of detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and an end to military rule.

Bottom: A young man at a February protest holds up a printed sheet declaring state broadcaster MRTV to be "fake news". After the coup, the military seized control of all state media, which have since faithfully reported the junta's narrative to a disbelieving public.



outlets with many decades of experience in independent reporting and well-established, loyal readerships. Although organizations like *DVB*, *The Irrawaddy* and *Mizzima* had previously done vital reporting in exile, and others like *Myanmar Times* had pushed the boundaries of censorship within the country, independent media in Myanmar was young and fragile.

Insolvency was accompanied by other problems, including the government's efforts to discipline critical journalists with criminal charges, for instance in the case of Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, who spent more than 500 days in prison under the Official Secrets Acts for exposing a massacre in 2017 of ten Rohingya men in Rakhine State. Journalists who criticised the popular NLD administration also faced public scorn, which hurt morale across the press corps.

These difficulties seemed to amount to a crisis at the time, but in retrospect, they were temporary setbacks. The threat now facing Myanmar media is existential: Army snipers do not distinguish between reporters and front-line protesters, and every published word can be used against an organization by a regime that treats all criticism as sedition. Buoyed by massive public support, the country's journalists are largely determined to keep doing their jobs, whatever the risks – but with no end in sight to Myanmar's nightmare, I fear their work will come at the cost of lives and futures.

The sector soon ran into trouble, though. As the people got the first government of their choosing in more than five decades, they also got online. The opening up of the telecommunications industry in 2014 brought the price of a SIM card from several hundred US dollars to little more than a dollar. Cheap SIMs delivered regular internet to tens of millions of Myanmar people for the first time, and within just a few years, smartphones were everywhere and Facebook was the country's favourite news source. This robbed conventional media of its appeal to advertisers, and formerly profitable news organizations began shedding staff and paring down expenses.

In this financial reckoning, Myanmar was merely catching up with a global trend that low internet penetration had previously kept at bay. However, it was particularly unfortunate in a country that lacked a roster of legacy media

● Ben Dunant is managing editor of *Frontier Myanmar* magazine

FEATURE

PROTECTING PRESS FREEDOM



JULIO SHUK

London-based Chartered Institute of Journalists has long history of defending journalists around the world

ANTHONY ROWLEY

Freedom of the press, freedom of speech and free access to official information are all articles of faith with Britain's 137-year-old Chartered Institute of Journalists (CJoJ).

The institute believes that actions speak louder than words when it comes to safeguarding these key freedoms.

The same principles are applied by the London-based institution when it comes to aiding member (and sometimes non-member) journalists in other ways including financially from its various benevolent funds – something that has been a godsend for many during the Covid-19 pandemic.


The CJoJ (to which this writer has belonged since the 1970s) could arguably serve as a role model to press clubs and other journalism associations when it comes to how to approach the issue of press and other media freedoms from a holistic standpoint.

It campaigns actively on behalf of individual journalists. Its president, Tim Crook, noted in a recent issue of the CJoJ monthly magazine, *The Journal*, that “our support for the campaign to secure the release of Philippines journalist Lady Ann Salem (known as “Icy”) was successful.

“An appeal court in Manila ordered her release. We wrote to the Ambassador of the Philippines in London expressing our concerns about her detention [and] our daily vigil on social media contributed to the campaign to secure her freedom,” said Crook, who is an emeritus professor and historian at Goldsmiths, University of London.


The CJoJ, Crook said, had also “adopted the case of Australian broadcaster, Cheng Lei, who has been detained in China since August 14th 2020. She was allegedly detained on the spurious charge of communicating state secrets overseas, which is another way of trying to make journalism a crime”.

PROTECTING PRESS FREEDOM



The Journal
Serving professional journalism since 1912

Magazine of the
Chartered Institute
of Journalists



Fighting for freedom of information

The Chartered Institute of Journalists (CioJ) is breaking new ground in a series of test cases on Freedom of Information.

The Institute is currently battling five Freedom of Information cases at the First Tier Tribunal (Information Rights) and Upper Tribunal in a campaign to achieve proper recognition for the rights of journalists, academic researchers and NGOs to government information.


The Information Commissioner's Office is refusing to hear the CioJ President, Professor Tim Crook's appeals against the block by M5 and M6 for access to historical files more than 70-years old. The First Tier Tribunal, which hears appeals on FOI cases, has actually barred any access to justice by saying it does not have any jurisdiction and will not even hear the appeal against the refusal to hear the appeal.

Professor Crook's three longstanding investigative projects have huge public interest significance and are clearly part of the "social watchdog" role recognised by the highest European Court of Human Rights as deserving the right to state information. They have resulted in published books and a BBC television drama series.

Appeals

There are also two appeals before the Upper Tribunal where Professor Crook and the CioJ are challenging the refusal to recognise the European Court of Human Rights Grand Chamber ruling in 2016 saying there is a qualified right under Article 10 to state/government information. Strasbourg changed the law and extended the reach of Article 10 in freedom of information requests in a case from Hungary four years ago called "Magyar".

The UK government was the only intervening country opposing the move to recognise a standing right for access to government information under Article 10



European Court of Human Rights building by CherryX CC BY-SA 3.0

Freedom of Expression, which along with all the other Human Rights was enshrined into UK law by legislation in 1998 and enacted in the year 2000.

Every argument put forward by UK government lawyers was turned down in a high majority ruling of 15:2 by the Grand Chamber unequivocally declaring that there is a qualified right specifically for journalists, academic researchers and NGOs undertaking the public interest social watchdog role of seeking information in a democratic society.

But the UK government, the ICO (which regulates FOI in England) and the Information Tribunal system have blocked and opposed every move to apply the new ruling. In the Magyar ruling the Strasbourg court explained that the right to state information for journalists should be recognised because "It has been the Court's practice to recognise the essential role played by the press in a democratic society and the special position of journalists in this context. It has held that the safeguards to be afforded

- Chartered Institute of Journalists is the only UK journalist body fighting to put freedom of expression law at the heart of freedom of information process.
- European Court of Human Rights gave special recognition to journalists, academic researchers and NGOs by extending Article 10 to include the right to state information in 2016
- But UK government, FOI tribunal system and Information Commissioner's Office are stubbornly blocking implementation
- CioJ President Professor Tim Crook has five FOI appeals fighting the issue and challenging absolute blocks to historical archives managed by Met Police, M5 and M6
- He is seeking access to information on government spying of staff and students at Goldsmiths, University of London, vetting and spying on left wing BBC writers and producers, and the case of WWII M6 officer Alexander Wilson recently made into TV drama series Mrs Wilson

Continued on page 3

The official organ of the CioJ and has been in publication since 1912. It reports the activities of the institute and industry developments.

"A free press is the unsleeping guardian of every other right that free men prize"

The institute fights for individual journalists elsewhere in the 30 countries where it has members. It is involved, for example, in a campaign for the release of Al Jazeera journalist Mahmoud Hussein, who has been "detained without due process, charge or trial in Egypt" for more than four years.

Journalism "should never be a crime," the CioJ has declared. One of its more illustrious members, erstwhile journalist, statesman and British prime minister Sir Winston Churchill who joined what was then the Institute of Journalists in 1936, noted famously that "a free press is the unsleeping guardian of every other right that free men prize".

Preserving press freedoms (and wider freedoms of speech) goes beyond just battling on behalf of individual journalists. The CioJ has urged the UK parliament "to legislate for the protection of journalists and their sources by recognising a public interest defence for news gathering.

"An across-the-board public interest defense in professional media cases is an essential pathway to providing the necessary protection for the social watchdog role of journalists and journalism that sustains democracy and basic liberty in a fair and stable society," the Institute argues.

Crook, meanwhile, attacked as a "Snoopers Charter" UK legislation passed in 2016 (The Investigatory Powers Act) which he claimed would create an open door for secret snooping on journalists and their sources. Under the legislation, any investigation into any kind of public interest story based on a leak or whistle-blowing source can be defined as a serious crime, Crook noted. And if the "mother of parliaments" in the UK can endorse such legislation, it is "open season" for others to do likewise.

The CioJ is also fighting to put freedom of expression law at the heart of the freedom of information process.

In 2016, the European Court of Human Rights gave special recognition to journalists, academic researchers and NGOs to have access to certain state information. But, says the CioJ, the UK government is "stubbornly blocking" implementation of the law and thus the social watchdog role of journalism.

The CioJ has been representing the interests of its members for well over a century. It is, in its own words, an "independent organization that promotes standards and ethics throughout the profession," including through courses in teaching law as it affects journalists.

The institute is the oldest professional body for journalists in the world. It was founded as the National Association of Journalists in 1884, and six years later was granted its Royal Charter by Queen Victoria, to protect and serve those employed in the field of journalism.

The institute combines the role of professional society with that of a trade union – known as the IoJ(TU). The institute's union section protects members' interests in the workplace and campaigns for better conditions for working journalists.

Apart from being concerned with protection of journalistic freedoms, the CioJ promotes standards and ethics for the media and the principles of "honest reporting, independence and being apolitical".

● Anthony Rowley is the Tokyo correspondent for *Singapore Business Times*

FEATURE

‘I AM NOT A FABRICATOR’



Japanese journalist hounded by nationalists says he will not abandon ‘comfort women’ cause

DAVID McNEILL

Most newspaper journalists would love to have an article remembered a week after it was published. Takashi Uemura is still dealing with the fallout from something he wrote for *The Asahi Shimbun* 30 years ago.

Uemura’s reports in Japan’s flagship liberal daily on Kim Hak-sun, the first wartime “comfort woman” to publicly reveal her history, was seen at the time as a landmark in national atonement. The backlash was slow but, eventually, crippling.

Nishioka Tsutomu, an academic associated

with the nationalist right, fired the first salvo against Uemura in the conservative magazine *Bungei Shunju*. The criticism gradually built into a campaign of denunciation that branded the *Asahi* reporter a “fabricator” whose work was tainted by anti-Japanese bias.

When Uemura left the *Asahi* in 2014, a job offer at Kobe Shoin University was retracted after the university received death threats and hate mail triggered by an article in another weekly, *Shukan Bunshun*.

Unwittingly, Uemura had become the central figure in the conservative right’s hatred of the

'I AM NOT A FABRICATOR'

“Journalism is under attack from the authorities, and not just here. History is a constant flashpoint in Japan. The biggest difference (with elsewhere) is that in other countries the inconvenient past is being remembered while here it is being erased.”

Asahi, and in the toxic disputes over World War 2 history that have poisoned Japan’s ties with South Korea.

His public vilification was fueled by the Internet. Blogs, message boards and social networking sites spread his writings, image and profile. A picture of Uemura’s daughter, who is half Korean, was published online. Another university in Hokkaido that had offered him an adjunct position was targeted by bomb threats.

Sakurai Yoshiko, a journalist close to the former prime minister, Shinzo Abe, said Uemura “must be held accountable” for hurting Japan.

Initially stunned by this campaign, Uemura fought back, speaking at friendly conferences and penning a piece for *Shunju* in a bid to argue his case. Backed by unions and supporters, he launched lawsuits against Nishioka and Sakurai.

A central issue in these legal fights was the claim that Uemura did not himself talk to Kim (he used a taped interview) and that he implied that she had been forcibly taken. The key dispute in the historical debate over comfort women is the extent to which force was used against them – the right argues that they were willing prostitutes.

If Uemura has any regrets about penning the article that has defined his life since the summer of 1991, he wasn’t showing them at the FCCJ. “I have great pride that I was able to report on that moment when the first survivor started to give testimony,” he said.

Sitting beside him was filmmaker Shinji Nishijima, who has made a new documentary about Uemura’s professional and legal struggles. “Target” tells the story of a reporter who spoke “truth to power” and suffered the consequences, said Nishijima.

“Journalism is under attack from the authorities, and not just here,” he said. History is a constant flashpoint in Japan, he added. “The biggest difference (with elsewhere) is that in other countries the inconvenient past is being remembered while here it is being erased.”

If the FCCJ event was any indication, however, the right’s attention has moved on. Whereas previous press conferences by Uemura drew hecklers and haters among large crowds, just a handful turned up to hear him at the FCCJ. The few comments under his video on the FCCJ website were mostly hostile. “He has no shame,” said one.

One reason for this indifference, perhaps, is

that his five-year legal battle has petered out. A defamation lawsuit against Sakurai and the three publishers who carried her work was defeated in the Supreme Court last November (a local court in Sapporo had earlier ruled in 2018 that Sakurai’s work had damaged his reputation but not defamed him; Tokyo District Court said in 2019 that *Bunshun* had defamed him but dismissed claims for damages).

Uemura’s suit against Nishioka and *Bungei Shunju*, meanwhile, was dismissed in March 2020. (Uemura did win a separate harassment lawsuit and damages against a person who had threatened him on Twitter).

These days, Uemura has his own pulpit – though far less powerful than the one provided by either his former employer, or to his detractors in the *Sankei Shimbun*. Since 2018, he has been an editor with the small leftwing magazine *Shukan Kinyōbi*, which reported his court proceedings even as much of the Japanese media more or less ignored them.

Uemura brandished a cover of one recent edition of the magazine carrying his picture and the headline: “I’m not a fabricator.” *Kinyōbi* published the entire verdict of a ruling in January by the Seoul Central District Court, ordering the Japanese government to compensate 12 survivors of the comfort women system.

For some, the verdict was another depressing sign that Japan and South Korean pull ever further apart in their interpretation of events that occurred 80 years ago. For Uemura, however, it was a rare but welcome vindication. “The biasing of history is spreading and it is becoming taboo to speak about comfort women in Japan.” But in Korea, the comfort women are winning, he added.

He flatly rejected the claim that his initial *Asahi* article was to blame for starting the whole comfort women debacle. “That’s not the case at all – it is because the survivors themselves started to speak out.

“We will not give into this pressure. Not until all women who suffered under the (comfort women system) are compensated.”

● David McNeill is professor of communications and English at University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo, and co-chair of the FCCJ’s Professional Activities Committee. He was previously a correspondent for *The Independent*, *The Economist* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

BOOK RELEASE

NYBOE'S

JAPAN

**Danish journalist Svend Nyboe Andersen
was a radical, colorful figure who divided
and inspired his FCCJ colleagues**

ASGER RØEJLE CHRISTENSEN

In 1965, the Danish journalist Svend Nyboe Andersen moved to Japan with his family to work as a correspondent for the Danish press. He was a true pioneer.

Twenty-four years later, in 1989, I did the same, although I was certainly much less of a pioneer. Nyboe and I both worked for a long time for the liberal Danish newspaper *Politiken*, and spent a long time at our base at the FCCJ.

My book, *Nyboe and his Japan*, which will be published in Danish on May 17, is a biography about my predecessor, whom I barely knew, with focus on his years in Japan. I have tried to write an interesting tale about a talented and curious man and his time – and also offer a glimpse into Japan during a period of great change.

The book was written in close collaboration with Agnete Nyboe Andersen, Nyboe's

NYBOE'S JAPAN



▲
Nyboe with a group
of children in South
Korea in 1974

daughter and my old friend and colleague. The book is about much more than a single man in a single country. "Your father is a huge inspiration for anyone who dreams about leaving the beaten path," one of the manuscript's first readers said in a note to Agnete.

The translated excerpts below are taken from the book's chapters about Nyboe's life and work at the FCCJ during his second stay in Japan, from 1971 to 1977. Having divorced in Denmark, Nyboe met Yukari Hayasaki, who would become his girlfriend, after arriving in Japan. Yukari helped as an interpreter and assistant, and, like her partner and colleague, was a frequent visitor to the Club.

Revived, with long hair

We had an appointment to meet at the reception of the Club, which had moved to a new address in upmarket Marunouchi. We were both nervous and therefore early. We noticed each other and established we had got the right person. "Are you Yukari?" "Are you Asger?"

Walking through the Club to the Main Bar, we passed the wide corridors of the new premises, adorned with memorable photographs from the Club's history.

"That guy", Yukari said as we passed a photo of one of the coryphaeuses of Club history, "was suspected of being a CIA agent in the 70s by some people at the Club". And it was still the same in the nineties, I told her. Yukari looked around as we reached the new Italian café-like Main Bar. "Svend would not have liked the new Club," she said.

It was June 2020, in the middle of the corona virus pandemic. We wore masks and sat a little apart, as we were supposed to. Yukari, now 70, was excited and nervous about visiting the Club for the first time in decades, even though it was far from the same place she once knew. We sat down at the most discreet table we could find, and she told me with a small smile behind the mask about the first time she met Nyboe.

"I was still a student, and then one summer I met him in the lobby of the Imperial Hotel. He was there to meet a colleague from a Danish weekly magazine, and I also had an appointment. I was early and he looked at me and smiled. We starting chatting. I was studying English literature, so I thought it would be a good opportunity to practice a little English, right?"

They had a drink together. You always had a drink with Nyboe during those years. Nyboe's friend, a journalist from *Familie Journalen*, arrived. He was looking for "exotic things" in Japan that he could buy to take home to his boss. He asked Yukari to go out into city and help him find some souvenirs – for a fee. Svend said to me: "Why not? You should do that". "That's how it all started."

Nyboe was back in Tokyo. "Revived, with long hair," as one of his good friends and colleagues, the Indian journalist Swadesh DeRoy, later described his reappearance at the Club.

"I enjoyed Svend's company. He had a sardonic sense of humor and intelligence, even though he was dressed like a homeless man", another Club veteran, Bob Kirschenbaum, told me about his impressions of Nyboe during the same period.

Nyboe had left Denmark for Japan for a second time to conduct assignments for Danish newspapers, magazines, radio and TV. It was still hard to make enough money. His divorce and finances were far from settled with his former wife. Money was a perennial problem, but now he had Yukari to help him. They became a couple – and only after that she became his news assistant. It is very important to her to emphasize that things happened in that order.

"People perceived me as his assistant, but first and foremost I was his girlfriend. Only then I became his assistant. It is so typical that they have an assistant and then they start a relationship. I didn't like that some of his Japanese friends looked at me in that way".

NYBOE'S JAPAN

The FCCJ space was different from the Japan outside. It appealed not only to correspondents, for whom it was an immensely practical workplace, but also to many Japanese members who liked the “exotic” atmosphere.

Although she told me many times that she was not a professional, neither as an interpreter nor an assistant, she enjoyed working with Nyboe. “I have never met anyone like him. He was so open to everything. He accepted all things, without prejudice, without discrimination. I really liked that. There are so many ways to look at things. That was what he told me, and that was what I liked so much”.

A drink or two

Much of Nyboe's and Yukari's lives and routines revolved around the Club. More often during the house of darkness.

“He did not have an office. Usually, he worked in the Club's workroom, where there was a kind of telex. When he worked at night, he was very concentrated”, said Yukari.

“His routine was to wake up in the morning, which would sometimes mean mid-afternoon.” After checking if there was anything new to report, he went to the Club, where he had “a drink or two and a chat with colleagues”. Nyboe engaged “very energetically” in this community. It was here that ideas were created, reversed, refined or dropped again. It was here that strong collegial friendships developed. They were absolutely crucial hours of the day.

At the time, there were very few Westerners on the streets of Tokyo. The FCCJ space was different from the Japan outside. It appealed not only to correspondents, for whom it was an immensely practical workplace, but also to many Japanese members who liked the “exotic” atmosphere.

After focusing on what the day had to offer in terms of news, Nyboe typically spent his evenings writing letters and planning projects. Finally, around midnight, he contacted the editorial offices back home in Denmark by collect call.

After the reports of that day were later handed on to the home newsrooms via telex, Nyboe would typically go with Yukari to their regular pub a few blocks from the FCCJ and meet other colleagues. They had beer and whiskey, and Yukari always drank ginger ale, just like she did when she met me. “He did not want to go home, even though it was the middle of the night. Then we played chess”, Yukari told me. Nyboe was a skilled chess player with several tournament victories behind him, but Yukari was good enough to catch up with him.

Undeniably, a lot of alcohol was consumed

during the day. According to a Scandinavian friend and colleague, Nyboe had a special fondness for Sapporo beer and schnapps. But “he never drank so much that he lost control of himself and became drunk. It was almost as if alcohol did not affect him to the same degree as it affected the rest of us”.

Yukari often spent the entire day at the Club helping Nyboe. “I was not a professional interpreter, so I made a lot of mistakes. But he just smiled and backed me up, quickly moving on to the next question. His Japanese ability was not very good. But he had a good sense of what was being said when we did these interviews. Whether the answer was friendly or hostile or critical, he understood ...”

When he attended professional lunches with well-known and influential speakers, Nyboe frequently asked questions that were completely different from those posed by colleagues from other countries. “He had an ability to look at things from a different angle,” Yukari said. “People said to each other, ‘Aah, now Svend is asking a question. Maybe it will be interesting.’ He was just an ordinary Danish journalist, but he got other people interested through his questions. That's how I felt.” Often, colleagues from all over the world would leave the room with a new idea for a different and less predictable angle on the news story of the day.

Nyboe was an active member of the Club community. The FCCJ was his second home, and he wanted to make his mark on the place. He chaired the decoration and exhibition committee, and at other times led the entertainment and planning committees. He helped establishing an active chess club and served on the editorial board of the *Number 1 Shimbun*.

Despite his efforts, for the club's old guard, including its then managing director, Nyboe was always the “wild Dane”, said Yukari. “He was not an establishment type. He was against snobbish people. The way he was dressed ... his long hair. At one point he had very long hair. It wasn't that long when I met him.” In those days, most correspondents in Tokyo wore a jacket and tie at work, believing that was what everyone expected of them. At the very least, they kept a tie in their pocket to slip on when they attended press conferences or were due to meet someone. “But not the Scandinavians”, Yukari said. Svend's good friend, the Swedish journalist Lars Hansegård, was equally unorthodox.

NYBOE'S JAPAN



▲
Nyboe in Japan's Southern Alps in the 1970s. The photo was taken by his friend and mountaineering companion Susumu Nakamura

In the evening – or rather late at night – Nyboe and Yukari returned to their modest apartment near Nezu station. Their circadian rhythms were determined by their work. But their work-life balance had its downsides.

In 1972, Nyboe's 16-year-old son, Lars, spent six months in Tokyo, after dropping out of school in Denmark. His father was too busy to spend much time with him, so Lars wrote to his younger sister in Denmark, complaining that he was bored and missed his friends. There is little doubt that Lars felt let down by his father during those lonely months in Tokyo.

Nyboe had been independent in his youth and had even sailed on international container ships in his teens. He expected others to be equally free spirited, but not everyone was able to live up to his expectations. At work, he was deeply serious, focused and cut no corners. And he expected the same from other people. He was particularly dismissive of what he perceived as Danish mediocrity and petty bourgeois attitudes. In his daughter's words,

he was "always very upset about the Danes' preoccupation at that time with owning their own home, instead of traveling and doing something interesting with their lives".

The 'Scandinavian table'

During Nyboe's time at the FCCJ, one of the three correspondents' tables was known as the infamous "Scandinavian table". "The atmosphere at the Scandinavian table was as pleasant and all-encompassing as it was unique", said a frequent guest at the table, who described it as "an institution within an institution".

Conversations around the Scandinavian table covered everything under the sun: jobs, Japan, private lives, Club politics and the news. "The Scandinavian table was always there when we arrived at the Club at lunchtime or in the afternoon", Yukari said. "There was Lars Hansegård from Swedish Radio, another Swedish woman, Monica Braw, Claes Bjerner and his Japanese wife, Tamiko, and Inger-Johanne Holmboe. Henrik Richter, a young Finnish photographer spent a lot of time at the Club. Svend and Lars were very close friends ... and also Inger."

The lingua franca at the Scandinavian table was usually a mixture of Swedish and inter-Scandinavian. The regulars helped, supported and inspired each other, and they had fun at the same time.

It was nice group to be part of, and it generated so much laughter and noise that the people around the Scandinavian table, with their strange language and informal attire, were sometimes seen as provocative by the American colleagues – then in the majority – at neighbouring tables.

One of Nyboe's Scandinavian colleagues and friends spoke of "Club McCarthyism", recalling that fraternizing with the Scandinavian table was perceived by some as an "act of treachery". At the time there had been a bitter public row about the Vietnam War between the Swedish prime minister, Olof Palme, and US President Richard Nixon. Many Americans looked askance at Sweden, so "it goes without saying that some elements of the Club perceived us as the devil's advocates", Nyboe's friend recalled.

The Club was perceived as a place largely for white men, with Americans the dominant nationality. Nyboe, who at the Club was known as Svend Andersen, joined forces with Lars

NYBOE'S JAPAN



▲
The “Scandinavian table” at the FCCJ in the mid-1970s. Nyboe is on the phone, with Lars Hansegaard to his left and Greg Clark on the far left of the photo.

He was a little bit of a radical, almost hippy-like in his views, and that made some club members angry.

Hansegård – already a friend from his first stay in Japan to cover the 1964 Tokyo Olympics – as they became embroiled in Club politics.

Nyboe saw himself as part of a group opposed to the Club’s American majority who, he believed, were uncritical in their attitude towards their country’s tragic war in Vietnam. Nyboe was “either intensely loved or hated”, but “only a few could resist his charisma”, DeRoy wrote in the *Number 1 Shimibun* when Nyboe left the Club a few years later to become editor-in-chief of a local newspaper in Denmark.

During his time at the club, Nyboe became the leader of a powerful movement at the Club that, for the first time in its history, rattled the cage of the FCCJ establishment. His crusade was such that, at one point, he almost provoked those in charge to introduce a strict dress code for members, DeRoy wrote.

Nyboe dressed casually, in keeping with the spirit of the times, but in Club terms he was seen as a pioneer. But he was not scruffy. He was always clean, valued personal hygiene and shaved daily. Ironically, his personal dress code is now the norm at the FCCJ.

A frequent guest at the Scandinavian table was the Australian correspondent and ex-diplomat, Greg Clark, who became a close friend of Nyboe. “I knew Svend well, better than most,” Clark said. “He was a little bit of a radical, almost hippy-like in his views, and that made some club members angry. But he had a very strong and attractive personality. For me, a battered survivor from the years we spent fighting against the Vietnam War, these were all important qualities.

“It was basically an American club, and Svend was anti-American. But he didn’t care and occupied with his group a table in the main bar. Some wanted him thrown out of the Club, but I always enjoyed sitting at Svend’s table.”

The so-called anti-Svend faction were angry about more important things than his taste in clothes.

Nyboe had many Japanese friends and contacts. He was good at networking, long before the word became common parlance. He met representatives of Chongryun, the organization representing North Korean residents of Japan, and in the evenings, he played chess with colleagues from Tass, the Soviet news agency – an activity that, given the Cold War context of the time, only further aroused suspicions among some of his American colleagues.

To an extent, the ditch-digging and factionalism went over Nyboe’s head. “Svend never turned his back on anyone,” one Scandinavian table regular recalled. “He dealt with his harshest critics with a benevolent interest and a desire to understand their views.”

While he was far removed from the Club mainstream, Nyboe was heavily involved in the club’s activities and politics. During his second stay in Tokyo in the 1970s, he ran for the board every year, becoming an ordinary board official in 1974.

Two years later, when he ran for president for the first and only time, he finished second out of three candidates. The imaginative campaign posters he put up around the Club appealed implored members, in large type, to “Think Big – Vote Andersen”. With his trademark instinct for irony, he embellished the poster with a drawing of a large male gorilla. Later, that same poster hung over the bed at Nyboe and Yukari’s home in Roskilde, Denmark.

After returning to Denmark, Svend Nyboe Andersen served as editor-in-chief for *Aftenavisen Roskilde Tidende*, a local daily paper, for four years until, in May 1981, he succumbed to cancer, an illness that had already resulted in a leg amputation in 1975. He was just 49.

● **Asger Røejle Christensen was a regular member of the FCCJ from 1989 until 1995, and again from 2013 until January this year. He is still an ex-Kanto regular member and looks forward to visiting the Club again as soon as Japan reopens its borders.**

FCCJ SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS



PREYING
ON
A
PANDEMIC

**An edited version of the winning essay in this year's
FCCJ Swadesh DeRoy Scholarship awards**

KAORI KOHYAMA

End of March 2020. While the news was telling us how unusual it was for Tokyo to have snow, I was sitting by the window of a café in the deep cold, facing two women, desperately trying to figure out how to get home.

Just a couple of weeks earlier, I had received a message from a classmate, 11 years after we had graduated. "I've heard about your success, I'd love to catch up," she said. Feeling a slight sense of apprehension that the text had not mentioned her intentions, I concluded she might have something special to discuss in person.

As soon as I arrived at the café, I found a stranger standing next to my friend, who, according to her, was "a person as important as my mother" and wanted to join us for coffee. As bizarre as snow in March, the three of us started our meeting at a table a long way from anyone else in the café. As we made chit-chat, I gradually felt that my initial suspicions might have been wrong. Just when it was about time to hit the road, my friend broke the ice.

"After all, I guess you can't really know what happiness is, don't you think?" she said. "But there's something I've been doing lately"

PREYING ON A PANDEMIC

This was my first experience of a solicitation to join a cult. My tea had gone cold and I had little desire to finish my cake. After hours of listening to stories about what had happened to believers, I finally succeeded in escaping due to an imaginary curfew. I ran home in the heavy snow.

Covid recruitment drive

After the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a pandemic in March 2020, Japan experienced an explosive increase in infections. In this unpredictable situation, there seems to have been a rise in something other than Covid-19 cases: recruitment by cults that take advantage of growing anxiety among people, according to experts.

“During times of pervasive social anxiety, people reportedly create relationships on a short-term basis”, said Kimiaki Nishida, president of the [Japan Society for Cult Prevention and Recovery](#) (JSCPR). Solicitation through social networking services seems to be the new norm during the pandemic, Nishida added. Hiding their identities and intentions, members contact people who are struggling with loneliness and seeking social connections, gradually exploring their insecurities and weaknesses.

Kensho-kai, the group that approached this author, is a self-proclaimed Buddhist organization that has been charged with assaulting people and forcing them to join in at least 23 cases since 1974, according to the Asahi Shimbun digital database.

An examination of tweets – but not retweets or bot posts – containing “Kensho-kai” (顕正会) and “recruitment” (勧誘) between November 2019 and November 2020 revealed striking results. While the spike from March and onwards is clear, the peak came in April, when the greater Tokyo area was undergoing voluntary lockdown.

Taken together the tweets showed that these groups’ recruitment style can be categorized as follows: home visits, handing out flyers on the street, and using personal connections. During the period of “self-restraint” during the pandemic, house visits appeared to be the most common form of approach – a sensible strategy given that more people were working from home.

Repeat after me

On March 26 2020, the day after the governor of Tokyo, Yuriko Koike, held an emergency press conference to announce the country’s first state of emergency, Asai Shoei, the head of Kensho-kai, declared at a monthly meeting that the “great plague and depression” were “the prelude to missionary outreach,” adding that “increasing membership would save Japan and eventually, the entire planet”.

Suzuki Aika, a fourth-year law student in Tokyo, was recruited by Kensho-kai back in July 2020. That process also started with a casual invitation to lunch by a friend from high school. And in another echo of my experience, the third person joining them was a stranger to Aika. “When I saw my friend brainwashed like that, I was really shocked to see what her initial defiance eventually led to,” Aika recalls.

Aika continued to reject the group’s advances. “They were begging me to repeat their sutra just once, telling me it would save me from Covid,” she said. She felt uncomfortable and left the restaurant. “Later, I knew it was their way of converting people into believers.”

In 1995, Kensho-kai simplified its recruiting guidelines, stipulating that chanting the sutra once equals agreement, and that members can apply on behalf of others without their signatures.

“In this turbulent and evil world, ‘signing and stamping’ may cause unnecessary misunderstandings and suspicions in others,” Asai said at a general meeting, according to the July 1995 issue of *The Kensho Shimbun*. “The important thing is to make them practice their faith, not the value of a single application form that has been signed and sealed. Chanting for the first time is the very initiation into Buddhism.”

Longing for connection

The longing for social connections accelerates recruitments, Nishida from JSCPR said. It is not uncommon for high school and college students to join cults, he added. Typically, a student at a famous university approaches high schoolers under the guise of “guidance” to help them enter their university. After the student passes the entrance exam, they become closer and build a relationship of mutual trust. By the time the “mentor” finally introduces the junior student to the cult, there is hardly any

PREYING ON A PANDEMIC

psychological space left for them to harbor suspicions, a psychologic effect known as Pluralistic Ignorance. This mechanism has been made significantly easier online, where there is no third person giving advice.

In addition, cults masquerading as volunteer groups or organizers of overseas educational tours have long operated at Japanese universities. The problem now, however, is that the pandemic enables them to directly approach freshmen who are unable to attend on-campus classes and establish relationships in a private, invisible space. These cases are extremely difficult to identify and address.

Is there any harm in joining one of these groups? After all, Japan is a democratic country where freedom of religion is guaranteed under the principle of the separation of religion and state. Citizens are therefore free to believe in whatever religion they like, regardless of whether it is established or new.

According to Nishida, many of emerging cult activities are problematic because they are inherently designed to violate the human rights of individual believers. Their purpose is to make money, acquire power, satisfy the sexual urges of the founder - or all of the above. Whatever the group's goals, mind control is the favoured means of achieving them.

New believers themselves start to justify the unjust exploitation of resources, the abuse of their educational opportunities and their individual freedoms. As a result, the exploitation continues unchecked.

“Cults blame a recruit’s ‘unbelief’ when something bad happens, so once a believer joins, he or she clings to the faith more and more,” said Nishida, adding that in some cases, people become so absorbed in their faith that they stop accepting the advice of others after just a few months. Those who become involved in such activities begin to undergo dramatic changes in their diet, clothing and values, feel alienated from the people around them and prioritize their new relationships in the group.

Psychologically speaking, every time an individual makes a commitment to the group, it makes it even harder to escape and seek outside help, even while the abuse of escalating.

New believers themselves start to justify the unjust exploitation of resources, the abuse of their educational opportunities and their individual freedoms. As a result, the exploitation continues unchecked.

Before it's too late

According to a report in the December 2020 edition of *The Kensho Shimbun*, the cult had 2.22 million members, an increase of about 4% over the year up to November.

If the group had acquired new believers at that pace since its foundation, its total membership would now be larger than the population of Japan, Nishida said. Claims about extraordinary recruitment numbers are part of cult propaganda.

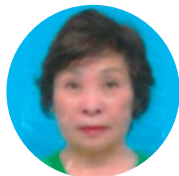
Even so, the fundamental motive to join a cult – a strong desire to connect with people – has been amplified during the pandemic. That, combined with a rise in online and offline recruitment drives, means these groups are likely to exploit people's sense of loneliness.

As Japan enters a fourth wave driven by new Covid-19 variants, people with financial problems or mental health issues could turn to new religions and cults for help, or simply for someone to talk to. Although virtual communication makes it more difficult, checking on each other's mental health has become more important than ever. Noticing a slight change in their behavior, and then acting on it, could end up keeping them out of the clutches of the cults.

● Kaori Kohyama is a student at Waseda University.

CLUB NEWS

New members

**ASSOCIATE MEMBER**

KAZUYO FUJIE was born in Tokyo in 1946. She graduated from Keio University (Library and Information Science) in 1969 and then worked as a librarian at Keio University library for several years. Her hobbies are

travelling, writing haiku, watching movies, cooking, walking and going to the theater.

**ASSOCIATE MEMBER**

YUKA NAGASHIMA was born and brought up in Tokyo. She has one daughter and identical twin boys. A nature lover, her hobbies are skiing, surfing, golf, trekking, hiking, camping, and traveling. She

graduated from Tamagawa University in 1982 and then worked in the overseas department at Koa Fire & Marine Insurance Co. Ltd. From 1985-1987, she studied in Britain and later worked as a tour guide at the M.O. Tourist Co. Ltd. In 1995, she started work at Lloyd as an office clerk and has been president of the company since June 2014. In December 2015, she also became president of Unatech, a 100% subsidiary of Lloyd.

**ASSOCIATE MEMBER****KATSUYA ITO**

Nikkei Ryutsu Co., Ltd.

**ASSOCIATE MEMBER**

NORIAKI NAGASHIMA was born in Shimizu, Shizuoka Prefecture, in 1931. The city is famous for Shimizu no Jirocho, a yakuza gangster and Japanese folk hero at the end of the Edo period and the start of

the Meiji era. Nagashima graduated in economics from Keio University in 1952, just before Japan's education system was transformed by the US-led occupation forces. After graduating, he worked for a shipping company in Kobe for five years, and is now chairman of Lloyd, Inc., a chemical spray manufacturer based in Tokyo.

**ASSOCIATE MEMBER - REINSTATEMENT**

KENICHI SUZUKI is acting general manager in the public relations department of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan. He is a member of the International Academic Society for Asian Community and the Japan Commission on Global Governance.

**PROFESSIONAL JOURNALIST ASSOCIATE MEMBER**

ALEXANDRA HONGO Alexandra "Ally" Hongo is a writer, editor and translator based in Tokyo. Originally from Bulgaria, she has lived in Japan for over 20 years, during which she has worked at and written for various English-language media, including *The Mainichi*, *Japan Today*, *GaijinPot*, *Tokyo Weekender* and *Savvy Tokyo*, where she was editor-in-chief for over three years. As a writer, Ally's greatest passion is finding inspiration from the people she interviews (among her favorites are bridal designer Yumi Katsura, Shibuya

Mayor Ken Hasebe and former astronaut Naoko Yamazaki) and places she visits in Japan. Ally is based in Tokyo, where she lives with her husband, son, and two dog-like cats. She is fluent in Japanese, English, her native Bulgarian and can also order a cup of coffee in French and Russian.

CLUB NEWS

New members



REGULAR MEMBER

BENJAMIN GROSSER works in managerial and coordinating positions for ARD German TV. He initially worked at the ARD German TV studio in Stockholm, Sweden, before joining the team in Tokyo on January 1, 2019

as a project manager. From January 2021, he will take over the provisional management of ARD German TV, Studio Tokyo from the outgoing correspondent and bureau chief, until a successor is chosen.

Benjamin Grosser gained experience in handling major events and crises, such as the terrorist attack in Stockholm in 2017, the 2018 Russia-US summit in Helsinki, Finland, and the G20 summit in Osaka in 2019. Together with the team in the studio, he is looking forward to the postponed Tokyo Olympic Games – a challenging task, due to Covid-19, for an event that he is sure will be very special.



REGULAR MEMBER

DAVE McCOMBS is Asia-Pacific editor at *Brightwire* and founder of Julio Platforms, a startup that helps high schools expand and improve their student news media programs. Between 1998 and 2021, he

was an editor at Bloomberg and most recently oversaw Asia coverage of telecommunications, media and conglomerates, a beat that encompassed Asia's largest family-dynasty companies, sports business and entertainment.

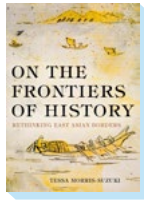
While he's dug out a few minor scoops in recent years on the sports business beat, including record large endorsement deals for tennis stars Kei Nishikori and Naomi Osaka, he's also been a featured reporter on Bloomberg television broadcasts for two decades. Previously, as a staff writer at *The Daily Yomiuri*, he delivered a scoop about *Marco Polo* magazine that was followed by all major media in Japan and that led to the resignation of *Marco Polo* editor Kazuyoshi Hanada. *Marco Polo* had published an essay by a Holocaust denier, a decision that first led Volkswagen AG to pull its advertising and then to the editor's departure.

McCombs has also covered Asia's bond markets, foreign exchange trading and commodities, including a daily column on platinum trading. He has been in Japan for almost three decades, and was editor of the late *Tokyo Journal* magazine, a staff writer at the *Los Angeles Downtown News* and a copy editor for MacMillan Publishers. He enjoys tennis, live music and beer.

CLUB NEWS

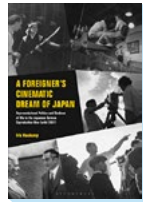
New in the library

1



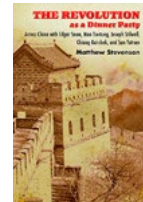
On the Frontiers of History: Rethinking East Asian Borders
Tessa Morris-Suzuki
Australian National University Press

2



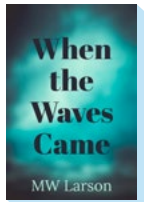
A Foreigner's Cinematic Dream of Japan: Representational Politics and Shadows of War in the Japanese-German Coproduction New Earth (1937)
Iris Haukamp
Bloomsbury Academic
Gift from Iris Haukamp

3



The Revolution as a Dinner Party: Across China with Edgar Snow, Mao Tse-tung, Joseph Stilwell, Chiang Kai-shek, and Sun Yat-sen
Matthew Stevenson
Odysseus Books
Gift from Matthew Stevenson

4



When the Waves Came
MW Larson
Chin Music Press
Gift from MW Larson

5



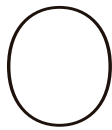
JR Shinagawa Eki Takanawa-guchi
JR品川駅高輪口
Miri Yu
Kawade Shobo Shinsha
Gift from Kawade Shobo Shinsha

6



JR Takadanobaba eki Toyama-guchi
JR高田馬場駅戸山口
Miri Yu
Kawade Shobo Shinsha
Gift from Kawade Shobo Shinsha

Join the Film Committee

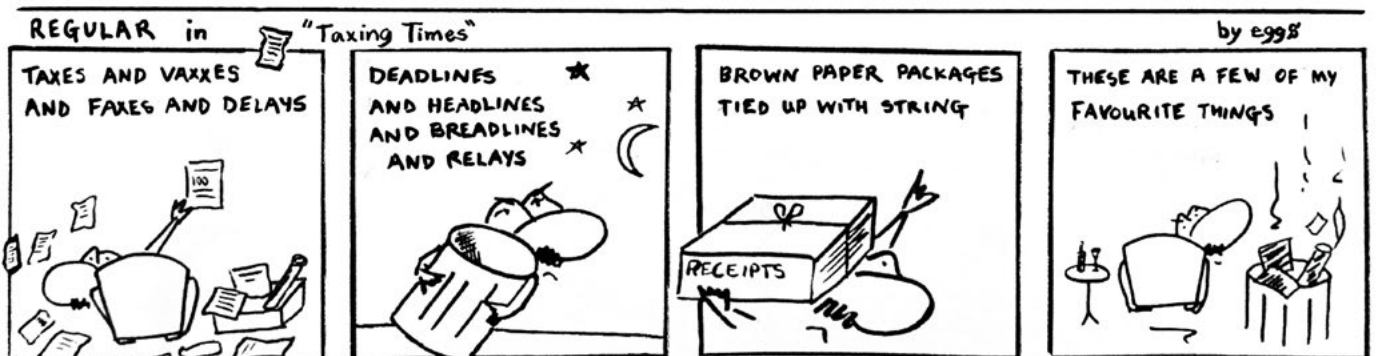


On Tuesday, May 18, at 5:30 p.m. for a sneak preview screening of the animated masterwork *True North*, which traces a young man's harrowing experiences inside one of North Korea's six known political prisoner camps, where an estimated 120,000 innocent people of all ages are living in subhuman conditions, scrambling to survive starvation, disease, torture and backbreaking labor. Director Eiji Han Shimizu spent 10 years researching the camps, conducting dozens of interviews with survivors and former guards, before creating his fictitious characters. Although the story is set against the backdrop of an impossibly brutal environment, encompassing some of the worst human rights abuses of our time, *True North* finds cracks of light in the darkness. Shimizu will be joining us for the Q&A session, along with Human Rights Watch Japan director Kanae Doi and No Fence secretary-general Yoon-Bok Song. (*True North*, Japan/Indonesia, 2020, 94 minutes, in English with Japanese subtitles).



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● Karen Severns



EXHIBITION

888Zenya

PHOTO EXHIBITION

BY MASANORI

KAMIDE'

MAY 8-JUNE 4, 2021

On Christmas Eve 2020, the number of people newly infected with the coronavirus in Tokyo reached 888 on a single day. Going to the downtown area, chatting at bars and on dance floors was no longer something that could be enjoyed freely. The title 888Zenya [The Night Before 888] evokes the bustling energy of Tokyo's streets that everyone loved before their lives were changed by the virus.

Kamide, a musician who had been at the center of Tokyo's entertainment scene since the 1980s as a professional DJ, was distressed when Tokyo's neon lights were temporarily switched off after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. As a result, he transformed from being a creator of entertainment to a recorder of events. The images are the work of a man who has now watched over Tokyo for 10 years; whose love for the city's neighbourhoods and people has lasted four decades. He has been able to grasp the miraculous and rare scenery of the city by cycling around the city at night. Kamide's images liven up the darkened streets – a fuse with which to relight the nightlife in a new age.



About Masanori Kamide:

Born in Osaka, Kamide was active as a DJ and musician for 30 years. After the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, he shifted his focus to photography and now takes photos of a variety of subjects, from street style to portraits, with a focus on people. Kamide won the 2017 Ken Domon Cultural Award Encouragement Prize for his photo collection Monochrome Blues, which captures communities, such as the legendary Fussa discos and Kabukicho pole dancers, from the inside.

<https://www.masanorikamide.com>

EXHIBITION

888Zenya - Photo exhibition by Masanori Kamide: May 8-June 4, 2021



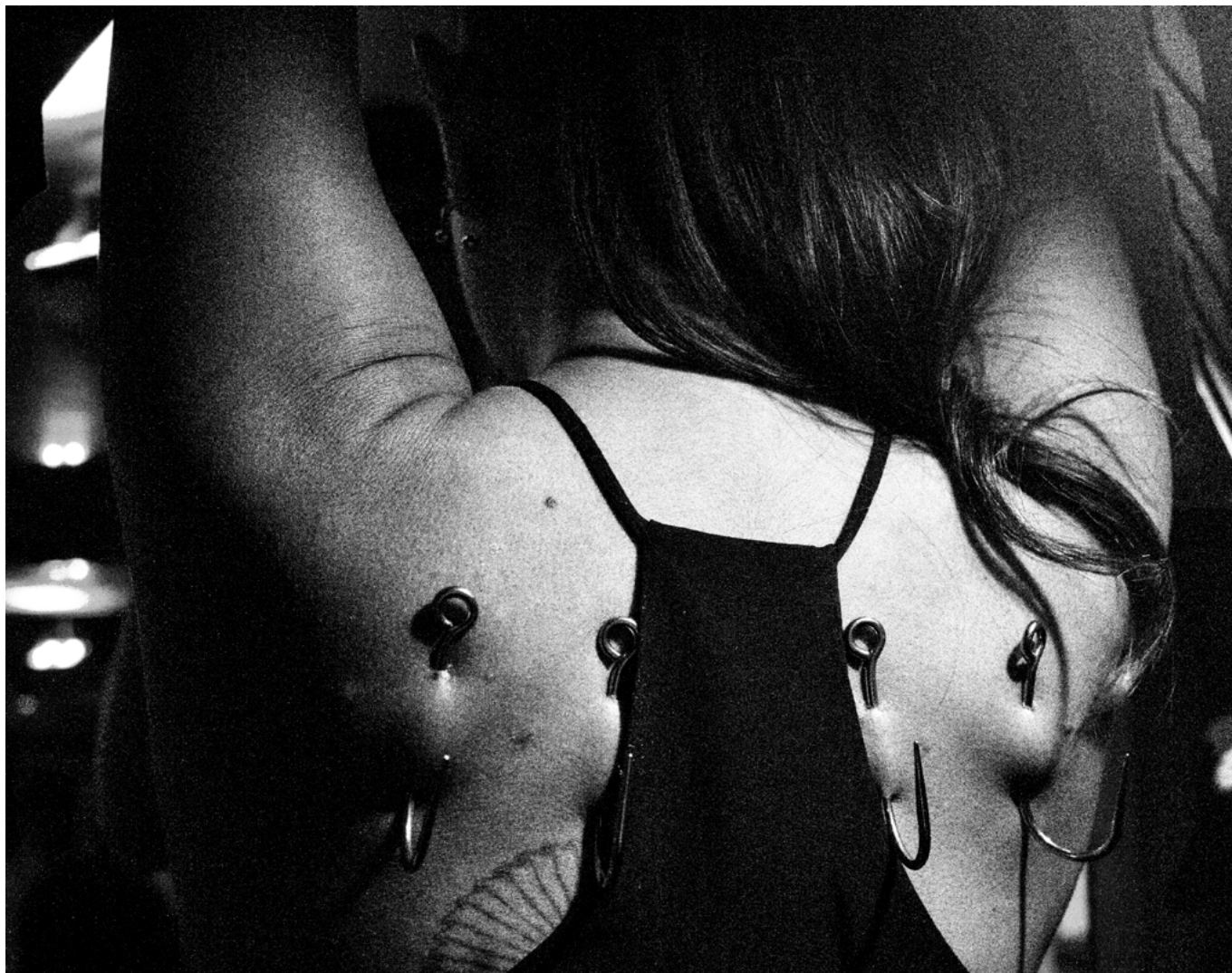
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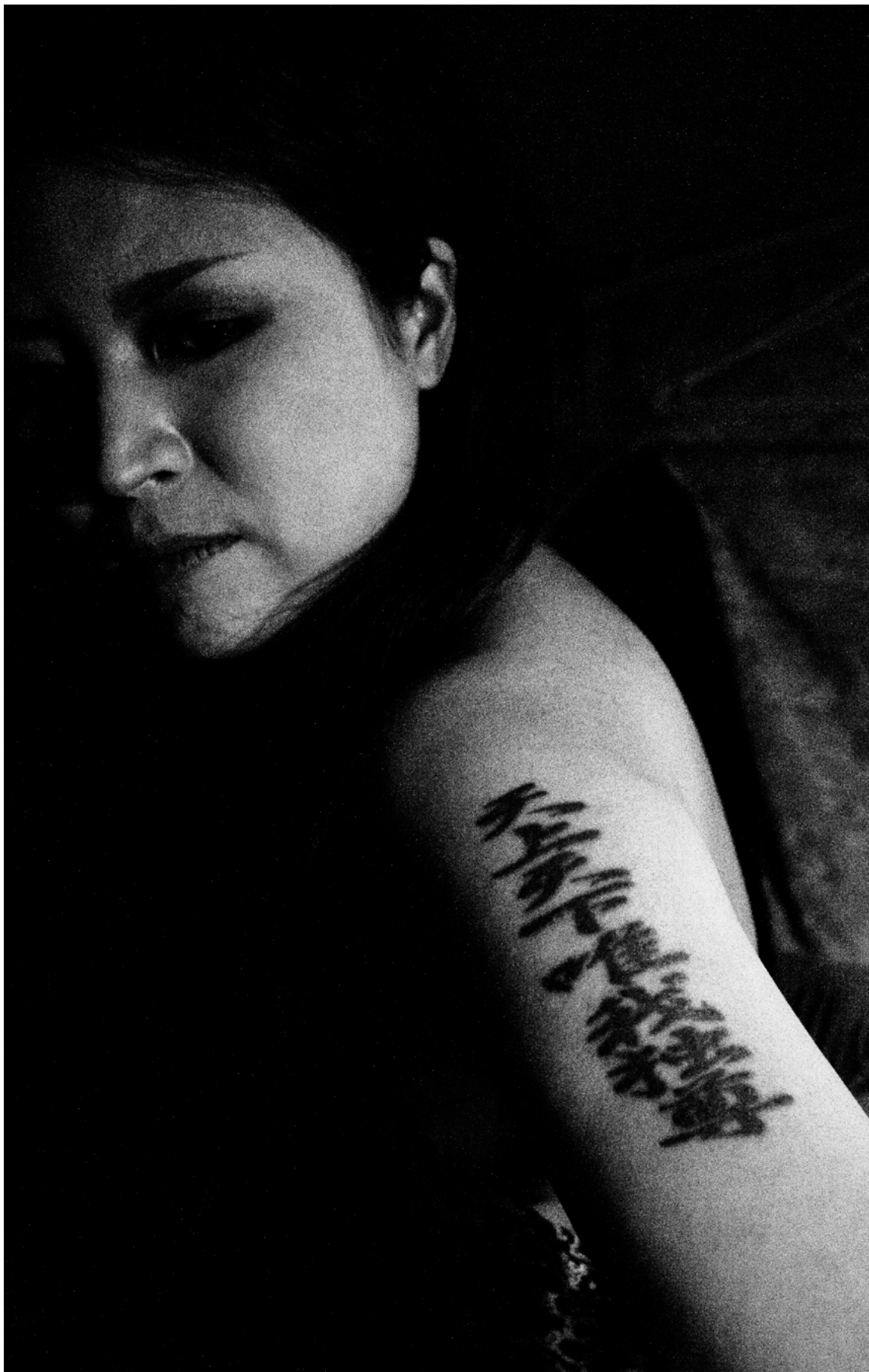
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