

Pseudo-Democracy of the Japanese Press: *Kisha Clubs* and Unwritten Rules

Nobuyuki OKUMURA*

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The Fixer

During the late fall of 2007, there was an unexpected development in Japanese politics. Ichiro Ozawa, the President of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the largest opposition party, who had been rejecting direct talks with the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the current ruling party, suddenly agreed to meet with then Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda. They met twice between late October and early November. The topic of discussion was the creation of a “Grand Coalition” between the LDP and the DPJ. The idea met with harsh opposition by DPJ members and was quickly shot down.

The LDP lost the majority in the House of Councilors to the DPJ in the election held on July 29, 2007, while the LDP had the overwhelming majority in the House of Representatives. The situation made it difficult for LDP to pass the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law, which was the Fukuda administration’s first priority,¹ and would enable the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force’s vessels to resume refueling operations in the Indian Ocean as a part of the “War Against the Terror”. The “Grand Coalition” would have allowed the LDP to accelerate passing legislation in the Diet under the current political environment.

* Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Science, Ritsumeikan University

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It was rumored that Tsuneo Watanabe, Editor in Chief of *Yomiuri Shimbun* and also Chairman of *Yomiuri Shimbun* Holdings, had been the mediator between the two leaders². The *Yomiuri* boasts the largest circulation in Japan³, with ten million readers. Watanabe himself admitted his involvement in a speech, by promising to disclose the inside story of the “Grand Coalition” someday⁴, although he would not do so right away from concern for disturbing potential further developments. .

Watanabe is considered to be one of the most distinguished political writers in Japan, with more than half century’s experience. However, he is also notorious for his political interventions, failing to maintain “independence”⁵ and thereby breaching journalism ethics. He once commented in an interview held in 1999, “You need power in order to change the world in a favorable way. For better or for worse, I have the power of ten million in circulation. I can move the Prime Minister into action with this power...All the proposals which *Yomiuri* made in its articles have been realized as government policy within a year, for example, cuts in both income and corporate taxes. It is a most joyful thing, second to none.”⁶

However, the Japanese people are not surprised or disappointed with Watanabe’s behavior, for there was no decline in *Yomiuri*’s readership. Cozy relationships between reporters and politicians, while not unique in Japan, have a long history and the public has come to accept such practice as routine. The Japanese public seems to accept that while not a healthy journalism practice, that prominent political journalists in Japan tend to establish such relations with politicians.

However, the failure to reform journalism ethics and standards could have a negative impact on Japan’s global reputation. Japan ranks thirty-seventh in The Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2007 published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a media watchdog NGO⁷. Japan ranks after Macedonia (36th) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (34th), and far behind countries such as Latvia (12th) and Trinidad and Tobago (19th). This low ranking is a large gap compared with the fact that Japan advocates democracy as a democratic leader in Asia. This essay will examine the backwardness and structure of politics-media relations in Japan and how the notorious *Kisha Club* (Press Club) system, which has been cited as the main factor for Japan’s low ranking RSF, aggravates the situation.

The Kisha Club System

Japan has many *Kisha Clubs*, in various fields. All government offices, political parties, local governments, industry associations, professional sports (baseball, soccer, *Sumo* wrestling, etc.) have their own *Kisha Clubs* and offer office space, desks and chairs, and other office equipment to the members of the club. In some *Kisha Clubs*, even receptionists or a refrigerator (occasionally equipped with chilled beer) are provided. Usually a press conference room is located right next door, and all press conferences and briefings are announced to the members. Almost all the clubs limit memberships to core national print and TV media outlets, and exclude freelance-journalists and foreign media, with few exceptions. In *Kisha Clubs*, all the reporter has to do is to wait, because there are press conferences and

hourly background briefings and the reporters are able to obtain information with little effort. This eventually gives birth to inert reporters who no longer make the effort to go out and cover stories based on their own interests.

The exclusivity of *Kisha Clubs* is a commonly cited defect of the system. What some foreign media may find surprising is that almost all press conferences held in *Kisha Clubs* are hosted by *Kisha Club members*, rather than the government offices or political parties who hold the press conferences. If you were a local reporter or freelance and tried to take part in a press conference which interests you, you would probably first approach the public relations or press relations department of the relevant government office or political party. However, in Japan, the answer you would receive is, "You'll have to ask permission from the managing reporters at the *Kisha Club*." Members of the *Kisha Club* take turns managing the club every one or two months. When non-members ask for permission to attend the press conference, the requests are frequently rejected, or only reluctantly admitted as observers who are not allowed to pose questions. Without membership at a *Kisha Club*, non-members must go through such unpleasant negotiations without support from public institutions which send speakers to these press conferences. Thus, ordinary press conferences in Japan are akin to private conferences and only on limited occasions do the *Kisha Club* members "generously" agree to make some part public.

In Japanese political coverage, ordinary reporters from mainstream media usually start their career by covering exclusively the Prime Minister, after seven to ten years⁸ of basic training covering local prefectures, cities or municipalities. Covering the Prime Minister is considered the easiest, as there are no "off-the-record" comments. After that, those reporters rotate every one or two years to cover different LDP faction leaders, officials at the Prime Minister's Office, leaders of opposition parties and government offices.

Reporters who are assigned to exclusively cover a particular politician or official are called "*Ban-Kisha* (watchdog reporters)", and are assigned to stand-by in the *Kisha Clubs*. *Ban-Kisha* in the *Kisha Club* get exclusive access to informal, usually off-the-record meetings with the politician they cover. All they have to do is to wait around the *Kisha Club* room and the politician's secretary will come by and circulate an invitation to organizer of the *Ban-Kisha* group⁹ or there will simply be a posting on the board. Reporters usually are not allowed to take notes at these meetings, yet these informal meetings with politicians are indispensable, because they often provide information on the outlook of the Diet proceedings or political developments. Exclusive access to these meetings is another lucrative aspect of holding membership in the *Kisha Club*, and for obvious reasons, local, freelance and foreign media have criticized this closed system¹⁰.

The informal meetings between politicians and officials and their *Ban-Kisha* are not only held during the daytime, but also take place in the evenings or late at night, even on weekend or occasional golf trips. It is a common practice for Japanese reporters to visit the homes of politicians or officials after working hours to have unofficial get-togethers, called "*Yomawari* (night duty)". It is common for politicians and officials to unofficially provide drinks or meals to these journalists at these meetings. Reporters often make the gesture of

trying to pay in part, but rarely end up paying in full, because the politician foots the bill. Politicians attempt to forge personal ties, make reporters feel indebted, making it more difficult for them to find fault with them. If a reporter is found to have criticized the politician in public or to have written off-the-record information, they could be excluded from further meetings unless they make an official apology or a correction notice.

The *Kisha Club* system thus allows powerful politicians the opportunity to manipulate their relationships to make it difficult for the *Ban-Kisha* to write critical articles. Although the *Ban-Kisha* are rotated every year or two, this “loyalty” towards the politician continues even after they are promoted to senior editors many years later. In a way, politicians make prior investment in their *Ban-Kisha*, of which some may become future senior editors of major media outlets.

However, the existence of the *Kisha Club* alone does not explain why politicians attempt to build close ties with their *Ban-Kisha*. It is rather the combination of the unique developments in the history of Japanese democracy together and the *Kisha Club* system that provides background of the defects of the political-media relations in Japan.

The “1955 System”

Although Japan is a democratic society, it is essentially an autocracy of LDP and allies, usually referred to as the “1955 System.” The LDP has had leadership and control the government for the most of post-World War II¹¹. Rather than being fought between different political parties, leadership has been fought among factions within the LDP, which function as if they are mini political parties. Membership of factions range from ten or so¹², based on origins and personal ties with factional leaders. Loyalty to factional leaders used to be reinforced by constant financial assistance provided to faction members. Rather than discussion of policies or fundamental policy reform, issues have had the tendency to focus on leadership competition among the factions. Political coverage in the media has also followed these lines – focusing on who the next leader in the party would be, how the leader would compromise with dominant politicians backed by various interest groups and what the leader would get in return. In short, the media has not been interested in covering policy discussion, but rather power games. All too often have media members themselves been drawn into these power games.

Since obtaining information on the movements of rival factions is indispensable for winning leadership within the party, LDP politicians are desperate to find experienced and loyal reporters to rely on their intelligence as well as advice. At the same time, newspaper and television reporters cannot obtain inside coverage unless they are willing to barter their knowledge and advice for inside information. Eventually some reporters develop sympathy toward the faction leaders they cover, occasionally outright expressing their support. Rivalries even develop within a newspaper political section between groups of reporters covering different factions.

The Hierarchy among the *Ban-Kisha*

The *Kisha Club* system provides exclusive access to off-the-record information to certain members of the media, but there is a further hierarchical structure that develops among the *Ban-Kisha* of the *Kisha Club*. Politicians often capitalize on competition among journalists in the *Kisha Club* to recruit “friendly” reporters who are provided with further preferential treatment. This preferential treatment includes face-to-face dinners, and being provided information before other *Ban-Kisha*. In return for this privileged information, the recruited journalist often provides personal strategic advice or even media advice on how to control other *Ban-Kisha* to retain favorable coverage.

When Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori was in serious predicament in 2000 after his remark that “Japan is a divine nation with the Emperor at its center”¹³, there was evidence that someone in the *Kisha Club* at the Prime Minister’s Office tried to coach Mori on how to manage the press conference for his apology. A piece of paper was found near a photocopy machine in the *Kisha Club*’s office a day before Mori held the press conference on May 25, 2000. There was no author’s name but it provided very detailed advice on how he should make his explanation to dissuade media from harsh criticism. It even warned Mori that one of the liberal newspapers was about to begin a campaign to topple his Cabinet¹⁴.

A hierarchy among the *Ban-Kisha* is clandestinely established, although there are only a few reporters of such a status. These reporters actually seldom write much about the politician and the faction because they often have to devote themselves to providing advice to politicians (although they take care not to be noticed by rival reporters) in order to maintain good relations. Most of the articles they write are those that contribute to strengthen the politician’s influence by slandering rivals.

Journalists who are able to establish preferential ties with politicians occasionally develop political influence. Watanabe is a prime example. He once was witnessed nominating members of the Cabinet alongside Banboku Ohno, the then Vice President of LDP. Eager politicians who wanted to become members of the Cabinet approached Watanabe to intermeditate with Ohno¹⁵. Watanabe described his relationship with Banboku Ohno during the mid-1950’s, “I felt the euphoria of knowing confidential information far before others. I also felt the joy of being trusted by a big-name politician. I recall that my relationship with Mr. Banboku Ohno was different from that of a usual a politician and a reporter.”¹⁶ He himself wrote about how he contributed the backroom political dealings for restoring diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea during early 1960’s. He arranged meetings between LDP’s leaders including Ohno and South Korean intelligence officials and provided a negotiation channel through help of his colleague who was a correspondent in Seoul¹⁷. It is also said that Watanabe has on occasion protected politicians from press coverage. It is said that he provided his chauffeur-driven car to deceive city section reporters, including his colleagues, to let a LDP politician under suspicion of election offences escape¹⁸.

Leaders of the factions are in short, the candidates for the future Prime Minister. A political writer once commented, “It’s a common practice particularly in Japanese newspapers

and news agencies that reporters covering the Prime Minister's faction in the LDP are the ones that get promotions.”¹⁹ He further said that some reporters, in a sense, are the ones who “raise and educate” politicians in the political world in Japan.

Watanabe himself “raised and educated” Yasuhiro Nakasone, who became the Prime Minister in 1982. Watanabe invited Nakasone into his study group on politics and diplomacy with reporters and business people when Nakasone was only a rookie lawmaker. Watanabe later helped Nakasone by taking advantage of his political connections, confidentially introducing Nakasone to then LDP leaders with whom Nakasone had been finding difficulty in establishing intimate relations. He further persuaded some of the leaders to nominate Nakasone as a member of the Cabinet.

After Watanabe won the power struggle within the *Yomiuri* and took control as both as the Chairman and the Editor in Chief, he extended his involvement in politics not as a journalist but as an outright player and “fixer”, though he continued to write various inside stories on decision makings by the leaders. On being named Editor in Chief in 1979, almost all of the chairpersons of committees at the House of Representatives openly came to greet him as a demonstration of their loyalty²⁰. With ten million in circulation, there are few hard-core politicians, particularly within the LDP, that can act or speak against what the *Yomiuri* says.

There is another reason for why the *Yomiuri*, did not stop Watanabe but rather encouraged him to maintain his influence over LDP politicians. It is said that in the early 1960's, the *Yomiuri* was desperate to obtain government permission to purchase the former Ministry of Finance site in downtown Tokyo²¹ for relocating their office. Under orders of the management executives of *Yomiuri*, Watanabe actively tried to directly negotiate with the LDP Secretary General Kakuei Tanaka. He aggressively took the lead of the newspaper's campaign against Prime Minister Eisaku Sato who was unwilling to give *Yomiuri* the approval for the concession²². It is ironic for Watanabe to proudly publish his use of political influence as a journalist²³.

However, Watanabe is no exception. In parallel to *Yomiuri's* attempts to purchase the site, *Sankei Shinbun* a rival paper, whose building was located right next to the site in question, was also actively lobbying LDP politicians, especially Prime Minister Sato²⁴. The President of *Sankei*, Shigeo Mizuno, had a close relationship with Sato²⁵. In fact, every major national newspaper during the period between 1960's through 1980's had promoted some of its reporters in order to capitalize on their political contacts. There are five nationwide newspapers in Japan, and all five papers maintain cross-ownership or close relationship with five commercial television stations²⁶. These newspapers, as large shareholders, actively competed in approaching LDP politicians with strong influence over the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (now merged into the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications) for licensing of local television stations for network expansion. Such a necessity for media outlets remains present. In Nihon Hoso Kyokai (NHK), the only public broadcasting station in Japan²⁷, there are management executives who maintain close ties with dominant LDP politicians, since NHK requires the Diet's approval for its budget. It is common for prominent

NHK political reporters with established political capital with LDP politicians to be promoted to a department where he or she functions as a full-time lobbyist. He or she looks and behaves the same in the Diet building, but only with a different mission. In 2001, NHK is said to have altered the contents of a documentary program on the issue of sex crimes during World War II owing to excessive concern for maintaining relationships with powerful conservative politicians in the LDP, including former Prime Minister (then Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary) Shinzo Abe. This ignited a large movement advocating nonpayment of viewer fees among the Japanese public. Such incident was regarded to be a result of too much consideration to those influential lawmakers by “lobbyist” executives.

The Subtlety of “Sundome”

A senior staff writer for a major newspaper, who was once also a correspondent in Washington D.C.²⁸, analyzed that there is not a fundamental difference in coverage of politics between the United States and Japan. He said that an excellent political reporter, regardless of the political system or environment, is basically good at identifying personal connections of the politician and establishing relationships with the “key persons,” who are close advisors. According to him, a capable political reporter is able to withdraw information by merely asking, “How are things going?” since they already are familiar with politician and the background of the issues in question.

The senior staff writer alluded to the concept of *sun-dome* (pronounced “Soon Domey”), a technique in *karate* as a way that journalists can maintain their ethics. *Sun-dome* is an expert skill in karate, *where* a punch or kick is stopped just about an inch away from the opponent²⁹. Though there is confidential information which reporters cannot obtain unless they are willing to become an insider with the politician they intend to cover, he also stated there are minimum rules and ethics that reporters should follow as journalists. The first he illustrated was making efforts to ensure that they do not become a “player” in politics. He explained that he provides his opinion when demanded, but also avoids using phrases such as “you must” or “you should” that could be misconstrued as advice, and limits comments to analysis based on information from his own coverage. The other is maintaining objectivity and being courageous enough to write criticism about the politician or the high-ranked government official when necessary. He said that a politician can be considered to be reliable source with whom a fair and balanced relationship can be maintained, only if they still treat you with respect after publishing a critical article. Watanabe, unfortunately, failed to follow these *sun-dome* techniques and chose to become an active player in the political power game.

Such judicious political reporters like the previously mentioned senior staff writer are an exception in Japanese media world. As *sun-dome* is a master maneuver acquired only after long year’s hard experience, there are very few reporters who can maintain ethical relationships with politicians, and the majority often breach ethics of journalism to regularly maintain their status in the inner circle. The senior reporter above developed his own code of conduct, and was able to illustrate examples of what is ethically acceptable and not acceptable

as a journalist. However, such rules have never been explicitly communicated by their employers, nor passed on by senior reporters. Most journalists lack formal training, since theory and ethics of journalism are rarely methodically taught in Japanese college education. The codes of ethics are often not prepared in even major Japanese media outlets. Even if they do exist, those codes are often too vague to provide guidance, open to wide interpretation, or they are not printed and distributed to reporters. In contrast, internationally prominent media such as *The New York Times* and the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)* have developed detailed codes of ethics which are publically disclosed on their websites. Without guiding ethical principles, Japanese reporters have rather been educated to promptly become an insider with the target, particularly throughout 1970's and 1980's. Many a junior reporter has a similar story of after months of efforts in trying to develop relationships with the politician they cover, they finally are invited into the politicians home only to find that their bosses had long been playing mah-jongg with the politician. Thus, ultimate goal of Japanese political reporter had long been considered, until recently, to become as close as possible to the source, to the extent of becoming mah-jongg buddies in a living room.

The “Other” *Ban-Kisha*

The *Ban-Kisha* who are not provided preferential treatment are the “other *Ban-Kisha*”. While some politicians take measures to ensure that these “other *Ban-Kisha*” feel that they are not getting unfair treatment, some politicians are quite merciless and scarcely talk to the “other *Ban-Kisha*”. Although some ambitious reporters continue to make efforts to approach the politician, it is the natural course for those “other *Ban-Kisha*” to give up seeking scoops and instead focus their efforts to ensure that they are not to be left behind from information that the other “other *Ban-Kisha*” have. As a result, those reporters tend to share memos and pass on the same information to their editors of their papers and diversity is lost.

A tragic example of this is the case of the *Ban-Kisha* covering Hiromu Nonaka, who was a Chief Cabinet Secretary under Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi from July 1998 through October 1999. Nonaka would never disclose information in response to journalists' questions, and would only respond with “*So-suka*,” meaning “Oh, really”. Once when he arrived at the entrance of his apartment, a group of *Ban-Kisha* desperately chased him and quickly asked various questions in the corridors, elevator and by the door. But the only answers they were able to obtain were simply many “*So-suka*.” After being unable to obtain comments other than “*So-suka*”, the *Ban-Kisha* gathered in a circle in the center of the lobby and shared their various interpretations of the “*So-suka*”. Since almost all his comments were “*So-suka*”, they agreed to level nuances of “*So-suka*” and wrote “*So-suka* (affirmative)” or “*So-suka* (not yet decided)” in the reports they were to send to their editors.

The majority of political reporters are unable to receive preferential treatment, and as a result, they tend to monitor one another so that no single reporter stands out. Coverage from a unique point of view, not even based on exclusive information, can bring antagonism within a group of *Ban-Kisha*. Thus the more solid a group of *Ban-Kisha* becomes, the diversity in

the information which readers or viewers receive diminishes. However, the environment makes it difficult for “ordinary” reporters to criticize “insider” reporters for writing obviously biased articles or for breaches of journalist ethics, because such actions could be interpreted as an act against the politician himself. Akira Uozumi, who wrote a critical biography of Watanabe, introduced a story that when he was with Ohno, almost all new *Ban-Kisha* came to greet Watanabe first, before paying respect to Ohno himself.³⁰

An Unchangeable Ancien Regime?

Relations between politicians and reporters changed dramatically during Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s administration. One of the reasons was his personality. Outside of any traditional LDP faction, he was a maverick and there were very few in his inner circle. Political reporters had to adjust their traditional practices in covering him. Koizumi established close ties and consult with very few reporters for advice. Though he started an innovative system of daily interviews with the press³¹ and the press acquired more opportunities to approach him, it was difficult to seize his true colors, owing to his speech skills. He excelled at dodging reporters’ questions, while at the same time he was capable of entertaining the public through television with catchy quips. A journalist complained that Koizumi gave the same information whether on or off the record, and whether speaking with the Prime Minister’s *Ban-Kisha*, senior chiefs of *Kisha Club*, or even executives of the media outlets.

The second possible reason is the declining solidarity of the factions in LDP over the years, with the lack of outstanding leaders. A senior staff writer of a major newspaper stated in an interview that it has become more important to closely cover government officials assisting those politicians instead of the politicians themselves³².

Another reason is development of so-called “telepolitics.” Koizumi succeeded in retaining his leadership for more than five years, not based on support merely from LDP lawmakers, but from the general public. It seems that his television interviews played a decisive role in his popularity. Since the impact of Koizumi’s skillfulness in selling his image through television was so strong, young politicians started to actively appear in television, not only in news programs, but also on talk shows, quiz or comedy shows. As a result, some politicians started to place more emphasis on developing close relations with reporters from TV stations that have programs with high ratings on the air. Politicians used to regard reporters from newspapers and news agencies as more reliable than television reporters, particularly owing to the fact that TV reporters from the five commercial networks lack experience and sufficient training³³. However, politicians came to realize that appearance on TV programs is a powerful tool for appealing to their constituency by carefully observing Koizumi and have grown to be less reliant on reporters.

Notwithstanding, such change still has had limited impact, as politicians have also found that Koizumi only succeeded due to his natural gift for verbal performances. His successors, Shinzo Abe, Yasuo Fukuda and Taro Aso have been rather reserved about the use of

television, though they have maintained interview opportunities³⁴.

Now that faction-oriented politics within the LDP has already gone, it seems unlikely that another Watanabe would grow out of young reporters within the present Japanese political system. However, the change is so gradual and much room remains for traditional politicians to dominate in the LDP's gerontocracy, as well as for the old *Ban-Kisha* type reporters like Watanabe to enjoy influence on politics because he is much older and more experienced than the majority of LDP leaders.

It is an open secret that Watanabe had a hand in nominating Fukuda as a leading candidate for the President of LDP, who was to automatically become the Prime Minister after his predecessor Abe abruptly resigned in September 2007. It is said that Watanabe, together with Seiichiro Ujiie, Representative Director and Executive Chairman of Nippon Television Network Corporation (NTV)³⁵ who was Watanabe's close junior colleague at the *Yomiuri*, confidentially invited three LDP's senior leaders including former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori in Ujiie's executive room in NTV the day immediately after Abe's resignation. The unwritten rules governing relationships between politicians and reporters may well endure and prevent the desperately needed reform of journalism ethics and practice in Japan.

NOTES

- 1 The Replenishment Support Special Measures Law passes the Diet and was enacted on January 11, 2008.
"Statement of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on enactment of the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan's website, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/fukuda/state0801.html> last viewed on February 25, 2008.
- 2 Watanabe virtually admitted that he acted as go-between in his speech at the fundraising party held by an influential LDP politician on December 5. "*Seikai: Watanabe Tsuneo-shi*, Tou-shu Kaidan, 'Izure Kaku'" (Translation: Mr.Tsuneo Watanabe spoke on the talk between the two leaders and he will write about it someday.)
Mainichi Shimbun, December 6, 2007.
- 3 *Yomiuri Shimbun*'s most recent official circulation is 10,033,061 copies a day, according to Japan Audit Bureau of Circulation's report issued on December 15, 2007.
<http://adv.yomiuri.co.jp/yomiuri/n-busu/index.html>
However, it is said that the figures of circulation of all Japanese newspapers includes certain amount of dead stock at local distributors.
- 4 , *Mainichi*, op.cit.
- 5 Bill Kovach & Tom Rosenstiel, "The Elements of Journalism What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect," Three Rivers Press, New York, 2001, pp.12-13
- 6 Akira Uozumi, "*Watanabe Tsuneo, Media To Kenryoku* (Tsuneo Watanabe, Media and Power)," Kodansha, Tokyo, 2003, p.429 The quotation is Okumura's translation.
- 7 "Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2007," Reporters Without Borders' website, http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=24025 last viewed on February 25, 2008.
- 8 Television and Radio reporters except Nihon Hoso Kyokai (NHK), the only public

broadcasting station in Japan, are sometimes assigned without sufficient journalist training in their early twenties and occasionally cause problems, but their inability has seldom been reported. Please see also; Nobuyuki Okumura, "Japan's Media Fiefdom – Mainstream press is covertly disturbing people's free access to information by monopolizing daily interviews with media-savvy prime minister," *Ritsumeikan Social Science Review*, Vol.42 No.2, September 2006, <http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/acd/cg/ss/sansharonshu/422pdf/02-04.pdf> last viewed on February 25, 2008

- 9 For example, there are approximately twenty media maintain their desks at LDP *Kisha Club* at present and they take turns the organizers every two months with a pair of a newspaper and a television.
- 10 Recently, there has been a little breakthrough. Kisha Clubs at the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gradually accept major foreign media and several international press such as Reuters are occasionally allowed to be in such informal talks.
- 11 To be exact, LDP was officially founded in November 1955, after "Conservative Alliance" was formed between Japan Liberal Party and Japan Democratic Party.
 "The Formation of Liberal Democratic Party," LDP website, <http://www.jimin.jp/jimin/english/history/03.html> last viewed on February 25, 2008.
 And LDP became an opposition party only once during the period from August 1993 until June 1994.
 "Period of President Kono's Leadership," LDP website, <http://www.jimin.jp/jimin/english/history/chap16.html> last viewed on February 25, 2008.
- 12 There are so far eight factions in LDP at present, but LDP does not officially admit such groups exist.
- 13 "Japanese PM says sorry," BBC News Asia-Pacific, May 17, 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/752284.stm> last viewed on February 25, 2008.
- 14 "*Mori Shusho Shakumei Kaiken 'Shinan-sho'* Mondai, Kokumin heno Haishin Misugosenu" (Translation: The issue of coaching papers to Prime Minister Mori for his press conference on apology cannot be overlooked, because it represents betrayal to voters.) *Nishinippon Shimbun*, June 8, 2000
 It was a *Nishinippon's* reporter who discovered the sheet of the paper and first reported the issue.
- 15 Uozumi, op.cit., p.132
- 16 Tsuneo Watanabe, "*Kunmei Mo Ukezaru Tokoro Ari*" (Meaning: You sometimes have to go against the order.), Nikkei Publishing Inc. Tokyo 2007, p.132, Quotation is Okumura's translation.
- 17 Ibid. p.149
 Watanabe, op.cit. pp.154-162
- 18 Uozumi, op.cit. pp.196-198
- 19 Author's interview with a senior political staff writer of major Japanese newspaper on December 14, 2007. He spoke under the condition of anonymity.
- 20 Uozumi, op.cit. p.351

- 21 Uozumi, op.cit. pp.262-277
- 22 Watanabe, op.cit. pp.184-191
- 23 Ito, Mikuriya and Iio, op.cit. pp.220-226
- 24 Uozumi, op.cit. pp.263-264
- 25 Ito, Mikuriya and Iio, op.cit. p.221
- 26 At present, *Asahi Shimbun* holds about thirty-three per cent of TV Asahi. *Yomiuri Shimbun* and Nippon Television Network (NTV), *Sankei Shimbun* and Fuji TV and Nikkei and TV Tokyo have similar ties. Though intimate cross ownership between *Mainichi Shimbun* and Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) has declined, they also maintain close collaboration in news gathering and news program production.
- 27 NHK is legally a government-affiliated corporation.
- 28 He spoke under the condition of anonymity on December 14, 2007.
- 29 “*Sun*” (pronounced “soon”) is a unit of length in traditional Japan, equivalent of 3.03 centimeters.
- 30 Uozumi, op.cit. p.238
- 31 At present, the Prime Minister Fukuda accepts brief interviews with members of *Kisha Club* twice a day, one without a television camera around eleven o'clock in the morning and the other with a television camera in the evening around six o'clock. If there are any serious incidents, Fukuda and *Kisha Club* agree to include television camera in the morning interview.
- 32 The interview was held on December 14, 2007, under the consent of anonymity.
- 33 Regarding problems on unskilled TV reporters in Japan, please refer to; Nobuyuki Okumura, “Japan’s Media Fiefdom – Mainstream press is covertly disturbing people’s free access to information by monopolizing daily interviews with media-savvy prime minister,” *Ritsumeikan Social Science Review*, Vol.42 No.2, September 2006, <http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/acd/cg/ss/sansharonshu/422pdf/02-04.pdf> last viewed on February 25, 2008
- 34 To be exact, Abe tried to reduce interviews to only once a day in the evenings, complaining that the questions posed by the press were all the same both in the mornings and evenings and it is was a waste of time.
- 35 *Yomiuri Shimbun*’s affiliate. As of September 30, 2007, *Yomiuri* holds 14.8% of NTV shares http://www.ntv.co.jp/ir/holder/stock_info.html

日本の政治報道における危うい民主主義 —記者クラブ制度と暗黙のルールに囲まれて

奥村 信幸*

2007年秋、突然の安倍政権崩壊から福田政権が誕生した際に起きた自民党と民主党の「大連立」騒ぎは日本のジャーナリズムの危うい側面を浮き彫りにした。読売新聞の主筆で読売新聞ホールディングス会長の渡辺恒雄氏が「仕掛け人」であったことが明らかになったのである。渡辺氏は政治記者として半世紀以上のキャリアを持ち、数々の業績を残している。しかし同時に購読者1千万部を超える読売新聞の力を頼りに自民党の内側に深く影響力を及ぼし続け、政治をコントロールしようとしてきたこともまた事実であり、これを「ジャーナリズム」とは到底呼ぶことはできない。しかしながら上記の事件が明らかになっても読売新聞の購読者が減少しなかった事実からも、日本の一般国民はこのような事実をあまり深刻に受け止めていないという側面もうかがえる。

日本の報道における倫理がしばしば欠如してしまう最大の構造的理由は「記者クラブ制度」にあると言って過言ではない。記者クラブは霞ヶ関の省庁から地方都市の市役所まで、また政党や金融、大企業やプロスポーツまであらゆる分野に存在する。そして驚くべき事にそこで行われるほとんどの記者会見は、政府や政党などではなく、「記者クラブの主催」で行われるのである。その結果、記者はクラブで情報漬けにされてなかなか独自の取材がしにくくなる一方、情報源とのオフレコの懇談に出席できるという何にも勝る「特権」を手に入れているのである。

政治の取材では記者が「番記者」となって特定の政治家や派閥を専ら取材するという体制を取る。記者会見はむしろ形式的な情報の確認の場にしか過ぎず、様々なレベルで行われるオフレコ懇談で得られる情報が非常に重要視されるため、記者はさまざまな方法で接近を試みるが、その際にジャーナリズムの原則はないがしろにされやすい。

また、そのような取材が可能なのは一部の「大手メディア」に限られたことであり、地方のメディアやフリーランス、外国の報道機関などは多くの場合排除されてしまっていることに注目しておく必要もある。

いわゆる「55年体制」と言われる自民党政権が長期にわたって続いたことにより、与党の政治家たちは自民党内の派閥間の権力闘争に長らくその政治活動の重点を置いてきたため、番記者にとっては「政局」を把握するため、取材相手のインサイダーになることが推奨され、反対に政治家は一部の「目を付けた」優秀な記者にインテリジェンス（内密の情報収集）や政策面のアドバイスなどで依存するという構造が固定化されてしまったのである。渡辺氏はそのような記者の中では傑出した実力を発揮していたと言われている。さらに派閥の領袖から頼りにされる政治家は、将来のリーダー候補となる若手の有望政治家の「教育」を任されるという例もしばしばあり、事実渡辺氏は後年首相となる中曽根康弘氏と20年以上にわたって勉強会などを行い人脈を駆け、政策の知識を学ばせ、「育てた」と言っ

* 立命館大学産業社会学部准教授

でも過言ではない。政局のオフレコ情報を尊重する報道機関内では、自らが番記者であった派閥の領袖がリーダーシップを握れば、社内でも出世していくという構造が出来上がってしまった。

しかし、そのような権力構造に接近できた記者はほんの一部の「エリート記者」であり、記者クラブに所属する大部分の記者は習慣化している「夜回り」（取材相手の家などに深夜に訪問しオフレコ懇談を行うこと）をこなすのが精一杯であり、記者の中での階層化が深化する。「エリート記者」は全てを知り、時に政治家とともに人事や政策の中味にまで関与することもある一方、「その他大勢」の記者は情報が取れなかったり情報の錯綜に惑わされたりして、結局安易な「メモ合わせ」という途を選択することが多い。「メモ合わせ」とはそれぞれが取材して取った情報を何社かの記者が照合し、情報を平準化して共有してしまうことである。もちろんそこには、そもそもニュースに求められる「多様性」の理念は存在しない。しかし、照合した情報でもそれは記者クラブに所属している報道機関が「独占している」情報であり、報道機関は長らくこの「特権」に寄りかかって「どこを見ても同じニュースばかり」という要求に何ら対応してこなかったという批判は否めない。

「インサイダー」になってしまった記者にジャーナリズムは求めようもないが、極端な例になると人事のために新人の政治家が記者に挨拶をしに訪れるようになるとか、政治家のスキャンダルを助けるために、記者会見でのコメントや答え方を指南するなどの目を覆うような例も出てきてしまう。

このような政治とメディアの関係は2001年に小泉政権ができて以降、自民党における派閥の影響力は著しく低下し、変化の兆しも訪れている。世論の批判的な目もあってメディアの内部でもジャーナリズムのルールを尊重しなければという機運も見られる。しかしニューヨークタイムズや英国放送協会（BBC）などが自らの「社会的な使命」を明確に宣言し、特定の場面で記者にどのような行動を要求するかという具体的な「倫理規程」を確立し、透明性を確保するために公開しているのに対し、日本の報道機関はそのような面においてまだ「遅れている」と言わざるを得ず、ほんの一部の優秀な記者が倫理違反と特ダネの狭間で「寸止め」を繰り返しているというのが現状である。

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キーワード：記者クラブ、政治とメディア、ジャーナリズム、日本のジャーナリズム、報道倫理、番記者、夜回り、自民党、民主党、大連立、55年体制、大野伴睦、佐藤栄作、田中角栄、中曽根康弘、小泉純一郎、安倍晋三、福田康夫、小沢一郎、渡辺恒雄、読売新聞、産経新聞、NHK（日本放送協会）、国境なき記者団（RSF）、ニューヨークタイムズ、英国放送協会（BBC）、魚住昭