

**FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS IN JAPAN:
PROBLEMS AND PECULIARITIES OF THE
JAPANESE CONTEXT.**

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

Introducing the reader to some of the theoretical findings drawn from previous studies into news production and media workers-in both a domestic and foreign context, this study leads on to the author's own findings. By undertaking a content analysis of the Foreign Correspondents' Club monthly journal, the *No.1 Shimbun* and by interviewing several correspondents themselves, this study investigates the ways and means by which a number of foreign correspondents, operating in Japan, go about selecting and gathering news. By doing so, the writer seeks to find out how and to what extent their "normal practice" is influenced by factors specific to this country and/or forces working beyond the Japan context. The author concludes that it is the latter which – indirectly - are more influential.

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CONTENTS:	PAGE NUMBER
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: NEWS PRODUCTION & NEWS GATHERING IN CONTEXT	2 – 6
CHAPTER TWO: THE FOREIGN CONTEXT	7 – 10
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	11 – 15
CHAPTER FOUR: PROBLEMS AND PECULIARITIES OF THE JAPANESE CONTEXT	
<u>4.1 INTRODUCTION :</u>	16
<u>4.2 EYE DOG JOURNALISM:</u>	16 – 19
<u>4.3 EDITORS AND READERS:</u>	19 – 23
<u>4.4 PRESSURES FROM COST:</u>	23 – 24
<u>4.5 SLIPSTREAMING:</u>	24 – 26
<u>4.5 ACCESS TO SOURCES:</u>	27 – 29
<u>4.6 HITTING THE KISHA WALL:</u>	29 – 34
<u>4.7 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:</u>	34 – 35
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	36 – 39
BIBLIOGRAPHY:	40 – 41
APPENDIX: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS	42 - 70

INTRODUCTION:

This study is an investigation into the ways and means by which foreign correspondents go about gathering news in Japan, and whether problems specific to the Japanese context, such as language, costs, culture and access to news sources, present obstacles to their news gathering activities. As well as this, some effort will be made to find out from some of the correspondents themselves, how they go about deciding what kind of news to select and report back to their home readership, and in particular, factors which may influence such decisions. Taking all of the above into account, this study will consider which has the greater influence on the correspondents' news selection and gathering behavior, the Japanese context or perhaps forces impacting from outside the Japanese context. Throughout the dissertation, findings from other news production and news reporter studies- both from the domestic and the foreign context-will be discussed and compared to my own findings. Hence, many of the theoretical insights gained from my own research will be discussed in the light of what others have found.

Chapter One provides a theoretical background to news production and news gathering in general. Chapter Two looks at some of the issues and findings gathered in particular from previous foreign correspondent studies. Chapter Three introduces the reader to the methodology this writer used to conduct his research. Chapter four, the main focus of this study, details the findings got from my research and tries to analyse these in order to identify the problems and constraints imposed on the correspondent's news practices and the effects these have on the way Japan is reported. Chapter Five concludes this study by stressing the writer's overall impression of the findings in the previous chapter, and the implications they have concerning the international news system in general.

CHAPTER ONE:

NEWS PRODUCTION & NEWS GATHERING IN CONTEXT.

Within this chapter I will be taking an overview of some of the findings that researchers have drawn up from their investigations of media workers and the news organizations they work under. Primarily, the aim of this is to highlight the fact that any understanding of the mechanics of news production –of how “news” is selected, gathered and constructed – has to involve a deeper analysis, one that takes in the varying political, economic and cultural contexts which come to shape the “news product” you and I read, watch and hear everyday.

The popular image of a journalist is usually one that is associated with the notion of an individual, at one moment sitting at his desk, and the next rushing out on the trail of a potential “scoop” he’s just been tipped about. But in more realistic terms, the reporter is often the first one to say that his sense of *professionalism* would imbue him to be associated with notions of ethics likely to win the trust of his audience. These perhaps would include efforts to insure objectivity, honesty and integrity in relation to his role as news gatherer and writer. Yet, as Boyd-Barret suggests, “ professionals will be inclined to stress the norms and values of their particular occupational specialization, but their perceptions of what they do and why they do it typically omit reference to some of the parameters to do with the economic (or for that matter political) interests of owners, managers and shareholders.” (1995,p.270)

Trying to position the journalist as an autonomous information gatherer within Habermas’s Public Sphere (1989) has to be put in context to the current capitalistic reality, in which the journalist is foremost an employee in a business. That business/organization will inevitably revolve its’ operation around the production of news for the accumulation of revenue and hence profit. In simplistic economic terms, the achievement of this can be done by increasing and/or maintaining consumers (the audience) and by keeping the costs of production (news gathering) to a minimum. In this light, the political-economic perspective gives us a useful overview of the varying external economic pressures hitting on the newsroom...For the greater part, each organization has specific revenue goals to achieve. The editor, under whom the

journalist works, has a duty to insure to his managers, owner and stockbrokers that product consistency and audience figures are maintained (Bromley, 1996, p.240). The benefit of taking on board a Political Economic view as suggested by such writers as Herman and Chomski (1988 /in Helland, 1995, P.55) is that it allows us to see the power of advertisers indirectly working within the news production process. Since newspapers and T.V derive most of their revenue from this source, getting the largest audience or the right kind of audience seems to have a corresponding effect on how a reporter goes about selecting and gathering news. That in the current set up, the audience/advertiser consideration essentially becomes the hidden *gatekeeper*. This seems to be backed up by McManus' study of the fiercely competitive American (t.v) market that has involved, 'replacing the journalist with the consumer as the *gatekeeper* of what becomes news, and replacing the standards of journalism with the rigors of the market' (1994, p.13 quoted in Bromely, 1996, p.224). Such conclusions are reflected in Curran (1986), who suggested that the requirements/demands of advertisers, in effect placed limitations upon the kind of news topics editors and reporters choose to select; put another way, the "market-led" journalist 's criteria of news values have shifted from what lies in the public interest to what the public finds interesting.

Of course, one defect that many sociologists are keen to point out about the political-economic perspective is that it fails to give attention to the individual media worker, and thus fails to see how his interaction with newsroom colleagues, newsroom/organizational policy and working practices come to shape his working behavior. Certainly, the political-economic viewpoint looks at the bigger picture and perhaps side steps the need to look inside the newsroom rather than the "forces" outside it. Yet, as we shall soon see, the roots of many of the particular routines and beats, that sociological studies into news production suggest journalists commonly adopt, are very often found to be derived from the political-economic context.

The focus on the social organization of news production has been a key feature from sociological studies carried out in the newsroom and by talking to reporters. The two principle theoretical strands that emanate from this field –the social constructionist and the bureaucratic –share a common bond, which is that both see journalistic 'normal news gathering practice' characterized by heavy dependence upon official

sources and spokespersons; that reporters come to adopt common work routines/beats that revolve around a handful of news distribution centers –be it government or non government information bureaus.

The social constructional emphasis on how the close interaction between the reporter and the official spokesperson/organization in effect dictates the flow and nature of what we see as ‘news’ is a consistent theme in study after study. For Fishman, ‘the world is bureaucratically organized for journalists...that is the organization of beats...which provide for the continuous production of events’ (1980:p.52 quoted in Schudson,1991:p.148), and this is reflected in Tuchman (1978. In Schudson p.148), where a reporter’s mark of professional status was commonly related to his/her number of official contacts.

But for the organizational/bureaucratic theorists the fundamental reason why, as Ericson, Baranek and Chan say ‘journalists tend to limit themselves to the performative of news releases and interview quotations from...key spokesmen for particular bureaucratic organizations’ (1989, p.254) derives from the particular pressures of especially time and cost that hall mark the news industry. News is a deadline business, working to 24-hour cycles, within an extremely competitive environment. News gathering can also be immensely expensive. Added to this are professional demands for news that has the essential elements of impartiality, objectivity and a hierarchy of credibility (Hall, 1978/1997 p.253). In this light, the consistent findings gathered from newsroom studies are that the new entrant will soon adjust himself to the typical routine of news gathering imposed by his employer and followed by his newsroom colleagues. As highlighted in Tuchman’s (1978/1995) description of the News Net and Breed’s analysis of the constraints inside the newsroom (1955/1995), the reporter comes to adopt the routines of “official beat” because such sources and spokespersons offer to him and the organization a ready supply of cheap, authoritative and lucid information. News gathering becomes a structured process in which events occurring in the world are channeled, filtered and made articulate by those bureaucratic institutions which make up a large part of a journalist’s beat.

In effect, this large degree of dependence on official sources, this 'over accessing', which for Hall means that they become the 'primary definers' of what newspapers report as news (1978/1997, p.257) can be clearly tied up to the political-economic context since this type of normal practice is very much related to his/her employer's revenue goals i.e. having an economical and reliable means of producing news in order to maintain revenue through sales and advertising.

Understanding how these revenue goals of the reporter's organization can shape and impinge on his / her news gathering practice should also be extended to the fact that the perceived needs of the audience can be just as much a restraint on the reporter's autonomy. This consideration brings in the culturalogical aspects concerning news production. How does the reporter and for that matter his employer come to regularly decide what is or not newsworthy for **its** audience? In other words, what are the particular criteria that shape the media workers sense of *news values*? At a very basic level we can agree with Soloski who says that, "news judgment requires that journalists share assumptions about what is normal in society" (1989, p.215), that they share similar cultural maps of meaning with their audience, as talked about by Hall (1978/1997, p.250). By using the notion of culture as a commodity as an equation from which to try and understand how organizations win and keep an audience, we may even see how an events departure from this normality attains a higher accord within these news values. This is reflected in Galtung and Ruge (1965, in Boyd-Barrett, 1995, p.270) who also put an event's recency, accessibility and involvement of a personal angle and elite persons onto the list. Yet we need to go further. Particular newspapers cater for particular audiences. Journalists may often find their autonomy in news selection and write up stunted by the genre they're working within. As Ericson, Baranek and Chan suggest, journalists must operate inside and in effect be restricted by the prevailing "institutional formats" (1989, taken from K. Hellan 1995:p.41)

In essence then, revenue goals insure that managerial demands for sales and efficiency, and audiences' generic expectations of the product they buy from the organization, provide two indirect means of coercion. Inside the newsroom though, these forces are likely to take on a direct form of conflict, in the figure of the editor who sets these considerations as a matter of *newsroom policy*(Bromley) . Estimating

the degree of autonomy a journalist has inside the newsroom often becomes a tricky task due to the many varying contexts that are special to the journalistic profession. Not least is the fact that media production involves the need for creativity, that the public expect owners to give their employees the freedom to ensure the media product provides a public service and not merely a corporate one. A further context resides in the fact that many owners of news organizations have particular non-revenue goals such as attaining political influence, personal status and organizational prestige (e.g. having reporters in major foreign capitals), all of which can potentially distance the journalist from the forces that end up materialized in the shape of the editor. But having said this, one cannot refute the large body of newsroom research, most using participant observation, which tells us how, for the typical domestic reporter, the editorial line is one be broken at one's peril. Breed's study argued that, "Instead of adhering to societal and professional ideals, he redefines his values to the more pragmatic level of the newsroom" (1954:p.96/1995), and accounts by Epstein (1973) and Tuchman (1978) of U.S media workers' and Schiesinger's study of the B.B.C newsroom practices (1978) have all focused on the way the reporter comes to negotiate and eventually conform his reporting "style" to that followed by his newsroom colleagues –which is ultimately set / influenced by corporate considerations, but usually followed by the employee through his/her own career considerations.

Notions of "professionalism", that no mans land which locates itself between satisfying corporate and audience needs, on the one hand, and fulfilling public service goals on the other, are shown to be highly contentious points of issue between the editor and reporter, and even amongst the reporters themselves inside the newsroom . Burn's (1977) newsroom study, which highlighted the rift between the hard-nosed "participant" reporter and the editorially passive, "neutral" reporter provides a useful continuity to this point.

As we now enter chapter 2, we will move away from the domestic/national focus of news production seen in chapter one, and instead look at studies of the reporter in the *foreign* context and see how, and to what extent, the non-revenue goal "specialist" presents a different picture.

CHAPTER TWO: THE FOREIGN CONTEXT.

From chapter one's analysis of the contexts under which news gathering and news production is carried out in general, and more specifically in reference to the domestic reporter, this section aims to draw out from a number of studies into foreign correspondents a general outline of characteristics of news gathering and its particular pressures and responses, which may or may not differentiate him from his domestic counterpart. At the same time, this chapter will in a sense be laying the ground before we look at the case in Japan, providing a 'model' of foreign news gathering with which to contrast the Japanese/Tokyo context. However, there needs to be a degree of qualification and limitation attached to the use of a "*general outline/model*" in respect to how foreign correspondents operate. Each country is likely to have its own set of political, economic, legal and cultural D.N.A shaping or governing the activity of news gathering, which each foreign journalist has to confront. In other words, part of his/her role involves negotiating that difference of the local with their own background in news gathering. Logically then, the more numerous and varied research into foreign correspondents is, in relation to countries or regions covered, the better the model. Yet, what we find is that in the area of news production, research of the foreign correspondent has been only lightly touched upon. And of the limited number of studies we do have, a large preponderance of attention has only been directed to those working in America-the Washington Correspondents, or to correspondents operating within an abnormal war context. Despite then this writer not exactly having an as adequate and varied deck of "cards" to choose from as he would have liked (especially when -after months of trying-I found it impossible to lay my hands on some of these same Washington studies!), lets lay the "hand" dealt out and see what's revealed.

Perhaps the most evident difference that distinguishes the foreign correspondent from his general reporter counterpart is the fact that he operates outside the physical confines of the newsroom. Away from the prying eyes of his co-workers and the editor, accorded a greater measure of news gathering autonomy in respect to his "specialist" ability in knowing sources and contacts in an alien arena, in *theory*, these

points, combined with the supposition that “the greater the element of non-revenue goal, the more autonomy will the news gatherer have in relation to his sources” (Tunstall, p.149), suggest clear cut differences with the general reporter. That’s the theory. The reality, though, seems to be more complex than that.

Although he is unlike domestic reporter who has to constantly get the ‘o.k.’ from his/her editor before hunting out or running a story, there are hints from foreign correspondent studies that imply ‘Big Brother’ is still watching. Pedelty’s study into the culture of foreign correspondents covering the civil war in El Salvador came to the conclusion that “most...are no more independent or free from discipline and censure than their domestic colleagues”, that in the last resort, “the editor’s constant eye forms an inescapable centre, exercising control over their charge’s postings, their writings, public exposure and career choice...they are not only ‘gatekeepers’ but overseers as well” (1995, p.93). Studies about the Washington Correspondents form of *modus operandi* suggests a similar picture...Leo Rosten’s early 1930 investigation, and to a lesser degree, the 1960 one by William River, found that though often thousands of miles away, their daily work pattern was often interrupted by having to respond to directives from their home office (in Schudson/1989:p.279).

In spite of his distant location, then, it appears that the foreign editor’s presence is felt. That he is only a phone call away. Moreover, today’s use of new, fast and cheap digitalized communication, means not only can the editor have an instant, up to date view of the world from his desk via global satellite and wire service news inflows to help him decide what event he wants the correspondent to cover, but be able to do this so much more efficiently and economically than before. Having said this though, most accounts do say that in story choice/selection the foreign-based reporter has, in line with his non-revenue status, more freedom than his home based opposite. Jeremy Tunstall’s interviews with a number of British correspondents working from Washington, Rome and Bonn revealed that 75% of the stories they did were “my own idea”(1971:p.133). But one needs to put these findings in context...In considering what stories to do, he also has to consider what he judges to be the kind of story likely to get onto the pages of the news sheet. Put more bluntly, free choice becomes conditional upon what he thinks his editor wants. And these wants become closely tied to the perceived preferences of their audience. In this sense, the editor as

gatekeeper can wield a strong, if indirect influence over the correspondent. This factor seems to tie in with Tunstall's belief that "foreign correspondents were firmly under the control of their news organisation"(p.214). Though having some measure of independence in news gathering accorded to him in recognition of such things as his writing ability and his sources of contacts, he is still constrained (but to a lesser extent) by audience goals; that news be of some relevance and interest to its audience (Tunstall, p.119). Thus, in Pedelty's and Tunstall's accounts, correspondents very often came to choose stories that had a bilateral angle or which were "funny" or unusual.

How does a correspondent operating in an alien environment typically gather news? Who are his main sources and contacts?... It appears from the literature that old habits are hard to break: despite being away from the confined beat culture of the home news reporter, the foreign location doesn't do much to loosen his dependence on official sources and spokespersons for that quote, that interview or that document. According to Tunstall, 70% of Washington correspondents, 65% of Rome and Berlin based correspondents went to a P.R man first. In Washington, British journalists said they enjoyed good high level access to personnel in the White House and various state departments and committees-including off the record *back grounders*. (p.178) Hess's Washington study found that the correspondents did little in the way of personal research for a story but instead relied on interviews from "credible sources" for information. (1984.in Schudson, 1991, p.148). Pedelty mirrors this by telling us that his war correspondents "play a relatively small role in the creative process of discovery, analysis and representation involved in news production...Instead they are mainly conduits for a system of institutions, authoritative sources and ideologies that frame events"(p.24) In El Salvador these were primarily the western embassies and government press offices. The tendency of correspondents to stay rooted in a country's capital are all noted in these studies. In reference to their news gathering practices we can see why; the incentive, in news gathering terms, simply isn't there.

All of the above seems to raise serious doubts concerning the theory that "the greater the element of non-revenue goal, the more autonomy will the news gatherer have in relation to his sources"(Tunstall, p.149). In one area, the correspondent can have a certain detachment in that these studies highlight that his *normal practice* does

involve a large amount of “lifting” of ideas and tips from primary sources such the local media and the wires and from competitor-colleagues they meet socially at some official or unofficial Correspondents club. Yet to make it a story they will very often have to follow through these tips by getting interview quotes from an official/credible source. Therefor a picture emerges which shows a familiar domestic reporter ring to it, namely of dependence rather than independence from his source. Roston noted how “almost every correspondent has a source whose displeasure he consciously or unconsciously fears”(1930/ quoted in Schudson, 1989, p.201).

We can now try to ask ourselves; what are the forces/factors that come to shape this picture of normal practice? In all possibility, some answers to this question may led us on a merry go round back to chapter one. The accounts of foreign correspondents mentioned in this section have all stressed that time differences led to pressures of time. Thus, official sources offer a short cut and they cut down costs in news gathering. Also, it must be remembered that these correspondents have typically worked themselves up the newsroom ladder, individuals whose news values and practices have been ingrained in them before working abroad...old habits die hard, remember. But other reasons more particular to the foreign context may apply. One reason behind sending a man to an often very expensive posting is the non-revenue goal of having prestige. This may mean the correspondent is given another form of negative control by his organisation because he may feel obliged to write nothing but high-class material that inevitably places a high emphasis on top level authoritative sources.... Food for thought anyway!

In trying to look into some of the pressures, responses and issues that appear from some of the literature, this writer found that language problems were hardly-if ever-touched upon. Though this chapter has provided only a very general model from which to contrast with the findings from my own research of foreign correspondents in Japan in chapter four. Its lack of a linguistical context to news gathering (especially in the light of the importance chapter four’s stress on it) will highlight its limitations.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.

Before we go on to chapter four's findings, concerned with the problems and peculiarities of the Japanese context faced by foreign correspondents, some words need to be said on the methodology that was used by this writer to get to these findings. This section will aim to try and suggest the particular strengths and weaknesses of the methodology adopted, so that the reader will have some awareness as to limitations of my research's findings. As well as this, I would like to use this part to offer up to any student of the future who wishes to study media workers, some of the personal "highs and lows" I experienced while on the course of conducting my own research. By doing this, I hope that he/she will become aware that, in many ways, it was precisely these ups and down which (in hindsight) proved to be some of the most insightful. That many of the "cock ups" I inevitably did at the beginning of my research were essential lessons to learn and improve from. My confidence became higher as I went along largely because the mistakes that happened turned into valuable nuggets of experience.

Throughout the course of my research I continuously referred back to see how others carried out investigations into news production and journalist. What, for me, were the most valuable sources of "advice" were the recollections and insights of Simon Cottle's (1995) and Knutt Helland's (1996) own research of this arena. Yet, having said this, their methodology, as with so much of latter day news production studies in general, used participant observation to compliment their interviews and content analysis. Mine, however, first and for most used the structured interview with a number of foreign correspondents and secondly, a content analysis of the F.C.C.J's (*Foreign Correspondents' Club Of Japan*) monthly journal, *The No.1 Shimbun*, to gather up information from which theoretical insights could be made. Thus, no participant observation was carried out. As we shall soon see, in terms of practicality and appropriateness, the methodology I used was, I think, well suited to the task in hand. While observations of journalists in the news room environment offer an extra visual way to triangulate with oral and written data, the particular nature of my own study suggested its application would be impractical. The vast majority of journalists here operate in ones or two, and as I personally saw on a couple of occasions, the news room in this context, will most often be a small, dingy room, stuffed to the hilt with the usual office paraphernalia, in the heart of Tokyo. Observation of the

newsroom in this light would mean going round several, which, given the limited research time available, would be hard work to say the least! Anyway, what exactly would I be observing?... Maybe watching the journalist speaking to someone on the phone or the times he/she goes out. As one correspondent said to me, I was welcome to sit down all day and observe human interaction take place in his office, the only problem being that him and the cleaner didn't want me to smoke while I was watching them! Yet having said this, there's little doubt that had I had the time to go "walk about" with them, to see how they met and interviewed their contacts, or went with them to a news conference, it would have given my theoretical insights that extra bite.

So in the end I used the structured interview combined with a content analysis of the F.C.C.J's journal. The reason why I preferred the structured interview to the unstructured one was simply through trial and error. The first interview I did was with the *Associated Press* Bureau Chief, James Lagier. It was unstructured. I was unprepared- I hadn't done my homework. It was a disaster. I was all over the place, picking out straws on what I wanted to know. A complete waste of time, with little much to show for it other than a free A.P pen he gave me at the end of it. This incident certainly changed my resolve. I would now spend a considerable amount of time getting the "background" information, to carefully work out a list of questions through researching any available literature about correspondents here. This is where the No.1 *Shimbun* proved so helpful. Here was a news letter/magazine printed twelve times a year, over the last twenty years by the F.C.C.J. Written primarily by its foreign correspondent members for other foreign correspondents, it proved to be a wealth of information detailing their personal experiences and opinions of having to operate here. Of course, that it's written by "insiders" may mean a one sided, unverifiable source of information, but by carefully going through the pages, it opened up a Pandora's box of problems and issues concerned with news gathering in Japan from which to investigate further. As a method to help focus my questions and to help orientate myself to, what for me is, an alien occupation and work culture, it proved invaluable.

By pulling the right strings (or rather asking my tutor to write a letter to the F.C.C.J Board of Directors!) I was given permission to use the library facilities of the club and to talk to journalists in the club bar. Over a period of a month I spent many a late night or a long weekend shifting through the past issues of the No.1 *Shimbun*, writing

notes. Having compiled a formidable number of notes I then, with the help of my tutor, very carefully drew up a list of questions. This took a lot of time and thinking because I wanted to make sure that nothing of possible importance was left out. That all flanks would be covered. And to make sure, I would ask at the end of the interview if I had left any thing out which needed to be asked. By having carefully structured and prepared questions, it later made it easier for me to group and file their responses for comparison and analysis. But as Cottle did for his (1995, p.49), I attempted to make theoretical insights and notes throughout my research, so in the later interviews I would perhaps ask other questions which were related to what I had learned from the previous interview or talks in the F.C.C.J Bar.

Having drawn up my questions the next stage was to find correspondents to answer them. One Friday evening, around the end of September, I bravely strode into the club bar, clutching my newly bought executive notepad, tape recorder and most vitally, the letter of permission from the former president of the club and *Financial Times* Bureau Chief, William Dawkins. Eyeing to my left I noticed a group of three men happily sipping drinks and chatting away. My chance had come. Approaching their table, I introduced myself and showed them the letter and cordially asked them if they were willing to be interviewed. Things went down hill from that point:

“Well, we don’t know you and I suggest you leave us alone”, one of them replied. I floated out of there in automatic shock mode, with my tail lodged firmly between my legs. Drifting back home, I remember that the only record I kept of that night was what I wrote on the first page of my new executive notepad on the train back: “Hitler, Chamberlain, Munich = worthless piece of paper...Letter, club, access =worthless piece of paper”. Time to start again.

I came out of that bombshell a wiser man. I called up the new president, Steve Herman, and asked him what was the best strategy. Caution was the word. He’d put it through the grapevine that I’m O.K, but that meanwhile I should look through the club’s membership directory and call them and ask for an interview. This I did and it worked. I interviewed four foreign correspondents, two Bureau Chiefs, the F.C.C.J president and a Japanese reporter working for the Washington Post, thus, a total of eight persons. The reason for the last choice was because he was also the unofficial middleman between the Foreign correspondents and the Japanese press system and

state bureaucracy. He was recommended, by a number of foreign correspondents, as being supremely knowledgeable and experienced in matters related to the Kisha clubs.

That bar encounter proved a one off. Generally I found that only about fifty percent of those I called (politely) turned me down. But persistence certainly pays dividends. I repeatedly called up the *Reuters* Bureau Chief, leaving a message on his machine. After the third time, my English reserve was certainly making me hesitate about calling up a fourth. Downing a double I tried again. The next moment he called me back and the interview date was set. He later told me that the only reason why he decided to give up his Saturday for me was because I was so persistent:

“Loads of guys ring me up asking for a job. The only ones I’ll consider are those who ring up constantly. That tells me he’s the kind I want-someone who’ll hunger for a story and won’t let go. A digger”

The questions I had gave me confidence when I met them. In return I found that my interviewees were happy to talk freely and even treated me out! They had a lot to say and they seemed glad that I wanted to find out.

If this study was a ship, then in methodological terms, it certainly had holes in it! Probably the biggest of which was that I interviewed only eight people, and all excepting one freelance, worked for American or British news organisations. This was through no want of trying. I did approach others but nothing “panned out”. I’m sure that had I had more time, something would have come to fruition. Despite this though, I came to see the club bar as an effective way to make some amends for these shortcomings. Since my Japanese wife’s father is an associate member (non-journalist) of the club, I would sometimes meet up with him in the bar or go with the whole family to the occasional parties they have there. Being with “a friend” certainly gave me more courage to talk with others around us. These times became prime opportunities to test the data coming out from the interviews. Moreover, I could check with these other correspondents my own theoretical insights, assumptions and conclusions. The bar setting, despite the odd personality minefield, it was, I believe now, a good sounding board to throw my opinions at.... THROUGH WINE TRUTH...as the Greeks used to say!!

3.1 SUMMARY POINTS:

Briefly, then, the methodology I used was primarily the one to one structured interview, although a certain measure of flexibility was involved since many of their

replies deserved further questioning, and also because not all the interviewees were strictly foreign correspondents. The *No.1 Shimbun* was used to find out some of the issues and problems sometimes faced by correspondents working here. In this way, the journal became an excellent resource from which to raise questions. Throughout my investigation, I would try to seek theoretical avenues that perhaps needed exploring, and often it would be the F.C.C.J's Bar where many of these theoretical insights were fed to journalists for digestion and comment.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROBLEMS AND PECULIARITIES OF THE JAPANESE CONTEXT.

4.1 INTRODUCTION:

We now come to the main part of this dissertation that looks at how foreign correspondents operate in Japan. Within Japan there are about 467 accredited foreign correspondents working for around 300 news organizations from 45 countries, nearly all based in Tokyo (Neilan/No.1 Shimbun: Sept. 1995). Though the focus is on the foreign correspondent, my research has found it necessary to also look at how the Japanese media itself operates. Such an analysis will help us to understand that some of the news gathering problems and frustrations faced by the foreign correspondent here, derive from the protective and insular practices of Japanese reporters and to a lesser extent their sources....As a final point, before we "hit the road", I would like to say that trying to put my findings in to some sort of order-deciding a plan- has been extremely difficult. Yet on reflection, I believe this is indicative of the fact that a lot of the problems and their causes are in some way inter-related with each other.

4.2 EYE DOG JOURNALISM:

Perhaps one of the biggest surprises I got from my interviews was that all freely admitted their own and their colleagues inadequacy in spoken and especially written Japanese. The reason why I have decided to mention this linguistic aspect at the beginning is because it will enable us to see, very clearly, how their editors and audiences preferences indirectly remove a correspondent's incentive to gain fluency in Japanese. Thus, as starter point it, this becomes very useful since this study's underlining theme is the belief that such preferences come to irrevocably shape and limit his news gathering practice, to the detriment of a truthful and balanced portrayal of Japanese society.

The level of spoken Japanese from among the people I talked to seemed to be not much more than basis conversational level. Reading ability was considered even more difficult.. In the estimation of the following:

“.. there are very few guys here who can hack it on their own, you’ve gotta have a Japanese news assistant”(Charles Neilan/*Freelance*)

“.. may be one in five doesn’t need a translator, might be even less than that even. I would include myself among them”(David Holley/*L.A Times*)

“.. my Japanese is halting. I can’t read the newspapers, I can just about follow the news, so in an important news item I use a Japanese assistant....I imagine, in say Paris, there are very few correspondents who don’t speak French-you couldn’t get away with it, people wouldn’t take you seriously, but here they do!” (Richard Lloyd-Parry/*Independent*)

For some Japanese people this situation is lamentable. One media analyst commented that, “I have come across many foreigners once willing to pay high fees to learn Japanese after arriving in Japan who later abandon it. Certainly, we Japanese-both journalists and citizens-expect that more foreign correspondents master Japanese and will then be able to participate in the (Press) clubs to obtain accurate information directly from Japanese sources”(Takeshi Maezawa/No.1 Shimbun.Dec.1992).

The up some of all this for the vast majority of correspondents here is what Jeffery Bartholet, Bureau Chief of *Newsweek*, referred to as “eye dog journalism”. That, like a blind person needing a guide dog “to see”, so a correspondent becomes dependent on an interpreter to “hear”. As even the correspondents themselves point out, the faults of this system are numerous; that it creates a filter between him and what he’s covering, it doesn’t allow one to sense the way a person’s answering and as the ex-*L.A Times* Bureau chief said, “I’ve never seen anybody develop a friendship using an interpreter”(No1.Shimbun.Aug.1993). Most correspondents in Tokyo operate as one-man bands, and the cost factor inhibits them from hiring full time Japanese translators/interpreters. The result of this is that their *news net* is usually cast in pathetically confined waters....it makes it difficult for them to travel outside Tokyo, where English is even less understood. Instead they tend to stay around the capital picking off ideas from domestic English newspapers like the Japan Times, going to F.C.C.J news conference luncheons or the Foreign Ministry’s twice weekly news conference, that have interpreters provided. I asked one correspondent if there were any sinister reasons why the Foreign Ministry had two separate news conferences, one for Japanese and one for foreigners. He gave me a knowing smile and said “you tell me, but it sure smells funny”. In hindsight, I now think there’s nothing “smelly”or

sinister about it. It's more likely the reason lies in the correspondents' own linguistic handicap. Yet, in saying this, the difficulty in learning a language as especially difficult as Japanese was pointed out by the *Reuters* Bureau Chief, William Sposato, who said that though he has "dead bi-lingual" foreigners working for him:

"We can't send a non Japanese to the Finance Ministry news conference. No way. No matter how good they are, there's something they're going to miss. The Minister of Finance will speak obliquely, as all ministers at all levels tend to do here".

What for me was very insightful, though, was that the correspondents I spoke to didn't think their low Japanese ability was a major problem, and there seemed no burning drive to make amends for this by taking lessons. My impression is that this isn't rooted in the correspondents' own laziness, but that the incentive to do so simply isn't there and that the principal disincentive is comes from the limited nature of their editors and audiences news story preferences. David Holley's comment wonderfully illustrates this I think:

"With a language as difficult as Japanese, it's difficult to be really, really good until you have a whole lot of experience of Japan, and if you have a whole lot of experience here then you're not overwhelmed and surprised by the ordinary aspects of life here. It depends on what editors want and who your audience is, erm, but someone who is new to Japan is gonna be much more interested in writing an interesting, colorful, fun story about Sushi for someone who has never been to Japan and never gonna come to Japan, but wants fun reading a newspaper by reading a story about Sushi...that kind of issue relates to a lot of subjects-it relates to language especially; you've devoted your self to learning this difficult language and learning about society, your deep interests are not the superficial things about society-the very things that a features editor will pick out for L.A readers"

Holly's insight offers us a crucial context which addresses the reason behind some of the other correspondents comments, which in some way strive to legitimize news values that in essence place a stress on entertaining his/her audience with the superficial to the detriment of a more astute analysis which requires Japanese language proficiency:

“People who don’t speak Japanese have a fresher eye on the place... people who speak the language come along with a lot of baggage, they have fixed ideas of what Japan is, what Japanese are”. (Bartholet)

“What do you want to have here- a reporter or a linguist?”(Neilan)

“The first requirement is that you’re a good journalist”(Lloyd-Parry)

Clearly then, a warped dichotomy exists. The correspondent, occasionally accompanied with his “guide dog”, but at most other times linguistically blind is considered to have the fresher, keener “eye”. One of the frustrations for correspondents here appears to be that like Alice’s looking glass, they have to check their reflections of Japanese society by jumping over to the side of their audience and editors in order to imagine what they want to “see”. The policy of rotating correspondents around every few years also insures that fresh eyes don’t become stale. Some Japanese wonder whether this to prevent their correspondents from really seeing. (T. Maezawa, No.1 Shimbun, Dec.1992)

4.3 **EDITORS AND READERS:**

By looking at the correspondents’ own deficiency in spoken and written Japanese and the consequential limitations these imposed on the range and type of news gathering activities that could be undertaken, one was able to see that in linguistic terms, audience preferences (represented by the figure of the editor) put the correspondents between a rock and a hard place; if they were to devote themselves to learning the language, then more of the country would be open to them and they’d be more capable of taking hold of the more complex and deeper issues of Japanese society and it’s people. Yet by doing this, the chances are that they’d go way beyond the funny, entertaining surface level of analysis of Japan that are more likely to get on to the news sheet. Carrying on from this, Editors and Readers focuses on finding out how they may more directly impinge on a correspondent’s news selection and gathering activity.

More than anything, when asked about how much freedom did their editor back home give them here, their replies were seemingly quite varied. But that this variation, when triangulated with my own analysis of the types of stories they came to select, showed a consistent tendency to restrict themselves to a narrow range of news items and features that they imagined their editors would favor. Mark Pedelty’s study strongly

sided with the view that the editors had their correspondents firmly attached to a leash in regards to story selection and write up since they were the all powerful *gatekeepers* between the guy in El Salvador and the readers. The result of this situation was that they became a figure of hate-“editors suck!”(p.89)-for the correspondent. Yet, in reference to my own findings, I would suggest that this needs to put into context and reassessed. The one correspondent who was very critical of editors said:

“You find that editors want you to write ‘isn’t Japan strange’ kind of stories...It happened to me. The first couple of stories I wrote were political interviews with the Ambassador and so fourth. Then they started to loose interest and to get back on the page I had to do a story about women wrestlers. That’s an example of the way editors think. Editors are a Fucking problem here.”(Neilan)

But the point is that he was a freelance and many of Pedelty’s conclusions derive from the same source-the stringers, the B. Team. I would argue that the reason why I found Neilan far more critical than the others lies in the fact that the editor’s yes or no is the Damocles sword over their day to day livelihood. Even so, in the F.C.C.J’s No.1 Shimbun, stories abound of editors shouting down the telephone demanding that their man in Japan concentrate on the strange, funny or unusual. One story mentions the experience of a major daily newspaper correspondent in Tokyo who was told to write nothing other than short trendy stories on “intelligent toilets”, “robot sushi bars” and “brain improvement relaxer chairs.”(No.1 Shimbun.Sept.1995) But one the whole, the correspondents I interviewed didn’t find this to be a true representative picture from their own experience, with only Lloyd Parry, from the *Independent* relating to me the experience of an ex-*Daily Telegraph* correspondent in Tokyo, who had a terrible time in having to kow tow to editors who “had preconceived notions of which he was expected to write to”

Instead, a different, more subtler picture emerges, where though there appears to be on the surface a great deal of “freedom” in story selection, underneath, the correspondents’ sense of news values come to be heavily weighted towards the tastes of his editor and, to this end, the editor’s audience. Harmony seems to exist with their editors, but only because such “freedom” is conditional on that they maintain an awareness of what kind of stories are favored back home. For instance, when I asked Mary Jordan of the *Washington Post* how much freedom her editor gave her here, she answered:

“Great freedom. I can basically do what I want here. In terms of stories, it’s the journalist here who chooses the menu. We only hear from them a couple of times a week. It’s amazing.”

But one only had to see the kind of stories she concentrates on—urban fishing centers, the strange public bath systems, love hotels and the unusual technology crazies they have here, like Tamagochis and car navigation systems—to notice that this “great freedom” has done little to extend the bounds of news topics to anything other than the surface deep, “isn’t Japan strange” level of analysis.

While this writer contends that the image of the constantly harassed correspondent reflected in Pedelty’s account doesn’t appear to hold much sway amongst all but one of the people I talked to, the findings of Tunstall’s correspondents in Washington, Rome and Bonn that around two thirds of their stories were their own idea also seem to be out of line with my own study. The essential reason for this is because though they may decide them, it was a decision often taken in the light of their own understanding of what kind of story the editor wanted. As the L.A Times correspondent relates, the editor presence, like that of Hamlet’s father, is never far from his mind:

“Probably two thirds of the stories I write are mine I decide myself and about one third are suggestions from the editor I work for. From among that two thirds I decide myself, probably half of them relate fairly closely to subjects that I know the editor in Los Angeles is especially interested in right now. So in some sense I’m responding to an awareness that he wants me to cover this fairly closely”.

For British and American correspondents, Tokyo’s time difference carried several distinct advantages. Being several hours a head meant that they were not subject to the same deadline pressures experienced by Tunstall’s subjects. Indeed one of the reasons put forward for the very few times in which the editor directly makes his presence felt via the hot line was simply this time factor. For Lloyd Parry:

“I have a lot of freedom, erm, partly that’s because during my working day my bosses are asleep, so they can’t tell me where to go.”

Even so, he soon after qualified this notion of freedom by stressing that his agenda ultimately “comes out from what readers are interested in.” What we find is that though the correspondent is geographically detached from his audience, and by his

specialist knowledge of the country *assumed* to have more autonomy in what he considers to be a worthy event occurring there, in practice his own personal choice plays second fiddle to what he thinks the audience wants. The outcome of all this, in respect to the stories chosen, are Tokyo centered “isn’t Japan strange” things, political and economic issues that have a very direct bilateral theme involving well known domestic figure - many of the ideas of which can be easily picked up from his desk - the wires, the Japanese English papers, a phone call to his Embassy’s spokesman, or if he’s feeling active simply going for a walk around the streets looking out for something they don’t have at home (with or without his “guide dog”).

One time, when I was having a beer or five in the F.C.C.J bar, I got talking to a very drunk long term American Tokyo resident and ex-war correspondent. When I asked him his opinion of editors back home, he said that for many of his journalist friends who have lived here for so long and really knew about Japan, the biggest frustration was that the longer they lived here the more they knew, but the more they knew the less they could tell. After mulling over his reply, I’ve come to think that that simply wasn’t a criticism that could be solely directed to an editor, but one that directs itself to the flaws and limitations inherent in a commercial free press. Though professing its function as providing a public service-to inform and educate its readership in an objective manner, the reality is that both journalists’ and audiences’ notion of what news is, have been nurtured, shaped and limited by their life long and only experience of a commercial press system. As it is, the theory that his non-revenue goal gives him a sense of freedom from the editor and the audience doesn’t appear to be reflected from the replies I received to my questions. Audience goals are very much in evidence, and hence one can suggest from this that he still has a revenue goal to fulfill. Keeping and winning audiences by staying within the confines of what is considered normal in his society, and picking out stories that depart from this, become a fundamental element of his news values (Soloski: p.215). Market rules still apply, though perhaps in a more indirect sense. As John O’Neill states:

“The market causes questions over the relationship between journalism and democracy, i.e. to survive the press has to satisfy the preferences of its consumers, the market encourages the producer to present news which is congruent with the preexisting values and beliefs of its audience, therefor many journalists will tend to

work within the confines of the dominant culture in which it operates, and this is shaped by consumer preference”(1995:p.347-48).

4.4 PRESSURES FROM COSTS:

Before we go forward to look more closely at the correspondents' typical daily routines, and in what ways and to what extent the Japanese press clubs (the “Kisha Club” system) play a role in these, the fact that Tokyo is one of the world's most expensive cities to live and operate in, needs to be analyzed since this economic factor has had a definite effect upon the character of news gathering here. In 1994 there were thirty-six British publications, in a period of just a year this figure dropped by eight. The *Toronto Globe and Mail*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Guardian*, *The San Francisco Examiner*, *The Observer* and *The Daily Telegraph* have all since closed down their bureaus and instead have resorted to freelancers. The fundamental reason has been the enormous cost that's involved in keeping their own correspondent here. *The Atlanta Constitution*, which shut up shop in 1995, said that the estimated eight hundred thousand dollars it was having to spend annually to put a correspondent in Tokyo was finally beyond them (No.1 Shimbun, Sept.1995). When I asked the current President of the F.C.C.J, Steve Herman, about what he considered to be one of the major frustrations for his members, he replied:

“These days, it's that there's less space, less demand for news in Japan. Japan is not considered to be as important as it used to, in the eyes of western editors anymore. I've seen a big change... The cost factor here has put real pressure upon news organizations to ask themselves whether it's worth having a presence here. So, since say the end of *Bubble*¹ We've had a major decline in our membership.”

Despite the flurry of massive, world grabbing news events that struck Japan in 1995- the sarin gas attack and the Kobe earthquake- the feeling amongst the vast majority of correspondents was that nothing much happens here. This creates a source of friction with editor's back home who have to legitimize the cost of maintaining a posting in Tokyo:

“A bureau in Tokyo is the most expensive, bar none. So there's a pressure through that for the correspondent to perform. There's a guy at the end of the phone saying,

¹ Bubble economy- the boom time between 1987-1993

‘Christ! We’re paying all this money, can’t you do this...?’, that kind of stuff.”(Neilan)

Having to legitimize themselves in an uneventful country will often take the of (yes, you’ve guessed it!) “Isn’t Japan strange” type news.

For the bigger publications like *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post* and *Reuters*, financial belts didn’t seem to need tightening so much. In the case of the smaller news organizations, things are different. One major complaint was that the cost of rail traveling was exorbitantly high, with the result being that they tended to stay in the capital more than they wished. Yet, since Japan is considered the modern communications hub of Asia, the decision of many organizations to keep a correspondent here lies in the fact that they can “parachute” in to events happening around them in countries like Korea, Indonesia and so forth. This “parachute” term was used in Pedelty’s study to describe those foreign reporters who just slip in and out of the country, writing about a people they knew little about, a language they often couldn’t understand, and news stories which were themselves usually recycled from the local, especially the English-El Salvadorian newspapers (p.109-111). But my question is whether this terminology could be extended to describe the news practices of some of these same correspondents when they’re covering Japan? After all, if we once again go back to some of the findings mentioned earlier on in this chapter, particularly a general inability to speak adequate Japanese, one gets the impression that they become culturally isolated from the nation they’re covering. Within Tokyo, they often stay in their own English speaking, cultural “ghetto”. When it’s time for that interview, the bomb bay opens and they parachute into that office or that street firmly attached to their “eye dog”.

4.5 “SLIPSTREAMING”

How do the correspondents go about gathering news on a day to day basis? Who or what are their main sources? And what, if any, are the difficulties and disadvantages faced by the foreign reporter who operates in this country, when he/she goes about trying to interview someone? These are important questions to look into more deeply, since their answers will inevitably offer up a profile detailing how this “normal practice” of foreign journalists has come to be shaped. We can then perhaps take this further, by aiming to discover whether this shaping is derived from conditions that are particular to Japan, or ones that could be a lined to more common, more universal pressures and influences that affect foreign correspondents generally? To answer this,

comparisons to the findings related to news gathering and sources (especially the nature and type of access to such) drawn from other foreign correspondent studies needs to be made. This section will also be attempting to set a pathway which will nicely lead on to the following section's focus on how and to what degree the foreign correspondent's news gathering practices confronts and negotiates with the Japanese domestic press system, particularly the Kisha clubs.

If I were to give a general assessment as to what is the primary characteristic of foreign correspondents' news gathering behavior, at least from those I talked to, I would suggest that it fundamentally based upon **slipstreaming** off other news producing organizations' information. Especially noticeable is the large amount of attention they gave to the news coming from the wire services, at various times throughout the day. Along with this, their other main source of news comes from the Japanese media and in particular the English- Japanese papers such as *The Japan Times* or *The Daily Yomiuri*. When I asked them how they went about getting news and deciding what to go for, their replies all seemed to have a common ancestry:

"When you get up in the morning, what grabs you first-what papers you read first..Japan is richly endowed with agency journals, *Reuters*, *A.P*, *Bloomberg*. They have huge bureaus, with dozens of journalists. There's no point trying to do their job, which is getting the basic facts of the story, presenting them in an extremely straight forward, direct way. I read the wires, *Reuters*, *A.P*, every four hours-*Kyodo* as well- and see what they're reporting"(Lloyd Parry)

"Eighty percent of the news we cover the first tips come from the wires and the Japanese media, I mean newspapers and TV. But we never write a story on that. We always do our own reporting, our own research. And the second comes from what we experience."(Togo)

The typical daily routine of the L.A times correspondent was described as one being very much revolved around monitoring what the wires have about Japan, in the so called "Asia Basket" at regular times in the day, reading the English- Japanese newspapers and watching the T.V news.

I think the important point which "slipstreaming" opens up is one that though basic, is nevertheless one that has not been given its full due by Tunstall and Pedelty. The foreign correspondent in Japan (or as I imagine, the majority of foreign

correspondents all over the globe) who use “slipstreaming” as a large part of their normal practice, use it to pick out potential features to write, trends to cover, from the incoming daily and “spot news”. My overall impression of the nature and role of the foreign reporter as news gatherer and writer here, is that they’re much more analytical than is commonly understood, and in fact they’ll often analyze things that the Japanese press will not. They’ll show their perspective of what’s new here, although, as mentioned previously, such perspectives are often tainted by the “isn’t Japan strange” frame. So what a foreign correspondent will typically do is to look at all this news flowing through everyday, and take a snapshot and say, “O.K, here’s what’s really interesting”, and from that he will proceed to fill up this news item with the necessary “stuffing”- the interview, in order to make it a feature. Given the financial, linguistic and manpower limitations for the normal correspondent, the process of slipstreaming in itself should not be labeled too strongly as second rate reporting, but one, when looked at from their perspective, admirably suited to resources. The flaw in all this, in respect to reporting a fair, representative picture of Japan, would appear to be the journalists’ sense of news values, which will tend to home in on the “O.K, here’s what’s really interesting”, rather than the “O.K, here’s what’s really happening” type of news coming in.

While this forms the correspondents’ principal mechanism for news orientation and ideas, simply going out for a walk and looking around can offer up potential stories. As mentioned previously, the nature of such stories will tend to focus on things, which from the correspondents own “cultural maps,” he/she thinks are strange and different for his/her audience. At the beginning of my research, I was certain that the F.C.C.J would prove to be a valuable news gathering resource for its members, in regards to exchanging tips and information while they met socially in the bar. After all, in both Tunstall’s and Pedelty’s accounts, the reporters’ club was described as an important informal supplement to their more regular, daily news gathering routines. Yet, none of the correspondents I talked to had personally used the club for such. In fact some of them disliked hanging around the club too long, finding it rather cliquey, the bar area tending to be dominated by the same faces night after night. I later found out that the guy who gave me the very unwelcoming, cold shoulder when I first went into the bar and introduced myself and my project, was the unofficial “big shot” amongst these regulars... I was beginning to understand.

4.5 ACCESS TO SOURCES.

Once the correspondent has hit on some news item that grabs his/her interest, the time now comes for them to put into practice what their assigned role as specialist news gatherer expects of them—the actual process of meeting with persons or institutions who have specialized knowledge, whose information and remarks will then provide the necessary “stuffing” for their article. As is also reflected in most other foreign correspondent studies, a large proportion of contacts that they go to are people working in the Embassies of their own country. I would suggest that this is due to three primary factors: the linguistic, the bilateral nature of many of their chosen topics, and in the case of the smaller, less well known news organizations, a difficulty in getting access to top Japanese officials (especially those who work through the Kisha/press clubs). Since many of the stories that need “stuffing” are related to lifestyles and such, simply going to the person on the street for opinions is considered appropriate. Yet inevitably the time comes when a more authoritative voice is required. Trying to arrange a meeting with a top Japanese official or spokesperson can often be an extremely long and tiresome process, and even when this is finally achieved a second barrier arises from their reluctance to “open up”:

“In general, Japanese are much less talkative to reporters than Americans in all levels of society and business, and even compared with other Asians. That’s a barrier everyone faces. Another barrier is that when you have to interview a top executive, you have to make a request many days a head of time and submit a lot of questions. And the third problem of access is that people from unknown publications can’t get access at all to top people, but the *L.A Times* doesn’t normally have that problem.”(Holley)

“The society, compared to Europe and America, is a fairly closed society. People aren’t used to the idea that information about their government is something they have a right to, and for that reason government departments or say the police don’t feel they have a duty to talk about what they do, so that’s a frustration... Japanese are often very cautious. It takes a long time relatively, to get to people. You might have to phone up a few times and explain in great detail what you want to do.”(Lloyd Parry)

But for the much more well known, particularly the big American newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, doors are more easily opened to elite government departments and personnel. One reason for this is perhaps the greater

importance the government attaches to Japan-American relations, and the belief that these two publications are widely read in U.S government circles:

“Main sources? Our sources are everywhere, but we happen to have a good source in the government Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Finance because we usually don’t go to the press conference, it’s not necessary, we can go direct to the persons..Fortunately the *Washington Post* carries some weight-**its name means something**”(Togo)

[emphasis added]

Getting a simple, straight answer to a question from the Japanese appeared to be an almost Herculean task. As Jeffery Bartholet related to me:

“People will tell you there are two levels of communication. One is at the surface level, they’ll tell you what you want to hear, and the other is the reality, and that’s very hard to get at that second level.”

What he is referring to is perhaps one prime example of the peculiarities of Japanese culture that correspondents have to negotiate with in their news gathering routines, and it is one which most of the people I talked to mentioned. In Japanese the two faces- the “*tatemae*”(the surface level) and the much rarer “*honne*”(true intention) are, for foreigners, very difficult to distinguish between. Access is not only a question of getting to see someone within an organization. The foreign reporter often comes to find it almost impossible to breakdown apparently universal reluctance to offer insight or interpretation (No.1 *Shimbun*: Nov.1994). According to Steve Herman:

“When you go to interview a Japanese official or a company spokesman, say, you ask them a question and they’re likely to reel out a bunch of figures. But when you move on to ask them how they themselves feel about a situation, it’s like you’ve just hammered him for a ten count!”

Moreover, even if the foreign correspondent is able to get access to an official of a government or company organization, he/she is then often told not to mention them as sources:

“Some say this is the land of the non-quote...a lot of guys here simply say it’s better to spend your time dunking donuts in your coffee than wasting time with officials here.”(Bartholet)

Some of the correspondents’ comments then, clearly illustrate that getting access to Japanese officials and representatives can at times be a long, tiring and, in the end, a

pointless process. The popularity of the F.C.C.J news conference luncheons, (where well known Japanese from the political, bureaucratic, corporate and artistic world are invited to speak and answer questions from the reporter audience) comes not only from the fact that interpreters are provided, but also because it's about the only place where the correspondents can really put the heat on. It takes a brave or ignorant Japanese to accept an invitation to the lion's den. One correspondent described the expression of a top Sony executive, on leaving the podium, as looking like he'd just been mugged and assaulted on the New York Subway.

In chapter two we saw that the Washington correspondent studies of Hess, Tunstall and Rosten, and Pedelty's El Salvador account, suggested that the foreign context did little to lessen the foreign reporters' dependence on official source organizations and spokesperson. In Washington and Bonn, Tunstall said that British reporters had good access to high-level government people and institutions and used P.R persons as a large part of their normal news gathering practices. What I think the findings in this section imply is that Japan provides an interesting contrast to these studies, in respect to the nature and extent of the official source and foreign correspondent relationship. If any one of Tunstall's correspondents came to Tokyo, he would probably soon be in for a shock. My over all impression from the interviews and through chatting with other correspondents in the F.C.C.J bar, is that Japanese officials from bureaucratic and corporate bodies certainly don't bring out the red carpet when correspondents, from anywhere other than world famous organizations, first approach them. It takes many correspondents a lot of effort and infinite amounts of patience to get to the door, and the lack of willingness of these officials to speak frankly, makes many correspondents wonder if it was worth knocking in the first place. As we shall soon see in the following section, one reason why many of these doors seem so hard to open is because some members of the Kisha clubs are keen to keep them chained up from the inside...

4.6 HITTING THE KISHA WALL.

...In the light of our analysis concerning how the correspondents typically went about gathering news on a normal day to day basis, one can now ask ourselves to what extent and in what ways does the domestic Japanese press system and practices play a part, or interfere with foreign journalists' news gathering behavior? What will become apparent in the following section is that the Kisha club system, which is so prevalent

here, is a source of friction and dissatisfaction amongst almost all the correspondents I talked to. But, before we try to find out what essentially these sore points of issue are and from where they derive from, some explanation of what Kisha clubs are and their place within the country's news media structure is necessary.

According to the F.C.C.J President there are around four hundred Kisha (Press) clubs across Japan. Practically every national, local and official government institution, including the police and law courts and major public and private company has a Kisha club attached to it. Usually, the club looks like a small office room, crammed up with work desks and chairs from which the assigned Japanese journalist will stay and work in. Along with this, there is usually another room where they hang out to relax. This is often the place where the journalists, from the varying national newspapers, after official work hours, sit around sofas drinking beers, exchanging small talk or information, and wait for the Minister or the company representative to come in to perhaps give them a "*kondan*"-an off the record background briefing. During the daytime, though, the journalists spend practically all their time simply tied to that desk, waiting for the regular, scheduled or unscheduled news conference to be held. In the opinion of William Sposato, the life of the typical Japanese is one to be pitied: "If you're a high flying Japanese reporter, you do a huge number of hours of work. Work seven days a week. These guys never see their families, and that's how you get ahead... It's a miserable life."

For the mainstream Japanese newspapers, the Kisha club system dominates the way news is gathered here. Papers like the *Asahi*, *Mainichi* and the *Yomiuri* are, in size of readership, some of the biggest in the world. The thousands of journalists they employ enable them to plant one of their own in each of these clubs. Ericson, Baranek and Chan suggested that:

"On most beats, the source symbolizes the incorporation of news reporting with the organization having office facilities for journalists. On beats, journalists are not only physically part of the source organization, but over time become part of its culture of sources on the beat to the point where the relationship between their understanding and values coheres with that of their sources... The task is to capture how the physical, social and cultural terrain merge as the landscape of each beat and affect the news product."(1989, p.6/p.26)

In dealing with contacts, journalists always have to think about how they write up their source, but in the case of the Kisha clubs, this situation becomes extreme. As well as controlling the flow of information (by way of the fact that most information from government offices, major private organizations and enterprises are channeled through the press clubs), the close intimacy between the journalist and his source, means it becomes something akin to reporting on your own mother. In terms of getting scoops, the main stream news media use a procedure that Mr. Togo from the *Washington Post*, translated as “the morning ride and night attack”. After late night *Kondan*, an extremely tired out journalist will have to follow the Minister to his home and wait outside in his car. Sometime in the morning, the minister’s wife will then invite him in for breakfast and in the process he’ll have the chance to get that early tip concerning the minister’s plans for the day or week:

“In news gathering terms it’s unique. I don’t know anywhere else where the minister’s wife makes the reporter breakfast!”(Sposato)

Until a few years ago, foreign news organizations found attempts to penetrate the walls of the Kisha system futile. Both the Kisha journalists and their sources wanted to preserve their cozy relationship, and the *Japanese National Papers and Publishers And Editors Association* (J.N.P.P.E.A) refused out right to give the foreign companies official recognition, which there by effectively eliminated their chances of being members of a Kisha club. By 1991, the fight was on. For the most part, that fight was carried out by the financial news wire companies-*Reuters*, *Associated Press* and *Bloomberg* through the *Foreign Press In Japan* (F.P.I.J)², with the American Embassy as their corner man. For the news wires, access to the clubs was vital. If they weren’t at say the *Kasumi* (Foreign Ministry) or the *Kabuto* (Stock Exchange) club when an official gave an in house news conference or *Kondan*, then the competing Japanese wire services like *Kyodo* news, would always get the news first. Since their business clients demand the news as fast as possible, and also that these foreign wire companies also compete domestically, this situation was in terms of fair competition, bananas.

² F.P.I.J-an organisation attached to the F.C.C.J whose role is to channel complaints from foreign reporters to the appropriate Japanese authorities.

By 1993 the fight was won. The J.N.P.P.E.A sent out instructions to the clubs recommending that they accept journalists working for foreign news organizations into their clubs, providing that the organizations themselves fulfilled the same provisos as Japanese members did. These provisos remain, and it is these which, in technical terms, bar the vast majority of foreign correspondents. The two most important of these are:

(1). That news organizations maintain a full-time presence in a particular club.

(2). That the assigned reporter has fluency in spoken and written Japanese.

Hence, in the light of these conditions, it seems obvious why, according to Steve Herman, ninety five percent of foreign news organizations are simply not interested in, or unable to maintain, a presence in these clubs:

“I’m writing about the whole country. Kisha clubs control, determine the flow of news in very specialized subjects, erm, industries, Ministries, town halls, that kind of stuff.”(Lloyd Parry)

“For us they’re irrelevant.”(Holley)

The other five percent, who do have employees in some or one of these clubs, are the financial wire companies, or the highly specialized publications. And out of this five percent, it is usually considered normal practice to send only a native Japanese speaker there.

To a very limited extent, comparisons of the Kisha to Britain’s own Lobby system are justifiable. Both have reporters working away from their news room, often socializing with each other and having close intimate relationships with their sources, with spoken or unspoken rules impinging on when and what can be reported, yet in terms of scale, the fact that in Japan such a system is not just segregated to one Parliament but to hundreds of public and private institutions, places it in a whole different ball game. The American correspondents said that the clubs were to a small degree similar to the White House press corps:

“They’re more comparable to the off the record stuff in Washington from state officials, the only difference is that non-authorized leaks are virtually non-existent in Japan; you’ve only got the authorized leaks, the Kisha clubs, the official line. Dissident views within the bureaucracies aren’t there... Yet it makes these authorized leaks more reliable”(Holley)

While most correspondents aren't part of the system, many have experienced clashes with it. Surprisingly, their venom is directed not primarily at the official spokespersons but to their Japanese colleagues, who jealously guard their sources from non-Kisha club outsiders. When he was based in Hong Kong, Charles Neilan did an interview with the then Japanese Prime Minister. Soon after, the Japanese Consul paid him a visit and told him:

"I'm very sorry Mr. Neilan but I have to present you with this'. It was a letter of protest from the Prime Minister's Kisha club, because I hadn't gone through them. That's the kind of stuff you have to go through sometimes... They're a news cartel" There are two kinds of news conferences in Japan. There is the official, Regular one that is organized and presided by that particular ministry or company which is open to any journalist, and the unofficial short notice news conference that is organized by the Kisha club itself. Foreign correspondents often encounter a swift rebuttal at the door if they go to the latter. One frustration however, is that in times of crises, when a spokesperson has to suddenly announce something to the world, confusion arises as to whether they're allowed in or not.

Moreover, sometimes, even when the correspondent wants to speak individually to a spokesperson, the presence of the clubs is still felt:

"...the obstructions one encounters in news gathering when you look at industries, ministries or town halls don't actually come from the officials concerned, they come from the Kisha club, where officials are scared of offending a Kisha club. So they will say 'I'd like to invite you to this press conference, I'd like to answer that question-but I can't, because we haven't told that Kisha club yet. If we tell you first they'd be annoyed.' So it's rather disillusioning to discover that it's not the system that's obstructing you, but your own Japanese colleagues"(Lloyd Parry).

Interestingly, being "outsiders" does offer the foreign correspondent a number of advantages. Each club has its own particular rules. One that is common throughout most of them is referred to as the "Blackboard Agreement". Here, the Kisha club members are obliged to collectively refrain from passing on information they have received from a *Kondan* or an in house news conference until the time and date of official release that's written on the board. Along with this, the close ties between the journalist and sources often means that embarrassing or difficult questions and issues don't crop up inside the clubs. The reporter who decides to rock the boat, risks being

ostracized from not only his source but by other Kisha members. (Herman) Thus, outside it, the foreign correspondent can sometimes take advantage of this freedom. Some Japanese reporters, working in the clubs, get hold of scoops and scandals which either through coercion or the Blackboard Agreement, they are unable to print. These they will sometimes secretly pass on to Japanese tabloid magazines, who are banned from the clubs, but who are also distrusted by the public, or passed on to a foreign news contact here. Most of the scoops the foreign correspondents are able to get, come from this practice. The Imperial Family's Kisha club is reputed to be one of the most strictly controlled. In 1991, members of the club became aware that a Princess Masako was to be engaged to the heir to the throne, but they were prevented from revealing it. Someone then passed it on to the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, who then printed it first. Like the Japanese gossip magazines, the foreign press has what Mr. Togo thinks is that vital detachment, yet unlike them they have the status and reputation for good journalistic practice, to make these stories be listened to seriously. For the *L.A Times* correspondent, this is where a foreign reporter can really make a valuable contribution in Japan:

“The Japanese media in general is divided between the mainstream media, which reflects the Kisha club hand out information fairly often, and the weekly magazines, which are generally barred from the Kisha clubs and have all this outrageous stuff... If there is any place for the foreigner to do reporting that excels in Japan, it's by taking advantage of that difference. That we are the ones who can be very, very accurate and very, very tough-both at the same time.”

More than anything, then, while the Kisha clubs and especially the Japanese journalists who work in them, can be a potential source of frustration and obstruction for the foreign correspondent, in terms of scoops, his position of being beyond manipulation by the Kisha club system, suggests the foreigner has a certain advantage here.

4.7 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

This chapter has detailed some of the difficulties faced by the correspondent presented by the Japanese context. Language difficulties provide a “cultural curtain” between the foreigner and Japanese society. The high cost of hiring interpreters and rail travel means that the correspondent rarely goes out of Tokyo but instead tends to stay in the capital, his/her news gathering activities largely dependent on English based news

information and sources. When correspondents do approach Japanese officials in, say, the government bureaucracies or private corporations, they will often encounter the cold shoulder, and even when they are finally allowed to interview them, officials seem to share a common (cultural?) trait of not opening up. The biggest frustration for many foreign correspondents, in relation to the Kisha Clubs, is not that they can't be members, but rather the way in which the Japanese members have a tendency to jealously guard their access to officials from "outsiders." Perceived editorial and audience news preferences come to indelibly shape, either directly or indirectly, the news gathering and selection behavior of nearly all the correspondents I talked to. The apparent news gathering inadequacies and limitations mentioned above, are, in effect, neutralized by the surface deep "isn't Japan strange" type of news stories favored back home. The irony of this situation is acknowledged by the correspondents themselves.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.

Within this dissertation I have tried to pick out from data gathered from formal interviews and informal conversations with some of the foreign correspondents working in Japan, and through a content analysis of the No.1 Shimbun. In attempting to process this data, and hence derive some theoretical insights from it, I became aware that, for the sake of good methodology and added accuracy, I should relay many of the conclusions I drew from my research back to some of the correspondents I studied, and see what they thought. What I was after, was to give to the reader a fair and generally accurate picture as to some of the issues and problems often faced by the foreign reporter in Tokyo. As I have remarked in chapter three, the limited nature of my methodology should in consequence be considered as having a definite bearing as to how accurate this study can be. Having said this though, the following conclusion was evolved from many discussions with not only the people I interviewed, but also a wide variety of correspondents I consulted with, in the club bar. My own over all impression of how, or how not, the Japanese context infringes on the foreign correspondent here was, to my relief, considered to be just by nearly all those I conferred with.

My concluding impression of all this is that the correspondent who first comes to be posted here will, in time, be faced with “the great dilemma”.

What becomes apparent from speaking to people here, is that one of the great issues in Japan is that the language is so difficult and the society is so complicated and so different from western society, that one can't really understand about what's going on here without spending many years here before you even start to get that deeper, clearer perspective. Having done so, many of those correspondents will then realize that it becomes frustratingly difficult to explain what's going on without writing very sophisticated, very long articles about how things are so inter-related and complicated, that tend to be aimed at fairly sophisticated audiences. Without doing that, many correspondents don't believe that the person in Leicester or New York can really grasp what's really going on here. Yet that kind of reporting is too overwhelming for most publications that correspondents here work for, and the readers aren't interested enough in Japan to read through such extraordinary complex explanations of a society they've never been to. And if you don't do that, you're reduced to flashy, colorful

stories about what a robotic Sushi bar is, the “isn’t Japan strange” kind of topics. That’s why people who know Japan and understand the Japanese are often so critical of western reporting about Japan. It’s not really a failure by the correspondent, it’s that the whole relationship of news media and audience and the complexity of Japanese society makes it almost impossible to write really, really first class material—that experts and people who know Japan consider first class. This, I think, is the great dilemma for many correspondents here.

The main theme that runs throughout much of this study’s look into how correspondents operate here, is that the perceived requirements of their editors and audience, in effect, come to irrevocably shape their news values. Despite their distant location, most of the foreign correspondents I spoke to, do not appear to have as much leverage, in respect to the range of stories they can choose to write about, as one would expect. The preponderance of funny and unusual news items, to the detriment of a more honest, but perhaps less interesting, representation of this country, for me, highlights the inadequacies of the commercially based news system rather than the failings of the individual correspondent. As the title suggests, the main concern of this dissertation was to find out how the news gathering practices of foreign correspondents were constrained and shaped by contexts particular to Japan. And yes, as we saw in the previous chapter, the character of the national press system, in particular the dominance and protective practices of the Kisha clubs can often directly or indirectly create frustrations and obstacles for the non-Japanese news reporter. Yet, we need to set this against how the workings of the international commercial press system come to impinge on the correspondent’s news gathering and selection behavior. In my estimation, it is the latter which has the greater propensity to shape his/her behavior. Audience goals are consciously or unconsciously ingrained in the news values of the vast majority of correspondents I talked to. The degree to which the difficulties of the Japanese context (such as language, officials and Kisha clubs) effect the foreigner **shouldn’t be overstated**. This is primarily because his/her news values will tend to stress the surface -isn’t Japan strange- level of analysis on what is news worthy here, rather than the deeper, more complex, investigative type of analysis which would require Japanese and access to specialized source institutions and individuals, such as Ministries, large companies and their officials.

Pedely believed that the goal of journalism should be something akin to the goal of anthropology:

“To provide as adequate definition of events, the context in which they take place, their underlying causes, and most importantly, our connection to them... a sense of knowledge and interconnectedness linking individuals to the larger world in which they live. Unfortunately, the international news system is currently inadequate to the task.”(p.25)

From the standpoint of my own conclusions above, I think he got it basically right. The implication of all this is, potentially, awesome... In terms of a fair portrayal, many of the correspondents I met know that the Japanese are getting a raw deal. The narrowness of what is considered to be “newsworthy” about the society they’re supposed to be informing about, may materialize into stereotypical perceptions by the correspondent’s readership about the Japanese... Wars have been known to be started and propelled by governments’ use and exploitation of such untruths, namely propaganda. When I returned to Britain for my annual three-week holiday, I met up with some old friends one night. They asked me what Japan was like. Before I answered, I asked them to tell me what they knew about the country and people. Their replies revolved around the same themes—a robot like group society, mad on stupid technology and with a cold hearted business mentality that wants to rule the global economy. This was totally at odds from my own experience, which has found Japan to be a very much traditional family based society, with a people who have a remarkable politeness and generosity about them. I took it then as a kind of a joke, but now, in the light of my research, I don’t think it’s so funny, and I now wonder whether their perceptions can be in some way connected up with the inadequacies of the international news system—from where they get much of their information about the world around them.

To really do this topic justice, I would have liked to have had the chance to interview a wider variety of correspondents, both in terms of nationality and type of publications they work for, operating in Tokyo and to have spent some quality time observing their news gathering routines. As well as this, approaches to the Japanese side, especially reporters and government and corporate spokespersons would have given my theoretical insights an important extra balance. Yet, in all truthfulness, such

a study would be far beyond the fifteen thousand-word limit that I'm sweatingly close to reaching at this time!

Each country and region will almost certainly provide different contexts to news gathering for the foreign correspondent. At the moment, it seems that this has been a neglected area of news production research, especially in respect to non-American and non-European nations. Hence, there appears to be a need for comparative foreign correspondent studies to be done, involving a much wider national and regional "net". Only when this is done can common issues and themes be confidently brought to light and discussed. By doing this, an exciting and new dynamic contribution to international news production research will surely be spawned.

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