

# Is It so Powerful? The Power and Positionality of Online Journalism in Japan

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## Abstract

This paper has aimed to overview the current situations of online journalism, its characteristics and implications to other journalisms, and tried to evaluate the impact and challenges to democracy and the public opinion in Japan. What I would like to suggest is that any study of what is going on the website in terms of Journalism should start with a clear understanding about the actual condition of the public opinion, politics and culture of the society. I consider this paper as a preliminary attempt to provide such a description hopefully leading to better understanding Japanese society and public opinion, and a redefinition of online journalism strategies, as well as a starting point for comparing various societies.

## 1. Introduction

I would like to start with introducing two famous episodes that tell the power of the Internet in Japan.

### Toshiba Incident

After purchasing the VCRs from a shop in Fukuoka in 1998, an unlucky 38-year-old man disliked the machine's playback quality and sent the players Toshiba's Tokyo headquarters

for repair. To his disappointment, technicians toned down extraneous static in the signals by degrading the overall clarity of the pictures - essentially masking the original problem by creating a new one, according to the consumer. In June of next year, he put up a website titled "About Toshiba's Post-Sale Service" detailing his travails and demanding a formal apology from the corporation as well as \$26 to cover his shipping costs. Toshiba's response is that the customer is wrong. Toshiba sought a court order to get AKKY-san to remove postings that described the Toshiba productive as defective. The Fukuoka man installed audio files of his customer service conversations on the Web. He taped some of the phone conversations, on which a gruff male can be heard hectoring the customer.

"I'm not going to apologize for being impolite, why should I? You should be a professional claimer. An ordinary consumer does not do this sort of thing. Perhaps you are too free and bored."

Everyone who cared to listen could decide for himself whether he had been treated disrespectfully. AKKY-san's campaign sparked an outpouring of e-mail complaints, while others gathered signatures online in protest of poor consumer service. On July 19, Toshiba issued a public apology, withdrew its lawsuit, and dis-

patched vice president to Fukuoka for a personal apology though only for rudeness.<sup>1)</sup>

### **Protest against JAPAN - KOREA friendship campaign**

In the Round of 16 of 2002 FIFA World Cup, Korea Republic claimed an electrifying 2-1 victory. Even more unlikely was a penalty shootout win over Spain in the quarterfinal. In contrast, another co-hosts Japan was defeated by Turkey in the second round on their way to the semifinals. Korean people's street performances that made the streets like a sea of red during and after every match were already subject matter of media coverage in Japan in somehow joyful but sometimes jealousy mood.

The semifinal between Republic Korea versus Germany was held in Seoul on June 25. In order to support Germany, about 1000 Japanese gathered for public viewing performed in the National Stadium of Tokyo by the appeal on the Internet. The reason for which they gathered seemed to be not only the anxiety which cannot allow atmosphere which supports South Korea at the holy national stadium but also the criticism to the media "which do not tell the truth."<sup>2)</sup> It can be said that the group that had always hidden the body to virtual and anonymous space appeared in public space at last. The following is the message of the appeal in "2 Channel" which is said to have urged this mobilization.

1 Name : the Nameless (名無しさん)

Posted Date : 2002/06/24 (Mon.) 19 : 58

It became real that we are afraid!

Unlike South Korean, you think that you continue taking an opposite attitude against the unjust judgment of Korean game until now, but

the scheme "privatization of World Cup by conspiracy with Japanese and South Koreans" will be drawn for the foreign media and foreign people that cannot distinguish Japan from China and Korea. In order to avoid it and to send to foreign media (our message), a movement of wanting to perform our declaration of intention is occurring and expanding. Let's gather in the National Stadium on the day with T-shirts, sashes, headbands, placards on which messages like "against unjust judgment!", "Japanese want Justice!" written in English to the world.

From this message, the deep anxiety over 'justice' not being protected from a pure soccer fan's position towards the 'world' can be read. However, the 'world' here is not necessarily the real world itself. It is the West to which modern Japan has desired its recognition for self-identity since the modern times.<sup>3)</sup> Otherwise it is 'the countries which they think the strongest de no jours.'<sup>4)</sup> Moreover one should be cautious about whom we are and who the two "others" are, the West as the World and Korea as the other, or the unjust"

Each of above two episodes has been told as episode that tells the power of the Internet and the importance of the freedom of speech. However, what is important is who the enemy was in fighting in which they are proud of the victory.

## **2. Current Conditions of Online Journalism in Japan**

### **Overview of penetration of the Internet**

The penetration of the Internet in 2006 was

68.5% and the number of Internet users was estimated at about 87.54 million (an increase of 2.25 million compared to the previous year). The number of broadband subscribers was approximately 2.33 million as of the end of 2005 (an increase of 19.1% over the previous year). The broadband household diffusion rate became 50.9% as of March 2007, and exceeded the half of all the households of Japan for the first time. From 41.4% at the February 2006, it has been extended steadily. Among those, the number of DSL subscribers was approximately 14.52 million (up to 6.2% from the previous year), which was the highest figure. This was followed by FTTH (Fiber to The Home) with about 5.46 million (up 88.4%) and wireless Internet (FWA) with about 20,000 (down 34.8 %).<sup>5)</sup> Moreover, according to recent study, broadband service in Japan is eight to 30 times as fast as in the United States……and considerably cheaper, as little as \$22 a month. Japan has the world's fastest Internet connections, delivering more data at a lower cost than anywhere else does.<sup>6)</sup>

Likewise, the amount of Internet use has been increasing steadily, and the amount of information on the websites expands rapidly. In 2004, people used Internet more than newspaper, 37 minutes per a day compared to 31 minutes reading newspaper, for the first time. Moreover, Japanese is the Internet's third most populous language group after English and Chinese.<sup>7)</sup> Although Japan is a relatively small country, the space for Japanese on the virtual world could not be told small. In addition, Japanese people seem to be polite and reluctant to speak out. However, they might be very active and straight in a specific situation just like any other ethnic group all over the

world.

### Reluctant major media

In these ten years, many individual users or special interest groups have used the Internet as an outlet for their news, but also almost all the Japanese major media have launched their news sites. As of 2007, Japan's major print dailies each maintain their own news sites: Asahi Newspaper's Asahi.com; YOMIURI ONLINE of the Yomiuri Shimbun; Mainichi Newspaper's Mainichi Daily News; NIKKEI NET and Nikkei 4946 of the Nihon Keizai Shimbun; and MSN-Sankei News of the Sankei Shimbun.<sup>8)</sup>

Japanese major media have been reluctant to go online. There are some reasons. First, High circulation: Japanese newspapers have the highest circulation rate of any country in the world. Given that Japan still ranks second in the world when looking at consumption by population at 549 copies per thousand and subscriptions per household more than 1 copy they might think they don't need to try go to the frontier. Second, Japan's unique distribution system: It relies heavily on independent distributors, many of which are small businesses and solely focus on newspaper distribution. For instance, the Asahi Shimbun alone carries a distribution channel of 3,400 agents totaling 84,000 employees who would balk at the thought of newspaper companies bypassing them to directly reach its readers. In a system that has prevailed since 1903, traditional media behemoths are struggling to make a transition that could result in the displacement of thousands of individuals. Third, disposition of elitism of the major newspaper: they criticize online content as "stale reprints" of previously

Figure 1. Electronic Media Projects by Newspapers and News Agencies

Services		Number of companies
Internet	Web	86
	Mail	40
	Video on the Web	42
	Contents Provider	46
	Digital Replica	10
Information Provider for Browser Phones		66
New Internet Services	RSS Feeds	26
	Podcasting	12
	Blog	29
	SNS	3
Cable Television		38(4)
Teletext Service by Terrestrial Broadcasting		6
FM Teletext Broadcasting		8
Data Multiplex Broadcasting		5
Communication Satellite Broadcasting		6(1)
BS Digital Broadcasting		6
Program Supplier for Broadcasting		9
Community Broadcasting		24(5)
Internet Service Provider and other telecommunication business		13
Facsimile		5
Archives		38
Illuminated news display		43

※ Figures in parentheses show numbers of news organizations that provide only information, not make capital participation or do other activities. However, such ventures as the Internet, teletext service by terrestrial broadcasting, FM teletext broadcasting, television data multiplex broadcasting, BS digital broadcasting, information provider for browser phones, archives, illuminated news display are counted as entries, even if they are mere information offerings. A total of 104 news organizations, including nonrespondents, are operating 179 Web sites.

※ Source : Annual survey by NSK's Digital Media Development Section, questioning 111 member newspapers and news agencies (86 responses), conducted as of January 1, 2007.

run stories.

From a viewpoint of business side, however we can have a different look, which show us that the Japanese media conglomerates are not reluctant to get new business opportunities as Figure 1 shows. Possibly, they might have been waiting for time to merely ripen.

### Participatory citizen journalism

Japan Alternative News for Justices and New Cultures (JanJan) is the first alternative online daily new service. It was launched as a free daily Internet news service in February 2003 by Ken Takeuchi, a former the Asahi's reporter and ex-mayor of Kamakura City, whose goal is to "completely rework the traditional concept of media." Two policies distinguished from mainstream newspapers: First, JanJan relies primarily on citizen reporters, not professional journalists, to write articles. Second, in contrast to mainstream competitors, JanJan does not rely heavily on government and corporate press news releases. Although it is told that, the English name makes JanJan sound something like a cross between the Japan Communist party and Greenpeace—in a sense it is similar to online publications by labor or peace activist organizations—this is no strident radical rag. JanJan's antiestablishment bent is tempered with a polite tone; JanJan intends to co-exist peacefully with the media establishment it hopes to change.<sup>9)</sup> JanJan is published daily and covers a range of news in seven sections: Living, Regional, Culture, Media, Business, Politics and World.

Ohmynews Japan rolled off the virtual presses August 2006. By the end of the year, 2,600 citizen journalists had registered and, funded with an \$11 million cash injection from telecom-

munications corporation Softbank, the site was publishing 25 to 30 new articles a day. Shuntaro Torigoe, a well-known journalist and TV anchor, was appointed to head the site, but resigned not long after. Professional editors and journalists were taken on to proofread and fact-check articles, while contributors were paid up to 2000 yen for their articles.

Other websites adopt citizen journalism as a slogan such as PJ news (<http://www.pjnews.net>) by Livedoor and NIKKANBERITA (<http://www.nikkanberita.com>) which mainly focuses on international affairs.

However, in the public journalism arena, no other sites have matched the success of South Korea's OhmyNews, (after which both sites are modeled) which is credited with influencing the election of the president Roh Moo-hyun in 2003 but also claims to have earned \$400,000 in profit in 2004. Yet, for all their ambition, neither JanJan nor OhmyNews Japan seem to have landed a blow on the mainstream media as yet. The sites have communities of dedicated contributors, but they are little known and have relatively little influence. While the South Korean OhmyNews has tens of thousands of citizen journalists, the Japanese sites have only a few thousand between them. The number of active writers is probably more like in the tens.<sup>10)</sup>

### Bulletin Board and Blog, etc.

On the other hand, many journalists and social scientists shed the light on Japan's largest Internet bulletin board '2 channel' ("ni-chan-neru" as pronounced in Japanese) where more than 400 bulletin boards including more than 6000 threads (each thread is a series of postings to a particular message) are managed to discuss various topics. About 5.4 million people

come to this “2 Channel” each month, many of them several times a day, according to the survey of NetRatings Japan Inc. In addition, Google, which is the most popular search engine of the Internet, announced at December 2002 that the most used query in Japan was “2 channel”. These facts clearly show that 2 channel is the most popular online community site in Japan and has become part of Japan’s everyday culture as no other Web site has.

Founded on May 30, 1999, in a college apartment in Arkansas, USA, this single site has more influence on Japanese popular opinion than the prime minister, the emperor and the traditional media combined. On one level, it serves as a fun, informative place for people to read product reviews, download software and compare everything from the size of their poop to quiz show answers. However, conversations hosted here have also influenced stock prices, rallied support for philanthropic causes, organized massive synchronized dance routines, prevented terrorism and driven people to their deathbeds.”<sup>11)</sup> The place where disgruntled employees leak information about their companies, journalists include tidbits they cannot get into the mainstream news media and the average salary man attacks with ferocity and language unacceptable in daily life. It is also the place where gays come out in a society in which they mostly remain in the closet, where users freely broach taboo subjects.

The community is an anonymous anarchy, though there are two types of anonymity: handle name type and nameless type, which gives participants more freedom. Anonymous posting is regarded as vital for the popularity of this bulletin because in Japan speaking out risks public humiliation<sup>12)</sup>, so without taking risks

participants can criticize not only politicians, celebrities and their teachers but also a specific ethnic group, leftist groups and feminist groups.

### 3. Lagging in participatory citizen journalism and volatile in anonymous bulletin boards

Why hasn’t citizen journalism taken off in Japan? Why are Japanese people so volatile in anonymous bulletin board? To these questions, there are many explanations. I would like to introduce some of the typical ones.

First, it has been suggested that Japanese people simply do not have time to research and write articles and Japan has fewer activists and volunteers than any other countries. However, that is not an adequate explanation, compared to a neighboring country.

Second, cultural explanation: JanJan’s founder Takeuchi, Ken has pointed out Japanese national character for this phenomenon. According to him, Japanese by nature prefer to avoid dissonance in a culture that values harmony.

*In my opinion, people in South Korea all have their own ideas and opinions and tend to speak out what they think in frank words. On the other hand, Japanese people often hesitate in expressing themselves. Even when they do speak out, they tend to choose ambiguous words.*

*Japanese people have traditionally believed in the importance of social harmony. The famous [sixth-century] Prince Shotoku who established the oldest constitution in Japan, said that harmony is to be valued, and contentiousness is to be avoided. Many Japanese people tend to avoid arguing with*

*others, not to speak out one's own opinion, and are easily overwhelmed by the majority. In general, Japanese people are not good at expressing their opinions.*<sup>13)</sup>

Mr. Takeuchi refers to people's distrust of the Internet, thanks to the online bulletin 2 Channel, though he did not name it explicitly.

*This site is flooded with libels, slanders, copyright violations and even terror announcements. It is basically a lawless area. Offensive right-wing rhetoric prevails in this site, and the liberal newspapers, magazines and intellectuals are constantly under fierce attack ... It is said that this site is supported by advertising revenue, with customers mainly from pornography sites, customer loan businesses and online casinos.*<sup>14)</sup>

Ohmynews Japan's first senior editor, Mr. Torigoe also explained about the differences between Japan and South Korea at a conference held by Ohmynews Korea as following.

*- South Korea had a successful democratic movement in 1987, which generated a great deal of political will and power. In Japan, a dominant political party has ruled for over 60 years. Thus, politics in Japan tends to be covered as a horserace or a baseball game, not a participatory phenomenon.*

*- There is a strong distrust of mainstream media in South Korea, but great respect for mainstream journalism in Japan.*

*- The relationship to the Internet is complicated in Japan. Yes, there are 8.6 million bloggers, many of them writing expert blogs on esoteric subjects. However, there is a lot of resentment of this culture, largely based on the culture of "2 channel",*

*a Japanese site that shows much of the worst of the participatory internet.*

*- Many Japanese are not comfortable connecting their names to their opinions. They are more comfortable in a culture of anonymity.*

*In bringing OhmyNews to Japan, these questions and disparities will need to be addressed and bridged.*<sup>15)</sup>

Two former major newspaper's reporter seem to agree to the cultural differences between South Korea and Japan and to the derogatory culture in the Japanese Internet bulletins. Regarding Japanese people's respect for mainstream media, however, they have different opinion. Mr. Torigoe seemed to think that the Japanese public appears relatively satisfied with the media they have ; Mr. Takeuchi apparently has taken an opinion that dailies operated by Japan's five media powerhouses lack a tradition of hard-nosed reporting and their articles often faithfully retain the original spin of press materials by released by government and business organizations.

Things are not so simple, but complicated. Japanese newspapers have the highest circulation rate of any country in the world. Japan still ranks second in the world when looking at consumption by population at 549 copies per thousand. However, South Korean situation is not that different. Newspaper circulation rate has been high enough at 449.8 copies per thousand. According to a survey, in both countries, Japan and South Korea, newspaper is thought as the most reliable institution among military, the police, United Nations, labor union, administration, big business, national legislature, religious association (In Japan 70.2 %, in South Korea 64.9%).<sup>16)</sup> People in both

countries still love reading newspapers, but sometimes harshly criticizing the tone of some news articles from various positions, and then go to on-line and compare various news-sites and try to find “truths” they can agree to. Isn’t that close to what is really happening here and there?

In the meantime, what they do not give any explanation is about why 2 channel has been so popular especially among younger generation. For ‘2 channeler’ (people taking part in 2 channel), the place is felt like the public sphere where actors are equally endowed with the capacities of discourse, recognize each other’s basic social equality and speech is undistorted by ideology or misrecognition. In addition, the sensational site has been known to uncover corporate secrets and political scandals, at times being a news source for journalists seeking to dig up interesting stories. In the May 2001 issue of *Cyzo* magazine, veteran journalist Soichiro Tawara interviewed 2 Channel founders Hiroyuki Nishimura and Ichiro Yamamoto, who spoke of instances where information on their site was picked up by a tabloid journalist and made it into the mainstream news. With this anonymity, 2 channel allows users to post revealing truth that the established media never report, increasingly being recognized as a special place on the internet, where people can combat the mass media on a grass-root level.

#### 4. Positionality of Online Journalism in Japan

Long-standing “politically icy, economically hot” (for China-Japan) or “culturally cool, politically freezing” (for South Korea-Japan) relations seem to have been eased since September

2006 when newly elected prime minister, Shinzo Abe, visited South Korea and China tout de suite. With the jumped approval rating for the Cabinet, it appeared that the public opinion supported new prime minister’s effort to improve relations between Japan and the two important countries in Asia that had been freezing for much of the past half-decade, mainly due to Abe’s predecessor Junichiro Koizumi’s multiple visits to Yasukuni Shrine for war dead. As the name’s literally meaning is “peaceful country”, Yasukuni implies that, owing to the meritorious services of the spirits of the deities-the war dead-worshipped, the nation enjoys peace and security. Hence, it has been criticized as a symbol of Japan’s militarism not only by the neighboring countries that had been suffered for Japanese invasion or colonization but also in some Japanese public.

In the visit to the China as well as South Korea less than two weeks after taking office, Abe declared that he would not reply to the question if he will visit to Yasukuni shrine, saying that he do not want the issue politicized as “a tool of international politics.” So far, he has not visited the shrine, just showing some gestures like sending a floral offering to the shrine.

The problematic is the public opinion about the historical and current political issues between Japan and Korea. The fact that with the visit to Beijing the approval rate of the government became higher seems to suggest that the majority in Japan support Abe’s efforts to improve the relations between two countries. At the same time, however, it does not mean that the majority agree with the Beijing’s arguments concerning historical issues. In fact, the contrary is near the case. For example, when Koizumi was in office, same thing happened.



Although many polls showed nearly majority's opposition to the prime minister's visit to Yasukuni shrine, the approval rate had been so high, almost up to 70%. It might seem odd, but it is not. Business leaders such as Nippon Keidanren (Japan Business Federation) had same opinion, that is to say, "Opposition to the visit to the shrine, support to the Koizumi's Cabinet." In addition, the Komeito in the ruling coalition has been against not only the visit to Yasukuni but also many right wings' movement in the government, though, keeping the coalition. The bottom line is that those oppositions to the visit to the shrine were not from the public contrition for colonizing Korean peninsular and invading China and many of Asian countries before and during World War 2. Those have been from the expectation to the improvement of the relations between Japan and the neighboring countries, especially South Korea and China.

To understand the actual conditions of the public opinion in Japan, I would like to try to discuss the dialectic between the agenda and opinions in two spheres, the traditional media and the newly rising public community and try to explain the geopolitics of the news media using the concept of positionality. The concept was originally developed from theoretical discourse regarding identity, though, I think it is more useful for investigating processes and outcomes of collective identification, which is the key factor for understanding the modern cultural politics and the public opinion in Japan.

#### **The gap between the polls and the discourse on the Internet**

If the public opinion in the two spheres is different, what are we supposed to do with the

difference?

Almost every opinion survey conducted by major news media regarding the prime minister's visit to Yasukuni shrine shows that Japanese public has been divided into two groups either of which could not take the majority (see figure 1). However, the thing is the questionnaire itself rather than the ratio of pro and con. According to another survey<sup>17)</sup> done right after Koizumi's trip on the Aug-15, 2006, a total of 51.5 percent approved of Koizumi's visit to the shrine, while 41.8 percent opposed it. However, 44.9 percent were opposed to the next prime minister visiting the shrine and only 39.6 percent said Koizumi's successor should make a trip. Of the supporters of Koizumi's visit, 56.6 percent said the decision to visit should not be altered by other countries' opinions on the issue, while 55.4 percent of the people who said they opposed the trip cited the negative effects the trip made on ties with China and South Korea as the reason.

Here, we can recognize that the negative effect on relations with China and South Korea is the majority opinion of the opposition rather than the fact that Yasukuni worships the war criminals. Although the 60.4 percent of the respondents believed the Class-A war criminals enshrined at Yasukuni along with 2.5 million war-dead should be separated from the shrine they do not seem to think the Class-A war criminals problem is not the reason for the question. On the contrary, the majority among the positive point out the foreign intervention in the domestic matters as an objection. For their part, the Yasukuni issue should be domestic and should not be politicized due to the holy character of Yasukuni Shrine. The bottom line is that Japanese public opinion for that matter

**Figure 1 the opinion polls about Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni**

The Asahi	2004-11	2005-04	2005-05	2005-06	2005-08	2005-10
Positive	38%	36%	39%	36%	41%	42%
Negative	39%	48%	49%	52%	47%	41%
The Mainichi	2004-12	2005-04	2005-06	2005-07	2005-10	2005-11
Positive	46%	42%	41%	39%	44%	50%
Negative	41%	45%	50%	51%	51%	46%
The Nikkei	2005-06	2005-08	2005-11			
Positive	38%	46%	47%			
Negative	42%	38%	37%			
The Yomiuri	2001-08	2005-05	2005-11			
Positive	40%	48%	47%			
Negative	34%	45%	41%			
The Sankei	2005-08	2005-11				
Positive	40%	47%				
Negative	43%	45%				

**Source :** Each Newspaper. Cited from 大石裕・山本信人編著『メディア・ナショナリズムのゆくえー「日中摩擦」を検証する』朝日新聞社、2006年

seems to be divided, but actually it is not. Gerald Curtis, professor of political science at Columbia University points out as following.

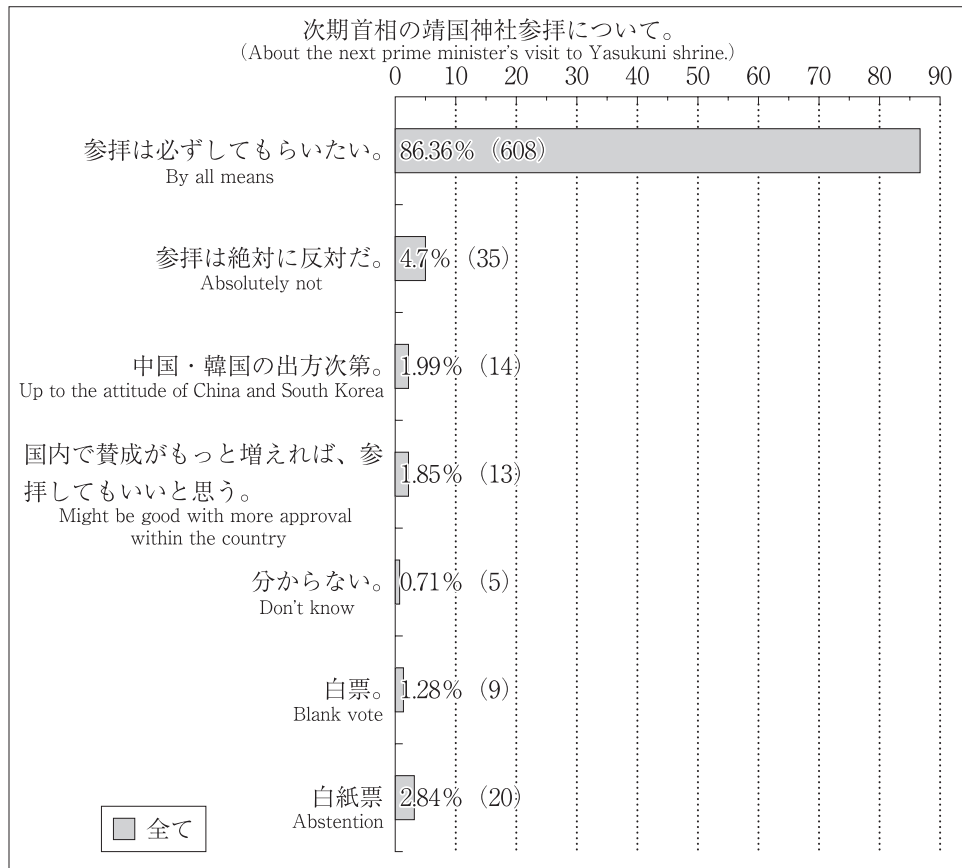
“Yasukuni is not simply a shrine to honor the young men who fought and died for their country. Yasukuni honors the ideology and the policies of the government that sent these young men to war. It endorses the view that the attack on Pearl Harbor was a preemptive attack, taken in self-defense, and Japanese aggression

in Asia was in fact a noble endeavor to liberate Asia from Western imperialism and colonialism.”<sup>18)</sup>

Furthermore, looking at the Internet, we cannot help but be surprised to see another public opinion, which is totally different from the major media's polls. As Figure 2 shows, the vast majority of the respondents think exactly same way.

What we could learn from these phenomena

**Figure 2 an opinion poll in the Internet (as shown on the website)**



**Source :** [http://www.yoronchousa.net/webapp/vote/result/?id\\_research=930](http://www.yoronchousa.net/webapp/vote/result/?id_research=930)

survey period : from 8-16 to 9-30, 2006

the total number of respondents : 704

is that there could be several phases in the public opinion, which we can get not only from the traditional journalism but also in the on-line community. In addition, sometimes we cannot get it from the opinion survey done by the major journalism because people might not tell their true intention openly. For example, what if you ask someone, "Are you racist?" Certainly, you hardly hear "Yes" in any society. However, as you might guess, some people have

negative stereotype to a specific race or ethnic group, to some extent, especially in a society where people tend to avoid arguing with others, not to speak out one's own opinion.<sup>19)</sup> Some might argue that it is Japanese culture. However, it could happen in other countries. One possibility is that this disposition has been prominent with popularization of the Internet.

## 5. Postionality and the public opinion

In Figure 3, the horizontal line stands for ideology from Left to Right. Not to mention we have to be careful about the definition of ideological ground because it depends upon the context of the society. The vertical line, which is not common in the academic field, stands for a different phase, from the emotional to the rational, or from the cultural to the political, in Japanese terms, from Honne (本音) as true intention to Tatemae (建前) As enunciated principle.

Logically, people's opinion on the website might be found in all the area of the figure. Accordingly, it would be an interesting topic if any imbalance or difference between in the traditional journalism and the Internet. In other words, if any Internet bias is to be found, we should be interested in the bias and we are to explain why it does happen.

Certainly, there is considerable gap between the two spheres in terms of public opinion, as we have seen in the Yasukuni's case.

Here, let's take a look at the most influential Internet bulletin in Japan, which is famous (notorious?) for anti-Chinese and anti-Korean contention. As a New York Times reporter observed, '2-Channel' might seem as a window into Japan's ugly side. Many of the contents tend to be nationalistic and xenophobic, especially toward Koreans most fiercely and then Chinese just behind. When Sony and Samsung announced a joint project in 2004, users attacked Sony for cooperating with the South Korean company. "Die, Sony!" (氏ね!) read several comments. Many wrote that they hated Koreans, using a derogatory term to describe them. When Chinese soccer fans have been at

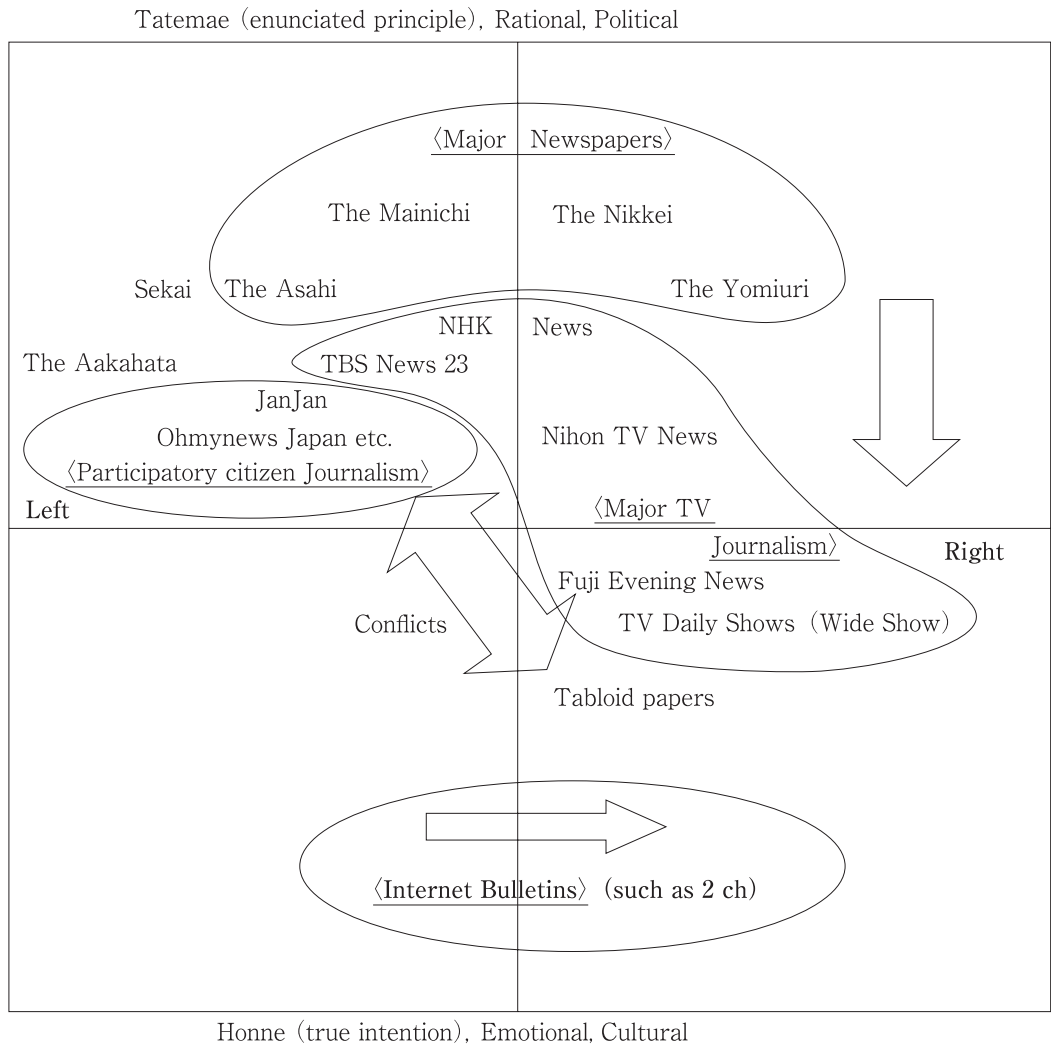
odds with Japanese soccer players, many derogatory comments on Chinese have appeared on the bulletin. Some see that kind of comment as simply a reflection of a society that has grown increasingly conservative and nationalistic. Others say that part of 2 Channel's culture is to shock by exaggerating.

What is confusing is that one hardly hears those kinds of xenophobic attack in daily life as well as in the major journalism except some tabloid papers only in somehow indirect way. So which is real opinion of Japanese people? Is it plausible that college students who study racism in the sun, post the racial discriminative comments on the 2 channel after sunset?

It is clear that Japanese society is not unique in that there has been a prohibition against racism and xenophobia at least since the defeat in World War II. However, some might point out that those prohibitions are not from their Honne, true feeling, which is to say that the mood in the on-line is closer to Japanese people's real feeling towards Korean and Chinese. Is it a kind of intrinsic disposition of Japanese people? Otherwise, should it be a sort of geopolitical fate?

In the meantime, why has 2 channel been so popular especially among younger generation? It is likely because for '2 channeler' (people taking part in 2 channel), the place is felt like the public sphere where actors are equally endowed with the capacities of discourse, recognize each other's basic social equality and speech is undistorted by ideology or misrecognition just as Habermas has presented. In addition, the sensational site has been known to uncover corporate secrets and political scandals, at times being a news source for journalists seeking to dig up interesting stories. With this

Figure 3 Positionality of the public opinion in Japan



anonymity, 2 channel allows users to post revealing truth that the established media never report, increasingly being recognized as a special place on the internet, where people can combat the mass media on a grass-root level.

Henceforth, we need to understand the political or cultural context of the society. Since 1990, a kind of “cultural war” has occurred in

Japan. Interestingly enough, the hot topics in the culture war have been related to the history textbook issues, the comfort women issues, and the Nanjing massacre, etc. In other words, revisionist’s movement has spread. All of them are related with Japanese occupation of Korea and invasion to China. In addition, the conservative movements are not limited to the

Politics in capital letters. It goes to brutal crime, gender politics, etc. leading to some nostalgia for so-called “old time Japan.”

Why do they hate the left more than the right? It is because they think hegemony has been in the Left despite the fact that the political power has been so long in LDP, Liberal Democratic Party. It is an irony. However, it is also the positionality. For them, the post war democracy and the liberal have been the establishment, which has oppressed their true desire, which is to become a ‘normal country.’ Ironically enough, despite that the post war democracy was brought in Japan by GHQ during the American occupation of Japan, animosity goes to the neighboring countries that Japan occupied and invaded, not to the occupier.

What is important here is that so called online public’s positionality with regard to the public opinion has been shifted toward the emotional right (心情右翼), confronting against the rational left (左翼言論). In addition, the positionality that is prominent in the Internet bulletin such as 2 channel also could be found in many of the tabloids and daily TV shows. Probably this shift to the lower right of the traditional media as suggested in Figure 3 have had a great impact on the conservative swing on the Internet where by now mainly younger generation gather around.

## 6. Concluding remarks

With the advent of the digital era, the sources of information have diversified and the possibility of public discussion has expanded. At the same time, however, we also can witness the tendency of fragmentation of public agenda and some inclination to polarization of

public opinion about the agenda. In the space of web community, even people who have a very excessive opinion, which could not be addressed easily before, could argue freely and publicly. Furthermore, once those kinds of extreme opinions were identified on the web community then could be strengthened and amplified as, say, the opinion of silent majority or the truth unknown to “us” with much clarity. We can find easily this kind of inclination in the public discourse about the historical and current issues in/between Japan and other Asian countries not only on the Internet but also in the traditional media. Because of the trans-nationalization of the news media and the expansion of the border-less Internet, public discourse could easily cross the border and people could find obstacles less frequently to communicate with the people of the other countries. Nevertheless, the content of the public conversation or the position people take in the discussion have strong tendency of going nationalistic, barricaded in the shell of the state or nation. We should work more to explain the mechanism.

Although we do not need to underestimate the role and some positive impact of Online journalism, we should not mystify or privilege participatory journalism on the Internet. It could be democratic in communication style but nationalistic in content. In addition, we have to inquire into the characteristics of discussion or the continued dialogue on the Internet. Some scholars pointed out that those kinds of online discussion are likely to end as a sort of group polarization partly because of the anonymity that many Internet users consider as a key factor for active postings or any other reason. How can we deepen the deliberate discussion

for better society in this globalized and digitalized world? That is the problematic.

## 注

- 1) [http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/technology/990806/web\\_revolt.html](http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/technology/990806/web_revolt.html)
- 2) 宇都宮徹彦『サッカー批評』第一六号、三四—四一頁参照
- 3) 阿部潔 (二〇〇一)『彷徨えるナショナリズム』世界思想社
- 4) 米田万理『毎日新聞』七月二九日付夕刊
- 5) Source. Ministry of Internet Affairs and Communications, Japan, Information and Communications in Japan
- 6) Blaine Harden, “Japan’s Warp-Speed Ride to Internet Future”, *Washington Post*, August 29, 2007.
- 7) <http://global-reach.biz/globstats/index.php3> (Accessed 29 September, 2007) According to March 2006 statistics, Chinese language now represents 14.1% of all Internet communication and media use, Japanese 9.6% and Spanish 9%, and Korean 4.1%.
- 8) Recently, Microsoft’s MSN and the Manichi Shimbun finished their joint venture, MSN - Manichi News. The Mainichi started its own website and MSN shifted to the Sankei since 1 October 2007.
- 9) Tim Clark, “New Online Daily Gives Readers a Fresh Take on the News, *Japan Media Review*, posted 2003-05-01. ([www.ojr.org/japan/internet/1051767575.php](http://www.ojr.org/japan/internet/1051767575.php))
- 10) Tony McNicol, Citizen-Journalism Web Sites struggle to attract reporters, *The Japan Times*, 2007-05-15.
- 11) Lisa katayama “2-Channel Gives Japan’s Famously Quiet People a Mighty Voice”, *Wired News*, 2007-04-19.
- 12) The founder of 2 channel, Mr. Nishimura gave

the reason for allowing anonymous posting in an interview with the Japan Media Review.

Q : Why did you decide to use perfect anonymity, not even requiring a user name?

A : Because delivering news without taking any risk is very important to us. There is a lot of information disclosure or secret news gathered on Channel 2. Few people would post that kind of information by taking a risk. Moreover, people can only truly discuss something when they do not know each other.

If there is a user ID attached to a user, a discussion tends to become a criticizing game. On the other hand, under the anonymous system, even though your opinion/information is criticized, you do not know with whom to be upset. Also with a user ID, those who participate in the site for a long time tend to have authority, and it becomes difficult for a user to disagree with them. Under a perfectly anonymous system, you can say, “it’s boring,” if it is actually boring. All information is treated equally ; only an accurate argument will work.

- 13) Ken Takeuchi at the International Citizen Reporter Forum, Seoul, June 23 - 26, 2005, sponsored by OhMyNews. Cited from David Jacobson, “JanJan Founder Explains Lagging Growth”, *Japan Media Review*, posted : 2005-07-02. (<http://www.japanmediareview.com/japan/blog/Business/640/>).
- 14) cited above
- 15) Ethan Zuckerman, “Japan versus South Korea : Can you export OhmyNews?”, *Center for Citizen Media Blog*, posted : 2006-7-13. (<http://cit-media.org/blog/2006/07/13/japan-versus-south-korea-can-you-export-ohmynews/>)
- 16) 電通総研・日本リサーチセンター編『世界 60 カ国 価値観データブック』(2000 年)
- 17) Kyoto News International, Inc. Kyodo conducted

the opinion poll by phone for two days immediately after the visit, and 1,001 people out of 1,473 randomly-selected eligible voters, aged 20 and above, gave replies.

- 18) In testimony before the U. S. Senate Subcommittee on East Asia and the Pacific in September 2006. Cited from a Japan Times Online Article. Reiji Yoshida, "Yasukuni gripes still dog nation", *Japan Times*, 2006-8-12.
- 19) Ken Takeuchi, the founder of JANJAN as the first participatory citizen journalism in Japan, at the International Citizen Reporter Forum, Seoul, June 23 - 26, 2005, sponsored by OhMyNews Korea Cited from David Jacobson, " JanJan Founder Explains Lagging Growth", *Japan Media Review*, posted : 2005-07-02. (<http://www.japanmediareview.com/japan/blog/Business/640/>).