

# Electronic Publication and the Critical Intellectual in the Post-Print Era: An Asia-Pacific Perspective 電子出版と印刷文化後の批判的知識人—アジア太平洋の一展望 • Korean translation available

Mark Selden

## Electronic Publication and the Critical Intellectual in the Post-Print Era: An Asia-Pacific Perspective

A Korean translation by Koonyong Kim is [available here](#).

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The future of independent publishing, and particularly independent critical publishing, is at risk. To begin with political economy: book, newspaper, television, radio and film ownership is everywhere concentrated in the hands of a small number of mega-corporations. Many of these, like Rupert Murdoch's multimedia News Corporation, which is accurately self-described as a "Global vertically integrated media company... with properties in film, television, cable, magazines, newspapers," ([link](#)) have vast international profiles. The company, the world's second largest media conglomerate, had \$55 billion in declared assets and annual revenues of \$32 billion on March 10, 2010 ([link](#)). Its claim of "Creating and distributing top-quality news, sports and entertainment around the world," while undeniable in terms of global reach, is rubbish with respect to quality and slant of news.

With major holdings in the US, Britain, Australia, East Asia and elsewhere, [News Corporation owns among others](#):

- [Newspapers](#). 175 newspapers, its flagships include *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York*

*Post*, *The Weekly Standard* (news website and magazine). In Britain, *The Sun* and *The Times*. In Australia, *The Australian* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

- [Books](#). Major publishers include HarperCollins, William Morrow, Avon Books in the US, Britain and Canada, among others.

- [Television](#), radio and film. Fox News, one of the four major US TV networks plus satellite channels and 35 TV stations, and DirecTV, the largest American satellite TV system. BSkyB (39% holding) dominates satellite TV in Britain with other ventures in Australia, New Zealand, Italy, Germany, India and Latin America. Star TV, an Asian TV service headquartered in Hong Kong, has regional offices in China, Singapore, Taiwan and India. 20th Century Fox is a major film producer in the US with other outlets in Australia and India.

- [Social media](#). Intermix Media, owner of MySpace.com.

News Corporation is the largest global conglomerate in publishing and a wide range of media. It is also emblematic of patterns found worldwide. These are, notably, centralization and concentration of ownership of mass media in a small number of mega-corporations; the creation of media empires including newspapers, magazines, books, radio and tv broadcast media, film, and social media. Its monopoly power is unabashedly used to promote the neo-liberal and hawkish views of

its Chairman, Rupert Murdoch, whose reach and power extends from the mediascape to the political in many nations.

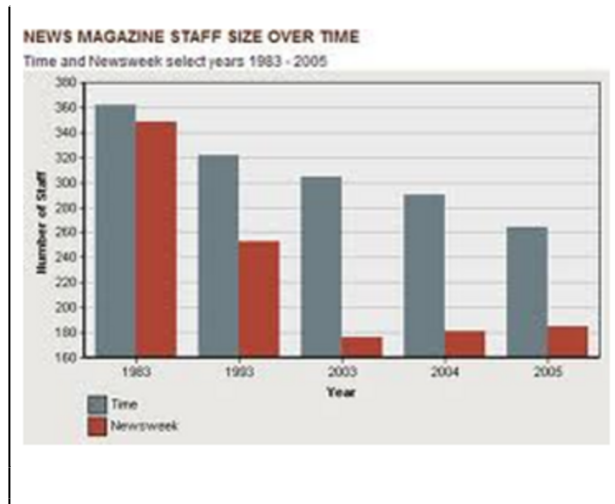
### Disappearance of the newspaper, the journal, and the book

Three intertwined phenomena herald the decline, and perhaps ultimately the disappearance of the newspaper, the journal, and the book, certainly as we know them in the form of print publications.

The first, noted above, is the centralization of capital in the spheres of publication and the media. Centralization in the US and many other countries has led to reduction of large numbers of newspapers. Between 1950 and 2000, the number of daily newspapers in the US [declined from 1,772 to 1,480](#). More important, over the last decade, daily newspaper sales [plummeted by ten million to 30.4 million in 2009](#). Whereas a century ago nearly all newspapers were locally owned, today nearly all are in the hands of multimedia conglomerates. The pattern of two or more newspapers vying for readership in most major cities has given way, with few exceptions, to a single newspaper while increasing numbers of communities are without a newspaper. *The Washington Post*, the US's second daily newspaper, lost 18% of subscribers in the first half of 2010 alone, and announced closure of most of its national bureau offices. Its parent company's \$30 million profit in 2007 had turned to a \$30 million loss in 2009, forcing the company to sell Newsweek in August 2010.



By October 2010, *Newsweek* was a shadow of its former self, its leading commentators having abandoned ship in favor of *Time* and other positions, and the magazine was publishing threadbare issues that were barely half the length of *Times*'. The number of newspapers with any significant international coverage is on the wane as more and more rely essentially on the wire services for international coverage even as world coverage shrinks.



Perhaps the emblematic disaster in American media is the Tribune Company, whose holdings included *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Hartford Courant*, and *WGN America*. It was sold in Jan. 2008 for \$8.2 billion to a group headed by Sam Zell, a real estate tycoon with no journalism experience. In less than a year, the company filed for bankruptcy, its \$7.6 billion in assets set off against \$13 billion in debt. With more than 4,200 employees laid off, resources allocated to the newspapers and TV stations were cut to the bone by new management whose experience was largely in radio entertainment and shock radio. [Link](#).

In financial terms, the heart of the problem, notably for newspapers but also for magazines, is a pincer movement that is comprised of plummeting advertising revenues and declining subscriptions. Major revenue sources such as classified ads simply disappeared as advertising in the era of Craig's List and other online outlets abandoned the newspapers. At the same time, newspapers in particular, and to a lesser extent, magazines, were forced to provide on-line versions of their product. With the notable exception of *The Wall Street Journal*, they have been unable to find a formula to charge readers to subscribe for the on-line publications, forced, therefore to rely on advertising revenues for the on-line versions of their product. Declining subscriptions are

further driven by a generational chasm as younger readers look to the internet rather than to print sources, and by the fact that instant news is available on line, undercutting the print media with its "day old" news (Jason Jones' *Daily Show* spoof on "aged news" at *The New York Times* may be a bit unfair, but it is nevertheless telling).

Among the major casualties in this vicious cycle has been international reporting, which has been in decline for decades. *The Wall Street Journal* on January 15, 2009 reported "that the Tribune Co., which owns *The Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune*, is in talks with the [Washington Post](#) Co. about a deal to pay The Post for foreign and national coverage for the Tribune's eight major dailies. Meanwhile, *The New York Daily News* has reached an agreement with a Boston-based start-up called *GlobalPost* to use the company's network of 125 part-time foreign correspondents. Together, the agreements could substantially overhaul the foreign news operations of three of the 10 largest U.S. newspapers." [Link](#).

At the same time, there has been a sharp decline in fulltime international reporting positions with virtually all major newspapers and magazines cutting back on international staff and closing offices while relying ever more heavily on wire services and free lance writers. This in turn was a product of the gluttonous demand by mega news corporations for profits in the twenty percent range, which made it impossible for all but a few to provide international coverage even before the electronic challenge.

The US is the avatar and future of the world in all this as in so much else, our worst nightmare in many instances, though regional and national differences are also distinctive. Japan, with the world's most robust newspaper readership (51.5 million sales in 2009), experienced a decline in readership of only 1.5 percent over the last decade. Yet between 2007

and 2009 Japanese newspaper advertising revenues dropped by forty percent and there is great uncertainty over whether younger generations continue to read newspapers. Generational issues—in political, intellectual and cultural terms—may prove to be even greater in Japan, China and Korea, and across the Asia-Pacific in the era of the internet and the cell phone.

Second, the new technologies that gave rise to the internet and multiple electronic publications and new forms of communication such as blogs and social communication networks, have transformed both the economics of publishing and the nature and size of readership. Notable trends include the radical decline in newspaper, magazine and journal readership and subscribers, and the shift from print to on-line publication and reading. Among the major casualties in the decline of the print press is the demise of international reporting. The Wall Street Journal in early 2009 noted that “Tribune Co., which owns the Los Angeles Times and Chicago Tribune, is in talks with the [Washington Post](#) Co. about a deal to pay the Post for foreign and national coverage for Tribune's eight major dailies. Meantime, *The New York Daily News* has reached an agreement with a Boston-based start-up called [GlobalPost](#) to use the company's network of part-time foreign correspondents. Together the agreements could substantially overhaul the foreign news operations of three of the 10 largest U.S. newspapers.”



**GlobalPost leader on November 1, 2010  
features the election of the Brazilian  
President**

What about journals and magazines? As in the case of newspapers, print publications for almost all journals now coexist with electronic versions of the texts, with the former in steep decline in subscribers and readers while the latter experience rapid growth. For many publishers, the results have been devastating. And this is just the beginning.

In July 2010, the *China Heritage Quarterly* (CHQ), an ambitious, beautifully produced and highly subsidized journal published at Australian National University since 2005, announced the end of print publication. Its first exclusively on-line issue appeared in October 2010 and the journal is now available free. This, together with declining subscriptions and advertising for print journals and magazines generally, is one of many harbingers of the permanent decline of print publication. If this means the demise of some publications, the dominant trend is likely to be shifting to online readership at the same time that the number of paid subscribers plummets. The August 2010 announcement that the *Washington Post* had sold *Newsweek* to a 91-year old billionaire with no experience in journalism, many believe, is but one of many indicators of the demise of a major magazine at a time when weekly and monthly magazines are under the gun. And why



not?

In many academic journals, nearly all of which are now published in both print and electronic format, the majority of articles are now accessed on line as individual subscriptions decline, and this trend is accelerating. One caveat. Subscriptions of the organs of major academic societies are in part insulated from this trend by the provision of a subscription with membership. It is a safe prediction, however, that many of these journals, too, will cease print publication and provide members on-line access in the years to come. Amazon's announcement that electronic books outsold printed books by a factor of 1.4 to 1 in the first quarter of 2010 delivered a powerful message about the future of print vs. electronic publication.

Everywhere, the readership of print journals and magazines is declining and/or shifting to online readership, while personal subscriptions plummet. Publishers may find ways to charge readers for electronic access, or to devise a viable advertising-based model that can flourish in the absence of paid subscribers. But the results to date suggest otherwise. In the coming decades, we can confidently predict that many more print newspapers, magazines and journals will disappear together with the rebirth of some of these in exclusively or primarily electronic forms. The problem facing the publishing industry, however, is that it has thus far failed to find ways to make on-line publishing profitable.

### The Rise of Electronic Publication

While some lament not only the dominance of print publication by the mega corporations but also its imminent demise, it is worth noting that electronic publication offers new opportunities that print cannot match. Recent innovations in electronic publishing permit far greater versatility in the use of images and sound, including color, music, voice, and moving images, as well as powerful search engines,

interactive texts and comment functions that have the potential to redefine the relationship between author and text. The opening wave is apparent in electronic texts read on computers, Kindles, I-Pads, cell phones, Blackberries and a host of new hybrid vessels for the receipt, manipulation, and exchange of information and data . . . what once was the purview of the printed word. This is even visible in Japan, perhaps among the last bastions of print publication: a trip on the Tokyo subways reveals that the lines of seated passengers buried in books, newspapers and manga has largely given way to commuters staring at their *keitai* or other electronic device, their thumbs working overtime and/or deep into ear-phoned music.



Have keitai, will travel

Third, over the last decade, coinciding with the centralization of ownership and control of print newspapers and magazines, there has been a proliferation of electronic sources: journals, magazines, newspapers. This includes some notable for their independent and critical spirit across the political, social and cultural spectrum. And the quality of research and writing. In the US and elsewhere, the overwhelming majority of these are socially and culturally driven publications that have scant interest in public or international affairs. But

they also include websites, like [Znet](#), [Truthout](#), [Common Dreams](#), [Foreign Policy in Focus](#), [Counterpunch](#), [Truthdig](#), [War in Context](#), [Wikileaks](#), and one on-line newspaper, [The Huffington Post](#), which provide alternative, independent, and in some instances, progressive critique centered on American domestic issues and American wars. Some electronic journals and political newsletters such as [TomDispatch](#) and blogs such as Juan Cole's [Informed Comment](#). [Thoughts on the Middle East, History and Religion](#) offer not only independent thinking, but depth and analytical coverage which frequently puts to shame the print press. Far and away the highest quality, and most fearless, writing on America's wars and the geopolitics of the contemporary era can be found in myriad online sources including several of those mentioned above, and this is true not only in Anglophone literature but also in Japan in such sources as [Tanaka News](#) and many blogs, and in the Chinese blogosphere, just as Wikipedia has rapidly established itself as a major (if controversial) source of encyclopedic information.

I have mentioned primarily progressive sources and the relative independence that non-corporate dominated electronic media enjoy. This has opened significant space. But it should not be overlooked that, non-print media including radio, TV, commercial film and electronic media are also overwhelmingly dominated by big capital and the politics of neo-nationalism and neo-liberalism predominates. So while these big media offer no space for critical thought, there is (thus far) space available in the electronic sphere.

One observation about most of the important new electronic sources, including those of a progressive bent, is their parochialism with respect to geographical coverage. The "world" tends to be limited to a range of hot button American domestic issues, American wars, war zones and potential war zones (notably Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel, Palestine, Iran

and North Korea) with the barest coverage of other areas and issues as crises flare. Specifically, there is virtually no coverage of East Asia and the Pacific, of Africa or Latin America or even of Europe, with the notable exception of US strategic policy (especially US relations with North Korea and China), with occasional stories related to Chinese economic growth and political power, US-China relations, and Chinese geopolitics in an era in which China has emerged as a potential challenger to the US.

It is worth mentioning two exclusively electronic sources that seek to provide international coverage including extensive coverage of the Asia-Pacific. These are [Asia Times online](#) and [Global Post](#). Both rely on freelance journalists, including some outstanding contributors, and are somewhat less politically constrained than the mainstream media. Global Post, a Boston-based paper, in May, 2010 claimed that 905,000 unique visitors from more than 222 countries. Both papers presently rely primarily on advertising revenues ([link](#)).

Against this background, I would like to profile [The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus](#) as a new international approach to independent analysis and critical scholarship that seeks to bridge space/time/culture/language, and to circumvent the centralized publishing phenomenon and the decline of international reportage described above. I use the journal to reflect on the possibilities that the new open source media offer for challenging the monopoly grip of capital on the media and creating an independent critical scholarship, but also to recognize some of the difficulties and limits of our work, now in its eighth year. The point of this exercise is to suggest that there is ample room for other publications to surpass what we have done in publishing a critical open source electronic journal that offers independent and critical perspectives on large contentious issues. . . whether taking as their terrain other

world regions such as Africa, Latin America, or Europe, or thematic issues such as war and peace, historical memory, development and underdevelopment, race, nation, gender or myriad other topics. So far, there have been no takers.

Asia in the World and the World in Asia. Global Understanding of Asia and Asian Global Understanding

The developments described above need to be grasped within the framework of global changes in the nature of capital leading to the gravest economic crisis of the postwar era in the years 2007-present, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the American permanent warfare state, the resurgence of Asia in recent decades and profound environmental challenges, with new social and political forces rising to address all of these issues. Where will the research-based ideas emerge from to challenge powerful military, political and economic forces at work in the new millennium? It is certain that they will not be spawned from within the institutions dominated by media and publishing conglomerates.



**A standard map of the Asia-Pacific, which excludes its dominant power, the US**

Gavan McCormack and I launched *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* in 2002 as *Japan Focus*, dimly aware of the changing character of communications in the context of such global phenomena. We had several modest goals, and a sense of new possibilities.

We began with a perspective that Japan and the Asia-Pacific were critical to grasping contemporary global forces and that a one-way flow of information to Japan, with little feedback illuminating Japanese perspectives or Japan's place in the world, was part of the problem. While everything of any importance (and much of no importance) was being translated into Japanese (and to a significant extent, Chinese and Korean), resulting in close Japanese attention to (if not always 20-20 understanding of) much contemporary international, particularly European and American thought and writing, Japan (and the Asia-Pacific generally) remained a black box for much of the world. This, we concluded, was not because the Japanese were "inscrutable" or insignificant, but in part because of a startling information blockage. Our initial thought was to make available translation of some of the most distinctive and important Japanese writings in English, thus disseminating them to a global readership, thereby opening new possibilities for dialogue. In the years since we have translated or introduced the work of scores of historians, novelists, manga artists, playwrights, filmmakers, economists, philosophers, social critics, activists, journalists, and politicians, among many others. For example, Honda Katsuichi, Hayashi Kyoko, Ishimure Michiko, Inoue Hisashi, Oda Makoto, Takahashi Tetsuya, Kang Sang Jung, Nakamura Tetsu, Kamata Satoshi, Wada Haruki, Utsumi Aiko, Oguma Eiji, Fujiwara Akira, Ito Ruri, Hayashi Hirofumi, Ota Masahide, Kato Shuichi, Tanaka Sakai, Medoruma Shun, Inoue Hisashi, Ahagon Shoko, Oe Kenzaburo, Tawada Yoko and Nakazawa Keiji to mention a few of the most important, urgent, and distinctive voices. In many instances, their voices have rarely if

ever found their way into Anglophone literature. We thought in particular that independent and critical voices were rarely heard outside Japan, and we looked to journals such as *Sekai* (World) and *Shukan Kinyōbi* among many sources for writing that addressed timely and important global themes in fresh ways. We have begun, but only just begun, to do the same both for writers across the ideological and political spectrum, and for China and Korea. These constitute important agendas for the coming years.

Early on, while continuing to provide translation, we began to publish writing of our own and others, directly soliciting contributions from fresh and leading authors throughout the Asia-Pacific and beyond, many of those mentioned above among them. In focusing on Japan and the Asia-Pacific, we have placed the US at the center of many of the issues under review including war and peace, geopolitics, political economy, and even culture in the perspective of the long twentieth century. At the same time, we have featured discussion of regional efforts that may challenge the hegemonic thrust of American power, and are themselves both at the center of debate over intra-regional conflicts, such as those involving Japan-China and Japan-North Korea, North Korea-South Korea, and China-Korea, while suggesting possibilities of regional solutions. Our regional approach led to expanded coverage of China, greater China, and the two Koreas, and, in 2008 we changed our name to *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*. Our Korean and Korean diaspora authors and counselors have included Paik Nak-chung, Kim Dong-choon, Kang Sang Jung, Chung-in Moon, Heonik Kwon, John Lie, Sonia Ryang, Hyo Sun Kim, J.J. Suh, Seunghun Lee, Byung-ho Chung, Saeyoung Park, Yun Ch'oe, Andrew Yeo, Jae Bong Lee, Hong Kal, Seung-ho Lee, Han Kyung-Koo, and Andrew Eungi Kim, among others. Again, we have been able to bring to Anglophone readers major Korean authors, many of whom have rarely appeared in Western

languages.

We sensed the importance and the possibilities of making new beginnings toward grasping the great contemporary issues concerning Japan and the Asia Pacific through a new international cooperative scholarship cutting across national borders and prejudices. We saw the region, with the end of the Cold War in Asia (1970) and the protracted peace in the decades since 1975 opening the way toward economic resurgence, moving to the fore globally. At the same time, the early G.W. Bush administration was targeting China as the main enemy. Shortly, that would give way to an era in which the war on terror, that is a US permanent global war centered this time not on East and Southeast Asia but on Inner Asia and the Middle East, would dominate not just US but also Asian and global affairs. And with it, the virtual disappearance of East Asia from world journalism, with the exception of the rise and threat of China. Our sense then and now is that, with the Anglophone media preoccupied with America's present wars, few people in the Western world, including Asian specialists and researchers, were effectively tuned into the major debates and the driving forces that were shaping the Asia-Pacific region. Beyond their research specializations, how many relied on the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist* or *Financial Times*, whose international coverage was narrow, lacking in historical or sociological depth, and dwindling? We hoped to bridge scholarship and contemporary affairs in fresh ways that area studies had failed to provide through new regional and global perspectives and the view from below on the historical roots of contemporary conflicts and large themes redefining the region and its place in world geopolitics and political economy.

Toward this end, we created an international editorship centered in Japan, the US and Australia. At present, five of our coordinators are based in Japan (Yuki Tanaka, David



McNeill, Geoff Gunn, Taggart Murphy and Andrew DeWit), one in Australia (Gavan McCormack), and three in the US (Laura Hein, William Underwood and Mark Selden), with more than 70 associates (editorial board members) in North America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The basics of our system are these: our 3,600 subscribers (concentrated in North America, Western Europe, Asia and Australasia but including readers in more than 200 nations) receive a free weekly newsletter published, generally linking to three to six new articles, that is, the equivalent of a journal issue. Some 200,000 visitors access our site each month with 2,000,000 pages opened and more than 6,000,000 hits, whatever these numbers mean.

Perhaps a better measure is the number of readers for each article. Most average 10-20,000 readers within six months to a year of publication, with more widely read articles attracting 20-100,000 readers. Because of Google searches and course adoptions, in contrast to the blogosphere, our articles continue to attract significant readership over the years. At this writing, 31.5 million articles have been accessed.

All articles are fully indexed by author, title and key word. Facebook and Twitter subscribers receive immediate information about new articles as they are posted, and many readers come to our work through search engines such as Google and Yahoo, or through reproduction of our Newsletter weekly at H-Asia and H-Japan. In addition, many articles are reprinted at other sites, primarily online but also print, such as History News Network, Asia Times, Nautilus, China Digital Times, China Dialogue, Yale Global, Critical Asian Studies, Foreign Policy in Focus, Znet, East Asia Forum, Ohmy News, and Economic and Political Weekly, while many more are blogged, and a respectable number have been translated into Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and other languages where

they reach many more readers. We provide links to translations at the site as well as providing Japanese titles for all articles, a move that we hope will eventually expand our readership in Japan.

I would like to briefly discuss three sets of issues that we have taken up extensively and that, to my mind, remain among the hallmarks of the journal:

# 1. War, historical memory and contemporary struggles

From the outset we have sought to address problems of war, colonialism, and historical memory that have been and remain sources of contention, conflict and misunderstanding in the Asia Pacific and in some instances globally. Initially we introduced writings by independent Japanese and international authors on major controversies concerning Japan including those over the Nanjing Massacre, Yasukuni shrine, Unit 731, the comfort women, and forced and slave labor, and others that have reverberated in textbook battles, in manga, and film controversies, and in debates over museum contents and lawsuits by victims seeking compensation. Distinctive to our approach have been a number of features:

- In engaging Japanese atrocities associated with colonialism and war in this 100th and 60th anniversary year of major events in Japan-Korea relations and 65th anniversary year of the dawn of the atomic era and the end of the Asia-Pacific War, we simultaneously address US war atrocities from World War II bombing to Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, with particular attention to responsibility at the highest levels and the systematic character of the contemporary empire of bases and permanent warfare. Consider this: Why is it that sixty-five years after Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War, an epoch in which Japan has not gone to war, international scrutiny centers almost exclusively on Japanese war crimes and atrocities while the war crimes and atrocities of

the United States, which has been continuously engaged in wars against post-colonial nations, has gone virtually without scrutiny, certainly at the level of international juridical processes and international relations, but also in the international press? The answer to this question, of course, is in part a product of Japanese failures to effectively and decisively come to terms with its past. But it also has much to do with international power relations and the ability of the US to wield its voice and power to shield it from effective criticism both international and domestic. History, however, will ultimately provide other verdicts. Only through the comparative and interactive study of war and conflict is it possible to begin to address the central problem of impunity that plagued and continues to plague both international tribunals such as the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, which denied responsibility for Allied, especially US war crimes and atrocities, and addressed only those of the defeated nations . . . whether Japan, Germany, or later Serbia.

We seek to examine a wide range of controversies involving the full spectrum of nations of the Asia-Pacific, such as those over Korean War atrocities at Nogunri and Cheju, Vietnam War atrocities committed by Korean forces as well as those by Americans at My Lai, or the 1965 massacres of more than half a million Indonesians by Indonesian generals with CIA complicity. We approach the issues in regional/global perspective, recognizing the role of nationalism not only among Japanese politicians, but also among Chinese, Koreans, Vietnamese Indonesians and Americans. We do so in order to highlight the poisonous effects of nationalism as an obstacle to reconciliation and overcoming inter-state tensions that are often rooted in the inability to reconcile historical conflicts long after divisive and crippling wars, and frequently exacerbated by diaspora populations. Nationalism, including diaspora nationalisms, in turn exacerbates such issues as territorial conflicts in the

Senkakus/Diaoyutai, or in Takeshima/Dokdo islands, or between China and Korea over historical understanding of the ancient state of Koguryo/Gaogouli, conflicts with deep historical roots, including those in the early stages of Japanese expansionism in Asia and the post-war reconstruction of Asia associated with the San Francisco Treaty of 1952 which drew (or failed to draw) boundaries which remain the subject of fierce contestation. The China-Japan clash over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, provides a powerful contemporary example of the dangers inherent in conflicts with deep historical roots (Japan seized the Senkakus in 1872 at the time of incorporation of Okinawa), even when the territories appear small and at the margins. Our stance: we seek to probe the roots of conflict in the interest of common understanding and peaceful solutions to historical tensions.



## A view of the Diaoyu/Senkaku islets

- We seek to offer a victim's perspective that transcends parochialisms of nationality and is geared toward reconciliation. Our studies of court cases and settlements pertaining to Korean and Chinese forced labor history, the comfort women of many nations, the Nanjing Massacre and CBW Unit 731, and the movements seeking justice and restitution for victims that have continued for decades in Japan, Okinawa, China and Korea, for example, are, we believe,, among the most comprehensive available in English. Recent court breakthroughs on Chinese forced labor in the Nishimatsu case suggest the possibility for resolution of both Chinese and Korean forced labor cases, opening the way toward easing relations among Japan and her East Asian neighbors, but also the continuing controversies that have long bedeviled lasting settlements.

- We historicize contemporary conflicts such as the continuing US-Korean War, which threatens to re-erupt in the wake of the sinking of the South Korean warship Cheonan (the 1953 armistice has, of course, yet to be followed by a peace treaty) and the legacies of Japanese colonialism and the Battle of Okinawa which reverberate in the ongoing US-Japan-Okinawa conflict over military bases. An ongoing series in the sixtieth anniversary year focuses on the US-Korean War and its legacies.



**Refugees flee fighting near Pusan, South Korea. (US Defense Department photo)**

Scores of articles on war and historical memory controversies, compensation and reconciliation can be accessed through our index, [here](#).

- Viewed from another perspective, we have sought to set historical/ideological conflicts that threaten regional accord and stability against the potential of East Asia and the Pacific inherent in the dynamic regional economy that has been the most striking feature of world economic developments since the 1980s, with China, Japan and Korea at its core. We have appraised this phenomenon in light of two historical frameworks: earlier attempts at regional formation, notably the 18th century East Asian tributary-trade order, and Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the former offering a relatively peaceful and stable approach, the latter a short-lived and costly attempt to impose regional order; and the US-attempt to create a new regional order in the wake of the Asia-Pacific War with its combination of an empire of bases, the permanent stationing of military forces in Japan and Korea, two major wars in Korea and Vietnam, the geopolitical division of the region in the era of US-Soviet conflict, and the framing of a new order in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid economic development of the region. In

addressing the issues of regional futures, our interest lies in exploring more humane alternatives to American hegemony, and any other hegemony, and the possibilities for cooperative solutions to geopolitical, economic, and environmental issues.

Against this broad spectrum of issues, I would like to look more closely at two subjects that have been central to our work: regional and global perspectives on Korea and Okinawa.

2. Korea: The regional and global geopolitics of war and conflict on the Korean peninsula from occupation to the US-Korean War and its contemporary international legacies, North-South division, the failure of the 6-Party talks, the controversy over the sinking of the South Korean warship Cheonan, and mounting tensions between the US/ROK and China.

*The Journal* has published a series of articles and interviews on US-Korean War atrocities and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to research and publicize these events, which generate continued controversy but could also provide a prelude to reconciliation within Korea and between Korea and the United States. This has included articles by Charles J. Hanley, Bruce Cumings, Heonik Kwon, and others on Nogunri and other atrocities of the war era, and by Kim Dong-Choon, Akira Kobayashi and others on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in documenting the atrocities and the struggles of victims for recognition and apology. Others are in progress. Another ongoing series has centered on Korean (and Chinese) forced labor in wartime Japan, and the lawsuits seeking apology and compensation, a struggle that now shows belated promise of success in bringing the issues to closure with compensation for surviving victims and families. Our contributors include Japanese, Chinese, Korean and American activists pursuing truth and justice, including Kim Hyo Soon, Kang Jian, Ivy Lee, William Underwood, Do Khiem, Song-soo Kim,

and Arimitsu Ken among others. Perhaps better than any other case, this well illustrates the possibility of links to an important international movement joining Japanese, Zainichi, Chinese, South Korean, and American lawyers and activists who have worked tirelessly over decades. Many key texts and documents have been made available in Korean, Japanese, English and Chinese language editions all linked at our site. Particularly striking has been the persistent determination of Japanese and international activists working side by side with Chinese and Korean activists to expose Japanese and American war atrocities through their research, writing and activism, and to seek justice for victims—though not always without conflict, as illustrated by differing views on the recent Nishimatsu Case which paves the way to government and corporate apologies and compensation.

We also closely followed the Six-Party Talks on North Korea issues including the US-Korea War, the North Korean bomb, North-South Korea relations and the possibility for resumption of US-North Korea relationships. Likewise, we have provided detailed documentation of, and historical perspectives on the efforts by the US to force capitulation on North Korea and China through the use of sophisticated economic and financial sanctions, strategies that placed powerful pressures on adversaries, but which, thus far, have largely proved abortive.

Finally, *The Asia-Pacific Journal* was the first English language source to provide extensive critical analysis of the sinking of the Cheonan, the ROK-US report on the event, the political implications of its handling of the case for sanctions at the UN and elsewhere, and the planned military exercises which produced sharp Chinese protests. This series, too, is in progress, with more to come in the wake of the ROK publishing a second and fuller report on the incident. Our authors have not attempted to answer the question: who sank the Cheonan?



Rather, they have provided exhaustive independent analysis of the ROK report and the regional and global political consequences of US pressures to impose sanctions on North Korea via the UN and other channels. Beginning with a translation of a major article by the Japanese analyst Tanaka Sakai, we followed this up with reports by John McGlynn, Seunghun Lee and Jaejung Suh, and Mark Caprio, stories that helped eventually to spring the first serious look at the events in major American journals, beginning with David Cyranoski's article in *Nature* followed by the *Los Angeles Times* July 23, 2010 report by Barbara Demick and John Glionna after several months of silence by Anglophone media. Other major Korea themes have included the Japanese colonization of Korea, the economy and society of North Korea, Zainichi Koreans in Japan, North-South relations, the conflict over Dokdo/Takeshima, and studies of Korean film, literature and war museums. We are presently running a series on US-Korean War at 60 years initially featuring Korean authors Heonik Kwon and Han Kyung-Koo, with several others to follow.

3. Okinawa likewise provides a key to opening multiple issues of war/memory as well as of Japan-Okinawa, Japan-US, Okinawa-US issues with regional and global implications, and with historical roots and contemporary clashes that extend beyond Japanese borders. Indeed, issues of US bases on Okinawa have provided the most contentious terrain in the US-Japan relationship in recent years. Like the Korea issues, our work hinges on establishing close relations with Okinawan activist intellectuals and activists who have produced, in our judgment, the finest work on Okinawa-US-Japan relations. Our coverage begins with discussions of Japan's incorporation of the Ryukyus in the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, the destruction of the monarchy and transformation of the islands into a Japanese prefecture, and the onslaught against Okinawan languages and cultures. If this

differed in important respects from the colonization of Korea, in both cases a process of ruthless assimilation took place, and in both the population was incorporated into the military machine that went into battle in China and against the US and its colonial allies across East and South Asia.

We focus on two issues. First is the Battle of Okinawa, which took the lives of more than one fourth of the Okinawan population, witnessed the imposition of Japanese military-imposed collective suicide on Okinawan soldiers and civilians, as well as the destruction of virtually the entire central and southern parts of the island during the battle and in the seizure and bulldozing of the land for US military bases. The second is the nature of Okinawa's 1972 reversion to Japan and continued US military rule subsequently under nominal Japanese administration. In particular, we have closely followed the powerful and persistent Okinawan resistance demanding closure of the dangerous Futenma Marine Base in the midst of populous Ginowan, and rejecting construction of a new base in Oura Bay in light of the six decades' sacrifice of Okinawan interests to those of the US military. That resistance led to the fall of the first Democratic Party administration of Hatoyama Yukio when he was unable to find a solution acceptable to the US, an outcome demonstrating again the client status of the Japanese government, in this case involving a government that came to power proclaiming the need to develop more proactive policies with neighboring nations. The issue continues to challenge his successor as Prime Minister, Kan Naoto. It has also deeply divided progressive forces in Okinawa and Japan. At this writing, the situation appears to be insoluble for the United States and Japan in the face of firm Okinawan resistance to the construction of a new base on Okinawa. That resistance is, above all, what prompts the US to plan to transfer 8,000 Marines and their dependents to Guam (at Japanese expense), despite the fact that this will end the lucrative

payments by Japan to maintain US forces in Japan.

Our Okinawa coverage, which explores such myriad issues as the environment, Japanese and US forms of colonial rule, intra-Okinawan political divisions and electoral politics, Japanese attempts to buy off both the US and Okinawa to resolve the base construction question, issues of military rape and violence, and the relationship between US base plans for Okinawa and Guam, can be accessed [here](#). In addition to important contributions by leading Okinawan authors including Ahagon Shoko, Fija Bairon, Iha Yoichi, Miyagi Yasuhiro, Ota Masahide, Sakurai Kunitoshi, Manabu SATO, Medoruma Shun, Yoshio SHIMOJI, Koji TAIRA, Miyume TANJI, Urashima Etsuko, Yoshida Kensei, and Hideki YOSHIKAWA, other important contributions have been made by Chalmers Johnson, Gavan McCormack, Oe Kenzaburo, C. Douglas Lummis, Gregory Smits, Terashima Jitsuro, Tanaka Sakai, Steve Rabson, and Kamata Satoshi among others.



**90,000 anti-base demonstrators rally at Yomitan, April, 2010**

The inability of the US to force resolution of the Okinawa base question—the September election of an anti-base candidate in Nago, the area for the proposed new Oura Bay Base placed another nail in that coffin—is one of many examples of changing geopolitical and

economic relations in the Asia-Pacific. With US power throughout the Asia-Pacific in decline, with the continued expansiveness of the Chinese and South Korean economies, with the growth of an East Asian regional economy, possibilities now exist for the formation of a robust East Asian community. Yet the region itself remains subject to deep divisions among and within (class and ethnicity) the nations that comprise it, and it is these troubled relations, frequently exacerbated by the workings of US power, which we seek to chronicle even while highlighting initiatives that promise a peaceful regional future.

### Problems and Prospects

*The Asia-Pacific Journal* is, in certain respects, a beast like no other. Like India's *Economic and Political Weekly*, we are a rare example of a weekly publication that seeks to combine immediacy with a priority on writing and translation in depth. Like the journal *Sekai (World)*, we aspire to illuminate contentious contemporary issues through in-depth scholarship and journalism, seeking to provide an independent and critical voice on historical and contemporary affairs. Like *The Journal of Asian Studies*, our scope is regional (the Asia-Pacific) and comprehensive (history, geopolitics, economics, society and culture), but unlike it, we provide global coverage with attention both to the role of the dominant global power in the Pacific, and the place of Asia in the world. An interesting side note: Cambridge University Press recently reported that *The Journal of Asian Studies* records more than 3,000 downloads of articles each month. In the two days since the five most recent articles were posted at *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, they totaled more than 10,000 readers, while other articles at the site attracted more than twice the number of readers in the same period. To be sure, these numbers remain modest, yet indicative of the potential of the medium.

In contrast to many other journals, our consistent approach is to view regional issues from the perspective of the most hopeful popular struggles across the Asia-Pacific. Finally, unlike all of the above, we are an open source electronic publication whose pride is to make our work freely available to readers around the world. In the absence of institutional or grant funding, we rely on our readers, authors and associates to help fund the journal, as they have through our first decade by becoming sustainers. <http://japanfocus.org> If many people associate electronic publication with superficiality and presentism, we seek to offer an archive of nearly 2,000 articles which probe the past in the present, and the local in national, regional and global perspective, work that is regularly consulted, cited and reproduced in English and in translation, in many instances months and years after original publication.

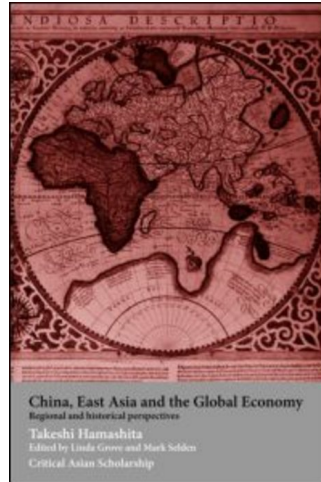
We now face the challenge of making our work more accessible through packaging and disseminating it in other forms. With substantial and growing adoption of *Journal* articles in courses on Asia and the Pacific, we are exploring possibilities of providing course syllabi drawing on our own work, and of publication of readers that reproduce our articles, in revised form, as the basis for volumes on such subjects as war and historical memory, Korea, and Okinawa.

If the Asia-Pacific Journal is to succeed, we will

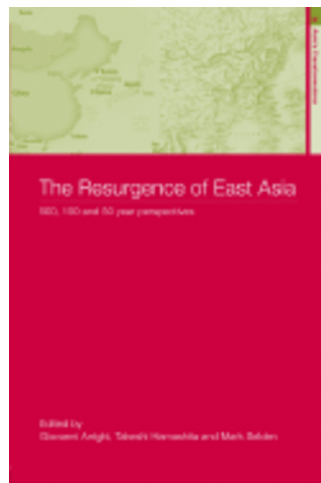
need to substantially expand the reach of its contributors and readership: among researchers, students, teachers, journalists, and English-speaking readers throughout the Asia-Pacific. This will require greater efforts to build cooperative relationships among like-minded researchers and readers in China, Japan and Korea and beyond, who can help to overcome gaps of language and culture to create a forum for independent, critical and humane voices.

*Mark Selden is a Senior Research Associate in the East Asia Program at Cornell University and a coordinator of the Asia-Pacific Journal. His recent books include Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance (with Elizabeth Perry), China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and historical perspectives (with Takeshi Hamashita and Linda Grove), The Resurgence of East Asia: 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives (edited by Giovanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita and Mark Selden), and War and State Terrorism: The United States, Japan, and the Asia-Pacific in the Long Twentieth Century (with Alvin So). His homepage is [www.markselden.info](http://www.markselden.info)*

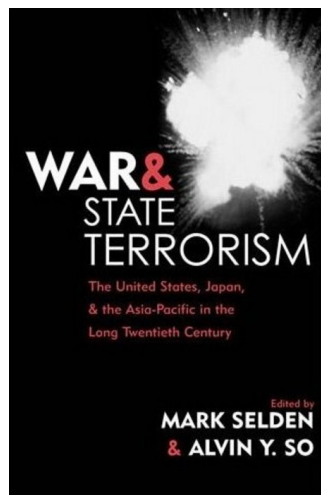
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