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J. O'Dwyer

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Japanese Kisha Clubs and the Canberra Press Gallery: Siblings or Strangers?

By Jane O’Dwyer
Canberra, Australia

The press gallery system that developed in the British parliament in the 18th and 19th centuries has become the basis upon which the political media systems have developed in Australia and Japan. Despite cultural differences, the formal and informal mechanisms by which the galleries operate are similar, as are the criticisms and controversies that arise. The Japanese kisha (press) club system is not a unique aberration, but rather a more extreme version of the Australian, British and United States’ press club systems. This paper argues that, at its core, the Japanese kisha club system operates formally and informally in a similar manner to the Australian and British press club systems, but a combination of cultural characteristics and 50 years of almost uninterrupted rule by one political party have resulted in it developing some unique, and from a liberal perspective, concerning traits.
Introduction

Surveying the array of Japanese daily newspapers in the subway news kiosk in the morning, one is struck by how similar the headlines are. It is not unusual for all newspapers, Japanese and English alike, to carry almost identical stories with almost identical angles. Many researchers argue that the kisha club system is responsible for this homogeneity in the Japanese media and for the lack of an investigative journalism tradition – a situation regarded by many researchers as anti-democratic (de Lange, 1998; Feldman, 1993; Freeman, 2000; Hirose, 1994; Nomura, 2002, Sale, 1998; Suzuki, 1995).

However, it is also not unusual to encounter the same phenomenon in Australia. Newspapers regularly run the same political stories with similar angles and placements. The phenomenon is even more noticeable in television news with all three commercial stations running almost identical programs each night. Critics of the Australian Parliamentary Press gallery point to this homogeneity, usually labeled ‘pack behavior’, as evidence of a failing of the press gallery system (Burns, 1994; Henham, 1995; Parker, 1990; Simons, 1999; Summers, 1997).

In Australia and Japan, press galleries or press clubs covering the executive and parliament play a central role in disseminating information about government policies and activities. The informal and formal mechanisms of press galleries provide journalist members with day-to-day access and information direct from the source not easily obtainable from outside the gallery.

This paper seeks to identify, analyse and compare those mechanisms that are common between the Australian and Japanese press club systems, placing them in the context of the political system and history of each country.

The Japanese kisha club system has been the subject of criticism both within and outside the country. Academics, journalists and political commentators have argued that the system allows tight control of information by government and so hampers effective democracy (de Lange, 1998; Feldman, 1993; Freeman, 2000; Hirose, 1994; Nomura, 2002, Sale, 1998; Suzuki, 1995). The Foreign Press Centre of Japan (1997) identifies key problems with Japanese press clubs as: favoring the dominant and established media outlets, a monopoly on political news by press club members; a perilously close relationship between news sources and journalists; and an unequal relationship between journalists and government by virtue of the provision by the news source of accommodation and facilities for journalists.

Similar criticisms are leveled against the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery in Australia – that the gallery is too close to sources, biased toward one party, and unwilling to challenge Canberra orthodoxy. Former Liberal Party advisers Parker (1990) and Henham (1995) level charges of pack behavior, bias and closeness to the Labor Party and government at the press gallery during the periods of the Hawke Government and Keating government respectively. The Australian Labor Party, under the leadership of Simon Crean in 2003, argued that the press gallery was acting en masse against the Labor Opposition (Savage, 2003) in much the same way.

Indeed, the same charges are leveled at the Westminster press gallery in Britain, and the Washington Press Corps, in particular the Whitehouse press corps, in the United States.
“The desire by club members not to alienate the source they are covering can easily lead to the group pressures that inhibit competitive reporting and that give the news source undue leverage over club members in return for the source going beyond the official positions in the briefings” (FPC, 1997, p. 36)

The above quote, which refers to the Japanese media, is also one which appears in various forms in relation to the Australian, British and US parliamentary press clubs.

An internet search reveals extensive English language criticism of kisha clubs, especially by foreign journalists operating in Japan, who are often excluded from the clubs. In October 2003, the European Union raised the issue of kisha clubs in a trade report, urging not the admittance of foreign journalists, but the abolition of the clubs altogether claiming they act as a barrier to free trade by inhibiting free flow of information (Shih 2004).

It is arguable that this tendency to treat the press club system in Japan as unique is a continuation of a long tradition of Western academics treating Japan in all its aspects as ‘other’ and without Western peer, rather than recognising that many of the institutions and mechanisms that govern Japan are actually derived from Western institutions and share common traits. The kisha club system should not be viewed in isolation, but should be examined in the context of press club systems operating around the world.

Comparative Political Systems and Press Clubs

Australia and Japan share similar parliamentary traditions and have related ‘Washminster’ parliamentary systems that, while based on the British Westminster system of government, draw elements from the US system. While Japan’s kisha club system has been historically treated by Western academics and journalists as radically different from the press gallery systems operating in the US, UK and Australia, it can be argued that kisha clubs are simply another manifestation of the Western systems, and have developed the current degree of rigidity not as a result of Japanese uniqueness, but as a result of some cultural differences, an almost uninterrupted 50 year reign by the Liberal Democratic Party and the absence of a viable Opposition.

The Canberra press gallery has been shaped to some degree by the long tradition of a viable Opposition, and regular changes of Government. Australia has a history of closely run elections, including during the Menzies years, while Japan has had very few closely run elections since 1955. There has been only one, brief change of government in that time. All governments seek to exercise control over the news agenda and without a viable Opposition have more opportunities to gradually co-opt the mainstream media.

Political Systems Overview

The Australian federal political institutions comprise of a bicameral Parliament (the House of Representatives and the Senate), the Executive (consisting of the Cabinet, Ministry and Prime Minister) and a High Court, which administers laws made by the Parliament. The Prime Minister is elected by an internal election of the political party with the majority of seats in the House of Representatives. The Senate is modeled on the US Senate as a house of review with the power to reject Government legislation and supply. The Australian Parliament is unique in that the two houses of Parliament...
Jane O’Dwyer: Japanese kisha clubs ...

and the Executive are housed in the same building (Lloyd 1999). Australia has a history of a strident Opposition, and since the early 1970’s relatively regular changes of government. Australia has a compulsory voting system, and as a result political news commands a reasonable degree of importance. Politics dominates news during Budgets and elections.

Japan also has a bicameral parliamentary system consisting of a House of Representatives and a House of Councilors. The political party with the majority in the House of Representatives forms government. The Executive consists of the Prime Minister, Cabinet and Ministers. Drawing from the United States system, Cabinet Ministers can be appointed by the Prime Minister from outside the Parliament. The High Court acts as the third arm of Government, administering and interpreting laws made by Parliament. The House of Councilors is arguably more closely related to the British House of Lords than the Australian and United States Senates. Japan does not have a compulsory voting system and over the past twenty years there has been a significant decline in voter turnout from 74.57% in 1980 to just 59.65% in 1996 (Tanaka and Martin, 2003).

Australia and Japan’s parliamentary systems draw heavily on Britain’s Westminster system, with its two houses government formed by the party that holds a majority in the House of Commons and the Prime Minister elected by the ruling party.

While there are greater differences between the United States political system and those operating in Japan, Australia and Britain, the dominance of analysis by writers exploring kisha club system in the context of American journalism highlights the extent of American influence in Japan. Following Japan’s defeat in World War Two, the United States oversaw the implementation of the current constitution, the parliamentary and kisha club system. That period of occupation, along with ongoing interdependence between the two largest economies in the world, has resulted in strong US political and cultural influence on Japanese society.

Press Gallery Systems

The similarities between the British and Australian press gallery systems are, as to be expected given Australia’s history as a British colony, numerous ranging from the provision of a press-viewing gallery (from where the name ‘press gallery’ is derived), offices in the parliament, and access to government and Opposition daily briefings. The Japanese kisha club system differs quite significantly in its setup, consisting of numerous press clubs, each dealing with individual aspects or institutions of the political system, perhaps is more influenced by the US press system with its separate press corps for the Whitehouse, Congress, Senate, Supreme Court and government departments. Nonetheless, similar mechanisms are at play in all four press club systems, and both Australia and Japan have drawn some common elements from the two older systems.

Westminster Press Gallery and the Lobby

The Westminster press gallery has a long history, founded in 1861 (www.parliamentarypressgallery.org.uk/, 5 May 2003). It has two elements - the overall press gallery, and the smaller, more exclusive lobby. Lobby correspondents, usually chief political
correspondents of news outlets, have privileged access to the Parliament house lobbies where they can speak directly, often off the record, to MP’s and Ministers. Lobby correspondents also attend the twice-daily press briefings provided by the Prime Minister’s office and have access to official documents before public release (Alger, 1989; Hennessy and Walker, 1987; Negrine, 1989; Riddell, 1998; Wright, 1998).

Journalists in the lobby operate under ‘lobby terms’ where they agree to obscure the source of their information, using terms like ‘sources close to the Prime Minister’ or ‘government sources’ instead of names (Negrine, 1989). Such a system has left the Lobby open to criticism as there is no way of checking the veracity of claims, sources are protected and may easily use journalists for their own political ends, and the system places Westminster and Number 10 at the centre of all political events, leaving out the significant contribution of Whitehall (the Public Service). In the mid-1990’s The Independent withdrew entirely from the Lobby, and The Guardian announced it would, where possible, name its sources (Riddell, 1998; Wright, 1998).

In recent times the Lobby has become the dominant political reporting institution in Britain. Over the past 20 years, especially since the rise of television, the press gallery and its direct reports of day-to-day happenings in the Parliament have declined to the point of being almost non-existent (Alger, 1989; Hennessy and Walker, 1987; Negrine, 1989; Riddell, 1998; Wright, 1998). The Lobby has expanded greatly in size and in breadth of membership, and has become the main conduit for political reporting (Riddell 1998). It has only recently broadened its membership to allow a wider representation of media, including foreign correspondents (Jones 2004, Hennessy and Walker 1987, and Seaton 1998). Access to the Lobby is granted by the Parliament.

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**Washington Press Corps**

A press club system is well established in the United States. Press corps are attached to the Whitehouse, the Congress and Senate, the High Court and some government departments. The major media outlets have access to offices in the organisations they are covering. The Whitehouse press office issue press credentials for its press corps, and has the power to deny access to a journalist (Alger, 1989).

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**The Canberra Press Gallery**

The Canberra press gallery is a broad institution because each news outlet has its entire Canberra bureau in Parliament House, rather than just an offshoot office for political correspondents. Political correspondents share space with specialist journalists, photographers, technical and administrative staff. The location of the Canberra press gallery is especially privileged – with the Parliament, Executive and press gallery all located in one building. That privilege can also prove to be somewhat isolating (Grattan,1996; Lloyd, 1998; Lloyd, 1999; Payne, 1997; Payne, 1999).

Journalists are technically ‘strangers’ in the Parliament, with their access at the mercy of the Executive and the Departments of the Senate and the House of Representatives (Steketee, 1996). In the new Australian Parliament House journalists may not approach Members or Senators in the corridors without being approached first, and have no
access to the House of Representatives and Senate lobbies. Though I might note, while a number of analysts, including Lloyd (1999) and Steketee (1996), decry this development in the new parliament house building, during the six years I worked in the building, MPs and Senators almost never used the lobbies themselves. Instead they choose to meet in either the privacy of their offices and party rooms or, if the meeting is for public or media consumption, at Ozzies Café—a forum open to everyone working in the building and a place where, informally at least, journalists are free to approach MPs and Senators.

In fact, Steketee (1996) argues that Australian journalists have much greater access to the senior levels of the Executive than their colleagues in comparable countries because of the collocation of the Executive and Parliament.

Membership to the press gallery is broad and inclusive, including major newspapers, television stations and radio, along with news magazines, trade papers, party organs and overseas bureaus. However, Burns (1994) disputes the apparent ease of access for foreign correspondents, recounting the difficulties she faced in obtaining a box (for mail and press releases) and suitable office space and equipment. The membership of the press gallery, however, bears out that 58 overseas representatives belong to the gallery. (www.crowncontent.com.au/prod/directories/mediaguide.htm)

Journalists in the press gallery have access to the numerous press releases and papers produced by the government, Opposition and bureaucracy, as well as press conferences and briefings. Journalists also have access to observe the Parliament and its various committees in action. Press gallery journalists also receive privileged, albeit embargoed, access to the Budget Papers ahead of their release.

Kisha Club System

Feldman (1993) lists the key factors influencing the nature of media in Japan as high literacy, linguistic homogeneity, shared basic values, and a shared consciousness. “There is a strong emphasis in Japan on hierarchy, social deference, group orientation, the value of conformity, and dedication to one’s group” (Feldman, 1993, p 9). That conformity and group deference is not common to countries like Australia where a robust and independent media is valued (Henningham, 1991).

This cultural difference is to some extent at play in the kisha clubs, which are attached to almost all ministries, political bodies, and major business groups. There are eight clubs attached to the Diet (parliament) as well as separate clubs attached to the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Hirose, 1994).

Membership is often restricted to Japanese nationals attached to major newspapers, broadcasters and wire services, and is governed by a strict set of rules. Seventeen media companies dominate the kisha clubs; the five big national newspapers, four large regional ‘block’ papers, the two Japanese wire services, and six broadcast companies (Freeman, 2000, p. 87). While kisha clubs vary in size, membership vary with over 5000 members belonging to the eight Diet kisha clubs, and some 600 members of the Nagata (Cabinet) press club. (FPC, 1997; Freeman, 2000; Gibson, 1998; Hirose, 1994; Young, 1981)

Kisha clubs, while officially ‘friendship societies’ for journalists (Hirose, 1994; FPC, 1997; Feldman, 1993), are hosted by the source organisation, usually in the headquarters
of that organisation. The clubs are provided with office facilities and have access to daily press briefings, press releases, lectures and government reports. Kisha club journalists tend to work directly from the club, much like lobby and press gallery journalists, rather than returning to the media outlets’ main office (Feldman, 1993; Freeman, 2000; Young, 1981).

Kisha club journalists tend to have free access to the source they are covering, wandering into offices at will (Young, 1981). Within kisha clubs exist ‘bans’ or clubs within the club. Ban journalists are assigned to cover one politician or official. They follow that politician every moment of the day, waiting outside their house early in the morning and late at night in the hope of gathering some background or additional information.

In order to access sources and information for stories, journalists must become a member of the relevant kisha clubs. The club itself administers membership. In other words, it is not the government or Diet, but fellow journalists who determine membership. In my experience working as a journalist on the English-language Daily Yomiuri that only had membership to sports kisha clubs, requests by staff writers to attend one-off kisha club press conference or to join a relevant kisha club were directed to the kisha club journalists on the parent paper – and quite often knocked back. The club is based on seniority and hierarchy, which means, to rise up the rank a journalist must not rock the boat, or place the flow of information from the source in any danger. Journalists who ‘play by the rules’ are rewarded with higher-level access to sources while journalists who challenge the source risk expulsion from the club (Young, 1981).

Magazine, trade, party organs and foreign correspondents are almost universally excluded from the kisha clubs. Ironically, the weekly magazines are usually the first to cover political misconduct and scandals. Journalists working for non-kisha club outlets have to rely on investigative techniques, and don’t have to worry about offending a source and, subsequently, being expelled from a kisha club. It is not unusual for kisha club journalists to moonlight under assumed names for the weekly magazines, writing the stories they cannot write for their main employer (Freeman, 2000).

The result of the kisha club system is a limited scope of reporting, and what can only be described as dull copy. A Japanese journalist agrees:

What makes the content of our newspapers boring and uniform is undoubtedly the existence of the press clubs and the lectures organized by the news source with the press clubs as a medium (de Lang, 1998, p 186).

Common Issues and Controversies

Structural Issues: The Rise of Television

In Australia and Britain, television has had a profound effect on the way press galleries operate, and how the Executive and Parliament respond to the media. Both galleries have shifted away from ‘gallery sketches’ and direct reporting of the day-to-day activities of the Parliament, to focused reporting on the Executive, especially the Prime Minister. Bongiorno (1999) quotes research that found that 70% of Australians use television news as their primary, and often exclusive, source of news.
In Australia, as in Japan and the UK, competition between and within media institutions means that news values are defined by drama, significance, and effect on the general population. There is a natural tendency, especially since the rise of television, for editors and journalists to choose drama over dry policy stories (Steketee, 1996).

In Japan the trend is very different. Newspapers, especially the big five dailies, remain the main source of political news as television reporting is dull and loaded with minutiae. The national broadcaster, NHK, is widely seen as a mouthpiece of the ruling LDP, a situation somewhat damaging to its credibility (Feldman, 1993). In Japan, which has the highest newspaper readership in the world, the public still rely on newspapers for political news. However, newspaper reporting of politics tends to be heavily factual and drawn from government press releases. That is not to say that a vibrant and investigative media does not exist in Japan. What seems to be overlooked or given short shrift by most analysts is that stories of political impropriety and scandal are, almost without exception, broken in the weekly news magazines, which are excluded from kisha clubs.

**Media Ownership**

Australia and Britain have similar issues with media ownership and cross media ownership. The press in both countries has been “Murdochised” significantly, which commentators such as Bowman (1988), Riddell (1998) and Wright (1998) argue has resulted in a diminished presence and quality of political news coverage in the pursuit of profit. All three point out that Murdoch papers very often will run a similar, if not identical, editorial line.

In Japan, media ownership is relatively diverse with some 112 newspapers and hundreds of weekly magazines (FPC, 2004; Freeman, 2000). However, the two biggest circulation newspapers, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and the *Asahi Shimbun*, with total daily circulations of 14 million and 12 million respectively, are more than double that of the next biggest newspaper (FPC, 2004). The profitability of these two companies ensures that they are able to devote considerable resources to political coverage. Both take distinct political perspectives, with the *Yomiuri Shimbun* adopting a right-of-centre worldview, and the *Asahi Shimbun* a left-of-centre worldview.

**Common Controversies**

“The extremely close relationship with the authorities, the consequent incidents of a socially unacceptable self-censorship, the uniformity of reporting due to the lecture system – all institutionalized and perpetrated in the Japanese press clubs – each in turn help to undermine the principles that are crucial requirements if the press is to be a guardian of democracy” (de Lang, 1998, p. 194).

Compare this to an assessment of the Australian Press gallery:

“In my view, the Gallery’s political coverage today can be characterized as relatively bland and superficial. The gallery is still motivated by fashion. Content is becoming increasingly homogenous. Dissent from ‘line’ is increasingly rare, as is the propensity to challenge prevailing orthodoxies of
the decision making elites in the bureaucracy, government, so called ‘think tanks’ and the wider media” (Henham, 1995, p. 5).

The same mechanisms operating in the kisha club system that attract the vehement disapproval of Western writers can be found in both the Australian and British press galleries. The elements that are treated as unique to Japan by many analysts can be found in reviews of the Australian and British press galleries. Is the media too close to the government? Does the press club system result in too cozy a relationship between the journalist and the source? Does the club system enable the Government to too easily manage the media, making journalists a tool in political decision-making? Are political journalists too much a part of the world they report rather than that of the average reader? Do the formal and informal rules operating in press clubs hamper effective political debate and thus democracy? Versions of these criticisms of the British and Australian press galleries are reflected by Ashley (1999), Grattan (1996), Lloyd (1988, 1999), Negrine (1989) Riddell (1998), Simons (1999), Steketee (1996), Summers (1997) and White (1999). Kim (1981), Cooper-Chen (1997), Feldman (1993), Freeman (2000) and de Lange (1998) all raise the same issues in relation to kisha club.

While the overwhelming majority of English language analysis of kisha clubs is negative, critics of the press gallery are met with robust rebuttal, and very few Australian or British analysts go so far as to accuse the system of hampering democracy. Only two English-language papers (Benkoil 2003 and Jones 200?) acknowledge that a great number of the issues raised by Western observers of Japan exist in their own countries. Benkoil points out that the Washington Press Corps regularly agree to treat information as ‘off-the-record’ or background only, while Jones highlights the strict membership and non-attribution rules that have long existed in the British Lobby.

Closeness to the Source

A common thread throughout English-language analysis of kisha clubs is the concern that the club setup, with its close proximity to the source, causes journalists to become too close to the source and to adopt a similar worldview. Namura (2002) argues that the interdependent relationship between the media and government is fostered by the kisha club system, allowing government to engender in the media a sense that it is part of the ruling elite. The location of separate kisha clubs in each agency prevents journalists from seeking a wide range of contacts outside official channels. This results in a failure to report Opposition and alternative responses to Government statement.

The charge that the Canberra press gallery was too close to the government during the Hawke and Keating years, and failed to provide adequate coverage to the Opposition is the basis of both Parker (1992) and Henham’s (1995) analyses of the press gallery. Steketee (1996) points out that this is not so surprising. It is difficult for an Opposition to gain balanced coverage because the incumbent has the means to shape media coverage.

While kisha clubs may enable the government to closely shape the news agenda, the reality is governments around the world exercise enormous influence over the news agenda. Journalists in the press gallery find themselves having to deal carefully with politicians, especially senior ones who have the ability to bestow favours and threaten retribution. Steketee (1996) recounts a now famous conversation between then senior
Jane O’Dwyer: Japanese kisha clubs ...

economic reporter for the Sydney Morning Herald, Tom Burton, and then Treasurer Paul Keating. Keating allegedly told Burton that if he wrote stories favorable to the government he would be placed on a ‘high-grade drip’, but if the coverage was unfavorable “we will chop you off at the knees and you will get nothing.” (Steketee, 1996, p.199). Grattan (1996) more colorfully makes the same point “…sharing the same kennel has its own subtle effect, including acquiring some common fleas” (Grattan, 1996, p.218).

It must be acknowledged that the sheer number of press clubs, each attached to different aspects of the political system, do tend to prevent individual journalists from gathering news from a wide variety of sources. However, it would not be difficult for colleagues in various clubs to feed into the one story. In Australia and Britain, government media management techniques are often used to the same level as success as the Japanese government obtains from maintenance of the kisha club system.

Homogeneity of News from Press Clubs

Because journalists are working together, under rules set by the press club or the host, with tight time pressures and little outside contact, press clubs result in ‘pack journalism’ where the same angle is adopted by all journalists in the press club, resulting in a paucity of balanced coverage (Alger, 1989; Ashley, 1986; Cooper-Chen, 1995; Foreign Press Centre, 1997; Gibson, 1998; Negrine, 1989; Parker 1990; Young, 1981).

Kisha clubs have formal rules that prevent members from scooping one another. A journalist or media organisation that reports information that is either off-the-record or gained at the expense of other press club members risks being excluded from the club for a period of time (de Lange, 1998; Feldman, 1993; Freeman, 2000; Hirose, 1994; Nomura, 2002, Sale, 1998; Suzuki, 1995).

The British lobby and Australian press gallery come under fire for exactly the same reason, although analysts identify a different mechanism in place – competition, which leads to sameness. Riddell (1998) argues that lobby correspondents produce almost identical copy because they work in close proximity to each other and the source, and “are always frightened of not having covered a story, however minor” (Riddell, 1998, p. 15). White (1999), Wright (1998) and Hennessy and Walker (1987) identify the increased centralization of government news by political leaders as another key mechanism resulting in homogeneity of coverage. The lobby, because of its location and proximity to the Prime Minister, stands accused of a narrow news agenda that fails to incorporate the other organs of the State.

This criticism is acknowledged in the Australian context by Steketee (1996) and Grattan (1996), both senior press gallery correspondents. Both argue that the government of the day has enormous ability to influence the news agenda and is able to control access by journalists to news sources, and that the location of the press gallery in the Parliament building has meant that other organs of government, especially the bureaucracy, are ignored. However, Steketee says that “while a great deal of reporting of major events is similar, there is considerable diversity in other areas covered” (Steketee, 1996, p. 202).

While kisha clubs may have formal mechanisms that ensure homogeneity, the British and Australian press clubs have informal mechanisms that result in the same outcome.
Announcement Journalism

The volume of information that travels through press clubs, along with their physical closeness to the source, prevents investigative and analytical journalism and results in a tendency to simply print information as provided by the source (Alger, 1989; Ashley, 1986; Cooper-Chen, 1995; Hirose, 1994; Negrine, 1989; Parker 1990; Suzuki, 1995; Sayle, 1998; Western and Brown, 1982; Young, 1981).

Hirose refers to this phenomenon as “announcement journalism” (Hirose, 1994, p.73). Bruns (1994) accused Australian journalists of announcement journalism as well.

“Parliamentary press releases are generally just a starting point. Thus I was amazed to see how many of my colleagues simply wrote their stories from these releases without making any phone calls. I had noticed that the same version appeared in their stories, often without change and with a by-line at the top” (Burns, 1995, p.34).

Grattan acknowledges this problem (1999) identifying the volume of information that finds its way to a modern political journalist’s desk along with the ability of Government to prevent journalists from accessing information as a problem in modern journalism. “In contrast to the ease of the mass of information, however, is the difficulty the political reporter has with the barriers to burrowing in to the Cabinet and to the bureaucracy” (Grattan, 1999, p.164).

In addition, the Executive in all three countries has shifted away from using Parliament as the main forum for debate and announcements, preferring instead a telegenic backdrop in keeping with the policy announcement, and hampering the ability of the Opposition to respond (Hennessy and Walker, 1987; Payne, 1999; Riddell 1998; Simons, 1999; Steketee, 1996; Summers 1997; Wright 1998).

Rules That Hamper Transparent Reporting

A common feature of the Japanese and British press clubs is the provision of background briefings to press club members on the basis of non-attribution. In the UK such a mechanism is referred to as “lobby rules” while in Japan they are referred to as “kandan” (Hirose, 1994; Negrine, 1989). Parker (1990) alleges that the same process unofficially takes place in the Australian Parliamentary Press gallery.

Strict rules and exclusion of much media from kisha clubs set the Japanese kisha clubs apart from the others. There is no doubt that the exclusion of many journalists may hamper democracy. However, it is with these rules that the cultural issues come into play. Japanese society is deeply imbued with loyalty to the group and social cohesion (Feldman, 1993; Freeman, 2000). The rules attached to kisha clubs can be explained to some extent by the ordered nature of Japanese society.

In Australia, the government via the Parliament has been able to impose strict rules on political reporting. Bongiorno (1999) recounts the saga of the introduction of televised broadcasting into the Senate and eventually the House of Representatives. He points out that the government was extremely reluctant to allow live broadcasting of Parliament because it restricted the control they could have over media images. However, while agreeing to broadcast, strict rules were imposed on the use of those images by media.
Only edited material of certain sessions of the Parliament were allowed to be used by television stations, and still photographers were forced to take their images from the edited film footage, rather than live in the Chamber. Television stations may not use their own cameras to film the Chambers, and press photographers are required to obtain special permission to take photos of politicians in action, and even then are subject to strict rules about of whom and when photos can be taken (Bongiorno, 1999, p.159).

Governments will always seek to impose restrictions and control over media access and reporting. The Japanese government is able to step back and say it does nothing to discourage open reporting, by holding regular press conferences, and upholding laws designed to protect press freedom. The government of Japan has a tendency to claim that it supports the opening up of kisha clubs, but that the rules of kisha clubs are very much a matter for the clubs themselves to deal with (Suzuki, 1995). The existence of the kisha club system allows the government to engage in much more subtle and implicit media control than governments in Australia, Britain and the USA can.

In Australia and Britain governments seek to control the media by playing favorites and utilizing media forums that limit the ability of journalists to ask difficult questions (for example, Prime Minister John Howard is notorious for his use of friendly talk-back radio hosts and doorstep interviews to control the media agenda). While many Western commentators on Japanese media are critical of the relationship between the media and government in Japan, the relationship between newspaper proprietors and government in Australia should not be dismissed lightly.

**Elite Nature of Press Clubs**

Political journalists across the world are accused of not representing a wide cross-section of the community, and operating in an ‘ivory tower’. This criticism is made particularly strongly of the elite educational background of Japanese journalists, who tend to be drawn from Tokyo, Keio and Waseda Universities, by Young (1981) and Cooper-Chen (1995) and of British journalists, drawn from Oxford and Cambridge, by Negrine (1989). It seems that Washington and Canberra journalists come in for criticism because they live in a government town rather than in the ‘real world’ outside the purpose built capitals (Alger, 1989; Parker, 1990).

The reality is that modern day journalists are drawn from the ranks of the tertiary educated. The charge that they operate in an ivory tower can never be resolved because of the nature of the work of a political journalist. After all, to do their job, they must be close to political institutions and leadership.

Riddell (1998) argues there has also been a rise in the celebrity journalist, and the hybrid political journalist – one who moves between jobs in the media to Parliament either as a member or staffer. This trend can also be observed in Australia (Parker, 1990; Simmons, 1998; Summers, 1997; Grattan, 1996). While the celebrity journalist has not developed in Japan, where bylines in newspaper remain a rarity and stories are often a team effort, forming a close relationship with a faction of the LDP as a journalist is identified as one of the paths to pre-selection for the Diet.

The Australian practice of including bylines results, according to Steketee (1996), in greater accountability. Journalists become answerable to the public for the information...
they gather and write. Bylines remain unusual in Japan, perhaps due to the collective method of reporting. However, the lack of bylines does shield journalists from responsibility for the information they publish.

Conclusion

The press is not simply a function of democracy but a result of democracy. The Australian press gallery is well protected by the presence of a viable Opposition and minor parties with a balance of power and regular changes of government. The Japanese system has developed homogeneity and become more and more subject to rule of government because there has been no viable opposition since 1955. The rules governing Japanese press are overt, while those operating in Australia are more covert or incidental. While freedom of press in Japan is hampered by informal means and protected by law, in Australia it is hampered by law and protected by informal means.

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JANE O’DWYER observed the workings of the Australian Press gallery at close hand over the six years she spent as a political and media advisor to Stephen Smith MP and Senator Sue Mackay. She also worked with the press gallery during a stint at the Australian Local Government Association as media officer, and as director of public affairs at Sports Medicine Australia. She has observed Japanese media at close hand while living in Japan for four years until the end of 2005, where she did contract English language publicity work for the Australian Embassy and later worked as a journalist for *The Daily Yomiuri*, the English-language edition of *The Yomiuri Shimbun*. She is now Media Manager at the Australian National University. Email: jane.odwyer@anu.edu.au