

Japonesia is valuable alternative to mainstream

Saturday 19 April 2008, by [KEIJI Hirano](#) (Date first published: 14 February 2008).

A small publisher is struggling to expand the circulation of its biannual English-language magazine, which features hard-hitting stories on controversial issues, including the overseas deployment of the Self-Defense Forces and gender equality.

“We aim to deliver high-quality, critical stories about the political, economic and social states in Japan to the world in English,” said Hikaru Kasahara, an editor of Japonesia Review.

The number of subscribers currently stands at 60, including 10 overseas researchers and civil activists.

“We are trying to carry enduring, analytical stories,” Kasahara said, suggesting the magazine can exist side by side with English-language newspapers that report on a daily basis.

“We expect more people to know about our magazine and subscribe to it,” she said.

Japonesia Review is published by a Tokyo-based private research institution, People’s Plan Study Group, which also hosts symposiums on social issues and seminars by professors from major universities.

Its first issue was published in 2006. Each edition — about 100 pages — is priced at ¥1,800 plus tax.

The first and second issues featured stories about North Korea’s abduction of Japanese citizens, the controversy over history textbooks and the emperor system.

The third edition, published last September, mostly carried articles focusing on Japanese politics.

One of the edition’s 12 stories was headlined “Japan’s ‘Comfort Women’” by Tessa Morris-Suzuki, a professor at Australian National University.

She commented on the controversial remarks by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that there was no evidence that the recruitment of comfort women was forced “in the narrow sense of the word.”

Comfort women is Japan’s euphemism to describe the sex slaves forced to serve Japanese soldiers at frontline brothels during the war.

“Reading these remarks, I found myself imagining the international reaction to the German government if it proposed that it was not historically responsible for the Nazi forced labor camps, on the grounds that it was not ‘forcible in the narrow sense of the word,’” she said in her article.

Referring to a former Australian comfort woman, Jan Ruff O’Herne, who testified before the U.S. Congress about her wartime experience of rape and abuse by the Japanese military, Morris-Suzuki noted, “The fate of Japanese citizens kidnapped by North Korea has aroused intense feelings in Japan in recent years, and Abe himself has been among those publicly moved to tears by their

plight."One wonders, then, why Abe and his fellow ministers find it so hard to imagine that the stories of people like Jan Ruff O'Herne might stir similar emotions in Australia and other parts of our region.

"The morally bankrupt, hair-splitting rhetoric of politicians" damages not only the surviving comfort women but also the Japanese people themselves, "whose relationship with neighboring countries is being damaged by the short-sighted and inept behavior of their political leaders," she concluded.

Satoshi Kamata, a well-known freelance journalist, wrote about the growing financial disparity among the Japanese public.

On part-time and other casual workers who represent one-third of the Japanese workforce, he said, "Big business, not satisfied with this figure, is pressing harder to expand the casual labor force."While the legal maximum term of a dispatch contract is currently three years (beyond which the hiring company must employ the dispatch worker as a regular employee), business organizations are now demanding that this restriction be abolished so the dispatch worker can be kept indefinitely,"he wrote."Japanese global corporations have succeeded in maintaining their competitiveness by paying them (dispatched workers) extremely low wages and saving on social security costs that they would otherwise have to meet," he argued.

Japonesia Review mainly runs new articles, although it also carries a few reprints from other publications and translations of Japanese articles.

"We are supported by volunteer translators and proofreaders, but we need more in order to enrich the magazine," Kasahara said.

One of the subscribers, Toshio Nagasawa, said, "The magazine provides us with unique viewpoints on social issues in Japan from the perspectives of women or minorities that can rarely be seen in mainstream media."Reading the articles in English inevitably makes me focus on them carefully, and I believe the magazine could be used as a textbook at a college level," said the 50-year-old social science teacher at a high school in Chiba Prefecture.

The fourth edition is scheduled to be published this month, focusing on such issues as how Japanese politics will change following the major defeat of the ruling coalition in the House of Councilors election last year and how the people in Hokkaido are facing the upcoming Group of Eight summit in July.

"We will also carry some articles about capital punishment," Kasahara said.

The publisher is planning to expand the magazine's market by reaching out to such venues as college bookstores and libraries, Kasahara added.

For further information, call People's Plan Study Group at (03) 6424-5748.

View online : <http://www.ppjaponesia.org/>

P.S.

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