While Searching for a Scoop

Developing an Understanding of Working Conditions of Journalists in Japan Through an Analysis of Firsthand Accounts

East Asian Studies

Master's thesis

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Master's thesis

This thesis explores the working conditions of journalists in Japan through the perspective of reporters with experience working in such an environment. A tradition of studies on Japanese mass media depicts the working environment for journalists in Japan as difficult for those journalists that do not rely on the traditional means of access to official information, such as the kisha clubs. Previous research often fails to consider how journalists cope with the limitations from the government, as they face the need to gather the necessary information to carry out their job.

This study is based on a qualitative approach and follows a constructivist paradigm. The participants have a major role in the construction of the knowledge at the centre of the study; the experience of the journalists is the knowledge upon which the discourse of this thesis is based on. Such experience is supplemented by personal experience in the workplace of journalists from fieldwork in Japan in 2019.
Through the analysis of the accounts of the fifteen participants in this study, it appears that Japan is not a country where reporters face a particular challenge to their work.

The records indicate that the journalists in Japan are not a homogenous group and that the need of each individual has a strong influence on how they approach the gathering of information. While the system put in place by the government to regulate official information is still relevant for a part of the journalists in Japan, especially those tied to major corporations, it is not as relevant as it was in the past. Thanks to the expansion of the internet and the loss of popularity of Japan for the international public, journalists do not need to rush while covering the country. Personal experience also plays an important role, both for local and international reporters, with ways to avoid official channels when in search of information. For many reporters, the key point to gather information while in Japan is to build a solid and wide network of sources that can substitute the official infrastructures.
Through comparison of previous studies with firsthand experience of those involved with the Japanese mass media system, this study highlights a tendency in presenting an incomplete image of the workplace in which journalists operate. Such misconception is often brought by a lack of understanding behind the dynamics of the work of reporters in Japan. Further studies should be carried out on a larger scale and with a more varied sample to gain a better understanding of the dynamic behind journalisms in Japan.

Keywords: journalism, Japan, mass media, kisha club, journalist, Shinzo Abe, law

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1 - Introduction

Journalism is often referred to as the fourth pillar of democracy together with the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches of the government.

In democracies, it is assumed that the role of the media is that of a watchdog for the citizens (Hammond, 2016,). Democracies work best when their citizens are politically informed, and that is the primary role of the media (Aalberg & Curran, 2012). Information is key in letting the population make decisions based on facts rather than on ignorance; it is also a check for those in power, like politicians and the government, as it ensures that they uphold their responsibilities towards the citizens and work for the benefit of those that entrusted them power (Aalberg & Curran, 2012). To fulfil their role as a watchdog, media organizations are expected to be independent from the power that they have to monitor, instead of working as an arm of official authority (McQuail, 2010). Media freedom, meaning the circulation of information by news organizations with as few influences from economic, political, or other external factors as possible, is often stated to be the ideal condition under which watchdog journalism can operate (McQuail, 2010). However, this situation is purely theoretical and difficult to apply empirically. The influence of the media today has a central role in a nation, independently from its political system. To control the media means not only to control what information reaches the citizens but also what information they do not receive. Ways of controlling and influencing media can be found in all political systems by observing the media landscape. As Pfetsch writes: "news management appears as one of the practical solutions for governments and other political actors to strategically communicate their message and use the media to further their political and policy goals" (1999, 2).

Japan is often cited to be a great example of how close relations between national political actors and media organizations can endanger the watchdog role that media is often envisioned to have in democratic political systems (McNeil, 2016; Hayes, 1992; Feldman, 2011). The role of media organizations is to circulate the information to the citizens, yet to obtain such information there is a need to form contact with those at the centre of political and economic circles. It is through this link that the elites usually try to influence the news while paying attention not to cross the limits imposed by the government and the public. From what researchers such as Freeman (2000) and Kingston (2017) explain, such limits in Japan are mostly under the discretion of the government. A system that pushes the relationship between the official sources of information and those that gather the news, the journalists, mostly in favour of the latter has been institutionalized over the years; this

has turned the Japanese media not into the fourth pillar of democracy, but a lapdog of the government according to some critics (Kingston, 2018). The journalists, under the looming danger of losing their source of information and their job, choose to comply with the government rather than denounce it (Freeman, 2000). The kisha clubs are institutions that work as the foundation of this system. The kisha clubs restrict access to official sources for all those reporters that are not affiliated with a selected number of major news organizations and prevent other organizations from obtaining first-hand information (Freeman, 2000).

This however is what has been regularly reported in studies concerned with the work of the reporters active in Japan and does not necessarily reflect the real conditions under which they work. Some organizations have a negative opinion regarding press freedom in Japan, such as Reporters Without Borders[1]; however, other organizations, such as Freedom House[2], consider Japan a democratic country with a high level of freedom of expression. What are then the real conditions under which journalists work in Japan?
Are journalists in Japan as powerless as they are described in the various research describing the Japanese mass media landscape? Is there no way for the reporters to do their job without succumbing to the demands of the government? How accurate are the descriptions of the working environment of these Journalists? These are the initial questions behind the conception of this thesis.

This study will cover some aspects of the Japanese mass media system, as it is where the workplace of the journalists is located. However, it is not the objective of this study to start a critical analysis of the state of mass media in Japan. The focus will be on the environment in which the journalists operate, how it does affect them, and the way they carry out their job. Other studies covered the involvement of the government or other actors more in-depth.

The primary focus of this thesis is on the workplace conditions of the journalists that work in Japan, both for local news sources and international ones. In this study, the term workplace refers to the place where the journalists conduct their practice, with a focus on the gathering of information, and is not tied to a specific physical place like an office.

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[1] In the 2021 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Border, Japan's rank is 67th.
https://rsf.org/en/japan (08/09/2021)
[2] According to the NGO Freedom House, Japan is a democratic country with a high score in political rights and civil liberties. According to their methodology the country has an overall score of 96/100 in regard to freedom.
https://freedomhouse.org/country/japan/freedom-world/2021 (08/09/2021)

The activities of the journalists in Japan are carried out within the Japanese mass media system, meaning the set of written and unwritten rules, the customs, and all the other elements that distinguish the Japanese media scene. The journalists have to move within this system, where they build their workplace and work following or finding ways to avoid such rules.

The working journalists in Japan will be at the centre of the study. Their experience will be necessary to obtain a more complete understanding of how they carry on their work and how the barriers normally mentioned when covering the mass media landscape in Japan affect their work.

The main argument that this thesis presents is that journalists that work in Japan and focus on covering news related to the country can gather the necessary information for their job despite a series of limitations present in their workplace.

Most of the material written until now that covers this topic emphasizes the limitation that reporters face while working in Japan, often disregarding the actual ability of said reporters to carry on their activity. The image that is brought forward by studies, a notable example being the 2017 book edited by Kingston, is that of a Japan where journalists need to pay attention to the content of their article in fear of losing access to official sources or other repercussions that can affect their job; under such climate, the local journalists, intended as Japanese journalists that work in Japan, have no choice but to submit to the official narrative of the government while the foreign correspondents fight for freedom. At least this is the image often projected by such studies.

This study argues while the Japanese reporters might have to balance on a narrower rope than in other similar democracies, it is not as oppressive as often described. The news we receive daily from journalists that work actively in Japan shows that reporters that work for international news organizations can gather information in the country even in face of the described barriers. Local reporters are the ones that are the most affected by governmental restrictions, but they still manage to carry on their job. There are also occasional instances of investigative journalism usually carried out by monthly magazines such as Facta or similar projects such as Tansa[3] that show the presence of a more critical local journalism, usually not affiliated with kisha clubs. As journalists can continue their work despite the limitations put in place by aspects such as the government and the local culture, there must be a reason behind their relative success in managing to gather

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[3] Tansa is an investigative newsroom based in Tokyo founded by Makoto Watanabe as a continuation of his previous project, Waseda Chronicle.
https://en.tansajp.org/ (06/09/2021)

information. This study argues that reporters can go around such limitations through a series of "tools" they developed to nullify the negative effects of the barriers, or at least reduce them.

To strengthen the arguments risen by this study and to give a clearer understanding of the topics covered, the concept of 'everyday resistance' developed by James Scott will be used. This theory is at the centre of his work "Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance" (1987) and can be applied to this study of how journalists can continue their everyday activities without clashing directly with the official authorities in Japan. As such the work by Scott is the basis for the theoretical framework of this study.

1.1 – Theoretical Framework

James Scott developed the concept of everyday resistance in his book "Weapons of the Weak" (1985). Through his account of the time spent in the Malaysian village of Sedaka, Scott analyses how the relationship between the classes of the small agricultural village, and how they interact with each other. At the centre of this analysis is the discourse on the power relationship between two classes: the peasants and the elites (Scott, 1985). Scott delves into how the two classes see each other, interact, and cope with each other.

While the book specifically covers the dynamics of a village in Malaysia, the theoretical discourse used in the book can be applied to other realities (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020). Johansson and Vinthagen use this framework to analyse the practice of Sumūd by the Palestinian population as a form of resistance against the Israeli occupation (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020, 149-180)[4]. The analysis of the Palestinian issue works as an example of how this framework can be applied to different contexts than what was originally presented by Scott. The framework helps analyse the acts of resistance based on the time, space, relationships, and the actors that are part of it.
In the case of this study what is analysed is the relationship between journalists and the government, as the principal source of official information, in modern Japan.
The research conducted by Scott makes a point in the validity of learning about the condition of the subject of a study through direct involvement and inquiry of the involved parts (Scott, 1985). This study, in a similar fashion, emphasize the reports from those journalists that have first-hand

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[4] Sumūd is a political term born during the resistance within the Palestinian community that emphasizes the importance of maintaining a presence on the land despite Israeli policies. This happens through physical presence and through the perpetuation of the Palestinian populace (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020).

experience working in Japan to gain a better understanding of the conditions under which they work.

Even though Scott's theory was originally developed concerning his anthropological studies on the relationship between peasants and the elite; today the concept of everyday resistance has been applied to studies in several different fields (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020). To clarify the concept of everyday resistance this study will refer to the definition given by Johansson and Vinthagen that recognize as everyday resistance "[…] such resistance that is done routinely (as a pattern of acts), but which is not politically articulated in public or formally organized" (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020, 30). This definition is preferred to the original concept by Scott where the actors that carry out acts of everyday resistance may vary their actions based on the response from the elite, mainly in a political way (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020). However, acts of everyday resistance are influenced by the changes all around the actors and are not necessarily triggered by political reasons; it is part of a more complex and dynamic system (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020).

This kind of resistance is not a violent wave whose objective is to seize the power or change the current social order, but more a continuous wind that aims of sabotaging the powerful through continuous action. Everyday resistance has two main features: It is an everyday activity and is done in an oppositional relation to the power to counteract it (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020).
The nature of resistance itself is to oppose power as a counterbalance, a way to undermine, destabilise, or go beyond it; this creates new ways of life and ways of being (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020).
Everyday resistance usually consists of acts of sabotage, evasion, deception, and a general passive non-compliance to the decisions of the elite (Scott, 1985). In the case of journalists in Japan, these can vary from building a personal network of sources to avoid relying on the ones supported by the state, to leaking sensitive information to third parties so that local journalists could cite them without breaking the rules of the kisha clubs. While these acts can annoy the elites, as they may slow production or just question their authority, they do not pass the invisible line that would incur in a strong counter-reaction (Scott, 1985). The daily resistance of the weak is always one step short of defiance and always avoid direct confrontation.

Everyday resistance is based more on individual action than on a textbook uprising organized by a group. A key aspect of it is that it is a "self-centred" resistance; those that engage in this type of resistance express their rejections of laws, policies, or other actions that come from the ruling elite, but at the same time want to avoid threats to their livelihood (Scott, 1985). To protect themselves

the 'protesters' prefer to stay anonymous, to avoid possible retaliation. The elite looks past these pity actions and just endures, as singularly they are too small to require action, it is difficult to identify the perpetrators, and a reaction would be akin to admitting the unpopularity of their policies (Scott, 1985). Occasionally the elite carries out acts of repression to establish a boundary the weak will not break deliberately. Such boundaries are not unreasonable, limits that are too strict may cause a reaction from the "oppressed" that the elite is not comfortable in facing.

It is not necessary for the actors of resistance to consciously "oppose the power" through their resistance. Everyday resistance is a practice, a social act that involves agency, carried in opposition to power as a reaction to power itself, but fundamentally diverse from an open conscious opposition; everyday resistance is an act irrespective of interest or consciousness (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). This does not mean that it's an act done without intent, however it does not involve political-ideological or antagonistic class interest. The aim of the actors is more focused on surviving, solving practical problems, or fulfilling immediate needs (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020).

Another point raised by Scott covers the dynamics of the classes. This study narrows the concept of class to a group of individuals who occupies a similar position within society, or in specific of this study shares a common occupation within the workplace of those that work in newsgathering in Japan.

While the weak may oppose the elite, this does not mean that the weak is a solid and united class. An individual is not influenced only by his/her class when he/she decides to act; a series of other factors such as livelihood, self-preservation, familial ties, or working ties may have a stronger influence on the single (Scott, 1985). Such factors make it so that a class is not unified and that its members act under different priorities. Not everyone within a class, like the journalists, necessarily engages in forms of everyday resistance. However, there is a degree of protection that those within a certain group are willing to give to those that engage in everyday resistance (Scott, 1985). Those within a group know that internal discord may bring more power to the elite and betraying a fellow member of the poor class may result in becoming an outcast (Scott, 1985). This makes for a diverse group of individuals, each fueled by their objective, united by a common occupation and a loose shared interest in maintaining the ability to carry out their job.

Finally, while Scott's work focuses on everyday resistance by peasants, the concept is not only applicable to them. Everyday resistance is dynamic and changes according to history, space, and context (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020). The repertoires of contention used by the agents of

resistance are unique and formed taking into account political structures and processes, especially state institutions and processes of modernization (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020). In the case of the Japanese journalists, the everyday resistance they employ is different from what can be employed by journalists in another country. This is due to the different circumstances and environment that influences them.

1.2 – Research Questions and Thesis Structure

This research will focus on three main questions:

1. How are journalists affected by the restrictions enforced by the government, directly or indirectly, on official sources of information?
2. What are the ways for reporters to gather news despite the limitations of the Japanese media system often described by academic articles?
3. Is the image commonly associated with the working conditions for journalists in Japan by academic and editorial articles the same as what is perceived by the journalists directly involved?

To answer these questions main source of data will come from the face-to-face interviews and questionnaires with journalists active in Japan that I gathered. Following James Scott's line of thought, only while being directly involved with the environment and the subjects of the study can one grasp the effects decisions have on them. This is particularly the case in silent and everyday resistance, which rarely attracts the attention of researchers and the media. While the journalists themselves may not identify their actions as resistance, under the framework of everyday resistance there is no necessity of intent or consciousness from the actors or recognition by the target of resistance to detect everyday resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020, 47).

As such, this study will take a qualitative approach to the analysis of the primary and secondary data. This will give it the chance to compare the experience and opinion of fifteen different reporters that have been active for a relevant amount of time in Japan to what previous studies have depicted as the working condition of journalists in Japan.

To present my research this thesis will be structured as follows: chapter 2 presents relevant material on Japanese mass media and the working condition of journalists in Japan; this material will be presented together with extracts from the interviews and questionnaires to give a clear image of the working environment in which reporters have to operate. This comparison is necessary to obtain an accurate perspective of the environment in which journalists in Japan work. Chapter three covers

the methodology used for this study and the reasons why such an approach has been considered the most appropriate. The third chapter also contains the fieldwork report of the experience and methods used to gather primary data for the sake of this study. Chapter four will present the analysis of the data gathered for this research and focus on answering the main research question at the base of this study. The fifth chapter will be the conclusion to this study and will discuss the current situation of journalists in Japan under the new light shed by the experience of the reporters together with a reflection on the future of journalists in Japan.

2 – Literature review and Background

The objective of this chapter is to impart a basic understanding of the current condition under which journalists in Japan work. The literature review presents some of the most relevant studies on the working condition of reporters in Japan. These articles provide the necessary base knowledge on the Japanese mass media system and the initial material for a comparison with the perspectives of the journalists that took part in this study.

An introduction to the history of the Japanese mass media will be given, as it is necessary to understand how the present system, and its peculiarities, has come to be. A summary of the Japanese mass media and how they operate will be provided. Particular care will be reserved to the kisha clubs, as this feature is often under scrutiny by critics and researchers.
The section following the summary will cover the image of the Japanese media in the media, especially the international ones. Such information will be of help in understanding how the Japanese media system, in which the journalists operate, is usually presented.
The final section will cover some of the different styles of journalism used by the reporters that work in Japan. The focus will be on those usually most used by the involved journalist.

As this work focuses on the experiences of the journalists, primary data gathered for it will be included to add their perspective. Pairing the secondary data from the literature review and the primary data from interviews and questionnaires is done to break the idea of the reporters as an unchanging group that is at the mercy of the restrictions placed on them in Japan. This chapter will focus on providing an image of the Japanese media system in which the journalists operate, including a historical background behind its development. It will also include an overview of some topics that are relevant in shaping the image of the Japanese media system in academia and traditional media.

2.1 – Mass media in Japan

The Japanese mass media system structure is similar to what can be found in other democracies such as the US and most European countries (Taniguchi, 2018). The public receives information from four primary media outlets: television, newspaper, radio, and the internet (Newman et Al., 2021). These outlets are for the major part-owned by private companies, with a few public

exceptions such as the national tv broadcaster NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai) (McCargo, 2002). The direct interference of the state with the media outlets is minimal (Feldman, 2011; Freeman, 2000)[5]. Only television and radio face some restrictions under the Broadcast Act, which highlights the need for a permit from the government to transmit for a Japanese audience (Kasahara, 2019). One of the most relevant restrictions is laid down in article 4 of the Broadcast Act. The broadcaster has to ensure to not harm public safety or good morals, to be politically fair, to not distort facts, and to cover issues according to all points of view when there are conflicting opinions (The Broadcast Act, 2010). While most points are reasonable, their vagueness leaves room for interpretation.

According to recent data, the most relevant sources of information in Japan are Television and online media, with printed media experiencing a slow decline in popularity[6]. Despite its decline, newspapers are still relevant in Japan (Dentsu, 2019; Kawanabe, 2019).

Taniguchi Masaki in his article "Changing political communication in Japan" in *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Media* (2018) gives a clear description of the structure of the market for newspaper and television, that despite the recent wane in popularity remain the backbone of mass communication in Japan.

Japanese newspapers boast some of the highest circulation numbers in the world. The WAN-IFRA's world newspaper ranking of 2016 shows that four of the top ten selling newspapers in the world are Japanese (Taniguchi, 2018). These numbers are likely due to the high literacy rate of the country and the efficiency of the newspaper delivery system. Each newspaper is delivered directly to each household that has a subscription, both the morning and evening editions, and are managed by local branches of the main company (Taniguchi, 2018). Because of historical reasons that will be covered in chapter 2.1.1, today in Japan five national newspapers dominate the market, except for regional newspapers that have a strong presence at the prefectural level. The most relevant newspapers in Japan are the *Yomiuri, Asahi, Mainichi, Sankei Shimbun* and the *Nikkei*; these publications are often referred to as 'The big 5' (Taniguchi, 2018). Because of the impact of their

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[5] According to critics, the Japanese government rarely directly interferes with newspaper and TV stations. During interaction with the participants to this study it was common knowledge that within reporters for major local newspaper self-censorship is a common act. Fear of exclusion from a kisha club as retribution for unwanted news pushes the journalists to not criticise the sources of information.
In such climate the government rarely needs to act.
The situation is generally known outside of Japan. The NGO Freedom house assigns a score of 3/4 to the country at the question "Are there free and independent media?". Such evaluation highlights a positive environment for the media, despite some shortcomings. Similar scores have been obtained by the US and Italy.
[6] Digital News Report on Japan by Reuters Institute and University of Oxford
  https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2020/japan-2020/

circulation, Japanese newspapers have to refrain from supporting political parties. While each newspaper tends to lean more towards an ideology, like the Asahi that is traditionally more liberal in opposition to the Yomiuri that is considered more conservative, they never express open support or rejection of a specific party (Taniguchi, 2018). According to Taniguchi, newspaper companies maintain neutrality also because most of the Japanese population is unaffiliated with a political party; a strong polarization may lead to the cancellation of subscriptions and an economic loss. Because of such circumstances, Japanese newspapers tend to deliver straight news, without analysis or critical assessment of political issues (2018)[7].

When it comes to gathering information Japan presents two controversial aspects. The first one involves the figure of the 'Beat reporter'. A beat reporter is a correspondent that sticks to a specific person, usually a member of the government, all day and follows him/her to record their activity (Taniguchi, 2018). Such reporters can develop a close relationship with the person they have to follow, and this can result in less objective coverage.

The second controversial aspect is the kisha club (press club) system and it will be covered in depth in chapter 2.1.2. The general idea of this system is that every organization that is a target of coverage has a 'press club' for members of newspapers and television stations (Freeman, 2000). The members of these clubs have exclusive access to the press conferences of the related organization, and consequently to official sources of information (Freeman, 2000). Access to members outside the major news agencies is very difficult, this applies to local, foreign, and freelance reporters (Freeman, 2000; Kuga, 2016; Kingston, 2017).

Television has been until recently the main source of information for the Japanese. In 2020 social media surpassed television by 2% as the main source of information (Newman et al., 2021). Despite this TV is still the source of information for 60% of the Japanese population, as nearly every household own at least one television (Taniguchi, 2018). There are six major television stations in Japan, five private and one public.

Television stations and newspaper companies have strong ties, as most of them are owned by the same news organizations. So apart from the public broadcaster NHK, the other five stations are tied with a correspondent newspaper: TV Asahi with the Asahi Shimbun, Nippon Television with

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[7] The tendency of Japanese media of delivering news in a straight way, without a critical analysis was an issue brought up by a number of participants of this study. Especially critical was Marc (pseudonym), that tied this to the tendency to self-censorship. At the same time Marc pointed out that this tendency is becoming more and more common in today's media, even big international outlets such as Bloomberg.

Yomiuri Shimbun, TV Tokyo with Nikkei, Fuji TV with the Sankei Shimbun, and finally Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) with the Mainichi Shimbun. While TV is one of the main sources of political information in Japan, because the companies need to maximise the revenue from advertisement and news programs have low viewership, political topics do not usually receive much coverage (Taniguchi, 2007). News tries to be as entertaining as possible and tend to choose topics that are entertaining rather than informative (Taniguchi, 2007). The NHK does not rely solely on advertisements, but because of its position as a public broadcaster, it is difficult for it to give proper political coverage.

A journalist is a highly sought career in the country due to the high salary and its stability (Akhavan-Majidm, 1990). It is expected that after a reporter starts to work for one media company, he/she will stay with the same company until retirement (Inoue. 1997)[8].
The requirements to be recognized as a professional reporter are relatively lax, as there is no need to be registered in a national journalists' register like in countries such as Italy, explains Marc (pseudonym). The most common way to be recognized as a reporter in Japan is by working for a newspaper company. These aspects of journalism in Japan are due to the historical origin of the profession and how it is based on the American model of journalism[9].
It is possible to receive preparation to the journalistic path through studies at universities. However, a diploma in journalism does not assure employment in one of the major newspaper companies. Training to be a journalist is often provided by the employer, and often involves becoming a 'beat reporter', a role that involves sticking to a person of particular relevance all day long to gather information or possible scoops (Taniguchi, 2018).

While the system has been the subject of criticism and it may appear different to western standards, it is important to remember that journalism is not the same in all countries and history or social dynamics may cause variables in the local perception of how to operate.
While Japan's journalism is closer to the North Atlantic or Liberal model, it shows to emphasize

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[8] This view was also supported by Kenta. However, loyalty to a company from workers is not a mater of fact as in the past, especially within younger employees (Kobayashi, 2020). It is unclear if such trend also affects newspaper companies.

[9] In Italy to be recognised as a journalist one has to be registered as a member of the Ordine dei Giornalisti (Guild of journalists). In countries such as the USA and Japan, one is considered a journalist if employed to regularly engage in gathering, processing, and disseminating news and information to serve the public interest. Under such system anyone can be a journalist. However, for those that do not work as freelance reporters the status of journalist is tied to the employment with a media company. Losing employment could mean losing the status as journalist, or at least severely impact the ability to gather information.

different values than the US or UK market (Taniguchi, 2018). In the case of Japan, high priority is given to the press market dimension, explaining the highly competitive market present in the country; the reason behind such changes has roots from before the end of War World II, as chapter 2.1.1 will illustrate. Furthermore, due to the long-standing LDP one-party dominant system, political parallelism and the professionalization of journalism do not gain much priority (Taniguchi, 2018).

The analysis by O'Dwyer of the Japanese and Australian press highlights the difference between two systems that have similar premises but work differently due to historical, political, and informal factors (O'Dwyer, 2005). The homogeneity of the Japanese system born out of the constant supremacy of the LDP resulted in such a strong position of the government over the press (O'Dwyer, 2005).

Such conditions are due to historical, social, and institutional factors that shaped Japanese journalism into what we see today.

However, just because it is not what is usually considered "normal" by western standards, it should not be criticised from the onset.

As O'Dwyer explains "The press is not simply a function of democracy but a result of democracy" (O'Dwyer, 2005, 13). The press system of Japan is the result of the democratic path taken by the country and its politicians.

2.1.1 - History of Journalism in Japan

To understand the modern media system within which journalists in Japan work it is necessary to understand its history. The circumstances behind its birth are a key point in the development of a working environment similar to the journalism familiar to western democracies, but different in some of its aspects and customs.

In the introductory chapter of the book *Media and Politics in Japan* edited by Susan J. Pharr and Ellis S. Krauss (1996), Pharr goes over the history of Japanese newspapers and other media. She does this as it is necessary to understand how newspapers in their modern connotation have arrived in the country. This is particularly important when comparing the reasons behind the birth of newspapers in Europe and Japan.

Before the opening of Japan with the Meiji Restoration in 1868, there were no newspapers as we know them today. This is due to the strict restrictions on printed material enforced during the Tokugawa era (1603-1868) (Pharr, 1996). The first papers in Japanese were the *Kanban Batabia*

Shimbun and the Yokohama *Mainichi Shimbun,* the first daily newspaper in Japan. Both these papers were published or at least backed by the government, to "further the understanding and acceptance of new government policies" (Pharr, 1996, 9).

This point highlights a relevant difference between how newspapers came to be in Japan and Europe. While in Europe they were born to express the frustration of the population and as 'watchdogs' of the government, in Japan their initial role was that of the voice of the government itself (Freeman, 2000). The relationship between the media and the state experienced different phases from 1868 until the end of World War II. The government changed posture towards newspapers numerous times during this period; Shuichi Kato summarizes the action of the government: "It encourages their founding; then imposed strict censorship and police control; then adopted a more liberal attitude, if not *de jure*, at least *de facto*; then in the era of military domination, exerted direct control over all means of expressing an opinion" (Pharr, 1996, 11).

After 1874 the advent of the Popular Rights Movement transformed the role of the press, which for the first time assumed the role of watchdog of the government (Pharr, 1996). The critical stance toward the government was popular and was reflected in the sales of the newspapers. Also, contrary to today newspapers, they did support specific political parties, not reject all forms of partisanship (Pharr, 1996). These kinds of political papers did not survive the Meiji period and started to lose importance after the government began to take action against them. Press laws passed in 1883 and 1909 started to regulate the actions that the media could take (Pharr, 1996). These laws applied to newspapers, magazines, and literature. They actively censored newspaper content under the threat of retaliation from the government and the police (Pharr, 1996). These laws allowed for a relatively mild form of government criticisms, but always within the limit set by the government and its officials. During this period that precedes the start of WWII, three of the most important Japanese newspapers became well established 'corporations': the Yomiuri, Asahi, and the Mainichi Shimbun. These big newspapers helped in bringing neutral and objective news as the preferred style of information in Japan, strengthening their ties with the government to directly obtain information (Pharr, 1996). To facilitate such a process the first kisha club was instituted in 1890 in anticipation of the opening of the Diet (Freeman, 2000). While the first club was requested by reporters to facilitate the gathering of information, the government agreed to it to facilitate the control of the major newspapers of the time (Freeman, 2000). With the rise of militarism during the 1930s, and the beginning of the war in the Pacific, the government control over the media intensified. Newspapers' role during this period was to spread the propaganda of the state (Freeman, 2000). Agencies whose role was releasing information approved by the government to the reporters were founded during the war, with the relationship between newspaper management, press clubs, and the

Japanese state stronger than ever (Freeman, 2000). Reforms implemented during the wartime period limited the number of newspapers that had access to official information and the number of members. These reforms had a lasting impact on the reinforcement of a small number of press companies, that even after the end of the war managed to maintain a dominant position in the market (Freeman, 2000).

After Japan was defeated in 1945, the Allied Occupation authorities quickly abolished all wartime press controls and the barriers towards the flow of information. At the same time, they did not hesitate in instituting measures of their own to stop criticism of its policies, officials, and troops (Freeman, 2000). While the control of the government was reduced, and the number of kisha clubs raised in postwar Japan, access to these clubs was still limited to relevant newspapers. The clubs survived not as governmental institutions, but as "organizations to foster friendship and socializing" (Freeman, 2000, 58). This situation made it difficult for newly established newspapers to grow. Despite the pressure of the Occupation authorities to either demolish or reform the clubs to allow more freedom of information, these reforms did not have any major effect (Freeman, 2000). During the occupation period, the big newspaper organizations managed to consolidate their position as leaders of the industry in Japan. When the allies left the country these organizations, such as the Asahi, the Yomiuri and the Sankei, stood at the top of the industry (Freeman, 2000). Today's system of mass media in Japan is the result of these manoeuvres by the state and the major news organization.

2.1.2 – The Kisha Clubs

The Kisha (Press) clubs are the institutions that function as the foundation of the current mass media system of Japan (Seward, 2005). According to critics, they are the result of the actions not only of the government to influence the media, but also of the major news organization to keep exclusive access to official sources of information (Freeman, 2000). The kisha clubs as we know them today are the result of all the phases that Japanese journalism had to go through since its foundation, as laid out in the previous chapter.

In *Closing the Shop – Information Cartels and Japan's Mass Media* (2000), the author Laurie Anne Freeman presents a strong critique of the kisha clubs. At the same time, she presents a clear image of what are they, and how they manage to control the flow of information from official sources. Kisha clubs are physical structures, usually rooms, located in most major governmental, political, and business organizations. Clubs are present all-around Japan, and while most of them are in

Tokyo, every prefecture or large city has their press clubs in places like police headquarters, courts, and local parliaments. Freeman cites a 1993 article published by the Asahi Shimbun that states that there are as many as 700 kisha clubs in Japan (Freeman, 2000).

As stated before, the function of kisha clubs is to allow the daily interaction between political information sources and journalists. As Ofer Feldman explains in "Reporting with Wolves: Pack Journalism and the Dissemination of Political Information" in *Japanese Politics Today – From Karaoke to Kabuki Democracy* (2011), a kisha club is a formal association of reporters assigned to a common agency. News organizations send at least one journalist to every kisha club that they deem relevant. The reporters affiliated with a club receive daily news releases, attend periodical press conferences, and can try to get close to the sources to get scoops (Feldman, 2011). Only news organizations that are members of the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association (NSK) can apply for membership in a kisha club (Feldman, 2011). Membership in the NSK is determined by a board of directors based on several criteria, such as the promise to abide by the NSK's canon of journalism, and minimum size. The size is a big issue for independent reporters and minor newspapers, as the requirement is set at a circulation of more than ten thousand daily copies (Freeman, 2000). According to Freeman, together with the official criteria, there are some unwritten ones, such as the need to be not affiliated with any political parties or religious group, or the need for a member to be a Japanese company (2000). As many foreign major newspapers in the past saw their application refused without clear reasons, this may be possible (Freeman, 2000). Today foreign news organizations are accepted as members of kisha clubs, even if participants of this study admit that there are still some limitations in place. As of March 2019, there are a total of 129 members of the NSK[10]. According to Kenta, only the major media organizations have reporters in almost every major kisha club, giving them what can be seen as a monopoly over information. These major companies are the nine major newspapers of Japan: The Big Five (Asahi, Yomiuri, Mainichi, Sankei, Nikkei) and four prefectural newspapers, namely the Tokyo, Chūnichi, Nishi Nippon, and Hokkaido Shinbun; the six major television stations of the country (NHK, TBS, Fuji TV, TV Asahi, NTV, and TV Tokyo), and the two news agencies Jiji Press and Kyodo News are the companies that benefit most of the relationship between clubs and reporters (Feldman, 2011). Those that work for foreign media have a different relationship with the kisha clubs than their Japanese counterparts. Kisha club access has been for a long time a fight that foreign correspondents embraced. The book by Ivan P. Hall *Cartels of the Mind: Japan's Intellectual*

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[10] Pressnet – Nihon Shinbun Kyōkai: List of Members (as of 2019)

Closed Shop (1999) dedicated a whole section on how foreign reporters were treated in Japan and the bureaucratic excuses given by the kisha clubs, the Japanese Newspaper Association (Nihon Shinbun Kyōkai), and the government to impede the access to official press conferences to the foreign media.

Since October 1991 foreign correspondents have been granted access to a selected number of clubs (Freeman, 2000). Since 2009 access to all press conferences is given to all reporters, even with some limitations (Kuga, 2016). Despite this, it has been often argued that such concession has only been formal, and the treatment of foreign correspondents has not significantly changed, as Kuga (2016) and the annual Freedom Press Index from RSF report.

As explained previously, today foreign companies have access to kisha clubs. It is just that for many companies fulfilling the requirements to gain access to a club are the biggest obstacle. To be a member of a club, a reporter needs to spend a certain number of hours every day inside the club; therefore, the company that wants access to the club needs to commit some of its personnel solely to the coverage of that club. Even major international newspaper companies have just ten to twelve employees in the country and need to carefully plan how to manage them, according to participants. The few foreign companies that decide to invest so many resources into a club most of the time do not enjoy the same benefits and treatment as their local competitors. This is particularly evident in the impossibility for foreign correspondents in the participation to "background briefings", or *kondankai*. During such briefings, the sources tend to share more relevant information with the reporters and are one of the greatest benefits of joining a club for local journalists (Taniguchi, 2018).

The concept of foreign companies joining a kisha club will be further developed in chapter 4.2.2.2.

2.2 – Japan in the Media

The understanding most people have of Japan is derived from the image that the media project of this country. This image is the one that creates the general understanding we have of Japan and our opinion of the country. For most people, such an image is built upon the information we receive from daily news and newspapers.

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https://www.pressnet.or.jp/member/index.html

At times traditional media prefers to give a more sensationalistic image of Japan. This distortion comes from the desire to give information that the receiver could find entertaining and would gather bigger numbers of readers[11]. This is true both for traditional media, whose business is based on the number of readers, and academic ones. Japan is often seen as an exotic country with a different culture than what western countries such as Europe and the US have (Dale, 1995). This image is what makes Japan worth covering by the media (Judo and Horn, 2021).

It is not difficult to find titles that remind of how peculiar Japan as a country is, even with renowned organizations such as the BBC; "Japan bullet train driver leaves cockpit for toilet break" (BBC, 2021a) and "Japan town uses Covid grant to build squid statue"(BBC, 2021b) are some of the titles of articles related to Japan. This does not occur only with reports about the country, but they are fairly common and often dip into the stereotype of Japan as a different and eccentric country. Academic articles usually are aware of the problem and avoid stereotyping. However, there are cases where some misconceptions may be born for various reasons, such as poor wording or bias (Dale, 1995). In the case of the Japanese mass media system, there is a general understanding that under the pressure from political parties and other agents that have invested interests the mass media operates under a series of restrictions (Freeman, 2000; Kingston, 2017; Feldman, 2011). The situation is aggravated by the existence of the kisha clubs, and it has almost become the symbol of the corruption in Japanese mass media. Strong criticism is often directed towards the clubs, the local journalists, and the government in books. Both Ivan Hall (1998) and Anne Freeman (2000) strongly criticise the kisha clubs and the relationship between sources and reporters that they nurture. Emphasis is put on the 'complicity' of the journalists that work for the mainstream media that support the system to continue to monopolize the information. In his book *Press Freedom in Contemporary Japan* (2017), Jeff Kingston and many of the contributors condemn Abe Shinzo and its administration for what they perceive as a decline of press freedom in the country. The same explanation has been given for the low rank of Japan in the World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Without Borders (RSF)[12]. However, according to the media theory, the situation we have in Japan is in line with what is normally expected to happen when mass media organizations are

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[11] During an appearance in the podcast *Japan by River Cruise*, ex-journalists David McNeill told his experience as a foreign correspondent. During his intervention he narrated how newspapers would regularly ask him for stories that would paint Japan under a strongly romanticised and oriental light. Such trend still persists as in the recent article by the *New York Times Magazine* where cooking with a clay pot called Donabe was strongly praised (Rao, 2021).

involved. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* expresses how "Relations between the media and society are often mediated through a wide range of more or less informal, but often organized, pressure groups which seek to influence directly what media do […]" (2010, 290). This is the situation of what is happening in Japan, and while it may appear more visible it is certainly not something unique to the country.

Understanding the discourse about Japan by the media is necessary to understand the importance of this study. Often Japan is put under a light that presents it as a country similar to the "West", thanks to its democratic nature, but at the same time different from the "West" (Said, 2013).

Such ideas are properly explained by the concept of *Orientalism* and *Nihonjinron*.

2.2.1 – The Influence of Orientalism and Nihonjinron

Orientalism and *Nihonjinron* are two different but intertwined concepts that are used to identify a particular point of view or mindset commonly found when discussing specific geographical areas. *Orientalism* refers to how the East of the world is defined in the discourse of the West. *Nihonjinron* is more specific and covers only the country of Japan.

In 1978 Edward Said published his essay titled *Orientalism,* where he tried to explain how Europe defined its relationship with Asia. According to Said:

> Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident". Thus, a very large mass of writers […] have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people customs, "mind," destiny, and so on (Said, 2013, 12).

Said also believes that the idea of the Orient was created to strengthen the cultural identity of Europe. In fact, by creating the opposition between Orient and Occident, the opposition between the Western culture and the Eastern culture was born.

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[12] The worsening of Japan's position in the Freedom Index by RSF is largely attributed to the behaviour and actions of ex-prime minister Abe Shinzo. As of 2021 the entry for Japan in the Freedom Index highlights how his successor Yoshihide Suga has done nothing to improve the climate for press freedom. https://rsf.org/en/japan (17/09/2021)

While today such stark division is much harder to apply, such opposition can still be found in the way countries that are considered not western are being described; the instances in which events that involve China or Japan that incorporate some elements of orientalism are not uncommon.

Nihonjinron can be interpreted as a new appliance of orientalism, particularly in the way Japan is described as a country with a unique culture and society, intrinsically different from "us", the Western world. This type of distinction today is not seen as a way to disparage Asian countries, as it is often used by the same countries for political and nationalistic purposes (Levick, 2005; Kinmonth, 2019). In the last years, it has not been unusual for countries such as China to condemn "Western values", considered harmful for the nation, as reported Beech in an article for the *Time* (2016).

The book by Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (1995) eloquently gives us an explanation of what is *Nihonjinron*. The term refers to the 'discussion on the Japanese'. It covers a vast range of topics, embracing the whole field of discourse about Japan and its people. As Dale states, the point of this discourse is the attempt to define the specificity of the Japanese identity, including its history, culture, society, etc (Dale, 1995).

There are three assumptions at the base of the *nihonjinron* discourse. Firstly, the assumption that the Japanese constitute a culturally and socially homogenous racial entity, unchanged since prehistoric times. Secondly, the idea that the Japanese are radically different from all other known peoples. Finally, a nationalistic tendency that sees with hostility any mode of analysis that may be seen to derive from external, non-Japanese sources. Because of its nature, it is often used by Japanese politicians to further nationalistic discourses. In fact, in a general sense, the *nihonjinron* may be defined as works of cultural nationalism concerned with the ostensible 'uniqueness' of Japan in any aspect (Dale, 1995). This discourse is present also in the field of academia, even if often not with a clear nationalistic intent but just with a somewhat subconscious idea of Japan's uniqueness (Dale, 1995). Disciplined academic studies on Japanese society often betrays either a tacit or explicit endorsement of judgments which we may identify with the ideological analysis common to the *nihonjinron (*Dale, 1995*)*.

Today a lot of attention is placed in avoiding such depiction of Japan, as the demerits of such discourse are clear. However, such as in the case of the working conditions of journalists in Japan, there are still cases where such a concept of uniqueness can still be perceived. A central topic in the discussion on journalists in Japan is the close relationship between local reporters and official

sources. It is recognized that such a relationship is not unique to Japan, but the concept that in Japan it is especially strong is always highlighted (Freeman, 2000; O'Dwyer, 2005).

The idea of the 'uniqueness of Japan is problematic because it often becomes a barrier to analysing objectively the country and its people. Concerning the Japanese mass media, this may lead the researcher to look at the topic with something of a tunnel vision. Not taking account of mass communication theories, or failing to do a proper comparison between how the relationship between state and media carries on in other democracies and Japan, can lead to an imperfect record of the actual situation.

The working condition of reporters in Japan is one of those areas where such imperfect accounts appear, ending up as the commonly recognized academic reality.

2.2.2 – The Validity of the Freedom of Press Index

The Freedom of Press Index annually compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is one of the 'proofs' more often used to emphasize the bad situation in which the Japanese mass media system finds itself. Especially in the last years, during the Abe administration, the ranking became a tool to display the deterioration of the freedom of the press in Japan, or as proof of the crusade against the country embraced by foreign media (Busetto, 2019; Kinmonth, 2017)[13]. RSF is an international NGO that has a strong reputation as a defender of freedom of the press; such reputation is at the base of the credibility of the Freedom Index. However, many problems come up when considering the Index and its analysis of Japan.

Japan is shown as an environment where journalists struggle, where pressure from a government that is not scared of speaking its mind on what it finds displeasing, and that can go as far as threatening freedom of the press through legal means has made it harder for them to carry out their job. Such a point of view was especially relevant during the period of the second Abe administration. While the topic will be the focus of chapter 4.3.1, it will suffice to say that during his administration Prime Minister Abe Shinzo relationship with the media was one of the main factors cited by RSF for the rank drop in the Freedom Index of Japan.

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[13] Criticism towards the coverage of Japan from foreign correspondents and their bias toward the country is often at the center of editorials by conservative news outlets such as the Sankei Shimbun and Japan Forward.

Much of the discourse over the worsening of the conditions under which reporters work during the Abe administration is supported by the Freedom Index rankings, so it is necessary at this point to clarify the criteria behind them. During a press conference at the FCCJ in 2018, East Asia bureau director Cédric Alviani explained that the Freedom Index is not a scientific study but can be seen more like a personal opinion of RSF (FCCJ, 2018). Each nation is evaluated through a general criterion that examines issues related to media ownership, the number of lawsuits against journalists and media companies, new laws, and more (FCCJ, 2018). A major point is that a questionnaire is sent to many specialists that include journalists, lawyers and academics that are considered experts on the topic. Then the Freedom Index is compiled, creating a comparison of several countries all around the world. This formula implies that the position of a country in the ranking is not necessarily going to change because of fundamental changes that happened within it, but also because of variation within other countries (Tanaka, 2018). Finally, Alviani specifies that the Index scope is nothing more than to advise countries, and in doing so there may be some instances where the situation is exacerbated (FCCJ, 2018). The active role that journalists play in the evaluation process of the Freedom Index must not be underestimated, especially when the government of Abe Shinzo the one under scrutiny. During the interviews, one of the reporters, Michael, warned me about citing the Freedom Index as a source of information, despite he being quite critical of the situation in which Japanese journalism versed. When the topic of the Freedom Index come up, he advised caution as: "I would be careful of the RSF rankings as they are pretty controversial. They are considered quite salty […]".

Such wariness is shared by Cucek and Fackler in their contributions to Kingston's book (2017) on Japanese media. The "saltines" mentioned by Michael may have come from those journalists that have difficulty in accessing official sources.

When placed on a global scale, the freedom enjoyed by the reporters in Japan is fairly high. The Freedom House releases a report on the degree of freedom owned by the nations in the world. This report is different from the one released by RSF, in recent years it left the format of a ranking and opted for a score to each country based on a list of questions, with no comparison. Also, while there is undoubtedly an element of subjectivity, the scoring emphasizes methodological constituency[14]. A key element in this list is that "a score is typically changed only if there has been a real-world development during the year that warrants a decline or improvement […]", as the explanation on

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[14] https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology (19/09/2021)

the methodology reports[15]. While more gradual changes may affect the score, Japan in the last years has received a score of 96/100. It is fair to mention that the score takes note of the problems of Japanese mass media, highlighting the role of the laws and the kisha clubs, but it still gives the country a score of 3 over 4 in the field. A problem is certainly perceived, but not in a way that significantly harms the freedom of the press.

2.3 – The styles of Journalism

During the research process, both in literature and on interviews, one point that was often brought up when talking about kisha clubs was the issue of access. Freeman (2000), Hall (1998), and similar critics of the Japanese media system strongly criticise how limited access to official sources creates obstacles for reporters in Japan that colleagues in other parts of the world do not face. Such barriers originate from the close relationship between the government and a selected group of reporters affiliated with the clubs that have almost exclusive access to official information (Freeman, 2000; Hall, 1998). In the paragraph Feldman (2011) declares that such a relationship generates a system where reporters passively convey information from politicians and bureaucrats to the public. He believes that the clubs make it difficult for reporters to criticize authorities, impeded by the fear of losing their privileges. Hall (1999) condemns the mutual relationship between sources and reporters as a serious obstacle to the healthy development of Japan as a democracy.
An example is a comparison between the Japanese and the British lobbies. In her book, Freeman is critical of the British (and American) system but still puts the situation in Japan on a different level of urgency (2000).
However, such limitations are applied to a reporter only based on the type of journalisms he/she carries on. Reporters in Japan generally conduct one of three types of Journalism: Access, Investigative, and technical journalism.

The current situation in Japan is that Japanese journalists of the main news agencies strongly rely on kisha clubs for information, and this has led to a form of access journalism deeply ingrained in the journalistic culture. When talking about access journalism we refer to "reporting that limits itself to gaining inside information about the actions or intentions of powerful actors before they are widely known" (Fackler, 2017, p.44-45). This type of journalism relies strongly on the sources of

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[15] https://rsf.org/en/detailed-methodology (19/09/2021)

information and can bring imbalance in the relationship between the source and the reporter, as the latter relies increasingly on the information from the former. Worry over such a close relationship has been expressed on various occasions. UN rapporteur David Kanye (2017), after his visit to Japan, conveyed in his report worry towards the opaque relationship between sanctioned reporter and government. The main motivation behind his critic was the fear that such a relationship will weaken the media's independence from the state and prevent a healthy journalistic environment (Kaye, 2017). Such worries are shared by former New York Times bureau chief Martin Fackler. In his opinion, the threat of losing privileges and the vague possibility of retaliation is the main tool in the hand of the government to avoid criticism from the major newspapers and journalists (2016). What distinguishes access journalism is a stable, reliable, and regular source of information; this comes often at the cost of less objectivity, as the reporters frequently have to act in a way that will not displease the source of information and will not bring an end to their relationship.

Investigative journalism is usually brought up in contrast to access journalism and is also known as 'watchdog journalism'. De Burgh describes investigative journalism as the act in which reporters "discover the truth and identify lapses from it in whatever media may be available" (De Burgh, 2008, 10). This involves a degree of independent action from the journalist, that needs to find the necessary information relying mostly on himself/herself. Furthermore, there are occasions when such activity may clash with the interest of sources of information or relevant figures in society, and in such cases, the journalist is expected to maintain neutrality and carry on the reportage. This happens in an ideal scenario. Against some of the criticism towards investigative journalism, it is necessary to differentiate it from dissenting journalism, as investigative journalism is not inherently critical against the government and its authority (De Burgh, 2008).

Access and Investigative journalism are often viewed in Japan as the opposite due to the way they operate. First, access journalism enjoys a close relationship with official sources, with relatively easy access to information (Fackler, 2017). This is not the case for investigative journalism where the reporter is expected to personally gather the necessary information. Second, investigative journalism goal is to deliver the result of an investigation independently from the effect it could have on the subjects of said investigation (De Burgh, 2008). Access journalists in Japan cannot do that, as they may risk spoiling their relationship with sources of information and sometimes they may have to compromise.

The term "Technical journalism" originates from one of the interviews carried out for this study, and refers to the lack of analysis, or critical view, of the information delivered; this results in a type

of news that the journalist Marc defined as "technical" and "passive".

Marc: The reports from journalists that are well versed on specific subjects do not exist anymore. Now they just want to give all the information available, something that you can search on your phone without the need of a local reporter. No one explains, analyses or challenges the information; this is something that nowadays is not seen as necessary, not taken for granted, and subsequently not done. The result is that news is passive now and, unless you are someone interested and involved in social issues, you do not care about what you read, and all the information is soon forgotten.

3 - Methodology and fieldwork

This chapter will discuss the overall qualitative research design that has been used as a frame to conduct this study and the choices that have led to the present form.

It is divided into two main subchapters, section 3.1 introduces the methodological approach to the study, while section 3.2 will cover the experience of conducting the fieldwork to gather primary data. The second subchapter will be especially relevant, as it will give an idea of the methods, challenges, and luck involved in contacting the participants.

Overall, fifteen journalists took part in this study, all with experience living and working in Japan. Of these fifteen, ten are foreigners and five are Japanese. While this number is not a reflection of the actual ratio of foreign and Japanese journalists in Japan, it is still considered valid enough to present an image of the working environment in which reporters operate. Especially the size of the Japanese sample cannot be used to represent the opinion of all the Japanese reporters in the country; it will however be useful in presenting the impression of a part of them, particularly relevant given their position and experience (see chapter 4.2.1.2).

The number of participants is greater than what was expected at the beginning, especially in the face of the inexperience of the writer when it comes to fieldwork. It will be described how many journalists turned out to be extremely willing to help with this study, showing a willingness to cooperate and help that sincerely surprised me.

Most of the research has been conducted in Tokyo, a big hub of Japan's social and political life. Through a comparison with previous studies, most of which have been carried out in Tokyo, this study aim is to present an updated picture of the situation of journalists whose centre of activity is Japan and how they experience their work there.

3.1 – Methodology

This chapter will focus on the methodological aspects behind the collection of primary data that will be the focus of the analysis chapter of this work: semi-structured interviews, open questionnaires, and participatory observation.

The study of Japanese mass media has always gathered a great deal of interest, as one of the aspects in which Japan appears more 'unique' and more blatant in its 'diversity' in comparison to what western readers are used to.

When discussing mass media, the issue of a lack of freedom of press and the working condition of

journalists often has a central role (Freeman, 2000; Kingston, 2016).

The subject has been covered extensively in books and articles aimed not only towards the academic world but also toward a more casual public.

However, while there is always the aim to stay as objective as possible, the opinions of the writer or the researcher always have a strong influence. Even when journalists express their opinion on editorials, what we obtain is a partial view and it is difficult to ascertain how objective they are and how much instead is sensationalism (Fackler, 2016; Adelstein, 2016). The approach of this study is to try to include the opinion of the journalists that are directly engaged in news coverage in Japan, to generate data that takes into consideration the point of view of the reporters as much as possible, while also maintaining a reasonable degree of objectivity. Through such an approach I wish to minimize how my personal bias could influence the analysis of both the primary and secondary data used in this study.

Following the theories of Mahoney, Goertz, and Maxwell, I chose to carry out this research with a qualitative approach. A key motivation behind this choice is the nature of the group at the centre of this study. Mahoney & Goertz (2006), in their comparison of the approach qualitative and quantitative research respectively take when engaging in a study, highlights some of the criteria of qualitative research that fit the needs of this research. In qualitative research, the theoretical scope is narrow and applies only to a limited range of cases, so there is no danger of having casual heterogeneity or the possibility of losing key variables that could get lost in a bigger pool (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). When studying journalists in Japan this is a key factor, as we have to understand not only the group identified as 'journalists' but also all the possible sub-groups that experience the work differently and cannot just generalize their experience. The need not to generalize is another important aspect of qualitative research; the differences in data between those of the same group are not considered an error as with quantitative research, but as a variable that can disclose new information (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). Because of the possible variables that may appear during research, there is also the need for definitions and concepts that explains these variables and do not try to cover everything under a generic umbrella definition that can feel not appropriate for specific cases (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). Maxwell highlights how qualitative research is especially suited to understand the context in which the participants' acts and the influence it has on their actions (2005).

Studies on the condition of journalists in Japan are often based on qualitative research.

While quantitative elements may be present, a qualitative approach is usually preferred. Freeman

and her choice to directly experience the environment of a kisha club is a good example of that (2000).

A qualitative approach is employed more often, mainly through a case study, archival research, content analysis and sometimes participant observation. This is likely due to the nature of the study, as it often involves a perceived injustice within the Japanese mass media system. A quantitative study is ill-suited in this case, as it needs a high number of participants to generate relevant results and a fair variety of samples (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). In the case of Japan, there would be the need to balance the sample between foreign correspondents, local freelancers, local employees major newspapers, etc. This is not a task that could be tackled without a great number of resources. A qualitative approach is more effective with a smaller batch of participants, and in finding deep issues that superficial research may cover as a variable.

This has given us a vast amount of data regarding the environment in which the journalists operate in Japan and how this affects the society and the politics of the country. This corpus of data however has generated, especially in the academic field, a prevailing negative perception of the mass media in Japan and the way they operate (Freeman, 2000; Levick, 2005; McCargo, 2002). This appears to be the more accepted viewpoint on the topic, with a good amount of the books and articles written in support of such discourse. It is difficult to find articles, and even more so for books of academic nature that sustain the legitimacy of the mass media system of Japan. However there is a major problem that rises through the analysis of all the materials that have been examined as a preparation for this study, and that brought this study to formulate the question on how do journalists perceive their work in Japan; the research that has been conducted in the past has mainly focused on the analysis of the Japanese mass media system and of its mechanics rather than how the system affects and influences the work of the journalists, those that have the role to write the 'medium' that is the final product of the whole system by them analysed. Medium is intended as the message itself, as something that can influence society through the content of the message but also through its nature. This follows the idea that the technology behind a message is an integral part of the message itself, as argued by McLuhan (1964, 7-21).

This study argues that to reach a better understanding of the issue of Japanese mass media and its relationship with journalists it is necessary to gather and analyse the point of view of those actively involved with the issue itself, as they are often the more susceptible to notice the changes within their workplace. Therefore, the method of research implemented in this study will continue to be qualitative, but its paradigm will vary from those of previous studies leaning more toward a

constructivist approach. Lincoln, Lynham & Guba describe the constructivist paradigm as the one where knowledge is the fruit of "individual or collective reconstructions sometimes coalescing around consensus" and where the inquisitor is a "[…] facilitator of multivoice reconstruction", in opposition to studies where the voice of the researcher has an overwhelming relevance (2018, 112)[16].

One of the objectives of this study is to test if the information we have on the working condition of journalists in Japan is still relevant today or if there have been changes in the last years. The best source of information to gauge such changes is the community of journalists in Japan itself. With community, I follow the definition by Vered Amit, in this case of a group of people not necessarily close to each other that share the experience of working as a journalist in the location of Japan (2002).

Reality is not absolute, and account from those that are not part of the community may not reflect the point of view of its members (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2018, 113). Through the interaction with the journalists that have experience with working in Japan and with the changes that may have occurred within their workplace, it is possible to obtain first-hand data that reflects the point of view within the community. However, as this is not quantitative focused research, it is necessary to remember that the results cannot be generalized and should not be considered a mirror of how all journalists in Japan experience working in the country.

3.1.1 – Interviews with Journalists

The interviewee sample taken into consideration for the study must ideally be composed of participants that have working experience as journalists in Japan. Chapter 2.1 presents the image under which Japan's media has been perceived in the public eye and academic circles. Most new articles and books published today tend to use this as their foundation, continuing to maintain the same discourse through time. The journalists are an active part of this system and they are the ones that more often come into contact with the practices and institutions accused of acting as an obstacle toward the freedom of the press as seen in chapter 2.1.

The journalists can be a rather vast group, that is why the sample taken into consideration is composed of those that have worked in Japan for at least five years and live, or lived, in the country.

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[16] Based on Heron and Reason (1997), except for "ethics" and "value" columns.

This is necessary to exclude those journalists that cover Japan only occasionally and do not have a deep experience with its mass media system.

Due to my limited resources and time, I chose to focus my research on the area of Tokyo. However, I believe that these choices will not have a significant impact on the final results of the study. Tokyo is widely considered the centre of Japan's economic and political scene and almost all the more important Japanese and foreign mass media agencies, newspapers and magazines have a branch, if not their headquarters, in the city. As a high percentage of journalists lives and works in Tokyo and its vicinities, their opinion can be considered highly representative of the one for the whole journalist population of the country. The sample reached for the interviews consists of Japanese journalists and foreign ones; these include participants that have working experience with big news agencies and independent journalists. This choice was made to try to represent as much as possible the different kinds of journalists that operate in Japan.

The Japanese journalists are by no means a homogeneous group. While they share a profession, they have different nationalities, academic and job backgrounds, they may cover different kinds of stories, have different working statuses, and publish for different types of publications. Therefore, the sampling group should reflect this situation as much as possible. Under such circumstances, the interviewees' experience could be used as a window on the contemporary status of journalists in Japan and see if the image that we have through previous studies is still relevant today. The sample interviewed can be insightful in checking if changes have appeared on a smaller scale or for a specific group of people, as this study tries to avoid generalizing the research sample.

This research originally started with a slightly different objective, to learn more about the possible interference on published news of actors considered external to the journalistic world. Thus, the first interviews focus more on the general opinion of journalists in Japan rather than their experience. However, the content of these interviews is the main reason behind the current research and contain a relevant amount of information related to the topic in question despite a shift of the research scope.

The point of this study is not to generate results that can be applied to create a generalized theory on the population of journalists active in Japan but to test the knowledge that we have on them until now. Taking into consideration the small size of the sample the results can be considered at most a small window on how different kind of journalists experiences their work.

The sampling technique used for the interviews follows that of purposive sampling. Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016) explain that the purposive sampling technique focuses on choosing the

participants based on specific qualities that they have. As previously mentioned, the sample is composed of Journalists that have regularly been active in Japan and have experience in the field. This makes them ideal candidates, as they are rich in information about the subjects taken into consideration and thanks to their knowledge can give valuable insights into the mechanics of journalism in Japan.

It is fair to note that the selection process has elements of convenience sampling. This involves sampling choices that emphasize certain practical aspects such as geographical proximity, minor expenses, and access to the sources (Etikan et al., 2016).

The general reason behind my course of action during fieldwork was gaining access to places that journalists often visit and that would bring a higher chance to interact with them, such as a correspondents club; further attempts to gain contacts included searching through browsers and SNS, and snowballing. How I got into contact with the participants will be further described in the explanation of the fieldwork (see chapter 3.2).

As mentioned in chapter 3.1, the paradigm under which this inquiry operates is the one indicated as constructivism. Lincoln, Lynham & Guba highlight how the constructivist[17] paradigm objective is to "gain understanding by interpreting subject perception" under the assumption that reality is a construct "socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the person who holds them" (2018, 114). Under this assumption, the point of view of the interviewees will give the necessary tools to understand how the mass media reality is perceived by those actively related to it.

Robson points out how usually a distinction between the types of interviews is based on the structure or standardization of the interview (2002). The main categories are structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Robson, 2002). For this study, I deemed the semi-structured approach has the most appropriate. The semi-structured interview is more flexible and gave me the possibility to freely elaborate on concepts that came up during the interviews that I found relevant regarding some topics without being too restricted by the order or phrasing of the questions; at the same time, the list of predetermined questions helps in maintaining track of the topics I wanted to cover in the interviews, and makes it so that the different interviews follow a similar basic concept (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

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[17] Also referred as Interpretivism (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2018, 114)

The questionnaire for the interviews conducted in Tokyo was built with the idea of asking a few questions on some key issues of Japanese mass media, developed using the knowledge gathered through the analysis of secondary sources. Questions were open so that the interviewee could develop their answer while not deviating too much from the original topic.

3.1.2 - Questionnaire in Qualitative Research

I took into consideration conducting a questionnaire to gather additional data from a bigger sample after analysing the interviews collected at the beginning of the research. Rosenthal points out that when conducting qualitative social research this usually follows a logic of discovery, and hypotheses are generated during the research process (2018). In a similar tone, Robson says that in qualitative (or how he renames it, flexible) designs it is highly likely for the research questions at the beginning to need further polishing, starting from an underdeveloped general idea and a need to select a method to collect data (2002). This research followed a similar path and starting from a reasonably open research question it went down a more concrete and focused hypothesis after gaining empirical data. The need for more data and a bigger sample pushed me to rely on a questionnaire.

The sample taken into consideration for the questionnaire is similar to the one taken into consideration for the interviews. As the data obtained from the interviews was related to the opinion of journalists working in Japan, the sample was once again selected among those that fell under the category of a journalist that has experience with working in Japan. The participants focus their coverage on Japan mainly on political matters, economic issues, and pieces about the cultural aspect of the country; the focus may change according to the requests from their employers, but these topics are usually the focus of their news coverage.
The questionnaire aimed to gather the experience of the journalists that work in Japan and how they perceived their activities in Japan's working environment. The data collected was intended to be used in conjunction with the secondary data about the conditions of Journalists in Japan, to gain a better understanding of how clear is the picture that the previous studies give of such topic.

For this study, I wanted to carry out as many face-to-face interviews as possible, as they would have allowed me to ask further questions on topics that may appear while speaking with the journalists. However, sometimes there is the need to proceed with the study using a different method. The choice of a questionnaire was dictated by several factors and was made while considering all the advantages and disadvantages. I wanted to gather more data, and the questionnaire was the perfect

tool as it would allow me in reaching a high number of journalists, and I could reach them even while not being physically in Japan. The need for a questionnaire was born from the concern that the data collected from the interviews was too little and obtained from a sample too small to further justify the results of the research, to reduce the risk of what Robson calls 'inappropriate certainty' (2002, 370).

There was a need for a bigger and more representative sample to justify a result that could be used as a picture of the whole situation of the journalists.

Gillham lists some of the key advantages of conducting a questionnaire and, between those, some have a bigger relevance for this study (2008). The occupation of a journalist often implies a busy schedule and a questionnaire would give them less pressure for an immediate answer and adapts to their schedule; this is especially relevant for the period during which the questionnaire was sent, as explained in chapter 3.2. This does not imply an indefinite amount of time has been given to the interviewees, as there is the risk that because of their busy schedule they may forget of replying. Another strong point of conducting a questionnaire is the possibility to reach a lot of people in a small amount of time. Interviews take time to organize and often the sample subjects are either busy or just unwilling to be interviewed. Questionnaires can reach a much bigger number of people and because of their less 'onerous' nature are easier to answer from the point of view of the participants. Another strong advantage of a questionnaire is the comparatively low cost in comparison to interviews. The sample considered for the study resides mainly in Tokyo, Japan, and it was difficult to physically contact them; this stem not only from the economic burden a trip to Japan would have implied but also because of the numerous travel restrictions that were implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the method of sending a questionnaire through email was considered the optimal choice.

The objective of the questionnaire was to gather the opinion of the journalists on a set of key issues related to their work. The questionnaire permits sending a standardized set of questions to all the participants. Such consistency reduces the risk of obtaining different answers from the participants due to differences within the way a question is asked. However, it is necessary to highlight that the use of a questionnaire has various shortcomings, especially when compared to direct interviews. The main issue with questionnaires is that there is minimal control over the order and the context of the answers; while during an interview the interviewer can change what is been asked depending on the flow of the conversation, for example shifting to focus on a specific topic that has come up during questioning, this is not possible during questionnaires. Because of their less dynamic nature,

there is always a risk of getting less data than during an interview. Gillham points out how people are more prone to talk rather than write, even when using a semi-structured interview model (2008). The inability to talk directly with the participant makes it impossible to clarify possible misunderstandings of the reader when trying to understand a question; if the question is too vague or not clear enough, there is the danger that the answer could not be relevant to the research. As there is no direct interaction there is also the risk that the participants will not necessarily report their beliefs or point of view accurately, in an attempt to respond in a way that will show them in a good light (Robson, 2002, 233). Another risk of questionnaires is the low response rate that typically comes with this method and the difficulty in motivating the sample to answer it (Gillham, 2008).

People do not usually actively answer questionnaires unless they do not have a personal interest in the topic covered, consider it of real relevance, or it affects them directly. The questionnaire used for the study was developed considering all these disadvantages, and different steps were taken to try to overcome them as much as possible.

The questionnaire for this study was conceived as a follow up of the face-to-face interviews carried out in Japan. These interviews brought up questions on some specific topics, and the aim of the questionnaire was that of obtaining further data and clarification on such aspects. Previous contact with journalists in Japan already gave me an idea of which topic would be of more interest to the participants, and hopefully raise the number of replies.

The contacts built during the time in Japan were of great help when sending the questionnaires. I obtained such contacts not only through me directly reaching for them, but also through snowballing. Many journalists mentioned the name of colleagues that could be interested in participating in the study, actively expanding the number of reporters to whom I could send the questionnaire.

I tried to send the questionnaire to a large number of journalists that coincided with the standard of the sample, to try to get as many responses as possible. During the writing of the questionnaire, it was regularly subject to quality check to not include questions that may lead the reporters into specific answers. A key concern was the development of questions that were concise and clear so that they could not influence the answer of the participants and convey a clear inquiry. The questions touch on topics that were considered of interest to the research sample and try to appeal as much as possible to the participants to freely express their opinion.

There was the possibility, especially with reporters with which I never interacted before, of not

receiving answers because of the length of the questionnaire and the topics covered. To avoid such a scenario as much as possible I tried to write questions that were as concise as possible without losing the central idea of the question. I believe that a short question will have more chances of being read in its entirety by the participants, and as the participant already started to interact with the question it will consequentially rise the chance to receive an answer. The questions asked focused also on two kinds of topics: general questions on their working condition and environment, and their point of view on some key aspects of what affects the work of a journalist in Japan. The topics were chosen based on common topics covered when talking about the Japanese mass media system, and some points of interest that came up during the first set of interviews in Japan. This was done so that the questions would catch the interest of the journalists and obtain their cooperation.

The anonymity of the participants was one important aspect of the questionnaire and was one of the points that were made clear in the description of the research to them. The status of anonymity was the default and only under their consent would their name be directly referred to in the thesis only if deemed necessary to the end of the research. This was done for an ethical purpose, to ensure that their opinion would not be publicly disclosed in a way that could harm them or their job, and to give them the chance to express their unfiltered point of view.

Questionnaires are commonly used to collect statistical data and are composed of closed questions, meaning that the participant has to choose from some predetermined answers; in the case of this research, the focus is not on statistical analysis but content analysis. Gillham remarks that open questions are those where the participant can better express their opinion, and this is what is expected from the questionnaire as it has to work as a substitute for direct interviews, or at least work along the lines of one (2008). In my case, the questionnaire was also an extension of the interviews that I previously conducted in Tokyo, so I wanted as much data as possible on specific topics. The open approach gives the participants an idea of what the interviewer wants to know, but it gives them the ability to answer in a more free and 'personal' way; this is necessary when the objective is collecting the points of view and experiences of the journalists (Moser & Kalton, 1979). I wished for the participants to freely give their opinion and develop those topics that seemed relevant during my first round of interviews.

 The questionnaire was delivered through email, after an extensive search for as many potential participants as it was possible. The email route was considered the best option in this situation, as much of the contacts information collected were restricted to this method and I supposed it was more convenient not only for them but also for me as I could better keep track of our conversation.

3.1.3 – Participant Observation

This method was not initially contemplated into the research plan, but as I was given the chance to attend a series of press conferences, I decided to participate. This decision came initially from the idea that a first-hand experience of the working environment of the journalists in Japan, and how they usually carry out their work would be beneficial for my study. This proved to be a serendipitous event, as not only I was able to experience with my body the working environment of the journalists and how they carry out their work, but thanks to such press conferences I was able to form my first direct contacts with some of the participants of this study.

I gave myself the label of participant-observer as I was physically able to see, and in some way experience, the activities of the journalists that are at the centre of this study.
Participant observation has its main strength in the directness of the method. It allows the researcher to collect primary data with a minimal risk of artificiality that comes for example when gathering testimonies, as they could be affected by the source for a different array of reasons (Robson, 2002). However, there is the risk that opinions from the observer may influence the observation, or the behaviour of the population he/she is studying may be influenced by her/his presence (Bratich, 2018).

Participant observation is usually distinguished by the role the observer takes concerning the situation. The more common approaches are the complete participant, participant as an observer, and marginal participant (Robson, 2002).
The observation conducted regarding this thesis involved the researcher acting as a 'marginal participant' (Robson, 2002, 318). In such a role, the researcher takes a largely passive attitude, while not trying to hide his/her presence. In my case, I consider myself a marginal observer because of my actions during my observation. While I did participate in the press conferences and had minimal interaction with the reports, such interactions mainly happened before or during the actual conference; while the actual conference was in place, I did not directly interact with the journalists nor did I ask to intervene. I took this course of action as I considered active participation counterproductive to my study.

Given the focus of the research and the method chosen at the beginning to collect data, the observation was not scheduled in advance. However, it did provide precious data in the form of a deeper understanding of how journalists in Japan operate within their workplace, and a glimpse in how the dynamics behind the interaction between fellow reporters.

3.2 – Fieldwork

This section is an account of the fieldwork carried out to gather primary data for this research. It will present my actions while gathering data and how these resulted in my set of primary data. The fieldwork was conducted for the most part in Japan and Finland, where I worked on my questionnaire. The time spent doing fieldwork can be divided into two different periods: the period in Japan, where I focused on gathering more secondary data and conducting face-to-face interviews, and the period spent in Finland working on the questionnaire and analysing the data gathered. The questionnaire in this study is considered as part of the fieldwork. While it was not carried out physically in Japan, the data and insights obtained through it are the direct continuations of the first set of interviews. This makes the two closely related and a key component in gathering primary data.

I spent the spring semester of 2019 as an exchange student at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan. During my stay at Waseda University, the interviews were conducted mainly during the second half of my stay in Tokyo. Before the interviews, during my initial time in Japan, I mainly attended classes at the university, searched for additional material on my topic at the university libraries, and tried to find ways to get into contact with journalists. These actions were taken to strengthen my knowledge of Journalism in Japan in preparation for the interviews and to build a plan of action to contact as many journalists as possible for the interview. This approach did give me a stronger understanding of the current working environment of journalists in Japan, and during my search for contacts, I got familiar with the names of many of the journalists that I would try to contact during the first and second phases of my interviews.

There are certain aspects of the fieldwork that certainly could have been carried out more optimally. However, this mainly stems from my inexperience with this kind of approach to data gathering. Nevertheless, the final result is more than satisfactory as it produced a good amount of primary data. It can also be said that the current study is born out of the initial inexperience, as the idea of analysing the workplace of the journalists from their perspective was a reaction to the first interviews conducted under the initial research frame.

The 'workplace' of the journalists in Japan is where I choose to carry out my fieldwork. With the term workplace, I do not plan to limit the interpretation just to a physical location, but to a more encompassing definition that is based on a series of prerequisites. During my study, I defined as workplace those locations where journalists gather, where there are sources of information, where

journalists collect information, and where they interact with other journalists or sources of information.

Such a solution allows considering as workplace not only physical locations but also intangible ones, such as the internet and more specifically SNS. The need to include also the internet has come after realizing how relevant it has become today for the distribution of news; this is not only restricted to the activities of the newspaper themselves, but also the incredibly active network on SNS such as Twitter that journalists often use.

The relevance of such services became clear while sending questionnaires to journalists, making me realise that such platforms were also an important part of the 'workplace' where I was carrying out my fieldwork.

Following such rationale, I define as the "field" of my fieldwork the place where journalists conduct their job, the workplace.

3.2.1 – Access and Interviews in Tokyo

Interviewing had been a relevant method to collect primary data since the research project was defined. The decision to use such a method was brought by the acceptance of my application for a period as an exchange student at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan.

Prior to my departure to Japan, I gained a basic level of knowledge in how to carry out fieldwork through independent study and courses offered by my home university. However, it was impossible to build a proper plan before the departure because of a series of bureaucratic issues between the universities involved in the exchange as confirmation of my departure arrived a month before the scheduled departure. The period of uncertainty and the need to prepare for my departure left little time to properly plan the interviews.

I carried on the interviews during my exchange at Waseda University in Tokyo during the spring semester of 2019. Active preparations for the interviews were carried on mainly from May to July; this was done in consideration that during August many journalists would leave Tokyo for vacation and most of the structures that I relied on to approach them would be closed for the same reason. To contact the journalists two methods were mainly employed: direct confrontation and snowballing.

The journalists had been since the beginning the focus of the research, so a key aspect was finding a way to establish contact with them. Concerning this, I received great help from an assistant professor at the University of Copenhagen, Jens Sejrup, during a lecture at University of Turku who

counselled me on how to get into contact with journalists in Japan, mentioning the FCCJ as one place where a foreign student like me would have had more chances to appeal for assistance. While searching for willing participants I contacted mostly English-speaking reporters. This choice stems from my insecurity in being able to conduct an interview with Japanese reporters in Japanese, as such endeavour would involve familiarity with the language and the use of some technical terms that were over my language proficiency. Most of the journalists that I came into contact with were proficient in speaking English, making communication easier for both sides. To ensure my understanding of the interviews, and that there would be no problem when interacting with the interviewees, I chose to use English and on one occasion Italian as the language of interaction. As a way to avoid interviewing only non- Japanese journalists, I tried to contact as many English-speaking Japanese journalists as possible.

I came into contact with all the participants through direct contact and snowballing.
I tried to directly contact several journalists that coincided with my criteria for the participants. The way this contact was established relied mainly on email exchange and face-to-face interaction. I actively worked to contact the journalists after the first two months of my exchange in Japan, as I needed time to acclimate myself to the new environment and gather information on the channels that I could use to collect some interviews, also based on the suggestions received while in Finland. In the course of reaching out to journalists, I focused on three locations that I believed would have given me the highest chance to meet them: the internet, media organizations (news agencies, correspondents clubs and newspapers), and the university. This choice was compelled by the number of possible participants in such locations and the nature of my time-limited stay in Japan.

At the end of my exchange at Waseda University, I was able to collect a total of five face-to-face interviews, with each lasting for at least one hour.
As mentioned before, the participants were contacted in two ways: direct contact or snowballing. Direct contact means that the participant was approached by the researcher without prior introduction or advice by another party and is mostly based on research and serendipity. Snowballing involves another party, in the case of this research a journalist or someone involved with them, introduction or recommendation to meet the possible candidate; this method is solely based on personal connections and is the one that resulted in an interview most of the time. When a common 'acquaintance' was involved, it was more difficult for a journalist to refuse an interview.

The location that I focused on to try to reach out to journalists gave different results and highlighted some trends that are often mentioned as key in other fieldwork reports, namely serendipity and personal connections (Reader, 2003; Henry, 2003).

Another aspect that worked in favour of my research was the unexpected support and willingness of the journalists in telling their experiences and opinions; many of them showed interest in my research and when they could not help directly, they often offered support in other ways. This is something that would happen once again during the second part of my research while conducting questionnaires. However, I have to concede that if more preparation would have been done before the departure to Japan, more interviews could have been collected. An area that definitely could have improved is the type of SNS preferred by the journalists, some of which I was unfamiliar with. Fieldwork in Tokyo proved difficult thanks to the poor preparations I did before arriving in Japan, but the results were not negative, thanks to a mix of serendipity, initiative, and reputation.

Before leaving for Japan one of the books that I read in preparation for fieldwork was "Doing Fieldwork in Japan" by Bestor, Steinhoff & Bestor (2003). The book helped to give a glimpse of what can happen during fieldwork and how to cope with it to a certain degree, not in a way exclusive to Japan but in general; the events of each chapter highlighted how each researcher has a different experience during fieldwork and how the place where you work has a partial impact on your results. During my fieldwork fortuitous chances were the events that gave me access to the most valuable opportunities during my fieldwork, like access to the FCCJ conferences (Henry, 2003). These fortuitous events were always born out of a personal initiative. In my case, such initiative consisted in taking fast decisions when presented with more than one choice, even when this decision would take me out of my comfort zone. In many situations, I was given the chance to make such decisions out of the 'reputation' that I was carrying. As a nameless master's student my request for cooperation with my research would have most likely been ignored unless my topic concerned the other party in a way or another; to make up for this I needed to borrow the prestige of someone with a strong reputation in my area of study or Japan (Coleman, 2003). Being a student of Waseda University, a fairly renown university in Japan, gave me the credibility that I needed and helped me in obtaining access to the FCCJ and much help, especially from Japanese nationals.

Each location gave different results based on serendipity, initiative, and reputation. Research through the internet gave fairly few results in comparison to what I expected. Finding the name of local correspondents that wrote about the country for important newspapers was not an issue, contacting them proved difficult often due to the absence of contact information in the newspapers.

The only successful attempt came out of Marc (pseudonym)[18], whose name I previously knew because of his reputation and that I managed to contact through the SNS Facebook. The university similarly gave only one result, but since the beginning this was the expected result as the location was selected due to good luck; during my exchange at Waseda University I decided to follow a course in international journalism, and the professor was a reporter for an important Japanese news agency.

Mass media organizations provided the highest number of interviews and opportunities, but this depended on the approach used. I tried to directly contact through email some of the mainstream Japanese newspapers that also offered an English edition of their content (Asahi Shimbun, Mainichi Shimbun, The Japan Times) to ask for assistance in my research in the form of introduction to journalists willing to hear me out, but unfortunately, I received no replies; this also happened with international newspapers that had reporters in Japan.

In the beginning the situation with the FCCJ was similar, as I did not receive a reply to my email asking for assistance. I decided to go directly to the FCCJ building after one week. Here I received help after an initial moment of confusion caused by my sudden appearance. In this situation, my status as a Waseda student helped me not only in gaining a degree of trustworthiness in the eyes of the personnel of the FCCJ, but also access to the club's press conferences until its closure in August for the summer break. Going to the FCCJ building had the intention of showing my dedication to the research and avoiding possible excuses that I could have been sent by email. My regular 'intrusions' in the FCCJ allowed me to get into contact with a total of seven journalists; I introduced myself to them and asked for cooperation to five of them at the end of press conferences, and the other two were introduced to me by a relevant member of the FCCJ staff. Of these seven journalists two agreed to be interviewed and one asked the Kyodo News World section desk for a comment on my questions and later gave me the chance to visit the company headquarters in Tokyo; both the journalists introduced by the FCCJ are included in these three. Also, one of the journalists that I contacted introduced me to the name of another famous reporter, Michael, that after a quick email exchange agreed to an interview. Connections and reputation both played an important role during my time at the FCCJ, much more than the other locations, and were also the source of the highest

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[18] Most reporters gave permission to use their name during this study. However, not everyone gave this consent. To maintain a uniform standard during the whole study, and protect in any way possible the privacy of the sources I decide to use a pseudonym for all the participants of this study.

amount of data I managed to collect. While these two factors may not be unique to Japan, they certainly had a great impact during my research there.

The interviews were carried out in locations of preference of the participant and except for one in a café, all were carried out in a calm and silent environment, as Table 1 shows. This situation aided the collection of clear recordings of the conversation in most cases, and this was of great help during the transcription process. The only problematic record was the interview conducted in a café, where background noises caused the transcription to take double the time in comparison to the others.

Table 1: Interviews circumstances

Contact	First Approach	Interview Location
Direct	University	Classroom
Snowballing	FCCJ	Journalist's Office
Direct	Internet	Journalist's House
Snowballing	FCCJ	Café
Direct	FCCJ	FCCJ Conference Room

The transcription work started after my return to Finland, due to my busy schedule while in Japan, and took me six days of work. The interviews went according to the idea of a semi-structured interview expressed in chapter 3.1.1 and each of them lasted an average of one hour.

At the end of my stay in Tokyo, I managed to gather five interviews and the statement of one news agency. The number of interviews was better than what I expected at the beginning but still below what I needed for a solid result. The amount of help I received from the journalists that were interested in my research was overwhelming but at the same time, many journalists that showed apparent interest at the beginning never replied to my emails. While disheartening at times, this outcome is not uncommon during research and considering the final amount of data gathered I would consider this a success.

3.2.2 – Supplementing data through questionnaires

The decision to conduct a questionnaire came up after the exchange program in Tokyo came to an end and my return to Finland.

As explained in chapter 3.1.2, such a method was chosen out of the need for more data and a bigger sample. The issue of the distance between me and the participants was also a key factor.

The search for journalists to whom I could send the questionnaire was different in comparison to the previous experience with the interviews, as following the advice of some colleagues I started to interact with the SNS Twitter. Twitter turned out to be the preferred SNS of many reporters, and the easiest way to contact them. I also reached out to the journalists that I interviewed previously to elaborate on some of the experiences they mentioned.

In the end, I sent the questionnaire to more than 40 different reporters, and receives replies from 14 of them; of these 12 sent me back the complete questionnaire, one granted me an online interview on the subject, and one refrained to compile the questionnaire because of the little time he spent in Japan as a journalist, but still helped me providing the address of an acquaintance that had more experience. The timeframe given to the journalists to send back the questionnaires was approximately from the beginning of June to the beginning of August. Throughout the entire process of writing, distributing, and getting back the questionnaires there has been no major discrepancy from the initial plan described in chapter 3.1.2 apart from the direct interaction with the journalists. The interaction with the journalists was the only part of the research not completely under my control, as I had to wait for a response from the other party. The times I received a response, it rarely contained the filled questionnaire and I needed to clarify the timeframe during which I would like to receive the data back. After the initial contact around half of the journalists that agreed to send me back the compiled questionnaire and did so in the period by them announced; the other half was probably too busy and I had to periodically remind them about the questionnaire. Such situations turned to be the most difficult for me, as I needed to send an email that did not sound like a reprimand or as a forced request, but as a simple reminder that the questionnaire was there. Contrary to my fears, all the journalists proved really understanding and even apologetic at times.

The whole experience required more preparation than the interviews conducted in Tokyo, but in comparison it took less time to contact the reporters and produced a higher number of positive responses. One aspect that impressed me was the high response rate of the journalists and the willingness to help, often agreeing to the release of their name if needed for the sake of the research. There are no major regrets with using this method. As I did not use Twitter before this study, I did not understand how relevant it could have been during my time in Japan to contact the journalists and schedule more interviews. This remains my only regret during this whole study.

The questionnaires proved to be a great tool to collect more information, as the answers provided data abundant both in quantity and in quality, from a reasonably diverse number of journalists. The questionnaire ended up as a method that exceeded the initial expectations.

3.2.3 – Participant observation inside the workplace

Participant observation was not a method initially considered for this research, as I found it difficult that a student would be granted access to the locations where journalists exercise their profession. This came from the belief that my Japanese language was not to a level where I could take part in a press conference, and that the location would present a level of professionalism that would not allow the presence of a student unrelated to the topic of the conference.

Such worries proved to be false, at least on the ground that the press conferences where I was allowed to participate were not in Japanese but English, or with an English translator, and my presence was tolerated as that of an 'interested observer'. During my stay in Japan, I had the chance to take part in three different press conferences at the FCCJ and do a guided tour of Kyodo News' Tokyo headquarters.

The chance to experience first-hand the working environment of journalists came as a mix of serendipity and connections. A key event is my decision to go directly to the FCCJ to ask for support in my thesis. The day I went there a press conference was scheduled one hour later and the staff gave me the chance to take part in it, suggesting that it would be a great chance to ask questions to the journalists present there.

After this first experience, I was permitted to go to all the press conferences organized by the club until August, when the FCCJ would close for summer vacation. During my stay in Tokyo, I was able to attend a total of three conferences; I could not attend all that were organized while in Japan due to university and work obligations. The possibility to visit the Kyodo News headquarters came thanks to the connection of one member of the FCCJ to a reporter that worked there. The same reporter helped me in obtaining a written statement on some of the questions I sent them from the world service desk, and at the time we were formally introduced at the FCCJ, I received an offer for a guided visit to the office, that I promptly accepted.

While my research does not directly require participatory observation, the chance to see how reporters in Japan act in their workplace was a great opportunity to better understand their behaviour and put their experience in a more defined context. I tried to participate in as many

conferences as possible, but since participant observation was not a key aspect of my research if there were circumstances that made it difficult for me to attend, I did not prioritize the press events. The content of the three events that I observed was different every time and this was reflected in the number of participants and what kind of reporters would attend.

The first conference that I attended was centred on the issue of the resumption of commercial whaling by Japan and had as the main speaker Mr Patrick Ramage from the International Fund for Animal Welfare. The second conference main speaker was the politician Toranosuke Katayama, from the party Nippon Ishin, who talked about the incoming 2019 upper house elections. The last was a presentation by Doctor Mario Garret on Alzheimer and its impact on Japan.

The visit to the Kyodo News headquarters lasted approximately an hour and the guide was a reporter of the organization. The tour was totally in Japanese and while there were some moments when I had to ask for clarifications, I had no relevant difficulties in understanding. The situation was interesting because I was shown an environment different to what I was used to seeing at the FCCJ, where the use of English and the presence of foreigners is more noticeable. The tour was just a quick introduction of the history of the company and its main activities, followed by a visit of all the different sections of Kyodo News and a subsequent explanation of their role. The visit to Kyodo News gave me the chance to observe the environment of a news company, different from the less strict atmosphere of the FCCJ, and another working environment of the journalist that I was studying. During the tour, I tried to ask about the opinion of the guide and my contact at Kyodo News about the situation of the Japanese mass media system. I received a pretty clear denial of further comments, citing the statement that I received from the world section desk.

While unplanned, participatory observation was a pleasant surprise and a great help for my study. The opportunity to experience first-hand the workplace of those journalists whose opinions I was trying to collect gave me a glimpse of the environment where they work, and how different environments influence the way they interact with each other and those outside their journalistic circle. All in all, these experiences certainly influenced my perception of how journalism is carried out in Japan and the conditions in which journalists operate.

4 - Analysis and Results

This chapter will present the primary data collected for this study. There will be three main sections, each with a focus on one of the research questions presented in chapter 1.

The first section will highlight how the group of reporters that are active in Japan are not a homogenous group. While researchers often describe the limitations present in the Japanese media system as something that influences every reporter equally, not all journalists suffer the same problems. Within the macro group of reporters there exist several relatively smaller groups that interact differently with the Japanese mass media system following a series of different factors.

The second section will focus on the methods the reporters in Japan use to cope with barriers that they may face when carrying on their work. This chapter will heavily rely on the theory of everyday resistance initially developed by John Scott to delve into the methods used by reporters to defend their livelihood and surpass the obstacle put in the way of collecting information. Attention will be given not only to the methods themselves but also to the dynamics of the relationship between journalists and the power that gives birth to the resistance.

The final section will cover issues of relevance for the workplace of journalists in Japan. The topics covered are the role of the previous prime minister Abe Shinzo and the LDP on the work of journalists, and the way laws influence the work of reporters. These two topics are important as they strongly influence the working condition in the country. However, the impact of Abe on the work of journalists is not as great as described by researchers and critics. On the other hand, the impact that laws have on the operation of reporters is a topic not often discussed, especially concerning how important it is.

Regarding this chapter, it is of the utmost importance to clarify that this study has been carried out with the intention to build an image of Japanese journalism as balanced as possible, and by no means it wants to attack or defend any aspect that may be deemed problematic or controversial. As studies on the work of reporters in Japan usually give insufficient relevance to the point of view of the reporters themselves, this study aims to fill such a gap.

The data has been collected with the intent of maintaining a stance as neutral as possible. The participants for this study were selected under the basic requirement of exercising the journalist profession now or in the recent past in Japan. All the participants satisfy this requirement, as explained in chapters 3.1.1 and 3.1.2.

The general data of the interviewees is displayed in appendix 1. While trying to collect a sample as balanced as possible, the number of respondents and the nature of the study brought some limitations on the balance between different attributes of the aforementioned.

Most of the participants operate in the Tokyo area. This study is set as a way to check the working condition of journalists in Japan, not only in Tokyo; reasonably it may appear that interacting mainly with journalists from this area could pose a problem.

As explained in chapter 3.1.1, the relevance of this city and the high concentration of journalists within it should make up for such a problem.

The nationality of the participants may be seen as another issue. Of the fifteen journalists that took part in the interviews and questionnaire, ten of them were foreigners and five of them were Japanese. This division is the result of the choice of not using Japanese as a language of communication and the response rate of the questionnaires. Despite this, the amount of cooperation received by Japanese reporters is still one-third of the total number, and I believe this number is enough to form a realistic image of their position in Japan. This is further strengthened by the survey on what Japanese journalists think about their changing working environment conducted by the Institute of Journalism & Media Studies of Nihon University conducted in 2008 and analysed by Shinji, Mitsuru and Shinsuke (2012) where a similar ratio of age, employment status, and the gender ratio is presented.

Another point that is necessary to highlight is the ratio between men and women. Of the fifteen participants, thirteen are men and two are women. While the majority of the journalists whose contact I managed to find were men, almost a third of the questionnaires that I sent were towards women. As this study tries to find what are the factors that may influence the working environment of a journalist, the gender of a participant was also taken into consideration as an important parameter. Because of the low number of women that replied to the questionnaire this study cannot cover the importance of how gender plays a role in the working life of a journalist. While there is a significant number of studies on the topic, the lack of primary data renders me impossible to cover this important side of the working environment of journalists in Japan.

This study has been conducted with a satisfactory number of participants. Despite this, it does not want to claim to be representative of the whole population of journalists in Japan, regardless of nationality, gender, or any other factor. As this is a study qualitative in nature, there will be opinions and experiences bound to individuals that may not represent those of other reporters. This study objective is to have journalists express their opinion on their working environment, to draw a

picture of what their work in Japan involves. While it may not necessarily represent the entirety of the reporters active in Japan, it proposes a picture based on the experience of those directly involved with such an environment.

While collecting the data, I gave more importance to topics that, according to the material consulted until that moment, were deemed more sensible regarding the working environment in Japan.

4.1 – Japanese Journalists not as a Homogeneous Group

The working conditions of journalists in Japan is a common topic of discussion when analysing the Japanese mass media system. The obstacles and limitations that all reporters face in the form of rules imposed by the government often lead the discussion on the working environment of journalists.

However, most accounts describe the journalists in Japan as a homogenous group, where its members are subject to the same limitations uniformly. There are some instances where attempts to divide journalists into those working for major companies and freelances are made, but there is still a tendency to generalize (Freeman, 2000). Journalists in Japan should not be 'categorized' solely based on their working affiliation or nationality. Different groups of reporters act differently according to their needs, and such needs naturally impact their approach to their job and how they operate in Japan.

When the topic of discussion is the "Journalists in Japan", the definition broadly targets those reporters that simply work and cover information related to the country while also residing there for a lengthy period of time. As previously mentioned, they are usually considered as a homogenous group with just a few distinctions.

In most articles and books that mention the reporters that work in Japan, the are three main groups that are mentioned. The first of those groups are the foreign reporters, in opposition to the local ones. Foreign reporters are generally used as an example of the unbalance of the Japanese system towards 'outsiders'. The most detailed example comes from the book "Cartels of the Mind" by Ivan Hall (1999), where the injustice and unreciprocated mutuality of the Japanese system, especially in the field of journalism, are discussed in detail. Similar, even if not as detailed, arguments are found in other authors such as Freeman (2000), Krauss (1996), and Kingston (2015).

The other two groups are the journalist that works for a major newspaper and thus have access to the kisha clubs, and those that do not (Legewie et al., 2010). These two are interdependent and are the focus of the critique towards the Japanese media system. This division also includes the group

of foreign reporters, that is absorbed into the group of those that do not have ties with the government. Such division is at the centre of the debate on the Japanese media system that covers the unbalanced division of official information. The most relevant work on the subject is Freeman "Closing the Shop" (2000) where she strongly criticises the instrument of such division, the kisha clubs; through her critic of the clubs, she regularly stresses the more favourable position of those reporters that work with major newspaper companies in contrast to "the others" that do not. Such division is present also in the work of many other researchers that follow Freeman's point of view, such as Feldman (2012), Krauss (1996), Kingston (2017), Fackler (2016), and McNeil (2016).

This study brings more nuances to the existing understanding of the Japanese media and tries to convene the complex dynamics part of the work of the journalists.

The fieldwork carried out for this study is the basis for such a statement. There is the risk that a superficial analysis of the activities of the journalists in Japan would not be able to catch aspects that are meaningful for those journalists involved. Limiting the explanation to a generalized group of reporters has this danger, as "class […] does not exhaust the total explanatory space of social actions" (Scott, 1985, 43).

Through the interaction with reporters for the sake of this study, what came up was a complex group of individuals that depending on their obligations and resources had found different ways to operate and collect the necessary information. While the methods journalists use to collect information is certainly important, so is the reason behind such methods.

It is difficult to compile a proper list of all the different kinds of journalists active in Japan, especially given the limited number of reporters that took part in this study. However, the point behind analysing some of the groups of reporters encountered during fieldwork is to emphasize how studies until now failed to recognize an important point within the study of Japanese journalists.

The objective of this section is to point out that different groups of reporters face different degrees of impediment during their work based on the aforementioned obligations and resources.

Access to official sources does not imply that a reporter does not face obstacles during his/her work, and not all reporters outside the kisha clubs may find their situation particularly inconvenient.

It often depends on the obligations a journalist has to follow, the ease to access information and experience.

4.1.1 – The Impact of Nationality: Comparison between Local and Foreign Journalists

The division between foreign journalists and local ones is a fairly common theme when the working condition of reporters in Japan is discussed. This is a division used not only by critics of the Japanese system to control the flow of information but also by those that wish to defend it. The way official sources are precluded to those that are not members of a kisha club is considered by most critics the biggest flaw of the Japanese mass media system. On the other hand, when negative coverage of Japan is carried out by foreign media outlets it is not uncommon for Japanese supporters to accuse the foreign correspondents of "malice or stupidity" in their view towards the country (Komori & Kinmonth, 2017).

It is necessary to clarify that the situation is not as black and white as described, as the working environment of journalists is dynamic. Both parties regularly face a series of advantages and limitations, not always clearly distinct from each other.

When talking about nationality this study does not mean solely the country of origin of journalists, but it also includes the country of origin of the company a journalist works for. This clarification is needed as limitations on journalists may vary depending on their affiliation; someone working for the Yomiuri Shimbun is less likely to incur into restrictions from kisha clubs than a journalist working for Bloomberg (Hall, 1999).

The division between foreign and local journalists is centred around the access to official sources through the kisha clubs. Chapter 2.1.1 covers how access to kisha clubs is managed in Japan, and who are the biggest beneficiaries of such restrictions. But a key aspect of such division is the degree of reliance major local media have on the clubs.

Over time kisha clubs and major Japanese media companies have built a relationship that is difficult to break. Reliance on official sources is a key element in Japan to gain credibility in the eyes of the public, an important factor to sell copies or gain TV share (Freeman, 2000). *Table 2* shows the top mass media 'brands' trusted by the Japanese public on a scale from 0 to 10, respectively from those that know a brand by its name and regular consumers.

If a newspaper or news station does not have access to official sources, its credibility is significantly reduced in the eyes of the public. Table 2 shows how among the first ten most trusted news sources nine are regular members of most kisha clubs, except for local newspapers. All the newspapers in

the chart are regular members of the main kisha clubs, and also have the highest revenue in Japan, indicating the strong relationship between trust and sales for a newspaper (Dentsu, 2019).

Table 2: Brand trust

	Aware	Users
NHK news	6.32	6.90
Nikkei (Japan Economic Daily)	6.09	7.08
Nippon TV (NTV)	5.95	6.35
Local Newspaper	5.94	6.63
TBS news	5.86	6.39
Yomiuri Shimbun	5.80	6.59
Fuji TV news	5.79	6.31
Sankei Shimbun	5.78	6.57
TV Asahi	5.76	6.36
Mainichi Shimbun	5.65	6.45
Asahi Shimbun	5.39	6.47
HuffPost Japan Edition	5.09	
BuzzFeed Japan	5.01	
Weekly Shincho	4.86	6.46
Weekly Bunshun	4.67	5.74
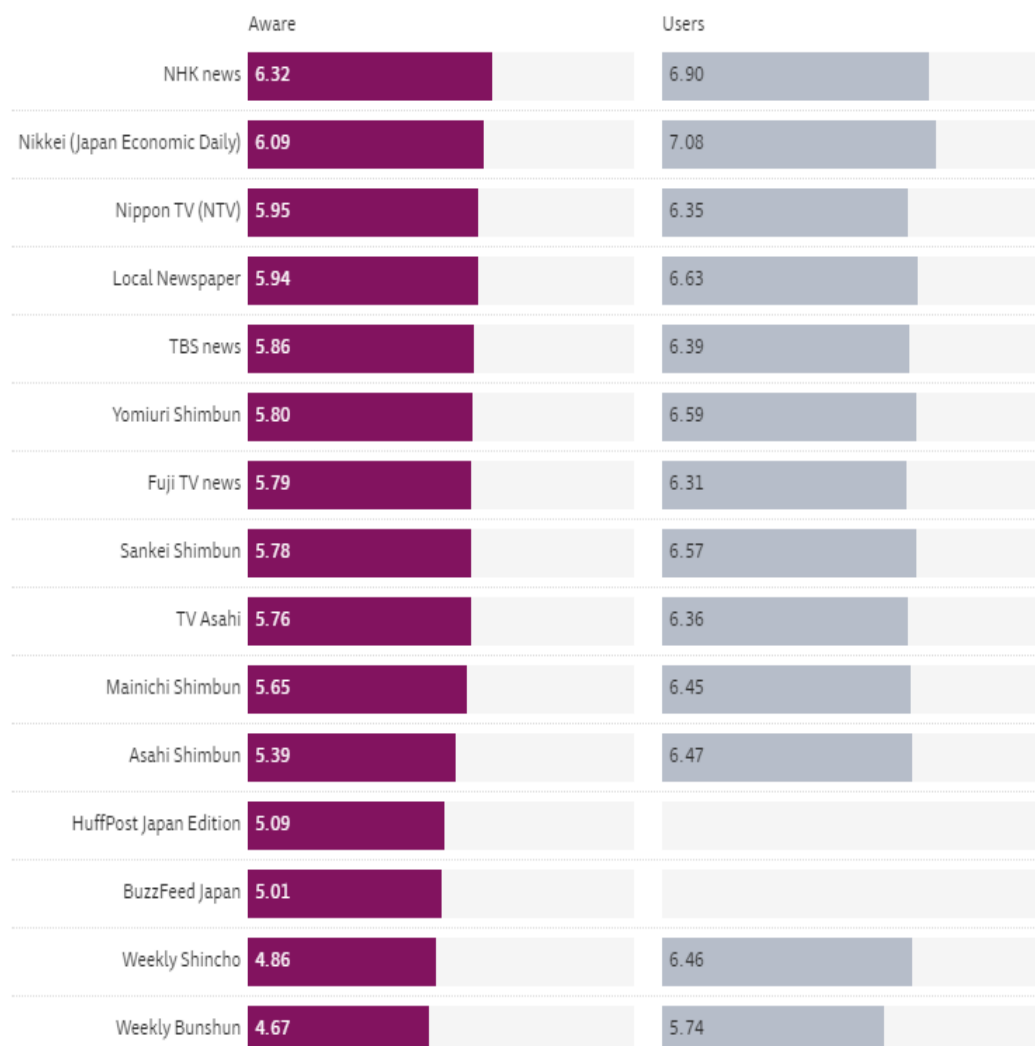
Data from the Digital News Report 2019 by Reuters Institute and University of Oxford

Under such circumstances, the reporters affiliated with the mainstream newspapers need to follow the kisha club system to not fall behind in sales to other competitors that benefit from the same privileges. The mainstream media organizations present in Table 2 certainly have a vested interest in maintaining the situation as it currently is.

In her book, Freeman described how the kisha clubs operate and how they limit the flow of information to only members of the clubs (2000). Some of the Japanese journalists that experienced working both as members of a club and as outsiders, did confirm such a situation.

Yuta was a member of a kisha club at the beginning of his career, before leaving for some time to become a foreign correspondent. When talking about the impact of kisha clubs on his work as a journalist, Yuta emphasized how now that he is not a member of a club anymore it is harder to obtain access to some agencies or departments of the government; this was not a problem when he was a member of the club. The function of kisha clubs as a method to interact with sources exclusive to the members was an aspect of the clubs that was mentioned by every single Japanese participant of this study, included reporters that supported the continuation of the infrastructure.

Due to these conditions journalists that work for major companies often have to engage in self-censorship either because they do not want to lose their privileges or because they know that even if they would try to write the truth, someone higher than them will just not publish the article. For Marc, this can be seen as a sort of defence mechanism, where everyone just avoids the issue of the strict control of what can be published.

> Marc: It is similar to when you are married and know that a particular topic or world will lead to problems and fights. To avoid conflict, you do not speak about that, so you avoid the possible problem acting as it does not exist.

As explained in chapter 2.1.2, the relationship with the foreign media is complicated, to say the least. While the situation is different from the past, and a certain degree of access has been granted to foreign companies, there are still many concerns that afflict those involved. Even if access is given to journalists, the control is still mostly in the hands of the sources (Fujita, 2018).

It is simple to recognize that the NSK does not plan to ease access to kisha clubs for foreign companies. But this does not mean that foreign companies are completely barred out from the kisha clubs. One of the participants, William, explained how his company had some regular members in those kisha clubs that it saw as worth the investment. However, he also mentioned how access could be hindered by protests from those reporters that are already members of the club. It is fair to mention that the limitations that foreign journalists face when it comes to access to kisha clubs are the same ones that local reporters not affiliated with major newspaper companies are subject to. Such barriers are there not to specifically hinder foreign companies, but to protect the interest of the major newspapers and agencies that are part of the clubs (Freeman, 2000).

But in the case of foreign correspondents, the reliance on the information shared by kisha clubs is minimal and generally has no great impact on their work. This aspect of the work of journalists will be covered more in-depth in chapter 4.2.2.

4.1.2 – The dynamics behind journalists' groups

The previous chapter touched on the relevance of the kisha clubs for local major newspapers and how that relevance creates a division between them and those that do not have access to kisha clubs. The division is born out of the need the major newspapers have for official sources of information and their access to them.

This situation is not unique to the two groups just described but is also behind almost all the groups of journalists that form the community of journalists in Japan.

Demand for information and access to sources are the biggest reasons behind different behaviours by reporters. These differences influence not only the actions reporters have to take to complete their work, but also the kind of information they need.

Factors such as the employment status, the identity of the employer, gender, nationality, and working experience in Japan deeply impact the activities of journalists. Under such circumstances the result is not a homogenous group of reporters with the same needs and 'modus operandi', but different individuals that tackle their work with different approaches to obtain the best results with the resources they have at their disposal.

Table 3: Access by group

Nationality	Employment Status	Major News Company	Access to Kisha Clubs
Japanese: 5	Employed: 4	Major: 3	Yes: 2
			No: 1
		National level: 1	Yes: 1
			No: 0
	Independent: 1		Yes: 0
			No: 1
Foreign: 10	Employed: 9	Major: 5	Yes: 1
			No: 4
		National level: 4	Yes: 1
			No: 3
	Independent: 1		Yes: 0
			No: 1

Table 3 presents a rough division of the journalists that participated in this study based on their working affiliation and their access to kisha clubs. This table takes into consideration only access to official sources through kisha clubs, as some reporters may rely on other canals to gather information as covered in chapter 4.2.

Table 3 showcases how even within just a small group of journalists there are already many different variables that may affect the way they approach their job.

Journalists that work in Japan do not fall all under the same circumstances or operate with the same resources. This is clear when just considering the small group of reporters that took part in this study. As table 3 shows, just applying 4 variables it was possible to see how the individuals part of this group have to work under different circumstances. Naturally, if other variables such as gender, working experience, and Japanese fluency are taken into consideration the distinction within the group becomes even more accentuated.

Just through the primary data, it is possible to notice how difficult it is to gain access to official sources of information. Of the fifteen journalists that participated only five had access to kisha clubs through their companies; of these five, four that had access worked for Japanese companies, be it for one of the major ones or at the national level. While in table 3 one of the foreign reporters that work for a national company had access to kisha clubs or at least some of their press conferences, the reporter worked for a Japanese national newspaper. Of all the foreign journalists that worked for national foreign newspapers, no one had access to official sources of information through the kisha clubs. Only one of the reporters employed by a major international newspaper explained that his company had access to some kisha clubs because of the decision to commit some personnel to them. On the other hand, all reporters employed by Japanese newspapers had access to the clubs, save one that at the time of the interview was not a member of any club.

Through this initial division of the participants, it may appear that two-thirds of them will have problems carrying on their work because of the barrier that the kisha clubs creates. Thanks to the constant flow of news that we daily get from Japan, not solely through local news agencies such as Jiji News and Kyodo News, it is clear that reporters are active in Japan.

Then, there must be ways for the journalists to gather the information they need to do their job. The next chapter will cover how reporters manage to go around the limitations placed by the government to control the flux of official information. The methods to gather information differ based on the needs of each journalist, following a pattern similar to what is represented in table 3.

4.2 – Climbing Over the Wall: Everyday Resistance in Japanese Journalism

Access to sources is not equal for all journalists. This is not unique to Japan, but the regulations present in the country make it so that a unique system is born. In chapter 4.1 through the analysis of primary and secondary data, it was possible to see how different groups of journalists do not have the same degree of access to official sources of information. Information is necessary for all journalists, even those that do not have access to official sources. So, for the sake of their job, those journalists had to find a way to gain such information even without official access.

Under such circumstances, the kisha clubs can be considered the biggest obstacle in the way of gathering information, both for affiliated and unaffiliated journalists, according to general understanding (Freeman, 2000; McNeil, 2016; Hall, 1998).

To avoid the barriers placed by the kisha clubs, journalists developed parallel ways to gather information without relying on channels officially recognized.

The idea of everyday resistance introduced by Scott perfectly represents the way journalists in Japan manage to bypass such obstacles and the reasons behind it (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020). The kind of resistance employed by journalists covered in this chapter is characterised by the fact that it is done routinely, has no political motivation, and is not formally organized (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020).

This type of resistance is different from the more direct and outspoken one that could be attributed to the strong critiques of the Japanese media system or the kisha clubs. Direct resistance traditionally has a final goal, be it the change of social rules or the improvement of the conditions of a group (Scott, 1985). Everyday resistance is an act devoid of open conscious opposition, its final goal is not a radical change of the conditions of a group or society; the practice of everyday resistance is tied to short term gain and it is more individualistic in nature (Scott, 1985). Agents focus on immediate benefits, ways to maintain their livelihood, or just finding shortcuts to a goal. The activity of those journalists that every day work to gather the information needed to carry out their work falls under what can be described as everyday resistance under the definition by Johansson and Vinthagen based on the work of Scott. Everyday resistance is a 'quiet' kind of resistance, invisible to the elites, born out of the need to survive and undermine repressive domination (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020). But in a more general sense, everyday resistance is "[…] a resistance that is done routinely (as a pattern of acts), but which is not politically articulated in public or formally organized (in that situation)" (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020, 30).

For the sake of clarity, it is important to note that while a journalist may be involved in everyday resistance it does not automatically exclude his/her involvement in other kinds of more direct resistance. In the book edited by Kingston "Press Freedom in Contemporary Japan" some of the contributors worked or work as journalists in Japan; while their articles in the book may be perceived as a critique towards the Japanese media system, it does not mean that the articles they write in their role as correspondents necessarily have the same final intent (2017). It is necessary to understand that everyday resistance is not determined by the relationship between the agent and the recipient, but it is more of a means to an end (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020).

4.2.1 – Local journalists and the role of the kisha clubs

Local journalists are the ones that normally have more access to official information, especially if they are tied to a mainstream news organization. However, this does not mean that there are no problems between the correspondent and the officials.
This section will focus on the group of journalists that work for local news companies and how they carry out their work. This section will include their thoughts on the current system based on kisha clubs and will mention some of the ways they use to avoid some of the regulations imposed on members of the clubs.

At a first glance, local journalists members of a kisha club can gain a substantial number of privileges in exchange for a "reasonable" loss of freedom in the kind of information they can release to the public. In chapter 2.2.2 it has been explained how, according to Freedom House, Japan is a country that enjoys a reasonably high level of freedom of expression. However, studies have shown that there are some limitations that journalists that operate in the country have to accept, or avoid, to work properly (Kingston, 2017; Freeman, 2000; McNeil, 2021b).
These limitations are relevant especially for those reporters that work for local major newspaper agencies. If these reporters want to maintain their position as members of a kisha club they need to follow the rules set by the club. Major newspaper companies expect such behaviour from their journalists to maintain a constant stream of official information. Due to the high value the Japanese press market puts on official information, major companies need to maintain their access to kisha clubs; through this access, they will not lose to the competition and will be able to maintain their position within the market (Taniguchi, 2018; Freeman, 2000).

4.2.1.1 – Approach to Journalism in Japan

Journalists that have to abide by the rules the kisha club membership imposes are continuously under scrutiny. According to Freeman, a series of formal and informal rules ties the journalists that are members to a kisha club (Freeman, 2000). Such rules are rarely enforced by the sources, only rarely there is the need for them to step up (Freeman, 2000). Usually, the ones that enforce the rules are the journalists themselves, under the fear of sanctions and the subsequent loss of the channel to the official sources of information (Freeman, 2000). Such rules certainly may enforce a climate where journalists are certainly colleagues, but at the same time see each other as competitors. Freeman goes as far as to state that often journalists will feel closer to members of the same club, even if a competitor from another company, than to another journalist from the same company (Freeman, 2000). This behaviour has been noticed by other journalists as well, such as Italian correspondent Pio d'Emilia. During a press conference at the FCCJ, the journalist cited two issues that in his opinion hinder the work of reporters in the country: the first one the law (chapter 4.3.2.3), and the second the lack of solidarity between the journalists that work in Japan (Alviani et al, 2018).

> D'Emilia: […] The other issue is a lack of solidarity. When I say lack of solidarity […] it was one of the most sad, probably also disgusting, things about exercising our work here. It is the lack of solidarity between journalists and other journalists. I believe that journalists […] belong to a certain profession; we do have to share some basic mission, some basic ideas. One of these should be the solidarity.

This competitive climate is certainly not unique to Japan, but it gains different connotations thanks to the way institutions such as the kisha clubs operate in the country. Local journalists are naturally influenced by such an environment. To work under such circumstances, it is then necessary to adapt either by following the rules or bypassing them.

Chapter 2.3 covers how access journalism is the standard type of journalism conducted in Japan, especially by those reporters that work for mainstream companies. This kind of journalism is defined by a close relationship between the journalists and their sources, with the risk of creating a dangerous situation in which the reporters are too reliant on the sources.
Fackler points out that while access journalism has a prominent position in Japan, it is not a practice unique to the country's media and is often found in other parts of the world, like the United States (2017). Access to official sources of information is not considered a problem itself, the issue in

Japan is the over-reliance of the media companies on this type of journalism, creating an almost symbiotic relationship with them (Fackler, 2017).

It is necessary to remember once again that the journalistic system of each country is not the same and develops based on different variables and values (Taniguchi, 2018; O'Dwyer, 2005). This is especially relevant in the case of the Japanese kisha clubs.

According to Pharr, the kisha clubs did not start as a way to control the flow of information, but as a way for the Japanese journalists to ask for access to the Diet, and only through the work of the government they gradually became a way to gain exclusive access to official sources (1996). Later, when the interest over Japan increased and foreign newspapers started a more stable coverage of the country, they were faced with the same system that applied to the Japanese newspapers, and the same restrictions.

The point that needs to be clarified is that this system was born when the foreign media was not present. The Japanese media had to work almost from the beginning with the kisha clubs, and this turned the clubs into an integral and irreplaceable part of the process to gain access to the sources of information for the reporters.

Investigative journalist Yasuomi Sawa, a reporter for the news agency Kyodo News, during a recent interview emphasized how journalists may tend to prioritize access to a source and maintain a "good relationship" with it rather than maintain a critical attitude (Alecci, 2020). A big part of the critiques over the situation of Japan's media lies in the media conglomerates at the head of the industry; they willingly take part and perpetuate the climate created by the kisha clubs, reciprocally supporting each other. Independent reporter Kenta (pseudonym) explained the advantages these big companies gain by maintaining the system alive:

> Kenta: […] this allows them not to face competition outside the other mainstream companies. It may look that there is a competition, but you only have four rivals, so they end up with a preferential position in the market and preferential access to information.

Under such advantageous conditions, it is difficult to think that any company would go against a system that gives it so many benefits. Under such circumstances, mainstream media prefer to prioritize access over other forms of journalism. An example of this is the weak presence of investigative journalism in Japan. In his interview, Sawa states that investigative journalism is growing in Japan, albeit slowly (Alecci, 2020). On the other hand, during the interviews that I had while in Japan, all the reporters expressed their concern over the status of investigative reporting in

the country. Reporter Yuta presented three factors behind the lack of Japanese investigative journalism when asked:

> Nicholas: […] I read that now it is difficult to find investigative journalists. Is it a problem of the way to do journalism in Japan, because of its structure?
>
> Yuta: I think there are three reasons. Investigative reporting is an easy target for legal actions by the people criticised in the stories. […]
> The second reason is that the government is very good at handling the reporters. They have to stay in the press clubs to get news, so there aren't enough people or enough time to go out and do investigative work. And the third reason is the broad range of interest of the population. […] It's not about right and left, it's more than people don't care about politics and only care about their everyday life. Even my wife doesn't know about it. That's why I think that investigative reporting in Japan is so weak because people don't care about big wrongdoings.

Independent reporter Kenta also finds a problem with the freedom of information act, which theoretically grants access to information from governmental agencies:

> Kenta: In Japan, the freedom of information act is very weak, anyone can go to governmental agencies to ask the disclosure of information, but the agency can come up with any kind of unreasonable excuse to reject this request; and if you take this to the court, they will hardly hear you.

It is necessary to point out that the participants are not arguing against the presence of investigative journalism in Japan. Many argued that while its presence is weak, from time-to-time big stories come up from investigative journalists that bring up important issues. The most mentioned case during the interviews has been the Olympus scandal of 2011[19], where a Japanese reporter from the magazine FACTA unveiled for the first time the economic losses of the company. But all the

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[19] In 2011 the Japanese company Olympus, at the time the third largest Japanese company, had been discovered engaging in improper accounting practices for over 20 years. Trough illegal measure it covered its financial losses. The case resulted in the waste of hundreds of billions of yen in shareholder value.

participants that mentioned this case also stressed how the case gained relevance only after it was published in a second moment by The Financial Times. Before it gained international relevance, it was not covered in national newspapers.

4.2.1.2 – Local View on Kisha Clubs

The main issue remains the role of the kisha clubs in the local journalistic process. The image that we perceive remains unchanged by what Freeman described in her book as "Information cartels", a closed shop where a selected group of individuals has proprietary access to the official sources of information while striving to please the sources themselves in fear of losing their exclusive access (Freeman, 2000). This situation was the focus of the UN special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, in his report about Japan in 2016. This report was written after a trip to the country and meetings with various journalists. One of the main issues he found in Japan was the dependency of the reporters on the government and the pressure that the government could apply on those that report unwanted information (Kaye, 2017).

Despite the reliance journalists have on the kisha club infrastructure a critical view was prevalent within the Japanese reporters that took part in this study, even those working for mainstream newspapers. This new awareness could be the result of the debate over freedom of speech in Japan, and the presence of many journalists, especially affiliated with mainstream media newspapers, that experienced working abroad. While this critical view may not be the mainstream opinion within the circle of Japan's reporters, it certainly gives a different perspective from the image of a monolithic body of reporters usually described by works such as the one from Freeman.

Through the interaction with Japanese reporters, the situation described by Freeman regarding the monopoly of official sources appeared unchanged in the twenty years that separate the publication of the book to the current time, at least concerning Japanese reporters. As mentioned in chapter 4.1.1, Yuta and the other Japanese reporters did find difficulty in accessing official sources tied to kisha clubs when they were not members of a club anymore or never had access. The testimony of these Japanese journalists validates the image given by Freeman, where kisha clubs are infrastructures used to maintain tight control over the official sources of information and over the mainstream media that divulges such information (2000).

During my research, a total of five Japanese journalists took part in the study. All the participants are male, and all work in the Tokyo area. Table 4 shows that when asked to share their experience

with the kisha clubs, four of them had been members of one and used their services to gather information.

All the reporters that worked with the kisha clubs were employed by one of the mainstream media organizations that are allowed resident journalists in the clubs, or at least organizations that had a regular membership that gave them the right to take part in the regular press conferences. Only one of the participants was an independent reporter and did not have any kind of access to the kisha clubs.

Table 4: Local journalists relation with kisha clubs

Name	Employment status	Experience abroad	Kisha club relationship	Attitude towards clubs	Need of reform
Keisuke	Employed	Yes	Previous access	Supportive	Yes
Kenta	Independent	Yes	No access	Against	Yes
Tanaka	Employed	No	Previous Access	Supportive	Yes
Taro	Employed	No	Access	Supportive	n.d.
Yuta	Employed	Yes	Previous access	Supportive	Yes

Of all the participants Kenta, the independent reporter, was the only one to express strong opposition to the kisha club infrastructure. His critique was founded on the monopoly on information the club members enjoy, and the favourable treatment the media organizations receive from the government. The other four journalists expressed their support for the kisha clubs, but not with an adamant position; they preferred to highlight the positive sides of the infrastructure. In his questionnaire, Keisuke expresses his belief that the privileges of the clubs should be maintained, as they give access to exclusive documents, like court records, that normally would be difficult to obtain. He also points out how the beat reporters at the kisha clubs use the institution to cultivate their source of information through their efforts, something that other journalists can also do even without access to the kisha clubs. Beat journalists focus on covering one ministry, agency, or organization, and this forces them to stay in one location; in Japan, this location is usually the kisha

club tied to the organization they are covering (Taniguchi, 2018). This position has been criticized often during this study by a part of the foreign reporters and by the independent Japanese reporter. What most of these critics worry about is the closeness that journalists and the sources, and the possibility that this closeness could compromise the objectivity of the journalists.

Despite these concerns, because of the way mass media has developed in Japan, it has become difficult for the big Japanese media companies to not rely on the clubs as the members receive substantial resources and advantages from being official members.

This reliance on the kisha clubs and official sources certainly does not appear as pertinent to the everyday resistance that is the focus of this section; however, Scott in his studies covers similar circumstances, when discussing how at times the "oppressed" may instead choose to comply to the instructions of the power (Scott, 1985).

Those that carry out acts of everyday resistance do so because of a danger to their livelihood, or more broadly for necessity (Scott, 1985). Those journalists that have easy access to information through their membership to a kisha club do not have such necessities and find it more convenient to comply with the power rather than "opposing" it.

During his interview, Kenta discussed at length the advantages that these organizations receive from the state and from employing members that are part of kisha clubs. How the beneficiary organizations of the present arrangement hardly wanted changes that could compromise the advantage they have over other publications, both Japanese and foreign, thanks to their status as members. On this point reporter Keisuke, that works for one of the organizations that regularly assigns reporters to kisha clubs, confirmed what Kenta said. Keisuke described how requests for interviews could be denied not only from the government side because of not being part of a club, but also from the members of the club itself, that push to keep conferences member exclusive.

Most of the Japanese reporters that took place in this study were against the idea of abolishing the kisha clubs to allow for easier access to the sources of information. However, they did not portray the current situation as ideal. Apart from one journalist that did not express any opinion on this topic, all the other four reporters pointed out problems that come with the kisha clubs, and ways to bring more freedom to the media. Journalists Keisuke and Tanaka were proactive in giving suggestions on how to improve the current system. Keisuke was aware of the privileges that kisha clubs enjoy from the government, but in his opinion, they should not act as a barrier against other journalists. Instead, more journalists should be given access to the clubs to use those privileges.

> Keisuke: I would like to underline that Club's privilege should not be stripped down, instead they (the clubs) should be open to other journalists or the public.

Reporter Tanaka, that as Keisuke works for a mainstream media organization, similarly believed in the usefulness of the kisha club institution and the need to keep them active. What he denounced was the loss of the original intention behind the establishment of the clubs in 1890 as a way to gain access to information restricted by the government. He expressed the need for a reform of the clubs to improve the rights of the journalists.

> Tanaka: It was an organisation that fought for the right to know and did not mean an exclusive inner circle to get on with authorities. We need to reinforce this function in kisha clubs again and establish a new comprehensive journalism organisation to protect and improve the right of journalists.

This critical point of view shared by these reporters is something that is hardly mentioned when discussing the kisha clubs. This could be traced back to many reasons, like the lack of study on the perception of the kisha clubs from the perspective of Japanese journalists, or the development of a new mentality within the ranks of said reporters. It is nevertheless important as it gives us a perspective of how the kisha clubs are perceived within the ranks of the local reporters and how their perception may have changed during the years.

4.2.1.3 – Avoiding the Limitations of the Clubs at the Local Level

While many journalists that work for major newspapers may rely on the kisha clubs, and some of its critics do not see the need to dismantle them occasionally local reporters need to find ways to bypass its limitations. There are cases when local reporters can break the rule of self-censorship intentionally. This has happened in the past, and it often involves information that can be considered scandalous or delicate, whose circulation is limited by kisha club rules.
Such actions can be viewed as acts of everyday resistance, as they are fairly common and have the final goal of easing their job and jumping over the limitations imposed by club membership (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020).

Local reporters, often members of kisha clubs, that come up with information that they know they cannot publish in a mainstream newspaper, can use other ways to make the news public. This usually involves the reporter working as a ghost-writer for a weekly magazine. These magazines do

not have access to the kisha clubs, but because of this are also free from its rules. In the past, such magazines have been the firsts to circulate stories on delicate topics such as scandals involving politicians or the imperial family. This practice is mentioned as one of the reasons behind the low interest from magazines to ask for access to kisha clubs (Freeman, 2000).

Another ploy used by local reporters is leaking the information to foreign media so that the news can be published first outside of Japan. These methods have been mentioned more than once by the journalists that took part in this study, especially the ones with more than twenty years of experience, and were also mentioned by Legewie while writing about the impact of media outside the kisha club infrastructure (2010). The advantage of these actions for local reporters is that the barrier that protects delicate news is broken, and by someone that is not in danger of receiving retaliations by either the club or the sources; thanks to magazines and foreign media they are able to quote the news as a rumour, indirectly bringing up the possibility that such rumour is true while avoiding a direct assault toward the source. A prime example of this was the case of Empress Masako, whose mental health issues were first brought up by newspapers in the UK. As Michael highlights, only after the story was reported in the UK did Japanese newspapers start to talk about it, citing directly what was published in Great Britain.

This behaviour has also caused worry, as investigative reporter Tateishi Yoichiro expresses his concerns in the April edition of Nikkan Gendai ("Reporter lambasts", 2020). The propensity to cite the foreign media on controversial or risky subjects rather than to take the initiative and report on their own is condemned by the reporter as a sign of the fear for the government that is present within Japan's journalistic circle.

4.2.2 – Everyday Resistance in Not-Mainstream Journalistic Groups

For the reporters that have access to official sources of information through compliance, the kisha clubs may be the optimal way to create a stable workplace where their livelihood is not at risk. On the other hand, many journalists are independent or work for international newspapers or news agencies that may not enjoy such "privileges". These journalists are some of the strong voices that ask for a revision of the clubs, or at least a more open system, to gain access to official sources of information.

While access to official sources is restricted, it does not preclude reporters from carrying out their job. The journalists that do not, or cannot, enjoy the benefits of membership to a kisha club have found other ways to collect the information necessary to carry out their job in Japan. Through the

theory of everyday resistance and the primary data gathered, this section will cover the dynamics and the methods behind the work of foreign correspondents in Japan.

Chapter 2.1.2 touched upon the issue of access for foreign correspondents to the kisha clubs. The restriction on access has often been at the centre of the criticism towards the barriers that journalists face in Japan. An example can be found in the 2016 report from UN special rapporteur Kaye and his concerns on the kisha clubs (Kaye, 2017). Some may debate the accuracy of such critics, citing a lack of trustworthiness in the reports made by foreign journalists blinded by the desire to sensationalize their article on Japan, or influenced by western values incompatible with the one employed by Japanese reporters; an example of this opposition can be found in Kinmonth and numerous discussions about reporters in Japan that can be found on Twitter and other similar social media (2017).

 Testimony of the difficult relationship between kisha clubs and foreign reporters is the description by McNeil of the treatment foreign correspondents endured despite the 1991 resolution (2016). What transpires is that some steps have been taken to grant more access to kisha clubs to foreign reporters. But despite these steps forward, there are still many obstacles that may put a limit to interactions or access to the official sources of information.

This study found a situation slightly different from the one usually presented when describing the status of foreign correspondents in Japan. While some difficulties in obtaining information are present for the foreign correspondents, from the data gathered the situation appears different than the picture transmitted by sources like Kingston (2017), Freeman (2000), and RSF. The tone used to describe the situation of Japanese media by these experts usually depicts a situation where reporters continuously struggle to gather information, frequently hindered by the system while trying to perform their job.

However, during this study, a different situation than the one of continuous struggle was described by the journalists. The ten foreign reporters that took part in this study had different opinions about the kisha clubs. Their evaluation was influenced by several factors such as the time spent in Japan, their professional affiliation, and the kind of work they are required to carry.

Table 5 gives a general idea of how the ten foreign participants perceive the subject of the kisha club infrastructure and how it impacts their work. Between the majority of the foreign reporters interviewed, almost everyone shared a critical view of the kisha club infrastructure. Some of them were strongly critical of the role that the kisha clubs play in managing access to official sources, but surprisingly those that were strongly critical amounted to a relatively small number. The other

journalists that expressed a negative opinion regarding the kisha clubs were fairly moderate in their tone, and their criticism was founded on a desire for fairness and a sense of duty toward freedom of speech, rather than on a direct impact on their work and personal interest.

Table 5: Impact of kisha clubs on foreign journalists

Name	Employment status	View of clubs	Access to clubs	Impact on work
George	Employed	Strongly negative	Accredited	Relevant
Joseph	Employed*	Slightly critical	No	Minimal
Julian	Independent*	Negative	No	Minimal
Marc	Employed	Negative	No	Minimal
Michael	Independent*	Negative	No	Minimal
Miles	Employed	Critical	n.d.	Minimal
Sam	Employed	n.d.	Accredited	Relevant
Sofia	Employed	Critical	Accredited	Relevant
Tina	Independent	Negative	No	Minimal
William	Employed	Neutral	Accredited	Relevant

*At the time of the interview/questionnaire, may not reflect the current employment situation

In Table 5 we see that those journalists that had some degree of access to the clubs did rely, at least partially, on the official channels of information. The correspondents that did not have direct access to the information dispensed by the clubs were not heavily impacted in their ability to work. None of the correspondents that took part in this study was a resident journalist of any club, at least from what was explained during their interviews. Some of them were accredited, meaning that the company for whom they work had official access to all or a part of the kisha clubs.

Marc (pseudonym) is a foreign reporter that has worked for over twenty years in Japan and had fought for long against the kisha clubs and in favour of a more liberal press in the country; during a direct interview, he explains his point of view as a correspondent on the issue of access to the kisha clubs.

> Marc: […] We (the journalists) are not required anymore to constantly know and be updated instantly on what is going on, especially regarding politics. That is why even though the

battle at the institutional level should still be fought because there is still discrimination, the limitations have lost effectiveness.

This part of his interview gives a new perspective on the condition under which the foreign journalists in Japan operate. While access to the kisha clubs is still an issue, it does not have the central role that many critics believe it has. Under the circumstances described by Marc, the modern journalist does not need to rely heavily on the sources of information managed by the kisha clubs, and through other channels can collect the necessary documentation. The use of these other channels of information is the foundation of the everyday resistance that reporters in Japan carry out to jump over the barriers placed by the elite.

4.2.2.1 – Leisurely gathering information

What the previous statement by Marc highlights is a new perspective on the condition under which the foreign journalists in Japan operate. Because of how reporters today are expected to work, access to kisha clubs is not as urgent as it was before. According to Marc, the modern journalist does not need to rely heavily on the sources of information managed by the kisha clubs, and through other channels can collect the necessary documentation. Of course, this does not apply to all the reporters in Japan. Different variables influence the need to rely on the kisha clubs, above all the need to receive the disclosed information in the shortest amount of time as possible.

Ivan Hall describes in his book 'Cartels of the Mind' (1998) how access to clubs for foreign correspondents was a big problem and a big source of distress. Access to official sources of information had a higher priority than today. Today there are other means to obtain the necessary information even without being an accredited member of a kisha club. While Japan still has an important role in the world, interest from the public is not as high as before, and newspapers adapted to this situation. Japan is regularly covered in newspapers, but not as much as twenty years ago. According to Joseph, foreign reporters not affiliated with newspapers or news agencies that require a constant influx of information, such as Bloomberg or the Wall Street Journal, do not have tight schedules as their colleagues. The difference is due to the low priority of articles over issues regarding Japan. At least in Joseph's case, if something unexpected occurred, for example a terrorist attack somewhere in the world, his article on Japan would be likely delayed and published at a later date. This is a trend that can be seen in most publications around the world, where Japan is mentioned periodically, but not constantly as during the period of its economic boom. Outside

Japan, quick official information is not always of the utmost priority for newspapers, except for extraordinary events or economic news.

If there is a need for official information many journalists use the major local newspaper and news organizations themselves as sources. Many foreign correspondents that are not in a hurry, can use the official information that such newspapers publish. These newspapers work as a bridge between the kisha clubs and the reporters that do not have access.

Some journalists do not need to gather news as soon as an event takes place, as their employers may regard such news with low priority. A Japanese national newspaper needs to deliver news to the public as fast as possible, or at least as fast as its competitors. The mainstream Japanese newspapers rely on the kisha club to deliver official news before the other competitors while maintaining a balance with the other members of the clubs. Foreign media, apart from news agencies and financial newspapers, usually do not need to distribute news in real-time. Outside of special occasions, like the 3.11 Fukushima disaster, newspapers do not necessarily prioritize articles about Japan; this gives the reporters more time to collect information.

The six journalists in table 5 that deemed the impact of kisha clubs on their work minimal, are all independent or write for newspapers that do not have to cover Japan daily. On the other hand, the four reporters that described the access to the kisha clubs as relevant to their job, all work for newspapers that have Japan as their focus or that cover financial issues.

The analysis of table 5 clarifies that even though most of the foreign reporters hold a critical view of the kisha clubs, this does not translate automatically into a negative impact of the clubs on the work of the same reporters. Foreign reporters may view the kisha club infrastructure in a more negative view than their Japanese colleagues, or just be more vocal about it, but from their response to the questionnaires and interviews these critics are based more on ideological and ethical beliefs rather than the impossibility to carry out their job. This does not exclude the fact that the kisha clubs often work as a wall that blocks foreign and unaccredited journalists to access information from official sources. Access to these sources would certainly ease the work of many reporters.

4.2.2.2 – Different standards regarding the value of information

While the information from the kisha clubs may be valuable for most local journalists, this does not necessarily apply to foreign correspondents. The Japanese news market highly values the officiality of the source, even at the cost of a critical analysis of the information. Depending on the publication one works for, such limitations do not apply to journalists that work for international companies

(Germis, 2015). Even when a foreign company manages to become a club member, foreign reporters still face the possibility of isolation within the club itself. Also, some journalists find that the information gained through official canals are not valuable enough to pay for the limitations one has to abide by to gain access. The experience of William and Julian (pseudonyms) gives a clear idea of such mechanics and the reasons behind them.

William and Julian worked for two different important economic newspapers. William has worked in Japan for close to 10 years, and Julian for almost 20. During the interview when asked about the impact of the kisha clubs on the work as reporters, especially as foreign ones, they both mentioned their experience with the Bank of Japan. From the experience of William, the kisha clubs were not as close and difficult to access as often described. While there are limitations toward news agencies under the direct control of a government (ex. Xinhua), generally foreign journalists can gain access to kisha clubs. As an example, William cited the kisha club of the Bank of Japan, where the newspaper company he works for had dispatched some reporters as official members, thus gaining regular access to the press conferences held in the club, and the chance to ask questions during them. It was also mentioned how access is not always easy, as in some cases the local members of the club have the right to reject new members or just give access to reporters. According to William, the biggest obstacle toward the access of a club lies in the number of resources a newspaper is willing to spend on it. To be recognized as an official member of a club, a reporter needs to spend a certain number of hours every day inside the club; therefore, the company that wants access to the club needs to commit a certain number of personnel solely on the coverage of that club. Even major international newspaper companies have just ten to twelve employees in the country and need to carefully plan how to manage them, according to participants. That is why, using the words of William, "[…] gaining access to a kisha club involves big obligations and it is hard to negotiate".

Julian is a reporter that similarly has worked for many years in Japan and has a lot of experience in the field of investigative reporting. For a while, he was put in charge of the coverage of the Bank of Japan, and while not an official member of the related kisha club, he asked permission to attend the press conference organized by the bank. In his case he found an obstacle in the chief of the club tied to the bank, that refused to let him attend; after various requested he was allowed to attend but only as an observer, a position that interdicts its holder from asking questions. Under such limitations, Julian decided to not attend the press conference, as information gathered that way would not have been as valuable.

These kinds of restrictions are not unique to Julian's case, as I was told of similar circumstances in other clubs by other participants, where reporters not barred from participating would simply not receive permission to ask questions.

In the case of Julian, access to official sources was not considered relevant enough given the prohibition from speaking. Access to the content of the press conferences can be accessed at a later moment through what has been published by other newspapers, and some ministries even stream their conferences. In the case of investigative reporters, while official sources are always welcome, there is often a personal network of sources, preexistent or built during the search for news, that the reporter can use to collect relevant information on the topic of interest. In the situation described by William, access to official sources is relevant to those major international newspapers that value the officiality of the information; this is the case of sensitive fields such as economy and stock exchange.

Currently, this stamp of credibility can be considered one of the few advantages foreign reporters gain from having access to a kisha club. William explains that it is possible to take part in news conferences and even ask questions during them if you are a member, but foreign reporters still are precluded to attend what he defines as "background briefings", or *kondankai*. Background briefings are described as meetings between official sources and local reporters where the source gives off-the-record comments on the topic of interest for the reporters to publish, always without mentioning the source's name (Taniguchi, 2018). These kinds of meetings, where the truly important information is given, are the most important benefit to those part of a club; a benefit denied to foreign reporters.

During my interviews and questionnaires, four participants complained about this aspect of Japan's journalism while they were covering the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. The more relevant information on the decisions of the government regarding how to organize for the games and how to limit the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the schedule were usually given to the local journalists through such informal meetings. It is relevant to specify that such treatment is not restricted only to foreign correspondents, but also the local reporters that are not members of a major mass media company are also subject to it.

The experience of William and Julian shows us a side rarely taken into consideration by the research on the working condition of journalists in Japan. Reporters have different priorities when it comes to the information they need. While both were talking about the Bank of Japan, Julian and his employer did not rate the "officiality" of the information as high as William and his employer,

that spent a vastly major amount on resources on the coverage. Depending on the kind of publication one works for, the need for official sources of information and the speed at which one can get them changes drastically.

For many journalists, participation in a press conference is not worth the energy spent trying to gain access. Even if one manages to participate, it is difficult to obtain the right to ask questions, and if one gains such right there is the possibility that such questions need to be submitted before the conference to avoid uncomfortable topics.

Under such circumstances, for many journalists waiting half a day before the release of the morning or evening edition of the newspapers may lead to the same result as personally taking part in a press conference.

Or gathering information through other channels proves easier and more effective.

4.2.2.3 – The Weight of Experience and changes through time

While all reporters have different needs to gather information, independently from their working affiliation there is one common "tool" that they all use during their work, their experience. Through the experience that the journalists accumulated during their work, they can build networks of sources to obtain the information they need without relying on structures like the kisha clubs. It is also through their experience that journalists know how to interact with the local population and how to keep relevant relationships alive. This tool at the disposal of the reporters is the main protagonist of the everyday resistance they engage in during their work. Thanks to their experience reporters have learned how much they can push the limits before receiving retaliation by the state and how to go over the limitations put in place against them.

The experience and opinions of the participants of this study is a key element needed to acquire a new awareness of how journalists work today in Japan.

Of the fifteen participants of this study, the majority has over fifteen years of experience working as a journalist. The experience collected during those years is not important for this study only because it gives a picture of how reporters perceive their working environment and its issues; this experience is also valuable because it shows what a reporter needs to do to operate successfully in Japan and covers aspects of the job that are rarely considered by other media. Their experience is the main weapon in the hands of journalists in Japan that regularly avoid the obstacles in the way of their job.

As we discussed in chapter 4.2.2.2, while the kisha clubs have a pivotal role with the local mass media, we have established that they are not regarded as necessary by many foreign correspondents; and even local correspondents can work without official access unless they have to cover a specific organization that has its club. Usually, foreign correspondents that need to access kisha clubs are those working for major international new companies.

Technology had gained a central position in society, and this applies also to the job of journalists, as many things have changed in the last years. Internet is certainly the most important change, thanks to how easy it is today to gain access to information through it. Obtaining contact information and reaching sources has become much easier today thanks to social media and similar platforms. Thanks to online publications there is a constant stream of information on the latest news. While Japanese bureaucracy may be criticised sometimes because of its unenthusiastic approach to new technologies and its attachment to fax, a point raised by many reporters, the information revolution brought by the internet has caused some changes lately (Loh, 2021). Marc mentioned how some of the press conferences today, including the ones held by the prime minister, are streamed on the internet. This help reporters gather news, without having to rely on the publications of competitors that are members of the club. Because of this today the issue of being barred from attending a conference has lost relevance both in its social and political aspect, says Marc. Reporters have access to the content of a press conference without having to fight for physical access to it; something that is most of the time equally frustrating as there are still the limitations imposed by the role of observer, the solid possibility of not having your questions answered, or just not being able to take part in the background meetings (Taniguchi, 2108).

While some things do indeed change, some skills remain relevant despite the passage of time. An aspect that has been stressed over by many reporters is the need to build and maintain a network of sources.
In Joseph's opinion, there may not be another career where it is vital to keep the contact with your source alive as within journalism, and this is even more relevant within East Asia.

> Joseph: This is also typical of East Asia, where you have to create a relationship before you do business. And then once you have a relationship you do business, like Japanese companies that keep doing business with the same companies even if the competitor is better. This faithfulness is present in our works too, and the way bureaucrats are moved around all the time makes almost prohibiting the creation of these kinds of steady relations.

Relationship with the source needs to be nurtured. Sources may fear that there could be some negative effect if the information is disclosed, and this is not limited to politicians and bureaucrats, but normal citizens too. Marc defines this attitude with the adjective "mendokusai" (めんどくさい), meaning 'bothersome' in Japanese; specifically, as something that will potentially just bring problems. According to Yuta, this attitude is also behind the attitude of bureaucrats and officials towards most foreign reporters. Because of the lack of a previous relationship between the two, the source is unwilling to disclose information that could lead to him/her if handled wrongly by the other party.

Naturally, this situation makes starting a proper network of sources difficult; but this can be overcome in two ways: reputation and introduction.

If you have good reputation sources are more likely to believe in your professionality as a journalist and share information; a positive reputation can come not only from the reporter itself but also from the company for which he/she works. As an example, sources are usually more inclined to open towards someone that works for a big newspaper with a solid history, like the New York Times, rather than a weekly tabloid. From my interviews, some of the reporters that gave more importance to reputation were freelance reporters. While I managed to contact only a couple of them, they were very open during the study. Tina, a freelancer, explained how from her experience in Japan being a freelancer is usually looked down on, but after building enough of a reputation people started to agree to talk with her, albeit warily.

The other way to get in contact with sources for the first time is through an introduction. From my experience in Japan, while trying to contact reporters for this study, an introduction is the best approach to a new source. While not always happily, introductions result in the source agreeing to a meeting most of the time. This happens for three main reasons: the history between the source and the person that introduces you, the reputation that the backer has in the eyes of the source, and the difficulty the source may have in denying a favour to an acquaintance.

During my research in Japan, I was able to use both of these ways to start contact with a source, thanks to the reputation I had as a student of Waseda University and thanks to the introduction of staff members at the FCCJ; both resulted in a higher number of participants than I expected at the beginning.

The last point that the reporters not members of clubs wanted to bring up was the value of knowledge and experience. These two were particularly relevant to those that had been working in Japan for many years. Marc, Joseph, and Julian are some of the reporters with the longest

experience in Japan that I managed to contact. According to them, while there are many problems in Japan tied to bureaucracy and the kisha clubs, the situation is not as bad as it is often described. From Marc's point of view, access for reporters in today's Japan has improved greatly in comparison to years ago and is not as severe as many "newcomers" describe. A problem that in his opinion affects the foreign media in Japan is the lack of recruits, especially from big companies, that hold enough knowledge over the country's history and culture to critically analyse and understand today's events. This situation is the cause behind purely technical journalism, not restricted to matters regarding Japan, that limits itself with just describing rather than explaining.

Access to the kisha clubs is not a necessary condition for being able to do journalism in Japan. The restrains put on the local media by the infrastructure can also work in favour of the foreign reporters. Julian has always been critical of the situation in Japan, but when asked about it, his opinion is all but positive; thanks to the scarcity of investigative reporting by the local media that focuses on access journalism, he was left with a lot of space to properly do his job.

In the end, each reporter has its own circumstances dictated by their working affiliation, nationality, and style of journalism. While it is true that in many aspects the limited access to the kisha clubs can be a powerful barrier, the role of foreign correspondents implies the need to understand what is happening around them and operate as if doing anthropological research, says Joseph. Access to clubs is almost irrelevant if you do your research properly.

From Joseph experience: "If you go to Akita or some mid-sized town, you can just go into an office and go 'Here I am, I want to know that' and the Japanese often are helpful and open to answer". Japanese journalism is not all about the kisha clubs, and answers are available to those that know how to search.

4.3 – Major Issues from the Perspective of Journalists

During the conversations with the journalists that took part in this study, some interesting points were raised regarding two issues that deeply concern their work in Japan. The first issue is the relationship between prime minister Abe Shinzo and the mass media.

During his time as prime minister Abe was heavily criticised for the way he handled the media and the reporters, he was often accused by journalists and researchers of endangering the freedom of press in Japan through restrictive laws and unjust punishments (Mulgan, 2017). From the reports of his actions in the last seven years, the work of Abe could be considered as damaging as the kisha clubs for journalists. However, the testimonies of the journalists depicted a different picture from

what is usually perceived through the critics. From their testimonies, while the administration was often criticised for its attitude towards journalists, in reality little had changed for reporters in the way they carried out their work.

The other issue that came up during the interviews was how impactful Japanese laws are on the work of journalists. Many local and foreign correspondents found laws a bigger obstacle than kisha clubs, which usually receive much more coverage. Because of the nature of the restraints these laws impose when covering personal information, it is more difficult for journalists to avoid their limitations in the same way as with the kisha clubs.

A deeper understanding of these two issues on the journalistic landscape of Japan will hopefully clarify some of the misconceptions around the Japanese mass media system and what are the real problems journalists have to face while working in Japan.

4.3.1 – LDP and Media: The Influence of the Abe Administration

Politicians and the government have always occupied a central position in the discourse about the condition of freedom of the press in Japan (Campbell, 1996). During the last years, one of the key topics in such discussions has been the condition under which both Japanese and foreign reporters had to work during prime minister Shinzo Abe mandate. Several articles described the relationship between the mass media and Abe as tense, going as far as accusing the prime minister of obstructing media freedom (Kingston, 2015).

A point that this study wants to clarify is that, while the influence of politicians and the government in Japan over the reporters is indeed problematic under international standards of journalism, the Abe administration was not as problematic as it may have seemed. It is indeed true that Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and his administration showcased a more aggressive attitude towards journalists and the media in general. However, the real impact of the administration on the work of the reporters and their ability to gather information did not appear to be that relevant; this data comes from the testimonies of the reporters that took part in this study.

Not all the reporters worked on issues that could gather the attention of the Abe administration, nine out of fifteen did regular coverage of topics that the administration would consider more sensitive such as the status of freedom of press in Japan, the comfort women issue, and the role of the LDP in the prevention of the 3.11 disaster.

So, while on the surface the strong tone used by the administration projected a harsher attitude against mass media and reporters, the effect on them was minimal.

Table 6 shows what was the experience of the journalist that took part in this study under the Abe administration. Of the fifteen reporters that took part in this study, only one could not answer as he was active in the country before the second term of Abe as prime minister; his experience is nonetheless precious since it gives us an understanding of the changes between the most recent and pre-2012 LDP administrations.

The primary and secondary data consolidate the idea that while the Abe administration did display a more blatant aggressive stance towards journalists, the working conditions for journalists under previous LDP administrations did not differ that much from the most recent ones. The more aggressive tones used by the Abe administration towards journalists falls under the global trend that sees some government officials in a confrontational attitude towards reporters (Ogata, 2017). Most journalists did not experience relevant differences during the Abe administration while they were getting access to or gathering the information necessary for their work.

Table 6: Issues under Abe Administration

Name	No Issues	Some Issues	Issues
George	x		
Joseph			x
Julian	x		
Keisuke	x		
Kenta	x		
Marc	x		
Michael			x
Miles	N.d.	N.d.	N.d.
Sam		x	
Sofia	x		
Tanaka	x		
Taro	x		
Tina	x		
William	x		
Yuta	x		

4.3.1.1 – Criticism against Abe

Abe Shinzō served as prime minister of Japan twice. His first term was a short one, from 2006 to 2007; on the other hand, his second term lasted from 2012 to 2020, making him the longest-serving prime minister in the history of Japan.

While Abe's government was criticised for various issues, such as the intent to change the constitution or his economic plans, the main focus of this section is the accusation of endangering freedom of expression in Japan and creating a difficult environment for journalists that were willing to criticise his administration (Mulgan, 2017).

The general understanding behind this accusation is that during his service as prime minister, Abe restrained or punished those news agencies and reporters that published information that could affect his and the LDP approval ratings negatively. Through them, he would make an example to the other reporters that in fear of retaliation would limit the critics against him, this in turn would lead to a lower degree of opposition from the media (Fackler, 2017).

This passage will try to explain that, while the Abe administration was indeed vocal in its dislike of criticism from journalists, its overall impact on the work of reporters was minimal and not different from that of previous LDP administrations. An exacerbation of the negative feelings toward the Abe administration concerning the treatment of reporters could be found in the return to a more traditional and restrictive journalistic environment after the more liberal period experienced under the DPJ administration.

As mentioned, concern over the attitude of the Abe administrations towards reporters generated criticism towards the prime minister in fear of an attack towards freedom of expression (McNeil, 2016; Fackler, 2017). As one of the parties directly affected by this issue, many reporters condemned the work of the prime minister and his cabinet. Some of the foreign correspondents that have tackled this issue are Martin Fackler and David McNeil, that with more than two decades of experience in Japan have often expressed their worry over the danger to press freedom in the country. Just to present some of the arguments they make, McNeil in his 2016's article argues that press freedom worsened since the fall of the DPJ in 2012 and the subsequent return of Abe. Fackler also describes a country where the local media works under the fear of possible retribution from the government in case of news pieces that may be considered undesirable (2016).

The Abe administration has been the focus of many researchers in recent years. Jeff Kingston has been one of the more prolific researchers on the topic. Kingston attributes to the Abe administration a worsening of the conditions under which journalists can carry out their job. The administration is seen as one with a strong nationalistic inclination, focused particularly on the objective of amending the 1947 constitution, in particular article 9, and to create a new historical discourse where Japan's

past as a colonial power and role in World War II is different to what is generally accepted today (Yamada, 2017).

The image we get at the end is a country where the relationship between the press and the government is becoming closer, and where the role of the media as a watchdog against abuse of power is becoming meaningless. These opinions are not exclusive of the foreign press, contrary to what critiques online and from sources close to the government are used to accuse but are shared by several Japanese journalists (Komori & Kinmonth, 2017).

An example comes from the FCCJ press conference held on March 24th, 2016 (FCCJ, 2016a). Local reporters Shigetada Kishii, Shuntaro Torigoe, Soichiro Tahara, Akihiro Otani, and Osamu Aoki expressed their anger towards a remark made by the time minister for internal affairs and communications Sanae Takaichi. Minister Takaichi had previously commented how the government could suspend the broadcasting license of the TV stations that transmitted content biased against the government, in line with the broadcasting act. Such a declaration was perceived as intimidation by the government by some reporters.

Various allegations were made against the Abe administrations, especially following some cases where Abe and other members of the administrations publicly expressed their displeasure towards news sources, mainly TV stations, that released content that criticized the work of the government. Some of the more noteworthy include the comment in 2015 by politician Ōnishi Hideo on how to punish media organizations by cutting advertisement, and the stricter control of the government on the NHK, the semi-public broadcast station (Mulgan, 2017; Krauss, 2017). While in these cases the reporters themselves are not directly involved, limitations on their employers can certainly affect them.

Table 7.1: Rank of Japan in Freedom Index 1

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Rank	53	53	59	61	72	72	67	67	66

Data from Reporters Without Borders Freedom Press Index 2012-2020

Another strong argument against Abe came from his implementation of the State Designated Secrets Act (SDS) of 2013. This law will be covered in depth in chapter 4.3.2.1, but during the Abe administration it was often cited as a blatant attack towards freedom of information (Usaki, 2014). Because of the fear that the law would deny reporters access to critical information covering it under the guise of national security, the opinion towards the administration plummeted in 2014

when the law was implemented. Such low opinion is reflected in the position in the ranking of Japan in the Freedom Index since the law came to be, as shown in table 7.1.

4.3.1.2 – Nothing New: The Effect of the Abe Administration on Journalists

The previous chapter showcases how the situation regarding Abe was perceived by the general media and in most academic circles.

But there are a series of circumstances that must be taken into consideration to attain a clearer understanding of the treatment of media under the second Abe administration.

An excellent article written by Cucek describes the situation of the Abe administration from a different perspective (2017). The essay is built around the analysis of the various accusation directed towards the Abe administrations and the evidence used to support such claims.

While the article is not focused solely on the effect of journalists, but on the totality of the Japanese mass media, Cucek raises a question relevant for this study, and the research on the workplace of journalists (Cucek, 2017, 76). Are the actions of the Abe administration in regards to press freedom truly unprecedented? This is relevant because a sudden change in the working environment can have a meaningful impact on a journalist, but if the change is not as unforeseen or violent the effect on the worker may not be as impactful or limiting. Resistance, in general, is born out of discontent or claims of the party that perceives to have incurred losses or faced unfairness (Scott, 1985). Sudden change is more likely to generate that.

An example of this is the challenges and the frustration that many reporters had to face when Trump won the elections in 2016 and his administration opted for an antagonistic relationship with new sources, and the White House correspondents (Ogata, 2017). Ogata narrates how after the inauguration of the Trump administration in America in 2016, the attitude of the new administration towards the press led to a relationship that the chief of the White House correspondents described as "tense".

This was a new situation for the reporters, a period during which the press felt "under attack by the administration" as April Ryan said (Ogata, 2017, 133-134).

As explained before, table 6 shows how the reporters that took part in this study perceived the degree of influence the Abe administration had on their work.

Most of the Japanese reporters did not feel changes during the Abe administration.

The aggressive stance of the government did certainly stir unrest within the reporters; various correspondents expressed their distress over the treatment, or rather the neglect of the government towards them (McNeil, 2016). But this situation is not something new for those reporters that work in Japan. There is no clear evidence that the pressure the Abe administration placed on foreign and local mass media was stronger, or in any way more relevant, than the one placed by previous LDP administrations (Cucek, 2017). The work of almost all the reporters that took place in this study where not disrupted in any particular way during the Abe administration. There were certainly issues in the way Abe behaved toward the reporters, but this stems more from how the relationship between LDP governments and journalists has traditionally been. Looking closely at the previous LDP administration and the one led by Abe, it is difficult to find major differences in their behaviour towards reporters. Access to official sources remains the main issue, and that was regulated by the kisha club's way before Abe came to power.

Historically this mistrust of the media comes from when in 1993 the LDP lost the elections for the first time since 1955, the year when it was founded. The reason behind the defeat of the party was attributed to the influence television and unconventional anchors have on public opinion (McNeil, 2021a). After this incident, the relationship between the LDP and the media changed.

It is almost in the nature of the media to receive pressure from groups that have an interest in influencing their content, especially political groups (McQuail, 2010). There are testimonies of instances where the Abe administration did indeed try to directly put pressure on journalists. This happens usually when journalists do not follow the official narrative of the government, as described by Germis during his five years in Japan (2105). Julian speaks about how he experienced pressure from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from the Prime Minister Office to be more cooperative and adhere to official narratives. After he refused, they cut him off from official information, but "I still rejected this pressure, which had little impact on my reporting because I don't engage in access journalism but favour an investigative approach".

In both cases, the reprimand from officials resulted in no change in the approach to their work, if not in a more aggressive reporting.

The experience of Miles corroborates the idea that the differences between the various LDP administrations when dealing with journalists did not change that much along the way. Until 2006 Miles worked as a foreign correspondent in Japan for seventeen years before going back to his home country. While he has no experience with the second Abe administration, he did point out many elements that remain constants even today and that are mentioned as big problems. They can

be surmised in two points: the difficulty of accessing official sources because of the kisha club system, and the different treatment towards most foreign media. The last one may have changed a bit over time, as a degree of access to a limited number of clubs, for a limited number of foreign organizations has been granted, but overall, it is far from the freedom of access many desires. Miles's impression of Japan is not that much different from that of reporters that took part in this study that still reside and works in the country. The only difference between the two is in regard to the positive experience described by those reporters that could fully enjoy the period under the DPJ. Abe may have indeed tried to muzzle the press, and we can argue that it was successful in his intent. But his success was not his own, it was born out of the structure that was built over the years by previous administrations.

After the analysis of the primary and secondary sources, this study argues that while the Abe administration did display a more blatant aggressive stance towards the journalists, this was not different from past conduct under similar situations during other LDP administrations and was in line with the global development trend of the relationship between reporters and authorities in recent years (UNESCO, 2018).

Despite the problems that Japan may present due to the work of the Abe and previous LDP administrations, from the testimony of some of the reporters that took part in this study Japan is not in any way a country where journalists are actively restricted from carrying out their work. Foreign correspondents Julian, Joseph and William had experience working in East Asia and South-East Asia on many occasions, and even when compared with other democracies such as South Korea, Japan was described as a country where working is not that difficult.

4.3.1.3 – Going Back to "Normal": The Effect of the DPJ Administration

The fall of Japan's reputation in the field of mass media freedom coincides with the return of an LDP led government in 2012, under prime minister Abe. The previous government was under the DPJ and reporters had better access to official sources of information thanks to the more liberal stance of the administration. Form the interviews that were conducted, comes up the image of a general dissatisfaction toward the Abe administration that goes back to the old relationship between journalists and government; such dissatisfaction appears to be caused more by the loss of the freedom experienced under the DPJ administration than particularly oppressive conduct by the Abe administration.

As explained in chapter 2.2.2, the reporters directly involved with the country in question have a say when the Freedom Index is compiled.

Table 7.2: Rank of Japan in Freedom index 2

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rank	51	37	29	17	11	22

Data from Reporters Without Borders Freedom Press Index 2006-2011

Table 7.1 shows the rank of Japan on the World Press Freedom Index from 2012 until 2020, the years of Abe's second mandate. Table 7.2 shows the ranking of Japan before the return of the LDP in 2012 and gives an idea of the reason behind the sudden fall of the country in the Index rankings. The period between 2009 and 2012 highlights the DPJ government in Japan. Lifting the restrictions towards free access to kisha clubs was one of the objectives of the DPJ, and was naturally welcomed by journalists (Makino, 2009).

Joseph clearly remembers that period as one where access to official sources was much easier to get, especially at the time of prime minister Hatoyama Yukio.

> Joseph: When Hatoyama became prime minister [...] I asked the spokesperson of the foreign ministry, whom I knew since before Hatoyama became prime minister […] if anything has changed and he said (regarding the possibility of talking freely with reporters), "It's a whole new life".

It is only after the return to power of the LDP that the ranking of Japan fell once again, as the period of "openness" came to an end. The return to the old routine resulted in a lower rating on the Freedom index, and the more aggressive attitude from Abe further worsened the situation.

The aggressive stance of the government did certainly stir unrest within the reporters; various correspondents expressed their distress over the treatment, or rather the neglect of the government towards them (McNeil, 2016). But this situation is not something new for those reporters that work in Japan. There is no clear evidence that the pressure the Abe administration placed on foreign and local mass media was stronger, or in any way more relevant, than the one placed by previous LDP administrations. The work of almost all the reporters that took place in this study where not disrupted in any particular way during the Abe administration, as table 6 shows. What instead is highlighted by some of them, especially those more critical of the last administration, is the time under the DPJ administration.

As previously mentioned by Joseph, this period was marked by an open relationship between official sources and reporters, with an easing of numerous limitations usually placed on journalists, especially foreign ones. As table 7.1 shows, 2009-2011 is the period during which Japan attained a high ranking within the Freedom Index, and this coincides with the rise to power of the DPJ. The comments of some participants bring up the image of a strong nostalgia to the time when the DPJ was in power and official sources were more accessible; such nostalgia could also be one of the most relevant reasons behind the harsh evaluation of the Abe administration. The almost opposite treatment of the new LDP administration in comparison to the DPJ administration, especially under Kan Naoto, was an unwelcomed return to the old ways of the government – media interaction for many.

A bit more than half of the participants commented on how during the DPJ administration the country experienced a higher degree of press freedom. This period under the DPJ was the real exception, not the one under Shinzo Abe. Prime minister Abe's administration did not change in any remarkable way the dynamics of the relationship between journalists and government that was present before the rise to power of the DPJ; it stayed in line with what previous LDP administrations did. This situation appears to have persisted with Abe's successor, Suga Yoshihide. The new prime minister has not tried to improve his relationship with the reporters, with commentators describing the present situation as worse than the previous administration (McNeil, 2021a). His tendency to avoid questions and manage what to say has been labelled problematic. Therefore, it can be argued that the reputation of Abe as an oppressor of the press be in some ways considered too severe when compared to the actual impact his administration had on the work of journalists.

4.3.2 – The Law as a Sword of Damocles

During a press conference at the FCCJ in 2016, UN special rapporteur David Kaye expressed his concern over the recent State Secrecy Law, officially the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets[20], enacted by the Abe government (FCCJ, 2016b). While the law was never implemented, Kaye saw it as "a sword of Damocles" over the head of journalists in Japan (FCCJ, 2016b).

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[20] Act No. 108 of 2013

In Japan freedom of expression is guaranteed by the 1947 constitution. Article 21 declares: "Freedom of assembly and association, as well as speech, press and all other forms of expression, are guaranteed. No censorship shall be maintained, nor shall the secrecy of any means of communication be violated". By the standards of other democracies such as the USA, this law highlights a strong commitment to the defence of freedom of speech.

During the press conference, Kaye strongly praised the commitment of the Japanese society to freedom of speech, press, and the prohibition of censorship reflected by the constitution (FCCJ, 2016b). However, while he praised the foundation for freedom of expression of Japan, he expressed concern over some trends that could endanger such freedom (FCCJ, 2016b). One of those was the effects laws had on the work of reporters.

After the UN special rapporteur officially submitted his recommendations, the Japanese government issued its own commentary of the same. In its response, the government strongly stressed the commitment of Japan in defending the freedom of expression explaining that "It cannot be restricted unjustifiably even by laws. In Japan, freedom of expression is fully guaranteed" (State of Japan, 2017).

However, during the interviews for this study what bothered most of the reporters, especially the local ones, was not the kisha club infrastructure or the hostile atmosphere of the Abe administration. Reporters expressed their frustration on how laws are usually the biggest obstacles in the way of their work. The issue does not lie in the direct use of the law against journalistic activities, but how some laws can stall for time while covering an event or put pressure on reporters without the need to use them. When someone does want to impede the progression of the work of a journalist, laws do not work as a barrier that blocks access to information, but they are a bog that slows down the process so much that it often discourages reporters to pursue that information. The fear of legal repercussion and time stalling has the power to actively stop reporters from even beginning to cover certain topics.

4.3.2.1 – More of the Same: The State Designated Secrets Act

One of the most recent and criticised laws that can affect the work of journalists is the State Designated Secrets Act (SDS) of 2013.

On paper, under this new law heads of government agencies have the power to designate as secret information matters covering the four areas of defence, diplomacy, counterespionage, and

counterterrorism (Usaki, 2014). While there are some aspects considered problematic within the law, the one that gathered more attention in which information can be designated as confidential.

The term "designated State secrets" is not clearly defined and leaves a lot of decisional power in the hands of the government. Lawrence Repeta gives a clear analysis of the legal effects of the law and its possible implications (2014). A major point that he raises is the vagueness of what the law designates as a secret; the original text of the law redirects to the appendix of the same for definitions on what kind of information falls under the scope of one of the previously mentioned four categories, but when the appendix is consulted it contains only a list of examples, providing administrative agencies with a large amount of flexibility (Repeta, 2014).

After this law was promulgated, many criticised the Abe administration, regarding this as a blatant attack towards freedom of expression and as a tool to exert his nationalistic agenda (Stockwin, 2017). Others pointed out how this law could "provide unlimited power for bureaucrats to conceal information as they please" (Repeta, 2014). Great concern was expressed toward the effect of this law on journalists. A point was made that government officials could design as national secret information that was deemed damaging for themselves; this would not only prevent journalists from obtaining such information, actively stopping them from acting as a watchdog against governmental malpractice, but subject them to possible legal threats if they still managed to obtain and publish such information (Yamada, 2017).

Seven years after the enactment of the law, the impressions of several journalists depict a situation way different than what was feared at the beginning. The SDS did not change how reporters get their information, nor did it represent a real impediment to their work. This is because this law did not add any obstacle that reporters already must face to obtain information or access to sources. Fourteen of the fifteen reporters that took part in this study did not experience any remarkable inconvenience to their job because of the SDS; the remaining reporter was not in Japan anymore at the time this law was rectified. Michael, Julian, Kenta and Joseph expressed some reservations on the law, specifically on how it gives a new weapon against reporters to the government. Cucek explains that this law does not include a broadening of what is considered illegal behaviour, the main change involves the total length of imprisonment that someone could be sentenced to (2017). That said, it is not an instrument that the government can easily wield. Article 22 of the SDS imposes an important restriction on the use of the law, as Repeta explains (2014, 20).

Keywording declares that "to the extent the newsgathering activities of persons engaged in the publishing or reporting industries exclusively seek to serve the public interest and do not violate the law or employ extremely inappropriate means" those newsgathering activities (shuzai kōi) will be deemed "legitimate" (seitō na gyōmu).

This article makes it difficult for prosecutors to charge a reporter under the SDS. Unless a journalist threatened or manipulated someone into disclosing the information categorized as a state secret, this law cannot be used against them. To arrest a reporter a prosecutor would need to label the act of newsgathering itself as "inappropriate", and this would directly go against the Japanese Constitution's Article 21. While such an action is not impossible, it is unlikely that any profit will come from blatantly taking a political stance towards the guarantees of press freedom in the Constitution, Cucek concludes (2016). Marc's account is in line with this line of thought, asserting when asked about the SDS that the law was a topic that brought much discussion but few actual changes, as Japan is not a country that can apply the law whenever it wants. In his opinion, the biggest effect of the law was to worsen the already rampaging self-censorship, but it did not impact the work of foreign reporters.

Of the fourteen reporters that could give an opinion on the SDS and its effects on their work six expressed their opinion on it. Four of these six had reservations on the law but were not affected by it until that point in time. Of these six that talked about the SDS, five are part of the journalists that I interviewed face to face while in Japan, and to whom I directly asked their opinion on the law. Apart from Julian, that mentioned his worries over the law, while acknowledging that such laws are common also in other countries, the other nine journalists that answered through the questionnaire did not even mention the SDS. This response came both from foreign and local reporters when asked if they ever experienced a situation in which Japanese law impaired their process of gathering information.

4.3.2.2 – The Laws on Privacy and Protection of Personal Information

The SDS did not cause as many problems for the journalists as it was feared when the law was released. However, there exists another set of laws that the reporters identify as obstacles to their work. While not as relevant for foreign correspondents, the laws over privacy and the protection of personal information were considered by many journalists as the real barrier they had to face. This impacts mostly local reporters as these laws are usually applied in cases that involve the police and court cases; these entities are normally involved with news that finds their bigger audience in local

consumers and that usually does not interest international readers, outside of some exceptions like the case involving Nissan's former CEO Carlos Ghosn and his false accounting charges.

According to Repeta and Sawa, these laws often limit the range of their work (2017). The way the identity and the personal information of subjects under scrutiny are hidden, and the harsh punishment that comes to those reporters that manage to obtain such information gives birth to a difficult environment where journalism find flourishing difficult. This is especially relevant for investigative journalism. What these laws bring about is an "anonymous society" (Repeta & Sawa, 2017, 93).

During the interviews and the questionnaire, all the reporters did not directly experience any problem with the law in Japan that interfered with their work. Japanese reporters in particular did not even have comments when asked about their experience with the juridical system of Japan, except for Tanaka and Keisuke.

These two reporters worked for major local newspapers and were very critical of the Protection of Personal Information Act of 2003. This law objective is the protection of personal information, meaning information identifiable to any person, like name, date of birth, individual identification code, etc. According to Keisuke, this law caused the removal of a great variety of information from the public domain under the name of data protection, regardless of the actual validity of such a claim. He also laments how the law caused significant confusion between privacy and personal information.

Privacy is someone's right to keep their personal matters and relationships a secret[21], personal information is usually considered recorded information about an identifiable individual[22].

> Keisuke: I feel there is a de-facto standard that almost any information that identifies or belongs to particular individuals should not be disclosed by citizens without the permission of the individuals. This contradicts journalists' work of news gatherings, especially information with people.

Furthermore, Keisuke and Tanaka denounced how this law is often used as a shield by the private and public sectors. Both expressed their frustration at how government officials often refuse to disclose information to journalists using the excuse that "It may be personal information".

Keisuke: I was outraged when a spokesman from The Japanese Institute of Certified Public Accountants, which is the official body of CPAs (Certified public accountant), said this phrase when I asked how many CPAs with Brazilian nationality are registered in Japan.

4.3.2.3 – Laws as a Quagmire: The Defamation law

Repeta and Sawa in their 2017 article also covered Article 709 of the Civil Code of Japan, the one that defines defamation.

Article 709 declares that a person that infringes the rights or interests of others is liable to pay compensations. Okamoto explains that with 'interest' the law implies the reputation of the plaintiff, an objective appreciation from society concerning personal worth (2012). A major problem with the defamation law is the burden of proof, as it lies solely on the defendants to show that (1) the allegation was of public concern, (2) the statement was made solely for the benefit of the public, and (3) the allegation was true or the defendants had reason to believe that the statement was true (Okamoto, 2012). Whenever a defendant cannot prove one of these three points, the court can rule in favour of the plaintiff; this happens even if the statement was true but lacks the requirement of public concern. Such dispositions put heavy pressure on reporters, that may face legal consequences even in cases where the other party is indeed at fault of whatever the coverage discovered (Repeta & Sawa, 2017).

Such cases have precedents, as in the case of Yokota Masuo and his coverage of Uniqlo abusive working conditions in China in 2010. Uniqlo sued Masuo for defamation, and while after a two-year legal battle is lost, it managed to devastate the reporter (Repeta & Sawa, 2017). This kind of practice was denounced also by foreign correspondent Pio d'Emilia during a press conference at the FCCJ in December 2018; he emphasizes how such legal cases block the right of pursuing the truth, be it right or wrong. Freelancers and small newspapers cannot investigate some stories for fear of the possible financial blow of losing one of these complaints.

Some publications have the financial strength and the will to cover cases that other newspapers may avoid, especially mainstream ones (McNeil, 2021b). A great deal of Japan's investigative journalism nowadays has been attributed to weekly magazines (McNeil, 2021b). While their content may vary from proper investigative reports on government officials to cases of extramarital

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[21] Definition by Cambridge Dictionary
[22] This definition is shared within the legal system of numerous countries (AU, EU, USA, UK)

relationships, they offer an important source of information. Because of their work they often have to face criminal charges of defamation says Shintani Manabu, director of the Shukan Bunshun, during an interview (Oi, 2016; McNeil, 2021b).

Laws are one of the cornerstones of society and are much needed, but there are cases where restraint, common sense, and upholding equally important rights, such as free speech and the right of the public to know, must be taken into consideration. These laws are not unique to Japan, and similar legislation can be found all around the world. But the laws that have been mentioned by reporters, while not exclusive of Japan, put a great deal of pressure on those that work to keep the public informed and discourages the pursuit of information that could result in a legal claim. These laws too many times work as a tool to restrain the activity of reporters and when a case is filed against them, journalists are often at a disadvantage when it comes to defending their rights. For many journalists, especially local ones, these laws are the biggest obstacle during the pursuit of information. This pressure is real, as d'Emilia stresses during his address to the FCCJ.

> D'Emilia: Two issues hinder freedom of the press in Japan […] much more than violence, torture, or threat of death. One is the legal issue […]. There is a habit in Japan that once there is a lawsuit concerning an article and the content of an article […] you do not write any more about it. This is nonsense. This is nonsense because it blocks the right to pursue an issue, whether that is right or wrong. […]

5 – Conclusion

The result of this study reveals a perception of Japan as the workplace for journalists different from its usual depiction in editorial and academic articles. The image of a closed system where the journalists that do not follow the will of the government are forced to scrap for information that the major media companies easily get through their loyalty is not realistic.

Through the analysis of the data, this study presents a new picture of the workplace of journalists in Japan. As the myth of Japan as a homogeneous country has long been debunked, in the same way it is now clear that journalists in Japan are not as uniform as studies until now suggested. Through the experiences of the participants, we find a new perspective on the Japanese media system as the workplace in which reporters have to operate. The flow of time, the shrewdness of reporters, and changes in society all work together to create a dynamic workplace in which journalists carry out their activities; this is different from the environment that in the last 20 years or so of studies has been presented as the norm, seldom changing under the weight of the kisha clubs and the government.

The analysis of the interviews and the questionnaires this study has focused on three key elements that compose the working environment of the journalists that work in Japan. First are the journalists themselves, meaning the individuals that are active in Japan and gather the necessary information. Second are the methods employed by these individuals to gather information, either through total compliance with the system laid down by the government or through various forms of everyday resistance. Finally, the environment in which the journalists operate, meaning Japan; this is not restricted only to the influence the government may have on the mass media system, but also on the effect of the law, and some misconceptions that may distort our understanding of the country effect on the operate of journalists.

One of the points raised in the introduction questioned how journalists were affected by the regulations in Japan. Such a question was raised after the comparison of previous literature and the different interviews with journalists in Japan. While sharing their experience, the different reporters painted a complex picture of how they operate in Japan. All journalists work under the premise that most official sources of information are accessible only through the kisha clubs. Under such conditions, each journalist is affected differently and has to approach his/her work differently according to working affiliation, experience, access to official sources, etc. This situation is different from what is usually portrayed in studies that cover the working condition of journalists in Japan; often the image transmitted is that of a homogenous group of reporters, uniformly affected in

their work by the restrictions put in place by the government, that struggles to carry out their activities.

Through the interaction with the journalists, it can be said with a reasonable amount of confidence that this is indeed not the case.

The study clarified that journalists are a complex group, where the small differences between two similar reporters could lead to different needs while they carry out their work. This can lead to different methods of information gathering, and distinct ways of approaching Japan as a workplace where this activity is carried out.

Previous studies on journalists in Japan has failed to properly consider such aspect of the activity of the reporters. This is understandable, as the topic of the differences within the group of journalists in Japan could easily be the subject of a study by itself. However, the general lack of mention of such diversity has brought an oversimplification of the activity of the few groups usually identified, such as local, local mainstream, and foreign journalists. Such reduction can lead to bias when studying the condition of journalists in Japan and how the working environment of the country affects the concerned subjects.

The study of the experiences of the participants also highlights how even within those groups that share similar opinions about the working environment of Japan or job ethics, present sub-groups that operate differently or do not share the same privileges. Even within the groups of those working for major local newspaper organizations the opinion on the infrastructure of the kisha clubs is not always positive; reporters of such organizations also may find it difficult to gather information from the clubs according to the type of journalism they carry out. Similarly, not all foreign correspondents are excluded from entering the kisha clubs and the information they provide. All these variables add more layers of complexity to how journalists in Japan approach their work, making the idea of a solid and cohesive group unrealistic.

The focus on external factors carried out by other studies, such as the limitations imposed by the kisha clubs, causes a loss in the understanding of the internal dynamics that govern the actions of journalists. These same dynamics are key in influencing the working behaviour of the correspondents, and subsequently the different approaches that each group takes.

The variety of the group of journalists active in Japan is directly tied to the methods every one of them employs to gather the necessary information to carry out their job.

Many of the works taken into consideration for this study, such as Freeman and Kingston, often present the idea of a harsh environment for Japanese correspondents (2000; 2017). The image of a

country where journalists that do not conform to the will of the government have to struggle daily to perform their job is not uncommon when researching the Japanese mass media system.

The accounts from the participants however presented a different scenario from this standard scenario. The journalists active in Japan, regardless of their working affiliation or nationality, did not appear impacted by the limitations as hardly as often described by academic articles (Freeman, 2000; Hall, 1998).

To simplify the explanation of the mechanics behind the incongruity between journalists and academic reports, the concept of everyday resistance initially developed by Scott has been introduced. This theoretical framework has proved effective in the explanation of the dynamics behind the work of journalists.

The most important point that this study found through the interaction with the journalists is the dynamism of their workplace. While articles may present the Japanese mass media system as still and immutable, this is not entirely the case. The workplace is not consisted only of the infrastructures, but also of those that move and operate within it. In the case of journalists in Japan, the kisha club infrastructure can be considered for the most part unchanging, but the journalists themselves have changed since the time of Hall's book and the Asian bureau chief of Bloomberg stormed the Kabuto Club at the Tokyo Stock Exchange in 1993 (Hall, 1998, 93). The minimal changes that the clubs have experienced has a key role in the actions that journalists take in their information gathering. Most of the major local newspapers still rely on the access that their membership grants them because of the system of the value the Japanese news market sees in official information. On the other hand, especially thanks to the prominent role that internet today has in our life, the approach to work for unaffiliated journalists has changed. Information from official sources is easily accessible even when there is no direct access to a club. Save the case when a reporter needs the information as quickly as possible, nowadays it is not usually required for correspondents, especially those working for foreign newspapers, to have the latest news before the others. International newspapers continue to cover Japan, as the country continues to pick the interest of the general public and it still has a central role in the world economy; but its importance has diminished in recent years in face of the growth of China, making news on Japan not a priority on the printing schedule of most newspapers.

This new situation is different from when the kisha clubs were founded, or when the foreign journalist constantly covered Japan during its 'economic miracle' period[23].

Today the journalist not only have other methods outside the kisha clubs to obtain information, but the power relationship between them and the clubs is not the same for everyone. As several reporters are not under pressure to obtain information from the clubs, these cannot impose their terms unilaterally.

Unless a journalist has to follow specific limitations because of requests from his/her employer, such as the officiality of the source, today it is not uncommon to directly jump over the barriers described by previous works (Freeman, 2000; Feldman, 2011).

The analysis of the daily activities of the reporters and how they move within their workplace in Japan gives us a new perspective on their situation while working. The contemporary environment in which reporters are active today is different from the one described twenty years ago. While limitations toward the activities of reporters are still in place, independently of affiliation, they are not as effective as in the past. Today these limitations are most effective on journalists affiliated with local major newspapers, which this way secure a stable source of information. The unaffiliated journalists on the other hand do not suffer the same difficulties as in the past; the technological advancement and a proper network for many reporters have become the best way to collect information without having to rely on the kisha clubs supported by the government. What we have in the end is the picture of a workplace where journalists can carry out their work with reasonable ease; some barriers are present, but they do not present as big an obstacle for journalists as described in most past and recent publications. Through the tools most journalists have at their disposition, avoiding the present limitations appears to be fairly feasible.

Lastly, it has been possible to gain a new awareness of the working environment in which the journalists in Japan have to operate. The participants' point of view has made it possible to understand which aspects of Japan as a workplace have a real impact on their job. A surprise from the analysis of these records is certainly the relatively minor impact the kisha clubs had on many reporters, especially those working for foreign publications. Another relevant point was the actual relevance the Abe administration had on their work. Most reporters were critical of the aggressive attitude regularly employed by prime minister Abe when engaged with critical journalists.

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[23] Refers to the period of significant economic growth that Japan experienced in the period between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War.

However, when talking about the actual impact of his threats and the laws he promoted, no one experienced a significant change in their work. The limitations that were already in place did not change in comparison to past LDP administrations. Differences appeared only when compared to the previous DPJ administration that sported, at least in the beginning, a more liberal and open attitude towards the media.

On the other hand, various reporters have voiced their complaints toward some aspects of Japanese law that at times proves to be the biggest obstacle in the pursuit of information or may make the publication of certain articles problematic. While the laws do not directly deny journalists from carrying out their work, lawsuits from privates may put so much stress or create setbacks so great that they may prefer to avoid covering certain topics altogether. Privacy and defamation laws are certainly not unique to Japan, but the broad definition of what is considered a felony under such laws has been the biggest obstacle while working for many of the participants. While this topic proved to be of great relevance for the working conditions of journalists in Japan, only three chapters of one book exhaustively covered this topic (Stockwin, 2017; Repeta & Sawa, 2017; Yamada, 2017). Other sources preferred to focus on the political aspect of the Japanese media rather than the legislative.

What we are left with at the end of this study is a new understanding of the workplace in which journalists in Japan operate. Contrary to the tones often used when describing the working conditions of reporters, Japan appears to be a fairly tame environment in which it is possible to conduct journalistic activities under a system that poses certain limitations but not to a degree that makes their work particularly harsh. Strong criticism towards the Japanese model of journalism and the workplace that it generates for other correspondents, especially foreign ones, has been prevalent within the articles generally written on the subject of Japanese media, many of which have been consulted for this study. However, the experiences of the interviewed correspondents do not support such a view. Almost all journalists expressed a dislike to certain aspects of the system in which they have to operate. The oligarchy that is at the centre of the system has often been the aspect more condemned, as it often makes it difficult for those that do not follow the flow to work properly within it.

Despite that, all journalists expressed a positive view of their experience in working in Japan. Some cited the greater freedom of speech they enjoy in Japan in comparison to other Eastern Asia countries, or just the possibilities a national market that relies mainly on access journalism has for investigative journalists that know where to search.

This does not mean that what has been written until now on the topic is wrong. Many articles on the

Japanese mass media system have been written by journalists that have experience with working in Japan. However, according to Scott's theory, it is possible to categorize those articles as a form of direct resistance against limitations such as the kisha clubs, some of the laws, and the LDP leadership. Such resistance is different than what is the everyday experience of the journalists, as its sole focus is highlighting some of the more relevant obstacles they face during their work; it does not mean that such obstacles are impossible to avoid when working, just that their absence would make work easier.

The points raised by the study suggest a different environment than what is usually perceived through just the consultation of articles of academic or other nature. Japan has a dynamic workplace in which journalists with different resources and needs have found methods to avoid the limitations that are usually accused of being the cause of Japan's poor working environment for correspondents. These results come from the interaction of a relatively restricted number of journalists, but they do nevertheless open for more study and discussions on the subject. Further research on the dynamics of the different groups of journalists that work in Japan and how they interact with the system will certainly have value towards the understanding of the Japanese mass media system and those that work within it.

What this study reveals at the end is a Japan in which journalists, wherever they work for local or foreign newspaper companies, carry out their activities within a workplace that does not impede their access to information. Some limitations and obstacles unique to Japan are present, mainly due to how the newspaper industry developed after WWII under the guide of the American occupation force and the Japanese government. However, because of the development of new technologies and techniques employed by the journalists, they are not as effective as in the past and allow for local and foreign correspondents to carry out their job.

■ ■

This study was conducted for a master's thesis, and as such, it has certain limitations of the study and methodology. The thesis scope changed during the analysis of the primary data gathered, as the understanding of the working condition of the journalists active in Japan changed. The experience of working on this study has brought up several aspects that could have been carried out differently: a better preparation on how to conduct fieldwork, a bigger number of participants, different questions, more diversity in the gender and working affiliation of the participants, just to cite a few. However, despite some limitations, it is believed that this study accomplished its scope in bringing a new

understanding of the working condition of journalists in Japan and opening the possibility for future studies on the topic. These results come from the analysis that I did of my interactions with the participants, as such it must be noted that any faults or potential errors in the interpretation of such interactions or this study are solely my own.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviewee details

No.	Gender	Age	Nationality	Employment	Years of activity	Years of Activity in Japan	Language	Audience	Exp. outside Japan
Keisuke	Male	Over 50	Japanese	Employed	Over 30	Over 20	Jpn	Jpn	Yes
Miles	Male	Around 60	Western	Employed	Over 30	Around 15	Jpn/Eng	Int	Yes
Tina	Female	Around 40	Western	Independent	Around 15	Under 5	Eng	Int	Yes
Julian	Male	Around 50	Western	Employed	Over 20	Around 20	Jpn/Eng	Int	Yes
Sam	Male	Over 40	Western	Employed	Around 15	Around 15	Jpn/Eng	Jpn/Int	No
Sofia	Female	Around 40	Western	Employed	Under 10	Under 10	Jpn/Eng	Jpn/Int	No
Taro	Male	Around 30	Japanese	Employed	Under 10	Under 10	Jpn/Eng	Jpn/Int	No
Tanaka	Male	Around 50	Japanese	Employed	Over 20	Over 20	Jpn	Jpn/Int	No
George	Male	Over 40	Western	Employed	Almost 20	Under 5	Eng	Jpn/Int	Yes
William	Male	Over 40	Western	Employed	Over 10	Around 10	Jpn/Eng	Int	Yes
Joseph	Male	Over 60	Western	Employed	Over 40	Almost 20	Eng/Other	Int	Yes
Michael	Male	Under 60	Western	Employed (retired)	Almost 20	Almost 20	Jpn/Eng	Jpn/Int	Yes
Marc	Male	Over 60	Western	Collaborator	Over 20	Over 20	Jpn/Other	Int	No
Kenta	Male	Under 60	Japanese	Independent	Over 20	Over 20	Jpn/Eng	Jpn	Yes
Yuta	Male	Over 60	Japanese	Employed	Over 40	Over 20	Jpn/Eng	Jpn/Int	Yes

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for journalists

The objective of the following questionnaire is to understand how journalists who have worked in Japan perceive their work experience. This questionnaire will be used in my research project "How Journalists Perceive Their Working Freedom in Japan" (tentative title).
The data will be used to compare the common perception on Japanese press, described often as a negative environment for journalists and press freedom, and the experience of journalists who are actually in the journalistic scene in the contemporary today.

If you could spend some minutes of your time to answer this questionnaire it would be a great help to my research. Your participation will be a step toward a better understanding of how journalists engage in their work in Japan.

This questionnaire is confidential, and your identity will remain anonymous. Any type of personal information that could directly link to the identity of the interviewed will be omitted in the final version of the thesis and this questionnaire will not be shared with other parties.

The results of this questionnaire will be used solely for the purpose of academic research and without any secondary purpose.
No answer will be taken out of context or in any way the meaning distorted to alter the message it wants to convey.

If the interviewed wishes for his/her name to appear in the final version of the thesis, please agree to the following statement.

☐ I wish for my name to appear in the final version of the thesis in case it is deemed helpful to give credibility to the discussion or to appear between the contributors to the study.

For any question please contact me at the following email:
- Private:
- University:

In case you are interested in receiving a copy of my thesis:

☐ I wish to receive a copy of the final thesis when it will be ready.

GENERAL INFORMATION

GENDER	MALE: ☐	FEMALE: ☐		OTHERS: ☐
AGE				
NATIONALITY				
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	FREELANCER: ☐		EMPLOYEE: ☐	
TYPE OF PUBLICATION (E.g. Magazine, Online Newspaper, Traditional Newspaper, News Agency, TV News)				
YEARS OF ACTIVITY (E.g. 1991-2020 or 29 years)				
YEARS OF ACTIVITY IN JAPAN (E.g. 1991-2020 or 29 years)				
LANGUAGE OF OPEARATION (In case of multiple languages please specify)				
AUDIENCE OF PUBLICATION	JAPAN ☐	INTERNATIONAL ☐		BOTH ☐

QUESTIONNAIRE

1) Have you worked as a journalist in other countries beside Japan?
   If yes, was it in any way different from working in Japan?

2) Have you ever felt that one or more attributes that apply to you (e.g., gender nationality, employment status, etc.) have made it difficult for you to gain access to a source of information?

3) In your opinion, do online news outlets have a significant impact on the media landscape in Japan?

4) Has your work being impacted by the kisha club system?

5) Have you ever experienced a situation in which Japanese law has impaired your process of gathering information?

6) How much time do you usually spend preparing an article on a topic related to Japan?
   What are the factors that influence this process?

7) Did Internet bring a big change in the way you gather information in Japan?

8) What are common social conventions or practices related to the work of journalists especially relevant in a Japanese context?
   Do they matter more than in other countries?

9) Has you work been impacted in any way by measures taken under the Abe administration?

10) How would you describe your experience as a journalist in Japan?