

The Web Revolution

By Noboru HATAKEYAMA

We have stopped publishing *Japan SPOTLIGHT* in printed form. Instead, we decided to publish it as a web-magazine, from this issue. This change in itself, though perhaps a little late, symbolizes the web revolution.

The biggest web revolution has been the political regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt and possibly some other countries that may follow, making use of Facebook and other web media. These regime changes really deserve the name of web revolution. When the editorial committee of this magazine decided early last December to feature the Asian web revolution in this issue, the above movement in North Africa and the Middle East had not yet begun. In the not so distant future, this movement may spill over to other areas including Asia, if people there are feeling suppressed.

Another recent international incident was the diplomatic information leakage called "Wiki-leaks." Although no radical outcome has erupted from this incident as yet, it is certain that overall diplomatic exchanges will shrink because of it. Some diplomats may now think it best not to report to their home countries their real feelings on relations with other countries, out of concern that, if leaked, this information could negatively affect such relations.

Nowadays, a great deal of information floods the world, at least partly thanks to the revolution in information communication technology. The entities that issue information reject censorship. Of course, if news is censored and sifted and only information not harmful to the censoring government is allowed to be communicated, democracy will lose its most basic requirement. On the other hand, if such information is transmitted unilaterally, without any dialogue, it will not serve democracy either.

Censorship of information transmission should not be allowed, but the government should be given a fair opportunity to express its own opinion on the information. Needless to say, every government has its newspaper or homepage, to which people on the street generally do not pay much attention. Mass media in a democratic country often carry information critical of the government. This deepens the relationship between the government and the people in a democratic country. One of the most important tasks in such a country is for its government to come up with a web device to enable people to accurately understand what the government is doing or not doing.

A big earthquake occurred in Christchurch, New Zealand on February 22 this year. As of March 7, 145 people were confirmed dead, with more than 200 missing. A young Japanese man who experienced this earthquake had his right leg trapped under debris. The leg had to be amputated to save his life. In these circumstances,

he picked up his mobile phone and called his family in Japan to explain the disastrous situation there. This information was immediately transmitted to NZ and helped firefighters rescue five people buried alive under the debris.

After I had written about the above NZ earthquake, one of the biggest earthquakes ever in the world, accompanied by relentless tsunami, attacked northern Japan on March 11, 2011 with around 25,000 people killed or missing. This time, the internet including twitter turned out to be a very efficient method of informing your family of your situation in circumstances where telephones including mobile phones were unavailable or out of action.

March is the season for university entrance examinations in Japan. Yahoo Japan, a world-famous search engine, has a column to answer questions from outside, and on Feb. 26 received an inquiry with several questions on mathematics and English. Yahoo Japan, apparently without knowing from whom these questions had come, answered them rather quickly. The inquiry turned out to be from a former high school student who was sitting an entrance exam for Kyoto University, one of Japan's top universities, at the time. Reportedly, he used a mobile phone hidden between his legs to input the questions with his left hand, while using his right hand to write the answers sent back from Yahoo Japan in the exam papers. He was arrested for obstructing the entrance examination and now his dream to become a university student at one of Japan's best schools has disappeared for ever. A similar scandal also happened in South Korea and, as the internet spreads, similar cases may also occur in other countries where competition for entrance exams is severe.

Last year, it was reported that a Chinese fishing boat intentionally collided with a Japanese coastguard ship around the Senkaku Island area. For some reason the government of Japan did not release a video that recorded the incident from beginning to end. Then, I suppose, a frustrated crew member of the coastguard ship obtained the video somewhere and sent it to You Tube, making the collision scene viewable throughout the world via the internet.

These examples show how the internet is now incorporated in many of our activities. The web may be the most convenient tool that human beings have ever invented. However, it is a double-edged sword, as depicted above. It is human beings who use the web; using it, we can change the world in a revolutionary way, for good or for bad.

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