

TRAFFICKING, money laundering, phishing – these words have become common in Japanese newspapers nowadays. Technological innovation has removed the national borders that used to block the flow of money and information, making crime and criminal organizations increasingly borderless. The 2005 White Paper on the National Police Agency (NPA) has a section entitled “The Activities of Japanese Police in International Society.” In response to the growing threat of cross-border crimes, Japan’s police are strengthening their efforts for international coordination.

Among the violations of the Immigration Control Act introduced in this report, international human trafficking has recently surfaced. An American woman arrested in Okinawa in June 2004 forced an undocumented Columbian girl to work as a stripper. The 17-year-old girl was told that working in Japan as a dancer was a well-paid job, and she entered Japan on a counterfeit passport. The broker then took away her passport and told her, “Your travel cost ¥5 million, so you have to work to pay it back!” The broker forced the girl to work as a stripper and prostitute, and of the ¥150,000 she brought in, the broker took ¥140,000. ❷

The White Paper pointed out that underage trafficking like this case is an international problem and 58 criminals were arrested for this type of offense in Japan in 2004. Forty-eight of their victims were Thais, 13 were Filipinos and 5 were Colombians.

According to an NGO report, 99 Thai women have been taken into protective custody since 1997. The women were tricked into thinking they would be working in “beautician-related jobs,” and were later threatened that if they tried to escape, their homes in Thailand would be burned down. They were also physically abused if they did not accept to service large numbers of customers. This example demonstrates the serious damage caused by of trafficking-related crimes.

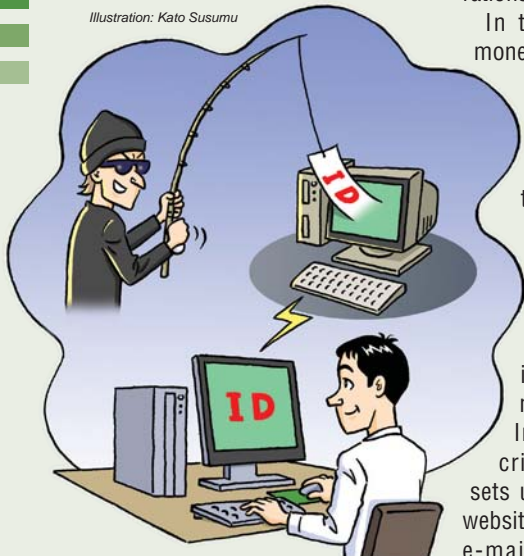
In 2004 gangsters affiliated with the Yamaguchi-gumi crime syndicate were charged and an ingenious mechanism for laundering illegal profits was disclosed. A leader of the gang group who was known as the king of *yamikin* or underworld finance, managed to hide ¥5.1 billion of illegal profits from underworld activities in collusion with a clerk of the Hong Kong branch of a European bank. The complicated money-flow scheme involved the redemp-

The Globalization of Crime and Japan’s Changing Police

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tion of blank discount bank debentures under the name of a foreign financial institution in Hong Kong and the transferring of the redeemed funds into accounts in the names of Hong Kong corporations.

Illustration: Kato Susumu



In that same year, 70 money laundering offenses were exposed, and 60% of these cases involved organized criminal gangs or their affiliates.

Case of phishing have increased markedly in the United States since 2003, but the risk is insufficiently recognized in Japan to date. In this type of cyber crime, the perpetrator sets up a counterfeit bank website and then sends out e-mails that induce the

recipients to access the false website, leading the victims to input a credit card number or ID number. The criminal then makes fraudulent use of this personal information. Because many of these counterfeit websites are on overseas web servers, it is difficult to positively identify the criminals.

In March 2005, the NPA located web servers hosting fake websites in Argentina, Poland and South Korea. The fake websites were virtually identical to those of major Japanese banks and phishing e-mails were sent to the customers of those banks. The Japanese authorities notified the public security agencies of each of these nations and the websites were subsequently shut down, but this case gave the strong impression that international crime is near at hand.

The NPA is promoting cooperation with overseas public security organizations through Interpol to deal with these crimes. The number of criminals that Japan has investigated through Interpol has increased by some 80% in the past decade.

The latest NPA White Paper clearly states, “The days when public security was a matter of a single nation is clearly over. The Japanese police are endeavoring to cope with the globalization of crime in step with an increasingly interdependent international society.” The Japanese police are obviously in the midst of making major changes.

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