

## Electronic Media Reviews

### Clandestine Journalism in North Korea: A Review of *Rimjin-gang* (<http://www.asiapress.org/rimjingang/english/>)

Nuclear and ballistic missile programs and repeated testing of nuclear devices in the 2000s make the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (henceforth North Korea) a pivotal point in Northeast Asia's peace and stability. Revelations of a revitalized nuclear program in 2010 were accompanied by the sinking of the Republic of Korea's (henceforth South Korea) corvette *Cheonan* that killed 46 seamen in March and the shelling of the South's Yeonpyeong Island that claimed the lives of four people in November. Moreover, failed economic reforms and chronic food shortages prolong hardship in the population, as generational change has unfolded in Pyongyang's leadership echelons.

North Korea's domestic affairs remain shrouded in secrecy. Korea expert Peter Beck describes scholarship on North Korea as "more often dark art rather than science" (2011, p. 33). To counter this lack of information, the undercover news project *Rimjin-gang* attempts to reveal "what is really happening inside this secretive nation."

Launched in 2007, *Rimjin-gang* claims to be "the first-ever independent publication in the world written directly by people of North Korea." Named after the *Rimjin-gang*, a river that flows from the North to the demilitarized zone into South Korea, this news outlet features coverage by North Koreans who smuggle their reports to China and Japan, which is the headquarters of the magazine's publisher, Asiapress. Published in Japanese and Korean since 2007 and in English since 2010, *Rimjin-gang*'s reports are available online. A photograph of a 23-year-old homeless woman recently drew attention to the suffering of North Koreans after the failed economic and currency reforms of 2009. *Rimjin-gang* reporter Kim Dong-cheol states that the woman lost her parents and was forced to live on the streets. Eventually, she was found dead in October 2010 (Kim Dong-cheol, 2011a).

Japanese journalist and *Rimjin-gang* editor Jiro Ishimaru states that "outsiders attempting to shed light on North Korea hit a wall that is simply impossible to breach." In 2002, Ishimaru and his collaborators started to recruit and train North Koreans in underground coverage techniques and journalism. Today, eight "citizen journalists," who count among them factory workers and mothers, are active for *Rimjin-gang*. Prior to their activities as reporters, some of them had fled to China to escape economic hardship and returned to the North. They receive a monthly pay between US\$300 and \$400 (Kim, 2010). Many reports



Picture 1. Secretly taken imagery in 2010, showing a 23-year-old North Korean woman searching for food. Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11868641> (retrieved January 2, 2011).

contain trivial information, but the act of reporting itself poses a risk to their lives. Thus, their identities are kept secret.

In “The Testimony of a Starving Soldier,” Kim Dong-cheol reports on food shortages in the military. A video of two cadets in Pyongan province revealed that high numbers of soldiers are malnourished. While being granted one “corn meal” a day, the images show the soldiers in an emaciated state (Kim Dong-cheol, 2011b). Kim Dong-cheol also features two homeless men who were employed by a state-run coal mine. The report entitled “‘Unemployment’ Increases While the State Growls Socialism” provides a bleak picture of the North’s changing mining industry and labor market. It illustrates how *jatos*—half-privatized mining enterprises operated by state officials who invest in abandoned coal mines—have increased rapidly. These private mines are said to be highly productive, whereas the drastic decline of state-run coal mines has made it difficult for many North Koreans to find employment. The report illustrates the malaise of North Korea’s labor system, which fails to provide stable employment in a socialist society (Kim Dong-cheol, 2011c).

The project’s home page states that North Korean reporters have collected over 100 hours of video footage. Yet only screen shots are made available online. The original material is available through international media outlets and on CD-ROM. The reports are smuggled on USB sticks over the Sino-North Korean border or transmitted via Chinese mobile phones.

However, *Rimjin-gang* is also meant to provide an inward flow of information, with small numbers of independent Korean-language print and digital news reports sent to North Korea. As such, the magazine follows a political agenda. In an interview with the South Korean news portal *Daily NK*, Ishimura explained that “the media is a kind of social infrastructure for making a democratic society. . . . I think it is necessary to fertilize North Korean society with the seed of journalism” (Yang, 2007).

Meanwhile, *Rimjin-gang* is also an object of criticism. Suzy Kim (2010) has expressed her doubts on whether the content should be classified as journalism.

Kim argues that “there is very little outward expression of any serious reflection on whether information coming from North Korean informants can indeed be considered ‘journalism by North Koreans in North Korea’ if the information is being passed through multiple channels—from China to Seoul, then on to Japan, with editing done in Seoul and translation done in Japan.” Journalism, she continues, requires “context and analyses in order to make sense of them, and it is not clear who is providing such an interpretive framework or whether the one provided is an adequate one.” Thus, while many of the articles are based on reports, the “citizen journalists” “seem neither to write the accompanying text nor do they determine what is in fact used or left out of the final publication.” For these reasons, Kim refers to the reporters as informants. Likewise, in an assessment of *Rimjin-gang* in *The Nation*, Joanna Chiu quotes American scholars who are reluctant to adopt the venue as a serious source for information based on concerns that information provided by defectors from North Korea has proven to be false. Some scholars are also concerned with the safety of *Rimjin-gang*’s informants. Quoting Korea expert Henry Em of New York University, Chiu (2010) writes that “local knowledge still needs to be interpreted, and depending on who’s doing the interpreting, the story could be shaped very differently.” Thus, “all of the stories in *Rimjin-gang* require knowledge of the historical contexts” (Chiu, 2010).

Nonetheless, *Rimjin-gang* represents an important firsthand source for information. While the magazine’s online content remains limited, it provides an important window onto an otherwise closed society (“Not the Pyongyang Times,” 2011). In combination with the Japanese- and Korean-language online platforms of *Rimjin-gang*’s publisher Asiapress (<http://www.asiapress.org/apnnk/>), students of North Korean affairs gain access to an important source of policy-relevant information. Asiapress was launched in 1987 as a network of freelance journalists from various Asian countries. The network’s reporting on North Korea began in 1998.

In conclusion, *Rimjin-gang* represents a unique and significant effort in providing information while facilitating domestic change through the growth of journalism inside North Korea. Its stories add important insights to our knowledge of the North’s domestic dynamics. As such, *Rimjin-gang* should be of great interest to students of North Korea and Northeast Asian affairs.

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## **Observing the Global Financial Crisis From the Developing World: The Case of Kazakhstan (<http://pm.kz/en/blog> in English; <http://pm.kz/kz/blog> in Kazakh; <http://pm.kz/ru/blog> in Russian)**

The blogosphere in Kazakhstan has been discussing the global financial crisis since 2008, in the context of local economic and financial problems and some transitional issues specific to this oil-rich, newly independent country. Several groups of bloggers with interest in global economic issues have emerged in the course of heated debates about the crisis and about the policies of Kazakhstan's government in dealing with the impact of global turmoil on the national economy and society. One camp, as in many other Commonwealth of Independent States members, is represented by independent journalists and experts who have been quite critical of government policies and have tended to suggest more radical measures from the right or left side of the political spectrum. The other camp is represented by various entities in the government (<http://www.blogs.e.gov.kz/>), including the office of the prime minister. Among the blogs organized by government officials in Kazakhstan, the blog of Karim Massimov, the prime minister of the country since January 2007, is one of the most comprehensive and representative (<http://pm.kz/en/blog> in English; <http://pm.kz/kz/blog> in Kazakh; <http://pm.kz/ru/blog> in Russian).

Karim Massimov, a seasoned Kazakh politician, served as deputy prime minister between January 2006 and January 2007 and as minister of economy and budget planning, and minister of transport and communications between 2001 and 2006. He was among the pioneers of e-governance in Kazakhstan and among the first government officials to begin using teleconferences and blogging to address and discuss in public the most pressing issues, especially those concerning the economy. He actively uses international social networks such as Twitter and Facebook and the Russian social network [vkontakte.ru](http://vkontakte.ru). Moreover, he has personal accounts on video- and photo-sharing services like [youtube.com](http://youtube.com) and [flickr.com](http://flickr.com). Most recently, he has established his presence on Kazakhstan's national social networks, such as [www.on.kz](http://www.on.kz) and [www.ilike.kz](http://www.ilike.kz).

The importance of these steps can be better understood if we look at the history of the Internet in the region. Kazakhstan was a relative latecomer to the Internet revolution: the first national domain with extension .kz was opened on September 19, 1994, and the e-governance portal ([www.e.gov.kz](http://www.e.gov.kz)) was opened on April 12, 2006.<sup>1</sup>

According to the prime minister's Web site, the blog was first aired on March 17, 2011, and Massimov became one of the most prolific bloggers in the government. He has blogged more than 100 times in 2011.

His blog has been among the most visited in the government, as he has tended to update it several times a week. As a prime minister, he has to cover a range of issues, for example, from the Kazakh real estate crisis and the country's newly introduced National Program of Forced Industrial and Innovative Development<sup>2</sup> to everyday issues like reforms and quality of services in health care and education. His blog, along with those of other government officials (found on <http://www.blogs.e.gov.kz/>), provides insights on the government's positions on multiple issues and reveals interesting details about the decision-making process in the country.

Feedback from readers has been quite substantial, representing a variety of views, including some critical remarks, although apparently a very small group of readers follows this blog on a regular basis.

One of the challenges for every public figure in Kazakhstan is the issue of language, and blogging is no exception. The official language in Kazakhstan is Kazakh; however, Russian is also still widely used in the government, in traditional mass media, and in the blogosphere. Lately the government has been promoting a trilingual policy, strongly advancing English as a third language in education, cultural, and everyday life. Therefore, Karim Massimov has been posting on his blog in three languages—Kazakh, Russian, and English. The support team for the blog is doing an admirable job of maintaining mirror blogs in alternate languages, posting the translations almost immediately after the original posting.

For a scholar studying Kazakhstan and its politics, this blog is a rich minefield for data, government positions, and personal positions on many topics, as sometimes politicians express their own views, showing the existence of heated internal debates on some economic and social policies. The blog is easy to navigate and includes several subsections, including *News*, *Meet the PM*, *Government Guide*, *Transparency*, and *Kazakhstan*. The subsection *Transparency* is one of the most interesting, as it provides a platform for dialogue with readers on this very important issue. The section *Meet the PM* is also important, offering a space for the prime minister to comment on the recent policy initiatives of his government.

Understandably, a significant number of the prime minister's postings are devoted to policy issues and economic and social changes in the country. The global financial crisis is covered mainly from the local and national perspective and reflects the government's policies and approach. The PM also provides regular coverage of his frequent international trips, though he tries to avoid touching foreign policy issues. One important exception, however, has been his participation at international forums where global issues such as the financial crisis and climate change are discussed.

In Kazakhstan, similar to many Western countries, the major public debates on the global financial crisis have evolved around the government-prescribed economic remedies and government approaches in addressing the major social and economic problems. In the wake of the crisis and possible real estate and banking sectors collapse, the government of Kazakhstan led by Karim Massimov has decided to introduce a massive rescue package and tap into the National Fund.

A significant portion of this estimated \$10 billion stimulus program was diverted to bail out four major Kazakh banks (about 45% of the package) and to support the completion of some major real estate projects around the country

(about 35% of the package). The package also included some other measures, such as job creation, especially in the state sector; additional spending on agriculture; and some additional social programs for pensioners and families with many children.

The opponents of the prime minister criticized the government and prime minister for spending too much money on rescuing the major banks, including some apparently insolvent ones. In addition, they criticized the prime minister for arbitrarily selecting the real estate projects that received government loans and grants for completion. The government decided to finance only those large projects, especially housing, that were close to completion. The opposition claims that not enough was spent on the social welfare sector, education, health care, and the support of small and medium enterprises. In fact, the developments in these four sectors were among the most frequently discussed on the prime minister's blog (as of December 2011 and January 2012).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Retrieved from <http://www.bnews.kz/ru/news/post/53709/>.

<sup>2</sup>Retrieved from <http://www.pm.kz/program/event/index/8?lang=en>

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### **Registan.net: All Central Asia, All the Time (<http://www.registan.net/>)**

The region of Central Asia is much neglected by Western media, especially the American media. The blog Registan.net was started in 2003 with a focus on Central Asia's domestic politics and its relations with the rest of the world, as well as occasional reports on pop culture. The site is a joint venture by three Americans: Nathan Hamm, the founding editor; Joshua Foust; and Michael Hancock. All three contributors have done graduate studies on Central Asia and have spent a considerable amount of time in the region.

### **Form/Presentation**

The home page is user friendly, allowing for ease of navigation. At the top of the banner are tabs for Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The main column features the latest blog posting at the top and less recent postings further down. The home page shows only the first few lines of content, which enables the visitor to scan for titles or topics of interest.

Given that Registan.net has been in existence for several years a considerable archive of materials has accumulated, but there appears to be no link to an

archive listing. A search engine for the site is available but is of limited use for those seeking to do historical research. For example, the reviewer typed in “Kyrgyzstan 2004” and the results were mixed: not all the results were for articles posted that year. The lack of dates for the summaries can be frustrating, forcing the visitor to click on each headline to find postings pertinent to a specific event or a particular time period.

In addition to the main column, the home page contains a side column that displays recent comments, a series of 15 links relating to Afghanistan, and eight links relating to Central Asia. The listing of related links is helpful in that it spares visitors the chore of doing a search for other related sites. The heavy emphasis on links to Afghanistan apparently reflects the U.S. military engagement there. The absence of links to non-English sources suggests limited usefulness for scholars who already possess in-depth knowledge of the region.

### Audience

The site is written for an English-speaking audience. It is written in a manner that makes it accessible to nonexperts. The links to other sites are helpful to those who wish to do further research.

This makes the site well suited for students interested in the current political situation in Central Asia. However, the site assumes knowledge of modern history (e.g., the Soviet Union and the rise of the Central Asian states following the collapse of the Soviet Union) and a fair amount of ethnography (e.g., the various ethnic groups that compose the Central Asian states, their respective histories, and cultures; and Islam’s influence in Central Asia).

The site is also recommended for professionals who wish to keep up with the ongoing conversation about the region. The site functions more as an aggregator of analytical essays presented elsewhere (e.g., *Foreign Policy*). It is not theory driven compared to journals like *Comparative Politics* or *American Political Science Review*.

### Content

A visit to the home page in late November 2011 showed that it is constantly being updated, with new postings uploaded a few days apart. The tone of the postings tends to an informal academic style. Many of the postings consist of an informed discussion of an article that appeared elsewhere. For example, in “A Clumsy Propaganda” (November 22, 2011), Foust critiques an article that appeared in *Foreign Policy* that takes a critical look at the U.S. military’s spending millions of dollars to run “influence websites” relating to Central Asia. A visit to the “About” page shows that Foust likely has his own biases in light of the fact that he is a fellow at the American Security Project.

Original articles have also been posted. A guest article, “China Is the Power of the Future in Central Asia” (November 22, 2011), by Raffaello Pantucci and Alexandros Petersen, asserts that China will play a leading role in the region. Foust doesn’t agree with the authors but posted it in order to facilitate an exchange of views in the comment section.

There does not seem to be much journalistic coverage on this site. There were several postings on the Peace Corps being forced to leave Uzbekistan. If one is looking for up-to-the-minute reporting on events in Central Asia, one should look elsewhere. The site provides a link to NewEurasia (<http://www.neweurasia.net/>).

In June 2010, the *New York Times* reported on a rich deposit of rare earths found in Afghanistan. Registan.net, in "Formula for Success in Afghanistan" (June 21, 2010), gave the article scant attention, apparently reflecting the skepticism and criticism the article received. This reviewer had to undertake numerous search attempts before finding something related to the topic, suggesting a missed opportunity by the blog to inform the general audience.

The site's usefulness is enhanced by the broad approach taken, helping the audience derive a nuanced understanding of Central Asian politics. Politics in Central Asia are often shaped by nonsocial factors like natural resources. The posting "Central Asia's Water Woes" (July 26, 2011) shows a broad understanding of politics. "Enforcing the Border" (July 4, 2011) makes use of images from Google Earth for a discussion of the porosity of the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the dynamics of border crossings there. This methodology is strikingly different from that found in conventional social sciences.

Postings on culture can take on a more substantive tone. "In Osh, One Man Triumphs" (October 20, 2011) reports on a paraplegic in Kyrgyzstan and the challenge of living in a society that offers very little support to those with disabilities. Postings like these provide an on-the-ground perspective of social conditions in Central Asia.

### Conclusion

The blog site Registan.net is neither journalistic nor theory driven in focus; it occupies a broad middle ground between the two. Given the lack of attention given to the region, this site provides a useful service to those interested in the politics of Central Asia. Its style is accessible to the nonexpert but assumes a broad general knowledge of modern political history and Islam.

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## 25 Years After the Enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL): Online Access to Gender Equality in Japan

Twenty-five years after the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in Japan, this review introduces a number of Web sites of the Japanese government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and institutions such as universities that aim to implement gender equality in the Japanese workplace.

Rina Bovrisse, senior retail manager of Prada Japan, captured the attention of the Japanese media last year by filing a legal complaint against her employer in

which she accused the Italian fashion company of harassment and discrimination based on age and physical appearance. Following an order of Prada Japan CEO Davide Sesia to remove 15 employees from their workplaces in Prada stores since they were “old, fat, ugly” or simply did not have “the Prada look” (Matsutani, 2010), Prada Japan Senior Human Resources Manager Hiroyuki Takahashi issued transfers to remote and less attractive locations that affected 13 managers and shop assistants in May 2009, hoping this would lead to voluntary resigning of the employees in question. Bovrisse, a Japanese professional woman in her mid-30s with long experience in the fashion industry, was in charge of approximately 500 employees working in Prada stores in Japan, Guam, and Saipan at the time, when she herself became the target of harassment in a separate incident after Takahashi told her that she needed to change her physical appearance and lose weight. Bovrisse’s outspokenness about the harassment case and her decision to file a legal complaint against her employer drew attention to the arbitrariness of discriminatory employment practices that are prevalent even in foreign corporations based in Japan.

In a different context, the University of Tokyo issued a Declaration of Gender Equality Acceleration on March 3, 2009, following the U7 Joint Declaration on Gender Equality agreed upon by the seven imperial universities in Japan, with the ambitious objective of increasing the number of female researchers at Tokyo University from a mere 9% in 2009 to 25% in 2010. Women are still underrepresented in teaching and academia in Japan despite such efforts of positive action. Female researchers account for merely 13% of the total research personnel in Japan, which is very low by international comparison.<sup>1</sup> Further data compiled by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology show that the number of female teachers decreases as education proceeds to higher levels. Whereas 62% of elementary school teachers are female and almost 50% of all teachers at junior colleges are women, only 19.5% of university faculties consist of female lecturers, associate professors, or full professors (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, 2011a).

In a similar vein, women are underrepresented in politics. Only 10.9% of all members of the House of Representatives are women. In response to women’s low participation rates in education, leadership positions, and decision-making processes, the government has initiated the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality, which aims to raise the participation of women in leadership positions to 30% by 2020 through the implementation of positive action programs. To achieve this goal, the University of Tokyo pledged to “welcome applications from women for teaching and research positions, proactively recruit female researchers on the basis of fair assessment and encourage work-life balance by holding no official meetings after 5:00 p.m.” (University of Tokyo, 2009).

The above examples are taken from the very different professional fields of the high-end fashion industry and academia and point to the fact that gender equality in Japan in the workplace still has a long way to go. This is in spite of the EEOL, which is Japan’s major legal framework toward the implementation of gender equality in the workplace, after Japan ratified the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1980 (Mae, 2008, p. 219). The EEOL, which has gone through two major revisions in 1997 and 2006/2007, celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. This presents an occasion to

give a brief introduction to various online sites on gender equality in Japan. Among the organizations that maintain data and information on gender equality, statistics, childcare facilities, harassment, discrimination, domestic violence, and human trafficking are NGOs, government organizations such as the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), and gender equality centers of universities, such as the Office for Gender Equality at the University of Tokyo.

The Japanese government accumulates comprehensive data on gender equality measures and gender equality statistics. The Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office maintains the Gender Information Site, available at [http://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/index.html](http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/index.html), and offers information on general statistics on the population, data on employment of men and women in Japan, and pertinent issues such as work-life balance, birthrates and gender equality, the promotion of positive action (the Japanese equivalent of affirmative action), and the prevention of domestic violence. In addition, the site provides information on international gender equality meetings, such as the East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meetings. An English site is available and updated on a regular basis.

A link to other Web sites leads to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and sites on gender equality maintained by the United Nations. The motivation of the Japanese government to establish gender equality has shifted from complying with international pressures to recognizing the actual need of gender equality in the wake of low birthrates and the aging of Japan's population. This led to the formulation of the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society, which was enacted in 1999 as a guideline for creating a society in which both men and women participate on an equal basis. The Gender Equality Bureau provides an English translation of the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society on its Web site. The EEOL and the more general Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society form a government policy framework toward the implementation of gender equality in the family and in the workplace. The MHLW provides online access to the full content of the EEOL in Japanese language on their Web site (<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/general/seido/koyou/danjokintou/danjyokoyou.html>).

In particular, the most recent revision of the EEOL of 2007 has advanced major changes and prohibits all forms of indirect discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. For example, job advertisements must not contain hiring conditions such as physical strength, weight, or height. Furthermore, the willingness to accept nationwide transfers must not be a condition for hiring or professional advancement. In addition, it is now illegal to lay off women during pregnancy or immediately after the birth of a child. In the case of termination of employment during pregnancy or childcare leave, the company has the responsibility to prove that parenthood was not the reason for terminating employment.

Finally, positive action programs have become an integral part of the implementation of gender equality. Apart from information on children and child rearing, work-life balance, and part-time and dispatched labor, the latest campaign of the MHLW is the Ikumen Project, which encourages men to take paternity leave or leave to take care of elderly family members; this can be accessed online at [http://ikumen-project.jp/project\\_design.html](http://ikumen-project.jp/project_design.html). The term *ikumen* is a

creation of the Chinese character *iku*, which means “education or nourishment,” and the English word *men*.

Whereas the EEOL enacted in 1986 particularly targeted the improvement of working conditions of women, the most recent reform of 2007 protects both men and women from discriminatory practices in the workplace. However, the EEOL merely represents a guideline for private corporations. Up to this point, there are no sanctions for not adhering to the EEOL, which questions the effectiveness of the EEOL as a tool to effectively implement gender equality in the workplace.

The National Women’s Education Center Japan (NVEC), an independent administrative institution, is committed to realizing a gender-equal society and promotes education, encourages international collaborations of working women, and offers access to research publications on their Web site (<http://www.nvec.jp/en/publish/page01.html>). NVEC publishes a biannual Gender Statistics Newsletter and conducts independent research projects in collaboration with researchers in the fields of women’s studies, gender equality, and statistics, such as a two-year study on men’s participation in the household. A further goal of NVEC is to accumulate data on gender statistics with the aim of compiling the Data Book of Gender Equality Statistics 2012. Further, their Web site maintains a Gender Statistics Database, searchable, however, only in the Japanese language. In addition, the Web site features links to government Web sites such as the Gender Equality Bureau’s Gender Information Site and also provides a number of useful resources on data on Japanese women in English.

As previously stated, many universities operate their own offices for gender equality. The University of Tokyo is one example; in addition to online information on the Declaration of Gender Equality Acceleration, their Web site (<http://kyodo-sankaku.u-tokyo.ac.jp/index.html>) offers information on childcare facilities and childcare measures. Mothers can take breaks for nursing their babies, finish work early, or work flex time.

The Web site of the University of Tokyo also provides information on licensed childcare facilities and Tokyo Metropolitan Government Certified Daycare Facilities. With regard to career advancement, the University of Tokyo has implemented the Todai Support Plan “10 Years to Establish a Career,” with the objective of raising the number of female researchers to 25% of the newly employed. This plan follows the Gender Equality Basic Plan, which the University of Tokyo adopted in 2003.

Finally, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs of Japan (BPW Japan), available at <http://www.bpw-japan.jp/english/news20111118.html>, was formed in 1958 and belongs to the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW or BPW International), which is a transnational NGO. Among their recent activities is a recovery support grant program for working women who have been affected by the earthquake and tsunami of March 2011 in the disaster regions.

In conclusion, it is valid to say that online sources on gender equality policies of Japan are well documented, cross-linked, and available in English language. Information on the recent revisions of the EEOL is available, as are policies of higher education facilities enacted by gender equality centers. However, the question remains why—despite a comprehensive legal framework and gender

equality policies developed by individual institutions—women’s participation in leadership positions remains far below the average by international comparison.

A special feature by the magazine *Tōyō Keizai Online* entitled “Naze josei ha shussei shinai no ka?” [Why are women not advancing in their careers?] (2011) asks this very question.

According to a survey conducted by the Japan Productivity Center among 3,000 companies, 70% of the companies investigated replied that the attitude of women contributed to the lack of career advancement. Even though chances for professional advancement do exist, many women do not consider career advancement and/or remaining in employment as an attractive and viable option.

The difficulties of combining childcare and employment, long working hours, and a lack of role models lead to low consciousness for career advancement. Involvement of men in household work remains low at one hour per day; traditional gendered role divisions prevail. In addition, many women do not apply for the more qualified management track positions but keep applying for clerical positions, which in turn makes it more difficult to acquire the necessary knowledge and qualifications for advancing to a management position. This is reflected in the fact that only 16% of all managers are women. Furthermore, the lack of adequate childcare facilities poses a challenge. According to *Tōyō Keizai Online*, approximately 25,000 children are currently waiting to get accepted into a kindergarten. Society’s infrastructure does not yet seem ready to accommodate working women’s needs sufficiently, nor do women themselves consider viable alternatives in their careers.

Available Web sites on the pertinent issue of gender equality provide insightful information on policy frameworks initiated by the Japanese government and activities of institutions such as universities that implement these policy frameworks. It is essential to bear in mind that the official voice of the government is represented on these sites; the discrepancy between government policies and the reality of gender equality is not captured in these official documents. However, the Web sites cited in the review provide a comprehensive and detailed collection of data on gender equality, many of them available in English, and provide a useful resource for researchers on gender equality, women’s studies, and policy studies.

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### Note

<sup>1</sup>For instance, Eastern European countries exhibit very high percentages of female researchers (Bulgaria, 44.6%; Romania, 43.3%), followed by the United States (34.3%) and Northern European countries (Sweden, 35.8%; Norway, 31.7%; Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, 2011b, p. 23).

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## A Selection of Useful Web Sites

- Action Center for Working Women [Hataraku josei no zenkoku sentaa], <http://wwt.acw2.org/?lang=en>.
- Fusae Ichikawa Memorial Association, <http://www.ichikawa-fusae.or.jp/#>.
- Gender Information Site, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, [http://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/index.html](http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/index.html) (in English), <http://www.gender.go.jp/index.html> (in Japanese).
- Kita Kyushu Forum on Asian Women [Ajia josei kōryū. Kenkyū Forumu], <http://www.kfaw.or.jp/index.html>.
- National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs of Japan (BPW Japan), <http://www.bpw-japan.jp/english/news20111118.html>.
- National Women’s Education Center of Japan, <http://www.nwec.jp/en/publish/page01.html>.
- Office for Gender Equality, the University of Tokyo [Tōkyō Daigaku Danjo Kyōdō Sankaku-shitsu], <http://kyodo-sankaku.u-tokyo.ac.jp/index.html>.
- Women’s Employment Support Back-Up Navigator [Josei shūgyō shien bakku appu nabi], [http://www.joseishugyo.go.jp/jouhou/index\\_jouhou.html#koyoukintou](http://www.joseishugyo.go.jp/jouhou/index_jouhou.html#koyoukintou).
- Working Women’s Network, <http://wwn-net.org/english/>.

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## Review of “The China Beat: Blogging How the East Is Read”

The graphic design of “The China Beat” (<http://www.thechinabeat.org>) is exceedingly simple, almost austere, featuring the regular styled calligraphy etched on a stone surface that might have been a section of some formal documentation posted by the premodern Chinese government for the educated, as Confucian texts etched on large stone steles now stored in the Confucius Temple in Beijing. As the vertical columnar context is broken by the horizontal setting of the picture, the recognizable characters shown across the panel make no contextual sense. The two most prominent individual characters in focus, 府 and 故, meaning “mansion/bureau/government” and “former/the deceased,” respectively, lay out an inadvertent link among the present, the government, and the past—issues that any commentators on China would have to take into consideration one way or the other. It is the style of the calligraphy and the gray, smooth surface of the background that suggest the weight of knowledge and the depth of learning.

Below the title section of the Web page, on the left-hand side is a search window, which allows the reader to search for subjects by inputting words or a phrase. The results will lead to the articles on this Web site that contain the search terms.

Below the search window, the section of “From the China Beat Archives” boasts “more than 800 posts at China Beat” and offers “a glance at something from our archives.” Presently, Jeff Wasserstrom posts his comments on March 13, 2008, about the Chinese government’s attitude toward foreign entertainers—the tactful balance between the government, the present, and the tradition—a case in point of what the Chinese characters 府 and 故 suggest.

Right below Wasserstrom’s comments, one finds a list of “Recent Posts” consisting of book excerpts, book reviews, and commentaries on current events, including the artist Ai Weiwei’s recent arrest. The third and lowest block on the left is devoted to “China Beat Archives.” Readers may click to enter all past issues since the establishment of the blog in January 2008.

Moving to the right, a line of buttons labeled “Home,” “About,” “Who We Are,” “Media,” and “Twentieth-Century Book Review” offers more information about the Web site, its editors, its contributors, and major content. From “About” (2011) we find

*The China Beat* provides context and criticism on contemporary China from China scholars and journalists. Based around a group of active contributors at the University of California, Irvine, including co-founders Kenneth Pomeranz and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, the blog draws on a global group of China watchers in the U.S., China, the U.K., Australia, Japan, Canada, Taiwan, and many other locations.

The status of the contributors, scholars, and journalists suggests in-depth discussion and up-to-date coverage of current events. The subjects of the books reviewed and the articles published on this Web site demonstrate strong interest in the humanities, such as religion, politics, sociology, arts, and literature. The book reviews and book excerpts are very helpful for readers looking for in-depth scholastic treatments of specific subjects. A wide range of interested readers, especially those in higher education, including professors and students, will find it very convenient. The commentaries on sociopolitical issues—such as the political controversy in 2008 around the time of the presidential election in Taiwan, Republic of China, and the arrest of the now internationally renowned artist Ai Weiwei—all provide insights into the events in question. The electronic links provided under certain words or authors’ names open up more doors for further research.

There are minor errors of Chinese characters in the captions of the photos posted under “We Chinese” (Brauer, 2011). To list just a few:

中国就是一个国~~皮~~的名称: ~~皮~~ should be 度.

中国只我~~她~~祖国母亲: ~~只~~ and ~~她~~ should be 是 and 的.

做微小~~贡~~献的公民: ~~贡~~ should be 贡.

家征着: 家 should be 象.

Nevertheless, the pictures speak clearly about the Chinese people with or without the captions.

How do we gain a better understanding of a country? Tony Blair (2011) summed it up very nicely:

But in my experience you don't get to understand a country just by reading its political speeches, studying its economic statistics, measuring its output. You understand it best when you understand its culture, its history and traditions, its family life, the special characteristics that have influenced its society, and most of all its people.

People in the fields of humanities who have strong personal or scholastic interests in China, who need to read carefully thought-out commentaries on current issues, would find this Web site very informative and helpful. I will highly recommend it to my students in my Chinese culture class.

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