

Ads Focus on Japanese Tabloid Practices

BY JEFF FARR
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

In an effort to raise awareness about Japanese tabloid media practices, the SGI purchased quarter-page advertisements in *The Asian Wall Street Journal* for a five-day period last December. The advertisements targeted the general public in Japan and Asia, sponsors of Japanese tabloid magazines and the foreign media in Asia.

Each advertisement carried the headline “Should You Be Concerned?” with new information each day about transgressions the tabloid media has made, as in *Marco Polo* magazine’s infamous 1995 article “There Were No Nazi Gas Chambers.” Each advertisement ended with the slogan “Responsibility in Media Is Everyone’s Concern.”

The Associated Press covered the campaign, interviewing SGI spokesperson Rie Tsumura, who said that “all we’re asking is for Japanese society to be more conscious about accurate and fair media coverage.”

As the *World Tribune* has often reported, SGI President Ikeda and the Soka Gakkai members have for many years been subjected to irresponsible and sometimes libelous reports about their activities in the Japanese tabloid press. For instance, President Ikeda has endlessly been portrayed as a seedy character — even a rapist, as when last year a former Hokkaido women’s division leader alleged in the *Shukan Shincho* magazine that President Ikeda assaulted her three times. The collusive relationship that exists in Japan between the press and political authority has led to unsubstantiated articles being used as political weapons against the Soka Gakkai by Liberal Democratic Party politicians.

In the past, the Soka Gakkai has challenged many of these libelous articles in court and won financial awards. But compared to similar cases in America, the awards the tabloid publications must pay in Japan are extremely low — \$10,000 is considered the average.

A recent example of this, not directly involving the Soka Gakkai, concerned Nobuyuki Shiroyama, a Hokkaido Soka Gakkai member who in December won a libel suit against *Shukan Shincho*. In September 1994, the magazine falsely reported that Mr. Shiroyama had killed a Nichiren Shoshu priest in a head-on traffic collision, although the police and an insurance company had already cleared Mr. Shiroyama of any liability before the story ran. The Sapporo District Court awarded him \$10,000, while a similar case in the United States could potentially reap millions for the defamed.

The potential financial gains in printing sensational yet slanderous articles far outweigh the potential financial penalties. In fact, SGI Public Relations officials explain that Soka Gakkai libel suits against the tabloids have become a cottage industry for the tabloids, allowing them to publish further sensational stories on the libel suits themselves — and to make more profits.

And even when the Gakkai wins, the tabloids sometimes reprint the lies a few years later. In 1983, the Soka Gakkai won a libel suit against *Gekkan Pen* magazine, after it accused President Ikeda of womanizing. Last August, the *Shukan Bunshun* printed a new article reviving the *Gekkan Pen* allegations, which had been proven false in the Tokyo District Court 13 years previous. In the Associated Press article on the SGI’s ad campaign, *Shukan Bunshun* editor Takahiro Hirao admitted the magazine had not even interviewed the women alleged to have been involved with President Ikeda.

Foreign media, including such respected publications as the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Time* and *The Australian*, has in recent months used such tabloid articles as sources for international reports on the SGI. The foreign media may be unaware of the Japanese tabloid press’ practices, the SGI Public Relations Office suggested with the December ad

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campaign. As one of the ads pointed out to the foreign media: “Bylines are a rarity in Japan’s print media. Editors do not insist on either attribution, direct quotation or independent fact-checking. This type of lax editorial policy often results in stories based on innuendo, half-truths or even outright fabrications.”

Raising the awareness of the foreign media will undoubtedly take time, for unlike American tabloids the Japanese counterparts have two faces: They do some legitimate investigative reporting at the same time that they publish these outright fabrications. The “Should You Be Concerned?” ad campaign was the SGI’s first step toward building a consensus in society that the tabloid media in Japan needs to be more responsible.

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