

MEDIATING SCANDAL IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

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Abstract

Cet article aborde des traits essentiels des affaires médiatiques dans le Japon contemporain. Il s'agit d'une étude interdisciplinaire qui enrichit non seulement le discours des sciences de médias et du journalisme, mais aussi la philologie japonaise. L'inspiration théorique s'appuie sur la conception néo-fonctionnaliste du scandale en tant que performance sociale située à la limite du « rituel » (la conduite expressive à la motivation socioculturelle) et de la « stratégie » (une action stratégique délibérée).

La première partie de cette étude est consacrée aux caractéristiques du journalisme politique et du contexte médiatico-politique du Japon d'après-guerre. La seconde partie analyse le procès du scandale médiatique lui-même et quelques techniques ritualisées des organisations médiatiques japonaises.

Mots-clés

Médias japonais, pratiques de journalisme, affaire médiatique, rituel médiatique, procès de la scandalisation

Abstract

This paper investigates the main features of media scandal in contemporary Japan. This is important because it can add a fresh interdisciplinary direction in the fields of media studies, journalism, and Japanese philology. Furthermore, the sources from the mainstream media, semi-mainstream tabloids and foreign press were examined via the lens of contemporary neofunctionalist theory, where scandal is approached as a social performance between ritual (motivated expressive behavior) and strategy (conscious strategic action). Moreover, this research illuminates the logic behind the scandal mediation process in Japan, including the performances of both the journalists and the non-media actors, who become decisive for the development of every media scandal. In other words, the social drama of a scandal (and its construction as media event) represents a heterogeneous assemblage of various associated actors that together form a complex “scandal network” depending on their ideological and commercial leanings.

Keywords

Japanese media, journalistic practices, media scandal, media ritual, scandal mediation process

INTRODUCTION: UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR QUALITIES OF JAPANESE

¹ I am obliged to my supervisor, professor Yoshimi Shunya from The University of Tokyo, whose academic guidance contributed greatly to this research.

SCANDAL

Scandals are omnipresent. At first sight, the conduct of corruption and scandal does not differ much from culture to culture, while the “minimal structure” of scandal seems to be universal. Everywhere in the world, corruption, scandal and gossip focuses on areas of “structural tension” where conflicting interpretations of obligation and expectation cause certain strains. The existence of liminal and remedial phases (i.e. conflict/transgression and resolution/redemption) was confirmed cross-culturally (Turner 1990; Bell 1992; Barkow 1992; Jenks 2003; Alexander 2006). Historically, a culture at the edge of utter corruption is one of the oldest themes found in narratives of the human race as such (Girard 1996; Campbell 2004), while narratives of scandal as epic, tragedy, and heroism are present in both East and West (West 2006; Prusa 2016). Feeding on one’s private issues and scandalizing one’s inappropriate behavior was part of social and political communication since antiquity. The instances of transgression and corruption have occurred every since the very instances of organized life, dating back to ancient Rome, Greece and China (e.g. Pascha 1999; Kidd and Richter 2003), but corruption and scandal is not limited to aforementioned regions. Especially in last few decades, major corruption scandals have rocked on a massive scale many Asian countries including South Korea, Indonesia, Cambodia, the Philippines or Myanmar.

If we take into account the recorded cases of unveiled corruption, followed by a public scandal in various world regions, we can assume that this phenomenon is a standard feature of all forms of political systems worldwide. The present-day systemic corruption is attributable to various normative strengths (i.e. personal moral obligations, effective voluntary associations, the centrality of elections in politics and the value of winning them, which triggers attack-politics and eventually a scandal). In the West same as in Japan, scandal derives from capitalist conditions, the influences of globalization, and the distorted public sphere which is now being mediated by money and power media (Hanada 1997; Castells 2009).

Corporate contributions and donations that bear an element of bribery are evident in many democracies including Japan. Furthermore, buying political influence and influencing governmental policy in contemporary America is a “legal” way of “institutional corruption” today (see Lessig 2011; Gilens and Page 2014). In the same vein, illegal financial practices in many European countries had been common and tolerated throughout the 20th century, with many European politicians relying heavily on illegal funds (see Barker 1994; Pujas 2002; Adut 2008). Besides, scandals and other socially harmful acts of political and corporate elites in the US are actually less common in Japan (e.g. Reischauer 1977; Kerbo and Inoue 1990; West 2006).

Likewise, gossip is also a universal social phenomenon, while the contents of gossip do not differ much across human societies. In Japan and elsewhere, judgemental/malicious gossiping leads to being ridiculed with derogatory nicknames, while the victims of foul gossip are ostracized or ignored (e.g. Smith 1961; Gluckman 1963; Merry 1984). Even the use of gossip for the sake of informal social control and maintenance of discipline is not unique to Japan.²

² In feudal Japan, intra-group mutual surveillance (including village gossiping and reporting deviances to authority) played important socially-integrative role in maintaining group responsibility (cf. the *goningumi* system, or the *han* system). In contemporary Japan, people still receive occasional visits from agents of social control who collect gossip about their neighborhood, albeit mainly in rural and suburban areas. We can however find similar utilization of gossip in western corporate culture: consider the 2015 Amazon scandal, where it was revealed that workers were instructed to gossip about their colleagues, and encouraged to send secret feedback to their bosses for “the good” of the company.

Nepotism and cronyism are endemic in all kinds of systems and cultures. Especially the psychological trait of nepotism, which is constitutive of many power scandals based on bribery and kick-backs, are in many cultures considered as immoral, but its psychological mechanisms have universal design features that make human beings everywhere tend to be nepotistic (e.g. Barkow 1992; Matsumoto 1996). Besides, politicians everywhere came to be gradually perceived (if not expected) to be more or less inherently corrupted, so the issue of frequent political corruption does not bring about any serious public outrage in today's "disaffected democracies" (Pharr 2000), importantly including Japan.

On the other hand, however, corruption cannot be viewed in isolation of its societal context: the recognition of certain behavior as scandalous, and the way how each society treats transgression, is to an important degree culturally-specific, and reflective of each society's mores and attitudes. What constitutes transgression and corruption is culturally variable: the forms of institutionalized corruption are not the same in all places (and times), and the boundaries for defining what is "deviant" or "antisocial" are from a significant part cultural boundaries. Equally importantly, what matters in a culture-specific scandal performance is the varying dominance of beliefs, emotions, and ritualized modes of expression. Some researchers emphasized that in Asia, social conflicts and mainstream media logic is linked to preservation of (Confucianism-influenced) social harmony, face-saving, mutual trust, and respect for leadership (e.g. Masterton 1996; Hanitzsch 2007). Furthermore, symbolic connections between acts of ritual and governance were registered in both China and Japan (Pye 1985), while a sense of "institutional sacredness" (and the authoritarian aura that surrounds institutional arrangements) was recognized to be characteristic for Asia in general (Chang and Chu 2006) and Japan in particular (Murphy 2014).

The Japanese media system and the nature of Japanese public sphere are products of their own distinct histories. Frequent scandalization of the Japanese politics in postwar Japan was partly a consequence of a specific electoral system (i.e. the multi-seat constituency system which let parties strive to win as many seats in the same constituency as possible, wherefore the candidates from the same party must fight one another). Worth considering are also the omnipresent scandals of Japanese celebrities (especially drug/sex scandals). The Japanese media deliberately exaggerate these events, which becomes apparent if compared to a rather benevolent approach to celebrity scandals in the West. Furthermore, a rather humiliating public treatment of female celebrities during their closely watched post-scandal press conferences, same as the harsh treatment by their agencies (*jimusho*) reflect both the deeply-rooted sexism of the entertainment industry (Marx 2012; McCurry 2016), and Japan's deeply rooted rigid patrilineal family system (*ie*), in which female adultery is still seen as a serious infraction (Sechiyama 2016). On the contrary, the overflowing sexuality is at times thought to be part of the package that makes for a vital, charismatic male leader.

Regarding the corporate idiosyncrasies of contemporary Japan, the whole sector is often perceived as a homogeneous communal society with tight social networks based on mutual trust, ritual deference to authority, and a sense of shared self-interest in pursuit of national advancement. The governing bodies might be rather weak, but Japanese corporations rely strongly on internal rules, norms of silence, and extralegal punishments. Besides, in societies such as Japan, where the lasting social ties based on mutual obligation and gift-giving become emphasized, removing oneself from the obligation to receive or give can itself become the object of denunciatory scandal (Gluckman 1963; Mauss 1966). The traditional corporate governance is typical of opaque decision-making, hierarchy-driven culture, and internal

managerial rigor. Failure to abide by the law may be known to, but not condemned by, the group, while avoiding a leak of certain sensitive information in order to maintain the group is considered public morality. Besides, in Japanese corporate world, these factors impede the outside directors from having sufficient independence from the management, and the statutory auditors having enough power against directors.

1. SOME IDIOSYNCRACIES OF SCANDAL REPORTING IN JAPAN

1.1. Mediopolitical Background: Economic and Professional Structures

As I indicated above, the sociopolitical background has an important impact on the logic of scandal in Japan. Within this overarching framework, specific economic patterns, journalistic values, and mediopolitical relations are likely to emerge. It is especially the economic and journalistic structures that co-define the process of scandal mediation:

1. Economic structures and ownership patterns (vertical, horizontal and diagonal media ownership). Apart from the sale of the newspaper, the main sources of revenue for the Japanese press rest upon advertising (generally represented by Dentsu), and other businesses (i.e. publication of magazines and books). Furthermore, each of the “big five” Japanese dailies (*Yomiuri, Asahi, Mainichi, Nikkei and Sankei*) at least partially own one commercial TV station, many local TV's, radio stations and other non-media subjects, whereas representing powerful media oligopolies. This “information cartel” (Freeman 2000) is set up by Japanese media organizations based on the business model of *keiretsu* (somewhat controversial but generally legal grouping of complementary firms that take place in an oligopolistic framework and are based on the stock control patterns). Many finance schemes within *keiretsu* are common and tolerated, which further increases the potential for media corruption while diminishing media's capacity as an independent watchdog.

2. Professional structures and collusion between newspapers and their sources. The structure of this collusion is embodied in the “reporters' club” system (*kisha kurabu*). These clubs, administered by the Japanese Newspaper Association (Nihon Shimbun Kyōkai), organize access and facilitate relations between news media and sources. Complex rules (both formal and informal) concern their operation and the treatment of information gathered, and they play important role during scandals. In fact, almost all news articles distributed by the Japanese news agencies are from government, big companies, or big labor unions, and originate in press conferences and background meetings. The journalists collude with official sources (including the police or the prosecutors), and between the top politicians and veteran reporters there often exists an understanding of mutual empathy. This basic mutual trust, along with the clubs' limited membership and sanctions in case of violating in-group norms, have a significant impact on the control of scandal information flow. Among other norms of self-restraint (*jishuku*), there exist “blackboard agreements” (*kokuban kyōtei*) and “press agreements” (*hōdō kyōtei*) that put the timing of scandalous information release under control, restrict the entire newsgathering process, and result in a more or less uniform, standardized coverage. Besides, the course of many official political discussions, mediatized interviews and press conferences are usually anticipated by transcripts and list of questions (*burasagari*) that are submitted to respective authorities in advance.

Some Japanese scholars note that these practices can be related to the sociocultural dichotomy of *uchi* and *ura* (the reality within/behind the scene) and *soto* and *omote* (the reality of surface appearances). While *uchi/ura* is a platform, where real solutions are construed, *soto/omote* presents the ready-made solutions to the outside world (e.g. Stockwin 2008). In its consequence, the Japanese mainstream press defers to elite sources by reporting stated principles (*tatema*) at the expense of real journalistic intentions (*honne*), and is at times criticized for being a PR office of Japanese authorities.

1.2. Political Journalism and the Use of Japanese Language

Apart from visual and auditory perception, our mediated experience of social reality is equally importantly shaped by the textual (linguistic, written) cues. Language itself is however not a neutral medium for transmission and reception of pre-existing knowledge, since it reconstructs experience by putting in grammatical form the results of retrospective analysis while failing to represent reality in its entirety (Wittgenstein 1953). After all, journalism is a matter of rhetorical forms and choices of argumentation: it is always to a certain degree a “rhetoric fiction” (Fisher 1984) based on the traditional function of storytelling (Barkin 1984), which argumentatively produces its “pseudo-environment” (Lippmann 1922). Importantly for the context of this chapter, the ritualized journalistic language too can easily fall prey to more or less deliberate distortions that usually reflects the ideological/commercial leanings of each media organization. This subchapter was inspired by the “sociology of language” (e.g. Bourdieu 1991) whose aim is not to understand language only as a means of communication, but also as a medium of power. Such perspective indicates how various social phenomena, including scandals, become reinterpreted through, in and by the structures in language in general, and by the linguistic devices of Japanese journalism in particular. While blurring and eventually obfuscating some parts of social reality, which becomes materialized in media texts, the ritualized use of some journalistic expressions often conveys additional information and meaning to media reports

Generally speaking, corruption and pollution in Japanese mainstream media is usually confined to latter part of aforementioned dichotomy of the explicit, ritualized “front” (*omote*), which becomes exposed to public attention, and the implicit “rear” (*ura*), which is in principle hidden from the public eye. While this dichotomy is not exclusively Japanese, it parallels Erving Goffman (1959) and his distinction between the frontstage and backstage: in the media-sponsored “theater of politics” we can generally distinguish between the stage where politicians engage in formal, conventional performances, while being aware that they are framed by the media, whereas in the back stage the informal actions, private consultations and role performances are in principle not in the focus of the big media. Importantly for analyzing media scandals, deception and hiding of facts is one of the most crucial elements of a politician’s backstage performance. Such performance can also refer to concealment of some information from the audience in order to avoid divulging information that could be damaging to political authorities.

The Japanese power elites in general, and the brokers between business and bureaucracy in particular, were in Japanese past always “naturally” reluctant to support the policy of information disclosure (*jōhō kōkai*). In a similar vein, the Japanese mainstream press usually does not want to be seen as taking sides, so it in principle applies descriptive frames within the so-called objective reporting (*kyakkan hōdō*) (term by Hara 1997), while practicing

strict self-censorship. The primary medium that can soften up (or cover up) the impact of sensitive political information, is the language itself. Language can help structure the culture of structural corruption: words and phrases are used in a deliberately indirect fashion, and linguistic tricks are applied in order to maintain the power consensus even after a scandal surfaces. While being aware of the fact that every word is recorded (the off-record accounts can also trigger scandal), both politicians and mainstream journalists make use of the “imprecision” of Japanese, which offers various means of blurring the sources and obfuscating the reporting by using a “soft language”. For instance, when citing the sources, the mainstream media use expressions such as *suji mono* (official sources), *seifu shunō* (usually the secretary general or the Prime Minister himself), or *shunō shūhen* (usually people close to the person of Prime Minister such as his personal secretary), though the meaning remains indistinct. Besides, if the media choose not to quote someone’s name in an article, they simply refer to him/her as *nado* (etcetera). Especially in mainstream scandal reporting, milder versions of the phenomenon of corporate/political corruption are commonly used, such as *funshoku kessan* (“creative accounting”), *kinken seiji* (“money-politics”), or *sakiokuri* (“postponement”, “delay”). Furthermore, the use of passive voice in Japanese journalism is another important way that the media avoid assigning responsibility. The way in which Japanese verbs are used, and modifying negative words into their milder versions, are among those effective ritualized means that blur responsibility and/or protect the sources.³

In this context, some scholars also pointed at the phenomenon of *kotodama* (originally a Shinto-belief that words have spirits): the speaker is advised to avoid saying anything negative as it may become reality, and this tendency is embedded in the language of Japanese journalism (Maeda 2003; Killmeier and Chiba 2010). At any rate, the pragmatism of using indirect expressions, and the discrepancy between saying something and actually practicing is a structural feature around which the polity has evolved throughout Japanese political history.

In case of media scandal, the data-gathering/editing processes reflect the policy of the mainstream media in general, and the editorial policy of each newspaper in particular. The journalistic “labor” is divided and responsibility diffused during the ritualized teamwork. The full-time reporters (*ban kisha*) are on everyday basis attached to their political counterparts, maintaining specific proximity, which in turn influences the way of coverage. This proximity is conditioned by the fact that reporters identify with the politicians they cover, while their careers advance along with the politician’s career (see Feldman 1993; Uesugi 2012). They are part of the aforementioned reporters’ club system (*kisha kurabu*) which largely controls political reporting in Japan, including the wording of power-sensitive news. It gives the official reporters privileged access to politicians while disadvantaging the regional press, foreign press, and the freelance journalists. Besides, political journalists submit their questions in advance, and many front-line reporters are young and underexperienced.

³ In such cases, the Japanese verb appears at the end of a sentence in a passive form. Furthermore, it facilitates a “rhetoric of commentation” (term by Maynard 1997), where the human agent does not appear in the sentence as an explicit grammatical subject, whereby avoiding responsibility for the described action. While obfuscating the source of a certain coverage, verbal expressions in a potential/passive form are used, such as *to ieru* (“it can be said that”), *to iwareru* (“it is said that”), *to omowareru* (“it is considered”), *to mirareru* (“it seems to be the case that”), *keikō ga aru* (“there is a tendency that”), *koe ga aru* (“there exists an opinion”), *kanōsei ga aru* (“there exists a possibility”) and *koto ga wakatta/akiraka ni natta* (it became clear/ it was understood that). The impact of a scandalous reporting can be also softened by using adverbs such as *tabun* (“probably”) or *osoraku* (“perhaps”). Another strategy of political/journalistic vagueness lies in modifying negative words into milder ones: for instance, “prostitution” (*baishun*) becomes “helping relationship” (*enjo kōsai*), wartime sex slaves are called “comfort women” (*ianfu*), taxes (*zeikin*) are replaced by “public funds” (*kōteki shikin*) and self-censorship (*jiko ken’etsu*) by “self-regulation” (*jishu kisei*).

Finally, in Japanese language, various phenomena related to transgression, corruption and scandal are frequently reflected in proverbial phrases. This reminds us of Lyotard's impression that popular sayings, proverbs and other maxims are "like little splinters of potential narratives that circulate on certain levels of the social" (Lyotard 1984, 22). In case of Japanese discourse, consider popular idioms such as "if water is too clean no fish can live in it", "put a lid on something that smells", "it is sometimes necessary to stretch the truth", or "in strategy, secrecy is highly regarded". In scandal, the idiom "cutting the tail of the lizard" (*tokage no shippo kiri*) is a proverbial account on the Japanese politicians' ability to undertake "purification" (*misogi*) and swiftly regenerate after their transgression, while "the honest man is sure to lose" (*shōjikimono ga baka wo miru*) can refer to the tendency to keep silent about a corruption rather than to blow the whistle.

1.3. Bottom-up Mediation and the Role of Tabloids

Scandals are primarily kept private by elite mainstream media. The Japanese mainstream press rarely confronts political controversies, and even if they eventually do, they expose elite deviations within the aforementioned official, ritualized "front" (*omote*). Moreover, these media are unlikely to carry out any investigation that would uncover political or corporate secrets. On the one hand, this *modus operandi* is underpinned by unwritten norms of the reporters' club (*kisha kurabu*), and on the other hand it is a result of the power of major advertising agencies (especially Dentsu), business circles (*zaikai*), government ministries, and even organized crime (*yakuza*).

The implicit "rear" (*ura*) of things, which is normally hidden from the Japanese mainstream audiences, is usually handled by the outside media. The initial impulse for triggering a scandal usually lies in a bottom-up process initiated by the semi-mainstream weekly magazines (*shūkanshi*), but occasionally also via freelance reporting or local newspapers. Furthermore, some Japanese scandals with global reach were instigated by the foreign press (e.g. the 1976 Lockheed case) or amplified by online communities (e.g. the 2015 Olympic logo scandal). Some major postwar corruption scandals were triggered by the prosecutor's office (the cases of Lockheed, Recruit, and Sagawa), or via a motivated whistleblower, who forwards scoops to a place where the appearance of consensus is less assured, such as the tabloids or foreign press.

Apart from a handful of biweeklies, Japan has over 100 weeklies (*shūkanshi*) and about 3,500 monthly magazines (*gekkanshi*) with annual sales of more than three billion copies (e.g. Legewie 2010). Altogether amounting to a circulation of five to six million, the weeklies are usually the prime movers of scandals in Japan (the largest weeklies sell around half million copies). In terms of marketing, over 90 percent of Japanese magazines are bought at newsstands, so their existence is largely based on their controversial and scandalous appeal. In terms of censorship, they are free to indulge in a more speculative journalism because they do not belong to the restrictive "club system" (*kisha kurabu*). Moreover, the major Japanese newspapers are known for representing the accurate-but-official *omote*-reality in a strikingly homogeneous way, so many readers turn to magazines for an alternative. Apart from the weekly tabloids like *Sunday Mainichi* or *Shūkan Asahi* that are rather conservative since they are owned by one of the big dailies, there exists a variety of sensationalist sports papers with circulation around one million (e.g. *Sankei Supōtsu* or *Supōtsu Nippon*).

The most prominent scandal instigators are those weeklies owned by larger publishing houses – most notably the *Shūkan Bunshun* (publisher Bungei Shunjū), *Shūkan Shinchō* (Shinchōsha), and *Shūkan Gendai* (Kōdansha), or the photo-tabloids *Friday* (Kōdansha) and *Flash* (Kōbunsha) or *Spa!* (Fusōsha). No matter how speculative or unethical the weeklies get, they still represent an influential news format that is necessarily guided by profit, and ranges from celebrity news to high quality journalism, serious speculations and unsubstantiated libel.⁴

The more powerful the object in journalism, the greater is editors' reluctance to publish the story, same as the damage to the reporter if it collapses (Liebes and Blum-Kulka 2004). The scandal-seeking tabloids are often in trouble and legal action comes with the territory. The danger lies in those cases where editors have to correctly judge the norm audience when publishing a scandal because it may backfire. Furthermore, it is equally dangerous to scandalize too far and overstep the values of the target group. If the privacy violation (*puraibashī shingai*) is at stake, the media can plead the constitutional freedom of expression (*hyōgen no jiyū*). The tabloids' "nihilist enthusiasm" can get under fire also because of the placement and size of transgressors' unflattering images (most recently, the tabloids became criticized after ridiculing Obokata Haruko by oversizing her close-up image on front pages of the sports papers in the wake of her academic scandal in 2014). Although the Japanese generally tend to avoid litigation, in some cases the weeklies are brought to court and penalized (they are in principle represented by their publishing houses). Only sometimes are they prohibited publishing, but it is still rare to be prosecuted.⁵ The financial damages are on the increase, but they are rather nominal, reaching up to one million yen per case (Asano 2004; Legewie 2010). Once the cost/benefit estimation is made it is often worthwhile for the weeklies to run the risk, publish rumors, and eventually gain from negative publicity.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE SCANDAL MEDIATION PROCESS IN JAPAN

In this section I aim to create a map of the scandal mediation process across the Japanese mediascape, including both the inside/outside media and their role in scandal. This endeavor falls within the objectivist paradigm of scandal studies, which focuses on transgressions and misconducts as related to various organizational biases (structural, impersonal issues, malfunctions of the system) and media routines (i.e. patterned and repeated practices and forms that media workers use). They both result in so-called "journalistic rituals of objectivity" that ensure that the media system responds in predictable ways (Shoemaker and Reese 1996) and prevent individual journalists from being blamed (Tuchman 1972).

Lance Bennett (2007) noted that scandals occupy more of the news, while a "strange sort of gatekeeping" develops. Indeed, the basic communication model of sender-message-receiver is in scandal reporting more complex than it looks like, because scandals are being co-

⁴ The weeklies were in the past calling into question the background and details regarding factual historical events such as the Nanking massacre, the existence of Holocaust and gas chambers, or the sex slavery of the "comfort women" (*ianfu*) in the Japanese army during the World War II. Furthermore, the Japanese tabloids were in the past wrongly accusing and stigmatizing ordinary citizens (e.g. the case of Kōno Yoshiyuki in 1994) and stigmatizing individuals to the point of their suicide (e.g. the case of Professor Kagawa Mitsuo in 2001).

⁵ For instance, an arrest warrant was issued by Kobe prosecutors in 2005 on a suspicion of defamation in a tabloid magazine *Kami no Bakudan* (published by Matsuoka Toshiyasu's *Rokusaisha*). Earlier in 1994 the popular tabloid *Shūkan Shinchō* (published by *Shinchōsha*) was ordered by court to pay damages in a serious misreporting incident involving a *Sōka Gakkai* priest. In 1995, the monthly magazine *Marco Polo* (published by *Bungei Shunjū*) ceased to exist based on an article denying Holocaust, which was publicly attacked by the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

constructed by multiple more or less interrelated actors. On the most general level, I distinguish between four types of actors that co-construct a media scandal. They are based on principles of social organization that both affect, and are manipulated by concrete individuals and related institutions:

1. **scandal promoters** (“sources of perception”, whistleblowers, insiders). They identify and deliberately promote some occurrence as newsworthy. The promotion can take a shape of spin (*varase*), PR activity, hoax, or tabloid gossip, and it is occurring frequently during attack-politics at the elite backstage
2. **primary participants** (“assemblers”, “communicators”). They transform occurrences via mediatization into newsworthy media events, and they include information sources, news agencies, low-level media workers (reporters, editors, writers) and high-level workers (publishers, news (vice-)presidents)
3. **secondary participants**. They can legitimize/criminalize the transgression (the police, prosecutors, lawyers). They wield some power to influence the scandal development (entertainment/advertising agencies, crisis managers, investigative commissions, organized crime), or they provide the public with an “expert truth” via various “pundits” that are relied on by the media to put events into context and explain them)
4. **scandal consumers** (“receivers”, readers/viewers, “media audience”). They decode and interpret meanings of previously promoted, assembled (encoded) and criminalized media events.

This chapter will focus most closely on “primary participants”: the media workers with their media routines. I will attempt to delineate those forces that control various functions along the scandal news process, including their decision what will become scandal and in what way.

The contemporary media/communication research implies that the traditional public watchdog argument is outdated. It is not paramount anymore in determining the media policy that are today given over largely to entertainment/infotainment, while more decisive is the exercise of economic power by shareholders and managers. In this vein, the Japanese mediascape is often criticized for having no real independent body to keep government from controlling the media, while the watchdog role of journalists is on trial in several cases with enormous implications for freedom of the press. Also in order to review this criticism in case of the Japanese media I analyze and highlight the developmental logic of and ideal-scandal mediation. I offer a five-act structure consisting of scoop leak to media, scandal processing, scoop leak to the public, scandal climax, and the post-scandal phase.

2.1. Initiation Phase: Scoop Leak to the Media

In their initiation phase, scandals are fundamentally structured by the dialectic of cover-up and exposure, and the explanation of initial revelation is seminal for understanding the process of scandal. Given how various social systems work (in Japan especially the world of entertainment, politics, and the corporate world), scandal seems to be always already there, “waiting to show itself” (Gamson 2001, 198). The emergence of a scandal, as just one product of journalistic rituals, is however nothing “epiphanic”, while leaks are more routine than exceptional. Indeed, scandals may appear as discoveries, but they are in principle *given*, and not *born* out of their respective contexts.

In order to initiate a scandal, a transgression must be revealed, and leaked to the media that authorize it for publishing. During the initiation phase of scandal, the exposure itself is not controlled by the journalists. Generally, the news content in Japan and elsewhere consists largely of statements from official sources (e.g. Shoemaker and Reese 1996), and in the same vein, the so-called “scoops” in Japanese dailies are almost always authorized leaks (McNeill 2014). In some isolated cases, the scandal disclosure is claimed to have been based on sheer happenstance (for instance, the drug-packed husband of Sakai Noriko was body-searched by the Tokyo police “at random”, or the Watergate burglars were caught “incidentally”). However, I argue that the primary motivation for leaking scoops to the media usually derives from the “three Cs”:

- 1. Capital.** The disclosure is profit-oriented. Some whistleblowers are primarily motivated by financial benefits for leaking some sensitive information (notes, documents or photos) while usually hiding their real identity.
- 2. Conspiracy.** In denunciatory power scandals, the narrative about conspiracy can refer to secretive or illegal plots by political enemies, bureaucrats, prosecutors and other parties. Many scandal incentives come from the opposing parties as a part of attack-politics.
- 3. Confession.** The disclosure works as unforced confession to the media (e.g. based on a spontaneous moral reflection), or as a provocation (e.g. art scandals that challenge artistic norms and/or provoke shock from the “immoral” in art).

While being motivated primarily by commercial profit, or by a political conspiracy, or even by one’s “moral awakening”, a certain transgressive occurrence is transformed into a media event and reduced into an understandable media phenomenon. The revelatory act is usually realized via whistleblowing (i.e. insider revealing information about some hidden secret), which is the most frequent type of short-circuiting of subversion of communication between reporters and their sources.⁶ In other words, every scandal requires some intentional form of information leak, usually conducted by scandal “promoters” (insiders, or company zealots, anonymous reporter sources, political opposition, auditors, the police, prosecutors, or individual victims of corruption). Unfortunately, the information source is usually impossible to trace since scoops are based on the understanding that journalists will protect the person who gave them the information.⁷

In Japan, the most of prosecutorial investigations that lead to scandal are based on anonymous tips (Hasegawa 2000), or they were “motivated” by the data stemming from investigative journalism (Johnson 1997). Some law-breaking scandals are triggered by the police leaking data to the media through unofficial channels (e.g. Asano 2004). Other leaks are not always accurate and can be potentially harmful to commoners.⁸

⁶ Apart from the practice of whistleblowing (i.e. insiders and informers revealing information about certain hidden secret) we can add two more types of short-circuiting/subversion of communication between reporters and their sources: *entrapment* (journalists betraying their sources by breaking a formal or tacit agreement), and *spotlighting* (journalists retrospectively retracing a routine talk in the media that may have in the past lead to a major violation) (Liebes and Blum-Kulka 2004). The process of spotlighting became easier due to technological developments, since various journalistic sources are now accessible electronically, allowing to reconstruct past editorial efforts.

⁷ For instance, up to 40 percent of published gossip in the weekly tabloid *Uwasa no Shinsō* (active 1979-2004) came straight from the *kisha kurabu* reporters (Gamble and Watanabe 2004). While enjoying friendly links with the weeklies, the reporter-whistleblowers usually write under pen name, or they at least sell a tip for scandal, for which they can receive an amount of money which equals up to 1,000 dollars (West 2006). The magazines in turn serve as a valuable scandal source for the commercial television broadcast (ibid).

⁸ Consider the leaked disinformation case based on a flawed police report that led to the false accusation of Kōno Yoshiyuki

Some Japanese celebrity scandals stem from coincidences resulting in public exposure (and they are further amped up by the tabloid paparazzi), while other leaks are based on rumors that first emerged outside the big media (e.g. in online forums such as Channel 2 and critical blogs such as Netgeek.biz). The most reliable source for scandal is sensitive data leak in a “fixed” form (*busshō*): the medium for scoop (and body of evidence) is represented by audio/video tapes, phone calls/transcripts, seized account books, or photographs of celebrities in “unflattering” scenarios. The emergence of fixed evidence hinges on whistleblowing, investigative journalism, the police, and the prosecutors. Nonetheless, some discrediting “mysterious documents” (*kaibunsho*) are discovered all of sudden, which is to be attributed either to the practices of schemed attack-politics (Taniguchi 2007) or to bureaucrats avoiding/calling for responsibility (Miyamoto 1996). These documents are re-printed in the tabloids, and they can generate up to three unique scandal articles per month (West 2006).

2.2. Pre-scandal Phase: Data Processing

Not every publicized transgression causes public outrage and media scandal. Some scoops, same as other “low-order events” cannot constitute a proper scandal because 1) they do not reach the threshold of attention of the public, 2) there was no scandal promoter who would start the “moral crusade”, or 3) the solution was already internally reached at the level of elites and institutions.

The pre-scandal phase lies primarily in investigation and search for information prior to actual media release. The media wrestle whether some rumors are fit to print. In cases of confirmed violation of dominant social norm, it is primarily the media to get involved, while in the case of a violation of law, it is the police and the prosecutor's office. Thus, scandals are often simultaneously processed on two levels: the repressive/legal level, where an occurrence becomes a criminal act (i.e. the wrongdoing is rendered as infringing formal rules), and the symbolic/ethical level, on which the occurrence becomes a non-routine media event (i.e. the wrongdoing is rendered as infringing social custom, tradition or taboo). Regarding the processing of information, the former level corresponds to the realm of fact and motivation (i.e. the pentad of questions starting with who, what, where, when and how), while eventually resulting in material punitive sanctions (detention, fines). The repressive/legal process is supervised by the agents of formal social control (police, courts, correctional institutions) based on failing one's “legal responsibility” (*hōteki sekinin*). On the contrary, the symbolic/ethical level lies in interpretations and meanings of transgression and relates to one's “moral responsibilities” (*dōgiteki sekinin*). The latter leads to symbolic punitive sanctions (loss of status, reputation and other forms of social disgrace), and is facilitated by the media as informal agents of social control. Especially in Japan, where social order is said to be often maintained through informal social control and damaging one's reputation (Haley 1982; Miller and Kanazawa 2000), sanctions on the symbolic/mediated level can be more devastating than legal punishment.

during the Matsumoto/Sarin incident from 1994, or the 1999 Tochigi *ijime* case from 1999, where a teenager from Tochigi Prefecture was bullied to death, but the media misinformed the public about the incident by quoting incorrect police reports. In cases like this, Japanese journalists do not tend to maintain the presumption of innocence, and they often uncritically adopt the police data since they are protected by the guidelines of The Japanese Newspaper Association (*Nihon Shimbum Kyōkai*), where newspapers are not held responsible for misinformation or libel as long as it is based on a police report.

In power-related scandals, the Japanese mainstream media are likely to ignore the story, previously released by tabloids. They take the “see no evil” approach and keep the information outside their focus. As I indicated above, this is partly caused by institutionalized norms of silence: the details of corruption/transgression are an open secret to many mainstream reporters, who are however not encouraged to undertake any serious investigative reporting. This rule is institutionalized by aforementioned *kisha* clubs that are obliged to behave in accord with the “information cartel”. Another reason for keeping the rule comes from the conservative political pressures that can de facto lead to revoking broadcasting licenses.⁹

The mainstream media are also unlikely to carry out any investigation that would uncover corporate secrets including corruptive practices. Such norms of silence are underpinned by the pressure coming from advertising agencies (in Japan most notably Dentsu and Hakuhodo) and from partners in elite business circles (*zaikai*). On the contrary, the non-mainstream tabloids, sports magazines and local papers pick a scoop and take the initiative in investigation. Some Japanese magazines sell their gathered memo to other domestic media companies, or they inform other subjects, including foreign media, the police and prosecutors. The tabloids’ risk lies in reliability of leaked information and accuracy of the tips from whistleblowers, and the information is further evaluated in terms of estimated profit and eventual damages. In many cases, however, it financially pays to be sued for previously released untruths or half-truths, although it is not preferable for the weeklies to be sued by an ordinary person (Gamble and Watanabe 2004). Once the prosecutor’s office obtains information from their sources (anonymous whistleblowers, police, tabloids, online forums), they eventually start investigation on their own. In other words, during the pre-scandal phase the outside media can determine what information reaches the prosecutors and which subject will be investigated. Pre-arrest reports in the weeklies are rather exceptional, because they can become heavily criticized if the accusation turns out to be wrong.

2.3. Scandal Proper: Transgression Going Public

During the stage, which I call scandal proper, the media finally piece together all available fragments of information and approach the public with a more or less consistent scandal narrative. After first revelation surfaces, the new ones are quickly made, and from now on the media will keep establishing a record while keeping the scandal alive.

As I indicated above, the mainstream media are usually reluctant to pick up an info-leak pointing at some form of serious domestic corruption. However, these media can at least publish “news report about a news report” while distancing themselves and referring to outside sources.¹⁰ Some scandals (especially those related to plagiarizing and safety) are scrutinized in

⁹ The Communications and Internal Affairs Ministry has the power to issue, renew or revoke licenses of broadcasting companies. There are more cases in Japanese history where the politicians put pressure on a broadcaster due to sensitive media content (most notably the 1993 *Asahi* TV anti-LDP pre-election media coverage, or the 2001 NHK “comfort women” documentary censorship). Most recently, the Internal Affairs Communications Minister Takaichi Sanae warned the broadcasters that the government can order them to suspend operations if they keep on airing programs that are deemed “politically biased”.

¹⁰ The mainstream Japanese media often avoid responsibility by reposting pictures or quoting articles from foreign sources or domestic weeklies. Without certifying the story or digging any deeper, the media state that something occurred “according to an article in...” (*...ni yoru to*). For instance, in 2004 the foreign media speculated that princess Masako suffered from depression, but the Japanese media only mentioned that *Washington Post* covered the story on its front page, and later they added that it was the weekly *Shūkan Bunshun* that had broken the story in Japan. In another case from 2013, *Asahi Shimbun* published an incident of four lynched American civilian contractors in Iraq’s Fallujah (the so-called “strange fruit” incident), but

Japanese online platforms (most importantly the “2channel” forum, or BuzzFeed Japan). Scandalous controversies and political gaffes are also initiated by individually posted clips (on YouTube, U-stream, or Nico Nico Douga), pictures and comments (on Facebook or Twitter).

The key media actors in scandal proper are the weeklies (*shūkanshi*). While sensing larger profit, the biggest competing tabloids (especially *Shūkan Bunshun* and *Shūkan Shinchō*) deepen their investigative reporting and elaborate on new disclosures, twists and turns. By doing so, the tabloids infuse the social drama of scandal with new moral energy, eventually facilitating a “media hype”.¹¹ The hype tends to focus on negative aspects of the alleged transgressor, whose past is re-examined, leaving little space for other perspectives. There exist various strategies how to operate effectively during a media hype. For instance, the weeklies choose to publish selected fragments of a scandal in a slow drip-drip process, where the first exposure (*ichidan*) is followed by a new one (*nidan*) in next edition. Equally important is the intermedia influence as a routine of sharing information among various media/journalists.

The media power in scandal is generated within the relations among their actors: the conservative dailies “need” the radical weeklies (and vice versa) in order to assemble a commercially successful scandal. Owing to such “division of labor” in scandal mediation, the scandal proper represents a transformation of the *sign* of a transgression into a complex *symbol* of the profane, polluted, and impure. Furthermore, this symbol becomes “contagious”: those individuals and companies who happen to be associated with it can suddenly find themselves on the “evil” side of the polarized symbolic classification. Scandals usually trigger the so-called snowball effect, which adds new polluted actors to scandal agenda by indicating their links to main transgressor.¹²

Besides, transgressor’s demeanor and attitude can give birth to a second-order transgression, which is based on a new statement, performance, or opinion related to the ongoing scandal. In other words, some actions during the scandal development can assign an aura of yet another scandal. Consider for instance the press conference of Nonomura Ryūtarō in 2014, which ended up in what looked like the politician’s emotional breakdown. The initial charges pointed to the politician’s accounting fraud, but Nonomura’s hysterical performance embarrassed the feelings of national pride as soon as the spectacularly disastrous conference went global.¹³

Asahi only reprinted the controversial picture as it earlier appeared in *The New York Times*.

¹¹ Generally speaking, media hype is a media-practiced form of overstatement and exaggeration of events predominantly for the sake of novelty and newsworthiness. It may be channeled via sensational headlines, melodramatic vocabulary, or deliberate heightening of certain elements in the story (see Vasterman 2005). As a result, large scandals under the spell of media hype become typically inflated in size, scope, seriousness, while shifting our attention from structural problems to selected sensationalist elements of the story.

¹² One typical case of the snowball effect in postwar Japan was the Sagawa Kyūbin scandal from 1992. It became gradually clear that the trucking company bribed more than 100 politicians in return for political favors. Based on a thorough investigative journalism followed by issuing warrant arrests, many heavyweight politicians including Takeshita Noboru and Kanemaru Shin had to resign from their posts one after another. The snowball effect can also travel across the border: in Lockheed bribery scandal from 1976, even the Prince Bernhard of Netherlands was stripped of his official functions, while the scandal resulted in investigation in several other countries. Dangerously enough, the snowball effect can also be based on some arbitrary correlation. For instance, then minister of finance Nakagawa Shōichi not only appeared drunk at the G7 press conference in Rome in 2009: he blamed his intoxication on the overuse of his cold medication, which in turn infuriated the Japanese medicine makers who blamed Nakagawa’s statement for sudden sales decrease of their products. In another pseudo-correlation, the head of the Socialist party Doi Takako accepted in 1979 campaign money from the *pachinko* industry and the media linked her case to Koreans in Japan who own over one half of Japanese parlors and are involved in unsound activities.

¹³ The Japanese media are in principle careful not to disturb the “national harmony” by exposing certain sensitive issues. It is usually the foreign media, and/or the internet communities that make the public outrage occurs on a basis of national identity,

At a certain point of scandal proper, the typically reluctant Japanese mainstream press eventually takes up the case. The main incentives for the mainstream media to start covering a scandal are:

1. **official investigation:** transgression becomes a subject of substantiated indictment. Public officials, prosecutors, and police make raids and arrests, changing a private matter to a public one whereby practically legitimating a scandal
2. **foreign pressure:** some non-Japanese agency (foreign media, international committees, auditors) enters the scene first and reveals/magnifies scandal, eventually forcing the Japanese mainstream media to report on the case as well
3. **domestic mood:** the moral indignation within the public climate (*seken*) in the wake of a scandal reaches critical levels that the mainstream media cannot ignore anymore. In extreme cases, the public *en masse* symbolically challenge the media institution by sending angry letters or protesting to pay television fees.¹⁴

In the meantime, the desk people discuss obtained scoops and new updates with their bosses and editors of section that in turn consult the editor-in-chief. This highly specialized factory-like environment however leads to a lack of personal commitment, and lack of the individuals' control over the final news product. Besides, individual journalists who write news are rarely named. In case of newspaper editing, scandals are generally handled by the social affairs section, or "city desk" (*shakaibu*), and not by the political section (*seijibu*). The latter usually keeps such scoops off the front page since they are either too close to their sources, or they are supportive of the ruling party (see Lee 1980; Krauss 2000). Moreover, *shakaibu*, which is the largest in size, controls the hierarchy of the news organization, not to mention that its reporters are often friends with police (Asano 2001; Uesugi 2012). On the other hand, the lack of political background knowledge makes the *shakaibu* section focus more on public degradations and ceremonial apologies.

The Japanese television broadcast is equally important in scandal, since in Japan many people still turn to television as their main source of information (e.g. Kabashima and Steel 2010). The TV broadcast usually catches on as soon as the scandal appears in one of the big dailies, which is partly due to the fact that the commercial TV networks get their news from the same source as the elite newspapers (West 2006). Moreover, once televisualized, the stories reach millions more viewers once they shift from the tabloids to TV shows. Other scandals

which in turn may produce "national feelings" of shame. The image of the Japanese can be also shattered by exposing corruption during some closely watched global event, such as the plagiarism affair around the Japanese Olympic logo designer Sano Kenjirō, who was accused by Japanese tabloids of spoiling the image of Japan (Prusa, forthcoming). Moreover, in Japanese past the feelings of national embarrassment have arisen from letting the Japanese public know that it was actually the foreigners who exposed Japanese corruption (Johnson 1986; Nester 1990). This was also the case of the media's (mis)reporting on the 2011 Fukushima disaster (see Wakiyama 2011; Uesugi 2012).

¹⁴ Especially the sub-publics (loyal fans, orthodox supporters) can publicly challenge the media or criticize prosecutorial conduct during a scandal. The most effective strategies are social networking, "flaming" incidents in online forums (*enjō jiken*), sending angry letters to media companies, and even organizing public rallies. In Japan, the public broadcaster NHK experienced these pressures on multiple occasions. For instance, the 1976 Lockheed scandal forced the president of NHK to resign after the broadcaster received over 1,200 angry phone calls over the president's links to Tanaka Kakuei, while in 2004 more than a million of Japanese households refused to pay the television fees after what they perceived as a mild treatment of an NHK producer tainted by embezzlement scandal. In the aftermath of the 1992 Sagawa scandal, the Japanese public exerted enormous pressure on the prosecution via rallies, petitions, and even hunger strikes (the source of the public backlash was the prosecutors' mild treatment of Kanemaru Shin). Most recently, in case of scandals related to Obokata Haruko (the 2014 STAP cell scandal), Sano Kenjirō (the 2015 Olympic logo scandal) and Shawn K (the 2016 CV fraud scandal), it was the internet communities that flamed the debate and contributed to large-scale exposure.

become televizualized once the tabloid coverage of a scandal grew out of proportion. In such case, commentators in the studio introduce the story by pointing to its prominence in the tabloids. In terms of its form and content, by switching between hard news and soft news, the television during scandals both mimics and distinguishes itself from the tabloid media. In other words, the Japanese TV broadcast during scandals is more comparable to the media logic of the tabloid weeklies, albeit more in content than in form. (This convergence could be also attributed to a rising reputation of the weeklies that have just recently intensified their fierce investigative journalism.) Especially during Japanese celebrity scandals, the TV broadcast lies in what Gamson (2001) described as hardening and lengthening what is a soft, short-lived, and lower status story.

In Japan, most of such stories become an issue during the daytime TV “wideshows” (*waidoshō*), where the commentators refer to the sensitive news as it previously appeared in daily press. These shows run on weekdays on major private TV networks, and they often monopolize attention of the viewing public (predominantly housewives) through real-life scandal, tragedy, crime and gossip. Apart from continually debating the appropriateness of transgressors’ performances, the TV broadcast likes to focus on various pseudo-events that became related to a scandal. Especially police arrests and prosecutorial raids are carefully staged for the TV consumption, while the closely watched televisual climax comes as a confessional ritual of apology and sanction.

2.4. Scandal Climax: Confessions and Damages

Not all stories lead to resolution. Some stories are unreliable, based on bad tips, or they fail to give rise to criminal/moral charges. Some investigations end by expelling the journalist from the reporter’s club on the grounds of violating the unwritten rules. In case of false indictment, the media can be sued and brought to court where they are represented by their publishing houses.

If a transgression becomes fully exposed and succeeds in awaking negative public backlash, the ideal-type scandal will be concluded by mediated confessions and apologies. In this stage, the media uniformly and in detail cover the final part of the scandal including dismissals or further prosecution. Tabloids and TV channels accelerate the scandal by paying excessive amount of attention to the moment of denouncement. The scandal climax is constituted by a televizualized press conference with alleged transgressor. This media event follows the logic of a “degradation ceremony” (term by Garfinkel 1956): in the midst of moral indignation the elites are pushed to apologize, and eventually they step down in order to stabilize the situation or to minimize the snowball effect. Needless to say, these confessional events are overwhelmingly strategic: it is a mixture of efforts to preserve the system/subsystem one belongs to, to save one’s reputation, and to alleviate negative public moods.

During scandal climax, the TV commentators, journalists and pundits judge rather passionately the (in)adequacy of confession and apology, analyzing “expressive equipment” of transgressor’s performance. The most closely watched is physical appearance (frequency and length of bows, clothing, gestures, and tears), and verbal eloquence (word usage, politeness level, and the amount of words expressing repentance). In ideal-type scandal, the culprit apologizes for failing his/her responsibility and causing trouble to all concerned parties, but the less cooperative actors use the scandal climax as a site of contestation and conspiracy. The

apologetic/cooperative performance is typical for Japanese celebrity scandals, while the protective/offensive strategy is at times utilized by experienced politicians. Importantly for the transgressor, the apologetic conference starts up the process, which aims to restore the damaged reputation and make future comeback possible. While being concerned with their symbolic capital, celebrities, politicians and corporate leaders in most cases demonstrate regret, apologize, and eventually resign. Some of them return part of their salary by way of a symbolic apology to the public. In case of a court trial they pay a fine, get a suspended sentence, and they almost never serve prison terms.

2.5. Post-scandal Phase: Return to Normality

In (neo)functionalist thought, some social rituals present liminal opportunities to modify existing norms in moments of “collective effervescence” (Durkheim 1915; Turner 1969; Moore and Myerhoff 1977). However, in case of Japanese scandals the transgression only hardly disrupts social order or transforms social understanding of corruption. Rather, transgressions are regulated and integrated into social order by the ritual performance. Similarly, in Japan the social ritual of scandal rarely challenges deeper social structures or transform dominant norms (see above). Scandals only seem to offer an outlet for the social order, meet structural demands and re-confirm their integrative character without necessarily incorporating some transformative ideas in order to avoid new corruption. After a certain period of time (usually weeks in case of minor controversies and months in case of a large scandal) the liminoid state is suspended by readjusting to the routine world of:

1. Public everydayness. The scandal-ritual is concluded and the audiences return again to the common-sense world. The mobilized media public repositions itself on the emotional level to resume the profane level of everyday reality. The short-lived emotions that the audiences have felt during the liminoid period of scandal seem rather alien to them once the scandal is concluded. In other words, we may retrospectively realize that during the scandal hype we have *undergone* the emotional stir rather than *generating* it.

2. Journalistic everydayness. The scandal climax is followed by exiting the media event and converting back from the ceremonial (non-routine) to agonistic (routine) mode, in which events are again treated as news and addressed within ordinary news broadcast. Big scandals tend to overshadow other social, political or economic issues, so once the media return to journalistic routine, old conflicts loom large again, capturing the news for the first time in weeks or months.

3. Elite everydayness. To be involved in a scandal can damage or remove one’s delegated trustworthiness as a social elite. After the crisis of delegitimation subsides, the rules for the delegation of political power, that were temporarily annulled by scandal, are re-consolidated again. The return of Japanese transgressors to their professional platform (albeit to a different post) is usually the case, although it demands some time (decisions are made by managements/parties/factions). Only in extreme cases the return is made completely impossible. Once the punitive exile is nearly over, the transgressor usually offers another mediated apology to the public, symbolizing his/her comeback. Political actors are exiled from the public sphere, some of them conceiving their next election campaign as a “purification ritual” (*misogi*). In bureaucratic and corporate scandal, the transgressor is often side-slipped (*yokosuberi*) to different section, assigned a different, usually lower post, or they retire while being compensated behind the scenes. Usually, no big lessons are learned and no real reform

is achieved. Nonetheless, during the post-scandal phase a subtle outpouring from the “collective conscience” occurs: major scandals become materialized in books, articles, and films that are more or less loosely based on given scandal narrative.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

In this text, I mentioned some universal and particular qualities of media scandals in contemporary Japan. Furthermore, I elaborated a five-step process of scandal mediation in Japanese mediascape. This process aimed to model the complex causes propelling the scandal process. Throughout the aforementioned stages, the scandal promoters, primary and secondary participants, and the scandal audiences have all their share in constituting scandal. The ideal-scandal flows from the moment of actual transgression, through the leak to the public via mainstream media, until the scandal climax. During each phase of the process there are multiple sets of forces facilitating the flow, or trying to get information under their control. First, whistleblowers forward a compromising data to the media (domestic/foreign, mainstream/nonmainstream), or to formal agents of social control (police/prosecutors). It is usually in a common interest of the power circles (*sei-kan-zai*), the mainstream media with its *kisha* club system, the advertising companies, and the celebrity agencies to “manage” the information flow. Simultaneously, sensitive information is being leaked to the outside media. This is possible due the fact that both the tabloids and the foreign press are not official members of the inside media, although they are related on a level of cross-reference. The general press in the first instance ignores the tabloids' revelations. This is not only because of the journalistic agreements within the *kisha kurabu* system, but it also maintains the market share by avoiding offences (i.e. if a story is not based on an official investigation by prosecutors, there is always a risk that publications carrying the story will expose themselves to lawsuit). Nonetheless, depending on various circumstances, the national dailies eventually start to cover the case, constructing a large-scale media scandal.

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¹⁵ Apart from countless confessional autobiographies in the aftermath of many Japanese scandals, it is also the film production which leaves traces of scandal in popular culture. For instance, the wrong accusation of Kōno Yoshiyuki in the aftermath of the 1994 sarin gas attack was dramatized by Fuji TV in 2009. The Japanese celebrity megascandal of Sakai Noriko from the same year was adapted for the screen under the title *Setsuna*, and a feature-length documentary about the 2011 Olympus scandal, titled *Samurai and Idiots: The Olympus Affair*, was released in 2014. Recently, the acclaimed documentarist Mori Tatsuya produced a documentary-style film about the 2014 scandal of composer Samuragōchi Mamoru who was faking deafness while using a ghostwriter.

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