

Master or Servant

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You are deeply in love, and your wedding is just a few months away. All of a sudden, you have to tell you fiancée that you cannot marry him. You have to reject your fiancée through no fault of your own.

You are the owner of a small fairly successful local business, then all of a sudden your world comes crashing in around you. Nobody wants to buy your product any more.

There is an English proverb, "Fire is a good servant, but a bad master," meaning that fire under control is very useful, but when out of control, it can cause enormous damage.

In a way, freedom of the press is similar to fire. The Japanese people gained freedom of the press after World War Two, and when we think about the mis-information during the war, we are so lucky now to have such a strong servant for our society.

At times however, I feel that this servant has become a terrible master.

Mr. Tsutomu Miyazaki... yes, there is probably no one in this audience who hasn't heard of him. Since he was arrested, the mass media in Japan has told us what he did to the four little girls, how he grew up, and all the details about his family after he was arrested. Some of them have even given us set of questions, so that we can check how '*Miyazakistic*' we are.

But why does the mass media have to use real names when referring to suspects, criminals, victims and even relatives? Why is there a demand for real names? Are they really necessary? Is the use of real names doing any good to our society?

Firstly, let's think about the suspect. What do you think when you see an article in a newspaper with a man's name and photograph saying that he was arrested or held by the police as a suspect for a certain case?

"Gosh, look at this face! This IS a face for a criminal. As long as he was arrested by the police, there must be some evidence. He must be guilty. Thank god he was caught. Serve him right!"

BUT, did you know that out of every ten suspects of "general" crimes like robbery, arson and murder, only six are actually prosecuted? This means that 40% of the suspects, who won't go to court, and their families, face lives of being scorned. In fact, suicide in such case is not rare.

Remember the two people at the beginning of my speech? They are true stories about Miyazaki's sister and about his father after his arrest. They were innocent people. Their only fault was that they were related to a suspect.

Furthermore, even if a suspect is sentenced as guilty, it may not be absolutely true. There have been so many suspects who turned out to be innocent. Of those who revealed their names and those who denounced them, who is going to apologize? Who is going to compensate for their honor, which has been trampled and burned at the stake called mass media?

Secondly, even for those who have actually committed crimes, revealing their names is a far greater punishment than what the laws of our nation demand.

Here is an example. There was a fireman who was arrested for drunken driving when he was not on duty. The next day, his name appeared in a newspaper. If it hadn't been in there, he would simply have had to pay a fine and have his driver's license suspended. But his boss saw the article and told him to resign. Since then, he hasn't been able to get a proper job. This is far beyond what the law calls for. A little newspaper article changed his whole life. If a drunken driver has to suffer this much, think what it must be like for robbers or murderers who have completed their sentences and trying to start new lives.

We must also think about the victims and their families. Think of how the families of the four little girls who were kidnapped and killed were hounded by the press. There are probably many cases which go unreported because the victims are afraid of having their names exposed to the public.

When you get home tonight and watch the TV news talking about a suspect for murder or robbery, ask yourself whether there is any merit in knowing the real name or face of the suspect. It might be a source of entertainment for us for about ten seconds, but it might mean torture for him for the rest of his life. These are all violations of human rights, and there are the things we, the receivers of mass media, should always think about.

I believe that mass media should stop using real names or any information which would help identify suspects, criminals and victims. All of the problems I have mentioned can be avoided by this manoeuvre. This may sound radical and impossible, but it isn't. In fact, this system is already at work in Sweden and partially in Finland. In Sweden, no names of ordinary citizens are revealed, unless it is thought to be in the public interest; for example, the names of ministers, officials of high rank and so forth.

We, the customers of the mass media, can influence it. So, for instance, how about writing letters to newspaper companies? Do you think that they will be censored and ignored? Well, look at what I've got here. This is a cutting from Asahi Shimbun. There is somebody already on the move and it's here in the newspaper. Let the mass media know how many of us want real names from being revealed.

And when there's enough understanding between the presenting side and the receiving side, the bad master today may turn into a good servant tomorrow. As long as human rights are being violated, it is not freedom of the press, but tyranny of the press. You never know how hot the fire would be until it is set on you.