

Chunichi Has Forgotten Missions of Press

Katsuhiko Takaike

The paper once accepted opinion ad

The Chunichi Shimbun has refused to carry an opinion advertisement of a “National Movement to Support (Nagoya Mayor Takashi) Kawamura’s Remarks and Ascertain the Truth of the Nanjing Incident” led by Shoichi Watanabe, a professor emeritus of Sophia University. The refusal reportedly came after the newspaper agreed to carry the ad. The reason for the refusal is that the ad does not meet the newspaper's opinion.

Informing the public of various opinions is an indispensable condition for a democratic society. And media organizations must inform the public of any specific opinions unless they run counter to law, public order or morality. The opinion ad includes no specific view on the Nanjing incident and only calls for free discussions on the matter. Nevertheless, the Chunichi Shimbun unilaterally cancelled the agreement that had been made once. Such action cannot be acceptable as an action of a media organization in a democratic society like Japan, let alone a business practice.

Nagoya Mayor’s remarks

Nagoya Mayor Takashi Kawamura made the remarks in question on February 20, when he received a courtesy call by a delegation from the Nanjing municipal government of China's Jiangsu Province. Kawamura said there might not have been the so-called Nanjing incident although there had been ordinary battle actions. He also said he would like to say what he should say and get along with Chinese people. In response, the Nanjing municipality suspended its sister-city exchange with Nagoya. The People's Daily, Chinese Communist Party's organ, intimidated Kawamura by saying he would have to pay a price. Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said he could not deny that Japanese troops killed non-combatants and conducted looting. Not a small number of Japanese newspapers criticized the Kawamura remarks.

Sudden notice of refusal

Mayor Kawamura’s remarks are modest and reasonable. In reaction to China’s overbearing criticism against the mayor, some experts and journalists founded the national movement. The movement planned to place

the opinion ad on the Chunichi Shimbun based in Nagoya and negotiated the plan with the newspaper from late March. After discussions on the size and details of the ad, the Chunichi agreed on April 19 to carry the ad. A galley for the ad was then created, including the names of 58 lawmakers supporting the ad and a call for free discussions to ascertain the truth of the Nanjin incident. The contract on the opinion ad was validly established at this stage.

On May 2, however, the newspaper suddenly made a notice of refusal to carry the ad. The movement was to file a petition with the Tokyo District Court on May 15 for an interim injunction to carry the ad. The extent to which the court understands democracy will be tested depending on the decision the court will make.

Katsuhiko Takaike is an attorney and Vice President of the Japan Institute for National Fundamentals