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Cover photograph by Andrew Pothearcy

*Dear Editor*

ALTHOUGH I HAVE BEEN LIVING and working in the U.S. state of Alaska for the past year, my letter to the editor is in reference to Alaska, the venerable restaurant organization that is now taking over our F&B according to today's announcement.

Like our club, Alaska was big in bringing European cuisine to Japan – once upon a time. Yes, the company operates the drinking and dining facilities at the Japan National Press Club. Let me point out something, though. In the 35 years since I was posted to Japan by the *Baltimore Sun*, my invitations to (a.) have lunch at Alaska the restaurant and (b.) have coffee at the Japan National Press Club have totaled one each. Both of those invitations came in the 1970s.

NEVER have I been invited to have a drink at the Japan National Press Club. I imagine my experience is similar to that of other members of my generation and later generations of correspondents.

What does this suggest? I'll tell you: Alaska has not the foggiest notion of how to make a press club appealing to its journalist members. What it knows is how to present a dignified, prestigious image, which to some (probably rapidly diminishing) extent carries over in an age characterized by a multitude of competing culinary opportunities in Tokyo. Some Japanese non-journalist members may think, "Ah, Alaska! I'll have my daughter's wedding in the club."

But five years from now, who will say, "Hey, Brad, let's meet in the club for a drink"? By then we'll be talking Imperial Hotel prices for a simple drink mixed from nondescript bar-well gin. Might as well go to the Old Imperial Bar, which at least has architectural distinction.

I understand the board and membership have made a choice, journalistic organization over social group. Do you really know what you're going to lose? Drop over to Seoul and drop into the SFCC, currently managed by a similar local high-end caterer, and you'll find out. Not a soul is present most times to order from the expensive menu. Friday night when the beer is \$1 – that's the only time the journalists and their sources show up.

**Bradley Martin**  
Naalehu, Hawaii

**THE CLUB**

A LONG-TERM MEMBER PROVES THAT  
RETIREMENT DOESN'T MEAN SLOWING DOWN

**Alfred Cheung:  
logistical idealist**

by Brian Stewart

Most of us dream of retiring at one time or another to a life of golf, fishing, travel and leisurely lunches at the FCCJ. Alfred Cheung, an Associate Member of the FCCJ since 1989, has a different take on retirement.

Alfred arrived in Japan in 1973 to study at Keio University on a Mombusho scholarship. For a poor but smart boy from Hong Kong, a scholarship abroad was the only way to get a graduate education. He graduated in 1976 with his M.A. in Sociology and began a series of part-time jobs while he looked for a career.

The following year, C.H. Tung, the head of Orient Overseas Container Line (OOCL), came to Japan looking for trilingual (Japanese, English and Chinese) speakers to join his growing shipping line. Mr. Tung later admitted that he didn't expect Alfred, the sociology graduate, to ever reach management level but thought his education would prove useful at some level.

After a two-month training period in Hong Kong – where the absolute land-lubber learned the difference between a container ship and a cruise ship, bow from stern, and a few other useful things – Alfred returned to Tokyo and OOCL's office at staff level. The office at that time was in the old Hibiya Park Building, so Alfred effectively started his career as a neighbor of the club.

As a new hire, he spent time learning the ropes in all areas of the operation. An early indication of his self-motivation came when he spent a full month's salary, much to his wife's dismay, on an early personal computer. Alfred taught himself programming and created a payroll program for the Japanese branch. This was the first computer used anywhere in the OOCL network. In 1987, Alfred moved to Hong Kong as head of human resources for the entire company, where over the next two years he put in place all the H.R. procedures, policies and manuals that, with amendments over time, are still in place.

The nineties saw him back in Japan as head of operations and inter-Asia sales. Recognizing that the inter-Asia traffic



wasn't optimally organized, Alfred set up a network which rationalized traffic flows, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and company revenue.

The slow bouncing yo-yo of Alfred's career found him back in Hong Kong in 1988 as head of reefer services for the shipping line. Never content to accept a position at face value, Alfred set himself the task of creating the industry's first integrated reefer department. Bringing everything from pricing, sales, tracking,

university researchers formed the Green Society Association (GSA). They focus on reefer logistics from an holistic perspective. Using state-of-the-art technologies, the GSA aims to achieve increased performance in terms of cost, transit time, safety, return on investment and reduced energy inputs throughout the entire reefer industry environment.

Alfred is regularly invited to speak at global logistics conferences to highlight what the GSA is focusing on. He also

remuneration will be paid to the employer. His background as a poor boy from Hong Kong, whose only way forward was by way of a scholarship provided by others, left him with the ongoing desire to help others in a similar position.

Seeing the ambitious, smart, yet under-educated young Cantonese speakers arriving in Hong Kong from the hinterlands over the past years set Alfred off on a new challenge. To help these young migrants' entrance into the broader world, Alfred has created an internet-based set of language lessons combining English, Japanese and Cantonese. This totally free program provides the learner with a series of phrases in each of the three languages with the ability to hear the correct pronunciation of each phrase in Japanese and Cantonese. The aim of the program is to provide the all important basic language phrases to students and workers whose only chance to study may be at odd hours. The program is free because these students are working for minimal salaries and may be attending school at the same time. Alfred writes all the lessons and does all the programming for the site. The lessons are an on-going exercise that will increase in number as time goes on.

In his "spare time," Cheung focuses on his hobbies of photography and watch

## HIS BACKGROUND AS A POOR BOY FROM HONG KONG LEFT HIM WITH THE ONGOING DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS IN A SIMILAR POSITION

box management, and other areas under one department may seem obvious, but OOCL was the first in the industry to have what is now a standard feature.

In 2007, Cheung retired from OOCL and returned to Tokyo with his wife Keiko and a desire to share his knowledge and experience with others. Before he had a chance to break in a new easy chair, Zim Lines came calling – asking him to become their Managing Director in Japan as they launched their service here. In 2010, with Zim performing well, Alfred retired again with plans to enjoy life, which for Alfred means getting really busy.

Believing strongly in the importance and value of efficient global logistics and transportation, Alfred and some like-minded logistics professionals and

shares his knowledge and experience as an adjunct professor at both City University of Hong Kong and at Yunnan University. He is an advisor to Yunnan University and the Port of Tsuruga, and Fukui Prefecture has made him one of their brand ambassadors. His long relationship with both countries has led him to become a council member for both the Japan Society of Hong Kong and the Japan-Hong Kong Society of Tokyo.

Sharing his knowledge and experience is what motivates Alfred to maintain his busy schedule. Financial gain doesn't enter into it – as those who ask him for consulting services are amazed to discover. If, and only if, the assignment is challenging and interesting, Alfred will take it on and leave the decision as to how much, if any,

repair. He not only cleans and reconditions old Rolexes' and other fine watches that people bring him, but also makes any missing or broken gears or other parts for which replacements no longer exist.

Retirement is just another challenge for Alfred Cheung. How can he add the most value and benefit to society with this wonderful opportunity that retirement has provided him? 🗣️

See Alfred's blog on the GSA website:  
[www.greensocietyassociation.com](http://www.greensocietyassociation.com)

**Brian Stewart** first joined the Club as a Regular Member in 1984 when he was a reporter for *Shipping and Trade News* and Japan correspondent for a number of shipping and economic journals.