



China watchers used to base themselves in Hong Kong and occasionally indulge in venomous rows in the letters' pages of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* over their differing interpretations of the tea leaves. How times change. Modern observers actually reside in the PRC to ponder crashed Ferraris, dead foreign middlemen and coup rumblings while keeping a sharp eye out for telling details. **Kathrin Hille** of the *Financial Times* in Beijing reported last year on a homegrown China watcher, **Daniel Wu**, "a watch enthusiast who rose to prominence pointing out the excesses of communist party officials by identifying and valuing their expensive watches". According to Hille's report, followers of Wu's blog on timepieces jumped to 20,000 after he began matching the timepieces worn by Chinese officials to catalogue prices. Wu first noticed the railway minister at a crash site wearing a Rolex costing US\$11,000. Investigation revealed that this was but one of the minister's expensive watches. Wu's new hobby exposed over a hundred public officials with similarly refined tastes. Working under the internet pseudonym **Secretary General of the Flower Fruit Mountain**, it was not long before Wu's site was jammed. None of this could ever happen in Thailand, of course.

Dancing with Dictators is a recent documentary by Australian producer **Helen Barrow** about the mercurial Australian regional media magnate **Ross Dunkley** and his *Myanmar Times*. "It portrays him in a reasonable light as a sort of outspoken knock-about," according to an FCCT board member who has seen the documentary and hopes it will be screened at the club. Since this was made well before the amazing Myanmar turnabout, Hillary Clinton's visit and Aung San Suu Kyi's election, the film's crew was deported for its trouble in a charming traditional display of Burmese official hospitality. "Ross had problems before we teamed up, but we definitely compounded that," Barrow later admitted back in Oz. Indeed, Dunkley's ordeals in 2011 included an assault charge involving a sex worker, time in deten-

tion and — possibly not by coincidence — a serious business dispute with his Burmese partners. His visits to the country have since been seriously curtailed so he spends more time running another of his papers, *The Phnom Penh Post*. By coincidence, that paper was the subject of a documentary by the same production team ten years ago when Michael Hayes was still at the helm.

Dateline Bangkok's erratic publication in 2011 would have tested the skills of any gossip columnist mad enough to try and titillate readers with events already over a year old. Indeed, the FCCT's past president, **Dan Ten Kate** of Bloomberg, barely surfaced in its pages during his year in office, no doubt much to his relief. All former FCCT presidents know how many hidden pressures and thankless hours go into this unpaid position. In 2011, the problems were unusually bad with both vice-presidents doing bunks. Second VP **Vaudine England** quit the BBC and headed off joyously to write books in Hong Kong. Soon after, first VP **Tim Johnston** quit the *Financial Times* hoping to prise a book from the jungles of northwest Myanmar. Tim has been replaced at the FT by **Gwen Akiko Robinson** who was last part of the Bangkok press pack in the late 1980s, but appears little changed. Seriously adding to the pressures on Dan, a number of other board members went AWOL for a variety of reasons and to varying degrees. As he discovered, life is always lonely at the top.

The latest offering from the *Bangkok Post* stable is *M2F*, a free Thai-language daily. Chairman of the Post's board, **Suthikiati Chirathivat**, deserves full marks for grabbing international media interest at the launch. "I would say newspapers will never die," he pronounced in resolute defiance of most industry assessments. "*M2F* is prepared to compete with any media. Some people compare newspapers to dinosaurs — large, old and clumsy. But *M2F* will be a mutant dinosaur — a fast and modern one, capable even of rap-dancing." (Ed: That's sometimes pronounced lap-dancing hereabouts.)

Speaking of eccentrics, **Andrew MacGregor Marshall**, a former cor-

respondent with Thomson Reuters in Bangkok, has set up shop in Singapore of all places to test the boundaries of free expression on the Internet. What most people don't know is that **Andrew Marshall** the journalist is in fact at least three people. Although there is not a single Wikileak to confirm this, one is the fellow living dangerously in the Lion City and hyperventilating on his Twitter account on aspects of Thai history — having committed *harakiri* as far as being a working journalist in Bangkok is concerned; another lives in Bangkok, wrote for *Time* and is the author of the very entertaining *The Trouser People* about Burma's colonial era and its legacy; a third writes light features on golf and the like from Taiwan and various Asian backwaters. All of which used to be very helpful when it came to applying for visas to Myanmar/Burma. As Burmese officials Google up billions of hits, the Andrews attached to the Marshalls of this world can honestly claim to have a pretty common name and know nothing about any probing articles — though Marshall is nothing like as common as Lee in China, Kim in Korea or Maung in Myanmar. It is not all good news, however. In journalism, a distinctive byline is fairly basic to building recognition. Few of us are blessed with unique or unusual names like **Wolf Blitzer** or **Larry Jagan**. In recent months, the confusingly common byline problem has been playing on the mind of the Andrew Marshall formerly associated with *Time* and people with trousers. In January, he joined Thomson Reuters as one of its new special correspondents doing investigative reports. How to distinguish himself from the dark celebrity Andrew MacGregor Marshall formerly employed there? The Andrew Marshall still in Bangkok opted for the judicious addition of the initials R.C. in the **Denis D. Gray** tradition. A radical and utterly effective solution would have been Andrew Not-The-Macgregor Marshall, but it was doomed from the outset. Mere mention of the MacGregor apparently prompts something of a sense of humour failure at his former employ-

er — like Macbeth in the playhouse, his name shall not be spoken. “Maybe they [Thomson Reuters] have an Andrew Marshall fixation,” speculates the irrepressible **Jim Pollard**, alone at the bar and as always the last FCCT board member standing.

Prime Minister **Yingluck Shinawatra** made her welcome debut keynote address to the FCCT in late March at a well attended dinner with some 400 present. Although her answers lacked any depth, most gave her credit for taking on such a large audience and being open to unprepared questions without an interpreter. Her performance was both charming and gutsy. There was, however, more than a hint of ASSKS in the air: **Aung San Suu Kyi Syndrome**. This may be a variant of bird flu and can strike when normally bullish, red-blooded male Western journalists are disarmed by the manifest charms of female Asian politicians. It happened with **Cory Aquino** to some degree, though not **Gloria Macapagal Arroyo**, **Benazir Bhutto** (at least, not in her strident final days), or **Megawati Sukarnoputri**. Indeed, the latter sometimes had unwanted foreign journalists imperiously booted out the door. It was the sparrow-like Aung San Suu Kyi who really took infatuation among foreign journalists to new heights. One of the most prominent victims in the FCCT has already been mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, but he is far from alone. In 1989, a contract photographer for *Time* would all but lie face down in the puddles when Suu Kyi passed lest her feet got wet. His adoring, soft focus images continue to get good play. Later, a reporter for The Associated Press, who is still an FCCT member, was nearly banned by his exasperated bureau chief from reporting on Suu Kyi. The lovelorn hack invariably completely lost his mind in her sainted presence. Going pink and clammy, he would fail to stammer out even the most basic of

questions. This rather uncritical approach has probably done little to promote understanding of Myanmar/Burma over the years. According to FCCT official photographer **Nick Nostitz**, perusal of photographs from the evening with Yingluck reveal symptoms of a few quite advanced Yingluck-related cases of ASSKS among FCCT members.

As Yingluck was leaving the Hotel InterContinental, she exchanged pleasantries with among others photographer **Nick Nostitz** and the club's incumbent president, **Nirmal Ghosh**. The magic bubble about them was rudely popped by a guest without a tie and of uncertain Western origin. For reasons best known to himself, the fellow decided this was the right moment to heckle Nostitz, a minor German aristocrat surviving on a shoestring budget. Authorities are combing through thousands of images of the evening to make an identification of the culprit, and it is unclear as yet if expulsion or even deportation proceedings will ensue. Back in the clubhouse, **Dan Ten Kate** received some equally unwelcome attention: a number of kisses were planted on his burnished pate by an

inebriated public relations man from London. The latter was so intoxicated that he even managed to upset the unflappable **Newley Purnell**, though not a word of this appears on Purnell's normally hot blog. After demanding to know if anybody realized how tremendously important he was, the drunken communications specialist staggered out of the FCCT, took a wrong turn in the Maneeya Centre car park, upended near the plants around the neighbouring Renaissance hotel and passed out. Building security having been alerted and an ambulance summoned, a tenuous connection to the ongoing FCCT festivities in the penthouse was made. The PR guru was thereafter assisted back to his real hotel, the Grand Hyatt Erawan, in a state of utter oblivion on the strong arms of **James Hookway** with two fellow Samaritans from Oz hovering in attendance. The comatose fellow's card, which may be framed for permanent display in the clubhouse, leads to a website revealing his specialist field of counsel: “reputation and crisis management”. In the PR business, experience is everything.



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