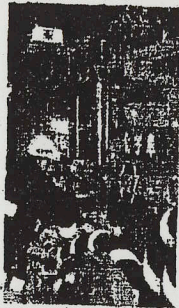


TOPICS & PEOPLE

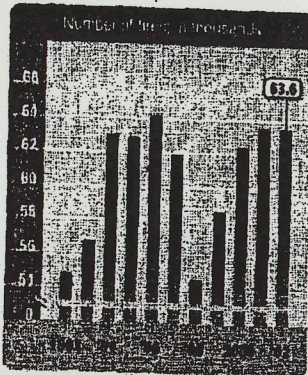
WEEKLY WINDOW



Japanese saying, the third of the world after earthquake is fire (the fourth is

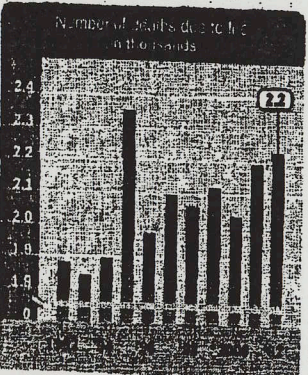
3,575 building fires in almost unchanged from last year, according to Fire Management Agency. The number of fires in 2002, including suspected arson, totaled 14,386, accounting for 22.6% of all building fires. Improper handling of lit cigarettes was the cause of 6,749 fires or 10.6%, followed by gas cooking ranges (5,800 or 9.3%).

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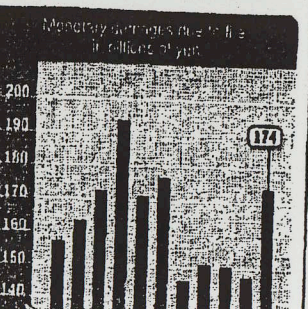
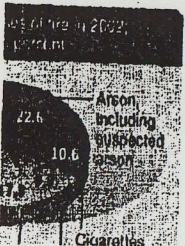
fires topped the 60,000 mark, stayed above that level for eight minutes.

2,232 fire-related deaths, an increase of 37 or 1.7% from last year. The number includes 860 deaths from suicide by setting homes on fire. Nearly 40% of those were people aged 65 or older. In 2002, 28.5 house fires, one every 18 minutes, totaled 8,643, up



ages due to fire stood at 18.1%. A total of 31,288 homes were destroyed by fire, and 17 buildings destroyed a total of 8,643 sq. meters of floor

arson cases, including



Japanese bestsellers translate overseas

English-language versions of popular books to hit foreign shelves

KENJI URATA
Senior staff writer

Several years ago, the book editor at a major Japanese newspaper found himself puzzling over the question of why, if Japan produces so many interesting and marketable books each year, so few Japanese works get any exposure abroad.

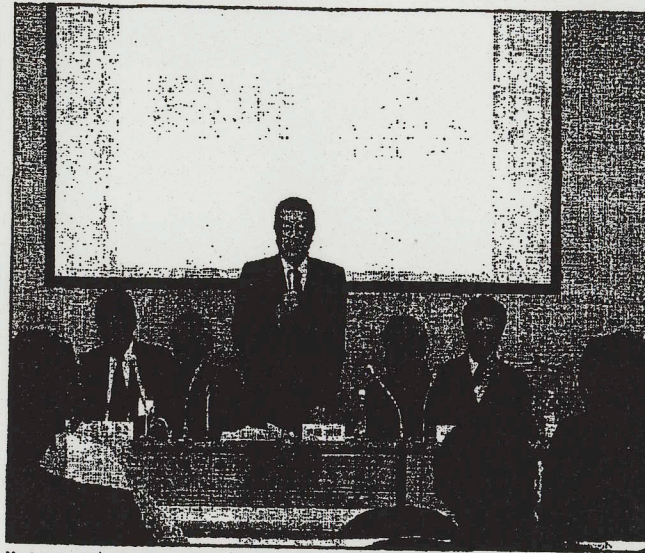
The editor, Hiroki Sakai, decided that the only thing needed for Japan to export more books was someone with the determination to get the job done.

"When I worked as an editor in Tokyo, I wondered why interesting Japanese novels and nonfiction books were not going to the U.S. or Europe, even though there were a lot to choose from," Sakai said. "I realized that Japanese publishers lacked the will to offer them abroad. I thought then that I would do it."

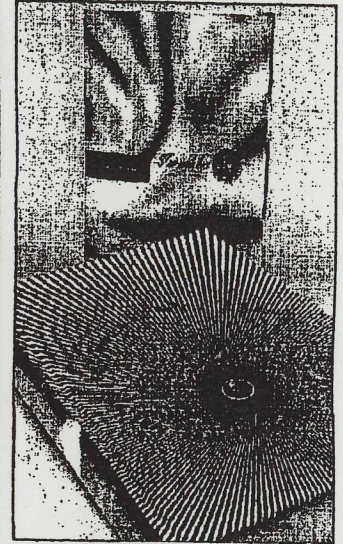
Thus began Sakai's career in international publishing. In 1999, he established Vertical Inc., a New York-based publisher (www.vertical-inc.com), which recently released English versions of "Ring" by Koji Suzuki and "Twinkle Twinkle" by Kaori Ekuni and will publish "Ashes" by Kenzo Kitakata and "The Quin Saga, Book One: The Leopard Mask" by Kaoru Kurimoto next month.

Sakai is not the only one to see potential for Japanese books abroad — Kodansha Ltd., Japan's leading publisher, is this month forming a joint venture with the biggest U.S. publisher, Random House Inc., to produce translations of best-selling Japanese works. Random House, which has more than 100 affiliated publishers, will help the Japanese partner expand overseas business and publish Kodansha's books abroad.

"Japan's book market represents



Kodansha Vice President Hironobu Hamada announces the tie-up with Random House at a press conference on Jan. 23. Another firm, Vertical Inc., recently released English versions of "Ring" by Koji Suzuki and "Twinkle Twinkle" by Kaori Ekuni.



about 10% of the world market. Random House sought a foothold in Japan to expand here and in other Asian countries," explained Junichi Yoshii, executive director of Kodansha's digital operations, who was involved in creating the alliance. "Kodansha wanted to release highly entertaining books abroad as a business," he said, adding that the two companies' goals dovetailed nicely.

Kodansha previously set up a unit focusing on export markets called Kodansha International Ltd., but that firm focuses primarily on books designed to introduce traditional Japanese culture to people overseas and on translations of classic literary works by authors such as Yukio Mishima and Kenzaburo Oe. It relies on Oxford University Press for its U.S. sales.

"Honestly, Kodansha International focuses on cultural activities. It is not

suited to publish popular mysteries and nonfiction books. Popular publications for overseas markets will be distributed through Random House's strong sales channels in the future," said Yoshii.

Cultural exchange

The appearance of the two ventures has pleased the Japan Foundation, which has long questioned why so few Japanese books are translated. The international cultural exchange foundation has provided a total of ¥900 million (\$7.6 million) to fund the translation of some 900 Japanese publications since its establishment by Japan's Foreign Ministry in 1972.

"The ratio of exports to imports of publications has improved from one in 36 two decades ago to one in 20 at present. Translating and publishing books should primarily be performed on a commercial basis. We are pleased that the foundation's

activities have led the way in encouraging some publishers to start expanding business overseas," said Nobutaka Saiki, director of the publishing division of the Japan Foundation's media department.

The Agency for Cultural Affairs has also been promoting exports of Japanese writers' works. Last year it inaugurated a ¥300 million project to translate the works of 27 Japanese authors into English and make them available in the U.S. and other countries. They include novels written by Soji Shimada, Go Osaka, Amy Yamada and Kyusaku Yumeno.

Sakai, who started Vertical, is optimistic that books that sell well in Japan will also get a good reception abroad. "The four books we are publishing are diverse — a horror mystery story, a romance novel, a hard-boiled tale and a science-fiction fantasy. I'm sure they will become popular in America," he said.

Young women sweet on Asian desserts