

# SFM Interview - Hanako Dosukoi

by Chris Gould

*Warming the SFM interview hot-seat this issue is Shoko Sato who, under the pen-name of Hanako Dosukoi (HD), is one of Japan's leading sumo commentators.*

*A regular in the Kokugikan press room filing freelance basho reports to magazines, Hanako is also author of the popular 2006 text: 'Cute Sumo.' Shortly after the Hatsu Basho she sat down with Chris Gould (CG) of SFM.*

**CG:** Hanako-san, did you like sumo as a kid?

**HD:** I watched sumo as a kid, but not very often. My grandmother liked it a lot and we enjoyed sitting and watching Wakamisugi (later yokozuna Wakanohana II and now Magaki oyakata) together. As a child, Wakamisugi was easily my favourite rikishi. He had a very handsome face.

**CG:** Did your parents like sumo?

**HD:** They were not big fans. My father was a pilot so he was hardly ever in Japan!

**CG:** When did you become a sumo journalist?

**HD:** About 15 years ago at the start of the Waka-Taka boom. I started covering sumo for a Friday weekly and soon came to like reporting on keiko. There was something impressive about two strong bodies colliding with intensity, and the good torikumi that resulted from this.

**CG:** Did you find it difficult [to

establish yourself] as a female reporter in a male-centric environment?

**HD:** Actually, I found it an advantage to be a woman in my line of work. I was able to get away with asking slightly stranger questions than the guys. If a male sumo reporter asks something a little stupid, he is ridiculed and asked to leave the room. But if a female reporter asks something a little stupid, she is met with polite bows and smiles. As is often the case in Japan, getting your face known is the most important means of getting accepted. Once my face became known in sumo circles, my job became easier.



**CG:** What about some of the major sumo events of the 1990s? Were you around, for instance, when Takahanada defeated Chiyonofuji in 1991?

**HD:** I watched the match on

television but I had yet to become a sumo reporter at the time. It was exciting, though.

**CG:** And what about when Akebono became the first ever 'gaijin yokozuna'?

**HD:** Yes, I covered that story and went to Meiji Jingu for Akebono's first ever dohyo-iri. I remember Akebono and Takahanada both being ranked at ozeki, and everybody wondering which of the two would become yokozuna first.

**CG:** There was a lot of controversy surrounding the first 'gaijin yokozuna?' What was the general attitude to Akebono's promotion?

**HD:** I don't recall it being too bad. Things got a bit heated when Konishiki looked set to become the first gaijin yokozuna the year before, but people generally accepted that Akebono was more deserving of the title.

**CG:** Moving on to present-day sumo. We saw Tochiazuma retire the other day and heralded with the song: 'Hero.' Who do you see as the next Japanese hero?

**HD:** [instantly] Kisenosato. His determination, perseverance and fighting spirit are impressive. When he loses, you can see that it really hurts him and he is determined to bounce back. He just needs to improve his consistency. He is still young and the consistency will come with experience. Next year we might start to see big things from him. Right now, the Mongolian

wrestlers are very strong and very dominant, but Japanese wrestlers with the right mental strength (Kisenosato, Kotoshogiku and Goeido) should be able to beat them. Asashoryu especially will be susceptible to Japanese opponents with the right mental strength.

**CG:** The last basho saw Hakuho beat Asashoryu yet again. The last five years can safely be called The Asashoryu Era. Are we now in The Asa-Haku Era? Or even The Hakuho Era?

**HD:** Realistically, at the age of 27, Asa has probably hit his peak. Hakuho, at age 22, still has time to improve and grow stronger. Although neither of the two currently trains as much as they did when they were ozeki, Hakuho's age means that he has

more chance of dominating.

**CG:** Why did you write 'Cute Sumo?'

**HD:** I was encouraged to write the book by someone at NHK who wanted to pen something similar but could not do so because of their work circumstances.

**CG:** But given that the book highlights the good looks of certain rikishi, did you not perhaps write it with a view to broadening sumo's appeal among younger women?

**HD:** Yes, that's true. But more importantly, I wanted to write a simple introductory text. Many introductory books on sumo are too long and difficult. The 'kawaii' theme helped keep my book

simple – and hopefully accessible.

**CG:** Do you have plans to write another book?

**HD:** At the moment, I am writing a book on sumo's okami-san. I think there are 52 of them that need interviewing and I have only managed to talk to 12 so far. I don't know when the book will be ready for sale as the research will take a lot of time!

**CG:** Now that the basho is over, what does your work consist of?

**HD:** I don't only write about sumo so there's plenty of freelance work to be done. I interview, and write pieces on, other sports stars and TV tarento – and visit sumo-beya in my spare time.