

Publisher pounces 'as nationalist bullies nap'

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Tokyo correspondent

AKIRA Kitagawa slipped out his latest trouble-making title ahead of schedule this week, reasoning that in Tokyo's sweaty post-holiday torpor the nationalist bully groups that object to Ben Hills's Princess Masako biography would be too limp to rouse themselves.

"So far, no more trouble, but I still think something might happen," says Mr Kitagawa, fondling a Japanese-language edition of the Sydney author-journalist's irreverent, tendentious *Princess Masako: Prisoner of the Chrysanthemum Throne*.

The cramped, tatty former apartment from which Mr Kitagawa and his assistant operate Dai-san Shokan publishing house was picketed by nationalists in their trademark black loudspeaker vans after news emerged of the Masako project.

His alleged misdeeds as a far-Left student radical in the 1970s have been raked over, his ads refused by the national newspapers and it has been made clear the Imperial Household Agency is displeased.

Mr Kitagawa is alert but not alarmed, his mood brightened by a tray full of faxed bookseller orders for the Masako book. He has printed 20,000 copies and is confident of selling 50,000 — a moderate best-seller in Japan.

Having got up so many noses over 30 years and 600 titles, he rates as only a middling risk publishing Hills's account of the common-born Crown Princess Masako's miseries in the Imperial Household.

Mr Kitagawa piles the table with notable Dai-san Shokan publications — not just a collected Shakespeare and the great Meiji-era novelist Soseki but also *Japan's Underground Money* (how the yakuza pays off cabinet ministers, police and, yes, right-wing groups), four volumes on marijuana cultivation (advice, which if followed here, risks years in jail) and the million-copy-selling *Wonderful world of Japanese police* series.

When Kodansha, Hills's intended

Japanese publisher, went to water in February in the face of Foreign Ministry and Imperial Household Agency claims of bias and inaccuracy, most assumed the whole book trade had been warned off.

Not Mr Kitagawa: "As soon as I heard that Kodansha had given up, I sent an email saying, 'We are here, we are ready to publish your book'."

"This book is about a very talented lady who has lost her human rights because she got married to a royal prince... it is a very inhuman system, Ben Hills tells it so, and I agree."

Nor has he let Kodansha off the hook. A companion paperback, *The truth of Princess Masako*, alleges that even before backing out, Kodansha hacked out and rewrote contentious material from Hills' manuscript, reducing the original 291 pages to 155.

"It's true," Hills said yesterday. "I found out a week before they were supposed to publish that Kodansha bowdlerised the whole thing, anything of consequence was taken out."

"I'm really happy they didn't publish it and that Kitagawa now has."

About a month ago, Hills said, the well-known news magazine *Shukan Shincho* asked why he'd chosen a former Japanese Red Army member as his new publisher. (The Marxist splinter group was implicated in various Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine terror actions, the worst being the 1972 Lod Airport massacre.) Kitagawa says he never belonged, although as a student in Sweden, he knew several Red Army suspects in Stockholm and Paris. He was deported in 1975, arrested on arrival in Tokyo, detained for three weeks and released. He was charged with a passport offence and fined Y20,000.

"I still support the Palestinian cause, and in general, I support the social-democratic system."

"Am I Left or Right?" Kitagawa gestures at his pile of troublesome books. "You tell me."



Trouble-making titles: Publisher Akira Kitagawa in his Tokyo office-

Picture: Jeremy Sutton-Hibbert