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# National Model United Nations and the First Student Press Corps: With a Thought on Journalism Education at Japanese Universities

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## Abstract

Eleven students from Kobe City University of Foreign Studies participated in the National Model United Nation (NMUN) in Japan as journalists—the first time in the history of NMUN. Having supervised their activities, the author examines the history and the status quo of journalism education in Japan, and explores the prospect of how to build on the experience. She concludes that it is important for the university to turn the experience into a continuous effort in education.

Key words: Model United Nations, The Press, journalism education, NMUN Kobe Times

## 1. Introduction

Eleven students from Kobe City University of Foreign Studies (KCUFS) worked as journalists at the Kobe conference. They reported every class of the *Studies in Model United Nations*—a special course that started in July 2016 to prepare delegates from both Gaidai Rengo and the Hyogo Consortium for the NMUN Japan—in the newsletter *NMUN Kobe Times*, and published the digital newsletter every day during the period of the actual conference and relevant events from Nov. 21. The number of issues totaled 13, including the last issue published in January that covered the last class held on December 3, 2017.

In this paper, I would like to take a look back at the student journalists' activities as a whole, then to examine the status quo of journalism education in Japan, and lastly explore the prospect of how we should build on this experience. The first half of this article is based on my first-hand, personal observation of the event, and the rest consists of my thoughts and perspectives that are mainly based on the history of the journalism education and the current standing of the English media in the country.

## 2. Development of the NMUN Press

One A4-size, full-color newsletter consists of 4-7 pages per issue. The Nos. 1-5 issues, as well as the No. 13 issue, covered the developments in the course and the Nos. 6-12 issues covered all the events after the arrivals of the international delegates to Kobe. By incorporating as many photos and graphics as possible, the journalists aimed to inform the readers of how the MUN, which many people in the country still were not familiar with, works and to record the first-time-ever event in the country. They not only chronicled the class activities and conference meetings, but also interviewed the delegates and those who were involved in various ways in the conference.

The student journalists also wrote feature stories on places and things in Kobe or Japan for the No. 6 and later issues. The English newsletter was translated into Japanese with the cooperation of students of the university's International Communication Course (ICC) translation class. All the issues came in PDF files on the KCUFS' NMUN Web page, which are accessible to the public.

It is said to be the first time that students participated in the NMUN as journalists in the history of the National Collegiate Conference Association (NCAA) that operates the

NMUN.

The idea of the press corps for the NMUN in Kobe, I believe, was already there when the KCUFS invited the conference a few years ago. It was a matter of who would initiate, and how at a university where there had been no culture of student journalism. It only came about in May 2016—just six months before the conference. Unlike all the other activities for the conference, e.g. organizing cultural visits, opening ceremony and the UN Forum, which involved almost one sixth of the entire students at the university (Kamo, 2016), journalism was the field not excavated and left intact, as it had always been at the KCUFS.

This author happened to start working at the university in April 2016. Having been more of a historian than a journalist after I started graduate study in 2008, honestly speaking, I did not know if I could be of any help for the press corps at the NMUN. However, as the time just passed by with the conference just around the corner, I just did not want to see the opportunity missed. The opportunity to have a couple of hundred people from around the world gathered in Kobe might not come again. As Emily Johnson, Assistant Director for UNHCR, said (*NMUN Kobe Times*, 2017, Jan. 13, p. 5), it would certainly be an once-in-a-lifetime experience for KCUFS students.

I also felt it might be a chance for me to repay what I owed some people in journalism who helped me to become a journalist, especially a former editor at *the Japan Times* in Osaka Office who hired me as a regional correspondence—a paid-per-article part time position when I was a junior at the KCUFS a quarter century ago. I have had an unequivocal feeling that this experience during my university years provided me with an invaluable lesson, which has made what I am today. So, this time, I hoped I would be the one who would help the younger generation. Pressed with time, the university threw out an announcement in late May that it would organize a press corps in the upcoming NMUN that invited those who were interested in the project to a briefing that was to be held on June 1. *Alea iacta est!*

A little more than 20 students came to the briefing and 11 students decided to join the corps after all. Three students and I went to the Kyoto University of Foreign Studies on June 25 when the JUEMUN was being held to see an actual MUN conference. I was concerned about my lack of knowledge about NMUN and its procedures. Watching the meetings

progress at the JUEMUN, we were totally at a loss as to why the delegates competed to raise their placards, why they broke into groups and what they were doing in groups. All we knew at the end of the day was that there was a tremendous amount of work ahead if we were really planning to publish something at the NMUN.

The first class of the *Studies in Model United Nations* was to take place in two weeks. I was thinking of perhaps doing some lectures for the student journalists on such topics as the freedom of the press, the ethics of and manner in journalism, writing in journalistic styles and the media history. But it seemed by then more important for the journalists to learn the procedure of the NMUN to write about it. Fortunately, most of the student delegates who would attend the course were also said to have little knowledge about it. This course is for them to learn about it and to become delegates. Why not have the student journalist also learn with them and become journalists as they write about their process of becoming a delegate?

### 3. Coverage Before the Conference

The day came for the first class. I recorded the lectures and took photos. I suggested a couple of students to also interview students who attended the class. The idea was to cover the whole class in four pages of the first issue of *the NMUN Kobe Times*. I suggested the journalists to refer to NCAA web pages and journal articles on MUN for information on the historical background to include in their articles. After about two weeks, the first issue came out. But would they be able to turn it out the next day during the conference? It looked like a formidable task.

The experience of editing the first issue also taught me more about the practical level of English writing of each journalist. I found errors even in the simple facts of interviewees' names, grades or departments they belonged to, because the writers were not familiar with the act of verifying facts. In addition to the technical skills, I also noticed their inexperience in writing in English as a whole.

Obviously, I was not the only one who noticed their weakness. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology plans to introduce a new common test for entrance to universities in Japan in fiscal year 2020. One of the major changes in the new test will reportedly be the test formula for English that is designed to judge students' abilities in speaking and writing, in addition to reading and listening, which are evaluated in the current

scheme (*Japan News*, 2017, May 18). The ministry also announced in February new guidelines to be implemented in elementary schools and junior high schools in the 2020 and 2021 academic years, respectively, which will bolster English reading and writing (*Japan Times*, 2017, Feb 15).

Of the 11 student journalists, five had TOEIC scores at the time of application that ranged from 595 to 870 points. Excluding two students who lived or studied abroad before and who scored more than 800 points, the average score of 662 points seems to be a fair estimate for students of foreign studies. Still, their English writing seemed to need a lot of work in order to improve.

That they cannot write usually means that they do not read enough, because the very basics of acquiring skills often comes from emulating other people's work. Good writing takes a lot of reading of good writing. While they certainly read novels and poems, as the KCUFS curriculum is designed, I find that there are few courses that are designed to read journalistic work, not to speak of courses designed to write in journalistic styles.

There were two and half months before the second class in the *Studies in Model United Nations* was to take place in late September. While delegates were busy preparing their position papers, I organized a couple of additional classes for the journalists during the summer that was designed to improve their writing.

In the second class of the *Studies in Model United Nations*, I suggested to the journalists to take notes. Taking notes seemed to be also something students are not familiar with. In the first class, they were just listening to the lectures. It is really important for the journalists to engage themselves in something they are going to cover. Taking notes would also help them to focus on the lectures. In the classes of the *Studies in Model United Nations*, delegates were often divided into groups by countries or committees to discuss their agendas. Each journalist was also assigned to one of the four committees during the summer so they would deepen their understanding of the agendas to be discussed in the sessions during the NMUN.

The second issue was published 10 days after the class, a couple days shorter than the time it took for the first issue. However, the third and fourth issues also took 10 days; they were

unable to shorten the time further. It might have something to do with the fact that the third and fourth classes dealt with more complicated procedures of the NMUN so that they needed time to accurately write about the lectures. The fifth issue was done in a week; yet, it was only two days before the arrivals of the overseas delegates when it came out!

#### 4. Coverage at the Conference

To publish the newsletters the next day of the event, it was necessary to prepare ahead. I suggested the journalists to prepare draft articles for the cultural visits to Kobe, Kyoto and Hiroshima, and faculty lecture, which would be published with possible minor modifications upon completion of the events. Each journalist chose a topic to write a feature stories with a deadline in October. They hoped they would finish all the layouts for the feature articles before the conference. They also planned to conduct interviews of delegates and other individuals involved in the conference ahead of time.

Writing the draft articles for the cultural visits before they took place turned out to be the one of the most difficult job for the journalists. The custom of writing draft articles ahead of time should be found at any newspaper companies and broadcasting stations. But the journalists could not imagine at first what it was like to write something that had not taken place. It takes good imagination to the details and you cannot sometimes write just with the imagination.

In that case, you have to do researches and make calls to obtain information—such as how many people will be there, how many minutes it takes to walk to the place, and how will they move one place to the other—to fill in the gaps that you cannot with your imagination alone. But this researches and inquiring will also help when you write post factum articles. The journalists can make changes in the draft if necessary after seeing through to the end of the events.

It was also a matter of concern whom to ask to proofread the articles. With all the journalists and myself being learners of English as a second language, we needed some native English writers who can make suggestions for stylistic improvements. Prof. Matthew Theado of the KCUFS English Studies Department had kindly provided us with the help for the first several issues. Since it would be daily for a week once the conference opens, I asked all the native English speaking faculty members in the department to take turns for the rest of the issues. They accepted to work early in the morning to allow the students in charge of layout

enough time to finish and publish the newsletter within the day.

After all, it took much longer than expected to do the layout and it was late at night when they published the issues that covered the events of the day before. Therefore, much of the native English proofreading ended up being done thanks to the generous spontaneous help of Professor Craig Smith and Professor Donna Tatsuki. Most of the planned interviews were left undone when the conference started, as everyone was busy. Still it seems like a miracle that they published every day and by the next day.<sup>1</sup>

## 5. Learning the Hard Way

What concerned me personally most before the conference was how and when to assign the job of the editor to the journalist team. As I have never studied the journalism theory, and I had only learned the art of journalism in an old-school apprenticeship, all I could do was to show an example—through editing their writing. But students had to start on their own at some point.

In early October, I assigned four students—seniors and juniors—to the editors of three sections of interview, conference and feature stories, and suggested them to make detailed plans for each issue to be published during the conference. In the beginning, I helped them with the photography and layout, but they gradually took over the jobs.

The writing was the hardest part. As I mentioned above, the students were not familiar with writing based on facts, which they have to verify as they write. They had been the receiving ends of information, but now they were dispatching end and thus were responsible for the accuracy of the information. Not having been used to this practice, they often wrote what they heard without verifying or finding supporting evidence. They often took things at face value, without critical thinking. All these years since media literacy was advocated in Western hemisphere (Stein & Prewett, 2009), Japan seems to still lag behind in that it has yet to incorporate the media literacy into the curriculum of higher education.

In Japan, there is a saying, “Yoko-o-tate-ni-suru,” meaning, “make a horizontal line to a vertical line” in English. This refers to making a newspaper article (written vertically) from a press release (which is often written horizontally) without adding any point of view or

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<sup>1</sup> The No. 12 issue, which covered the last day of the conference, came out two days later as the next day fell on a Sunday when the university’s PR section that did the uploading files on the web page was closed.



analysis. It represents a bad example because data and information become journalism “only when they are given meaning and context” (McNair, 1998, p. 5). In fact, few news reports come out without being filtered through the eyes of journalists. It is important that the students learn the difference between processed information and raw information, as much as they learn how to process the data and to write from their own point of view.

I therefore made up my mind to continue to play the role of *de facto* editor until before the conference. I asked them to rewrite the places in the draft articles that were incomprehensible or not verified. I turned down the submissions twice or three times until they came to have meaning and context. I also changed their writings in a hope that they would learn from the changes. This seems to be the only way to train them as journalists to be ready for the conference that was just around the corner.

When I first became a staff writer of a newspaper upon graduation from the KCUFS, I did not know how to write even in Japanese. It took me a day to write one 100-character small article on a ceremony at a police station. After being edited by an editor in the bureau, the article was published in the next day’s issue with little portion of my writing left. It was a humiliating experience.

In order to improve my writing and have it published, I started to seriously read articles written by my colleagues as well as writers of rival papers. I read the articles by the best writers in the bureau again and again. Gradually, my writing started to survive the blue pencils of the editors. I went through the same process with my English writing. I like to find out how my writing was changed and why by the native writer’s hand. I admire improvements made to the draft with the final touches given by proofreaders. This is how I have learned writing.

I decided to show the journalists examples until before the conference. The journalists would then proceed on their own with whatever skills they had acquired by then. Actually, I never had to change their writings once the conference started: it was also physically impossible for one individual to grasp what was going on in all the conference rooms, anyway. But this situation that they work on their own was what I had aimed for.

Actually, the journalists did an excellent job. I am so pleased that all of the 11 students stayed through to the end. They could have left at any point under such hard-working conditions. I just regret it was done in a rush. If we were ever given another chance, I hope there would be experienced student journalists who could lead the whole press corps just like Prof. Nishide's wonderful team of student delegates did. But what can we do to make this come true?

I think it is time to encourage students to publish a student newspaper—a regular periodical edited and published by students—at KCUFS. To help them to launch the publication, I hope the university would offer a one-year course in English journalism. It could be in Japanese journalism; however, Japanese courses already exist and English would certainly be a strong option to differentiate from and to have an edge over other universities.

## 6. A Thought on Journalism Education

According to the Asahi Shimbun Journalist School (2009), a Japanese nation-wide daily, there are currently almost 100 university journalism programs across the country, including eight university departments that are dedicated to journalism education. These programs are trying to attract both undergraduates and graduates who primarily want to get a job in newspapers and broadcasting companies.

While KCUFS provides its students university-wide with a Japanese course as a yearly one-year *Publication and Editing* course and biannual one-term *Journalism Studies*, English media-related courses—*Communication Theory* and *Publication Studies*—are only for ICC students, where few students actually want to pursue a job in journalism.<sup>2</sup> There should be a good number of students, however, who are interested in journalism when we take the entire students at the university into consideration. This proved right when we remember the turnout at the briefing for the NMUN journalists in May 2016.<sup>3</sup> And there are those who get a job in the media from the KCUFS almost every year. I think it is time for the university to bring in the culture of English journalism and critical thinking if it is to grow as an educational institute.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the applications filed in November 2016 by first-year students for ICC. Many applicants want to become interpreters and translators, or English teachers, with a small number of diplomats after their graduation.

<sup>3</sup> Based on applications from student journalists. Most of the students who applied mentioned their interests in journalism and publication.

This will also help students to take advantage of the market in the English media in Japan, which seems to be upward for the time being. With the progress of the Internet and the communication technology, the speed and the extent news stories travel has become faster and wider, making the globe smaller, which helped the demand for English news dispatched from Japan increase. The amount of the distribution of the English news from *the Kyodo News Agency*, for example, increased to some 200 per day now from about 150 per day in 2000.<sup>4</sup>

While *the Asahi* and *the Mainichi* withdrew from the market of the print English media some years ago, Japanese yearning for the English media seems to have taken a new turn. *The Nikkei*, Japan's largest Japanese business paper, purchased the *Financial Times*, London-based global news organization, in July 2015 (*Nikkei Asian Review*, 2015, July 23). The Japanese financial daily also launched a new English weekly, *Nikkei Asian Review*, in November 2013 with an eye on rapidly growing Asian market (*Wall Street Journal*, 2015, July 23). *The Japan Times* has tied up with *the New York Times* since March 2013 to distribute the global edition of the America's quality paper in a bundle from Monday through Saturday (*Japan Times*, 2013, March 25).

While the future of English journalism in Japan may remain uncertain, it is yet a great learning subject for students. The art of efficient and concise writing in English journalism will also be useful in the field of translation and interpretation. Launching a student paper on campus will also bring in a sense of democracy among students and university culture to the community. But will this be feasible? In the following, I will take a look back at the history of journalism education in Japan and discuss its future.

## 7. History of School Journalism at Universities in Japan

A number of journalism programs were established at large universities in the post-World War II Japan, including Tokyo, Waseda, and Keio universities. The General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ/SCAP) encouraged Japanese universities to introduce journalism education as it believed in the need of the development of democratic newspapers to democratize the defeated country (Suzuki, 2008; Mori, 2012).

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<sup>4</sup> Email responses to the author's inquiry on May 1 and 2, 2017.

Journalism education existed in the pre-war Japan. The first qualified programs, for example, is said to be the department of newspaper studies established in 1909 at Waseda University.<sup>5</sup> The move was followed by universities of Chuo, Keio, Tokyo, Sophia and Meiji, which established either a course or department of journalism from 1910 and 1932 (Suzuki, 2008). All of these programs were closed or cancelled by the end of the war. According to the Civil Information and Education Section (CIE) of the GHQ, who examined the prewar programs, no school of journalism in Japan had ever been present that had met the reputation, prestige, or academic standings equivalent of elite universities in the United States (Mori, 2012).

During the war, the Japanese press worked as a propaganda machine for the government. This bitter experience has been ingrained in the memory of not only the nation but also the world over. It was not therefore unexpected when the first United States Education Mission to Japan suggested the need to promote Journalism education (Mori, 2012). The Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association (NSK) was established in July 1946 at the suggestion of Ken R. Dyke, Director of CIE, which subsidized newly-opened newspaper departments or courses at the universities of Tokyo, Waseda and Keio later that year.

These programs were likely modeled after curriculums at schools of journalism in the United States. The CIE asked Burton Crane, a *New York Times* correspondent in Tokyo, to draft a curriculum, which was handed to the professors in charge at the three universities (Mori, 2012). Frank L. Mott, dean of the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri, also gave lectures to these professors on journalism education during his stay in Japan as an advisor for CIE from March to May 1947 (Suzuki, 2008; Mori, 2012). The NSK's subsidy was gradually expanded to other universities nationwide (Suzuki, 2008; Haruhara, 2003). These programs, however, started disintegrate in the 1950s, as they could not meet the expectations for journalism education or vocational education for journalists (Haruhara, 2003).

To understand the reason why this occurred, Akihiro Haruhara, journalism scholar and professor emeritus at the Sophia University, points out that the journalism education taught at most of the universities ended up in teaching theories, which Japanese

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<sup>5</sup> It was closed soon likely due to the transfer to the other university of a main faculty member.

newspaper and broadcasting companies did not require for their new employees. Those papers and TV stations wanted their rookies to be “white” rather than being painted with presumptuous knowledge in journalism so that he/she would adapt to their corporate culture more easily (2003, pp. 17-19).

## 8. Status Quo of Journalism Education in Japan

With the wave of calls for university reform since 1990s, some universities started to overhaul their journalism programs in early 2000s, which also brought the opening of several graduate schools of journalism (Asahi Shimbun Journalist School, February 2009). Yet, there seems to be discussions still going on whether journalism education at the university level is necessary for the trade. In the United States, on the other hand, which once provided Japanese universities with a model of journalism education, the debate about whether journalism education is necessary has likely become obsolete at a time when “the majority of the recruits entering newsrooms were graduates of journalism school” (King, 2010, pp. 127-128).

Journalism schools are now playing larger roles when local and regional newspapers that used to provide graduates of the schools with an opportunity to apprentice themselves, no longer exist (King, 2010). Furthermore, university-based journalism programs are expected to offer students,

...multidisciplinary opportunities such as those that integrate the role of religion in geopolitics, examine the place of medical advances in influencing policy options, and look to history for context in international coverage. (King, 2010, pp. 128-129)

Under such circumstances, student papers at universities are likely playing the role local and regional papers used to play.

Having been a product of apprenticeship myself, I would not deny the traditional Japanese way. English journalism education would definitely be an added strength, I think, as the English media in Japan should have less capacity to raise their own staff writers from scratch. Just like the media in the US, they are usually looking for someone who is ready to work. But to serve these markets, the university should provide students with a course designed to teach not only theories but also to nurture

skills in coverage. It should also encourage its students to launch a school paper where they can practice the art of writing.

Last but not least, I would like to discuss how the journalists at the NMUN in Japan, students at a university that does not have a journalism department or a student newspaper, could have published a daily, though a limited edition, newsletter after all? I think that was because of the following two reasons: Firstly, there was the magnetism of the event—an international conference that took place for the first time in Japan with more than 300 people from around the globe. They saw the exciting world of international politics unfolding in front of them. Just like the delegates who adopted the resolutions by consent, the journalists also felt a sense of achievement as they gathered the threads of the days' stories with deadlines.

Secondly, it was the tremendous charm of the student leaders who worked as the Secretary General, Assistant Secretary-General, and Assistant Directors of the four committees simulated in the conference, as well as the members of the students' executive committee that organized the relevant events for the conference. I have never seen any groups of Japanese university students who spoke English so well, and who acted with confidence or in a more sophisticated manner than these students.

Admitting that they had three-years of experience, people would be just awe-struck at their capabilities to give lectures in English. The journalists felt stimulated in the presence of such great role models, and they wanted to live up to the high standard these leaders had set. The leadership and excellence of these students indeed inspired journalists and other students. The journalists simply could not help but write about them and the conference.

## 9. Conclusion

The 13 issues of the NMUN Kobe Times were published thanks to the efforts and teamwork of journalists, and cooperation of other people who supported the event. However, it was barely done and in such a haste without a system. It is time for the university to build on this experience by working on the system of the journalism education. There will be a lot to do ahead but it's worth taking and through this experiment we can also be able to learn. It is important that we turn this NMUN experience into a continuous effort in education. Hidekazu Tanaka, Assistant Secretary

General, then senior at the English Studies Department, once told a journalist in an interview that the whole NMUN was a classroom for him and his mates to learn (*NMUN Kobe Times*, 2017, Jan. 13, p. 4). It was the same for the journalists. They learned from every step they took in writing and editing *the NMUN Kobe Times*. This experience of overcoming hardship will surely support them throughout their life. I hope more will follow.

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