

Japan's reality, as exposed by the coronavirus pandemic, and challenges to its future

NAGANO Hiroshi, President, the Minato UNESCO Association



All the world has been in turmoil since early this year, with the alarming news on the new coronavirus pandemic. Not a single day has passed without our exposure to such news provided by mass media internationally. For those at age 75 or younger, who have not experienced any war, the stay-at-home regulation may have sounded like a bolt from the blue. Indeed, not a soul seems to have predicted the emergence of such a threat during the short course of our life.

Under the threat of the new pandemic, many issues were brought to light in Japan. Back in 2001, Japan proudly announced the e-Japan initiative to establish a digitally-competent government. It was based on Japan's advanced position at the forefront of ICT technology as well as its manifestation to become a science & technology-centric country. Today, 20 years thereafter, we are facing a reality where our government uses facsimiles for delivering information on the tested-positive citizens, and where civil servants prepare necessary lists by manually modifying the received information.

Japan is a democracy-based law-governed country without any doubt. Still the stay-at-home regulation was announced entirely on a request for cooperation basis and it was up to each individual's discretion, apart from the law, whether or not to follow it. Under this circumstance, nasty activities called "self-regulating police" have emerged.

Due to ambiguity in the division of administrative power between the state and local autonomous bodies, necessary actions were not taken timely or lacked in alignment across different local bodies. If the definition of a serious-case patient varies among different prefectures, how can we expect validity in the statistical figures? However, if we interpret this situation from a positive viewpoint, it has provided an optimal opportunity for Japan to correct what has been neglected in the past.

A majority of Japanese citizens have not been satisfied with the way the government has taken measures to fight back the coronavirus. It is because the government has not clearly expressed the objective and background of such measures while being mindful of how to encourage the shrunken economy. Under the current circumstance, the government has to consult with infection experts. However, the government does not disclose the process where such experts express their candid opinions. All information, openly announced to the public, is the aftermath of what has been coordinated between the experts and the government or politicians. People's inability to listen directly to what experts say has caused suspicion, which in turn resulted in the decline of people's trust in the government. This situation may even cause people to have criticism about the experts.

Additionally, it is difficult to understand why the minutes of the experts' discussions are not produced or made public. It is only natural that the experts and politicians have different opinions

(To be continued on P. 3)

Start of Japanese Language Course

MUA starts a new Japanese Language Course on October 13th. Ms. TAGAWA Junko, a planner and an instructor, introduces the outline of her plan on the course as follows.



I participated in an intensive course of Chinese Language held for a month during a summer vacation by a national university of Taiwan. To my surprise, however, a whole week out of a month was devoted only in the practice of very basic pronunciation of “mar, mar-ma, and mar-a.” Therefore, I could not even say a very simple phrase “how much” in Chinese at a food stand.

From an instructor’s viewpoint, it would be the best way to start from the practice of pronunciation and basic sentence patterns in an orderly manner. On the other hand, however, a student would want to learn useful daily conversations as soon as possible. Thus, I, as a student, was quite depressed by the gap between what an instructor aims for and what a student asks for in a language course.

This experience made me determine to teach fundamental but very useful Japanese expressions from the beginning.

I plan to teach daily Japanese conversations taking participants’ goals and progress well into consideration utilizing my long experience in teaching embassy staffs, expatriates and students from Northern Europe.

(Translated by SUDA Yasushi, the PR & Internet Committee Associate)

New governance groups established

During MUA directors’ meeting held on July 3, 2020, it was decided to establish the following two groups for better governance, in compliance with the MUA rules.

1. Accounting Check Group

Objective: MUA has received financial support for its activities from the Minato City’s budget. Therefore, it is mandatory to maintain its accounting practices open and adequate. This group was organized to confirm that MUA’s accounting during Fiscal 2019, ending on March 31, 2020, was conducted in an adequate manner.

Leader: TANABE Kiichiro, Auditor

Subleader: NAKAGAWA Norio, Auditor; OKUMURA Kazuko, Vice President

Members: Personnel from the Subsidy Usage Committee (Chairperson, Vice Chairperson or Acting Director in charge)

2. Rules Amendment Group

Objective: Since the rules of MUA took effect in 1981, they were amended four times, including the last one in 2016. The rules should be maintained up-to-date and compatible with the current status of society. This group was organized to consider, among others, whether or not any amendment is necessary. Should there be any need for amendment, the matter shall be included in the agenda of the next MUA General Meeting.

Leader: KIKUCHI Kensuke, Vice President

Subleader: MINEO Shigekatsu, Director

Members: NAKAMAE Yuki, Director; SHIMPUKU Shoji, Secretary General

(Translated by TANAHASHI Seiichi, the PR & Internet Committee)

Welcome on board two new staff in MUA's secretariat office

After the departure of Mr. TSUNO Hisashi, Secretary General, in March and Ms. TAKAHASHI Ikuko, staff, in April of this year, MUA has sought their successors and fortunately recruited the following two persons. We asked them to give a brief self-introduction to our members and readers.

Mr. SHIMPUKU Shoji, Secretary General



I took a position as Secretary General in June. I was born in Kirishima-Shi, Kagoshima-Ken which is famous for a folk song called Oharabushi. I worked for an insurance company before joining MUA. There are many places worth visiting in Kagoshima such as Mount Sakurajima which is clearly viewed from the sea as well as Yakushima which is a world heritage site. Chiran Peace Museum is also very famous. I emphasize with mental states of those ceased soldiers who died as Army Tokko pilots of special attack forces and my tears do not stop dropping. While I have not been deeply related with the UNESCO activities so far, I am determined to offer whatever assistance possible to the development of MUA. I look forward to working with you all.

(Translated by SUDA Yasushi, the PR & Internet Committee Associate)

Ms. KODAMA Keiko, Staff



Hello. My name is KOMADA Keiko and I joined MUA in June. I used to work mainly at financial institutions, but now I spend my days taking care of a Border Collie, which I started keeping this year, and my family. It's been a precious time to relax in MUA office, but I enjoy working while receiving good stimulation from the energetic members. I am still unfamiliar with this work and may cause inconveniences. Therefore, I'd appreciate your cooperation.

(Translated by MAEDA Mikihiro, the PR & Internet Committee)

(Continued from P. 1) Japan's reality, as exposed by the coronavirus pandemic

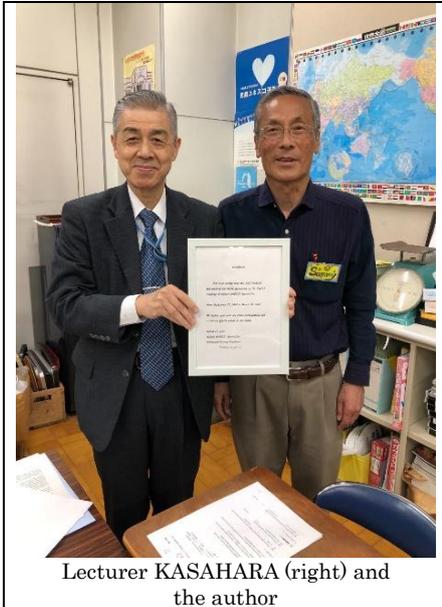
because their backgrounds are different. If people could have the first-hand access to what the experts say and to the way politicians arrive at their decisions, based on their own logic after digesting the experts' opinions, people would understand the decision-making process and, where necessary, come up with arguments. If government continues to reject people's request for the disclosure of the process of their discussions with the experts, we cannot help concluding that the viewpoints of both the government and politicians are regrettably derailed from what citizens expect.

The pandemic, which has been a tremendous threat to the whole world, will force us to seek continuously a new system with our way of life or society at large. This won't be a simple change such as more introduction of remote working or reduced burden in commutation. We would face a new challenge to what we have regarded as important and would need a conversion of our value system. Ultimately each one of us will be required to have a clear opinion of our own on various societal issues. To prepare for such a new normal era, it is essential that we secure a place where we can routinely talk and exchange opinions freely. This must be a clear sign that the grass-roots culture of our UNESCO activities should expand its presence further in the "new normal" society.

(Translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR & Internet Committee)

Words of gratitude on the retirement of Mr. KASAHARA Saburo, the lecturer for MUA's Intermediate English Conversation Course

This time, Mr. KASAHARA Saburo, a lecturer who has worked hard for 4 years as a teacher of "Beginner-Intermediate English Conversation Course", will be retired.



Lecturer KASAHARA (right) and
the author

The encounter with Lecturer KASAHARA began with the establishment of the "Beginner-Intermediate English Conversation Course". Five years ago, I was enrolled in the MUA "Beginners' English Conversation Course" and studying many years, and I requested the secretariat for a new English Conversation class in order to further step up and change the learning environment.

As a result, it was Mr. KASAHARA who undertook a new "Beginner-Intermediate English Conversation Course" (changed to "Intermediate English Conversation Course" on the way) that satisfied all the requests, and he was familiar to the students as "Mr. Sammy".

Mr. KASAHARA has a mild personality and advanced abilities in English and other foreign languages, and the content of each study was ideal for improving skills such as reading comprehension, grammar, and hearing.

Although it was difficult to submit homework every week, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all the class members for their continued learning in a wonderful environment where the classroom was always cheerful and praised, and the students were always motivated.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to Mr. KASAHARA for his efforts and challenges in introducing the video lesson for the spring course in April this year to prevent infection. Thank you very much. Gentleman, ten thousand years!

(Written by ISHII Yoshiaki, Intermediate English Conversation Course student, and translated by MAEDA Mikihiro, the PR & Internet Committee)

Minato UNESCO Association is a citizens' voluntary membership organization that promotes Japanese traditional culture, holds cross-cultural workshops and presents multicultural events and international symposia for world peace. For any questions or comments about our articles, please contact our secretariat office at:

Tel: 03-3434-2300, Tel & Fax: 03-3434-2233, E-mail: info@minatounesco.jp
URL: <http://minato-unesco.jp/>