US-Japan Journalism Postgraduate Fellowship

Narrative Report

The US-Japan Journalism Postgraduate Fellowship was created as a pilot program to make promising American journalism students aware of the US-Japan relationship. The goal of the program was to build an interest in US-Japan and US-Asia affairs among future foreign correspondents and foreign editors. By introducing the students to Japanese leaders, students and citizens, it is hoped that the fellows will create lasting relationships that will enable them to explain the US-Japan relationship in a more nuanced, more accurate and more complete manner.

Six fellows were selected among four prestigious journalism programs in the Northeastern region of the United States. The schools that participated were Columbia University, New York University, University of Maryland and Emerson College. The fellows were assembled in New York City for a briefing on US-Japan and Japanese cultural issues, and they traveled together for 10 days in Japan, August 15th through August 25th, 2009.

The US-Japan Journalism Fellowship was a collaboration of the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership, Emerson College and Professor Isami Takeda of Dokkyo University. CGP organized the Japan travel arrangements. Emerson College served as the US coordinator and bursar. And Professor Takeda advised the project's activities and the welfare of the students. The Japan Foundation New York office also provided valuable assistance toward the project.

Project Activities

During the Spring of 2009, journalism graduate programs were recruited to participate in this pilot project. On May 15th, four programs were asked to select students to participate in the program and prepare an application form. Emerson College collected the applications and forwarded them to Japan Foundation CGP for approval. Six students were awarded fellowships on June 22.

On July 24th and July 25th, a fellowship orientation was held in New York City. An orientation was valuable because the journalism fellows were not expected to have previous experience with Japan or Asia. The goal of the orientation was to provide information to help them fully appreciate their experience in Japan. Fellows were briefed on cultural issues and US-Japan relations. The orientation also allowed the fellows to get to know each other so that they could concentrate on building friendships with the people they met while in Japan.

The fellows arrived in Tokyo on the evening of August 16th. Every morning, the fellows met for breakfast where they reviewed the day's agenda and received a briefing on the people they would meet and the issues they would discuss. On August 17th, the fellows met the APSIA fellows and were greeted by Japan Foundation President Kazuo Ogoura and other officers of the Japan Foundation. After lunch, the fellows

visited Dr. Robert Feldman of Morgan Stanley where they were briefed on the challenges of the Japanese economy. During the late afternoon, the fellows visited the US Embassy where they were received by Charge d'Affairs Jim Zumwalt. The fellows spent their evening at a reception with journalists, professors and officers of the Japan Foundation at the Shinjuku Washington Hotel.

On August 18th, the fellows received a morning lecture on the Japanese political system from Professor Takako Hikotani of the National Defense Academy of Japan. After an okonomiyaki lunch, the fellows traveled to NHK where they met Chief Commentator Hidetoshi Fujisaki, NHK's future foreign correspondents and NHK World Editor Ryuichiro Nakamura and toured the network's historical drama set. The fellows spent their evening in Harajuku and Shibuya. Professor Takeda accompanied the fellows on their tour of NHK, Harajuku and Shibuya and offered precious guidance.

On August 19th, the fellows traveled to Yokosuka to visit the Japanese National Defense Academy and US Naval Base. The fellows received lectures on the US Japan Alliance from Academy President Makoto Iokibe and Professor Noboru Yamaguchi. Professor Hikotani gave the students a tour of the academy before traveling to the US Naval Base. The fellows were greeted by the commanding officer of the naval base, Commander Daniel Weed. In the afternoon, the students received a lecture on Japan's global warming efforts by Institute for Global Environmental Strategies Vice President Hideyuki Mori and Dr. Kentaro Tamura.

On August 20th, the fellows ate a sushi breakfast at Tsukiji Market before visiting Asahi Shimbun. The fellows were joined by Waseda Professor Shiro Segawa and his journalism graduate students. Asahi Shimbun Executive Secretary Koji Igarashi gave the fellows a tour of the Asahi newsroom and introduced them to the future foreign correspondents of the newspaper. In the afternoon, the fellows visited Waseda University's graduate journalism program. During the evening, the fellows dined with Professor Segawa, Professor Hans Griemel of Waseda University, NHK Producer Ayumi Takahira and Mainichi Shimbun reporter Yoji Hanaoka.

On the morning of August 21st, the fellows met Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General of Public Affairs Kazuo Kodama. They had a lunch briefing with Meiji University Professor Kaichiro Morikawa on otaku culture. They also toured Madhouse Studios, an anime production house. The fellows had dinner at the Foreign Correspondents club with a group of Asian American foreign correspondents organized by the Associated Press Reporter Tomoko Hosaka.

On August 22, the fellows traveled by Shinkansen to Kobe. The fellows visited the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institute to learn about the Kobe Earthquake. In the afternoon, Takuhide Nakao of the Mainichi Shimbun introduced the fellows to survivors of the earthquake. The fellows wept at a neighborhood memorial. In the evening, Japan Foundation Managing Director and Kobe native Tadashi Ogawa showed the fellows the "diamond view" and dined with them in Sannomiya.

On August 23rd, the fellows traveled to Kyoto after visiting Himeji Castle. Japan Foundation Officer and Kyoto native Aska Takeshiro showed the fellows the Kiyomizudera Temple Complex, the Nishiki Market and the Gion District.

On August 24th, the fellows visited the Arashiyama area in the morning and experienced afternoon tea at Koho Tatsumura's textile studio. The fellows attended a farewell dinner in the evening.

On August 25th, the fellows departed for the United States.

On August 26-27th, the grantee coordinator attended project briefings at Japan Foundation and met with supporters of the program, such as Nippon Press Club Secretariat Yoshinori Nakai, Waseda University Vice President Katsuichi Uchida and MOFA Director General Yoichi Suzuki.

Participants

Haley Sweetland Edwards

Haley Sweetland Edwards has spent the last year studying international politics at the Columbia Journalism School, where she wrote primarily about the role of digital media in conflict zones. She reported her master's thesis from Indian-held Kashmir. Before returning to graduate school last fall, Haley was a reporter at The Seattle Times, where she covered a variety of topics ranging from the 2008 presidential election and natural disasters to local chihuahua races. She has written travel stories for the paper from Cambodia, Vietnam, Syria, Jordan and a handful of other locales. After graduating from Yale with a degree in philosophy and history in 2005, Haley helped launch and edit The Internationalist, a quarterly print magazine about foreign and domestic culture and politics. She was born and raised in California, Lake Tahoe, and off the coast of Central America, and has ridden her bicycle across the United States and Canada twice.

Sandra Garcia

Sandra (Sandie) Garcia recently graduated with her Master's degree in Broadcast Journalism from Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts. Her passion for writing has been fueled through various internships and unique opportunities. Her most memorable experience came in the Summer of 2008 when she worked for the Olympic News Service in Beijing, China. Sandie's love for foreign affairs, especially in Asian studies, brought her to Japan. Sandie was born in Miami, Florida and spent most of her life in Baltimore, Maryland. She traveled extensively throughout the eastern United States with her family, who love the outdoors. Sandie was a competitive figure skater and dancer throughout high school and college. She loves dogs and has a heart for the homeless, having spent time volunteering at the Helping Up Mission in Baltimore since an early age. She received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Communications from Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania in 2003.

Catherine Krikstan

Catherine Krikstan is a graduate student at the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism. She graduated cum laude from St. Mary's College of Maryland with a Bachelor of Art in English and a minor in Asian Studies. As an undergraduate, she served as president of the college's Asian Studies Club and was a recipient of the Asian Studies Award. She had the opportunity to spend a semester abroad at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. While there, she traveled to Vietnam, Thailand and mainland China. She plans to pursue a career in magazine writing. She is from Silver Spring, Maryland.

Joseph Lin

Joseph C. Lin is a photographer and multimedia journalist with extensive knowledge and interest about Asia. He received his M.S. in Journalism from the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and studied architecture for two years before changing majors to receive a B.F.A in Photography from Pratt. His life was changed in the fall of 2007, when he criss-crossed China for three months to photographically document the dichotomy between old and new China. He experienced everything from the dusty air of Tibet, to the congested roads of Shanghai. The memories of the people he met and the places he walked forever cemented within him a passion for Asia and for travel.

Kathleen Massara

Kathleen Massara is a Master's candidate in the Cultural Reporting and Criticism program at New York University and is an editorial intern at The Paris Review. She received her B.A. in political science from McGill University in 2004. As an English tutor in Tokyo from 2005-2006, Kathleen edited Mariko Uchida's Ph.D. dissertation and PowerPoint presentation titled 'Cultural Industry and the Government: The Case of 'Kontenzu' Policy in Japan' for ICCPR 2006, the fourth annual conference on cultural policy research in Vienna, Austria. After returning to the United States, Kathleen continued to be interested in East Asian affairs. Her research interests include: the construction of culture and identity in Japan, issues associated with U.S. foreign policy, and Asian regionalism.

Michael Miller

Michael is a journalist currently interning with the Associated Press in Mexico City. He holds a dual MA in journalism and Latin American studies from New York University and a BA in philosophy and Spanish from the University of Chicago. His interest in Asian culture, politics and markets was sparked by a 2007 trip to Thailand, Cambodia and Japan. He has lived in Northern Ireland, Spain, Venezuela, Mexico and the United States and has written for various publications including Newsweek International, the New York Daily News, the Associated Press and the Brooklyn Rail. He was born and raised in Columbia, Missouri, where he learned to read, write and kick a soccer ball. He hopes to spend his twenties traveling and reporting with his girlfriend, Hannah.

Daily reflections written by the fellows

August 18, 2009 by Joseph Lin

The afternoon visit to the NHK was very helpful in understanding the structural differences between Japanese and American media. Japanese media is structured linearly whereas a career in American media typically involves a more circuitous route.

Within the Japanese system, prospective journalists take entrance exams for the respective companies in which they are interested. Once accepted into a company, they usually work at the same company for the entirety of their careers. This is mostly due to the government mandated lifetime employment policy that guarantees an employee's job at a company until the age of 65. This policy is reflective of the Japanese emphasis on stability, but creates a rigid structure that is not conducive to a dynamic field such as the news media.

By its very nature, the news media can be defined as the aggregation and dissemination of information. The feudal structure found in Japanese media, in which employees are essentially tied to a company, means that the cross-pollination of ideas brought upon by bringing on outside talent is virtually non-existent. In-house innovation is also severely stagnated due to the bureaucracies formed due to lifetime employment.

In the example of the NHK, new hires are brought in and given a rigorous training course on the fundamentals of journalism before given their first beat. This first beat is almost always a bureau in a remote area away from a major metropolis such as Tokyo. In this initial bureau they cover local news and gain firsthand journalistic experience. Only after several years working at such bureaus is a journalist given the option to relocate to a larger bureau, such as Tokyo, where most of the senior journalists work. While this is akin to the smaller beats typically given to rookie journalists in America, the system employed by the NHK effectively segregates new talent from senior talent at a time when mentorship is needed the most.

This also gives management a glut of mid/senior level talent. With no way to dispose of ineffectual workers, a bottleneck occurs suppressing the rise of new talent that could reinvigorate the system. The NHK may be able to afford to continue this rigid feudalistic system since they are publicly subsidized, however, if the rapid decline of media in America can be used as a precedent, I do not think that the rest of the Japanese media outlets will be sustainable in the near future.

August 19, 2009 by Haley Sweetland Edwards

In a week that has been packed with meetings and activities, today was especially busy. The highlight, in my opinion, was the visit to the United States base in Yokosuka. Commander Dan Weed, our host, was both genial and forthright about the problems that arise when one nation – ours – has such an enormous military presence in another nation – Japan. I was particularly interested in the diplomatic problems that arise when young American soldiers criminally misbehave on Japanese soil. Commander Weed mentioned that in the last few years, U.S. soldiers have raped and murdered Japanese civilians in

at least two instances. This, to me, is both repulsive and absolutely integral in understanding the complex security relationships between Japan and the U.S. At the time of our meeting (the numbers may change with the DPJ in power), Japan was paying the U.S. six billion dollars per year to protect their island nation. That payment – and the asymmetrical power balance it engenders – is controversial, both in Japan and among some more isolationist groups in the U.S. While I still have a lot to learn about this complex relationship, I am grateful for the opportunity to listen to Commander Weed and see the enormous footprint that U.S. military operations have in Japan.

August 20, 2009 by Catherine Krikstan

As a student who will emerge from graduate school amidst rapid and unpredictable change within the journalism industry, I have spent the past several months preoccupied with questions concerning the future of printed news. I embarked on this fellowship interested in learning just how Japan planned to cope with this problem.

Because even in Japan—a nation that consumes more than 50 million newspapers each day; where households subscribe to more than one newspaper; where evening editions are still printed—journalists admit to an uncertain future. During our visit to the offices of Asahi Shimbun, for instance, we learned that the average age of an Asahi Shimbun subscriber is 57. And, the newspaper acknowledged, without a change in the company's business model, this age will only rise. For younger generations in Japan (like those in the United States), consuming information through a mobile phone remains more appealing than reading a newspaper.

But the future that I glimpsed at Asahi Shimbun was not an entirely bleak one. Because rather than back down from the challenge of a changing media landscape, the newspaper seems, instead, driven by the fact that someone must gather the news. Although this visit could not define, for me, the future of print news, it did reassure and even inspire me, in the newspaper's resolve—whether through upholding the quality that sets them apart from their competitors or developing outreach programs to prepare for the future—to preserve the press.

August 21, 2009 by Michael Miller

Kazuo Kodama seemed confused when I told him he reminded me of Ryszard Kapuscinski. After all, I said, the Japanese Press Secretary could not have done a better job reciting the famous Polish journalist's recipe for reporting on foreign lands: forget neutrality, read obsessively about your adopted land and be as fair as possible with your readers. Good reporting requires reporters to be in touch with the moods, attitudes and concerns of his or her adopted country, Kodama-san told us.

Unsurprisingly, our conversation had begun with a question, not from the six young journalists in the room but from Mr. Kodama himself: "To what extent have foreign correspondents in Japan been able to escape the dangers of editors pushing stories and angles that merely confirm national prejudices?" Over the course of an hour and a half, Kodama explained in his best, if unintentional, Kapuscinski impersonation that foreign correspondents bear a great responsibility to accurately convey current events in one country to an audience in another in a "fair and non-partisan" manner. When they fail to do so, he reminded us with a smile, it was his job to prepare a rebuttal, dial the foreign newspaper in question and demand space on its op-ed page.

Despite their best intentions, Western media often lapse into orientalist reporting, "merely satisfying pre-cooked ideas of Eastern or Japanese society," Kodama said. He gave Nicholas Kristof's reporting for the *New York Times*, in which he criticized Japan's treatment of women and women's rights, as an example of such a misunderstanding. Kodama criticized Kristof for holding Japan to the same standards and criteria as the United States, despite very different cultures and gender relations.

But is this fair? Surely, Western journalists should be expected to learn as much as possible about their host country and approach it with an open mind. But, in an age of globalization, many values are becoming less relative and more universal. Indeed, human rights are defined as universal. Can an American journalist be blamed for noting if Japan pays its women unequally; for describing restrictions on speech in China; or for calling on countries in the Middle East to allow freedom of religion?

Newspapers and news agencies are fast becoming global companies with international reach. And although the Bush administration used human rights as a smokescreen for the invasion of Iraq, the world is nonetheless a better place for the emergence of human rights discourse. As Kapuscinski himself noted, foreign correspondents are in a unique position, poised between their readers and their local subjects. But as these readers are increasingly scattered across the globe, governments must adjust to increased scrutiny of cultural practices outside the international mainstream.

August 22, 2009 by Sandra Garcia

The trip to Kobe was one of my favorite parts of the fellowship. I try not to ever travel only as a tourist. I love getting to know people and asking questions and becoming part of their world for the limited time of my trip. Today's experience is the perfect example.

The Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation institution showed me effects of the 1995 earthquake, had a simulation, and even pictures and artifacts from the disaster. I was informed, touched, but not exactly connected with the magnitude of lives affected.

Next, during the visit to the Takatori Community Center, the group heard stories from a few survivors of the earthquake. The stories were heart wrenching to say the least, and I don't think there was a dry eye in the room. I slowly understood how the lives of these people had been turned upside down. Putting myself in their shoes is impossible, but I tried.

My pivotal moment came next. Having gotten up at 6:15, I was so tired and wanted nothing more than sleep, which was the next thing on our agenda. As we were saying our goodbyes at the Center, one of the speakers asked us if we wanted to see his wife's memorial. For obvious reasons of etiquette, nobody could decline that offer, and I am ashamed to admit, at that point, it was the only reason I went.

The memorial site was beautiful. There was a large fountain, and stairs that took us below it to a circular room. When we looked up, we were under the fountain, looking up at the sun beaming through the splashing water. Surrounding us were plaques with the names all 6,434 people who lost their lives. It was at this moment I became aware of my selfishness. This man that I had never met wanted to share such a personal part of his life with me, and my desire to sleep outweighed that?

He showed us the plaque with his wife's name on it and was smiling as he rubbed his hand back and forth over it. It was such a sad smile, but his eyes were so proud. He said, "This is my life's work now." I lost it, as I'm sure most of the others did too.

His strength and desire to take his experience and share it with others was so overwhelming. Before we left, I spoke with him and thanked him profusely for sharing his wife's memorial with us. I was overwhelmed at his selflessness as *he* tried to comfort *me* through my tears.

On the ride back to the hotel, I thought about my personal quest of not just being a tourist. Going to the Renovation Institution and looking at pictures is being a tourist, going back to the hotel and sleeping when you are in an amazing place, is being a tourist. Talking to people and stepping into their lives, and truly becoming a part of their world, is what I want to do. Through this man's story, I not only experienced his wife's story, but also took away an unintended lesson about myself.

August 23, 2009 by Kathleen Massara

Today we visited Himeji Castle, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Walking up the meandering path to the castle keep, I could see how intruders could be easily confused! Our tour guide informed us that the slats in the sides of the tower allowed for burning water to be dumped on entering forces.

It was interesting to compare the lightness of Himeji's wooden towers to the thick stone castles of Europe. Also, every few steps we would pass an open window at the top of Himeji; I can't imagine this happening in the fortresses in Europe.

This was the first day we were able to view traditional Japanese architecture and experience how it interacts with nature. A soft breeze from nearby trees would drift through the open windows of the castle, giving a sense of peacefulness after a long journey.

August 24, 2009 by Joseph Lin

In Japan, there is no sport like baseball and no baseball like high school baseball. Every summer 49 schools, distilled from thousands across the nation, descend upon the hallowed ground of the Hanshin Koshien Stadium for the National High School Baseball Tournament. Simply called the Koshien by most Japanese, after the stadium in which it is traditionally held, the tournament captures the collective attention of the nation every summer. Koshien news makes the front page of the daily Japanese newspapers and games are regularly commentated upon in national television news programming.

During my visit to Japan, I was fortunate enough to experience this unique piece of Japanese culture. The excitement in the air was palpable as the sold-out stadium fixated on every pitch of the ball and swing of the bat. Each school's orchestra showed up in full, sporting instruments ranging from tubas to traditional Japanese taiko drums, while cheering sections numbering in the hundreds stood behind them equipped with pairs of plastic bottles. Whenever a play was made, or their team was at bat, these cheering sections burst into displays of synchronized plastic percussion as they banged their bottles in support. In these young shaven head athletes the audience saw a reflection of the core values that defined their nation.

With bat and glove in lieu of sword and armor, the young baseball players took the field for honor and pride, epitomizing the stoic samurai spirit from which they hail. The athletes showed maturity and sportsmanship well beyond their years as they displayed their impeccable team work to the nation. The effort that players put into mundane plays such as running out ground balls or sprinting to first base after an out has been made, would put most major league baseball players to shame. It is this maximum effort in the minutiae of the game that is reflective of the hard work that the Japanese put into all that they do.

Even baseball strategy at the Koshien is reflective of the Japanese mindset. The sacrifice bunt, a play in which a player sacrifices themselves for an out in order to advance a team mate one base, is a commonly employed tactic in the tournament. This act of sacrificing oneself for the greater whole is a common theme in Japanese society as individual are expected to sacrifice themselves for a larger entity such as their company.

Few events can capture the spirit of a nation, but the Koshien represents Japan in its purest form.

August 25, 2009 by Haley Sweetland Edwards

Today was the day of departures. Unfortunately, I was the first to leave. As we had arranged at the karaoke bar the night before, all the other fellows and I met for breakfast at the hotel buffet at 7:15 a.m. By 7:20, I was astounded to find that everyone had indeed managed to claw themselves out of bed and make it to breakfast to say goodbye. (Sure, they were all sleep-deprived and dehydrated from the previous night's "activities" – and they all sported headaches to match – but that's beside the point). I can't say how much it meant to me to see all those sleepy-eyed faces that morning. Half an hour later, I boarded the bus and waved a long goodbye – as is the Japanese fashion – to Paul, Julie, our inimitable guide, Aska, and our fearless intellectual mascot, Takeda Sensei. As all those smiling faces disappeared from view, I turned back around in my seat and teared up a bit. I never could have imagined that I would have grown so attached to so many of the people – both American and Japanese – on this trip. I respect, admire and genuinely just *like* to be around all of them. The day of departures could have been a day of relief – after all, we all were looking forward to 15 hour flights, if only to get some sleep! – but instead, it was a day of sadness and gratefulness for having had such an incredible opportunity.

Fellowship Trip Self-Reflections

Haley Sweetland Edwards

After returning from this trip, I was asked the same question about a hundred times – "So, what's Japan like?" Each time, I made it a point to say something new: Japan is hot. Japan is beautiful. Japan is nothing, at all, like you'd expect.

Above all, Japan is as diverse and heterogeneous as the United States. That seems obvious now, in retrospect, but I think in America, we tend to imagine the Japanese as a single entity: they are small and polite, and they like things like sushi and manga. That is, of course, a very silly way to imagine a culture as ancient and intellectually diverse as Japan. I loved visiting Himeji Castle and peering in on the ancient traditions of seppuku, and in the same day, chatting with two nattily-dressed Japanese teenagers in the Gardens of Kyoto. While there are aspects of Japanese culture that seem to be pervasive – a sense of hierarchy, respect and cleanliness – I was delighted by the diversity of intellectual experiences we encountered.

On that same vein, one of my favorite events was the lecture on Japanese Pop Culture from Associate Professor Morikawa of Meiji University. His perspective – as both a manga fan personally and an academic researcher of manga professionally – was incredibly unique and fascinating. As he mentioned in his talk, Westerners tend to be offended or alarmed by the sexualization of cartoon characters, as is the case in some forms of manga. Our group was no exception. Afterward, the six of us fellows had a heated discussion in the bus over whether or not the U.S. is responsible for exporting the pressure for young boys and girls to interact sexually – a pressure that Professor Morikawa said lead to the current market for sexually-explicit manga games. I'm still undecided about a lot of the issues the professor raised, and am grateful for the opportunity to think about aspects of Japanese culture that I never would have thought to consider previously.

Sandra Garcia

The goal of this trip was to meet with foreign correspondents of all kinds, network for future careers, learn how my role as a journalist affects the way the U.S. views other countries and vice versa. All of these things were accomplished better than I ever expected, but I took away so much more from Japan.

Throughout the entire trip I found myself repeating the same phrase over and over, "Japan just gets it!" If you ask anyone on the trip, those words came out of my mouth at least twice a day. There were a few things that really caught my attention.

There were the little things, like the day I couldn't peel open a jelly container, and Paul said, "We're in Japan, there has to be an easier way." I turned the container over and saw that cracks open, and it sprays jelly onto your food so your hands don't get dirty.

Then there were bigger things, like Japan's collective understanding of being on time. If a meeting starts at noon, everyone is there by 11:50, and if it ends at 1:30, the speaker wraps up at 1:29. It sounds minor, but when every single person does this, so much can be done in a given day. And in Japan, so much is.

As far as Tokyo being three times the size of New York City, you would never know, because it is impeccably clean. There are not many trash cans around the city, but people hold on to it until there is a place to throw it away. Again, this is seemingly trivial, but when everyone does it, you wind up with a city like Tokyo.

Tokyo has upwards of 35 million people, but has one of the lowest crime rates in the world. People leave their bikes on the street without locks or chains; there are entire bike garages where they store their bikes without worry of them not being there when they return. Maybe I'm jaded from living in big cities all of my life, but this is pretty incredible. I was having dinner with a friend of a friend in Tokyo one night and he said it interestingly: "You can pass out in the middle of a busy street with 10,000 yen ($100) on your forehead, and not only will it be there the next morning, but you'd probably be pulled to the side of the street so you don't get run over."

Perhaps it's the self-absorbed American way of getting your individual tasks done and not focusing too much on what is going on around you. It was remarkable to see what can happen when everyone works together and is considerate of each other's common space. So I will say it again, from the small details, to the large ones, Japan just gets it. Perhaps we should all take their standard of living back to the U.S.

Catherine Krikstan

In a lecture that began our time in Japan, the president of the Japan Foundation discussed the distinction that Japan has, in recent years, drawn between itself and the rest of the world, as just one small step in its search for a Japanese identity. Kazuo Ogoura's words colored the rest of my time in Japan. Each day, I confronted the idea of a career as a foreign correspondent with the question: how can I even begin to make sense of the Japanese identity, when Japan itself is struggling to do the same?

So I sought definitions of "Japan" everywhere we went. Can Japan be defined through the nation's past? Through the sites, like Himeji Castle, that it and the rest of the world have deemed so culturally significant as to warrant preservation? Or through the artistic traditions, from Kabuki theatre to woven silk, that persist into the present? Can Japan be defined through something more subtle? Like the social customs that I so often stumbled over? Or can Japan be defined through something more tangible and closer at hand? Like its fashion, its animation or its baseball players?

Of course, Japan is not one of these things. It is all of these things, and more, the sum of which I might never have enough time to see. But, I realize, it is these single, small experiences of Japan that I hope will allow me to discover the whole, and to seek out the Japanese stories that I have learned are so difficult, but important, to tell.

Joseph C. Lin

Having been born in the 80s, I grew up with distinct memories of American popular culture ranging from Scooby Doo to the furry phenom known as Furby. Although America has always been a mixing pot of

cultures, assimilating whatever words and ideas that came its way, at the turn of the century I noticed a distinct increase in the influence of Japanese culture on our country.

Vocabulary such as anime and ramen became mainstays in the modern American lexicon overshadowing that of Disney and pasta. Sony was making all our televisions and Toyota was making all our cars. Japanese culture was becoming increasingly prevalent in American society and I began to wonder how a small island nation could exact such a large influence over the world's only superpower. Was American culture in its decline and Japan's on the rise?

The answer to this question evaded me until I finally visited Japan this past summer. Just as Japan has had a tangible influence on the landscape of American society within the past decade, American culture has left its indelible footprint in Japan. American franchises, such as McDonald's and 7-Eleven, not only permeate major metropolitan areas such as Tokyo, but reach deep into rural cities such as Hofu and Miyajima as well. Hip-hop culture influences the dress of Japanese youth, while advertisements for American movies plaster billboards all across Tokyo.

The cultural exchange between America and Japan is not one-sided, but rather symbiotic and cyclical. Disney was the original inspiration for Japanese anime which has, in recent years, become prolific in America. Anime, such as that produced by Hayao Miyazaki, has in turn become influential with modern American animators such as Pixar, thus bringing the process full circle.

Japan, perhaps more than any other country in the world, shares a unique commonality with American culture and ideals, making cultural exchange such a fluid process. In short, we embrace Japan, because they are like us and we are like them.

Kathleen Massara

A highlight of the trip for me was listening to Associate Professor Morikawa's presentation of "otaku" culture. Morikawa, a self-professed "otaku," showed photos of the changing face of Akihabara, as well as Japan's contribution to the "Metamorph" exhibition in Venice. He made a particularly interesting point during his lecture: that, in the course of promoting "otaku" culture, the Japanese government casts pressure on the creators to produce marketable products internationally. To Morikawa, this considerably dilutes the art form. As both an "otaku" and researcher of "otaku" culture, Morikawa's analysis was invaluable to journalists like myself who are interested in covering stories about Japanese soft power.

The trip to Kobe, though, was by far the best experience I will take from this trip. Hearing the earthquake survivors' stories at the Takatori Community Center was such a heart-wrenching event. Walking through the monument with one of the survivors after hearing his account of the earthquake's aftermath, one couldn't help but be moved by the setting and his presence there.

Michael E. Miller

"I didn't have that experience: to be buried in the dark so close to the dying body of my mother," Mr. Nakajima said, tears brimming behind is glasses. "I didn't have that experience. My daughter did."

We sat in a cool, air conditioned room in Kobe across from Mr. Nakajima, his daughter—now fully grown—and Mr. Utani: three survivors of the 1995 earthquake that set this quiet neighborhood on fire and claimed more than 6,400 lives. Tired from more than a week of relentless meetings and incessant traveling, we had arrived at the Takatori Community Center struggling to keep our eyes open. Now, listening to their stories of broken ribs and lost loved ones, we were all fighting back tears.

We came to Japan to learn more about its culture, politics and relationship with the United States, all in the aim of becoming better foreign correspondents. And after a whirlwind tour of Tokyo and fascinating lectures on the upcoming election, Japanese pop culture and the US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement, I felt like I finally had a grasp on the basics required to write about the country.

But as we listened to the Nakajimas' experience over glasses of tea, I remembered that it is personal stories—of grief and joy, failure and success—that drive good reporting. After all, the goal of the US-Japan Journalism Fellowship was never to completely "understand" Japan, but rather to arm us with the knowledge needed to confidently tell the important, often overlooked, stories that can sketch Japanese life for overseas readers.

It is no secret that these are difficult times for journalists. This is triply true for young, aspiring foreign correspondents, searching for footing in an earthquake of industry unrest. It is, therefore, a rare and beautiful thing to be able to learn so much about another country in such little time. I can honestly say that I never expected a 10-day trip to Japan to be so exhausting, or so much fun.

There are a few things, however, that the Japan Foundation and the Center for Global Partnership could do to improve the fellowship for next year. More free time—perhaps just in the evenings or at night—would not only help fellows stay energized during the trip, but would also allow them more time to write or blog about their experiences. Personally, I wish I had had more time to translate my amazing experiences in Japan into news articles or travel stories for publication in the United States.

Second, more interviews with everyday Japanese citizens like the Nakajimas, instead of academics or government officials, would help fellows develop a more complete picture of contemporary Japan. For example, our visit to the Yokosuka Navy Base and US Embassy provided invaluable insight into the US-Japan military relationship; however, it gave us little idea of how ordinary Japanese citizens feel about the presence of 50,000 foreign troops in their country.

Finally, I think the fellows would benefit from a more complete understanding of the "darker" side of present-day Japan. For example, despite our visits with Japanese reporters, all of whom started out covering local beats, I gained little insight into how crime works in Japan, or who benefits.

I would like to thank everyone at the Japan Foundation, CGP and Emerson College for this opportunity. It is a trying time to begin a career in foreign correspondence, and it is nice to know that there are people and programs that believe in the value of good reporting.

Like the elderly survivors of the Kobe earthquake who wrote pen pal letters to keep from losing faith, we all need to be reminded that we are still necessary. If this fellowship has achieved anything, it has reminded me of the continued need for quality journalism.

2009 US-Japan Journalism Fellows Sandra Garcia, Michael Miller, Kathleen Massara, Haley Edwards, Joseph Lin, and Catherine Krikstan.

Sandra Garcia, Michael Miller, and Haley Edwards enjoy some friendly competition on a visit to the NHK studios

Catherine Krikstan explores the streets of Harajuku while enjoying a crepe dessert

US-Japan Journalism Fellows and the APSIA Fellows with Captain Daniel Weed at Yokosuka Naval Base

Sandra Garcia and Catherine Krikstan at the Tsukiji fish market

US-Japan Journalism Fellows with University of Waseda students, Professor Shiro Segawa, Mr. Karl Greimel, and Professor Paul Niwa on a visit to the Graduate School of Journalism

Mr. Kazuo Kodama shows the students the press room at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Joseph Lin points out a familiar animated series he is a fan of to the other fellows on a visit to MadHouse Animation Studios

The students attend an informative dinner with journalists
at the Foreign Correspondents Club in Tokyo

Kobe earthquake survivors treat the students to a moving experience by taking them on a special trip to visit a memorial dedicated to the lives lost in the 1995 earthquake

The group poses for a quick photo before making the long journey up to Himeji Castle

Sandra Garcia with geishas during an outing in Kyoto

Michael Miller stops to enjoy the view at the Yasaka shrine

Kathleen Massara and Haley Edwards unwind with some karaoke on their last night in Japan