

## **The Iraq War and the Japanese Media: Images on television and arguments in the print media**

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On December 13, 2003, Saddam Hussein, the former president of the Republic of Iraq, was dragged out of a pit on the ground by the American troops. During the period between his capture and the outbreak of the Iraq War in March, the Iraqi capital of Baghdad fell, and a statue of Hussein was pulled down in April, and U.S. President George W. Bush made a declaration that major battles were over on a US aircraft carrier in May. None of these, however, was enough to make people all over the world believe that the war was over. In contrast, the capture of Saddam Hussein could convince them that the war is indeed over. Of course, the capture might be just a beginning of the end. Still, this great “fact” can be described as a part of the grand information strategy of this war. We have to wait for some time before analyses on this matter come out. (Note: The most of this essay was written before the capture of Saddam Hussein.)

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U.S., British, and coalition forces launched attacks on Iraq in 2003. The Iraq War has become a symbol of an extreme situation of “war” in the 21st century, where the media and information are greatly relevant to the international community. Wars have often been described as “media war” or “information war” in history. It was particularly true with the Gulf Crisis and the first Gulf War in 1990-91, since when wars have been typically recognized as television wars. The 9.11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. in 2001, the ensuing conflict in Afghanistan, and the latest war in Iraq have ushered us into a new era. Such situations can be observed not only in the U.S. and Europe, but also in Asia and other parts of the world. Especially, in Japan, where the mass media, particularly television, has deeply penetrated into daily life of the people, the Iraq War was clearly recognized as media war or television war. This essay will discuss how the Japanese media reported the Iraq War and what kind of messages they sent, and raise some issues.

In November 2003, US President George W. Bush visited the British capital of London on a state visit at the invitation of Queen Elizabeth II. It was the first visit by an incumbent US president in more than 80 years since President Thomas Wilson. Britain quickly and strongly supported the U.S. when it decided to go into a war with Iraq. British Prime Minister Tony Blair was even derided by the media as “Bush’s poodle” for taking such a stance. Britain was also the only permanent member of the United Nations’ Security Council that supported the U.S. Naturally, it was a great opportunity to demonstrate the strong tie between the two countries to the world. That is why Mr. Bush’s state visit to Britain was scheduled at this timing. There is no doubt the visit was planned according to an information strategy.

It turned out, however, Mr. Bush was greeted with a rather harsh treatment

in Britain. The British public opinion was critical of Mr. Bush's policy towards Iraq. The majority of the British people were against Mr. Blair's policy supporting Mr. Bush. Before and after Mr. Bush's visit to Britain, hundreds of thousands people took to the street in central London, protesting against the war.

Among other protests, a scene which gave the strongest impression was the one that a make-shift statute of Mr. Bush erected in Trafalgar Square was pulled down with a rope around the neck. The incident was reported to the world. In Japan, the November 21 evening edition of broadsheet newspapers (Note: Most major broadsheet Japanese newspapers sell morning and evening editions in a package. Therefore, the evening edition of broadsheet papers should clearly be distinguished from tabloid popular evening newspapers.) and the major television networks (Note: Japan has a powerful public broadcaster, Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK), and several major commercial broadcast networks.) all carried the news.

Pulling down the Bush statute is, of course, a duplication of toppling one of those of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in April the same year, which was also broadcasted live to the world and carried in newspapers with a big photo of the scene.

The U.S. defeated Saddam's Iraq in a space of several weeks with the overwhelming military power. The scene of pulling down the Hussein statute was used to demonstrate to the world through the media that the Iraqi capital of Baghdad was now under control of the U.S. The image was the best among other scenes to impress the world with the victory of the US troops and the fall of Saddam Hussein. However, a careful thought would make one realize that the scene is almost the only image of such a big event as the end of a war.

Meanwhile, a calm analysis of news images, photos, and articles of the toppling Saddam statute that were distributed to the world would lead us to wonder whether the incident truly occurred as an improvised response of the Baghdadis, who celebrated the fall of the Saddam regime and welcomed the US troops, or it might have been a US maneuver, since it was a US armored tank recovery vehicle that actually toppled the statute by pulling the rope tied around the neck. Was it the Baghdadis' will that pulled down the statute? Or, was it a US maneuver? Was it the US troops helping the Baghdadis who wanted to topple the statute? Or, was it the Baghdadis mobilized by the US troops to carry out its maneuver? Further questions would be: Was it a "set-up" by the US troops disguised as the Baghdadis celebrating? And, was it just a coincidence that the statue in front of the Palestine Hotel, which served as bureaus of the foreign media, was brought down, when there were a lot more statutes anywhere in Baghdad?

Images both real and false conveyed by visuals, risks of misleading as the negative side of visuals' ability of making strong impression, and problems caused by the flood of information on the battle ground. These are issues that were taken up in an essay carried in a Japanese monthly magazine at an early stage. (Reimei Okamura, *Terebi Jânarizumu ha Sensô o Dô Tsutaeta ka?* (How Did the Television Journalism Report the War?), Ronza, June 2003 edition,

issued in early-May 2003, Asahi Shimbun) The essay raised an issue about the war journalism in Japan.

The event of bringing down the Saddam statue was discussed at a meeting of the editorial committee of the Asahi Shimbun, one of the leading Japanese newspaper. The editorial committee is a forum for external influential figures and senior editorial officers of the company to exchange opinions about handling and editing of news carried in the paper. The gist of the committee discussion was carried in the Asahi Shimbun.

At the committee, a freelance journalist concluded based on hearings with other freelance journalist who had been at the site in Baghdad that the Saddam statue had been in effect pulled down by the US troops. He showed a close-up photo of the statute being brought down and a photo of the entire square where the statute was erected. The close-up photo indeed gave an impression that the Baghdadis were excited over pulling down the statute. But the larger photo showed that the crowd was thin and did not look like welcoming the US troops as liberator.

Asahi Shimbun later instructed a Baghdad correspondent to collect related materials to verify the incident. A report from Baghdad carried in August said that the correspondent had identified and interviewed the man who first hit the seating of the statute with a hammer and partly destroyed it. There was indeed a Baghdadis who tried to destroy the Saddam statue. The article said: The man owned an automobile repair shop. When the Saddam regime was in full swing, he was falsely charged that some of the used cars that he had dealt with belonged to the government's security authorities, and arrested and detained on the false charge. Later, he was released under an amnesty.

By the article's account, it has been confirmed that there were some Baghdadis who indeed joined in pulling down the Saddam statute. However, it is not certain with how much voluntariness they participated in the toppling, or what was their relationship with the US troops that came to the square and actually pulled down the statute with a vehicle, without which the toppling was impossible. Nor is it clear whether a suspicion that the crowd was gathered under an instruction of the US troops has completely been cleared. In short, it remains uncertain whether or not the tone in which the news of the toppling of the Saddam statute was brought to the world was appropriate.

The reason why the US troops' involvement in the event is such a big deal is that it is suspected that "toppling Saddam statutes" had been one of important operational targets of the US and British troops before they launched attacks on Iraq. Several days before the Saddam statute was pulled down in Baghdad, The New York Times said in an article that the British troops brought down a Saddam statute in a city of southern Iraq with some photos of the scene.

If such an operational command was truly issued to the US and British troops, what was the intention? Was it to drive home the fall of Saddam Hussein to the Iraqi people? Was it to demonstrate the Iraqi liberation? Or, was it to send a message to the remaining Saddam loyalists?

Perhaps, the event of toppling a Saddam statute served as a proxy of capture or killing of Saddam Hussein, which had been considered as difficult

from the outset, to show the world a victorious image.

In ensuing developments, reportedly, the US troops pulled down a few Saddam statues that had remained in the city in November 2003, eight months after the fall of Baghdad, as if it suddenly occurred to them that they should do so. One might sensibly wonder why these statues remained undestroyed in the early stage. Conversely, one might speculate that there should be some reason why it was necessary to erase all the marks of Saddam Hussein at this point. That is, this may be because of concerns about security in Baghdad, which had been deteriorating mainly due to the remnant of Saddam loyalists.

Such observations would logically lead to an interpretation that the US and British military commanders and the White House considered it the major objective of the latest Iraq War to eliminate the glory of Saddam Hussein.

Furthermore, it also seems that they just had presumed that the fall of Saddam Hussein would invariably develop into a fall of the Saddam regime. Unfortunately for the US and British troops, even though the Iraqi capital of Baghdad fell and government organizations of Saddam Hussein collapsed only several weeks after the war broke out, it did not equate to an immediate dismantle of Saddam loyalists. (It would be unconceivable, if it were with a government of developed country of the West, though.)

Worse, it remains unknown whether Mr. Hussein is dead or still alive. A huge amount of bounty on the head of Saddam Hussein does not seem to help.

We do not know for sure whether toppling of Saddam statues has been originally planned, since such a situation (namely, Saddam is missing) could easily be predicted. If that is the case, what really matters is not whether Saddam is dead or alive, but how well information about Saddam can be manipulated. Presumably, this is a good illustration of the nature of a modern information strategy or a media strategy, especially with television.

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In the recent the US-led attacks on Iraq, as mentioned earlier, the military strength in a narrow sense was characteristically linked closely with information capability. The US air raid on Baghdad at the onset of the war demonstrated the overwhelmingly stronger US air power. The attack was dubbed as “Operation Fear and Owe”, which shows that the US expected not only large-scale destruction, but also a lot of psychological effects caused by fear that such destruction brought about.

Another characteristic of the recent Iraq War is that “live events on the battle ground” were frequently aired on television. For most of the live broadcast, the US troops provided support to the media personnel to help them report on television. During the first Gulf War a decade ago, similar, but much-smaller-scale, support was provided by the armed forces to the media. At the time, CNN telecasted live US air raids on Baghdad, an adversarial capital for the US, from the scene. It has turned out, however, that the live reports worked to tilt the world public opinion towards feeling sympathy for those who had to suffer destructions. The US might have learned hard way the importance of how to deliver news.

During the recent war, the US armed forces were mostly accompanied by

embedded journalists. It was the US troops that organized the embedding program. That was a large group of reporters and photographers of 600, of which nearly 100 were foreign media personnel, including about a dozen Japanese journalists. The embedding program was different from the conventional war coverage by journalists, in that reporters and photographers were allowed to accompany military units, in operation on the war front and spend 24 hours a day with military personnel. Thus, the media personnel could go deeper inside the troops. For the military personnel, in addition to already extreme strains of being at the battle front, they had to endure the uncommon presence of journalists and also run a risk of revealing details of operations (though there were indeed restrictions on what they could report).

Still, by allowing media personnel embedded with the military units in operation, the US military forces disclosed or at least appeared to be disclosing some of the information about the war, battles, and operations. They seem to have understood that they could more easily win the support of the world public opinion by letting the media report what they are doing than by hiding it.

The most illustrative undertaking was television broadcast of live events on the battle ground. In fact, the Japanese could view reports mainly by the embedded US media from the battle field in their living room. For example, a tense scene of the US troops fighting back the adversary was live-broadcasted with real sound of firing, bombing, and explosions. People tend to irresistibly be attracted by such scenes, and without knowing, feel affinity towards the US troops and hostility towards “the adversary”.

Embedded reporters and photographers were not all American, but the media personnel of other countries, including Japanese newspaper and television personnel, joined the program. Among the Japanese media, NHK (a public broadcast) and Nippon Television (NTV) (a commercial network) accompanied the ground troops, and Fuji (a commercial network) the air forces. TBS (a commercial network), which chose not to go with the ground troops, and other media companies went aboard an aircraft carrier.

During the first Gulf War a decade ago, the coalition forces led by the US allowed only pool or escort reporters and camera crew to cover battles (and provided guidance on what and how to report, namely, censorship). In contrast to that, the embedding program of the latest war without doubt let the media penetrate far deep into the troops. In that sense, it can be said that the US-led coalition troops has decided to shift from indirect to direct control of the media. Particularly, non-American newspapers and televisions had been hardly included in the pool reporters and photographers ten years ago, but even though a majority of the media personnel were American, the non-American media was given a larger lot during this war. This is a show of confidence of the US military forces, which is to be covered. It seems that a web of publicity strategy of the US has now spread over not only the US, but also the major media of other countries across the world.

About a dozen Japanese reporters were embedded with the troops and reported the war. How were they affected by the US publicity strategy and intension as such? This is to be thoroughly analyzed, but some things can

already be safely said. For example, Mr. Nojima of Asahi Shimbun reported from the front not only ongoing battles, but also psychology of soldiers of the unit that he accompanied, which drew attention of readers. It is true that embedded reporters were at the forefront of the war, but what Mr. Nojima revealed in his articles was difficulties of grasping the overall status of the war, if you were there. If the embedding program is to be a common practice of a war, since there is no guarantee that no war will break out in future, the media should always be prepared to handle such a situation properly from the viewpoint of freedoms of press and speech.

In particular, for Japan and other countries that are not belligerent parties, there are some issues to be debated in peacetime among the inner circle of the media, journalists, outside pundits on the media, consumers of media reports and so on. Such issues to be debated include the objectives of war reports, an appropriate stance of reporting a war, the degree of commitment required for general reports on a war, reports from the battle ground, and an embedding program.

Among media personnel who covered the latest war, there was a Japanese female reporter from a Japanese media company. Ms. Imaizumi, a Paris correspondent of Nippon Television flew to Iraq to accompany a US ground troop. It must have already been a tough condition for anyone, but would have been of especially great strain for a woman. Despite such a hardship, she joined her male colleagues to report the war. To avoid a pitfall of sensationalism, it is necessary for a television station to establish a solid stance on how to assign their personnel before the war.

In the following paragraphs, the author would like to wrap up how the Japanese media reported the Iraq War.

First, the coverage of the coalition forces led by the US and Britain. The coverage at the front mainly came from the earlier-mentioned media personnel embedded with military units (ie, ground troops of the Air Force and the Marine, air troops, aircraft carriers, etc.). In addition, the US and British commands located around Iraq, particularly the US Central Command and the Press Center based in Kuwait, were attended by reporters and other personnel of the Japanese media. Broadcast equipment to send images through satellites was also installed here, making the location a transmission center of reports and information from the battle field.

Second, the coverage of Iraq under the Saddam Hussein regime. Naturally, these were mainly reports from the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. Personnel of major Japanese media, however, evacuated from Baghdad and other major cities in flocks, once a US and British attack became imminent. Those journalists belonged to large newspapers, news agencies and tv-networks, and they were ordered to leave by respective employers, who decided that their employees' personal safety could not be secured. It was mainly because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan had issued an evacuation recommendation. Major Japanese news media, without exception, always assign reporters to "the kisha club" or beaureaues at the MOFA headquarters in Tokyo. It was difficult for a media company to instruct

personnel on the scene to do something against the MOFA guidance. Moreover, there is no denying that the mindset of “no sticking-out, go hand-in-hand”, which underlies the press club system and has shackled the Japanese journalism, played some role.

It was freelance journalists who filled in gaps that the major media failed to serve. Japanese newspaper and tv-networks and news agencies signed contracts with Japanese freelance journalists who stayed in Baghdad at their own risk to obtain information and reports and have them make live reports from the scene. Meanwhile, after Japanese correspondents evacuated from the country, some Iraqi staffs were left in charge of running the local office. These local reporters obtained information and images and sent them to an office in a neighboring country, for example, Jordan, where Japanese reporters were based. In these ways, the major Japanese media tried to track what was going on at site.

In some instances, in northern Kurdish Iraq, a Japanese non-governmental organization that had come to the place to provide aid, helped the Japanese media to make reports on the status of Kurdish people there. Thus, the media strived to somehow cover areas where Japanese reporters, especially ones belonging to big names, had left.

Thus, in the latest Iraq War, the Japanese media truly devoted considerable human resources, money, and equipment for exclusive coverage. That exceeded in scale the Gulf Crisis and the ensuing War in 1990-91.

It does not mean, however, that Japanese readers or viewers could grasp the overall status of the war only through the coverage by the Japanese media from the Japanese perspective.

The war coverage by the Japanese news media was, needless to say, greatly supported by the foreign news media, particularly, Western news networks with the Anglo-American news media at the center.

A Japanese newspaper issuer usually has Japanese news agencies as sources. The Japanese news agencies, in turn, are supported by Western global news agency networks through contracts for information exchanges. In the past, there were World Big Five news agencies. Among them, UPI, an American news agency, dropped out from business competition, while TASS of a lost its power due to the fall of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Block. Currently, AP, Reuter, and AFP can in effect be described as Big Three. The former two are Anglo-American, whereas the last one is French. This shows that the world news agency industry is dominated by the Anglo-American.

International television news agencies had been re-aligned to two companies, namely, AP-TV and Reuter TV, by the mid-1990s.

Moreover, television networks that have capacity of collecting news material from across the world are nearly limited to the American Big Three Networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC), which have been on the market since the time of territorial broadcast, and BBC. On top of the list, CNN, which entered the industry in the 1980s with the technological innovation such as cable and satellite TV broadcast, and FOX, which joined the party in the 1990s, are added. Japanese television stations have contracts with one or some of these

global news networks to obtain news materials. TV-News delivered in Japan is consist of news materials provided by the global networks and materials by the Japanese networks by themselves.

Among the global networks of collecting news materials, those which directly deliver news to the world or provide services for consumers to directly receive news across the globe are in effect CNN and its rival BBC. In Japan, some cable TV networks and CS, mid-sized channel satellite television services, deliver programs of CNN and BBC. Meanwhile, as a news channel specialized in economy, CNBC and Nikkei have set up a joint venture to directly deliver news on economics. Meanwhile, in Japan, BS or DBS using a large-scale satellite, is more popular, whose channels are dominated by NHK, a public broadcast organization, and major commercial television networks. NHK-BS allocates some broadcast time to deliver some of the unedited news programs of major countries, including the US, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, and South Korea. Meanwhile, there are some Japanese news channels on CS and cable, but most of them are in inmatured stage. NHK and major commercial networks covered news, including the Iraq War, with an eye on across the world, but admittedly, they cater to only the Japanese viewers from a Japanese perspective.

Before and after the Iraq War, Arabic borderless satellite television services drew much attention even in Japan, while television news is dominated by the Anglo-America or the Western organizations as described above. During the conflict in Afghanistan which broke out about one and half years before the Iraq War, Al Jazeera, a satellite television based in Qatar, carried images and voice of Usama bin Laden, the head of the Al Qaeda terrorist organization. That the broadcast drew much attention of the world is still fresh in Japanese memory. Al Jazeera is a private broadcaster established in the mid-1990s. Immediately before the Iraq War broke out, along with Al Jazeera, Al Arabia, based in Dubai of the United Arab Emirate (UAE), entered news services on the war and other international affairs from the viewpoint of the Arab world, including Iraq. For example, it carried messages of the then President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Japanese television news programs also devoted considerable space for news provided by such Arabic broadcasters.



The biggest concern of the Japanese journalism in regard with the Iraq War was, needless to say, whether or not they should support the war. It was also an issue of how to report and set the tone on Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and his government, which quickly expressed support for the US and Britain launching the war, especially the decision of the Bush administration.

Newspapers were split into two, depending on whether the editorial expressed either understanding towards the Bush administration's argument and support for Mr. Koizumi or head-on criticism and opposition.

Japanese newspapers' editorials used to be more of the explanatory and analytical nature and shied away from making unequivocal statements or arguments. After its defeat in World War II, Japan was occupied by the allied forces led by the US, and the new constitution was established. In this



historical context, it has become a custom not to argue against principles of democracy, anti-militarism, and the spirit for international peace. In such a social climate, post-war administrations of Japan focused on economic growth, and political and military issues were on the second importance in the political agenda, which has been accepted by the general public. That is the reason why different newspapers did not make much different arguments.

During World War II, Japanese newspapers were forced by the government to align a pyramid-shape structure with a few national newspapers on the top and many local newspapers on the bottom, under the wartime policy of press control. Even after the war, the structure has basically stayed. This structure helps keep the newspaper business stable under a certain order.

Most Japanese newspapers are customarily delivered to regular subscriber households, which has set a standard of “one newspaper per household”. So, in Japan, it is required that the attitude of reporting and the stance of editorials are more or less practical manner among different newspapers.

The circulation of Japanese newspaper is characteristically large in total and by newspapers. That might be because of the levels of education and literacy, as well as above-mentioned peculiar circumstances where the Japanese media, including newspapers, operate.

Yomiuri Shimbun, which enjoys the largest circulation in Japan, issues more than 10 million copies. Each of the five major national newspapers issues more than 2-3 million copies. Three major regional (block) papers issue 1-3 million copies, respectively, while local (prefectural) papers typically issue several hundreds thousands copies, or one-hundred thousand copies even on the smaller end.

The process of polarization in the Japanese newspaper journalism has gradually proceeded under such circumstances. After the occupation of Japan was over, Sankei Shimbun made a foray to Tokyo from Osaka with support by the Japanese business circle. The newspaper clearly showed its stance of conservative journalism in the 1950s to 60s. Other newspapers shared an idea of “light-armed mercantilism”, some of which has started to revert to the pre-war values and tilt to nationalism and re-armament.

Still, such a trend did not manifest itself for a long time, but was quietly smoldering under the surface in the 1970s-80s.

Situations were as such before the 1990s, but great changes occurred in the 1990s. One is Japanese contributions in the Gulf War. The other is ensuing debates over Japan’s human contributions, Self Defense Forces, the national security, and eventually an amendment to the post-war constitution, which renounces war and bars Japan from having military capabilities.

As a general trend, the scope of Japan’s Self Defense Forces’ activities had been expanded by changing interpretation and implementation of the current constitution. It was generally accepted that the constitution should stay intact, and that any talks about changing it was a taboo. As already mentioned, the preservation of democracy and pacifism in post-war Japan, as well as a policy putting the utmost priority to economy based on the first two tenets had contributed to creating such an atmosphere. Almost all newspapers, except for

Sankei Shimbun, had followed this line of thought. However, at this point of time, Yomiuri Shimbun pushed forward an argument for a constitutional amendment and establishment of a constitution by the Japanese people as the newspaper's opinion. Moreover, the newspaper also announced an outline of constitutional amendment of its proposal. As expected, Yomiuri Shimbun's move sent a big shock wave to the whole Japanese newspaper.

The turnaround of Yomiuri Shimbun, which boasts the largest circulation in Japan, greatly changed the landscape of the Japanese newspaper industry, where in the past, Sankei Shimbun was the odd-man-out in that it was the only conservative newspaper.

By then, the tone of Japanese newspapers' arguments had been set mainly by Asahi and Mainichi. Now, Japanese papers were split into the liberalist Asahi and Mainichi on the one hand and the conservative Yomiuri and Sankei on the other. Among national newspapers, Nippon Keizai Shimbun, an economic/financial daily, seems to basically stay poised as liberal from the perspective of someone who highly values the basic policy of post-war Japan that had driven the country's rapid economic growth by putting the utmost priority to economy, while pandering to the conservative tilt in the business circle.

Among regional newspapers, Hokkaido, which is one of major newspapers after national papers, has had a more liberal tendency. Chunichi and Nishi-Nihon can also be classified as liberal.

Some local papers have started to take on conservatism. Many others, however, stay within a broader definition of liberalism.

In this way, conservative newspapers are outnumbered by non-conservative ones. Still, there is no denying that the conservative argument mainly made by big-name Yomiuri and Sankei has a strong impact.

Such a trend is getting more and more perceivable as time progresses from the 1990s, to 2000, and to the 21st century. The contrast in the argument has become ever sharper on the 9.11 terrorist attacks, the conflict in Afghanistan, and the Iraq War.

Under such circumstances, Sankei Shimbun has often carried feature articles that compared outlines of editorials of Sankei, Yomiuri, Asahi, and Mainichi since the late-1990s. The first such attempt was made at an opportunity of the annual Newspaper Week in fall. Later, it has become customary to carry this kind of feature articles on occurrence of an important event such as the latest Iraq War. Of course, the objective is not to make a simple comparison, but to make a case for the legitimacy of conservative arguments.

On the other hand, Asahi carried in its quality monthly magazine "Ronza" an article titled "A Study of Yomiuri Shimbun Opinions" (November 2003 issue) and similar features. Thus, it does not bother at all to hide its rivalry against Yomiuri.

The feature article said, "Yomiuri with 10 million circulation has consistently supported the US and Britain in the Iraq War", and analyzed Yomiuri's editorials. Both newspapers, at the point of late-January 2003,

basically agreed that “Iraq is not cooperative with the US weapons inspectors. There remains “suspicion” of development of weapons of mass destruction, but there is no conclusive evidence, either.” In early-February, however, in response to US Secretary of State Collin Powell’s remarks and other relevant incidents, the Asahi editorial decided that no “conclusive evidence” was eventually not found, while the Yomiuri editorial concluded that the “suspicion” has now almost been confirmed. Thus, the two newspapers drew completely opposite conclusions.

In the run-up to US and British attacks on Iraq, the difference in stance towards the imminent war became more and more clear: Asahi was against, while Yomiuri was for the war. (ibid. Ronza, essay by Professor Ken’ichi Matusmoto of Reitaku University)

Then, what are their grounds? It can be summarized that Asahi opposed the Iraq War because “there is no cause for this war”, and that Yomiuri supported the war for “Japan’s ‘national interests’”. (ibid. Matsumoto)

What does the “national interests” mean? Yomiuri based its case on pragmatism in international politics. “In short, the support for the Iraq War is made because it will be beneficial to Japan, in a context of the ‘threat’ of North Korea, even though there is a criticism as helping out the US in the war.” (ibid. Matsumoto)

Logic is self-explanatory. More importantly, however, Yomiuri’s editorials are in harmony with political decisions of the Japanese government, or the Koizumi administration. In contrast, Asahi’s editorials criticized the government and squarely objected its policy.

Whether they were for or against the government, it was a breakthrough in the post-war Japanese journalism in that leading newspapers brought up a theme that was a critical international issue and a contentious political issue for the Japanese in a head-on manner. Thus, the Japanese journalism has taken an important step forward.

Such debates were not confined to the forum of newspapers. Difference in stances could be detected even in broadcast, particularly television, which is considered to have more constraints on clearly making a “case”. Ostensibly, they claimed themselves as independent, but actually they were split into two camps, too. On the one hand, we had NHK, which has made its stance clear, by not opposing the government, and some commercial television networks that were sympathetic towards the government. On the other, there were commercial news networks that were critical of or against the government policy. Such inclinations affected all news programs of networks in general. The difference in stance was particularly clear in prime-time news shows. That is, contrast between NHK’s “News 10” (at 10: pm), and TV Asahi’s “News Station” (at 9:54 pm) and TBS’s “News 23” (at 10:54 pm).

Most of the Japanese commercial networks are affiliated with major newspapers. The tone of the news show, however, did not necessarily reflect that of related newspapers. Rather, the personality of popular anchormen, Hiroshi Kume of News Station and Tetsuya Chikushi of News 23, set the tone.

Though it is not only in regard with the Iraq War, government officials

certainly feel displeased by TV Asahi and TBS. Particularly, TV Asahi are often denied interviews with Mr. Koizumi, ministers, senior members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in these day.

The Japanese broadcast journalism used to be even more standardized and homogeneous than newspapers. Over the past decade or so, however, they stretched themselves to an area of news analyses and opinion sharing. Thus, the Japanese broadcast has started to make unique reports, which is the essence of journalism. That might be bad news for some government officials, political parties, and lawmakers, though.



### **Conclusion**

The Iraq War in 2003 was a great challenge for the Japanese journalism in many aspects.

First, in such an event of international significance in modern times as the Iraq War, interests of concerning countries are intertwined. Moreover, the belligerent countries have a well-worked-out information strategy and deftly manipulate information. Therefore, it is hard to figure out what is the fact, and what is the truth.

Even a visual image, which appears to be “a fact” to any viewer, can not be taken at face value. As discussed in the paragraphs about the toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue, even though the “toppling” is a fact, you will never know what really happened without checking on who pulled down the statue for what purpose, how was it done, and who used the event in what way.

One has to bear this in mind not only when he/she views television news, but also when reading a newspaper, which is supposed to work as a checking machine of visual images or live broadcast on television. That is because newspapers are also inundated with visual images and influenced by them.

Secondly, a war in the 21st century is not like any in the past centuries, in which belligerent parties, militaries, governments, and military commands strived to keep information to themselves at any cost. Instead, in a war in the 21st century, warring parties try its best to aggressively spread information to gain the upper hand on the adversary. Allowing journalists, including female reporters, to be “embedded” with front-line troops is the best manifestation of the new characteristic of a war. Needless to say, behind the information “on show” is important “hidden” information. In that sense, the information “on show” is provided to divert attention from such “hidden” information.

Last but not least, what is most important in reporting a war is how to grasp and understand the essence of the war. That is “judgment”, “claims”, and “opinions”.

This is especially important when the “cause” of a war is in question as with the Iraq War. What is the purpose of the war? Is it a war on terror, is it to find and dispose weapons of mass destruction, or is it to topple the authoritarian and undemocratic regime of Saddam Hussein and liberate the Iraqi people? Do we have “facts” based on which we have to make a judgment? What are national interests of Japan under such a circumstance? Even though many Japanese believe that the Japan-US security alliance is important, and that the

United Nations should play a leading role in international affairs, what will happen when these two institutions are against each other? Why is Japan's US policy different from those of France, Germany, Russia, China, and other countries? Isn't it a real friend to say sometimes bitter words to US President George W. Bush and his government? Many more questions and issues could be raised. This proves that expressing opinions is also important for newspapers as well as television, on top of delivery of facts.

This line of thought will lead to a suggestion that the media literacy and its education are important all the more for such reasons. The author could not agree more. It is also true, however, that obtaining the media literacy, or deepening understanding of the media, would not solve these problems by itself.

At the end of the day, we might have to wait till democracy has established itself to the extent that individuals can make their own judgment from everyday issues to global challenges.

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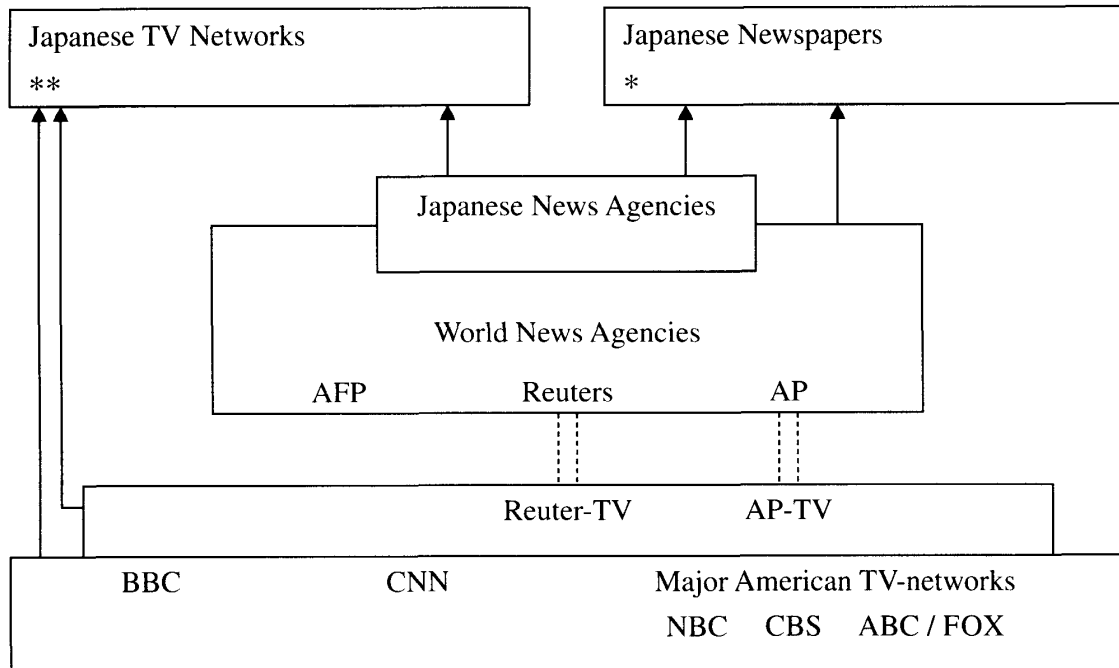
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\* *major national newspapers*

Yomiuri  
Asahi  
Mainichi  
Nikkei (Japan Economic Journal)  
Sankei

*influential regional newspapers*

Chunichi (Nagoya)  
Hokkaido (Sapporo)  
Nishi Nihon (Fukuoka)

\*\* *public broadcasting organization*

NHK (Nihon Hoso Kyokai)

*commercial TV networks*

NTV (Nihon Television Network)  
TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System)  
Fuji  
TV-Asahi  
TV-Tokyo