

## A Piece of Advice to the Media on Their Coverage of the Coronavirus in Japan

“Did any newspapers write an editorial saying we need to come together and overcome this crisis?”

This is how journalist Yoshiko Sakurai questioned media coverage of news about the new coronavirus on BS Fuji TV’s Prime News program, which aired on March 4.

Sakurai said that the Japanese news outlets were unfairly criticizing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who urged elementary, middle, and senior high schools nationwide to close.

It is indeed the media’s job to probe measures taken by the government. However, Ms. Sakurai’s comments hit a sensitive spot.

Certainly, what stands out among news programs are reports that stir anxiety in viewers, saying that the government’s countermeasures are failures and finding fault with Prime Minister Abe’s decisions. In the beginning, even opinions that we should learn the tactics taken by South Korea were unanimously proffered by the media, although, compared to Japan, the spread of the infection in South Korea has been significantly more serious.

How about the reaction to Abe’s decision to restrict entry of visitors from South Korea and China? A look at various morning newspapers dated March 6 is instructive. The Asahi Shimbun reported, “We can easily see through the aim of his orchestrated leadership.” Mainichi Shimbun said, “They’re trying to create the perception of containment through the Prime Minister’s leadership.”

In peaceful times, this may be acceptable. However, even during this emergency, the media focuses on Prime Minister Abe’s political beliefs and trivializes his response to the national crisis. As Ms. Sakurai pointed out, there is no sense of seeking unity in order to cope with the crisis.

It would be easier to do nothing if you are attacked for anything and everything you do. Winston Churchill, prime minister of Great Britain during World War II, criticized his predecessor Stanley Baldwin’s Cabinet for looking on idly with its policy of appeasement, as the Nazi regime’s military expanded. He said, “The do-nothing government is jeopardizing their power, as they are letting things take their own course and sitting idly by.”

Whether in the beginning they failed to seize the initiative or not, the Japanese government is now on the move. If the mass media is only capable of finding fault and criticizing for the sake of criticizing, is there any value in its existence?

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## 「新型コロナ」報道の在り方に苦言

「みんなで力を合わせ、この危機を乗り越えようと論説で書いたところがありますか」。ジャーナリストの櫻井よしこさんは4日のBSフジ番組で、新型コロナウイルス報道の在り方に疑問を投げかけた。全国の小中高校などに休校を要請した安倍晋三首相に対しても、ケチばかりつけていると。

政府の施策チェックもマスコミの仕事ではあるものの、櫻井さんの言葉は耳に痛い。確かにテレビのニュース番組をはじめ、政府対応は失敗だと不安をあおったり、安倍首相の決断のあら探しをしたりが目立つ。当初は、日本より感染拡大が著しい韓国の手法に見習えという合唱も起きた。

安倍首相が今回打ち出した中国、韓国からの入国制限に対してはどうか。6日付朝刊各紙をみると、朝日新聞は「自身の指導力を演出しようとする狙いが透けて見える」。毎日新聞も「首相のリーダーシップで封じ込めに動く姿勢を演出」と書いていた。

平時ならともかく、この非常時に際しても安倍首相の政局的思惑に焦点を当て、国難への対処策を個人的な演出へと矮小（わいしょう）化することに努めている。櫻井さんが指摘する通り、そこにみんなで協力して危機に立ち向かおうという意識は感じられない。

何をしてもたたかれるのであれば、じっとしている方が楽だろう。第二次世界大戦時の英首相、チャーチルは宥和（ゆうわ）政策でナチスドイツの軍事的伸長を座視したボールドウィン内閣をこう指弾した。「成り行きのままに任せ、流動するままに放置し、無為無策のために力を傾けている」。

後手を引いたかどうかはともかく、政府は動き出している。この局面でただ揚げ足取りや批判のための批判しかできないとしたら、そんなマスコミに存在価値はあるだろうか。

出典「新型コロナ」報道の在り方に苦言

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