

# THE YOUNG DIPLOMATS

A Model United Nations  
Conference in Tokyo in 2015  
Photo: Courtesy of JMUN



**For more than thirty years, a select band of students with an interest in international relations have gained firsthand experience of the challenges involved in the professional field through the Japan Model United Nations.**

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## TOSHIO MATSUBARA

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**T**HE United Nations is the place for representatives from different countries to discuss international issues and determine a solution for them. Countries frequently have conflicting interests, and heated arguments and bargaining occur. Accordingly the representatives of each country must have an advanced ability to hold discussions and negotiations.

The Model United Nations provides an opportunity for actual experience in the process of producing solutions for such international issues. The Model United Nations is an education program under which university students and other participants are assigned a country and arrive at resolutions through discussions and negotiations from the position of the country of which they are in charge.

The beginning of the Model United Nations was the Model League of Nations held at Harvard University in the United States, in 1923. Since then, it has been introduced into universities and senior high schools around the world as an educational program to deepen understanding of international issues and negotiation skills. Currently about 400 Model United Nations Conferences are held in countries throughout the world.

The activities of the Model United Nations started in Japan in 1983. The organization to dispatch Japanese students to the National Model United Nations Conference in New York was organized under the leadership of Sadako Ogata, who was a professor of Sophia University at that time (later United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Since that time, activities of the Model United Nations have been conducted by many universities in Japan. In 2009, the Japan Model United Nations (JMUN) was officially launched as the organ to organize such activities. Currently over thirty universities have joined JMUN and about 800 students participate. The national conference is hosted four times a year by JMUN in Japan.

Masaki Nakanishi, a junior in the Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo and president of JMUN  
Photo: Toshio Matsubara



“My interest in international affairs naturally deepened due to my frequent experiences of overseas trips with my parents since my childhood,” says Masaki Nakanishi, a junior in the Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo and the president of JMUN. “Also the experience of participating in the world contest of the International Geography Olympiad in my high school days greatly inspired me to start my activities with JMUN upon entering university.”

In the fall of 2014, Nakanishi was chosen as one of the nine members of the 32nd Japanese delegation and was dispatched to the National Model United Nations Conference held in March 2015. The Conference takes place in New York every year and gathers about 5,000 students from over 300 universities worldwide.

At the Conference, the Japanese delegation collaborated with Central Michigan University and participated as the joint delegation of the Swiss delegation. The Japanese delegation visited the United States and stayed at Central Michigan University for about a week. They also coordinated policies and received briefings from the secretariats of the United Nations organs and the Swiss Government before attending the Conference. At the Conference, which was held over five days, Nakanishi and other members of the delegation held discussions and negotiations on issues such as the Syrian refugee crisis, prevention of child abuse through the use of information technologies, crisis management in natural disasters, and food programs.

“All I could do was to hold discussions at that time, but I fully understood the significance that can be achieved only through the Model United Nations, the real experience of international problems,” says Nakanishi. “On the other hand, I also experienced the problem of the United Nations, which is compromising among various countries on decisions.”

The JMUN and Central Michigan University joint delegation was awarded the prestigious prize for distinguished delegation that year. The nine members of the Japanese delegation were then assigned to the executive secretariat of the National Model United Nations Conference and engaged in activi-

ties for the selection of the next delegation.

“I think that the Model United Nations is the place to understand the absurdity of international society,” says Nakanishi. “To pursue the interests of one’s own country, to discuss the development of policies, to cultivate the ability to refute the other side and recurrent debates are all that is needed. However, the international community is not so simple. The activities of the Model United Nations work to discover that political compromise in a sense. From absurd situations caused by various problems, how can one reach an agreement? The Model United Nations is the place to cultivate such abilities.”

JMUN also performs activities to further spread such importance of the Model United Nations around Japan. For example, the staff of JMUN visits the Super Global High School chosen by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology for the development of human resources who will play an active part internationally and provides lectures on the United Nations and the Model United Nations.

It has been over thirty years since the start of activities of the Model United Nations in Japan. It has produced over 5,000 participants, and many have worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the United Nations organs, NGOs, and other similar organizations after graduating from university. The current Japanese ambassador to South Sudan is also a former member of JMUN. This July, the Foreign Minister’s Commendation was awarded to JMUN in recognition of the promotion of mutual understanding between Japan and foreign countries.

“I want to engage in work which builds the future order in the international society with the platform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan or the International Criminal Court by making the most of the knowledge cultivated through the Model United Nations after graduating from university,” says Nakanishi. **■**