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Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website

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Japan Fact Sheet

MASS MEDIA

Pillars of the “information-oriented society”

Freedom of speech and the press is guaranteed by the constitution of Japan as a fundamental human right. Japan’s high literacy rate and its people’s thirst for new and stimulating information has sustained the mass media’s appeal.

In the past several decades, advances in computer and digital-communications technology have brought many changes to existing print and broadcast media while also creating a brand new mass media in the form of the Internet-based World Wide Web.

Newspapers

It was in 1868 that newspapers covering domestic news appeared in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Nagasaki, though not on a daily basis. Then, in 1871, the first daily newspaper, the *Yokohama mainichi shimbun*, was launched. Others followed in rapid succession. Most of today’s major daily newspapers have a history going back to the 1870s.

Today’s newspapers are central members of huge media conglomerates, often affiliated with television networks, professional sports teams, and other businesses. On a per capita basis, Japan ranks first in the world in circulation of newspapers. The total circulation (with morning and evening editions counted as one subscription) of daily papers exceeds 50 million, giving an average of over 1.0 newspapers per Japanese household. Major general newspapers usually put out both morning and evening editions (except on Sundays), with more than 90 percent of these newspapers being delivered

directly to homes. In addition to the general newspapers, there are sports newspapers, political party newspapers, tabloids, industry-specific trade newspapers, and leisure-oriented newspapers.

The five largest daily general papers are circulated in local editions nationwide and account for more than 50% of all newspapers sold. In the order of their circulation, they are *Yomiuri shimbun*, *Asahi shimbun*, *Mainichi shimbun*, *Nihon keizai shimbun*, and *Sankei shimbun*. All these organizations maintain overseas bureaus, and several of them now use communications satellites to transfer digital data that is utilized to print daily overseas editions. Many regional cities and towns have their own newspapers to report local news.

At first, newspapers were sold on consignment in bookstores, but the practice of home delivery, a system started by the *Hochi shimbun* in 1903, soon followed. Today 93% of newspapers are delivered directly to homes and offices from 23,000 delivery agents with 480,000 employees throughout the country. On the other hand, newsstand sales are no more than 7%. Another system peculiar to Japan, the appointing of exclusive dealerships that act both as distribution agents and subscription salesmen, became widespread after 1930 and remains in effect today. These systems sustain the high circulation of newspapers in Japan.

In addition to the newspaper organizations, two news agencies, Kyodo News Service and Jiji Press, maintain domestic and overseas bureaus and share

coverage with foreign wire services.

Japan has three English-language daily newspapers: *The Japan Times*, *The Daily Yomiuri*, and *International Herald Tribune/The Asahi Shimbun*. Some foreign newspapers print editions in Japan, and others are air freighted from overseas; they can be found in major hotels and bookstores and at a few of the kiosks at urban railway and subway stations.

Books and Magazines

In 2002 approximately 75,000 books and magazines were published in Japan, with total copies amounting to about 6 billion.

Newly published books cover a wide range of fields. By category, social science and literature each represent about one-fifth, followed by fine arts, technology and industry, natural science, history, and books for children. In terms of sales, popular literature such as historical novels and mysteries, which are mainly favorites of the middle-aged, overwhelms all other genres.

A tremendous variety of magazines are published in Japan on a weekly, biweekly, monthly, and quarterly basis. Many of the magazines are produced by major newspapers and book publishing houses, others by magazine specialty houses, and still others by independent organizations or special interest groups.

Weekly magazines were originally published primarily by newspaper companies, but book publishers began to enter the field in February 1956, with the launching of *Weekly shincho*. The weeklies enjoy wide circulation and provide an alternative to the more staid reporting of daily newspapers. Their contents run the gamut: everything from political scandals to gossip about media personalities and sensational crime stories. Affectionately referred to as “guerrilla journalism,” they frequently find it necessary to defend their own freedom of the press as guaranteed by the constitution.

While general magazines such as *Bungei shunju*, *Chuo koron*, *Sekai*, and other long-

established monthlies maintain a high reputation and are sought out by educated people, fashion magazines aimed at a younger female readership, such as *With* and *More*, also enjoy wide circulation. In recent years, magazines have become more focused in their contents, appealing to specific age groups and people with specialized interests, such as collectors, sports enthusiasts, and personal computer users. Reflecting the steady rise in the average age of the population, the number of new magazines targeting middle-aged and elderly people is growing. Japanese editions of foreign magazines are also a part of the market, one example being the Japanese-language version of *Newsweek*, which has been published since 1986. Going the other way, in recent years a number of Japanese magazines have established overseas editions, primarily targeting young female readers in China and South Korea.

Comic magazines and books known as *manga* are very popular among both young people and adults. *Manga* has so enormous a market that its total sales account for more than 30% of all publishing. Spurred by the global popularity of Japanese animation, a growing number of stories featured in Japanese *manga* are being translated into foreign languages and published abroad. The U.S. monthly comic magazine *Shonen Jump* runs translated stories from *Shonen jumpu*, a weekly *manga* with a circulation of 3.2 million in Japan.

Although still very small in absolute terms, the electronic book market is growing rapidly. A number of services offer electronic books formatted for reading on personal computers and personal digital assistants (PDA), and in 2003 a new service was introduced that distributes fiction and other electronic books for reading on cellular telephones.

Broadcasting

Radio broadcasts in Japan date from 1926, but until the end of World War II they were monopolized by the government-affiliated Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK: Japan Broadcasting Corporation). A new

broadcasting law that came into effect in 1950 resulted in NHK being reorganized as a special corporation that is neither state-operated nor private. Unlike private companies, NHK's activities are subject to restrictions by the government. Decisions regarding programming and other matters are made by the Management Commission, a governing body whose members are appointed by the prime minister after obtaining the Diet's approval. NHK radio and television do not broadcast commercial advertising. About 98% of operating revenues are obtained from monthly viewer fees.

NHK television made its debut in Tokyo in February 1953. In August of the same year, the first commercial broadcast station, an affiliate of the *Yomiuri shimbun*, began broadcasts.

In its first few years, television was a luxury commodity that only a few could afford, and large crowds would often gather around television sets set up in front of railroad stations and other places for a chance to watch *sumo* wrestling and other sports events. Within five years of its introduction, the number of registered owners of television receivers passed the 1-million mark. When color broadcasts began in September 1960, sales rose rapidly. By 1962, ownership of color and black-and-white models had increased tenfold, to over 10 million—just under half of the country's households. The Tokyo Olympics in 1964 further accelerated the growth in television set ownership.

Satellite and Digital Broadcasting

Full-scale NHK broadcast satellite (BS) broadcasts began in 1989 with two channels. In 1991 Japan's first commercial BS channel, called WOWOW, was introduced. Analog format communications satellite (CS) broadcasts began in 1992, and digital CS broadcasts were started by PerfectTV



(now SKY PerfecTV) in 1996. In December 2000 BS digital broadcasts began with 10 television channels as well as radio and data transmission channels.

Cable stations have been gradually switching to digital transmissions since 1998. The first terrestrial digital television broadcasts began in limited areas of Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya in December 2003. Digital broadcast coverage is to be gradually expanded, and the government plans for all broadcast media (except terrestrial radio broadcasts) to complete the transition from analog to digital by 2011, when analog broadcasts are to stop. The digital broadcasts will bring higher quality pictures and sound, enable the addition of new functions such as caption display and audio speed adjustment, and make it possible to create an interactive viewing environment with data access and e-commerce capabilities.

The Internet and the World Wide Web

Commercial Internet service providers appeared in Japan in 1993. It is estimated that as of the end of 2002 the Internet was being used by 70 million individuals and more than 80% of all households in Japan. Two factors that have significantly increased the Internet user population are the start of cellular telephone access services, which occurred in December 1999, and the fact that Japan has the most inexpensive broadband access fees in the world.

Digital broadcasting

Viewers admire the quality of terrestrial digital television broadcasts, which began in limited areas in late 2003.

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