

Television and Contemporary Society in Japan*

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Abstract

36 years have now passed since television broadcasting in Japan started in 1953. There is no doubt that television has had a great influence on the development of contemporary society in Japan. What kind of role has television played? What has been the effect of television on Japanese culture? How has television changed the lifestyle of the Japanese people?

Let us consider relations between television and contemporary society in Japan. After World War II, Japan made great efforts to attain to the standard of living in the United States and Europe. According to the slogan, "Catch up with and overtake the West," Japanese people worked hard. And that slogan is now becoming a reality. Japanese society is facing a great turning point in its long history. As a major characteristic of contemporary society in Japan, we can point out the "information explosion", for which television is largely responsible.

Television is also facing a turning point. I would like to consider the new role of television in today's "information society" in Japan, and also to consider what direction Japanese contemporary society is shifting to.

Key words: Television, TV generation, Information society, Japanese culture, Contemporary society, New media.

抄 録

1953年に日本のテレビ放送が始まって、既に36年が経った。テレビが日本の現代社会の発展に大きな影響力をもったということは疑いようがない。ではテレビはどんな役割を演じたのか。日本の文化にどんな影響を与えたのか。日本人のライフスタイルをどのように変えたのか。この小論はテレビと日本の現代社会との関係について考察したものである。

第2次世界大戦後、日本人は「追いつき追い越せ」のスローガンのもとに西欧の生活水準に追いつくべく懸命に働いた。そして今やスローガンは現実化し、日本社会はその歴史上大きなターニング・ポイントに立っている。日本の現代社会の大きな特徴の一つとして、テレビを中心とした「情報の氾濫」が指摘できる。テレビもまたターニング・ポイントに立っており、私は日本の「情報化社会」におけるテレビの新しい役割について、と同時にどういう方向に日本の社会が移行していこうとしているのかについて考える。

キーワード：テレビジョン、テレビ・ジェネレーション、情報化社会、日本文化、現代社会、ニュー・メディア。

* 当論文は、1989年4月12日、米国 Sweet Briar College で行われた「The 1989 Ewald Scholars symposium」においての発表を原稿化したものである。シンポジウムは Edwin O. Reischauer 博士を司会者として「Contemporary Culture in Japan」のテーマで行われた。他のパネリストとして、コーネル大学準教授 J. Victor Koschmann、ハワイ大学教授 Takie Sugiyama Lebra が参加。

1) Diffusion of television sets

Television broadcasting in Japan started in 1953. It can be said that Television in Japan has been developing in parallel with the development of Japanese economy since World war II.

The diffusion of black and white sets reached 90% nationwide in 1964, only eleven years after the beginning of television broadcasting¹⁾.

Color television broadcasting was started in Japan in 1960 by NHK (Japan's public broadcasting corporation) and commercial broadcasters in Tokyo and Osaka using the American NTSC system (current color television transmission standard).

There were 1200 color television sets in Japan at that time, but the rapid shifting from black-and-white to color television was accelerated by Tokyo Olympics Games in 1964.

Color television sets, likewise, achieved the diffusion rate of 90% in about ten years from the introduction of color television²⁾. The very speed of television diffusion indicates how eager people were to have television.

The spread with which television diffused was much faster than many had expected.

Let me consider the reason why the speed of diffusion was so rapid. I would like to point out two reasons.

One reason is the economic and technical conditions. After World War II, Japanese economy had recovered to prewar levels by the midfifties. In 1956 the Economic Planning Agency remarked that the economy of Japan could no longer be termed "Postwar". The real rate of growth from 1955 into the '60s averaged around 10% a year.

Japanese labor productivity and labor conditions were improved. In result personal income went up.

The household electric appliance industry has developed rapidly because of the increase in the domestic demand accompanying the continual modernization of living style. Owing to the electric technological development, the electric industry produced

1) Hideo Kitamura, "Television is a Fiction, and Viewers are Observers—Relation between Television and Viewers in Japan—", *Studies of Broadcasting*, No. 23, March 1987, pp. 141.

2) Ibid.

a quantity of black-and-white TVs in the latter 1950's, and also color television sets in the latter half of the 1960's.

The other reason is the social and cultural conditions. In prewar era, Japanese people had already experienced a number of mass culture to some extent. After World War II, cultural facilities were not enough to provide a mass audience with entertainment. People were anxious for entertainment. Television was first accepted as a medium of entertainment by the mass audience in spite of the fact that many critics expected television to be a powerful educational medium.

Not only visual cultures such as photography and movies but also radio broadcasting had already developed across the country³⁾. In addition to it, it seems to me that Japanese culture made it easier to accept television. That is to say, I would like to say that Japanese people are enthusiastic about making things that are pleasing to their eyes.

Although Japanese television broadcasting started about ten years later than that of America, Japanese electric industry imported American technologies and tried hard to catch up with America and Europe. And they began to pursue in the various visual devices for themselves. They produced many types of television sets and VCRs. VCRs made in Japan penetrated all over the world.

With regard to High Definition TV (I would like to mention it later), Japan is heading the competition of developing HDTV. It seems to me that this high advancement of visual technology is related to Japanese culture.

2) Television watching and Leisure time

According to the NHK Time Budget Survey, in 1960 the watching hours for television owners were 7 hours 4 minutes weekly, in 1965 21 hours 2 minutes, in 1970 22 hours 18 minutes, in 1975 24 hours 30 minutes. The watching hours were increasing year after year.

But the watching hours began to decrease since 1980. The decreasing trend between 1975 and 1980 continued from 1980 through 1985 to amount to a 2 hour decrease in weekly total. The decrease is evident in every group regardless of sex, age, or educational background. Watching hours per person a day tend to decrease, but

3) Hiroshi Inoue, 「Telebunka no Syakaigaku」 (Sociology of Television culture), Sekaishisoya, 1987, pp. 16-20.

the number of television set per household are increasing. In 1986, owners of 1 set are 30%, 2 sets 37%, more than 3 sets 33%⁴⁾.

There are two patterns of television watching; watching while doing something else, and watching TV only.

Watching television occurring with some other activity occupies a large part of the total watching hours. There are two main things people do when they watch television; eat and do housework. Television has changed the Japanese lifestyle.

Television is used as a means of mitigating the monotony of routine works at home as well as background music. Television also becomes a great comfort to a lonely person. When a housewife is alone after her husband and children left home in the morning, television is a comfort for her to do housework alone.

Leisure activities are divided into two categories; exposure to mass media and other leisure activities.

A large part of the total leisure time is allocated to the exposure to mass media, especially to watching television.

As a recent trend of spending leisure time, we can point out two phenomena. The first is the watching hours are decreasing. The second is energetic leisure activities are increasing. Even in the case of housewives, hours spent on houseworks have been reduced and hours for energetic leisure activities have increased.

3) Change of Viewer's Attitude toward Television

During 36 years since people encountered television, people have changed their attitude toward television.

It seems to me that we can set the three stages of changes as follows; the first stage in 1960's, the second stage in 1970's and the third stage in 1980's.

In the first stage, people were attracted to television. But on the other hand, they suffered from confusion caused by television.

In the ordinary home a television set was placed in the family room where family members have meals. All of the family members used to have their meals watching TV. The children were deeply absorbed in watching TV. Their mother scolded them for not eating. Even if their father scolded them, the children were too involved in

4) Toshihiko Aida, "Mass Communication Behavior of Japanese Audience—Changes from the 1950's to the 1980's—", *Studies of Broadcasting*, No. 23., March 1987, pp. 88-91.

watching to listen to their father's scolding.

Television set used to be placed at KAMIZA of the family room. In the Japanese house there is a place called the KAMIZA. It is the place where an important person is seated. As a result fathers were taken away from the KAMIZA. They were forced to see TV as a member of their family.

Before the introduction of television, father's prestige had been maintained in his family. Father used to sit on the KAMIZA but television deprived fathers of their own seats.

In a sense, we might say that television contributed to democratize the Japanese family. Many fathers were irritated, but they could not help it.

Let me talk a little more about the example of confusion. Before the advent of television, the family members had conversation with each other while having meals. But after introduction of television, their conversation was often interfered with by television. Many parents complained of television's intervention.

However television's attraction was too strong for children to listen to their parent's complains. And even parents were attracted to television.

Besides, the quarell between family members often happened with regard to selecting channels, because they had only one TV set in their homes. In the first stage, we have plenty of such confusing phenomena. Television caused dramatic change of media environment in the viewer's home. And television has changed the Japanese lifestyle.

In the second stage, television deeply infiltrated people's lives. Many people got used to television's existence at home. Television ceased to be a uncommon thing and was integrated into the context of people's everyday lives. People recognized television as a part of everyday life.

Young people began to say that television was something like a furniture placed in a house. Owners of plural TV sets began to increase.

In this period, young people said television is necessary for them to talk with their father. They say they feel uneasy talking to their fathers without television's vision and sound, because they are helpful to mitigate some tensions between them and their fathers⁵⁾.

In the third stage, television watching is as ordinary as any other daily activity.

5) Hiroshi Inoue, [Telebi no Syakaigaku] (Sociology of Television), Sekaishisosya, 1978, pp. 135-145.

At present, people are watching TV as well as before. However, there is no doubt that their attitude toward television has changed.

4) Television Generation

In today's television age, children have grown up on television. They devoted their own much time to watching TV.

Television gave birth to a new generation called "Television generation". There is no doubt they have been given a great influence through watching television from childhood to adolescence.

It is very difficult to point out what influence television has had on them. However, we can recognize that they show different ways of life from the older people who have grown up on books. They tend to prefer visual images to printed culture.

In contrast with TV generation, we are calling the older KATUJI SEDAI (Book generation). It does not mean that TV generation do not like books. They are fond of reading. However the books they read are different from the books Book generation does.

TV generation likes such sentences as make it easy to have visual images. Therefore it gets difficult for young people to read the old writer's books.

The popular novels for young people are often transformed into movie or TV drama. Sometimes movie scenario or TV drama scenario comes first and after that, a novel is written according to the scenario⁶⁾.

Let me give a typical example.

In 1977 KADOKAWA HARUKI, president KADOKAWA SYOTEN which is one of the big publishing companies in Japan, produced a famous TV commercial. It follows as; see it after reading or read it after seeing. The novel was named NINGEN NO SYOMEI (verification of human being) was written by MORIMURA SEIICHI. This novel was transformed into movie. The novel was appeared on bookstore's shelves at the same time as the movie released. TV commercial appealed to the public with the announcement "see it after reading or read it after seeing".

This way of campaigning by means of combined media have been getting popular since KADOKAWA's campaign.

6) Hiroshi Inoue, 「Telebunka no Syakaigaku」 (Sociology of Television culture), Sekaishisosya, 1987, pp. 177-193.

Here, I would like to talk about printed culture was influenced by pictorial culture. TV generation gave birth to comic-book culture. As a matter of fact, we have had MANGA or cartoons since old times. We may trace their origin back to the CHOJYU GIGA of 12th century.

But today's comic-book culture is the first phenomenon we have had in our history. Today's MANGA are enjoyed by not only children but also adult people. And therefore MANGA describes the story not only for the children, but also for the adult people.

MANGA provides many kinds of stories. MANGA is also used to teach or learn about difficult subjects. A variety of topics from law and economics to cooking are cartooned.

Let me give an example of a series of Manga Nihon Keizai Nyumon (A Cartoon Introduction to the Japanese Economy) by ISINOMORI SHOTARO.

This book describes the problems of the strong yen, the trade friction, industrial restructuring and so on. And it has been a best seller. Since volume 1 appeared in 1986, it has been selling well. The first three volumes have had sales of 1.5 million copies.

I guess the people in business who belong to TV generation bought these books.

The most popular comic magazine is Shukan Shonen Jampu (boys' weekly). Shukan Shonen Jampu has the largest circulation of all magazines in Japan. The four leading boys' comic weeklies, including Jump, publish a total of 8.4 million copies per week.

In 1985 the aggregate number of comic magazines issued in Japan came to 1,149 million. This means one-third the total number of all magazines issued⁷⁾.

Addition to this phenomenon, the photo weeklies are also very popular among Japanese adults. FOCUS and FRIDAY, launched in 1981 and 1982, were immediate hits, and their circulation quickly exceeded one million.

It seems to me we are forced to recognize the rise of pictorial value. This tendency is being promoted by new technologies of electronics.

The behavior of TV generation has produced the various phenomena of contemporary culture in Japan.

Recent young people have enough money to buy their goods and services for them-

7) Eiji Otsuka, "Comic-Book Formula for Success", Japan Quaterly, July-September 1988, pp. 287-288.

selves. Young people have been given high priority as consumers. Producers and advertisers are trying hard to appeal to young people⁸⁾.

5) Roles Television Played

What kind of role has television played during the 36 years since we first encountered television? This is a very difficult question.

Television brought us into a great confusion, but there is no doubt television gave us something precious beyond our confusion.

In short, I would like to point out three characteristics from the cultural and social point of view.

- (1) Spread and enrichment of visual culture
- (2) Popularization of information
- (3) Explosion of information

(1) Spread and enrichment of visual culture

Many people have been watching TV for a long time.

The innovation of visual technology provided us with many chances to see. New communication technologies made it possible to see the invisible world which we could not see before. I would like to point out three new communication technologies.

The first is the development of communication satellite. It brought us the new world which we could not see before. At present, it is easy to see the world events at our home through satellite. The main events in the world are televised.

The second is the development of VCR. Home VCR are saturating so rapidly in Japan. According to a June 1982 NHK Survey, 8.8% of all households owned one VCR.

At November 1985, the number of VCR owners reached 37 % of all households.

At present, it seems the number has reached about 80%.

A number of various things are taped and sold. Recently bookstores are selling recorded videotapes. At any cities across the country, we can find video rental shops.

Third is the development of video camera.

8) Minoru Tamura, "The Information Environment around the Japanese People", Studies of Broadcasting, No. 23, March 1987, pp. 25.

Today's camera has succeeded in producing a high quality picture and besides, it is small and portable.

This high advanced small camera changed the way TV programs are produced. It became possible for a cameraman to shoot whatever he wants to do.

Professional cameramen brought us a variety of visual objects. They turned the invisible world into the visible world⁹⁾.

(2) Popularization of information

TV sets have saturated across the country. I think all the household have at least one TV set, except for the people who don't like it.

With regard to popularization of information, we have also to mention about newspapers.

We have a large newspaper circulation. There are some 125 newspapers in Japan with fairly large circulation. Most Japanese papers issue both morning and evening editions, and counting the two editions seperately as is done in Europe and United States would give a total circulation of 68.3 million in 1985.

In terms of number of copies per 1000 population, Japan ranks number one with 569¹⁰⁾.

Although newspaper has also saturated the country, television today is more popular than newspaper.

In 1975, television surpassed newspaper for the first time in terms of the amount of money invested annually for advertisement. For advertisers, television has been playing the part of a showwindow. In order to let the people know about something, it is necessary to show it on TV.

I would like to mention one example.

In 1973 when the Middle East War led to the restriction of oil exports from the Middle East, the Japanese economy suffered a tremendous shock. Japanese society had to shift toward low-energy consuming sectors in order to cut back on oil requirements. Between 1972 and 1975, oil prices raised more than 4 times.

At that time, the campaign to save energy resources was carried out through television as well as newspapers.

9) Hiroshi Inoue, 「Telebibunka no Syakaigaku」 (Sociology of Television culture), Sekaishisosya, 1987, pp. 34-36.

10) "About Japan" Series 7 「Japan's Mass Media」, Foreign Press Center, Japan, 1986, pp. 12.

Before oil crisis, some automobile commercials were saying “to be bigger is better”. But such commercials shifted to “to be smaller looks more beautiful”.

Television spread information quickly and widely to the people from the old to the young all over the country.

Television made it possible for a number of people to share such common information within a short time.

It seems to me television integrated the people and contributed to cooperation by the people to a great extent.

(3) Explosion of information

Television has been providing a quantity of information from entertainment to news reports.

I think we can say that owing to television we have become accustomed to the explosion of information. We have accepted the TV screen as a part of everyday life. We are familiar with the TV screen.

It seems to me this familiarity is preparing the attitude for the next electronic age.

Today, various new information appear on the TV screen through the telephone line, cable TV, VCR, broadcasting satellite and so on.

We are now exposed to an explosion of information including not only electronic information but also printed information.

Television provided our society with a quantity of various informations. People has been accustomed to them.

As a result, people are likely to prefer diversity to conformity or uniformity. They began to have their own taste and interest. In addition to it, people learned how to select information.

We might say people are getting immune to the explosion of information. It seems to me television made it easier for us to enter into the information society¹¹⁾.

11) Hiroshi Inoue, 『Telebibunka no Syakaigaku』 (Sociology of Television Culture), Sekaishisosya, 1987, pp. 194-199.

6) The Rise of the New Media

It is said that today's Japanese society is changing in the direction of becoming a highly advanced information society.

The so-called "personal computer revolution" and "electronics revolution" have accompanied the almost complete penetration of information technology into many Japanese industrial sectors. The penetration of information technology into various fields is changing Japanese society itself.¹²⁾

In combination with advanced computer technology, telecommunication is giving birth to a variety of new communication systems.

These are referred to as the new media, and it is believed that these new media will be central to the post-industrial information society of the 21st century in Japan.

There is no doubt that the conventional television is also facing a turning point.

I pick up and explain a few major new media in Japan. I would like to mention Direct Broadcasting System (DBS), Cable Television and HDTV.

Let me talk a little about DBS. DBS's signal is broadcast directly from a satellite to a small satellite dish (about 19 inches in diameter) connected to the viewer's TV.

Currently NHK is using two channels on the BS-2 satellite. This DBS is now getting popular. DBS receiving household reached about 1 million at the end of 1988.

When we consider the new role of television in future, DBS is a very important medium. It seems to me today's NHK DBS services are indicating the possibility of new television.

DBS programs include more than 11 hours of news programs called the "World news", featuring live or delayed relays of news broadcasts from the foreign stations such as ABC network, CNN Headline News, PBS, BBC in Britain, Korea, China France, West Germany, India and so on.

Award-winning classic movies and relays of theatrical performances and major sports events appear on DBS.

A popular American series "Dynasty" was also an exclusive feature on the satellite channel.

12) Ken'ichi Imai, "Changes in Industrial Structure and Organization", [Contemporary Japan : Self Portraits], Gakuseisya, 1988, pp. 137.

These programs are transmitted in terms of bilingual system. Either original language or Japanese is available.

DBS is also being used for experiments in such new technologies as HDTV (High Definition TV) in preparation for regular service with the next generation BS-3 satellite, which are to be launched in 1990.

If the next generation satellite BS-3 is launched in 1990, three channels will be available, two to be used by NHK and a third by the newly formed Japan Satellite Broadcasting Company, which will use the channel for Japan's first commercial satellite broadcasts.

DBS seems to be the most important new medium after conventional television broadcasting. We must consider how to use it.

The conventional television has been regarded as a national medium. Of course, it televises foreign programs and also features live or delayed relays from abroad.

But, it does not play a role of international medium on regular basis.

In order for Japanese people to be exposed to international informations, we need such a medium as DBS. It is necessary for Japanese people to be exposed to world news and events.

News itself reflect its own country's interest. If we don't access to foreign news, we will be forced to be satisfied only with our own country's news. We have to look at ourselves from outside and to know our own position in the world community.

It seems to me DBS will make it possible to open our eyes to the world.

In Japan, Cable TV has been used mainly in remote area to facilitate community TV reception. In recent years, however, it is also in increasing use in urban areas, because TV reception difficulties are caused by highrise buildings. Most facilities are in use only for simultaneous retransmission of regular TV broadcasting.

The new type cable TV facilities which have multiple channels, superior picture quality and the two-way system started in 1987. Such a urban multichannel cable TV is gradually increasing.

Each cable system will be connected with satellite soon. The satellite which is able to be connected with cable TV was launched on March 7 in 1989 by Japan Communications Satellite, a joint venture of Itochu, Mituibuttsan and Hughes Communications of the United States and it made a succes.

Each of cable TV station is hoping to utilize the private satellite to receive a large

variety of programming.

The private satellite have a great possibility as a means of telecommunication. Not only broadcasting & cable businnes but also the other various business are planning to use it for their own effective communications.

The most revolutionary event seems to be the development of HDTV by NHK's Broadcast Technology Research Institute.

HDTV is a new typy of television. It has 1125 scanning lines of information. Today's conventional TV has 525 scanning lines. HDTV has more than doubled the number of today's TV and widened the vertical and horizontal ratio to 3 : 5.

The greater number of scanning lines increase its own clarity and improve the quality of TV screen images. It can transmit about five times the information of conventional television and it is said to be as good as 35 mm film¹³⁾.

NHK demonstrated HDTV system at 200 places such as train stations and other public locations to broadcast the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

HDTV needs a much wider frequency band than conventional television and besides, NHK's HDTV is not compatible with conventional television.

At present, NHK's HDTV standard has not been recognized as a international standard.

However, HDTV system itself is said the new television system of the future.

HDTV's applications also go beyond television. It can easily convert into 35 mm film and make the film editing easier, faster and cheaper. Some movie directors are playing a great attention to HDTV.

HDTV will be also used as a motion picture distribution system, by way of HDTV video theater, and HDTV video theaters will be connected to DBS or communication satellite.

HDTV's still pictures reflecting famous paintings, we will be able to exhibit at the socalled "HDTV art gallery".

It is said that at the Gifu prefectural Musium "HDTV art gallery" will be soon installed.

At present, HDTV in Japan is experimental. Some experts say HDTV sets will show up on store shelves in 1990. In 1990 the BS-3 satellite is scheduled for launching. NHK has the plan to broadcast HDTV through BS-3.

13) Hiroshi Inoue, [Telekomu Syakai] (Telecom Society), Kodansya, 1987, pp. 100-113.

In order to realize it, HDTV receivers must be sold in retail shops.

It seems to me that even if HDTV sets are very expensive, Japanese people will try to buy it as well as they bought expensive black and white TV at the dawn of TV age.

We are going to enter into the age of explosion of information. The age of television gave birth to the tendency toward diversity. People got to prefer diversity or flexibility to conformity or uniformity. We have now gotten a number of media and multiple channel of informations. It is getting possible for us to select the information which we want according to our need and taste.

It seems to me Japanese society is gradually shifting to a diverse society. We can see this tendency especially among young people, namely TV generation.