THE HOME AND FAMILY SECTION IN JAPANESE NEWSPAPERS

KAORI HAYASHI

Abstract

Japanese newspapers are unique in the world in that they have extremely large circulations and are, at the same time, "serious." Another remarkable fact about the leading Japanese newspapers is that, despite the fact that they are now classed as serious, they originated as "little," or tabloid, newspapers. It was only gradually that they came to have their current status.

The newspapers retain an element of their original tabloid character in their "home and family" sections, which are amongst the most popular parts of the papers. The readers of these sections are primarily women, and it is in these pages that many of the issues directly affecting domestic and family life in Japan have first been aired. The news in the political and economic sections of the paper is produced in close co-operation with powerful news sources in government, industry and the civil service, organised through the "press club" system. It thus tends to have an "official" character. The home and family sections are free of these restraints. The journalists employed on them are marginal to the internal status hierarchy of Japanese newspapers, and this was the first area of journalism to employ any large number of women journalists.

The lesson from this experience is that "tabloidisation" can have at least two meanings. On the one hand, the home and family sections developed close identification between the journalists and their audience. On the other hand, the commercialisation of the press means the increasing importance of a journalism that is oriented towards entertainment. The home and family sections of the Japanese press are "tabloid" in the sense that they are the best kind of popular journalism.

Kaori Hayashi is research associate at the Institute of Socio-Information and Communication Studies (ISICS), University of Tokyo.

Introduction

The Japanese newspapers are widely-known for their extraordinarily large circulation. Besides local papers in each prefecture, there are the so-called "big five" national papers, which account for more than 50 percent of Japan's total newspaper circulation. The influence of these papers on Japanese society is strong. This is suggested not only by the large sales figures of each paper, but by the financial investment and the control over the personnel that each national daily holds in one of Japan's five commercial television networks, and by their additional involvement in a range of social and business activities such as recording, travel agencies, department stores, baseball clubs and football teams.

Thanks to the well-networked home delivery service, the country also boasts a high diffusion rate of newspapers. According to statistics by the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association, each Japanese household subscribes to an average of 1.2 newspapers per day.

Despite all these statistical facts, it seems to me that there have not been sufficient analyses, both economic and sociological, as to why and how Japanese newspaper companies have accomplished such astonishing circulation figures and high dissemination rates among the population. However, I believe one reason for the remarkable circulation of the major Japanese papers is their historical development. Specifically, two of the leading national newspapers originated as tabloids. This is quite a unique aspect of the Japanese papers, since in most of the Western press markets the lineage of the "quality" press is distinct from that of the "tabloid" press.

Yomiuri and *Asahi*, the leading national newspapers in contemporary Japan, used to be called "little papers" (Ko-shimbun) about a hundred years ago, a sort of press which would best be labelled "tabloid" by today's standards. The so-called "large papers" were the other sort of the newspaper publication in those days.

The main concerns of the large papers were political issues, and most of them had party affiliations. They catered to the political elite, and were written in highly formalised academic language. The little papers, on the other hand, were filled with gossip, town rumours and penny dreadfuls, and were written in colloquial language so that women and the uneducated underclass people could read and understand them (Tsuchiya 1997, Haruhara 1987, 31ff). Presently they are by far the two best-selling newspapers (*Yomiuri* sells daily 10 million copies and *Asahi* 8 million) and wield great power in the formation of the nation's public opinion. They are widely recognised as the papers that set Japan's standard of journalism.

Table 1: Comparison of Japanese and U.K. National Newspaper Markets

		Type of Newspapers		
		National Popular	National Mid	National Quality
U.K.	circulation	7,699,593	3,380,174	2,850,837
	share	55.3%	24.3%	20.5%
Japan	circulation	*6,579,964	—	27,485,644
	share	19.3%	—	80.7%

*includes national and local sports papers.

Figures from Statistics by Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association 1996. Other figures: ABC statistics. Average Net Circulation per Effective Publishing Day (Jan.97-Jun.97).

It has been often questioned as to what category these Japanese papers belong to. The content of the papers is mostly quite serious at present despite their historical background, so some people would call these Japanese national newspapers quality "papers", in simple comparison with the quality of journalism of Japanese tabloids, which are mostly called "Sports Papers." But if we consider the circulation of the "quality papers" in Europe, we can name the Japanese counterparts also as mass papers (see Table 1). A classical European view would suggest that a "quality press" must endure a modest circulation since it circulates only among the elite upper-class, but in Japan, this is not the case. People generally believe, the larger the circulation, the more trustworthy the paper and the higher the news quality. And indeed, it has been undeniable in the Japanese press market that intense competition among newspapers has sustained the quality of press journalism.

Politics Section and Home and Family Section

Looking closer, one can find that the discourse these Japanese mass newspapers produce is not monolithic. Because of their mass characteristics, the papers try to include as many people as possible as potential readers, and this has produced complex, sometimes conflicting meaning spheres within one newspaper. This discrepancy in the editorial policy is quite remarkable, especially between so-called "hard news" sections and "soft news" sections.

As I mentioned, two of the main Japanese papers developed themselves from tabloids into more serious, mass "quality" papers. The cornerstones of Japan"s newspaper contents, the politics and social affairs reporting,[1] have served the public by meeting its demands for general information typically seen in advanced industrial nations. Extremely up-to-date lines of news and information both in national and international events, balanced political coverage, timely editorials, as well as thoughtful essays and incisive analyses by first-rate scholars at home and abroad are sources of justifiable journalistic pride. However, one must also acknowledge that the Politics and Social Affairs Sections, which are regarded as the indicators of the standard of the paper"s journalism, have been often the target of criticism due to too close relationships with the government or administration. The rigid reporting system these sections depend on, the so-called Press Clubs, is one of the main reasons for the criticisms that these sections are neglecting to provide the general public information for rational debate that would support the nation's democracy.

Instead of the Politics Section, it has been the Home and Family Section, the part with some reminiscence of the tabloid reporting of a hundred years ago, that offers a wider range of the population a space for critical debate. Though a significant part of the section is occupied by stories like counselling, human interest stories and practical tips such as cooking recipes, child care and fashion, and are written in a concrete, simple manner with abundant illustrations and pictures, the section takes up social stories at the same time, and produces articles from alternative angles. This was especially true in the late 1960s and 1970s as several grass-root social movements — such as those for consumers' rights or environmental issues — emerged and flourished. The section was the first to pick up such topics, while other hard-news sections still regarded them as housewives' chat.

Journalists working in the section are also unique. The number of female journalists working there is high compared with that of other sections. Very often they are excluded

from the promotional track inside a newspaper company. They do not belong to a reporting institution like the Press Club. They can work more or less in a much freer atmosphere than in the sections like Politics or Social Affairs.

Because of such a background, the section often serves as a pipeline to connect immediate daily problems in private life to the stage of social and political debate. In other words, the articles there often provide readers with viewpoints to make them aware that problems they are facing may not be so personal as they might think. It is not that women make insufficient efforts, the Home and Family Section suggested, or that they lack the ability to keep up with reality and overcome their problems; but rather, it is society as constructed that is to blame. So cheer up and stand up and do something about it! The Home and Family Section has often called for action on the parts of women and minorities, and proved every now and then that experiences of everyday life can be translated into political action at any time.

Ironically, the section, a tabloid vestige in the newspapers in Japan, is now challenged by an overall phenomenon taking place in the media sector, which is being described as "tabloidisation," which I will discuss in the last section. This phenomenon is forcing the section to shed its social and political weight, putting more emphasis on a softer kind of contents called infotainment..

In this paper, I will investigate how the Home and Family Section succeeded in making a public forum in the course of its history, and what problems it is facing at the moment in modern society. In the last chapter, I will relate the current problems of the Home and Family Section with some aspects of tabloidisation.

Pre-War History of the Home and Family Section

First I would like to sketch briefly the history of the Home and Family Section.

By the end of the 19th century many papers set up a space in one of their pages for topics related to women, family and home issues. With the emergence of the first modern state after the overthrow of the feudalistic *shogunate* government in 1868, Japan's new government (Meiji government, 1868-1912) recognised newspaper publishing as a modern, civilised activity and therefore encouraged nation-wide diffusion of newspapers. The government officials not only permitted, but encouraged the founding of private journals. The government even bought copies of Tokyo newspapers and distributed them nation-wide, provided special postage rates for publications, and supported the opening of tabloids in many provinces where there was initially no press at all (Kasza 1988, 4). Newspaper publishers, in line with such enlightenment policies, thought that their mission was not only to reach the intellectual few, but as many Japanese as possible, to help carry out the modernisation project of the time. This momentum was further accelerated by the capitalistic orientation of the newspaper industry. With such political and cultural movements, "women" and "home" became two of the frequent themes in the Japanese newspapers.

Tabloid papers of that time, in such a national climate, cast light on the lives of the poor and the hard work that women had to do to earn a living, and tried to educate readers for an improvement in lifestyle. Practical information on health and sanitation were popular topics in the so-called Women and Home Column of that time (Kawashima 1996, 95). But the real breakthrough of the Women and Home Column was achieved by the *Yomiuri*. Beginning April 3, 1914, the paper assigned a whole page to the Home and Family Section. It was called "Women's Supplement." This is said to have set the prototype of today's Home and Family Section.

It was in the more liberal 1910s, in the reign of the Taisho Emperor (Taisho era; 1912-1926), newspapers in general showed a strong commitment to the ideal of democracy in response to the democracy movement in society. A handful of daily newspapers, among which the *Asahi* can be named as the best example, evolved into national opinion leaders. And as the Diet was moving to legislate universal male suffrage, which was realised in 1925, women's exclusion from politics was called into question, spurring women to demand higher education, improved social status and better working conditions. It was around that time that a number of women's magazines emerged, backed up by an improved literacy rate among women. A statistic shows that as many as 214 women's magazines started during the period of 1911 to 1931(Miki 1996, 4-7).

The Women and Home Section in newspapers accordingly started to add more social profile in this period (Kanamori 1984, 62). However, despite the social and political stance of articles, journalists deliberately chose to use plain language, "in an effort to reach rising women readership of that time" (Kawashima 1996, 186). The women's movement was expanding to quite a wide range of society. Not only the major national newspapers such as *Yomiuri* and *Asahi*, but local newspapers wrote about possibilities of "new women" who would enjoy higher education and an equal relationship with men. They even called for men to change their daily attitudes. (Kawashima 1996, 170).

However, the "Taisho Democracy" did not live long. Following the economic crisis in the 1920s, Japan was taken over by the militarists. The Women and Home Section changed accordingly, becoming a space to inspire women to be "the nation's mothers" and encouraging them to sacrifice for imperial Japan. A few years later, the Home and Family Section disappeared altogether; the Japanese people had to wait until the beginning of the 1950s for the next edition of the Home and Family Section.

It is also important to see the effect the Home and Family Section had on newspaper industry personnel. Namely, with the birth of the Home and Family Section, women journalists became indispensable to editorial departments. Since male journalists were reluctant to work for the section that has to do with "pots and pans" and virtually incapable of identifying what to write for the Home and Family Section, press companies started to employ women. The Home and Family Section provided women chances to take part in Japanese journalism, although they were regarded as journalists of the second class. Though there have been some improvements, the status of journalists of the Home and Family Section remains subordinate inside the newspaper industry even today. This is an important point for understanding the Home and Family Section, and I will show how this subordinate status has been related to its content later.

The Structure and Content of the Home and Family Section Today

The Home and Family Section typically supplies down-to-earth and human-interest stories, rather than academic, high-brow or cutting-edge expert analyses. Usually the section is assigned two pages in the morning edition.[2] Though the name varies from one paper to another,[3] it usually consists of the following three types of articles: (1) practical tips; cooking recipes, health, fashion, and child care; (2) social issues concerning domestic lives, mostly related to women, family and home; and (3) columns written by women readers.

The first one, the practical information, is an indispensable part of this section. It is said this is one of the most carefully read articles in the Japanese newspapers. One mistake in such an article (for example skipping the quantity of salt in a recipe) would bring at least a few dozen calls to the editorial department for complaints. The section often carries counselling, most of which would also fall into this practical category, but counselling can sometimes develop into more social debates.

The second category of articles, about social and domestic issues, emerged and gradually increased in the late 1950s and then in the 1960s, as Japan was climbing up to economic world power. It was the Home and Family Section that introduced overseas women's liberation movements in the 1970s, whereas other sections, including Politics and Social Affairs, totally ignored the issue. Also in the 1970s, because post-war Japan had concentrated on economic progress at the expense of social welfare and environment policies, many people, most of them women, stopped to think and question the production-first ideology that encouraged one to sacrifice one's personal life. The Home and Family Section became a forum for these people and developed itself in line with social movements. Protection of consumer rights and improvements in working conditions for female part-time workers are among the issues that the section submitted successfully to the wider general public as national agendas through its tenacious investigative reporting (Kitamura and Fukushi 1996, 267). School and education, care and concerns for the disabled and the aged have also been topics actively picked up in the Home and Family Section.

The third category, columns by women readers, gives the section a unique status in every paper. This was first invented by Saburo Kageyama, the first sub-editor (called "desk" in Japanese) of *Asahi*'s Home and Family Section after World War II. In resuming the Home and Family Section after the war, Kageyama did not want to limit the section to practical information for housewives, but to extend its role to a forum for women so that it would correspond to the newly-born democracy, in which the constitution stipulates the equal status of men and women. He got an inspiration from "the workers and farmers correspondent system" in the Soviet newspapers, in which those papers gave a considerable space to contributions by layman journalists such as workers and farmers from the countryside. Lists of the addresses of contributors were kept so that the editorial department could come back to them and ask them to write articles on local matters at a later date. This way, the newspapers were able to cover a wide range of local events and opinions. Kageyama, much impressed by this system, created a participatory column for *Asahi*'s Home and Family Section (Arima 1981,188-202). The column basically accepted contributions only from female readers. Kageyama's idea was very successful despite a lot of scepticism inside the newspaper company, and other papers, even local papers, followed suit and set up similar columns. In 1960s and 1970s, the contributors of the column even organised themselves as a group, held meetings and took part in social movements and campaigns, and producing yet more social topics for the section.

Though the relative influence of these columns has weakened, they are still alive in today's Home and Family Section in most papers. The contributions are done by a wide range of women with various backgrounds; they are written mostly like essays, describing their daily lives and problems. From time to time a contribution invites a lot of feedback and dispute from other readers. Then the editors print all the contributions on the theme (or summaries of them) at a later date or ask more opinions

from readers, giving the page to them as a public forum. Through interactions of this kind, the section becomes an open-ended source for editors to learn what today's women are thinking and what is happening in their lives. And very often editors discover among these contributions topics they feel are newsworthy, deserving of further coverage by professional reporters.

These are roughly the three pillars of the Home and Family Section. Each of them is indispensable, but the emphasis among the three has been changing with the passage of time. The importance of the three pillars depends on the social circumstances, editorial policies and management strategies. And the changing emphasis in the contents sometimes causes conflicts and debates among journalists as well as between journalists and readers.

Japan's Press Club System and Journalists

As I mentioned, the Japanese national newspaper companies have been exercising substantial influence on Japanese society together with national television networks which are partly owned by them. One can say they played a vital role in forming the Japanese national identity in the post-war period. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate how the Japanese press exercised its influence on the formation of nationalism among Japanese people,[4] I can mention one significant factor that directs the Japanese press inevitably toward conservative nationalism. This is its news gathering system called "Press Club" (*Kisha-Kurabu*). In Japan the newspaper and television companies as well as two major news agencies send their reporters to each Press Club attached to government offices or major industry associations in order to get official news. There are virtually few other avenues available for reporters to take part in an official news conference other than belonging to the Press Club. This institution enables government officials to control and manipulate information. This long established and institutionalised press ritual[5] excludes the "outsiders" of the Japanese newspaper industry (typically the foreign reporters but also Japanese journalists outside the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association). And an exclusive closed-shop atmosphere in the club generates extremely close and even personal relationships between journalists and government officials (de Lange 1998, 193ff). This system has been the target of criticism as a "non-tariff barrier on information' by the foreign journalists in Japan. (Note that the criticism was first articulated by foreigners, not from Japanese citizens demanding freedom of information.) Obviously the Press Club system has been playing a pivotal role in supporting the present political economy of Japan's newspaper industry.

This Press Club system also affects the newsroom hierarchy in a newspaper company. Such extremely close connections between journalists and the Japanese politicians and economic leaders — some reporters boast openly of "sleeping in the vest pocket" of high officials[6] — fortifies a hierarchy within the newspaper company, mirroring exactly the hierarchy of the authorities they are in charge of. So it is natural that the reporters and journalists dealing with politics rank as the highest of all (and the highest of the high are those who have to do with the Prime Minister's Office). Identifying themselves more with the sources, reporters from different departments feel competitive and sometimes even hostile toward colleagues in other departments (Feldman 1993, 16). And this hierarchy among the journalists produces the hierarchy of the contents of the news in the newspaper, too. Little respect is demonstrated

between reporters specialising so-called in "hard news" such as politics and economics, and colleagues in the "soft news' departments.

Journalists in the Home and Family Section — the "Marginal Men"[7]

I mentioned the Press Club system, which produces the hierarchy of the contents of discourse among sections in one newspaper. The Home and Family Section is one section that ranks itself at the bottom of the newspaper hierarchy, both in terms of journalists and contents. One may well say that inside a newspaper company, the news created for the Home and Family Section, as well as the journalists creating it, live in the peripheries of the company climate. A good example of their humble status is that the journalists working for these pages have the earliest deadlines of all departments. (Usually they write articles for the edition two days in advance.) Until a couple of decades ago, they even got lower salaries. Since the themes they are dealing with are of non-organisational character, typically about the lives of housewives, children, or old people, they are not members of the Press Clubs.

That the journalists of these pages belong to the peripheries of the newspaper firm affects very much the perception of the journalists and their mode of news production. They tend to pay attention to the peripheries of the society and to look to those people who are without organisational backups. The values and standards of their perception inevitably differ from those of the high-rank officials at the Ministry of Finance. This reflects the contents of this section. Though this stance of the Home and Family Section is changing at the moment, and I will discuss this tendency more fully in section 5, this hierarchy inside the Japanese press industry is an important aspect for understanding the role of the Home and Family Section in Japanese journalism.

Table 2: Reading of Newspaper Sections by Sex and Age
(in percentages of all respodendts)

	Newspaper Sections			
Reading Groups	1st Page	Politics	Economics	Home
30s Male	38.2	25.6	39.7	21.0
30s Female	39.9	27.3	31.9	63.4
40s Male	53.7	38.3	49.2	27.5
40s Female	41.2	28.0	27.6	62.1
50s Male	51.4	35.9	46.4	32.8
50s Female	48.1	24.7	25.2	72.8

Source: Mainichi Newspaper Data 1996 ("Which pages do you read carefully?").

Readers evaluate the Home and Family Section much higher than do insiders at the newspaper company. According to questionnaires conducted by each newspaper company, the Home and Family Section is well-read. Its popularity stands out compared with sections of politics, economy, or editorial (see Table 2). The managements of the newspaper companies are aware of the fact and admit the importance of these pages for the following reasons: (1) In most Japanese families the wives hold the purse strings. Women tend to decide which paper to buy by reading the Home and Family Section to get the most out of the price of the newspapers. So these pages hold the key to

boosting the company's sales figures. (2) It is the Home and Family Section that can express the characteristics of a newspaper at its best and thus enable the company to show its difference from others. Stories on other pages, such as about politics, economy or social affairs, are more or less moulded into the same, monotonous information by the Press Club system. (Most typically, such news is written based on official briefings or lectures.) But the Home and Family Section requires innovative plans, new ideas and thorough investigations with initiatives by journalists themselves.

The Home and Family Section Today

In this chapter I would like to describe the current situation and the problems today's Home and Family Section is facing. In sum, the section is challenged by several changes confronting the whole media sector, and is being forced to change itself to adjust to the market.

Diversified Interests and Segmented Readers

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, news production of the Home and Family Section is not based on the standardised briefings and announcements of the Press Club system. And they do not have to follow each of the actual events in competition with other companies.

But because of this freedom in its reporting style, difficulties arise in deciding an appropriate constellation for the content of the section. In present Japanese society, people's interests are becoming diverse, and it is thus extremely difficult to satisfy all the information needs the readers may have. In this environment, it is a very difficult task to recognise what news is worth writing. Consequently, the Home and Family Section at present tends to give a thin impression because of its extreme diversification of contents.

The growth of the magazine market is another problem for the section. The number of magazines has increased in accordance with the diversification of interests within society. Considering that the kind of information in the Home and Family Section is often very personal, and must reflect individual taste and lifestyle, one can easily reach the conclusion that a magazine is better suited to offering such information. The recent start of hundreds of television programmes in Japan via communication satellite and the Internet technology also accelerates the segmentation of audiences. In short, the section is facing a competition with other growing media. If the public gets used to such a media environment, the Home and Family Section in the mammoth national newspapers will lose its meaning. And this is already happening.

Changing Perceptions and Consciousness of the Young Journalists

I mentioned earlier that journalists belonging to the Home and Family Section identify themselves as marginal in the editorial department. Especially male journalists feel humiliated if told to work for the "women's ghetto." This is still true to some extent, but the tendency is now changing little by little in the waves of overall social change Japan is undergoing in the 1990s. Many newspapers are experiencing that some of the young male journalists graduated from so-called elite universities wish to become journalists in the Home and Family Section. To the surprise of senior male journalists, "they are even willing to work on themes like cooking, health and fashion."

The background of such changes can be attributed to overall social changes in the 1990s. Younger people starting their working lives in the 1990s have different life

experiences, interests and priorities than the older generation who built up Japan in the post-World War II era. They tend to be more focused on themselves, more assertive, less influenced by authority, and possess less automatic respect for authority, and, in their working lives, less willing to sacrifice all for the company. This tendency is also true with younger journalists. Traditionally newspaper companies are famous for long and irregular working hours, and being a journalist therefore means almost a total sacrifice of one's private or family life, especially if one works in the Politics, Economy or Social Affairs section. In the Home and Family Section, however, irregular duties are seldom, they can write features on the topics in which they are interested, and take time for investigation. Their perception is essentially different from that of their superiors.

The increased number of women is also changing the male-oriented corporate culture. Young women tend towards careers and have become more assertive regarding their working conditions, interests and work goals. Now in the newspaper companies, female journalists are no longer so exceptional as ten years ago, even in the Politics and Economy Sections. They no longer identify themselves as marginal in the editorial department. The fight against gender discrimination is gradually losing its impetus. Altogether with these changes in the working climate, it seems the end of the time in which the Home and Family Section was the feminists' ghetto, or the haunt of drop-out male journalists.

This phenomenon has quite an ambivalent meaning. On one hand, the Home and Family Section, its choice of topics and its reporting style, are now appreciated as important constituents of Japanese press journalism. And having increasing numbers of younger journalists with a different way of thinking, newspaper companies appear to be becoming less hierarchical and more democratic. But on the other hand, the alternative stance shared among the journalists in the Home and Family Section has been the strength of their journalism. Without being able to depend on any of the Press Clubs, they gradually discovered forgotten corners of people's lives by themselves and shed light on social welfare matters, or associated themselves actively with suburban housewives to exchange opinions. The ongoing change in the company climate can undermine the journalists' capacity to look at the society from a down-to-earth or even grass-root angle. Consequently, the Home and Family Section, once seen as an alternative to the authoritative and bureaucratic Japanese journalism, is now being incorporated into the elite main-stream. And Japan's main-stream press journalism is, like that of other developed countries, stagnant, threatened by competition with other media and overwhelmed by keeping up with new technologies. The Home and Family Section is not an exception and shares the fate of Japanese print journalism.

Visualisation and Packaged Information

In the 1980s, the newspaper companies entered their new technology era. The new technology enabled the papers to carry more visual materials, more colour pages. This was done more or less at the expense of written text. Most of the Home and Family Section in the national dailies took the opportunity of technological innovation to change its layout drastically in the 80s. Today, the pages put emphasis on information and entertaining tips; they often look more like magazine layouts, using colours and illustrations. In addition, there is a growing tendency for the section to adopt

information produced by advertising, public-relations companies as it stands. These companies offer media a lot of conveniently-packaged information based upon statistics and surveys they conduct. The editorial departments are tempted to use this well-made information package for an easy solution to fill up the assigned pages (Shimbun Kenkyu, November, 1993, 24) Until several years ago, the Home and Family Section was exhibiting the antithesis of the uniformity of the Press Club reporting, but the development of commercial packaged information dampened the uniqueness of its articles.

Convergence of Hard and Soft News and Rise of Other Media

Along with the diversification of taste and interest in society, there is also another phenomenon that poses a serious problem for the Home and Family Section. Namely, even the political and economic news, which have been called "hard news", try to soften their tone and report from a more popular angle. The newspaper managements make efforts to push the papers "closer to the readers" in line with their market strategies. Thus journalists are now encouraged to write news from softer angles to attract readers. This is not necessarily a negative thing, since previously the newspaper managements treated the Home and Family Section as a dumping ground for so-called soft news related to women, children or social minorities, and threw everything that has to do with these themes in there. But at present, many papers also set up new sections such as those on education, media, personal finance and leisure, all of which deal with topics that ten years ago would have been printed in the Home and Family Section. Now other sections are dealing with the kinds of issues and agenda that the Home and Family Section used to treat. It is feared that the Home and Family Section may sometime disappear by being merged with or acquired by other sections, or else it will be forced to undergo a thorough renewal in the combination of other sections in the future.

With soft news, or so-called "infotainment," occupying more and more space in the newspapers, readers are finding a handy, alternative turf where they can exchange their serious and honest opinions. Namely, computer and communication technology, including the Internet, electronic mail, fax and copy machines are easily available at affordable prices. This way, for example, newsletters and home pages become a cheap, convenient, and effective means to publicise opinions for social minorities. And they are more effective in reaching targeted social groups and organisations. The functions of the mass media are being replaced by those of personal media in the new technology era.

Conclusion for Tabloids and Tabloidisation

Even inside Japan, few are aware of the fact that Japan's journalism is rooted in a tabloid culture and that its Home and Family Section is the vestige of this history. However, this has not been negative for Japanese journalism. On the contrary, the background has served to raise Japan's journalistic standards and to create a concept that may be termed as "popular journalism" in its best meaning. The Home and Family Section is a specific Japanese case in point where one is "to recognize the ways in which popular culture can become the site of political resistance. The conditions and the forms may vary, but the possibility is always there"(Street 1997, 29).

Despite all those curious or even scurrilous stories at the beginning of their history, tabloids had elements that gave the newspapers an impetus to develop themselves

into political powers. They contributed to putting papers within the reach of people's daily lives and to organising a discursive public out of the masses, especially among women, and from time to time nourished social movements that even reached the stage of legislative action. The Home and Family Section in Japan confirms that certain aspects of tabloids are in a position to exercise a positive effect on media. In this sense "tabloids" should not be only a target to be criticised or blamed; rather we should "take these extremely important cultural phenomena as objects of study in their own right rather than as exemplars of the lamentable debasement of popular taste compared with that shown by intellectuals."(Sparks, 1991, 64).

Nevertheless, the word "tabloid" usually spurs a moral judgement, mostly a negative one. This is natural when we take into consideration what the media of this kind have done to society in the guise of journalism, often with mis- and abuse of the concept of freedom of expression. Most typically, sensationalism is one principal characteristic in the discourse of tabloids. In a study of Joseph Pulitzer, G. Juergens defines sensationalism as the "strategy of attracting a large audience by concentrating on stories of timeless appeal — sex, crime, tragedy" (Crouthamel 1989, 24). According to this definition, sensationalism is a tool to carry out commercialism in the news industry. Companies make newspaper pages sensational, both in content and style, to appeal to as many potential readers as possible and to boost sales figures. At this point, the newspaper companies profile themselves not as bastions of free thought and speech, but as industrial organisations that produce informative and entertaining commodities that sell well. And this would be one way that tabloidisation of media begins. Commodification of news and information is one aspect of tabloidisation.

In the 1990s, the alternative attitude of the Home and Family Section is toppling and its unique status inside the Japanese press, disappearing. These phenomena derive partly from general moves towards commodification of news and information, upon decisions by the management of the newspaper industry. Even the Home and Family Section, counterbalance to the rigid conceptual journalism dominant in the elite part of the Japanese newspaper, is not exempt from a sweeping and intensifying degree of commercial competition, to which the whole media sector is more or less being subjected in the most of the advanced industrial nations.

But here again, we should not jump to the conclusion that the phenomenon of tabloidisation of the media is ushered in by the tabloid press. I would say that the cause of this phenomenon has something more to do with the dynamic structural transformation the whole media sector is undergoing in the developments of new information technologies and general social changes. I touched upon this point a little bit in the former section.

I can conclude, through this analysis of the historical and present circumstances of the Home and Family Section in the Japanese newspaper, that there are at least two meanings to the term "tabloid." One depicts more the closer, optimal relationships between journalists and readers in this type of medium; the other means rather a shift towards more entertainment-oriented contents, usually triggered by the ultimate pursuit of commercialism in the media business. Some elements of tabloids did achieve and nurture relationships between journalists and readers and produced unique public spheres in a normative sense, but other elements of tabloids severed such reader-journalist relationships and destroyed those spheres. At present, it seems very difficult to take these losses back.

Notes:

1. Japanese newspapers are divided into several sections such as Politics, Social Affairs, Economy, Culture, Home and Family, Television Programmes etc. All sections are assigned separate pages in the paper.

2. Most Japanese newspapers have morning and evening editions. They are usually sold as a set to the subscriber, who thus receives the same paper twice a day.

3. Asahi: Home; Yomiuri: Home and Daily Life; Mainichi: Vivid Life and Home. All of the names included the word "women" until a few years ago. However, they dropped the word "women" because of the criticism from women, saying the title "Women and Home" defines home issues as something related only to women.

4. For more discussions concerning Japan's media and its public sphere, see Hanada, 1997, especially 15ff.

5. De Lange 1998, surveys the Press Club system historically in his work, pointing out that its root already existed in the Meiji period.

6. De Lange 1998, 194, citing William Horsley, Tokyo Correspondent for the BBC.

7. T.Nishiyama, an Asahi editor and journalist, coined this word to refer to the journalists working in the culture department, to which the Home and Family Section belongs. He meant by "marginal" that the journalists in the cultural department stand on the border in order to mediate between the press journals and their readers, or academic scholars and experts, or other media such as magazines (Arima et al., 1981, 241). I agree with him, but would like to add another aspect of their marginality, namely that these reporters are marginal in the journalist hierarchy and also have to stand on the border of journalism and capitalism, as I discuss in this section.

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