

CHAPTER XV

COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE PRESS

Japan had to engage in a war with China in 1894-5. The roots of the cause went back more than ten years to the intrigues of Tai Wen Kun, the Regent of the young Korean king. He was an anti-foreign trouble monger. When his son made a treaty with Japan he instigated an attack on the Japanese Legation in Seoul. The Japanese Government sent troops to Korea; and China, who was trying to make Korea her vassal state, also sent troops. These remained in Seoul two years. Finally Li Hung Chang invited Kun to a dinner on board a Chinese warship and kidnapped him sailing away with him to China. But Kun was soon sent back to Korea. On his return, Kun started a revolution against his pro-foreign son, the king. Japan and China intervened. Then Li Hung Chang and Count Ito concluded a treaty on April 18, 1895, by which the Chinese as well as the Japanese troops should be withdrawn within four months. For the next ten years Japan endeavoured to reform Korea and to keep her as an independent state. However, China opposed the reforms and tried to keep Korea in her grip. China sent thousands of troops to Korea and notified Japan that she did so to protect her "tributary state". This was resented by the Japanese nation. Emperor Meiji issued an Edict and declared war on China August 1, 1894. The war ended in April, 1895, after the duration of eight months of hostilities, in which the Japanese Army scored easy victories. On April 17 of that year, the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed. China ceded to Japan

Formosa, the Pescadores and the Liaotung Promontory, including Port Arthur and Dairen.

At the end of this war, the long-awaited treaty revision with foreign Powers was effected, though not on entirely satisfactory terms.

However, after the war, Japan was again tested by another political catastrophe in the shape of what is called "Three Powers' Intervention". Russia, Germany and France directed a united front towards Japan, coercing her to return the Liaotung Promontory to China for the sake of the "preservation of the future peace of the Far East." Japan had no way but to yield to their threats and returned the peninsula to China.

Newspaper editors suddenly rose up to oppose the Government bitterly for this submissive attitude. They used their mighty pen and severely attacked the Government. Suspension of papers ensued. Mass meetings were interfered with. However, the people's agitation subsided by the persuasion of the Government leaders who advised them to be quiet until another chance came for revenge.

The Sino-Japanese War marked a new epoch in the development of Japanese journalism. After the end of the war, papers came to pay much more attention to financial and economic news than before and had a more important change in the editing, in that they treated straight news as more valuable than editorials which had until then held an important place in journalism. Experts on a certain branch, say, stock

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exchange, silk, cotton, diplomacy, politics, plays, music, literature, art, Army and Navy, schools, oil, iron, etc., etc., were engaged as staff members. More university graduates chose journalism as their profession and actively engaged in reporting the lines assigned them.

Commerce and industry of the Japanese Empire achieved great expansion after the war. When we survey the development of commerce since the beginning of the Meiji era in 1868 up to 1902, 12 years before the outbreak of the world war, the imports and exports of this country were on the increase with rapid strides. The following table shows Japan's foreign trade from 1868 to 1902:

Japan's Foreign Trade
(in 1,000 yen)

year	exports	imports	total	balance
1868..	15,553	10,693	26,246	4,860
1871..	23,348	27,420	50,769	4,072
1887..	52,207	44,304	96,711	8,103
1892..	91,199	75,982	167,181	15,217
1897..	177,875	274,170	452,046	96,295
1902.	285,093	300,938	586,031	15,844

Commercialisation of newspapers set in after the close of the Sino-Japanese War. As a result of the war, Japanese foreign trade increased in value and volume. This gave a fillip to the rapid growth of journalism. Then came the age of commercialisation of newspapers. Hitherto, the newspaper business had not been a regular business, but after the Chinese War, some newspapers succeeded in making themselves economically independent. However, what they strove for was just the economic ascendancy of the press, far apart from the realisation of the freedom of the press. Newspapers thus became a paying business, though at the same time they came to be under

the influence of investors or advertisers.

With the advent of the commercialisation of the press, a movement was introduced to bring them down to the taste of the majority of the readers, which is always slightly vulgar. The positions of business manager, circulation manager and advertisement manager became more important. All papers drifted towards extreme commercialisation and naturally went on to be enterprising. As one of the results of this tendency editorials lost their influence and dignity and, short comments, as long as two lines, became a fashion. Sensationalism was the motto, concealed from the readers. Murder stories, suicides, the dark side of Tokyo, romances of actors, and so on were exactly the news sought by news editors. Papers continued to expand by means of various attractive enterprises, as well as by sensational news stories. Voting for popular actors or beaux was in vogue. The Yorozu launched an unusually interesting contest in calling up on its readers to search for golden medals hidden underground two or three inches deep in the compounds of famous shrines, temples or parks in the city. The contest was very exciting. On the very morning of the contest, the paper made public some hints as to where the golden medals were to be found. One of the salient points of the changes introduced into newspapers after the Sino-Japanese War, was the tendency of realism. Editorial writers who were inclined to discuss the abstract ideas of politics, began to choose more practical subjects for editorials. The same characteristic was also witnessed in almost all pages. Newspapermen and readers alike had been taught the value of reporting the bare

THE DEVELOPMENT OF JAPANESE JOURNALISM

truth during the Chinese War. only paper noted for its literary
Special despatches and mail stories features. It was in this paper that
from the front only reported facts. "Konjiki Yasha" or Gold Demon,

one of the most popular novels of
Among the papers saturated with Koyo Ozaki, the father of the Mei-
materialism, the Yomiuri was the ji literature, was first published.