

Media Literacy: An Unknown Concept in Japan?

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When, in 2003, I showed a small group of university students a Japanese TV documentary on media literacy, none of them had ever heard of the term. What was surprising was that they were second-year students majoring in media studies. Since then I asked many educated Japanese if they had heard of media literacy (ML), and none of them had. Similarly I asked many British and other nationalities and no one provided a satisfactory definition. Almost a year later in the autumn of 2004, I was able to ask another group of twenty six second and third year media studies students the same question. This time only one student had never heard of ML. Three had first heard of ML in junior or senior high school. However, when asked to write down a definition, several students could not remember or gave wrong answers. Some mentioned 'skills' but only seven answers included words such as judge, analyze, protect, dangerous. Thus, this paper seeks to answer the question as to what extent media literacy is an unknown concept in Japan, and what it implies. There are five sections: the first discusses 'media' and 'literacy'; the second gives examples of media and literacy in Japan; the third provides possible definitions of media literacy; the fourth section examines briefly the emergence of 'ML' in Japan; and the fifth looks at five Japanese books on ML.

Section I Media and Literacy

Media

Traditionally, the focus of the topic media is the mass media. However, strictly speaking, what we call media are a medium or means of communication – satellite, newspaper, phone, letter, email etc. Potter (2004: 43) states, "The media are the technological means of disseminating messages." Thus, Neuman (1991: 7) distinguishes between two media: the mass media of print, film, radio and television; and the new media, the Internet, mobile phones, computers etc. Where does this place NTT, the Japanese phone giant more powerful than BT or ATT? Salomon (1979) provides a different categorization for the aim of enhancing learning, and talks of a "discrepancy between the results of media research in instruction and mass media research" (p. 6). He identifies four media attributes (contents, symbol systems, the technologies, and the situations) and their potential to affect learning.

Neuman outlines three attributes of the new media. First, they all connect with one another. Second, they can be as easily extended horizontally (among individuals and groups) as vertically. He states, "In some political cultures attempts will be made to try to disable and constrain horizontal connectivity, but the explosive force of the growth in the volume of communications and the ease of personalized encryption will make such restrictions increasingly difficult to enforce"

(p.12). Third, “the individual is increasingly empowered to retrieve information from diverse sources and to confirm its veracity from multiple sources” (p.13).

He discusses the thesis of Pool (1983 a, 1983 b) that the new media will permit us to return to the political dynamics of an early time, and presents an adaptation of the model of Tomita (1980) (In Neuman, 1991:9), of Japan’s Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication, shown in Figure 1.

With the emergence new paradigms due to the new media, the gatekeepers of the traditional mass media and the new media leaders are now locked in a battle for this media gap space.

Some idealists or romantics have hoped that the new media and the personalized alternatives that they offer would reduce the power of the mass media. This diversity, increased access, fragmentation and empowerment, is accompanied by an ever-extending reach of and globalization of present-day big (mass media) companies such as News Corporation, CNN, BBC. At the same time the new media companies are gaining serious financial power, and a few companies are emerging in each field as the new leaders. When the dust settles and the new paradigms are set, some of the old and some new media powerhouses will have a combination of, the already present and the emerging forms of control and power: in effect, the ‘new mass media’. In other words, it seems that nothing much will change. It will still be big companies giving out ‘the news’; only ‘the medium’ may be different.

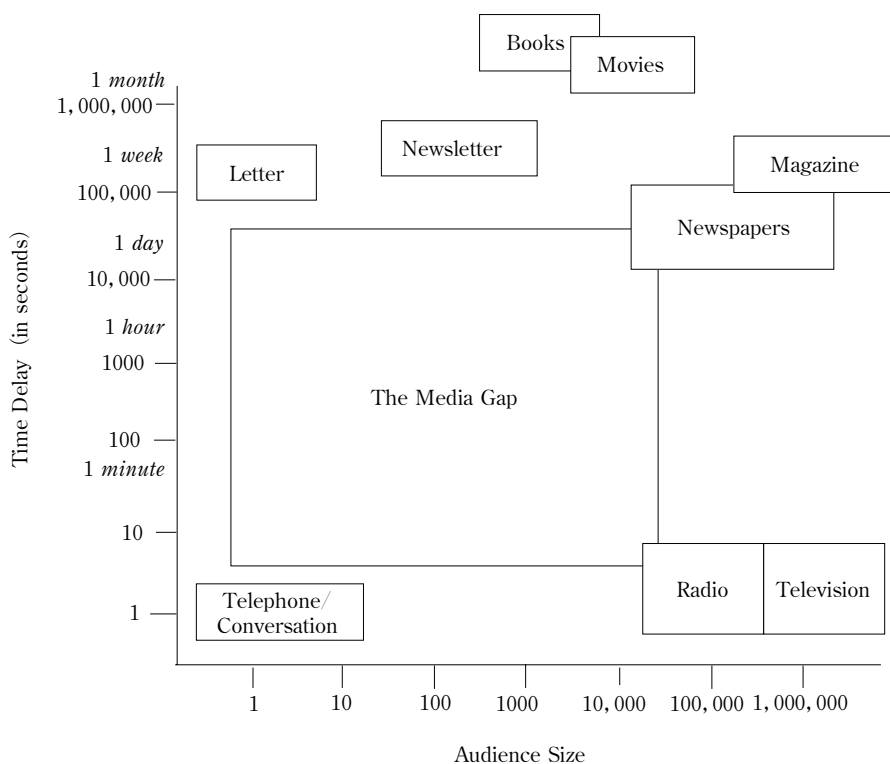


Figure 1 Tomita's discovery of the media gap. (Adapted from Tomita 1980.)

Literacy

Traditionally a separation is made between functional literacy and critical literacy. The former usually means being able to read a restaurant menu, fill in a form, etc. In English-speaking countries adult illiteracy is much higher than Japan, probably because the English alphabet and script is not phonetic, which causes immense problems for some primary school children. Discussion of literacy in Japan usually refers to the functional literacy rate, which is claimed to be almost 100%. This may be so for reading the phonetic scripts of *hiragana* and *katakana*. However, the frequently found *furigana* (phonetic *hiragana* readings of *kanji*) alongside *kanji* in comic books and when singing karaoke songs indicates that the literacy rate is not 100% when it comes to the full Japanese *kanji*.

Critical literacy or critical reading is something different. It is an ability to read what lies behind or is hidden in the passage, and detect the slant or bias of the writer. "Critical literacy makes possible a more adequate and accurate "reading" of the world..." (Lankshear & McLaren, 1991: viii). This is also true of the media of print, TV, and film, although 'increased awareness or consciousness', the aim of traditional media studies, might be better a better term. However, the new media are two-directional, and while not having the same powers of persuasion of the mass-media, hold different benefits, attractions and dangers, such as chat rooms, Internet dating, high-charging mobile sites, tracking systems etc. Thus, Beavis (In Snyder 1998:244) states, "The new literacies need to include the capacity to 'read' and 'write' the new technologies." She also refers to Lemke (1997) who identifies the need for new literacies of multimedia authoring skills, multimedia critical analysis, cyberspace exploration strategies, and cyberspace navigation. This suggests that there is a need to widen the traditional meaning of critical literacy from text alone, so as to in some way incorporate both the mass-media and the new media.

Section 2 Media and Literacy in Japan

Those familiar with primary and secondary Japanese education know that generally critical literacy is not usually required for the entrance examination to university. Likewise, media studies and any examination of the role of the 'mass' media is not a school subject. Thus, for all issues, including media and literacy, students and Japanese in general are less likely to be inquisitive, skeptical, or wary of what is found on TV or the papers or the Internet. This is not to say that Japanese do not have or do not develop critical literacy skills, but it is more likely that they develop such skills due to their experiences, personal intelligence, and desire for accurate information. Here are cited a few examples of media performance in Japan, at a less than critical level.

The failure of Japanese newspapers, magazines, and TV to predict either the break-up of the Soviet Union, or the imminence of the US-led attack on Iraqi forces in Kuwait in the first Gulf War led to an increase of sales of the Japanese edition of Newsweek, which did have such analysis, from an average of 100,000 to 300,000. Sales at one point were over 500,000. To compete, Japanese magazines and newspapers started to include more articles and reports from the foreign press.

Before the 2002 World Cup in Japan, an atmosphere of pre-tournament paranoia of hooligans

was created by the Japanese media. One had a sense new 'black ships' were about to disgorge hoards of marauding foreigners onto the safe and tranquil shores of Japan. TV stations repeatedly showed the worst disasters from South America or Europe, unconnected with the World Cup. When educated Japanese began to ask how many people died at every World Cup, clearly perspectives had become warped. However, the World Cup was an easy target for the Japanese media because it was a foreign threat.

The media's handling of the 1994 sarin gas attack in Matsumoto City, Nagano Prefecture, was something less easily brushed aside. It created among Japanese a strong sense of mistrust of the media. The first gas attack occurred eight months before the one carried out in the Tokyo underground (subway). Yoshiyuki Kono living right adjacent to where the gas was released, was hospitalized due to the attack, and his wife is today still in a coma. However, for eight months he was presumed to be guilty by the police and he and his family were harassed as the perpetrator. At no time did the media question or examine more closely the evidence behind the charges (see Asano website for a very scathing analysis). In fact they merely were the police's mouthpiece. It was only after the Tokyo sarin gas attack in March 1995 that Kono was exonerated. It is a sign of the changing times that the author Tanaka, voted in as the Governor of Nagano on the basis of his stand against dam construction and big business in general (see Kerr A. 2001, for a general analysis), chose to appoint Kono as a watchdog over police policy in the prefecture.

Constant requests have been made by the Peruvian government for the extradition of former Peruvian Prime Minister Fujimori, now resident in Japan. As he is a Japanese citizen the news reports merely mention that the request is declined. There is no discussion of his previous and/or present Peruvian nationality, or that under Japanese law a Japanese citizen cannot hold dual-nationality.

An even more interesting case is that of the Japanese royal family. The Crown Prince earlier this year prior to his departure for a Danish royal wedding broke with protocol to launch an unprecedented attack upon the Imperial Household's treatment on his wife Masako, who prior to her marriage had been an elite foreign ministry diplomat. Television programs discussed Masako's 'depression'. However, no criticism or discussion was made of Imperial Household policy. A group of Japanese students visiting the UK were surprised to see how broadsheets or quality newspapers such as *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Telegraph* were reporting events. Cleverly some Japanese newspapers and TV did report the foreign press reports particularly those from the British press. Only in this way did the Japanese public see in writing what many of them already knew or felt. When the Imperial Household did much later deign to hold a press conference, it was not televised and the spokesman remained unnamed. Thus, the control the authorities have over the papers and TV channels is still strong and reported risk being banned from press clubs and conferences, if they do not follow the 'official' line. The press are invited to special briefings only to ask questions which have been submitted in advance. Other media, such as the weekly magazines and the foreign press, are usually barred but have more freedom to offer what is sometimes revealing information.

What the effect of the new media will be upon this centralized control is not clear. Certainly there is now a vast amount of accessible information available on the Internet for all kinds of issues.

The website of Yoshiyuki Kono gives the story of his harassment and general police and media issues. Channel 2 (www.2ch.net) provides a forum for discussion on all kinds of subjects. From websites one can find out about illegal dumping of industrial chemicals in the countryside, medical malpractice, illegal dismissals, etc. Japan does not try to close such sites or restrict them like China. In fact, Japan is considered to have the highest degree of press freedom in Asia, with a 'restriction score' of 19 (Gunarante, 2000:3). Furthermore, local interest or pressure groups can be formed and/or maintained through the Internet and information exchanged.

Broadband Internet connections are spreading rapidly, especially in the urban areas. However, some young Japanese do not have either a computer or a ground phone line Internet connection. So mobile phones are used for texting messages, accessing train times, getting the latest news. The advertising stakes are high, as soon video clips of news, sports highlights etc will be sent directly to these mobiles, challenging the monopoly of TV. Mobile and IP phones (broadband Internet phones), and private phone companies have seriously affected the revenues of NTT. Young Japanese often do not have a phone in their apartment. IP phones offer 3-minute calls for eight yen to anywhere in Japan. IT advances are forcing NTT to reduce charges in order to gain new, or retain present, customers.

Foreign broadcasts can be viewed by satellite or listened to on the Internet. SKY PerfecTV, Japan's part of Murdoch's News Corporation, now has about four million subscribers. NHK, with its three satellite channels, BS 1, 2, and WowWow, is seriously concerned by this threat to its monopoly. NHK, along with commercial stations, is now offering high vision digital broadcasts but the selection of programmes is still limited. SKYPerfecTV or Sukapa, as it is more commonly known in Japan, offers a wide range of high quality programmes with a technical limit of one thousand channels. This provides immediate access to foreign and domestic programs whether they be sport, documentaries, news, music etc. Some elitists consider this a world macdonaldisation. However, it offers, rather, a wider range specialist choice to the consumer to watch something of their preference, rather than being limited to the long standing monopoly of terrestrial TV-Kanto area channels 1 and 3 (government owned) and 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 TV (owned by newspaper empires).

The present crisis facing Japanese baseball is recent evidence of media struggle here in Japan. Domestic baseball TV viewing rates and crowds have been in decline for a long time, partially because of the popularity of football, especially J-League, and more recently due to the success of Japanese football players in Europe (Nakata, Ono, Nakamura, Inamoto, Takahara) and baseball players in the US (Nomo, Matsui and Suzuki) all of which have weakened the old domestic baseball monopoly. Change was needed. The old guard sought to amalgamate the leagues into one league without any consultation with players or fans. This was a short-sighted attempt to keep power centralized and would have been the death knell of the sport. The eventual resignation of the leader, Yomiuri Giants owner Watanabe from the committee was forced from within on the grounds of illegal cash support to a university baseball club. However, the real motive behind his ousting was because of his intransigence in not talking to the new media players. On one occasion, following a committee meeting, in answer to a TV press question, he stated that he had never heard of a venture (*bencha*) [company] but only of a *benjau* (toilet). Rakuten and Live Door, of which the chairmen of both are still in their thirties, competed to be the owner of a new baseball team in To-

hoku (North East Japan, Honshu Island), and Rakuten were selected. SOFTBANK, another IT powerhouse, is seeking to buy the Daiei Hawks, despite the enormous debt of the Daiei department store chain.

These examples of the changing dominance of mass media and new media competition are evidence of general change. Clearly IT and the new media are rapidly closing the Media Gap. It is unlikely that we will be able to return to the life styles of the quaint 'ye oldie' English village, of the Japanese village peacefully in harmony with nature in the mountain valley, or of the 'hippie-like' beach paradise. Rather, as stated earlier, that we are witnessing the emergence of 'new mass media' which can encroach into every part of society anywhere, and at anytime. However, this change still does not explain what ML is.

Section 3 What is Media Literacy?

'Media Literacy' (ML) could be said to be a subcategory of, to have evolved from, or to be interchangeable with 'media education'. However, from a number of sources, it seems that there is no simple definition for ML. Potter (2004) provides a large number of definitions: two in tabular format, one from citizen action groups and the second from media scholars (pp.24-27); and two appendices from a variety of scholars of definitions of, and the purpose of, ML (pp.257-264). He summarizes that ML is not limited to one medium, requires skills, requires certain types of knowledge, and must deal with values (pp.32-34) before presenting a cognitive model (p.68), (see Figure 2).

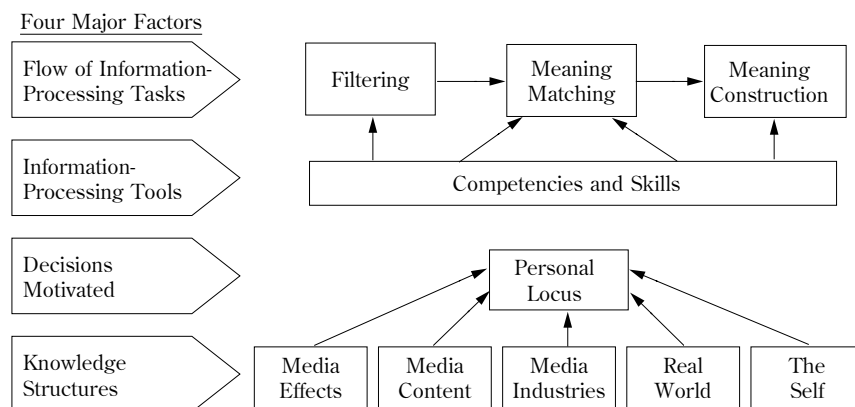


Figure 2 The Cognitive Model of Media Literacy

Buckingham (2003:38), in discussing media literacies (pp.35-50), states, "For want of a better term, media literacy is a form of critical literacy. It involves analysis, evaluation, and critical reflection."

Suzuki Midori (2001:4) states, "Media literacy enables citizens to critically analyze media in its social context, have access to the media, and in diverse ways create communicative power. The

struggle to acquire such kinds of power is also called media literacy.” (メディア・リテラシーとは、市民がメディアを社会的文脈でクリティカルに分析し、メディアにアクセスし、多様な形態でコミュニケーションを創りだす力をさす。また、そのような力の獲得をめざす取り組みもメディア・リテラシーという。Media riterashi to wa, shimin ga media o shakaibunmyaku de kuritikaru ni bunseki shi, media ni akusesu shi, tayo na keitai de komyunikeshon o tsukuridasu o sasu. Mata, sono yo na chikara no kakutoku o mezasu torikumi mo media riterashi to iu). This is also quoted in *Media Riterashi no Shotai: Shogaigakusushakai o Ikiru Chikara* メディア・リテラシーへの招待：生涯学習社会を生きる力。

‘Introduction to Media Literacy: Power to Promote Lifelong Learning’ published (2004) by the National Education Policy Research Center (NIER), with an additional condition or aim that the ‘group ML’ as proposed by Suzuki will “from Asia will expand a wide network throughout the world” (アジアから世界へと広いネットワークを育てつつある。Asia kara Sekai e to hiroi netowaku o sodatetsutsu aru” (2004:9).

Suzuki Yoshie (2003:6) defines ML as, “the power/ability to sift through the information from TV, newspapers, computers etc., and judge it by themselves and make use of it. Or, [ML] could also be called having the power and attitude to be able to deliver information accurately.” (テレビや新聞、コンピュータなどから「情報」を見極め、判断し活用する力、あるいは自らも情報を正しく発言できる力や姿勢といえます。Terebi ya shimbun, konputa nado kara ‘joho’ o mikiwame, handan shi katsuyo o suru chikara, aruiwa mizukara mo joho o tadashiku hatsugen dekiru chikara ya shisei to iemasu). She also includes a section, ‘purpose/will rather than skills’ (「スキルより will (意志)!! sukiru yori will (ishi)!!) to emphasize that ML education is not concerned so much with skills and editing associated with AV equipment. Rather, she holds that if ML is ‘taken as being a problem of ‘awareness’ (意識の問題)』だとすれば, ishiki no mondai da to sureba), it is not essential to have special equipment or possess special skills.

Section 4 The Emergence of Media Literacy

The term ‘ML’ does exist in Japan but has only emerged in the last ten years. The database of Kinokuniya bookshop in Shinjuku, Tokyo produced thirty-eight books with publication dates. On a time-continuum, only one was pre-1990’s *Shashin to Shakai: Media to Poritiku* a translation of ‘Photography and Society’ (1986). The second was *Media Riterashi: Masumedia o Yomitoku* (1992). This is a translation by the Forum for Citizen’s Television (FCT) of ‘Media Literacy: A Resource Guide’ (1989) produced by the Ontario Ministry of Education. The third *Media Riterashi* ‘Media Literacy’ (Tanaka, 1995) was the first publication which is not a translation. Twenty-five of the thirty-eight books were published between 2000 and 2003. A search of the Kinokuniya webpage offers nineteen titles of which only four were published before 2000.

The term ‘ML’ has also only recently appeared in the English language. An examination of the reference section of ‘Theory of Media Literacy’ (Potter, 2004:265-287) mentions only one book prior to the 1990’s: Houk and Bogart (1974). In ‘Dictionary of Media Literacy’ (Silverplatt and Enright Eliceiri, 1997) the definition of media literacy section (pp.48-49) contains no recommended references which predate 1993. The indexes of a large number of books on mass media, media edu-

cation, media culture and multimedia all discuss literacy, whether it is called critical literacy, critical thinking, or literate viewing etc., (Salomon, 1979:189). However, finding the term 'media literacy' is more difficult. Rice, Huston and Wright (1984:266) state, "The notion of 'literate viewing' is closely related to the more informal term 'media literacy' ", indicating that at that time the expression was not yet widespread or established. Silverplatt (2001:8) in his 'Introduction to Media Literacy' (pp. 1-10) states that it is "an established field of study within the international academic community." In the same paragraph he states that the province of Ontario has had a media education requirement for grades seven through twelve since 1987. The Japanese TV documentary on Toronto education stated that the subject of English had three main pillars: English language, English literature, and ML.

Silverplatt (2001:8) continues,

Media literacy is an established field of study within the international community. England and Australia have emerged as the world leaders in the discipline of media education,.... Thanks largely to the Association for Media Literacy (AML) Canada is also at an advanced stage in the development of media literacy. ...Other countries have also made significant inroads into the field of media literacy, including New Zealand, Chile, India, Scotland, South Africa, Japan, France, Italy, Spain, and Jordan.

Despite the power of US mass media companies, and the cutting edge technologies of their new media, ML is one area where the US has not influenced Japan. Silverplatt points out that the US has lagged behind and quotes Pungente (1992, in Silverplatt 2001: 8-9) as to why.

It is ironic and also understandable that the United States is the premier producer of international mass media, but that media literacy is only beginning in this country. The United States has a culture fascinated with individualism and with the potential of technology to solve social problems. Its culture is also pervaded with commercialism ...that simultaneously produces a 'culture of denial' about the cultural implications of commercialism. Media literacy is thus an especially difficult challenge in the U.S.

So Japan's 'history of media literacy' is not so different from the rest of the world. Publications both in English and in Japanese show that it will be more widely encountered in the future. The last section examines its usage in the Japanese context.

Section 5 Analysis of Japanese Media Literacy (ML) Books

For a more detailed analysis, from a large number of books five Japanese books were selected. Despite the purpose of the books supposedly being to inform on ML, none of the five had an index, or lists of diagrams and tables. Only Suzuki Midori included comprehensive appendixes or a list of definitions/keywords. All the books contained references lists, apart from the secondary school text.

The National Institute for Education Policy Research (NIER) (2004) report on ML limited its references to 2000-2003, and included only nine non-Japanese references out of one hundred and nineteen.

From these books four factors were identified. The first factor is the change from the single traditional media studies framework of the mass media to a number of different frameworks. Only the 1992 ML book follows the traditional categorization of sections as discrete units: TV, film, radio etc. The second, very readable, ML book (Sugaya, 2001) adopts a historical approach with three sections: UK, the roots of media; Canada, the spread of a unique practice; and US, the grass-roots movement. The fourth section is titled- 'the digital age of [multi] ML'. Suzuki Midori (2001) in 'Media Literacy: Present and Future' divides between theory, practice, and perspective/outlook. The secondary school text (Suzuki, Yoshie, 2001) 'Project Learning with A Portfolio: Media Literacy-Mobile Phones' focuses on the active process. However it does include a brief background and theory section at the beginning, and at the end a reanalysis of and further gathering of data and rearrangement of the portfolio. It also has suggestions and provides a platform and framework for future projects with other media. The NIER report, with twelve different authored chapters, is broken into three sections: children and media, adults and media, and world ML. A vast amount of data is presented about attitudes toward and use of mass and new media.

The second factor is that the focus is on a far wider range of media, and how new media can or should be used within education to increase ML awareness. This is hardly surprising given that the computers, the Internet and mobile phones are extending into most young peoples' lives. In the last fifteen years, the production and use of technologies is now no longer limited to the specialists or to the elite. Sugaya (2001) introduces the fourth section with a chapter on 'Digital Materials Strengthen Media Literacy' (pp. 184-189). She is very critical of some ML researchers for dismissing computer games as being unsuitable as texts for ML learning or for use in the classroom, and accuses them, in banning the game culture from school education, of repeating the mistakes of educators of the past, who forbade the use of TV programs (p. 218). Suzuki Midori devotes a large part of her third section to the Internet, in particular MNet, and to the linking of computer technologies and ML education. Suzuki Toshie does exactly the same by constructing an ML course around mobile phones. The NIER report shows that primary school children ranked the Internet above magazines for being useful for study (p. 67). Primary and junior and senior-high school children rated the Internet lowest for reliability shinraisei (p. 69). Data on the influence of the Internet upon life style changes between 2000 and 2002 states that the making of new friends had increased 28.7%, whereas watching TV, phone use, and sleep time had decreased 30.3%, 34.5% and 52.6% respectively!! This data is from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 'How IT Affects People's Lifestyle' (ITと国民生活に関する調査分析, IT to Kokumin Seikatsu ni Kansuru Chosa Bunseki), although it is included in Section 1 'Children and Media' of the NIER report. Closer examination shows that this data does not specifically relate to children. The questionable reliability of data in this and other chapters and a lack of structure giving one a sense of jumping around and inadequate analysis indicate that the parameters set for the contributors and guidelines and editing were weak.

The third factor is that ML is no longer confined to tertiary education as media studies used to

be. The books indicate that the drive is to increase awareness in two areas. The first area is to educate at all levels of education. The 1992 ML translation of the Ontario program states that, ML skills must be learnt as curriculum courses from kindergarten through to third year senior high school. The accompanying workbook has activities and worksheets which can be used for a range of student ages. Sugaya (2001) discusses not only this program but also how ML classes are conducted in schools in British Columbia (pp.104-112). Suzuki Midori argues, in a section on teacher education *kyoshi no kyoiku* (pp.87-92), using CLEMI (Bazalgette, 1992), that “critical ability concerning the media and information encountered should be learnt as one of the basic skills of education along with listening, visual education, and various reading styles” (p.87). However, it is the second area, the drive to inform the general public, which appears more important to Suzuki. In her first chapter, immediately after defining and describing the development of ML in Japan, she presents a section, ‘The Grass-Roots ML Movement’ (市民が担う草のメディア・リテラシー活動, *shimin ga ninau kusa no media riterashi katsudo*) (pp.6-11), and in the fourth part of the final chapter ‘A Call for the Partnership of Media and Citizens’ (市民とメディアのパートナーシップを求めて, *shimin to media no patonashippu o motome*) (pp.228-233). In the NIER report, two of the four chapters of the middle section on adults and media furnish data on how the study of ML has “changed their awareness” (意識変容, *ishiki henyo*).

The fourth factor is that of empowerment and movement towards democracy *minshushugi*. While increased critical awareness has always been the aim of media education, the new media enable people to actively pursue such issues. Pressure groups, the exchange of and access to information, the establishment of websites, printing leaflets, and even the publishing of books have become possible. Sugaya in Chapter Two (pp.141-161) contains a section explaining how ML can be ‘A Watchdog to Check on the Media’ (メディアを監視するウオッチドグ (番犬), *media o kanshi suru uochidogu (banken)*). Suzuki Midori (p.25) quotes from a 1999 UNESCO conference on ‘Educating the Media and the Digital Age’. “ML education is to ensure that in nations around the world citizens have freedom of expression, have basic rights of access to information, and that ML is a mechanism for construction of and maintaining democracy.” Clearly her aim is to make citizens more active. Section 2 Chapter 4, ‘Making Alternative Media’ (pp.159-168) is but one example. The focused nature of the mobile phone portfolio text of Suzuki Yoshie provides a framework for active research. The NIER report does not pursue the concept of empowerment in terms of civil rights or address imbalances of authorities or the mass media. Possibly this is because nine of the fourteen contributors are from the government research center. In the preface and introduction (pp.1-13) the word ‘critical’ *hihanteki* appears five times, ‘critical’ *kuritikaru* once, but neither ‘democratization’ *minshuka*, nor ‘democracy’ *minshushugi* appear at all. The word ‘citizen’ *shimin* appears several times but only in the section on ‘ML in Citizens’ Activities’ (市民活動の文脈のメディア・リテラシー, *shimin katsudo no bunmyaku no media riterashi*). In other areas, words such as ‘people’ *kokumin*, ‘adult’ *otona*, *seijin*, ‘learning’ *gakushu*, and ‘education’ *kyoiku* are preferred. This suggests that the critical side of ML is not the main concern of the report.

Conclusion

The concept of ML does exist in Japan. And yet at the same time it seems virtually unknown. It is possible to detect three currents of ML in the Japanese context. The first current is the skill of being able to use the technology of the new media. The government desires that both children and adults become competent, as some of the data from the NIER report has shown. In effect, this is, a kind of functional literacy extended to the new media. The second current is a literacy of increased media awareness. People want more knowledge and are concerned with the dangers that the new media have brought, especially the Internet and mobile phones. The arrival of the new media has forced educational institutions to promote media awareness.

The third current of ML is the broadening of critical literacy to encompass all media, rather than text alone. The translation of the Ontario media text on mass media and the books by Sugaya and Suzuki Midori explain the way ML has developed and why and how it can be made active either in school classrooms or as citizen's movements, particularly with enhanced potential due to the new media.

All three currents reflect the spread of all media into all aspects of our lives, and also the trend of reducing or lowering barriers to access to information and communication. These create grass movements and the questioning of authority, something which governments usually do not like. Given that most Japanese still have not heard of the term ML, it is not clear whether it will enter general usage or remain within limited areas of academia and education. While some would like to think that the new media have afforded new weapons to Japanese who seek a more 'democratic' environment in Japan, the media powers that be and the new media powers are rapidly closing the media gap. Whether media literacy will spread enough to counterbalance present and new forces is difficult to tell. However, the emergence of the term media literacy indicates that for some there is not only a need and a desire for such a balance, but also the potential and opportunity to create it.

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