

8-1992

Public service broadcasting and the challenge of new technology: A case study of Japan's NHK

Roya Akhavan-Majid

St. Cloud State University, rakhavan@stcloudstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.stcloudstate.edu/comm_facpubs



Part of the [Television Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Akhavan-Majid, Roya, "Public service broadcasting and the challenge of new technology: A case study of Japan's NHK" (1992). *Mass Communication Faculty Publications*. Paper 5.
http://repository.stcloudstate.edu/comm_facpubs/5

This Peer Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Mass Communications at theRepository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mass Communication Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of theRepository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact kewing@stcloudstate.edu.

Public service broadcasting and the challenge of new technology: A case study of Japan's NHK

Roya Akhavan-Majid

Abstract

The decade of 1980's was characterized by multiplying challenges to public service broadcasting in many countries. The threat to the financial viability of public broadcasting, which had originated with the stagnation of receiver fee revenue in the face of rapidly escalating production costs, was compounded by the economic-ideological challenges posed by the advent of new media technologies. By the end of the 1980s, public broadcasting systems everywhere appeared to be either crumbling or managing a slow decline.

As a system operating in a uniquely different, and little-studied, policy environment, Japan's public service broadcasting system, NHK, presents a sharp contrast to this grim picture of decline. In contrast to many of its Western counterparts, such as the BBC, for example, NHK has succeeded in adapting new technologies to its own advantage and has grown tremendously in power and prominence as a broadcasting institution since the early 1980s.

Based on extensive personal interviews conducted with Japanese media scholars, commercial broadcasters, and NHK representatives in the course of a four-month field study in Japan (January 1991-April 1991), as well as library research, this study analyzes the reasons behind this contrast in terms of 1) the elements in the Japanese policy environment which have given NHK an advantage over its counterparts and 2) the management strategies pursued by NHK itself in response to new technologies.

The decade of 1980's was characterized by multiplying challenges to public service broadcasting in many countries. The threat to the financial viability of public broadcasting, which had originated with the stagnation of receiver fee revenue in the face of rapidly escalating production costs, was compounded by the economic-ideological challenges posed by the advent of new media technologies.

The economic challenge posed by new technology took different forms in different countries. In those countries where the public broadcasting system was a monopoly, the potential for commercial exploitation of new broadcasting technologies created pressures for liberalization and privatization; pressures which encompassed not only public broadcasting but also telecommunications monopolies. These economically-motivated pressures toward privatization were further reinforced by politically conservative arguments in favor of market competition and by an ideological assault on the very concept of 'public service' broadcasting and its relevance in the new information age. In those countries, on the other hand, where a commercial system already existed, the primary economic challenge to public broadcasting was posed by the competition from new forms of program delivery such as cable and satellite. Yet, the pre-

existence of a commercial system in a country did not mean that its public broadcasting system would be immune to ideological challenge in favor of complete privatization, as demonstrated in the case of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), for example. By the end of the 1980's

the edifice [of public broadcasting] was widely seen to be crumbling. Public broadcasting institutions and the notions of cultural and political discourse that undergird them seemed to be under attack everywhere¹

As a system operating in a uniquely different, and little-studied, policy environment, Japan's public service broadcasting system, Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK) presents a sharp contrast to this grim picture of decline. Indeed, in contrast to many of its European counterparts, such as the BBC, for example, NHK has succeeded in adapting new technologies to its own advantage and has grown tremendously in power and prominence as a broadcasting institution since the early 1980s. As a first-comer in Japanese broadcasting with a continuing edge over the commercial broadcasters in Japan, NHK has rapidly outpaced its commercial competitors and is now poised to become a major international force in broadcast technology and program production.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the reasons behind this contrast in terms of 1) the elements in the Japanese policy environment which have given NHK an advantage over its counterparts and 2) the management strategies pursued by NHK itself in response to new technologies.

Historical roots and present structure: An overview

NHK was formed in 1926, when the Japanese government urged the three receiver-fee supported stations originally established in 1924 by the Japanese newspaper publishers and electronic manufacturers, to merge into one nationwide network. Motivated by a desire to tighten government control over the system, this merger marked the beginning of growing government interference in the affairs of NHK, a control which reached its peak during World War II.² After the war, NHK was reorganized by the General Headquarters for the Allied Powers (GHQ) based on a new Broadcast Law (1950) designed to insulate NHK from government control. The law provided for a 12-member board of directors, to be appointed by the prime minister. It also sanctioned the continuation of the same receiver fee-based system of financing, within which NHK itself had been responsible for collecting the receiver fees. In addition, the General Headquarters (GHQ) established a Radio Regulatory Commission, (RCC) patterned after the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), to oversee and regulate broadcasting in Japan. Soon after the departure of the GHQ in 1952, however, the RCC was absorbed into the Ministry for Posts and Telecommunications (MPT).³ Since then, MPT has remained the primary authority responsible for regulating broadcasting and telecommunications in Japan. A fully commercial system of broadcasting was established shortly afterwards in 1951, with the licenses going to a handful of consortia dominated largely by newspaper publishing interests. Thus, the commercial broadcasting industry in Japan was founded, from the outset, as an extension of the interests of the country's newspaper industry. Both industries are currently dominated by five major media conglomerates, NTV-Yomiuri Shimbun, TV Asahi-Asahi Shimbun, TBS-Mainichi Shimbun, TV Tokyo-Nikkei Shimbun, and Fuji TV-Sankei Shimbun.⁴

Although the competition between NHK and the commercial broadcasters has been fierce, NHK has been able to maintain its position as the country's leading broadcaster. As the 'senior'

broadcaster (an important concept in Japan), NHK has been able to attract the country's best engineering, production, and programming talent and managed to remain highly popular with audiences, commanding over half of the Japanese viewership.

As the country's public service broadcaster, NHK displays a vastly different approach to programming than the commercial broadcasters. As Donald Browne has pointed out

NHK generally has taken upon itself the obligation to preserve traditional elements of Japanese culture and to promote living culture. If NHK broadcasts a fifteenth-century tale, it will make the production as authentic as possible in setting, costuming, and staging... Commercial broadcasters are far more apt to treat traditional or contemporary drama as pegs on which to hang action, feeling that this is the key to attract larger audiences... Commercial stations are more likely to imitate already successful entertainment shows and to emphasize the colourful, loud, and comedic aspects of shows than is NHK.⁵

Among some of NHK's most popular cultural programs have been such multiple-episode documentaries as the 'Silk Road' (1980) and the 'Yellow River' (1987), both of which managed to garner some of the highest ratings ever achieved by any station during prime-time. Another example of high quality and popular cultural programming by NHK is its 'Taiga Drama,' a drama series which recreates figures and events from Japanese history.

NHK's success in producing quality programs is also reflected in the number of international awards it has received. In 1989, 38 NHK programs were nominated for international competitions, 14 of which received major awards.

Although the commercial stations have made major strides in raising the quality of their news and public affairs programming during the last decade, NHK continues to remain in the lead in this area, providing a greater amount, as well as a higher quality, of informational programming.

NHK's programming activities also benefit from one of the largest broadcasting budgets in the world. In 1990, NHK operated on a budget of approximately 400 billion yen (3 billion dollars), 97% of which was obtained from receiver fees.

NHK's financial viability was threatened in the early 1980's, when the company began to experience shortfalls in its budget due to the saturation of television sets and stagnating receiver fees. In view of the political difficulty of raising receiver fees, the Ministry for Posts and Telecommunications responded by authorizing NHK in 1982 to engage in a limited range of commercial activities through subsidiary companies to supplement its receiver fee income. The first commercially-oriented subsidiary, NHK Enterprises, was established shortly afterwards, with the mandate to coproduce and sell NHK programs for domestic as well as international consumption. NHK's involvement with subsidiary companies accelerated⁶ after a 1988 amendment to the Broadcast Law authorizing NHK to invest its receiver fees (and not just outside income) in its affiliated companies, so long as the activities of such companies were 'in harmony with NHK's character as public service broadcaster.' NHK's activities through its subsidiaries have not only given a visible boost to its financial condition, but they have also vastly expanded the scope of NHK's domestic and international activities.

In addition to its involvement in such varied areas as commercial teletext broadcasting and international program co-production, NHK currently operates two medium-wave AM radio networks, one VHF-FM network, an external broadcasting service, two television networks

(General TV and Educational TV), and two of the three channels on Japan's second generation operational direct broadcast satellite (BS3). (The third channel is run as subscription television by a commercial consortium, JSB). The satellite service, offering multi-language news and sports on one channel, and movies and cultural programming as well as experimental HDTV and multiplex sound programming on the other, has had great success with Japanese viewers. As of September 1991, 4.5 million households were able to receive NHK's DBS (Direct Broadcast Satellite) signals, via cable as well as through dish antennas.⁷ Because of NHK's ability to collect DBS fees from every household with the technical capability to receive its signals, the rise in DBS-equipped households has given a major boost to NHK's budget, averting the original threat posed by stagnating receiver fees.

NHK expanded the reach of its programs even further in April 1991 when it began beaming its signals to Japanese households in the U.S. and in Europe via INTELSAT.

Currently, NHK awaits permission from the Ministry for Post and Telecommunications to begin operation of a television facsimile system, using a communication satellite.

NHK's advantages over other public broadcasting systems

NHK's ability to take advantage of the very same trends which have posed serious threats to the survival of public broadcasting institutions elsewhere in the world has been due to a variety of factors. Some of these are inherent to the cultural and political environment of Japan and the historical roots of NHK itself, while others are related to management choices and policy decisions. Each of these factors will be discussed in turn.

Elements of fate: Cultural, organizational, and political advantages

Among the elements of fate giving NHK a built-in advantage over its Western counterparts has been the highly homogeneous nature of the Japanese audience. In contrast to most other public broadcasting systems, whose efforts to attend to the needs and tastes of their diverse viewership tends to preclude their ability to attract high 'ratings', NHK has had to appeal to a largely culturally homogeneous audience. It has therefore been easier for NHK to remain popular with, and relevant to, a large percentage of the Japanese viewing public, without sacrificing quality and cultural value.

NHK's greatest advantage over other public broadcasting systems in the new information age, however, lies in its organizational set-up. In contrast to its counterparts in other countries, which have had little or no involvement in technological research and development, since early in its development, NHK has functioned as a forerunner and standard-bearer in all areas of broadcast technology.⁸ Since its establishment in 1928, NHK's Technical Research Institute has been the site of a variety of innovations, including the latest advances in HDTV technology and multiplex sound broadcasting. NHK's 'Hi-Vision' standard, which makes use of a DBS band compression system called MUSE (also developed by NHK) has already been adopted as the Japanese HDTV standard. Since 1989, NHK has been broadcasting in HDTV on an experimental basis and has cooperated with Japanese manufacturers in developing HDTV television sets.

NHK's leading role in technological Research and Development thus contrasts sharply with other public broadcasting systems which are often seen as slow-moving and unresponsive to new technology.

A further advantaged of NHK over its counterparts is that it has never faced either a conservative ideological challenge, or pressures from commercial interests seeking entry into the broadcasting market. The lack of the ideological pressure may be explained, in part, by the distinctly pragmatic nature of Japanese culture and politics. To the extent that economic and ideological challenges to public institutions tend to be interrelated, the lack of ideological pressure may also be explained, in part, by the absence of commercial pressure.

In contrast to the United Kingdom, where ITV was established as a commercial system subject to strict public controls on commercial time and other related activities, the commercial system in Japan has developed as a fully commercialized system and, along with the closely related newspaper industry, has absorbed much of the advertising money available in Japan. Thus, unlike the BBC, NHK has never been under pressure to open its doors to commercial advertising. Indeed, any suggestions of commercialization as an alternative means of financing for NHK have been fiercely opposed by the Japanese commercial broadcasters, for whom the starkest doomsday scenario consists of a day in which a ratings powerhouse like NHK, commanding two full HDTV channels, would be converted into a competing commercial enterprise.

The case was different with Japan's telecommunications monopoly, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT), and the country's telecommunications market, which was privatized in 1984 largely as a result of pressure from big business interests seeking to enter the lucrative telecommunications market. Even then, ideological discourse played a minor role in the debates which led to the privatization of NTT. Although such phrases as 'efficiency' and 'serving the consumer through competition' were conspicuous in the final policy statements, it was the need for accommodating the demands of the U.S., on the one hand, and the pressures being exerted by the Japanese big business interests, on the other, which ultimately led to NTT's privatization.⁹

Given NHK's popularity, sound financial base, and leading role in new technology, as well as the absence of economic and ideological pressures pushing for its commercialization, it is clear that NHK shares very few of the challenges faced by its counterparts in other advanced industrialized countries. At the same time however, NHK's encounter with the new information technologies and its efforts to respond to their potential threats and opportunities has not, by any means, been free of challenge. Operating in a dual broadcasting environment, and under the supervision of a government ministry (MPT) whose interests lie in ensuring that neither of the two broadcasting systems become too powerful to challenge its regulatory authority and subtle control, NHK has faced unique challenges of its own. Unlike its counterparts, NHK has had to operate within the limits placed on its ambitions by the country's powerful commercial media conglomerates, whose interests have come into increasing conflict with those of NHK in the course of the last decade.

As a major elite power group, the commercial media conglomerates constitute a strong influence on the government's media policy. Indeed, if one were to identify the top four elite power groups in Japan, these would be the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, the country's top government ministries (including the MPT), big business, and the mass media conglomerates. The media conglomerates derive their power from a variety of factors, including 1) domination of newspaper and broadcast ownership patterns, which gives them considerable control over the flow of information in Japan, and 2) integration with the other three elite power groups, through social clubs, economic interlocking, and flow of personnel, which creates a high level of commonality of interest between the commercial media conglomerates and the other powerful elites.¹⁰

It is in the context of the dynamics created by these clashing interests, therefore, that NHK's management strategy and responses to technological advancements in the new information age need to be evaluated.

Elements of freewill: NHK's management strategy in the new information age.

NHK's first encounter with new technology came in the mid 1950s, when cable technology first emerged as a means of enhancing signal reception in remote and mountainous areas. Based on its mandate to pursue nation-wide coverage of its signals, as well as its interest in expanding its receiver fee base, NHK cooperated with cable operators seeking to establish retransmission units.

A ferment began in this harmonious relationship, however, when a company named NCV sought in 1968 to establish Japan's first program origination urban CATV system. Fearing the threat of competition from cable, in a rare coalition with the commercial broadcasters, NHK asked the Ministry for Posts and Telecommunications to stop the venture. Seeking to respond to the strong protest on the part of the mass media elite, yet lacking any legal grounds to block the venture, MPT asked NCV to allow the existing broadcasters to join it as partners in the proposed cable TV company, leading to a forced coalition among adversarial interests which brought an effective halt to the venture.¹¹

The resistance by the vested broadcasting interests to CATV development in Japan compounded such other pre-existing problems as market uncertainty and shortage of software for cable programming, effectively halting cable's further advances in Japan until the late 1980s. Reflecting this late start, current cable penetration in Japan stands at a mere 20%.¹²

NHK's posture with regards to program origination cable, however, took a sharp turn in the late 1980s, largely as a result of NHK's involvement in and success with direct satellite broadcasting.

As already mentioned, in order to be entitled to collect receiver fees from each household, NHK needs to establish the household's technical capability to receive NHK signals. In the case of DBS, NHK would need to establish that the household is able to receive the signals either via cable or through dish antennas. Although a large number of dish antennas have been sold in Japan, cable remains, by far, the primary means of DBS signal reception. It is this simple fact which has tied NHK's fortunes to those of the CATV operators in Japan. Building further on this commonality of interest, NHK recently began an effort to convince Japanese cable operators to collect its DBS fees at the same time that they collect their own cable subscription fees, offering them a commission for their service. Should NHK succeed in concluding such arrangements with all cable operators, it will soon be able to collect fees from almost all of the 4.5 million households currently able to receive its signals. Thus, in contrast to a decade earlier, cable no longer poses a threat to NHK. Rather, every new cable subscription promises to automatically bring with it a DBS 'subscription' for NHK.

NHK's ability to harmonize its interests with those of the cable operators and its growing success with direct satellite broadcasting has deepened its conflict of interest with the commercial broadcasters, exacerbating the tensions which have been brewing between the two power groups since the early days of NHK involvement with DBS technology.¹³

Japan's first experimental DBS project was initiated by the joint efforts of MPT and NHK in 1972. Launched in 1978, the experimental satellite (BSE) functioned until 1980 when a transponder failure brought a halt to the project. NHK, which bore 60% of the project's costs, used BSE to carry out various experiments including HDTV and multiplex sound broadcasting.

Japan's first operational satellite, BS2, was launched in 1984. As in the case of the experimental satellite, BS2 was used exclusively by NHK in fulfilling its mandate of providing nationwide coverage of its programs and carrying out innovative technological experiments.

NHK's close involvement in the development and exclusive use of Japan's first two direct broadcast satellites proved from the beginning to be a source of great anxiety for the country's commercial broadcasters, an anxiety which did not seem to be relieved by NHK's repeated assurances that it intended to use the satellites only for nation-wide coverage and experimental purposes.

The commercial broadcasters' general peril at the country's involvement in DBS technology, however, began to reach new heights in 1980, when MPT announced its intention to launch a new four-channel satellite, allocating one of the channels for commercial broadcasting purposes. MPT's plans met with the strong opposition of the commercial broadcasters who, aside from their weariness about NHK's domination of the DBS, viewed DBS technology as a major threat to the reason for existence of the local stations. In addition, they feared the potential for advertising competition implied by the development of such alternative commercial channels. However, faced with MPT's determination to launch the satellite, the National Association of Commercial Broadcasters (NACB) announced, after lengthy deliberations, that it was ready to participate in the project, assuming that there would be no advertising, and that the commercial broadcasters would hold the majority of the shares of the proposed commercial channel.¹⁴

In the course of the ensuing policy negotiations - which, typical of Japanese media policy making, structures and process took place in the context of semi-formal MPT 'advisory committees' representing all powerful parties potentially affected by policy - it became apparent that there was a much larger number of businesses interested in investing in the new company than originally anticipated. By the time the process of negotiations ended, the commercial broadcasters were left with a mere 19% of the shares as opposed to the majority share they had expected. Although the combined share of the five media conglomerates (including the 16% obtained by the newspaper companies) stood at 35%, giving the conglomerates the controlling interest, the lion's share of over 60% was allocated to a variety of big businesses, including Japan's major banks and trading houses.

A further blow to the interests of the commercial broadcasters came in 1985, when NHK began considering plans to use one of the two DBS channels allocated to it to start a new NHK channel devoted to special DBS programming. Taking advantage of its position as a public broadcaster supported by receiver fees, NHK later announced that it intended to ultimately finance the new DBS channel by charging an additional fee from all Japanese households equipped with DBS reception capability. The sudden change in NHK's DBS plans created a formidable threat of competition for commercial broadcasters, a competition which would be especially difficult to beat because of NHK's ability as a public broadcaster automatically to count the DBS-equipped households as 'subscribers' to its DBS service, leaving the commercial broadcasters with the task of soliciting additional subscriptions from the same pool of households.

NHK's rapid gains in DBS subscription in the face of the much slower growth in the subscriptions to the new commercial DBS channel (which began operation in April 1991), appears to have realized the Commercial broadcasters' worst fears. And NHK's inroads into experimental HDTV broadcasting on two full-fledged DBS channels, while the commercial broadcasters continue to own only 19% of one channel, has further placed the commercial broadcasters at a disadvantage.

The accumulating disadvantages of commercial broadcasters vis-à-vis NHK has turned the current preparations for the launching of Japan's third generation satellite (BS4) in 1997 into a bitter fight. Currently, MPT plans to equip BS4 with the capability to carry 8 channels, the maximum number allocated to Japan based on International Telecommunications Union agreements. Still discontent with their minimal share of BS3, each of the five major media conglomerates have claimed the right to be allocated a minimum of one DBS channel.¹⁵ NHK, on the other hand, has been pushing for at least one, and if possible, two additional channels on the DBS, bringing its share from two to up to four channels.¹⁶ NHK plans to use two of the channels for round-the-clock special HDTV programming and the other two for broadcasting its current programs to households without HDTV reception capability. In return for the additional DBS channels, NHK has offered to give up one of its terrestrial channels.¹⁷ This offer on the part of NHK is in line with its strategy of moving toward complete reliance on satellite technology by the end of the century. NHK's determination to focus on space technology as a primary means of delivering its programs is also reflected in its willingness to invest its own funds on procuring and launching foreign-made back-up satellites to insure the smooth operation of its DBS channels which, in the course of the last decade, have seen several transponder failures. Aside from NHK and the commercial broadcasters, two other parties are currently competing for the limited number of DBS channels. These are Japan's major trading houses and banks, already partners in almost all areas broadcasting in Japan, and the Education Ministry's University of the Air.

Given a 1990 trade agreement between Japan and the U.S., obligating Japan to buy all future satellites from U.S. manufacturers, the difficulty in deciding who will use BS4 has also halted the process of the satellite's procurement. Until it is decided who will use the satellite, and hence who will pay for it, MPT will not be able to move forward with the country's plans for BS4.¹⁸

While the deadlock over BS4 has frustrated NHK's plans to move ahead with its future DBS plans, it has not placed a limit on NHK's space-age ambitions. Determined not to allow any delay in its plans, NHK recently turned its attention to Communication Satellite (CS) technology. Given NHK's move toward cooperation with cable, DBS is no longer the only means for NHK of expanding its receiver fee base. NHK's prospects for a successful adoption of CS and CATV technology as a primary means of program delivery has been enhanced by the Ministry for Posts and Telecommunication's favorable posture toward increased use of communication satellites in Japan. Calling Japan's emerging network of CS and cable (which currently consists of two American-made communication satellites) the 'Space Cable Network,' MPT is currently offering low interest loans and other incentives to prospective investors.¹⁹

Given the growing need in Japan for attractive programming to fill the increasing numbers of cable and DBS channels, NHK has already taken bold steps toward becoming a dominant force in the area of program production. This new direction in NHK activities is exemplified not only in the program production activities of NHK Enterprises, but in a far more large scale venture (MICO) entered into in 1991 by NHK and over 40 of Japan's 'fortune 100' companies, including such major businesses as Itoh-Chuo, Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Marubeni, Daiichi Kangyo Bank, and Sumitomo Bank, to buy and sell programs and to produce programs for international, as well as domestic consumption.²⁰ Fearing an uproar from commercial broadcasters, NHK limited its initial financial investment in MICO to only 5%. Its major investment came in the form of personnel, with 13 top NHK executives moving to head various departments in the new venture. NHK does intend, however, to gradually increase its financial investment in the venture.²¹ NHK's investment in MICO adds yet another dimension to the growing scope of its commercial activities which

began in the early 1980s when NHK's first commercial subsidiary, NHK enterprises, was established as a means of supplementing NHK's receiver fee income.

NHK's clear advantages over commercial broadcasters in utilizing new forms of program delivery such as DBS, HDTV, and CS+CATV, and its bold inroads into program production, combined with the bitter debates over BS4, made 1991 a critical year for commercial broadcasters. In the explosive atmosphere of the spring of 1991, the commercial broadcasters and their parent corporations, the country's newspaper publishers, were finally given an opportunity to strike back.

On April 24th, an NHK back-up satellite, purchased from an American manufacturer (G.E.) and launched from the Cape Canaveral Air Force Base, failed to launch into orbit. When reporting on the matter to the Telecommunications Committee of the Japanese parliament, NHK president, Keiji Shima, was asked, as a matter of course, where he had been at the time of the launch. In response, Mr. Shima indicated that he had been at the General Electric Co. headquarters in New Jersey. He later changed his initial response, however, by saying that he had actually been at Hotel New Otani in Los Angeles, directing the operation via telephone.²² The contradictory statements by Keiji Shima, the man responsible for NHK's aggressive strategy for much of the 1980s and early 1990s, gave the Japanese commercial media the story they had been waiting for. United in their interests against NHK, the Japanese media succeeded in orchestrating the incident into scandalous proportions, leading Shima to resign his post as NHK president.²³

The new president, Mikio Kawaguchi, who, according to the Japan Newspaper Editors and Publishers News Bulletin was selected for his 'good sense of judgement and balance,' is likely to follow many of Shima's policies. He may be expected, however, to move with greater caution than his predecessor vis-à-vis the interests of the country's powerful media conglomerates. He identified the major issue facing NHK very clearly in his inaugural address when he said: '...Harmony and progress is important. We must maintain a friendly and harmonious relationship with commercial broadcasting networks and other related circles, while striving to achieve steady growth of our public broadcasting activities.'²⁴

Conclusions and suggestions for future research

As this study has sought to illustrate, Japan's public service broadcaster, NHK, has faced few of the challenges posed to its Western counterparts by the advent of new technology. Thanks to a creative and forward-looking management strategy and a uniquely different policy environment, NHK appears to have in fact been able to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by new technology.

The major challenge posed to the interests of NHK continues to remain the collective clout of the country's five major commercial media conglomerates, whose demands on government media policy is likely to continue to define the boundaries for NHK's ambitions.

Although there is little doubt that NHK has grown in power and prestige in the new information age, this discussion would not be complete without addressing a further question; that of the impact of NHK's success in adapting to new technology on the integrity of its character as a public service broadcaster. Has NHK's increasing ties with Japanese big business and its increasing involvement in commercial activities through subsidiary companies, in other words, been detrimental to its character as a public service broadcaster?

Obviously, the answer to this question depends, in part, on the definition of 'public service broadcasting' itself. It may be argued that despite the many dimensions that such a definition may

include, ultimately public service broadcasting is defined on the basis of two components, 1) program quality and 2) mode of financing. Of these two elements, program quality may be said to have the greater weight, since the non-commercial mode of financing has been designed primarily as a means of protecting the programming component from the dictates of mass taste and profit.

If we look only at the mode of financing at NHK, we will find that, although the bulk of NHK funds continue to come from receiver fees, a commercial component has indeed come to supplement its income. The major question which remains to be answered then is whether this commercial link has discernibly altered the quality and orientation of programming at NHK. Future research on NHK needs to focus on a systematic study of the impact of NHK's growing scope of commercial and international activities on the quality of its programs and, thus, on its overall character as a public service broadcasting system.

Notes

¹ Willard Rowland Jr. and Michael Tracey, 'Worldwide Challenges to Public Service Broadcasting,' *Journal of Communication*, 40, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 8-27.

² Donald Browne (1989), *Comparing Broadcast Systems: The experience of Six Industrialized Nations* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), pp. 303-319.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the structure of the Japanese commercial media see: Roya Akhavan-Majid, 'The Press as an Elite Power Group in Japan,' *Journalism Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 1006-1014.

⁵ Donald Browne (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 336.

⁶ Personal interview with Hidehiro Adachi, Director, Audit Department, NHK. March 15, 1991. Also see, 'Keiji Shima Leads NHK into Forward Looking Era,' *Variety*, October 9, 1985, p. 76.

⁷ Yukio Ohmori, 'Kawaguchi Named New President of NHK,' *The Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association Bulletin*, September 1991, p. 3.

⁸ Personal interview with Kazuhiko Goto, Professor of Mass Communication, Tokiwa University, (formerly Director, NHK Broadcast Culture Research Institute), Japan, April 29, 1991.

⁹ Roya Akhavan-Majid, 'Telecommunications Policy-making in Japan: The 1980s and Beyond,' *Telecommunications Policy*, 14, no. 2 (April 1990): 159-168.

¹⁰ Roya Akhavan-Majid, 'The Press as an Elite Power Group in Japan,' *Journalism Quarterly*, 67, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 1006-1014.

¹¹ Kuichi Kobayashi, 'Some Critical Remarks on the New Media Research and Development in Japan,' *Studies of Broadcasting*, (March 1982): 23-49.

¹² Ministry for Posts and Telecommunications, Tokyo, Japan. *Posts and Telecommunications in Japan: Fiscal 1990*, April 1991.

¹³ Roya Akhavan-Majid, 'DBS Policy-making in Japan: An Interpretive History,' *Telecommunications Policy*, 13, no. 4 (December 1989): 363-369.

¹⁴ Kazuhiko Goto, 'Japanese Project for Direct Broadcasting Satellite Service,' *Studies of Broadcasting*, (March 1983): 9-47.

¹⁵ Personal interview with Masayuki Kurasawa, Research Department, National Association of Commercial Broadcasters (NACB), Japan, January 31, 1991.

¹⁶ Personal interview with Kazuhiko Goto, Professor of Mass Communication, Tokiwa University, (formerly Director, NHK Broadcast Culture Research Institute), Japan, March 15, 1991.

¹⁷ *Ibid*. This also reflects an ongoing reconsideration within NHK of the role of NHK's educational broadcasting in the face of the advancement in technology. With the availability of video cassettes, for example, there is no need to take up a full channel to directly broadcast educational programs to schools, or to repeat the same program three times a day to fit different school schedules. Instead of beaming the programs to the schools, NHK could concentrate instead on producing educational videotapes and distributing them to schools.

¹⁸ Personal interview with Izumi Tadokoro, Deputy Secretary General, Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association (NSK), April 29, 1991.

¹⁹ Personal interview with Kazuhiko Goto, February 1, 1991.

²⁰ Personal interview with Hidehiro Adachi, Director, Audit Department, NHK, March 15, 1991.

²¹ Ohmori, 'Kawaguchi Named New President of NHK,' 3-5.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

References

Alexander, Garth, 'In the Japanese Contingent, Execs are Many, Buys Few,' *Variety*, August 1991.

'Broadcasting Satellite,' *Dentsu: Japan Marketing/Advertising Biannual*, July 1981.

Foreign Press Center, Tokyo, Japan. *About Japan Series: Japan's Mass Media*, March 1990.

Guider, Elizabeth, 'Mico's High on High-Def "Perry Mason",' *Television*, 18 March 1991.

Ishii, Yoshinaga, 'The New Media and Public Broadcasting Service,' *Studies of Broadcasting*, (March 1985): 77-93.

Japan Newspaper Editors and Publishers Association News Bulletin, September 1987, p. 6.

Maeda, Jiro, 'Japan's Space Development Program,' *Media Asia* 8, no. 3, (1981): 125.

'NHK Begins 24-hour Satellite Programming,' *The Daily Yomiuri*, 24 July 1987.

Personal interview with Izumi Tadokoro, Deputy Secretary General, Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association (NSK), February 1, 1991, and February 15, 1991.

Personal interview with Masayuki Kurasawa, Research Department, National Association of Commercial Broadcasters (NACB), Japan, February 15, 1991.

Personal interview with Sakae Ishikawa, senior researcher, NHK Broadcast Culture Research Institute, February 1, 1991.

Personal interview with Takeshi Maezawa, Senior Editor, The Yomiuri Shimbun, January 31, 1991.

Segers, Frank, 'Cable, DBS Fuel Japanese Software Appetite,' *Variety*, 18 April 1990.