

# Public service television in the new broadcasting environment

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## PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION IN THE NEW BROADCASTING ENVIRONMENT

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### 1. New Broadcasting Environment

Public service television is entering a period of considerable change. New commercial channels are emerging on terrestrial channels. CATV provides a vastly extended range of general and specialized programmes. BS and CS will erode audience shares. Subscription television will provide types of programming not previously available.

### 2. Competition: Pub-caster vs Com-caster

Co-existence of pub-casters and com-casters is not new to Japan. Japan is perhaps one of the first countries to introduce com-casters side by side with pub-casters.

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
Japan	NHK	1951 com-caster			
U.K.	BBC	1955 ITV			
R.O.K.	KBS	1959 MBC			1991 SBS
Italy	RAI		1974 com-caster		
France	RTF			1984 Canal+	1987 TF1
Germany	ARD, ZDF			1984 CATV SAT	
U.S.A.	ABC, NBC, CBS		1969 PBS		

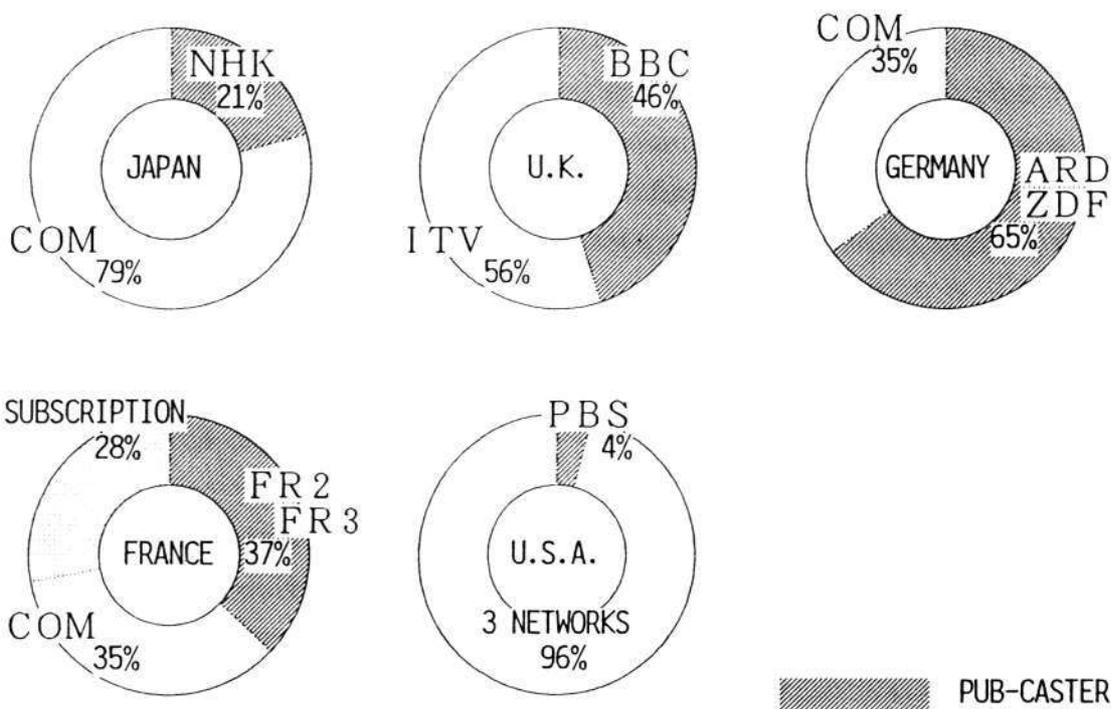
It was upon grave reflection on the role of radio during the war that the dual system was introduced for radio.

(1) Funding

Public service television means different things in different countries. In Japan the main difference between pub-casters and com-casters is the difference in funding. NHK derives its income solely from license fees and com-casters depend on commercial sponsorship.

As of 1991, license fee income for NHK amounted to 523,000 million yen whereas the combined commercial incomes for commercial broadcasters was 2,215,600 million yen. The ratio of NHK funding to com-caster funding is 1:4.24. The funding balance between pub-casters and com-casters is different from country to country.

Funding Share



The balance also varies year by year.

	NHK	COM	COM/NHK
1951	59	5	0.1
1955	106	108	1.0
1960	324	583	1.8
1965	713	1,247	1.7
1970	921	3,108	3.4
1975	1,314	5,623	4.3
1980	2,714	10,140	3.7
1985	3,480	13,594	3.9
1990	4,884	21,061	4.3
1994	5,681	21,437	3.8

(100 million yen)

Commercial income has a tendency to increase as national economic strength grows. It is rather difficult, on the other hand, to raise the license fee for the same service once the media gets to near saturation. That is perhaps the reason why the rate of growth in commercial funds was greater than that of public funds. The number of commercial stations also increased from 40 in 1955 to 156 in 1990.

## (2) Mixed Economy

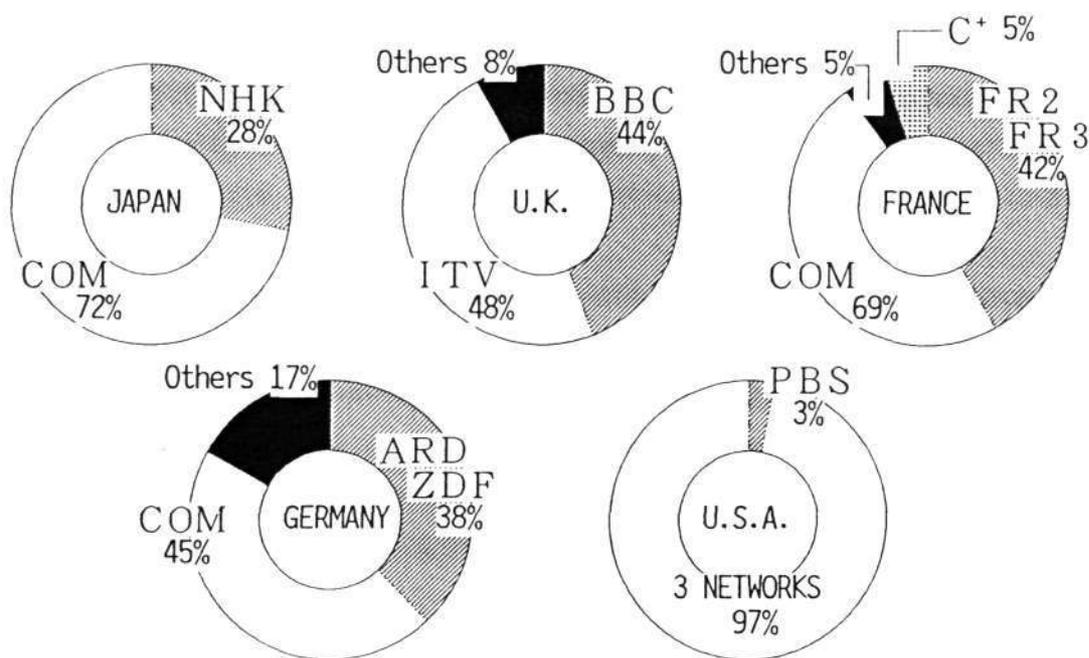
We live in countries where business is relatively unregulated. We believe in free enterprise, but there are many areas in society where the public sector plays important roles side by side with private enterprise. There are public hospitals and private hospitals, public universities and private universities, public railways and private railways. We even had a national steel company and a national silk factory in the Meiji Era (since 1868) when we were in the process of modernization and Westernization. Now we have both national (public) and private railways available depending upon our destination. But in the Kansai area where the national railway (JR) runs in parallel with private railways, it is commonly known that if you choose a private railway you will be

served an "oshibori" (steamed towel). It is believed that service is better in the private sector. Another example, often cited by Tokyoites, is that it costs only ¥750 to go to Odawara if you choose the private railway, whereas it costs ¥1,420 by national railway, hence the rumor that the private sector is more efficient. I wonder if this is true of public television and commercial television.

(3) Service

NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute conducts an extensive audience survey twice every year. On average, Japanese audiences spend 3 hours and 20 minutes every day watching TV. This figure has not changed much throughout the years. Out of the 3 hours and 45 minutes, one hour is spent watching NHK (public broadcasting) and approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes watching commercial broadcasters.

Rating Share



TV viewing	3h 45min	(per day)
NHK	1h 04min	
COM	2h 41min	

NHK is watched more by elderly people and less by the younger generation, more in the countryside than in the cities. Public broadcasting (NHK) is strong in cases of emergency such as earthquakes, and in elections, sumo (national sport) and Olympic Games. Com-casters specialize in chat shows and entertainment. We think NHK is superior in quality and variety. We have more serious dramas, documentaries, and cultural and educational programs than commercial broadcasters. We are relied upon by the audience, but we are a bit behind com-casters in popularity. We believe that television is a part of national culture. We would like to be proud of the quality of the programming we offer. We also believe that television is an essential structure in support of our democratic society.

### 3. Television, Culture and Society

The television is an electronic gadget sitting in the living room, but it is not quite the same as a refrigerator or a washing machine. Television is part of national culture and it is one of the essential elements of communication in society. Technological development is changing the role of television and television in turn is likely to change the national culture and the nature of communication.

NHK's Technical Research Institute works side by side with NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute. NHK is determined to keep up with new technology and hopes to be a pioneer in making use of this new technology. We will continue to make use of BS as well as terrestrial television; NHK has taken a pioneering role in promoting Hi-Definition television.

The late Professor Ithiel de Sola Pool of MIT wrote in his book Technologies of Freedom :

By adopting a licensed, advertiser-supported, limited-channel broadcasting system, America has penalized itself for half a century. It has undermined its tradition of free communication, and it has limited broadcasting to mass provision of the few most popular formats of entertainment. The 'vast wasteland' of television programs is

effectively closed to any video production that does not fit the few molds that attract the largest audiences. (p. 149)

We are confronting an electronic age where television as it is currently known will no longer exist. In this electronic age publishing is being transformed into electronic publishing. Telecommunication is merging with radio communication. Books, videotape and discs are likely to be combined through satellite technology and optical fibers. This new technology may be used as an instrument of freedom or, conversely, for propaganda. With its unique ability to reach all members of society, television is an essential tool of communication in the world's democracies and can be of invaluable support to developing countries.

I am convinced that the public sector, with its responsibility to promote and improve education and cultural awareness through broadcasting, has a major role to play in this electronic environment. Television is too important a medium to leave its future in the hands of those interested only in making money.