Foreword

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I spent two years from 1976 to 1978 at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, as a research fellow. During that period, I regularly attended a seminar on ‘communication policies’ organized by the late Professor Ithiel de Sola Pool of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Major subjects discussed at the seminar were as follows: (1) the history of press freedom; (2) the development of electronics; (3) the relationships between the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and all kinds of communication media and services such as printing, postal services, telegraph, telephone and broadcasting; (4) the development of cable television and the end of spectrum scarcity; and (5) the development of electronic printing. For Professor Pool, this seminar was in fact a preparation for his book, *Technologies of Freedom*, published in 1983.

The core idea at this seminar, therefore, as in his book, was freedom of communication or free flow of information. When someone mentions freedom of communication, we automatically think of government restrictions on particular opinions or discourses. However, that is only one of many forms of suppression of freedom of communication. In Japan before 1945 and Korea before the 1990s, scarcity of paper or pulp resources, and avoidance of redundancy, were used to restrict the number of newspaper publishers. Everywhere in the world including advanced European countries, scarcity of radio waves was used to control the numbers of broadcasters, which often affected the content of broadcasting.

According to Professor Pool, there is no freedom of communication under monopoly of any kind, be it public or private. In most advanced industrial countries before the 1980s, public or private monopoly in telecommunications, especially common carriers, and postal services was permitted with the condition that they do not intervene in the content that they carry. Theories that justified public or private monopoly before the 1980s included notions such as universal service or prevention of ‘cream skimming’, economies of scale and avoidance of overlapping investment. However, innovations in telecommunication technologies and services in the 1960s and 1970s such as cable television, pay television and data transmission or processing using common carrier facilities were making it difficult to justify the traditional monopoly or oligopoly in broadcasting and telecommunications. Professor Pool was one of the earliest scholars who insisted on a need for deregulation and introduction of more competition in broadcasting and telecommunications. These deregulation policies started in the United States in the early 1980s and gradually expanded to all other advanced industrial countries.

The United Nations decided at the 36th General Conference in 1981 to call the year 1983 ‘World Communication Year’ (WCY). The three major objectives of WCY were: (1) to provide an opportunity for all countries to make analyses and studies of policies for developing communication; (2) to provide a trigger for the future development of communication infrastructure, an inevitable factor for the development of economy and society; and (3) to provide an opportunity for letting the public, as well as the people concerned, recognize the importance of communication media.

By 1983, Japan had attracted attention across the world as a top-class ‘information society’. Partly for this reason, the Japanese government took this opportunity very seriously, moving to establish the WCY Promotion Head Office with the Prime Minister as director, and the Minister of Education, Minister of International Trade and Industry and Minister of Posts and

Telecommunications as assistant directors. This WCY Promotion Head Office raised several million dollars from the private sector and held the WCY Conference in Tokyo in September 1983. After this conference the fund was donated to the newly created academic association named the Japan Society of Information and Communication Research (JSICR). At that time, this academic association was said to be the richest academic association in Japan (and probably in the world as well). Fortunately, I served this rich association as president from 2004 to 2008. Using the donated fund just mentioned, JSICR has held an International Communication Forum on information and communication policy research every year. Professor Alistair Duff, the editor of this book, was invited to the 25th Anniversary International Communication Forum held in Tokyo in 2008 as a guest speaker.

Before JSICR was established in 1983, there were two major academic associations on communication: the Japan Society for the Study of Journalism and Mass Communication (JSJMC) and the Communication Association in Japan (CAJ). The subjects covered by JSJMC have included journalism, broadcasting, film, public opinion and popular culture, and those covered by CAJ have included interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, speech communication and rhetoric. Therefore, the areas to be covered by JSJCR were decided to be, among others, communication policies and technologies, information society research and telecommunications.

There are some arguments regarding the origin of the concept ‘information society’. In a widely used textbook on communication, Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl gave information society research the status of a new paradigm and wrote as follows: ‘The concept of “information society” seems to have originated in Japan (Ito 1981), although it is a logical extension of earlier ideas about the rise of a “post-industrial” society (Bell 1973)’ (McQuail & Windahl 1993, p. 201). I disagree with this remark because as I wrote in my article entitled ‘Birth of *joho shakai* and *johoka* concepts in Japan and their diffusion outside Japan’ (Ito 1991), the term *joho shakai* or information society was first used in 1964 in a paper discussing Tadao Umesao’s article ‘On information industries’ (in Japanese) published in 1963. Umesao’s basic idea is an analogy of industrial development to biological evolution. His theory is more similar to that of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) than of Daniel Bell (1919–2011). Even if Umesao’s article should be regarded as far inferior to Bell’s books and articles from an academic or scientific viewpoint, to compare their ideas is like comparing an apple and a pear.

In my opinion, the idea of *johoka* (informatization) that ‘began to be used [in Japan] in early 1967’ (Ito 1991, p. 7) is more important than information society. The reason is that it has been applied to not only the present and future but also the past. Inspired by this concept, many experts on the history of communication published books and articles on publishing, private schools and news media, among other topics, during the Edo Period (1603–1867) (Ito 2009).

In Japan, the ‘modern age’ has been divided by historians into *kinsei* (early modern) and *kindai* (modern). Most historians agree that modernization started in Japan as a result of industrialization policies by the Meiji Government established in 1868. As for the beginning of *kinsei* (early modern), however, there are several different theories. I support the theory that it started in the early eighteenth century when popular books such as *kibyoshi* and *kusazoshi*, and news media called *kawaraban* (tile printing) prevailed among the general public.

According to *Bookstores in Edo* (in Japanese), the first information policy in Japan may have been the ‘announcement’ to ban ‘pirate books’ in 1698 (Konta 1977, p. 76). *Information Businesses in Edo* (also in Japanese) describes a number of genres of information businesses including popular book publishing, news media and advertising agencies. According to this

book, the first formal law to control publication was the Publication Control Law promulgated in 1790 (Yoshihara 1978, p. 24).

Inspired by a book chapter entitled 'The Formation of Information Society in the Early Modern Period' (Maruyama 1992), I wrote an article entitled 'Historical comparisons of the degree of "johoka" [informatization]: implications for modernization' (Ito 2000). In this article, I compared illiteracy rates of major countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was found that Japan's illiteracy rate (24 per cent) in 1897 was higher than those of major western European countries but lower than Italy (37 per cent) and Russia (58 per cent). By the early twentieth century, Japan's illiteracy rate dropped to less than 10 per cent, which was the same level as France and the United Kingdom. In addition to these hard data, the article describes soft data such as the number of copies of popular novels sold, the payment of royalties in cash (which meant the emergence of professional novelists), nationwide distribution networks of private-school textbooks and copyright disputes, during the Edo Period (1603–1867). The article concludes that the degree of informatization in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries is a good predictor of the degree of economic development or the level of per capita income in the twentieth century.

Although informatization has not yet been well theorized, policy-makers seem to have intuitively been aware of its importance in relation to economic and social development, which was the reason for the World Communication Year of 1983 mentioned above, and the later World Summit on the Information Society, both initiated by the United Nations.

In spite of these UN promotion policies, we should not be overly optimistic about their effects. Japan at present may be a good example. After Japan created and publicized the idea of *johoka*/informatization in the late 1960s, many Japanese government agencies launched many kinds of informatization policies. The Japan Information Processing Development Corporation (JIPDC) established by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications designated the first week of October as 'informatization week' in 1972 and October as 'informatization month' in 1982, and have introduced all kinds of informatization-related activities such as policy plans, exhibitions and conferences. Despite all these governmental efforts, nobody nowadays says that Japan made a remarkable success of it. On the contrary, a number of books and articles have been recently published arguing that Japan has dropped or is dropping from the front line of informatization. A number of reasons have been offered, including bureaucratic red tape, cultural conservatism and lack of sufficient competition. In developing countries, competent information technology engineers leave their home countries behind and move to advanced high-income countries to work.

Michael Porter, an American economist who conducted a long-term, wide-ranging and thorough piece of research on international competitiveness, states in his book *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* (1990) that it is extremely difficult to predict and control the international competitiveness of a state as a whole especially in recent years. The reason is that international competitiveness could be affected by many uncontrollable exogenous factors. For example, successful policies and systems can be easily imitated by foreign countries, technologies and brains can easily drain out of successful countries and hegemonic powers can act strategically, such as the United States and the European Union blocking the advancement of seemingly successful countries like Japan in the late 1980s/early 1990s and China at present.

This Handbook for which I am writing the Foreword, however, covers not only information policies for economic and technological development but also those for social, political and cultural development. It is more difficult to define and discuss degrees of social, political and

cultural development than to define and discuss degrees of economic and/or technological development. However, as long as the purpose of information policies is to achieve not only economic and technological goals but also social, political and cultural ones, we indeed need to consider and discuss precisely what we mean by social, political and cultural progress.

NOTE

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