

## **The Reality of the Japanese Mass Media**

Japan is a country where freedom of expression is fully guaranteed by the Constitution. However, paradoxically it is very difficult for us to enjoy this precious right.

To explain this contradiction, I will first explain about the specific problems of the Japanese mass media, which are little known abroad.

In Japan, the distance between the media and the government has been very close. For example, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzou Abe and Tsuneo Watanabe, editor-in-chief of the Yomiuri Shimbun, Japan's largest newspaper with a circulation of 6.5 million or so, used to exchange views on politics and performance from time to time, eating and drinking in restaurants. The company executives of other newspapers and TV stations have done the same under the pretext of getting information on government policy.

In the close relationship between the two sides, the government has implemented policies that economically benefit the media. For example, the sales tax on general

merchandise is 10%, but the sales tax on newspapers is 8%.

Also, the government allocates a large budget to public advertising. For example, the government's public relations budget in fiscal 2020 was approximately \$140 million. These funds were paid to key advertising agencies and media outlets.

However, the biggest problem is the protection of the problematic system of newspaper distribution by the government. Newspaper distributors are obliged to buy a certain number of copies of the newspaper.

For example, a distributor with 3,000 readers of the newspaper only needs 3,000 copies. However, they are forced to buy 4,000 copies. This would be a violation of the antitrust laws. However, no action has been taken to date on the issue and the same problem has been going on for more than 50 years.

I have been investigating this problem since 1997 and have published many reports in magazines and Internet media in which I have reported that at least 20% to 30% of Japanese newspapers have overcirculation that was never delivered to any residence. According to my calculations, the newspaper industry thus earns at least 706 million corrupt dollars a year. Newspapers are not only hurting their distributors, they are also cheating their advertisers.

## Scene of collecting surplus newspapers



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXJzfQXllq4&t=2s>