

# THE MAGAZINES OF JAPAN

By S. TAKAHASHI

*The variety and size of Japanese magazines, together with their huge circulation, come as a surprise to the Westerner visiting Japan. Usually considering magazines to be a peculiarly European or American institution, he finds in Japan countless newsstands and book-shops filled to the brim with magazines of all forms and descriptions.*

*Very few foreigners, even those living in Japan, know anything about the contents of the magazines which pour in a ceaseless stream from the printing-presses of Japan, influencing and shaping the mind of its people. Mr. Takahashi, who has long been connected with Japanese journalism, has kindly contributed an article on this subject.—K.M.*

## THE MAGAZINE IN JAPANESE LIFE

In Japan's cultural and spiritual life magazines play such an essential part that one can call them one of the most important organs of general education, enlightenment, and formation of public opinion. There are magazines for all ages—from tiny tots onwards—for all classes and professions, and for all demands and interests. The number of Japanese periodicals is extraordinarily large. According to the Magazine Year Book, published last July, there were in 1940 about 3,000 periodicals on sale to the public, over sixty of which were women's magazines. The publishing companies amalgamated in the recently founded Publishers' Association issue about 2,000 magazines. The remaining thousand not affiliated to this Association are probably such magazines as have either, under present conditions, ceased publication since 1940 or are no longer of any importance.

The leading magazines appear on the twentieth of each month. On this day newspapers carry huge publishers' advertisements with detailed tables of contents. A glance at a book-store or at the book-section of a department store will show the great importance of periodicals for the bookselling-trade. Japanese bookstores are, as a rule, entirely open to the street, and on

large tables usually projecting right out into the open there are piles of newly published magazines, besieged by people from early morning till closing-time. Before deciding to buy, one is allowed thoroughly to look through every magazine. Unkind tongues assert that there are people who go from bookstore to bookstore and in this manner read through all magazines of interest to them without spending a cent. Some such readers even go so far as to mark the magazine when they go home to lunch, so that they need waste no time in finding the place where they left off when they return later on.

## THEY ARE CHEAP

The price of Japanese periodicals is comparatively low. It ranges from thirty sen to one yen (seven to twenty-five U.S. cents at the official exchange rate.) On an average the large popular magazines containing about 300 pages cost sixty sen, while the serious magazines, which are of a much higher intellectual level, cost one yen for 350-400 pages. How can this low price be explained? First of all no importance is attached to outward appearance. The paper is of a very poor quality. The cover, as a rule, only shows the name of the magazine. Only in the case of popular magazines is the cover

made to look a little more colorful and attractive. Beyond that the popular magazines are profusely, but very simply, illustrated. The deciding factors for the cheap price are, of course, the huge circulation of most of the magazines and the large advertising they carry.

Of first rank among the more important periodicals are the four leading serious magazines: *Kaizo* (Reorganization), *Chuo Koron* (Central Review), *Nippon Hyoron* (Nippon Review), and *Bungei Shunju* (Current Literature). I call them serious magazines because of the high level of their political-economic-cultural contents, of which one or the other side is more or less emphasized by the various publications.

#### EX-LIBERAL

In principle it can be said that until quite recently most of the leading magazines were of a strong liberal trend and thereby followed and encouraged the inclinations of the intelligentsia. The four magazines mentioned above are published mainly for the educated classes. This is apparent from the very style of printing. Japan uses the Chinese system of writing, and in addition has developed a phonetic script, called Kana. The popular magazines, designed mainly for entertainment, use only a limited number of Chinese characters, and even these are almost all furnished at the side with *furigana*, i.e. tiny signs of the Kana script giving the pronunciation and thereby also the meaning of the Chinese character. The four serious magazines, however, contain many more Chinese characters without the explanatory Kana signs. This fact alone is enough to determine fairly accurately the type of reader.

At present the afore-mentioned liberal tendency is, of course, hardly noticeable. The magazines have lately had to change their tone considerably and have thereby lost much of their original character. Today one can already speak of a far-reaching co-ordi-

nation of all publications along the lines of the current inner-political reform (*Shintaisei*). Most periodicals have officially abandoned their former stand and consciously placed themselves at the service of the reform. Without doubt the importance of this fact for the future development of Japan is not to be underestimated. If, here and there, something of the former tendency can still be glimpsed, this is because, on the whole, the contributors have remained the same and the final adjustment does require some time.

The magazine *Kaizo* (Reorganization) exists since 1919. Its former trend was rather leftist. It was founded at a time when Marxism happened to be the fashion also in Japanese intellectual circles. At present there is, of course, no longer any trace to be found of such tendencies. The magazine has its own publishing-house. The President of the *Kaizo* Publishing Company is Sanehiko Yamamoto, himself a well-known writer who quite recently, after his travels in Europe and America, appeared again in the limelight with numerous articles and books describing his impressions and views on the world situation.

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Like nearly all periodicals, *Kaizo* has no fixed staff of collaborators. The articles are written by well-known journalists, writers, university professors, politicians, authors, etc., who publish their works in this or that magazine and are sometimes represented in the same month by different articles in several publications. In *Kaizo* political problems have first place.

A specialty of almost all Japanese magazines are the so-called *Zadankai* reports, i.e. reports on a discussion, arranged by the editors, by a number of experts on some specially controversial topic of political, economic or cultural nature. These reports are often very interesting and revealing. From time to time special supplements about unusually important questions are pub-

lished at a small increase in price of about twenty sen. The literary section of *Kaizo* is composed of a few poems, several new short stories, sometimes even a play or a novel in serial form. The same can be said of the other serious magazines.

### CIRCULATION

The circulation figures of Japanese periodicals are kept secret by the publishers and exact data are unobtainable. *Kaizo* and *Chuo Koron* are said to have a circulation of about 140,000 each. The largest circulation of the four magazines is supposedly that of *Bungei Shunju*. This, apart from its high standard, is probably due to the low price of only sixty sen for an issue of about 400 pages, while *Kaizo* and *Chuo Koron* cost one yen.

Since the outbreak of the China incident, the *Kaizo* Publishing Company, beside its large monthly, appearing every twentieth, also publishes a special number on the first of every month called *Jikyoku-han* (Current Events) which deals mainly with world-political questions of the day. It is thinner and has a far smaller circulation.

One of the oldest existing magazines is *Chuo Koron* (Central Review). It was founded in 1887 and is likewise published by its own company. *Chuo Koron* was formerly emphatically liberal. It has a very high intellectual standard and is addressed to the educated classes. Many Japanese say that one need only read *Chuo Koron* to be adequately informed on all important topics.

The magazine *Nippon Hyoron* (Japanese Review) has appeared since 1927. It was originally called *Keizai Orui* (Economic Review) and was re-named only quite recently. Economic questions still play an important part in it.

### THE BEST-SELLER

The most widely read of the four great periodicals, as indicated above, is *Bungei Shunju* (Current Literature),

founded in 1927. It is in spite of its name by no means a purely literary magazine, but is also of political-economic-cultural interest, with emphasis on the cultural side. The essay enjoys special consideration in *Bungei Shunju*. The President of its publishing company is Kan Kikuchi, one of the best-known and most widely read modern authors, who in addition to his numerous contemporary novels has also published several excellent popular history books. Since the outbreak of the China incident a special number of *Bungei Shunju* is published every month under the name of *Genchi Hokoku* (Reports from the Scene of Action), which has meanwhile developed into an independent magazine and which deals mainly with problems of the Asiatic sphere, events in China, and world problems connected more or less closely with them.

In addition to these four outstanding periodicals, a few others deserve mention. One of the newest is *Koron* (Review). It was founded in 1939 in connection with the great national reform movement and is considered an excellent exponent of the new spirit of Japan. It has quite a high standard and deals mainly with problems of the Japanese and Greater Asiatic spheres.

This spirit of Japan is also strongly emphasized in the magazine *Gendai* (The Present Day). Although in existence since 1920, it was formerly chiefly devoted to light reading. It is only recently that it has attained a much higher standard, so that it could really be ranked with the four great serious magazines. The contents are mainly of a politico-cultural nature, and it is addressed primarily to university students.

### THE KODANSHA COMPANY

*Gendai* is published by the Nippon Yuben Kodansha Company, the biggest publishing-house in Japan, which issues a number of the best-known children's and popular magazines, starting with picture-books, and all very national and educational. The nine great magazines of the Kodansha Company make up

seventy-five per cent of the total circulation of all Japanese publications. The founder of this company was Seiji Noma, a former elementary school-teacher, who recognized the great value of magazines for national education, and who, out of almost nothing, created the colossal enterprise of the Kodansha Publishing Company.

The oldest publication of this company is *Yuben* (Eloquence), which exists since 1919 and is also widely read. It is written more or less in popular style and its contents are partly entertaining, partly instructive.

However, the most important contribution of Mr. Noma to the development of the Japanese magazines was his idea to publish the *Kodan Club* through which he introduced the treasures of Japanese folklore into the society of printed words. At first, it is true, his plan seemed a failure. While waiting several months for the sales agents to return the unsold copies, he had no idea of how his magazine was selling. In his autobiography he describes how he finally learned the sad truth: "Only 1,800 out of the 10,000 copies of the first issue had been sold, the remaining 8,200 unsold copies poured back upon us like a cloudburst from the angry heavens and filled our 'store-house' up to the ceiling. The second issue had fared no better and we were flooded with five or six thousand unwanted copies. The third deluge of as many returned magazines all but swamped us. It is impossible adequately to convey the black despondency into which I sank at the sight of this incredible pile of unsold goods."

But he stuck it out. To quote him again: "Call it hope, confidence, vision—what you will—a man who is whole-hearted in his devotion to any work has certain convictions that the work will succeed whether or not it seems promising to other eyes. From the start, and in spite of the most forbidding appearances for over half a year, I knew that this *Kodan Club* would be all right in the end.

"After a year things began to mend. We saw the *Kodan Club* in the barber's shop with waiting customers gloating over its pages; we saw it in the hands of passengers in trams and trains. It was despised by highbrows and superior women at first, but it was read by workmen, *rikisha* men and shop apprentices. By and by it made an ascent in the social scale. Nurses in hospitals and doctors would recommend it to convalescents. Statesmen and business men whose brains were taxed by grave problems found in the *Kodan Club* food for mental relaxation. The latest science and philosophy may teach us a great deal, but there is something in the words and deeds of our less sophisticated fore-fathers, as told by the skilled tongues of professional romance-narrators, which can thrill our hearts and make us look back wistfully upon the old days. After a year the *Kodan Club* was doing fairly well in its sales." After that, Noma moved from success to success.

#### POLITICS, LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY

The best-known political monthlies are *Sekai Orai* (World Review), in existence since 1936, and *Nippon oyobi Nipponjin* (Japan and the Japanese), like *Chuo Koron*, one of the oldest Japanese magazines, existing since 1888. It will be noticed that most periodicals are of recent origin; only very few have been appearing since before the World War.

The best-known magazine for foreign politics is *Kokusai Hyoron* (1936). As leading economic magazines one should name: *Jitsugyo no Nippon* (Economic Japan), existing since 1897 and appearing fortnightly; *Economist*, published three times a month since 1913 by the *Osaka Mainichi* (a daily newspaper); *Diamond*, also founded in 1913 and published three times monthly; and *Toyo Keizai Shimpō* (Far Eastern Economic News), the oldest of all, dating from 1895. The English titles of both the newer economic magazines are significant of the hitherto strong Anglo-American ties of Japanese economics.

There are numerous literary magazines. The following deserve special mention: *Shincho* (New Currents), published since 1904 by the Shincho Publishing-House, and *Bungei* (Literature), founded in 1933 and published by the Kaizo Company. The aforementioned Bungei Shunju Publishing Company also issues, since 1935, the magazine *Bungakukai* (Literary World).

The philosophical magazine with the highest standard is *Shiso*, (Thought), published since 1921 by the Iwanami Company. Another well-known philosophical monthly is *Riso* (The Ideal), founded in 1927 and published by its own company.

### POPULAR MAGAZINES

Amongst the innumerable popular magazines some of the best-known may be mentioned here. The largest and probably the most widely read of all Japanese magazines is *King*, reputed to have a circulation of about 800,000. It has been issued since 1925 by the Kodansha Publishing Company, which should suffice to indicate its patriotic tendency. Apart from the purely entertaining section, *King* also contains popular and intelligible interpretations of problems touching on the national existence of Japan. This very tendency is even more strongly emphasized in the second great popular magazine *Hinode* (Sunrise), published since 1932 by the Shincho Company.

### WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Heading the numerous women's magazines is the *Shufu no Tomo* (The Housewife's Friend). Founded in 1917, it is published by its own company and, like *King*, has a circulation of about 800,000. On account of its excellent literary section it is also highly esteemed by the masculine world. Occupying second place is *Fujin Kurabu* (The Women's Club, club being pronounced *kurabu* in Japan). This magazine has appeared since 1920 and is another product of the Kodansha

Publishing Company. *Fujin Koron* (Women's Review) has been issued since 1916 by the publishers of the big monthly *Chuo Koron*, and appeals to more educated women. *Fujin no Tomo* (The Women's Friend) exists since 1910. It was founded by Mrs. Tomoko Hani, who is very well-known for her part in women's activities; it shows a certain Christian influence and is also much read in educated circles. For the younger, more modern feminine world the *Shinjoen* (The New Garden) has been published since 1937.

Among various children's magazines there is the newly-founded *Shin Wakodo* (New Youth) which enthusiastically supports national education of youth.

Finally two periodicals born out of latest political developments may be mentioned: *Tairiku* (The Mainland) and *Taiyo* (The Pacific Ocean). The titles are sufficient to give an idea of their contents and readers.

### THE FUTURE

As in many other spheres the development of the last decade has been towards ever greater numbers. The present political and spiritual co-ordination will, however, probably bring about many changes and do away with many periodicals not mentioned in this article. For instance, it is already intended henceforth to permit only about ten women's magazines to appear, instead of the sixty now published. For economic reasons and for the purpose of a general improvement in standard, such a step may have its advantages. This movement towards centralization is probably being supported by the recently formed Association of Publishers, which is under the supervision of Government authorities.

The Government's interest in the Japanese magazines is the result of their deep influence on the life of the people. There is probably no country in which magazines play a greater educational or national role than in Japan.