THE SERIES NOVELS AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY – A COMPARISON BETWEEN JAPANESE AND SWEDISH NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract:

The development of newspapers in Japan and Sweden follow radically different paths. The newspapers fulfilled quite different roles in the two countries and were to an extensive degree reflecting the societies in which they were produced. This paper will start by giving a short overview of the development of the newspaper industry in Japan and in Sweden. A comparison will be made between the types of newspapers that were produced as well as to their content. We will then continue with a comparison of the popular press, the *koshimbun* in the Japanese case, a small format paper produced for a larger audience largely containing news of a sensational type as well as entertainment, with similar publication in Sweden. Special attention will also be given to the type of series novel that was published by the papers of both countries at the time.

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At the end of the Tokugawa period and the beginning of Meiji there was almost no one in Japan who knew what a newspaper was. When the popular educator Fukuzawa Yukichi wrote his famous book on western institutions, *Seiyô no jijô*, in 1866, he found it necessary to include a chapter that explained what a newspaper was. In Europe, the press was already a power factor within the states pushing for reforms. In 1865 newspaper editors in Sweden were celebrating the successful introduction of a representative reform they had been pushing hard to introduce.

The development of newspapers in Japan and Sweden follow radically different paths. The newspapers fulfilled quite different roles in the two countries and were to an extensive degree reflecting the societies in which they were produced. This paper will start by giving a short overview of the development of the newspaper industry in Japan and in Sweden. A comparison will be made between the types of newspapers that were produced as well as to their content. We will then continue with a comparison of the popular press, the *koshimbun* in the Japanese case, a small format paper produced for a larger audience largely containing news of a sensational type as well as entertainment, with similar publication in Sweden. Special attention will also be given to the type of series novel that was published by the papers of both countries at the time.

The development of the newspapers in Sweden and in Japan

The first Swedish newspaper (*Ordinari Post Tijdender*) was published in 1645 and the head of the postal service served as its editor. It was to a large extent built on newsletters from

correspondents in Europe. For many years it was the only Swedish newspaper and it was firmly controlled by the state authorities.

In the middle of the 18th century, a number of newspapers appeared even before the liberty of the press law was enacted in 1766. Besides news items and advertisements, many of them also contained publications with moral teachings. Circulation was still quite low, however and it was not until the middle of the 19th century that there was a real increase in circulation. There were several reasons for the increase; strong population growth, changes in society caused by the industrialisation, increased literacy as well as improved techniques for production. One of the first modern newspapers in Sweden was Aftonbladet, founded in 1830. It was epoch-making as it became the liberal opposition's strongest weapon against the conservative monarch. It was the forerunner of political change and it treated the affairs of the state without respect and in an intrusive way. It's models were, among others, the French newspapers.[1]

Aftonbladet was the leading newspaper until the middle of the 1860s when so called penny-papers, a new papers appealing to a broader audience, sold at considerably lower prices appeared. The first of those was Dagens Nyheter. Its editor's ambition was to make a newspaper that was easy to read. It was distributed to the countryside by train and brought out to its subscribers in the Stockholm area for free. Between 1865 and 1884 there was a five-fold increase (from 100 000 to 500 000) of issues printed.

In Japan the situation was completely different. It was a feudal state where the inhabitants were subjects rather than citizens and the leaders wanted to have full control over their subjects. The communication policy could best be summarised in the expression "let them serve us but keep them ignorant". This meant strict rules for the distribution of information.[2] The Japanese closed door policy, *sakoku*, that shut of the rest of the world and kept Japan isolated for 250 years was an early experiment of information control. The Tokugawa leaders prevented information from

reaching their subjects but they did not isolate themselves totally from the surrounding world. Dutch traders that lived on the small island of Deshima outside Nagasaki provided the Tokugawa leaders with yearly reports about conditions in the outside world. These reports were classified as state secrets and could only be read by the shogunate's council of elders. Information was the privilege of a few.

In his book about western institutions Fukuzawa explained what newspapers were, and chose to ignore the medias sensitive political role and instead emphasized its potential when it came to education and entertainment.

Pressured to open up both from outside and within the country the Tokougawa leaders realized that they had to change and in 1862 the first Japanese language newspaper *Kanban Batavia Shimbun*, was published. It mainly contained articles that had been translated from the Dutch colonial office newspaper *Javasche Courant* published in Batavia (present Djakarta). The articles were about conditions in other countries and not about Japan.

This was not enough to save the regime. It fell confronted by domestic forces for change such as the poverty of the samurai class, the development of a market economy and new social classes in combination with pressure from the outside to open up. During the civil war that followed in January 1868 the censorship was released and newspapers allowed. Some of these such as *Chûgai Shimbun* published by Yanagawa Shunzan, and *Kôko Shimbun* published by Fukuchi Genchirô, supported the old shogunate and were openly critical of the new leaders from Satsuma and Chôshu and the so called Meiji regime.[3] It only took a few months before the Meiji regime forbade all newspaper publishing and during a period of almost ten months no papers were published. In February 1869 new laws and regulations were implemented to suppress the opposition press. A licensing system was introduced, but the new regulations also showed that

the Meiji regime had understood the importance of newspapers and it was now that they seriously started to use them as a tool to educate the people.

After *Sanjô no Kyôken*,[4] an educational edict where Confucian moral principles and support for the emperor was emphasised, there were many journalists who saw it as their duty to write articles with moral messages. A number of new papers were started, but few dealt with politics and most of them were working for the regime under their protection and published various government documents, so called *goyô shimbun*. One example was *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbun* published by the above mentioned Fukuchi Genchirô, a former bureaucrat who was now working closely together with the Meiji oligarchs Yamagata Aritomo och Katsura Tarô. This newspaper would finally get official status as a government paper and would be the only one that never saw its financial support withdrawn or its position questioned.

The general discontent that existed in the beginning of the 1870s could be found on the pages of letters to the editor.[5] In 1873 there was a new regulation that forbid journalists to criticize the government or put hindrance to the work of national institutions by speaking in favour of foreign ideas.

When the Meiji regime was united, it could control the press but when disunity occurred there was an end to the close relationship between the state and the press. A new type of newspaper for political discussion, the so called *seiron shimbun,* appeared. These were among other things debating a national assembly elected by the people. Most of them did not survive more than a decade. This resulted in the division of the newspapers into so called *ôshimbun* and *koshimnbun*. Ôshimbun, 'large papers', were called so due to their size. These papers were focusing on political issues and were primarily read by the elite.

Another type of paper developed simultaneously, the so-called *koshimbun,* 'small papers'. These concentrated on non-political, often sensational news. They catered to the large masses.

Within this category commercial papers with large circulation dominated the newspaper industry at the end of the Meiji and beginning of the Taishô period.

Koshimbun, that was based on a wide readership started to overtake *ôshimbun* already in the 1870s. *Yomiuri Shimbun* was the first entertainment newspaper which was supplied in large numbers to a wider audience. Within a year from its start in 1874 its circulation had increased to 10,000 and before 1878 it had reached 33,000 issues which was the largest circulation in the country. *Yomiuri* and other similar papers such as *Kanayomi Shimbun, Tokyo Eiri Shimbun and Sakigake Shimbun* differed from other papers in several important ways. The writers were often literary persons and playwriters with their roots in the Edo culture. The papers were written in a simple language with phonetical signs, (*furigana*), beside all difficult Chinese characters (*kanji*). This made them much easier to read than the political press.[6] The information in the papers was no longer for an exclusive well educated elite. Instead they by their choice of topics also turned to a wider audience. The articles were less politically oriented and more suited for a larger audience. They had no editorials but local news, gossips, social news and various scandals. They also had series novels of an easy reading entertaining type so called *tsuzukimono,* that were especially popular among women. The *koshimbun* were also considerably cheaper and cost only half of what the *ôshimbun* did. These were the "penny papers " of Japan.

The Series Novels

" A newspaper cannot be without a series novel nowadays because its friends are more numerous than those who look at it with indifference or do not look at it at all".[7]

That was the way the publicist Claes Lundin in 1892 described the role of the series novel for the Swedish newspapers. A newspaper cannot be without a series novel. With this formulation Carl Lundin probably also had the commercial value of the entertainment literature in mind. The audience of the series novels were of economic importance to almost all newspapers in Sweden

by the end of the 19th century.[8] The real boom in series novels in Sweden was from 1890 to 1910-15. That was when mass circulation had started but before the weekly press had become a competing factor. These novels were one of the cornerstones in the journalistic program designed by Anders Jeurling that before the turn of the 19th century made Stockholms-Tidningen the most circulated newspaper in the country.[9]

Literary material and series novels appeared already in the 18th century. At that time there was a contribution of moralistic allegories, satires, eastern fairy tales and pastoral idylls.

At the beginning of the 19th century these became more unusual and new novel types like episodes from history, war and adventure novel, ghost histories, humoristic or sentimental love and family stories from a middle class environment took their place.

It was in the 1840s that the novels started to appear and got a breakthrough in the Swedish press, which by European standards was not exactly advanced. If they had appeared sporadically before, they were now appearing regularly and with a massive amount of text, through which the press tried to increase its circulation and reach new readers. Besides the popularity of the series novels among the public, there seemed to have been good economic reasons for publishing them on the part of the newspapers. The material could be prepared in advance and was relatively cheap. There was, especially among the smaller papers, an extensive amount of borrowing material from other sources, including other newspapers. In the early days the writers of the series novel were often amateurs or the journalists themselves. But in time more established authors also came to write series novels. [10]

The content and the design of the daily papers changed as a consequence of the increase of literary material. Translating and editing got special resources and the authors a new source of income as well as the possibility of gaining a wider recognition among a part of the population that had no tradition of book reading.[11]

The series novel, or feuilleton[12] as they were named after their French predecessors, appeared in a reserved space, what in Swedish was called "*under strecket*" (under the line) for the first time in 1938 in Stockholm's Weckoblad that at it's start declared that it would have a series novel with reading for women and youth. This promise of entertainment literature however had another hidden advanced purpose that, according to the anonymous author, was to tell "what for a women is necessary to be in good taste" that is "a comprehensive textbook in aesthetics".

An example of novels of the social realism type is the one by Bjursten "Den vackra masthuggsflickan" where the problem of extensive prostitution in Gothenburg was taken up. There were also novels that used facts from recent well-known events, or even recent news, as a basis for fiction writing. In extreme cases, the series novels could claim to describe events that were taking place the same day as they were printed and read.[13]

In Japan series novels in the newspapers did of course not appear until the newspapers did, which was much later than in Europe. But before that, there existed an entertainment literature called *gesaku*[14] with books that sometimes were only a few pages thick, and more resembled pamphlets. The authors wrote on different topics, often in a humoristic and indecent way. Many of these were illustrated with woodblock prints and the pictures were often as important as the text. When the demand for certain *gesaku*-writing was big they were often reprinted and on such occasions certain publishers bound several pamphlets together into one volume so called *gôkan*. An example of such a work is "The false Murasaki and Genji from the Countryside" (Nise Murasaki inaka Genji). This is a love story where the author borrowed several themes and persons from Genji Monogatari, one of Japan's most well known classical books from the beginning of the 11th century.[15] During the beginning of the Meiji period the *gesaku* literature lost it's popularity and when the newspapers were introduced into Japan many of the *gesaku* writers turned to journalism as well. By the end of the Edo period many of the writers were dependent on other persons for

economic support. To get away from this dependency some turned to writing for the government and helped them spread the state religion and provide moral enlightment for the people.

The readers of the koshimbun, however, wanted entertaining articles. Some news material was edited into article series (*rensai kiji*) where facts and fictions were mixed to provide entertaining readings. These articles series were one of the sources for the Japanese series novels.[16] The contents of a novel were often romance stories with different intrigues or adventure.

There was one type of series novels called " dangerous women" (*dokuonna*[17]) that was about women that not only cheated, but also committed criminal act and usually ended by killing one or several men.

The novels in the Japanese press, as well as in the Swedish, were used to attract a wider audience of readers. In this sense they were similar, although they had a later start in Japan than in Sweden. Series novels were handy to have ready at any time; they were relatively cheap material and had the power to attract a large readership. This was very important at the end of the 19th century when the newspaper industry had a great upswing. There was an extensive borrowing of novels and their themes from one paper to another in both countries. The phenomenon of series novels as such was similar not only in Japan and Sweden but in many other countries as well.

What differed, however, was the way the dramas were built up. Here they came to rely on local literature and theatre, in the Japanese case often on kabuki. Other differences were the moral messages, the values and the way the respective societies were described in the novels. These to a large extent reflected the different cultures and traditions of Sweden and Japan.

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[1] Karl-Erik Gustafsson and Per Rydén (eds.), *Den svenska pressens historia- åren då allting hände* (The History of the Swedish Press-the Years when everything happened), Ekerlids förlag, Sweden 2001.

[2] Yamamoto Taketoshi, "The Press Clubs of Japan", Journal of Japanese Studies 15, 1989 pp. 371-388. Restrictions were so hard that one before 1841 could not mention the name of the Tokugawa family with out risking reprisals.

[3] Okitsu Kaname*, Meiji Shimbun Koto Hajime – Bunmei Kaika no Jaanarizumu*, (The start of newspapers during Meiji – journalism of Bunmei Kaika) Daishukanshoten, Tokyo 1997.

[4] Sanjô no Kyôken, The three important edict were 1. You should honour good and love your country 2. The laws of nature and humanity should govern. 3. You should honour the emperor and obey the intentions of the imperial court.
[5] Okitsu Kaname, ibid.
[6] Yomiuri Shimbun, that is the Japanese newspaper with the largest circulation still uses this policy. In their marketing they emphasise that they are *'yomiyasukute'*, that is easy to read.
[7] Ord och Bild 6:1892, Under strecket, Bidrag till följetongens historia (Under the line, Contribution to the history of series novels)
[8] Ingemar Oscarsson, *"Fortsättning följer" Följetong och fortsättningsroman I dagspress till ca 1850* (The story will go on, Series novels and other continuing litterature in the daily newspapers until 1850 , Studentlitteratur, Lund 1980.
[9] G Sundell, *Ord och Öden i ett tidningshus. Stockholms-Tidningen 1889-1959* (Words and destinies in a newspaper company. The Stockholm's Paper 1889-1959) Stockholm 1959.
[10] Ingemar Oscarsson, ibid.
[11] Ingemar Oscarsson, ibid.
[12] Diminutive form of feuillet, paper or book leave.
[13] Ingemar Oscarsson, ibid.
[14] That is the name of a writing style that existed from the end of the 18th until the end of the 19th century.
[15] Ulla Frisk "Populära följetonger i det gamla Japan" (Popular series novels in the old Japan), Orientaliska Studier Nr. 105, Akademitryck AB, Edsbruk, Sweden 2001.
[16] Ibid.
[17] A direct modern translation of the word *dokuonna,* would be poisonous women, but the meaning of the Chinese character *doku*, in this word at this time would be dangerous. A dangerous woman is one that seduces and swindle men. In modern Japanese it would be *warui onna.*