

The development of ‘newspaper studies’ as an academic discipline in the discursive space of 1930s Japan

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Abstrak

There has long been a conventional understanding that mass communication studies in Japan started with the introduction of theories of mass communication from the USA in the 1950s. However, as this paper demonstrates, a new academic paradigm, ‘newspaper studies’ (shinbungaku) had begun to take shape as early as the 1920s. At first the infant discipline occupied a very marginal position in mainstream academia, but as Japan prepared for war during the 1930s, giving information increasing strategic importance, these early media studies became associated with the state's mobilization for total war. This paper identifies three competing perspectives in prewar newspaper studies: an empiricist/historical perspective, a constructionist perspective, and a Marxist perspective. It then demonstrates how the second perspective transformed itself into a logic of propaganda, and joined hands with ultranationalism. The paper concludes by arguing that the parameters of the discursive space concerning mass media in the 1920s and 1930s survived to the postwar era.