

# Kyoto City's Public 'Radio Towers'

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## Abstract

This paper introduces Kyoto's 'radio towers', a largely forgotten element of Japan's early mass media history and a now scarce concrete reminder of the interpenetration of the private and state spheres characteristic of Japan in the 1930s and early 1940s. After a brief survey of the early development of radio broadcasting in Japan and the social, technological and political factors that fed into their conception, the paper presents a brief survey of the towers still known to be extant in Kyoto City. Attempts at preservation have been haphazard but there seems to be a growing realisation that these often overlooked and sometimes misconstrued pieces of public heritage are worthy of the attention of both academics seeking to understand the intersection of radio, state and audience in 1930s Japan and of those with an interest in preserving their local history.

**Keywords:** Radio broadcasting, radio towers, mass audiences, public media, prewar media history, Kyoto local history

## 1 Introductory Comments

The successful establishment of a mixed public-private television broadcasting system in Japan in the years after World War Two can in part be traced to the promotional abilities of Shōriki Matsutaro, the leader of Nippon TV, Japan's first commercial broadcaster. In order to introduce the new technology to the mass audience he understood to be a prerequisite for successful advertising-funded broadcasting, he set up 'street-corner' televisions (*gaitō terebi*) across Japan. These were placed in public squares near busy railway stations and other places where crowds could gather (Yoshimi, 2005). they allowed viewers to experience television before investing in a set of their own, with the hope that the content offered by NTV would be attractive enough to persuade many people into buying a set and becoming a regular part of an expanding audience. His plan seems inspired until one takes into account the fact that many Japanese at this time would already have had experience of this type of street-corner broadcasting; this paper covers the establishment and growth of what can be considered the forerunner of Shōriki's street-corner televisions, the extensive, yet now

largely forgotten, system of public ‘radio towers’<sup>1</sup> which were established by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (*Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai*, hereon NHK) throughout Japan during the period 1930 – 1945. By 1945 there may have been as many as 460 such radio towers throughout Japan. Only about a tenth of these now remain and a disproportionate number of the surviving radio towers are located in the Kansai region, this paper focusses on Kyoto City which is home to about a fifth of Japan’s known remaining public radio towers.

It is conventional to attempt to place any piece of research in its intellectual and disciplinary context by means of a literature review, in the case of this paper this is remarkably straightforward as there is nothing on the subject written in English and works in Japanese are very few in number. Where radio towers are mentioned in the Japanese-language literature they tend not to be the focus of research but receive a passing mention in works looking at the management of public spaces (eg. Doi, 1991; Yamaguchi, 2003; Higuchi, 2014) or at the development of radio callisthenics (*rajio taisō*, see sec. 2.1. Kuroda, 1999; Takahashi, 2013). One author who has written specifically on radio towers, in a local context, is Yoshii Masahiko, who has discussed the remaining towers around Kobe City (Yoshii 2008, 2012). Despite this scarcity it can reasonably be argued that radio towers potentially provide a useful focus for study of the changing interactions between state, broadcasting and the general populace in prewar Japan. They can also be seen as predecessors of the street-corner televisions mentioned above. For both these reasons, this is a subject which should interest scholars of media history and this paper is presented as a brief introduction to the subject in the hope that it will encourage further research. The main sources for this research have been the relevant NHK-published ‘Radio Yearbooks’ for 1930 to 1943 (cited below as RY), and a brief work by cameraman, radio tower enthusiast and independent researcher Ichiman Kōhei (Ichiman, 2017). Kyoto City archives provided mentions of the existence of radio towers and no doubt similar primary sources, while elusive, remain to be discovered in similar archives across Japan.

## 2 The Birth of Radio

Radio towers, the subject of this paper, were conceived of as publicly available radio receivers, but such a radio is little use without broadcasts to listen to, in order to provide some necessary context this section summarises the inception and early years of growth of radio broadcasting in Japan. The founding of NHK as Japan’s national broadcaster has been covered in detail elsewhere before (eg. Furuta, 2002; Kasza, 1988, pp. 72–101) so this section outlines briefly the major events which concern us here. Organised broadcasting in Japan started in 1925 with the establishment of three radio stations in the three largest cities, Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. These separate companies were formed by aggregating the applications of the 64 different organisations and individuals who had applied for permission to broadcast, they included manufacturers of electronics, newspapers and local business leaders. Some of the larger newspapers, for instance the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbun* in 1922 (Yokosawa & Tomonari, 1948, p. 26), had been among the first organisations in Japan to use and demonstrate radio, as an aid to their news-gathering activities. In 1926 the three city-based companies were merged into one, christened NHK, though they retained a degree

of local independence — in terms of programming, personnel matters, and being able to set their own budgets (Higuchi, 2014, p. 76) — until 1934 when changes were made to the managerial structure in order to strengthen central control (Hiramoto, 2010, pp. 23–5, 101–2). From its inception, broadcasting in Japan rejected the commercial model established by the earliest stations in the US and NHK was intimately, and ‘naturally’ it was thought, linked to the state and funded, not through the sales of on-air advertising but, like the BBC in the UK, through the sale of licences (formally ‘listening contracts’) to owners of receiving equipment. The dominant thinking initially was that those who benefitted from radio broadcasting — primarily listeners and the manufacturers of receivers — should pay for it. Based on the projected number of subscribers the cost of a monthly license was set at ¥2 in Tokyo and Nagoya, and ¥1.5 in Osaka. However as the number of applications for licenses exceeded initial predictions, license fees steadily fell, to ¥1 in Jan 1926, then to ¥0.75 in April 1932. By 1935 the cost of a licence had fallen to just a quarter of its original price and cost ¥0.5 (RY, 1935, p. 255).

People wishing to listen (legally) to NHK's broadcasts were required to enter into a receiving contract with NHK. Experimental uses of radio had taken place in Japan since the early 1920s and, in the year of NHK's launch, in addition to licensed listeners there may have been up to 30,000 unlicensed radio hobbyists in the Tokyo area alone (Hiramoto, 2010, p. 22). The number of contract-holders (table 2) therefore provides some indication of the growth of radio-listening in Japan; contract numbers grew somewhat erratically over the first few years of broadcasting. In contrast, NHK grew rapidly as an organisation, from just 395 employees in 1926 to 2249 in 1932, in the same period the number of branches across the country increased from the original three to 19. As early as 1928 there were enough stations across Japan for a nationwide network to exist thus allowing the possibility of the simultaneous broadcast of programming across the whole of Japan's main four islands. However, if radio is to become communication, then broadcasting is only half the equation and a significant problem remained, this was the relatively low level of penetration of radio reception into rural areas which in 1932 had reached only 4.5 per cent of households, the overall urban penetration level at this time was much greater at over 25 per cent (Kasza, 1988, p. 88).

Aside from the difference in pace of penetration between urban and rural areas, the story of the spread of radio-listening is further complicated by the fact that it was taking place at a time when many fundamental aspects of daily life were being affected by other types of technological change; radio — as a technology — was novel in that it required the owner of a radio set to rely on a number of other technological developments outside their control, the provision of programming from a broadcaster, and the provision of an electricity supply. Merely owning a radio receiver was largely meaningless in the absence of these other advances. However, it was only during the second half of the 1920s, as organised broadcasting was becoming established, that the regular supplies of electricity necessary to run a receiver were available to a significant part of Japan's urban inhabitants.

The experience of radio listeners in Osaka, Kansai's largest city and commercial centre, is illustrative; Osaka City government took control of electricity supply in 1923, at this time supply was limited and households and businesses had to share generated capacity, with

supply to businesses being prioritised during daylight hours. In 1929 a special contract aimed at households wishing to listen to the radio during the day was introduced. In the same year only about 5 per cent of households, 25,000 of the total of 841,000, had access to an electricity supply which would allow daytime listening; this grew to about 30 per cent (apx. 150,000 households) by 1933 but even so Yamaguchi (2003, pp. 146–7) suggests that for many people radio listening would primarily have been an evening activity, the relevance here being that some of the most popular broadcasts in this early period, and certainly the ones that drew audiences to the radios placed in shops and businesses, were live baseball matches, which took place during daylight. When live baseball broadcasts from the Kōshien Stadium in Osaka began in August 1927, 90 per cent of city residents did not have a daytime electricity supply, never mind a radio set.

Encouraging take-up of radio beyond the technology hobbyists, who provided the bedrock of knowledge and energy for its initial spread, was therefore not entirely straightforward. As can be seen from the figures in table 1, NHK initially had a problem attracting and retaining listeners, the primary reason often being the cost of running a radio receiver; regular replacement of vacuum tubes was a significant cost (Hiramoto 2010). The *1931 Radio Yearbook* (p. 555–6) put total monthly running costs, set maintenance and the variety of costs associated with maintaining an electricity supply for the set, at somewhere between ¥0.2 for a crystal set and ¥3.9 for a five-tube set. This was significantly more than the annual cost of a receiving contract. Having said this, even those who did not yet own a radio set of their own may well have had previous experience of radio-listening — at that time a new type of activity — as during this early period radios were often purchased by cafes, restaurants or other shops as a way to attract customers, and after 1930 the radio towers described here began to appear in public spaces around Japan.

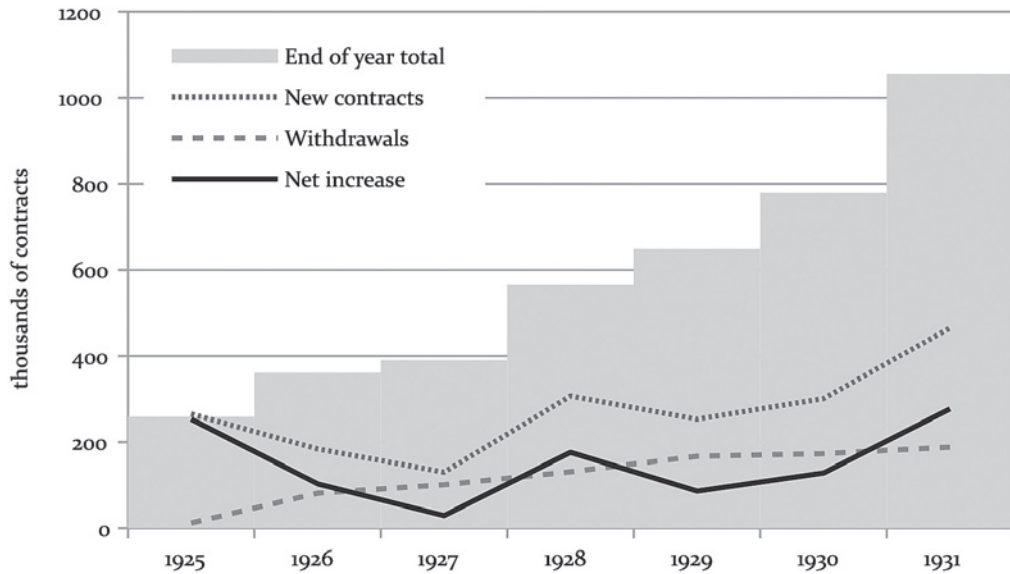
**Table 1: New NHK contracts and withdrawals 1925–31. All figures are for thousands of contracts (Hiramoto, 2010, p. 245)**

Year	Year end total	Join	Leave	Net increase
1925	259	265	12	253
1926	361	184	81	103
1927	390	130	101	29
1928	565	307	131	176
1929	650	253	167	86
1930	779	301	173	128
1931	1056	465	188	277

The spread of radio towers was linked to a growing self-awareness at NHK of its role as a ‘national broadcaster’. Over the first few years of its existence NHK came to perceive itself as having a public function which extended beyond its subscribers to the Japanese public in general. The *1932 Radio Yearbook* (pp. 102–8) includes a section on the public service aspects of NHK’s work where it outlines public listening sessions over the past year (aimed at encouraging radio listening), and for the first time, mentions ‘radio towers’, or as it refers to

them 'Public-use radio listening facilities' (*Kōshū-yō rajio chōshu shisetsu*). Throughout the 1930s NHK undertook an expanding series of efforts to encourage radio listening; offices were set up across the country to offer advice on radio equipment and reception, donations of radio receivers were made to schools and various community groups, and thousands of people attended open lectures aimed at improving the knowledge and skills of radio technicians.

**Figure 1: Changes in NHK contract numbers, 1925–31. Source Hiramoto (2010, p. 245).**



During 1931 NHK reached its one millionth licensed listener and to mark this milestone plans were made to establish 50 radio towers around Japan. Regional offices were asked to suggest sites which were then reviewed by the Tokyo office, which also oversaw the design of towers asking experts to propose designs and eventually selecting 10 alternatives. Of the originally proposed 50 sites, several turned out to be unusable for various reasons (lack of electricity supply, concerns of landowner etc) and 36 new towers were eventually built. This was in addition to the four towers already in place around the Kansai region, in Osaka (Tennōji), Kyoto (Maruyama Park), Kobe (Minatogawa Park) and Nara (Sarusawa-no-ike/Nara Park) (RY, 1933, p. 660).

The growth of enthusiasm for radio contributed to the prosperity of other branches of the mass media also; in the mid-1920s some of the larger city-based newspapers began to offer supplements, often printed on coloured paper, focussing on radio. These typically covered the day's scheduled programs, interviews with performers and the lyrics to songs broadcast. The *Yomiuri Shimbun*, newly led by Shōriki Matsutaro and with a readership in the region of 50,000, was said to have increased its sales by 'thousands per month' in the period after its decision to start including its pink-paper 'Yomiuri Rajio-ban' radio insert (NHK, 2001a, p. 36). For the *Yomiuri* this new opportunity appeared just in time to see them through the

difficult period after the Great Kanto Earthquake of September 1923 had destroyed their just-completed Ginza main office (Uhlan & Thomas, 1957, pp. 88–89).

### **2.1 The Showa Accession and ‘Rajio Taisō’**

Another element of the story of public broadcasting in Japan is the appearance of ‘rajio taisō’ (morning group callisthenics led by radio broadcast), which can be seen as symbolising the increasingly dense relationship between broadcasting, the state and the individual during this period. ‘Radio exercises’ originated in the US in the early 1920s and were introduced into Japan by Inokuma Teiji, a bureaucrat at the Ministry of Communications (*Teishin-shō*), after he encountered them at a US insurance company during a fact-finding tour. During 1928 Inokuma, the Japan Association of Life insurers, and NHK jointly proposed a radio exercise program to the Ministry of Education. This was put forward as an element in the celebrations of the 1926 accession of Emperor Hirohito, the various events for which were to culminate in late 1928. Nationwide broadcasts of the ‘Peoples’ Health Exercises’ (*kokumin hoken taisō*) program started at 7 am on 1 November 1928 and two weeks later several of the official events around the accession took place at the Imperial Palace in Kyoto. Again however, as with the establishment of radio towers, the Kansai region seems to have been in the lead here too; NHK’s Osaka station had tried a similar one-off exercise program during the month of August earlier in the year, this was run in cooperation with the local board of education and had consisted of unaccompanied callisthenics instructions, the new national radio exercises, on the other hand, had their own specially created music and movements (Kuroda, 1999) and, more importantly, backing from Tokyo.

The appearance of radio callisthenics can be seen in the broader context of the atmosphere of nationalism pervading international society at the time. Group, sometimes ‘mass’, callisthenics had provided a focus for national awareness in other countries too; the *Sokol* (Falcon) movement centred on Czechoslovakia acted as a focus for Czech ethnic feeling and a physical manifestation of the desire for independence from Austro-Hungary. Kuroda (1999) mentions that administrators involved in the setting up of Japan’s public exercise program, having travelled in the USA and Europe, were aware of movements such as Sokol. In passing, it might also be noted that some of the exercises practised by Sokol groups are highly reminiscent of the ‘kumi-taisō’<sup>2</sup> still performed during many Japanese school sports days. Radio callisthenics linked the national event of the imperial accession, the state (mediated through its representative, NHK) and the population of Japan.

As Japan headed further into the mire of its various Asian and Pacific wars after 1931, radio callisthenics took on, at least as far as the state was concerned, an ever greater significance;

A core component of spiritual mobilization [Japan’s “secret weapon”] was physical fitness, and people were encouraged to exercise to the beat of Radio Calisthenics (Rajio taisō) broadcasts. [...] The radio was new, modern, and exciting in the 1930s, playing a vital role in disseminating information and uniting the population in common purpose and action. Like boot camp, the goal of Radio Calisthenics was conditioning the body while disciplining the mind and subjugating the individual to authority. [...] Radio Calisthenics became a tool of mass mobilization, mass organization, and mass psychol-

ogy. (Earhart, 2015, p. 112)

Radio listening and participation in such activities as radio callisthenics, merging the personal body with the state body (Kuroda, 1999, p. 214) as a member of the national audience became a patriotic duty, and NHK's effort to make radio available to the widest possible audience, enabled and encouraged this participation. The public involvement required by radio callisthenics also included an element of mutual surveillance, enthusiastic participation could be viewed as approval of the national goals whereas reluctance might be judged negatively (Takahashi, 2013, pp. 152–4).

### 3 Radio Broadcasting and the State

After its initial brief period as a group of three relatively independent city-based broadcasters, the merger of these stations saw NHK established as Japan's sole radio broadcaster in 1926. Very rapidly it became understood that radio would be a vital tool in the Japanese state's relationship with its citizens, and that government control would be 'extensive' and proactive, later shading into mobilisation (Kasza, 1988, p. 88). Radio broadcast stations and relay facilities were set up around Japan and in January 1929 the spring sumo tournament was broadcast simultaneously to the newly created nationwide audience from Tokyo (NHK, 2001a, p. 61). As early as 1931, as the Mukden Incident set Japan on the path to war with China, Japan's government put in place administrative structures that would ensure their message, as far as possible a *unified* message, would get through to as many readers and listeners as could be reached through newspapers and radio, including potential listeners overseas (Robbins, 2001, p. 43). A new government agency, the *Jōhō Inikai* (Information Committee), was formed in September 1931 to take charge of this task (Takeyama, 2013, p. 12) and a 'national' news agency, Dōmei, was created by merging a number of already existing companies, again with the aim of facilitating the presentation of news with a perspective consistent with state views (Robbins, 2001, p. 44). The overall task for radio was somewhat simplified by NHK's reliance on (already censored) newspapers for much of its news coverage during this period (Kasza, 1988, p. 94).

For the state though, radio had more than just a communicational role, it also had symbolic value. The Japanese state was conscious of the role of new technologies in its efforts to build an international image of itself as a nation worthy of a respected position on the world stage. Iida (2008, p. 70) sees the attention paid to the deliberate encouragement of radio, and somewhat later, to demonstrations of experimental television, as a symptom of the mounting nationalism in the international community in the 1930s and the Japanese state's desire to demonstrate its maturity as a modern, that is, technologically competent, country. Indeed, the Japanese state's media management policy drew heavily on the latest models from Europe and in particular reproduced the centralising tendencies seen in Germany from the early 1930s. For example, following Germany's lead, the state became deeply involved in the approval, provision and standardisation of radio receivers; on 18 August 1933 Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister, presented the low-cost *Volksempfänger* (People's Receiver) at an international radio exhibition in Berlin, part of state efforts to promote radio listening (Adena et al., 2013, p. 13). Six months later, in

February 1934, Japan saw the arrival of its own 'People's Receiver' (*kokumin jushinki*) in the form of the Matsushita Electrics models K1 and K2 (Hiramoto, 2010, p. 108).

Media coverage of the events around the enthronement of Emperor Hirohito in 1925 was a *national* event but listeners and readers came into contact with it through *local* channels, by the time of the birth of Crown Prince Akihito in 1933 it was possible for the national audience to share a more unified experience of this national event because of the existence of a national broadcast network, the increased availability of more affordable radio receivers, and the spread of electrification. State events could now also be genuinely *national* 'media events'. Another significant state-related media event — and one related directly the further spread of radio towers around Japan — was the result of a decision to turn the celebration the 'year 2600'<sup>3</sup> in the Gregorian calendar year 1940 CE (see Ruoff, 2010, especially pp. 56–81) into a series of mass participatory events. The Imperial Era calendar had been in limited use for certain types of official document since the 1870s, alongside the traditional 'nengo' system of counting regnal years, thus the year 1940 CE was both *Shōwa* 15 and *kigen* 2600, plaques attached to two of the radio towers mentioned below (see secs. 4.3 and 4.4) use the dates *kigen* 2600 and *kigen* 2601.

A 1939 article entitled 'The State and Broadcasting', penned by Miyamoto Yoshio a senior bureaucrat in the Ministry of Communications, elucidates contemporary thinking on the relationship of broadcasting, at that point only NHK, government and the Japanese people; since its inception in 1926 broadcasting in Japan, he explains, has undertaken as its mission the improvement of Japanese culture and the building of national spirit (*kokumin-seishin no sakkō*), and it has undertaken this role as a representative of the state (*kokka no dai-kō-kan*) (Miyamoto, 1939, p. 12). In the article he also laments that Japan was perhaps late to realise the power of broadcasting and stresses the importance of speedily realising the goal of 'one household, one receiver' (*ikko ichi jushinki*). The scheme to set up radio towers in public places around Japan can in retrospect be seen as a temporary way to address this concern, a way to provide public access to broadcasting without burdening individual households with the costs of purchasing and maintaining a receiving set.

### 3.1 Radio Towers

The previous sections have presented the background against which the 'radio towers' that are the main subject of this paper were conceived and put in place across Japan. Their appearance in public parks, intended for leisure and play, can be seen as another instance of how NHK radio aided in colonising and occupying the space between state and citizen during the 1930s. From 1930 onward there began to exist the possibility that the voice of the state would reach directly into the leisure time of Japanese of all ages. This section gives a brief outline of the development and spread of 'radio towers' and the sections that follow provide a more detailed view of the radio towers still extant in Kyoto City.

Until the centralisation of NHK in 1934 took away much of its autonomy, NHK's Osaka branch, JOBK, showed a greater tendency to innovation than either Tokyo or Nagoya; the first public radio was established at Tennōji in Osaka in August 1930, perhaps with the specific aim of making live commentary from the Kōshien high-school baseball championship more widely available. NHK Osaka took the lead in establishing radio towers and 1931



saw two more established in Nara, in Sarusawa-no-ike Park, and at Minatogawa Park in Kobe (RY, 1938, p.240). Overall, the Kansai region audience seems to have been particularly enthusiastic in its adoption of radio; comparing figures taken soon after the founding of the NHK stations in 1925 and those announced for the March 1932 'millionth license' celebrations in Osaka, the rate of increase in Kansai was close to double that in both the Tokyo (Kantō) and Nagoya (Tōkai) areas (see table 2).

**Table 2: Number (thousands) of radio licences issued by main three NHK stations (Shōwa 7-nen rajio nenkan [1933 radio yearbook], 1933, p. 606).**

	Sept 1926	Mar 1932	Rate
Tokyo-Kanto	225.05	458.68	2.04
Osaka-Kansai	72.33	331.46	4.58
Nagoya-Tokai	41.79	116.99	2.8

As mentioned previously the first radio towers had all been established around the Kansai region, in Osaka, Kobe, Nara and in 1932 Kyoto (Maruyama Park) (RY, 1933, p. 660). As part of the celebrations to mark the 'one-million license' milestone, it was decided that radio towers, as they had already proved popular, should be established throughout the rest of Japan. During 1932–3 22 of the initially proposed 36 towers were put in place, from Kumamoto in the south of Kyushu to Asahikawa in Hokkaido. Until the first or second year of the Pacific War the number of radio towers increased, spreading throughout the territory of Imperial Japan, including Taiwan, where an example remains in Taipei's 228 Peace Memorial Park. In the nine years until 1939 the number of towers had gradually crept up to 60 (RY, 1940, pp. 277–8) but in the three years 1939–1942 there was a huge expansion in the number of radio towers and the following year saw the creation of more than 200 more installations bringing the total to 269 (RY, 1941, pp. 322–4). The following year saw a similar pace of expansion and the 1942 *Radio Yearbook* list mentions 412 sites. However, there is considerable variation in the figures given by various sources for the total number eventually put in place, for example, the Kyoto City plaque on the Funaoka-yama tower says that 'more than 300' towers were set up between 1930 and the end of WW2, however Ichiman (2017) mentions that there may have been around 450, though not all of these have been confirmed. The initial years of the radio tower are comparatively well recorded, their end however is largely lost in the fog of the disastrous end to Japan's Pacific War. There is no official record after the publication of the 1943 yearbook, as Japan headed deeper into war and requisitioning began to affect access to paper and other raw materials (there was no 1944 yearbook) but the number of radio towers put in place ultimately seems to have been in the region of 450 (Omori, 2009).

**Table 3: Increase in number of radio towers listed in NHK Yearbook, column headings indicate NHK yearbook year.**

Area	1940	1941	1942
Tokyo	13	62	93
Osaka	17	61	80
Nagoya	4	4	31
Hiroshima	6	43	74
Kumamoto	8	38	55
Sendai	4	32	43
Sapporo	8	29	36
<b>TOTAL</b>	60	269	412

Turning now to Kyoto, the NHK Kyoto station, JOOK, started life in July 1929 as a local branch office of the JOBK Osaka station. At first it merely provided advice and information on radio reception for Kyoto listeners but in November 1928 a recording and performance studio was added and, after the coverage of the various events connected with the accession of the Emperor Hirohito, NHK Kyoto began to produce its own programming. Kyoto got its first radio tower in 1932 at Maruyama Park (see sec. 4.1).

The *1941 Radio Yearbook* (p. 323) lists five radio towers in Kyoto City; Maruyama Park, Funaoka-yama Park, Tachibana-jido Park, Kosaka Park and Nijo Park<sup>4</sup>. The first three of these are still extant, the latter two still exist as public parks but there is no longer any trace of their radio towers. A year later they had been joined by the still extant installation at Yase and another now-missing tower at Nishi-Honganji-jidō Park (RY, 1942, pp. 318–9). By the time the compilers of the 1943 yearbook were at work, it seems that there were so many towers it was no longer practical to list them all in detail; it is merely recorded that there were 90 towers in the ‘Osaka region’, which had during the previous year been put under the control of the Osaka Railways Agency (*Osaka Tetsudō Kyoku*) (RY 1943, p. 243).

#### 4 Kyoto City’s Extant Radio Towers

Ichiman (2017) lists 37 surviving prewar radio towers in Japan and three still standing in Taiwan. In general plan they tend to be 2.5–3.5 m tall, though some were close to 5 m tall, and have a round or rectangular cross section 45–60 cm across. Notwithstanding the original NHK plan to have a limited number of approved designs, actual towers vary a great deal with individual installations having been conceived to blend appropriately into their surroundings, indeed some of the ‘towers’ are elements designed into a wider environment (see secs. 4.2 and 4.7). Small local parks like the ones where many of the radio towers are placed are typically now managed jointly by a local government office, usually at city or ward level, and a group of local residents who form a Protection Support Association (PSA) (*aigo-kyōryoku-kai*) associated with a particular park. In Kyoto, the local city government’s two parks management offices are responsible for the upkeep of the city’s 780 green spaces and park facilities - managing vegetation, cleaning, and managing events that use the park

space<sup>5</sup> - while the PSA takes on itself more of the responsibility for features, such as the radio towers which, since 1945, have generally had little more than a decorative function. NHK no longer plays any significant role in maintaining the radio towers it set up. Nearly all management, preservation and restoration initiatives connected to radio towers have come exclusively from local, if not hyper-local, voluntary groups.

Kyoto, unlike many of Japan's other cities, was never the target of a systematic allied bombing campaign, it thus preserves much prewar physical culture that is largely lost in other areas. This includes eight of the 17 radio towers still extant in the Kansai area. These eight towers, primarily in the north and west of the city, are listed in table 4 and located as shown in figure 2.

**Table 4: Basic data of extant radio towers around Kyoto City**

Location	City Ward	Erected	Height(m)
Maruyama Park	Higashiyama	1932	3.3
Funaoka-yama Park	Kita	1935	3.0
Tachibana-jidō Park	Kamigyō	1939	2.3
Yase Park	Ukyō	1939	2.8
Komatsubara Park	Kita	1940	2.7
Hagi-jidō Park	Sakyo	1941	2.9
Murasakinoyanagi Park	Kita	1941	2.4
Misayama Park	Nakagyo	unknown	2.7

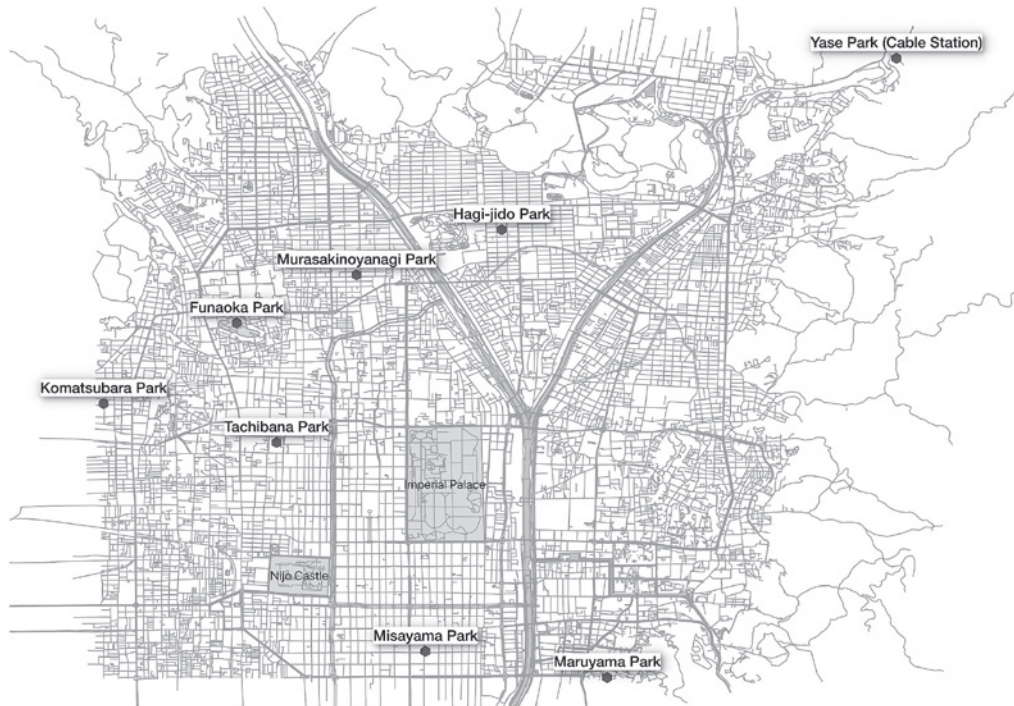
The placement of the radio towers can perhaps be seen reflecting the use of urban space in the early decades of the 20th century. The earliest installations were in long-established 'natural' parks (Maruyama and Funaoka-yama), later, they evince changes in the availability of open public spaces; the central areas of Kyoto were, and still are, notoriously crowded, under a 1919 reform surrounding villages and rural areas across the north and west of the city were incorporated, the national town planning regulations for this reform mandated a minimum three per cent of land to be used as parks and it is in these 'new' park areas that many of the earlier radio towers were erected.<sup>6</sup> They may also reflect the extent of electrification inside Kyoto City; a 1932 map in the records of Kyoto City Electric (*Kōei-kōtsū*, 1990, p. 538) shows supply largely confined to the more northern areas of the city, largely north of Shijo Road (roughly the area shown in fig. 2). The following brief sections outline the significant features and placement of Kyoto City's remaining radio towers.

#### 4.1 Maruyama Park

This tower (fig. 3), erected in March 1932, was the first in Kyoto, and one of the first in the whole of Japan. It is positioned in the centre of a wide expanse of grass making it possible for listeners to gather around it, engage in morning exercises, or listen to live baseball commentary. It is described in the *1936 Radio Yearbook* (p356) as, 'height 11.5 *shaku* [3.5 m] reinforced concrete, upper portion granite, square-lantern shaped'.

The origin of the radio tower phenomenon is linked to, amongst other things, the national

**Figure 2: Position of extant Kyoto radio towers (Map data ©OpenStreetMap contributors).**



**Figure 3: Radio tower in Maruyama Park, Kyoto.**



enthusiasm for baseball and the fervour with which fans followed the regular Kōshien baseball tournament held in Osaka. While records related to towers seem to be fairly rare, Kyoto City archives<sup>7</sup> from 1933 and 1934 record applications from Itō Kei'ichi, then head of NHK's Kyoto office, applying for permission to set up a 2.7 m x 1.0 m blackboard next to the northern side of the radio tower to record the scores of the baseball matches broadcast live from the Kōshien tournaments.

The tower was refurbished in 1982, when most of its bronze fittings seem to have been replaced. What was once the button used to activate the radio and speakers can be seen in the centre of the face under the plaque detailing the tower's history and restoration (see figure 3).

#### **4.2 Funaoka-yama Park**

The current park, after a long history as a place where locals could enjoy the landscape and scenic views offered by the 100 m elevation of the central hill, was opened as a public park in November 1935 after new city regulations raised funds to arrange a 50-year lease of land owned by the nearby Daitoku-ji temple. The radio tower (fig. 4) was installed in 1935 during the improvements to the park undertaken, at a cost of ¥288,000, in the period 1932–5 (Kyoto-shi Doboku-kyoku Shomu-ka, 1940, p. 4). It is briefly described in the *1936 Radio Yearbook* (p356) as '10 *shaku* [3.3 m] tall, box-shaped, reinforced with steel, receiver donated by NHK. (Constructed by Kyoto City)'.

The park is built around Funaoka-yama, a raised area of land once the site of a 15th century castle, it now adjoins the grounds of Kenkun-jinja shrine (also known as Takeisao-jinja) constructed during the Meiji period (1868–1912) and devoted to Oda Nobunaga. The radio tower is located on a raised path on the north west slope of the hill around which the park is built, it overlooks a broad sandy plaza typical of public parks in Japan. The

**Figure 4: Funaoka-yama Park radio tower is positioned to overlook the sandy plaza below.**



placement was no doubt influenced by what was perceived at the time as being the primary functions of the radio towers, that is, to involve the local population in the daily morning ‘rajio taisō’ exercises. The plaza is a conveniently spacious area for a crowd of exercisers to gather. Behind the radio tower is another part of this ‘outdoor entertainment complex’, a raised stage which was originally a bandstand (Kyoto-shi Doboku-kyoku Shomu-ka, 1940, p. 5).

This tower was restored in 2012 and a bronze plaque explaining its role and giving general information about radio towers has been mounted on its north side. Local people still gather to perform their morning exercise here, though a request by the group who took on the task of preserving the tower to re-install a working radio was rejected on the grounds that it might cause a disturbance to local residents.<sup>8</sup> It is one of the few radio towers to still have an active user group; Ichiman (2017, pp. 30–1) reports users gathering every morning before the 7 am ‘rajio taisō’ broadcast to install a radio into the tower, which houses an electrical socket.

#### **4.3 Komatsubara Park**

Erected in 1940 in the south-east quadrant of this now rather dilapidated park, the front face of this tower (fig. 5) is decorated with a plaque which reads;

*Shin-shin ren-sei* (心身練成) *kigen 2600-nen kinen kensetsu*

The four-character idiomatic phrase (*shin-shin ren-sei*), roughly equivalent to *mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body) can reasonably be interpreted as an exhortation to those using the park and perhaps especially to people joining on with the early

**Figure 5: This 2.7m tower, on its raised podium, overlooks the southeast corner of this rather run-down park.**



morning radio exercises. Of the towers surveyed here it the one most in need of immediate attention if it is to be preserved. Like some of the other towers mentioned here it shares the park space with two other features which seem to be characteristic of the urban public spaces of this period; on the eastern edge of the park is low concrete post with a semi-circular groove running up its rear face, this was undoubtedly a mount for a flagpole, and the park also contains a 'fuji-dana' wisteria trellis.

#### 4.4 Hagi-jidō Park

Placed in the centre of this park in 1941, this 2.9m tall tower (fig. 6) has a design unlike other towers mentioned here, or indeed anywhere else in Japan (though it does bear some overall similarities to the Sapporo tower pictured on p. 411 of the *1934 Radio Yearbook*). Whereas the majority of towers are symmetrical in plan, this one seems to be 'aimed' in one particular direction, towards the eastern half of the park. The front face still bears the letters JOOK, the call sign of the NHK Kyoto station. On the rear is a small plaque recording the names of those who contributed to the tower's construction and dating it to the year *ki-gen* 2601, or 1941.

**Figure 6: This unusually-shaped, non-symmetric tower still retains the JOOK call-sign and a plaque marking its establishment 1940.**



Standing a few metres to the north of the radio tower is a nondescript and unmarked concrete pillar roughly a metre in height, a wide semi-circular groove runs down its back and attached over the groove are three rusted metal fixings; given the co-occurrence of radio towers and flag-stands, it is probable that this was erected during the same period as the radio tower and was intended to support a flagpole.

#### **4.5 Tachibana-jidō Park**

Standing 2.3m tall in the middle of the western edge of this park, this radio tower was renovated, along with the rest of the park, in 2013; both the outer and inner surfaces of the tower itself have been coated in concrete (fig. 7). A new plaque on the east-facing side reads ‘Tachibana-jidō Kōen Aigokai’ (Tachibana Children’s Park Supporters Association). The portion of the tower that previously held the speakers has been treated more kindly and the south face still retains part of one of the metal grilles put in place to protect the internal workings.

**Figure 7: The Tachibana-jidō Park tower, shows few of its original features after restoration.**



The park itself was established on the site of a large restaurant (*ryōtei*) in July 1939 as part of a plan which aimed to expand open spaces for children by creating seven new parks (Kyoto-shi Doboku-kyoku Shomu-ka, 1940, pp. 6–7). The creation of these ‘children’s parks’ (*jidō kōen*) marked the birth of Crown Prince Akihito in 1933 (Doi, 1991, p. 174). Another of the parks so designated at this time was Kosaka Park, later also to contain a radio tower (now lost).

#### **4.6 Yase Park**

Unlike the other towers described here, this one is located not in an urban park but at the foot of Mt. Hiei to the northeast of the city. It is positioned on a fairly steep slope close to the Yase cable-car station, there is no longer any obvious place for people to gather for their morning exercise session, if that was the original motivation for its installation here. At the foot of this slope, adjacent to the Takana River that flows nearby, are a number of flatter



areas - now apparently aimed at autumn-leaf viewers.

**Figure 8: Near the Mt.Hiei Yase cable-car station, Yase valley.**



As can be seen in figure 8, the call sign for the Kyoto NHK station, JOOK, were prominently displayed on the 2.8m tower's front face. It is fairly typical in design, with a rectangular cross-section and four openings in its uppermost section, but relatively plain and it has been perhaps 'renovated' at some point as there is no longer any visible access door or other exterior sign of the fact that it was once a public radio.

A nearby sign offers general details of radio towers but no specific information about this one, describing it only as a 'rare reminder of the daily lives of ordinary people long ago.'<sup>9</sup>

#### **4.7 Murasakinoyanagi Park**

This park opened in May 1935<sup>10</sup> as a designated children's park, part of a city-wide plan to increase the amount of outside space available for children to play in created after the 1926 Takada Report had raised concerns that the majority of Kyoto's children spent their time playing in the street or indoors (Doi, 1991, p. 173). This tower (fig. 9) is situated at the eastern end the park, it is, unlike others mentioned here, built into a larger structure consisting of a concrete plaza, roughly 11 m by 4 m, and some bench seating.

This entire installation, including the 2.4 m tall tower, seems to have been built some time after 1941, though the exact date is unknown. A semi-circular groove roughly 6 cm across runs up the centre of the rear of this tower, this was to allow it to act as flag stand. The connection between the national flag, the state, and radio broadcasting is embodied in the design of this and similar installations (see also sec. 4.4), which were not uncommon

**Figure 9: Murasakinoyanagi Park radio tower and seating area.**



(Ichiman, 2017, p. 43). The *1934 Radio Yearbook* (p.411) contains a photograph of the unusually tall Sapporo radio tower, above which can be seen flying a flag, this tower too seems to have functioned as a flagpole.

#### **4.8 Misayama Park**

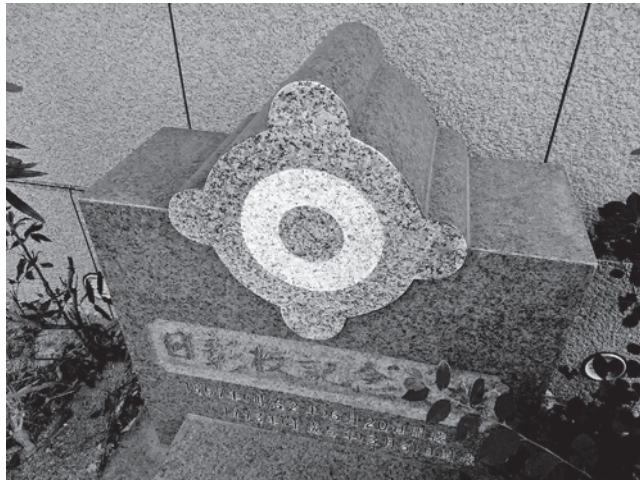
The tower (fig. 10) currently to be seen in this park was moved from the grounds of the nearby Takakura Primary School in 1995, when five smaller schools were merged into it, and now stands in the southeast quadrant of the park surrounded by a stone bench which seems to have been added at the time the tower was relocated. This 2.7 m tall tower is unusual in being circular in plan, this design seems to have been influenced by the name of the school in which it was originally situated, the Nisshō (Rising Sun) Primary School. The plan of the tower, and the bench added later, has been designed to resemble the ‘mon’ (crest) of the school, which can be seen on the memorial in the grounds of Takakura School (fig. 11). The lion-head spouts are stylistically perhaps somewhat out of character, they were originally fountains with water accumulating in the space between the tower and surround (Ichiman, 2017, p. 30).

This radio tower appears in a children’s picture book (Matsumoto, 2008) by local artist, Matsumoto Yuka, in a story which brings together various wartime events which affected the residents in the area around the park. It includes a description of people gathering around the tower – then situated next to a large ginkgo tree (still standing) in the primary school grounds – to listen to Emperor Hirohito announce Japan’s surrender on 15 August 1945. According to Ms Matsumoto<sup>11</sup> it was originally surrounded by a low, plain concrete wall surmounted by a handrail, this formed a small fish-pond around the tower. Misayama Park itself is the result of the wartime clearance of buildings to create *hinan-jo*, open ‘refuge-areas’ where people could gather in times of emergency.

**Figure 10: Misayama Park radio tower, originally positioned in the grounds of the adjacent Takakura (formerly Nisshō) Primary School.**



**Figure 11: Nisshō School memorial, incorporating the school's 'mon' crest (highlighted).**



## 5 Conclusion

Pre-1945 radio licence numbers peaked at 7.47 million in 1944, when household penetration levels for radio across Japan reached 50 per cent for first time (NHK, 2001b, p. 532). However, despite the growth of radio-listening, radio towers were falling into disuse even as the Pacific War entered its second year, with requisitioning meaning that many of these public radios were removed to allow their metal content to be reused. The final fate, surely undeserved, of the 400 or more radio towers installed across Japan is largely unknown at present.

I would argue that radio towers offer a useful focus for further research in a number of areas; however, significant obstacles stand in the way of systematic research, primarily the elusive nature of records regarding radio towers, which, like many mass media phenomena may have been perceived as largely ephemeral and thus not necessarily worthy of official record. Having said this, many radio towers were established in pre-existing public spaces and it can reasonably be expected that records will exist of interactions between NHK and the local authorities responsible for their management. If the paucity of records can somehow be overcome then there a number of areas to which studies of radio towers might contribute; understandings of the role of leisure and exercise in the relationship between Imperial Japan and its citizens, the interactive nature of the relationships between different types of mass media – newspapers, magazines, radio, film – during the 1930s and the creation of the ‘mass’ audience in Japan, and, with a focus on the future rather than the past, local efforts (in the context of the rediscovery of industrial heritage sites) to preserve these concrete reminders of the Japan’s ‘mass media heritage’ and their incorporation into community, promotional and touristic activities.

Primarily though, it is in the field of media history that the study of radio towers has most to offer; there are the various questions around the beginnings of the radio tower program itself and the related stories of the individual locations themselves, investigations here would be useful in revealing the relationships between NHK and the state as sponsors of technological innovation and local groups (public officials, radio’s potential ‘audience’ etc). Then there is the contribution that radio towers, and more generally all types of ‘public’ media consumption, via newspaper companies, may have made to the creation of a mass audience allowing NTV to rapidly establish itself as a commercial broadcaster in the years after 1953. However, all further research is contingent on the identification and establishment of a reliable body of fact, and at the time of writing this work remains to be done.

For the time being it will suffice if the radio towers spread throughout Japan (and other Imperial territories) can become better known and be attributed the value they undoubtedly have as a reminder that the period in which they were constructed, while often characterised as a ‘dark valley’, was also a period which saw a flourishing of technological innovation, urban life, mass consumption and popular culture. Fortunately, over the past decade there has been an increased awareness of the value of these and similar urban and industrial heritage objects, and a number of local governments have made moves to register radio towers as ‘cultural properties’<sup>12</sup> thus ensuring they will be preserved. Probably less than ten percent of the towers originally constructed still remain; it is encouraging to see these

reminders of the first years of radio, while their spread may have coincided with a gradually darkening period in Japan's pre-war history, begin to receive more attention from local heritage groups, city authorities and academics who have recognised their value as reminders of the earliest period of broadcasting in Japan.

## Endnotes

- 1) The Japanese language term is 'rajio-tō'; it can confusingly refer now to both the public radio receivers discussed in this paper, and to the much larger towers (*tettō*) used to mount broadcasting antennae.
- 2) Group exercises where several participants stand/kneel/sit on each other's knees/shoulders/backs to form elaborate display shapes.
- 3) Based on a dating system which puts the founding of Japan at the start of the reign of the mythical Emperor Jimmu in 660 BCE.
- 4) NHK Kyoto's office was located next to this park until its 2015 move to their current premises at Karasuma-Oike.
- 5) *Kyoto-shi: Gyōmu no shōkai (Hokubu midori-kanri-jimukyoku)* [Introducing Kyoto City Facilities] <http://www.city.kyoto.lg.jp/kensetu/page/0000082762.html>
- 6) A large memorial stone stands in Hagi-jidō Park commemorating this period of town-planning, during which the current 50 m by 100 m road-grid was established, and the park created.
- 7) Box Ref./name: Shō 09-0083-007 / *Fūchi-chiku*  
Item No./name: 014 / *Fūchi-chiku nami meishochinai genjō-henkō no ken kyōka-shimei*  
Date: 26 Jul 1934
- 8) *Asahi Shimbun*, 23 May 2012: (*Rajio-tō*) to no mukashi ni yakuwari ... oezu <http://www.asahi.com/kansai/travel/kansaiisan/OSK201205230020.html>
- 9) *ōji no shomin no seikatsu wo shinobaseru mezurashii isan*
- 10) A map created for urban planning in 1935 records the park's name simply as 'Yanagi-jidō kōen'.  
See 1935 map overlay at *Kindai Kyoto ōbārei mappu*: <https://www.arc.ritsumei.ac.jp/archive01/theater/html/ModernKyoto/>
- 11) Personal communication, 27 February 2019.
- 12) The radio tower in Maebashi Central Park (Maebashi City, Gunma) was registered as cultural property number 10-0247 in December 2007. The Nakazaki Park tower in Akashi City was registered (No. 28-0556) in March 2013.

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## 京都市の「ラジオ塔」

この論文では、日本のマスメディア史上重要でありながらも実際はあまり触れられていない「ラジオ塔」について述べている。ここでいうラジオ塔とは、戦前の日本に、一般市民が放送を受信するために多くの公園等に設置されていた、公共ラジオ塔を指すものとする。当時は約460塔は設置されていたと推測されるが、現存するものは40塔以下が確認されているのみである。特に京都に多く点在している。これは、第二次世界大戦時に京都市が連合軍の爆撃の標的とされることが少なかったからではないかと推測される。1930年から1942-3年、定期的に始まったラジオ放送、大量消費主義、大衆文化の拡大、それに加え、民族主義の向上—これら変化の最も大きかった期間にラジオ塔は配置された。ラジオは市民行動の規範となり、集団で参加できる活動の焦点のひとつとなった。たとえば、早朝の「ラジオ体操」や、1940年の紀元2600関連の祝賀などがある。

まず最初のセクションでは、NHK（日本放送協会）の創立と共に、背景になる様々な様子などをサマライズしている。都市部への電力供給の拡大、甲子園（全国野球大会）の人気上昇、昭和天皇即位を祝う事業の一貫として始まったラジオ体操（「国家の健康」と「個人の健康」運動の間の認識の変化融合）によりラジオ塔設置計画が考案がされたことを重点としてまとめている。中間セクションでは、京都市に現存している8つのラジオ塔の詳細と写真等を掲載。衣笠キャンパスから徒歩数分の位置にあるラジオ塔も含む。最終セクションでは、海外においても日本においてもラジオ塔について体系建てた研究がほとんどなされてこなかったことにも言及している。これは大変にもったいないことである。

ラジオ塔は、戦前の公と個を結びつける大変重要な存在であった。私に関わるメディア学からみても、また文化人類学方面から見ても大きな意味のある存在であり、未来へ残す遺産として保護すべきものと提言したい。

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