19-1b Communication

Auguste and Louis Lumière (French inventors of motion pictures whose equipment demonstrations abroad stimulated the growth of cinema around the world. (*p.* 562)) projected the first motion pictures in Paris in 1895. The following year the brothers held demonstrations in Bombay, London, Montreal, New York, and Buenos Aires. Other exhibitors soon showed off the new medium in Johannesburg, Alexandria, and Tokyo. Unlike expensive innovations like automobiles and airplanes, motion pictures could be made cheaply using fairly inexpensive equipment. The idea of moving images appealed just as much to non-European audiences as it did to Europeans.

The first experiments with film in India appeared two years after the Lumières' visit. The first full-length feature, screening in 1912, told the story of a legendary Indian king from the classical Sanskrit epics. Movies also caught on quickly in Japan, which had a tradition of magic lantern displays. Local theatrical traditions like *kabuki* and *bunraku* influenced the style and content of the earliest films just as early European filmmakers concentrated on reproducing stage plays. Japanese films of the silent era were usually accompanied by spoken narration, as were the films the Japanese exported to Formosa (now Taiwan), a Chinese-speaking island that came under Japanese control in 1895.

American and European silent films found ready markets around the world, but non-Western filmmaking flourished in some countries. Moreover, the impact of film was not limited to entertainment. Documentary films and especially newsreels became major sources of information. Filmed news coverage of key political figures like Mahatma Gandhi in India played a major role in their success (see Diversity & Dominance: Gandhi and the Media in Chapter 18), especially after the advent of sound in the late 1920s.

Practical photography began in Europe in 1839, and forty years later an efficient way was developed for printing photographs in newspapers. Photographic images soon became common throughout the world, often as picture postcards. European photographers, however, tended to look upon Asians and Africans, particularly semi-nude women, as exotic subjects and thereby catered to common European assumptions about racial superiority.

Non-European photographers rarely became known outside their home countries. Nevertheless, they produced thousands of images that are now used to reconstruct history. Chinese newspapers and magazines usually published images without naming the photographers. A dozen early photographers became famous in Japan, however, possibly because popular woodblock prints had created an audience for artistic images of everyday scenes. In Iran, the most avid photographer was the ruler Naser al-Din Shah (r. 1848–1896). Despite Muslim clerical disapproval of making images of human beings, the shah

shot some 48,000 pictures, including members of his own family and even nudes and prisoners.

Lumière Brothers Camera

In this simple and lightweight early model, turning the crank caused the chain drive to pull the film in front of the lens from a roll suspended above the device. The larger the roll of film (not shown), the longer the resulting movie.

Science & Society Picture Library/Getty Images

Photography enabled newspapers, magazines, and advertisements to inform even illiterate people about what their country and their fellow citizens looked like, who was ruling them, and how traditional elites and prosperous Europeanized families lived. Thus photography contributed to feelings of national identity and common experience even in lands that were internally divided by language and ethnicity.

Radio had served ships and the military during the Great War as a means of point-to-point telecommunication. After the war, amateurs used surplus radio equipment to talk to one another. The first commercial station began broadcasting in Pittsburgh in 1920. By 1924, 600 stations were broadcasting news, sports, soap operas, and advertising to homes throughout North America. By 1930, 12 million families owned radio receivers. In Europe radio spread more slowly because governments reserved the airwaves for cultural and official programs and taxed radio owners to pay for the service.

Japan followed the North American model of commercial radio. The first AM station began broadcasting in 1925, and by 1941 there were almost fifty stations organized in two networks covering both the home islands and imperial possessions in Formosa (Taiwan), Korea, and Manchuria. Programming increasingly reflected the militarist tendencies of the

government, but it also included Japanese and classical Western music, English lessons, exercise programs, and tips for urban gardeners.

Radio development in Shanghai was also robust, with 100,000 receivers in use by 1936. Most were imported, but small local manufacturers contributed to the new fad. British authorities in India and Africa, on the other hand, established central control of radio transmissions and programming. French colonial administrations did likewise.

South Africa saw the first attempts at radio broadcasting in 1924, but these enjoyed very little success until the South African Broadcasting Corporation was established with monopolistic control over the medium in 1936. Down to World War II it broadcast only in English and Afrikaans. Most efforts in other colonies, such as Mozambique and Kenya, likewise targeted European listeners. The exception was British West Africa—Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria—where African languages were used. Rather than wireless service, subscribers had loudspeakers in their homes that were connected by wire to the radio station. After 1936 the British authorities generally began to see radio as a medium for reaching Africans who did not understand English.

Africa had almost no cinematic presence prior to World War II, apart from fourteen stereotype-filled Tarzan films made in Hollywood between 1918 and 1949. A few films were made for British and Afrikaner audiences in South Africa, but the French issued a decree in 1934 prohibiting the shooting of movies.

Rural Japan Before World War I

This village scene from Japan reflects the taste for landscapes and ordinary life typical of the earliest photographers in Japan, both European and Japanese. The popularity of such scenes in earlier colored woodcuts may have influenced the choice of such subjects.

Royal Photographic Society/Getty Images

Chapter 19: Technological Advances and Economics in the Global Age: 19-1b Communication
Book Title: The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History 7th Edition Update, AP® Edition
Printed By: James Harper (carter_mcquaid@roundrockisd.org)
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