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D'ING JAPANESE BROADCAST STATIONS: Some little-known facts brought to light

by Charles A. Taylor

It seems to me that North American mediumwave DXers make the process of identifying Japanese broadcast stations unnecessarily difficult, either because they don't know what to expect, or because they don't use the information contained in the WRTH to the maximum extent.

The JO callsign I sometimes wonder why the Japanese Radio Regulatory Bureau assigns callsigns to Japanese stations. At least among commercial broadcast stations, they are used rather infrequently—more infrequently than Latin American callsigns are used. In some instances, the callsign may be announced at sign-on or sign-off only. Among the orientals that assign callsigns, only the Taiwanese use callsign more infrequently, perhaps.

The NHK stations are somewhat different in this respect, both from their Japanese commercial sisters, and from other stations worldwide, in that they do use callsigns, but only at very specific times.

Note that the last letter of the Roman alphabet over here in Japan is Zed, not zee as in the U.S., Canada, and the Philippines.

Why are Japanese callsign infrequently used? The Japanese Radio Regulatory Bureau hasn't the enforcement and the supervisory workload of, say, the Mexican Dirección General de Telecomunicaciones, and most certainly not that of the FCC of the U.S.A. Consequently, there isn't the need for explicitness of identification here in Japan. The most densely populated mediumwave channels are 1341 and 1026 kHz. Both are populated 26 stations each, of 100 and 50 watts. The most densely populated commercial channel, possessing full-power stations (1 kW and above) is 1098 kHz, with six stations (discounting three 100-W stations, also there). Assuming that NHK, as a governmental agency, can be trusted with the supervision and regulation of its own stations, the aforesaid Bureau really hasn't a burden which would force the need for explicitness such as in the U.S., Canada, or Mexico.

Commercial station identification practices Instead of assigned callsigns, commercial stations identify with (in most cases) pseudo callsigns of three letters, such as ROK, RBC, KBC, KBS, RSK, et al., or with a station name such as Rajio Nihon, Rajio Kansai, et al. This is important to remember: Listen for pseudo-calls or station names rather than callsigns when attempting to identify Japanese commercial stations.

Interestingly, in most cases, these pseudocalls are derived from the abbreviation of a fictitious English-language corporate name, or a variation thereof, which is a translation of the Japanese-language name of the station ownership entity.

Pseudocalls are usually broadcast within a minute or two of the hour and half-hour. Listen carefully: Frequently the pseudocall or station name is referred to briefly or offhandedly. Since the number of commercial stations is limited—even in populous Tokyo there are, NHK stations counted, only five stations (six if FEN-810 is counted)—there is no need for stations to continually bellow and shout some identifier to distinguish themselves from all the other, identical-sounding stations in the same area.

In the way of example: In one two-hour listening period, local JOXR-783 was observed to have identified itself only three times, and in all three cases it was only a brief, off-hand "Rajio Okinawa." Aside from one citation of station name at :45

minutes, the identification came shortly before hourly time pips. Usually, however, the station identifies in a direct, attention-getting female voice: "R-O-K, Rajio Okinawa desu," shortly before the time pips. Local JORR-738 plays a jingle every half-hour with an attention-getting "R-B-C" at the end of the jingle.

Commercial-station pseudocalls are listed in the frequency section of the WRTH, in parenthesis, after the station location. They are not listed in the Japan directory section, although they often can be formulated from the listed English-language translation of the ownership entity name.

NHK identification practices The pseudocall "NHK" is broadcast rather infrequently over either NHK network, and usually right after time pips, as an introduction to news, e.g. "Go-ji no NHK nyusu desu" ("This is the five-o'clock NHK news."). At other times, an emphatically-spoken "N-H-K" is an outcue to local and regional studio stations to cut away from the network for local news, weather, stock, or livestock market reports, et al.

In the matter of local callsigns, NHK stations are probably unique. There are certain exact times at which local callsign identification is broadcast by studio stations. By dint of much listening, I have observed the following times for local identifications (UTC):

NHK net 1: 1959;45, 2059;45, 2359;45, 1259;45, and 1502 (the latter immediately after the national anthem)

NHK net 2: 2029;45, 0029;45, 0719;45, 1319;45, and 1459;30 (the latter immediately before pips and the national anthem)

NHK-FM: 2259;45 (the only one I've observed thusfar)

There is a general formula for local identification, and the two Okinawa (Naha) stations are reasonably typical, so I will cite them:

NHK net 1: "Okinawa dai-ichi hoso desu, J-O-A-P."

NHK net 2: "Okinawa dai-ni hoso desu, J-O-A-D."

NHK-FM: "Okinawa FM hoso desu, J-O-A-D F-M."

A variation omits the location: "N-H-K dai-ichi hoso desu, J-O-A-P." Still another variation: "Tokyo dai-ichi hoso desu; Okinawa J-O-A-P desu."

As a rule, relays, although signed in some cases, do not ID individually. Some of them, especially the 50 and 100-W relays, are doubtlessly unmanned (or unwomaned, hi), and others probably have only a technician or two.

A relay will carry the identification of the station that it relays. Usually, this will be the master NHK1 or NHK2 station in the prefectural capital. A local studio station will broadcast its own, individual ID.

Generally, stations of 500W or less are relays (but not always, the two 500-W NHK stations in Sasebo are studio stations). The 1-kW stations may be either relays or studio stations. I would suppose that anything in excess of 1 kW is a studio station.

I hope that this will help you in your quest for Japanese DX. If you have any questions or comments, I can be reached at my latest published address, and at 139 Eastern Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana 46203, U.S.A.

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Some Addenda

by Charles A. Taylor

The earlier article under the title IDing Japanese Broadcasting stations, was forwarded for publishing at the earliest date so that perhaps someone could use it in the waning weeks of this DX season.

It remains to put some other observations on paper after rereading the earlier article. These should be considered a part of the original article, and grouped with it.

Station names Besides the pseudocall, many or most Japanese commercial broadcast stations announce a short station name. Some examples are:

- JORR-738 Naha, Okinawa Fukuju Hoso
- JCEP-1143 Kyoto, Hyogo Kyoto Hoso
- JCEP-1197 Kumamoto, Kumamoto Kumamoto Hoso
- JOUR-1233 Nagasaki, Nagasaki Nagasaki Hoso
- JCTF-1251 Urasoe, Okinawa Fukuto Hoso

I've observed that the three commercial locals (JORR-738 and JOKR-783 Naha; and JCTF-1251 Urasoe) announce their call signs rather frequently. JCTF announces its call sign nearly every hour immediately before its pig. JORR and JOKR are more sporadic. It occurs to me that perhaps the commercials are required to announce their call signs at specific times each day. If this is so, I haven't observed a pattern yet.

NHK Local IDs The NHK stations omit most local ID breaks on Sunday. Partially, this is to avoid interrupting some cultural programs. It does appear, however, that the omitted breaks only occur during daylight hours, so they are of minimal consequence to overseas DXers, anyway.

Commercial Networks There exists at least one commercial network of non-co-owned, affiliate stations. I don't yet know the name of this network. At least JCEP-1197 (and relays), JOIF-1413 (and relays), JORF-1422, and JCMF-1440 (and relays) are affiliates.

Conclusions Perhaps usually, overseas DXers will have to settle for IDing NHK stations by establishing parallels with the superpower NHK outlets. However, at least it is possible to positively and individually identify most of the superpower NHK stations, at least some of the medium-power NHK regionals, and possibly even some of the 5-kW locals and 1-kW relays. A DXer has some factors working against him/her in IDing some of the synchros, however, as during network feed, audio components recovered at the receiver from the signals received from all the stations on the channel will be additive; but when stations break away from net feed, all coherence will be lost and what was shortly before audible as clearly readable audio from a synchro channel, may become a faint jumble.

It is expected that the NHK1 local IDs at 2159:45 and 0002 JST/1259:45Z and 1502Z/0459:45 and 0702 PST, and the NHK2 local IDs at 2219:45 and 2359:45 JST/1319:45Z and 1459:45Z/0529:45 and 0659:45 PST, will be the only local ID breaks available for West Coast North-America DXers. But even a few individual superpower IDs on tape will be much superior to the "UJ talks by male" type of recording (and a whole lot more verifiable, too!).

The Japanese commercials (or private stations, as the Japanese themselves term them) will continue to be as difficult or as easy to identify as the DXer is alert—at least we can expect an ID most anytime. Good luck, DXers!

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