Adapting to the Digital Age

The pervasive influence of digital media was highlighted on June 7 by the announcement of recommendations for changes in the authorized list of kanji for everyday use. A government advisory panel has proposed adding 196 kanji and removing five for a total of 2,136 characters.

Many of those to be added are difficult ones like *utsu* (psychological depression), which are now easier to use thanks to mobile phones and computers. In addition, *ore* (informal "I") has been added, as it was the most frequently used kanji on Web sites that was not included on the earlier list.

Meanwhile, many publishers seem to regard the heralded arrival of iPad in Japan at the end of last month with dread as the latest "black ship" from America. Although some forms of e-content have spread, such as electronic dictionaries and manga for mobile phones, e-books are not yet established here.

One publisher, however, has taken the lead in meeting the new challenge. On May 20, eight days before the iPad went on sale in Japan, the president of Kodansha Ltd. held a press conference with popular mystery writer Natsuhiko Kyogoku to announce their plan — if final agreement was reached with Apple — to put out his recently published mystery immediately for reading on iPad. This would represent the first major novel from a large publisher to be simultaneously released as an e-book, with a price set at ¥700 for the first two weeks and then ¥900, compared with ¥1,700 for the hardcover edition.

The aim of Kodansha president Yoshinobu Noma is to establish a precedent for the publisher setting the price, rather than Amazon or Apple or the like. Kodansha sees e-books capturing 10 percent of the book market in five years.

On the other hand, the inevitable problems accompanying the spread of a new media are illustrated by the case of Twitter and politicians in Japan. It turns out that there were as many as five separate Naoto Kan impostors with Twitter accounts — one attracting more than 10,000 followers — around the time of his selection as prime minister, forcing a public announcement that Kan does not use Twitter.