

Column 1 Past 50 years of mail and correspondence delivery

This column reviews the history of mail and correspondence delivery by dividing the 50 years after the publication of the White Paper into five periods as in Chapter 1.

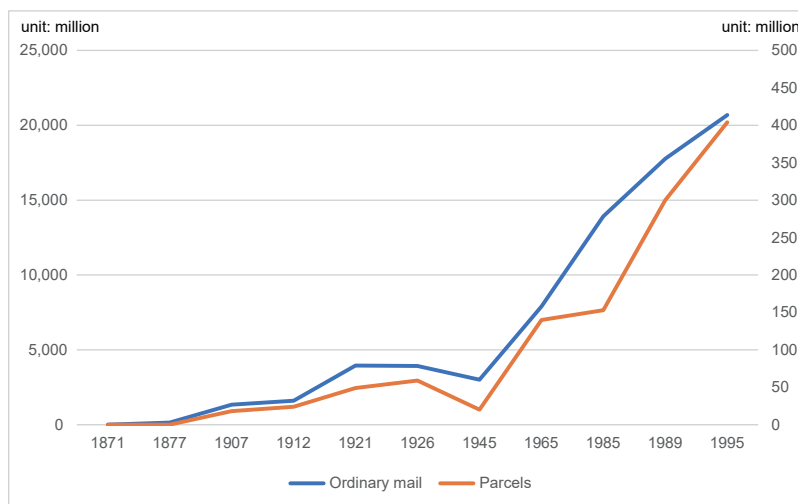
1. 1973 to 1985

With the expansion of economic activities during a period of high economic growth in Japan, the volume of mail and parcels increased. The total volume of post reached 15.3 billion items in fiscal 1979¹, the third highest volume in the world after the United States and the Soviet Union.

During this period, the further development of transportation means, including railways and aircraft, as well

as progress in mechanization and computerization, further increased the speed of postal service provision. Key initiatives of the mechanization and computerization of postal services include a full-automatic system to consistently handle all processes, from the sorting of letters to placing them in mailbags, was introduced in 1975, and self-service machines for accepting mail were introduced in 1976.

Figure 1 Changes in postal volume



	1871	1877	1907	1912	1921	1926	1945	1965	1985	1989	1995
Ordinary mail	0.6	143	1,340	1,606	3,944	3,915	3,007	7,898	13,917	17,767	20,683
Parcels	0	0	18	24	49	59	20	140	153	300	404

(Source) Excerpt from Nakamura (1997)²

¹ Japan Post (2021) "Serving Customers – 150-year History of Postal Service" material p263.
<https://www.japanpost.jp/150th/digest/pdf/08.pdf>

² NAKAMURA, Yoshiaki (1997) "Transition of Postal Undertaking over 100 years -From Railroad Horse to Car & Airplane, from Manual Handling to Machine Processing" Japan Society of Mechanical Engineering, Vol.100, No.939, pp.177-184.
https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jsmemag/100/939/100_KJ00003054331/_pdf/-char/ja

2. 1985 to 1995

In this period, attention was paid to how postal services contribute to creating vibrant communities. The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications proposed its “Utopia Vision” in 1987 and experimentally introduced “Town Mail³” and “DM Support Service⁴” as new community post office services (**Figure 2**).

This is also a period when the quality of postal service

was improved through use of information and communications technologies. Introduction of a parcel tracking system and the international business mail (current EMS) tracking system in 1988 and the registered mail tracking system in 1991 enabled a prompt answer to customers’ inquiry of arrival.⁵

Figure 2 Model cities of the Utopia Vision



(Source) Excerpt from 1989 Communications White Paper⁶

3. 1995 to 2005

This period saw major changes in systems for providing postal services. Specifically, as a result of a central government reorganization in January 2001, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications was reorganized into the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) and the Postal Service Agency was set up as an affiliated agency of MIC. Later, the Postal Service Agency was reorganized into a public corporation, Japan Post, in April 2003. This marked a radical change in the form of postal services, and was a transition from national on-site operations that had existed since the Meiji Period (1868-1912). At the same time as the establish-

ment of Japan Post, private enterprises were permitted to enter the industry of correspondence delivery services, which had previously been a monopoly.

This is also a period during which various initiatives started for the streamlining and stabilization of postal services. In particular, the expansion of postal codes to seven digits in 1998 enabled the identification of addresses to a town level. Furthermore, sorting work was facilitated and overall postal services were streamlined by the reading of postal codes and address information on post with an OCR (Optical Character Reader) and by attaching bar codes to individual addresses.⁷

³ Service to deliver post without addresses to all households in areas designated by the sender

⁴ Direct mail support service where post offices connect individuals’ demand to receive direct mail meeting their needs and demand of enterprises, stores, etc. to send direct mail meeting needs

⁵ NAKAMURA, Yoshiaki (1997)

⁶ <https://www.soumu.go.jp/johotsusintokei/whitepaper/ja/h01/html/h01a01040600.html>

⁷ OE Hiroko and UCHIDA Hideo (2007) “Paradigm Shift Brought about by Information Processing Technologies in Postal Services – Impact of 7-digit Postal Code” Lectures of the 69th National Convention of the Information Processing Society of Japan, pp.341-342. https://ipsj.ixsq.nii.ac.jp/ej/?action=repository_action_common_download&item_id=173915&item_no=1&attribute_id=1&file_no=1

4. 2005 to 2015

With the enactment of the Postal Service Privatization Act (Act No. 97 of 2005), the Japan Post Group consisting of five companies was established: Japan Post Holdings, Japan Post Service, Japan Post Network, Japan Post Bank, and Japan Post Insurance. Later in October 2012, with the amendment of the Postal Service Privatization Act, Japan Post was established with the merging

of Japan Post Service and Japan Post Network (reorganization to the current 4-company structure). At the same time, the obligation of universal financial services at post offices⁸ expanded the scope of universal services: a system was established to provide basic bank and insurance services in addition to existing postal services in an integrated manner at post offices.

5. From 2015 to present day

In November 2015, a part of the shares of the three companies of Japan Post Group (stocks of Japan Post Holdings held by the government and the stocks of Japan Post Bank and Japan Post Insurance held by Japan Post Holdings) were listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange and sold to the market.

During this period, as ICT has come to play a key role

in social and economic activities, the Japan Post Group has worked to upgrade its post office network using ICT, which includes collaboration with other companies in the mobile, digital transformation and e-commerce fields.⁹ Initiatives to take advantage of ICT and use the nationwide post office network to solve regional challenges are also in progress.



Data related to Column 1

URL: https://www.soumu.go.jp/johotsusintokei/whitepaper/eng/WP2022/data_collection.pdf#2-C-1 (Data collection)

⁸ https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000431455.pdf

⁹ Rakuten Group “Progress of business alliance between the Japan Post Group and the Rakkuten Group” (April 28, 2021) https://corp.rakuten.co.jp/news/press/2021/0428_02.html