

# Public Relations in Postwar Britain and Japan: Fieldwork at the National Archives of the United Kingdom

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Between March 19 and 23, 2019, I visited the National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA) located in Richmond upon Thames in southwest London. The main purpose was to investigate records on the activities of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in and around Hiroshima. However, I was able to find reference materials that were more informative than expected, which made the fieldwork fruitful. Based on the research findings, this paper attempts to broaden the perspective in understanding the history of public relations in postwar Japan.

To begin with, I would like to mention that “Public Relations in Postwar Britain and Japan” is a very rare theme. Conventional studies on public relations in Japan—in particular, historical research to investigate its origin and starting point—have attached primary importance to the United States. The reason behind this is related to the trend in studies on the occupation of Japan, which form the foundation for research into the history of public relations. While studies on the occupation of Japan are supposed to focus on the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ/SCAP), these studies have clarified the actual conditions of the occupation, almost wholly centering on the U.S. military. Also, public relations studies have put a spotlight on how the GHQ’s occupational policy awakened political and economic entities in postwar Japan to work as practitioners of public relations, based on the assumption that the occupation forces were equal to the U.S. military.

I have no intention of raising any objections to these arguments. However, some issues remain to be discussed to provide deeper insight into this history. Even if the occupation of Japan was conducted under a power structure with the U.S. military as the de facto head, the GHQ was an organ of the Allied Powers, and various countries dispatched their military organizations to reside in Japan during the occupation period. Hiroshima and its surrounding areas came under the control of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF), which consisted of British, Australian, New Zealand, and British-ruled Indian military forces. As pointed out in the book *Eirenpogun no nihon shinchu to tenkai* (*British Commonwealth Occupation Force’s presence and deployment in Japan*) by Takeshi Chida (published in 1997 by Ochanomizu Shobo) and other related works, the BCOF units in charge of the Chugoku and Shikoku regions often had different views from those of the GHQ and the military government that executed GHQ directives, while working in cooperation with them in performing their duties.

Going back to the history of public relations, the GHQ and the military government made suggestions to the prefectural governments nationwide to install units responsible for public relations activities (called the Public Relations Office, or PRO). The aim was to encourage the country to reflect its public’s opinions in information disclosure and policymaking, thereby advancing Japan’s administrative democratization and establishing interactive relationships between the government and the private sector. On the one hand, the GHQ and the military government formulated a code and practiced censorship to eliminate obstacles to the occupation; on the other hand, they sought to have democratic communication take root in Japan. That attempt was itself ironic.

In light of the above history, we can consider that after World War II public relations was transplanted by the GHQ, in the course of reforming Japan’s militaristic and autocratic politics and government into advanced, democratic ones. However, this research has highlighted an issue regarding public relations in occupied Japan that cannot be fully explained by this simple theory. Specifically, there was a model other

than the American military for advancing democracy.

The major duties of the BCOF were to maintain security in the Chugoku and Shikoku regions, including the disarmament of Japan’s army and naval forces, disposal of discarded weapons, and crackdown on black markets and unlawful immigration. Civic administration was under the charge of the U.S. military. However, the BCOF carried out extensive sanitary, education and cultural programs, to meet the need for establishing friendly relationships with multilateral military organizations and soldiers, as well as with local residents whom the BCOF contacted while fulfilling their duties. Furthermore, the BCOF placed emphasis on activities to communicate information not only to the GHQ, but also to governments and people of countries comprising the British Commonwealth. For example, the BCOF published an original newspaper to explain the significance and achievements of its activities and cultivate their support. In postwar Japan, the BCOF played a key role not only in enforcing the occupation, but also in practicing public relations at the same time.

Also, a relationship of tension regarding public relations can be observed between the GHQ and the BCOF. The reference materials that I obtained during this research include many documents that clearly show an aspect of the BCOF as an observer that attentively watched the information dissemination and communication activities conducted by the GHQ (primarily the U.S. military). In some reports, the BCOF analyzed that the U.S. activities that extensively covered diverse fields, such as public relations, advertising, secret intelligence, censorship and culture, would ultimately lead to the “Americanization” of Japan. These reports were carefully studied and discussed by relevant divisions of the British government. The author considers that the BCOF provided the U.K. and other Commonwealth countries with important perspectives to be integrated when these nations conceived their strategies against Japan, while referencing the U.S. approaches.

The BCOF and its public relations activities in the regions under its jurisdiction made up only a small part of the larger picture of the occupation. Nevertheless, records left by the BCOF prompt us to look into the occupation of Japan in a multifaceted manner. In other words, the BCOF records highlight the fact that the occupation, whose objectives were to reconstruct Japanese society and transform the Japanese people’s mindset, was carried out by various forces that had different motives within the Allied Powers. Among other things, the BCOF records indicate that America/the U.S. military, which played a central role, had implications not only for Japanese society and people, but also for each county involved in the occupation and reform of Japan, influencing their identity as enforcers of the occupation.

The above perspective will open the possibility for a new interpretation of public relations, which is regarded to have been introduced to Japan to advance postwar democracy. Notably, by revisiting whether there were any other elements than “America” during the process in which public relations became widespread in various parts of occupied Japan, we can examine the history of postwar public relations and how it should be conducted. As the cases of the BCOF and the British government suggest, the pluralistic enforcers of Japan’s occupation directed close attention to the U.S. military and its public relations approach. Their attention focused first only on public relations that the U.S. conducted in occupied Japan, then grew to cover public relations in American society as a whole. Tracing this process might enable us to obtain clues to better understand the global expansion of public relations after World War II.

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