

# Breaking the Seal on the GHQ Burned Books

by  
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The censorship put into place by the GHQ during the post-war occupation of Japan is not a secret. Books, newspapers, broadcasts — all were subject to inspection and analysis. Not everyone knows that the censors were Japanese working for the GHQ, and their jobs were to go so far as to open even private mail searching for unlawful ideas. While Prof. Nishio's ire is raised against Japanese who would so willingly sell out their own people this way, it is the lesser known "book burning" operation of the GHQ, conducted by the same department, that motivates him to search for his country's historical soul.

The "book-burning" carried out by the occupation authorities did not have books literally thrown into bonfires, but mountains of books were confiscated and pulped. In total, 7,769 works — periodicals, textbooks, photo books, philosophical works, histories, etc. — were obliterated from the public record. An important part of a nation's history — especially of a nation at war, the philosophy and sentiment behind that critical period — have been lost to the Japanese and foreigners who would want to understand about that time.

Professor Nishio has worked to track down the missing works and to find out where they can be found — if they can be found at all. Only one or two copies of these works remain. While some are stored in the National Diet Library, Japan has yet to get the rest back from the American institutions that hold them.

It was a small unit in the GHQ — poorly staffed and not widely versed in the material — that had to rely on members of the Japanese intelligentsia to decide what had to go. Prof. Nishio's research provides an insight into the people who actually compiled the lists of books that were deemed "propaganda publications" by the GHQ and targeted for destruction. The political biases and motives of these people become clear as one reads their backgrounds and experiences. It is an eye-opening exposé on the people who were given the chance to recreate Japan's cultural mindset by first setting out to wipe the slate clean and destroy works that they, personally, disagreed with.

Such a large-scale confiscation of works would not have been possible if only the occupation forces were doing the work, so the GHQ enlisted the help of the Japanese government. People all over Japan were selected by the prefectural governments and actually conducted the confiscations — with police support when necessary.

Who were the Japanese who sold out their own nation's historical soul? How did they operate, and what exactly did they do? Why were they specifically ordered *not* to discuss their jobs, what they were doing, and why? Why are no names clearly on the record today?

Prof. Nishio provides a treasure of documentation in this short work which shows both the eccentric choices made in determining which works had to go, and the sheer extent of the cultural and historical loss. For anyone with an interest in wartime and post-war Japanese history, this article is a must-read, regardless of one's political sentiments or take on the events. There is history in this piece — history to which Japan no longer has access.

It is a part of the occupation history that is particularly shameful, and it needs exposure.