

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Law's Logistical Media: The Installation of the File System in the Postwar Japanese Prosecutor's Office

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Abstract

This article traces the fraught history of the file system's adoption by the Japanese Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, when the U.S. General Headquarters (GHQ), the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, decentralized the PPO's power and transformed it into a "democratic" judicial agency. This is also a postwar history of the introduction of Taylorism-derived scientific management to white collar office work and Weberian visions of bureaucratic rationality into government offices, as part of the democratization of public administration steered by various sections within GHQ. Among the key changes was a guarantee of the right to receive a "speedy trial." The essay argues that, while that guarantee was meant to secure human-rights protections for the accused, the file system introduced to the PPO translated the constitutional imperative of the rights of the accused into the pursuit of efficient scientific management, in which democracy was an operationalized socio-technical achievement. This logistical channel led to the co-emergence of democracy and modern rational bureaucracy, with each evincing mutual cause and effect. American reforms invested technicality with the promise of "democracy," but as this essay shows, senior Japanese officials envisioned it as a means to rebuild a centralized information network.

Keywords: logistical media; linguistic anthropology; postwar Japan; government of things; law and media technology; paperwork; material semiotics

Introduction

In the aftermath of World War II, urged on by the American Occupation under General Douglas MacArthur's command, the Japanese legal system underwent a fundamental reorganization. Changes in the national Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) within the Ministry of Justice were particularly noteworthy. The changes were said to be about "democracy," but also, and just as importantly, "efficiency." The Occupation-guided reform of criminal justice sought to rid the courts of their wartime fascist heritage, and this democratic imperative was inextricably linked up with a larger Taylorist modernization of office work simultaneously taking place

indigenously in Japanese civil society, including, first and foremost, the installation of a full-fledged Western filing system. This was meant, at least by MacArthur's General Headquarters, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (hereafter GHQ), to render justice speedy, compared to the wartime practice of holding "suspects" in detention indefinitely without charge or trial. The efficiency of judicial administration was thus framed as a human rights issue—the need to guarantee a speedy trial.¹

GHQ noted the staggering backlog and the entropy of papers, which was overwhelming the PPO's administrative capacity. From 1940 to 1944, despite the convolutions of war, the number of suspects both registered and processed by the PPO nationwide remained relatively stable, with an average annual tally of 554,732. The postwar period saw a dramatic shift. In 1946, just after the war ended, the PPO's caseload began to surge. The number of suspects received and processed rose by 26 percent from the wartime average. By 1948, the figure skyrocketed to 2,040,447, a 267.83 percent increase from the wartime average.² In addition, the transition from the old Code of Criminal Procedure to a new one threw courts and the PPO into chaos. Depending on whether a case was initiated before or after the new Code of Criminal Procedure, the judge and the public prosecutor were required to switch between the old code and the new one. One senior prosecutor said that the office would need three times as many prosecutors to handle the current cases.

GHQ facilitated the adoption of a file system in order to modernize the PPO's outdated method of storing case records in bound books, which by the end of World War II had already reached its functional limits as an office system. The Matsue District PPO in Shimane Prefecture, for example, had maintained its case records from 1876 in ninety-nine volumes with eight hundred pages in each, containing as many as eighty thousand criminal cases. To retrieve a specific record one had to flip through the pages starting from the first one, making the process cumbersome and inefficient. The books, particularly the earlier pages, were so deteriorated and dirty that they raised serious health concerns.³ Consequently, one might assume that the function of the file system would be self-evident, especially if one views it reductively as an instrument for enhancing productivity in a modern or modernizing context. However, the PPO's implementation of the system proved far from straightforward, to put it mildly.

Under the guidance of GHQ and in consultation with the FBI, the Investigation Division of the Prosecutorial Affairs Bureau of the Justice Ministry translated into Japanese "Progressive Filing," published in 1934 by the Library Bureau. Copies were disseminated to all respective offices in 1949, culminating in the nationwide launch of a file system within the PPO in October 1950. This marked the PPO as the inaugural

¹The Allied Powers reported, "The fact that procurators' offices are badly understaffed has contributed to the unfortunate and widely criticized delay in the operation of criminal justice." Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Government Section, *Political Reorientation of Japan, September 1945 to September 1948* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), vol. 1, 210.

²Bureau of Statistics, Office of the Prime Minister, *Japan Statistical Yearbook* (1960), 503. The reported dramatic escalation of crime can be attributed to a confluence of factors: acute shortages of basic necessities, the disintegration of social order, pervasive unemployment and poverty, challenges in reintegrating returning soldiers, and the proliferation of a black market.

³Hōmufu Kenmukyoku [Ministry of Justice, Prosecutorial Affairs Bureau], *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite* [On the filing system] (Tokyo: Hōmufu Kenmukyoku, 1950), 363.

postwar government entity to assimilate a Western-style file system.⁴ However, the administrative leadership swiftly became aware that the system was encountering resistance. Prosecutors, in general, were reluctant to transition from their traditional bound books to the new file system. During the opening remarks at a file system workshop, Nagashima Atsushi, head of the Research Section of the Investigative Affairs Bureau and the principal architect of the PPO's file system, confronted a skeptical and reserved audience of prosecutors and assistant officers, particularly those representing offices that had already faced troubled trials of the system. Anticipating their reservations, Nagashima acknowledged the lackluster results reported by the pilot offices but nonetheless gently shamed and admonished the audience to renew their efforts and cooperation. He also reaffirmed his steadfast belief that, once properly instituted, the file system would enhance efficiency and time management.⁵ The reluctance among the participating prosecutors is understandable, since paperwork is often considered tangential to the core responsibilities of career prosecutors. Unlike the bound-book system, though, the new file mechanism implicated a broader network of personnel, extending even to higher-ranking prosecutors.

This essay traces the fraught history surrounding the initial design and implantation of a file system⁶ within the PPO from the late 1940s into the early 1950s. This period was marked by GHQ's efforts to curtail and decentralize the office's prewar concentration of power and transforming it into a "democratic" judicial entity. The new Japanese constitution in 1946 incorporated the American framework that enshrined guarantees such as equity before the law, individual liberties, and due processes, elements that included the right to a "speedy trial."⁷

This essay will not assess the new file system's impact either on administrative efficiency or democratic rights, nor will it detail ways in which public officials and clients used the system for bureaucratic corruption and manipulation for personal gains; these have long been effectively analyzed in the anthropological literature on bureaucracy. Instead, I will focus on how the file system was initially built and tested in the aftermath of the war-inflicted physical and moral assault on the state, and how various constituencies inscribed different hopes and aspirations in this newly introduced logistical framework. I consider the intelligibility of the emergent ensemble of the file system rooted in economic and engineering rationality at the

⁴Watanabe Tatsuo, "Fairingu shisutemu no tane" [The seed of the filing system], *Kenshū* 104 (1957): 68–69, 68. The only prior case of a government office implementing a large-scale filing system was the prewar Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After the Paris Peace Conference in 1921, a group of officials advocated the switch of the document classification and storage system from the traditional alphabetical order to the decimal filing system. Launched in 1924, it was soon doomed a failure because its use of numerical identifiers made people uneasy by obscuring the topics and categories for document classification. By 1930, the Ministry had discarded the vertical filing method and returned to bound books. See Hiroko Yagishita, "'Gaimushō bunsho bunrui hyō no hensen' ni tsuite" [On "the transformation of the document classification table"] *Journal of the Diplomatic Archives* 6 (1993): 78–95.

⁵Hōmufu Kenmukyoku, *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite*, 4.

⁶This present essay employs "file system" rather than "filing system" to highlight its material-medial capacity for active enrollment in the PPO's modernization. I reserve the latter to explicitly refer to the filing practice. I thank an anonymous CSSH reviewer for bringing this important difference to my attention.

⁷*Kenpō*, 3 Nov. 1946, article 37. See also, Taizo Yokoi, "Kōryū riyū kajji seido no tōwaku" [The perplexity of the rule of disclosure of reasons for detention], *Jurisuto* 39 (1953): 6–8, 7.

core of the political project to democratize the Japanese government, and in particular the PPO.

This belated arrival of scientific management and of a modern (Western) office fixture in Japan's PPO was a critical event that had a formative and enduring influence on its postwar reorganization. What GHQ termed an "induced revolution"⁸ aspired to restructure the country's prewar-style "fascist" state into a "democracy," with the PPO as its specific target of intervention. This also recast public officials, formerly the emperor's servants who administered his subjects (*kanri*), as civil servants democratically serving the nation's citizens (*kōmuin*). Internal PPO documents⁹ regarding the file system's initial implementation provide a glimpse of moral and institutional disarray during the transition. It was at this historically and politically turbulent juncture that the file system arrived as an aspiring, liberal democratic technique of governance.¹⁰

This essay explains how, while the guarantee of a speedy trial was clearly meant to secure human-rights protections for the accused, the file system introduced to the PPO translated the constitutional imperative of the rights of the accused into the efficiency of scientific management—democracy would be a socio-technical achievement. This logistical channel was designed to bring forth the co-emergence of democracy and *modern* bureaucracy, with each becoming the mutual cause and effect of the other. People and things would be disposed of accordingly, under the imperative of efficiency. While the American reforms invested the horizontal network of paperwork with the promise of democracy, we will see how senior Japanese officials also envisioned this logical network as a way to rebuild the country's highly hierarchical and centralized information network.

In tracing the planning and implementation processes, I will provide a material-semiotic analysis of the file system as a form of political technology. The postwar push for PPO administrative efficiency recast its objectives of democratization and modernization into a logistical mode of governance, an indirect form of control, in light of the postwar reforms led by GHQ, the introduction of the new Peace Constitution, the Emperor's Humanity Declaration, and other democratization policies. Collectively, these changes delegitimized the imperial concepts of *seishinshugi* ("idealism") and *kazokushugi* ("familialism"), which had previously served as moral justifications for the existing social order. And traditional norms, such as allegiance to a patronage system, unconditional loyalty to superiors, and self-sacrifice for the nation and the Emperor, were exposed as "ideological" and lost a great deal of their hold over the populace. The file system introduced to the PPO needs to be situated within this shifting political landscape. It claimed to demand

⁸*Political Reorientation of Japan*, vol. 2, 662.

⁹The historical materials drawn on for this study include publications originally designated for "Internal Use Only" (*bugaihi*), such as the stenographic proceedings of the file system workshops and internally circulated research materials (*Kensatsu Shiryō*), as well as PPO monthly reports, Justice Ministry yearbooks, the PPO in-house journal (*Kenshū*), and various directives issued by the Justice Ministry and official remarks by PPO and Justice Ministry leaders.

¹⁰For analyses of rapid transformations in judicial or political systems concomitant with shifts in documentary practices, see Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Miyako Inoue, "Stenography and Ventriloquism in Late Nineteenth Century Japan." *Language & Communication* 31, 3 (2011): 181–90.

nothing from the souls of workers. Instead, it atomized individual workers' jobs, and made each autonomous with a self-contained responsibility, while at the same time linking and integrating them all into a cohesive administrative body. In short, the file system sought to inaugurate a liberal technique of governance, governing *of* and *through*, things which acted upon individuals.

The File System as a Logistical Medium

The file system in general is both material and immaterial. It is a calculated method and procedure, including logistics and a standardized classificatory system, that organizes the circulation, storage, and retrieval of documents. It is rooted in the larger imperative of the economy of efficiency and speed. The replacement of bound books and other horizontal document storage and retrieval media with vertical files early in the twentieth century enabled rapidly expanding business organizations to increase their capacity for holding and making practical use of more documents.¹¹ The file system also entails a host of material things, including papers, documents, inscription tools and forms, the filing furniture, the index card boxes, the physical space for storage and for the pathways (*dōsen*) of document circulation, and workers. The system is therefore a *dispositif*, as defined by Michel Foucault as “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid,” and it resides on “precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements,” whose formation “has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need.”¹²

The central issue at stake here is how to foreground the emergent semiotic and medial capacity of the file system, which not only participated in but also materialized within the historically and politically charged context of the postwar PPO. The file system historically served as a linchpin by facilitating a “translation” between the economic rationality of efficiency and the political rationality of democracy, an interaction that ultimately ushered in a liberal mode of control and management.

Recent advancements in the anthropological study of bureaucracy have enriched both descriptive and analytical dimensions by elevating the role of material documents beyond their mere referential and semantic functions. This shift incorporates them into an ethnographic examination of bureaucratic practices. However, this development should not be construed as a mere expansion of ethnographic actors to include non-human elements, but as a significant analytical shift in understanding power and governance. Matthew Hull's¹³ inaugural ethnography of an Islamabad urban planning office is a case in point. While he

¹¹For the foundational literature on the history of filing systems that anchored their material mediality in the history of bureaucracy in business, government, and law, see JoAnne Yates, *Control through Communication* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Craig Roberts, *The Filing Cabinet: A Vertical History of Information* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021); and Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

¹²Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” in Colin Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194–95.

¹³Matthew Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

delineates the material mediation of the everyday bureaucratic encounter between public servants through a variety of “graphic artifacts”—files, maps, lists, petitions, and tickets—his analysis posits government as the effect of forces and capacities of relations among the participating elements and resists the deduction of inscriptions and markings from what is postulated as a rational structure or system of bureaucracy. It effectively eschews a facile political functional critique (such as the question of whether or not a policy or practice is working effectively) and stays at the material and immanent level where graphic artifacts shape and participate in a particular configuration of people, ideas, and things as government.¹⁴

A conceptually analogous trajectory can be found in the study of judicial bureaucracy, where the notion of “law” is construed as emergent through and as relations among humans and non-humans. Of particular salience is the circulation of legal documents, a process that not only literally “makes a case,” but also engenders evidence, constructs legal veracity, and safeguards judicial impartiality.¹⁵ In Kyle McGee’s¹⁶ lucid reading of Latour’s actor-network theory¹⁷ on jurisprudence, the force of law is understood as residing in, and contingent upon, its passage through variegated modes of material and technical mediation, as well as the indexical networks thereby generated.

¹⁴Some of the studies focused on a specific form of inscriptions and markings as active elements of a bureaucratic apparatus. Examples include, for “signature,” Francis Cody, “Inscribing Subjects to Citizenship: Petitions, Literacy Activism, and the Performativity of Signature in Rural Tamil India,” *Cultural Anthropology* 24, 3 (2009): 347–80; for “seals,” Gregg Hetherington, *The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay* (Durham: Duke University Press 2011); for “stamps,” Suresh, Mayur. “The ‘Paper Case’: Evidence and Narrative of a Terrorism Trial in Delhi,” *Law & Society Review* 53, 1 (2019): 173–201; for “PowerPoint,” Michael Prentice, “The Powers in PowerPoint: Embedded Authorities, Documentary Tastes, and Institutional (Second) Orders in Corporate Korea,” *American Anthropologist* 121, 2 (2019): 350–62; for “post-its,” Eitan Wilf, “The Post-It Note Economy: Understanding Post-Fordist Business Innovation through One of Its Key Semiotic Technologies,” *Current Anthropology* 57, 6 (2016): 732–601; for “format” and “forms,” Annelise Riles, *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2006), and Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); for “bullet points,” Marilyn Strathern, “Bullet Proofing: A Tale from the United Kingdom,” in Annelise Riles, ed., *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2006), 181–205; and for “lab books,” Darren Wershler, Lori Emerson, and Jussi Parikka, *The Lab Book: Situated Practices in Media Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022). For an informed overview of the recent scholarship on the materiality of documents and bureaucracy, see Matthew Hull, “Documents and Bureaucracy,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 251–67; and Stacy Lee Pigg, Susan L. Erikson, and Kathleen Inglis. “Introduction: Document/ation: Power, Interests, Accountabilities,” *Anthropologica* 60, 1 (2018): 167–77.

¹⁵See Bruno Latour, *The Making of Law* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); Leticia Barrera, “Files Circulation and the Forms of Legal Experts: Agency and Personhood in the Argentine Supreme Court,” *Journal of Legal Anthropology* 1, 3 (2008): 3–24; and Thomas Scheffer, *Adversarial Case-Making: An Ethnography of English Crown Court Procedure* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). In the shared line of inquiry, other scholars also theorize files and their material agency as “border objects”: Irene Van Oorschot and Willem Schinkel, “The Legal Case File as Border Object: On Self-Reference and Other-Reference in Criminal Law,” *Journal of Law and Society* 42, 4 (2015): 499–527; and “objectile”: Alexander Kozin, “The Legal File,” *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 20, 2 (2007): 191–216.

¹⁶Kyle McGee, “The Fragile Force of Law: Mediation, Stratification, and Law’s Material Life,” *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 11, 3 (2015): 467–90.

¹⁷Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

As Alain Pottage observes, Latour's material-compositionist approach to law shares an "old kinship" with Foucault's conception of *dispositif*, law understood as an ensemble of heterogeneous elements assembled to produce a particular effect.¹⁸ Likewise, in media studies, scholars of "cultural techniques"¹⁹ seek to deconstruct super-organic entities such as "law" as an ensemble of material and technical mediations, or "ontic operations that precede concepts."²⁰ Studies of cultural techniques recognize the originary hybridity of people, things, and media in elemental forms of actions such as processing, cutting, plowing, opening, folding, enclosing, and transferring, since none of them can be achieved by humans alone.

Vismann explains that the concept of cultural techniques not only "un-blackboxes" law as concrete actions entangled with things and media, but also offers a compelling critique of the human monopoly on "sovereignty." She contends, "The default positions of media and things that set cultural techniques into motion contradict a legally sanctioned, and thereby particularly widespread, notion: namely, the claim that only the subject can carry out actions and rule over things."²¹ The file system can thus be understood as a logistical medium. Vismann's media archaeological analysis of "files" illuminates how the mythic origin of the power and authority of law in fact derives from the medial effect of files. In reference to the German translation of "files" (*Akten*), which does not distinguish between their form and content, Vismann points out the impossibility of separating the form and the content of the files and, therefore, of defining what it is as a discrete entity, and famously argues that "files process the separation of the law into authority and administration."²² Accordingly, she argues that the origin of law is not in the mythic past but in the present moment, on the surface and in the spatial milieu of mundane paper transactions.

Echoing Vismann's media-technological approach to files—wherein she strategically collapses the distinction between their materiality and function as recording devices²³—Alexander Klose conceptualizes "containers," both as material artifacts and epistemic concepts that function as powerful media-technological apparatuses.²⁴ Serving as the linchpin of logistical systems—which are, in essence, the science of controlling the movement of goods and people—containers act as media to "transform the world into a moving warehouse and arrange it in the mode of standardized movable spatial units, switched processes,

¹⁸Alain Pottage, "The Materiality of What?" *Journal of Law and Society* 39, 1 (2012): 167–83.

¹⁹For a general introduction to "cultural techniques" including its intellectual history, see Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and other Articulations of the Real* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, Ilinca Iurascu, and Jussi Parikka, eds., "Special Issue: Cultural Techniques," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, 6 (2013); Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, "After Kittler: On the Cultural Techniques of Recent German Media Theory," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 30, 3 (2013): 66–82.

²⁰Liam Cole Young, "Cultural Techniques and Logistical Media: Tuning German and Anglo-American Media Studies," *M/C Journal* 8, 2 (2015), <https://www.journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/961>.

²¹Cornelia Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," *Theory Culture & Society* 30, 6 (2013): 83–93, 84.

²²Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), xii.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Alexander Klose, *The Container Principle: How a Box Changes the Way We Think* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).

and clocked times.”²⁵ Its operational principles of modularity, mobility, and standardization, which are the functions of cultural techniques, effectively “contain” logistical entropy. By extension, it also serves as a material mode of governance and control that profoundly impacts modern social life on multiple scales, encompassing everything from transportation and global supply chains to modular architecture, computer information systems, and beyond. The analytical lens of cultural techniques thus shifts away from content or governing rules, and instead focuses on their historically contingent, media-specific material operations. It is concerned with the semiotic operation of their indexical connectivity with and distinction from other entities, which then bring forth institutions, ideologies, social formation, and other normative underpinnings and epistemic structures of society that often dissimulate their material and technical origins.

In the process of implementing the file system, public prosecutors and clerks often conceptualized it in terms akin to large-scale infrastructure—railroads, pipelines, or underwater cables—that serves to connect and network both individuals and objects. One common metaphor was an irrigation system (Japanese irrigation relies on a complex system of canals). One officer from the Tokyo High PPO,²⁶ for example, offered the following advice to his fellow participants in a workshop on how to divide filing tasks: “You need to figure out exactly who makes which document, when (in which order) to make them, and on what basis documents and cards can be produced. Then, you need to set forth the flow of work and think out from which part of the flow you should draw water.” The logistical trajectory of the file as an “irrigation system” was built into the office’s layout, and configured and channeled the workflow and the social relations in the PPO as part of its administrative infrastructure. John Durham Peters conceptualizes such channels as “logistical media”: “[T]he infrastructural role of media, which includes storage, transmission and processing systems. Logistical media are media that don’t necessarily have any content, but they coordinate or orient us in space and time. Logistical systems are also naturalized in that they do not appear political or contentious in any way....”²⁷

Such a technical medium, a logistical form of power, anonymously orients and organizes people and things in an order without appearing to be political or contentious,

²⁵Ibid., 5.

²⁶Hōmufu Kenmukyoku, *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite*, 66.

²⁷Carolyn L. Kane and John Durham Peters, “Speaking into the iPhone: An Interview with John Durham Peters, Or, Ghostly Cessation for the Digital Age,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, 2 (2010): 119–33, 123, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0196859910365908>. For the recent development of this concept, see Matthew Hockenberry, Nicole Starosielski, and Susan Zieger, *Assembly Codes: The Logistics of Media* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021); Liam Cole Young, *List Cultures: Knowledge and Poetics from Mesopotamia to BuzzFeed* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017); Ned Rossiter, “Coded Vanilla: Logistical Media and the Determination of Action,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, 1 (2015): 135–52; Klose, “*Container Principle*.” Roman Jakobson’s concept of “channel” offers a semiotic framework to the discussion on logistical media. As an element of communication, it is a function to open or close the channel of communication. *There is no linguistic meaning, no semantic or symbolic content, involved*. What is mediated is the sheer effect of social bonding or its absence or refusal. Channel is thus “a contact without a message,” Roman Jakobson, “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,” in Thomas Albert Sebeok, ed., *Style in Language* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960). For further theorizations of the channel as an infrastructure of communication, see Paul Kockelman, “Enemies, Parasites, and Noise: How to Take Up Residence in a System Without Becoming a Term in It,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20, 2 (2010): 406–21; and Julia Elyachar, “Phatic Labor, Infrastructure, and the Question of Empowerment in Cairo,” *American Ethnologist* 37, 3 (2010): 452–64.

and it thus underwrites a technology for “the conduct of conduct,”²⁸ an originary form of liberal governmentality. Logistical media are thus a specific form of “the government of things,”²⁹ whose power derives neither from rules nor disciplines, but from “disposition.” Government, for Foucault, “is not a matter of imposing a law on men, but of the disposition of things, that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, or, of as far as possible employing laws as tactics; arranging things so that this or that end may be achieved through a certain number of means.”³⁰ The file system in the postwar PPO served as a device of control less over people than over the environment, as in the apt metaphor of an canal, a “milieu,” “ensure[s] a certain allocation of people in space, a *canalization* of their circulation, as well as the coding of their reciprocal relations.”³¹

We will see that the engineering rationality of the file system that derived from the factory assembly line came to be implanted into the apparatus of the troubled postwar PPO, both as a government office and as a judicial authority disposing of cases. The mechanism of power that underlay the lofty authority of law and government was in fact made of paper.

The Postwar PPO

The Japanese public prosecutor, established in 1982, was modeled in part on the thirteenth-century French *Procureur de roi*.³² Serving as a quasi-judicial career civil servant, the prosecutor represents the public interest, akin to the U.S. model of “*United States v...*” or “*The State v...*” Until 1947, Japan’s criminal procedure was non-adversarial, and the courts and the Public Prosecutor’s Office, then called Public Prosecutor’s Bureau, functioned as administrative branches under a unified Ministry of Justice. In court, the judge and prosecutor sat together in robes of slightly different hues looking down from a bench on the accused and defense attorney. Mirroring France’s *Juge d’instruction*, prewar Japanese courts oversaw investigations via pretrial hearings, and also wielded authority over the judicial police, who were the main actors in criminal investigations.

By the 1930s, Japan’s Public Prosecutor’s Bureau had amassed significant authority, partly to quell internal and external threats amid its colonial expansion. This period witnessed increasingly authoritarian practices, later deemed abuses of power. After 1945, the Allied Forces instigated a comprehensive governmental overhaul aimed at “reviving and strengthening democratic tendencies.” The Bureau, criticized for “secret inquisitions,” became a focal point of reform. Under the postwar judiciary restructuring, courts gained independence from the Ministry of Justice, culminating in a judiciary led by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.³³ Consequently, the Bureau was reconstituted as the PPO, under a new law.³⁴ Though

²⁸Michel Foucault, *Power*, James D. Faubion, ed, Robert Hurley, trans. (New York: New Press, 2015), 341.

²⁹Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, Michel Senellart, ed. (New York: Picador/Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 97. See also Thomas Lemke, *The Government of Things* (New York: NYU Press, 2021).

³⁰Foucault, *Security*, 99.

³¹Michel Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1982) 239–56, 253; and 2007: 20–22.

³²Shigeki Ito, *Kensatsuchōhō chikujō kaisetsu* (Tokyo: Ryōsho Fukyukai, 1986), 1.

³³Saibanshōhō [Courts Act], Law Number 59 of 16 April 1947.

³⁴Kensatsuchōhō [PPO Law], Law Number 60 of 16 April 1947.

the PPO was organizationally within and remained part of the Ministry of Justice, it was designated “independent.” Officially, the Minister of Justice oversaw the Prosecutor-General but, ostensibly, not individual prosecutors or cases. With an unmistakable trace of the U.S. Bill of Rights, Japan’s 1946 Constitution³⁵ now foregrounded due process and procedural justice over substantive justice. Subsequent revisions to foundational laws like the Code of Criminal Procedure were aligned with these new constitutional principles, rooted in the Anglo-American adversarial system.

Efficiency as Democracy and Democracy As Efficiency

Postwar democratization of the justice system also meant aligning judicial process with the constitutional imperative of protecting civil rights through a speedy trial, which required expediting processing. This is where *efficiency* figured in as a constitutional issue in the postwar reconstruction of the justice system, and where scientific management of various sorts—including the humble file cabinet for papers—found its way into the administration of justice. The reformers’ view of the inescapable linkage between non-democratic practices and inefficient documentary practices was clear. The GHQ’s Public Administration Division (succeeded by the Civil Service Division) formulated and secured adoption of the Civil Service Law of 1947, which declared that as its purpose “to assure the people of democratic and efficient administration of public service by establishing basic standards....”³⁶ In his 1946 memorandum addressed to Brigadier General Courtney Whitney (chief of the Government Section, GHQ), Lieutenant Milton J. Esmen of the Public Administration Division in the Government Section (a former member on the United States Civil Service Commission) made a forceful recommendation that GHQ issue “guidance on the proper techniques to employ”³⁷ in modernizing the Japanese bureaucracy, which, he recognized, was still impaired by “the major bulwarks of feudal and totalitarian Japan.” Existing Japanese bureaucrats and officials were “incompetent to manage a modern democratic society,” because “modern democratic government requires a democratic and efficient public service.”³⁸

The PPO’s file system was not a mere carryover from prewar Taylorist principles.³⁹ It is better understood as part of the postwar “re-introduction” of

³⁵Abe, Haruo, “Self-Incrimination. Japan and the United States,” *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 46, 5 (1956): 613–31; Richard B. Appleton, “Reforms in Japanese Criminal Procedure under Allied Occupation,” *Washington Law Review and State Bar Journal* 24, 4 (1949), <https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wlr/vol24/iss4/13/>; Howard Meyers, “Revisions of the Criminal Code of Japan during the Occupation,” *Washington Law Review and State Bar Journal* 25 (1950): 104–34; Alfred C. Oppler, “The Reform of Japan’s Legal and Judicial System under Allied Occupation,” *Washington Law Review* 24, 3 (1949): 290–324; Daniel H. Foote, “Confessions and the Right to Silence in Japan,” *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 21, 3 (1991): 415–88.

³⁶APO 500, 30 Jan. 1946, Memorandum for Chief, Government Section on Japanese Civil Service Reform. *Political Reorientation of Japan*, vol. 1, 587.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹For a history of Taylorism and scientific management and their enduring impact upon Japanese industry and its business landscape, see William Tsutsui, *Manufacturing Ideology: Scientific Management in Twentieth-Century Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

scientific management, initially through GHQ and its Civil Communication Section initiatives. Japan adopted Taylorism and scientific management principles early on, starting in the 1910s. However, as prewar Japanese proponents of Taylorism recounted, until the postwar era, excepting certain isolated practices, there was little robust engagement with these principles within the realm of office administration, particularly in white-collar and governmental sectors.⁴⁰ Ueno Yōichi, often regarded as the pioneer of Japanese scientific management, observe, “As was the case in the States, in Japan too, initially, the focus was primarily on researching production efficiency. Office work was thought to be something that would somehow get sorted out if left to the office workers.... The issue of administrative efficiency in Japan began to be rigorously studied only after the end of the war.”⁴¹

The American literature on office administration management, re-introduced to Japan in the postwar era, was inflected with the language of cybernetic principles such as “control, feedback loop, and communication.” They no longer constituted a mere toolkit for enhancing labor-time efficiency, but shifted to embodying an imaginary of an interconnected, self-regulating “system” (*shisutemu*). This marked a conceptual transition from viewing office work as a “necessary evil” (*hitsuyō-aku*) ancillary to business operations, to recognizing it as the “brain” or “central nerve” essential to organizational success.

Some were lucky enough to witness those advanced office management practices personally. In one of the famous study missions to the United States orchestrated by the Japan Productivity Center—established in 1955 as a collaborative venture between Japan’s private and public sectors—a delegation of thirteen eminent corporate administrators and management experts toured companies across seven major cities to scrutinize advanced office management practices. One participant noted how “office” in the American business organizations is “the focal point of the company, the center of communication, facilitating interdepartmental coordination through record processing to enhance operations.”⁴² The mission’s report highlighted emergent technologies like the Punch Card System, Electronic Data

⁴⁰For an early publication on office document management in Japan, see Tokitomo Fuchi, *Bunsho seirihō no riron to jissai* [The theory and practice of document management] (Tokyo: Shinbunkan, 1932). The widespread adoption of the file system also needed the postwar domestic steel industry recovery, industrial production of filing cabinets, and the Japanese Industrial Standards Committee’s joining of ISO (the International Standards Organization) for the standardization of both paper and cabinet sizes in the early 1950s. See, *Itōki hyakunenshi* [Itoki, its first one-hundred-year history] (Tokyo: Itoki, 1991), 49–50.

⁴¹Ueno Yōichi, “Maegaki [Foreword],” for Misawa Hiroshi, *Kanchō jimu nō ritsu* [Office work efficiency in the public office] (Tokyo: Chūō-sha, 1950), 1–2. As early as 1914, U.S. pioneers like John William Schulze had pointed out the industrial sector’s “lion’s share of attention” within scientific management, and attributed the lag in clerical applications to prevalent perceptions that office was separate from factory work. See John William Schulze, *The American Office: Its Organization, Management and Records* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1914), 9.

⁴²*Nihon seisensei honbu, Jimu kanri: jimukanri senmon shiseatsudan hōkokusho* (Productivity Report, 29) [Office management: office management special mission report] (Tokyo: Japan Productivity Center, 1958), 220. See also *Nihon seisensei honbu, America no jimukanri* [Office management in America] (Tokyo: Japan Productivity Center, 1957). It is also noteworthy that a 1906 assertion by Dicksee and Blain that “the office [is] to a business [what] the mainspring is to a watch” and that it is “the nerve center of the entire mechanism,” unexpectedly found renewed resonance in postwar Japan. See Dicksee Lawrence Robert and Herbert Edwin Blain, *Office Organization and Management Including Secretarial Work* (London: Sir I. Pitman & Sons, 1906): 1–2.

Processing Systems, Information Retrieval, and the Management Information System, through which paperwork was transformed into new modes of existence as “data” and “information.” Most notably, they glimpsed the automated future of office administration that would become possible through such new technologies coordinating and communicating with each other.

Taylor’s maxim that “efficiency is the hope of democracy”⁴³ was reinterpreted to cultivate “modern” social relations in white-collar environments, free from the personal authority of supervisors, prewar feudalism, abuse, and servitude. The “feudal” was to be supplanted by democratic techniques, giving way to liberal governance rooted in rationality and science. This new vision of political freedom was at the core of new designs for liberal capitalism, more “open” markets, and more “free” economic actors that the American reformers had in mind when envisioning Japanese democracy and its citizens. Coinciding with this was the notion of liberal—or distanced, indirect—rule. As economic reconstruction became intertwined with democratization, the term “scientific management,” marred by the connotations of the prewar factory operations, was supplanted by “productivity” (*seisan-sei*). Governmental and quasi-public entities like the Japan Productivity Center championed the idea that administration should be driven by organizational prowess rather than individual personalities,⁴⁴ and that office work should shift “from people to documents, from documents to files.”⁴⁵

Steel filing cabinets also glowed with the aura of modernity. Traditionally, records were organized in commercial ledger-like bound books, commonly called *daifukuchō*, literally “a book of great fortune and prosperity.” One entered a written notation in a bound book based on a chronological, alphabetical, or numerical order—the order allowed the case to be found again later. Replacing *daifukuchō* with the file signaled the “democratization of paperwork,” as stated on a banner popular at that time (see figure 1). The replacement of hefty bound books with the sleek file cabinet and index cards, and democratizing paperwork through the file system, were meant to liberate official information from the arcane and personal authority and quasi-ownership of the book, since personal ownership of information was often at the core of the pre-Occupation system. Files only belonged to no one person. The file system as scientific management was thus imbued with moral value, not unlike the vision of a truly democratic system invested in cybernetics during the Cold War era in Europe and the United States, in which the promise of “information” confounded control with democracy.⁴⁶

⁴³Frederick Winslow Taylor, “The Principles of Scientific Management,” in J. M. Shafritz, J. S. Otto, and Y. S. Jang, eds., *Classics of Organizational Theory* (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005[1916]), 64.

⁴⁴Minutes of House of Representatives, Cabinet Committee, no. 2, 24 Mar. 1949. Katsuhiko Onogi, Deputy Chief of Administrative Management Agency, in his report on the on-going readjustment of the administrative structure, told the committee that the measures to improve the efficiency of administrative management included “repealing of the conventional ‘administration by people’ and establishing ‘the administration by the organization.’” At: <http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/SENTAKU/syugiin/005/0388/00503240388002a.html>.

⁴⁵Atsushi Nagashima, “Hitoyori bunsho e bunsho yori fairu e” [From people to documents, from documents to files] *Jimunōritsu* 2, 8 (1950): 20–23.

⁴⁶Kregg Hetherington, “Promising Information: Democracy, Development, and the Remapping of Latin America,” *Economy and Society* 42, 2 (2012): 127–50. See also Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Steward Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).



Figure 1. “The Democratization of Office Work: From *Daifukuchō* to the Filing System” [daifukuchōshiki kara fairingu shisutemu e: jimu no minshuka] *Nōritsudō* 17, 11 (1950): 13–14.

Democratization of the PPO

What survived the sweeping reorganization of the PPO by the Allied Occupation was the so called “principle of the united body of prosecutors” (*kensatsukan dōittai no gensoku*) (see figure 2).⁴⁷ Derived from the French system, “*règle de l’indivisibilité du parquet*,” meaning “the rule of the indivisibility of public prosecutors,” this refers to the legal and political imaginary in which “the public prosecutors are organized in the nationally united and hierarchical collective, with regards to prosecutorial administration, they are to act as an indivisible whole.”⁴⁸ The public prosecutor is thus both one and many, concrete yet abstract, acting as an individual professional, and at the same time embodying the abstraction of the entirety of the Prosecutor’s Office as one. It is an ultimate aporetic body politic.

One side of the principle is called *dokuninsei*, which means that each and every prosecutor holds the full power of the PPO and ultimately represents the nation, with no requirement to consult with supervisors or even peers. At the same time, individual prosecutors are required to act as one body and intention within the office in its hierarchical command structure.⁴⁹ This is why the PPO is referred to in the singular; only buildings and physical offices can be pluralized. So, the other side of “principle of the united body of the prosecutors” is its mandate of absolute obedience of the subordinate to the superior’s command (*jōmei kafuku*), a clearly vertical unity that is called “one taut thread.” In the mid-1950s, *Kenshū*, the PPO house organ, carried several prize-winning essays on the theme of the democratization of prosecution, authored by both public prosecutors and public prosecutors’ assistant officers. The essays commonly began with critical reflection upon the prewar PPO as “fascist” (*kensatsu fassho*, prosecutorial fascism), arbitrary, unconstrained, elitist, and cliquish—a hotbed of state abuse and authoritarianism. The authors argued that the remedy for rooting out any remaining vestiges of all this was (democratically) “rationalizing and modernizing” human relationships in the office.

Another essay⁵⁰ pointed out the persistent, blatant hierarchy within PPO workplace organization and underscored how assistant prosecutors, in particular,

⁴⁷This translation is more faithful to its French original phrase.

⁴⁸Shigemitsu Dando, *Shin keiji soshōhō kōyō: kaiteiban* (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1949), 96.

⁴⁹See, Chiaki Kashiwagi, *Keiji Soshōhō* [Code of criminal procedure] (Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 1970), 125.

⁵⁰Jisaku Taniguchi, “Kensatsu no minshuka” [The democratization of the PPO], *Kenshū* 100 (1956): 74–79, 78.

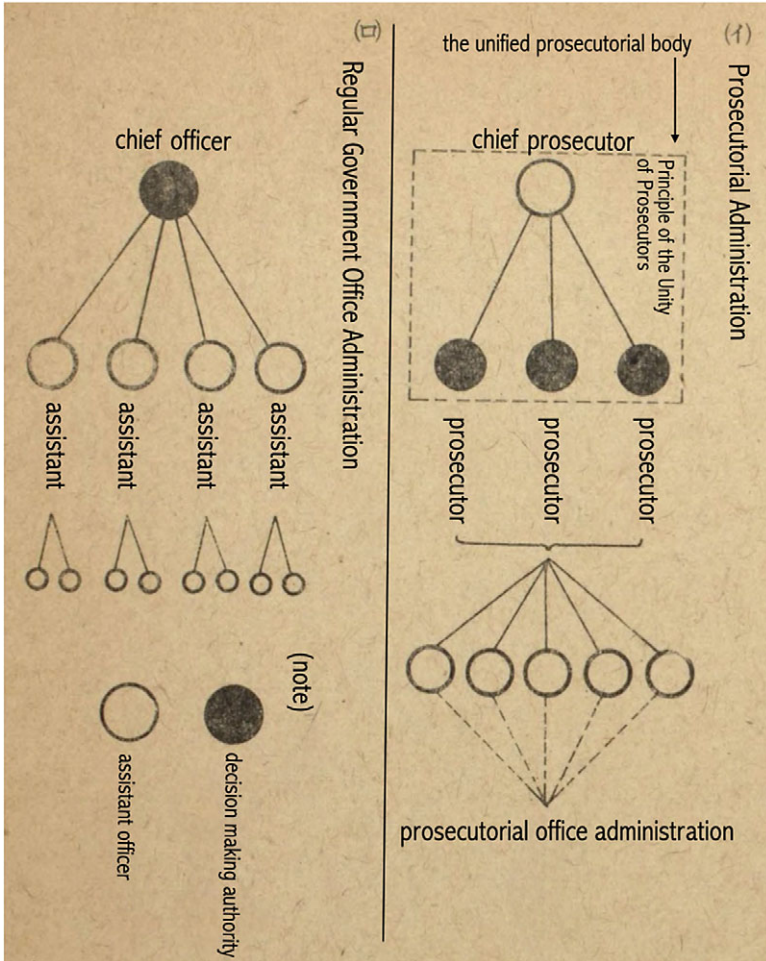


Figure 2. The difference between the regular government office administration and the *dokuninsei* prosecutorial administration. Komura, Yasuhide, *Kensatsuchō ni okeru jimu kanri no mondaiten*, 29.

had high expectations that scientific and rational office procedures would liberate them from archaic patron-client relationships, known in Japanese as *oyabun-kobun*, and hoped that superiors would learn how to talk “democratically” to their subordinates. Yet another essay attributed the PPO’s detachment from the rest of the society, which was rapidly democratizing, to its continued reliance on outdated office tools. In the 1950s the PPO was still using traditional implements like brushes and *koyori*, a type of hand-twisted paper string used for binding documents. The essay argued that modern office technologies—such as Japanese typewriters, contemporary accounting forms, card indexes, and filing systems—were not merely tools for efficiency but crucial for achieving a democratic workplace.⁵¹

⁵¹Sumio Kishi, “Kenstasu no minshuka” [The democratization of the PPO], *Kenshū* 101 (1956): 50–55, 55.

This emancipatory potential that the author attributed to technology intriguingly aligns with the democratic aspirations foundational to Norbert Wiener's development of cybernetics.⁵²

Aporia of the Postwar Prosecutorial Administration

The postwar reorganization of the PPO administrative structure rendered untenable the “principle of the united body of prosecutors.” By convention, prosecutorial administration itself came to be bureaucratized and was divided into two lines of work. One was the prosecution itself, consisting of investigations and trials (*kensatsu-jimu*). The other was prosecutorial administration (*kenmu-jimu*) to be carried out collectively, independent of any individual prosecutor's responsibility: receiving cases, cataloging evidence, custody procedure, and so on. The principle of the unity of the state in executing prosecution (which necessarily entails the support functions), meant that support work could not be allowed to be seen as separate from the underlying legal fiction that the public prosecutor was exercising all his appointed powers and duties. As an office of “individual independence,” the Public Prosecutor's Assistant Officers and the Public Prosecutor(s) were legally deemed one body with no division of authority between them.

And, yet, as a site of office work, the distinction between the line functions directly involved in the core prosecutorial activities and the support functions of the prosecutorial administration emerged quite clearly. Figure 3 shows a typical organizational structure of a mid-to-large PPO in which the organization is divided by the types of administrative work. Departments are headed by the senior public prosecutor, whereas the “bureau” (*kyoku*) is headed by an assistant officer, which means that there is no prosecutor directly supervising its day-to-day work. This clearly did not adhere to either the Public Prosecutor's Law or the fiction of prosecution as a process embodied in one official. It not only completely separated prosecutorial administration and support, but the Bureau of Secretariat, which the law stipulated should fall under the authority of the Public Prosecutor, was instead under that of the assistant officer heading it.

Komura Yasuhide,⁵³ himself a senior public prosecutor, critiqued the prevailing office hierarchy, arguing that the Public Prosecutor's “managing his or her staff” was less an expression of rational bureaucratic structure than a manifestation of retrograde elitism. This, he contended, resulted in an undemocratic status distinction between public prosecutors and assistant officers. Komura raised concerns about such an organizational framework and labeled it not only irrational but also socially and ethically problematic. Such an unsubtle display of the demarcation and stratification between public prosecutors and assistant officers, as well as between prosecutorial functions and what were deemed “supportive” roles, he argued, were corrosive to the democratic ethos and could demoralize assistant officers. Komura⁵⁴ stressed that it was imperative to forestall the opening of any

⁵²Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics; or, Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (New York: Wiley, 1948). See also Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006), 24.

⁵³Komura Yasuhide, *Kensatsuchō ni okeru jimu kanri no mondaiten* [The problems of office management in the PPO] (Tokyo: Homu Sogo Kenkyujo, 1963).

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 5.

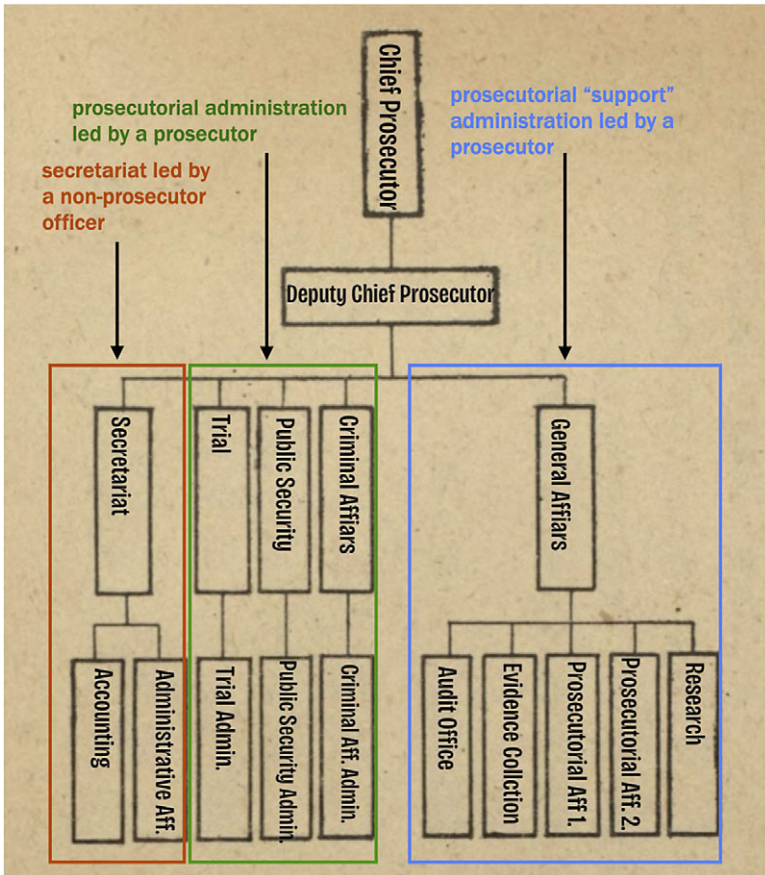


Figure 3. A common organizational structure of the mid-to-large size public prosecutor's office. Komura, Yasuhide, *Kensatsuchō ni okeru jimū kanri no mondaiten*, 2.

irreparable fissures between public prosecutors and their assistant officers that would leave them permanently separated like immiscible “water and oil.” For Komura, figure 4 represents an ideal organizational structure of the PPO.

As will be demonstrated in the next section, the humble file system turned out to offer a tangible manifestation of Komura’s vision for reforming the prosecutorial office, even if it did not actually succeed in diminishing the entrenched social distinctions. Its circulatory architecture was designed to suture the organizational rift between prosecutors and assistant officers and to institute a non-hierarchical, flat network process that effaced traditional distinctions—both administrative, between line functions and support roles, and social ones between public prosecutors and assistant officers. All were pulled into the circulatory, not hierarchical, path of the files.

The Implementation of the File System

This section explores the design and practical implementation of the file system through a case study of the Niigata District Public Prosecutor’s Office. It focuses on

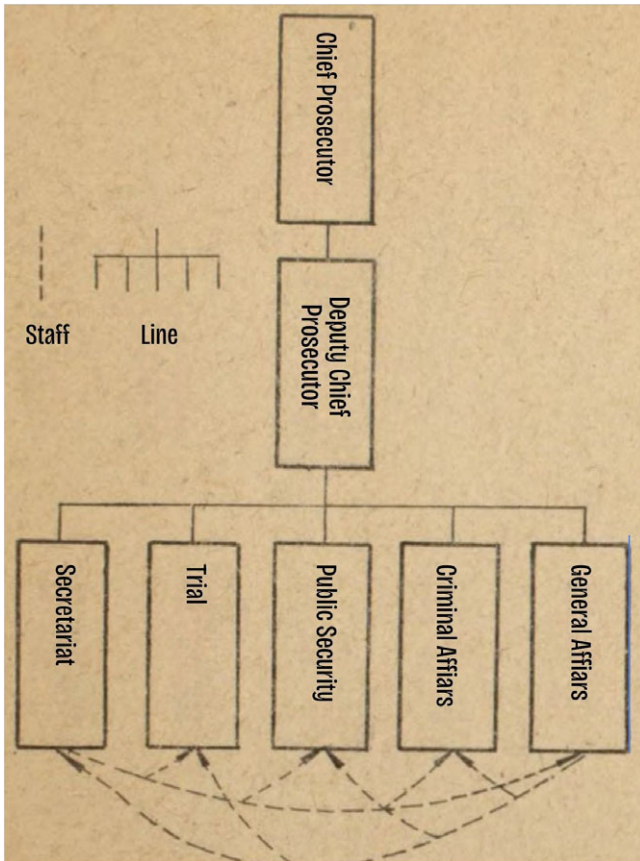


Figure 4. The ideal public prosecutor's office organizational structure. Komura, Yasuhide, *Kensatsuchō ni okeru jimu kanri no mondaiten*, (1963). 11.

the initial phase, where local law enforcement referred police dossiers to the district PPO. From there, a bundle of documents was transformed and stabilized into a “case” that was prosecutable, and was thus made “ripe” for use, as Latour puts it,⁵⁵ as it traveled through a designated circulatory channel.

In transitioning to the file system, the previously used bound books were transformed into individual file cards,⁵⁶ generally sorted into three types: (1) Case Card, (2) Receipt Card, and (3) Name Card (and a Statistics Card was made later in the process) (see figure 5) at the initial case intake process. The system also

⁵⁵Latour, *Making of Law*, 70–106. See also Corinna Kruse, *The Social Life of Forensic Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

⁵⁶For some districts, this transition was a monumental endeavor. Nagoya District PPO, for example, established a dedicated “File Section” with eleven staff members. Within just two and a half months this team converted the bound crime registry books into 163,000 individual cards, all while maintaining their regular responsibilities. Hōmufu Kenmukyoku, *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite*, 73–74.

BOUND BOOKS → **CARDS & SLIPS**

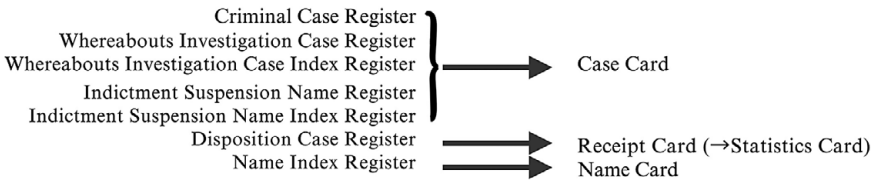


Figure 5. From bound books to cards.

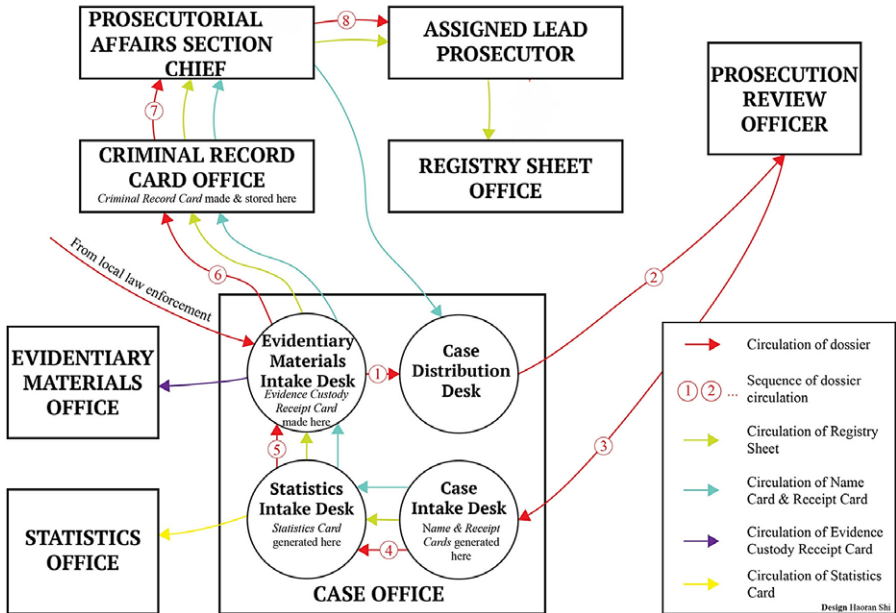


Figure 6. The passage of the filing system turning the dossier to a case file at Niigata District PPO, 1949.

introduced a “Registry Sheet” (*seiri genpyō*) that summarized the entire record of a suspect, from initial receipt of the dossier to case closure or suspension. This eliminated the need to consult multiple offices for such information.

Figure 6 illustrates the logistical trajectory of the dossier. The police dossier goes to the Case Office in the (Support) Prosecutorial Administration Section. Within the Case Office, there are four desks—the “Case Distribution Desk,” “Case Intake Desk,” “Evidentiary Materials Intake Desk,” and “Statistics Intake Desk”—where the initial paperwork is generated. The formal procedure of case-making begins with the creation of a Registry Sheet; two cards (a Name Card and a Receipt Card) that are mobile and move between offices with the Registry Sheet and the dossier; and the “Statistics Card,” a semi-mobile card that travels with the other documents part way through the circuit before returning. In addition, two stationary Cards (an Evidence Custody Receipt Card, and a Criminal Record Card) are created in the appropriate office and stored there.

Within the Case Office, the dossier's journey begins at the Evidentiary Materials Intake Desk, where the Evidence Custody Receipt Card is created. This card awaits the subsequent arrival of the Registry Sheet for completion. The dossier moves to the Case Distribution Desk and then to the Prosecution Review Officer. Next, it reaches the Case Intake Desk, where two mobile cards—the Name Card and the Receipt Card—are generated along with the Registry Sheet. These documents accompany the dossier to the Statistics Intake Desk, where a Statistics Card is created based on the Registry Sheet. This card is promptly sent to the Statistics Office. The dossier and the two mobile cards, and the Registry Sheet return to the Evidentiary Materials Intake Desk to complete the Evidence Custody Receipt Card, which then moves to the Evidentiary Materials Office for filing. The final leg involves the Criminal Record Card Office, where the Crime Card is generated and filed. The dossier and associated documents undergo a last inspection at the Prosecutorial Affairs Section, from where the Registry Sheet and the dossier go to the assigned lead prosecutor, and the mobile cards go to the Case Distribution Desk for archiving. The Registry Sheet is then archived at Registry Sheet Office, while the dossier stays with the assigned lead prosecutor.

Unlike traditional bound books, the file system's sheets and cards embody principles of “theoretical kinematics,” functioning as a dynamic system in which the rearrangement of one element necessitates the reconfiguration of others.⁵⁷ This mobility extends beyond mere bureaucratic shuffling; it constitutes a logistical medium that interacts with the administration of justice within the framework of “democratic” reform. As the dossier traverses the designated circuit in temporal sequence, and is inscribed at each office, it self-reflexively indexes and records its own path taken. This stabilizes the case into a legally robust object that counts for (now) unquestionable facts produced by the limitation of “facts” to those properly documented, inscribed, and circulated in a self-referential logistical channel.

The stationary cards—the Crime Card and the Evidence Custody Receipt Card—are additional material-indexical traces of the circuit navigated by the mobile cards and the Registry Sheet. For example, the Crime Card, generated on the basis of the dossier and the two mobile cards, not only triangulates the facts they contain, but also indexes their circulation. It records its own trace by having required information inscribed on it, and thus physically “proves” that the dossier, the two mobile cards, and the Registry Sheet traveled through the Crime Card Office; otherwise a Crime Card could not have been compiled. Similarly, the existence of the Evidence Custody Receipt Card, and thereby its legal validity, is contingent upon the return of the Registry Sheet to the Evidentiary Materials Intake Desk. In other words, this circulatory self-referentiality grounds the file system's own authority as a universe of legal documents. In essence, this is how a “case” materializes. Each card, sheet, and dossier creates a system of circular causality, being mutually indexical and reinforcing in terms of traces, routes, times, and

⁵⁷Markus Krajewski, *Paper Machines: About Cards & Catalogs, 1548–1929* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 7. See also Urs Stäheli, “Indexing—The Politics of Invisibility,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, 1 (2016): 14–29; and Colin B. Burke, *Information and Intrigue: From Index Cards to Dewey Decimals to Alger Hiss* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014).

locations. This interweaving of office space, people, documents, and file cabinets essentially transforms the whole into “one giant index card box.”⁵⁸

This is a semiotic process of recursivity.⁵⁹ The file system stabilizes itself through the multiple, cross-referencing, triangulating iteration of the case and its facts. Recursivity literally *materializes the process in due process*; circulating papers and files were the material form of constitutional due process in the democratic reform of postwar Japan, and an example of Latour’s insight that “law is itself its own metalanguage.”⁶⁰ The file system thus operates as the law’s logistical medium, self-recording its mundane due process in order to ensure the lofty due process famously guaranteed by the rule of law. It forms a self-referential and self-generating process with no external command and control, an essential semiotic condition of a system of administering criminal cases in particular, but also of “liberal government” in general.

The file system redefined what a “job” is. Just like the Taylorist assembly line, a “job” was turned into a task that was clearly divided, atomized, and linearized in a larger scheme of things. Each job position was designed to be autonomous from any personal ties of obligation or benevolence that might have survived from prewar social hierarchies at work. Instructions from the Judicial Affairs Office emphasized a rational division of labor to avoid any wasteful redundancy. To put it another way, as the representative from the Tokyo High Prosecutor’s Office did, each person must stop meddling with others’ work and mind their own, and deepen their respect for others, and others’ respect for *them*, through each person taking responsibility *only* for their own duly assigned tasks.⁶¹

The diagram in figure 6 illustrates the shift from human-centric to document-centric control within organizational logistics. Gone are the days of relying on a “living dictionary” (*ikijibiki*), on individual staff members acting as human repositories of institutional knowledge. This transition also reconfigures work ethics, moving Weber’s concept of *Lebensordnung*,⁶² or an ethical life order grounded in individual interiority, to a material documentation system. Such indirect control of people via the file system is a form of liberal governmentality⁶³ that intervenes in and arranges the *milieu* (the environment as the media), not workers’ minds or bodies. The figure 6 diagram is to be read as a map of a territory activated as, and transformed into, a *milieu* by the file’s logistical

⁵⁸I thank the late Michael Silverstein for pointing this out to me. For studies of how the governmental rationality of scientific management was spatially enacted through architectural design and the office furniture and space, see Mauro F. Guillén, *The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical: Scientific Management and the Rise of Modernist Architecture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Alexandra Lange, “White Collar Corbusier: From the Casier to the Cités D’affaires,” *Grey Room* 9 (2002): 58–79; Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

⁵⁹Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” in Paul Kroskrity, ed., *Regimes of Language* (Santa Fe: School for American Research, 2000).

⁶⁰Latour, *Making of Law*, 260.

⁶¹Hōmufu Kenmukyoku, *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite*, 60.

⁶²Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1404.

⁶³See Anita von Schnitzler’s compelling analysis of the water meter, which technologically replaced and materialized the government’s plea to the residents to pay for services; *Democracy’s Infrastructure: Technology and Protest after Apartheid* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

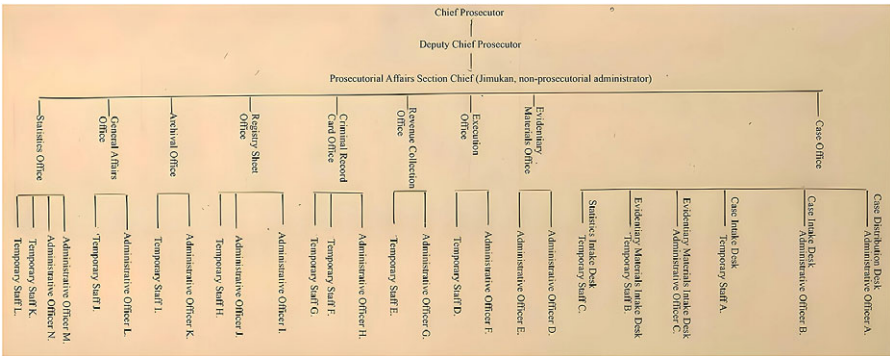


Figure 7. Niigata District PPO Organizational Chart. Hōmufu Kenmukyoku, *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite*, 243.

system.⁶⁴ It represents not a form of worker consciousness but an unintended apparatus for *the conduct of conduct*, which aspires to govern people not through injunctions, rules, ethics, or morals, but rather the milieu activated by the logistical channel.

Obviously, the diagram is neither a representation of empirical reality nor a structural model. Contrary to expectations, it coexisted with hierarchical practices. It did not supplant the traditional “*ringi*” decision-making process—a bottom-up hierarchy for review and approval—nor did it threaten the existing structure of authority and social relations. One might consider how the notion of “flow”—the seemingly smooth transit of paper—obscures underlying tensions and power dynamics. Yet, the diagram must not be dismissed as a mere “rice cake drawn in a picture,” to invoke a Japanese idiom. In the postwar period, when the very essence of “democracy” was radically up for grabs, a diagram like this one was imbued with aspirations, and pointed toward diverse future visions.

To return to the Niigata case, this diagram represented the organization of work through a bird’s-eye view of document circulation (see figures 7 and 8).⁶⁵ It allowed both prosecutors and assistant officers to see their own position and relationship with others in the organization less as a hierarchy than as a network. In stark contrast with the familiar Taylorist organizational chart that highlights hierarchies governed by “command and obey,” this diagram emphasized circulatory networks. Managers might be nominally higher, but in practice even Chief Prosecutors or the Section Chief of the Investigative Affairs Office were represented as mere nodes in a network of circulating documents, diagrammatically reducing the relevance of formal or personal status, akin to how an assembly line component was indifferent to the worker installing it. It presented PPO workers with a new way of seeing themselves and their relationship to other works situated in the circular network rather than in the hierarchical structure.

⁶⁴For the similar point but on a different scale, see Benjamin Bratton, “Introduction: Logistics of Habitable Circulation,” in Paul Virilio, ed., Mark Polizzotti, trans., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006 [1977]), 7–25, 12.

⁶⁵This is a rare mode of visualizing/spatializing an organization. A tree-like organizational chart, a visualization of an office marking its hierarchy, while still rare, started to appear as early as the 1920s. And the horizontal, network-like organizational chart was far less available until the 1960s.

CASE INTAKE PROCESS

事件受理の手続

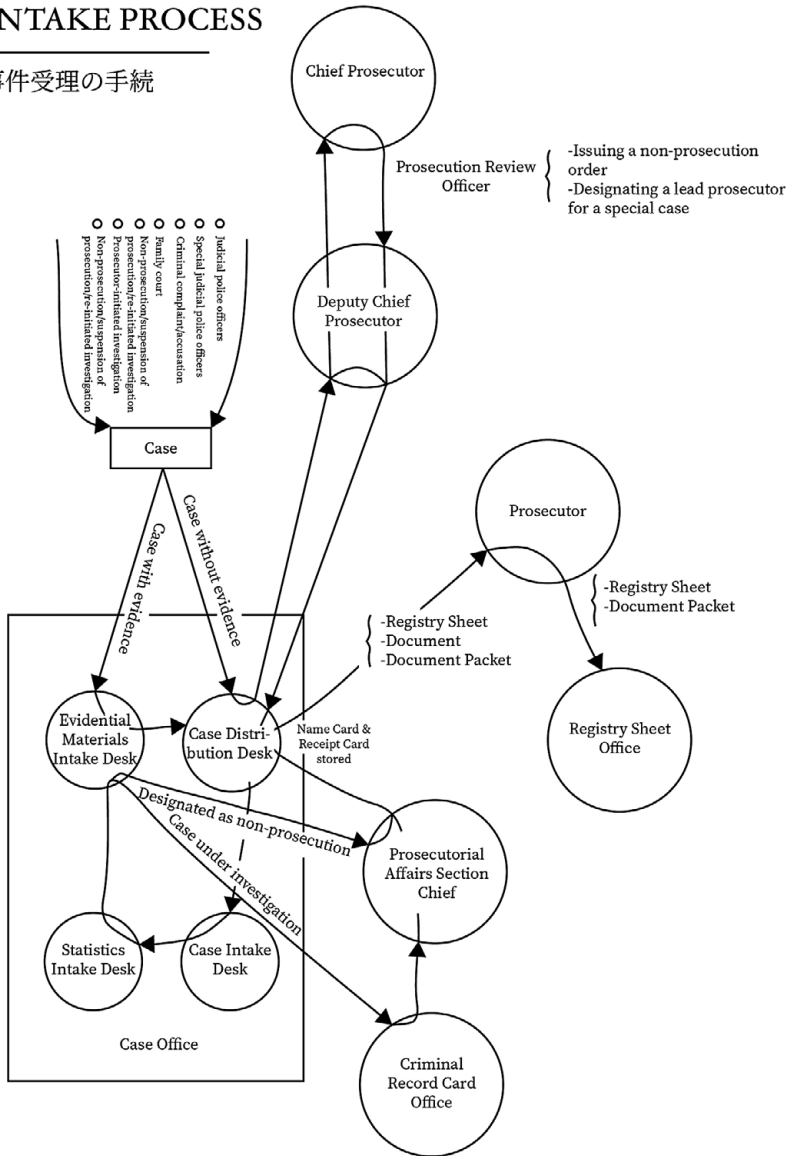


Figure 8. Niigata District PPO Organizational Chart from the Point of the Paper Flow. Hōmufu Kenmukyoku, *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite*, 236.

In implementing the file system, the workspaces of both the Niigata and Sendai District PPOs were redesigned to optimize document flow. Niigata physically divided its Case Reception Office into two distinct units: one for the initial receipt of dossiers and the other for their subsequent processing, thereby mitigating the risk of confusion and filing errors.⁶⁶ Sendai was different: constrained by spatial

⁶⁶Bratton, "Introduction," 83.

limitations, it expanded its operations across multiple buildings and even hallways. This spatial configuration was intended to minimize delays in circulating documents from one office to another within the file circuitry.⁶⁷

The file's logistical *channel*⁶⁸ bridged the organizational divide between the support for prosecutorial administration and that of the main, professional prosecutorial work. The circuitous mechanism physically spanned the PPO's organizational aporia, enacting a "unified" judicial entity and a hierarchical administrative body. The Tokyo District PPO exemplified this dynamic. Just like its smaller-scale counterparts in Niigata and Sendai, Tokyo reconfigured its office layout to rationalize document flow. When the Public Prosecutor's Law took effect in May 1947, the Case Office functioned as a subsection within the Support Prosecutorial Administration Section of the General Affairs Department, which encompassed all prosecutorial functions aside from trials and investigations. By July 1948, to align with the newly instituted "position-classification system," the Case Office was elevated to an independent section with three designated subsections for reception, disposition, and appeals.⁶⁹ That September, the General Affairs Department was rebranded as the Support Prosecutorial Administration Department,⁷⁰ thereby achieving organizational parity with the departments responsible for investigation and trials. This restructuring formalized the division between core and support administration.

On 1 March 1949, in anticipation of the file system's pilot launch scheduled for the following month, the Support Prosecutorial Administration Department was subdivided into a Case Section, a Disposition Section, and a newly established Registry Slip Section.⁷¹ The latter was further divided into two subsections: one responsible for document production, and another for archiving and calls for retrieval. In January 1950, the Registry Slip Section was relocated to the Trials Department,⁷² indicating its transition from a "support" function to a "main" prosecutorial role. Within the Trials Department, the Registry Section comprised three subsections: the first oversaw planning, statistics, and the entire filing process from the production of the file to its storage; the second managed file lending for trial-attending prosecutors and disposition of complete case records; and the third facilitated through coordination with the other two subsections.

The Registry Slip traversed two departments previously divided by function and official status: prosecutorial administration led by prosecutors, and "support" administration by assistant officers. The logistical pathway materialized the principle of prosecution indivisibility, which was not reflected in official "command-and-obey" vertical organizational charts. The flat file system's diagram subtly renegotiated different kinds of hierarchies. It established a temporally ordered, mutually exclusive network of tasks, which sharply demarcated Person A's job from Person B's job. This clarity made it possible for assistant officers to voice concerns—albeit respectfully and without being

⁶⁷Ibid., 81.

⁶⁸See note 27 for the definition of "channel."

⁶⁹Bratton, "Introduction," 170–71.

⁷⁰Ibid., 175.

⁷¹Ibid., 176.

⁷²Kotaro Kawaguchi, "Kensatsu jimū ni okeru fairu seido," *Jimū to Keiei* 1, 3&4 (1949): 20–23, 22.

impertinent—about prosecutors hampering file flow. At one file system workshop, some of the senior assistant officers reported that prosecutors misplaced files frequently. A Niigata officer, using honorifics, noted: “I fear that it might sound disrespectful for me to say this, but current prosecutors often lose (*nakusaremasu*, an honorific form of ‘to lose’) important records. Every time the record disappears, they ask us to search for it. It gives us a pain in the neck.”⁷³

The file system also obviated any private ownership of documents across ranks, and rendered the entire operation transparent. This transition posed significant challenges particularly for public prosecutors habituated to keeping documents and files in their own desk drawers. A Yokohama District Office assistant officer attributed the difficulties in switching to the file system in part to the fact that “public prosecutors have an attachment to bound books in the *daifukuchō* system, and have emotional difficulty letting go of the old system.”⁷⁴

The introduction of *memos*⁷⁵ (derived directly from the English word), a writing genre that was new became a focal point of prosecutorial resistance to the new file system because it was time-consuming (see figure 9). In the prewar period, one public prosecutor normally handled a case from inception to conclusion, making private notes known as *tebikae*—for personal use. The postwar case influx, however, necessitated personnel flexibility and interchangeability for speedy trials. Consequently, a trial’s progress had to be communicated via memos, especially to those handling appeals. Authored by the prosecutor and inserted into the case file, these memos supplanted *tebikae*, transforming them into circulated and public (shared) documents visible “to” the file system. While the hierarchical “command and obey” structure within the PPO remained intact, the file system subtly integrated prosecutors into a more decentralized administrative network.

Guilt by Indexicality and the Birth of the Delinquent

Once the file system transformed a bundle of papers into a case file, it entered into a dense network of *indexical*⁷⁶ relationships of traces, a material-semiotic nexus, whose

⁷³On 13 May 1950, in his address at the conference for Deputy Chief Prosecutors (16 May 1950), Takahashi also deplored the lack of the prosecutor’s will to work on the file system by drawing on an episode he heard from an assistant officer about prosecutors failing to file the Registry Slip and instead keeping it inserted in the non-prosecuted record, which prevented the officers from completing the file. Hōmufu, *Fairingu seido ni tsuite*, 84.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 77.

⁷⁵For a theoretical discussion on the generic specificity of “memos,” see John Guillory, “The Memo and Modernity,” *Critical Inquiry* 31, 1 (2004): 108–32.

⁷⁶The concept of “index” or “indexicality” originates from Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic theory of sign relations, which categorizes signs into three distinct types: icons, symbols, and indexes. While the relationship between a symbol and its referent is arbitrary and governed by convention, and the relationship of an icon is predicated on resemblance, an index maintains a physically contiguous, causal, and existentially co-present relationship with the object it signifies. Importantly, this indexical relationship is not contingent upon “the interpreting mind,” as Peirce elucidates; *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur W. Burks, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931–1934, 2.299). To illustrate, a smoky sky serves as an index of a wildfire, irrespective of whether an individual perceives and interprets it as indicative of a nearby wildfire. As Peirce further notes, “the index asserts nothing”; it merely indicates the presence of the object it indexes (*ibid.*, 3.361).

2. Sample of Memo Entry

第一例 Sample 1.

	Prosecution no.	
Inspector's Seal	Name	year/month/day
Disposition	shōwa year/month/day	summary of disposition
Personal History Form	Family background	Financial situation
	moverble property	real state
	monthly earnings	Personal & behavior
		year school name graduate dropout

recommended sentence

Figure 9. "Memo" Sheet (Sample) from Kyoto District PPO. Hōmufu Kenmukyoku, *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite*, 268.

intensification promised to isolate and identify suspects in new ways. The PPO leaders' aspiration was to build an ever-growing paper-based database. The primary indexical function of the Name Card was to locate the folder corresponding to the named suspect or accused. But the system acquired another

utility, as theorized by the Judicial Affairs Office: individuals linked to prior cases could serve as potential suspects in subsequent investigations:

Suppose that there is an individual whose name was once recorded as a witness to a case of stolen property, and this individual's name came up two or three times in similar cases. It is reasonable to suspect that this individual might be the buyer of those stolen properties, and one might want to look for the case files related to this individual and the "memos" attached to them. If you produced a Name Card for this individual and included on it the name-number of the suspect or the accused, you could arrive at the folder of the suspect.⁷⁷

In the file system, paper evolved into a "virtual" medium endowed with a future tense, thus creating a nebulous universe of individuals linked to crimes or known criminals. The distinction between predictive analytics and the creation of a new "criminal-prone" category was, of course, tenuous. Unlike names stuck in bound books—essentially "dead letters"—Name Cards remained permanently alive for future use, ready to be activated to cross-index with other names and cases. Existing in a liminal space between past and future, Name Cards were both ever-present and virtual (potential), built into a growing network of indexical contingencies. Transcribing names—previous offenders, witnesses, and other associated individuals—from bound books into Name Cards to file in the system materially opened a universe of latent *delinquency* beyond a mere epithet; it became an actionable, dividing practice. These individuals were not recidivists or criminals *yet*, but they could potentially become so. And would not those in charge of public order be derelict in their duty to ignore or fail to act on such knowledge?⁷⁸

The power at work here, while subtle, yielded concrete and unprecedented effects. Foucault notes that the use of individual index cards for criminal registers in nineteenth-century France materialized the techno-administrative expression of a form of power, which was "both individualizing and totalizing."⁷⁹ "Delinquency," then, emerged as a perpetual state of "political observatory," as individual index cards integrated into the existing card-index system allowed for their utilization by statisticians and sociologists, extending far beyond their initial use by the police. Foucault thus observed, "The appearance of the card-index system and the constitution of the human sciences are another invention that historians have taken little note of."⁸⁰

Such an alchemy of the file system marked a pivotal shift in the concept of "efficiency" from labor-time minimization to the maximization of *surplus*, that is, indexical traces that could aid present and future criminal investigations. Judicial Affairs Office leaders also posited that the "memo" could potentially lead to a treasure trove once it was fed into the file system automatically. In his address to the Deputy Chief Prosecutor's conference on 16 May 1950, Takahashi advocated for producing

⁷⁷Hōmufu, *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite*, 12. See also Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 3–64, for the history of the finger printing card system.

⁷⁸Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

⁷⁹Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983): 208–26, 213.

⁸⁰Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 281.

concise memos for future investigations rather than wasting time producing non-evidentiary statements of mere archival value.⁸¹ He thus told the Deputy Chief Prosecutors,

It is necessary to produce a memo detailing the contents of the suspicion, the content of the denial, the *modus operandi*, and any connections to organized crime groups in cases where there is sufficient suspicion of the perpetrator but not enough evidence to prosecute. This mainly applies to cases such as those involving suspected pickpockets, receivers of stolen goods, or fraudsters who deny the allegations, or witnesses who are expected to appear as offenders in the future. For example, it is necessary to generate a memo in cases involving a purchaser of stolen goods or even a minor extortionists when the existence of an organized crime group is suspected to be in the background.⁸²

The new procedural law, modeled after the Anglo-American adversarial system that mandates objective evidence, provided an additional rationale for meticulously documenting the details of individuals involved in a case—be they suspects, witnesses, or associates—irrespective of the case's outcome, for the purposes of the file system. Takeuchi Juhei, Prosecutor in the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, highlighted this shift by citing a case in which the prosecution's inability to corroborate the accused's presence at the crime scene led to acquittal. Takeuchi reminded his audience that, unlike during the prewar era, when the absence of objective proof did not necessarily disadvantage the prosecutor, with the new procedure such an absence would benefit the accused. But with the new file system, evidence collected that did not result in conviction could serve as potent material for later cases. For instance, suppose one found a newspaper article which recounts that the accused told a reporter that he had left Tokyo and arrived at an alleged crime scene on the previous day. This would be valuable to the prosecution. In the old criminal system, evidence collected for each case was deemed to have no use after the case was over. Under the new law, which demanded objective evidence, materials from past cases had the potential to be important for new cases. News and magazine articles that seemed irrelevant to a case could become conclusive evidence. Takeuchi urged his audience to see the file system as a powerful method for organizing and storing such materials and their potential.⁸³

The document's expanded temporality—from encompassing only the past and the present to also incorporating the future—marked a substantive shift in the function of written records. These records were no longer only for assembling facts for a trial; they acquired an open-ended indexical value that might materialize as new data entered the system. When combined with stored information, this evolving corpus could generate new knowledge.

Flow: Like Water Flowing Downstream

Despite the GHQ's belief that they had significantly weakened the power and authority of the PPO, its senior leaders recognized that the PPO had actually

⁸¹Hōmufu, *Fairingu shisutemu ni tsuite*, 383.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 384.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 18–19.

weathered the GHQ's reforms. At least that is how they presented the PPO's postwar standing to the file system workshop participants. Takeuchi assured the participants that the principle of prosecutorial indivisibility, the kernel of its organizational structure and ethos, had been intact since before the war. What had changed is that all the other state institutions had been unrecognizably decentralized, split into pieces leaving no trace of their prewar prototypes. Takeuchi said and that the PPO was "probably the only centralized organization left in Japan." He continued:

This is something whose significance must be re-recognized in light of the sensibilities of the new era. Is there a way to truly utilize and operate such an organization? Was there not a tendency before the war to operate [the PPO] minimally by relying on the police department's telegraphs and telephones? A deputy prosecutor in a remote District Prosecutor's Office can fulfill his duties with a small number of staff because there is a nationwide organization behind him, extending from the District Prosecutor's Office to the High Prosecutor's Office, and to the Supreme Prosecutor's Office. If it were an isolated entity, situations where it could not maintain its authority would surely arise. That is the power of the organization. If that organizational power is actually a facade and the whole body is uncoordinated and isolated, then it cannot exert its power, and when its true nature is exposed, it will have extremely serious consequences for the maintenance of public order.

Takeuchi underscored the continued relevance of the PPO's centralized structure, while also recognizing the democratic exigencies of the new era, a reckoning that the use of overt force and authoritarian tactics was no longer sustainable. In describing this tension, between conforming to postwar democratic norms and aspiring to further fortify the PPO's vertical organizational strength, Takeuchi asked, "Is there a way to truly utilize and operate such an organization?" He presented the file system as one way to do so. It eschewed force and instead resorted to the administrative technique of arranging and circulating documents. In a way, this transition from coercive methods to the logistical media that arranged and circulated documents aligned with Foucault's concept of *dispositif*.

Diverging substantially from the GHQ's original conception, and perhaps from the PPO workers' expectations that the new system would encourage democratization, senior leaders envisaged a dynamic, national communication infrastructure wherein the Supreme PPO would automatically and continually receive data from regional offices, which would in turn regularly receive authoritative directives from the central office. In other words, senior leaders saw in the horizontal logistical channel of the file system a potent vertical network—a "center of calculation," as Latour would put it⁸⁴—capable of generating novel and powerful investigatory and prosecutorial knowledge, which would benefit the nation. This move, conveniently, also aligned with the principle of prosecutorial indivisibility, an ironic but calculated move on the part of senior leaders, who infused it with prewar vigor while simultaneously reimagining its postwar institutional ethos.

The "flow" in the assembly line analogy for the file system became recast as the (natural, law of gravity-given) flow over a waterfall. The Prosecutorial Administration

⁸⁴Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 215.

Bureau Chief thus clearly recognized the power of the file system as a logistical medium, and emphasized: “It is about ‘*keiro*,’ the ‘channel, through which a document is produced, and is about its whole process until it goes into the filing cabinet. As is clear from the phrase, the *nagare* (‘flow’) of administration, to administer is to cause to flow, to keep flowing. It is as though the water flows from the high to the low; it must automatically flow. It must not stagnate or flow backward along the way.”⁸⁵

Takeuchi Juhei, prosecutor in Supreme Public Prosecutor’s Office, explained to the file system workshop participants how the ostensibly horizontal work process of the file system could engender a “vertical,” centralized logistical channel running from the upper echelons to the lower tiers, and vice versa. Recognizing that this “vertical” work—comprising the transmission of files and progress reports in memo form to higher offices—constituted an additional layer of responsibilities for both prosecutors and assistant officers, Takeuchi argued that the file system automated this process, often unbeknownst to the workers themselves. To underscore his point, he posed a rhetorical question, implicitly answered by the file system itself: “It is crucial for all district and local prosecutor’s offices to promptly relay the progress of their cases to higher authorities. However, if an officer becomes too preoccupied with composing such progress reports, their primary responsibilities could suffer neglect. Although vital, these reports constitute ‘vertical’ tasks, in contrast to the main work. The question then arises: How can this ‘vertical’ work be seamlessly and automatically navigated through many hands *just like water flows from the high to the low*?”⁸⁶ In his vision,

Cases across the nation and their processing status would be regularly reported sequentially to the higher Public Prosecutor’s Office, and from there to the Supreme Public Prosecutor’s Office by the “division of labor assembly line” (*bungyōteki nagare sagyō*⁸⁷) system—without officers having to pay special attention to it. The Supreme Public Prosecutor’s Office could then grasp the situation all over the country from its own office, and we could demonstrate the organizational power that unifies the regional and the central. One creates a card for each accused on which one can at a glance see all the pieces of information which used to be contained in the books, and the relationship among them. This would prevent any workflow from being dammed up by the old books. Paperwork needs to be reorganized like an assembly line by which documents are filled out as they are circulated.⁸⁸

The label “division of labor -assembly line” (*bungyōteki nagare sagyō*) system was directly borrowed from the Taylorist shop floor management lexicon. The metaphor of nature’s uninterrupted water flow concealed the arduous nature of the labor involved in the system as well as the labor-management strife inherent in it. It also encoded a desire and will to re-establish the centralized authority and organizational robustness that characterized the prewar PPO and recommitted to the principle of the indivisibility of prosecutors.

⁸⁵Ibid., 14–15.

⁸⁶Ibid., 17–18.

⁸⁷While “*nagare sagyō*” is conventionally translated as “assembly line,” its literal translation would be “flow work.”

⁸⁸Latour, *Science in Action*, 23–24.

Conclusion

The file system, as a historically situated logistical medium—the paragon of the cult of scientific management efficiency and engineering rationality—perversely carried the ideological weight of democracy in postwar Japan, since the PPO was blamed for the wartime state’s abuse of power and domestic human rights violations. The intelligibility of the linkage between democracy and efficiency that GHQ and other Allied reformers invested in the file system—in pursuit of both modern constitutional rights and modern office procedure—led to unintended consequences. The leaders of the Judicial Affairs Office saw new ways to rebuild the PPO as a powerful centralized national judicial agency. At the same time, the notion of efficiency shifted from the simple matters of retrievability of documents and timesaving toward that of generating surplus knowledge and an indexical network beyond the isolated facts contained in documents, as the location of institutional memories shifted from the walking dictionary and individually managed bound books, to files. Most importantly, this signaled a shift in the nature of the *subject* of paperwork, from the scribe to the modern bureaucrat, or better still, technocrats, who proliferated in Japanese business and government offices from the late 1960s. One could also say that the transition to the file system fundamentally transformed the nature and locus of the subject from the empirical individual to a systemic entity and collectivity.⁸⁹

The phrase “from people to documents, from documents to files” was not just an historic management meme; it marked a pivotal moment of the new analytics of power from ideology to physiognomy, and of a network connecting the constituents of the *dispositif* for the postwar administration of justice. Prosecutors and assistant officers differed in social status, but they were intricately entangled as the filing subjects. Assistant officers hoped the new system would democratize their workspace, echoing broader societal shifts towards democracy. Would the workplace be democratized, just as it was said was happening in society writ large? The contrast between the ambitions of PPO senior officials and officials of its local and lower echelons could hardly have been more pronounced. It is remarkable that the file system, rooted in early twentieth-century library science, found renewed relevance in postwar Japan. Mediated by U.S. office management literature steeped in Cold War-era cybernetics and systems theory, the file system held particular appeal for those in the PPO’s lower tiers. This system embodied a vision of a democratic social order facilitated through what was perceived to be horizontal communication networks. Intriguingly, this vision also resonated with U.S. countercultural ideals. Though these divergent dreams coalesced around the same file system, neither of them was faithful to GHQ’s original blueprint. In the end, this modest paper-based logistical medium spurred the postwar PPO’s methodical reclamation of the formidable prosecutorial powers of the prewar era. In an ironic twist, the introduction of the file system became deeply entrenched in their tenacious effort to avert the outcome the postwar PPO feared most: that its status would be degraded from being a powerful quasi-judicial agency to a mere general administrative one.⁹⁰

⁸⁹I thank an anonymous *CSSH* reviewer for bringing this insight to my attention.

⁹⁰Saikō-kensatsu-chō kōhōbu [Supreme Court Prosecutors Office Public Relations Department], *Atarashii kenstatsu no shimei* [The missions of the new public prosecution] (1949), 95–97.

Acknowledgments. I extend my sincere gratitude to Paulla Ebron, Steven Feld, Bernard Geoghegan, Ilana Gershon, Jennifer Hsieh, Matthew Hull, Paul Kockelman, Craig Murphy, Thomas Mullaney, Paul Manning, Jennifer Petersen, Annelise Riles, Jonathan Rosa, Shiho Satsuka, Kabir Tambar, Anna Tsing, Fred Turner, and Eitan Wilf, for their generous feedback and insights, which have been vital in enriching my thought process and perspective. My appreciation also goes to the Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford and the Annenberg Fellowship for their critical support and resources. I am also deeply indebted to the anonymous *CSSH* reviewers for their engaged reading and insightful critiques that have markedly improved the article. A special thanks to the librarians at the Supreme Court Library in Japan for their invaluable assistance, which was pivotal in making essential resources available and facilitating my research. This essay is dedicated to Noah Shintaro Biolsi.

Cite this article: Inoue, Miyako. 2024. "Law's Logistical Media: The Installation of the File System in the Postwar Japanese Prosecutor's Office." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1–31, doi:10.1017/S0010417524000112