

A Research Note: Survey of British Tank Production and Export 1920–30s

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We held a meeting on March 8, 2017, at Meiji University with Benjamin Coombs to examine tank production in Britain from the 1920s to the 1930s. At this meeting, we discussed ways to collaborate with and organise research subjects for the Research Institute for the History of Global Arms Transfer of Meiji University. Subjects were composed of two parts: the first part was on British tank production and export during the 1920s to 1930s; the second was on how Japanese tank production was formed and the extent of British roles and influence. We started to collect secondary sources to survey British tank exports in the 1920s to 1930s.

As for the first step, we focused on conclusions made by Harkavy and Krause. They aimed to grasp an overview of the arms transfer system and compare the pre-war and post-war era. Subsequently, we obtained references regarding British tanks. Consequently, we discovered that British tank development, production and export were wrapped in mystery. The volume and value of tank exports were vague and foggy, and it seemed as if the British Army did not develop any consistent tank production policy in the 1920s to 1930s. The situation of the British government's regulations on tank exportation was also unclear. Finally, Vickers Ltd., which had no experience with tank development and production, became the sole player in the tank manufacturing industry in the 1920s.

Therefore, to obtain primary sources, we conducted a broad survey at Vickers Archives, Cambridge University Library, and National Archives at Kew, London, to understand the facts of tank production and export. At these facilities, we researched, for example, Vickers's decision making on tank exports; business concerns between Vickers, the British government and foreign governments; as well as the policy-making process of tank development and production.