

Archives in the United States and Japan: Executive Session Summary

TAKASHI KOGA
Assistant Professor,
National Institute of Informatics (Japan)

INTRODUCTION

The author's role in this Japan-U.S. Archives Seminar was to summarize the discussions from the closed session and to evaluate the overall issues in the seminar. This paper offers two ways in which the author satisfies this role:

- 1) Picking up the similarities and differences in the Japan and U.S. archives identified through the discussions in the closed session, rather than summarizing each speech in the session; and
- 2) Suggesting topics that should be shared and discussed by people in Japan and the United States.

COMPARISON OF ARCHIVAL ISSUES IN JAPAN AND THE U.S.

First, the author tries to compare archival issues in Japan and the U.S. and pick up the similarities and archive differences between these two countries, based on the discussions in the closed session. Among the four parts below, the first three deal with the similarities, while the last one deals with the differences.

Access and Privacy

In the U.S., privacy and access issues are pressing problems, irrespective of the types of archival institutions, i.e. central government archives (the National Archives and Records Administration), local government ones, university and college ones, or business ones. What is emphasized is maintaining a good balance between privacy protection and providing access to records for the public good. Mr. Greene said that even the American archival institutions sometimes become too sensitive to the privacy issues and put excessive access restrictions on their records.

On the other hand, here in Japan, the "Act on the Protection of Personal Information" (Act No. 57 of 2003) was enacted in 2003 and enforced in 2005¹, and it has caused tremendous adverse effects. One example of these adverse effects is that the collection rate of the most recent census (2005) dropped significantly (96.6%) compared to the previous census in 2000 (98.3%), and the excessive reaction to the Act seemed to

¹ English and Japanese texts of the act in PDF format are available at: Translations of Laws and Regulations (in compliance with the Standard Bilingual Dictionary), by the Cabinet Secretariat, Government of Japan. <http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/hourei/data2.html> (accessed 2007-06-05).

contribute to this drop². In addition, some archival institutions in Japan put excessive access restrictions on their records due to their concerns for the personal information included in some of the records.

In the closed session, there was a discussion concerned with the privacy of public figures, such as politicians and top government officials. From an archive user's viewpoint, it is desirable to ensure that continued access to records that may include information on public figures, and that such access can be approved positively. On the other hand, researchers want access to ordinary peoples' records, although the concerns of the people and their descendants for their privacy may prohibit access to the records. Therefore, researchers may need to explain more persuasively why they need access to the records of such ordinary people, compared to access to the records of the public figures.

Governance Structures and Access to Records

This issue is similar to the abovementioned privacy issue, but it is an "extended" problem beyond simple privacy; society rather than an individual person is concerned about outside access to records of interest. In this case, governance does not mean only the activities of the government. Rather, according to Prof. Terry Cook at the University of Manitoba (Canada), governance "includes cognizance of the dialogue and interaction of citizens and groups with the state, the impact of the state on society, and the functions or activities of society itself, as much as it does the inner workings government or business structures."³

The issue of governance structures and access to records was raised by Mr. Pearce-Moses in the name of "cultural property rights", i.e.: "a nascent intellectual property right based on the idea that "a society, especially that of indigenous peoples, has the authority to control the use of its traditional heritage." To be specific, such cultural property rights are understood as the rights of Aborigines, Maoris, and Native Americans, who might want to save their dignities as tribespeople against the prejudices of non-tribal people and/or organizations outside the tribe. In terms of records and archives, indigenous people demand respect in the access to and handling of records that include information concerning their people, such as "sacred" dances and objects, and might raise prejudice in the users of records toward the people.

What is an analogous issue to such cultural property rights in Japan is the *Jinshin Koseki*, though the Japanese issue was not discussed in the closed session. *Koseki* means Family Registration system and the registry records, still maintained by the local government in Japan⁴. *Jinshin Koseki* was the percussive *koseki*, made in 1872 (called

² See for example: "Tokyo Census Data Down 11.3%: Households in the Capital Fail to Submit National Census Information." *The Daily Yomiuri*, May 5, 2006, 2.

³ Terry Cook "Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage," Paper delivered at the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Melbourne, 18 August 2000. <http://mybestdocs.com/cook-t-beyondthescreen-000818.htm> (accessed 2007-06-05). The author translated this paper into Japanese and included it in: *Introduction to Archival Science: Memory and Records into the Future* (An anthology of articles translated into Japanese). Compiled by the Records Management Society of Japan and the Japan Society of Archival Science. Tokyo, Nichigai Associates, 2006.

⁴ As examples of explanation of *koseki*, see: Japan Association of Translators, "Translating *Koseki*." <http://www.jat.org/jtkoseki.html> (accessed 2007-06-05); Dorota Hałas, "The Concept of *Ie* in Modern Japanese Society," *Silva Iaponicarum* 3 (2005): 9-31. Available at <http://www.silvajp.amu.edu.pl/Silva%203.pdf>

the *Jinshin* year under the Oriental Zodiac system) so that the new Meiji government could establish a modern administrative system and identify people subject to the new government. The problem was this *Jinshin Koseki* as the government records of a family registry reflected a discrimination of the classes and communities (called *buraku*) at that time. *Jinshin Koseki* records are still held in each local government office or regional legal affairs bureau, but they have not been released to the public because of the possible impact they may have on the descendants as well as the whole society⁵.

These two examples, the “cultural property rights” and *Jinshin Koseki*, share the problem of how the records reflecting the structure of governance at that time affect the current people and society. The author would like to add that, while privacy is understood to not apply to the dead both in the U.S. and in Japan, this is not the case for their descendants; the disclosure of the records of the dead might harm the dignity of the descendants, such as those concerned with the above-mentioned cultural property rights and *Jinshin Koseki*. In this sense, the issue of governance structures and access to records goes beyond the privacy issue.

Position of Governors and Authorities

The positions of governors and authorities is also a common issue in the United States and Japan, which shows the difficulties with archives and archivists against the attitudes of governors and authorities towards the records reflecting the activities of them.

As Japanese cases, Prof. Kato spoke about the rewriting of government documents by government officials concerning affairs in 1875 (Ganghwa Island Incident) that finally led to the occupation of Korea by Japan. Also, Mr. Muta spoke about prewar government records; contrary to the initial anticipations, they were systematically arranged and retained, but they were not widely accessible to the public; the records were to be possessed only by the government officials. In addition, one of the recent grave problems in the United States was that some parts of records that had been made available to the public in the National Archives were reclassified and restricted from public access due to national security concerns.

Such situations, both in the United States and Japan, bear tensions between governors who want to restrict access to records for any reason and archivists who want to ensure as much access to the records as possible. In this case, archivists need to persuasively appeal to their role as custodian of the records, and as a facilitator of access to the records towards politicians as well as the public, as discussed later in this paper.

Institutional Archives and Collecting Archives

While the author has discussed the commonalities between the United States and Japan so far, he would now like to introduce the most vivid differences between these two countries identified during the closed session. This concerns the view of the way archives are created, and it can be summarized as the consciousness for institutional archives and collecting archives.

⁵ For more issues about *koseki* and *buraku*, see for example: Chong-do Hah and Christopher C. Lapp, “Japanese Politics of Equality in Transition: The Case of the *Burakumin*,” *Asian Survey* 18, no. 5 (1978): 487-504.

In the United States, as far as the author could recognize during the closed session, there is a clear distinction between institutional archives and collecting archives. For example, government archives are recognized as the institutional archives of the government; i.e. the archives accept the records transferred systematically from the government offices, appraise them, and preserve the important ones. The same is true for other types of archives, such as university and business archives. It should be added, however, that in the United States the same type of archives may share both the roles of institutional and collecting archives; for example, some university archives may collect records and/or manuscripts of those associated with the university, such as the founders, board members, researchers, and students, in addition to accepting organizational records transferred within the university. Collecting archives are those consisting of records from outside the organization, in contrast to the institutional archives that consist of records transferred systematically from within the organization.

On the other hand, in Japan, for users of archives, creators of records, and even for archivists themselves in any institutions, it seems that there is not as clear a distinction between institutional and collecting archives as in the United States. Mr. Tominaga spoke about an example of a local government archives in Japan; the archivists cannot accept and appraise records transferred systematically from the government offices. Rather, they can only help by collecting government records during an “office clean-up” period — just like garbage collecting! Therefore, such local government archives should be recognized and reorganized as institutional archives with systematic recordkeeping and a record-transfer system. Similarly, university archives in Japan tend to be understood only as collecting archives consisting of personal records and manuscripts of those affiliated to the university through deposit and/or donation. Rather, they can be recognized as those including the roles of institutional archives that reflect the operations of a university as an organization.

FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR ARCHIVES AND ARCHIVISTS IN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN

In the following parts, the author would like to introduce some possible future challenges for archives and archivists in the United States and Japan, which need to be discussed.

Advocacies and Lobbying

The author believes that one of the biggest challenges for archives and archivists is advocacies and lobbying, i.e. how to communicate significances, roles, and the necessary skills for maintaining them for policymakers and the public. The bottom line is that it is necessary to correct the misunderstanding towards archives, such as that they are useful only for a handful of users such as historians. Discussions about concrete examples for advocacies and lobbying should be furthered between archivists and those concerned with archival issues in the United States and Japan.

For example, Ms. Peterson told me after the seminar that the Society of American Archivists (SAA) approve or oppose bills concerning archives and records brought up to the Federal Congress, and the representatives of the SAA join discussions at

Congressional Hearings. However, she added that the society has not attempted to construct a more systematic lobbying system like the American Library Association has, which has a branch at Washington D.C. as the central place for its lobbying. On the other hand, in Japan, there has been a “top down” movement toward the development of archives in recent years, i.e. a movement from politicians and authorities rather than archivists. It includes the establishment of a policy panel in the Cabinet Office of Japan, which was active from 2003 to 2006 and consisted of researchers of records management and administrative law, one lawyer, one journalist, several former government officials, and so forth. One prominent politician, Yasuo Fukuda (then the Chief Cabinet Secretary), was said to have ordered the establishment of the Panel⁶.

We need to exchange our ideas on how to communicate with the policy makers. Of course, the approach to policy makers should be distinguished with obedience towards both the policy makers and governments.

Dealing with Electronic Records

Management of electronic records as well as “published” electronic information, such as websites, raises serious issues for records and archival management. One of the issues is preservation; while abandoned paper records may be “rescued” and preserved in fortune, this is not the case for electronic records --- there is a lot more risk of them being lost forever due to physical breakdown and obsolete software and hardware. Another issue is authenticity, i.e. how to ensure that a record is made by the government, not by “fake” organizations. While e-mail in organizations is recognized as official records in the U.S. and Japan, we need to take care of the new styles of electronic information, such as blogs,⁷ SNS, instant messaging, Youtube, and so forth, as mentioned by Ms. Peterson in the open forum.

The author would like to add that electronic information might overcome the “tripartite theory,” which divides activities between archives, libraries, and museums, mentioned by Mr. Tominaga. That is, electronic records, electronic books, electronic research articles, electronic copies of museum materials, and so forth share common characteristics and communize the techniques and standards of organization for information resources used by archives, libraries, and museums, and even facilitate the merger of these institutions⁸. In this sense, the archivists need to seek partnerships with librarians, museum curators, IT staff, and other outside groups in this electronic environment.

⁶ For more issues about the panel in Japan (up to the summer of 2004), see: Koga, “Government Information and Roles of Libraries and Archives: Recent Policy Issues in Japan,” *Progress in Informatics* 1 (2005): 47-58. The Web version is available from http://www.nii.ac.jp/pi/n1/1_47.pdf (accessed 2007-06-05)

⁷ For archival issues of blogs, see: Catherine O’ Sullivan, “Diaries, Online Diaries and the Future Loss to Archives; or, Blogs and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them,” *American Archivist* 68, no. 1 (2005): 53-73.

⁸ For more issues about the possible merger of archives, libraries, and museums in the electronic environment, see for example: NISO Framework Advisory Group. *A Framework of Guidance for Building Good Digital Collections*. 2nd edition. Bethesda, National Information Standards Organization, 2004. Available from <http://www.niso.org/framework/framework2.html> (accessed 2007-06-05); Mary W. Elings and Günter Waibel, “Metadata for All: Descriptive Standards and Metadata Sharing across Libraries, Archives and Museums,” *First Monday* 12, no. 3 (2007). Available from http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue12_3/elings/index.html (accessed 2007-06-05).

Toward Consistent Management of Current Records and Archives

In the section above titled “Institutional Archives and Collecting Archives,” the author stressed that there is no clear distinction between these two archives in Japan. The important point, the author thinks, is that Japanese people tend to think about archives as someone outside the ordinal current organizations and activities, rather than as artifacts consisting of records within the organization and along with ordinal activities.

The below points might ensure the author’s thinking; watchdog groups, lawyers, politicians, law researchers, and journalists in Japan as well as the U.S. are really eager to pursue “freedom information” and accountability issues against government organizations. However, they seldom mention archives and archival issues, which ensure the “freedom of information” and accountability of governments in a retrospective manner.

In view of these situations in Japan, we need to discuss how to develop the consistent management of current records and archives. The most effective measures for this is to establish legislations that would ensure such consistent management, though legislation requires a lot of time and labor. Along with this, an “organizational culture” may affect the manner in which records and archival management is conducted in Japan, although it might be less productive to depend on cultural issues for our discussions of records and archival management.

CONCLUSION

The closed session of the seminar, as well as the open forum, raised a number of questions about archives in the United States and Japan. The author believes this is the most important meaning of the seminar. We did not excuse each other’s differences, saying “America is America, Japan is Japan.” Rather, we looked at the similarities as well as differences between these two countries, identified the common problems we faced, and thought about possible solutions. Surely, these activities were the first steps toward mutual understanding. The author hopes that we will continue discussions based on the accomplishments of this seminar for the development of archives in both countries.