

A Decisive Absence: A Dissenter's View on the Archival Strategy in Japan

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Introduction

I would like to thank all the people who made it possible to have this unprecedented seminar where advocates, patrons, and practitioners of archives on both sides of the Pacific get together, and discuss in detail the access issues of archival records. I have often thought to myself that there is a glass window somewhere in the Pacific for both of us to see what the other one is doing. Archivists on the western end of the Pacific (Japan), thanks to the American archival literature or the translation of it, and to the reports by international activists like Ms. Ogawa, see through the window and get some images about what their American counterparts are doing. But the Americans do not get very clear images of their Japanese colleagues. Perhaps the American archivists stand on the brighter side of the windowpane. In any case, little is known to American archivists of what their Japanese counterparts have been up to. I hope this seminar will contribute to fill the gap.

My role here, as I understand it, is to offer our American participants some basic facts and commentaries about access issues to historical documents of Japanese local governments. My presentation is first based on my own experiences and observations at the Okinawa prefectural archives, and from there my discussion becomes more generalized. Seminar participants, especially the ones from other local authorities, are encouraged to offer their own views, point out any factual errors I make, or modify any overgeneralization. Also I am sure that comments, questions, or just mere expressions of surprise and wonder from American discussants will enrich the dialog. Then the one-way glass becomes transparent from both sides. At the same time, it works as a mirror casting images of us by which we better understand ourselves. Thus balancing our views against each other, we will get closer to the reality of the Japanese archival policies as well as American. Let us hope to obtain a blueprint for a better future.

Why It Is Possible To Generalize Okinawan Archival Experience

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deduct a general statement or a general law relating to access issues of records held by local governments. My archival work experience is limited to that in the Okinawa prefectural archives. I have visited several other local government archives in Japan, but you need to work there to really understand the problems they face. Moreover, my home prefecture, Okinawa, where I was born, raised, and work now, is known by its historical background different from any other prefecture in Japan. It used to be a small kingdom called Ryukyu until it was annexed to the Empire of Japan in 1879. Two or three generations passed under the

central government's policy of integration when the war came. The battle of Okinawa claimed many thousands of lives of Okinawan people as well as soldiers of both sides. Many Americans are familiar with the name Okinawa by this battle or by the twenty-seven years of American military rule after the war. With the reversion of 1972, Okinawa is again one of the forty-seven prefectures in Japan.

The Okinawa prefectural archives was established in 1995. A major impetus came from the preservation issue of the records of the Ryukyu government, a self-governing authority under American rule with its own three branches of power. Since the records were acknowledged as very unique and historically important, it was agreed just before the reversion that all non-current records should be spared from destruction, the usual fate for such material. The prefectural library housed the fifteen thousand bound volumes of the Ryukyu government records until they were transferred to the newly built archival repository in 1995. This is a very simplified overview of how our archival program was created. Then we have to raise this question: is it feasible for an archivist from an archives with a unique "creation myth" to speak for the rest of the archives around the nation? I believe it is. There are three reasons.

First, we share the same legal system. We share the "Archives Law" as a basic legislation. While the records of the Ryukyu government may have provided the initial momentum, the Archives law functioned as a driving force for the crystallization of an archival program. Moreover, as many local government officials of this nation would agree, good administrators don't work in a vacuum. When they prepare for prefectural or municipal legislation, they thoroughly investigate precedents, looking for model programs. The good DNA's are copied or mixed and recycled. This is a kind of assimilation process. One can easily point out similarities rather than differences among archival regulations of local governments. Okinawa prefecture is no exception. Its archival legislation and regulations owe a lot to, among others, those of Kanagawa prefecture. Yes. We are copy cats.

Second, archivists have developed formal/informal networks to exchange information. Many archivists meet their colleagues from other local governments in archival classes and sessions offered by such organizations as the National Archives of Japan, the National Institute of Japanese Literature, and the Japan Association of Archives Institutions, to name a few leading examples. Exchange of opinions as well as business cards opens up a way to informal networks of archivists. Telephone calls, emails, and letters are carrying everyday inquiries and replies as well as gossip. It's a small world. I learned from my own experience of information exchange, that we share a lot in common and it makes sense for us to voice our views in unison in many archival aspects.

The final point has something to do with the first one. It is that we share the same national system in a broader sense and we operate everyday within the framework, or perhaps more frankly, the limits posed by it. Take employment practice. Local government regular employment is a synonym to a tenure status. When a local government wants to hire an archivist for their archival program as a regular employee, the cost of lifetime payment will be up to two million dollars. Once hired, he/she has strong protection from being fired. Usually bad professional performance cannot be a reason to slash his/her name out of the government's payroll. If a government is hesitant to take a risk, it may staff its archival repository with generalist administrators, who

move around the various government sections every two to three years. This practice may surprise our American colleagues, but it is not an unusual practice in a nation where local governments are run by generalists. As a prefectural administrator I am also subject to such reshuffling (my CV shows that I once was moved to the prefectural library). Under the pressures of government deficit and reform for slimmer administration, the governments may rely more on part-timers. They are usually lower paid, and in many cases their contract is terminated before their time in the archives becomes more than three years. These are dead end jobs. Unlike in the U.S., there is no licensing system for archivists here, no job market, no entry jobs. These are the hard facts we all share, and the question of who staffs the Japanese archival repositories may be an important issue that needs to be discussed in detail later.

Japanese Local Government: General Background

Local Government

We have a two-tiered local government system. The prefecture is a sub-national level of authority and serves a wider area. There are forty-seven prefectures in Japan. Municipal authorities, such as cities, towns, and villages, on the other hand, are called the “basic autonomous bodies” and provide various services directly to the local population. The number of municipal governments is decreasing drastically due to the recent merger initiatives by the central government. There were more than three thousand municipalities a few years ago, now the number is around eighteen hundred. There are other types and variations of basic tier authorities like wards, special wards or designated cities. Prefectural governors and municipal mayors are chosen by free elections. Each local government has a one-house legislative body. Representatives are elected into the house by its constituency. The state government in America seems to enjoy more autonomy compared to our prefecture. The prefectural government is endowed with two branches of powers, executive and legislative, but not justice. The state government raises its own military (the National Guard), the prefectural government does not. The executive power of a prefectural government is divided among the governor and several executive committees, such as the education board, the security committee (in charge of police), and the land procurement committee, to name a few. Basically the same structure of power goes for municipal governments, though the kinds of committees may vary according to the differences in service they provide (for example, municipal governments have no police).

There are forty-nine local government archives that are listed on the website of the National Archives of Japan, of which fifteen are placed within the education board, and others in the governor’s or the mayor’s jurisdiction.

The Archives Law

The Kobunshokan-ho, literally the Hall of Public Records Law, enacted in 1987¹ and enforced the following year, refers in article III to the national and local governments’ “responsibility to take necessary actions to preserve and provide access to historically important public documents and other records.” Here defined is the scope of

¹ National Law 115, 1987

responsibility of the national as well as local government archives. The “public documents and other records,” according to Article II, are “the public (“official” might be the better word in this context) documents and other records under the custody of the national and local governments except such records in current use.” The Prime Minister’s office in 1988 published its official construction of the law. According to it, “public documents” are records created by public servants in the course of duty and records of other types, which are recorded on various media, or of non-public origins, fall into the “other records” category. Both categories of records need to be in government custody (through creation or receipt in the course of duty, which is reasoned from the definition of “administrative documents” of the FOIA legislation) to be covered by the law. Therefore custody, rather than origin, is decisive. This seems to be compatible with the important archival principle of provenance. However, most local archives are open to donation of materials in private custody.

The Archival law does not mandate an archival program, and thus leaving each local government with its own decision to make whether what action or inaction to take in preserving and providing access to archival records. Article IV of the law regulates that a Kobunshokan (the hall of public records) should be staffed by a director as well as “specialists and other necessary employees who conduct research and studies on historically important public records.” Yet there is a supplementary provision for this which enables local governments not to place specialists “for the time being.” This reservation was meant to be temporary and conditional, for there was no national system to educate, train, and license archivists when the law was made. A premature mandate for specialist placement could have been an impediment rather than a momentum for local governments to launch an archival program. Now we know, after twenty years, how durable the provision was. Since a universal education and licensing system for the archival profession is yet to be realized, we are not sure exactly how long “for the time being” can mean.

Access Issues

Privacy

Local governments have been well ahead of the national government in developing freedom of information and privacy legislations. At the prefectural government level, first freedom of information legislation was enacted in 1982, and the dissemination process was completed by the end of the last century. The freedom of information act of the national government did not come to force before this century. In the case of Okinawa prefecture, its prefectural laws of information disclosure and the protection of personal information were enacted in 1991 and 1994 respectively. The archival materials kept by the Okinawa Prefectural Archives, however, are exempted from these laws.² I think this well designed. The privacy law strictly restricts the use of personal information for the purposes other than the one for which the information is obtained in

² The Administrative Information Disclosure Law of Okinawa, in Article II-2-(2), exempts “those under special control of the prefectural archives or of other prefectural agencies designated by the governor, as historical or cultural assets or sources for research” from its coverage of public records. Since the privacy protection legislation of Okinawa prefecture turns to the prefectural FOIA for the definition of public records for which the law is responsible, archival materials are placed outside of the Privacy Law’s coverage as well. In addition, Article LXI-3 specifies that “personal information in books, materials, publications or other sources held, for the purposes of general public use, by the libraries, museums, and similar prefectural facilities” is exempted.

the first place, and mandates that personal information be destroyed immediately when it becomes unnecessary to keep it. If this principle is applied to the archives, we have to destroy all the documents which contain personal information because archival use is not the purpose for which the documents are initially created.

Moreover, the freedom of information laws, though they are basically meant for opening information, leave in many cases personal information restricted without any period set for disclosure. If the law were applied to the records kept by the archives, it would be extremely difficult for the archives to provide access to its historical materials which contain personal information unless we were sure that a particular person in question is dead. So there is a kind of division of responsibilities here. While access to current government records is made or restricted by the freedom of information or privacy acts, access to non-current, archival records is covered by archival program. I checked up each of forty-seven prefectures' freedom of information and privacy laws. Whether it has an archival program or not, every prefecture exempts historical and cultural materials kept for public use.

Therefore, access to archival records is provided according to the rules set by each archives. A renewed privacy policy of Okinawa prefectural archives was bulletined last year. Yet policy announcement is one thing, and practicing is another. Perhaps privacy protection frustrates both parties that face each other across the service desk. We scrutinize every document in our arrangement process; unbind volumes which contain personal or private information, envelope items that need to be protected with acid-free material, and rebind. Information which may cause damage to the interest of a corporate body is also examined. Security information, such as contained in crime investigation files, is also subject to scrutiny, but we have had no acquisition so far of the records of the prefectural police department. Those records which had been opened before our privacy policy was made are scrutinized upon request in the reading room. Users might be asked to wait for more than an hour during our on site, page-by-page review. We can provide, upon further request for more information, reproduction of documents with black-ink strips of sanitization on them. It usually takes more time than enveloping.

Our policy sets three categories of protection period: 30-49 years, 50-79 years, and over 80 years according to the extent of possible damage disclosure could cause. Also set by the policy is a 30-year blanket rule of identity protection, intended for buffer period to make sure most personal information becomes too old to be misused. The numbers 30, 50, and 80 are widely used for protection period. 100 years and unlimited periods are adopted by some archives.³

In the OPA (Okinawa prefectural archives), the reference services section finally decides the protection period for each case according to the policy. Still, archivists often write dissenting views from the judgment of the section in charge. I have my own on some currently restricted cases. The ramification, in my view, is created by the difference in principle rather than a mere choice of protection period. Archival records, legally speaking, are subject to disclosure by principle. Restriction should be exceptional, and the burden of proof, in my view, should go to the side of closure. You should demonstrate probable damages to a person or a corporation caused by the

³ There are articles on privacy protection practices in Japanese archives in *Archives* (no.16, 2004). *Archives* is a quarterly journal edited, published, and distributed by the National Archives of Japan, and is influential among archival practitioners.

disclosure of information relating to them. But there is a contrary view, the ruling one, where each disclosure should be with a proof that it will contribute to cultural promotion, even when any violation of privacy is unlikely. The results should be drastically different, depending on which principle to choose.

The whole nation is now hypersensitive to the handling of personal information. The latest national census, taken in 2005, marked a record high rate of failure in information collection. 4.4 per cent of the whole population has slipped out of the national statistics, a figure which more than doubled from the previous census of 2000. Some observers suggest that many people, inspired by the Privacy Law enforced the same year, might have become excessively sensitive to providing personal information. An archivist is not working in a vacuum. He/she may tend to be cautious, prone rather to close than to open personal information even archival records are exempted from privacy legislations.

The privacy protection legislation in Japan, whether national or of local, not only protects privacy information but also enforces blanket closure of personal identities with a few exceptions. Excessive compliance and self-imposed restrictions, some are from misunderstanding and some may be from the ambiguity of the law and official guidelines, are widespread around the nation. Now we are witnessing, especially after the enforcement of the national privacy law, more of such cases as hospitals refuse to provide the names of the patients wounded in a large-scale disaster, schools and local communities ceased to make or distribute the directories among their constituents, local governments decline to give civil welfare caseworkers the list of individuals who need assistance and vigilance due to age or disability, all for reasons of legal compliance. On the other hand, there are cases where governments, central or local, refused to disclose the names of officials who were punished by misconduct. Alarmed by the emergence of an overwhelmingly anonymous society, where communal activities are shrinking, and medicine, education, and welfare programs are functioning in a more reserved way, which is likely to hit the less advantaged in our society harder, lawyers, journalists, and scholars are calling for a large-scale revision and amendment of the law.⁴

Eventually, this kind of craze will calm down and people will come to their senses. For the time being, it is important for archivists to stay cool-headed and have their own vision. For each archives is enabled to have their own policy and guidelines for access to its archival records, it will be necessary to reach an agreement with the society it serves as well as among its own archivists on the least, not the most, restriction necessary to balance the contradictory needs of protection and access. Perhaps, a system should be built to exchange views or take criticism from the citizens and scholars.

Access Problems Created in Logistics

Thus far, I have shared with you rather direct problems relating to the use of archival records: the problems that take place in the reading room, or the archival frontline, so to

⁴ In 2006, Nihon Bengoshi Rengokai (Japan Federation of Bar Associations) and Nihon Shinbun Kyokai (The Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association) made their case that the law be modified when they submitted their opinion papers submitted respectively in March and April, to the personal information protection working group of the Advisory Committee for the Cabinet's Office. For various problems of the current privacy legislations and their applications, and suggested alternatives as well, see Aoyagi Takehiko, *Kojin Joho "Ka" hogo ga Nihon o Hakaisuru* (Excessive Protection of Personal Information Is Destroying Japan), Tokyo, 2006.

speak. From here, we are going to shift our attention to logistics, and discuss problems which take place before archival records are delivered to the reading room. If something does not work well at these staging phases, archival records will not reach the users properly and timely. The quality of archival access in a large part is decided by the quality of logistics.

Description and Arrangement

It is the staging phase that is directly connected to the frontline. This includes all the processes beginning with the accession and ending with the access ready condition, from inventory, through rearrangement, description, privacy protection, and to basic preservation.

How much access to archival records as historical sources we can secure is, aside from the access restriction issues, decided by the quality and efficiency of the description and arrangement section. More efficiency in this section, more access to archival records. It is important to design a workflow which makes the most of the given resources especially the human resource. Last year, we examined each process, omitted unimportant ones, introduced necessary ones, described at the series level first and the file level later in a reversal of the OPA practice to that point, and tried to buoy up the morale of catalogers by keeping them aware of their role in the whole archival enterprise. The result was rewarding. The output tripled compared to the average figure of the past ten years. We will keep on improving the system to add more for the public to access. The importance of improvement for better management is common sense among business people whether in the U.S. or in Japan, but it does not seem to be so in the Japanese archival settings. Archivists here discuss methodologies of archival arrangement and description, but not management. As our case shows, improvement of efficiency indicates past losses. If you allow my guesswork, I would think there is a lot of room for many archives in this nation to ensure more access to archival records.

I would also like to point out the immaturity of description standards. It is true that from the 1990's on, inspired by international standards like the International Standard Archival Description of the ICA, archivists here have accumulated case studies. Still, we are on the doorsteps of standardization compared to the cataloging standards achieved and disseminated by the library community here. From my own experience, I am keenly aware of the catalogers' labor having been lost in haphazardness, especially in the case of personal papers, due to the lack of standard.

Problems in Appraisal and Selection

This is an area where it is more difficult to set standards than in arrangement and description. However, this probably is the most important process to ensure better access. The OPA has only three years' experience in appraisal and it is still in the process of standard setting. Personally, I strongly doubt the feasibility of trying to make an objective guideline to distinguish historically or culturally important records from those with no such values. Rather, we are making a guideline based on accountability. And more important thing should be to create a system where the citizens examine our appraisal guideline and results. We should be held accountable not only for destruction decisions but also keeping decisions. It costs approximately two-hundred dollars to process a volume of documents in a Hollinger type of box. Most taxpayers might be

interested in what we preserve rather than what we destroy because it takes more from their pockets.

We made a drastic change in our appraisal methodology last year, and records are now kept or destroyed on the series-by-series basis rather than the usual file-to-file (sometimes item-to-item) basis. We create a series based on an administrative function. We have accumulated nearly three-hundred series so far, and expect that the figure will reach around one thousand finally. The keep/destroy ratio so far is 14/86.

We make series description before appraisal and the descriptions of the series judged to be kept are passed down to the arrangement and description section. This “spin-off” enormously sped up the cataloging process. On the personal papers kept in the archives, however, there seems to be a kind of unwritten rule among the archivists of this nation not to select or weed once donated. The OPA was not an exception and it has processed personal papers regardless of its importance, thus accumulating a lot of backlogs every year. Weeding process was introduced in the OPA two years ago and it was very successful in terms of ensuring the public more access to historical sources. My friends in other local archives hush their voice when I bring up this issue. If, like in the OPA, the selection process, as in the case of government records, is introduced properly, archives will ensure more, not less, access to historical documents.

Problems in Accession

From its creation in 1995, the OPA has been receiving the records from the governors section, where the OPA as an organization is placed. But it is not all that is called the Okinawa prefectural government. The Okinawa prefecture’s freedom of information law defines the scope of the Okinawa prefecture, which includes: the prefectural legislature, executive committees such as the education board or the security committee, and government run corporations like water supplying service or prefecture-run hospitals.

The OPA should have acquired records from these entities, but somehow did not. Again, the OPA is not exceptional. As is often the case for archives in Japan that they keep stronger ties to the section they belong to. Therefore, archives under governor’s section may be weak in accessioning the records of the education board and other committees, and archives belonging to the education board may face difficulties in acquiring the records from the governor’s section. I do not know exactly how this happens. Some might think it has something to do with sectionalism of bureaucracy, but I have reservation about this explanation.

Anyway, without a route for the non-current records open to the archives, they are just sent for destruction as industrial waste. It is true that archives destroy about 90% of records after appraisal, but it is done under intellectual control to serve archival mission. To think of the massive, automatic destruction of non-current records, issues of access restriction discussed above seems to be minor. It is a very serious access problem. Last year, the OPA began to approach the education board and other government entities for accession and obtained a couple of hundred boxes of records as well as accession routes. It will take some more time for us to become a full-fledged archives to ensure better access to the archival records of Okinawa prefecture.

Problems in Records Management and Archives Administration

It is becoming clear to us that perhaps immature records management is the largest factor that impedes records to be transferred to the archives. Documents are created by government officials, and become records when they are fixed and kept for common use. The administrative entities I approached last year had their own repositories for semi-current records. It turned out, however, that they did not have inventories. They did not know what records they kept. So we began with providing advice and support to make lists of records, then we identified records to be transferred to the archives. There have been a couple of cases of transfer from prefectural entities other than the governor's section so far, but they were sporadic, usually transferred with the move of the office, and the documents were boxed in an unorganized way. It makes the following processes like appraisal, arrangement and description extremely strenuous.

These were surely documents, but not records, and the way they were transferred should rather be called collection, like that of the library, than archival accession.⁵ There is an interesting episode in the history of Japanese archives. The Yamaguchi prefectural archives was established in 1959, and is paid respect for as the oldest government archives in Japan. SUZUKI Masachi, then the director of the Yamaguchi prefectural library and the leading figure in the establishment of the Yamaguchi prefectural archives, published his complaints about the way it obtained the prefectural records. Suzuki, who introduced the Japanese to the archival ideas and theories of Hilary Jenkinson and T. R. Schellenberg, was invited to write an essay for the newsletter of the Yamaguchi prefectural archives. He emphasized in the essay that the archival holdings should be naturally transferred, not collected, that this was the difference from the library's way of acquisition.⁶

This episode makes a very important point for us if we are to ensure present and future access to archival records. In a nation where "archives" are mistakenly understood to mean "documentary sources of historical or cultural value," apparently emphasis has been placed on collecting antique manuscripts, leaving the accession of government records unorganized and rather haphazard. A friend of mine from a local archives in the Kanto area once quipped in a self-deriding manner, "what we are doing is garbage collecting." He meant it is not archival to go around government offices during the "office clean-up" operation period and quickly pick up supposedly archival documents from the stacks of trashed papers.

In Japan, there is an often used notion to explain what an archives is. It goes like this: the library collects books, the museum collects artifacts, and the archives collects documents." This tripartite theory is misleading in two senses. First, by regarding the form (i.e. document) as the source of "archivalness," archivists tend to lack the notion that proper management of current records is essential for proper accession of archives. Secondly, the tripartite theory totally lacks the appreciation of the roles the libraries and

⁵ The Library Law (National Law No. 118, 1950) in Article II establishes the functional definition of the library as it "collects, organizes, and keeps books, records, and other necessary materials for the use of the general public." (*Italics added*) The Archives Law, on the other hand, does not refer to archival accession by the term "collect." Instead, "preserve" is called out from the lexicon into this very simple, seven-article law. The presumable reason is that because the Archives Law is intended to secure government records of historical importance, which are otherwise destroyed as their retention periods expire, so the most suitable term should be "preserve," not "collect."

⁶ Suzuki Masachi, "On Archives: Three Points of My Criticism," *Monjokan News* no.2, Yamaguchi Prefectural Archives, 1966.

museums have played for decades in collecting, preserving, and providing access to documentary sources of historical importance. Instead, archivists, misled by the theory, have regarded the roles and achievements of libraries and museums as a kind of anomaly. They maintained that libraries and museums would be relieved of the “burden” once archival programs had disseminated around the nation. This precluded any chance of cooperation with the library and museum communities.⁷

The OPA’s past collecting policy has been compatible with the tripartite theory. It has been competing with the prefectural library in building its collections. Accession, appraisal, arrangement and description of prefectural records have been but a sideshow on the archival stage. This has been revised. Last year, the prefectural government decided to withdraw from the management of the prefectural archives and designate an enterprise to run the archives for the prefecture. The specifications the prefectural government drew up placed emphasis on the prefectural records based on the lessons learned of the past decade. In the past March, a committee was set up with representatives from the prefectural library, the prefectural museum, the prefectural peace museum, the library of the prefectural college for fine and performing arts, and the prefectural archives. The mission of the committee is to cooperate and establish efficient collection building. The prefectural archives in April enlarged its government archives section to complete appraisal of 26,000 boxes of records waiting in the repository in three years.

Thus far, I have discussed problems of record management and archives management which may have impeded access to historical archives and the actions taken by the OPA to solve these problems. It is possible to share this experience of Okinawa, for I believe that the issues of reallocating resources and cooperating with other institutes are not isolated matters.

A Decisive Absence: the Most Serious Problem of All

My discussion began in the reading room issues, and like through the viewfinder of a withdrawing camera, the scope was getting broader, and so were issues: arrangement and description, appraisal, accession, records management, and archives administration. Finally, I would like to discuss what I think is the most serious access problem of all: a decisive absence of archival program.

Access problems discussed so far belong to those local governments with archival programs. Local governments without archival programs, on the other hand, have no access problems to archival records discussed above because they have no archival records. Such problems CAN’T happen. This should be the most serious problem when we discuss the access issues. Thirty out of the forty-seven prefectures (63.8%), and seven out of the seventeen designated cities (41.2%) have archives. These figures may not be that bad. At the municipal level, though, only twelve out of 1,800 have archives (0.4%). The sheer lack is overwhelming. It would make better sense to discuss the absence of archives rather than to talk of a fraction of archives for ensuring access to archival records. In the case of the library program, for comparison, the rates are 100%

⁷ The legislations of Library and Museum encourage both institutions to collect what they regard necessary to achieve their goals without any categorical boundaries such as “library to collect books” or “museum to collect artifacts.” The “tripartite theory” is built on shaky grounds in a legal sense.

for the prefecture, 94% for the designated city, 97.9% for the city, 53.9% for the township, and 22.0% for the village.

Why the Absence? Theories and Refutations

There are two popular explanations for the absence. One is economical and fiscal, the other politico-cultural. We have experienced a decade of recession in the 1990's dubbed as "the lost ten years." Government deficits, whether central or local, are reaching a thousand trillion yen. On a per capita basis, each of Japanese people, even a baby, is in debt more than eight million yen. The situation is too bad for initiating a new program like archives. This explanation sounds true, but before embracing it, we may need some examination. During the first thirty years of Japanese local government archives, that is from 1959, when the Yamaguchi prefectural archives was created, through the 1960's and 1970's which boosted Japan as the world's second largest economy, to the end of 1980's, when Japan's "bubble economy" was at its peak, the number of prefectural archives increased from one to sixteen. From the 1990's on, on the other hand, fourteen prefectures joined the archival community in fifteen years. In other words, one archives was created every two years while the Japanese economy was rapidly expanding, whereas one archival program was added every year during the period including a decade of lean years. The pace doubled, and yet it's still a long way to go.

The municipality, however, is falling far behind. There were four archival programs in 1989, and twelve at present. True, a 300% increasing rate seems to be extremely high. But it is because the initial number of programs was small. The number of municipal governments was 3,000 several years ago, and now 1,800. Twelve new programs created in seventeen years seem to be too few. Take the public library for example. Its number grew from 1,917 in 1990 to 2,714 in 2003. A 42% increase is an astounding figure considering the already large size of the library community. Since every prefecture already has its library program, the growth is attributed to the municipal library. This phenomenon strongly suggests that economical and fiscal adversity is not enough to explain the sluggishness of archival growth. Indeed, the library is an enterprise which costs more than archival program, for the library has to secure a budget for purchasing thousands of published materials. Roughly speaking, prefectural and designated city libraries spends a couple of million dollars a year and municipal libraries several thousand dollars. The archives, on the other hand, does not pay for accession of government records except for transportation if necessary. Therefore, behind the library boom in the time of spending cuts should be something appealing both to the municipal authorities and taxpayers.

I have heard that political culture of Japan is the impeding factor. This theory is based on a hypothesis that the mentality of the ruling class of feudal Japan has been passed down to the present politicians and bureaucrats. People should obey the law but should not be inquisitive. Bureaucrats know that public access to administrative information will weaken their rule and are reluctant to create archival programs. However, this theory is refuted by the sheer fact that it took only sixteen years for all the prefectural government to legislate freedom of information acts since the time when Kanagawa and Saitama prefectures enacted the first FOIA's. If bureaucrats dislike transparency of administration, they should be more reluctant in allowing access to current records rather than non-current, archival records. Moreover, there are archives that successfully combined the two. Municipal archives of the cities of Kawasaki and Kuki concluded

that freedom information and archives were inextricable, and introduced both programs at the same time.

A “Double Track Strategy” Hypothesis

My own theory to explain the absence is this: the long advocated and widespread notion that the local government archives should be built on “two pillars,” that is government records and old private papers, has been hindering faster dissemination of archival programs. This is but a hypothesis, evidence and counter-evidence yet to be collected. Still, I would like to suggest that an archival program as a documentary repository is less appealing to taxpayers and administrators than a library program is. I will provide the grounds for this contention now.

Archival Niche

As said before, archival materials are not merely historical or cultural sources in the form of documents as opposed to historical or cultural artifacts and books. Such documentary sources have been already treated by librarians and curators as cultural heritage. What is really new and unique in the archival program is that it appraises, processes, preserves, and provides access to non-current government records for the present and future generations. To borrow a term from the lexicon of ecological biology, documentation of local history or culture is a *niche* which has long been occupied by the species such as librarians and curators. Treatment of non-current government records, on the other hand, is a niche uninhabited so far. Filling up of the latter position, therefore, should be harmoniously done, for it is not a duplication of existing programs, and no one will dispute the necessity of the government’s initiating an archival program with a simple and straightforward message of archival mission. This I believe will help increase the number of local government archives.

Administrative Placement of the Archives

The “tripartite theory” is, as said before, based on the division of work, where the archives works on the documentary sources while the library and the museum on the books and the artifacts respectively. Since the library and museum have their legal grounds in the Social Education Law, the tripartite theory presumes that an archival program belongs to the domain of social education. This idea does not seem to be very innovative. Instead, it should be more appealing to place stronger emphasis on how an archives secures, processes, preserves, and provide access to important administrative records and in so doing, supports the government and constituents it serves. Especially, it is essential to make government officials convinced of the usefulness of the archives for their own conduct of duty.

Assessing the Performance of Local Governments

To sum up and paraphrase the discussion above, assessment of the performance of a local government in taking responsibilities of its non-current records just takes a look at its archival program. Assessment of the performance in local documentation, on the other hand, involves other factors such as social education. Archival program may play a role in the cultural policy of a government and may even contribute a lot to it, but it is not a decisive factor. Assessment is done in total ratings. If the emphasis is on the local

documentation, a difference that an archives would make could be too small to be appreciated. This will not help motivate local governments to introduce archival programs in the first place. While there should be various explanations why the freedom of information legislation has proven to be so contagious, I would like to put my two cents in: it's visible. A government has either (a) introduced it, or (b) not introduced it. It is binary ("yes" or "no"), no ambiguity in it. Perhaps there was a threshold dissemination ratio beyond which the "have-nots" began to feel uneasy about being a backward minority and take pressures from their constituents. Indicators, simple and straightforward, should be established to assess local government archival programs like the quality of records management, archival coverage of local government entities, and so on, thus exposing each government to the light of comparison. Essentially, archives is not a building. It is a program. Each government may have their own archival program according to its fiscal standing and other factors to consider.

Discussed thus far is not meant to be a sweeping repudiation of the traditional "double-track strategy." I am more of a practitioner than a theorist, and as a practitioner, I subscribe a notion that "the cats that can catch the mice are the good ones."⁸ If better access to local government records is the shared concern here, and if the dissemination of archival program is recognized as an important advocacy, I would suggest to examine and appraise how good a cat the traditional theory has been. We learn from the past and that is what archives are for.

Tapping the Untapped: the Library's Potential

"Create the *monjokan* (the house of documents) movement," a preservation movement for local documentation, apparently alienated librarians in the 1960's.⁹ The Japan Association of Archives Institutions (*Zenshiryokyo*), a vehicle of the movement since its foundation in the 1970's, consists of a wide membership such as archivists, local government officials, historians, curators, conservators, and so on, but few librarians. It is regrettable in terms of the preservation of historical sources of locality, for the library has been the champion of such materials even before the war. It is true that its emphasis to local materials seems to have been shifted to other areas of concerns since the 1970's, however, the library still has enormous potential.

The prefectural library of Okinawa (OPL) a couple of years ago decided to do more about the local materials of Okinawa, and redirected its resources accordingly. It had then three million dollars of purchasing budget, of which we redirected approximately 30%. That means almost a million dollars' additional investment in purchase, microfilming, processing, digitizing, and preservation of historical materials of local importance that year. It is amazing how enormous a difference that a library can make even if it is the library of the poorest prefecture's, with a budget size which belongs to the lowest tier of all the prefectural libraries. The purchase budget of all the public

⁸ Deng Xiaoping's famous 1978 rhetoric on economic reform

⁹ For the ramifications of the *monjokan* movement and librarians, see NEMOTO Akira, "Chiiki Saabisu no Igi" (the Value of Local Service) in *Chiiki Shiryo Nyumon* (Introduction to Local Sources) edited by San-Tama Kyodo Shiryo Kenkyukai (1999), pp.30-31. See also TAJIMA Tomohiro, "Nihon ni Okeru Toshokan to Monjokan no Kankei no Arikata ni Tsuite: Toshokan no Monjokan Ninshiki wo Chushin ni," (The Relations between the Library and the Archives in Japan: Centered on the Ways the Library Community Has Understood the Archives," in *Yokohama Shiritsu Daigaku Gakusei Ronshu* (Collected Essays of Yokohama City University Students) no. 43, edited by Yokohama Shiritsu Daigaku Gakujutsu Kenkyukai, pp.136-137.

libraries combined mounts more than 30 million dollars annually. If a fraction, say 3%, of it is redirected to the treatment of local materials, we get a million dollars for that purpose.

Moreover, there are more than 7,000 librarians in the public libraries around the nation. The number of archivists, on the other hand, is about 40¹⁰. Since there is no licensing system in this nation, the figure is based on the returns by local government archives upon an inquiry made by the National Archives of Japan. The gap in sheer size and resource between the two communities is beyond comparison. We have often heard such comments in archival circles that “the librarians can’t process private papers properly. They are trained to handle books.” It is not a constructive attitude. If archivists are allowed to monopolize the mission of local documentation, can a force of 40 self-styled professionals do better than a community of 7,000 licensed professionals? An archival cat might think better. He/she advocates, instead, the development of cooperation strategy instead of competition, help the library cats catch more local mice. At the same time, he/she promotes dissemination of archival programs nationwide. After all, if the goal is public access to administrative, historical and cultural documents, then it should be access to more of such resources, certainly not less.

¹⁰ The figure is based on the National Archives’ latest annual report on the state of the central and local government archives in Japan. This author picked up, from each archives’ submitted organizational structure, the number of full time archivist by the name of “senmon-in”(specialists) or “kenkyuin” (researcher) and the like. Again, there is no licensing system in Japan, the nature of these archival positions may vary a lot.