

Business Archives in Japan: An Overview and Access Issues

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INTRODUCTION

Despite Japan's history of industrialization since the nineteenth century and its current membership of the Group of Eight, those involved in business archives in Japan have long been isolated from opportunities to share their information on Japanese business archives with their international counterparts, except for those belonging to the China Archives Association and some European archivists and scholars. As such, there has not been much of a connection with the Section on Business and Labour Archives of the International Council on Archives (ICA/SBL) and thus there is no entry on Japan in *Business Archives in International Comparison*¹ published by the section. As one of those involved in preservation and utilization of business archives in Japan, I am very excited about this opportunity to report on Japanese business archives to our friends from the United States and to share with them what we see in the present situation.

I would like to first present an overview of business archives in Japan and then explain the relationship between *shashi* (published company histories in Japan), which genre is not often seen abroad², and business archives. I would also like to introduce issues surrounding disposition, salvage, and preservation of business archives in Japan citing examples from corporate M&A and bankruptcy cases which frequency has surged recently. Toward the end of my presentation, I am going to report on the issues faced in accessing Japanese business archives based on the most updated information obtained through the research conducted for the project of compiling a directory of business archives in Japan, which is currently undertaken by the Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship, Shibusawa Ei'ichi Memorial Foundation.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW OF BUSINESS ARCHIVES IN JAPAN

First of all an overview of business archives in Japan is presented following the format of the above-mentioned ICA /SBL report.

(1) Definition and Legislation

¹ <http://www.ica.org/biblio/SBL25082004.pdf>

² The practice of narrating and publishing histories of companies and enterprises does exist in the United States and Europe. *Shashi*, or published company histories in Japan, is different from them in that the company itself becomes the compiler as well as the publisher. Some view it as a practice unique to Japan, but to the extent of my knowledge, corporate histories and histories of associations in Korea are extremely similar to Japanese *shashi*.

Japanese statute does not provide the definition of business archives as such. Looking over the related laws and ordinance, article 4 of the “Public Archives Law” enacted in 1987 defines a public archives as “an institution whose purpose is to preserve and to offer for public perusal those public documents and records that are of importance as historical materials, including such public documents and other records of importance as historical materials that were formerly in the custody of the State (...) as well as to conduct research and studies relating thereto.” According to the summary of interpretation issued by the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary in 1989, “public documents and records” are “public documents and other records,” which “include antique books, ancient texts and any other private papers.” Since business archives are one form of private documents, one may expect to see them being within the scope of preservation and perusal at public archives. However, there does not exist a special legislation focused on private papers, in particular on business archives, and regulate their management, preservation and public access.

Establishment of local public archives ran by local public bodies are governed by the local ordinance. Documents preserved and made available to the public by local public archives are historical documents including private papers. Again, it is reasonable to expect business archives to be part of private papers, but there is no ordinance devoted to business archives.

“The Law Concerning Access to Information Held by Incorporated Administrative Agencies, Etc.,” which was enacted in 2001 stipulates rules for disclosure of information owned by Incorporated Administrative Agencies. Agencies such as the Bank of Japan are subject to this act.

Neither legislation nor ordinance exists for in-house corporate archives.

Organizations and programs equivalent to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) and its grants program, or former Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (HMC=Historical Manuscripts Commission) and its official registration program do not currently exist in Japan³.

(2) Institutions

i) Public repositories

Shown below are the examples of public repositories that collect and preserve business archives.

- Research Institute for Economics & Business Administration, Kobe University
<http://www.rieb.kobe-u.ac.jp/index-e.html>

³ Locating and preserving private archives became active as a part of historical data preservation campaign after 1945. [Shirai, Tetsuya. “Minkan Shiryo Kara Monjokan & Koubunshokan wo Torae Naosu” (Reexamine archival institutions focusing on private archives). *Chihou-shi Kenkyu* (Study of local history). No.314 (2005)] After mid-1980s, there has been an increase in the number of historians and archival scientists investigating location and outline of archives and archival institutions using *Kaken’hi* (Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research) funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and then Ministry of Education (current Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). Their research, however, is placed as academic research without any linkage to the archives policy adopted by the Japanese government. There has been no study focused solely on business archives.

- Tokyo Keizai University Library <http://www.tku.ac.jp/~library/> (in Japanese)
- The Library of Economics, the University of Tokyo
<http://www.lib.e.u-tokyo.ac.jp/english/>
- Hitotsubashi University Library <http://www.lib.hit-u.ac.jp/>

ii) Former *zaibatsu* oriented repositories

Shown below are the *zaibatsu* (giant family controlled business conglomerates) oriented repositories.

- Sumitomo Shi-ryo-kan
- Mitsui Bunko <http://www.mitsui-bunko.or.jp/> (in Japanese)
- The Mitsubishi Archives <http://www.meri.or.jp/>

The *zaibatsu* played a significant role in the Japanese economy from 19th century to early 20th century. Although they were dissolved following the end of World War II, archives of the *zaibatsu* families and group companies have been passed down to date. Establishment of Sumitomo Shi-ryo-kan dates back to 1887 when compilation of Sumitomo family history began, and the origin of Mitsui Bunko can be traced back to 1903 when Mitsui assigned a division to compile its family history. The Mitsubishi Archives is relatively new with its opening in 1996 in commemoration of the 125th anniversary of Mitsubishi group. It was established as an adjunct facility to The Mitsubishi Economic Research Institute (MERI), which has its own tradition since 1932.

iii) In-house corporate archives

It is not an easy task to get hold of how many in-house corporate archives exist in Japan. As I will explain later on, preservation and utilization of business archives in Japan has evolved in the form dependent on *shashi* compilation. This made in-house departments such as *shashi* compilation division and corporate information division (library) partially take charge of archives function, instead of archives that manage noncurrent documents taking full responsibility. In addition, in-house archives often reside with sections such as public relations, general administration, and corporate communications.

Recently, however, some efforts can be seen in developing archives as a division that constantly maintains and manages noncurrent documents. There is an increase in the number of cases where such divisions are named “Archives.” Following are examples of the usage of “Archives” in English appellations: Archives (Bank of Japan), Corporate Archive Office (Kao Corporation), Toyota Archives (TOYOTA MOTOR CORPORATION), Toraya Archives (TORAYA Confectionery Co., Ltd), Corporate History Archives Office (CANON INC.), Archives and Documents Section (SHIMIZU CORPORATION), Archives Group (TAKENAKA CORPORATION), etc⁴. Divisions in charge of archives with “History” included as a part of their names are observed in Corporate History Group (DAIKIN INDUSTRIES, LTD.) and Office of Corporate History (Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd., Morinaga & Co., Ltd.)

In the field of in-house corporate archives in Japan, records management system and archives generally exist as discrete functions. Based on the research so far, no case of managing

⁴ This does not necessarily mean that divisions named “Archives” are not responsible for compilation of *shashi*.

records pursuant to record schedules is found except for the Bank of Japan.

(3) Business Archives Association and related organizations

- **Business Archives Association** <http://www.baa.gr.jp/> (in Japanese)

Business Archives Association (BAA) was established in 1981 with the assistance from members of *shashi* group of the Japan Special Libraries Association-Kanto, scholars, and business leaders. It is the only organization in Japan that is specialized in business archives. The purpose of BAA is to recognize (raise awareness of) the social and historical importance of business archives, to enhance the exchange among members, and to study and conduct research on collection, preservation and management of business archives, by which it will help improve practice and knowledge of business archives.

Members of BAA are comprised of institutional members and individuals known as special members. Institutional members include companies that agree with the purpose of BAA, of which departments are engaged in collection, preservation, and management of business archives as well as compilation of corporate histories. They also include research institutes, libraries, and museums that house industry histories related documents and business archives.

The number of institutional memberships steadily increased during the first 10 years and gradually decreased thereafter. This probably reflects the downturn of the Japanese economy in the 1990s. In addition, members have reportedly been experiencing difficulty in participating in the BAA activities because of the increased workload within their own companies since the late 1990s. The latest figure in this institutional membership category is 86.

BAA is working on providing a place for interactions between the members and enhancing skill and knowledge required in dealing with archives through activities such as issuance of newsletters, publication of research reports *Kigyo to Shiryo* (The Journal of Business Archives), holding of seminars related to *shashi*, corporate museums and archives, organization of study meetings and observation tours, putting together survey teams visiting industrial heritages and museums in and out of Japan, interactions with China Archives Association, and provision of courses for training business archivists.

Publications. In addition to the issuance of newsletters on paper basis, BAA has launched its website in May 2001. *Kigyo to Shiryo* (The Journal of Business Archives) which was first issued in March 1986, on the other hand, has been dormant since the issuance of Series 6 in April 1998.

- **The Japan Society for Archival Science** <http://www.jsas.info/> (in Japanese)
- **The Records Management Society of Japan** <http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/rmsj/> (in Japanese)

Archivists, curators, and librarians who handle business archives sometimes belong to the above two organizations as individual members. However, there currently exists no sectional committee specialized in business archives in neither of the organizations.

(4) Training for Business Archivists

Personnel in charge of in-house business archives are not always professionally qualified or trained as archivists. A system for certifying professional archivists is yet to be established in Japan. In some cases, certified librarians or curators function as archivists; in other cases, corporate personnel who have the requisite background with a specialization in history play the roles of archivists. Otherwise, staff members who are not trained in archives, records management, library or museum work or history simply have to work as archivists. The last type of staff appointment is a widely held custom in Japanese companies; the newly appointed person makes an effort to fit the role of archivist. Employees assigned to in-house archives related departments can receive education for the theory and practice of archives using programs such as those listed below.

Firstly, there is a course for training business archivists provided by BAA. The course has basically been offered each year since 1992 although there were some interruptions from time to time.

There is also a program called Archives College organized by the Department of Archival Studies, National Institute of Japanese Literature. Although this program is not exclusive to those responsible for in-house business archives, such audience are also welcomed among graduate students and archivists currently working for public archives.

(5) Guides

Following are some of the guides to business archives.

i) Paper forms

- *Nihon Komonjo-gaku Koza* (Japanese diplomatic seminars) Volume 10 Modern Age II. Tokyo: Yuzankaku, Inc., 1980.
- *Shintei Kigyo Hakubutsu-kan Jiten* (Directory of museums established by private enterprises in Japan, revised edition). Tokyo: Nichigai Associates, Inc., 2003.

ii) Electric forms

- The Research Institute for Economics and Business Administration Liaison Center, Kobe University
<http://www.rieb.kobe-u.ac.jp/liaison/eng/>
- The Library of the Center for International Research on the Japanese Economy, the University of Tokyo
<http://www.lib.e.u-tokyo.ac.jp/shiryō/shiryō.html> (in Japanese)
- Special Collections, Hitotsubashi University Library
<http://www.lib.hit-u.ac.jp/service/bunko/bunko.html> (in Japanese)
- *Shashi* project links, The Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship, Shibusawa Ei'ichi Memorial Foundation
<http://www.shibusawa.or.jp/english/center/shashi/shashi03.html>

(6) Journals and literature

i) Serial publications

- Business Archives Association, ed. *Kigyo to Shiryo* (The Journal of Business Archives). Series. 1 (1986) – Series. 6 (1998). Tokyo: Business Archives Association, 1986 – 1998.
- Business Archives Association, ed. *Newsletters*. Tokyo: Business Archives Association.

Discussions on business archives can be found in following academic journals.

- The Records Management Society of Japan, ed. *Records Management, Journal of the Records Management Society of Japan*. Japan: The Records Management Society of Japan, 1996 ~.
- The Japan Society for Archival Science, ed. *Akaibuzu Gaku Kenkyu* (Journal of the Japan Society for Archival Science). Tokyo: The Japan Society for Archival Science, 2004 ~.

ii) Books

- Business Archives Association, ed. *Kigyo Shiryo Kyogi-kai 20 Nen-shi* (The 20-year history of the Business Archives Association). Tokyo: Business Archives Association, 2004.

Although following is a catalog of *shashi*, I am adding this to the list because it provides clues as to the existence of business archives based on which *shashi* originated.

- Japan Business History Institute, ed. *Zoho Kaitei-ban Kaishashi Sogo Mokuroku* (A supplemented and revised union catalog of histories of companies and economic organizations). Tokyo: Japan Business History Institute, 1996.

SHASHI AND BUSINESS ARCHIVES

More than a hundred of *shashi* are issued each year in Japan and the number accumulates to at least 13,000 since Meiji-era (1868-1912)⁵. Murahashi Katsuko, an expert on *shashi*, defines that “*shashi* is the publication in which a company provides an account of its own history based on its own archives and assumes responsibility for it⁶.” *Shashi* is gray literature that is not available through normal channels of publications and distributions. It is often used as educational materials for employees and sometimes as in-house reference tools. One major manufacturer in Japan digitized the information related to its *shashi* and made all the data

⁵ Murahashi, Katsuko. *Shashi no Kenkyu* (A study of company histories). Tokyo: Diamond, Inc., 2002. p.i.
Japan Business History Institute, ed. *Zoho Kaiteiban Kaishashi Sogo Mokuroku* (A supplemented and revised union catalog of histories of companies and economic organizations) . Tokyo: Japan Business History Institute, 1996. 817.

⁶ Murahashi, Katsuko. *Shashi no Kenkyu* (A study of company histories). 2-3.

available to the employees from their computer terminals using intracompany LAN. In addition to the form of printed books, there is also an increase in the number of *shashi* issued in electronic media such as DVDs. Some companies even provide their *shashi* to an internet based *shashi* full text search service in order to enhance the use of corporate and intellectual information resources⁷.

Compilation of *shashi* rarely becomes a routine or core operations within an enterprise. It is not something that is constantly worked on, but rather be focused in the time frame of every 5 years, 10 years, and in some occasions 25 years. There are not many companies that establish in-house corporate archives and maintain perpetual programs for preserving and making use of noncurrent documents with historical value. Instead, working groups are often assigned on ad-hoc basis some years prior to a commemorating time such as a semi-centennial or a centennial anniversary and start putting together *shashi* by collecting documents or using oral history techniques. This is why there is demand for various seminars, workshops and forums focused on compiling *shashi*.

In response to such demand, BAA holds “Kaishashi (Corporate History) Seminar” twice a year. Nippon Keidanren, which has more than 1300 corporate members, also supports *shashi* compilation of its members by hosting “Shashi Forum” about twice a year. In-house archive department staffs or employees responsible for *shashi* compilation can benefit from exchanging information at these opportunities and also acquiring know-how required in assembling *shashi* using business archives.

There also exists a business supporting compilation and publication of *shashi*. It may well be referred to as “*Shashi* Industry.” Service providers such as printing and publishing companies also organize seminars periodically. These seminars also play a role similar to those offered by BAA and Nippon Keidanren.

After completing the publication of *shashi*, some companies set up archives programs to make use of the non-current documents collected for *shashi* compilation, while some others left the documents untouched, without any active management. The latter implies the loss of archival resources and is one of the problems that need to be solved.

MERGERS, ACQUISITIONS AND LIQUIDATION ISSUES

Issues related to the disposition of business archives upon mergers, acquisitions and liquidation indicate unique aspects of how business archives are treated in Japan.

- **Yokohama Specie Bank**

Yokohama Specie Bank (YSB) was exclusively engaged in foreign exchange currency operations until the end of World War II. After the War, its operations were succeeded by the Bank of Tokyo, Ltd. (BoT), which further merged into the Bank of Mitsubishi, Ltd. (BoM) in 1996. Business archives of YSB that were held by the BoT (over 1,200 boxes) were supposed to have been disposed at the time of the merger with the BoM. Thanks to the intermediacy by economic history scholars and other university staffs, the archives instead ended up being transferred and donated to the University of Tokyo, Faculty of

⁷ <http://shashinomori.dualchives.jp/>

Economics in 2000.

- **Yamaichi Securities**

Yamaichi Securities Co. had been in operation for over a hundred years when it announced voluntary closure of its business in 1997. A part of its archives were donated to The Library of Economics, the University of Tokyo, and documents related to Yamaichi Economic Research Institute together with one professional management staff were transferred to the Osaka Gakuin University Library for value.

Salvation and transfer of archives upon disposition of business archives associated with mergers and bankruptcies are often led by scholars in the field of economic and business history rather than the network of business archivists. Two cases mentioned above happen to involve the Library of Economics, the University of Tokyo but there are other cases reported involving libraries of other universities.

ACCESS

When considering access to business archives, appropriate starting point would probably be to obtain information as to the location of business archives in repositories and in-house corporate archives. In Japan, directories for in-house corporate archives similar to the Directory of Corporate Archives in the United States and Canada edited by the Business Archives Section of the Society of American Archivist, or Directory of corporate archives by The Business Archives Council have never been put together to date. Because there is no professional archivist association, location information of business archives tend to have been kept to scholars studying history at universities and thus has not been easily accessible by general public. This situation still holds true. It is also not easy for scholars to get access to such information. In many cases, their access is based on their individual effort and use of private contacts rather than taking advantage of finding aids of some sort.

In order to improve the situation described above, the Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship, Shibusawa Ei'ichi Memorial Foundation, to which I belong, is working on developing a directory of institutions in Japan that hold business archives. Our project also includes establishment of a database covering location and outline of business archives in Japan. Business archives directories in the US and Europe are drawn upon in facilitating this project.

The information sought included the following: the name of the corporate, its English appellation, the address of the Internet homepage, its history, the name of the section in charge of archives, its English appellation, address, phone and fax numbers, e-mail address, the name of the person in charge of archives, conditions governing access, conditions governing reproduction, scope and content, finding aids, archival history, immediate source of acquisition or transfer, the language and scripts of the material, the scheduling information on appraisal and destruction, the system of arrangement, the physical characteristics and technical requirements, the existence and location of originals, the existence and location of copies, related publications, museums and exhibitions, date, notes, and the records management system.

We just received responses to our surveys from approximately 30 in-house archives and repositories, which result is being disclosed on trial on a limited basis.⁸ Let me introduce accessibility to Japanese business archives based on this study, in particular conditions required for access.

Based on responses to our survey, public repositories such as university libraries are open to general public.⁹ Access to in-house corporate archives, on the other hand, tends to be basically limited to internal use or scholarly research. Advance applications and screening are required when granting access to outside users in most of the cases. Some archives responded that they handle such requests on a case-by-case basis. *Business Archives in International Comparison* issued by ICA/SBL begins with the following sentence: “In dealing with business archives, we are caught between two fundamental democratic rights: The right to have access to information, and The right to have and control private property.” This also applies to Japan. The Bank of Japan and The Industry Club of Japan are two exceptions among in-house archives, disclosing what they have to the public without any restriction.

In the survey, we also asked whether there is any internal rule as to preservation and custody of documents, to which 12 organizations responded “yes” and 8 organizations with “no” (including 1 with “currently in work.”). For those answered yes, we further asked for rules regarding the time period applicable for preservation and custody. Responses varied from “stipulated in the internal rules” and “(governed by) document handling rule” to “from 1 year up to permanent preservation,” “responsible department is assigned but no further rule is provided for its activities,” “detailed retention years are determined for each of business historical archives, numerical documents (finance), and operation related documents,” “according to the internal document rule, term for custody (security) purposes is set by original departments and there is no further rule for long term custody of archives,” and “criteria for identifying archives to be preserved is provided, but nothing more.” It is hard to say that the rules and frameworks for preserving records and documents related to past operations are adequately prepared at in-house corporate archives in Japan. As I previously mentioned in National overview of business archives in Japan, records management that secure accountability of current or near past operations is not collaborating or linking with archives.

An impending issue on access seems to be to prepare rules related to management and utilization of archives at in-house corporate archives, to put rules such as access policies in writing, and to form a mechanism that connects from records management to archives. In addition to this, it is also important to aggregate, disclose and provide institutional information and archives information related to repositories and in-house corporate archives to users.

⁸ Following enterprises, organizations, and institutions provided cooperation. Ajinomoto Co., Inc, Isetan Company Limited, Kao Corporation, CANON INC., Kyodo Printing Co., Ltd., SHIMIZU CORPORATION, DAIKIN INDUSTRIES, LTD., Dai Nippon Printing Co., Ltd., TAKENAKA CORPORATION, Teikoku Databank, Ltd., Tokio Marine & Nichido Fire Insurance Co., Ltd., TOYOTA MOTOR CORPORATION, TORAYA Confectionary Co., Ltd., NAKABAYASHI CO., LTD., Bank of Japan, The Industry Club of Japan, Nippon Yusen Kabushiki Kaisha, Fuji Photo Film Co., Ltd., Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd., Mitsui Sumitomo Insurance Company, Limited, Morinaga & Co., Ltd., The Yamaguchi Bank, Ltd., Lion Corporation., Rissho Kosei-kai, WAKODO COMPANY LIMITED, Research Institute for Economics & Business Administration - Kobe University, Shibusawa Memorial Museum Shibusawa Ei'ichi Memorial Foundation, Sumitomo Shi-ryo-kan, Tokyo Keizai University Library, The Library of Economics the University of Tokyo, Hitotsubashi University Library, Mitsui Bunko, and The Mitsubishi Archives.

⁹ Note that you will still be required to satisfy conditions for using university libraries.

CONCLUSION

As you can see from the number of *shashi* issuance, no small volume of business archives is being brought forward to date. However, there lie various obstacles in accessing these archives: lack of tool such as a business archives directory, unavailability of finding aids, inadequacy in professional business archivists, exclusive possession of archives information by scholars, and last but not least, absence of access policies and rules for preservation and custody of records and archives.

Given this situation, it is evident that the development of various sources of business archives information such as promotion of in-house corporate archives directory is necessary. Advanced information and communication technology is likely to be of great help in working on these projects. It is indeed required to introduce global level best practice guidelines to those engaged in business archives in Japan and also to provide business archives information to users in and outside Japan.

In addition, globalization in economy directs entrepreneurial operations to transnational movement whether people like it or not. Business archives also need to proceed with globalization. Once an enterprise becomes globalized, it is required to ensure its transparency to more stakeholders in wider range. Those of us who work on archives in Japan earnestly hope to make our interaction with business archivists abroad including friends from the US more active, and encourage information sharing.