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Efforts of Japanese local governments to develop record management systems and public archives

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Dr. Tetsuya Shirai and Dr. Seiichi Koike

The Japanese Government has gone through many transitions since the 1880's to develop record management systems and public archives in Japan. The need to address their development stemmed from the need to address the preservation and use of historically important records and materials. The local government system saw a reform in the late 1880's followed by the abolishment of county offices in 1926, merger of cities, towns and villages in the late 1950's and the establishment of the National Archives Act in 1987. Although there has been progress on the establishment of the Act, to date, there has been little progress on the preservation of historically important records and materials. Common challenges continue to hinder the preservation efforts as a result of financial and physical limitations, poor understanding of the use of such records and the failure of local governments to acknowledge records management as a priority.

The Public Records and Archives Management Act (PRAMA) was enacted on 01 July, 2009 and stipulates the responsibility of local governments with regards to efforts to achieve and manage better public records. A group of experts from different sectors in Japan published a guideline to assist local governments in formulating records management regulations in 2011. To date, some local governments are introducing frameworks to assist the management of public records whilst other local governments work in partnership with affiliated institutions (such as libraries) to establish systems that will better address records management and in the process address the preservation and use of historically important records and materials of Japan. It is anticipated that through the increasing number of public archives established in museums and libraries in Japan, local governments can continue in its efforts to preserve records and materials that are part of Japan's heritage.

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Public Records and Archives Management Act and challenges after its enforcement

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Professor Shinichi Okamoto

The Public Records and Archives Management Act (PRAMA) was enacted on 01 July, 2009 to improve the records management efforts of Japanese state organizations and administrative agencies and to strengthen the archival system through the National Archives of Japan. However, it was not fully effective until the Japanese State of Emergency on April, 2011 during the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Nuclear Power plant disaster in Fukushima, Japan. During these major disasters, PRAMA faced challenges in relation to the practical manner of enforcing compliance at the operational level and in the aftermath of these two disasters. In addition, there was a need to streamline procedures in relation to the checking of record schedules and the clarity required to check administrative documents and records that were approved to be destroyed by responsible Ministers of government departments. In the aftermath of the Earthquake and Nuclear power plant disaster, the National Archives of Japan further identified the need to establish rules for the creation and preservation of records created in a state of emergency. Japan is taking all steps necessary to preserve these records, strengthen PRAMA and in the process, to address the challenges faced in order for Japan to be better prepared for the future.

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The archives in the Japan Earthquake 2011

SEARCH

English

Takayama Masaya, President, National Archives of Japan

Sasaki Kazuko, researcher, Office of Promoting Regional Partnership, Kobe University (Japan Society of Archives Institutions)

Nagasaka Toshinari, Director, Disaster Risk Governance Research Project, Disaster Prevention System Research Center, National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention

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Takayama Masaya, President, National Archives of Japan

In 2011, Japan faced a huge earthquake and a tsunami. Official documents of 26 local governments suffered damages. **The Japanese government** did recognize the need to preserve records of this disaster from an early stage. To support the strong need for prompt restoration of the damaged documents in local governments, **the National Archives of Japan**, in coordination with the government and other affiliated organizations, and supported by governmental financial measures, has launched the "Restoration Project for Damaged Official Documents" in January 2012. The project contents were based on requests from local governments in the stricken area. National Archives of Japan conducted the following:

- sending experts in restoration techniques and management staff
- employing local people to work on restoring the damaged official documents
- training the employees in restoration techniques
- procuring and providing the equipment and items necessary for restoration

Kobe Shiryō-Net (Kobe Network for Preserving Historical Materials) was formed by specialist volunteers about 20 days after the Kobe earthquake (1995). As Japan is an earthquake prone country, Kobe Shiryō-Net was established to assist and support in the archiving preserving of documents at a prefectural level. **Miyagi**

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Shiryo-Net was formed after Tohoku region earthquake in May, 2003. Both were involved in restoration on archives after the 2011 Japan earthquake.

Last but not least, a **government-private joint project on a digital archive** took place to record the Japan earthquake. The question was how to archive this disaster:

- by hiring professional photographers
- by collecting photos and videos from victims and local administrations
- by collecting photos and videos before the earthquake
- by making an historical oral project
- by recovering the memory by the citizens themselves The result is an application

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