Challenges of Two Digital Archive Systems at the National Archives of Japan

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【Abstract】

The National Archives of Japan (NAJ) offers two digital archive services, the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) established in 2001 and the Digital Archives of NAJ (DA) which has begun to use in 2005 in accordance with the IT strategy of the Japanese Government.

Under the main mission of promoting "mutual understanding" between Japan and neighboring Asian countries, JACAR releases Asia-related records dating from the early Meiji era to the end of the Pacific war as digital data, come from holdings of Government agencies.

The two digital archives provide anyone the means to peruse, print, and download image-data of records at anytime, from anywhere, at no charge. NAJ is also putting the emphasis on substantiality of the cataloging function which searches for documents from digital contents, and it becomes possible to search for a catalog of all documents in DA.

NAJ holds many challenges about the development of a digital archive system. Much local archives is faced with difficulties such as budget limitation, shortage of specialists, long-term preservation of born digital in particular. While NAJ is tackling these difficulties, we believe that the future lies in development of a shared information infrastructure offering comprehensive access to documents held across Japan.

In line with long-term vision which contributes to a digital archive network about historical documents in East Asia, JACAR attempts to extend the coverage of database until the postwar era, and to collaborate with various digital archives in Japan through linking with other databases.

By sharing our experience and prospects for the future in our efforts, we hope to offer an useful information for discussion to the common problems and technical difficulties we, as digital archivists are facing around the world.

【Biography】

Dr. Sumio HATANO

From April 2014, he has been working as the Director-General of JACAR (Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, National Archives of Japan), and until recently he was Professor of Japanese Diplomatic History at the University of Tsukuba as well as Visiting Scholar at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University. His publications include many books and articles on WW2 and diplomatic history of modern Japan in Japanese and English such as coauthored "The End of the Pacific War:Reappraisals"(Stanford). He is also currently serving as the Chief Editor of "Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy" at the Diplomatic Archives of Japan,Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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(Director-General of Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, National Archives of Japan)

Introduction

Main Points:

Challenges of the Two Digital Archives in the "Digital Age":
－JACAR (est. 2001) & NAJ DA (est. 2005)－

JACAR - http://www.jacar.go.jp/   NAJ DA - https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/

1. Why Are There Two Different Digital Archives?

(1) JACAR (Japan Center for Asian Historical Records)

1994   PM Murayama **"Peace, Friendship, and Exchange Initiatives"**

・Historical recognition problems: For mutual understanding
& trust with neighboring countries

・Japan was less advanced: Preserving & declassifying
historical records and training archivists

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2001   JACAR was established

1. Why Are There Two Different Digital Archives?

(2) NAJ DA (National Archives of Japan Digital Archives)

2005   NAJ launched Digital Archives

2011   NAJ began to accept & store electronic public records

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Common Service Principles of the Two DAs:

Historical records should be accessible

"Anytime, Anywhere, to Anyone, Freely, and at No Charge"

2. The Accomplishments and Present Conditions of the Two Digital Archives

(1) JACAR (Japan Center for Asian Historical Records)
Digital Records: Japan's public papers & other materials to record
Japanese relations with neighboring Asian countries
in modern times (1868-1945)
Record Holding Institutions: 3 major organizations
(NAJ, Diplomatic Archives of MOFA,
NIDS (National Institute for Defense Studies) of MOD)
Number: About 2 million files, 30 million pages (as of 2016)
(=75% of Diplomatic Archives, 90% of NIDS)
2017~ Digitization of Post-WWII Asian historical records (up to 1972)

2. The Accomplishments and Present Conditions of the Two Digital Archives

(2) NAJ (National Archives of Japan)
Digitization Project: For overall holdings of NAJ
(Basic documents of Japan (e.g. Constitution of the Japanese
Empire), maps, paintings, "Cabinet Library" collected by the
Tokugawa regime)
Digitized Index: Entire collections of NAJ (=1.39 million materials)
Digitized Records: 0.18 million materials, 20.23 million pages
(=13% of holdings)

2. The Accomplishments and Present Conditions of the Two Digital Archives

Increase in the Number of Digitized Images of JACAR & NAJ DA
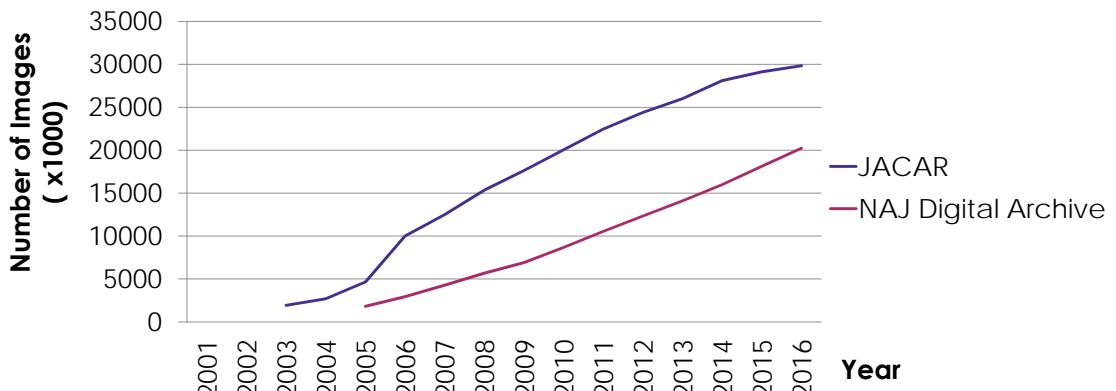
2. The Accomplishments and Present Conditions of the Two Digital Archives

(3) Collaborations between the Two Digital Archives

1. Maintaining Credibility of the Data

① Identical to the Original Records:

All data classifications & names should be identical to original materials to prevent misunderstanding of historical context

② Users can easily access original materials

③ Digitized documents should not be selective but all should be open to the public

2. The Accomplishments and Present Conditions of the Two DAs

(3) Collaborations between the Two DAs

2. Improvement of Search Functions (JACAR)

・Available for English search

・Make initial 300 letters of
each record searchable
in full-text
   → significant improvement
      for search functions

2. The Accomplishments and Present Conditions of the Two Digital Archives

(4) System Integration of the Two Digital Archives

Running Two (Inter-connected but Independent) DA Systems:

→ Problems: Running cost & Need for efficient maintenance

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System Integration: ・integrating DA system infrastructure

   ・introducing latest IT technology

Apr/2016   NAJ launched the new (integrated) DA system

Oct/2016   JACAR will launch the new (integrated) DA system

3. New Challenges of the NAJ

(1) Preservation & Use of Electronic Public Records

2011~ NAJ began to accept & preserve "born-digital" records

→ Essential for governmental officials to understand
preservation process of electronic public records

Search Result   Display of Electronic Public Records
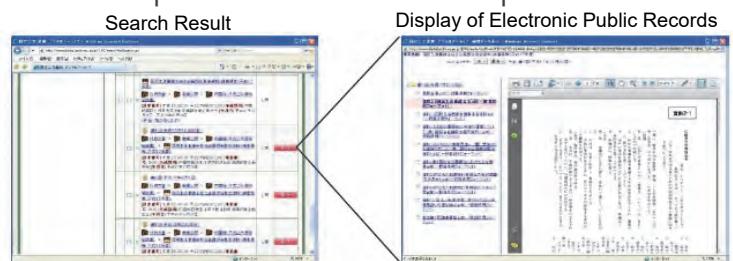
3. New Challenges of the NAJ

(2) Technical Support for Local Public Archives

NAJ promulgates **"Standard Specifications of Digital Archive Systems"** to local public archives which have just limited human & financial resources

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Create national & local Digital Archives network across Japan by technical support of standard specifications
(now: 10 DAs)

3. New Challenges of the NAJ

(3) Challenges for "Shared Infrastructure for Information Systems"
・Hurdles to set up nation-wide information systems infrastructure
・Lack of technology & staff for DA system in local public archives
・Vulnerability of original records & DA system by natural disasters
　　　↓
Introducing a Cloud Computing System
・Share common platform for DA system
・Develop sustainable & durable information systems across Japan

4. New Challenges of the JACAR

(1) Provide Links to Other DA System for More Accessible Database
Linkage Method:　　・Import index data from other DAs into JACAR
　　　　　　　　　・Link to digital images of other DAs from JACAR
　- University of the Ryukyus Library (2013)
　- Institute for Economic & Business Research, Shiga University (2016)
　- Hokkaido Prefectural Library (in progress)

(2) For Establishing the "Digital Archive Network" in East Asia
Can we build the "Digital Archive Network" to mutually connect with other leading Digital Archives in East Asia?

Conclusions

Missions of Digital Archives as Historical Materials:
→ Remove barriers to historical research for ordinary citizens
   & encourage wider perspectives of history
→ Bridge between different historical interpretations for mutual
   understanding (= reduce bias & prejudice in historical facts)

Future Visions of the Two Digital Archives:
・Build a nation-wide information system infrastructure in Japan
・Establish the "Digital Archive Network" in East Asia