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International Council on Archives (ICA) in Seoul, South Korea
Panel Presentation: Archives and Disasters: Japanese Strategies after Five Years from the Great East Japan Earthquake

Initiatives for Rescuing Damaged Official Documents – The Case of Rescue Team Dispatched by the National Archives of Japan



Masaki KAKEHI
Chief of the Planning and Legal Affairs Section,
General Affairs Division, National Archives of Japan

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Table of Contents


1. Introduction
 1. Features of Japan's Territory and Natural Disasters
 2. Issues that People Involved in Archives Face and their Initiatives
2. Establishment of the Rescue Team
 1. Background of Establishment
 2. Experiences in the Restoration Projects for Damaged Official Documents after the Great East Japan Earthquake
3. Activities of the Rescue Team
 1. Gathering Information
 2. Technical Support Necessary for Document Preservation
 3. Collaboration with Related Organizations and Groups
4. Closing

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1. Introduction

1. Features of Japan's Territory and Natural Disasters



Land features

- Belongs to the temperate zone →Typhoons, heavy rain and snow
- Located between the oceanic and continental plates →Earthquakes
- Surrounded on all four sides by sea →Tsunamis
- Located in the Pacific Ring of Fire →Volcanic eruption

Whereas Japan occupies just 0.25% of the entire land mass of the Earth....

- Number of magnitude 6.0 or greater earthquakes: 20.5%
- Number of active volcanoes: 7.0%
- Number of deaths: 0.3%
- Disaster damage cost: 11.9%

Source: Cabinet Office White Paper on Disaster Management 2010

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1. Introduction

2. Issues that People Involved in Archives Face and their Initiatives

Issue 1
How should they protect archives from natural disasters?

Issue 2
How should they minimize damage, scratches, etc. on damaged archives? How should archives be preserved?

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Action
cooperation with organizations and groups with various backgrounds

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1. Introduction

2. Issues that people involved in archives face and their initiatives

Cases of the National Archives of Japan (NAJ)

- Rescue activities for official documents damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake (Restoration Project for Damaged Official Documents)
- Rescue activities by the rescue team for damaged official documents (Rescue Team)

Other main cases

- Post-earthquake rescue project by Committee for Salvaging Cultural Properties, an organization that consists of specialist organs (Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and Great East Japan Earthquake)
- Preparing for disasters by building a network for protecting cultural assets at a time of emergency or disaster in alliance with the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan (a national administrative organ)(Executive Committee of the National Task Force for the Japanese Cultural Heritage Disaster Risk Mitigation Network)

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This report mainly deals with the establishment of the NAJ Rescue Team and its activities

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2. Establishment of the Rescue Team

1. Background of Establishment

1) Heavy rain in the Kanto and Tohoku regions in September 2015

On September 10, the Kinugawa River overflowed and flooded 40km² of land in Joso City.

Joso City's permanent storage, located in the city office, was flooded. Administrative documents stored in this storage that contained the city's activity and historical records were damaged by water.

Source: Joso City's report on the status of the damage caused by the heavy rain in the Kanto and Tohoku regions in September 2015

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2. Establishment of the Rescue Team

1. Background of Establishment

2) Formation of the Rescue Team (November 16, 2015)

Issues discussed by NAJ

- How to deal with Joso City's water-damaged administrative documents

Issues discussed by NAJ

- Building a system that allows NAJ to take actions actively and promptly when other similar incidents occur

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NAJ formed a rescue team for damaged official documents (Rescue Team), and engaged in rescue activities in Joso City.

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2. Establishment of the Rescue Team

1. Background of Establishment

3) Features of the team

Assumed activities

- Collecting information on damaged official documents
- Maintaining contacts and collaborating with related organizations
- Providing supports necessary for preserving damaged official documents

Features of formation

- The team consists of conservation or restoration experts, or personnel cross-sectionally selected from various departments that are responsible for cooperation with related organizations.
- The team is a permanent unit which, unlike an ad hoc one, can provide an immediate response.

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2. Establishment of the Rescue Team


2. Experiences in the Restoration Projects for Damaged Official Documents after the Great East Japan Earthquake

1) Initiatives before the formation of the Rescue Team— Restoration Project for Damaged Official Documents


Official documents of local administrations were damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake. (For example, damages caused by the collapse of a administrative buildings, attached sludge, dust, and pathogens to the documents, and mold caused due to immersion in water)

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Restoration Project for Damaged Official Documents (2011-2012)



Example of treatment for tsunami-damaged official documents
Before the treatment



After the treatment

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2. Establishment of the Rescue Team

2. Experiences in the Restoration Projects for Damaged official documents after the Great East Japan Earthquake

2) Implementation of the project

Fostering personnel skills through trainings

- NAJ recognized that official documents damaged by the Earthquake recorded the history of the regions, and it was an urgent issue to quickly restore, preserve, and conserve them as important historical materials.
- NAJ aimed to create conditions for local administrations in the devastated areas to address these issues as soon as possible. In order to achieve this goal, NAJ recruited personnel in the devastated areas and provided them opportunities of technical training on the restoration and preservation of damaged official documents.

Collaboration with related organizations

- Cooperation with local administrations in the devastated areas
- Cooperation with the Tokyo Document Recovery Assistance Force (a volunteer group that was created to rescue the damaged documents)*
- Sharing information with public archives in Japan

* The Tokyo Document Recovery Assistance Force has designed a document restoration system. This system allows people who do not have knowledge and skills for document restoration and conservation to carry out such work effectively and safely. NAJ used this system in the Restoration Project for Damaged Official Documents.


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2. Establishment of the Rescue Team

2. Experiences in the Restoration Projects for Damaged Official Documents after the Great East Japan Earthquake

3) Results of the project

	Content	Location
FY 2011	Technical training on the cleaning and drying out of water-damaged official documents **The document restoration system, designed by the Tokyo Document Recovery Assistance Force, was used.	Iwate--Yamada Town, Rikuzentakata City Miyagi--Kesennuma City, Ishinomaki City, Sendai City
FY 2012	Technical training on the cleaning and drying out of water-damaged official documents Training on paper-patching and backing of damaged documents.	Iwate--Rikuzentakata City, Ofunato City Miyagi--Kesennuma City, Ishinomaki City, Onagawa Town

 Cleaning

 Restoring

Training personnel who can restore and preserve damaged official documents by themselves.

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Creating feasible conditions for local administrations in the devastated areas to restore and preserve damaged official documents by themselves.

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3. Activities of the Rescue Team

1. Gathering Information

1) Collaboration with public archives in Japan

Gathering information on the status of the damaged official documents as well as its rescue activities through the Ibaraki Prefectural Museum of History

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NAJ confirmed the necessity for rescue activities based on the information collected and its analysis.

Gathering Information

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Flow chart for rescuing damaged official documents in Joso City.

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    graph LR
      A[Bringing out] --> B[Drying out/Sorting]
      B --> C[Cleaning]
      C --> D[Preserving]
  
```

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3. Activities of the Rescue Team

1. Gathering Information
2) On-site inspection

Confirming the status of the damage and document rescue activities

- Bringing out all the documents from the storage that was immersed in water.
- Drying out and sorting damaged official documents according to the paper quality and the condition of the mold caused.

Exchanging opinions with Joso City's staff and experts sent from related organizations.

- Understanding the city's rescue needs that NAJ could satisfy.

It was cleared NAJ skills that had been used in the Restoration Project for Damaged Official Documents would be effective.

On-site inspection

Flow chart for rescuing damaged official documents in Joso City.

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3. Activities of the Rescue Team

2. Technical support necessary for document preservation

1) Supply relief

Before the technical support, NAJ provided equipment and consumables.

- Equipment, such as the fans necessary for drying out documents quickly.
- Consumables necessary for drying out and sorting documents safely.

Drying out documents by a fan

Supply relief

Flow chart for rescuing damaged official documents in Joso City.

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3. The Rescue Team's activities

2. Technical support necessary for document preservation

2) Technical support

NAJ aimed to help Joso City, struck by flood, rescue water-damaged administrative documents as soon as possible. To create conditions for the city to preserve and conserve their important historical documents, NAJ provided residents in the devastated areas with training in skills necessary for document rescue and preservation.

	Content
FY 2015	Technical training on the cleaning and drying out of damaged official documents *The document restoration system designed by the Tokyo Document Recovery Assistance Force was used.
FY 2016	Technical training on paper-patching of damaged documents (to be scheduled)

Training

In Joso City, personnel who took the NAJ training are tackling with preservation of damaged official documents.

Technical support

Flow chart for rescuing damaged official documents in Joso City.

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3. Activities of the Rescue Team

3. Collaboration with Related Organizations and Groups

A wide range of organizations and groups engaging in damaged official documents rescue activities in Joso City.

- Ibaraki Prefecture (Culture Division of the Ibaraki Prefectural Board of Education, Ibaraki Prefectural Museum of History)
- National Institutes for Cultural Heritage
- National Institute of Japanese Literature, Inter-University Research Institute Corporation National Institutes for the Humanities
- Ibaraki Cultural Asset/Historical Material Rescue/Preservation Network
- The Japan Society of Archives Institutions
- NAJ

Source: Joso City Document Restoration News no.4

NAJ attended/will attend the liaison meetings held by Joso City, and has engaged in missions while sharing information with related organizations

Liaison meetings (to be scheduled)

Flow chart for rescuing damaged official documents in Joso City.

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4. Closing

Establishment of the Rescue Team

- Expertise and technical knowledge of NAJ is effective

Collaboration and cooperation with related organizations

- Local administrations in the devastated areas
- Public archives in Japan
- Executive Committee of the National Task Force for the Japanese Cultural Heritage Disaster Risk Mitigation Network

NAJ will play the core part to contribute to the preservation of Damaged Official Documents in close partnership with related organs.

<Thank you for your kind attention.>

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