

# Reconciling Japanese Archival Traditions with the New Demands of the Global Age: Focusing on Business Archives in Japan

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## I Business Archives in Japan

I-1 Fostering and Maintaining Corporate Culture

I-2 Contributing to Corporate Governance

I-3 Business Archives for the Future

## II Japanese Initiatives to Improve Archival Systems

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II-2 Initiatives to Improve Archives

II-3 Launch of the New Building for Archives Project :  
the Starting Point of the New Era

## 1) The Commitment to the Compilation of “Corporate History”

### ■ Business archives

- 1) Minutes of board meetings and financial statements prepared, preserved, and published due to legal reasons
- 2) Summaries on the business activities of a company from its establishment to the present
- 3) Archival records on histories of the industry, or histories of economic communities that the company is part of
- 4) Autobiographies of inspiring managers

## 1) The Commitment to the Compilation of “Corporate History”

- Many corporations compile commemorative “Corporate History” book on their 50<sup>th</sup> or 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- Large corporations with long histories make gorgeous books and distribute them to their clients and customers
- These corporations often have their own office for corporate history
- Some corporations maintain their own museums to exhibit business archives and old products



## 2) People love reading autobiographies of inspiring managers

- Famous autobiographies of Japanese inspiring managers : Eiichi Shibusawa, who founded many companies during the Meiji period, Kōnosuke Matsushita, the founder of Panasonic Corporation, Kazuo Inamori, the founder of KYOCERA Corporation
- Companies in Japan compile “Corporate History” more enthusiastically than other countries
- Japan has the greatest numbers of “long-standing firms” which is relevant to Japanese companies’ views to value “Corporate History”

## 3) Building up Corporate Culture

- Every corporation has its corporate philosophy or corporate culture based on the characteristics built up with its long history
- Japanese business community has a tradition of valuing corporate culture
- Compilation of “Corporate History” has a clear role in conveying the corporate culture to both inside and outside the corporation



## 4) Supporting an Employment System That Is Unique to Japan

- Respect to corporate culture is deeply committed to employment system in Japan
- Japanese unique employment system:  
To start working for a company after graduation and continue working with the same company until one's retirement at the age of 60 or 65
- Companies with this type of employment system treat their young and old employees like members of a family and the system helps to build the corporate culture
- This corporate culture continues to grow from generation to generation and becomes the company's DNA

### 1) Promoting Access to Corporate Information Leads to Build Trust with Stakeholders

- Disclosure of corporate information aims to enhance corporate governance and ensure accountability
- Providing correct corporate information leads to build trust with stakeholders
- Japanese companies only became aware of the importance of accountability
- Stakeholders started to insist that the records on the management decision-making process were as important as the records on the final results after the 1990s
- It is now widely understood the importance of preserving background documents on all business activities



### 2) Contributing to the Globalization of Companies

- The globalization of business activities increased the recognition of the business records
- It is hard for individual business persons overseas to understand the relationship between Japanese corporate culture and the employment system including “lifetime employment”. “salaries based on seniority system”, and “internal labor unions”
- In order to improve oversea stakeholders’ understanding of the business strategies of Japanese companies, it is crucial to give them a better understanding of the unique corporate culture in Japan, and business archives can play an important role

### 3) Good Records Management Assists Good Corporate Governance

- Many cases on accounting errors or defects in products were reported and it turned out that such companies often had operational difficulties due to a lack of evidential records of their business activities
- Discovery of a product defect may sometimes lead to a spread of rumors and it may cause heavy damages to the companies
- To prevent such damages, it is indispensable to maintain accurate and complete records on product quality and disclose them

- Business archives can play an important role in connecting the past, the present, and the future of the company's activities, as well as providing evidence to justify its business operations
- The status of business archives within a company is not that high
- Heads of corporations need to recognize the importance of archives for the corporate governance and to show leadership to strengthen the function of Business Archives in the future

### II-1 Commitment to Saving Historical Materials

#### 1) The Long History in Preserving Materials in Japan

- Japan has a rich 1,000-year tradition of record keeping from the early 8th-century
- After Meiji Restoration in 1868, about 150 years ago, Japan eventually became a modern nation under the imperial sovereignty, however, the opportunities for citizens to participate in politics were very limited
- In 1945, Japan's defeat at the end of the World War II changed the traditional form of government completely and a more democratic chapter in the nation's history began

### 2) Continuous Fight to Protect Records from Disasters

- While historical records have been preserved over the years, the country's frequent natural disasters have repeatedly destroyed valuable materials of our history
- Apart from losses due to natural disasters, tremendous amount of records were lost in the devastation of Japanese cities by the air attacks of World War II
- These national experiences of losing valuable records have a significant impact on how to protect records

- After the World War II, Japan experienced remarkable economic development. However, in terms of archival systems, the interest level from the public was low
- Basic principles of democracies had not been fully recognized by Japanese citizens
- It took more than 40 years after the war for the Japanese government to start a real commitment on improving archival systems and developing legal regulations on records management
  - Public Archives Act 1987
  - Act on Access to Information Held by Administrative Organs 1999
  - Act on the Protection of Personal Information 2003
  - Public Records and Archives Management Act 2009 (came into force in 2011)

- Currently, the national project of “building a new national archives as a national monument” is moving forward
- The project is not merely about building a new facility, but has great impacts on improving the management of public records and archives in Japan
  1. Under the government's leadership, the importance of management of public records and archives will be more widely recognized across the country
  2. This project will be regarded as a model case throughout Japan for facilities and functions in local archives around the country
  3. It is expected to enhance the human resources that are currently insufficient all over the country

## ■ “不易流行 continuity and change”

While protecting a tradition that have been kept for a long time, one must flexibly adapt oneself according to changing times by not being stuck in old habits

- Both corporations and governments should bear in mind this proverb in order to keep growing in the new era
- Archives that will have one of the most important roles in supporting the growth of both corporations and nations

\*\*\* Thank you very much for your kind attention.