

The Preservation of Archival Records at the National Archives of Japan: Policy, Planning, and Implementation

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Introduction

At the 2021 EASTICA conference, a variety of discussions will be held under the theme of “Archives, Recovery and Preservation Strategy: Restoration of non-digital and digital records.” The National Archives of Japan (NAJ) will discuss this theme by focusing primarily on our preservation efforts for records held at NAJ (hereafter “NAJ records”).

1. Legal Obligations for Archival Records Preservation at NAJ

In Japan, under the Public Records and Archives Management Act¹ (Act No. 66 of July 1, 2009; hereinafter “the Act”), national governmental organizations create and preserve records, and transfer important records to NAJ. NAJ then preserves those records. According to the Act, NAJ has three primary legal obligations that pertain to preservation specifically: (1) Permanent preservation, (2) Balancing preservation and public access, and (3) Reproduction and conversion.

(1) Permanent Preservation

First, Article 15, Paragraph 1 of the Act states that NAJ “must permanently preserve” the records that it keeps in its holding. According to Article 1 of the Act, records created by the Japanese government organizations are defined as being “available for independent use by the citizens, who have popular sovereignty, as an intellectual resource to be shared by the people in supporting the basis of sound democracy.” Through proper records management, the “accountability ... to the public for [the government’s] various activities in both the present and future” is expected to be ensured. The Act requires accountability to the people of both the present and the future. To ensure that accountability, government organizations are considered to have the obligation to properly manage the records that they create, and NAJ has the obligation to permanently preserve those records that it keeps in its holding.

(2) Balancing Preservation and Public Access

Second, the Act not only requires permanent preservation of records, but also that

¹ “Public Records and Archives Management Act” Japanese Law Translation. Litigation Bureau, Ministry of Justice. <http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/law/detail/?id=3140&vm=04&re=01&new=1> (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

NAJ ensure public access to the records -- seemingly a contradiction, at first glance. Article 16, Paragraph 1 of the Act states that if there is a request for the use of records, then NAJ must permit the use thereof, except in certain cases. One of these cases is “when providing the originals of the relevant specified historical public records and archives for use is likely to result in the damage or defacement of the relevant originals.” NAJ is required to judge, for each individual record, whether the public can be given access to the original copy for use or whether the use of the original should be restricted in the interest of preservation. In addition, NAJ is also accountable for explaining the reasoning behind such decisions. NAJ is required to take a neutral stance in making decisions and explaining the balance between preservation and use to members of the public seeking access to records and the usage thereof.

(3) Reproduction and Conversion

Third, in the guidelines based on the Act, NAJ has the obligation to make an effort for reproduction and conversion in order to ensure both preservation of and public access to archival records².

The guidelines state that reproduction is an effective means of 1) maintaining opportunities for the public to access NAJ records and 2) enabling both preservation and use of NAJ records, especially those that are degraded and may be damaged during use. Further, the guidelines show that the creation of digital copies enables records to be used over the internet.

While the scope of the guidelines on conversion is limited to electronic records and magnetic records, they state that it is effective when making preservation plans for the future use of the records with difficulties in securing the hardware or software playback devices needed for the conventional methods of use. One of the government’s rulebooks on records management, the Government Policy on Transfers, Preservation, and Use of Electronic Records Transferred to the National Archives of Japan, states that as a general rule, electronic records are to be converted to and saved in a file format suited to long-term preservation, and that if preservation in the original format is determined to be necessary or conversion is considered difficult, it shall be preserved in the original format.

2. NAJ’s Archival Records and Preservation Efforts

This section will discuss NAJ records and their preservation and conservation. As of March 2021, NAJ has 1.56 million volumes of records in its holding. NAJ accepted

² Cabinet Office. “Guidelines on the Preservation, Use, and Destruction of Specified Historical Public Records and Archives (Decision by the Prime Minister on April 1, 2011).” <https://www8.cao.go.jp/chosei/koubun/hourei/hozonriyou-gl.pdf> (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

around 23,000 volumes of records in FY2020³.

A review of all records held at NAJ by media type shows that most are in paper format. There are around 10,000 volumes of non-paper records, which amount to less than 1% of the total holdings. This includes microfilm, magnetic records, movie film, optical disks, and electronic records. It also includes objects such as a Nobel Peace Prize medal⁴.

(1) Preservation Policy and related Planning and Implementation

NAJ has an obligation to permanently preserve all of the records in its holding. As such, NAJ has set up several policies and plans to that end and performs specific tasks to ensure the proper preservation and public access to the records. The Records Preservation Policy for the National Archives of Japan establishes standards for the repository environment, preservation measures for records when accepted, and other specific measures⁵.

(2) Different Preservation Methods according to Type of Media

Records in different media are preserved differently. Paper records are preserved in dedicated repositories in which both temperature and humidity are controlled. In addition to temperature and humidity control, these dedicated repositories also require lighting control, anti-theft measures, and fire prevention facilities to be in place. Movie film and microfilm records are also preserved in dedicated repositories that are temperature- and humidity-controlled. Electronic records are preserved in a dedicated system called the Electronic Records Archives of Japan (ERAJ). Launched in April 2011, this system can be used from accession and long-term preservation of electronic records to linking data for the purpose of providing those records through the National Archives of Japan Digital Archive⁶.

Conservation efforts are made as necessary with respect to paper records, which comprise the majority of NAJ records. Conservation work is conducted systematically based on a conservation plan and based on the damage and usage status of the paper records. Even among different paper records, conservation methods may differ based on the extent of damage or the characteristics of the paper.

³ National Archives of Japan. “FY2020 National Archives of Japan Performance Report.” The number of new records accepted is reported in Appendix 7 of this report. http://www.archives.go.jp/information/pdf/r2/results2020_siryoku.pdf (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

⁴ “Nobel Peace Prize, gold medal (Reference Code: 寄贈 01854100).” <https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/file/3282501> (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

⁵ National Archives of Japan. “Preservation Policy for Specified Historical Public Records and Archives (Decision by the NAJ President on May 27, 2015).” <http://www.archives.go.jp/information/pdf/hozontaisaku.pdf> (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

⁶ Kazama, Yoshiyuki. “The Electronic Records Archives of Japan.” *Archives*, no.47. http://www.archives.go.jp/publication/archives/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/acv_47_p33.pdf (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

For example, many records have text information written on both sides of each sheet of paper. These records are conserved by applying ultra-thin Japanese paper to both sides to reinforce the pages while still leaving the texts readable. On the technical side of conservation, NAJ is working to respond to the damaging of records by flooding and other natural disasters, provide technical support for the rescue of water damaged records in Japan, and share our skills required to rescue records with archival community around Japan and the world through ICA conferences and other workshops⁷.

(3) Reproduction and Conversion for Different Types of Media

The methods of reproduction and conversion also vary depending on the type of media.

Reproduction of paper records (which account for most NAJ's archival records), movie film and microfilm is being carried out through digitization, with plans set in place⁸. As of March 2021, around 350,000 volumes of records have been digitized, accounting for 22.5% of all NAJ records.⁹ Images can be viewed of most of these records on the National Archives of Japan Digital Archive via the internet.

On the other hand, as a general rule, electronic records are preserved on ERAJ. ERAJ is equipped with functionality whereby files are converted upon their accession from the original format to a format suited for long-term preservation. For example, if the file is originally in the MS Word file format, it is converted to the PDF/A format, one of the international standard formats for long-term preservation¹⁰.

As in this example, NAJ's daily operations consist of establishing policies for preservation, selecting the appropriate preservation method for each media, and creating copies or converting media as necessary.

3. Recent Developments: Contributing to Records Preservation before Transfer

This final section will discuss NAJ's efforts regarding preservation of the records while they are still managed by government organizations before they are transferred to NAJ.

In the Act, government organizations are obligated to properly preserve records for the duration of a set retention period. If records preserved throughout the entire

⁷ Nakajima, Ikuko. "ICA Brisbane Conference and AICCM Conservation Workshop." *Archives*, no.48. http://www.archives.go.jp/publication/archives/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/acv_48_p45.pdf (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021). Morisaki, Masanori. "ICA Seoul Conference Conservation Workshop." *Archives*, no.62. <http://www.archives.go.jp/publication/archives/no62/5551> (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

⁸ National Archives of Japan. "Reproduction Plan (Decision by the NAJ President on Mar. 29, 2012)." <http://www.archives.go.jp/information/pdf/preservationcopying.pdf> (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

⁹ The current figures for NAJ records are listed in Appendix 6 of No. 3 above.

¹⁰ ISO 19005-1:2005. Document management — Electronic document file format for long-term preservation — Part 1: Use of PDF 1.4 (PDF/A-1).

government are broken down by media, paper records account for 90% of the total and electronic records account for 10%¹¹.

Every year, among the records created by a government organization, those which are judged to be important records are transferred to NAJ. Some records have a retention period of a year, while others may be kept in a storage cabinet at a government organization for over 30 years. If a record has a long retention period, the condition of the record will be heavily impacted by the environment and how it was handled before it was transferred to NAJ. Therefore, in order for NAJ to permanently preserve records to be transferred from government organizations, those records need to be properly preserved while still in the care of the government organization.

(1) Proper Preservation of Paper Records

One initiative undertaken at NAJ are training sessions held for staff responsible for practically handling records management at government organizations. Every fiscal year, NAJ creates a training plan and holds training sessions in accordance with that plan, targeting staff at government organizations who create and manage records¹². Part of that curriculum is the “preservation management of paper records”. This training course covers not only “daily management of paper records created and acquired on a daily basis”, but also “disaster preparedness measures and protecting against water damage.”

Another NAJ initiative is cooperation with government organizations with jurisdiction over records management systems. Specifically, NAJ cooperates with on-site surveys performed by the government organizations as part of their audits, offering expert advice to contribute to the proper transfer of important government records. For example, according to the Criteria for transferring government records to NAJ, records created and acquired up through FY 1952 are to be transferred to NAJ as a general rule. Around 70 years or longer have passed since the records to which these Criteria apply were created, and in some cases these records are still at the government organizations and have not been transferred to NAJ. Should a record like this be found during an on-site survey, NAJ provides expert technical advice including how to properly preserve and manage the record until it can be transferred to NAJ.

Efforts to encourage the proper preservation of records managed by the government help to avoid the degradation or loss of records before they are

¹¹ Cabinet Office. “Status of the Management of Public Records and Archives in FY2019.” Table 2 on page 8. https://www8.cao.go.jp/chosei/koubun/houkoku/2019/pdf/2019_houkoku.pdf (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

¹² “National Archives of Japan FY2021 Training Plan.” http://www.archives.go.jp/news/20210331_01.html (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)

transferred to NAJ, and help to avoid having the records transferred to NAJ in a state of disrepair beyond conservation. Ultimately, this will also lead to fulfilling NAJ's duty of "accountability ... to the public ... in both the present and future."

(2) Towards Electronic Management at Government Organizations

Records at government organizations that are created and stored electronically have been increasing in volume in recent years, though gradually. One initiative being considered by the government is the "electronic management of administrative documents"¹³. In 2021, a Digital Working Group of experts was established within the government records management council to discuss "the proper state of records management in the digital era"¹⁴, and NAJ participated in that discussion. Based on the report issued by the Working Group, a review of "reliable, efficient records management using digital technology" as well as "rules for business systems and the Act" is underway.

In connection with this review, NAJ plans to study ways to make its currently held records, as well as any new records it may acquire in the future, available for use on a longer term and more stable basis. This initiative will also contribute to fulfilling NAJ's goal of "accountability ... to the public ... in both the present and future."

Conclusion

This report covered the legal duties of public records management in Japan, the efforts of NAJ to meet those duties with respect to the preservation of NAJ records, and providing training and expert technical advice on the proper preservation of records before such records are transferred to NAJ for preservation. We will continue to deliver report like this on our efforts in the future and to learn from the knowledge and experiences of EASTICA members and other countries, so that we can apply those lessons to our own initiatives and elsewhere in Japan.

¹³ Cabinet Office. "Basic Policies for Electronic Management of Administrative Documents (Decision by the Prime Minister on Mar. 25, 2019)." <https://www8.cao.go.jp/chosei/koubun/hourei/kihonntekihousin.pdf> (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021).

¹⁴ "Digital Working Group Meeting Status." <https://www8.cao.go.jp/koubuniinkai/digitalwg/digitalwg.html> (Accessed Nov. 1, 2021.)