

Records Management and Standards in Japan

National Archives of Japan

Takehiko Osawa

Introduction

The theme for this EASTICA seminar held in Mongolia is “Archives Administration - ICA Standards.” Why do we have to think about archives administration and standards? In our daily affairs, we do think about on what standards we should conduct them, based on our experiences of success and failure. It is thought that accumulation of such individual experiences eventually becomes official standards by being shared with many other people and that in some cases it becomes law. Therefore, by studying standards, we can efficiently learn about other people’s experiences and accomplishments as shared knowledge.

The significance of holding an EASTICA seminar and bringing together archivists from East Asian countries and regions is that one can reconsider his/her own standards through the exchange of individually accumulated new experiences, and that experiences become new assets through sharing.

In accordance with the theme given by EASTICA, I would now like to report on three issues. The first issue is that in Japan the “Public Records and Archives Management Act” (hereinafter referred to as the “PRAMA”) was put into force in April 2011, thereby establishing unified rules and standards for records management, appraisal and selection. In this report I would like to focus on the aspect of appraisal and selection and explain its current situation. My intention is that this will serve as a reference for appraisal and selection in the countries and regions participating in EASTICA. The second issue is about catalog descriptions at the NAJ and the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, which are deeply related to the General International Standard Archival Description (hereinafter referred to as the “ISAD (G),” a catalog description standard proposed by the ICA. Lastly I will report on the NAJ’s response to the Great East Japan Earthquake which is still significantly affecting Japan’s records management standards.

1. Records management and standards in Japan – with a focus on appraisal and selection

The PRAMA, put into full force on April 1, 2011, caused drastic transformations in Japanese records management. The first transformation is that in Article 1, public records and archives which record various activities and historical facts of the State and

Incorporated Administrative Agencies are stipulated as intellectual resources to be shared by the people, and their preservation and use are stipulated as a way to achieve accountability to the citizens both present and in the future. In order to achieve it, creation, management, appraisal and selection are now conducted under a new system, the points of which are given as follows.

The first point is that unified management of records is now regulated by law. In other words, management of current records by administrative organs and management of non-current records by NAJ and other institutions have now come to be managed under the same law. In addition, uniform management rules related to administrative documents were made into law. Standards adopted here were prescribed in a Cabinet Order and the “Guidelines for the Management of Administrative Documents” (hereinafter referred to as the “Guidelines”) after thorough investigation and deliberation by the Public Records and Archives Management Commission which is comprised of external professionals and experts. The Guidelines describe the overall management of administrative documents, from their creation to their destruction or transfer. It was based on these Guidelines that each administrative organ was asked to establish its own regulations for document management.

The Guidelines stipulate the basic ideas below on documents that should be transferred in the future to NAJ.

- 【 I 】 Documents that contain important information regarding organization and functions of state organs and Incorporated Administrative Agencies; policymaking processes; and their decisions, implementation, and performance of policy;
- 【 II 】 Documents that contain important information concerning the rights and obligations of the citizens;
- 【 III 】 Documents that contain important information concerning social and natural environments surrounding the citizens;
- 【 IV 】 Documents that contain important information concerning the history, culture, academics, and incidents in the State.

Based on the above, document management regulations of administrative organs classify their work depending on its nature and stipulate standards for each category when establishing “measures to be taken upon expiration of the retention period” for individual Administrative Document Files. It is stipulated that documents which are considered as historical public records and archives are to be transferred to NAJ, while others are to be destroyed. For example, documents related to the formulation of laws and its backgrounds, as well as Cabinet decisions and their backgrounds, shall be transferred. Administrative organs now conduct appraisal and selection of their

administrative documents, based on these set standards.

The second point is improvement of the transfer system. With the aim of making transfers smooth, a records schedule system was introduced. Under this system, those who manage documents (in essence, those who create documents in administrative organs) are to conduct appraisal and selection of historical materials with support from NAJ experts at an earlier stage.

This system was introduced because before the PRAMA was put into force, appraisal and selection for transfer and destruction had long been conducted in a short period of time just before the expiration of a retention period for an Administrative Document File. As a result, the person who created the file and knew its content best was outside of appraisal and selection, which caused insufficient checks in relation to decisions on transfer and destruction.

These problems being considered, the new system made it mandatory for individual organs to stipulate measures to be taken upon expiration of the retention period in the form of a records schedule as early as possible prior to its expiration. As a rough guide, a records schedule is supposed to be granted by the end of the next fiscal year after the fiscal year in which an administrative document was created or obtained.

Individual organs are required to report to the Cabinet Office the status of these records schedules, and the Office then seeks professional and technical advice from the NAJ about the schedules. This system was created after the U.S. records schedule system in which records disposal plans are formulated beforehand.

The third point is that PRAMA clearly prescribes that when administrative organs intend to destroy an administrative document file upon expiration of its retention period they must obtain prior consent of the prime minister. This prevents administrative organs from destroying administrative documents on their own, and obligates them to consult the Cabinet Office concerning its consent to destruction. Upon request by the Office, the NAJ provides professional and technical advice about these consultations.

2. Catalog descriptions at the National Archives of Japan

Next I would like to explain the relation between ICA standards and the NAJ's catalog description for digital archives. The NAJ has two digital archives.

One is the "National Archives of Japan Digital Archive" (hereinafter referred to as the "DA") and it was launched in April 2005. It provides the catalog database of the NAJ's holdings searchable on the Internet and also gives access to digitized images of the holdings. As of the end of March 2012, catalog data of approximately 1.29 million volumes, which is nearly 100% of our holdings, and image data of 100 thousand volumes (12.35 million images), which is equivalent to approximately 8% of its holdings, are open to the public through the DA.

The digitized images searchable on the Internet include the following valuable documents: “Goshomei Gempon,” which are official original documents signed and sealed by the Emperor, including the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (1889), the Constitution of Japan (1946), imperial rescripts, laws, imperial edicts, and Cabinet Orders; “Kobun Ruishu,” which mainly consists of the original documents of laws and regulations; and “Records of Deliberations on Bills and Proposed Ordinances” transferred from the Cabinet Legislation Bureau; as well as “Azuma Kagami” and “Tenpo Kuni Ezu,” which are the nationally designated Important Cultural Properties.

The other digital archive operated by the NAJ is the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (hereinafter referred to as “JACAR”). JACAR was established on November 30, 2001 as an institution of the NAJ. It is a digital archive that provides on-line access to “Asian historical records” which are defined as “Japan’s public documents and other records that are important as historical materials related to the relationships between Japan and neighboring Asian countries in modern times.” Since its establishment, it has been digitizing “Asian historical records” in the possession of the NAJ, the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense, and providing access to those digitized records through its online database. As of the end of March 2012, JACAR has made public 1.74 million materials and 24.4 million images, and it is one of the world’s largest digital archives releasing public documents and images through the Internet.

Both of these digital archives at the NAJ are operated under the following motto: “free access by anybody from anywhere at anytime free of charge”; accordingly, they are freely accessible through the Internet 24 hours a day.

The catalog information registered in these two digital archives is based on the 2nd version of the General International Standard Archival Description, or ISAD (G), developed and released by the ICA in 2000. The ISAD (G) defines 26 data elements for describing archival records such as “title” and “name of creator.” It allows the multi-level search from general to specific. In the digitization of catalog information, the NAJ stipulated “National Archives of Japan EAD Definitions” and adopted XML format. It has wording composition which corresponds to ISAD (G) elements, and at the end it summarizes management information of physical materials which are not covered by the ISAD (G), such as “information on links to image information files,” and “material-specific information.” These definitions make it possible to cross-search the various catalog data created by different organs without breaking “respect for original order,” a universally accepted principle for the arrangement of archives.

It should be noted that while the two digital archives share some aspects in common, as explained above, they differ in others. First I will explain the hierarchic structure of the two digital archives. In the DA, the first level is government agencies which transferred the records as a “fond”; the next four levels (from the second to the fifth

levels) are “series”; the sixth level is positioned as a file; and the seventh level is positioned as an item. In JACAR, on the other hand, the first level is a name of the organ which holds the records as “fonds”; the second level is the place of origin as “sub-fonds”; the third level is “series”; the fourth level is “sub-series”; and the fifth level is positioned as a file and the sixth level is positioned as an item.

Next let’s look at the catalogs of the two digital archives. The data below is a catalog description for the Cabinet decision on September 4, 1923 by the Gonbei Yamamoto Cabinet for emergency policies after the Great Kanto Earthquake.

Image 1 Example of DA Catalog description (Measures to be taken after the Great Kanto Earthquake)

件名・細目詳細		戻る 件名一覧へ
① 件名	震災二付テノ処置ヲ為スコトノ件	
② 階層	行政文書 > *内閣・総理府 > 太政官・内閣関係 > 第一類 公文別録 > 公文別録・内閣・大正十二年～昭和十九年・第一巻・大正十二年～昭和八年	
③ 請求番号	本館-2A-001-00・別00231100	
④ 件名番号	001	
⑤ 作成部局	内閣	
⑥ 年月日	大正12年09月04日	
⑦ 関連事項	閣甲百四十三。関東大震災応急罹災救護方針閣議決定	
⑧ マイクロフィルム	リール番号: 002500、開始コマ: 1049	
⑨ 画像データ	アジ歴	

Please look at the DA’s display example. (2) “Hierarchy” indicates the hierarchy structure; (1) “Book title” corresponds to “title” in the ISAD (G); (3) “Call number” corresponds to the Reference code; (5) “Name of creator” corresponds to “Name of Creator” in ISAD (G); (6) corresponds to “Dates”; and (7) “Note related” corresponds to “Scope and Content.”

In addition, even for items not covered by the ISAD (G), information helpful for the user is arranged and provided. (4) is the item number within the file, and (8) indicates the reel number of the microfilm. When you click the orange icon displayed in this row (9), images of the material will be displayed.

Next, please look at the JACAR catalog for the same material.

Image 2 Example for JACAR catalog description (Measures to be taken after the Great Kanto Earthquake)

[→ 閲覧](#)

①	件名標題(日本語)	震災ニ付テノ処置ヲ為スコトノ件
②	階層	国立公文書館 > 内閣 > 公文別録 > 公文別録 > 公文別録・内閣・大正十二年～昭和十九年・第一巻・大正十二年～昭和八年
③	レファレンスコード	A03023581000
④	所蔵館における請求記号	別00231100(所蔵館:国立公文書館)
⑤	言語	jpn
⑥	記述単位の年代域	大正12年～昭和8年
⑦	規模	7
⑧	組織歴/履歴	内閣
⑨	内容	公文別録 内閣一 大正十二年 閣甲一四三 震災ニ付テノ処置ヲ為スコトノ件 九月四日 閣乙一三 震災ニ就キ列国ヨリ寄与スル救護事項ニ対スル帝国政府ノ態度綱領ニ関スル件 無号 攝政殿下御日課従前通御復@ニ関スル件 閣甲一四六ノ属 帝都復興ニ関スル根本方針 大正十三年 閣甲二七 恩赦ニ関シ閣議決定ノ件 一月二十一日 閣乙六 拓殖省設置ニ関スル意見書 七月二十六日 閣甲一七〇ノニ @ 昂鉄道建造請負契約締結 満蒙 八月二十二日 鉄道ニ関スル件 大正十五年 閣甲一三 皇統御順位御確定ノ件 六月二十二日 昭和八年 閣甲七 秘密会ニ於ケル外務大臣演説中誤ノ件 二月二十一日 閣甲一四三 十二年九

In this catalog as well, (2) “Hierarchy” indicates the hierarchic structure of the material; (1) corresponds to “title” in the ISAD (G); (3) corresponds to the Reference code given by JACAR; (5) corresponds to “Language/scripts of material”; (6) corresponds to “Dates”; (7) corresponds to “extent”; and (8) corresponds to “Administrative/Biographical history.” (9) is “Summary,” a JACAR’s unique area which extracts approximately first 300 characters of each material in order to post it as it was originally written.

Further, (4) displays the call numbers given by the organs that possess the material, and even for items not covered by the ISAD (G), information helpful for the user is arranged and provided, the same as in the DA. When you click the blue button at the top left of the screen, images of the material will be displayed.

Thus, although catalog descriptions of both DA and JACAR are based on the ISAD (G), the content differs in elements adopted and method of description. This is because JACAR creates its catalog based on the catalog data provided by three different institutions; namely, the NAJ, the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense.

3. Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake

On March 11, 2011, the Tohoku region of the Eastern Japan was struck by a catastrophic earthquake of magnitude 9.0 on the Richter scale and huge tsunami, and enormous damage was incurred. Due to this earthquake and tsunami, an extremely serious nuclear reactor disaster occurred at the Fukushima Dai-Ichi Nuclear Power Plant, and even now many nearby residents are forced to remain evacuated from their homes.

The NAJ has taken various initiatives since the earthquake occurred. First, on March 18 a message from the president was posted on its website to express condolences to the victims and its fullest commitment to support the restoration of related organs that had suffered from the disaster.

The Annual Meeting of the Directors of Public Archives, held in June 2011 gave priority to the issue of response to the Great East Japan Earthquake. At the meeting the results of a survey on effects of the disaster, which was conducted by the NAJ with the cooperation of local public archives affected by the disaster, were reported. In addition, opinions were exchanged based on the detailed damage reports from each archives. At a later date, investigation in the affected areas revealed that an enormous amount of official documents of local municipalities were badly damaged and remained untouched. In order to support quick restoration of these damaged official documents, NAJ coordinated with the government and related groups, received budgetary measures from the government, and finally initiated in January 2012 the Project to Support Restoration of Damaged Public Documents.

Under the project, the NAJ dispatched its own conservators and other staff members to municipalities that suffered damage, based on their requests. Specifically, they taught basic restoration techniques to local people who the NAJ had hired as full-time trainees. Another aim of this project was to cultivate those who would be engaged in preservation of public documents in the region. In the three months from January through March 2012, the project was conducted in five local municipalities. 22 NAJ employees were dispatched in total over 268 man-days, and 110 trainees finished the program. As a result, approximately 1,200 volumes (240,000 pages) of public documents were restored.

At the Annual Meeting of the Directors of Public Archives held in June 2012, the Statement on the Preservation of Records of the Great East Japan Earthquake was adopted, and the participants vowed anew that public archives throughout Japan would collaborate and cooperate for the preservation of damaged records. Furthermore, various proposals are being made, such as long-term preservation by way of portal archives along with the National Diet Library.

In light of last year's accomplishments, the Project is being continued this year as well, including cultivation of those who can take measures necessary for long-term

preservation and use. NAJ employees are engaged in this training program in the region today (July 18) as well.

These are the outlines of what the NAJ has been doing to support restoration of damaged public documents. If we turn our eyes outside the NAJ, however, it can be seen that the Great East Japan Earthquake not only caused enormous damage to property and humans, but also created an opportunity to press for serious reflection on and improvement of the system for public records management.

At a Cabinet meeting on April 1, 2011, then Minister Renho made the following remark upon enactment of the PRAMA: “Everyone must be busy dealing with the Great East Japan Earthquake. Nevertheless, I would like the relevant government agencies to take extra care in managing public documents.” In addition, at an April 12 liaison meeting of government agencies to rebuild the living of the sufferers, then Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Takino called attention to preservation of records and materials which show the facts of the quake.

However, in January 2012 it was revealed that of the 15 government deliberative bodies related to the Great East Japan Earthquake, minutes had not been prepared for 10 meetings. Concerning this problem, the Public Records and Archives Management Commission extensively interviewed relevant officials who had participated in each of the meetings, and investigated the reasons why minutes had not been prepared. This series of investigations was finalized in April 2012 as the Causal Analysis and Improvement Plan Concerning the Failure of the Meetings for the Great East Japan Earthquake to Keep Minutes. The improvement plan offered in this report proposes principles for the content of records to be prepared and preserved, a mechanism to secure their implementation, issues to be examined in the future, and so on. In response to this report, the Guidelines are currently being revised as well, taking into consideration circumstantial changes caused by the Earthquake. This indicates that even the Guidelines and standards we have are subject to waves of change and need to correspond to new social situations.

More time will be needed to see what the revised Guidelines will look like after thorough discussion at the Cabinet Office and the Public Records and Archives Management Commission. Needless to say, NAJ would be actively involved with those discussions by providing professional advice, with a deep awareness of its mission as a national archives.

Conclusion

At present, recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake is fully underway in parallel with the application of PRAMA. On the other hand, it is pressing to consider how to preserve records related to this unprecedented disaster on a long term basis in

order to pass them down for the future generations, as well as to put out the lessons domestically and internationally. As a matter of course, a new question will come up about on what standards we should collect, preserve and provide public access to records.

Supplementary Provision 13 of PRAMA requires the Japanese government, approximately five years after the enforcement of this act, to review its provisions and application and to take measures when it finds it necessary. Without doubt, the experiences of records management after the enforcement of PRAMA and that of the Great East Japan Earthquake will have a significant impact on the formation of a new records management framework in Japan.

When discussing this new framework, examples in EASTICA and ICA members will be a good reference for us. Thank you all very much in advance for your support and cooperation.