

Myth and Reality about Pre-World War II Government Records

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INTRODUCTION

The National Archives of Japan was established in 1971. Unlike the United States, Japan had no facilities until then that intensively preserve, manage and make available for public use documents and records of various governmental organs. On November 28, 1959, the Science Council of Japan under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister made a recommendation to Prime Minister Shinsuke Kishi requesting governmental action for preventing scattering and loss of official documents. It is true that a considerable number of important government records were lost due to war damage and “artificial destruction and extinction,” as the Science Council of Japan feared.¹ However, a survey for locating governmental documents conducted to realize the idea of the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) which provides digitized pre-war governmental records through the Internet, as well as our five-year experience since its establishment, found that contrary to expectation, pre-war government records had been systematically arranged and preserved in various national organs. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that the scattering and destruction of historically important official records, at least ones in the possession of pre-war governmental organs are concerned, is a myth. However, it is also the fact that pre-war government records were not fully used for historical studies. JACAR was established in 2001 to address this problem. This paper focuses on governmental records dating from the Meiji Era to the end of World War II, which are in the possession of the National Archives of Japan, the Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Military Archives of the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense, and discusses how those documents were created and preserved, how they were handled after the war, and how the establishment of JACAR made it possible to use them.

¹ Japan Society of Archives Institutions ed., *Nihon no monjokan undo: Zenshiryokyo no nijunen* (Archives Movement in Japan: Twenty Years of the Japan Society of Archives Institutions) (Iwata Shoin, 1996) p.242.

Meiji Restoration Government and the Preservation and Management of Official Records

Records Preservation Going Back to Ancient Times

About 12,000 documents in the Nara Era are preserved in Todaiji Shosoin or the Treasure House of Todai-ji Temple. In Japan, public administration based on documents has deeply taken root in society since Ritsuryo-seido or the ancient law and administrative system was established in the 8th century.² After 260 years of national isolation was brought to an end, the Meiji Restoration government first of all replaced the traditional document administration system with a modern Western administrative system. In the National Archives of Japan remain translation records of those reference materials on public archives systems in Western countries, which Japan acquired in the early Meiji Era (around 1870): For example, *Futsukoku kirokusho* or French archival manual and *Doitsukoku kirokusho* or German archival manual. In December 1885, Daijo-kanseido or the ancient central government system was abolished and the cabinet system was established modeled on the Western government system. In February 1886, Kobunshiki or the official documents form was formulated, which meant the establishment of the modern documents management system.

Governing Structure with the Emperor at Its Top and Official Records

The Meiji government gradually strengthened the foundation as a Western-style constitutional monarchy: It promulgated the Constitution of the Empire of Japan in February 1889 and convened the Imperial Diet for the first time in November 1890. On the other hand, Aritomo Yamagata, who, deeply involved in the formulation of Gunjin Chokuyu or the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors in 1882 and Kyoiku Chokugo or the Imperial Rescript to Education in 1890, allegedly set the grounds for the pre-war army and bureaucracy, deified the authority of the Emperor and generated a government under strong bureaucratic control with the Emperor at the top, which was contradictory to the constitutional monarchy. The typical example is the pre-war army. It was a modern bureaucratic structure completely based on the document based process. At the same time, it was a feudalistic organization in the sense that a higher-ranking person's decision was ultimately regarded as the Emperor's decision and the decision of the Emperor as a Living god was thought to be error-free. As seen in the recent movie about the battle on Iojima Island, which attracted public attention, once even a reckless decision was made by Daihonei or the Imperial General Headquarters, the supreme decision-making body, it could not be reversed nor challenged. The people as the subject of the Emperor were informed of government decisions one-sidedly through the official journal or government news and forced to follow them. Of course, official records of the decision-making process were not made public. There was certainly a period called Tisho democracy (around 1910-1920), when the Diet functioned to some extent, freedom of speech was ensured, and criticism on the government was allowed. However, if official records made by the authority,

² Masato Ando and Hideyuki Aoyama eds., *Kiroku shiryō no kanri to monjokan* (Archives Administration and Archival Institutions in Japan: Their Past, Present and Future) (Hokkaido University Press, 1996), Chapter 1, p.21.

that is, officers appointed by the Emperor, are made public, it can undermine the foundation of bureaucracy whose top is the error-free Emperor. For the pre-war government, “ko” for the Japanese term “ko-bunsho” (official records) does not mean “public,” but its origin can be traced back to the Japanese word “ooyake” (mansion of a local lord), which means “official.”³

Pre-War Administration and Preservation of Official Records

The pre-war system for managing and preserving official records was established as a part of the so-called Imperial bureaucracy, which dropped the tradition that had been retained since the modern era and hid records from the people.⁴

Documents concerning the government’s important matters, including laws, treaties and ordinances, were preserved and managed by the Record Division of the Cabinet Record Bureau, set up in 1886 after the establishment of the cabinet system. Later, this task was executed by the Record Division of the Cabinet Secretary Office and so on and, after the war, was taken over by the General Affairs Division of Prime Minister’s Office. Those documents, including official records, as well as books and others held by the Cabinet, were called Naikaku Bunko or the Cabinet Library. This collection, including the original documents of the Constitution and laws, was now transferred to the National Archives and constitutes its largest collection. Official records made by each Ministry or Agency were managed and preserved in its own way. It is said, for example, that the army modeled on the Prussian army was affected by Prussia, while the navy modeled on the British navy was affected by the UK. The Foreign Ministry’s document management system adopts a unique arrangement and classification method based on the Dewey decimal classification. Each organization also had its own preservation facility. Even after the war, some of the organizations continued to have their own facilities to preserve official records. For instance, the Imperial Household Agency has the Archives and Mausolea Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the Diplomatic Record Office. Official records of the organizations that were allowed to have their own facilities under the exceptional provisions of the Freedom of Information Act enacted in 2001 do not have to be transferred to the National Archives. The official name for the law is the Act on Access to Information Held by Administrative Organs.

Japan’s pre-war preservation and management of official records bear comparison with Western nations in terms of preservation and management only. The Foreign Ministry had completed a reinforced concrete storeroom for books in the Taisho Era (1912-1926). It was a fire and disaster prevention facility, so the Ministry’s precious records were not lost even in the face of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923.⁵ The fact that Cabinet-related official records going back to the early Meiji Era held by the National Archives “exist in near-perfect condition” seems to show

³ Toshiyuki Masamura, *Himitsu to haji* (Secret and Shame) (Keisoshobo, 1995), pp.150-152.

⁴ Ando and Aoyama, op. cit., p.253.

⁵ Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ed., *Gaiko shiryō-kan shozō Gaimu-sho kiroku somokuroku senzenki*, Vol. 2 (General Catalogue of the Foreign Ministry’s Records in the Pre-war Period Held by the Diplomatic Record Office) (Hara Shobo, 1992), p.iv.

that ministries and agencies strictly managed and preserved official records.⁶ It can be said that official records have been strictly managed and preserved as documents of the Emperor's officials. However, since official records were arranged and classified differently by ministry and agency and not made public, even nowadays users need to not only understand each institution's characteristics, but also visit relevant institutions to get access to pre-war official records. This is highly inconvenient for users. Experts in diplomatic history rarely use the Imperial army and navy documents held by the Military Archives of the National Institute for Defense Studies and the National Archives.

Major Archives Institutions for Pre-war Official Records

Pre-war official records were not transferred from the Foreign Ministry and the National Institute for Defense Studies to the National Archives even after it was opened in 1971. This chapter introduces three institutions that preserve official records of the Cabinet, the Foreign Ministry, and the Imperial army and navy. Those records are indispensable for studying pre-war history.

National Archives of Japan

The National Archives now preserves over 600,000 official records. They include: (1) Dajo Ruiten (Grand Council of State Categories of Regulations), a series in which regulations from 1867 to 1881 were classified into 19 categories and compiled chronologically; (2) Kobun Roku (Compiled Records of the Grand Council of State), a national important cultural property, which includes various official documents dating from 1868 to 1885 issued by internal subdivisions of the Grand Council of State, ministries, prefectures and others; (3) Kobun Ruishu (Various Official Records Compilations), which includes documents the Diet voted on for legislation from 1882 to 1954; and (4) Kobun Zassan (Miscellaneous Official Document Compilations), in which documents that were received by the Cabinet, but were not included in Kobun Ruishu from 1886 to 1950, were classified by ministry and agency and compiled chronologically.

Moreover, promulgated originals of the new and old Constitution, Imperial documents, laws, treaties, rescripts, government decrees and so on with the Emperor's name and seal are also preserved. They are precious records, so they can only be seen on microfilm. The National Archives also has the minutes of the Privy Council, a senior consultative body to the Emperor concerning important national policies, including the formulation of the Meiji Constitution and diplomacy, and 2,730 volumes on the army and navy, the Home Ministry, the Cabinet and others, which were returned in 1974 from the US. All of the catalogues the National Archives preserves can be searched via the Internet. (National Archives of Japan Digital Archives: <http://www.digital.archives.go.jp/index.html>)

⁶ Takayuki Ishiwatari, "Daijokan, Naikaku bunko" (Grand Council of State, Cabinet Library), *Nihon Komonjogaku koza 9: Kindaihen 1* (Course on Japanese Paleography 9: Modern Age 1) (Yuzankaku, 1985), p.33.

Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Diplomatic Record Office's archives contain approximately 48,000 files of the Foreign Ministry records, documents associated with foreign affairs, including telegraphs and official letters to and from overseas missions, during the period of approximately 80 years from the Ministry's establishment (1869) to the end of World War II. The records of the Meiji and Taisho Eras are classified into eight categories, such as (1) political affairs and (2) treaties, which include records of the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, World War I and the Paris Peace Conference. The records of the Pre-war Showa Era are classified into 16 categories, such as (A) political and diplomatic affairs, and (B) treaties, agreements and international conferences, which include records of foreign affairs during the period throughout the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Pacific War. In addition, the archives contain about 600 documents of treaties concluded from the end of the Edo Period to the end of World War II, and about 1,100 messages and letters by sovereigns dating from the 1860s to the end of World War II. See the website: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/>.

Military Archives of the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense

The Military Archives preserves the collection of official records of the Imperial Army and Navy. It consists of about 83,000 volumes (about 150 series) related to the Imperial Army and 33,000 volumes (90 series) related to the Imperial Navy. Among them are military administrative documents, including Rikugunsho Dainikki or the Document Files of the Ministry of the Army, and Kobunbiko or the Document Files of the Ministry of the Navy. Command-related documents of the Army General Staff Office and the Navy General Staff Office, which were stored by military personnel at the end of the war and were not seized by the US army, are preserved and made public. In particular, the documents of the Army General Staff Office include Kimitsu Senso Nisshi or Confidential War Reports, the highly confidential task diary written by the War Maneuver Section of the Army Division. In addition, the Archives preserves documents collected by or donated to the NIDS to compile the official history of the Greater East Asian War and to research war history. See the NIDS website: <http://www.nids.go.jp/>.

Myth and Reality concerning the Destruction of Official Records at the End of the War

Mythogenesis

The Pacific War was the greatest crisis for official records strictly managed and preserved as the Emperor's ones. In the fall of 1944, when the US forces launched an attack on the Japanese mainland from the air, official records began to be moved to rural areas. Literature and records that indicate the scattering and destruction of official records during and after the war are scarce. Although it is recorded that Cabinet-related important documents now preserved in the National

Archives were also moved for safety, the reality is not necessarily certain.⁷ The Navy Ministry moved important official records to Yokohama, Nirasaki (Yamanashi Prefecture) and others, while the Army Ministry moved them to safe places, for instance, in Kitatama county (suburbs of Tokyo). In the case of the Foreign Ministry, 650 files of official records related to the early Meiji Era, treaty revisions and World War I were destroyed by fire in 1942 because they were not stored in the fire-prevention book room. Moreover, major buildings were burnt down in air raids in 1945, so official records that were then used in offices were lost, but official records stored in the bombproof and fireproof archives survived. Although some important official records were lost during the war, many precious records escaped war damage because they had been moved to or preserved in safe facilities. For example, the original documents of treaties were safe because they were stored in the underground vault of the Bank of Japan.⁸

However, it is said that government organs began to cremate official records in August 1945, immediately before the end of the war. For example, on August 7 the Foreign Ministry set up a provisional Foreign Ministry's documents committee chaired by the Vice-Minister, and determined a document disposal policy. It decided to cremate 35,000 volumes of documents held in the Ministry and more than 40,000 volumes evacuated if the situation gets tenuous.⁹ However, there is no evidence that this decision was executed. As to records related to Japan-US negotiations, which show how the Pacific War broke out, there remain telegraphs and important documents, dating from the spring of 1941, when negotiations started, to December 7, when the "last notice" was delivered personally in Washington: They include the original of the "last notice." Why the Foreign Ministry did not destroy them by fire is not certain.

It has been generally thought that important documents of the Army General Staff Office and the Navy General Staff Office, which planned and maneuvered the war, were destroyed by fire. Truly, the cremation of a large number of documents is undeniable because quantities of partly burnt documents were uncovered at the site of the Army General Staff Office. However, important documents of the Army Division of the Imperial Headquarters, which it was testified at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East that were lost due to destruction by fire, had been brought out and hidden in drums or others by staff members. The existence of these documents was not known to the public until some of them were published as "Imperial Headquarters' Confidential War Diary" in the September to November 1971 issues of *Rekishi to Jinbutsu* (History and Figures), which was first published in 1971 by Chuokoron-sha. The Navy General Staff Office likewise

⁷ Yasushi Umehara, *Kobunsho no sokai to fukki* (The Evacuation and Return of Public Records), *KITANOMARU* (The Journal of the National Archives of Japan), No.39, 2006.

⁸ Hiromi Tanaka, "Kaisetsu" (Explanation), Hiromi Tanaka ed., *Beigikai toshokan shozō senryō sesshu kyurikukaigun shiryō somokuroku* (General Catalogue of Imperial Army and Navy Documents Seized during the Occupation and Preserved in the US Congress Library) (Toyo Shorin, 1995); Compilation Committee for Hundred Years History of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Gaimusho no hyakunen* (Hundred Years of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Vol.2 (Hara Shobo, 1969), pp.1294-1295.

⁹ *Gaimusho bunsho kaigi oyobi do shiryō kankei zakken* (Miscellaneous Documents Related to Records, Conferences and Their Materials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), held by the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (www.jacar.go.jp), Ref. B0501648900.

hid important documents. Official records of the Army General Staff Office and the Navy General Staff Office, which engaged in operations as military organ directly under the Emperor, escaped seizure by the GHQ. The military organs' important records, which are crucial for understanding the Showa history, had been hidden away for years from the eyes of the public.¹⁰

Senshi Soshō (War History Series), which totals 102 volumes, was compiled by the then Military History Office (now Department) of the National Institute for Defense Studies, on the basis of records of the Imperial Army and Navy which survived in Japan, as well as ones seized and later returned by the GHQ. Most of the documents used for Senshi Soshō are now kept at the Military Archives of NIDS.

It is undeniable that quantities of official records were destroyed. But given the above-mentioned, I doubt whether they were destroyed as thoroughly as assumed. The myth about pre-war official records is presumed to have been created in social disruption just after defeat in the war.

It is said in the world of archives that less than 5% of all official records are appraised and kept permanently at national archives institutions. Though there is no clear evidence, it can be supposed that many burnt documents would have been generally disposed of in a certain period. Official documents scattered to rural areas for evacuation were also returned to the original institutions in exchange for cooperation in the GHQ seizure of Japanese official records.

Seizure by and Return from WDC

As early as mid-1944, the Adjutant General's Office of US Army set up the Washington Documentation Center designed to seize documents necessary for a war crimes tribunal in Japan. An advance team got to Japan at the end of November 1945 and finished to seize major documents by March 31, 1946. It is said that the preliminary investigation was thoroughly conducted. Though it is now impossible to identify accurate figures, according to the survey conducted in preparation for opening the JACAR, approximately 470,000 items of official records, books and publications were collected and sent to the US. In the late 1940s, 50,000 official records were moved to the US National Archives, about 250,000 volumes of documents that were taken for books were moved to the US Congress Library, and the rest were sent to major college libraries in the US. Later the Japanese government called on the US to return those documents to Japan. In 1958, about 41,000 documents, mainly the Army and Navy Ministries' ones, were returned. They are now made public at the Military Archives of NIDS.¹¹

According to *Hundred Years of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* compiled by the Ministry, a part of its records were seized by the WDS, some of which were

¹⁰ The Military History Society of Japan ed., *Daihonei rikugunbu senso shidohan: Kimitsu senso nisshi jo* (War Maneuver Section, Army Division, Imperial General Headquarters: Confidential War Diary, Vol.1), (Kinseisha, 1998), pp.vii-xiv.

¹¹ Japan Center for International Exchange ed., *Ajia rekishi shiryō no genjō to shōzai* (Current Condition and Presence of Asian Historical Documents), 1997, p.7.

presented to the Tokyo war crimes tribunal or others. Moreover, those documents were allegedly recorded on microfilm by both the US Department of State and the Congress Library in the period between 1949 and 1951. The microfilmed records amounted to over two million pages, which constitute 2,100 microfilms. Their list was published in 1954 by the Congress Library (Checklist of Archives in Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, Japan, 1867-1945). The National Diet Library in Japan preserves 2,121 microfilms it got from the Congress Library.

Unfortunately, all of the seized official records have not yet been returned from the US. As to the National Archives, for example, of Privy Council Meeting Notes, which are documents essential for knowing of the government's diplomatic policy before the war, minutes related to the Tripartite Pact among Japan, Germany and Italy have not been returned. Some of the Japanese government's important official records may remain in the US archives and libraries because they were taken for books and sent to libraries, or because they were not returned for some reason.¹²

“Ghost of August” and the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records

“Ghost of August”

When the anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II (August 15) approaches every year, the Japanese media carry an exclusive story on a “discovery of new documents.” That discovery often occurs at the National Archives and Records Administration in the US. I have also visited the Archives 2 in Maryland and asked John E. Taylor, Japanese documents expert, whether there is a way to find Japan-related documents. I remember him pointing at his head and saying, “That is here.” As August 15 approaches, many Japanese journalists come to him and ask him whether there is any document unpublished, he said. When I asked him whether there are some documents still unknown, he said that there were many ones. The same thing happens in Japan. Official records preserved by the three archives institutions mentioned above have not been fully utilized though they have been made public. Nevertheless, when August 15 approaches, the media carry the story that “a new fact has been revealed.” Yomiuri Shimbun editorial writer Masayuki Mizuno wrote in a column that “any new fact is meaningful, but a merely seasonal topic is nothing less than a ghost story in summer. See the article “Annual ‘Ghost’ Again,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, July 25, 2002.

The major reason why this happens is that there are no proper finding aids. So a quick way to make access to necessary documents is to frequently visit archives institutions that preserve them, to make the acquaintance with staff, and to ask them whether there are some new documents. To take the Diplomatic Record Office as an example, only “file” titles are listed in the Gaimusho kiroku

¹² Official Records Expert Office, “Kobunsho no sesshu, henkan, mihenkan daicho (naikaku kankei) ni tsuite” (Ledger of Official Records (Related to the Cabinet) Seized, Returned, and Not Returned,” *KITANOMARU*, No.34, 2001. See http://www.digital.archives.go.jp/howto/pdf/kaiteiban_kitanomaru34gou_P88.pdf.

somokuroku (General Catalogue of Records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) published in 1992 by the Office. Therefore, for example, when you study what negotiations were made before the outbreak of war between Japan and the US, you need to check each of the 21 volumes which have similar titles like “Compilation of miscellaneous documents relating to diplomatic relations between Japan and United States: Negotiations concerning peace in the Pacific and problem of East Asia (including messages of Prime Minister Konoe).” That’s why many Japanese scholars in diplomatic history tend to rely not on the original documents, but on *Documentations on Japanese Foreign Policy: Japan-U.S. Talks in 1941*, Vols.1 and 2, compiled by the Foreign Ministry. However, this literature, published in 1990, does not include a file subtitled File of “Special Information,” which can bear testimony that Japan was deciphering US and UK telegrams. This file, which may demolish the general view of the Japan-US negotiations leading to the outbreak of war, has been made public. However, its existence was not known to the public until Toshihiro Minohara, then assistant professor at Kobe University, confirmed code-breaking by Japan according to CIA documents held by NARA, and made it known that the File of “Special Information” is preserved in the Diplomatic Record Office.

Why were available documents not found? The answer lies in the problem of access to pre-war Japanese official records. The generally accepted notion that the US could decipher Japanese telegrams, but Japan could not, as well as the assumption that important official records do not remain because they were destroyed, also constitutes an obstacle to access to documents. Another obstacle is, as mentioned above, a lack of finding aids. There are additional factors that make access difficult: the difference between historical terms and official names used in official records, and historical terms learned in current historical education; and texts written in the archaic or flowing style difficult to read. The General Catalogue published in 1992 was subtitled “Special Information.” Scholars in military history who know that “Special Information” is a term related to code-breaking can easily identify the document, but scholars in diplomatic history cannot understand the value of that file unless they request access to it and really look through it. Moreover, even if there are documents in front of you, the stereotyped view can hide their intrinsic value.

Outline of the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records

In Japan, objective studies of diplomatic or military history based on primary documents were slow to make progress because of a lack of finding aids, the discrepancy between terms, and the “myth” about the destruction of important official records at the end of the war. The typical example is the “Nanjing Massacre,” the topic over which a controversy has continued between two parties: The one party argues that there was no fact of the massacre, while the other argues that more than 300,000 people were killed. Then the Japanese government considered the establishment of JACAR as a solution to unresolved controversies over historical perception.

On November 30, 2001, JACAR was opened as an institution of the National

Archives of Japan. On August 31, 1994, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama delivered a discourse designed to improve relations with Asian people, which promised to establish JACAR as a facility to provide documents for squarely facing past history and promoting a future-oriented dialogue. In 1999, the Cabinet decided on establishing substantial digital archives within the National Archives, which provides access through the Internet to Asian historical records: Japanese official documents and other records important as historical records concerning relations between Japan and nearby Asian countries in the modern age. As of March 2007, JACAR provides access to about 12.5 million pieces of image data and a catalog database of 850,000 items of Asian historical records in the possession of the National Archives of Japan, the Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Military Archives of the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense, which holds Imperial Army and Navy documents.

Characteristics of the JACAR System for Accessing Information

JACAR provides electronically imaged official records. Unlike books, there is only one piece per record in principle. As mentioned above, Japanese official records are arranged and classified by the method unique to each institution that holds them, so there is no classification approach common to official records. Then a common classification system stratified into seven levels has been considered to integrate current classification methods. As a result, a catalogue data hierarchy model has been made, which has seven strata based on the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) proposed by the International Council on Archives (ICA) and the Japanese filing system in which official records are compiled as files by subject or in a chronological order. This enabled the crossover search of the different archives institutions' catalogue data without violating the "principle of respect for original order," an international rule for organizing documents. Moreover, taking into account the current status of document administration in Japan, the metadata element set consisting of 15 catalogue items was used as Dublin Core bibliographical items on the Internet.

In addition, for producing "content" data, though it needs archivists' summarization of documents, the first approximately 300 characters are extracted from each document. It is like inputting content data instead of attaching key words to the catalogue. This made it possible to significantly increase data available for content-based search, without getting help from experts. This system can also avoid selecting arbitrary keywords and thus help ensure the neutrality of search results. Furthermore, in order to enable free word search through the Internet, a dictionary was produced for linking currently used historical terms with terms actually appearing in the original documents. For example, the generally accepted term "Pacific War" is not seen in official records, but search became possible by handling it as the synonym of "Greater East Asia War."

CONCLUSION

Japan cannot avoid the problem of historical perception if it considers relations with neighboring countries. It may be impossible to share an understanding of history between victims and victimizers. However, sharing the fact is possible. If both parties can empathize with each other's situation, it becomes possible to avoid a conflict nowadays occurring due to the difference of historical perception. Though pre-war Japanese official records are basic documents for ascertaining historical facts, they have not been fully utilized due to difficulty of access to them. JACAR was established to overcome the problem of access by use of cutting-edge technology. The catalogue and original documents have been made public through the Internet, so pre-war official records are now available to anyone, at anytime, from anywhere, freely. Moreover, JACAR intends to improve access for users less fluent in Japanese by expanding English-word search and vigorously promoting the translation of the content of special exhibitions into English.