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<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Koga, Takashi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citation</td>
<td>(2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Date</td>
<td>2010-08-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2433/123545">http://hdl.handle.net/2433/123545</a></td>
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<td>Right</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type</td>
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Kyoto University
Changing face of access to government information in Japan: Issues concerning policy, the electronic environment, and the role of libraries and archives
(Web version: references added)
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5th International Shanghai (Hangzhou) International Library Forum
Hangzhou Public Library, Hangzhou, China
Aug. 24-27, 2010

Agenda
- Introduction and background
  - Including comparison with China (PRC)
- Three major policy initiatives in Japan
- Analysis of government information policy in Japan

I dedicate this presentation to …
The late Mr. Shohei Muta
(1953-2009)
- Former Senior Specialist for Archival Affairs, National Archives of Japan
- Former Senior Researcher, Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR)

Introduction

At the Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, July 2, 2007
The scope of this presentation

Community well-being

Government Information
- Published
- Non-published

Access

Libraries / Internet

Freedom of Information/ Archives

Research by the presenter

Background (1):
Role of government information revisited

Four roles
- (1) basis for the rule of law
- (2) quality-of-life issues
- (3) historical and cultural heritage
- (4) accountability for current and future generations
Background (2): Access to government information in China

Regulation of the People’s Republic of China on the Disclosure of Government Information

- Article 16
  - The people’s government agencies at various levels shall set up a place for consulting government information at national archives and public libraries, and equip with corresponding facilities to provide convenience for citizens, legal persons or other organizations to access government information.

Comparison of PRC with Japan

- More popularity of archives than public libraries in PRC?
  - Contrary to Japan …
    - 3,164 local public libraries (2009.3)
    - 54 local public archives (2010.8)

Recent revolution in government information policy in Japan

Three major policy initiatives

- (1) Enactment of Public Records Management Act (PRMA)
- (2) Strengthening the archive of government websites by the National Diet Library (NDL)
- (3) Enhancing the effectiveness of Section 9 of the Library Law concerning the dissemination of government publications in public libraries

Enactment of Public Records Management Act (PRMA)

Timeline (1)

- 2003.12 Advisory Panel to the Chief Cabinet Secretary on the management, Preservation and Use of the Public Records (-2006.6)
  - Storing influence from then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda
- 2007.2 Legislative plans for the “Government Records Management Law,” by a research group under the NIRA (Japan’s leading think tank)
- 2007.9 Fukuda became the Prime Minister of Japan (-2008.10)
- 2008.2 Advisory panel for overseeing public records management policy (-2008.11)
- 2008.2 First-ever Minister in Charge of Public Records Management
Timeline (2)

- **2009.3** The Cabinet submitted a Bill of Public Records Management to the National Diet (Parliament)
- **2009.6** The revised bill passed the both houses of the Diet unanimously
- **2009.7** The Public Records Management Act (PRMA) was enacted
  - due to come into effect by April 2011

The main points of the PRMA

- Covers full life cycle of records
- Regulates management of the records of all national government agencies
- Acknowledges the public’s right to access records
- Empowers the National Archive’s roles
- Establishes the Board of Public Records Management
- Urges (but not enforces) local governments to comply with the PRMA and establish their own archives

Members of the Board of Public Records Management

- Appointed in June 2010
- Professors of History (x2)
- Professors of Library and Information Science (x2)
- Professor of administrative law
- Lawyer
- Senior staff of local public archives

Challenges

- Education and training for professional archivists and records managers
- the actual creation of public records
- management and preservation of electronic records
  - Under collaboration/cooperation of the National Archives with IT-oriented government departments
Strengthening the archive of government websites by the National Diet Library (NDL)

Revision of the NDL Act and the Copyright Law in July 2009 (came into effect in April 2010)
- The NDL can collect and archive web contents of government and related public organizations without permission
  - include the contents of national universities
  - Insofar limits copyright of the organizations
- It needs the permission from the organization to provide access to the archived contents

Former “WARP” program (Web Archiving Project, 2006-2010)
- Needed permission from targeted organizations (including government ones) to collect, archive and provide access to their web contents
- Copyright law in Japan included government information, except legal texts, into copyrighted works

Current “Web Archiving Project” by NDL (http://warp.ndl.go.jp/search/)
Future legal deposit system of NDL
- In June 2010, the advisory council for the legal deposit recommended the NDL to include online materials into the deposit
  - The subject is the materials published by private companies, organizations, and persons (not by government ones)
  - Taking the trend for electronic books into consideration

Section 9 of the Library Law
1. The [national] Government shall furnish public libraries established by prefectures with two copies of the Official Gazette and other documents which are made available for public information published by the National Printing Bureau.
2. Agencies of the national government and of local governments may furnish public libraries free of charge, upon request with publications and other data and materials which they publish.

Resulted in weak compliance ...

Enhancing the effectiveness of Section 9 of the Library Law

Towards more compliance
- Question from congressmen
  - In conjunction with the revision of Library Law
- The advocacy programs of the Library Policy Program Committee of the Japan Library Association
Analysis of government information policy in Japan

The meaning of three major policy initiatives
- Did not have direct relationship among them
  - Promoted at the same time by accident?
- Implied importance of management, archiving of and access to government information

Four issues to be considered
1. The pros and cons of leadership and top-down policy-making
2. Awareness of government information as evidence
3. Issues concerning the management of electronic information
4. Education and training for professional librarians and archivists

The pros and cons of leadership and top-down policy-making
Leadership: key persons

- Political leadership toward enactment of the PRMA
  - Yasuo Fukuda: Former Prime Minister
  - Yoko Kamikawa: First Minister of the Cabinet Office in Charge of Public Records Management
- Administrative leadership
  - Mitsuoki Kikuchi: Former President of NAJ
  - Masaya Takayama: Current President of NAJ
  - Makoto Nagao: Current Head Librarian of NDL

Changing political environment

- Fukuda (Liberal Democratic Party) forced to resign Prime Minister in 2008
- New ruling party since 2009, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), is not eager to promote government records management, though it stresses importance of freedom of government information
- DPJ lost the Upper House election in July 2010

Advocacy from professional organizations

- Weak bottom-up policy making
- Librarians and archivists had been reluctant to get involved with political issues?
- From "viewers" to "players"

Awareness of government information as evidence
Effect of mismanagement of government records
- Huge impact by mismanagement of pension records
- Toward change of the view of historical government information
  - From “historical material as luxury” to “evidence of government activities accessible by any people”

Issues concerning the management of electronic information

Need of collaboration among policy initiatives
- Issues of archiving government information
  - Hard copy: public libraries
  - Web contents: Web archiving at NDL

Education and training for professional librarians and archivists
Current situations

- Archivists
  - No professional certificate, very small job market
  - Graduate courses for professional archivists are just beginning
- Librarians
  - Low status
  - Specialization (e.g. government information librarians) is very difficult

Conclusion

- From simply discussing abstract concepts (e.g. “right to know”) toward developing concrete measures to manage, archive, and provide access to government information
- In this sense, the role of libraries and archives will be very important
- The key will be …
  - Raising the visibility of these institutions
  - Keeping up with the electronic environment

References (1)

References (2)


References (3)


References (4)

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Thank you.

- This work was supported by KAKENHI: Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B) by MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) in Japan. No. 21700272.