

Archival Awareness in Japanese Local Government

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Abstract: In Japan, there are two different levels of local governments—municipal and prefectural. Presently, there are 47 prefectures and about 1,800 municipalities; only 53 local governments, or 3%, have archival institutions.

Most of these institutions focus on the historiography of that area, and/or are the result of a campaign conducted by historians to preserve historical materials. This is why many of them have been regarded as cultural repositories, a perception which has been far away from current records management. For example, almost all local archives do not have enough authority to draw up a retention schedule of their parent governments. In fact, some archives are forced to collect their papers and documents at the garbage collection point in the government offices, like “scavengers.”

On the other hand, in some local governments, where archival institutions have been successfully situated within Freedom of Information regulations, archival institutions play an important role in the lifecycle of records. These institutions operate records centers, and all those records that have expired retention periods are transferred to the archives. These archival authorities also have the formal authority to appraise those records.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the contributing factors that cause such variations between local archives in Japan. In particular, it focuses on the level of archival awareness that parent institutions have. This study will propose that the establishment of a healthy relationship between records management and archives in local Japanese government systems is desirable. This relationship should benefit those local governments that are planning to set up new archival institutions, or that are re-considering the lifecycle of their records.

About the author:

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