

Standardizing Non-Alphabetical Archival Description

**A Survey of Descriptive Practices
on Japanese Public Records**

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Introduction

- ❁ **Several descriptive standards** in English-speaking countries
 - EAD, DACS, RAD, MAD...
- ❁ “[T]here were enough **significant differences** between Canadian and U.S. practice that a joint content standard was not possible at this time.”

(Preface of DACS)

 - The same language and alphabet, but...
 - Close historical and cultural relationship, but...

How about Japan?

- ❁ Letters are different

全国歴史資料保存利用機関連絡協議会

記憶と記録を未来に

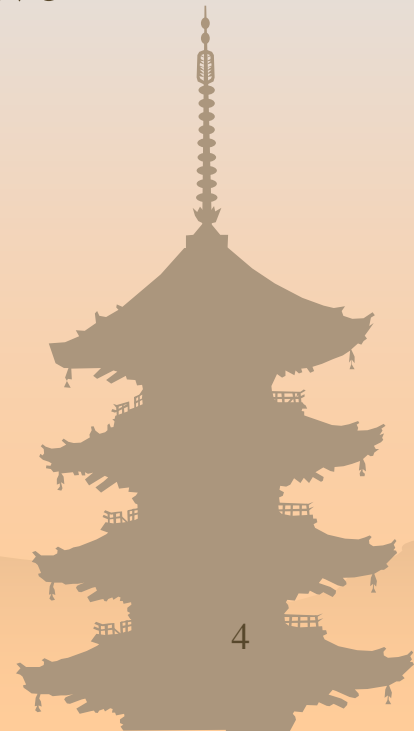
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- ❁ Only 20 years since Western archival theories have been introduced to Japan
- ❁ Is it possible or desirable to **apply** Western descriptive standards?

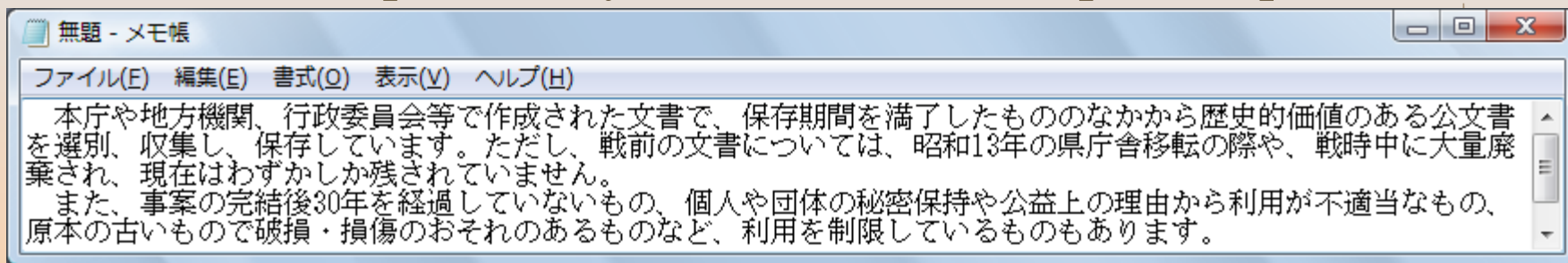
Methods

- ❁ 30/47 local governments have public archives
- ❁ Accessing their online finding aids of public records created after 1947
 - when the current local government systems have established
- ❁ Research Topics
 1. **Level** of description
 2. Data **structure** – descriptive elements
 3. Data **content** – title description



Record Group / Series Level

- ❁ 77% (23/30) provide **Record Group** descriptions – but mostly **short**
 - 47% (14/23) 0-200 Japanese letters = a few lines
 - Example of only 217 letters of Group description

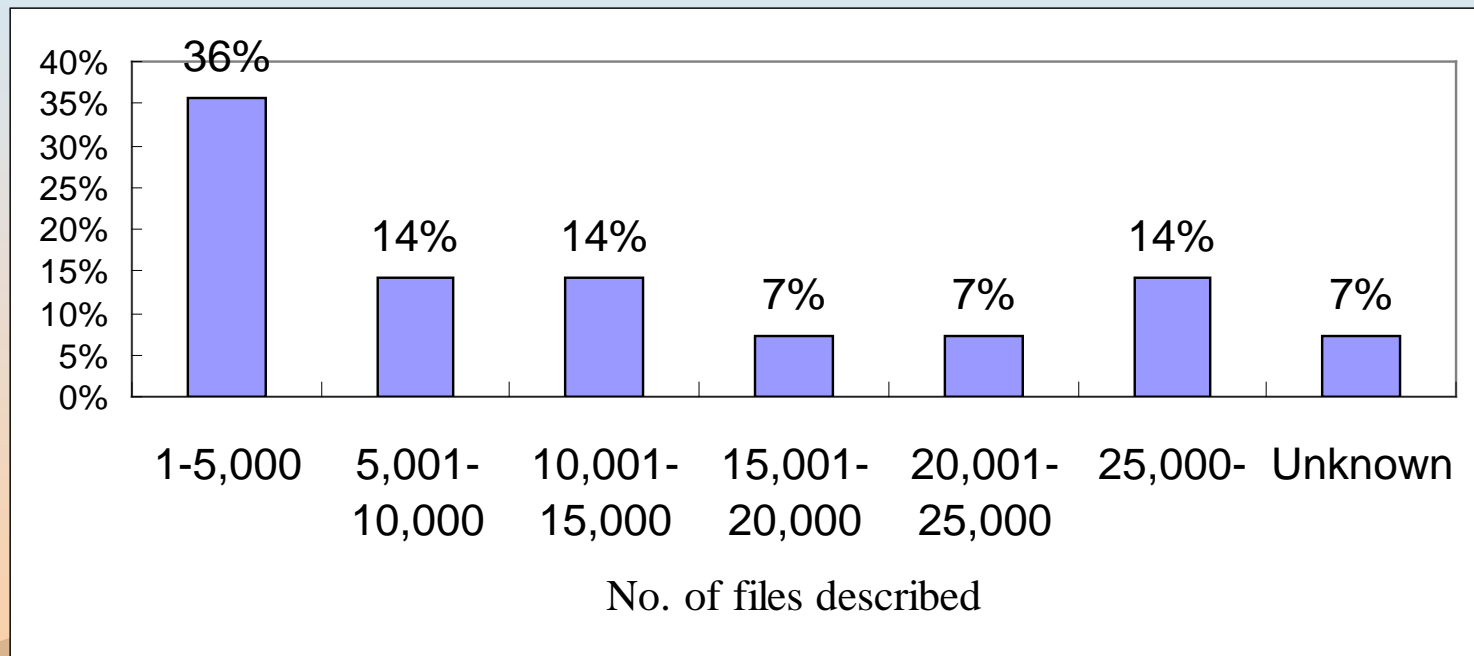


– 23% (7/23) 201-1000 letters

- ❁ 3% (1/30) provide **Series** descriptions

File / Item Level

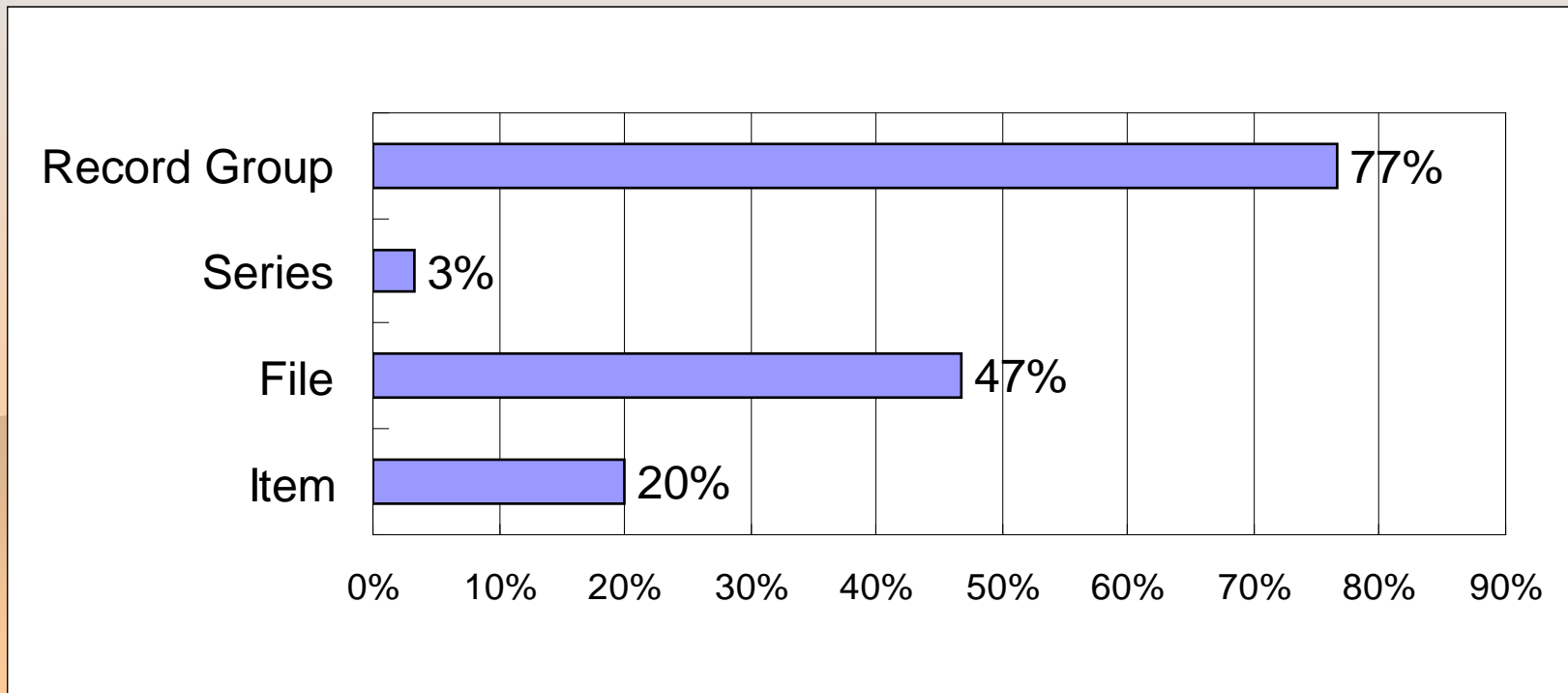
❁ 47% (14/30) provide **File** descriptions



❁ 20% (6/30) provide **Item** descriptions

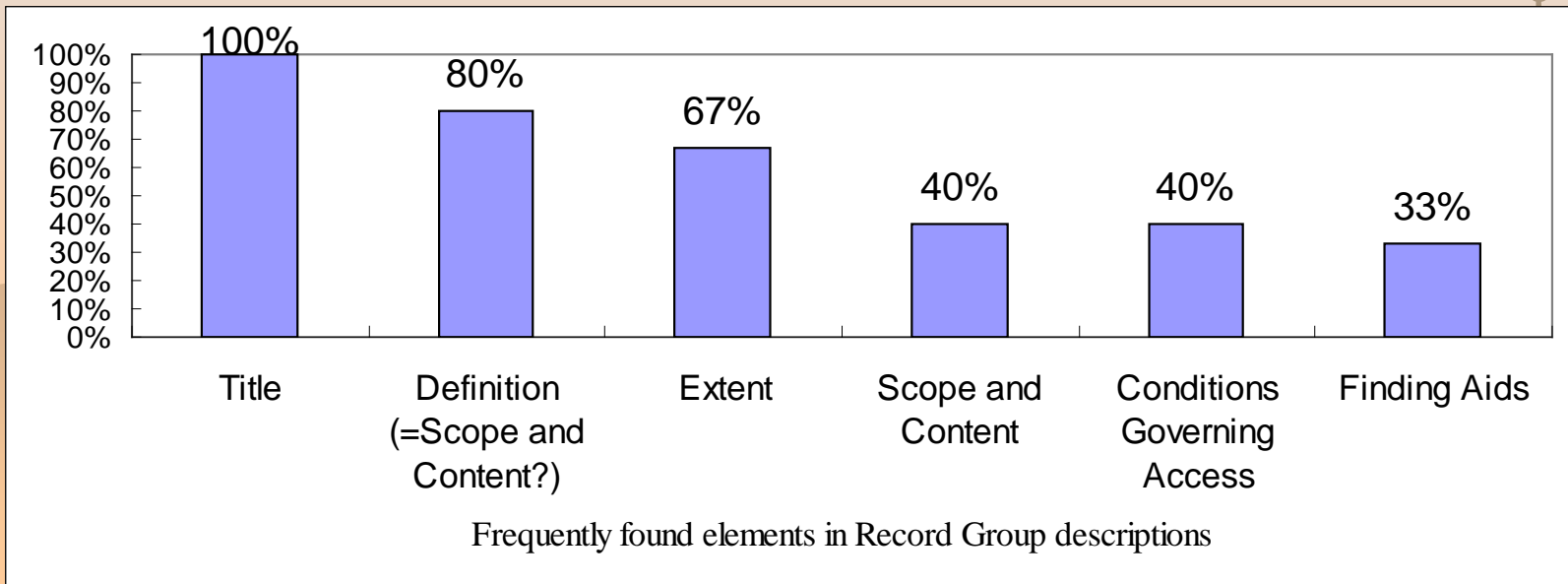
Level of Description

- ❁ In many institutions, collective descriptions (i.e., group or series) are **scarce or short**, while detailed levels of description are provided



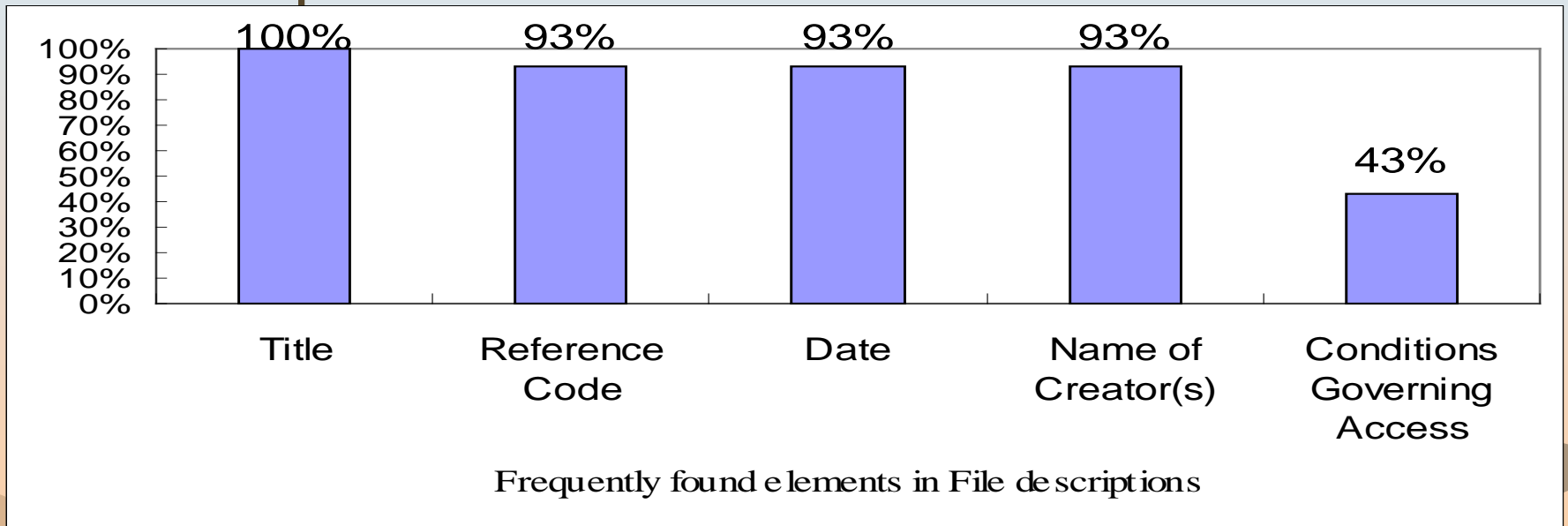
Elements on Record Groups

- ❁ Surveyed 15 institutions providing relatively rich descriptions (over 100 letters) at Record Group
- ❁ Example of simple “Definition”
 - “Public records created in government offices and appraised for archival preservation.”



Elements on Files

- Surveyed 14 institutions providing File descriptions



- **As a result**, nearly identical to some basic elements in American standards

Title Description

❁ Supplied Titles

- DACS: “nature of the archival unit”
- APPM: “form of material”

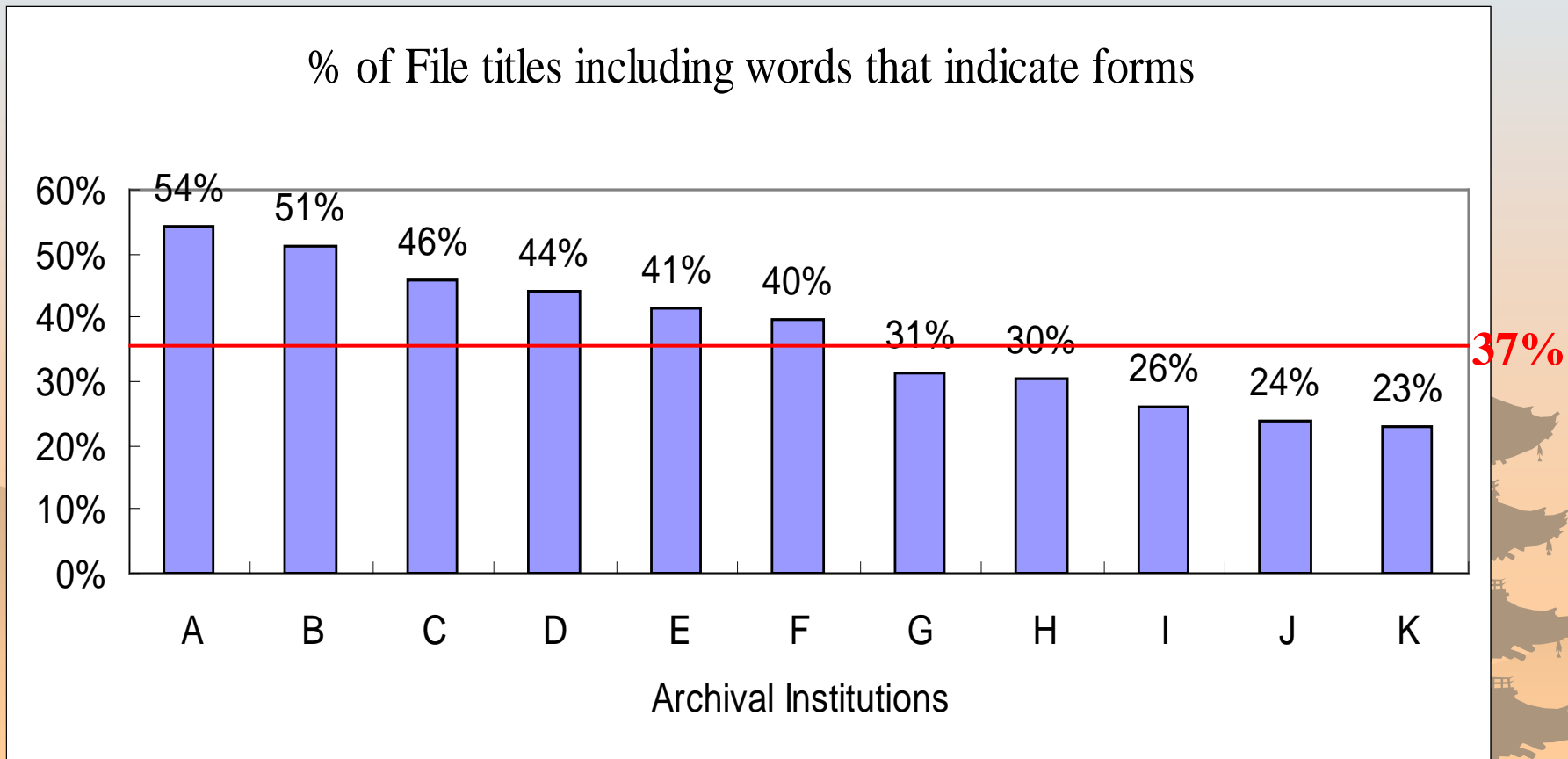
❁ Surveyed 11 institutions providing downloadable File titles

- A total of 82,568 files

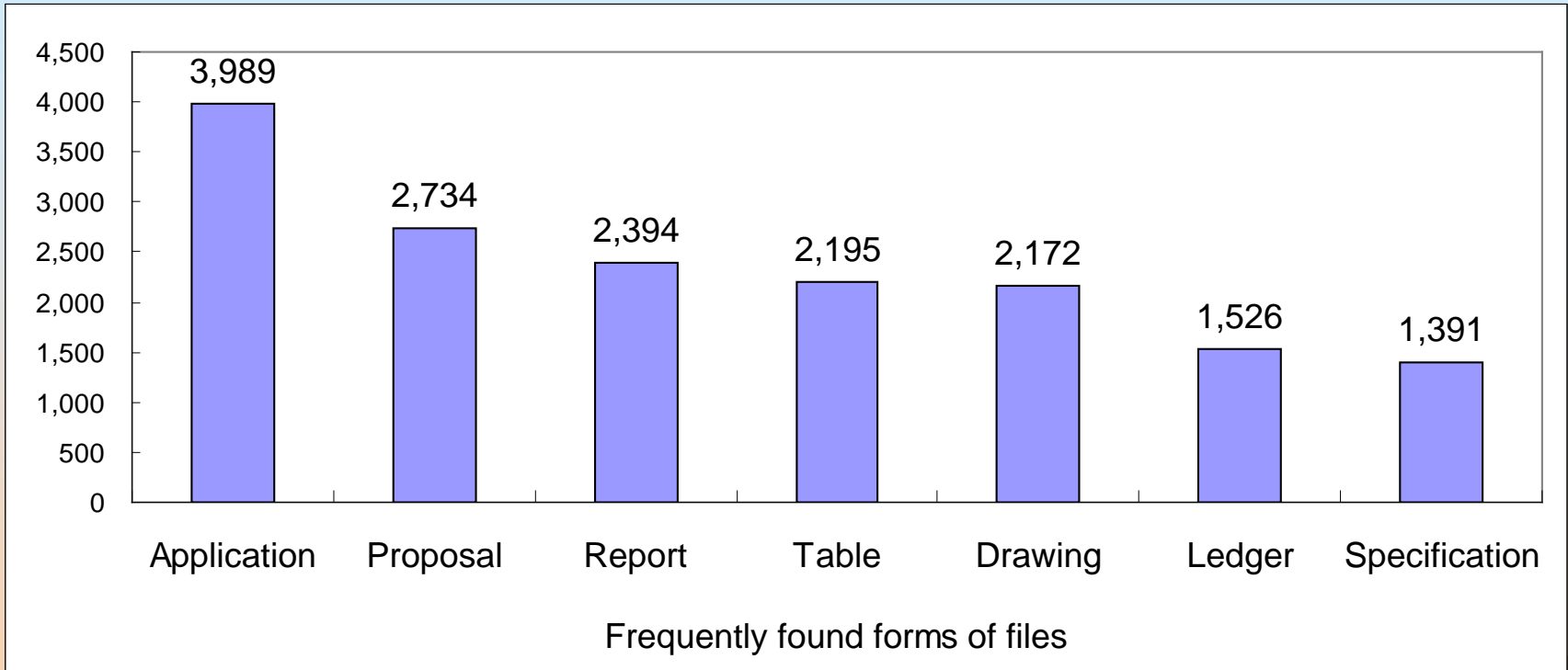


Title Description

- ❁ On average, 37% include words that explicitly indicate the forms of the files



Title Description



- In addition, 15% of File titles include some **ambiguous** terms of forms like “volume on ...”

Historical Manuscript Approach to Public Archives

- ❁ Providing information on Record Group / Series is usually not emphasized, compared to those on Files and Items
- ❁ May be useful for specific users who know what files they need
- ❁ Inconvenient for public users to gain an **overview** of the holdings



Hypothesis

- ❁ Describing public archives may have been regarded as **unprofessional** work of elementary labors
- ❁ Public records may have been used much by the **specific** users but not by the public
- ❁ Generally, Japanese people may prefer to be **delicate and accurate**

Discussion

- ❁ Data structure and content
 - Western standards will be helpful
- ❁ Further research is necessary
 - to test the hypothesis
 - to examine the feasibility of developing national standards
 - to respond to the new and growing demands to our community
 - to testify the portability or sustainability of international archival theory and methodology

Thank You

- ❁ This research is funded by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (KAKENHI no. 20700232)
- ❁ This research is part of my doctoral thesis at Graduate Course in Archival Science, Gakushuin University (in Tokyo), supervised by Dr. Masahito Ando

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