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# On the Use of Official Documents: Beyond JACAR (Keynote Speech at the International Workshop)

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### 1. The First Ten Years of JACAR

For four years from April 2010 to March this year, I served for the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records of the National Archives of Japan as its Director-General. To confess, I am quite an amateur to the field of the history of Japan-Indochina relations, although I was on the thesis committees for both Professor Shiraishi and Professor Furuta a long time ago. Yet, as the chief of JACAR, the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records in acronym, one time I think I came a little closer to the theme of this big joint research project of yours. This is why I think I am here this morning, and I am glad that I am invited to join you in the project. As a way to congratulate the launching of a significant international research project, let me tell you some of my experiences with the JACAR, hoping that my little talk may give you some hints in planning your researches.

To begin, I must explain why and how the JACAR was established in Japan. It was established in connection with the “Murayama Danwa”, or Prime Minister Murayama’s special speech, in August 1994, in which the then Japanese prime minister expressed sincere regrets and apologies for victimization caused by the wars and colonial rules of Imperial Japan in the neighboring countries. The speech was delivered one year in advance of 1995, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War. Prime Minister proposed to start what he called “plans of exchanges for peace and friendship”. Included was a plan to establish an institution that would collect historical materials and provide them for research, in order to support Japanese people to face up to the history of wars with the neighboring countries. The prime minister’s proposal has been materialized as JACAR.

Yet, it took a long time, longer than the other plans of exchanges for peace and friendship, before JACAR was established in 2001. The Japanese government and people as a whole were not necessarily enthusiastic about the idea of digging deeper modern Japanese history. Besides, there were a number of technical, financial and institutional problems for those officials and scholars who were concerned in designing the new archives to tackle with. The initial design was ambitious: for the government to build a completely new, big building for a new archives that should collect all related documents and materials from all the government offices, and not only from within Japan but from overseas as well. But, first of all, no ministry would take an initiative to take care of the new institution. The plan got shrunk quickly; a new building was given up. Instead, it was decided for financial reasons to collect

and disseminate all documents in digitalized form. The government offices to provide the new institution with materials were limited, at least for the moment, only to three offices, namely, the National Archives of Japan, the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, and the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense. With many difficulties remaining, finally in November 2001, JACAR was established as a tiny office to manage a database under the umbrella of the National Archives of Japan. Still today, it has no proper officials, with six full-time officials all being on loans from other ministries and three researchers and twelve associate researchers being on part-time employment, despite their fulfilling indispensable task of making and maintaining JACAR's database.

Nevertheless, JACAR is still alive. Whereas the other plans of exchanges for peace and friendships were terminated at the time limit of ten years as initially planned, JACAR which was started later than the others is still going on and is expected to remain. It is because JACAR has been regarded as an international commitment by the Japanese government, proved to be indispensable for Japanese diplomacy, and proved to be indispensable for history research inside and outside Japan. JACAR has had a tremendous impact on historical research, a part of which I will illustrate later.

## **2. JACAR's Achievement So Far**

Japan's first digital archives of government documents, JACAR supplies its users "Asian historical records" in digitalized form through internet. "Asian historical records" is defined as "the nation's archival and other records important to relations between Japan and primarily nearby nations in modern times." In actual terms, historical records JACAR supplies are restricted to those originally possessed by the National Archives of Japan, the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense and those produced from the beginning of the Meiji era to August 15, 1945. Appeals from JACAR and its users to increase document supplying organizations and to expand the period, say down to 1952, the year when the peace treaty was signed, have not been favorably responded. Nevertheless, JACAR users now have access to nearly 30 million document images, which is truly a gigantic volume.

JACAR can fulfill its mission when it supplies as many historical documents as it can; the more the better. For the first five years or so, when it was striving to quickly increase the volume of its data, JACAR was not immune of criticism, especially from overseas, that it did not release documents containing those historical records which were disadvantageous to Japan. That criticism has ceased since the accumulated volume of JACAR data crossed over a certain threshold. I am confident that JACAR is now considered credible, releasing all the documents that have been provided to it from the three government archives automatically, that is, without checking their contents. We have learned that exhaustiveness acquires a database its credibility. Indeed, JACAR has almost exhausted documents the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense can provide to it. I must admit that JACAR still has many shortcomings, as I have mentioned, in the scope of original data providing orga-

nizations and in the range of historical period it covers, but it has acquired approvals from its users, public users as well as historians, both in Japan and abroad.

### 3. How JACAR Database Works

However, the exhaustiveness of the data alone is not sufficient for any database to satisfy its users' needs. Suppose fifteen years ago a historian came from Vietnam to Tokyo to do research on war-time relations between French Indochina and Japan. He would have to stay in Tokyo for many days; for the first ten days, everyday he would commute to 外交史料館, the Diplomatic Archives of the MOFA, to peruse documents left by Japanese diplomats. Then for the second ten days, he would go to 防衛研究所, the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense, to search such documents as listed in Professor Tachikawa's lists. The day for him to return to Vietnam came and he would go home, with a grudge to leaving many documents he wanted to read unread and without even thinking to visit 国立公文書館, the National Archives of Japan.

Now, with JACAR at your service, you no longer need go through this kind of agony. Let me tell you why, by telling you an episode. I have an American friend who teaches modern Japanese history in the United States. He frequently visits Tokyo for short or long periods to do historical research. More than ten years ago, he asked me if I had any means to identify a Japanese man named Mr. Moriya Koyu. According to my friend, Moriya-san appeared to be a Japanese army officer who had studied in the United States. My friend's great uncle Charles Fuller was a professor at MIT and his descendants keep a letter Moriya-san sent, expressing gratitude for his mentorship. Professor Fuller's family were curious to know more about the sender of the letter and a gift from him. My friend, a Japan specialist, was thus entrusted to find the man's identity. He asked for my help, but at that time I could do little.

About a decade later, two years ago, when my friend visited Tokyo again, he asked me the same question. Returning home from my meeting with him, I opened JACAR's homepage on my computer, placed Moriya's full name in the keyword search box and, saying "there is no harm in trying," clicked the button. No sooner than I finished clicking, to my great surprise and joy, I got clues to four documents related to Mr. Moriya. I read the documents and found that surely there was a Japanese artillery major named Moriya Koyu who in 1935 was sent to the United States to study for two years. Please look at the present power point slide showing the Army Minister's letter to the Foreign Minister that listed Moriya among the officers to be sent to the United States. The next year, while in the United States, he was directed to assist a group of Japanese army officers during their inspection tour. Six years later, Mr. Moriya, now a colonel, led the Japanese Army's investigation into a hundred shells captured on battle fields in the south, which might have been Indochina. He apparently had come to be regarded as a leading officer in the artillery, probably thanks to his education at MIT. However, I learned in the last document I read, that the Army Minister ordered a bonus be paid to Major General Moriya, because he was in critical condition in June 1943.

I immediately reported my findings to my friend. I was very proud of JACAR and my association

with it. My friend was excited and said he would circulate the news among his relatives. I hope this episode illustrates how well the JACAR database system works.

#### **4. Key Characteristics of JACAR Database**

As I told you before, the JACAR database works because it has accumulated about 2 million original documents or about 30 million images from the three government archives mentioned above. However, this is not the only reason. JACAR's union cataloging and integrated search dictionary enable us to search a document across those three archives, without visiting any one of them. Two of the four original documents related to Moriya are stored in the archives of the Ministry of Defense, while the other two are in the National Archives. In addition to the dictionary, JACAR has developed a unique system of full-text indexing of the first 300 words of every document to use them as an auxiliary to the search dictionary. Even though Moriya is not registered in our dictionary since he was not a key player in the international arena, because his name appears in the first 300 words of the four documents, JACAR's database search engine hit upon all those documents that include references to Moriya. Thus, thanks to JACAR's cross search function, I was able to find him.

The cross search function on computer I just illustrated is the key. JACAR's researchers and associate researchers, all young promising historians, everyday work very hard to do the cataloging and the full-text indexing of the first 300 words of every document it acquires. No other organization can do it. The volume of the data supplied, and the key-word search function are the *raison-d'être* of JACAR. Our imagined Vietnamese scholar, if he accesses JACAR database, can read all the documents he would like to read at home in Vietnam, or even if he insists on reading historical documents in original, he can make a list of documents he wants to see in Japan, before he departs, thereby able to shorten his stay in Japan greatly. In addition, you can use the JACAR system all for free and you can do the document search and the key-word search in English as well as in Japanese, although the absolute majority of the data themselves appear on screen in the original Japanese.

#### **5. Vietnam in JACAR Database**

To conclude my short speech, let me tell you about JACAR's recent contacts with Vietnam. More than two years ago, in April 2012, JACAR received a visit by the Director-General of the State Records and Archives of the Vietnamese Ministry of Home Affairs (SRADV), Ms. Vu Thi Minh Huoh, and her secretary. The purpose of their visit was to inspect JACAR's facilities and operations and to exchange views on the release and use of digital archives. JACAR welcomed their visit, partly because it had long been searching a door for data exchange with Vietnam and the other Southeast Asian countries, in particular for documents related with Japanese policies and activities there before and during the war, including documents left by Japanese personnel. We learned that SRADV had three branch archives here and there and had to expect it would take some time to find whether and where the type of documents JACAR would like to have existed.

Then, soon in August 2012, we met Ms. Vu Thi Minh Huoh again in Brisbane where we together attended a general meeting of International Congress of Archives (ICA). SRADV and the National Archives of Japan are its members and Ms. Vu Thi Minh Huoh looked very active, freshly joining the executive board of the ICA. By Ms. Huoh's request, she and the president of the National Archives of Japan had a special meeting, where Ms. Huoh proposed that Vietnam and Japan might produce a joint virtual exhibition of historical documents and publish its catalog in Vietnamese and Japanese. Hopefully, the joint virtual exhibition would be put up the next year, 2013, which was the fortieth anniversary of the opening of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Japan. Between the two national archives, there were follow-up communications to design the exhibition and it was agreed that each side would propose to exhibit fifteen documents. Since it was going to be a virtual exhibition, JACAR must have taken the charge on the Japanese side and it was quite willing to do so. We searched for appropriate documents in our database and came up as candidates with those documents which I will show you on the slides. I wonder what you would say, looking at the list? Negotiations were seemingly going on between the two national archives but suddenly we were told that somehow the proposal was cancelled from the Vietnamese side. We were not told why, but we were sorry we missed a great chance.

Finally, let me give you a few interesting illustrations of what you would get from your access to the JACAR database. You try on JACAR's homepage a keyword search by putting your keyword "Futsuin" or French Indochina in the keyword search box, and you will get 2,724 documents. Of those documents, from No.1 to No.331 are originally stored at the National Archives of Japan, from No. 332 to No.1,070 are from the Diplomatic Archives and from No.1,071 to No.2,720 are from the National Institute of Defense Studies. Document No.2,636, for example, has the title "Nampo sakusen ni tomonau senryochi gyousei no gaiyou, Showa 21 nen 5 gatsu (Senshi kiroku gunsei) mokuji" (The outlines of administration for occupied zones following military operations in the south, May 1946 (Military history / military government); List of contents). This document file contains "Tai-Futsuin sesaku no gaiyo (soan)" (The outlines of policies vis-à-vis French Indochina, original plans) which are the contents numbered from No.2,638 to No.2,647. Significant is that this group of documents, broadly concerned with administration by the occupation army, are supplied by the National Institute of Defense Studies and were compiled in May 1946 after the war was over. This is one example that shows cross archival reference in the JACAR way is very much preferable.

Let us try one more keyword search. We place "Etsunan Kyosanto" (Vietnam Communist Party) in the keyword search box and we get two documents with the title "Etsumeito no naiyo" (Inside the Vietnam). It is again to be noted that these documents are originally kept in no other than the archives of the National Institute of Defense Studies. And in the first document, from page three to four, we come across the bibliographical data of Nguyen Ai Quoc, as you see in the slides. Of course, we have no entry for Ho Chi Minh yet those years.

I am afraid I may have played with the JACAR database too long. I hope you have realized JACAR database is useful for historical research. I shall be very much pleased if you would like to make use of

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the JACAR database. Yet, digital archives of official documents like JACAR are only a tool for research by a sensible historian. If I am given another chance to further share my experiences at JACAR with you, I would like to stress that we must go beyond JACAR.

Thank you very much for your attention.