
Part One: Opening and Preliminary Session

〈Keynote Speech〉 Imagination for History: Beyond JACAR Data

Ken'ichiro Hirano Executive Director of Toyo Bunko (Oriental Library) in Tokyo, Professor Emeritus, University of Tokyo and Waseda University, Former Director-General of Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR)

Introduction

In March this year, at the first conference held at Waseda University in Tokyo, I presented a paper entitled "On the Use of Official Documents: Beyond JACAR."¹ I was the Director-General of the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, or JACAR, under the National Archives of Japan for four years. In my paper, I expressed my thoughts on how we should conduct international joint studies on war history and I suggested that we must go beyond JACAR. If you want to study the Second World War in the Asia-Pacific region using official documents of the Japanese government, I would like to suggest that you get access to the database provided by JACAR, which allows you to access electronically an extensive number of Japanese government documents. But I do not think that you can complete your research only using those documents. So, I concluded my paper by saying that it would be necessary to go beyond JACAR. What does it mean to go beyond JACAR? Today, I would like to address this question.

When historians write history, they use records and memories as their source materials. But I should say that to write good history, records and memories alone are not enough; we need something more. The JACAR database may provide historical records, yet I would like to argue that historians must utilize their own imagination and sensibility that go beyond records and memories.

Some historical documents are not available on JACAR

First of all, quite a number of significant historical documents have been missing in the JACAR database from the start. Is it not the case, you may ask that JACAR has made public all the existing official documents of the Japanese government concerning the Second World War? If so, why do I say that we need go beyond the JACAR database, indicating that the official documents of the Japanese government are not sufficient to study the war? It is true that the Japanese government has committed to

¹ Masaya Shiraishi, ed., *Indochina, Thailand, Japan and France during World War II: Overview of Existing Literature and Related Documents for the Future Development of Research* [第二次世界大戦期のインドシナ・タイ、そして日本・フランスに関する研究蓄積と一次資料の概観—研究のさらなる進展を目指して] 早稲田大学アジア太平洋研究センター〔WIAPS〕, March 2015, pp. 71–76.

make public all the existing official documents relating to the war. In the archives of those government ministries and offices which have been in existence since before the war, we can get access to their entire sets of historical documents, with some exceptions. You will ask what these exceptions are, but let us set aside the question for the moment. In any case, it is the fact that the Japanese people and government have made public all the official records and documents in order to reflect on the war that ended 70 years ago. In addition, at the National Diet Library, we can get access to the personal files of national leaders concerned with the war as well.

JACAR was established on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the war to help everyone in the world get free access on the Internet to all the existing official documents of Japan concerning the war. It was meant to express apologies and regrets for those people who had suffered under the colonial rule, war and aggression inflicted by Japan. I said “all” the existing official documents are provided, but in actuality the data found in JACAR are limited to those documents originally stored at three institutions only, namely the National Archives, the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Library of the National Institute for Defense Studies, Ministry of Defense. For example, the official documents of the Imperial Household Agency—the agency responsible for administrative affairs related to the Emperor, Empress and Imperial Household—are not included in the JACAR database. In short, although it may sound strange, the establishment of JACAR did not open access to any new documents. All the print versions of the materials provided by JACAR have been published at the three agencies mentioned above; JACAR has only been digitalizing and uploading them on the Internet. In other words, if the departments originally concerned have not released particular documents, they are not available on JACAR either. Therefore, not all the official documents of prewar Japan can be accessed on JACAR in the first place. I must admit this is its biggest shortcoming.

On August 14, 1945, when the Japanese government decided to concede to the Potsdam Declaration and surrender to the Allies, smoke went up at many governmental offices in Japan. Before the Emperor released the Imperial Rescript ending the War on August 15, many official documents had been burnt. It seems that instructions were issued to burn critical documents. The absence of documents thus lost constitutes another limitation of JACAR.

After the end of the war, the Allies occupying Japan seized documents of the Japanese government from the wartime period. They confiscated the documents in order to clarify war responsibilities and to obtain information useful for their occupation policy. The US government confiscated the great majority of the documents, but it later returned most of the appropriated documents to the Japanese government. The Soviet Union also returned a certain number of documents it had confiscated. I would like to tell you this just to confirm the facts. Some of the returned documents have been digitalized and now can be accessed on JACAR.

However, many people suspect that some documents are still missing somewhere. In any case, it is safe to think that there remain a good number of documents that are not found in JACAR. By relying upon the JACAR data alone, we cannot write “accurate history.” I am afraid I may be asked whether we

can ever write fully “accurate history,” so I hasten to correct myself and say that the database of JACAR alone is not sufficient to write a “respectable history.”

There are many facts undocumented in the JACAR data

Secondly, although JACAR has data, we must note that “the facts” historians seek are not always documented in those data.

The JACAR system has a built-in search engine which makes the system function outstandingly. The JACAR database is equipped with a glossary that contains a relatively large number of keywords. In addition, the first 300 words of every handwritten document have been changed to print form, and these additional data make possible a far more extensive keyword search. This is the strength of the JACAR system, allowing for cross-document string matching.

Perhaps almost everyone who uses the JACAR database looks for documents by using its keyword search function. However, sometimes we input a particular keyword, expecting to be led to many appropriate documents, yet not a single document can be called up. The reason is because the keywords happen to be incorrect for documents from the wartime period. For example, we enter the keyword “Second World War,” only to realize that no document can be found. The reason is that during the period in question the war was not called “Second World War”; it is the same for the term “Pacific War.” In the past the war was called “China Incident” and then “Greater East Asia War.” Which name is used to refer to the war is a complicated issue, because this question is related to many other important issues for historians today. As for the “Second World War,” the people and in particular those who produced documents those days did not use the name, so it is not the correct keyword for document search in the JACAR database. The same problem holds for the keyword “Senkaku Islands.” As certain keywords produce no results, JACAR was once suspected of concealing important documents which was not the case. We have now enhanced the glossary and revised it to allow for accurate search results of related documents through synonyms.

The late Professor Ishii Yoneo, my predecessor as the first JACAR Director-General went so far as to say that “in the JACAR database there are no comfort women.” This was when comfort women had become an issue attracting attention and many people were accessing JACAR for related documents. They tried the keyword “*jugun ianfu*” (comfort women) and got no document, so JACAR and the Japanese government were criticized for concealing certain documents. In reality, however, the term “comfort women” was not used in official documents during the period. On the other hand, the word “*ianjo*” (comfort houses) was used in documents of the Japanese Army then. So, JACAR has expanded the keywords so that related documents can be retrieved. However, “comfort women” as a term does not exist in those documents either.

Thus, in some cases, facts are not recorded in the documents provided by JACAR. Consciously or not, some facts were not recorded in official documents during the period. Thus, in my opinion, if we are to seek historical facts, it is necessary for us to go beyond JACAR. Official documents are insuffi-

cient in quantity and in quality.

We cannot write history using only official documents

Not only are official documents incomplete, but a more important point every historian knows is that it is impossible to write history using only such sources. In fact, no historian has ever written history only by official documents. Historians collect, analyze and synthesize all documents in their attempts to elucidate details of certain society in a particular period. Official documents are nothing but one kind of material, one kind of record among others. They are records composed by the parties on the site at a historical moment, so their importance is irrefutable. But it is a mistake to conclude that “that which is not recorded in official documents is not a fact.” It is the nature of historians to respect “primary sources,” but I am afraid that attributing too much value to official documents as “primary sources” and overemphasizing their significance only leads to historical inaccuracy.

Because there is no word “comfort women” appearing in the JACAR database, for instance, I do not think we can conclude that “comfort women” did not exist. It is also too simplistic to conclude that because no document is found which proves that women were forced to become comfort women, therefore no coercion was involved. A historian (and even one who is not) is supposed to know that, in the modern history of Japan, there were so-called “*Karayuki-san*” who emerged from the desperate conditions in rural areas. In fact, the “Autobiography of Muraoka Iheiji” tells us the story of how a pimp (a prostitute’s intermediary) named Muraoka transformed a large number of young Japanese women into “*Karayuki-san*” and brought them to the areas in Nanyo (then Southeast Asia). It is a fact confirmed by historians and common knowledge that rural areas of mainland Japan and the Japanese colonies during the Showa period were in such desperate conditions.

The importance of memories

As a kind of historical material, memories supplement records. The so-called “memories” in this case refer to the memories of anyone who lived through the flow of history at historical sites at particular historical moments. They need not be memories of every single historical event, which once documented are rather to be considered as “records.” In one sense, they are testimonies of countless people who confirm that certain events did indeed take place. In another sense, “memories” represent a sense of a social situation in the past which indicates the probability that certain factual events must have occurred. The second type of memory is constituted by people’s testimonies that in those days such tragic events did happen and that at that time it was taken for granted that they could take place. These kinds of memories fill in the gaps left in the records in official documents.

I was only seven years old when the Pacific War ended, so I was unaware of the so-called “comfort women.” Yet I have memories of that time, though vague memories formed by testimonies about the social atmosphere, and based on those memories, I cannot join those people who deny the existence of comfort women on the grounds that the term is not found in official documents. Nor is it possible to

deny the coercive factors resulting from the desperate situation during those years which I have in my memory. These memories of mine agree with those of other people, and confirm what is left uncertain in records. I would maintain that the combination of records and memories, one supplementing the other, is indispensable for writing history.

The inadequacy of memories

However, memories can also be inaccurate. This is not merely an inherent shortcoming of memories, but also memories themselves tend to evaporate. Take the Pacific War for example. The memories of those who witnessed the war constitute social memories of the conflict. In such cases, the memories will fade away as time goes by, with the transition of generations. The fading or loss of memories is inevitable. This year is the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and this summer we have heard the remark that “the war is now history.” This reveals generational gaps that are now relevant, as the number of remaining witnesses shrinks and memories are fading and vanishing.

The emergence of historical revisionism

As memories fade, so the supplementary relationship between records and memories also becomes less effective, and what will happen then? I am afraid of the danger of biased and inaccurate records dominating history writing merely because they are documented as records. A history may be written based on the records documented and archived from the standpoint of a certain government of a certain nation, which are valued as primary sources. JACAR has done its best to make public the official documents of the Japanese government and facilitate access to them. In other words, JACAR has tried to increase the number of available historical records and I would like to think this effort should be appreciated. However, I am worried that when the war witnesses are no longer alive, then the value of biased records may be exaggerated.

History is always waiting to be rewritten, so I do not think that historical revisionism in itself is something appalling. However, if the historical revisionism currently being advocated to the general public in relation to the Pacific War and so on is reflective of the situation in which historical materials are offered for use, then revisionism should be considered a problem for historical research as well.

The progress of history

If a technical reason for the emergence of historical revisionism is the collapsing of what I call the “mutually complementary relationship between records and memories,” then history will be warped as time and generational transitions go on. However, I believe this is not the only case, because as time goes by, history also progresses. Here we can see some hope.

Take the comfort women issue as an example. It was in the 1980s that the problem of comfort women in the Japanese army was made an issue. It is worth noting that this issue primarily emerged in the context of Korea–Japan relations. In short, at that time, the process of democratization had already

started, ideas of human rights had deepened, and popular perceptions in the countries concerned had been altered, for example in their views on gender, and so individual memories suppressed until then emerged to the surface.

The imagination of historians

When memories fade and the “mutually complementary relationship between records and memories” is about to collapse, that is the moment when historians must reinforce memories, avoiding such pitfalls as biased use of records alone. To fill in the gap created by fading and vanishing memories, “something” is required of a historian. What is that “something”? I would argue that it is the historian’s viewpoints and imagination for history which are supported by his or her sensitivity. Historians have historical viewpoints with which they grasp long underlying currents through the history preceding and following the period in question. It is definitely possible and indeed necessary for historians to correct wishful historical revisionism with such historical viewpoints.

By persistently honing their reading of historical records, improving their perspectives and attempting to gain profound insights into humanity and society, historians have nurtured their personal sensitivity and developed their imagination for history. I hope that with the help of sensitivity and imagination, historians can compensate for the deficiency created by the simplistic use of records and the fading of memories. To write accurate and profound history, we must of course use records and memories properly, but we must also make full use of our sensitivity and imagination.

The individuality and universality of history

I am currently working with my colleagues to compile an index of diplomatic documents filed at the Tokyo Embassy of the Wang Jingwei regime which are now preserved at the Toyo Bunko in Tokyo. I have no idea how these documents came to be held by the Toyo Bunko, but they are no doubt genuine historical records. As you know, hoping to somehow end the Sino–Japanese war, Wang Jingwei fled to Hanoi in 1939 and the following year he established the Reorganized National Government of the Republic of China at Nanjing. This was a so-called puppet government created by Japanese machinations.

To make the index, I read a fragment of the documents and had a strong feeling that history possesses universal features resulting from humanity, while it also has different individualities according to era, country, culture and so on. This was an embassy of a puppet government lacking legitimacy and Tokyo, where it was located, was repeatedly bombed by US planes. In such conditions, the employees of the embassy were still engaged in producing, compiling and filing these documents with dedication. This fact almost moved me to tears. They might be insignificant people being tossed around by the great, harsh waves of history, but they devoted their efforts to completing their duties. Many of the people who produced and compiled the documents of the Japanese government during those years which are now available on the JACAR database shared the same spirit. As if in resistance to the great waves of history, some of them marked their honest opinions on these documents. The database of

JACAR contains many such records that are currently waiting to be discovered by historians.

Expectations for international cooperation in research

To conclude, I would like to express my enormous hope for the project of ordering, collecting and restoring historical records that you are currently developing as an international effort in research. Thanks to this project, a large volume of historical materials will be discovered and reviewed. Also many memories are likely to be recovered. As this is an international joint program, I also do hope that the war memories can be refined by both perpetrators and victims alike. I suggest the collective and mutual examination of the same texts by both sides is a very good method. This experiment is likely to be a good opportunity for the participants to exchange different viewpoints, discuss them and, perhaps referring to the experiences of the Vietnam War, stimulate each other to further strengthen their sensitivity and imagination as historians.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.