

The Municipalities Sections of the Home Ministry's Provincial
Department and local administrative agencies after
the Russo-Japanese War: An archival approach
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The later years of the Russo-Japanese War have been drawing the attention of historians as an era of transformation in Japan's existing system of local administration; however, only the strengthening of supervision on the town and village level by means of institutional restructuring has been revealed. To the contrary, the author of the present article is of the opinion that by analyzing the relationship between the activities of related departments within the Home Ministry and the local administrative agencies on the ground during approximately twenty years of local administration prior to the period in question conducted on the basis of stable institutions, a new image of the Ministry may come to light. For this purpose, the author makes an historiographic examination of the National Archives of Japan collection of documents related to the Home Ministry transferred from the present Ministry of Home Affairs to the Archives, specifically records entitled "Kachu Iken" 課中意見 (Intradepartmental Opinions) and "Ukagai Shokai" 伺照会 (Inquiries). The latter are collections of mainly decisions on the part of ministers and departmental heads concerning the replies to public inquiries made to the Ministry from local authorities and other ministries. They also contain direct sections from Shi-sei/Choson-sei Reiki 市制町村制例規 (Local Administrative Precedents) cited as public and legal interpretations related to the matters in question, revealing administrative tasks of the filing and preservation of records describing actual administrative actions taken, which correspond to the conventional image of Japan's bureaucracy, including great emphasis on the importance of precedent.

In contrast, Kachu Iken contain no official decisions and no documents

emanating from the top levels of minister, departmental head or provincial governor. Rather than dealing with public communiques and enquiries, these records circulated through unofficial, informal channels. Consequently, we find here an atmosphere of free and open-minded exchange of opinions among the departmental members, characterized by more flexible responses to problems, like decisions that no legal interpretation was needed, since the inquiries were not “on the public record”, and that while the Ministry would give silent approval, an administrative trial would never allow the remedy to stand. In other words, specific responses by departments put in charge of related affairs in light of extenuating circumstances exerted a great deal of sway in the way local administrative affairs were conducted.

The author concludes that in pursuing the operations of and changes that occurred in local administration during the late Meiji period, focus must be placed on the exchange that occurred between local regions and the Home Ministry departments who were charged with guiding them administratively.