

Symposium on Memories and “Negative History”: How to convey the 3.11 Disasters? Co-organized by IRIDeS and the Hoover Institution of Stanford University (2023/9/23)

Theme: Disaster Storytelling, cultural and collective memory, difficult pasts

Venue: IRIDeS, Namie Town

The multilingual Symposium (Jp-Eng) held on Saturday, September 23, 2023 brought together scholars and experts to discuss cultural memories, disaster storytelling, and Kamishibai. Organized by Asst. Prof. Julia Gerster, Assoc. Prof. Akihiro Shibayama (Disaster Culture and Archive Studies) of IRIDeS, Stanford University Hoover Institution research fellow Dr. Kaoru Ueda, and Kamishibai director Ikumasa Tepei, the event aimed to explore how historical experiences, particularly those of war, and disasters, are transmitted, expressed, and archived through various mediums. In total, on the first day about 170 people participated onsite and online, and 36 people joined the Fukushima and Kamishibai tour to Namie Town on the second day.

The morning session commenced with thought-provoking presentations under two thematic sessions. In Session 1, titled "Cultural Memories and Objects as Storytellers," speakers delved into the complexities of narrating historical experiences. Prof. Shinzo Araragi from Yamato University and Sophia University reflected on the challenges of recounting war and colonial experiences, emphasizing the nuanced ways these narratives are passed on through generations. Prof. Andrew Gordon from Harvard University (online) provided insights into the rhyming history of disasters, drawing parallels between the Ashio copper mine pollution incident and the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and Prof. Ryo Morimoto from Princeton University (online) presented on a hidden archive of TEPCO that conveys their employees' experiences, while also discussing the complexities of preserving historical records.

Session 2, focusing on the "Transmission and Expression of Memories," further enriched the discourse. Assoc. Prof. Shosuke Sato (Disaster Resilient Society Promotion Lab) analyzed the current landscape of disaster storytelling activities in Japan, highlighting the significance of passing down experiences of catastrophes across generations. Asst. Prof. Anna Wiemann from Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München explored storytelling through the lens of Zeitzeugen in Germany, shedding light on diverse approaches to recounting historical events. Asst. Prof. Gerster addressed the challenges in transmitting disaster memory in the regions of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima after the 3.11 Great East Japan Earthquake.

Following a stimulating morning of presentations, attendees could witness a live Disaster Kamishibai Performance. The performance, introduced by Ms. Mihoko Murakami, Mr. Tetsuo Murakami, and Mr. Ikumasa, was based on experiences of tsunami survivors in Fukushima Prefecture.

In the afternoon session, the focus shifted to "Historical Studies of Kamishibai and Digital Archives." Mr. Taketoshi Yamamoto from the NPO Institute of Intelligence Studies and Prof. Sharalyn Orbaugh from the University of British Columbia (online) delved into the role of Kamishibai as a tool for propaganda during wartime, offering critical insights into the manipulation of narratives for political purposes. Dr. Kaoru Ueda from the Hoover Institution Library & Archives at Stanford University explored the digitization of Kamishibai, underscoring the evolving nature of storytelling mediums and their impact on collective memory.

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The symposium culminated in a lively panel discussion, providing an opportunity for speakers and attendees to engage in dynamic exchanges. In particular, connections and differences between storytelling and memories of natural hazard disasters and wars were discussed.

Day 2 of the event, scheduled as a Fukushima and Kamishibai Study Tour under the lead of Kamishibai director Ikumasa Teppei, offered participants a hands-on experience to visit significant sites and engage with local narratives firsthand. During the one-day excursion, the participants had the chance to watch Disaster Kamishibai performances at the places significant to the story, such as the Ukedo Elementary School disaster heritage site, and an abandoned cow shed in the nuclear exclusion zone. The Kamishibai plays were performed by disaster survivors, evacuees and returnees in Namie Town.

Overall, the Symposium and Study Tour served as platforms for interdisciplinary dialogue, fostering greater awareness and appreciation for the complexities of cultural memory, disaster storytelling, in the aftermath of historical and contemporary crises.

More information and abstracts can be found at the event page:

(Eng): <https://irides.tohoku.ac.jp/eng/event/detail---id-6281.html>

(Jp): https://irides.tohoku.ac.jp/event/event_jn/detail---id-6279.html

Video recording of the event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1suA7A4MPpY>



Kamishibai performance accompanied by music and impression of one of the performances held at an abandoned cow shed in the nuclear exclusion zone

Text and pictures: Julia Gerster, Akihiro Shibayama (Disaster Culture and Archive Studies)