

GASP-EES International Symposium: Crisis of Wellbeing and Wellbeing in Crisis Across Borders (2024/12/5-7)

Theme: Crisis of Wellbeing and Wellbeing in Crisis Across Borders International Symposium

Venue: Tohoku Forum for Creativity, Tohoku University, Sendai, Japan

URL: [GASP-EES International Symposium](#), [Detailed Program](#)
[Global Area Studies Program \(GAPS\) and East Eurasian Studies Project \(EES\)](#)
[Center for Northeast Asian Studies](#)

The National Institute of Humanities, Global Area Studies Program (GAPS) and East Eurasian Studies Project (EES), the Center for Northeast Asian Studies (CNEAS), Tohoku University, and the International Research Institute of Disaster Sciences (IRIDeS), Tohoku University organised a 3-day international conference on the topic of Crisis of Wellbeing and Wellbeing in Crisis Across Borders hosted by The Tohoku Forum for Creativity, Tohoku University. The event gathered distinguished scholars and young researchers from Hong Kong (Lingnan University), Europe (UCL, University of Oxford, University of Tartu, University of Helsinki, Vilnius University), Mongolia (National University of Mongolia), the USA (University of Cincinnati), and Japan (Kyoto University, Nagoya University, Osaka Kyoiku University, National Museum of Ethnology, Ritsumeikan University, Saga University, University of Tokyo). Joining them was an audience of 30 participants, including students and visiting professors from Tohoku University and other members of GAPS-EES.

The event started with a field trip (Dec. 5) to the coastal areas affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. Led by Sébastien Boret, the visit began at the monument dedicated to the tsunami victims and a tour of the Arahama Elementary School Disaster Remains, Sendai City. While guiding the participants, the former school principal shared his experience and lessons of evacuating successfully the staff, students, and some of the residents on the school's rooftop before the tsunami engulfed the surroundings. The tour continued with a visit to the memorial parks of Yuriage Port Area, Natori City. While walking the grounds, the participants learned about the history of the community before and after the disaster, the processes of memorialisation and reconstruction, and the issues surrounding wellbeing.

The second day (Dec. 6) consisted of an Early Career Research Seminar from the GASP-EES participating institutions. The afternoon began with a welcome address from Prof. Hiroki Takakura (Director of the Centre for Northeast Asian Studies, Tohoku University), the leader of the Research Unit for Minority Rights and Media, part of the Global Area Studies Program (GAPS) and East Eurasian Studies Project (EES) with the support of Assistant Prof. Alimtohte Shiho (CNEAS, Tohoku University) overseeing the organisation of the event. The main activity involved the seminar, which consisted of five post-doctoral researchers and graduate presentations organised and moderated by Prof. Yukihiro Kawaguchi (Head of Cultural Anthropology, Tohoku University).

These international young researchers gave a stimulating presentation on their respective research projects: 1) Wellbeing and the Engagement with Environment: an Economic Anthropological Analysis, Roberto Facchia (PhD Candidate, Tohoku University); 2) Towards a Better Life: Contested, Cooperation in Urban Eco Park, Construction in China, Zhao Chen (JSPS PD, Tokyo Metropolitan University); 3) Women's Labor and Aspirations: Shaping Social Change in Urban Bangladesh, Ami Suzuki (Research Fellow, Kobe University); 4) Boundary between Sacred and Secular as Observed in Practice of "Changing into Red Clothes: A Case Study of Women in Western Bhutan, Fuko Kawamura, (JSPS PD, Kwansai Gakuin University); 5) Navigating Tradition and Modernity: Food in the Sakha Republic, Varvara Parilova (PhD Student, Tohoku University). The symposium concluded with comments from Prof. Kawaguchi and a stimulating discussion with senior researchers, setting the ground for the next day's main seminar.

The third day (Dec. 7) was an all-day international symposium with four distinctive sessions. The first session, Transition and Transformation: The Quest for Wellbeing in a Dynamic Environment, was organised and moderated by Dr. Hiroko Naito (IDE-JETRO). This session explores what well-being Hong Kong citizens seek and how they struggle to seize it in their relationship with mainland China and overseas countries. The speakers were Ruby YS LAI (Lingnan University, HK), presenting on the vulnerabilities and resilience of residents of Hong Kong and Ryuta Hagiwara (Hitotsubashi University), sharing his research on the relationship between law and happiness during the political crisis. The commentary was received from Sayaka Ogawa from Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto.

The second session, Nomadism, Borders, and Well-being: Strategies of Life Around Crisis and Mobility in Contemporary Pastoralists, was organised and moderated by Dr. Moe Terao (CNEAS, Tohoku University). This session discussed how the pursuit of well-being and mobility strategies are being implemented from the perspectives of pastoralists and urban people, as well as the mobility associated with crises and the potential for well-being. The main topics related to environmental crisis and well-being by Ariell Ahearn (University of Oxford) and the subject of cooperation during natural hazard disasters by Byambabaatar Ichinhorloo (National University of Mongolia) and Daniel Murphy (University of Cincinnati). Ayumi Nakano animated the discussion from Chukyo University in Nagoya.

The third session focused on the issue of People with Disabilities in Times of Disasters: Mobility, Welfare, and Social Inclusion in two Asian countries. This session discussed the impact of the crisis on existing vulnerabilities and a sense of well-being, not only for people with disabilities, but possible means of improving their inclusion and empowerment in crisis response and society as a whole. The presenters were Abigail Ewen from University College London and Madoka Nishiura from the University of Tokyo. They presented their respective research on disabled people in Nepal during the 2015 Earthquake aftermath and the experience of COVID-19 in a deaf community living on the island of Bali. The session concluded with a commentary on disability prejudice from Prof. Keiko Kitagawa from Saga University.

The fourth session explored The Russian Invasion of Ukraine and the Wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples. Organised and moderated by Prof. Hiroki Takakura, this session discussed the decision process and experience of exile of Indigenous Russian people due to the Ukrainian War. Unpacking their positionality and history, it (re)considered the meaning of their well-being and hope for these people. The two case studies examined the case of Indigenous participation in the war by Stephan Dudeck (University of Tartu) and the experience of a cross-border living minority of Tyva Republic by Victoria Peemot (University of Helsinki). Their presentation was further discussed during a commentary by Takehiko Inoue (Osaka Kyoiku University).

To conclude the symposium, Sébastien Boret invited commentaries of Donatas Brandisouskas from Vilnius University and Minoru Mio of the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka and head of the Global Area Studies Program (GAPS) and East Eurasian Studies Project (EES). Together with all the participants, they encouraged the organisation of future events and collaborative writing to tie the diversity of case studies around a common theoretical ground.

Report by Sébastien Penmellen Boret (International Research Collaboration Office),
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Visiting the Jizo Memorial Project and the 'Tea Place', Yuriage, Natori City



Tohoku GAPS-EES International Symposium Group Photo, Tohoku University.