

Symposium on Kamishibai-Based Disaster Storytelling by Foreign Residents in Japan (2025/03/20)

Theme: Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction, International DRR, The Great East Japan Earthquake, Tsunami and Nuclear Disaster.

Place: IRIDeS

On March 20, 2025, a symposium titled *"Transmitting Disaster Experiences through Kamishibai: Foreign Residents' Perspectives on the 3.11 disasters"* was held at the International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS), Tohoku University. The event brought together academics, community leaders, international residents, and disaster communication practitioners to discuss challenges foreigners may face in disaster situations in Japan, unique contributions they bring to disaster preparedness and explore the possibilities of kamishibai (Japanese picture storytelling) in sharing their disaster experiences, which are currently underrepresented in disaster memory.

The symposium was jointly organized by IRIDeS and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, in collaboration with the Sendai Tourism, Convention and International Association (SenTIA), and supported by the Machi Monogatari Production Committee and the Tohoku University Center for Integrated Japanese Studies. Assoc. Prof. Julia Gerster (Disaster Culture and Archive Studies) was responsible for the main organization and moderation of the event. Assoc. Prof. Elizabeth Maly (International Research Collaboration Office) supported a smooth event implementation on the day.

The program began with an introduction that outlined the objectives of the project, focusing on disaster storytelling as a method to enhance community resilience and inclusiveness in disaster education. This was followed by a presentation by representatives from SenTIA, highlighting the specific challenges faced by foreign residents in Sendai during the 2011 disaster. The highlight of the event was a kamishibai performance conducted by the Namie Machimonogatari Tsutaetai group from Namie Town (Fukushima Prefecture) based on two real-life stories. The first story recounted the experience of Mr. Richard Halberstadt, a British national who remained in the disaster-stricken city of Ishinomaki. Despite the overwhelming devastation, he chose to stay in Japan and now serves as the director of the Ishinomaki City Earthquake Ruins Kadonowaki Elementary School. The second story focused on a Nepalese family who had moved to Japan to seek medical treatment for their child. Just as they were beginning to adjust to life in Japan, the 2011 disaster struck. Their struggle to evacuate safely while caring for a sick child underscored the compounded difficulties faced by immigrant families during large-scale disasters. The story was based on the experiences of Ms. Bhawani Duwadi, a translator and advisor active in Sendai's international support services. Following the performances, all panelists, including Ms. Bhawani and Mr. Halberstadt, discussed the importance of inclusive disaster communication and the power of personal narratives in fostering understanding and preparedness across cultural and linguistic divides.

This symposium not only shed light on the often-overlooked experiences of foreign residents during disasters but also demonstrated the potential of traditional cultural forms like kamishibai in modern disaster education. The event was a meaningful step toward a more inclusive and empathetic approach to remembering and learning from the 3/11 disaster.

(continues to the next page)

This event and research were supported by the Co-creation Center for Disaster Resilience.

A short documentary about the event can be seen here (NHK WORLD-JAPAN):

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/shows/2087144/>



The Namie Machi Monogatari Tsutaetai holding the two Kamishibai stories.



The audience following the presentations.



During the panel discussion. From left to right: Assoc. Prof. Julia Gerster, Dr. Kaoru Ueda, Ms. Bhawani Duwadi, Mr. Richard Halberstadt, Mr. Masahiro Horino, and Mr. Ikumasa Teppei.

Report by: Julia Gerster (Disaster Culture and Archive Studies)
Elizabeth Maly (International Research Collaboration Office)