



Symposium Commemorating the Opening of the Great East Japan Earthquake Archive

Motivation and Effort to Preserve the Records of the Great East Japan Earthquake

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The National Diet Library officially published the National Diet Library Great East Japan Earthquake Archive (a.k.a. HINAGIKU) on March 7 for the purpose of passing records and lessons learnt from major earthquake disasters to the next generation to be used for projects to restore/recover disaster-hit areas and for future disaster prevention and reduction measures. HINAGIKU is a portal site that cooperates with various institutions and groups within Japan and overseas to collate, store and allow the unitary search and use of audio, video, photographs, web information and other digital data related to the Great East Japan Earthquake, as well as academic research findings from research institutions and related document information.

On March 26, 2013, the National Diet Library, together with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), held a symposium titled “Motivation and Effort to Preserve the Records of the Great East Japan Earthquake” at its Tokyo Main Library to commemorate the opening of its Great East Japan Earthquake Archive. The symposium proceedings were broadcast live to the Kansai-kan via television and on the Internet, with a total of approximately 230 people attending the event at the Tokyo Main Library and the Kansai-kan. This article provides an overview of the symposium.

I. Keynote address: “Engraving memories and the weathering of memories”

Overcoming the weathering of memories

The symposium commenced with Yamaori Tetsuo (a religious scholar) offering his keynote address, “Engraving memories and the weathering of memories.” Based on the perspective that all memories and records of those memories will, as per the law of nature, weather away, and that there is nothing that will not weather away, Yamaori made the following statement regarding authentic information or messages for the future that will not weather memories away.

In Berlin, a sidewalk in a former Jewish residential area has large nails hammered into the ground 50 cm apart with their heads protruding, and pedestrians must be careful not to step on them. This embodies a fierce fervor and motivation to prevent memories from weathering away by imposing pain on the human body. Compared to this, how are Hiroshima, Okinawa and Tohoku doing?

The government’s current disaster prevention/reduction measures are important, but they involve safety and assurance to alleviate anxiety in the state we are currently in. Do they lead to safety and



assurance against anxiety regarding disaster that may occur in the future and regarding safety and assurance in the future? When we think of key information that must be passed on to the future, we recall two messages devised by our country's ancestors.

The phrase, "Natural disasters come just when we have forgotten about them," which is attributed to Terada Torahiko (physicist, 1878-1935), suggests that the memories of disasters always weather away, no matter how well they are preserved. In order to preserve this message and pass it on to future generations, we must learn the concepts of life, death and the nature of our ancestors who lived in anxiety and fear in this island nation of natural disasters, and inherit them as our own. This will lead to safety and assurance for the future.

Another phrase is, "Better safe than sorry." Our nation's efforts today regarding disaster prevention and reduction are the very act of being safe. This phrase means that careful safety preparations will prevent us from being sorry, but it doesn't mean that they will offer safety and assurance. The psychological state of not being sorry rests on safety and assurance. It is effectively, "Do what you must do and let the heavens do the rest." This humane state also links closely with the Japanese traditional views of life, death, nature and values.

Japan has been an island nation of natural disasters for many thousands of years. People have lived in fear that when an earthquake occurs it will kill them or their families, and have built on their experiences. These experiences have not weathered away, as they remain etched in our bodies, deep within our organs. As with the nails in Germany, our earthquake island itself has offered the cultural blade and provided us with guidelines on how to survive. Because of their nature of threatening human existence from the very core, earthquakes are given a religious personality, and the Japanese who have lived together with earthquake disasters for many hundreds of years have developed their religious sentiments through earthquakes.

II. Introducing HINAGIKU, the Hybrid Infrastructure for the National Archive of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Innovative Knowledge Utilization

Moving on, MIC (Takahashi Fumiaki, Director, Promotion for Content Distribution Division, Information and Communications Bureau) and the National Diet Library (Kawai Miho, Director, Research and Development for Next-Generation Systems Office, Digital Information Services Division, Digital Information Department) gave their presentation, "Overview of the development of the Great East Japan Earthquake Archive and its system."

After the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, the government passed the Seven Principles for the Reconstruction Framework at the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Basic Policy on Reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake at the Headquarters for the Reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake. In response, MIC and the National Diet Library jointly launched a project to develop the infrastructure for the Great East Japan Earthquake Archive. The project consisted of the following three efforts.

The first was to develop the portal site HINAGIKU. When you search on HINAGIKU, photographs and where they were taken can be displayed on a map.

The second was to verify the operating model. The project team developed digital archives for five areas in four disaster-struck prefectures, each considering the area's traits, which were linked to



HINAGIKU and made searchable on HINAGIKU. The team ran a verification test on the system.

The third was to create a guideline on the development and operation of the digital archive, based on the verification test. MIC would release information it obtained from the verification test, sorting it into (1) points to note when running temporary repairs or repairs on disaster-struck documents, storing and digitalizing them, using metadata and clearing rights on them, (2) points to note in methods of long-term storage and in developing and operating the system, and (3) points to note in developing and operating the system.*

On March 7, the system safely commenced operation, and the National Diet Library has been running HINAGIKU since April 2013. Over two years have passed since the earthquake, and there are concerns regarding the possible dispersion and loss of valuable documents and information pertaining to the earthquake. The National Diet Library will call upon institutions collating contents or operating archives for greater cooperation, while MIC will take action to increase the number of users and participants, and both parties will cooperate with one another to run the project as a national effort.

III. Actions on collating and storing records

The presentation followed with “Reports on case examples of collating and storing records,” in which Aotake Yutaka (Director of Public Relations Department & Executive Director, Japanese Consumers’ Co-operative Union), Tajima Makoto (Chief Coordinator, JANIC Taskforce for Disaster Response) and Tanaka Hiroshi (Chief of Document Office, Nagaoka City Library) each reported on specific actions of the group/institution represented by each of them.

(1) Japanese Consumers’ Co-operative Union (JCCU)

As relief action from nationwide Co-ops, we first worked on restoring the daily lives of disaster-struck households. We supplied provisions to disaster-hit regions, confirmed the safety of member households, and offered support for daily life with mobile stores and temporary housing, while hosting study sessions on radiation and radioactive substance issues, which attracted large numbers of participants.

Secondly, we assisted in recovering the Co-op business and its producers and business partners. Miyagi Prefecture in particular has a Co-op membership rate of around 70% among all its households, so we believed that the recovery of the Co-op itself would restore the infrastructure of daily life in the disaster-hit region. We arranged for nationwide relief to focus on the Co-ops of the six Tohoku prefectures, and ran campaigns to encourage the use of local produce from the disaster-hit regions.

Thirdly, JCCU had the obligation to report to nationwide Co-ops and overseas Co-ops and society that had offered support information on the status of the quake-hit regions, so we released the details of our actions on our website and Facebook. To prevent the memories of this unprecedented disaster from weathering away and to pass them on to future generations, we opened the Great East Japan Earthquake Study & Reference Room in Sendai this March. The Room organizes and exhibits various movies, documents and quake-related books that record what the Miyagi Co-op worked on after the major quake and what its employees felt and did. The Room also releases information in the form of monthly newsletters and support activity reports.

We are still continuing our supportive activities today, through which we focus particularly on supporting Fukushima and understanding and communicating how the quake-hit areas are doing now.



The Co-ops of quake-hit areas tell us that gathering information on the quake and disaster and conveying it to the nation serve as the greatest support, but we believe that this not only supports the quake-hit areas but also benefits each and every one of us in our preparations for the next disaster.

(2) Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC)

The purpose of the documenting and record-taking activities conducted by the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC) was to preserve the issues and lessons learnt from the experiences in the Great East Japan Earthquake for future generations, and to make them useful in the next disaster. The reason why we document the disaster relief operations of NPOs and NGOs is (1) that they are the people who come in closest contact with the reality of survivors at the relief frontlines, and (2) that they are starting to play greater roles in disaster prevention and relief. At present, while the roles of NPOs and NGOs are continuing to expand, they serve the important role of saving people who tend to fall outside the framework of public aid, particularly in major disasters that cripple the functions of autonomies.

More than sixty international cooperation NGOs that are member organizations of JANIC have taken advantage of their experiences overseas to provide a large-scale support in various fields of expertise from very early stage. In documenting the issues that arose from these operations, we (1) published and distributed a record and recommendation report to various stakeholders, (2) produced a DVD for the general public, (3) published a booklet for the college student-level public, and (4) released English information website and newsletters targeting people overseas with an interest in the Fukushima issue.

Few NGOs have enough capacity to spare their resources to conduct documentation activities, and NGOs lack the know-how to organize scattered information and materials. And most of their members who were temporarily employed after the quake to serve as emergency relief crew have already left their organizations. We are at the risk of losing a vast amount of organizational and individual memories forever, and we believe that this third year of our operations is the last chance to organize the records. We would ask that you take this opportunity and send people to NGOs and NPOs to help collate and organize the information still buried there. Using this period to develop a system for collating and organizing records and sharing know-how on how to record information should, we believe, prove beneficial in preparing for the next disaster.

(3) Nagaoka City Library Document and Reference Office

The Nagaoka City Library Document and Reference Office responded to the 2004 Mid-Niigata Prefecture Earthquake with preventative measures that focused on “rescuing historical references” and “collating quake-related material.” As evacuation shelters were set up in Nagaoka City in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, we visited the shelters a total of twenty-seven times to undertake research collating materials and taking photographs.

Now, how were we able to set up an evacuation shelter archive for the Great East Japan Earthquake in Nagaoka City? First, our responsive actions to disaster, experienced after the Mid-Niigata Prefecture Earthquake about which we learned from the efforts of Kobe University Library after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, came into use. Second, we drafted a document requesting the collation of record documents that would be created at evacuation shelters, and Nagaoka City employees, with the



cooperation of shelter staff and officials from the Evacuation Shelter Section, went around collating postings, flyers and other documents that were due to be disposed of, taking care not to place a burden on the evacuees. And third, Nagaoka City has a history of having lost all its important documents in two wartime disasters – the Hokuetsu Boshin War and the air raid on Nagaoka – and the citizens of Nagaoka have shared the importance of retaining records, which served as a positive effect.

The collated documents show us, for example, the state of the evacuees and work roles at the shelter in each of the initial, middle and final stages of the evacuation.

Current issues are how we would (1) organize, (2) store, and (3) use the collated documents. The disaster-struck regions still have a lot of records, and I hope that they will be passed on for the future.

4. The future of collating quake/disaster-related records

Tsuda Daisuke (journalist & media activist) chaired the panel discussion and led the proceedings. The panelists included Amano Kazuhiko (Associate Project Professor, Fukushima Future Center for Regional Revitalization), Inagaki Fumihiko (Director, Recovery Design Center of Chuetsu Organization for Safe and Secure Society), Inaba Yoko (Part-time lecturer at Tezukayama University, former Manager of Information Management Section at Kobe University Library) and Shibayama Akihiro (Associate Professor, International Research Institute of Disaster Science at Tohoku University), who each introduced their work of collating and preserving records concerning the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, the Mid-Niigata Prefecture Earthquake and the Great East Japan Earthquake in which each was involved.

The panelists each offered numerous opinions on the importance of retaining records of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the role of the Archive, and prospects for the future, and prompted an active discussion.

In response to the chair's question, "For whom does the Archive exist?" a comment was made that the Archive is for the people in quake-hit areas – for them to talk about, for others to see and to come and meet the people – and should serve as a device to draw out the independence of the people that suffered and be offered as part of the efforts to support the recovery. Yet there were also comments made stating that the Archive should serve to pass the experience on to future generations, or that it should ideally communicate lessons to the entire world.

Another comment suggested that the Archive should become a knowledge database that would archive the variety of knowledge that arose during the restoration/recovery process, and would combine the accumulated information in the event of the next major disaster to use in restoration/recovery. Another comment placed expectations on the National Diet Library to play the role of connecting



A scene from the symposium

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE DIGITAL INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION DIVISION, DIGITAL INFORMATION DEPARTMENT OF THE NATIONAL DIET LIBRARY



industries, academic institutions, government and communities, with whom collaboration is necessary in sustaining the archives.

The discussion ended with a comment from a panelist suggesting that we work on the theme of “Making use of wisdom; expanding efforts,” and continue reporting to each other on the progress in each institution as we grow the *hinagiku* (Japanese for daisy).

We hope to continue sustaining our efforts to meet these expectations and to enable the Archive to be used in recovery projects and disaster prevention measures.

Materials and some movies from the symposium have been posted on HINAGIKU. (<http://kn.ndl.go.jp/information/57>)

Note: *Posted on the MIC website

(http://www.soumu.go.jp/menu_seisaku/ictseisaku/ictriyu/o2ryutsu02_03000114.html) as of June 2013 as “Guidelines to Developing and Operating Digital Archives Related to Earthquake Disaster (March 2013).”

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