

COMPLETION REPORT

University of Portsmouth

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【Subject of Research Project】

An Ethnographic Study: The Role of Collective Memory and Disaster Remains in The Social Construction of Disaster Cultural Heritage in Japan

【Research Summary】

This research project aims to explore the relationship between collective memory and cultural heritage with a focus on disaster remains and storytelling in Japan post-the 2011 tsunami.

This project employed an ethnographic approach, drawing on multiple methods including interviews, participant observation, media reports, disaster archives, visits to memorials, and document analysis etc. The project was collaborated with a Japanese scholar. The collaboration helps to engage community people more effectively. This approach enables us to maintain the quality of first-hand engagement with people and understand story narratives, the nuances and details of their lived experience at different levels.

The support from Sumitomo Foundation provided me the opportunities to spend prolonged amounts of time in disaster-affected areas in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, visited most disaster ruins, memorial parks and memorial museums /sites, engaged with many storytelling and cultural activities / storytelling events as I planned to understand their lived experience. See the map attached (I marked the disaster sites/ places I visited).

Our research reveals how these experiences both influence and reflect Japan's disaster culture, driving improvements in leadership, risk resilience, and sustainable community practices. Japan takes a lead in disaster management and has already made a significant contribution to disaster risk reduction. However, bottom-up disaster stories are not well disseminated despite their richness and relevance. Our study helps fill this gap, by capturing the community's haunting stories about disaster ruins from diverse perspectives (such as gender perspective) and their impact on disaster mitigation and sustainability.

In addition, the history of Japan's disaster stone monument (tsunami-hi) shows that communities erected monuments for at least three main reasons: prayer, education and healing. By actively engaging with the local residents especially women's stories, and putting their voice and experiences centre stage in the process of inquiry, our study refines current understandings and community practices of healing and well-being. Their bottom up approach in dealing with disaster and women's leadership in disaster management and their contribution to disaster cultural heritage should be documented and shared in wider context.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.) Oxford talk: https://talks.ox.ac.uk/talks/id/adefabbb8-cd28-4220-9c75-a8b9a5de185e/ Title: Gender and sustainable practice in disaster contexts: a feminist ethics of care lens Time and venue: Wednesday 19 February 2025, Oxford University, UK Ethnography conference presentation 2024: Title: Ethics of care and sustainability: The untold story of Okami (female inn proprietor) in community reconstruction and sustainability challenges after 2011 triple disasters in Japan. Time and venue: The 17th Annual Ethnography Symposium, Cardiff University, UK, Cardiff Business School, 28-30 August 2024. Theme: Crises, Change, and Continuities Business and law annual conference, at Portsmouth University, UK, June 26-27, 2025.
Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.) Papers in preparation for submission (by Yiwen Lin and Toru Kiyomiya) Title: Gender and sustainable practice in disaster contexts: a feminist ethics of care lens. Target journal: Gender, work and organization Title: How does the disaster storytelling shape post-disaster community identity? Target journal: Journal of culture and organization Title: Gender leadership and sustainable livelihood in post-disaster fishery communities.
Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)