

Symposium “Acquiring and preserving memories of 3.11: Establishing a Great East Japan Earthquake Archive”

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The National Diet Library (NDL) has launched a project to establish the NDL Great East Japan Earthquake Archive.¹ Many attempts have been already made by various organizations to collect and transmit memories or lessons of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Collaborating with relevant organizations, the NDL is striving to build a national system which archives earthquake records as a future benefit.²

To draw people’s attention to the importance of harvesting and preserving those records, the NDL held a symposium “Acquiring and preserving memories of 3.11: Establishing a Great East Japan Earthquake Archive” in the Tokyo Main Library on March 14, 2012, just one year after the earthquake. Relayed to the Kansai-kan of the NDL, it attracted 270 people in total. The program included three reports by key figures and a panel discussion.

As a starter, Dr. Takashi Mikuriya, professor at the University of Tokyo, delivered a lecture “Records and memories of the Great East Japan Earthquake: social significance.” He is serving the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake as vice-chairman, and the council submitted a report of recommendations on reconstruction planning to the Prime Minister in June 2011, presenting the Seven Principles for the Reconstruction Framework. In his talk, he stated that the opening first principle clearly touches upon the necessity of recording the disaster and passing the record down to posterity.



<<Dr. Mikuriya>>

¹ A website carrying various information on this project was launched on March 9, 2012.
http://www.ndl.go.jp/jp/311earthquake/disaster_archives/index.html (Japanese only)

² This project aspires not only to exhaustively gather records but also to establish their databases and creating a portal system which allows cross-search and retrieval of needed data.



<<Dr. Gordon>>

Dr. Andrew Gordon, professor at Harvard University, gave a talk titled “Establishing the Great East Japan Earthquake Archive: significance and challenges” and showed a variety of harvesting targets and the mechanism of the [Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters](#), an archiving project led by the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University in partnership with the Internet Archive, NDL and other organizations. Its alpha interface was released in March 2012, and a public beta interface will be available in the summer of 2012.



<<Dr. Nagao>>

Dr. Makoto Nagao, Librarian of the NDL, made a presentation titled “NDL Great East Japan Earthquake Archive Project.” He reported the fundamental project principle that the whole nation, both public and private sectors, works together to collect and preserve disaster-related records; basic concept of the system; harvesting policy; technical problems, and others. This archive was pre-surveyed for establishment in FY2011 and aimed to be developed and released early in FY 2012.

In the latter part of the symposium, a panel discussion chaired by Prof. Shunya Yoshimi, Vice President of University of Tokyo, was held, bringing together some leading figures: professor. Yoshihiro Katayama of Keio University, who was the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications at the time of the earthquake; Dr. Gordon; Mr. Toshinari Nagasaka, Project Director at the National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention, which created [“311 Complete Archives.”](#)

Prof. Yoshimi opened the discussion by presenting four features of the Great East Japan Earthquake: it happened in an advanced information society; its aftermath goes beyond Japan; “what is history?” is now being questioned; this Earthquake Archive will be a prototype of Japan’s future commitment to acquiring and preserving records of events affecting society. In response to this, the panel pointed out numerous concerns including the lack of support for archiving in the devastated areas, how to create metadata to video contents, Harvard University’s basic understanding that building such archives will be an important issue all over the world, and the need of copyright clearance to enable secondary use of archived contents. Furthermore, it was stated that the archiving target should contain data on nuclear hazard, for example, one indicating radiation dose; oral history by afflicted residents;

photographs and videos taken by media or volunteers and other records.



<<Panel discussion>>

(from left: Mr. Nagasaka, Prof. Katayama, Dr. Gordon, Prof. Yoshimi)

In the following Q&A session, there was a question from the floor about the possibility of building an archive which enables pulling up necessary data even many decades later when earthquake memories have faded away. Prof. Katayama expressed an expectation that librarians' skill in classifying and processing information would ensure long-term use of the archive.

This symposium highlighted not merely the technical issues of how to collect and preserve records, but also who administers the records and how to utilize them for future use.

Presentation slides (Japanese only) of Dr. Gordon and Dr. Nagao are available on the NDL website at http://www.ndl.go.jp/jp/311earthquake/disaster_archives/events/index.html