Environment of Northeast Asia: Cultural Perception and Policy Engagement

The annual public lectures of the Center for Northeast Asian Studies (CNEAS) were held on Saturday, December 4, 2016, in the large hall located on the sixth floor of the Multi-media Education and Research Complex at Kawasaki-kita Campus, Tohoku University. This year’s theme for the public lectures was “The Importance of Northeast Asia: Cultural Perception and Policy Engagement.” Professors Shinko Ogihara, Emeritus Professor at Chiba University, and Seita Emori, Head of the Climate Risk Assessment Section, Center for Global Environmental Research, National Institute for Environmental Studies, were invited for the lectures. Professor Ogihara spoke on “Message from a Hunt: World: Human Beings in Nature,” and Professor Emori spoke on “Climate Change and Our Future.”

Professor Ogihara gave a lecture on the relationship between human beings and their surrounding environment, presenting the lifestyle of the hunting race in the Amur River Basin of Russian Far East and the Ainu people as examples. In particular, she spoke on the formation of various ways of thinking about nature through examples of the narrative traditions and customs. Although each of the professors discussed issues regarding humans and the environment using different approaches, they both helped the audience realize the severity of the environmental problems threatening humanity, redefining the concept of how human beings have related to nature so far.

A large number of people attended the lectures despite the cold weather. Since many of the audience visited the venue to also attend the international symposium jointly held by the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU) at the Center the previous day, both professors’ lectures as well as the question and answer sessions were conducted in a lively manner with great excitement.

Faculty

Faculty at the Center is also engaged in undergraduate and graduate teaching at Tohoku University in their respective fields of specialization. We actively welcome special researchers nominated by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science to conduct their own original research. In addition, more junior researchers are being trained to the training of junior researchers. In addition, by providing linguistic training in the languages of the countries of Northeast Asia, which constitutes the foundation of area studies, as part of our curriculum, we are involved in the training of personnel who will have a broad-based interest in the Asian region.

I believe that our concern at CNEAS can be summed up in the key terms “environment and movement.” While the interests of faculty attached to the Center are naturally diverse, I believe that, broadly speaking, they are coalescing into two major areas of inquiry. The first of these spans environmental history and disaster history against the implicit backdrop of natural and human history. The second is an intermingling of culture, society, and statehood that has been engendered by the contemporary international order. We have undertaken several major research projects associated with these areas of inquiry. One such is our participation as a partner organization in the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU) Northeast Asia Area Studies Project, launched in April 2016.

I hope to continue striving to deepen our research and dissemination of our findings to fulfill an even greater role by delivering research on Asia from a northern perspective to Japanese society with a crucial understanding of the Asian region.

Hiroki Takakura, CNEAS Director

Study of Historical Documents and Local History Research

The Center for Northeast Asian Studies (CNEAS) Symposium was held on February 11 and 12, 2017, to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Department of Utahori Tohoku Historical Materials Research. During the first half of the second day, Arata Hirakawa (Professor, Department of History, Tohoku University) gave a lecture on “Japanese Local History as an Area of Specialization.” He commented on the necessity of research on how historical materials are introduced to a community and how they are utilized and inherited in the future. Of course, it is important to discuss in detail in what study, but the usefulness of historical materials goes beyond that. For example, the land system in the Edoya era that developed independently in the Kamaishi region (Ishikawa Prefecture) was discovered by Professor Brown. The issue of the collection of historical materials and the local community discussed by Professor Kamiyama from the perspective of a psychologist may seem to belong to different specialized areas. However, if you broaden your horizons, you will see that they are closely interwoven with the keywords of “local community,” “community,” “landscape,” which allow you to imagine the lives of the people on the Japanese islands irrespective of whether it is during ancient or modern times.

During the panel discussion in the second half, a question and answer session was held with Professor Daikuke Sato (Associate Professor, International Research Institute for Disaster Science), where frank opinions were exchanged regarding issues that need to be addressed in studies of historical documents in the future. A total of 300 people attended this two-day event, and I believe that, apart from their academic value, the Center’s activities were widely introduced to the public at large.

Division of Russian and Siberian Studies

Yusuke Terayama

Professor, Sociology, Russian history, Japanese–Russian relations

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the development of Stalin’s regime, I studied and investigated Soviet border areas (the Far East, Mongolia, Shikoku, Poland and Finland) and the interests of those two powers in the interwar period (1918–1939), especially from the perspective of view of mobilization of natural and human resources by Soviet government, so as to prepare for the long-term future war against Japan. I am also engaged in research on censorship policy in the former Soviet Union.

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9252-0067

Makachika Shiotani

Assistant Professor, Russian and Asian history

In the 19th century, Europe introduced a statistical system to improve the administration of governments. Imperial Russia established a central statistical committee in the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1858, after the experiences of other European countries to develop the statistical system with those in other countries, and examine the degree of governance in Russia at that time.

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3473-1673

J-GLOBAL ID: 2015010787627047

Kenji Yanagida

Associate Professor, Russian linguistics, Russian history

In the recent focus of my work is on re-examining the historiography of Mongolian scholars in and after the scientific era and also on Qing dynasty policy on Mongolia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

J-GLOBAL ID: 2009109783524047

Division of Central Asia

Hiroki Oka

Professor, Kazakhstani history, Central Asian history

My research explores the social and administrative structures established in Mongolia during the Qing dynasty (seventeenth to early twentieth centuries). The recent focus of my work is on re-examining the historiography of Mongolian scholars in and after the scientific era and also on Qing dynasty policy on Mongolia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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J-GLOBAL ID: 2009108764327313

Faculty

Social anthropology, Siberian and Arctic studies, disaster studies

My research in progress concerns the cultural adaptation of Siberian indigenous communities to climate change, focusing on indigenous knowledge of the river ice ecologies. Another topic is related to applied visual anthropology and exhibition, bridging people at home with people at field sites. After the 3.11 Tohoku Earthquake, I began documentation projects on the intangible cultural heritage of local communities based on applied disaster anthropology.

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3473-1673

J-GLOBAL ID: 2015010787627047

Kenji Yanagida

Associate Professor, Russian linguistics, Russian history

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J-GLOBAL ID: 2009109783524047

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A series for such purposes as timely reports from symposiums, cataloging references, and promotion of exchange with national and international researcher communities (since 2010).