

Preface

Research on the Coronavirus Disaster

Special Issue of Covid-19

The Institute of Civilization Research, Tokai University, was founded in 1959. Initially, along with being an institute conducting research on civilization, it was also characterized as an educational institution responsible for university-wide common education at Tokai University. In 2001, the Research Institute of Social Sciences and the Institute of Arts were merged, and it was re-established as a new Institute of Civilization Research founded with the “creation of civilization in the 21st century” as the basis of study. Since then, inter-disciplinary collaborative research has been propelled as its core project, and has continued to emphasize international research collaboration. In recent years, since 2015, we have held international symposiums on the theme “Dialogue between Civilizations”. From 2015 to 2019, the symposium was held at the Tokai University European Center in Denmark, and in March 2020, the symposium was scheduled to be held at the Takanawa Campus of Tokai University in Tokyo. However, as the spread of the new coronavirus infection (COVID-19) has worsened in Japan since late February 2020, and due to difficulties for people from Italy and other countries, who planned to participate, entering Japan and returning to their countries, we had to cancel the symposium. We hoped that it could be held after the spread of the infection had ended, but with the subsequent second wave and third wave in Japan, the situation does not allow holding an international symposium where people will gather. However, as a research institute, we will continue to promote the exchange of international research in the future as well, including conducting online symposiums. The publication of this issue is also one such attempt.

The theme of this issue is “Research on the Coronavirus Disaster”. We would like to talk about two or three aspects regarding the status of research and education that is familiar with us in the Corona disaster.

One of the staff members of this research institute took a sabbatical in 2020 and was scheduled to conduct research in the United States and Egypt, but the corona disaster made travel impossible and the planned research could unfortunately not be conducted. There will be many such cases. For the past few years, I have been looking at and accumulated local historical materials in Kanagawa Prefecture, where the University is located, and thus, I am not affected that much. However, even in the fields where overseas research is essential, it seems some researchers are not troubled that much by the situation like this. For example, in the case of a Middle East archeologist conducting research on the theme of farming and pastoral societies that emerged in the Neolithic period; he has been going to the Middle East every year and been involved in excavation of ruins in collaboration with the local people for more than 20 years. He could not go for the excavational investigation in the summer of 2020. Not only him, but others were supposed to conduct research of archaeology. Approximately ten research teams from Japan who had planned to study the archeological ruins in the Middle East had to be cancelled. However, archeologists specializing in the Middle East, it is said, are used to such situations. The political situation in the Middle

East is unstable and it is sometimes difficult to travel. In many cases, such as Iraq since the Gulf War, or Syria, which has been in a state of civil war since 2011, there are often situations in which it is not possible to travel to the local sites, and in such cases, it is a common pattern to organize and analyze data that has been accumulated thus far, and work on writing reports and papers on the excavations. This makes someone like me feel guilty because I have not sufficiently analyzed the accumulated historical materials, leaving them as is, however, you may say that the corona disaster may be a good opportunity to review the accumulated materials.

Due to the corona disaster, study groups and conferences are all being conducted online. I have also hosted several study groups on ZOOM, but there are quite a few issues that arise related to the communication environment and functioning. We are not really familiar with Zoom, and the level of satisfaction is low unfortunately. However, I have also received an update from an above-80 years old researcher who said “Corona may not be all bad, as conferences and seminars are now being conducted online, and I participated in them after a long time. Interacting with people has become easier while staying at home. . . .” In case of online sessions, it is easy to participate remotely, and is certainly easier to attend in seminars that people are used to be reluctant in participating in the past. Furthermore, even in the course of the daily operations of the academic societies, we heard some “unexpected benefits” brought by the online sessions such that committee members who were not able to participate because of travel hours became able to participate in the online committees. If it is difficult to conduct face-to-face meetings for the time being, devising means for conducting online meetings will be a priority.

In terms of devising means, various initiatives are being implemented all over Japan. The “Ouchi Museum” launched by Hokkaido Museum and which is a collaboration among 215 museums nationwide, is a model example among such initiatives. This project provides online information, during this period of closure of museums due to the corona disaster, about activities conducted as part of the research and exhibitions held before the museums closed. Also, in the course of this initiative, “One has come to realize that, till now museums mainly provided services based on the premise that people visit museums, and there has been inadequate consideration given to people who have difficulties visiting due to circumstances such as disabilities, taking care of family members, and residential areas.” (Mizuki SHIBUYA, “A Museum in My Living Room,” an Experiment in Dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic”, *Journal of Historical Studies (REKISHIGAKU KENKYU)*, No.1004, January 2021). This is an issue that is common to the abovementioned conferences, research, and lectures held online. I would like to consider the corona disaster as an opportunity to review the ideal way on how our research activities should be.

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