

DALS Newsletter No.4

*Construction of
DEATH and LIFE STUDIES
Concerning Value and Culture of Life*

21st century COE Program, The University of Tokyo
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Is There A Priority in Death and Life Studies?

Osano Shigetoshi

Although it may sound self-congratulatory, we were able to carry out the series of lectures, symposiums and workshops described in newsletter no.3. With the completion of all major events of this year, the faculty members as well as those involved members of the 21st century COE project “the Construction of Death and Life Studies” share a sense of relief. We are now planning to publish the contents of public forums in a variety of formats. In this newsletter, along with the report of public events held after September, we include for the first time a brief book review related to Death and Life Studies.

Quite a long time ago I participated in an international conference for the first time as an invited foreign student sponsored by the Italian government. After the keynote speech by a famous professor from Eastern Europe whose expertise was closer to my area of interest, I decided to gather my courage and start a conversation with him at the luncheon buffet. I don’t have the slightest idea what I asked him about, but I do remember very clearly what he told me at the end of our conversation - “Please do not forget, the most important aspects of international conferences are the encounters and dialogues in the hall way.” I have repeated these words to my students who have studied abroad.

For those of you who participated in public symposiums and workshops after September must also have experienced new encounters and discussions in and out of the conference rooms. At the symposium that took place on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Great Kanto Earthquake, there were many elderly participants who heard about the earthquake from their parents and their oral accounts revitalized the memories at the conference. Other participants might have also experienced the importance of a psychological approach, investigating the causes for the fear of death and factors that construct views on life and death. At the lecture by Professor Hurlbut, many probably felt the necessity to go beyond the frames of the traditional religious prudence and to include discussions of spirituality based on human dignity. Professor Hurlbut articulated and insisted on the need to re-acquire awe toward nature as that which continuously interconnects processes of living and dying. In particular, we believe that participation not only in lectures and symposiums but also in hallways and reception parties provided fruitful opportunities for many participants interested in the construction of Death and Life Studies.

Because I belong to the second section of the project called the images and perspectives on death and life, I selected a collection of essays that focus on the iconology of death and life. In particular, an article on the death portraits of kabuki actors relates to issues brought forward in the lecture by Professor Iwayumi Suzuki on the topic of *iei*, portraits of the dead. A number of publications that focus on death and life from an art historical or cultural historical perspective stand out in particular this year. For instance, the journal *Bijutsu Forum* dedicated volume 8 (Summer, 2003) on the topic of “<Life and Death> and Art.” The editors of this magazine probably planned it independent of our project. Even if they were aware of our project, I am not about to raise

my eyebrows and argue about the issues of intellectual property or priority as often happens in the area of natural science. Rather, it highlights the fact that our program “the Construction of Death and Life Studies” is a fitting to the needs of contemporary society and the attests to the fact that these topics contain pressing and vital issues for research. I am appreciative that we have more interested parties to further our interests.

I fervently hope that “Death and Life Studies” will acquire academic citizenship through the related events described above. But before that, I will focus on planning events for next year.

Masahiko Hayashi ed., “The Iconology of Life and Death- The Cosmology of Life and Death in Asia ”

Nagashima Hiroaki

This is a book of collected essays sharing a strong interest in how pictorial illustrations reflect concepts of life and death in Japan and other Asian countries or how pictorial representation construct the concepts of life and death. It includes nine articles in total – Masahiko Hayashi “‘Wheels of Life and Death’ as a Popular Trope in Asia and Annotating Images,” Akio Kanayama “The Structure of *Zetsugo Saiho*- Development of Dōgen’s Zen Buddhism,” Tamon Takase “*Tenju Kokuhocho*,” Koichi Watari “Stabbed Mother- The Representation of Hell and *Mokuren Kyubo* Narrative,” Takeshi Tokuda “‘*Nijyu-shi kō*’ and Two Pictorial Tropes,” “Reading ‘*Jyuben Jyutozu*,’” Michio Hara “About ‘*shini-e*’- Establishing its Foundational Aspects,” Ichirō Ikezawa “Subject Choices of Tanomura Chikuden,” Masahiko Hayashi “Text and Pictures in ‘*Dōjoji Engi*’- from the Perspective of Oratory Tradition.” Leading scholars from varied disciplines, such as religious studies, Buddhist studies, art history, literature, and performance art, discuss passionately and vigorously on these topics, and in this sense, the name in the title, “iconology” is a fitting choice.



Aside from the obvious religious paintings, there are numerous paintings that use the life and death of a person as a motif. It is not an exaggeration to say that even in portraits and genre paintings, the life and death of a person plays a part in one way or another. On the other hand, thoughts concerning life and death are condensed in paintings and other pictorial forms, functioning as mediating channels that surrounds us. Thoughts about the pleasure of living are compressed in *ukiyo-e* painting, while a hanging scroll of death reveals the cosmology between the actual and the world after death.

I will comment on a few essays in this book from the stand point of Edo literature. The introductory essay by Professor Hayashi is of a great interest to me. While the essay demonstrates the spread and evolution of the “wheel of life and death” throughout Asia, a type of oratory iconology that includes representations of the

reincarnations of all sentient beings, it also necessarily deals with issues of syncretism in Asia.

Essays by Professor Tokuda and by Ikezawa discuss the literary traditions during the Tokugawa period, dealing with figures such as Taiga, Buson, and Chikuden respectfully. They also investigate the relationship between Chinese poetry and paintings in detail. It is not an easy task to address *gasan*, poetry inscribed next to paintings that compete with text and images, but these two essays meticulously and marvelously shed light on the shared and differing aspects of the concept of life as practiced by literary figures in China and Japan.

Professor Hara's essay on *shini-e* during the Tokugawa period is a significant and foundational contribution for the future research on *shini-e*. While attending to the varied definitions, types and established backgrounds, Professor Hara also incorporates numerous concrete examples and offers substantial analysis. His articulation that while *shini-e* is positioned within the tradition of portrait paintings in Japan, *shini-e* in the Tokugawa period (for the most part, the object of representation are actors) differ from the purpose of traditional portrait paintings in that they were intended to transfer the latest information about the actors and are similar to the *yakusha-e* of the same period, is particularly important. The implication of Professor Hara's work sheds light on the possibility that for the merchant class of the Tokugawa, life and death were not clearly separated by a simple distinction, but rather formed one continuous relationship. (Of course, I am not claiming that life and death were always singularly connected for the merchants.)

Unfortunately, I am limited to discussing only a small portion of the issues brought forward and discussed in this book. However, considering the diversity of topics and issues this book contains, I recommend reading it from cover to cover.

Report on the Symposium “The Great Kanto Earthquake and Film-The death and life of a city”

Kono Kohei

On August 30th, 2003, at National Film Center, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, “The Great Kanto Earthquake and Film -The death and life of a city” Symposium was held to mark the eightieth anniversary of the Great Kanto Earthquake.

The sudden damage and large numbers of dead that accompany a great natural disaster force the survivors to consider how to deal with memorializing the dead and then begin steps toward recovery. Therefore, these disasters provide an extremely appropriate topic for Life Death Studies. In particular, the Great Kanto Earthquake, which occurred on September 1st, 1923, and the subsequent series of projects to rebuild the Imperial Capital in the seven years that followed, can be taken as a valuable model for the process by which a large city goes through the process of death and rebirth.

The Great Kanto Earthquake and the projects to rebuild the Imperial Capital were recorded during the early days of cinematography. A small portion of these films still exist today. These were screened during the symposium in the hopes that they would

provide avenues for further discussion. The National Film Center serves as an institution of research and analysis and has undertaken the preservation, release, discovery, and restoration of domestic films. All of the films screened at the symposium belong to the National Film Center.

Due to advanced notice in the Tokyo papers, the symposium was a great success. There were a number of elderly attendees who had heard stories of the earthquake from their parents and who wanted to see actual film of the event. The one-hundred and fifty seat hall was almost entirely full.

The first session included the screening of three films followed by a presentation on each. The films were: "A Commentary on the Great Earthquake and Conflagration of Kanto," "The Great Kanto Earthquake (Ina Seichi Edition)," and "Treading through the Tokyo of Raging Flames and Corpses." In "Earthquake and the Death of a City," Narita Ryûichi follows newspaper reports of the earthquake and then actually traces the process by which certain items were chosen to portray the event. In this way we are able to analyze the ways in which the media constructed the realities and the stories of the earthquake. Tochigi Akira's "That Which is Brought Forth in the Cinematic Expression after the Great Kanto Earthquake," explains how a film of the earthquake is actually shot and produced. He then goes on to show how these films contain the prototypical techniques that will later develop into documentary films and news films. In "Natural Disasters and Visual Media," Sato Kenji uses examples of popular media other than film such as "Current-events Postcards" and "rumors" of rebellious Koreans to consider what people try to get from complicated and fragmentary information.

In the second session, after a screening of parts of "Revival of the Imperial Capital," two reports were offered. Hara Takeshi, in his presentation entitled, "The Festival for the Reconstruction of the Imperial Capital and the Rebirth of the City," while focusing on the appearance in the films of the Emperor and the Imperial Palace, compares the differences in how these are portrayed in those films about the earthquake and those films that deal with the restoration. Kinoshita Naoyuki's presentation, "Whereabouts of the Dead," uses a variety of angles to analyze the way in which the dead were treated. His different viewpoints include information terminology, different types of Buddhist memorial services, the construction of memorials, and the route taken by the Emperor during his tour of the restoration festivities.

Report on the Symposium “Life and Death Studies and Psychology”

Akiyama Shigeyuki and Yokosawa Kazuhiko

This symposium was held in conjunction with the 67th Annual Convention of the Japanese Psychological Association, however on that day there were non-members in attendance as well, and the 300+ attendees came from all over Japan.

The lecture by Professor Shimazono Susumu, the first presenter and leader of the Death and Life Studies program, was entitled “The Potential of the Psychology of Views of Life and Death – Care and Practical Knowledge/ Historical Cultural Research/Verifiable Science”, Professor Shimazono began by demonstrating the relationship between Life and Death Studies and Psychology from the perspective of practical care, and further he stressed the importance of developing verifiable research.

Prof. Kaneko Satoru (Osaka City University) gave a lecture entitled “Religious Feeling and Attitude towards Death”, which was based on an analysis of the process and factors involved in the creation of the attitudes that we hold toward death from the perspective of social and religious psychology. Focusing on the concepts of *okage* and *tatari* and touching upon the views of the Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land) sect of Buddhism, Prof. Kaneko inquired into the relationships between religious view and death and life studies.

Next, Professor Sugishita Morihiro (Tokyo University of Social Welfare) lectured on the phenomenon of life and death from the neuro-psychological perspective. While making reference to recent research on the relationship between the brain and the mind with respect to the phenomena of out-of-body and near-death experiences, he consciously highlighted the distance between that research and the representative religious discourse and perception, and himself leveled this as a criticism of his work.



Tsuji Keiichiro (Chuo University) presented a lecture entitled, “Approach to a Life Perspective– A Foundational Psychology Approach. When one takes up the question of life and death as the theme of psychological research it means that we do so from the standpoint that we have created from our own varied life experience, and as such professor Tsuji provided a working theory on the creation of our view of life and further impressed upon us the importance of the field of psychology.

During the question and answer period following the lectures a lively exchange of opinions occurred on such topics as: the issue of a new style of death in contemporary society, universalism and (cultural) relativism, the problem of experiential knowledge of life and death, and introspective knowledge related to the concepts of value and merit, which are intrinsic to death and life studies. The entire symposium was well received and though many discussions developed and it was a prolific symposium, everyone amended the varied nature of their field's specificities and one could grasp the concreteness of the topics. I feel that this was a symposium at which, due to the melding of heterogeneous research fields, the importance of death and life studies was explored by the participants.

For this symposium we received the cooperative efforts of both the planning committee of the Japanese Psychological Association's 67th Annual Convention and many members from the death and life studies program, and we can demonstrate new potential for future collaboration. I would like to express my deepest thanks to all who were involved.

Report on the Workshop “What Does Decision Theory Tell Us?”

Ichinose Masaki

On October 7th, 2003 a lecture was given by Hugh Mellor entitled, “What does decision theory tell us?”. The lecture was held at 5 pm and there were more than 70 in attendance. Considering that it was a lecture aimed at specialists and that it was held in the middle of the week, the turn out was remarkable. Hugh Mellor is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Metaphysics at Cambridge University and has left an indelible footprint on the field in areas such as time, probability, causality and decision theory. It was a very exciting lecture as professor Mellor advanced a bold revision of the concept of the future as it applies to *decision theories*. *Decision theories* study how an agent determines what course of action is the rational one when in an uncertain, risky situation. While professor Mellor's lecture was primarily a mixture of decision theory and some discussion of economic *game theory*, adopting the theme of trying to redefine the philosophical concepts of rationality, utility and probability he flowed between topics. Moreover he grappled with the overall topic of decision theory from various perspectives, particularly medical decision theory in which he applied the theory to such problems as diagnosis, treatment, and patient choice. In order to deepen this COE program “Construction of Death and Life Studies” research, this work should be given serious attention. Mellor contends that rather than present the standard view of decision theory which holds that the principle of maximizing expected utility by subjectively interpreting



Professor Hugh Mellor

probability is a normative index, that we interpret probability (and also utility) objectively and that decision theory, as a whole, should move towards a descriptive discourse. This is a very provocative and original claim and prompted many questions. For example, Takayama Mamoru, one of the attendees, asked whether first Mellor could draw clear distinctions between what he meant by the terms *normative* and *descriptive*, and questioned whether there wasn't some sort of *meta*-norm that was a necessary condition for those distinctions. In the case where the behavior is different than that predicted, the descriptive approach holds that the conclusion is wrong while the normative one holds that the behavior was incorrect, Mellor replied. I, myself then asked, in an age when we must make some decisions about euthanasia, though the issue was meant to have been the probability of society being psychologically satisfied if the legal codes are changed to allow euthanasia, I asked instead if objective risk can be inserted into such a problem and if so what exactly is this objective risk. Professor Mellor replied that one must use statistical data to measure the probability of satisfaction that probability is only a frequency measure and is sufficiently objective. The exchanges continued in this vein and I think that we attained a much deeper understanding of his ideas. Afterwards we retired to another room in the Yamanoue Hall for an informal gathering. About 30 people amassed around professor Mellor and the discussions continued. It was a very fruitful conference. Professor Mellor expressed his hope that his lecture would inspire research in Japan on decision theory. It is my sincere hope that many Japanese researchers take this opportunity to embrace an interest in decision theory and that that work will contribute to the development of Death and Life Studies.

Report on the Lecture by Professor Iwayumi Suzuki, “Gazing From ‘The World Beyond’- Perspectives on Death and Life Embellishing the Portrait of the Deceased.”

Maegawa Kenichi and Shimazono Susumu

On October 10th, Professor Iwayumi Suzuki (University of Tohoku) gave a lecture called “Gazing From ‘The World Beyond’- Perspectives on Death and Life Embellishing the Portraits of the Deceased” in the large lecture hall of the Department of Letters, The University of Tokyo. Professor Suzuki studies religious anthropology, and has conducted research on contemporary approaches to portraits of the deceased.



In the lecture, Professor Suzuki first addressed the methodology he chose to employ for this research, which primarily examines the objects that represent death such as ashes and gravestones of the dead. He addressed the effectiveness of this methodology as he is interested in comparative studies within the areas of Asia. As an example, Professor Suzuki showed an interesting

phenomenon in Muslim areas of Asia, in which a life-size portrait of the deceased is engraved onto their gravestone. Also, he introduced various regional customs within Japan that utilize portraits or photographic representations of the deceased. Furthermore, Professor Suzuki demonstrated cases where post-mortem weddings for the dead were performed, as well as the dedication of *ema* to shrines and the display of ancestral portraits in living rooms. He argued that the custom of preserving the likeness of the deceased was not a general practice at first, but has become increasingly popular in modern times.

From this perspective, Professor Suzuki articulated his interest in photography. He demonstrated how photographic representations began to be incorporated into the practice of funerals, and basing his observation on how contemporary families display the portrait photographs of the deceased, he illustrated the changes in approach to photographic portraits of the deceased in the contemporary society. For instance, there are many families today that display a photograph of the deceased in places other than the *butsudan*, a traditional Buddhist altar, but continue to offer drinks of water to the dead in front of the photographs as they would at the *butsudan*. Professor Suzuki contended that photographs of the dead are used as objects of prayer, rather than objects of commemoration, and that the photographic representations of the deceased are passed down on the individual level, rather than a familial level, as they used to be.

The question and answer period was filled with dynamic interchanges, as the audience asked him to articulate specific differences between the contemporary practice of leaving portraits of the deceased and that of the early modern period, the particular intrinsic quality of the photographic medium, the origin of the word *iei*, and his assessment from a comparative cultural perspective. The audience listened mindfully to his lecture, since the topic relates directly and deeply to the everyday consciousness of contemporary life.

Report on the Workshop “Bioethics and Spirituality- New Approach to Bioethics”

Shimazono Susumu



On October 29th, Professor William Hurlbut from Stanford University who is also a member of The President’s Council on Bioethics participated in a workshop on the issue of “bioethics and spirituality” with the moderation of Professor Soho Machida (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) at Kanda Gakushikaikan. First in order was a keynote speech by Professor Hurlbut addressing the reasons to be cautious in utilizing human embryos for research purposes, an issue that has been central and

pivotal in bioethics in recent years.

Professor Hurlbut is a specialist in human biology with a background in theology and also a father of a disabled child. Presently, the United Kingdom allows for a cloned embryo from a rather early stage of its development to be used for research purposes, using a 14-day rule as a guideline. However, contestations against the 14-day rule are strong and deep-rooted in other parts of the world, as the primitive outlines of a human body begin to form around this period, and thus the use of embryos at this stage renders an incorporation and utilization of a human existence for research purposes. The President's Council on Bioethics in the United States decided on a four-year moratorium on this issue and proposed to deepen the discussion.

Professor Hurlbut pointed out the arbitrariness of the distinction implied by the 14-day rule that contends that before the 14-day period an embryo is not a human, and argued that human life is a continual process from the inception of life. He further argued that respecting the continuity of life and taking a cautious approach to the research use of embryos is in accord with the position that respects the rigorousness of science and is rooted in the understanding of spirituality that dignifies human life.

Responding to Professor Hurlbut, scholars from Japan specializing in religious studies, anthropology and medicine (Shinzo Kato, Susumu Shimazono, Noriyuki Ueda, Touji Kamata, Okio Hino) voiced their opinions from varying perspectives on the relationship between spirituality and the issues presented. Different religions and different cultures approach death and life differently, and subscription to a specific religion affects the decision making process. The discussion focused on the question of whether it is possible to share an ethical standard among the human race, and if the concept of "spirituality" could play the role of a common guideline. Furthermore, panelists discussed what alternative ways are possible to establish agreement within varying religions and cultures if "spirituality" fails to establish a common ground. The lively participation from the audience contributed to the dynamic interactions among the scholars and the audience.

I should add that this workshop was co-hosted by The Institute of Transcultural Studies at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, and that many members from the "Workshop on Life" hosted by Professor Soho Machida of the Tokyo Foreign University were among the participants.



Organizational Chart

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KUMANO Sumihiko <Ethics>

MATSUNAGA Sumio <Philosophy>

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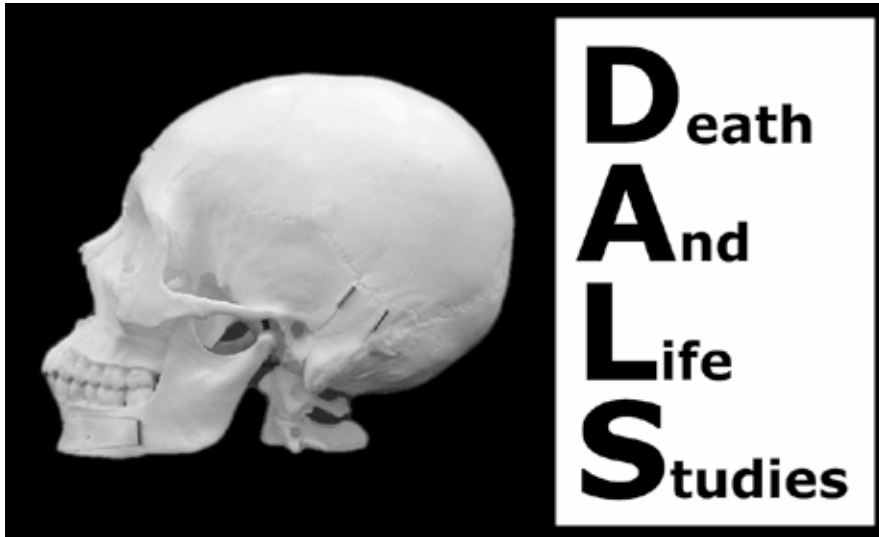
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