

Photos as Media of “Familiarity”: A Case Study of Relief Activities of Private Photos Flooded on 3.11

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This paper is to draw a possibility of solidarity under “reconstructions of the intimate and public spheres” by analyzing relief activities of private photos flooded by Tsunami of 2011 Tohoku earthquake. After 3.11, photos relief activities occurred spontaneously, multiply and simultaneously in vast disaster-stricken areas, and in a short period of time the activities spread all over Japan. People picked up photos, washing and digitizing them all over Japan (we call it “outsourcing the photos” to outside parties), data basing them, return it to the disaster-stricken area, hold “exhibitions” and return it to their owners. But such vast photos relief activities are a unique social solidarity. First, the activities are realized via social media like twitters. Second, precedent (about past earthquakes and tsunamis in Japan, 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake, or 2005 Hurricane Katrina) shows that such a huge social solidarity for private memories spread only in present Japan. In this paper, we represent a reconstruction of the intimate and public sphere in Japan, and show a clue to generalize it into global context by analyzing it by a viewpoint of “condensed modernity.”

This paper analyzed primary sources and interviews about the photos relief activities. The presenter is holding a photo relief project “Memories Salvage” that reliefs 700,000 photos via IT in Yamamoto town, Miyagi prefecture. “Memories Salvage” has implemented some systems to search flooded photos: search by key words, names, and faces. So there are many primary sources about the activities and interviews to parsons and parties concerned to the activities, like photo owners, project staffs and some readers of outside parties.

My paper shows following three results. 1) The analyses of varieties of flooded photos shows that most photos are made in 1970’s or 80’s, the decades of national economic stability after Japanese miracle. Most contents in the photos are family images reconstructed by

Japanese miracle. 2) Interviews to outside parties shows that 2-a) sometimes outside parties has “stronger passion” for flooded photos than inside parties, in spite of the photos are irrelevant to them, and 2-b) most triggers to do so is to feel “familiarity” when they wash the flooded photos of complete stranger. 3) The comment the owner said when he found his children’s photo by IT (face searching) tells us a possibility of reconstruction of intimate sphere via IT. For example, a man who used face search by his face and found his son’s photo said “Even though he never aware it, they are parent-child.” Found via face search, the son’s photo becomes a proof of ties between parent and child.

From these findings, following conclusions suggested. 1) We can tell that photos relief

activities after 3.11 are by-products of Japanese economic situation: Japanese miracle and a long economic slackening after that. 2) We can tell two possibilities to reconstruct the intimate and public sphere under that situation: 2-A) a possibility of social solidarities by unfamiliar people via “familiarity” reconstructed in condensed modernity 2-B) a possibility of reconstruction of “familiarity” itself via IT.