

COMPLETION REPORT

In Memoriam: Post-Tsunami Cinemas from Japan and Thailand

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In Memoriam : The Cinemas of 311 and the 2004 Tsunami in Japan and Thailand

This research project, originally entitled “In Memoriam: Post-Tsunami Cinemas from Japan and Thailand,” is to be retitled “In Memoriam : The Cinemas of 311 and the 2004 Tsunami in Japan and Thailand.” First of all, the “post-tsunami’ term is too broad to include all kinds of movies following both incidents in the two countries while this study focuses only on the tsunami-related theme. Secondly, the Great East Japan Disaster - known as the 311 disaster - is not only a matter of the tsunami, but also an earthquake and nuclear accidents that swept along the Tohoku coast on 11 March 2011. The term ‘311 cinema’ is then used in reference to all the movies that represent those three events in the Japanese world.

In the case of Japan, films and filmmakers have embraced their responsibility to record these modern histories. Productions are so great in number that an exact figure has not been officially identified, but there are estimated to be over 300 titles including shorts, features, and documentaries. Most of them use conventional narrative, rather than arthouse or experimental structures. Filmmakers prioritise their message over cinematic style. Stories covered range from the depiction of the disasters and the impact on the affected community and the country, to consequent political and social changes. Some documentaries are made through the mode of talking-head interviews and footage of conference discussions. Many also show strong artistic qualities. Filmmakers come from all walks of lives and may be amateur or professional. From the age of 18 to 77, they immediately carried their camera to the scene. Some had lived with the affected, shared their sorrows and depicted their stories. Several were victims themselves, and used cinema as catharsis. Cinema becomes everything in the case of 311 – a recorder, a storyteller, an observer, a visitor and even a therapist.

On the other hand, in the case of Thailand where a tsunami devastated its southern region in 2004, cinematic practitioners were much more under the controlling gaze of state or NGO sponsors. Only two out of forty movies about the disaster were initiated by directors themselves; the rest were part of campaigns by the Culture Ministry and the Raks Thai Foundation. And then almost all of them were shot when the affected areas were already empty.

The majority of the filmmakers were first-timers in organizational training programs. More experienced works can be seen in the Culture Ministry's Tsunami Short Digital Films, most of which were reflected an upper-class interest in cinematic experimentation more than a desire for social solidarity. Social awareness is more apparent in the productions of the nongovernmental project. But this needs to be understood alongside the fact that filmmaking was an expensive activity in Thailand at the times of the disaster.

Due to the amount of productions and the creative time involved, Japanese 311 cinema represents the concept of memory to a larger degree than the Thai tsunami films. It also tackles a particular aspect of cinematic memory in terms of an individual's internal and psychological conflicts over their simultaneous encounter with a place to remember and to forget.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

To be advised. Will be in English and overseas.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

“The Comparative Study of the Cinemas of 311 and Tsunami From Japan and Thailand.” a research report in Thai to be distributed to 10 universities in Thailand in October.

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)

To be advised. But probably a pocket book entitle “The Windy Days : The Warm Encounter of the East Coast.”, In Thai, probably in March 2016.