Natural Disasers and Narratives: A Methodological Study of Representative of the Sanriku Tsunami in 1933

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In this paper, I investigate the narrative system of natural disasters, focusing on the Sanriku Tsunami in 1933. My point of view is how and why natural disasters are conceived as a tragedy. If we think basically, the natural disasters are not a tragedy but an accidental occurrence. However, we often think natural disasters as a tragedy. I want to investigate such mechanism of consciousness.

I performed this analysis based on results of a field investigation. In Sanriku district (northeastern Japan), especially in seaside villeges, many people are handing down the calamity, so I recorded and analyzed their experiences.

An old man told me having lost his father and younger brother from tsunami. However, his tale was not explicit and was suggestive. Traumatic memory had prevented him from telling it directly. Another old man lost parents and the friend from tsunami. He had memorized the situation of their last very well, and he reproduced the last conversation with them. He told them objective rather than told them with an emotioned bias. Although this talk was full of the tragic tone, when inquiring in detail, the element which is not so was seen.

Survivors' complicated mental mechanism became clear as a result of analysis. As for their experience, having been expressed as a tragedy was suitable. However, even if about 80 years passed, there was a mental damage which cannot be expressed yet. I think that such psychological approach will be required for research of narratives of natural disasters from now on.