

Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters

The devastating Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011 along with the accompanying tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disasters, provoked a global outpouring of blog entries, audio recordings, Twitter tweets, non-governmental and relief organization communications, photographs, videos, news articles, disaster-related governmental websites, and other digital documentation. In contrast to even slightly less recent disasters in Japanese history, such as the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, the world of online interaction has provided instantaneous updates largely outside the control of mass media and official governmental channels. 3.11 is an ongoing story, and although its full consequences will not be understood for years, its sprawling digital record will be indispensable for long-term analysis of the disasters and their aftermath in Japan and around the world.

To preserve, organize, and make as much of this record as possible available to scholars and the wider online public, in the spring of 2011 the Reischauer Institute (RI) launched the Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters project (JDA). The project has been supervised by Professor Andrew Gordon (project director) and Professor Theodore C. Bestor (RI director). This undertaking draws in part on RI's experiences since 2005 with the Constitutional Revision in Japan research project, initiated by Professor Helen Hardacre, which has a major focus on archiving digital records from around eighty online sources related to constitutional revision. The Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters has developed in a distinctive direction, in active collaboration with numerous partners, mainly in Japan, to become much larger, more decentralized, and crowd-sourced.

The project's interactive approach to archive development includes collaboration with individual users as well as with partner institutions in Japan and around the globe.

It strives to become an active, dynamic, ever-expanding public space, as opposed to a simple repository of records.

Although the Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters includes tens of thousands of conventionally archived websites, its key innovation is an interface that enables users to curate personalized collections and submit their own digital materials. This empowerment of the user is crucially important, because RI faces the challenge of providing access to as wide a range of records of 3.11 as possible while remaining sensitive to the fact that it is a U.S.-based institution removed from the everyday experiences of the affected regions of northeastern Japan.

The JDA project seeks to provide a dynamic environment for users to contribute, curate, and annotate digital materials through its interface, described in more detail below, and this is arguably its greatest contribution.



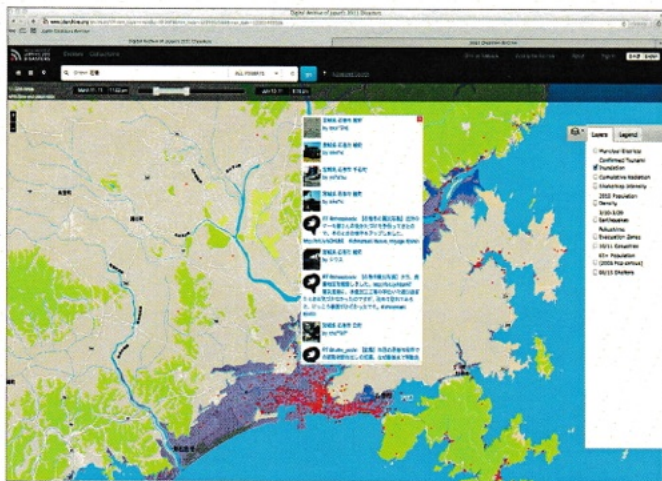
Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters homepage allows users to search the archive by keywords and browse the collections created by other visitors. Project partners are also featured on the homepage.

It is important to note that the heart of the "collection" made accessible through this interface actually lives in a network of records that reside in the faraway archives of our content partners. The vast majority of the materials one can access through the JDA have been collected and preserved by other organizations, some in the United States but mostly, of course, in Japan. The first collaborative steps beginning in March 2011 connected the RI both to the pioneering organization in the field of website archiving, the Internet Archive (IA) based in San Francisco, and to a global online public which recommended websites in Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean for preservation. The RI staff has been closely involved from the outset in selecting the sites to be archived by IA, and in providing the metadata (e.g. keywords, geo-location, etc.) that allows users to efficiently locate and access relevant websites.

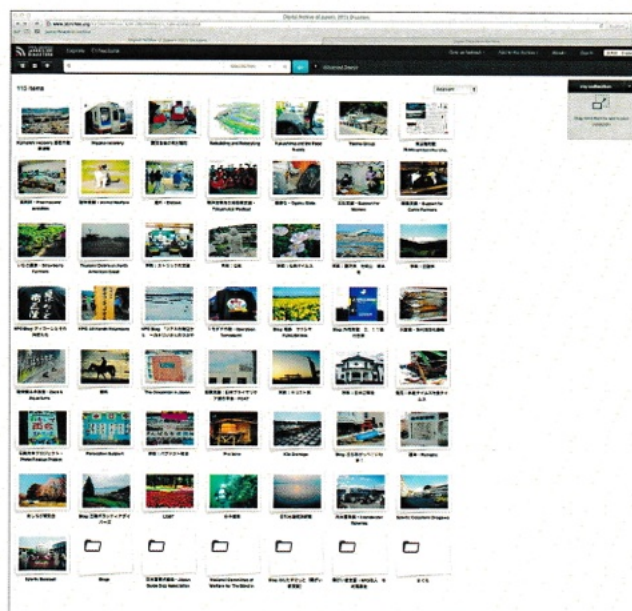
From the early months of the project, the RI also has been working with Japanese partners including national-level institutions and corporations such as the National Diet Library (NDL), Tohoku University, and Yahoo!Japan, as well as smaller grassroots archiving projects. The National Diet Library, since April 2010, has been harvesting records from all government websites, including those of local governments responding to the disasters. On March 2013 the National Diet Library made public its own digital archive of the disaster:

<http://kn.ndl.go.jp/node?language=en>.





Using the WorldMap platform users can overlay search results with rich layers of geographic information, narrow searches to specific dates and times, and from data points of key locations on the map, view an assortment of digital materials from the archive



Collections created on the Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters. This interactive and crowd-sourced feature allows users to select a range of digital materials and create content for inclusion in the archive

Similar to our project, the NDL archive interface offers users the ability to simultaneous search across multiple independent archives; it also offers unparalleled ability to ensure long-run preservation of these materials. Tohoku University's International Research Institute for Disaster Sciences is another important partner. It has launched Michinoku Shinrokuden, a ten-year project engaged in collecting, preserving, and making accessible digital records and memories of the disasters and subsequent recovery efforts. Yahoo!Japan, the largest internet service provider in Japan, oversaw a project that collected and made public photographic records of life before, during, and after 3.11 the contents of which can be accessed through the JDA as well as directly through Yahoo!Japan.

Other Japanese content partners are local-level organizations in disaster-affected regions. Sendai Mediatheque maintains a rich digital archive focused on the Sendai area during and after the disasters, and is leading a volunteer effort to document everyday life through film and audio recordings. The "Great East Japan Earthquake Archive Fukushima" is another partner, and it has made public its still-growing collection: <http://fukushima.archive-disasters.jp>.

Over the coming months, the JDA will be working to offer users access to these materials as well. All311 Archive, another non-governmental organization, has undertaken a comprehensive project committed to tracking the past, present, and future of disaster-affected regions, and we expect to be able to offer users access to these rich materials once they are made public. The centrality of these partnerships for our project underscores how vital it is for archiving organizations around the globe to collaborate and move beyond conventional proprietary models as the art of historical preservation enters the digital age.

To develop the interface to give users access to this network of archives, the Reischauer Institute has partnered with two other centers at Harvard, the Center for Geographic Analysis (CGA) and metaLAB of Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, together with a closely related non-profit organization called Zeega. To enhance users' abilities to discover archival materials in time and space together, the CGA has donated rich sets of geographic data that may already be browsed through its WorldMap platform:

<http://worldmap.harvard.edu/japanmap>.

Users of the interface are able to reference relevant geographic information and geolocate digital records as they explore the impacts of the disasters on natural and built environments. Zeega is an experimental research and design center devoted to innovating new approaches to analyzing, organizing, and publicly presenting digital materials. It has most recently launched its eponymous Zeega content curation platform: zeega.com.

Zeega is a model for new, crowd-sourced, and interactive approaches to the use of digital archives (as well as digital materials found on the internet that are not yet collected into archives). The Zeega-based interface for JDA allows users to compile their own collections, provide commentary on the items they select, and "tag" them with their own keywords. They will then have the option to make or not make their collections public. The ability of users to not only access a wide range of digital materials, but to organize them into virtual collections which are then deposited back into the archive, and to share those collections with others, is a distinctive feature of our project. The interface continues to build features, such as a more powerful tool to turn a collection into a presentation, and a tool to allow users to add to the archive a translation of any item in the archive (into any language). At present there are over 100 public collections prepared by users, and we hope that many more will be created in coming months and years.

The project is also collaborating with the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library and Information Resources (NCC) which has developed various resource guides for teaching and research using the Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters. This rich and varied resource provides navigational and subject guides and includes reference, subject, and news-related materials:

<http://guides.nccjapan.org/content.php?pid=223283&sid=1852904>.

We encourage you to explore, submit materials, and create collections for inclusion in the Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters project.