

Protecting *the Weak*

Entangled Processes of Framing, Mobilization and Institutionalization in East Asia

Coping with Disaster: Life in tsunami evacuation shelters in Yamada town, Iwate Prefecture (Japan)

**Brown Bag Lunch with
Dr. Brigitte Steger, Cambridge**

On 11 March 2011 an earthquake of magnitude 9 hit the northeast coast of Japan. The tsunami that followed caused not only one of the biggest nuclear disasters ever, it also destroyed many coastal communities and killed more than 23,000 people. In June and July 2011 I stayed in a small tsunami evacuation shelter in Yamada to share the life with a small group of survivors and ask them and many other people in the town about how they cope with their situation. How do people deal with traumatic experiences, with the loss of houses and loved ones, with lack of a lifeline? How do people ensure a good night sleep? What are their arrangements for sharing a large room with strangers? What are the worries that come up when people cannot find peaceful slumber day after day? How do people organise mundane issues such as cleaning the place they live in, arranging food or washing their bodies, especially when there is no water or electricity? How do people negotiate social relations, when they have to stay for months in one room with people they hadn't chosen to live with? How have social relations helped them to get their feet back on the ground?

**Monday, June 1, 2015, 12:30 – 14:00
Campus Westend, RuW building, room 4.238**

This brown bag lunch is part of the Lecture Series of the IZO's research project "Protecting the Weak. Entangled Processes of Framing, Institutionalization and Mobilization in East Asia" funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

Brigitte Steger is a Senior Lecturer in Modern Japanese Studies at the University of Cambridge. She has an MPhil and PhD from the University of Vienna and specialises in Japanese society, with an emphasis on the cultural history and anthropology of daily life. She has always been intrigued by questions of the cultural and social embeddedness of the practical matters of everyday life, and her doctoral dissertation pioneered research into the social and cultural aspects of sleep.

The tsunami disasters of March 2011 prompted her to travel to northeastern Japan, where she was the only researcher to live alongside survivors in a refugee shelter. By asking questions about everyday life, she has come to understand people's everyday struggles in the aftermath of such events. She observed how they expressed shared suffering in the shelters and how they tried to regain a sense of normality. Her co-edited book *Japan Copes with Calamity* (with Tom Gill and David Slater, 2013) has been translated into Japanese (currently in its second edition) and has recently been republished for a general audience.

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