



Sixth International Symposium on Human Survivability

7 December 2017, Kyoto, Japan

Symposium Hall, International Science Innovation Building (West) 5F,

Yoshida Campus, Kyoto University

“Bridging the Divide Between Science and Culture: The Role of Human Survivability Studies”

The international symposium is organized by the Graduate School of Advanced Integrated Studies in Human, Survivability (GSAIS/ Shishukan), Kyoto University, in collaboration with the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme, UNESCO.

For more information, please access the web site of the symposium :

<http://www.gsais.kyoto-u.ac.jp/symposium2017/>

Keywords: science-culture gap, sustainable development goals, preservation of cultural heritage, human survivability studies

1. Goals

The Sixth International Symposium on Human Survivability (hereafter referred to as “the symposium”) aims to bring together scholars from humanities, natural and social sciences, who are united by the idea that bridging the gap between science and culture is indispensable for achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs), as well as for dealing with present and future threats to human survivability.

The organizer GSAIS/ Shishukan holds once a year an international symposium that provides a fresh look at the global challenges facing humanity in areas such as energy, water, food, population, diseases, etc. For instance, the 2015 symposium focused on the global energy transformation, or the transition to sustainable sources of energy. The 2016 symposium discussed key issues related to “extreme”, or “low-probability, high-impact” disasters. In general, GSAIS/ Shishukan international symposiums are an important stepping stone for the development of a holistic and transdisciplinary perspective on complex global issues that is also known as "human survivability studies" (HSS).

2. Background and some key concepts

UNESCO about the role of culture for sustainable development

UNESCO has been advocating over the past decades the central role of culture for shaping sustainable development policies, in order to balance techno-scientific and economic advancement with social and human aspects, in close interrelation with environmental issues. Major conventions such as the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), or other documents such as the Kyoto Vision (2012) as well as the Hangzhou Declaration (2013) on “Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies”, are all key contributions of UNESCO towards integrating the cultural and human dimensions into the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals Agenda.

Through its Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme, UNESCO has also been promoting enhanced contributions from the social and human sciences to an integrated science for sustainable development, with several complementary strands: bigger, better and bolder social science, consistently with the conclusions of the 2013 World Social Science Report, co-published with the International Social Science Council; conceptual, methodical and institutional elaboration of sustainability science, with the support from the UNESCO Japanese Funds-in-Trust; and mobilization of the humanities to promote understanding of contemporary environmental challenges, notably through the 2017 World Humanities Conference. The engagement of MOST with the Sixth International Symposium on Human Survivability relates particularly to the follow-up of the World Humanities Conference.

GSAIS/ Shishukan about the challenge of developing human survivability studies

GSAIS/ Shishukan is a new graduate school at Kyoto University that has taken up the challenge to integrate traditional academic disciplines in the search for novel solutions to the global challenges facing humanity. A special feature of its innovative methodology is that humanities/social sciences (grouped in Japanese as *bunkei* 文系) and natural/life sciences (*rieki* 理系) are integrated (*bunri yugo* 文理融合) along a curriculum articulating theory and practice, in reference to the traditional Asian model of the so-called “three wisdoms” (studying, thinking and practicing, or *Mon-Shi-Shu* 聞思修). Another characteristics of the Graduate School of Advanced Integrated Studies in Human Survivability is its deep connection with Kyoto that is the center of Japanese traditional culture and arts.

3. Original contribution

In the 20th century, scientific knowledge has made a tremendous progress but, according to the French philosopher Edgar Morin, these achievements have followed a paradigm of fragmentation and compartmentalization of knowledge that has prevented us from having an

integrated vision of the whole. During the symposium we will argue that to overcome the fragmentation and compartmentalization of knowledge, we need to recognize the complementarity between science and culture. One way in which the symposium will contribute to existing discourses is offering new insights about the integration of knowledge from the Kyoto School of Philosophy, and especially from the East-West transcultural philosophical synthesis of Nishida Kitarô (西田幾多郎).

To bridge the culture-science gap, we must first define “culture” as something that is not limited to leisure or luxury, or something that is not just related to humanities, letters, arts or social sciences. In its most inclusive definition, culture is the integrated “knowledge system” of a civilization, with an intrinsically practical aspect (“know how”) in its integration into ways of living and livelihoods over the millennia. Culture is key to survival, resilience, and quality of life. In this regard, “science”, in general, can also be understood as a form of cultural activity.

But the modern problem of culture-science gap lies very much in the fragmentation of knowledge with disjunctive paradigms of learning and little visibility about long-term or indirect consequences, increasing the threats of humanity’s self-destruction. When science tends to exclude culture, it is very much cutting itself from the roots of life. Another original contribution of the symposium is examining the role that cultural heritage can play for the survival of humanity. In particular, we think that cultural heritage can act as both knowledge capital and identity resource. And human survivability studies can contribute too by helping to create the above-mentioned integrated body of knowledge.

4. Program

The symposium will start with a keynote lecture by Dr. John Crowley, Chief of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Section in UNESCO’s Sector for Social and Human Sciences, discussing the question of how the “Anthropocene” can be represented, building on UNESCO’s activities to integrate cultural and human dimensions into the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular through a new vision for the humanities. Later, it will unfold with three sessions, each aiming to overcome the gap between science and culture from a different perspective.

The first session will take the perspective of philosophy and cultural anthropology for a critical examination of these notions and the unperceived contradictions of the familiar attempt to distinguish between science and culture as two distinct and competing modes of understanding. The second session will deal with the role of science for the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, showing the subtle interaction between humanity and nature. Then, in the third session we shall see how traditions can be a source of innovation on the example of Kyoto traditional culture and scientific innovation. Finally, all speakers will gather together for a panel discussion to debate about the main findings and conclusions of the symposium.

The symposium will also include a student poster session. The posters will be exhibited in the open space in front of the Symposium Hall. All participants are encouraged to have a discussion with the students who will stand next to their posters during the breaks.

We look forward to your participation in the symposium.

The Organizing Committee of the Sixth International Symposium on Human Survivability
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