

Opening New Doors for Japan by Sustaining Wartime Memories

Potential for new “memory studies” in Japan
generated by perspectives from
dark tourism and pop culture

Memories of war in Japan are diverse and complex, with countless “unofficial” memories existing in the shadows of “official” memories such as those of Hiroshima. This research focuses on the role of pop culture in collective memory, combining it with dark tourism studies to furnish a new perspective. For example, in the island of Okunoshima in Hiroshima Prefecture, the remains of a poison gas plant coexist paradoxically with a reputation as a “rabbit island,” demonstrating a distinctive way of sustaining memory. This research aims to shed light on the processes by which war memories are constructed.



Principal Investigator

YOSHIDA Kaori

Professor, College of Asia Pacific Studies
Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

“I hope that the next generation will understand the formation and structure of complex war memories and work to build a new society.”

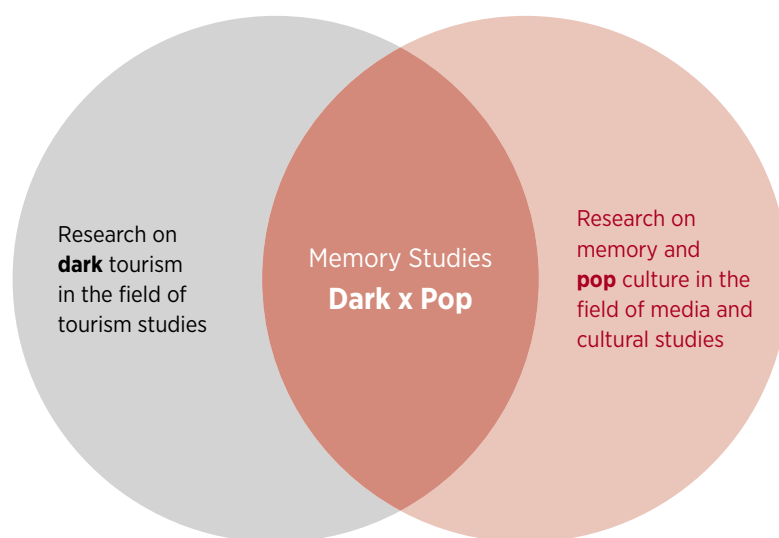
Using a multi-layered approach from a de-westernizing perspective to explicate the multiple facets in the construction of new war memories

Using the keyword of “memory studies,” this research combines the study of war memory in disciplines such as sociology and tourism, approaching the topic from a de-westernizing perspective. I am proposing Japan-specific concepts such as “hope tourism” focusing on themes such as peace and hope, in contrast to the emphasis on death and sadness in “dark tourism” in the West. I also examine the roles played by anime, manga, and other forms of pop culture, as well as social media-influenced tourism, in the reconstruction of war memories.

I am using the island of Okunoshima in Hiroshima Prefecture as my main field site, researching how an island with a dark legacy as the site of a wartime poison gas factory has become a popular tourist destination, known as “rabbit island.” I want to explain how this coexistence of pain and leisure, dark and pop can open up new possibilities for passing memories on to the younger generation.



On Okunoshima, numerous rabbits can be found even on the site of the former poison gas factory. Visitors to the island often make comments such as: “there’s a strange attraction in how the cuteness of the rabbits is juxtaposed with the creepiness of the factory’s remains,” and “the misery of war weighs heavily here, but the rabbits offer some solace.” Rather than being in conflict, the elements of pain and pleasure, or dark and pop, actually complement one another. (Image provided by the principal researcher)



Memory Studies

A field of research that explicates complexity in the construction of war memories

Collaborating with diverse actors to connect interdisciplinary research to sustaining memories in practice

Research findings in “memory studies” can be expected to contribute to society through various forms of community outreach. Through study tours in school education, and educational programs for inbound tourists, it is possible to propose new approaches that prompt people to think not only about the horrors of war, but also about the meaning of peace in a contemporary context. As those with personal experience of war grow older, in terms of partnerships with organizations dedicated to learning about peace and passing on wartime memories, I am working

with local volunteer guides to make recommendations regarding the preservation and use of war relics, and building an archive to store community memories. I also aim to collaborate with local government authorities in areas with war legacies, on projects to survey and pass down war memories unique to the local area. Moreover, through joint research with international memory studies networks, I hope to open up new horizons for war memory studies in Asia.

