

# Excavating Memories Through HTML: The Internet and the Personal Archive of Maekawa Toshiyuki

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## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the impact of the internet on the private practice of preserving historical documents, by focusing on the personal practice of MAEKAWA Toshiyuki, who for the past two decades has been collecting historical materials related to people's experiences in the Miike Coal Mine region and exhibiting them online. Examining the development of Maekawa's personal archive and the network of people who contributed to it, this paper discusses the conditions and effects of encounters between the community of Miike<sup>(1)</sup> and cyberspace at the turn of twenty-first century. In particular, this paper is concerned with the question of how an archive can become practically useful.<sup>(2)</sup>

First, we will make an overview of archiving practices, both institutional and private, related to the history of Miike. Second, we will briefly consider the family history of Maekawa and his parents. Third, I will observe how Maekawa launched his online archive. Fourth, we will examine the historical narratives in his privately published journal series. In conclusion, I will discuss the conditions and effects of the private online archive.

## Tradition of Archiving in Miike

There have been multiple archiving practices related to the history of the Miike Coal Mine. First, there are institutionalised efforts. The Mitsui Miike Coal Mine company preserved its own records that are now contained in the Mitsui Bunko in Tokyo. The company's collection of materials in order to compile its 50-year history in 1944 was an important event in the formation of this archive. In the end, these volumes remained unpublished manuscripts, which along with other related materials became internal records of the company and comprise the core of the collection in Mitsui Bunko [*Mitsui Kōzan Gojū-nen Shi Kō* 1944]. Interestingly, hand-copied version of the manuscripts is now kept in Omuta City Library. According to Ohara, it is likely that the version in the library was a copy of the original kept in Mitsui Bunko [Ohara, 2016: 97].

The Omuta City Library holds a large collection of local historical materials: published books and pamphlets, newspaper articles, records produced and kept by labour unions,<sup>(3)</sup> and personal documents donated by various individuals. Among the personal documents, one can find documents contributed by MATUSO Keiko, HARADA Masazumi, ARAKI Shinobu, MORI Kota, NODA Haruji, WAKAMATSU Sawakiyo, URAKAWA Mamoru, KOSAKI Fumito, TAKEMATSU Teruo and others. OHARA Toshihide, former librarian of the Omuta City Library, played a key role in the donation process of the records [Ohara 2015].<sup>(4)</sup>

Kyushu University also holds materials related to coal mining in Miike, including a large part of the First

(1) As the Miike Coal Mine extended across Omuta and Arao cities, the whole region is casually called "Miike." In this paper, I employ this casual name of "Miike" when I refer to the region.

(2) I have Hayden White's discussion on "practical past" in my mind here [White 2014].

(3) The Miike Labour Union (the First Union) records were donated to the Omuta City Library, Kyushu University and the Omuta Coal Industry and Science Museum in April 2005 when the union dissolved itself. Ohara records the testimony of Yoshikawa Masaru, the last union president. According to him, the union donated manuscripts to the university, artefacts to the museum, and books to the library. On the other hand, the Second Union only donated printed records to the library, i.e., no manuscripts were preserved [Ohara 2015: 89].

(4) See also Schieder [2018 (in this volume)] on Matsuo collection, and Miyamoto [2017] on Urakawa and Kosaki collections.

Union<sup>(5)</sup> records that were donated to the university, as well as some personal papers. An example is a large part of the Urakawa Mamoru papers not related to his activities in the Omuta Society for Prisoners' Cemetery Preservation.

Two museums in Omuta City keep historical materials as well. Omuta Coal Industry and Science Museum holds artefacts related to Miike coal mines, including materials from the First Union. Miike Playing Cards and History Material Museum holds various artefacts from ancient to modern times.

Apart from these record keeping institutions, there has been a local tradition of preserving records privately. Labor unions and other groups who filed suits against the government or/and the Mitsui company had good reason to keep records. There were other individuals as well, who collected records privately. In the 1960s, the Omuta Society for Prisoners' Cemetery Preservation (Ōmuta Shūjin Bochi Hozon Kai) started collecting historical materials related to convict labourers who worked in the mine [Miyamoto 2017]. A recent example is the HARADA Seiichi collection of comic books related to Miike.<sup>(6)</sup>

Notably, there has been a network of individuals who study the social and cultural history of Miike, composed of intellectuals from within and outside of institutionalised academia, including school teachers, public servants, company workers, book sellers, students, and others. The Omuta and Arao Coal Mine Town Fan Club is a node of the intellectual network.<sup>(7)</sup> Another outcome of such collective efforts was an exhibition titled *Tanko no Kioku to Kansai: Miike Tanko Heizan 20nen Ten* (Memories of a Coal Mine and Kansai: An Exhibition Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Miike Coal Mine / 炭鉱の記憶と関西：三池炭鉱閉山20年展) held in the Osaka Labor Archive and the Kansai University Museum in May and June 2017 [Osaka Labor Archive and Kansai Tanko to Kioku no Kai eds. 2017]. Maekawa Toshiyuki was one of the organising committee members of the exhibition and his collection was displayed there. Maekawa's collection is one example of such private efforts, and is unique in terms of the physical distance between Maekawa and Miike. To understand this point, we need to briefly examine his life history.

## History of a Family

Maekawa was born as KUSUMOTO Toshiyuki in a company housing complex in Midorikawa, Arao, in 1952.<sup>(8)</sup> His father KUSUMOTO Tatsuo and mother Sadae met each other in Taiwan, where they worked as farmers, and moved to Miike after the end of World War II.<sup>(9)</sup> Tatsuo found work as a coal miner while Sadae became an active member of *Miike Shufu Kai* (Miike Housewives' Association). Tatsuo was included in the 1,278 workers who were dismissed in December 1959, which Toshiyuki was told was partly because of Sadae's activism. Toshiyuki recalls the hardship during the strike, "When my father was to go to the demonstration, he protected his stomach with a magazine.<sup>(10)</sup> All we could have for our meal during the strike was somen."<sup>(11)</sup>

Although the family endured the hard days of the strike, the union eventually lost the battle against the company in 1960. The family left Miike for Gifu Prefecture in March 1961 when Toshiyuki was eight years old. Sadae told Toshiyuki, "Don't tell anybody that your dad worked in the Miike Coal Mine. Most of all, never talk about the Miike Labour Union" [Gushiken 2017]. They later moved to Kyoto in 1963, where the family received the news of the explosion in the Mikawa Pit. Upon hearing the news about the explosion, Sadae remarked to Tatsuo, "You were

(5) The Miike Labour Union split into the original First Union and the Second Union in 1960. See Schieder and Miyamoto [2018 (in this volume)].

(6) Harada Seiichi. 2018. Omuta Mangaka Meikan: Omuta ga Unda 22nin no Manga-ka Tachi. In Tanto to Bunka Kenkyukai (ed.) [2018: 112-121].

(7) <http://www.omuta-arao.net/> [last visited July 31, 2018]. Also see Nagayoshi [2008].

(8) The family history written in this section is based on an interview with Maekawa Toshiyuki. Interview with Maekawa, 23 July 2017, Hikone. See also essays written by Maekawa and Aoki in Osaka Labor Archive and Kansai Tanko to Kioku no Kai (eds.) [2017].

(9) Maekawa. 2007. *Ihyumon kara no Tsushin*, vol. 1, p. 8.

(10) KUBO Kiyoshi, a worker belonged to the First Union, was stabbed to death with a knife by a gang group member, while he and other union members were picketing the main gate of the Yotsuyama Pit on March 29, 1860. This might be the context of Tatsuo protecting his stomach with a magazine.

(11) Interview with Maekawa, *Ibid*. Somen are thin noodles made of wheat flour. Here, Maekawa mentions it as a meager meal.

lucky to have been dismissed. If you were still working there, you would have been dead as well.”<sup>(12)</sup> Ten years later, Tatsuo died of lung cancer in 1973. Toshiyuki became a police officer in Aichi Prefecture after graduating from senior high school. He then got married, assumed his wife’s surname, Maekawa, and moved to Shiga Prefecture. Sadae moved to Fukui Prefecture, and died in a car accident in 1981.

After leaving Miike, the family did not maintain a close connection with the community there. Sadae visited Miike to meet her friends sometime between 1961 and 1963. It was her last visit to the region. Toshiyuki kept in touch with his elder brother’s teacher for sometime. He visited Miike alone in March 1968 when he graduated from junior high school. He met the teacher once again when he visited Miike with his wife on their honeymoon. The teacher showed them the company housing complex in Midorikawa where he had grown up. However, this was his last visit to Miike before 1996. He had scant interest in the Miike Coal Mine and the society around it, until the closure of the mine in 1997, which reminded him of his “hometown.”

## Closure of the Mine and Encounter with the World Wide Web.

Although the company did not announce that it was making preparations for the closure until the last year of operations, it was apparent in the preceding years that it was moving towards a closure. In September 1996, the elevator shaft of Yotsuyama Pit was demolished, and the demolition scene was widely broadcast. Maekawa recalls that when he saw the image on TV, “I felt as if my hometown was disappearing.”<sup>(13)</sup>

He had a few black and white photographs from the days in Miike that his parents had left him. “I regretted that I did not ask my parents about Miike while they were alive. I made up my mind to make records of my hometown before it disappears.” He started visiting Omuta and Arao to take photographs every year. “Perhaps I started this because I wanted to understand my own parents’ lives. They might actually have wanted to shift to the Second Union, who knows...?”<sup>(14)</sup>

The Mitsui Miike Coal Mine was completely closed in 1997. This was around the time when the World Wide Web was becoming popular among ordinary people. Maekawa bought his first personal computer, a Windows 95 machine, in order to learn a new technology that seemed useful for his work. An owner of a *sentō* (public bath) suggested that he learn to make a website and taught him hyper text markup language (HTML), the lingua franca of the web. In August of the same year, Maekawa launched a website titled *Ihyumon Kara no Tsushin* (Communication from a Strange Man).<sup>(15)</sup>

Maekawa began posting pictures that he took during his visits to Miike on his website. He recalls, “Initially, I made my website out of nostalgia about my hometown. Later, someone suggested to me that I could look at something beyond that.”<sup>(16)</sup> He started sharing voices of people who read Maekawa’s website. Many of them had some connections with Miike and now lived in other parts of Japan.<sup>(17)</sup> Others entrusted him with documents and artefacts that they had kept. Now his collection includes pictures, letters, rare books, scripts for plays, poems, oral histories, post cards, as well as artefacts such as helmets, flags, clothes, etc. [figures 1-3].

His growing online collection attracted more people’s attention, and many others contacted him and enriched the archive with various types of records and artefacts. Maekawa says, “I have met many people through my website who showed sympathy with me.”<sup>(18)</sup> Some, including some former members of the Miike Union, were highly appreciative of his work. However, there were those who suspected that he was a “spy” of the police forces or some hostile groups. Others labeled Maekawa as a “leftist.” Maekawa adopted somewhat of a detached attitude to such accusations. He continued to call himself an *ihyumon*. This was when more and more people were leaving the region, and the entire community of Miike was grappling with their hometown’s disappearance.<sup>(19)</sup>

(12) Maekawa. 2007. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

(13) Interview with Maekawa, *Ibid.*

(14) Interview with Maekawa, *Ibid.*

(15) *Ihyumon* (異風者) is a person who is stubborn, strange or eccentric in Kumamoto / Saga dialect.

(16) Interview with Maekawa, *Ibid.*

(17) <http://www.miike-coalmine.org/message1.html> [last visited July 31, 2018]

(18) Interview with Maekawa, *Ibid.*

(19) The population of Omuta city was above 200,000 between the mid-1950s and early 1960s, but dwindled to below 140,000 in the 2000s.



Figure 1: Home page of Maekawa's *Ihyumon Kara no Tsushin*.  
<http://www.miike-coalmine.org/>



Figure 2: Pictures shared by visitors of Maekawa's website.  
<http://www.hasiru.net/~maekawa/kuri/index2.html>

**みいけ資料館展示室**

- 三池労組・三池主婦会鉢巻
- 炭鉱関係記事類
- 坑内作業袋
- チョーク入れ・尾灯・キャップランプ
- 西山鉱 ZD運動ハンカチ
- 石炭人形
- 昭和31年地図・くろだいや新聞
- 坑内着・脚絆・保安靴
- 三池闘争記念盾
- 坑内帽
- 赤旗
- 絵はがき
- ピラ
- じん肺訴訟原告団タスキ
- ホッパーパイプ
- 有資格者証明書
- ホッパー人形・三池主婦人形
- 三井鉱山宛て抗議はがき
- 炭塵爆発を見つめたカメラ

**展示品 2**



赤旗  
(提供 渡辺さん)

大きさ縦72センチ、横100センチ。「最強の武器は団結のみ」「共に闘う同志へ」「抵抗」など、たくさんの寄せ書きが記されてある。  
 三重一般労働組合（三重県津市）の書記長だった故・渡辺さんの奥さんが、昭和58年、60歳になる少し手前で病死した夫に代わって大切に長く保管していたもの。渡辺さんは1960年6月から終結まで三池闘争に総評オルグとして参加。参加当時は総評・全日自労 建設一般労働組合三重県本部の執行委員だった。  
 三重一般労働組合は「ユニオンみえ」とも言い、職種、正規・非正規、パート、アルバイト等、雇用態様に関係なく、個人加盟の労働組合。

**展示品 3**



赤旗  
(提供 渡辺さ)

Figure 3: Red flags donated by a visitor to the website.  
<http://www.miike-coalmine.org/data/tenzisu.html>

## Telling Histories in the Age of the Internet

In 2007, Maekawa started a home-made periodical journal series in addition to the website.<sup>(20)</sup> He reproduced the contents of the website with his commentaries on an A5 size brochure titled again *Ihyumon Kara no Tsushin* [figure 4]. Maekawa says, “I wanted elder people who do not use the internet to read my writings in my own words. I want to make it into a book if I win a lottery.”<sup>(21)</sup>

Unlike HTML format, paper media compelled him to write in a more rigid and inflexible style. Maekawa adopted a linear narrative style on paper whereas he took advantage of the non-linear structure of hypertext on his online archive. Now, his authorship or will to tell a story became more evident on paper.

Irrespective of the type of media, however, he maintains his position as *ihyumon*. He repeatedly presents himself as someone who no longer belongs to the Miike community. He continues to seek the meaning of the experiences he and his family had when they lived in Miike. For him, the texts that others shared might offer some clues to understand his own past. It is not assured that he would be able to find answers to



Figure 4: Paper edition of *Ihyumon Kara no Tsushin*.

(20) <http://www.miike-coalmine.org/NO1.html> [last visited July 31, 2018]

(21) Interview with Maekawa, *Ibid.*

his personal questions by looking at the lived experiences of others. Nonetheless, he carries on his personal project, the archive continues to grow, and he remains as an *ihyumon*.

## Conclusions

Maekawa Toshiyuki launched his website out of feelings of nostalgia towards Miike. His abiding quest was to seek the meaning of historical experience of Miike for his parents and himself. As we observed, inspired by the responses from his website visitors, he developed an interest in the lives of others who had some connections with Miike. His private endeavour based on the web opened up a space where various memories, in the forms of texts and objects, intersected. Out of these encounters, an archive evolved.

For Maekawa, creation of the archive was not the ultimate goal. His goal remained to understand the meaning of the lives of people in Miike. The question he asks might not be answerable at all. However, others who found his online activities meaningful entrusted him with their precious records and artefacts. In this sense, Maekawa's online archive is seen as practically useful for those who want to maintain the collective memory of Miike. His commitment to maintain his discursive position as *ihyumon*, or a strange man / stranger, might have contributed to his image as a trustworthy unbiased guardian of the archive.

Interestingly, he eventually chose paper as the media when he tells historical narratives in his own words. The non-linear nature of hypertext markup language was useful for him to construct the archive, but it was not the best language for narrating stories. What each media allows was critically important.

The nature of Maekawa's historical narrative, which is based on multiple voices pulled from the online archives, does not provide any definite conclusion to his personal quests. Rather, the polyphonic voices compel him to avoid telling any coherent story. He learns to improvise histories different from hegemonic narratives of the state, of the company, or of the labour unions. In this sense, his digital archive endows him narrative power.

Maekawa made his first travel abroad in January 2018. He visited Taiwan where his parents lived before they moved to Miike. He went to the place they lived and got a copy of the family register. He is writing on his parents' experience there, which will likely conclude his quest for the history of the Miike Coal Mine.<sup>(22)</sup>

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<sup>(22)</sup> E-mail from Maekawa Toshiyuki to Miyamoto, July 28, 2018. [Permission granted by the sender]

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