

The 7th Annual Hasekura International Japanese Studies Symposium
Naraku: Discord, Dysfunction, Dystopia
March 11-13, 2022
Sendai (live/online hybrid)

The world we know is unravelling. The global pandemic now approaching its third year masks a host of systemic crises lurking in its background. The failures of late-stage global capitalism go beyond the ineffective responses to COVID and are exposed with stark clarity at every new revelation of networks of global tax fraud, the servility of so-called democratic political systems to the handful of plutocrats that sit at the top of economic hierarchies, and a host of other symptoms of dysfunction. A single vessel jammed in a maritime trading route can cause week-long disruptions to world trade, the whims of the leaders of the superpowers and the elites that control them can leave populations around the world struggling to prepare for a final war of annihilation, and military campaigns of savagery and murder regularly leave hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable people in the world dead. Behind all of this is the rapidly worsening condition of human-caused climate change, now approaching a final point of no return and presenting a dire existential threat to human civilization on Earth. The hopefulness for the future and optimism that often found voice in the late 20th century has been utterly betrayed, leaving us in a bleak parody of now-defunct visions of human development.

Naraku (奈落) is a Japanese term that resonates with the current state of the world. Originally a religious term, its meaning has evolved in recent times to refer to deeply flawed conditions more generally, becoming “the worst of all possible worlds” in its longer form of *naraku no soko* (奈落の底). This symposium draws its inspiration from *naraku*, here interpreting it as describing states of discord, dysfunction, and dystopia. Historical concerns with decline, systemic failure, and the betrayal of hopes; literary and other depictions of failed and failing societies and futures of death and destruction; religious prophecies of spiritual and worldly decay; and philosophical musings and lamentations concerning the multifold failings of humanity and the futility of human civilization are a small sampling of the ways that *naraku* intersects with scholarly concerns. We invite scholars from all disciplines and concerned with all geographic regions to join us in Sendai (in person or virtually) to present their research on dysfunction and systemic failure in all its forms. Current plans for the symposium also include a day trip to the World Heritage Site Chūsonji temple complex in Hiraizumi, Iwate.

Costs associated with transportation (international and domestic) to and from the symposium and lodging (including, if necessary, additional quarantine lodging for international travelers) during the symposium will be covered for all participants.

Researchers interested in joining us and presenting their work at the symposium should send a proposed title to craig.christopher@gmail.com by November 11, 2021.