

How Survivor Have Overcome Trauma from the Great East Japan Earthquake: Shamanic Rites to Bid Farewell to Loved Ones and Creating Public Works Symbols of Rugby World Cup in 2019

Eiko HARA

Iwate Prefectural University

Abstract

It has been six years since the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. First I will briefly report the damages sustained. Next, I will describe two approaches to coping with the trauma of this event, one at the private level and one at the community level. I show how individual survivors seek out the missing family members. They climbed a holy mountain, named Mt. Osorezan to ask Itako (shaman) where their loved ones are. Some visit the shaman's homes and others visit Itako at the Osorezan Bodaiji Temple. Through these behaviors, I will consider why surviving families seek their family members and why they request Itako shamans' help in communicating with them. Finally, I will show how communities of survivors reconstruct their own town with public works with an eye toward the future. One stadium in the Tohoku region was selected for the stadium of Rugby World Cup in 2019. It already had become a symbolic city of Rugby because of its history. The first women's rugby regular game in National Sports Festivals played there in 2016. This stadium will become a symbol of recovery, showing that people have overcome their sad experiences and look toward to the future.

Keywords

The Great East Japan Earthquake, Itako shaman, Mt. Osorezan, Rugby World Cup in 2019.

1. Introduction

It has been six years since the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred in 2011. The 6th year has a special meaning for Japanese Buddhists after someone's death. This is the year a memorial religious service is held, which is called the 7th anniversary¹⁵. This year – 2017 - is the memorial year. Survivors recall memories of the event and look forward to a future apart from the sadness.

In this paper, I will first briefly report, the extent of damages from the Great East Japan Earthquake. Next, I will address individual Japanese belief customs in the Tohoku region, especially focusing on visits to *Itako* shamans and

¹⁵ Japanese Buddhist held memorial rites of Buddhism as follows; 1) the first time of the same day and month of someone's death is called the first anniversary, 2) the second time of it is called the third anniversary, 3) the sixth time of it is called the 7th anniversary.

the Buddhist temple, Osorezan Bodaizi Temple. Third, I will consider Japanese thought toward the dead and the living. And last, I will report a sign of community of progress on the recovery and reconstruction plans for the future, namely the building of a stadium for the Rugby World Cup in 2019, located in *Kamaishi* city. Through these events, I will show how survivors of the 2011 Earthquake have overcome their sad experiences and are creating symbols of recovery and reconstruction of their towns.

2. Damaged areas of the Great East Japan Earthquake

First, I will show the map of damaged areas from the Great East Japan Earthquake in Fig.1. A check mark ×pointed the seismic center and a circle ○ indicate the damaged areas by Tsunami waves. You see the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant and Kamaishi and Sendai city are all inside the circle. Tohoku region is in the right side of dotted line in the map. There were severely damaged region.

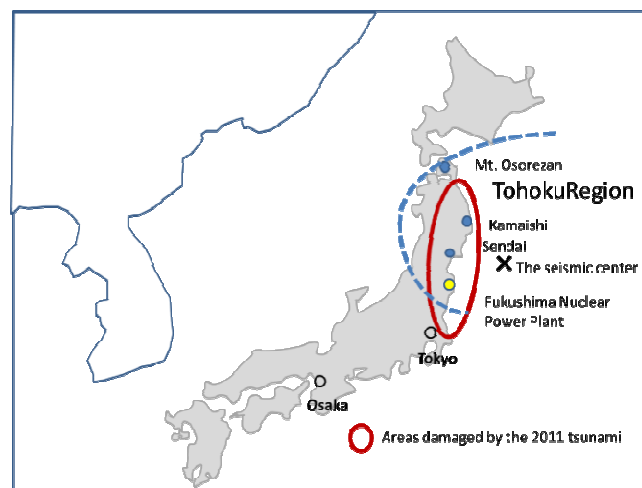


Fig. 1 Damaged areas from the Great East Japan Earthquake

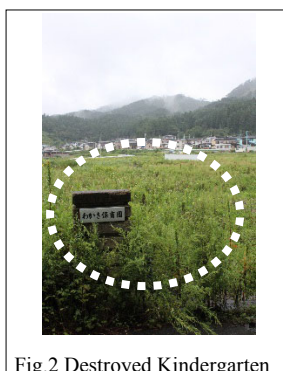


Fig.2 Destroyed Kindergarten



Fig.3 Destroyed sea wall and house

Many houses and persons were washed away from the original land and destroyed by waves. The Fig.2 photo shows the site where a kindergarten was washed away, except for a name board on a stone gate, because the sea wall in front of the kindergarten was destroyed by Tsunami waves (Fig.3).

3. Human Casualties from the Great East Japan Earthquake

The numbers of persons who were killed and went missing in this Earthquake is shown in Table 1. This table gives the scope of human casualties from the Great East Japan Earthquake from 2011 up to March of this year (2017). According to the National Police Agency of Japan on March in 2017, the numbers of killed persons totaled 15,893 in Japan, with 15,831 of those persons located in the Tohoku region. Missing persons totaled 2,553 in Japan, with 2,530 of them in the Tohoku region.

	Prefecture	Personal damages	
		Killed	Missing
Tohoku Region	Aomori	3	1
	Iwate	4,673	1,122
	Miyagi	9,540	1,230
	Akita	-----	-----
	Yamagata	2	
	Fukushima	1,613	197
	Total of Tohoku Region	15,831	2,550
Total of Japan		15,893	2,553

Created in accordance with "Damage Situation and Police Countermeasures as associated with 2011 Tohoku region- off the Pacific Ocean Earthquake" in National Police Agency of Japan Emergency Disaster Countermeasures Headquarters (http://www.npa.go.jp/news/other/earthquake2011/pdf/higaijokyo_e.pdf)

The Tohoku region is divided into six prefectures. Serious damages were concentrated along the coast line of the Pacific Ocean in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima Prefectures, as we see in Table 1. Kamaishi city (discussed below) and Sendai city (a regional capital) are also shown in the map. The former city belongs to Iwate Prefecture and the latter city belongs to Miyagi Prefecture. Both Prefectures were damaged seriously.

An understanding of these circumstances provides background for the following description of efforts to cope with the Earthquake and Tsunami trauma.

4. Shamanism in Japan

Mircea Eliade (1907-86) was a Romanian scholar who published “Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy” in 1951, which is an established classic of Shamanism in religious studies. He recognized shamanism as a religious phenomenon, analyzed its ideology and discussed its techniques, its symbolism and its mythologies (Eliade1964: xix). He described the Japanese shaman in it, and although he did not use the Japanese term, *Itako*, Japanese scholars recognize his description as characteristic of the *Itako* shaman.¹⁶ He wrote, “The Japanese shaman was rather far from shamanism proper of the North Asian or Siberian type.” It is primarily a technique of possession by ghosts and is practiced by blind women. They summon a dead person’s soul from the beyond and sometimes summon a living person’s soul from far away. Her ecstasy was factitious and simulated (Eliade1964:462-63). This rite called *Kuchi-yose*. In this rite, the dead expresses something by using the *Itako*’s mouth.

5. *Itako* Shaman and Mt. Osorezan

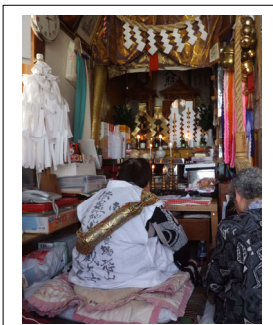


Fig.4 An *Itako* at the household altar



Fig.5 waiting people to request rites in Osorezan Bodaiji Temple



Fig.6 Entrance ceremony

The *Itako* shaman performs rites which are based on the Japanese folkloristic Buddhist and Shinto practices. They usually practice the rite at their own house or the clients’ house. So they are usually located in a town (Fig.4 shows an *Itako* at the household altar).

However, *Itako* shamans climb Mt. Osorezan on fixed days¹⁷ to perform the rite of *Kuchiyose* there. Masahiro Kusu, a Japanese religion scholar, said

¹⁶ Mircea Eliade did not mention the Japanese terms of shamans, but there some variations. *Itako* is used in northern Tohoku, *Okami-san* and *Ogamisama* are used in southern Iwate and Miyagi Prefectures, and *Onakama* is used in Yamagata Prefecture. Over all, *Itako* is the well-known and widely term in Japan.

¹⁷ Fixed days are as follows. 1) Golden Week, namely the end of April and beginning of May, 2) the summer festival at Osorezan Bodaiji Temple of Buddhism from 20th to 24th in July, 3) the Bon festival, namely Buddhist rites for ancestors and the dead from 13th to 15th in August, and 4) the autumn festival around the second week in October. After the autumn

villagers around Mt. Osorezan traditionally had customs to climb Mt. Osorezan for serving the dead during the summer festival (Kusu1966:216). He also suggested this custom began during the first half of the 20th century (Kusu1977:44). *Itako* shamans climb Mt. Osorezan, and according to the clients' requests they hold rites to summon the dead persons' souls, the *Kuchiyose* rite. The summer festival is the ceremony of Osorezan Bodaiji Temple, however *Itako* shamans also come here and perform their rites. Many people come and make requests to *Itako* shaman every year, as seen in the Fig.5 photo. When people enter the gate of Osorezan Bodaiji Temple, they see a board saying, “*Kuchiyose* [rite by] *Itako* shaman” in Japanese (see Fig.5). At the back of the board, there are a few small plastic shelters. One *Itako* shaman is in each shelter and people come into their preferred shelter and make their request. Nevertheless, while *Itako* shamans perform their work inside the temple grounds, and while Osorezan Bodaiji Temple accommodates them, the temple monks declare that they have nothing to do with *Itako* shamans.

Osorezan Bodaiji temple has many Buddhist ceremonies during summer festival. Fig.6 shows the entrance ceremony of the chief monk on July 22nd. It has imitated a parade of the Edo Period (17th-19th century), so they wear ancient Japanese clothes. After this ceremony, they hold many Buddhist ceremonies. The main purpose of the summer festival is memorial rites of the dead (Kusu 1966:216).

6. Relationships Between Osorezan Bodaiji and Damaged Areas



Fig.7 Stone tub of water treatment



Fig.8 Memorial stupa for Jikaku-Taishi



Fig.9 Standing Jizo (Kshitigarbha)



Fig.10 Established stupa for victims

Many people have climbed Mt. Osorezan from damaged areas since the Edo period, therefore we can see many monuments which are standing in the ground of Osorezan Bodaiji Temple. For example, Fig. 7 shows a stone tub for water purification of the hands and mouth. It was dedicated in the 19th century by a few persons who live in Iwate Prefecture, according to the carved letters on the

festival has finished, the gate on the road to Mt. Osorezan is closed during winter season from November to April.

stone tub. Fig. 8 is a memorial stupa for Jikaku Taishi who established the original temple on Mt. Osorezan, according to legend. The stupa was made by some persons from Sendai city in Miyagi Prefecture in Tohoku region in 1971. Fig. 9 is a standing figure of Jizo (Kshitigarbha) contributed also by persons in Sendai city in 1977. As can be seen in these photos, Osorezan Bodaiji Temple has had a strong relationship with the people of areas damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

It has been a sacred place to pray for safe sailing and fishing, harvest, and hot springs for curing. Also, many merchants, fishermen and visitors hoping to cure a disease have gone there. (Miyazaki 2002:361-363, 366-367, Kusu 1966:211-219). We can see many wooden stupas donated by fishermen and stone lanterns donated by merchants¹⁸ in the Osorezan Bodaiji Temple.

After the Earthquake, some fishermen's families came to the temple from the damaged area in spite of the difficulty of the travel at that time in Japan. Even under these circumstances, they came to Osorezan Bodaiji Temple, because it has been famous for the gods guarding safety from the sea (Hara 2014: 26-27).



Fig.11 Established
Sitting Jizo for victims

After the Earth quake, Osorezan Bodaiji temple established two monuments for victims. Fig.10 shows a stupa for victims of the Earthquake established in 2011 and Fig.11 is a sitting Jizo (Kshitigarbha) for victims established in 2012. These things indicate the rationships between the Osorezan Bodaiji Temple and areas damaged by the earthquake.

7. Surviving Families Climbed Mt. Osorezan to Make Requests of *Itako* Shamans

Since the Earthquake happened, many surviving persons have visited *Itako* shamans to summon the souls, of their family and relatives. Sometimes a surviving family would ask a soul, "Where are you now?" And the soul would answer with a location via *Itako*'s mouth and appeal to survivors to find the body. Using this rite, survivors could learn the circumstance of the death and could express their last farewell to the loved one.

Many people climb Mt. Osorezan every year to communicate with deceased persons. However, in the year of the Earthquake many people from the eastern coast of Tohoku region in particular came and asked an *Itako* where their family member was. One woman said she came with her husband and relatives to seek her father-in-law.

¹⁸ They had carried on trade by ships. Shimokita peninsula (where Mt.Osorezan is) is the location of the main important sea route (Miyazaki 2002: 369).

8. Other Shamans

Mt. Osorezan is the most famous place for *Itako* shaman gatherings. However, there are others (with shamans named in other ways, as mentioned). Although a number of survivors have not gone to Mt. Osorezan, many people have gone to shamans in other locations and asked to find their family members. In interviews, it was reported that some of them succeed in finding relatives, and some did not. Clients visit *Itako* shamans in their houses, except when they stay at Mt. Osorezan and ask for help with their problems (see Fig. 4).

9. Japanese Thought of Death

As described above, not just a few surviving families went to *Itako* shaman to seek family and said final greetings. Why have so many people visited *Itako* shamans? The reason is that Japanese people, from tradition, want to locate the dead body after death for burial rites. If it is difficult to find an intact body, they want to take even a part of body (such as a piece of bone). If they cannot even locate a part of the remains, they want to assemble some memories for him/her. After the Second World War, many soldiers did not come back. Surviving soldiers if they could brought a part of the deceased' body, visiting his family and explaining his final days and hours. Even now, surviving families go to ancient fields of hard-fought battles and collect bones of Japanese soldiers from the Second World War. As with the Japanese soldier's case, Earthquake victims' families visit *Itako* shaman and want to find their family and relatives.

Why do Japanese feel it is so important to have at least a small part of the dead body? Emiko Namihira, a scholar of anthropology, considered this problem. She said, the personal identity inhabits its soul and body, according to Japanese thought. Thus, Japanese hold the rite of picking up bones among the cremated remains with chopsticks for surviving family and relatives at the funeral ceremony. This is an important rite in Japanese funerals (Namihira 1990:230). Then the bones will be put into a cinerary urn and that urn put into a grave. According to Namihira's article, soul and body cannot be divided from each other, so finding the body of the dead is a very important obligation for surviving family and relatives. This motivated many people to visit *Itako* shamans after the Earthquake. The thought of soul, bones and body of the dead is a very important idea for Japanese thought.

10. Future-oriented Perspective of Survivors

As noted at the beginning, six years had passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred and this would be the big anniversary year. This means the sixth year is a period of time for remembering the dead, and so surviving people should step forward.

Recalling the time of these six years, some encouraging steps have been taken in the Tohoku region. For example, two historical sites were chosen as World Heritage Sites. In another case, significant for the Tohoku area, the Rugby World Cup will be held in Japan in 2019. A total of 12 stadiums were chosen in 2014 for this event. Among them, Kamaishi city was selected in Tohoku region. This is the only one city selected in the Tohoku region. Why was Kamaishi city chosen? One of the reasons is that a legend grew up about the Kamaishi children who survived the Tsunami waves. They had, in fact, practiced taking refuge from Tsunami waves, since this area has been attacked by Tsunami waves many times in history, and had acted on the practice at the time of that Earthquake. Almost all of the three thousand elementary and junior high school children survived. It is nearly a 100% survival rate for these children. Thus, a legend grew up around their survival. Another reason is that Kamaishi city is well-known Rugby city in Japan, because the rugby team of Nippon Steel Corporation rugby team succeeded in winning championships seven times consecutively, out of all Japan rugby games.

For these and other reasons, the rugby stadium of Kamaishi city is being constructed now. People expect that it will become a symbol of recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake. Moreover, with respect to the significance of rugby in Kamaishi city, the Japanese National Sports Festival in 2016, where the first official female rugby games were played, was also held in Kamaishi city, Iwate Prefecture. The National Sports Festival's regular match is highly anticipated at the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020.

Kamaishi city has developed some symbols of recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake during the past six years. The next symbol is being reconstructed now, anticipating the Rugby World Cup in 2019. Through the emergence of this public symbol of recovery, surviving people signal the overcoming of their sad experiences.

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