



Title	Religion's Response to the Earthquake and Tsunami in Northeastern Japan
Author(s)	Inaba, Keishin
Citation	大阪大学大学院人間科学研究科紀要. 2016, 42, p. 43-59
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/57243">https://doi.org/10.18910/57243</a>
rights	
Note	

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# Religion's Response to the Earthquake and Tsunami in Northeastern Japan

Keishin Inaba

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## Religion's Response to the Earthquake and Tsunami in Northeastern Japan

Keishin Inaba

### 1. Introduction

On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami jolted eastern Japan, causing a tremendous amount of damage. As a result of the disaster, 15,880 people lost their lives and 2,694 are still officially reported as missing, while a further 6,135 suffered injuries. In total, over 315,000 people were evacuated from their homes. The World Bank has estimated that the economic cost could reach up to US\$235 billion, making it the costliest natural disaster in world history (Reconstruction Agency, 2013).

Many religious organizations established their own disaster management headquarters on the day of the Earthquake and Tsunami in Northeastern Japan on 11 March, 2011. Some religious organizations in Tokyo opened their facilities up to the general public to serve as emergency overnight shelters for those who were unable to get home.

Moreover, many religious organizations quickly sent representatives to the affected area. The Shinnyo-en Relief Volunteers and the Tenrikyo Disaster Relief Hinokishin Corps, which have their own specialized organizations for responding to disasters, swung into action. The volunteer activities and technical support systems of religious organizations have been bolstered through their cooperation with other NGOs and the sharing of information. The strengths of religious organizations lie in their ability to mobilize people and their ability to organize.

The Donate-a-Meal Fund for Peace of Rissho Kosei-kai donated 500 million Japanese yen (5 million USD) for aiding the victims. Soka Gakkai and other religious groups also donated some amount of money. The various Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, and other religious organizations soon became engaged in efforts to ascertain the safety of their followers and give them support.

The surviving temples, shrines, and churches in the stricken region became places of temporary refuge and facilitated efforts by patrons, parishioners, and local residents to support one another. A large number of these religious facilities continued their activities as shelters for three months or more until the time when the disaster victims were moved to temporary housing. Religious facilities also became bases for volunteer activity.

Many personal relationships were weakened in areas affected by the nuclear disaster at the

Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. About 60,000 natives took refuge outside Fukushima prefecture. There are no fewer than 100,000 evacuees within the prefecture who have moved and are now living in areas with lower concentrations of radiation, while there are people who continue to live in areas where the radiation concentration is high. Opposition amongst families and regional leadership has emerged based on the circumstances and status of radiation in areas affected by the nuclear accident. In response to the parents' sincere wish that they would like to have the children of Fukushima play outdoors safely, recreation programs have been held at a number of places outside Fukushima prefecture. Many religious persons and religious organizations have sponsored the recreation programs. We shall now look into a survey of religious altruism and social capital in the general context of the sociology.

## 2. Religious Altruism and Social Capital

The bubble economy between 1986 and 1991 and its eventual collapse in the early 1990s, due to “limited government” and “free-market fundamentalism,” expanded disparities between rich and poor, and divided Japanese society into winners and losers. With the growth of transportation and information networks, diversification of the employment system, and a highly mobile society influenced by globalization, many communities teetered on the brink of collapse, bringing about a situation known as *disconnected society*. This term warns of a collapse of the moral infrastructure (i.e., social trust) that undergirded Japanese society since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tachibanaki, 2011).

The modern world is fragmented, with society becoming more diversified and socioeconomic systems becoming more fragile (Giddens, 2002). To remedy this, developed nations need a civil society with a voluntary altruistic nature—one that does not depend on conventional government-led systems (Giddens, 2002). Critics of excessive selfishness, in tandem with researchers on volunteerism and the characteristics of altruism, have called for the development of a supportive civil society, which has spurred a renewed interest in religious altruism (Habito & Inaba, 2006; Inaba, 2011; Inaba & Loewenthal, 2009; Neusner and Chilton, 2005). The term *altruism* was coined by a French sociologist, Auguste Comte (1798–1857), and entered the English language in 1853 in translation. The original French term *altruisme* was suggested by the French legal phrase “le bien d’autrui” (the good of others). Altruism is precisely “other-ism,” the effort or actual ability to act in the interest of others. Since then, altruism has been a recurring analytical concept in the social sciences (Inaba & Loewenthal, 2009).

There is abundant evidence to support the theory that altruism is a learned behavior and is capable of being improved by social learning. Through interviews with young people who have become involved in community service, as well as data from national surveys in the United States,

Wuthnow (1995) argues that a religious setting is the best environment to nurture altruism. In religious organizations, as well as in schools and community agencies, young people can find role models and moral incentives that instill a sense of service that they can carry into their adult life. There is also a considerable volume of research into the correlation between altruism and religion (Habito & Inaba, 2006). There is a long history in Japan of religious persons offering philanthropic services to those in need. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Prince Shotoku and Empress Komyokogo, who were Buddhists, established aid stations to provide food and services to the sick, elderly, or poverty-stricken. The public works of Gyoki, a Buddhist monk in the Nara period in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, are also famous. In medieval times, Jōdo monks of the late Heian period performed charity work. The Catholic Church's relief work for the poor is widely known. In sum, these diverse faiths have given rise to the notion of "religious altruism" (Inaba, 2011). Broadly defined, *religious altruism* means altruism based on a religious belief. Religious altruism shapes the social structure of a religious organization, along with affecting the way of life of individual religious believers, particularly in how they relate to others or to society. This stance forms the viewpoint of religion as social capital.

Social capital includes "networks," "norms," and "social trust," which serve as the foundation of various organizations and groups. Durkheim (1915) argues that a feeling of obligation is the foundation of moral life, and that people internalize social norms through education and socialization. Durkheim's view places emphasis on emotion, feeling, and compassion as the foundations of moral action. The richness of social capital as a construct is in the strength of the roles of these organizations and groups, in supportive acts based on sympathy, and in their role improving society's various problems. Western nations are highly concerned with religion as social capital (Furbey et al., 2006; Smidt, 2003). As religions create person-to-person connections, they may become the foundation of a community. The relationship to religious altruism is discussed below.

The weakening of communities may bring about an attendant decrease in social capital, but religion has the power to build person-to-person networks that serve as the base of a community (Sakurai, 2012). I define *religious philanthropy* as "religious persons or religious organizations, or culture and thought relevant to religion contributing to the solution of problems in various social domains, or contributing to the maintenance and improvement in the quality of life of the people" (Inaba & Sakurai, 2009:40). This is religion as social capital—namely the peace of mind that religious culture, space, and ideology bring, and the ties it fosters between people in a local community.

Roof (1978:29) contends that "church-linked beliefs and values are less and less a part of the cultural mainstream in modern industrial society. Whatever its functions in the past, one would hardly argue that church religion is a major source of cultural integration." Although Roof (1978:

30) maintains that “greater privatization of beliefs and commitments generally can only mean that religion loses its traditional function of providing a religiously based moral order for the society,” religion still holds influence over an individual’s private life. At present, the volunteer and philanthropic activities of religious organizations and religious persons are increasing in Japan (Inaba & Sakurai, 2009). Accordingly, the worldview offered by religion, and the religious creeds that server as their backbone, provides the individual volunteer with mental and emotional support. Furthermore, the relation of volunteers who share a common faith and worldview also serves as important spiritual support (i.e., bonding-type social capital). The individual and collective altruistic efforts of a religious group may invoke public empathy, and the possibility of disseminating this sense of ethics to the secular world cannot be denied. In other words, the contributions of religious groups and religious persons to society, including the visibility of the figurehead for philanthropic activities, can provide a public forum that nurtures a nation’s spirit of compassion as well. I will now turn to religions's response to the earthquake and tsunami.

### **3. Temple used as an Emergency Shelter**

After the massive earthquake on March 11, 2011, head priest, Kudō Reiryū, of Seiryūji (Soto Zen sect) in Kesenuma city, Miyagi prefecture, looking from the rooftop, he saw the tsunami surge into the harbor. He continued to shout, “Run away!” to those walking in the streets below. Many people took refuge in Seiryūji, and others took shelter in the Catholic kindergarten next door. After the tsunami receded, many adults took refuge in the neighboring Catholic kindergarten, but as there were also many children taking shelter there, the head priests invited the adults into the temple. As Head Priest Kudō and his wife, Yoshiko, had already had daily interactions with the Catholic kindergarten, they naturally worked together. The temple became a spontaneous shelter that took in forty people.

The following day, they began the removal of rubble from the roadways. Moreover, drawing water was important work. In the morning at sunrise, everyone went to the well to draw water together. Since there was no electricity, they performed various tasks while the sun was up then proceeded to prepare for bed. For food, they had 30 kilograms of rice. As they didn’t know how many days they’d need to endure, they stretched it out by making gruel. March 11 was a Friday, and below the temple were many restaurants, Japanese, Chinese, and so on, and from there they were able to replenish their provisions from ingredients on hand. As there was no electricity, and since the food in the refrigerators would rot, the restaurant owners brought it to them, and they all divided it up and ate it. However, they worried as the rice grew insufficient.

There is a temple in the northern part of Iwate Prefecture at which Head Priest Kudō holds an additional post, and the head priest there brought them rice on the fifth day. Since the bucket had

no lid it spilled frequently, so on the following day, the priest brought them the plastic container that they'd asked for, as well as other things that they'd need for the time being. Because the well water was subject to the influence of various things from the tsunami, such as rubble, it was used as water for the toilets, while the mineral water that they'd stockpiled was used for drinking water. A water wagon came to the nearby city office, and drew water. Even in thinking about it now, he barely remembers how they endured the first three days.

At any rate, they had pulled out the futons and the seat cushions and laid them on the tatami and the carpet, so everyone could sleep. A person who had taken refuge said, "Since it was a temple, it was warm compared with the official shelters like the gymnasium."

On March 14, they received a report from a parishioner that a family had died. Head priest Kudō cremated the first Great East Japan Earthquake victim on March 16. Every day after that, there was a cremation and a funeral. In those days, since Kesunnuma had insufficient crematories, cremations were also performed in other cities.

After the cremations, because everyone wanted the temple to keep the ashes, altars were installed and enshrined. The refugees too felt strongly like they wanted to lend a hand, so everyone's living quarters was moved from the Main Hall to a different room, and from the fourth day, they began holding a short twenty minute "morning service" from about 7:00 a.m. It is said that everybody participated.

Volunteers also stayed at the temple. The head priest introduced them to the evacuees at night saying, "Mr. X of Y prefecture came today." Priests from other religious sects also visited repeatedly. With no regard to denominations, they were accepted along with the other volunteers and there was good interaction.

During the Earthquake and Tsunami in Northeastern Japan, many religious organizations and individuals helped with relief activities, and I am confident that society recognizes that they have become a strong social force. Because of the social efforts of religious groups and religious NGOs that have been undertaken since the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, along with trend toward social activism in Buddhism in recent years and the support for the homeless that has been provided by people of faith in places like Kamagasaki, the media's interest in these kinds of efforts is growing.

I set up the Faith-Based Network for Earthquake Relief in Japan (FBNER), a FACE BOOK site for collecting information on the relief and support activities of people of faith, to serve as a research portal. I also built the Map of Faith-Based Earthquake Relief Services, which is a site that shows all the religious facilities in the affected area on a map, and provides information on the number of evacuees, the damage situation, and activities being performed. Both of these were built with Hiroyuki Kurosaki, Professor at Kokugakuin University. The Map of Faith-Based



Earthquake Relief Services was created using information provided by various religious groups and information published in the Annual Statistics on Religion (Agency for Cultural Affairs) and on the Internet. The volume of information on the site gradually increased as we added a map of housing information for survivors, maps by denomination and religious group, and a map of facilities where interviews had been conducted.

The Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief (JRPD, Jp. Shukyosha Saigai Shien Renrakukai, <https://sites.google.com/site/syuenrenindex/>) was established in April 2011 by people of faith and religious scholars to provide a place where people can actually come together and meet face to face. I myself was one of the founders, and I participate in the group as a facilitator. Striving to find more effective ways for people of faith and faith-based organizations to provide support to victims, the JRPD aims to facilitate information sharing and to expand activities that cross the boundaries of individual religions and denominations. It facilitates the sharing of information on survivor support services, mental health care, memorial service announcements, evacuee housing options, volunteer opportunities, and opportunities to assist with interview surveys at religious facilities in the affected areas.

In addition, interdenominational partnership organizations that were in place before the earthquake, such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), also engaged in relief work while sharing information with other groups. Support was also provided by religious universities, such as Taisho University, Ryukoku University, Hanazono University, Kokugakuin University, and Kogakkan University. Professors at religious universities, along with their students, helped with relief activities in the affected areas. They were involved in many different efforts in their roles as researchers, as religious university representatives, and as individuals.

#### **4. Power of Religion in Stricken Areas**

Referencing previous work (cf. Nishiyama, 2005) on topics such as disaster sociology and the data from various interviews held in affected areas, I arranged the recovery process after the Great East Japan Earthquake as follows. There is Phase 1 “Emergency Relief Period (up to one week),” Phase 2 “Refuge Relief Period (up to three months),” Phase 3 “Restoration Period (up to one year),” Phase 4 “Revival Preparation Period (up to two years),” and Phase 5 “Revival/Life Reconstruction Period (from two years).” In this paper, I explore four phases for approximately two years, from March 11, 2011, as outlined below:

1. *Emergency relief period* (up to one week):

Lifesaving; emergency evacuation; provision of materials

2. *Refuge relief period* (up to three months)

Support in shelters; provision of materials

3. *Restoration period* (up to one year)

Assisted living in temporary shelters; all-around care

4. *Reconstruction preparation period* (up to two years)

Support toward revival of life; Care for those suffering from post-traumatic stress

The corresponding activities are wide-ranging, but the principle subjects include: distribution of food after an emergency; assuring an adequate water supply; sorting and delivering materials; dealing with mud and debris; removal of scrap wood and debris with heavy equipment; gathering donation money; gathering support money; planning burials; visiting isolated communities; taking orders; listening closely; caring for the needs of the survivors; decontamination work; health preservation programs, and so on.

People who escaped the tsunami took refuge not just in the public halls or schools that had been designated as appointed shelters, but many people also escaped to religious facilities. Unlike in public facilities, people who took refuge in religious institutions were comforted due to the tatami mats. Temples, shrines, churches, and religion institutions in the stricken areas became emergency shelters, with a few hundred or more people taking refuge in one temple, and another temple seeing 300 or more people stay for three months. Tens of thousands of temple supporters, parishioners, and religious institutions banded together to offer support.

There was “resource power” in the religious facilities, many of which became shelters and bases for volunteer activities where there were large space and tatami mats as well as food and waters. Temple supporters, shrine parishioners, and believers offered “human power” by cooperating to perform aid work. In addition, there was “religious power” to offer prayer and tranquility for the hearts of the affected people. The religious acts performed by people who took shelter in temples, shrines, churches, and religious facilities were not obligatory religious acts, but there were people there who naturally wanted to pray. This is not to say that there weren't some who saw the activities of religious people in the affected areas as a kind of missionary work. In fact, some protestant churches used this massive disaster as an opportunity to spread their religion, treating their support activities and their proselytizing activities as interconnected efforts. However, such people were not accepted by local people. Many religious people and organizations engaged in relief and support activities while maintaining a policy against the conduct of any proselytizing activities. When people of faith took this approach, they were accepted by the victims. Other support organizations also appreciated this approach, and expanded their circle of partnership to include these groups.

One temple in Otsuchi-cho had been designated a shelter even before the earthquake. In March every year, emergency drills were performed jointly with the elementary, middle, and highs

schools, a women's association, and a local team of firefighters. Although the fire drills had been performed, this earthquake's devastation exceeded all assumptions. Since this temple had become a designated shelter in the regular emergency drills, 200 people took refuge there immediately following the earthquake. Charcoal commonly used for barbeques was used to make a fire for warmth and cooking. Cooked rice using the emergency rice stores of approximately 200 kilograms was distributed.

Since facilities in Iwate were not able to perform cremations, they were performed outside the prefecture in places such as Tokyo; about 400 bodies were gathered into the Inner Main Hall of the temple in Otsuchi-cho in no time.

Religious persons and organizations from outside the stricken areas headed to the temple to begin various types of relief work. In Phase 1, victims unable to return home were taken in, and a task force was established for the supply of relief goods, which proceeded to distribute cooked rice and a variety of other goods. Religious communities with previous experience in the Great Hanshin Earthquake, or even before, moved quickly. In Phase 2, various activities were performed, such as debris removal, footbaths, cleaning the temporary restrooms, sutra chanting, and mourning. Religious people from within the stricken areas and the religious groups that came from outside areas were effective participants in the emergency relief period of Phase 1 and the refuge relief period of Phase 2.

During Phase 3, makeshift shelters were erected and many victims were transferred, but the activities of religious persons continued. Many of the residents in the shelters required physical assistance, and able-bodied volunteers also helped to ward off despair. I would like to bring up the case of a head priest who was from one of the stricken areas. The Main Hall of this priest's temple was carried away by the tsunami. However, he continued to encourage his parishioners and other people from the area, and supervised the life of the evacuees in the shelters. At the time of Phase 2, together with other clergy, the head priest conducted a funeral for the believers on the 49<sup>th</sup> day after the earthquake. The funeral for missing persons continued into the summer during Phase 3. As it was thought that the disaster victims would like to hold a memorial service for the first Obon, the head priest held funeral services every day. By the time Phase 4 began, the head priest, along with his parishioners, was working to rebuild the communities. However, the chief priest reported that there was no one to help the religious persons who themselves suffered a great deal of damage from the earthquake. Without care, it became a mental burden to continue living in the area most affected by the tsunami. Although the priest remained firmly committed to offering his time, his senses were dulled by the continual stress of dealing with survivors, and he continues to take tranquilizers every day.

Preparations for reconstruction begin in Phase 4. Basic infrastructure, such as electricity and

plumbing, begin to be restored, but care for traumatic stress, including assisted living, continues to be important. Although counselors patrol the stricken areas under the pretense of “care for the heart,” disaster victims are forced to repeat the same story as the person in charge changes each time. For instance, a disaster victim may say, “They say that they will come again but there are no cases where the same person comes back.” On the other hand, there were reports of religious persons who performed “all-around care,” such as serving as a jack-of-all-trades, as an order taker, and helping to lay foundations, as well as being someone disaster victims could trust on both personal and practical levels.

Religious persons who form a sympathetic connection with victims perform “all-around care,” walking in step as an escort for those who lost various relationships. There were many cases of people who survived alongside others in the evacuation centers after the earthquake but were subsequently dispersed into temporary housing. Since many of the victims and care providers hoped to meet again, a priest arranged for flower viewings at his temple for the purpose of their gathering.

Heeding the doctrine of religious altruism, there are various points of argument to consider. For example, “Isn’t their work self-righteous?”, “Is their work open to people without faith, or people of different faiths?”, “Is it an atmosphere that is easy for general people to participate in?”, or “Do they have a method of accountability like a civic organization?” However, most religious organizations base their support work in stricken areas with these points in mind while carefully conducting their activities in an atmosphere of trust.

## **5. Issue with the Separation of State and Religion**

Over 100 religious facilities were used as shelters after the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the public has gradually become aware of this fact. According to the 11th Survey Report on Students’ Attitude Towards Religion: 2013, the most frequent responses about the roles that religious leaders and religious facilities can play at the time of a disaster were “providing a space for shelter (58.3%),” “providing mental care (50.9%),” and “providing memorial services and consoling the spirits of the deceased (40.0%).”

The number of local governments that enter into a disaster management agreement with religious facilities has been increasing since the Great East Japan Earthquake. To collect data on the current status of disaster management agreements between local governments and religious facilities throughout the country, I conducted a nationwide survey in July 2014 (1184 respondents out of 1,916 local governments, or a response rate of 62%). There were 95 local governments with a disaster management agreement with 399 religious facilities. In addition, there were 2103 religious facilities designated as shelter, even without a disaster management agreement in place.

Of all the disaster management agreements between local governments and religious facilities, the agreements with 167 facilities were signed after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The number of disaster management cooperation agreements between local governments and religious facilities will continue to grow in the future.

According to the survey, the reasons for not having a disaster management cooperation agreement with religious facilities included responses such as “the existing designed shelters can sufficiently accommodate evacuees at the time of a disaster,” “there are more important issues to be addressed than agreements regarding shelters,” and “since major religious facilities already have a close relationship with local residents, and they volunteer their facilities as shelter at the time of a disaster, we have not executed an agreement.” Meanwhile, there were only five respondents who stated the separation of state and religion as the reason. In addition, there are instances in which they cannot enter into a disaster management agreement even though they have a cooperative relationship because the religious facility building is old and does not meet earthquake-resistance standards.

Provisions in the agreement are diverse, depending on the situation with a given community and facility. Examples include making the facility available as a shelter, making it available as an activity base for organizations such as aid agencies, allowing its use as an emergency shelter at the time of a tsunami, allowing its use as a temporary shelter until the public shelter opens at the time of a disaster, allowing the facility to be used as a temporary refuge for stranded commuters during a disaster, allowing its use as a morgue, and a mutual relief supply relay point at the time of a large-scale disaster aiming to provide mutual aid on supply.

Taito-ku, in Tokyo designated Senso-ji as a place to accept stranded commuters and installed equipment, such as a generator, at public expense. Although there were voices of concern that it infringes on Articles 20 (freedom of religion) and 89 (public money spending) of the Constitution, there is an agreement for the local government to cover the cost of using the religious facility as a morgue or shelter. The city and district municipalities in Tokyo moved to secure facilities for the enforcement in April 2013 of “an ordinance for comprehensively promoting measures for stranded persons,” but there are cases where religious facilities were appointed as short-stay facilities.

Previously, when religious organizations encouraged municipalities to include their facilities in agreements on disaster-prevention measures, the government was usually hesitant. In some cases, Buddhist monks were not allowed to enter the public temporary mortuaries or crematoria after the Great East Japan Earthquake. On the national and local government sides, the principle of “playing it safe” in the name of the separation of religion and state was at work. There has been some movement away from this inflexible attitude.

Moving forward, the movement toward cooperation with religious institutions will increasingly spread in administrations, municipalities, and private sector aid agencies. However, even if

agreements between cities, towns, and villages with religious institution are made at the time of a disaster, they will continue to serve in other capacities. For instance, although many religious institutions functioned as emergency shelters and as bases of operation in the stricken areas, they continued to serve as religious institutions for the community. Religious persons who participated in citizen-based town planning meetings of their local government demonstrated great strength in coordinating after the earthquake.

## **6. Discussion on the Public Benefit of Religion**

There have been some enthusiastic discussions in recent years on the public benefit, public nature, and social contribution of religion. Some object from the standpoint of the Religious Corporation Law or disagree based on the essentialist theory of religion, while others believe that the true value of religion lies in the unique realm that cannot be replicated by the government or the private sector during a disaster. I do not deny that each religion has a unique nature and significance; however, I consider it important for religious people—as human individuals—to contribute socially, accommodate victims, remove debris, and sort relief supplies, among others, during our times of need. Temples, shrines, churches, and other religious facilities exhibited their capacity as emergency shelters and rescue activity bases at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake. They also demonstrated an ability to provide emotional support. On the other hand, there were instances of some religious people being barred from entering public morgues and crematoriums in the name of separating state and religion.

As the chief priest of a shrine in Iwate prefecture knew from past records that the shrine would become an emergency shelter in the event of a large earthquake, he reached out to the local government to establish a cooperation agreement on disaster management. However, the local government refused because of the separation of state and religion. Meanwhile, there were religious facilities that already had a disaster management agreement with the local government before the Great East Japan Earthquake. There were also religious facilities designated as an impromptu shelter in the recent earthquake. The communities where city officials and religious entities communicate with each other regularly about disaster prevention, social welfare, and community development initiatives were able to function efficiently at the time of the disaster.

At the time of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, religious organizations developed volunteer activities to provide emergency relief. While many victims needed emotional support, people were wary that the emotional support provided by religious organizations would be linked to proselytizing. Religious organizations thus did not take much initiative in providing such emotional support. Many religious groups quietly provided relief services in a way that their activities were

viewed in the same manner as those of ordinary volunteers. Therefore, it was not socially recognized that religious groups took part in the rescue activities (Kokusai Shūkyō Kenkyūjo edition, 1996). Moreover, newspapers did not recount the activities of the religious groups, such as the background and relationship of the subjects to the story, allowing the general public to say that there were few reports of rescue activities associated with religious organizations.

Although it cannot be said that the Great East Japan Earthquake brought about a sudden increase in reports of support activities associated with religious persons or organizations, from 2011 onward each newspaper has continuously covered the support activities of religious persons in earthquake disaster relief. However, in a survey about “the philanthropic activities of religious groups” conducted in April 2012 (Niwano Peace Foundation, Ishii Kenji, Professor of Kokugakuin University), 29.7% of respondents knew that a Shinto shrine, a temple, or a building of a religious organization became a place of refuge; 22.9% knew that a Shinto shrine, a temple, or a building of a religious organization offered support supplies, including food distribution; and 15.7% knew that members of a religious organization performed volunteer activity. It cannot be said that social recognition is high in Japan, but in the survey it was clearly expected that religious groups would offer “a place of refuge and a place for the accumulation of aid materials” (45.2%).

## 7. Conclusion

At the time of the Great East Japan earthquake, temples, shrines, churches, and other religious institutions demonstrated utility as emergency shelters and bases of operation. Many religious persons and groups report that they had no intention of carrying out proselytizing activities, and remained devoted exclusively to rescue operations and support service. Through their efforts during this great disaster, religious organizations had to navigate cooperation between denominations and look deep within to consider the role of a religious person during times of traumatic stress. In response to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, anti-nuclear energy declarations have followed one after another across the religious world. On the other hand, the need to share information and establish cooperative activities has also become clear. Highlighted by the reconstruction, the importance of disaster preparedness has become distinct.

Today, the government’s disaster prevention plan is undergoing significant change because it is clear that the existing designated shelters alone cannot accommodate all locals. The movement to establish cooperation among the government, local government, religious facilities, and other private aids organizations will continue to grow. However, a cooperation agreement alone, signed between local government and religious facilities, will not work during a disaster. Many religious facilities that functioned as emergency shelters or activity bases in the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake were already open to the local community regularly. Those religious facilities in which

the leader regularly cooperated with the local government's community development council, social welfare department, and disaster prevention department demonstrated the power of cooperation during a disaster. Therefore, routine efforts are important.

### Acknowledgement

This paper was supported by the following research grants: 2011 Human Science Project, Osaka University Graduate School of Human Sciences and JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 23401019.

### Notes

This paper is based on author's own filed work and interview surveys with people in the stricken areas conducted between 2011 and 2013

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## **Religion's Response to the Earthquake and Tsunami in Northeastern Japan**

Keishin INABA

This paper analyzes the support activities conducted by people of faith after the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. A massive earthquake and tsunami jolted eastern Japan, causing a tremendous amount of damage. Many people of faith have been involved in support activities. More than 100 temples, shrines, churches, and religious facilities in the affected region became emergency shelters and centers for relief efforts. There was "resource power" (places with large space and tatami mats accepted victims, plus had rice, food, the water) in temples, shrines, churches, and religious facilities. Temple supporters, shrine parishioners, and believers offered "human power" by cooperating to perform aid work. In addition, there was "religious power" to offer prayer and tranquility for the hearts of the people.

On March 13, two days after the quake, I founded the Faith-Based Network for Earthquake Relief in Japan. I was also involved in establishing the Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief, where I continue to serve as a facilitator. Using interview surveys with people in the disaster-stricken area, this paper analyzes the support activities conducted by religious people after the Great East Japan earthquake. This paper also speculates about a foundation for how religion and the government can work together in future disaster relief efforts.