



Reconstruction in the Shizugawa area; view from the yard of Shizugawa Junior High School, February 2017

©Roberto Grillo

## Kataribe: A Keyword to Recovery Practice of Storytelling in Post-Disaster Japan

Flavia Fulco, Italy

## Kataribe: A Keyword to Recovery

### Practice of Storytelling in Post-Disaster Japan

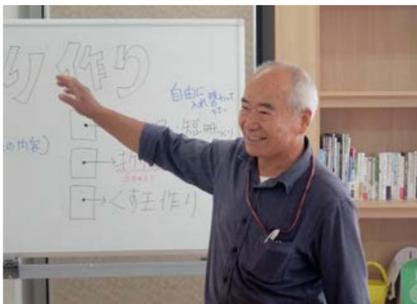


Shizugawa Disaster Prevention Office Building, March 2016  
©Flavia Fulco

**Motivation** The triple disaster of March 11th of 2011 (earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown) left the area of Northeast Japan (Tohoku), dealing with different causes and degrees of destruction. What has become known as The Great East Japan Earthquake, also known as 3.11, affected approximately 400 km of Japan's coastlines; it is therefore not easy to comprehend the consequences of its devastation as a whole. My research in the prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate began in December of 2015. Assuming that preserving the memory of the disaster would contribute to heightened risk awareness in the local population and would therefore be critical for building resilient communities, I investigated how the events surrounding the tsunami have been memorialized during these first years of the recovery process. The practice of conducting tours of the disaster sites enhanced by *kataribe*, storytellers who have inherited an ancient local tradition, flourished soon after the disaster. One of the merits of this practice is that of creating an environment suitable for tourists and visitors, reinvigorating the local economy, giving a new positive perspective to the local population as well – in particular to the younger generations, who can learn about the history and traditions of their hometowns.

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In kataribe, facts, personal stories, and feelings are mixed, as in ancient traditional kataribe. *Goto Kazuma*  
©Fukko Minasan Kai



Given that almost none of the teachers directly experienced the disaster, it is easy to understand why storytelling is so important. *Onodera Hiroshi*  
©Utatsu Fukkoshien no Kai Itto



All these people needed to be oriented in a place where no landmarks were available anymore. *Abe Noriko*  
©Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo



*Kataribe* tour organized by Hotel Kanyo, February 2017, ©Roberto Grillo

The resilience of a local population to a disaster, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, depends on a series of factors that also affect the speed of recovery. A cultural practice such as *kataribe*, which heightens risk awareness while telling the stories of ancestors and how they coped with disasters, can be an important starting point for recovery and can provide effective support. Improving the cohabitation with natural disasters is an opportunity for Tohoku to become a leader in cultivating disaster risk awareness.

#### Objective

This paper explores the practice of *kataribe* and its cultural significance, focusing on its importance during the recovery process following 3.11 disaster.

The fieldwork for my research has been developed in selected areas of Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, where I could observe different types of *kataribe* practices. There are *kataribe* tours, organized by tourist associations, private leisure and tourism companies, or NPOs interested in memorial issues. Typically, participants are accompanied to several locations on a bus while a *kataribe* tells the story of what happened on the day of the disaster and in the aftermath. Other tours were born spontaneously and individually, and some of them, in a later stage, were organized by associations, as happened with the taxi-*kataribe* in towns along the coast of Tohoku.

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This article focuses on organized *kataribe* tours in the town of Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture. It is based on three interviews with representatives of the community involved in the development of *kataribe* tours:

Goto Kazuma, director of the Fukko Minasan Kai association and instructor of *kataribe* guides; Onodera Hiroshi, director of the Utatsu Fukko Shien no Kai Itto association and is also involved in the recruiting of new *kataribe* guides; and Abe Noriko, director of the Hotel Kanyo in Minamisanriku.

**Context** The word *kataribe* comes from the Japanese verb *kataru*, which means to tell and is generally translated as storytelling/storyteller. *Kataribe* is used both for the practice and for the performer, a convention also followed in this paper.

The tradition of telling stories related to contemporary events constitutes a tradition in Japanese culture. In Edo-Tokyo Museum is reported the presence of itinerant storytellers of the disaster also after the Great Kanto Earthquake (1923).

Tohoku *kataribe* has also been inspired by the stories of hibakusha after Hiroshima bombings. The term *kataribe* has later been used in the Kobe area after the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995 and has since consolidated with its current meaning.

*Kataribe* tours, as they have been developed in disaster areas in Tohoku, are peculiar to Japanese culture, but their role in preserving the memory of the disaster could be very meaningful to many people worldwide, wherever a natural or man-made disaster disrupts the every-day reality of a community.

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*The Minamisanriku Fukko Ichi market held on the last Sunday of the month is a place to meet and exchange information*  
 ©Fukko Ichi

#### Development and Characteristics of *Kataribe* tours in Minamisanriku

Minamisanrikucho<sup>1</sup> as we know it today is a relatively new town, having been established in 1996 by the combining the municipalities of Shizugawa and Utatsu. The total population in January of 2011 was 17,676 people;<sup>2</sup> in December of the same year it was 15,488. At the beginning of 2016, the population was 13,782 people.<sup>3</sup> According to the Minamisanriku town website, the tsunami caused the loss of 620 people, while another 212 are still missing. The population decrease also reflects the relocation of people who lost houses and jobs to other areas.

Before the disaster, Minamisanriku's economy was based on fishery, agriculture and rich natural environment. The area had already been affected by depopulation, like many of Japan's rural communities. To attract visitors and reinvigorate the local economy, the local administration planned to train local guides who could provide visitors with first-hand accounts on local history and traditions and of crafts and food.

About 35 people were trained to be local guides before the disaster and Goto Kazuma was one of their instructors. Soon after the disaster, with the help of Asaichi Network, a NPO that supports local producers, Fukko Ichi (Recovery Market), was established as a monthly market where local farmers and fishermen could sell their products. This market, still open on the last Sunday of every month, served an important role as a place to meet and exchange information. At Fukko Ichi, volunteers, journalists, and researchers among others started to gather and ask about what had happened during the tsunami. In an area where large-scale destruction had made it impossible for outsiders to navigate locations and routes, visitors in need of direction had to rely on people who knew the history and layout of the city to get around and understand what had happened.

<sup>1</sup> From now on just Minamisanriku  
<sup>2,3</sup> [www.town.minamisanriku.miyagi.jp](http://www.town.minamisanriku.miyagi.jp)

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*Kataribe guides from the Minamisanriku Tourism Association*  
©Minamisanriku Tourism Association

When Minamisanriku Tourism Association started to receive official requests for guides, people who had previously trained to be local guides were asked if they wanted to participate in this new situation. Some declined. In Shizugawa alone, 70% of the existing buildings had been destroyed by the tsunami; many people had lost their houses and jobs, and many had also lost friends and family members. It is not surprising that some found it was too painful to start this new activity so soon. Yet ten people agreed and believing that this was a way to cope with pain, and also an opportunity to help the rescuers; they became the first *kataribe*. In May of 2011, they rented a room in Shizugawa's middle school and started their activities; they were soon joined by new members and grew to number approximately 30. Initially the plan was to provide information and directions for the volunteer rescue operations, not to organize *kataribe* tours for visitors. Onodera Hiroshi mentioned that he first joined the group to support family members who had lost their houses, and later he started to go to the temporary shelters looking after the needs of the evacuated people. *Kataribe* started from the need to fill an information, and also as an opportunity for survivors to share their stories. This double trigger of need and opportunity can be identified as the starting point of *kataribe*.

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View from Takano Kaikan showing how the ground is raised for rebuilding, February 2017, ©Roberto Grillo

Abe Noriko, director of the Hotel Kanyo in Minamisanriku, confirmed this development. *Kataribe* first flourished to attend to the needs of volunteers and only later for visitors related to the disaster later: *All these people needed to be oriented in a place where no landmarks were available anymore.* The role of Hotel Kanyo in the aftermath of the disaster was crucial. The hotel lies on a cape at the entrance of the town. Thanks to its position, it was spared by the tsunami; the waves reached just the first two floors of the building, where the spa is located. Because it was a huge facility, the hotel was used as a temporary shelter for people who had lost their houses. In autumn, when roads had been cleared of rubble, the hotel started to organize *kataribe* bus tours to satisfy the requests of the increasing number of visitors.

Today, *kataribe* bus tours are approximately one-hour trips. They stop at different locations where the storyteller, narrates the events of 3.11, starting from the moment of the earthquake and counting until the point when the tsunami hit. Between the two events there was a span of only 30 minutes. Depending on the location, the story of what happened in the aftermath is also part of the narration.

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*The roof of Takano Kaikan on March 11th, 2011, presented by a kataribe, February 2017*  
©Roberto Grillo



*Takano Kaikan, where over 300 people saved their lives escaping to the roof, and the Disaster Prevention Office Building are the only remains of pre-disaster Shizugawa, March 2016, ©Flavia Fulco*

Most of the places included in the tours have completely changed, and in several of them previous buildings do not even exist anymore, but all of the sites have one thing in common, the power of their stories. Most of them were chosen either because people died or were saved there, or because they have monumental value. Stories included in the tours usually start with an account of what people were doing at the time of the earthquake and then continue with a description of what happened until the tsunami struck, contextualizing the day from the perspective of individuals, a day that started as every other and in which normality was lost forever. Protecting human life and defending what constitutes the essence of everyday *normality* – *atarimaenomono* in Japanese – are values often stressed during these tours.

Abe Noriko also explained that to define the stories of each place, the prospective *kataribe* met with local journalists who had access to more detailed information. They had several study groups to define the stories, the routes and other details for the tours. The pattern of the narration is similar for every *kataribe* at each location; however, storytellers who directly experienced the tsunami also include personal anecdotes and feelings.

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A *kataribe*, standing in front of Togura Junior High School shows the scene right after the tsunami, February 2017  
©Roberto Grillo

This is the difference between a tourist guide and a *kataribe*. As all the interviewees agreed that the most significant difference between a local guide and a *kataribe* lies in the importance of narrating the experience of the disaster, conveying to the audience one's own emotions. *Kataribe* is not about data, as pointedly expressed by Goto Kazuma: *numbers and statistics can be read in the newspaper, in kataribe, facts, personal stories, and feelings are mixed, as in ancient traditional kataribe.*

The word *kataribe* has been used since ancient times to name the people whose role was to narrate the stories, legends, and folk tales of a given region. Modern *kataribe* however relate not only to the history and tradition of a place but also its more recent past. With this newly acquired nuance, the term has started to be used for the storytelling of the hibakusha, the survivors of the Hiroshima bombing.

Although *kataribe* seems to imply that the storyteller personally witnessed a life threatening experience that they barely survived and that their account needs to be passed on, for a *kataribe* in Tohoku it is not necessary to have directly witnessed the tsunami.

This was and still is a cause of arguments among the *kataribe* and the survivors' community. In the beginning, some of the survivors did not feel comfortable with people talking about the tsunami if they were not directly affected by it. The main argument for this position was that *kataribe* did not know what they were talking about and did not have the right to *steal* and share other people's stories. After a few years though, the criticism seems to have lessened. In the interviews I conducted I specifically asked the informants about their opinion on this point.

They thought that as long as *kataribe* have studied what happened and are willing to correctly convey the experience, it is desirable for them to continue this tradition. As Abe Noriko put it, in a hundred years, or even sooner, there will be no more survivors. Hence, it is important to start spreading the word right now, because the stories of 3.11 will need to be passed on for a long time, not only in the affected areas, but also in other parts of the country and even outside Japan. Goto Kazuma agreed and pointed out that a catastrophe like 3.11 happens in Tohoku every 600 years; there is indeed the need to tell the story of this disaster until then and relying only on survivors is not enough: *Humans are animals with a short memory, and they only see what is right in front of their eyes.*

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Hiroshi Onodera on a field trip with his disaster prevention class

©Utatsu Fukkoshien no Kai Itto

Onodera Hiroshi, who is often called upon to lecture on disaster related topics in local middle schools, observed that among the students, it is not uncommon to find someone who thinks that the tsunami of 2011 was the first one to hit the town. Given that almost none of the teachers directly experienced the disaster, it is easy to understand why storytelling is so important.

Though it is not essential to have direct experience to be a *kataribe*, the way the stories are told is very important. In order to be more effective, *kataribe* make use of pictures, occasionally resorting to technology such as tablets for presentations to larger groups. Sometimes, *kataribe* from Tohoku are invited to talk about their experiences in other regions of Japan. In such situations, *kataribe* employ slide or video presentations, as they cannot directly refer to the story's context as they do when on a live tour. According to Goto Kazuma, however, using only one's voice would make for a stronger impression with listeners, empowering them to project their own imagined movies. This approach to *kataribe* is very much in line with the ancient tradition of storytelling in Japan. For Goto all five senses are important: *Trusting only our eyes, we may understand more easily, but we may also forget much faster.* Not relying on images and videos, *kataribe* must focus on projecting their feelings, and that in itself, is the most important part of the practice.

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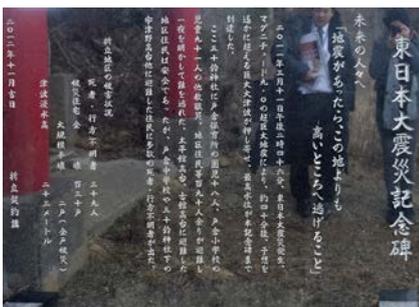
Banquet room of Takano Kaikan. On the small monitor, a party that was held before 3.11, February 2017  
©Roberto Grillo

### The Role of *Kataribe* in the Recovery Process and its Legacy to the World

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The most important message of life of *kataribe* in Tohoku is that each life cannot be considered in isolation, human beings need to be connected to each other across space and time. A keyword in *kataribe* is *manabu*, *to learn*; listening to the stories of the tragic events of 3.11 is an opportunity to understand what people experienced and also to know an important area for Japan – its products and richness that go so far beyond being a territory threatened by tsunamis.

One more important role for *kataribe* during the recovery process is its potential to create continuity from past to future. Onodera Hiroshi and Goto Kazuma both insisted that knowing about their ancestors' lives makes present and future generations more able to cope with a territory that is under constant threat of earthquakes and tsunamis. The populating of Tohoku began between 6,000 and 3,000 years ago; since then there has been no trace of it having been uninhabited, as Goto explained. This means that the local population has always found a way to cope with natural disasters. The combination of mountains and sea has enriched the territory with natural resources. In the last 120 years alone, the area of Minamisanriku has been hit by four tsunamis: in 1896, 1933, 1960, and 2011. Soon after the first one, known as the Meiji Tsunami, local authorities discussed the necessity of building railways in Tohoku to improve local development and strengthen protection of the territory against foreign attacks from the North. As Onodera Hiroshi explained, planning continued until the tsunami of 1960 (related to the earthquake in Chile) and led to the construction of the Kesenuma line, completed in 1977. Unfortunately, in 2011, a long section of the railway was washed away by the tsunami, and the Japan Railways Company decided to substitute the line with a bus system. Though local authorities initially agreed with this decision, as the railway was not very popular before the disaster, local population now feels cut off from many opportunities. Delving deep into local history is also a source to understand the social development of the region. Onodera explained how the study of family names in the local history revealed that Tohoku has always been a place of cultural exchange. The surname Chiba for example is proof that some ancestors came from Chiba Prefecture.



One of the stone monuments set-up on the break-line of tsunami inundations carrying a message for future generations: When earthquake strikes, evacuate to higher grounds than here, February 2017, ©Flavia Fluco

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*Moai Statue at Minamisanriku Portal Center, A gift of Chile government to Minamisanriku in 2012. March 2016, ©Flavia Fulco*

People visiting Tohoku and attending *kataribe* tours see this also as an opportunity to help. Not everybody can be an active volunteer and join activities that require physical strength such as the removal of rubble. Being there and bearing witness to the experiences of Tohoku's people was and still is one way to take part in the recovery process. Visiting the disaster areas also means staying at local hotels and eating local products in local restaurants. This supports the local economy and reassures the population both psychologically and physically. *Kataribe* has shown to be a highly effective source of stress relief, particularly for those who face the challenging experience of living in temporary housing.

Post-disaster *kataribe* have revitalized cultural exchange, raising awareness of local history and traditions and attracting both tourists and settlers. In fact, while visiting Tohoku and understanding more about life in rural areas, many people reflect on their own lives. Some occasional visitors might also decide to relocate there. The phenomenon known as I-turn, involving resettlement of people in rural and remote areas, and is spreading all over Japan.

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*Utatsu Summer Festival. A post box from Utatsu was recovered in Okinawa and sent back here, August 2016, ©Flavia Fulco*

Prefectures like Shimane are encouraging the arrival of new residents, promoting local tradition and culture, and in some cases, offering economic advantages to facilitate resettlement. The regions affected by the disaster are following a little behind the standards of other Japanese reality in promoting the settlement of new residents. However, the situation seems to be improving. Initially, in post-disaster Tohoku, new settlers were mostly volunteers who decided to stay and take part in the recovery. As the community had lost a great number of its younger population over the past five years, their presence is valued and the tsunami can be regarded a catalyst for reinvigorating local communities.

Today's *kataribe* aim at instilling a more global perspective in people by raising awareness of disaster risk prevention, and also at challenging common thinking about living in harmony with nature and the environment. The accident of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, even though it did not directly affect this area, was a warning that human beings need to consider all possible consequences when making decisions for the future. Sharing stories in a globalized world is not only a call for people affected by natural disasters, but also for those affected by wars, terrorism, and other traumatic experiences.

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*The Kataribe Symposium in Minamisanriku, March 2016*  
©Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo

**Conclusion** At the annual national Kataribe Symposium in Minamisanriku in March of 2016, participants produced a closing declaration that emphasized the principle of *inochi wo mamoru* (protecting life). This expression refers not only to human life per se, but also includes the nuance of protecting the everyday lifestyle (*atarimaenomono*, what is normal), stressing the need to communicate the memory of the disaster to future generations in Tohoku and beyond.

Through the narration of hardship brought by the disaster, *kataribe* aim to improve disaster risk prevention and lessen its consequences. To reach this goal, *kataribe* uses places, both their presence and their absence, as the starting and the ending points of a cultural process that will reshape the outer and the inner face of local communities.

Within the dynamic relationships between individual and collective memory, the practice of storytelling is critical for building a shared identity -even more so when catastrophic events force a community to re-establish its common history and values. Such storytelling also contributes to the building of a more resilient global society.

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*Shizugawa Disaster Prevention Office Building after restoration, February 2017  
©Roberto Grillo*

**Extensions** The participation of people who did not directly experience the tsunami is producing some changes to the kataribe practice. While initially it was only related to 3.11 experiences, it is increasingly enriching stories by including elements taken from local history and tradition, and also making the content more appealing to a wider audience. Although it is still too early to get a clear picture of the Tohoku coast after its full recovery, we can anticipate that, as it happened in Hiroshima, the city that inspired kataribe to become a memorial practice, and later in Kobe, and on the Awaji island after the 1995's earthquake, it is very likely that also in kataribe in Tohoku, will grow from an itinerant practice to a feature of memorial spaces within the rebuilt towns, keeping alive the memory of the disaster and contributing to the revitalization of the affected communities.

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Flavia Fulco is an Italian researcher based in Tokyo since 2011. She is currently a Visiting JSPS Post-Doctoral Fellow at Sophia University where she is conducting research within the project *Voices from Tohoku* at the Institute of Comparative Culture. The focus of her research is on cultural practices related to the memorialization of 3.11 disaster. She is interested in interdisciplinary and comparative approach between Social Sciences and Humanities.

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[www.tohokukaranokoe.org](http://www.tohokukaranokoe.org) (Japanese)

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### Places **Isuzu Shrine**

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This small shrine, dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami, provided shelter for 190 people, including 92 students from the Togura Elementary School. At more than 20m above sea level it narrowly escaped the tsunami, which reached almost 20m in this area. Next to its main torii (gate) is a stone memorial, showing the peaks of historic inundations. 986-0781 Miyagi ken, Motoyoshi gun, Minamisanriku cho, Tokura, Hoshiya 102-2

### **Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo**

Standing on rocky protrusion, Hotel Kanyo has survived the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Immediately after the event, the hotel opened its facilities to shelter evacuees and volunteers with limited resources for months.

Now back in normal operation, Hotel Kanyo organizes kataribe bus-tours, showing guests around tsunami affected locations as a contribution to the region and future generation.

986-0766 Miyagi ken, Motoyoshi gun, Minamisanriku cho, Kurosaki 99-17  
[web-site](#)

### **Minamisanriku Portal Center**

Home of the Minamisanriku Tourism Association this facility also functions as a communal space, hosting workshops, meetings, and various events for both locals and visitors.

986-0768 Miyagi ken, Motoyoshi gun, Minamisanriku cho, Shizugawa, Gozenshita 51  
[web-site](#)

### **Minamisanriku Sun Sun Shopping Village**

Established in 2012 to support recovery of the community, it officially opened with new premises March 3 in 2017. The name Sun Sun is a play on words referring to its founding date as the number 3 is pronounced as san in Japanese.

986-0752 Miyagi ken, Motoyoshi gun, Minamisanriku cho, Shizugawa, Itsukamachi 51  
[web-site](#) (Japanese)

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**Places**    **Minamisanriku Tourism Association**

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Promoting the region, connecting visitors and locals, and helping to restore communities through collaborations with locals, the Minamisanriku Tourism Association also offers special tours and programs related to The Great East Japan Earthquake.

986-0768 Miyagi ken, Motoyoshi gun, Minamisanriku cho, Shizugawa, Goenshita 51-1

[web-site](#)

**Shizugawa Disaster Prevention Office Building**

Built in 1995 at 1.7m above sea level and 600m away from the coast, it's rooftop evacuation area is just 12m above ground; the 3.11 tsunami reached 15.5m. Now the frame of the building is all that remains.

986-0762 Miyagi ken, Motoyoshi gun, Minamisanriku cho, Shizugawa, Shioiri 77

**Takano Kaikan**

200m inland, this four-story wedding hall could receive over 300 guests at a time. Here the lives of 330 were saved, most of whom were seniors. Together with the Disaster Prevention Office Building, Takano Kaikan is all that remains of pre-disaster Shizugawa.

986-0763 Miyagi ken, Motoyoshi gun, Minamisanriku cho, Shizugawa

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

**Togura Elementary School**

Although only 300m away from the coast, the school's principal saved 92 children by deciding against evacuation plans set-out in the disaster manual; students and teachers ran to higher ground, 400m away from the school and then even further, escaping the tsunami's destruction. The 3-storied school building was so badly damaged that it had to be torn down.

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

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### Places **Togura Junior High School**

The sports ground of this municipal school, established 1947 in Shizukawa, now part of Minamisanriku, has been a designated evacuation site as it was 20m above sea level. On 3.11, the tsunami reached higher, taking lives of evacuees and those who tried to save them. The school closed in 2014 and the restored building operates now as a community center and memorial to the disaster.

986-0781 Miyagi ken, Motoyoshi gun, Minamisanriku cho, Tokura, Okita 69

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### People



#### **Abe, Noriko**

Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo

Abe Noriko is Director at Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo, which also organizes Kataribe bus tours.

Having learned the value of engagement at the community-level in the recovery from the disaster, she devotes herself to the revitalization of Tohoku and better planning for future generations.

[web-site](#)



#### **Goto, Kazuma**

Fukko Minasan Kai

Born in 1947 in Togura, Minamisanriku, Kazuma Goto worked as a bank clerk for 7 years. He then became a secretary to his father who served as a Prefecture board member for 20 years. He is in charge of various committees in town, including being a director for Fukko Minasan Kai. He is also a Kataribe Instructor.

Losing home of his own, his experience of 3.11 made him a Kataribe. With his vast knowledge of Minamisanriku, ranging from pre-history to nature, he is one of the most engaged kataribe, taking initiative to spread the activity both locally and internationally.

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

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#### **Ito, Shun**

Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo

Ito Shun began to work at Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo in 2008. Since 2011, he has been serving as a Kataribe Bus guide for the Hotel Kanyo. His mission is to tell stories that encourage improved disaster prevention, and make sure that the events Minamisanriku experienced are not forgotten. He is also executive director of the Kataribe Symposium in Tohoku. Ito Shun conducts Kataribe Bus organized by Tour at Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo. The tours offer an opportunity to learn what had happened at various places on 3.11 and teach how one can be prepared for such events. The tour is available every day from minimum one participant to many.

[web-site](#)



#### **Onodera, Hiroshi**

Utatsu Fukkoshien No Kai Itto

Hiroshi Onodera is the head of Utatsu Fukkoshien No Kai Itto, an association for recovery support in the area.

Hiroshi Onodera, being himself as a Kataribe, is involved in the formation of new kataribe guides.

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

#### Organizations

##### **Fukko Minasan Kai**

An association established by locals to revitalize communities and reconnect people

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

##### **Utatsu Fukkoshien No Kai Itto**

This initiative engages in teaching disaster prevention to kids and visitors

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

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**Projects**    **Disaster Preparedness Camps Sonae**

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A unique two day program based on experiences of 3.11. Booking for groups is possible

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

**Fukko Ichi**

This Minamisanriku market held on the last sunday of the month is a place to meet and exchange information

[web-site](#)

**Kataribe Bus**

A bus tour to disaster affected locations guided by Kataribe, organized by Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo

[PDF](#)

**Kataribe Walking Tour**

A walk-around Kataribe tour organized by Minamisanriku Tourism Association

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

**Publications**    **About the status and plans of recoveries from damages caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake**

Minamisanriku cho Government Office, 2017

[web-site](#)

**The number of population, the households (for 2010)**

Minamisanriku cho Government Office, 2012

[web-site](#)

**The number of population, the households (for 2011)**

Minamisanriku cho Government Office, 2012

[web-site](#)

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- Web-Sites **Minamisanriku Town Official Website** 22|28  
The website provides facts and status quo on the disaster  
[web-site](#)
- Minamisanriku Virtual Museum**  
Virtual Museum of Minamisanriku cho connect us to the long history and culture established by local predecessors  
[web-site](#) (Japanese)
- Voices from Tohoku / Tohoku kara no Koe**  
*Voices from Tohoku*, an archive of oral narratives from 3.11 survivors collected by Sophia University's students. The author is collaborating with the project.  
[web-site](#) (Japanese)
- Wagakoto**  
English translations on 3.11 from Kahoku Shimpo, specially set up web-pages to share the lessons learnt from the Great East Japan Earthquake  
[web-site](#)

# Kataribe: A Keyword to Recovery

## Practice of Storytelling in Post-Disaster Japan

### Glossary 3.11

23 | 28

- ▶ Great East Japan Earthquake
- ▶ Higashi Nihon Daishinsai

#### **Fukushima**

It is one of the six prefectures of Tohoku and one of the most affected by 3.11 disaster. In Fukushima 3,626 people died, while 225 are still missing (March 2016, MIC). A 15-meter high tsunami triggered the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Dai Ichi Nuclear Plant, which caused the evacuation of more than 160,000 people.

#### **web-site**

- ▶ Fukushima Dai Ichi Nuclear Accident
- ▶ Great East Japan Earthquake
- ▶ Higashi Nihon Daishinsai

#### **Fukushima Dai Ichi Nuclear Accident**

On March 11, 2011 the tsunami following the magnitude-9 earthquake disabled the power supply and cooling of three out of six Fukushima Daiichi reactors, resulted in a nuclear accident. All three cores largely melted in the first three days. The accident was rated 7 (major accident) on the INES scale.

- ▶ Fukushima
- ▶ Higashi Nihon Daishinsai

#### **Great East Japan Earthquake**

3.11 or Higashi Nihon Daishinsai in Japanese. It is commonly known as a triple disaster, encompassing a magnitude-9 earthquake (epicenter at approximately 130 km offshore the Oshika peninsula in Miyagi Prefecture [www.bousai.go.jp/kohou/kouhoubousai/h23/63/special\\_01.html](http://www.bousai.go.jp/kohou/kouhoubousai/h23/63/special_01.html)); the consequent major tsunami that affected approximately 400 km of coastline from Fukushima to Iwate; and Fukushima Dai Ichi nuclear accident. The number of casualties reached 19,000 people, while more than 2,500 people are missing (March 2016, MIC).

The total number of evacuated people reached a peak of 250,000 in the months that followed the disaster.

- ▶ Hibakusha
- ▶ Higashi Nihon Daishinsai
- ▶ Tsunami

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### Glossary **Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake**

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Also known as Kobe Earthquake.

On January 17, 1995 a 7-magnitude earthquake hit the Awaji Island, 20 km from Kobe. The earthquake caused the death of more than 6,000 people in all the affected areas, approx 7% due to the extensive fires that developed as a consequence. Following the disaster, the Japanese government changed disaster management policies significantly, improving them to develop a faster and more effective response.

► Kobe Earthquake

### **Great Kanto Earthquake**

On September 1, 1923 a magnitude-7.9 earthquake hit the area of Tokyo and Yokohama, causing more than 100,000 deaths in all the affected areas, excluding the missing persons. In 1960, Japanese government declared September 1, as an annual *Disaster Prevention Day*.

### **Hibakusha**

The Japanese word means *people affected by an explosion*. It has been used for the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and after 3.11 it is sometimes used to talk about people that suffered consequences of the Fukushima Dai Ichi nuclear accident.

► Fukushima Dai Ichi Nuclear Accident

### **Higashi Nihon Daishinsai**

► Great East Japan Earthquake

### **Iwate**

It is one of the six prefectures of Tohoku, strongly affected by 3.11 disaster that caused the death of 5,132 people died, while 1,124 are still missing (March 2016, MIC).

► Great East Japan Earthquake

► Tohoku

# Kataribe: A Keyword to Recovery

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### Glossary

#### **Kataribe**

This term derives from the Japanese verb *kataru*, that means, *to tell*. It is a practice of Japanese storytelling, presented as folktales or as traditional tales about a place or a group of people. It can be performed following different techniques from acting to poetry and it can also include the use of dialects and music. In today Tohok

Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

u, *kataribe* is mostly related to sharing stories of 3.11 disaster's experiences.

▶ Hibakusha

▶ Higashi Nihon Daishinsai

#### **Kobe Earthquake**

▶ Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

#### **Miyagi**

Is one of the six prefectures of Tohoku and one of the most affected by 3.11 disaster that caused in this area the highest number of victims (10,549 people), and missing people (1,239). (The number as of March 2016, MIC)

▶ Great East Japan Earthquake

▶ Higashi Nihon Daishinsai

▶ Tohoku

#### **Resilience**

This word is borrowed from materials science, where it defines the ability of a material to restore its original shape, position or size after a deformation, compression or another kind of stress. In Social Sciences, the term resilience indicates the capability of a community to recover from a natural disaster or other kind of catastrophe, considering the speed and the dynamics of the recovery process, among other factors.

#### **Sanriku**

The name of the coast that runs from southern Aomori and Iwate to the northern Miyagi Prefecture

▶ Iwate

▶ Miyagi

# Kataribe: A Keyword to Recovery

## Practice of Storytelling in Post-Disaster Japan

### Glossary **Storytelling**

The practice of storytelling is present in different cultures worldwide. It is the social activity of sharing stories. The techniques employed can include improvisation, acting and digital technologies. The aims can be diverse and they include education, cultural preservation, empowerment of minorities and individual and group recovery.

►Kataribe

### **Tendenko**

Also known as tsunami tendenko. It is a word borrowed from Tohoku dialect, which refers to the concept *everyone for themselves*. It has become widely known after the Great East Japan Earthquake as a call for a quick tsunami evacuation to a higher ground without waiting for others, not even parents or children. The principle is grounded in the idea that everyone should care about saving their own lives, as this is the most effective way to save as many lives as possible.

►Tohoku

### **Tohoku**

Northeast Japan. It includes six prefectures: Akita, Aomori, Fukushima, Iwate, Miyagi and Yamagata. The Tohoku region is important for Japanese economy, as main resources includes fishery and agriculture. The six prefectures also include famous tourist attractions, such as the Buddhist temples of Hiraizumi (Iwate), Matsushima bay, considered one of the three most beautiful Japanese view (Miyagi), and the beautiful forests of the Shirakami-Sanchi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, between the prefectures of Akita and Aomori.

►Fukushima

►Iwate

►Miyagi

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## Practice of Storytelling in Post-Disaster Japan

### Glossary **Tsunami**

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This is the Japanese word commonly used worldwide to define tidal waves or seismic waves, usually caused by undersea earthquakes, AND volcano eruptions AMONG OTHER PHENOMENA. Prior to 3.11, the area of Sanriku had been already hit by several tsunamis in the past. Among them Meiji Tsunami of 1896, Showa Tsunami of 1933 and Chile Tsunami of 1960. This last one is particularly relevant for two reasons: triggered by an earthquake in Chile, the waves reached the coast without warning, causing the loss of 41 people in Minamisanriku alone; some of the survivors still live in the area and thanks to those memories they knew what to do and were it was most likely safe to evacuate.

- ▶ Great East Japan Earthquake
- ▶ Higashi Nihon Daishinsai

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