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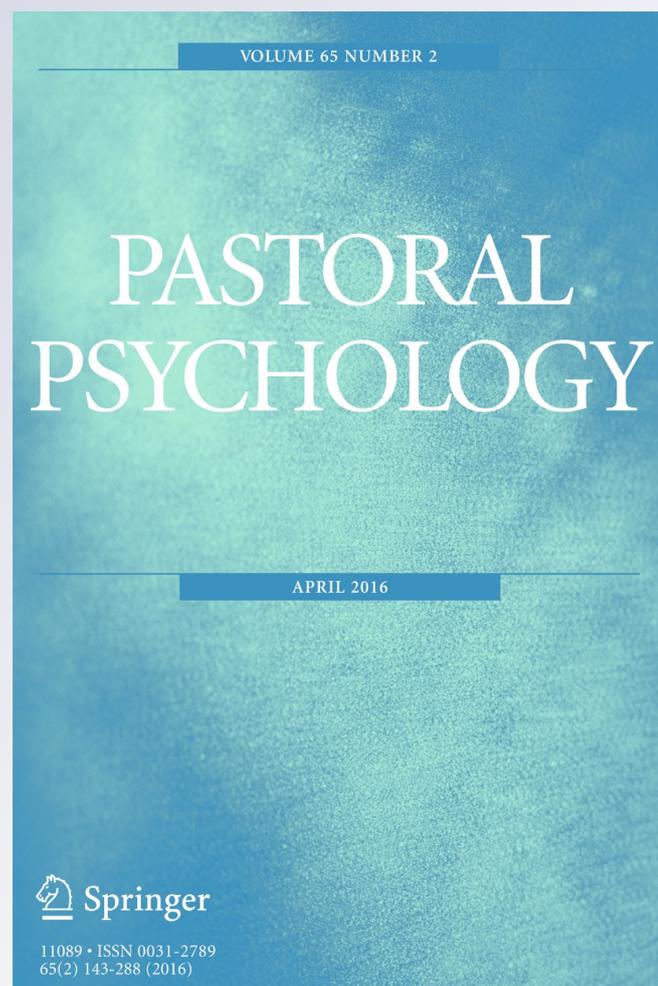
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Psychological Practices and Religiosity (*Shukyosei*) of People in Communities Affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami

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Abstract This article reflects on certain cultural phenomena in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 and discusses the significant role of Japanese religiosity (*shukyosei*) in mental health care practices. The authors introduce these cultural phenomena by presenting (1) the results of a survey related to the ritual of giving graduation certificates to children lost in the earthquake and (2) a case illustration reported by a Buddhist priest and clinical psychologist who performed many funeral services at a temporary morgue for the victims and their families. The issues of Japanese cultural contexts and the religiosity (*shukyosei*) of Japanese people will be also discussed. The authors propose that mental health care workers who engage in relief activities ought to understand the culturally and contextually sensitive religiosity of the people and community they are serving and explore ways to incorporate this religiosity in their clinical practices.

Keywords Great East Japan earthquake · Japanese religiosity (*shukyosei*) · Clinical psychology · Mental health care after a disaster

Introduction

On March 11, 2011, eastern Japan was struck by a mega-earthquake of magnitude 9.0, known as the Great East Japan Earthquake. The gigantic tsunami caused by the earthquake and numerous aftershocks left 19,225 people dead, 6,219 injured, and 2,614 missing across 21

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prefectures (Japan Fire and Disaster Management Agency 2015). This was the biggest earthquake ever recorded in or near Japan.

One of the notable features of the relief activities after the disaster was the cooperation of people from different religious communities, such as Christians and Buddhists, in offering spiritual care to the survivors. As a result of this collaborative effort to help those suffering because of the earthquake, people both inside and outside of religious communities acknowledged the significant role of religion or religiosity in the relief activities. Since the disaster, therefore, the importance of religion and religiosity in local communities and the public sphere has been widely discussed in Japan.

In what ways did mental health professionals participate in relief activities after the earthquake? In Japan, people had recognized the critical need for psychological support for the survivors of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995. When the Great East Japan Earthquake happened, therefore, many mental health care workers, including clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and nurses, were actively engaged in offering psychological support to the survivors.

Clinical psychologists in Japan have rarely had the opportunity to discuss issues concerning their faith or religious beliefs in public. To meet this need, the authors of this article planned a symposium entitled “Clinical Practice and Faith” at the 28th Conference of the Association of Japanese Clinical Psychology held in 2009, at which the authors and other participants discussed how our religious and spiritual values concerning the world and human nature emerge in our clinical practice. The symposium was favorably received by those who attended, and it has been held every year since then. We have discussed the issues concerning the faith or religious beliefs of both therapists and clients, as well as the religiosity (*shukyosei*)¹ of Japanese people that therapists encounter in their clinical practices.

Since three of the four authors of this article reside in the disaster-stricken area and are themselves survivors of the earthquake, topics related to the Great East Japan Earthquake have often been discussed at the symposium since 2011. This great calamity shook the foundations of Japanese people's views on life and death, so the relationship between religiosity (*shukyosei*) and mental health care practices has also received attention. After the devastating crisis caused by the earthquake, the authors consider it very important for Japanese psychologists to think about the necessity and inevitability of dealing with religiosity (*shukyosei*) in their clinical practices.

DeMarinis et al. (2011) argue for the centrality of culture for mental health care programs in Norway, stating that a meaning-making perspective is essential in understanding the cultural construction of health and illness. They assert that mental health workers should build a safe therapeutic space to comprehend clients' expressions of existential meaning in clinical contexts. Studies also suggest that mental health care at disaster sites should include spirituality as a necessary element of relief efforts, as the trauma impacts most people not only physically, socially, and psychologically but also spiritually (e.g., Schafer 2010). Dueck and Byron (2012) argue that because disasters after mega-earthquakes destroy the resources of communities, a deeply contextual and communal approach is the best way to reconstruct the survivors' sense of “home.” The reconstruction of communities is crucial for healing people. From his experiences as a mental health worker at the time of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake in China, Ren (2012) argues that mental health workers need to enter into the local community in their work and understand the culturally bound, communal spirituality from the perspectives of the

¹ The Japanese word *shukyosei* (religiosity) will be explained later in this article.

community members. Finally, Silove (2013) offers the ADAPT (Adaptation and Development after Persecution and Trauma) model, a conceptual framework for understanding policies and practices in post-mass conflict settings, and argues that conflict and displacement disrupt the survivors' sense of continuity of life and force them to reconsider and review their worldviews and belief systems. He considers it essential to repair five core psychosocial pillars in order to restore communal mental health and psychosocial recovery: (1) safety/security, (2) bonds/networks, (3) justice, (4) roles and identities, and (5) existential meaning. In a cross-cultural study of grief and bereavement, Klass and Chow (2011) summarize the cultural influences on grief as follows: (1) bereavement is experienced within a cultural framework, especially in language; (2) culture polices grief, especially in the expression of emotion and the management of continuing bonds; and (3) culture affects how grief is handled (p. 349).

In this article, the authors introduce certain cultural phenomena after the mega-earthquake and tsunami by presenting (1) the results of a survey conducted in Miyagi Prefecture on the ritual of giving graduation certificates to children lost in the earthquake (Ohmura) and (2) a case illustration reported by a Buddhist priest and clinical psychologist who performed many funeral services at a temporary public morgue in Ishinomaki-city, Miyagi Prefecture, for the victims and their families (Higuchi). Ohmura and Higuchi live in the disaster area and are survivors of the earthquake. The issues of Japanese cultural contexts and Japanese religiosity (*shukyosei*) that the authors observed in their clinical practices will also be discussed.

In order to convey a sense of the religious and spiritual beliefs and behavior among Japanese people, the authors use the term “religiosity,” which is a translation of the Japanese word *shukyosei*. According to a survey on religious consciousness among the Japanese (Yomiuri Shimbun 2008), 71.9 % of the respondents answered that they did not have religious belief, which supports the generally held idea that the Japanese have “no religion.” Traditionally, however, most Japanese are familiar with Buddhism and Shinto, and it is common that people practice rituals from both traditions. Regardless of the self-identification of many Japanese as not having religion, visits to graves on the occasions of *bon* and *higan*, according to the Buddhist calendar, are still widely practiced (78.3 % of Japanese participate in these ritual activities today, according to the *Yomiuri Shimbun*). At the beginning of the New Year, 73.1 % of Japanese pay the first visit of the year to Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples (*hatsumode*), thus revealing their desire to maintain their religious tradition.

The *Yomiuri Shimbun* (2008) survey further reports the following beliefs about what happens after death: the dead are reborn (29.8 %), the dead “go to the other world” (23.8 %), or the dead “remain in their graves” (9.9 %). This shows that most Japanese believe in the immortality of the soul—the continuation of the soul after death in one form or another. These results coincide with other survey results on the Japanese sense of religion, i.e., although the Japanese are not very interested in the beliefs or doctrines of a specific religion and their sense of belonging to a particular religious group is not strong, they do have a strong affinity with the traditional customs and rituals of folk religion that are related to death.

In this article, we use the term ‘religiosity’ (*shukyosei*) to refer to “the behavior or meaning presented toward events which one cannot rationally understand and that are beyond his or her control; this term does not necessarily indicate formal ‘religion’ or ‘beliefs’” (Ohmura 2010, pp. 20–25). The Japanese highly value a continuing emotional bond with the dead and have deep sympathy with the idea of maintaining personal and emotional bonds with the dead (Klass 1996). For bereaved family members and their community, the deceased person’s personality does not cease to exist after his or her death. Japanese people think that the soul of the newly dead is hovering near the living. They view the soul of the deceased person as still

dwelling in their grave or even in their ashes or belongings they left behind. Traditionally, the Japanese participate in an elaborate set of religious events and rituals such as the annual *bon* festival to express such thoughts. In fact, Yanagawa and Abe state that the core of Japanese religiosity lies in the symbolic reinforcement of family, local, and national group integration through ceremonies and festivals (Yanagawa and Abe, 1983, p. 302).

Relief activities by religious communities after the earthquake in Japan

In Japanese life, Buddhism and Shinto are best understood not as two separate religions but as complementary, complex cultural systems. Only 1 % of Japanese are Christian, either Catholic or Protestant. Japan's indigenous religion Shinto, and Buddhism which came to Japan in the sixth century, have complemented each other to a certain degree in Japanese history. After the medieval period of Japan, Buddha and the Shinto gods were often considered essentially the same, and Buddhist temples mostly governed the Shinto shrines. But since the Meiji Restoration (1868), these two forms of religiousness have been separated as a result of the Edict on the Separation of Shinto and Buddhism. In Japan, people usually adopt different religious traditions during different periods of their life, and people go to Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples depending on the situation—in general, Shinto is for the living, such as at the time of planting and harvesting of the rice and at the New Year, and Buddhism is for the dead, such as at the time of funerals and services for the dead (Van Bragt, 2010, p. 10). It is very common for the same family to visit a Buddhist temple to bury a deceased family member and a Shinto shrine to celebrate the birth of a child.

In contemporary Japanese society, however, as in many societies today, the Japanese have been losing their sense of community and the communal religious practices that they used to have. In Japanese society before World War II, it was common that households had Buddhist family altars. Most people held the belief that the souls of the deceased, from those who had died recently to those of ancestors several generations back, lived in the family altar. Family members offered them food and drink every morning, and thus people lived close to the dead. Lately, however, the number of families who maintain a family altar has decreased, and the old practice of ancestor veneration has been disappearing. This is a consequence of the drastic social changes after World War II that generated modern nuclear families. With this change, the room for “the dead” disappeared from people's homes. In this social milieu, the Great East Japan Earthquake hit Japan (Yamagata 2013, p. viii).

Sakurai and Hamada (2013) state that “most Japanese are comfortable with their conventional religious cultures but exercise caution in relation to the propagation or mission work of an existing or new religion” (pp. 5–6, trans. Saito). They further indicate that “people show strong resistance against the involvement of religion in the public sphere, and therefore religious organizations have refrained from dealing with matters of public concern” (p. 4). In fact, after World War II, religious activities were shunned in the public sphere to ensure freedom of religion. This was as if to say that no religion existed publicly.

However, this social atmosphere changed in 1995, the year of the Hanshin Awaji Earthquake. This year is often designated as “the first year of voluntarism” in Japan. What kinds of support activities were Japanese religious groups engaged in? What types of religious and spiritual support did they provide to the survivors of the earthquake?

Generally speaking, in Japan relief activities by a specific religious group are difficult to differentiate from their mission work and therefore survivors may be on guard against

proselytizing. In particular, whenever a specific religious group gets involved in activities in the spiritual domain, such as “healing or care of the mind” of survivors, it raises sensitive issues. People are concerned that the so-called “care of the mind” by a religious person is intended ultimately to lead to “spiritual salvation” by a particular religion. If that is the case, then acts of service by religious groups that contain elements of “mission” will usually be unacceptable to survivors of a disaster (Okao et al. 2013, p. 238, trans. Saito). Therefore, the critical question is whether the work by religious groups is truly an unselfish act of service or whether it involves the pressing of religious beliefs upon survivors who are vulnerable after a disaster.

After the 1995 Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, however, it was reported that while religious groups were still attempting to reach the survivors, the survivors had already conducted religious rituals themselves without the help of outside groups. Through such rituals, the survivors attempted to heal themselves. For example, the survivors held traditional *matsuri* or Shinto festivals and participated in *junrei* or pilgrimages to visit earthquake monuments (this is known as “earthquake monument walks”) (Miki 2001). Okao, Watanabe, and Miki observed that festival participants shared a feeling of solidarity by participating in such activities. The survivors healed their grief and pain through the pilgrimage, and thus they supported each other as a community. The authors conclude that they witnessed latent religiousness and religious needs among the survivors during these events (Okao et al. 2013, pp. 228–249).

As stated earlier, it is also important to note that these survivors had no help from any religious groups in conducting these religious events. In the areas struck by the Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, survey results indicate that religious groups were not very active and did not bring much help to the communities in the area (Miki 2001). Of course, there would have been many religious groups that were involved in relief activities. However, at that time, religious workers behaved the same way as non-religious volunteer workers, fearing people might misunderstand their activities as “mission work.” As a result, their relief activities did not gain social recognition as “religious” work.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, however, the authors saw different attitudes among religious leaders. The leaders were more explicit about their religiousness. One noteworthy event was the cooperation among local religious leaders of Buddhist, Christian, and other religious groups in relief activities and providing religious and spiritual care. As they worked together, they recognized that “religion” or “religiousness” was a significant resource for survivors who were suffering from loss and grief.

Compared to the large urban city of Kobe where the Hanshin Awaji Earthquake hit, the Tohoku region, which is the area most affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, is one of the areas in Japan where traditional Buddhist temples still maintain strong connections with their local communities. Many Buddhist priests devoted all their energy to helping their congregations after the earthquake. Temples, churches, and other religious institutions in the affected areas offered their buildings as shelters or base camps for their relief activities. Many religious groups participated in relief activities with great sincerity without forcing any religious language on the survivors. When members of religious communities provided spiritual care for survivors by sitting close to the suffering people and listening to them honestly, people realized that “religion” would be able to help the survivors.

Out of these experiences, religious leaders and scholars in the affected local communities realized there was an urgent need to train “chaplains” in the context of Japanese culture. They started clinical trainings for *rinsho shukyo-shi*, or “interfaith chaplains.” A *rinsho shukyo-shi* is a minister who does not pursue mission work but provides spiritual and religious care in the

public sphere in Japan (Ohmura 2014; Taniyama 2015). Thus, through relief activities after the Great East Japan Earthquake, religious leaders in the disaster areas are now in search of ways for interfaith collaboration, for support activities appropriate for local religious communities, and for proper religious and spiritual care in Japan (*Chugainippoh*, Sep. 8, 2011).

Clinical psychology and “religion” in Japan

So far we have discussed the relief activities conducted by religious communities after mega-earthquakes in Japan. Now we will address how clinical psychologists, specialists in psychological support in Japan, incorporate religion and religiousness in their relief activities.

The Japanese Society of Certified Clinical Psychologists states in Article 1 of their “Ethical Principles” regarding the basic ethics and responsibilities of clinical psychologists:

“Members shall respect fundamental human rights. They should neither discriminate nor harass anyone because of race, religion, sex, thought, or creed. They should not force their values on anyone.” According to the manual entitled “Ethics Guidelines” that is attached to the “Ethical Principles,”

Article 1: Clinical psychology is a science that claims to pursue scientific truth. Therefore, it should not be swayed or biased by any specific value or by any religious or political ideologies. In actuality, psychologists as well as their clients hold a certain sense of value that supports their daily lives. We cannot practice as clinical workers without recognizing some sense of value....Clinical psychologists have to be aware of their value judgments. They also should examine the value system of their workplace and the society in which they live and be aware of any value conflict between their professional ethics and the values of their workplace and society. (Ethics Committee of the Japanese Society of Certified Clinical Psychologists 2013, p. 14, trans. Saito)

The committee argues that clinical psychologists should be aware of and examine their own values as the foundation of their clinical practice. However, in Japan there have been hardly any opportunities for psychologists to discuss their personal values or their faith. As scholars of clinical psychology who are supposed to maintain scientific neutrality, they do not refer to their own values or their own religion or faith in their research. Most psychologists have had no systematic education and training in how to assess and deal with clients’ religiosity or spirituality in their practice. It is a common attitude among clinical psychologists in Japan that they are not directly affected by any religious values and should not talk about such sensitive subjects in their practice or research.

This is the reason for the resistance among Japanese clinical psychologists to discussing the religious and spiritual needs of the survivors of a disaster. The *Psychological First Aid Field Operations Guide* published by National Child Traumatic Stress Network and National Center for PTSD in 2006 was translated into Japanese and read carefully by professional medical and psychological workers who were engaged in relief activities at the disaster area. In the textbook, there is a section titled “Attend to Grief and Spiritual Issues” (Hyogo-ken Kokoro no Kea Sentah, pp. 51–53) that explains how to attend to the spiritual needs of survivors. However, Japanese mental health

professionals are generally reluctant to deal with religious and spiritual issues in their clinical practice because of the reasons mentioned above.

Psychological support and religiosity (*shukyosei*) of the survivors of the Great East Japan earthquake

Several suggestions should be taken into consideration when mental health professionals assess the complex constructs of religious and spiritual dimensions in their practices. These points are important in providing support to disaster survivors.

- (1) Examine the worker's own cultural modes of meaning-making, religious/spiritual beliefs, worldview, and practice and utilize them effectively in clinical practice.
- (2) Understand the client's cultural modes of meaning-making, religious/spiritual beliefs, worldview, and their expression and utilize religious and spiritual interventions.
- (3) Study the context (culture, community, etc.) in which the client lives and examine the contextual meaning of the beliefs, feelings, and behaviors of the client.

Thus, in order to help the survivors of the Great East Japan Earthquake, it is important to understand the religious context of the area devastated by the earthquake and tsunami. Large-scale community disasters destroy the resources of communities. Therefore, healing ought to take place not only on the individual level but also at the community level though the reconstruction of the traumatized communities. In this endeavor, local religious communities and leaders can be powerful allies (see Dueck and Byron 2012).

In the areas severely affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, however, survivors had little chance to participate in religious activities publicly in their communities because of the cultural and societal factors mentioned above. People had few opportunities to express and heal the spiritual dimensions of their grief and pain in public. As a result, they experienced feelings of unbearable frustration and strong emotional longing to comfort and pacify the spirits of the dead.

The authors of this article who worked with the survivors in the disaster-stricken areas were aware of the urgent spiritual and religious needs of the survivors. People lost family members, houses, land, and everything else in a moment. They were traumatized to see the ocean that they had trusted changed into a horrible "black sea" that swept away their loved ones right in front of their eyes. The authors tried to understand people's longing for spiritual activities to heal their grief and pain. As survivors of the disaster themselves, the authors also understood the contextual meanings of the spiritual and religious language and symbols of the people in the local communities.

In the following sections, survey results and a case illustration from Miyagi Prefecture in the disaster area will be introduced and their implications will be discussed. Ohmura reports on the results of a survey concerning the phenomenon of giving school graduation certificates for dead children in which people created a unique ceremony for deceased students based on time-honored religious and spiritual traditions nurtured in the community. Then, Higuchi, a Buddhist priest and psychologist who offered daily prayers at a temporary public morgue after the earthquake and tsunami, argues that the services he conducted were a support not only for the surviving families who came to the morgue to find their loved ones but also for the rescue workers.

Grief care at schools in which religious activities are prohibited: giving academic certificates to children who died in the earthquake (by Ohmura)

As I have reported elsewhere (Ohmura 2013), many school children succumbed to the Great East Japan Earthquake. In March of 2014,² 3 years after the disaster, television news reported that schools were giving an “academic certificate of completion” to each child who had died. The act had no legal support; it could even have been considered illegal, as the name of the child had been deleted from the registry at the time of the child’s death. Why did the schools dare to take this action? This instance of the posthumous granting of certificates is widely known in Japan, but there has been no open discussion or research as to what took place and its meaning.

I observed that certificates were given not only to earthquake survivors but also to children who had died of other unnatural causes such as accidents, crimes, and diseases. In this section, I will discuss Japanese people’s sentiment and religiosity regarding the unnatural death of children. Religious activities are prohibited in public schools in Japan, but I argue that the act of issuing an academic certificate replaces religious ritual in providing grief care for surviving families, classmates, and teachers, thus promoting healing among survivors.

I first explain the prohibition of religious activities in public education in Japan. The legal aspects of academic certificates are described in the next section, and then I discuss the results of my research regarding the giving of certificates to children who died in the earthquake. Lastly, I argue that the act of giving certificates is based on the traditional views of life and death among the Japanese and thus the acts take on the role of a religious memorial at schools where religious ceremonies are prohibited.

Prohibition of religion in public education In Japan, religious practices are strictly limited in public education. Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution regulates religion in the schools as follows:

- (1) Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority.
- (2) No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice.
- (3) The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity.

Drawing on the above article in the constitution, Article 15 of the Basic Act on Education (2006) states:

- (1) The attitude of religious tolerance, general knowledge regarding religion, and the position of religion in social life shall be valued in education.
- (2) The schools established by the national and local governments shall refrain from religious education or other activities for a specific religion.

The first sentence of each of these articles reflects a positive regard for religion, but the following sentences state that religious education and activities in public schools are prohibited. Accordingly, no religious activities were enacted for the children lost in the

² Graduation ceremonies are usually held in March in Japan.

Great East Japan Earthquake in the public schools even though very many children had died. Religion plays an important role in memorial services. Therefore, the fact that memorial services may not be held at schools implies that religion, which traditionally has been considered as a significant resource for grief support or care, cannot be utilized as a resource for healing.

Giving graduation certificates to children lost in the earthquake In Japanese schools, the graduation ceremony is considered the most important ceremony of the school year. The school principal, wearing daytime formal wear, presents each graduating student with a “certificate of graduation,” a special document that certifies the student’s graduation from school. Students go to many rehearsals to prepare for the graduation ceremony, and their parents and guests from the local community also participate in it. The Education Ministry, under the guidance of the Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act (1947), provides the certificate of graduation as an official document that is presented by the school principal. In Miyagi Prefecture, one of the disaster areas of the Great East Japan Earthquake, 327 children died and 35 were listed as missing from the 95 schools of the prefecture (these included public kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, and special needs schools) as of February 2013. I sent out surveys to all of these schools in order to investigate the giving of graduation certificates among the public schools in Miyagi Prefecture. The overall response rate was 47.4 %, which is considered rather high considering the sensitive nature of the questions.

The results show that the schools that gave certificates for the lost children were as follows: kindergartens, 100 %; elementary schools, 42.9 %; junior high schools 83.3 %; and senior high schools and special needs schools, 0 %. It is interesting to note that certificates were given to the families not only right after the earthquake but sometimes one or even 2 years later, when the deceased children would have reached the age of graduation if they had still been alive. The teachers decided to give the families the certificates after considering the feelings of surviving family members and consulting with them. In some junior high schools, surviving classmates and their parents made the appeal that they would like to “graduate with our lost classmates,” which led to the awarding of the certificate.

Many respondents mentioned that they awarded the certificates not only to console the survivors but also for their own healing as teachers of the students who had died. Some people stated that they decided to hand out the certificates because they wanted to “give prayers for the souls of the departed children.” The fact that few stated the purpose was to create a “memorial service for the deceased child,” while quite a few mentioned the “healing of the survivors,” might reflect the respondents’ awareness of the prohibition of religious activities at public schools.

The meaning of the certificates of graduation My analysis of the results of the survey is as follows. The certificates of graduation were given to the families of those who died not only right after the children’s deaths but sometimes 1 or 2 years later. This shows that the deceased children were considered to be growing up, moving up to higher grades and graduating together with their classmates who had survived the earthquake.³ The saying “counting the age of a dead child”—i.e., a child continues to grow even after death—reflects a traditional

³ The survey results indicate that surviving classmates, parents, and teachers of deceased children asked for the deceased students to graduate with them and to be awarded the certificate.

Japanese view of life and death. For example, if a child dies at a very young age, the parents build a statue of Jizo Bodhisattva that is believed to protect the child, and they provide it with clothes and school supplies. There is another folk custom in which the parents prepare a doll that signifies a husband or a wife when the dead child would have grown to marriageable age. These practices are not based on formal Buddhist teachings; rather, they are based on folk beliefs derived from Buddhist doctrine or a modification of Buddhist doctrine. It is interesting to note that these folk customs are not a residue of old superstitions or an area-specific folk tradition; they have been spreading among Japanese people today. Similar to holding a service for an aborted fetus, which has been quickly spreading in Japan since 1970, these forms of memorial services for the dead have become more popular in contemporary Japan than ever. The idea that the spirit of a child who died a violent death should be comforted in a special way is derived from the parents' love and grief. But at the same time, it is based on the parents' fear that the dead might bring a curse (*tatari*) upon them if they don't perform the ritual. Thus, there are ambivalent feelings and understandings in the practice of these folk customs.

I also found that most of the certificates that were given to the children who died in the earthquake and tsunami did not have registration numbers on them. Normally the registers, which contain the names of students who graduated, are kept permanently by the schools. Certificates without numbers are not considered to be formal public documents, even though they fulfill other requirements by having an official stamp, the student's name, and the student's birth date. This means that there is an ambiguous boundary between two different domains—the giving of certificates at school to the children who died is in the public domain, and holding services for children's souls is in the private and religious domain.

Why did the schools engage in these ambiguous actions? As we mentioned earlier, the Japanese put great value on maintaining bonds with the dead. For bereaved family members and their community, the deceased person's personality continues to exist after his or her death. As I explained above, conducting public services in the community to provide comfort to the spirits of the dead was not possible on account of the prohibition of religious activities in public schools. I suspect that giving graduation certificates met people's spiritual needs for such a communal ritual, thus easing their grief and pain that was not otherwise being dealt with properly. Since this phenomenon does not seem common in other countries, I am undertaking further research on this subject.

Experiences in a temporary morgue (by Higuchi)

I am the vice priest of a Jodo (Pure Land) sect Buddhist temple as well as a clinical psychologist. On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami hit Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, where I live; this is the prefecture that suffered the most casualties of all the disaster-stricken areas. Many secular morgues were set up temporarily, and as a priest I chanted the sutra and prayed to Amitabha as I performed many funeral services at the morgue, beginning immediately after the earthquake and continuing until August 2011 when the morgue was closed. From my experiences as a Buddhist priest and clinical psychologist, I discuss here what I experienced at the morgue, the characteristics of the religiosity (*shukyosei*) I observed among the people in the disaster-stricken area, and also my experience with the religiosity of clients in my psychological practice (Higuchi 2014). This is a vignette in which I reflect on my work as a Buddhist priest at a temporary morgue in the affected area. I am aware that during

this crisis I wavered in my mind, and my professional identity vacillated between two roles, that of a psychologist and a priest. At the same time, I also became aware of the commonalities between the psychological support and the religious/spiritual care being offered in disaster areas.

I was present at a temporary morgue in Ishinomaki City right after the earthquake. Unidentified bodies of those who had succumbed to the earthquake and tsunami were carried in one after another by self-defense force (*jieitai*) officers, police officers, firefighters, and local residents. A large number of bodies were placed in the morgues, municipal gymnasiums, and schools that were closed. Because of the crisis situation, bodies that normally would have been properly laid in coffins were covered with plastic sheets and placed directly on the floor, since the number of the dead was enormous. The high school buildings right behind the temple where I lived were also set up as a temporary morgue to meet the basic needs of the dead and the surviving family members. I constantly saw helicopters hovering above the temple, making turns to the south to take the injured to hospitals and to the east to take the dead to morgues. For days, my family and I were glad and sad by turn when we looked up at the helicopters to see which direction there were going in. As the days went by, we saw more eastbound helicopters, which told us of the increased number of fatalities.

Bodies brought into the morgues were not always clean. All utilities, including electricity, gas, and water, were completely shut down by the disaster. So, there was no way to clean the bodies, which were badly damaged by the tsunami and rubble in the water. There were just too many people who had died at the same time. People who had missing family members first looked for them by visiting several shelters, and then they came to the morgues. As time went by, more unidentified bodies were brought into the morgues and more people started to come to them to find their families.

When I saw the grieving families, I consulted with the chief priest and decided to offer services for the dead at the temporary morgue. I wanted to conduct services for those whose lives had been taken away suddenly. I also wanted to give support to surviving family members who might not have had enough time to mourn and see the dead off during the chaos right after the earthquake. In addition, facing the mountains of debris caused by the tsunami, I feared there might be nothing I and others could do in such a devastating situation. It was overwhelming to see the scene, and people felt absolutely powerless. The only thing I felt I could do for others as a priest was to give prayers for those who had become the victims. For me, it was also one way of easing my own feeling of powerlessness, and it gave me a sense of relief.

Temporary morgues were set up in different places throughout northeastern Japan, the area affected by the earthquake and tsunami. I later learned that services for the dead were performed in many other places as well. These religious activities were not coordinated among people with religious backgrounds; they were self-motivated activities initiated by priests based on their understanding of their role in the disaster or at the request of people around them.

I met many people at the morgue after I started giving services: the families and relatives of missing people, administrative officers, self-defense force officers, local residents, and volunteers who brought in the bodies of victims as well as coroners and police officers. Most people were not used to seeing so many bodies and it was obvious they were uncertain and shocked by the unusual experience, but they did their best to fulfill their purposes in working there. However, as time went by, I observed that people started expressing their grief, confusion, bewilderment, agony, and insecurity. I was not

an exception to this. Even though I performed funerals every day, I too had not been accustomed to seeing the bodies of deceased people. I felt confusion and perplexity when I saw the large number of bodies. I still remember the scene very clearly. When I realize how much I am affected by this painful memory, I realize how much other people, who were also not used to seeing bodies, would have suffered and later on would have grieved and been confused.

The mixed feelings of the surviving family members and friends who came to the morgue could be detected from what they said. A woman who was looking for her missing husband said, “I want to find him as soon as possible, but at the same time I don’t want to, because I want to keep hoping that he is still alive somewhere.” Thinking that her husband might be already dead, she still expected that he would be alive. She talked with me about her mixed feelings and thoughts.

A man who found the body of his missing wife at the site said, as he took her body home with him, “Because I have seen too many bodies, I don’t want to see any more. Now, instead of feeling grief, I feel relief since I don’t have to see them. For that, I feel sorry for my wife.” It was hard enough for him to face the loss and death of his beloved wife. But when he actually accepted the reality of the loss, he realized that he was also released from continuing the long, exhausting search, and he felt relieved. He was honest enough to describe his mixed feelings that included a sense of relief and a sense of guilt.

A mother found her child’s body at the morgue, but she burst out crying, saying, “No, no, no, this is not my child!” I also met survivors who found solace in not having found the bodies of their family members after their long search in the morgue. There were countless other examples like these on the site. No matter how hard I try, I cannot completely express the feelings I had at that time. These are just a few examples, but now I consider the temporary morgue, where the bodies were put to rest, as a place of a complex mixture of life and death, despair and hope, anxiety and relief.

As I continued giving services at the morgue, religious paraphernalia such as candles, incense, bells, and wood blocks (*mokugyo*) were provided without our asking for them. When we visited the site for daily services at a fixed time, coroners and police officers who were working outside started to join us for prayers. Residents of the area as well as survivors who had been searching for their family members or neighbors came to offer prayers. We never forced anyone to do anything—attendance at the services was voluntary—but people naturally offered prayers with us. Guides and staff members of the morgue politely ushered us into the site and sent us out.

The officials who were responsible for managing the morgue also expressed mixed feelings. I heard statements such as, “We feel relieved during the time of the prayer service.” I understand the service was a support for those who came to the morgue looking for loved ones. The same could be true for those who worked there in various capacities. As mentioned before, the Constitution of Japan has embraced the principle of separation of government and religion. This has been the policy for many years. But, interestingly, the chief priest of our temple later received a letter of appreciation from the local police department for his religious activities.

Since the period immediately following the earthquake, I have had no direct contact in my clinical practice with people I met at the morgue, and I have no way of knowing how they are doing. After the end of the religious activities at the morgue, I have been working as a clinical psychologist in the disaster area doing outreach activities for survivors who live in temporary housing. Clients I meet in my daily practice consult

with me not only about their traumatic experiences as a result of the earthquake and their grief over their losses; they also take counsel with me about their living environment, economic difficulties, family problems, alcohol dependency, emotional problems, etc. However, during the counseling sessions, not a small number of clients have talked about their mixed feelings from their experiences of loss and grief at the morgue, as I described above. Some clients who had multiple losses at the earthquake became alcoholics, for example, and they also confided having mixed feelings at the morgue, which suggests that there is a strong emotional conflict behind their alcoholism.

I have noticed a common element in the complaints of my clients in my practice: the severe, complete loss of a sense of basic trust and safety. The earth that been assumed to be firm ground moved unsteadily, and the ocean that used to produce food to support their lives assaulted them. The earthquake was a disaster no one could ever predict or prevent. Continual changes in the lives of those affected are and will continue to be unavoidable. My clients have had to change where they live, for example, from shelters to temporary houses and finally to government-subsidized houses over the several years after the earthquake. The temporary housing consists of multiple-unit dwellings that are often built in a place very far from a city. The residents of such low-cost, prefabricated housing units have to live in a very stressful environment where they are expected to be patient with and polite to noisy neighbors (the walls that separate each unit are very thin). More than that, they are put in situations where they have no control over the choice of their own living space, the foundation of their lives. All these stressful situations were caused by the disaster.

In my clinical practice, I strongly feel the survivors' pain caused by the earthquake and the hardships that have followed, and I believe that the disaster has deprived the affected people of the freedom to choose and control their own lives. In such a situation, the purpose of my practice as a psychologist might be to help and encourage these survivors to get their sense of control back even in a limited capacity due to the constraints of their environment. This is similar to the purpose of the religious services that I was involved in at the morgue. A religious understanding of a transcendent being and prayers to such a being make it possible for humans to transcend, embrace, and accept death, thus giving them the freedom to choose life. Here, I find a common purpose between my psychological practice and religious activities—encouraging people to regain a sense of self-efficacy even though human existence is finite in a finite world.

Conclusion

Based on our clinical work in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the authors of this article recognize that the mental health care workers who engage in relief activities in Japan need to explore ways to incorporate into their work Japanese people's religiosity (*shukyosei*), which emphasizes the significance of rituals to maintain bonds between the living and the dead. It is important to understand the survivors' cultural modes of meaning-making in order to utilize them for interventions. It is also necessary to study the meaning of the beliefs, feelings, and behavior of the survivors. The authors confirm that it is necessary for mental health care workers engaged in relief activities to understand the culturally and contextually sensitive religiosity of the people and community they are serving from their own perspective.

As the next step of this study, the authors envision expanding the study to explore how the rituals we described in this article, such as giving certificates to dead children, restored bonds/networks in the local community and also to explore the kinds of existential meaning that people found in such rituals that helped them recover from their grief and pain (Silove 2013). It should be noted that our study was conducted mostly in Miyagi Prefecture and that we hope to extend it to other affected regions.

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