

# **Cooperation and Recovery After the March 11<sup>th</sup> East Japan Earthquake: From the Standpoint of voluntary groups and JSAI**

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On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the Great Earthquake struck the area of East Japan. A lot of the documents, and archives needed to be recovered from the disaster area. The Kobe Earthquake in 1995 was the first time that staff of archival institutions and historical researchers and all joined hands to save documents from the stricken area. To assist them in their work, they organized a volunteer group named the Kobe Shiryo Net. Japan Society of Archives Institutions (JSAI) took part in the restoration work implemented by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, to rescue cultural heritage damaged by the quake. After the Kobe Earthquake, there were a lot of big earthquakes in Japan. Whenever big earthquakes happen, Kobe Shiryo-Net moved in to save the stricken historical materials and organize similar volunteer groups at the prefectural level.

## 1, Preface

After the March 11<sup>th</sup> East Japan Earthquake, Shiryo Net, Voluntary Groups, and JSAI rescued public documents and historical old documents damaged by the tsunami water. Shiryo Net, Voluntary Groups activities started after the Hanshin-Awaji Great Earthquake (Kobe Earthquake) occurred on January 17, 1995 in the southern part of Hyōgo Prefecture. After the earthquake, many volunteers visited the stricken area and helped restoration. It was called “the volunteer first year” in 1995. In the field of archival preservation, volunteers rescued the damaged documents after the earthquake.



(C) Kobe Shiryo-Net

This report begins by describing the activities of the first Shiryo-Net, Kobe Shiryo-Net. When Shiryo-Net began activity in 1995, nobody thought that many historical documents were in a stricken area. Since 1995, volunteer groups have spread all over the country. In the March 11<sup>th</sup>

East Japan Earthquake , the preservation activities of damaged documents depended on these experiences.

## 2,Kobe Shiryo-Net

Kobe Shiryo-Net (Kobe Network for Preserving Historical Materials) was formed by specialist volunteers about 20 days after the Kobe Earthquake. It started as a liaison association committee of historical societies for preserving historical documents. The volunteers were made up of university faculties, graduate and undergraduate students, staff of archival institutions, and historical researchers. In Japan, it was the first experience in rescuing old documents from the damaged houses. Shiryo-Net members did not know how it would go at the beginning. At first, they preserved damaged documents and records on the basis of information compiled by the Cultural Affairs Agency and local governments. Shiryo-Net appealed to the damaged area to preserve the old documents through mass media and waited for rescue requests to come. That said, few requests were made from the disaster area.

Kobe Shiryo-Net members performed round investigations called “Patrols” in damaged areas from March 29, 1995. The investigations revealed while the investigators believed the old documents were precious, many local people did not. Regrettably, in stricken areas, a lot of documents and records were never archived and remained in private homes. In addition, many historical records were thrown away.

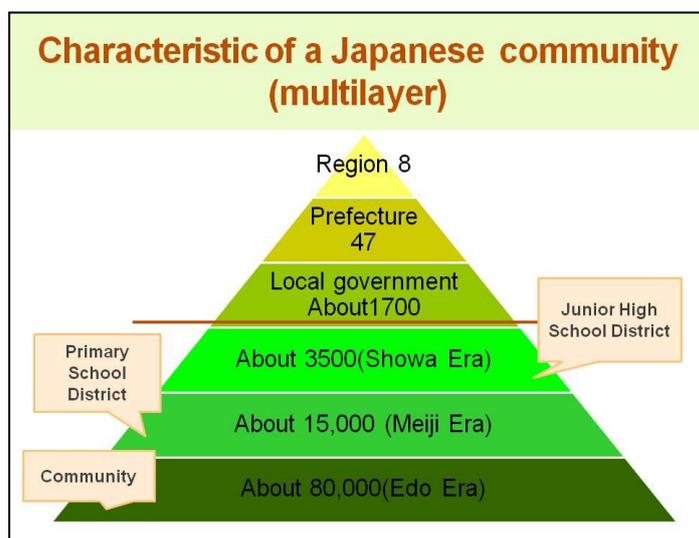


Fig 1

municipalities dropped from about 3,200 at the end of March 1998 to 1,700 at present.(Fig 1). The scale of municipalities became bigger, but in everyday life, former community size is valid as residents' groups. Residents' groups are private organizations, but the local governments depended on them for assistance. In most cities and towns, the history was compiled as an enterprise of the administration. After compiling the municipal history, subsequent historical-documents preservation had not necessarily worked. And as the system of municipal archiving is poor ,the documents of the communities since Edo are still saved in the homes of influential people and meeting places of the villages. This occurred not only in stricken area but throughout

In Japan, a lot of old public documents are in the possession of private houses or assembly houses in communities. In the late Edo period(about 1860),about 80,000 villages were merged. 15,000 municipalities were merged in the Meiji era and about 3,000 in the Showa era.

With the special law on the merger of municipalities in 1999, the number of

Japan.

### 3, Disasters and Shiryo-Net

As Japan is an earthquake prone country, Kobe Shiryo-Net was established to assist and support in the archiving and preserving of documents at a prefectural level. At present they are in the process of expanding Shiryo-Net. The recent research (Okumura, 2012, p.26) showed what kind of motion Kobe Net would carry out after a disaster. When a catastrophic disaster occurs, in a place which does not have a Shiryo-Net, Kobe Net collects the disaster information and appeals for document preservation to the section in charge of a public office and local media.

In October 16, 2000, Western Tottori Prefecture Earthquake occurred. 19 days after the earthquake, Sanin Shiryo-Net was established. It was the first time to perform support together with a network in a stricken area for Kobe Shiryo-Net. The following March, Geiyo Earthquake occurred and Shiryo-Nets in Ehime and Hiroshima were set up. One after another and a new Shiryo-Net established. Miyagi Shiryo-Net which is assisting with the March 11<sup>th</sup> disaster was established in 2003 after Tohoku Region Earthquake. (Table 1).

In July, 2004, heavy rain fell in Fukui Prefecture and flood damage occurred. Fukui Shiryo-Net was set up only 8 days after. In October of the same year, flood damage by typhoon No. 23 hit within Hyogo prefecture. For Kobe Shiryo-net, it was the first experience to preserve the water damaged documents. It was completely different work to rescue documents from water and to rescue documents from the houses damaged in the earthquake. Although what was necessary was just to carry out cleaning of the rescued documents after the earthquake, it was necessary to clean, dry and flatten them, as early as possible. Otherwise, mold would grow on the documents and result in terrible odors. Shiryo-Net members received restoration specialist's advice and studied the method for preservation. A lecture was given about the initial correspondence to documents damaged by water.

Why does Kobe Net support the starting of a new Net after a disaster? Okumura, Kobe Shiryo-Net Representation, has stated as follows. "Kobe Net was performed by people who reside around the stricken area from the beginning. From experience of Kobe earthquake, in the case of a large-scale disaster, the support immediately after an earthquake and from the outside of a stricken area is indispensable. Activity in a stricken area cannot be started without the support from outside. Also in order to prepare for a large-scale disaster, it is very important that the organization of Japanese everywhere builds a strong network and mutual cooperation."(2012, p.26) In 2005, Okayama and Yamagata Shiryo-Net were established for a preventive role.

### 4, After the March 11<sup>th</sup> East Japan Earthquake

Miyagi Shiryo-Net was formed after Tohoku Region Earthquake in May, 2003. At first, they preserved damaged documents after the earthquake. As of 2003, it was

said that "Earthquakes off the Coast of Miyagi Prefecture" will occur with a probability of 99% in less than 30 years. They changed the rescue operation after a disaster into the preservation activities before a disaster. From 2003 to 2010, Miyagi Shiryo-Net conducted 415 visits to people who possessed valued documents and carried out digital photography of said historical documents. It became a NPO in 2007.

As a result of the March 11<sup>th</sup> East Japan Earthquake, the building hosting Miyagi Shiryo-Net at Tohoku University suffered serious damage. From March 14, Miyagi Shiryo-Net began information gathering by telephone, focusing on one spot before visiting, since gasoline was limited, it was not able to visit stricken area quickly.

On 30 March, the Agency for Cultural Affairs determined to undertake a cultural-assets rescue enterprise called the Cultural Property Rescue Program involving Kobe Shiryo-Net and Miyagi Shiryo-Net. The program rescued cultural properties immediately, and performed a required emergency measure carrying out interim storage to a safe institution. It has been the 2nd program since the Kobe earthquake. Kobe and Miyagi Shiryo-Nets are contained in a committee. The official documents and historical documents damaged by the tsunami were included for rescue.

Miyagi Net has investigated Ishinomaki city on April 4 for the first time in the stricken area, since the March 11<sup>th</sup> Earthquake. Before the earthquake Miyagi Net visited and took the photos of more than 12000 documents. After the earthquake, the house and documents were destroyed, and only image data was left behind.

The documents of 50 boxes were taken out of DOZO ,Japanese storehouse, of the Honma family to Tohoku Historical Museum on April 8. Only one building was left behind although there were two DOZO buildings in the Honma family. This DOZO will fix and be saved as a symbol of revival.

As of the end of March, 2012, Miyagi Net got 541 pieces of information on houses and facilities which had damaged documents, 52 rescue activities were performed in liaison with the public sector and museums. After the March 11<sup>th</sup> Disaster, new Shiryo-Nets were established continuously. Shiryo Net groups in other regions are also involved in rescue activities for historical records and archives.

## 5, JSAI Activities

Japan Society of Archives Institutions (JSAI) , established in 1976, is a specialist organization for the preservation of archives. In the ICA, JSAI is a category B member and a member of the Section of Professional Associations (SPA). Now, there are 141 organization members and 283 private members. Organization members are municipal archives, archival facilities and offices for historical compilation of municipalities and so on.

After the March 11<sup>th</sup> Earthquake, JSAI started researching the state of damage in all member associations nationwide, and reported the results on their website on the

day following the earthquake. On 27 May, JSAI requested the rescue and preservation of stricken materials and disaster-related documents to the Prime Minister and the Conference of Governors. JSAI participated in the restoration work implemented by the Cultural Affairs Agency, called the Cultural Property Rescue Program.

On 26 May, JSAI set up “Great East Japan Earthquake emergency relief committee”. The committee decided to investigate about historical documents, archives and archival facilities in the damaged area and rescue the stricken public documents at Rikuzentakata city, Iwate prefecture. The rescue project was undertaken with National Archives of Japan, Hosei University and Kanagawa Prefectural Archive.



(C) JSAI

From 29 August, to 22 September 2011, JSAI sent 49 staff members of the JSAI in total, receiving support of the Cultural Property Rescue Program. They worked as specialist volunteer with Rikuzentakata city staff and provided technical training. In Rikuzentakata city, about 12,000 volumes of the water damaged documents were rescued and recovered about 5,000 volumes of the water damaged documents. The damaged public documents still remain in the stricken city hall of Rikuzentakata. Since the beginning of August, JSAI volunteers have been helping with the preservation work.

## 6, Conclusion

In the rescue activities of the March 11<sup>th</sup> Earthquake, it has become possible to preserve the stricken documents through the experiences and cooperation of the Shiryo-Net network. Since the March 11<sup>th</sup> Earthquake was a large scale disaster, damaged documents exist in large quantities. Therefore it is still necessary to continue preserving the damaged documents, and to shore-up shortages of manpower and materials.

New activities came out this time. The new Shiryo-Nets were established one after another after the earthquake. Miyagi Shiryo-Net established new network with volunteer builders to fix stricken historic buildings and informatics researchers to save digital documents. Miyagi Net revealed that before the disaster the prevention method of taking pictures was highly effective. We continue to support the preservation activities with hope.

## Reference

Okumura, H. (2012) *Great Earthquake and historical documents preservation*. Tokyo, Yoshikawakobunkan

Table 1

List of Shiryo-Net		As of March 2012	
Date of Foundation	Name of Shiryo-Net	The disaster of formation opportunity	
1995	Jan	Kobe Shiryo-Net	Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake
2000	Nov	Sanin Shiryo-Net	Western Tottori Prefecture Earthquake (October 2000)
2001	Mar	Geiyo Shiryo-Net	Geiyo Earthquake (March 2001)
	May	Hiroshima Shiryo-Net	
		Yamaguchi Shiryo-Net	
2003	Aug	Miyagi Shiryo-Net	Tohoku Region Earthquake (May, July 2003)
2004	July	Fukui Shiryo-Net	Fukui Torrential Rain Storm (July 2004)
	Nov	Niigata Shiryo-Net	Mid Niigata Prefecture Earthquake (October 2004)
2005	Aug	Miyazaki Shiryo-Net	Typhoon Nabi (August 2005)
	Sep	Okayama Shiryo-Net	
2006	Oct	<i>Fukushima Cultural Heritage Preserve Network<sup>1</sup></i>	
2008	Jan	Yamagata Shiryo-Net	
2010	Feb	<i>Chiba Cultural-assets Relief Network<sup>2</sup></i>	Kujuukuri sardine museum blasting accident (July 2004)
	Oct	Fukushima Shiryo-Net	
	Nov	Metropolitan Area Document Information Network	Typhoon Malou (September 2010)
2011	Apr	Iwate Shiryo-Net	Great East Japan Earthquake (March 2011)
		Preservation Volunteer Group of Regional History	North Nagano Prefecture Earthquake (March 2011)
	June	Mie Shiryo-Net <sup>3</sup>	
	July	Ibaraki Shiryo-Net	Great East Japan Earthquake (March 2011)
		Kanagawa Shiryo-Net	
2012	Feb	Wakayama Shiryo-Net	Typhoon Talas (September 2011)
	Mar	Chiba Shiryo-Net	Great East Japan Earthquake (March 2011)
		Shizuoka Shiryo-Net	

Source: Date from Kobe Shiryo-Net director, Mr. Kawauchi

Note1: It reorganized to Fukushima Shiryo-Net in October 2010.