



The roles of monuments for the dead during the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake



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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the roles of disaster memorials during the five years that followed the Great East Japan Earthquake (GEJE). After the collective experience of catastrophe, societies develop various modes of grieving and remembering the tragedies and their victims. One of these strategies consists of the erection of monuments where mourners, survivors, politicians, religious leaders and other visitors may process their sorrows, pay their respects to the dead, express their solidarity with the affected community, and remember the catastrophe. Despite the fact that the grieving process starts immediately after the event, memorials for the dead are paradoxically built years, if not decades, after the events. The reason might be that memorials are often conceived solely as 'mnemonic devices.' However, to limit their role as material testimonies of catastrophes is to ignore the functions they hold for communities during the immediate aftermath. In response, this study reports on the practical roles played by memorial monuments for the survivors of the Great East Japan Earthquake. It reflects on the significance of both their tangible (the monument and its surroundings) and intangible dimensions (grief, social bonds, memories). The paper concludes a few of general recommendations based on the idea that memorials compose a matrix of complementary practices of remembrance that together contribute to reducing the impact of the losses suffered by post-disaster communities.

1. Introduction

Industrial societies respond to threats of earthquakes and tsunamis by drawing primarily from the lessons learned by engineering and natural sciences. These fields most commonly study the physical evidence left these natural hazards on human habitations, the environment and human bodies themselves. The rapid advancement of hard sciences and technology has encouraged industrial societies – in their efforts to reduce disaster risk and impact – to increase their reliance on the resistance of buildings, infrastructures and information technologies. However, the rising complexity and costs of natural hazards have recently called for a more holistic approach, thus directing more attention to collective behaviours and cultures in the context of disasters [1–3]. The last few decades have witnessed an exponential increase in the number of scholars from the social sciences and humanities studying the influence of the collective experience, indigenous knowledge, and cultures of disasters on society's preparation, adaptation, response and recovery [4–7]. Cultural anthropologists, historians, and other specialists have been concentrating their efforts on understanding how communities that regularly experience disasters might create, develop or adopt particular perceptions of, knowledge of and responses to disasters

[8–10]. Their approach has brought more attention to the 'soft' responses that may contribute to disaster risk reduction.

One of the emergency responses examined by social scientists is the way groups of people memorialise disasters. Addressing the collective experience of catastrophes, societies develop various modes of grieving and remembering disasters and their victims [11–13]. These modes are both tangible (monuments, gardens, museums, and archives) and intangible (ceremonies, rituals, storytelling, oral histories). A common strategy consists of the erection of cenotaphs and memorial monuments where mourners, survivors, politicians, religious leaders and other visitors may process their sorrows, pay their respects to the dead, express their solidarity with the affected community, and remember the tragedy. In industrial societies, the most common type of memorials is probably that of wars. Such monuments constitute an official means of honouring fallen soldiers and reminding new generations of the atrocities and dangers of wars [14,15]. Some of the world's most notorious edifications include the memorials of the Holocaust in Berlin, the Vietnam War in Washington and the Hiroshima A-bomb in Japan. Other memorials of 'human-made' tragedies include those commemorating terror attacks, such as the 9/11 memorial for the assault on the World Trade Centre in New York City [16]. Less well known but increasing in

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number are commemorative stones for disasters related to natural hazards. Examples include memorials for the Sumatra Indian Tsunami (2004), Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the Sichuan Earthquake (2008). All these memorials often constitute 'les lieux de mémoire' or sites of collective memory [11]. More recently, some studies have demonstrated their capacity to improve the social recovery of affected communities for whom the memorialization of a catastrophe may serve as a means of resolving conflicts and a source of empowerment [17,18].

Despite their significant roles during the aftermath, monuments often seem to be considered the third wheel of disaster response and recovery. Monuments are built years, if not decades, after the events they memorialise. The memorials for Hiroshima and 9/11 were accomplished in 1954 and 2011, respectively, or approximately ten years later. We make the same observation when it comes memorials for those catastrophes that relate to a natural hazard. The memorials for Hurricane Katrina and Sichuan were built, respectively, three and five years following the tragedies. A possible reason for these delays might be that those responsible for their constructions conceive memorials as objects of closure that confine disastrous events to the past or 'mnemonic devices' [19]. This view suggests that monuments stand immobile as a timeless representation of the past rather than active elements of social recovery disaster risk reduction (DRR). The inclusion of memorial monuments as contributing elements depends on our understanding of what constitutes DRR. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), DRR "aims to reduce the damage caused by natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, droughts and cyclones, through an ethic of prevention...The scale of the impact, in turn, depends on the choices we make for our lives and for our environment." [20] If disaster risk reduction is about reducing the consequences of the disasters that follow natural hazards, then why are memorial monuments not considered part of this process? Considering this question, we hope to show how the presence of memorial monuments decrease the impact of the loss of lives and the loss of place suffered during a disaster. By drawing our attention to their roles during the immediate aftermath, this paper at contributing to the idea that memorials are memory itself, dynamic and adaptive to the needs of post-disaster society.

Inscribing itself within studies of memorials and the anthropology of absence [21,22], this paper investigates the multiple roles played by monuments during the immediate aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake (GEJE). The first section of this paper reports on the activities observed at three monuments in a community affected by the tsunami. The second section draws from this case study to highlight the distinctive and complementary roles played by the memorial stones of disaster victims. The third section concludes with recommendations about future approach to monuments that we believe is necessary to allow their active contributions to processes grief and well-being, social solidarity and place making, the preservation of memories and disaster education during the immediate aftermath of disaster.

2. Memorial monuments of the GEJE

On the afternoon of March 11, 2011, the northeast region of Japan was hit by a magnitude 9.0 earthquake. The quake triggered tidal waves that reached up to forty meters high and several kilometres inland. The tsunami washed away entire coastal settlements. Among those caught by the waves, 15,083 lost their lives, and 3971 went missing. The waves also ignited the crisis of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster, the second worst nuclear accident in history. The GEJE is reportedly the costliest catastrophe ever recorded, representing an economic deficit of over 210 billion US dollars [23]. To these overwhelming figures, we must add the devastating impact that the events have had on the livelihoods, social relationships and cultural assets of the affected communities and their survivors.

The intense degree of the commemoration of the GEJE matched the level of destruction. Every year, the whole country has marked the

anniversary of the disaster and observes a minute of silence to remember the loss incurred on March 11. The Emperor, the central and local governments, Buddhist temples, NGOs/NPOs, and local associations all perform ceremonies and other rituals, with attendance reaching several thousand individuals for the largest events. The barren landscapes of the disaster areas have become the sites of informal and formal acts of remembrance including flower, incense and water offerings, scribbled messages and other mementoes left by the wondering survivors in the ruins of some building or some makeshift shrines. These wilful behaviours preceded by the establishment of more orderly memorial sites including a stone monument(s). These stones are built in memory of the disaster and the souls of its victims. Many cities decided to build memorial parks and small museums, sometimes near the beaches where their communities once lived. As will be discussed below, the struggle over the planning of the reconstruction and the debate surrounding the location, the nature and the timing of memorials often delayed their construction.

The monuments of the GEJE find their roots in Japan's deep culture of memorial stones. The depth of this culture is reflected in the fact that Japanese people classify memorial monuments into several categories, each of which assumes a particular function. All of these share the Chinese character "碑", which is pronounced *hi* and means "stone monument bearing an inscription" [24]. The first and most common category is *kinenhi* that means stone in memory of something. *Kinenhi* commonly marks a place, an event or an institution. For example, they are often found on school grounds, new train stations and other public buildings. They may also be erected to commemorate an event such as a war, an earthquake or a tsunami. The stones that memorialise tsunamis are also referred to as *tsunamihi* [25]. The second category is *ireihi*, or stones to comfort the spirits of the dead. *Ireihi* comprises those monuments dedicated to victims of an unnatural death; another related category is *kuyōhi* or stones for the memorial services of the deceased [26]. *Ireihi* is a collective grave. Like cenotaphs, they do not contain the remains of the dead. They are most often the responsibility of religious institutions who commonly honour the 'souls' of the dead in Japanese society. Buddhist temples erect them as places to pray for the souls of their parish members who have become victims of 'natural' disasters. Shrines of Japan's native religion (i.e., Shinto) contain and maintain *ireihi* honouring the souls of fallen soldiers. As a result, *ireihi* are objects of ritual focus where bereaved families, survivors, religious leaders, government officials and visitors may pray or show their respects for the dead as well as their solidarity with the wider disaster community. Following these traditional patterns, the *kinenhi* and the *ireihi* of the GEJE have two defined functions.

In continuity with Japanese tradition, the GEJE stones constitute one of the most common modes of remembering the disaster and its victims. One of the first *ireihi* was erected within a year of the tsunami. Its location is the devastated land of the Ogawa Primary School in Ishinomaki City, where 74 pupils and ten staff members lost their lives in the tsunami. Before the erection of several grand stones, the first *ireihi* of the school resembles a regular family grave. The central element is a rectangular column of black granite engraved with the dates, the name of the monument, and other information. The engraving reads, "The Unnatural death of the Great East Japan Earthquake" and "The memorial tablet of ten teaching staff, 74 souls of the primary school children, three souls of the junior high school, and the young men and women residents of the area." The other elements of the memorial are an incense burner and two blocks for flower offerings, as well as Buddhist statues, several stupas, and other objects of remembrance. This structure materialises the tragedy that took place on the site of the school and the need to care for the souls of the 74 young lives drowned by the tsunami. Among the *kinenhi*, the most striking example can be found in Kamaishi City under the name "Telling and connecting with the giant tsunami of March 11" [27]. The monument is composed of five columns built of black granite, each of which measures 2.6 m in height. Each column comports the messages of primary school children,

which attempt to preserve the force of the tsunami in the collective memory of the community. The inscriptions are lessons that the children learned during the disaster. One of the titles engraved at the top of the stones reads “Let’s leave with the chest imprinted with “if a tsunami comes let’s run away.” Another recalls a Japanese motto that says “if a tsunami comes, each person must protect one’s life.” The inscription concludes with the warning “If there is an earthquake, go to high ground.” As the web page of the stone-making company financing this project suggests, they hope that this monument will continue to pass on the lessons of the GEJE for a thousand years to come.

Despite their popularity, the need for such disaster memorials is contested in Japan. The promoters of a new disaster prevention program have noted the fact that stones warning of past tsunamis had been forgotten or ignored by the local population. Their promotion video for a new tsunami prevention program begins by showing a memorial stone of the 1933 Sanriku Earthquake, inscribed with the message “do not build housing below this point.” The video shows that despite this warning, a community was built below the memorial and suffered by the community built below the monument despite the warning. A voice-over narration comments that the numbers of deaths and the level of destruction in the area below the stone suggest that such memorials were not worth building. It tells us that memorial stones are often forgotten. Although our study does not look at such *kinenhi*, this particular case inspired our idea that one can evaluate the roles of memorials without understanding the roles that played through time and space.

Inspired by this criticism, the next section draws from a case study to challenge two misconceptions about disaster monuments. Firstly, it refutes the view that memorials are standalone physical structures disconnected from their local environment, populations and – most importantly – other monuments. Such an approach does not allow us to improve our understanding of the roles of monuments. Instead, the section focuses on the social activities that surround memorials, from the most formal ceremonies to the most private and mundane actions, and considers the relationships among monuments within the broader matrix of disaster memorialization. Secondly, it opposes any synchronic approach that attempts to evaluate the roles of monuments by only looking at a particular point in time. Instead, this paper prefers a diachronic perspective that allows us to examine the discourses and the activities surrounding disaster monuments comprehensively. In addition to a better understanding of the functions of monuments, this approach may also help us to improve the positive impacts of memorial monuments in the long-term. In this vein, the next section of this paper examines the social activities that took place at three monuments located within a single disaster area during the five years that succeeded the GEJE.

3. Yuriage memorial monuments: a case study

The data used in this section are the result of ethnographic research carried out over a period of two years. Its location, the area of Yuriage in Natori City, Northeast Japan, was ravaged by the tsunami of the GEJE. Following the method of becoming a participant-observer, the first author integrated into the community that formed in the area after the disaster. He visited the bare land every weekend during the years 2013 and 2014, after which he has been conducting regular follow-ups to preserve the strong bond he developed with several of his informants. These visits also included episodically volunteering for a group that is searching for the human remains of missing victims or volunteering at memorial events and other festivals. Each day, the author was able to talk about the issue of memorialization as well as problems related to post-disaster reconstruction and the future of Yuriage. The “conversations” (i.e., informal interviews) lasted between several minutes and several hours. The core of the interviewees consisted of the regular comers, varying between 5 and 15 individuals, and many more occasional or one-time visitors or volunteers. With the

participants coming in and out of the disaster area, it was impossible to count the number of interviews and interviewees per se. However, the author had the opportunity to talk with between two and ten people every day he spent in Yuriage (i.e., over one hundred days) and most importantly was able to observe the behaviours of groups of visitors. The principal location was a temporary post-disaster facility, called the Tea Drinking Place (*Ocha-nomiba*). The ethnographers also gathered information at a memorial centre that was given the French name ‘Mémoire de Yuriage’, the sacred mound of Hiyoriyama and the Junior High School still standing at the time; all these places are discussed in this paper. The author further became involved with the survivors by initiating the creation of a group that raised awareness of the urgent need for the erection of a memorial monument for the victims of the tsunami and their surviving family members. This collective effort led to the establishment of two of the memorial monuments discussed in this paper. Through these various and intimate relationships, the author was able to acquire a comprehensive and qualitative understanding of the problems faced by the survivors of the tsunami, including, as discussed in this paper, the various views of the roles of memorial monuments within the context of a post-disaster community.

Before 11th March 2011, Yuriage was a mixed community of fishermen, commuting salarymen, incoming retirees and regular local tourists. Its population of 7103 inhabitants was distributed in 2551 households. Yuriage has a long history of fishing. Many of its inhabitants had a profound relationship with the sea and the fishing industry; many visitors come to catch fish along its estuary. Following the development of more housing, Yuriage became a commuter town for those who worked along the coastline of the larger neighbouring city of Sendai. Yuriage had also become locally renowned for its tourist attractions, including a Sunday market, a harbour, a sandy beach, cycling tracks, and even its horseback riding centre; it also hosted popular festivals. These facilities, together with factories, shops, cars, boats, and houses, were all washed away by the sheer power of the tsunami that swooped across the flat land for several kilometres. The wave also took the lives of 753 inhabitants and left 40 people missing – these people represented more than 10% of the community’s population, making it one of the most severely affected areas in the region of Tohoku.

The land of Yuriage remained a denuded landscape for almost five years. Soon after the tsunami, the local authorities expressed their determination to carry out rapid recovery and reconstruction. Yuriage was among the first areas free of debris. However, the mismanagement of diverging ideas over the rebuilding of the community put everything at a standstill. In 2014, a report declared that the area had the lowest percentage of reconstruction within Miyagi prefecture [28]. This situation did not change until the end of 2015 when the city officials finally announced the beginning of the execution of its reconstruction plans. The construction started with the building of embankments and levees, designed to elevate the land by five meters (i.e., the level of the tsunami waves in inhabited areas). This operation required a thousand trucks to enter the area every day to bring the earth necessary to raise the level of the land on which the new community would be ‘safely’ rebuilt.

Yuriage’s inability to reconstruct itself meant that memorial sites were like oases in the desert. Together with the Sunday market, an amenity centre (i.e., Maple Hall, see below) and an improvised tea place, memorials remained the only poles of activities. The only remaining features of pre-disaster Yuriage were a few buildings and the human-made mound of Hiyoriyama. Hiyoriyama is the site of a small shrine dedicated to a local divinity (*kami*) considered a benefactor of fishers. The symbolic and physical domination of the mound over the flattened landscape meant that it was subject to intense memorialization from volunteers, visitors and some survivors. It was there that the first temporary memorials could be found (see Fig. 1). The main elements are two wooden poles or stupas dedicated to the souls of the victims. These poles belong to two Buddhist sects (the Nichiren Sect and Rissho Kosei Kai). Several Buddhist statues, incense burners, cranes, and other



Fig. 1. View from the Mound of Hiyoriyama with a provisional praying pole (front), Yuriage.

artefacts complement the sites. Visitors to Yuriage systematically visit the mound and pray for the victims and to the divinities [29]. Despite their being part of disaster memorialization, these facilities do not have any direct relation with the bereaved and survivors of Yuriage and thus go beyond the scope of our analysis due to their temporary and singular nature.

3.1. Junior High School Memorial

The first memorial built in Yuriage is a *ireihi* that commemorates the 14 children of the Junior High School who lost their lives to the tsunami (see Fig. 2). During an interview, the head of the bereaved parent association explained that the school was holding its graduation ceremony on the morning of the tsunami. When the earthquake struck at 2:46 p.m., she and her son gathered at an evacuation area nearby the school together with other parents and children. She recalled that other inhabitants went running back to their homes to check whether their family members were safe and whether their houses had suffered any damage. She remembered people's confusion when the radio gave early warnings of a tsunami coming to Tohoku. The information seemed unreliable since they could not hear the sirens alerting of any imminent threat; the system had gone down as a result of the earthquake. Moreover, many of the affected cities mentioned by the announcers were thought to be very far away, making it difficult to imagine that Yuriage would share the same fate. People could not envision that a wave of 9.09 m was on its way. She concluded that by the time the wave reached Yuriage, her son and 13 other children were caught by the wave as they were running for safety. It is to remember the lives of these 14 victims that the bereaved parents came together to form an



Fig. 2. Junior High School Memorial (right) at its new location near the Natori City Memorial, 2016.

association and erected the memorial monument a year later.

The design of the children's memorial offers a tactile approach to memorialization. Rather than a monumental edifice, the association opted for a lower block of granite with smooth surfaces and round corners. The names of the 14 children are engraved on the top of the slightly slanted surface. Information about the disaster (designation, date and time) stand on the front, and the name of the association and the day of the erection of the monument on the back. This simple design enables all visitors, especially children, to read and touch the names of the pupils who have passed away. The bereaved parents believe that the repeated strokes make the monument warm, transcending the image of cold stone. This action can, therefore, be interpreted as a form of care for the dead but also as a way of comforting for the bereaved. Such practices are not uncommon in Japan or the world. People often touch or stroke statues of divinities or outstanding individuals. They may do this as an act of worship, prayer, or in the hope that they might acquire an extraordinary power or quality. In the context of memorialization, the same gesture may be a means of reaching a greater sense of intimacy with the dead and the catastrophe as a whole [30]. Japanese people visiting the memorial of GEJE can often be seen touching the names of relatives and friends that are inscribed on an *ireihi* as a way of bonding and comforting the dead.

The commemorative stone stands as a guardian of the children's memory rather than that of the disaster. In addition to mourning their lost children, the bereaved parents leave the stone as a legacy, a '*sonzai no shoumeisho*,' or proof of their past existence. On several occasions, their representative suggested that people may well forget the disaster but should not forget the lives of the dead children. This sentiment may at first indicate that we are dealing with competing narratives and memorialization, as is so widely recorded in studies about collective memories of catastrophe [31]. In the context of the early aftermath of the GEJE, the proposal of building memorial monuments were sometimes met strong opposition. The leaders of the reconstruction programs and some of the survivors considered these stones as further hindrances in areas like Yuriage, where rehabilitation plans had already been delayed. Some also saw in the disaster area a blank slate full of economic opportunities, where only discourses of vitality and prosperity should be heard [32]. They perceive memorials for the dead as reminders of a tragic a past that needed to be forgotten and physically removed from the landscape.

In addition to providing a grieving space, the Junior High School Memorial also became the centre of disaster-related activities for the many visitors. Their memorial site began by serving as a space for the performance of annual memorial services. Each year, this event attracts several hundred visitors, local and national media, as well as researchers. The ceremony ends with a spectacular balloon release. Helium-filled balloons in the shape of birds are unleashed into the sky carrying messages for the dead. All participants are invited to take part in this ritual even if their dead parents are not a tsunami victim. The NGO that has been working hand-in-hand with the bereaved association orchestrates these commemorative ceremonies since 2011. The organisation also installed a prefabricated office named it 'Memoire de Yuriage' or Memory of Yuriage. In addition to the regular meetings, the facility has been used by its staff to provide spiritual/psychological care to children and adults, during workshops. Survivors could also release suppressed and traumatic memories while sharing their experience during story-telling sessions. There is also a small exhibition hall and a projection room where visitors are invited to watch videos of and about the disaster. Last but not least, the centre provided for some times guided tours, of which the monument and the school were the highlights before being pulled down for the reconstruction of Yuriage. Having started as a place to remember the dead, the school memorial and its office became a place of healing, remembering and learning about the disaster.



Fig. 3. O-Jizô-san memorial and Hiyoriyama Mountain (background), Yuriage.

3.2. O-Jizô-san memorial

The second memorial built in Yuriage is a Buddhist monument called ‘O-Jizô-san’ (see Fig. 3). Jizô is a Bodhisattva who protects the souls of children, the travellers and the weak. He is also believed to watch over pregnant women. His representation is characterised by its round shapes, semi-closed eyes, and a gentle smile. Our informants reported that some statues of Jizô originally marked places where a person died of an unnatural cause and can be found everywhere around the country, along the roads and at crossroads. The death of the individual is eventually forgotten over time, but these statues remain part of the community. Jizô statues are often adorned with red bibs around their necks, as well as hats and robes. People pay their respects by joining their hands in front of the statues and by making regular offerings of sweets and drinks. Through these rituals, the living are said to increase the merits of the dead and ensure their passage into heaven. Believing in the power of the Bodhisattva to heal the hearts of the survivors, a group of Buddhist priests from the neighbouring prefecture of Yamagata decided to start the project of ‘Sending Jizô to the Disaster Areas’ [33].

The Jizô project aims at erecting 50 statues all along the affected coastline community of Tohoku. However, their initiative has been facing resistance from most local governments. Jizô statues are seen as an obstacle for reconstruction planning and a reminder of death. The problem is further complicated by the fact that Buddhism and Japanese governments have always had an ambiguous relationship since the country’s modern era. The post-war constitution of 1947 that says that the government and religion must remain separate reinforced this division [34]. As a result, local governments often shy away from any direct relationships with religion, including memorial monuments. Symptomatic of this situation, the office of Natori City declined to provide land for such a Buddhist monument. As in other instances, the Jizô of Yuriage came to stand on the private land owned by the survivor of a household several years after the priests had been promoting their initiative in the area. Today, the Jizô of Yuriage is one of the seven statues that have been established for the victims of the GEJE.

The O-Jizô-san memorial is composed of three main elements carved in light grey granite. Standing on a lotus flower, the two-meter-high statue occupies the centre of the platform. Small figures of a girl and a boy representing the victims of the tsunami stand on both sides. Some of the bereaved and the visitors have grown into the habits of stroking or hugging the small statues. At the back, a stone tells the name of the monument and the Buddhist group that sponsored its construction. It explains that the monument has been built to alleviate the suffering of the souls of the dead and the lives of the survivors of the GEJE. It also says that the group offers prayers for the rapid reconstruction of the disaster area. The names of the 66 donors and leaders of the project, as well as the date of its edification, complete the inscription.

Unlike the school memorial, the O-Jizô-san stands on a site that was already popular among those visiting Yuriage during the aftermath. Known as the ‘tea drinking place’ (*Ocha-nomiba*), it was run by a widow, her sister-in-law and her niece on the piece of land where the former’s house once stood; both her husband and her son perished in the tsunami. The group began setting up a few chairs around a table and offered with tea and snacks to the few visitors. When I joined the group in 2013, the improvised tent was hosting between 50 and 100 people every weekend and even served lunch for their regulars. The chores of the group activities, in which I participated, included the routines of setting up, running, and closing up the place. The guests included survivors, volunteers, students, visitors, politicians and occasional researchers, as well as the media. The initial objective of the group was to provide a place where survivors could find company, soothe their minds and hearts, and rebuild their ties to the community. As time passed, the participants in the tea place formed a small community composed of various groups discussing various topics of interest, including pre-disaster Yuriage, the tsunami, the politics of recovery and reconstruction, and the remembrance of the dead.

The core members of the tea place had already started a campaign for the construction of an *ireihi* for the victims of Yuriage (see below) when they were approached by the leaders of the Jizô project. The enquiry came indirectly via the head of the bereaved parents of the Junior High School Memorial. She explained that the group had been wanting to build an O-Jizô-san in Yuriage for some time, but their proposal was met with resistance from the office of Natori City. The latter was reluctant to provide public land for a religious monument, especially at a time when its plans for reconstruction had not yet been settled. The only solution was therefore to find a private piece of land such as the one of the tea place. Already in search for a memorial for the dead, the owners of the tea place soon agreed to provide the land as well as the maintenance necessary for the Jizô monument.

Since its construction, the O-Jizô-san has essentially been a catalyst of mortuary rituals as visitors. In seeing the tall statue, passersby, small groups of visitors as well as occasional Buddhist monks have come to pay their respects, pray and make offerings to the dead (i.e. cakes, drinks and incense). Unlike the school memorial, there has been no large public, and formal gatherings organised, except when the Buddhist group unveiled the monument or perform its annual prayers and rituals in front of bereaved parents and a few survivors. As the reconstruction of the area began, the leaders of the tea place felt that they could no longer face the labour associated with running the site. In 2016, they indefinitely interrupted their weekend gatherings. However, recent conversations suggest that since they learned that the city office would allow for the relocation of the Jizô would be relocated on within the memorial park of Yuriage, they would consider opening another tea room on its new site. If plans go ahead, the monument could be an essential determinant for the revival of the community formed around the tea place, a revival of the social life that was born during the liminal period of five years that lasted between the destruction and the reconstruction of Yuriage.

3.3. Natori City Memorial

The third monument was built and inaugurated (on August 11, 2014) by the authorities of the local government. The Natori City Memorial is a *ireihi* that was built a few hundred meters from O-Jizô-san. Of a much greater scale, the memorial is composed of a large mound, an oval black stone of granite at the front, and a tall column of grey granite, slightly curved, sprouting from its centre (see Fig. 4). These two stones are called, respectively, ‘the memorial of the seed’ and the ‘memorial of the bud’. The text engraved on the ‘seed’ suggests that the stone stands for the citizens and the hometown lost during the disaster. The growing ‘bud’ symbolises the revival of the community. Its height marks the level of the tsunami wave recorded at this particular point (8.4 m). On each side of the mound, two large signboards provide



Fig. 4. Natori City Ireihi, Yuriage.

the names of the 911 dead, information about the GEJE, and a detailed explanation about the memorial itself. The height of the monument and the number of names of the victims on the boards provides the visitors with a sense of the level of destruction that took place in Yuriage and develops public awareness about the dangers of tsunamis.

The primary visual attribute of the memorial is its symbolism, its innovative and its scale. As mentioned above, *ireihi* are traditionally conceived as collective graves. Their design follows that of traditional gravestones. They are composed of large granite stones engraved with the names of the disaster and the victims. According to my interviewees, such a design invokes the visitors to join their hands in front of the stone to show their respect or connect with the dead. For my informants, the symbolism of rebirth – materialised by the seed and the bud – does not allow them to express their sentiments of grief and thus connect with the dead. My observation also suggests that visitors do not systematically join their hand in front of the monument. This monument does not also include the sense of touch found at the school memorial and, to some extent, at the O-Jizô-san. As such, our finding seems to suggest that monuments favouring the sense of touch rather than visual senses allow for a more intimate engagement with the memorial, the dead and the process of memorialization.

The significance of Natori's monument is precisely the involvement local government. As previously mentioned, Japanese governments get rarely involved in the construction of cenotaphs for the 'souls' of individuals lost in natural disasters. In the context of the GEJE, our research suggests that the only other city to have erected a stone for the souls of its citizens lost on 3.11 is the neighbouring town of Iwanuma. Instead of an *ireihi*, the office of Natori City had planned the construction of a memorial park and a *kinenhi*. This project should have seen its completion after the reconstruction of Yuriage. However, the prospect of spending the next several years without a place to honour and care the dead seemed unbearable for many bereaved people. A small group constituted at the tea place began to campaign for the construction of an *ireihi*. With the support of researchers and Buddhist priests, its leaders visited the city office. They explain that they needed a place where the community could carry out the process of collective grief. Their temples, which had been ravaged by the tsunami and had no authority over their land, could not satisfy their need for a memorial. Therefore, they argued that their solution was for the Natori government to construct it. One of my interviewees suggested 'If we are citizens of Natori while alive, why can't we be citizens after death?' Prompted by the requests, the municipality conceded to anticipate the building of the present monument and to engrave the names of the 911 inhabitants of Natori who had lost their lives in the tsunami.

Since its construction, the city's memorial has been a land mark for outside visitors. Like the two other commemorative sites, it held annual ceremonies. The monument also attracted the circumstantial visits of Prime Minister Shinzô Abe and his Deputy Prime Minister, Tarô Asô, on July 11 and September 28, 2015, and the PM participated in the UN

World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. Moreover, participants in school trips and tsunami study tours also regularly visited the monument. Together the school and the tea place, Natori's memorial site forms a matrix of memorialization where, through the remembrance of the dead, old and new generations, bereaved, survivors and visitors have the opportunity not only to remember but also to learn from the events of the GEJE.

4. The roles of memorials during the aftermath of the GEJE

In this last section, we draw from the discussion of our case study to highlight the shared functions of the stones for the dead during the immediate aftermath of the GEJE. We aim to expose the relationships between their explicit and implicit functions. We divide our analysis into three sections: grief and well-being, social ties and place making, and memories and disaster education. Through this study, we hope to show that a holistic approach to the ideas and practices surrounding memorial monuments would enable us to understand their roles during the aftermath of a disaster accurately.

4.1. Grief and well-being

The first function of the memorials is unequivocally the collective alleviation of sorrow. The stone of the school, the O-Jizô-san and the Natori City Ireihi all contribute to the morning of the dead, albeit in diverse and complementary forms. Firstly, they memorialise different groups of victims that include the citizen of Natori, the dead of Yuriage, and the school children. Secondly, their mode of caring for the dead is also distinctive. While the memorial for the children calls for intimacy via the sense of touch, the monumentality of the city's monumental edifice imposes distance. Somewhat in between, the statue of Jizô did not allow for the feeling of intimacy commonly associated with this figure. It was simply too imposing. Instead, the bereaved turned to the children figure which they may touch or sometimes embrace. These differences can be traced back to the fact that three distinct institutions built the memorials: the bereaved and its NGO, the local government and a Buddhist group. Rather than resulting in competing modes of grievance, however, these diverging approaches to memorialization allow for a more comprehensive response to the variety of expectations of the bereaved as well as the visitors who come to express and share the sorrows in Yuriage.

The diversity of memorial is unified but the need for the collective dimension of grief or 'collective solace' [35]. During conversations preceding the construction of the Jizo and Natori monuments, the members of the tea place argued that the shared aspect of memorialization is essential. They contended that it is only through the process of joining their hands together in front of a collective monument standing for all the victims of Yuriage that they may overcome their suffering. Also, we observed that this communal healing would not be complete without the contributions of those visiting the devastated areas. Their honouring the dead in front of the memorial is also perceived as an expression of solidarity with the affected community of the GEJE. In other words, a critical dimension of memorialization for the victims of the GEJE is the collective bereavement of the victims of the catastrophe and the shared sentiment of loss.

By dealing with the process of grief in a complementary and communal manner, the three memorials contribute towards the restoration of the well-being of the particularly vulnerable survivors. Research shows that people who have lost relatives and friends constitute the most vulnerable group of disaster survivors [36]. Reasons for this might be not only that these individuals have to process their traumatic experiences but also that their loved ones suffered a violent death. Such a predisposition requires the arrangement of intensive spiritual care and psychological support, of which memorial monuments are an essential dimension of socio-psychological recovery.

4.2. Social ties and place making

The second function of memorials has been the reconstruction of social bonds between the survivors and their land, as well as to preserve the survivors' collective identity. As it is often the case in post-disaster contexts, the community of Yuriage was fragmented, reduced and weakened. During the first few months of the aftermath, the bare landscape, as well as the trauma incurred, made it difficult for the survivors to return to Yuriage. Some of the survivors compensated the absence of activity and the emptiness of the land by growing flower and vegetable gardens on the land on which their house or that of their relatives once stood. Others built an improvised shrine where they prayed for the spirits of the lost loved ones. While these activities maintained an extraordinary form of life and commemoration, they often remained solitary and did not seem to contribute to the formation of new social ties. Among the rare surviving features, the mound of Hiyoriyama became an important site of pilgrimage for survivors and visitors. However, its exposure to the cold wind and the absence of privacy often prevented locals from using it as a place for social gatherings. The weekly market resurfaced from its ashes with a new amenity centre. However, our observation reveals that many of the local inhabitants were not in the habit of visiting the market before the disaster and felt estranged from this site. As a result, maintaining a sense of community has consequently proven to be a serious challenge during the many years that followed the catastrophe. Many survivors ended up rebuilding their lives outside Yuriage, never to return. In this unconnected landscape, the memorials and the facilities of the 'Memory of Yuriage' and the 'Tea Room' became popular among those wishing to rebuild a bond with their hometown.

In addition to providing social bonds, the memorials become sort of social observatories during the liminal period of recovery and reconstruction. Those regularly returning to the land of Yuriage had the opportunity to observe the bare landscape and progressively accept the irreversible loss of their homeland as they once knew it. Moreover, these observatories enable them to bear witness to the dramatic changes that have been occurring through the construction of the new layout of Yuriage. In other words, this observation suggests that collective memorials not only help the survivors to accept the past, it also helps them to envision a future.

Relating to their capacity to create social space, we find that memorials also contribute to maintaining the identity of the survivors. Each of the monuments commemorates a particular group of victims. If the case of the Junior High School is self-evident, the Natori City ireihi and the O-Jizô-san are more ambiguous. The former is dedicated unequivocally to the victims of Natori City. Although the Bodhisattva is itself not devoted to any particular victims, it is nevertheless considered to care for the victims of Yuriage. Also, rather than their being citizens of Natori, the Bodhisattva's caretakers and the visitors to the tea place often expressed their attachments to their homeland and their identity as inhabitants of Yuriage. In other words, one might suggest that if the monuments cannot be said to memorialise two distinct groups of victims and therefore the two levels of local identities.

4.3. Memories and disaster education

The third function of the memorials is their complementarity about the preservation of memory of the catastrophe. Among the monuments found in Yuriage, the facts of the tragedy are mainly to be found at the site of the memorial of Natori City. The summit of the monument itself indicates the height of the tsunami. Its panels give information about the scale of the material loss. The names of the 911 victims constitute a reminder of the atrocities that the area suffered on that day. In contrast, we have seen that the Junior High School *ireihi* is a reminder of the past existence of these children rather than the GEJE. It is – together with the O-Jizô-san – first and foremost a place for grieving and providing ritual care for the dead. Nevertheless, we have also discussed the fact

that these two sites of the memorials led to the construction of important additional social spaces where visitors came to learn about the catastrophe from the survivors and their collaborators. The office of the school memorial became the 'Memory of Yuriage', a centre where survivors and their supporting staff share GEJE videos, photographs, and other documents. During the initial years of its existence, the centre also organised a weekly session of storytelling about the GEJE. In a slightly more informal manner, the tea place developed as a microcosm where survivors shared their memories of pre-disaster Yuriage, the events of the disaster, and so on.

By preserving and transmitting the memories of the disaster, the sites of memorial monuments became landmarks for disaster tourism and education. The memory centre took the lead in this domain by providing official and professional guides for disaster tourism and tsunami study tours. The guide, often a survivor from Yuriage, is asked to step on board the bus and, with the help of a microphone, to recall the events of GEJE as the tour progresses through the desolate landscape. During these tours, the most significant landmarks are certainly the memorials where the visitors can sense the scale of the loss and the pain encountered by the victims. In addition to talking (with the aid of laminated pictures) about the livelihood they had in Yuriage before the tsunami, the guide makes a particular effort to explain the significance and the brief history of these memorials. In addition to the loss of lives and goods, storytellers are often keen to share the lessons they learned through their own experience of the disaster. Visitors also receive pieces of advice about tsunami evacuation, sheltering and recovery. These experiences are also keenly shared with future generations, such as the pupils of local schools. In other words, the stories told at the memorial sites are as much about disaster education as they are about remembrance.

5. Conclusion

The above discussion has allowed moving away from the common misconception that disaster memorials are only mnemonic device of the past. Instead, we have observed memorial for the dead can play active and essential roles in healing, socialising and giving a sense of place in a temporarily barren land. Drawing our findings, we would like to return to the idea that memorial stones do not contribute to disaster response and DRR in its broad sense. as conveyed by the following three general recommendations:

5.1. Memorials are a means, not an end

Our first recommendation is that an edifice for the dead should be seen as part of a process of grief and/social reconstruction, and not an achievement or a goal in itself. This process includes the consultation of the survivors to understand the important roles they may play in the social recovery of the post-disaster community. A memorial monument should also be conceived as a means of creating and rebuilding relationships among survivors and visitors, as well as providing comfort for the bereaved. Needless to say, that memorials for the dead may be in some cultures an essential part of the grieving process and should therefore be built as early as possible in consultation with the bereaved families.

5.2. Diversity over unity

The second recommendation is to favour opting for several monuments rather than a single stone. Such strategy is more likely to provide a fair representation of and a response to the diverse needs of mourners and survivors. We have seen that in Japan, the edification of memorial monuments has long been an integral part of dealing with disasters. Their functions are extremely varied. Some monuments essentially commemorate and honour the dead. Other stones are meant to record a particular tragedy and to share necessary information about the event. Likewise, in Yuriage, we found that each memorial for the dead has its

own function, its community. They lessen the conflict over how and whom should be memorialised and brought a dislocated community together.

5.3. Memorials and DRR

The third recommendation is to use memorials for the dead as a central catalyst of disaster memory and education. Our study shows that memorials built in Yuriage ended up being the centre of activities for formal as well as informal exchange of emergency information and knowledge. As such, we believe that memorials actively contribute to community resilience as a whole. The anthropologist Jesse Nathan (2016) argues that resilience is something built over the long-term existence. Referring to the concept of "just resilience," Nathan states that it is a process that goes beyond the mere experience of a disaster [37]. It also extends beyond the fact of residence, evacuation, and safety. This argument resonates with Takano's and Kamiyama's article that suggests that a culture of catastrophe needs to be founded on a broader culture of education [38]. We believe that memorials for those who perished in a disaster belong to this general culture.

This preliminary discussion leaves many questions unanswered: How and when do monuments stop playing their roles in disaster risk reduction? Additionally, how and why do the functions of memorial monuments change over time, depending on the monuments' type, shape, design, and so on? When and why does the efficacy of each of their specific roles start to wear off? The answers to these questions call for studies of the life cycles of memorials. This paper has hinted on the fact that the roles of memorial monuments evolve. Like everything, memorials are not eternal, and their life cycle depends on a societies' ability to integrate them in their long-term experience of disaster.

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