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From Uniqlo to NGOs: The Problematic "Culture of Giving" in Inter-Disaster Japan　ユニクロから非非政府組織まで––災害間の日本における「与える文化」の問題

Jennifer Robertson

From Uniqlo to NGOs: The Problematic "Culture of Giving" in Inter-Disaster Japan

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In Japan, March is the month when the "awakening of insects" (*keichitsu)* and the vernal equinox (*shunbun*) are observed, the latter a national holiday. March is also the month when unthinkable things have happened, from the deadly Subway Sarin Gas Attack in Tokyo launched by the Aum Shinrikyo sect on 20 March 1995, to the magnitude 9.0 earthquake of 2:46 p.m. on 11 March 2011 followed by a mega-tsunami that shredded the northeast coast and precipitated the meltdown of several Fukushima Dai'ichi nuclear reactors. The coastal areas closest to the epicenter of the quake shifted four meters eastward and sank 1.2 meters; the main island of Honshu sank by an average of 2.4 centimeters. According to a National Policy Agency Report, as of March 2012, 15,854 people were killed, 26,992 injured, and 3,155 remain missing; 129,225 buildings were smashed to bits, and over a million seriously damaged. 325,000 people are still living in prefab barracks, and only about six percent of the 23 tons of debris have been disposed.[1] The seventeenth and first anniversaries of the subway attack and devastating earthquake were commemorated this past March.

2012 saw the inauguration of yet another March event. At 10 a.m. on 16 March, Uniqlo re-reopened its flagship store on the Ginza (Tokyo's Fifth Avenue). The twice-renovated site now boasted a twelve-story glass vitrine of inexpensive casual clothing. When I arrived an hour later, the double line of customers waiting their turn to snag the colorful Chinese-made t-shirts and jeans stretched well over two blocks (Fig. 1). Police and television crews were everywhere. Multilingual Uniqlo clerks with megaphones expertly shepherded the customers into the store. Meanwhile, flusher tourists from China flooded the high-end department stores like Wako, Mitsukoshi, and Matsuya that circle Uniqlo. I was reminded anew of how Chinese shoppers especially are helping keep alive Tokyo's (and Japan's) struggling retailers.

The founder and president of Uniqlo, Yanai Tadashi, allegedly the richest person in Japan, was interviewed on CNN's "Talk Asia" on 2 and 3 March of this year. He decried the inability of politicians to work together proactively as *national* leaders to rescue the collapsing economy, and was right on target with his sharp criticism of the central government's chaotic, dishonest, and wholly inadequate response to the triple disasters of last March. Curiously, he failed to implicate the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) in his censure of politicians,[2] and emphasized instead his own inability, as a businessman, to bring about constructive changes and reforms.

There is much about Yanai to admire, but I found his claims of political impotence a little disingenuous. Last year, Yanai contributed $25.7 million in aid for victims of the 11 March triple disaster, half of which came from his own pocket, and the rest from Uniqlo in the form of cash and clothing. But as I listened to the CNN interview, I could not help but muse that investing his profits in a model Uniqlo factory for the Tōhoku (Northeast) region, where the 9.0 earthquake, giant tsunami and three-reactor meltdown left 65,000 survivors without livelihoods (many of their unemployment benefits expired in February, 2012), would have been a far more boldly proactive and transformative initiative than one-time donations. In view of the fact that there is a long history of textile and sewing factories in the northeast, such a facility would help to rescue part of the slumping manufacturing sector as well as showcase Yanai's vaunted technological innovations and dynamic entrepreneurship. At some point, perhaps as early as in the next several years, Chinese labor will not be so "cheap" and the often harsh and exploitative working conditions less tolerated.[3] The repatriation of manufacturing would be a pragmatic move that could only strengthen the affluence and integrity of all sectors of Japanese society.

Fig. 1: The re-opening of Uniqlo's flagship store on the Ginza, 16 March 2012. Photograph by author.

However, a week before the Ginza flagship's re-opening, instead of a model factory, Uniqlo opened temporary (one-year) outlets in prefabricated metal structures in three northeastern cities. In its press release, Uniqlo claimed to be responding to local demand, and that these three stores would "provide daily necessities, the joy of wearing clothes and job opportunities." This response is part of Yanai's new Uniqlo Restoration Support Project that will invest $300 million in five relatively new NGOs. They are JEN, ADRA [Adventist Development and Relief Agency] Japan, IVY (International Volunteer Center Yamagata), PlaNet Finance Japan, and Tōhoku Kyōeki Tōshi Kikin (Northeast Profit Sharing Investment Fund). Founded at the end of 2011, this last NGO is the newest of the five.

I visited the prefab Uniqlo in Kesennuma (Miyagi prefecture), where I joined dear friends, who survived the tsunami, for the first-year anniversary of the multiple disasters. I will write more below about the commemoration we attended at a Buddhist temple. But first, I want to look more closely at Japanese NGOs and NPOs, including the Japanese Red Cross, as they, and not the Japanese central or local governments, have been the main clearing houses for earthquake and tsunami relief funds. A lot of thorough investigative reporting has been conducted on all angles of the Fukushima nuclear debacle, some of which is cited in this article. Likewise, moving stories about the versatility of the people who, having lost everything, started over again from scratch, continue to be published and broadcast in the Japanese and global mass media along with horrifying footage of the roiling tsunami. Less covered in the Japanese and foreign media is the connection between Japanese and foreign donors, whether corporate, governmental, or individual, and NGOs and NPOs, and the "culture of giving" enabled and perpetuated by that relationship.[4] While acknowledging the good and necessary work of non-governmental and non-profit organizations, in the pages that follow I aim to draw attention to some of the problematic aspects of seemingly altruistic activities, including "mission drift," on the part of those organizations as they seek to remain viable and solvent. It should already be evident that my approach to this end is not a typical "linear narrative," with a sequential, unidimensional, forward progression toward an "official story" about a given subject. Mine is more of a looping narrative. Nor do I give equal attention to competing or contradictory interpretations of a given subject, the so-called Rashomon effect. Rather, my method is an exercise in montage, or in connecting "dots"; that is, in juxtaposing events and actions that appear unrelated in order to reveal their contiguity and synergistic relationship, and, ideally, to generate new meanings and insights.

Moved by the horrific damage caused by the towering tsunami, individuals and corporations alike all around the world, including in Japan, have contributed several billions of dollars in charitable donations over the past year—Kuwait, for example sent five million barrels of crude oil worth $520 million. Almost all of the money was donated to NGO/NPOs, most of it to the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS), which the government designated as the focal point for cash donations in Japan.

In its February 2012 "Operations Update," the JRCS reports that it had transferred $4.5 billion over the past year to fifteen prefectures to assist disaster survivors with cash grants. The fifteen prefectures presumably included both prefectures that were devastated and those that accepted survivors for relocation. $4 billion came from "international donors" excluding "sister Red Cross societies," and $500 million from the public-owned Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) and from the Central Community Chest of Japan, the national organization that coordinates local community chests which are operated by individual and autonomous boards of directors. The Red Cross transfers donated cash to prefectural "grant disbursement committees" that work with municipal authorities to identify beneficiaries. Ostensibly (although exactly how is not clear) the several dozen NGO/NPOs involved in Tōhoku relief efforts, including those now affiliated with Uniqlo, also work with and through prefectural and municipal offices. The latter are also responsible for actually distributing the cash; as of February 2012, $3.84 billion has been delivered to "the beneficiaries" according to the JRCS, with at least $660 million yet to be transferred and disbursed.

A month after the mega-earthquake, reports of varying degrees of investigative depth were already circulating in the Japanese (and foreign) mass media about how donations were not reaching those who most needed them for the reasons that many local governmental offices, along their digital and paper records and files, had been destroyed by the tsunami, and that local officials had either lost their lives or evacuated. Also, insurance companies and municipal authorities were unable to process compensations and pensions until death certificates were properly registered. This did not begin to happen until months after the threefold disaster because surviving family members were unwilling to declare a missing relative "deceased" until 100 days had passed—a temporal boundary in Buddhist funerary practices separating the living from the dead.

Although pension funds are handled separately from charity donations, that both had yet to be fully distributed has been attributed in part to the dearth of local-level administrators. Civil engineers, nurses, counselors, and a whole spectrum of infrastructural support staff are needed to assist with the most urgent relief tasks. To further complicate matters, as reported in *Nikkei.com*, an online economics journal, the Reconstruction Agency, established a long eleven months after the catastrophic earthquake, is headquartered in Tokyo—not Tōhoku—with a regional bureau based in the inland city of Morioka (Iwate prefecture) and a couple of branch offices. Coastal towns and cities, whose elected officials survived the tsunami, are now at the mercy of a flood of paperwork that has to be ferried through several levels of bureaucracy before their petitions for aid reach Tokyo.

No wonder Twitters, blogs, and local newspapers (like the *Sanriku Shinpō* published in Kesennuma) are still abuzz with angry complaints about the snail's pace of financial assistance and reconstruction. Only a fraction of the enormous mountains of rubble has been incinerated. Because of widespread fears from local officials and citizens alike about possible contamination from the wreckage, Prime Minister Noda has had to promise "financial assistance" to municipalities willing to accept tsunami debris for disposal. Not unnoticed is the parallel to the Tokyo Electric Power Company's (TEPCO) subsidies to communities willing to host nuclear reactors, which in retrospect, was a Faustian pact. Noda has also appealed to the private sector, requesting that cement makers, paper mills and steelmakers recycle wood, metal and soil from the disaster zones. Because high radiation levels have been found in recycled cement, citizens are concerned that the companies involved in salvaging tsunami debris may be less diligent about, or even bypass, testing for toxic content.[5] TEPCO's own refusal to burn wood chips processed from debris has invoked one of the few expressions of open enmity toward that company in the Japanese Anglophone media—the Japanese language media simply reported its refusal.[6]

Dozens of wired Japanese have dedicated their blogs to soliciting answers to some of the same disturbing questions that drew my attention to the disbursement of charity donations.[7] On what items and projects has what amount of charity money been spent? How are the remaining donations being maintained or invested? Who is responsible for keeping strict track of the funds, and how is accountability being assured? These matters are not clearly spelled out, if at all, on the websites maintained (in Japanese and other languages) by, especially the large, NGOs involved in Tōhoku affairs. Given the succession of financial scandals and bankruptcies in Japan over the past year—most recently AIJ Investment Advisor's apparent ponzi scheme in which $2.4 billion in pension funds for 880,000 workers vanished—training a searchlight on NGO operations and encumbered donations would certainly seem in order. Such transparency would go a long way to dispel suspicions about the possible misappropriation of tsunami funds raised last December when, as reported in the *Japan Times*, the Japanese Fisheries Agency admitted to spending $29 million (!) to equip a whaling fleet based way down south in Nagasaki with "security equipment" in the event of an encounter with anti-whaling activists.

Fig. 2: The prefab Mina-machi Murasaki Ichiba (Violet Market) in Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture. Photograph by author, 11 March 2012.

The 3/11 *daishinsai* sparked a lively debate in the *Asahi Shinbun* and elsewhere about whether the crisis would occasion the spread in Japan of *kifubunka*, or "a culture of giving."[8] On its website JACO (Japan Association of Charitable Organizations) lauded the temporary (five-year) post-3/11 tax reforms that allows individuals to either deduct from their income tax or to gain as a tax credit, 80% of their donations, up from the earlier limit of 10%; for incorporated donors, the entire amount of a donation (to registered outfits) is tax deductible. A recent permanent reform, building on progressive legislation passed in 1998 concerning the role of incorporated NGO/NPOs, allows individuals to either deduct from their income tax or to gain as a tax credit, 40% of their taxable income, up from the earlier limit of 10%. JACO also reports that the requisite paperwork has been simplified, in itself a remarkable reform in the empire of paperphiles.[9] As of March 2011, there were 42,387 incorporated NGO/NPOs; however, donations to only 208 of them are eligible for tax deductions.[10] Unlike the NGOs whose coffers will soon be brimming with donations from Yanai and Uniqlo, among other wealthy CEOs and their corporations—all of whom stand to benefit from the temporary tax reforms—the vast majority of NGO/NPOs in Japan operate at the level of micro-local micro-financing.[11]

Like its 2011 heir, the 1998 law was occasioned by a natural disaster, the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 17 January 1995. The shocking paralysis of the central government at that time—Japan still lacks an accountable professional disaster management institution, like FEMA—inadvertently empowered the well-networked *yakuza* (organized crime syndicates) to step in as first responders. In fact, as reported in the *Japan Times*, Tomohiko Suzuki, a freelance journalist who worked underground at Fukushima, estimates that at least 10% of subcontractors depend on the *yakuza* for recruiting day laborers to clean up the radioactive mess.[12] An enhanced role for organized crime in disaster relief efforts is hardly a platform for the emergence of "citizens' power." What *is* indicative of an emergent "true civil society," JCIE and JACO insist, is the reality of the 1.2 million "volunteer days"—the actual number of volunteers is unknown—donated following the 1995 earthquake, and the 900,000 days in 2011, largely orchestrated by NGO/NPOs.[13] Uncounted in these figures, and not to be overlooked is the awe-inspiring commitment of hundreds of survivors to use their own hands, and funds, to help resurrect their hometowns, however futile some of those efforts appear to be due to contamination, significant sinkage and/or remote location.

On many NGO websites, much is made about how a "culture of giving" has not been nurtured in Japan. This is not quite accurate as "gift giving" is a highly structured—and highly commercialized—year-round ritual in Japan involving a network of mutual

obligations.[14] What the NGOs are likely alluding to is a new type of giving, the *voluntary* giving of donations to strangers at home and abroad, as opposed to both ritualized gifting and the long history of mutual aid (*tasuke'ai*), especially evident in the farming and fishing sectors. Regarding the latter, neighbors would collaborate in digging and maintaining irrigation canals, thatching roofs, repairing fishing nets, assisting at funerals, extinguishing fires, and so on.[15] An urban expression of this esprit de corps took the form of a "volunteer boom" in the 1980s and 1990s.[16] What is very different about *tasuke'ai* then and volunteerism today is motives—personal—and target population—strangers. The central government (through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) quickly sought to harness volunteerism as an agent of non-partisan public service unrelated to personal edification or self-fashioning. In short, the NGO/NPO reforms of 1998 marked the beginning of the government's dedicated investment in the "non-profit" sector as a way of redistributing social services, a strategy glossed as "neo-liberal" in the case of for-profit privatization.

The Japanese non-profit Public Resource Center (CPRD) declares in its manifesto that: "Our aim is to realize a 'civil society' that will enable people to express themselves without restraint, to cooperate with one another, to appeal to society vigorously, and to improve society." NGOs/NPOs are expected to serve as a vehicle for realizing these "hopes" from individuals and to take up a leadership role in this "new society".[17] Ishii Sumie, the managing director of the NGO Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP), whose usual bailiwick is "developing" countries, further qualifies a true civil society as one that is sex and gender sensitive and dedicated to enabling women to become a strong economic force.[18]

Clearly, NGOs and NPOs are not just a more efficient means of delivering disaster relief quickly and efficiently when and where needed and in whatever form necessary, from money to clothing to labor. They envision themselves, and have been harnessed by others, including the government and corporations, as vehicles for unprecedented social, economic, and political transformations. Moreover, as CPRD's executive director, Kishimoto Sachiko, emphasizes, the widespread use today in Japan of credit and debit cards,[19] in combination with internet shopping, has made it possible for individual givers to act spontaneously by simply clicking on the "donate" icon on NGO/NPO and corporate websites.

The rise of volunteerism was expedited by 1995 Hanshin earthquake and organized as a social force through the subsequent NG0/NPO reforms noted earlier. What is new, or at least blatantly visible today, is the high-profile role of the for-profit corporate sector in mediating NGO/NPO activities, including the selective recruitment of volunteers. Exemplifying this new reality is the influential, globally networked, and newly resurgent NGO, Japan Platform (JPF). On its website, JPF is introduced as a "new cooperation of NGOs, the business community, and the government" whose main mission is to "facilitate the development of Japanese civil society in the 21st century." Thirty-three NGO "unit members" are on board (two of which, JEN and ADRA have also teamed up with Uniqlo), and the "business community" in question is the powerful conservative Nippon Keidanren (Japan Business Federation). JPF's director, Arima Toshio, is former president and current board director and executive advisor of Fuji Xerox, and was appointed to the UN's Global Compact Board by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in 2007. Japan Platform is an international, *über* NGO, an NGO for NGOs: it collects donations—nearly $67 million in just one month following the 9.0 earthquake—which it then distributes to smaller NGOs whose programs it tracks and profiles on its website.[20]

Dr. Jennifer Jones (Virginia Tech), a political economist whose research focuses on American NGOs operating in Africa (Tanzania), has interrogated the unsavory aspects of "charity culture." Jones observes that many NGOs began as humanitarian missions but since have expanded to become growth industries, with the largest American NGOs boasting revenues of over $1 billion from donations, mostly from corporations and the U.S. government. Ironically, the activities of many of these corporations contribute to various environmental and social problems, but now, as Jones asserts, "they're giving the money to the NGOs to go and 'fix the problem'." Moreover, increasingly it is the case that donors (i.e., corporations and government) are setting the "humanitarian" agenda, their donations serving as "incentives."[21] Although Jones' subject is American NGOs involved with conservation and eco-tourism, her concerns raise questions relevant to the post-*daishinsai* role of NGOs in Japan, and the hundreds of millions of dollars donated to them by corporations (and their CEOs) like Uniqlo and Softbank. As noted earlier, Uniqlo has used its collaboration with NGOs, including the UN Refugee Agency, to meld humanitarian deeds with corporate interests.

Astonishingly, and in contrast to the rapid growth in NGO/NPOs, even after the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995 Japan still lacks an adequately staffed, unified disaster management office that integrates all relevant agencies. The staff of the Disaster Management Bureau (within the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism) was increased to fifty from thirty-six after March 2011; in contrast, FEMA has a staff of 3,700 about 4,000 personnel on standby. Almost by default then, individual volunteers and NGO/NPOs will continue to play a crucial role as first responders in managing the aftermath of natural disasters. Japanese automakers may have invented the "just in time" approach to manufacturing, but the central government continues to pursue "not in time" practices in disaster zones!

If new earthquake "predictions" prove accurate, NGO/NPO first responders are likely to once again have their work cut out for them. Japanese geologists and seismologists recently raised the alarm of a 7+ magnitude earthquake (and accompanying tsunami) occurring in the Nankai Trough running along the southwest coast, within four years at the earliest, and certainly within thirty years. Based on newly revised future disaster scenarios circulated at the beginning of April 2012 by an "expert panel" from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, a tsunami ranging from 2.3 meters in Tokyo Bay to 34 meters further south along the island of Shikoku is predicted in the event of a major earthquake. These numbers are two to three times higher than earlier figures on the basis of which exiting evacuation facilities were built.[22]

Up and down the coast, residents and local leaders alike are in a state of shock. Television programs are doing their part to unsettle viewers with graphic simulations of the predicted flooding of low-lying areas, subway tunnels, the immediate death of 11,000 people, and the collapse of 850,000 structures in the capital alone! But will such hair-raising prophesies provoke the central government and constituent parliamentarians to finally reverse the old adage and not miss the opportunity to *take* the opportunity to exercise definitive (as opposed to dogmatic) leadership? One hopes that if (and when) the Big One strikes, whoever is the prime minister at that time will actually declare a state of emergency, which former PM Kan did not do on 11 March 2011.[23] What cabinet officials are presently doing, through their media mouthpieces, is simply urging people from Tokyo on down the coast to "act urgently to protect themselves." Perhaps the much ballyhooed TOKYO SKYTREE (sic), at 2,080 feet the tallest tower in the world and set to open in May this year, can double as a tsunami evacuation site?

Nearly 300 square miles of Japan's northeast coast was decimated by the quake. Excepting the dangerously radioactive area around the crippled Fukushima reactors, Tōhoku has the potential to become the country's largest construction site. However, a building boom has yet to develop (with the exception of Sendai city) due to a triple whammy of post-disaster circumstances: utterly indecisive central, and disrupted local, leadership; continued delays in clearing tsunami debris and initiating reconstruction programs; and the exodus of 43,000 (mainly younger) people from the region, which has long suffered from a rapidly aging and declining population. The corporate sector does not seem to view as profitable a dedicated investment in the enlightened rebuilding of the Tōhoku coast, one that would, say, help subsidize the many brilliant designs for eco-friendly, tsunami-safe communities drawn up by architects, engineers, and environmentalists, in consultation with local residents, willing to contribute their expertise to the cause.[24] What the government is helping to make investment-worthy is debris disposal—which prompts the question of why incinerators and debris disposal facilities are not simply built in the devastated areas, thus providing employment and a new recycling industry for the region. A related question that arises—one that is not (yet) publicly posed—is whether funds earmarked for disaster relief, and even NGO surpluses, are being used to recruit waste management companies from outside Tōhoku.

It is difficult and frustrating to try and track both the actual amounts of money received (as opposed to pledged) by NGO/NPOs much less the actual amounts distributed, when, how, and/or to whom. GiveWell, an independent, nonprofit charity evaluator that focuses on "how well programs actually work and their effects on the people they serve," has crunched the numbers and deciphered the somewhat obfuscatory language and "low substantiveness" of the relief activities and reports of Japanese NGOs/NPOs operating in Tōhoku after 3/11. According to GiveWell one month after the disaster, "the numbers…imply that nonprofits have gotten more than enough funding for what they are planning."[25] However, GiveWell seems to rely on Anglophone documents, such as those published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Many of the smaller, highly localized NPOs not on GiveWell's radar offer clearer and more substantive accounts of relief activities on their websites (few of which have English versions). For example, It's Not Just Mud (INJM) is

noteworthy for providing straightforward, up to date reports on its projects, its collaborators, and its budget in English and Japanese.[26] In contrast, the websites of the more prominent and largest NGOs (including those mentioned earlier) are visually loquacious, with lots of flow charts and embedded links, but vague on nuts-and-bolts information.

Local newspapers, like the *Sanriku Shinpō* published in Kesennuma, provide sets of figures that an enterprising investigator could cross-check against those listed by NGO/NPOs. Most of the 11 March 2012 issue that I bought when visiting that port city was devoted to thanking the 50,000 volunteers who, for the past year, shoveled smelly sludge and sorted debris.[27] Twenty (unnamed) city-based and outside NGO/NPOs were also thanked for their continuing efforts to support the fishing industry and also families living in makeshift units. Of the approximately $226.5 million in donations received by Kesennuma (together with the neighboring town of Minamisanriku), 90% have been distributed in cash to survivors.[28] The paper also points out that the central government (Reconstruction Ministry) funded only 30% of the $88 million applied for to help cover the reconstructions of the port and roads. The city will reapply, a process that will further delay reconstruction.[29] Again the question arises, where and how—and when—is the substantial amount of monetary donations remaining going to be disbursed?

Without a doubt, NGO/NPOs supported and provided vital relief work from day one in the devastated cities, towns and villages along the northeast coast, and volunteers have been warmly thanked over and over by grateful survivors, like those in Kesennuma. Inspired by the intrinsic worth of public service, many volunteers of small, local, spontaneously formed NPOs, like the core members of It's Not Just Mud, have quit their regular jobs to become fulltime grassroots organizers. However, now that the first stage of disaster relief is over, how exactly will their needs to remain integral as an organization, which may involve merging with larger NGOs or even receiving corporate or government funds, mesh with the changing needs prioritized by local residents?[30] The problem of "mission drift" is not inconsiderable, and NGO/NPOs founded for humanitarian purposes must also take into account a corporate sponsor's record on ethical practices.

These are the kind of questions and concerns that bother Takasuna Harumi. The sixty-six year old Takasuna is an experienced disaster relief organizer from the Kobe area who acquired his sought after expertise in the aftermath of the 1995 earthquake. He was invited by the administrators of Kesennuma to assess the role of NGO/NPOs in the city's recovery efforts. Takasuna was emphatic about the need for Kesennuma citizens to deliberate among themselves to develop an agenda for reconstruction. He thus advocated for the creation of strictly local (*jimoto*) NPOs and the reconstitution of neighborhood and commercial associations that had been a casualty of the hellish tsunami and fire. Decisive local, regional and central leadership is crucial, he acknowledged, but not to the extent of extinguishing citizens' critical agency, especially if a community is regain its coherence and capacity for sustainability.[31]

Fig. 3: "Thank you" banners and posters in Tokyo, Ginza and Roppongi Hills, respectively. Photographs by author, 1 March 2012.

Realizing that after the first anniversary of 3/11 the wave of mass-media attention and volunteers would begin to recede—as it has—fifty-one venders who had lost everything pooled their money and resources and opened on 25 December 2011, a two-story prefab shopping center, the Mina-machi Murasaki Ichiba (lit. Southern Town Violet Market) (Fig. 2). The prefab market was managed by the Kesennuma Revitalized Shopping Street(s) (Kesennuma Fukkō Shotengai), a new iteration of the pre-disaster commercial association that had managed the shops, restaurants, and bars along the waterfront." Violet Market is not exactly a "Ginza," and there were certainly no Chinese tourists present on March 10 and 11 when I joined in the "3/11 Memorial Events" along with my local friends.

Unlike the prefab Uniqlo, located further inland off a busy street lined with newly opened car dealerships, Violet Market and nearby Sakana-chō (Fish Town), another prefab cluster of shops and restaurants, were surrounded by the gutted skeletons of wrecked buildings and lots of rubble. The memorial program flyer cautioned visitors to tread carefully. The two-day series of events was lively and upbeat, punctuated only by the one-minute of silent prayer at 2:46 p.m. on 11 March marking when the earthquake had struck. Featured artists included the omnipresent television talk show host, Mina Monta, the Japanese Regis Philbin; Dragon Ash, a rap-metal band; and the Sunnyside Gospel Club.[32] Snacks abounded and beer flowed freely.

Perhaps because it was cold and rainy, and because the television crews were stationed at Violet Market, attendance at the Fish Town celebrations was below expectations, according to shopkeepers. About one hundred locals and a few curious outsiders were on hand when I was there at the opening. Inside a large white tent to the side of the prefab market was a low stage for the performers. The audience stood in front, many of them commenting to each other about the before-and-after pictures strung along the canvas walls of the lively harbor neighborhood before it was "swallowed" (*nomareta*), as the Japanese say, by the 10-meter tsunami. We returned that evening to a third prefab cluster near the ruined harbor, Kesennuma Yokochō (Kesennuma Alley) to dine at Buggy, one of the several *izakaya*, or Japanese pubs, in the Alley. All twenty diners crammed into the 200 square foot prefab were from Kesennuma. Boisterous and animated, they transformed the cramped space into a festive family gathering. As my friend, whose family is in the "ocean vegetables" retail business, remarked, townies knew that it was important to help each other out by shopping and eating at these prefab shops and cafes, however inconveniently located.

Everyone attending the memorial events for the 3/11 disaster was aware that Violet Market, Fish Town and Kesennuma Alley were but temporary installations, but hoped that their presence would serve as a springboard for the rebuilding of the harbor community, which in turn might help stem the departure of young adults especially to greener paddies. It was thus encouraging to discover that on the evening of 11 March, Re:us.Kesennuma, a city-based NPO-like group of young adults, had organized a "Candle Night" memorial modeled after the late-summer Buddhist festival called *tōrōnagashi* that involves floating lighted candles down a river to guide the spirits of the departed back to their realm. In this case, Murasaki Jinja, the patron Shinto shrine of the Mina-machi distict, was the religious entity involved. Messages of hope from local residents and concerned citizens all over Japan were affixed to the floating candles, which were then launched across the choppy waters of the harbor. The group's odd English name, Re:us.Kesennuma, is explained (in Japanese) on their website: We chose our name to reflect our motto, "Let's begin now with what we can achieve by ourselves." The "re" refers to "starting over again," and the "us" to "Those of us who were born and raised in the Kesennuma area and began this project to support our beloved Kesennuma by collectively taking its recovery into our own hands."[33]

How many hands does it take to rebuild a devastated community? What are the limits of "home grown" sustainability? How do affective appeals for hometown loyalty mesh with businesses, like my friend's, dependent on a national and even global marketplace? The limited capacities of the central government in dealing responsibly and effectively with organizing the post-tsunami cleanup and in managing the disastrous and ongoing meltdown at the Fukushima Dai'ichi nuclear power plant, has been exposed to the world. In its stead will Japanese NGOs and NPOs use the multiple disasters to leverage their own solvency and sustainability as the leading role-players in an emergent new type of "culture of giving"? Of course, even voluntary "giving" is not such a simple act, and even at the interpersonal level there are expectations of a "return" of some kind, from a "thank you" to a tax exemption.

While acknowledging a new spirit of volunteerism in the country since 1995, Ishii Sumie, managing director of the aforementioned NGO, Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP), worries that the threefold- disaster has left the Japanese people as a whole "too inward looking." I have suggested that this is a tendency that well predates 2011.[34] Japan received unprecedented foreign assistance and aid, including donations from "developing" countries that were Japanese aid recipients themselves, underscoring the benefits of international interdependence. However, even before 3/11, the central government under the leadership of the dominant, but unstable, Democratic Party of Japan (DJP), had not sought to exert an influential role in global politics as befits the world's third largest economy. Rather, a politics of victimhood seems to be the order of the day, as evident, ironically, in an appeal omnipresent especially outside of Japan since 3/11: "Pray for Japan."

Prayers are better directed toward the memory of the nearly 16,000 people who lost their lives in the disaster.[35] "Pray for Japan" may have been an appeal initiated abroad, but it has been co-opted by agents of the state, such as the national tourism campaigns discussed below. At the Buddhist memorial service I attended in Kesennuma, prayers were offered to the souls of the deceased and to placate the wandering souls of those whose bodies are still missing. To "pray" for a nation-state seems a bit peculiar under the circumstances.In this connection, I also suggest that it was from the position of "national victimhood" that former Prime Minister Kan Naoto appropriated the word *kizuna*, or "family" bonds, in a letter published in seven selected newspapers in April 2011: *The Wall Street Journal*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *Financial Times*, *Le Figaro*, *People's Daily*, *Chosun Ilbo*, and *Kommersant*.[36] In his letter, Kan asserts that, "Through our own efforts and with the help of the global community, Japan will recover and come back even stronger. We will then repay you for your generous aid." Kan never got a chance to explain what he meant by "we will repay you" as he was forced to resign four months later over his mishandling of the multiple disasters.

The Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) and the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) picked up the *kizuna* baton with its own 2012 spring campaign to revive the tourism industry which fell by over 65% after 3/11 but is almost back to 2010 levels, in large part due to aggressive promotion deals aimed especially at the gigantic Chinese market.[37] JNTO has festooned subway stations in Beijing with posters glamorizing the Tōhoku region, and has resorted to micro-blogs as well to entice Chinese visitors to northeastern destinations, and not just to ritzy Ginza.[38] Curiously, JNTO's cyber-strategy of encouraging Tōhoku tourism includes omitting from its Chinese, English and Korean websites (updated in 2012) any textual or pictorial reference to the devastation wrought by the gigantic tsunami![39]

In Japan at least, the JNTO's campaign posters and banners are all in English, and their odd grammar and allusions to Japanese imperialism have provoked sarcastic comments in the media. One flag-like banner that is hung across the front of city buses and from street lamps in Ginza and other districts, features a stylized cherry blossom with the message, "Japan. Thank You." The other poster, posted in various public venues, features several stylized carp, symbols of perseverance, swimming upstream, and the phrases: "Japan, Rising Again. Thank you for your support. Japan. Thank you" (Fig. 3).[40]

It has been said, in the context of 3/11, that a crisis is defined not by an outside event, but by the incapacity to respond effectively.[41] Tell that to the brave survivors of the tsunami, especially in the more isolated areas, whose wits were all they had to live by in the days before help arrived. This definition of crisis though, rings true if the focus is on the central government and TEPCO, whose incapacity to act with alacrity also exposed the hubristic lack of preparation for such a cataclysmic cascade of events. Plenty has been written already about the way in which the smug executives of TEPCO categorically dismissed proposals to protect Fukushima Dai'ichi from various disaster scenarios. 3/11 is described by all as the biggest catastrophe in the archipelago since the deadly air raids and atomic bombings in 1945. Parallels can be drawn between the "official stories" of these historically separate tragic events. The incapacity of successive postwar administrations to acknowledge the wartime atrocities committed by Imperial forces throughout the Japan's Asian and Pacific Rim empire has been diagnosed, at best, as willful amnesia. JNTO's "thank you" campaign, timed to coincide with the spring and summer tourist season, could be similarly described. By omitting from its website up-to-date pictures of the tsunami-shredded coastline, the organization has effectively isolated and disconnected "that day" (*ano hi*, as 3/11 is termed) from today.[42] In short, the "thank you" campaign masks an incapacity to engage with the ongoing reality of not "*post*" but "*inter*-disaster" Japan. There is a long way to go before "post" can be used as a prefix.

The memorial service held this year on 11 March at the elegant Kannon-ji, a Tendai[43] Buddhist temple in Kesennuma founded in the late 17th century, was attended by over four hundred parishioners and their guests. One hundred monks from Tendai temples throughout Japan had been invited to chant in unison at different intervals during the two-hour service. The one-minute of silent prayer (*mokutō*) was "silent" only in name, for once the memorial sirens sounded at 2:46 p.m., the monks began a vigorous crescendo of chanting to console the spirits of the thousands who drowned in the tsunami and to offer solace to their living relatives and friends. Afterwards, my friends, whose families miraculously avoided a terrible fate, said they felt "refreshed" and "energized." We all sang praises for the Venerable Honda Kōjun (b. 1917), who heads the Tendai Sect in Japan and is the current president of the Japanese Buddhist Federation. The distinguished priest surprised us all by his rousing speech delivered in a robust voice that belied his frail appearance. Most memorable was his astute summation of both the 3/11 disaster, and meltdown in particular, as *daijinsai*, or "great human-made disasters," a play on *daishinsai*, or "great earthquake disaster." Most of the congregation nodded in agreement.

"Factors that turn natural events into a human disaster are generally the result of human action and inaction."[44] The Venerable priest knew this, the congregation of tsunami survivors knew this; it seems so obvious. I subtitled this paper "The Problematic "Culture of Giving" in Inter-Disaster Japan." Giving, as discussed earlier in the context of volunteerism and NGO/NPOs, is a fundamental corollary and component of a "culture of reaction."[45] Donations, whether in the form of money or materials, are a response to a perceived need. But after those immediate needs are met—the first phase of disaster relief—what must be fostered is a "culture of prevention."[46] The specter of the Big One in the Tokyo area looms. In closing, the wise words of Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General, are worth remembering. Building a culture of prevention, he cautioned, is not easy. Unlike in the culture of giving, results and benefits are not necessarily tangible. Rather, "they are the disasters that did not happen."[47] Until a culture of prevention matures and prevails over a culture of giving, NGO/NPOs, as currently structured and managed, will be the main entities that are self-sustaining. Until that time, Japan and Tōhoku will remain in the limbo-like mode of "inter-disaster."

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Notes

[1] For detailed information about the types of toxic contaminants in the tsunami debris, see *Winifred A. Bird and Elizabeth Grossman, Chemical Contamination, Cleanup and Longterm Consequences of Japan's Earthquake and Tsunami, The Asia-Pacific Journal, 9 (33), No 1, August 15, 2011*

[2] Did Yanai take for granted the collusive bond between TEPCO and the central government or did he, like so many corporate leaders, media pundits, and celebrities, avoid fingering the power company for fear of reprisals? Hizumi Kazuo, a lawyer cum investigative journalist, has censured the Japanese media for their cozy relationship with the government and TEPCO. He founded the online investigative newsletter, News for the People of Japan, to provide credible and accurate information about the aftermath of 3/11 . Unlike some of their counterparts in the United States, Japanese celebrities have steered clear of criticizing the government-TEPCO dyad for fear of being blacklisted, as was Yamamoto Taro. For his story, see Erika Arita, Actor in the spotlight of Japan's antinuke movement, Japan Times, 4 March 2012. Accessible online here.

[3] Uniqlo uses technology to invent and produce new synthetic fabrics and employs in Japan a multilingual staff. As reported in the Japanese mass media in April, Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries are becoming attractive destinations for Japanese companies as China has been losing its luster amid rising wages. Like other Japanese companies, Uniqlo has its sights set on Myanmar. Not only is the company training interns from Myanmar who have attended Japanese universities, but its program of distributing used Uniqlo clothing to refugee camps in Thailand in concert with the United Nations Refugee Agency has raised its profile in the region. See "Q&A: Japanese clothing retail giant helps refugees in unique ways," 2012. Available online here. Accessed 15 March 2012.

[4] In Japan, the main difference between NGOs and NPOs is that the former operate internationally as well as domestically. NPOs operate locally; 70% deal exclusively with activities within a single community.

[5] Contaminants include not only radioactive materials but asbestos, dioxin, chloroflourocarbon, diesel and other toxic agents. Also, as my Japanese colleague, the eminent bioethicist Morioka Masahiro mentioned to me, Shinto-based superstitions about "ritual pollution or defilement" (*kegare*) are also surfacing as "reasons" for rejecting Tōhoku debris.

[6] "Tepco should accept woodchips" *Japan Times*, 23 April 2012. Available online here. Accessed 23 April 2012.

[7] Their blogs are fairly easy to find by Googling, in Japanese, the keywords "*daishinsai*, or great earthquake disaster," "*kifukin*, or donations," "*haibun*, or disbursement," and "*gimon*, or doubts/questions."

[8] See, for example, Tanaka Yūichirō, "Kifu bunka wa hirogaruka" (Will the culture of giving spread), *Asahi Shinbun*, 28 September 2011: 15.

[9] See here. Accessed 15 March 2012.

[10] Sadakiyo Eiko, "Waga kuni kifu doko ni tsuite [Trends in charity donations in Japan]," Chosa repoto, Summer 2011, No. 74: 15-23, p. 17. Available online here. Accessed 15 March 2012.

[11]The website of the Japan NPO Center provides profiles of a number of local-level NPOs operating in the northeast.

[12] Eric Johnston, "Tōhoku in rebuilding bubble," *Japan Times*, 27 March 2012. Available online here. Accessed 28 March 2012.

[13] The lower figure for 2011 is due to the wider area of destruction, the remoteness of many northeastern towns, and the danger of exposure to radiation and other toxic materials. Gillian Yeoh, "Lesson Learned: The 2011 Disasters in Tōhoku Japan," p. 8. Available online here. Accessed 30 March 2012.

[14] There are also two official gift-giving occasions *ochugen* (midsummer) and *seibo* (year-end). The subject of gift-giving in Japan has generated huge literature over the past century. For a good, recently published introduction to the complexities of Japanese "gift-giving" practices, see Katherine Rupp, *Gift-Giving in Japan: Cash, Connections, Cosmologies* (Stanford UP, 2003).

[15] In the pre-modern period, one form of punishing errant households was to withhold all mutual aid except in the event of a fire or death.

[16] Volunteerism during this period has been studied in detail by Victor Koschmann, Robin LeBlanc, Lynne Nakano, Akihiro Ogawa, Carolyn Stevens, and other scholars (publishing in English). There is also a large literature in Japanese.

[17] "Civil society" is rendered in both Romanized form, *shibiru sosaetei*, and as a Japanese word, *shimin bunka*. See link here. Accessed 20 March 2012. Similarly, the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization founded in 1970, declares on its website (*www.jcie.or.jp)* that the passage of the 1998 NPO law set in motion the emergence in Japan of a true "civil society."

[18] JOICFP had to adopted a "somewhat unique" approach to relief work in Japan: "instead of focusing on one geographical area, we focused on one segment of the population," namely mothers. The NGO provided monetary and material assistance for "2,400 mothers who delivered their babies in the period from March 2011 until the end of that year." Brian Hutchinson and Erin Schneider, "Relief Efforts in Japan One Year Later: Reflections and Lessons Learned. An Expert Interview with Sumie Ishii," The National Bureau of Asian Research, Center for Health and Aging. Pp. 1-4. Available online at http://nbr.org/research/activity.aspx?id=221. Accessed 20 March 2012.

[19] Tanaka Yūichirō, "Kifu bunka wa hirogaruka." The widespread use of credit cards is a 21st century phenomenon in Japan.

[20] See here.

[21] See here. Accessed 20 March 2012.

[22] "Tokyo quake 'could be stronger than thought'," Accessed 31 March 2012.

[23] For an incisive analysis of the central government's failure to exercise leadership after the 11 March 2011 disaster, see Shuichi Wada, "Operation Tomodachi in Miyagi Prefecture: Success and Homework," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Japan Chair Platform, 13 December 2011. Available online here. Accessed on 20 March 2012.

[24] Among the websites showcasing such designs and projects, are this and this. Accessed 2 April 2012. The latter staged an exhibition at Tokyo's Hibiya Park Green Plaza, April-May 2012, that was innovative and exciting.

[25] See here. Accessed on 20 March 2012.

[26] See here. Accessed on 20 March 2012.

[27] Kesennuma suffered a fourfold disaster, for a ferocious fire caused by ruptured fuel tanks consumed structures still standing after the earthquake and tsunami.

[28] Arigato. Takusan no shien. (Thank you. Lots of aid), *Sanriku Shinpō*, 11 March 2012, p. 8

[29] Motomerareru jigyo netsudo (The degree of [reconstruction] work we can expect), *Sanriku Shinpō*, 11 March 2012, p. 4.

[30] It's Not Just Mud, for example, recently became an affiliate of JEN, which is working with Uniqlo and other corporations.

[31] "Fukkō *e shimin pawaa"* [Citizens' power toward reconstruction *Sanriku Shinpō*, 11 March 2012, p. 8.

[32]The club is affiliated with the NGO Gospel Square, founded by Japanese gospel singer Nana Gentle to help people within and outside of Japan rekindle a community spirit through song. It is not an overtly Christian organization and references to organized religion are hardly mentioned on their website. See here. Accessed 20 March 2012.

[33]Reus (Riasu), is also the name of a local train line. Accessed 15 March 2012. One wonders what they will make of the presence of recommissioned retired public servants unilaterally dispatched in April by the chauvinistic governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintarō, apparently unilaterally, to assist in the rebuilding of Tōhoku.

[34] See, for example, my concerns about a "technologically gated" society emerging in 21st –century Japan. Jennifer Robertson, "*Robo sapiens japanicus*: Humanoid Robots and the Posthuman Family," *Critical Asian Studies*, 39(3) 2007: 369-398. Ishii's concerns are echoed by the scholar-diplomat Ogata Sadako, who resigned at the end of March 2011 as president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). She also served as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1991-2001). Takayuki Hayashi and Noriyuki Wakisaka. 2012 "Sadako Ogata: Discuss nuts and bolts before deciding aid policy." Asahi Shinbun 12 March. Accessed on 25 March 2012. See link here.

[35] "Pray for Japan" is also the name of a Stu Levy film released in March 2012.

[36] The letter was translated into the primary language of each newspaper. *Kizuna* was selected as 2012 ideograph of year in an annual public opinion poll; runners up were *sai* (disaster) and *shin* (quake). Every mid-December the Japan Association of Kanji Aptitude Test announces the kanji of the year. The announcement is made in Kyoto at the Kiyomizu temple by a priest who writes the winning character on a large paper canvas.

[37] The World Travel and Tourism Council's Global Summit, sometimes called the "Davos Forum of Tourism", will be held in Japan for the first time on 16-19 April in Tokyo and Sendai (the capital of Miyagi prefecture).

[38] "Fukushima Tourism Set to Resume," 10 March 2012. Accessed 20 March 2012.

[39]See link here. Accessed 30 March 2012.

Earlier last year, an Australian tour agency did the opposite and, highlighting the devastation, launched "*kizuna* tours" of Minamisanriku, a town south of Kesennuma, where tourists could "volunteer at their own risk" in cleanup work (no NGO/NPOs are mentioned) before enjoying "Japanese hospitality" at a nice hotel in Sendai city. The agency reassured tourists that, "As you travel, shop and dine you can enjoy knowing that you have contributed to the economic revitalization of Tōhoku and Japan!"

(See link) Accessed 30 March 2012.

[40] For example, some of the sarcastic feedback in *Japan Today*, an Anglophone on-line newsletter, included: "…Looks like the creators are thanking Japan"; "'Japan thanks you.' would be more appropriate"; "At first, I thought it meant that Imperial Japan was rising to power again"; "In response: Rest of the world. Thank you for the cesium" ("Japan launches global 'thank you' poster campaign," *Japan Today*, 22 February 2012. Accessed 22 February 2012.

[41]Paraphrase from David Rubens, *Great Eastern Japan Earthquake: A Preliminary Briefing on the Japanese Government's Disaster Response Management* (London 2011). Accessed on 15 March 2012.

[42] Significantly, in this connection, *ano hi* has been used since 7 December 1941 to refer to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor after which the United States declared war on Japan.

[43] One of the two largest schools of Buddhism in Japan. For pictures of the temple, see here.

[44] "Can Disasters Help to Improve a Country's Economy?" *Tiempo Climate Newswatc*h. Accessed 20 March 2012.

[45] This expression was used by Dr. Kurokawa Kiyoshi in our conversation at his office at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, on 6 February 2012 in reference to the proclivity of "the Japanese" to react to events and the need today for a proactive mindset. Dr. Kurokawa now chairs the Committee of Parliament to Investigate the Accident at Fukushima Nuclear Power Plants established in December 2011.

[46] Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, coined the expression, and was an outspoken proponent of such a culture. Although Annan's proposal for "systemic prevention" was directed toward the resolution of violent, armed conflicts that transcended political boundaries, it can usefully be applied to topographies especially prone to natural disasters as well as to a reconception of NGO/NPO activity in Japan. See Melander, Erik & Claire Pigache, 2007. "Conflict Prevention: Concepts and Challenges", in Walter Feichtinger and Predrag Jurekovic, ed., *Konfliktprävention zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit*. Wien: the Austrian National Defence Academy (9-17), p. 10.

[47] Kofi Annan cited in "Can Disasters Help to Improve a Country's Economy?"