

The Kobe Earthquake and the Renaissance of Volunteerism in Japan^{1)*}

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This paper deals with three topics that are related to the re-emergence of volunteerism in Japan after the 1995 Kobe earthquake. The first topic is in the form of a “veteran’s field story”. It will provide readers with a sense of what is foreseeable and what is controllable during the emergency response period. It is reasonable to assume that if one knows what is happening and also knows what will follow next, one will feel much more in control of his or her own situation. This paper attempts to describe what volunteer management was like at a time of an urban mega-disaster, which incapacitated the infrastructure of metropolitan areas in one of the most advanced industrialized societies in the world.

The second topic is how the earthquake literally changed the way people constructed the reality of the society. Faced with the sudden emergence of an extreme number of volunteers, the mass media coined the term “Year One of Volunteerism”. It could be argued, however, that 1995 was not the “Year One”, but more accurately a “Renaissance” of volunteerism in Japanese society.

The third topic is an attempt to provide an historic account of the socio-economic contexts in which the earthquake galvanized the transformation of Japan into a country empowered by a civil society. This paper aims to convey that although Japan is a non-Judeo-Christian nation, it nevertheless shares the common language of civil society, active citizenship and community involvement in preparation for the next millennium.

A Veteran’s Story

It is important to be imaginative and creative as a volunteer manager during a mega-disaster. Literally tens and thousands of new, eager volunteers come to help out disaster victims everyday. At the same time, the welcoming volunteer managers are hopelessly and constantly understaffed. However, a disaster or mega-disaster is a moment in which vulnerability on the side of management can be reframed as one of its strengths. If so many people line up at the volunteer reception table, the first person in the line can be asked to help receive the volunteers behind him or her. This person can be taught how to register the necessary information and how to direct the applicant where to go next. During a disaster, there is no time for the luxury of volunteer training. Therefore, volunteer managers have to count on the maturity and self-sufficiency of the volunteering individuals. Thus

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the job of managing other volunteer individuals can and should be delegated to any mature and self-sufficient individuals present.

This know-how of a Kobe-veteran was transferred to a town called Mikuni two years after the 1995 Kobe earthquake. A Russian oil tanker, Navotka, was wrecked in the Sea of Japan in January of 1997. 19,000 tons of spilled crude oil and the front section of the ship drifted to the coast of Mikuni township in Fukui Prefecture. In response to the disaster, members from the local Junior Chamber of Commerce (JC) took responsibility for disaster volunteer management. This happened thanks to suggestions made by a couple of Kobe veterans, who dashed to the disaster site as soon as news of the oil spilled was released. These veterans foresaw that there would be a flood of clean-up volunteers from all across the country. They also foresaw that the sheer number of volunteers would paralyze local township officials. Just the number alone went way beyond the capacity of local volunteer coordinators. They knew this because they went through the same flood of volunteer response themselves. However, they also knew that volunteers could manage volunteers.

As previously mentioned, if one can foresee a sequence of emerging events, one feels much more in control of the situation. The most important message conveyed by the veteran's story is that there were three predictable phases in disaster: 1) emergency, 2) development, and 3) termination. The tasks of volunteer managers are different at each phase. Of those three phases, termination of the disaster relief volunteer operation must be considered and planned for long before the emergency responses start. An end for the relief effort needs to be defined and choreographed in order to avoid staff burnout, confusion, and a sense of powerlessness during the termination phase.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of relief volunteers managed by Kwansei Gakuin Relief Volunteer Center from January 21 to April 6, 1995. In total, about 7,500 volunteers were managed over a three-month period. This graph shows the three phases clearly. The graph can be sliced into three parts; the first third is the emergency phase, which is characterized by a high manpower mobilization. About 200 volunteers on average engaged in supporting 14 evacuation shelters surrounding the university campus everyday in this phase. The middle slice of the graph is the development phase. A gradual decline of work force mobilization characterized this period. The last third is the termination phase, in which the work force mobilization hit rock bottom and remained low until the end.

The emergency phase is a time of excitement. People's faces shine and everybody shares a heroic feeling. It is natural to feel good when doing the right thing or acting on behalf of a cause or a belief. Compassion and empathy for the disaster victims were the key driving forces during this period. Another factor also motivated our student volunteers. In everyday life, students live in a world of "role playing" or "role taking". In this world, roles are already prescribed and you are expected to follow them. However, in order to help run the evacuation shelters, each of which housed about 400 to 500 people, they could not be "role takers", because managers or supervisors were too busy to give them detailed instructions of how to be a good helper in an emergency shelter. They needed to be "role makers" during the disaster. Once the students started making roles for themselves, they began to realize that the rules and regulations of every day life are

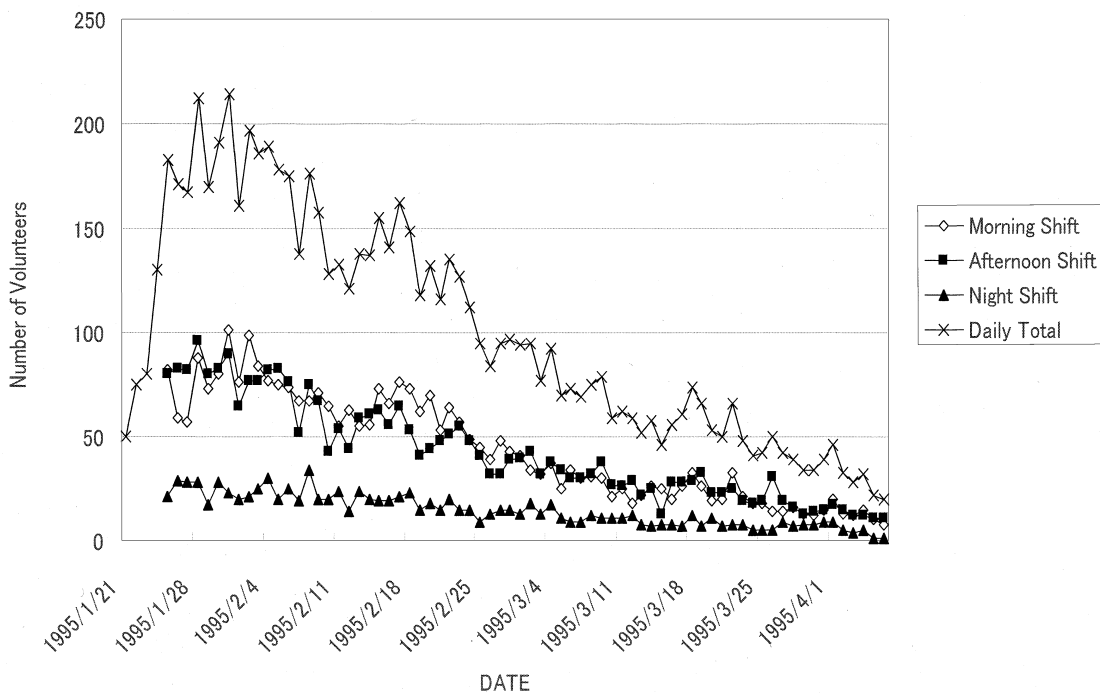


Figure 1: Number of Relief Volunteers Managed by KGU Relief Volunteer Center from January 21 to April 6, 1995

just the constructions of fellow human beings. That being the case, the students realized that rules could also be changed by the hands of fellow human beings. It is a powerful feeling to acknowledge being in charge of change in a society. There is a sense of connectedness to the society, of being part of the mainstream. Compassion, empathy, and role making were the driving forces of the emergency phase.

During the emergency phase, survival, safety, and security were the main goals for relief assistance. Accordingly, the provision of food, relief materials and a night watch were the three major activities that our student volunteers engaged in. These activities could be called Instrumental Work. Any disaster relief starts with an instrumental type of help. What comes next is Interpersonal Work. Our student volunteers organized a playgroup for children, overnight camp trips, and bath-taking tours for the elderly. The bath-taking tours were most appreciated by the elderly because no gas service was available for three months and thus no local hot water. Furthermore, bath taking is a Japanese national pastime. These were just a few examples of interpersonal work that the student volunteers improvised as they sensed the needs of the victims.

Allowing the student volunteers to be involved in instrumental work first was very effective. Such involvement gave them opportunities for rapport building with shelter residents. Rapport is the basis of any type of interpersonal work. Therefore, once a student was assigned to one shelter, they were encouraged to return to the same shelter for a second and third time. In doing so, volunteers gradually built rapport and initiated interpersonal types of work with residents.

A steady volunteer turn out followed by gradual decline of work force mobilization characterized the development phase. The number of volunteers declined mainly because the city office recovered from the initial state of shock and established channels to provide relief materials to temporary shelters. Accordingly, there was a sense that what the victims needed from the volunteers changed from material relief assistance to interpersonal care and the provision of information. Thanks to the instrumental work that the center had provided during the preceding emergency phase, the volunteers were already well accepted by the shelter residents. The next activities focussed on children and elderly during the development phase. Children and the elderly were the most vulnerable populations at the shelters and unsurprisingly requested volunteer help the most.

For children, our volunteers started shelter-based playgroups. For the elderly, we started the “apple girls” project. One day, the volunteer center received a truck full of apples donated from northern prefecture producers. Those apples were sent to shelters but not so many people were keen about eating apples in cold school gymnasiums. There was some concern that those apples would go to waste. At that time, one of the volunteers suggested that if a young co-ed student were to sit next to an elderly person and peel apples for them, the apples would be consumed fast. With that thought in mind, apple girls were sent to shelters. However, later that day, it was discovered that those Northern apples were too hard for the elderly to eat even after they were peeled. That was the end of the story, or so it was thought that day.

The following day after the apple girls attempt, the Kobe YMCA held a screening interview for possible financial donations from the International Rotary Club Kobe Disaster Relief Fund committee. As part of the explanation of PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder and ways of dealing with PTSD prevention, it seemed appropriate to describe the attempts of the special project team called apple girls. The committee members were so impressed by the story of indigenous lay counselors who used apples as a means of initiating conversation and allaying the suspicions of the elderly that the committee decided to give the KGU volunteer center quite a sizable donation.

A few days later, however, it was a shock to learn that the name “apple girls” appeared on the editorial page headline of a local Kobe newspaper. The editorial article asserted the importance of PTSD prevention and used the “apple girl story” as a prime example of how it could be done by volunteers. When the center staff volunteers saw the article they decided to start the lay counselor project as described in the article. The staff recruited educational psychology and social work major students. Then, a social work professor provided a half-day training session for the apple girls. Thus, a few days after the editorial article, the apple girls turned into a full reality. For about six weeks until the end of March, under the supervision of the social work professor, they offered lay counseling services at each of the 14 shelters that the center supported.

Inspired by the apple girls, a couple of theology school professors started their own shelter visits carrying a coffee maker and china cups. They called themselves “Coffee Shop Shalom” and practiced preventative counseling mainly to homemakers and unemployed men.

There is good reason to believe that those indigenous helpers really alleviated the in-

idence of PTSD among the sheltered people they visited. During the development phase of a disaster, volunteer lay counselors emphasized that disaster stress related symptoms such as sleeplessness, irritability, jumpiness and flashbacks were simply normal responses to an abnormal situation. The volunteers also emphasized the fact that the victims had managed to survive because they had activated their own strengths, their so-called internal and external coping resources. This approach contrasted to volunteer professional counselors and clinical psychologists that visited many of the same shelters. Not so many shelter residents opted for professional services in comparison to their response to the apple girls. Receiving professional services was viewed as an admission of vulnerability whereas conversing with apple girls was unthreatening and affirming.

It is always tempting to dash out to a new disaster because of the high spirits and heroic feelings that are part of the emergency phase experience. However, if one realizes that it will be necessary to go through the termination phase that enthusiasm quickly wanes. The termination phase is characterized by a further decline of the work force. At the center, the volunteers who were still willing to come back to work, reached rock bottom during this phase. The work at the shelter became less exciting than before. For example, shelter managers and residents kept requesting for night watch volunteers until the very end of the volunteer operation. The residents felt safer at night if they knew that there was some one to watch over them. In other words, the residents did not require action but the mere presence of the volunteers.

Once a low volunteer turn out became a reality, some staff volunteers at the center started feeling a sense of loss and failure. Physical and mental exhaustion was added to this. It was obviously the time to quit but no one knew when or how to quit the volunteer center operation. Internal conflicts arose with regard to if or when to stop the operation. The majority of management time and energy was spent dealing with these conflicts. It was found that the best way to deal with staff-to-staff conflict was to disclose and admit differences in opinion regarding relief work at full staff meetings. In retrospect, open discussions and sometimes the confrontations served as a type of defusing for staff feelings (Mitchel, 1983). Staff meetings revealed that it was not the particular personalities of group members but rather the nature of the ending phase itself that was causing a sense of loss and failure. The meetings also reminded the group that the end of the operation was near and it was time to prepare for the re-entry into the world of ordinary life, a life of role taking. The discussions and the open confrontations in the full staff meetings were instrumental in defusing the conflicts.

In retrospect, a lot of management time and energy could have been saved if the conditions for the termination of the operation had been decided long before the start of the relief volunteer center. For example, a low volunteer turn out could have been viewed as a sign that the termination phase was starting rather than a sign of failure and powerlessness. If this had been known during March of 1995, the rest of the operation time could have been spent in more imaginative and creative activities.

The Renaissance of Volunteerism

Reuben Nelson, a Canadian Futurologist, in his keynote speech for the 1998 World

Volunteer Conference, mentioned that certain conditions allow volunteerism to grow. He mentioned the recognition of a person as an individual and open psychological space. The western frontier is a good example of open space where a sense of individuality exceeds the values of tradition, authority and regulations. At the same time, the harsh environment of the frontier made individuals become inter-dependent. Here arises the essence of volunteerism.

For three months after the Kobe earthquake, people experienced a modern day frontier in a metropolitan area. Suddenly, they were put in a situation in which they could not count on the city office to take care of all or even any public needs. The city office itself had also become an earthquake victim. In this context, people learned how hard it was to survive as individuals, unconnected to other people. People then learned that they themselves, not city officials, could respond to public needs and that people could weave public interests. Those three months were days of no law prescribed by an authority. Instead, people became the law. People were able to and needed to govern their own communities during those three months without external help. In other words, people took part in role making on a very large scale during this period.

Figure 2 is an attempt to make sense out of volunteerism in our daily lives. It depicts a two dimensional map of social institutions. On top is the statutory or the government body. On the bottom, is the non-governmental or voluntary body. From right to left, are

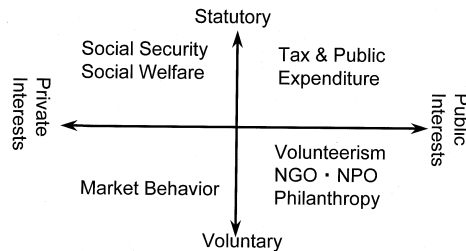


Figure 2 : A Cognitive Structure of Public-Private and Statutory-Voluntary Dimensions and Location of People-based Weaving of Public Interests

public and private interests. The top right quadrant is where the government responds to public needs by collecting tax and spending it for public interests. Going counter clock wise, the top left is where the government takes care of private interests by providing a social security and a social welfare net. The bottom left is where market behavior takes place. It deals with private interests by the non-governmental business sector. Finally, the bottom right corner is where volunteerism, non-governmental and non-profit organization activities, and philanthropy take place. Public needs are responded to by the non-governmental voluntary sector in this domain. That is the people-based weaving of public interests. This bottom right corner had been a blind spot for many Japanese people until the Kobe earthquake.

The earthquake literally changed the way people constructed their reality of society. Figure 3 illustrates how people thought prior to the earthquake. Public interests were

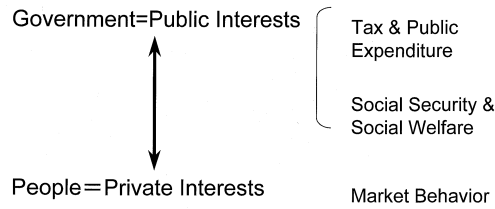


Figure 3: The View of Public Interests Prior to the Earthquake

equated with government and people were only equated with private interests. It is little wonder that volunteerism was not viewed seriously because there was no perceived domain for a people-based weaving of public interests. In that constructed reality, public needs had to be responded to by a statutory body, so that people could concentrate all of their energy for profit making.

The earthquake caused a shift in the view of society, simply because the government also became a victim and its functions were paralyzed for about three months. What happened during this time was the emergence of volunteerism all over the earthquake disaster hit frontier. For many years, government-led efforts to promote volunteerism have been very active in Japan, especially in the field of social welfare. Each locality has this type of social welfare oriented volunteer centers. But a volunteer manager who ran the volunteer relief operation for the city of Ashiya found that “the government-led volunteer centers were so overwhelmed at the time of the disaster and could not respond to the unpredictable situations.” Therefore, he himself as a volunteer took over the leadership as a manager of volunteers who came to the Ashiya city office. About a few months after the earthquake, Prof. Noriko Tsutsui of Ryukoku University conducted a survey of the 10 cities affected directly by the Hanshin Awaji earthquake regarding which departments of the city office were responsible for coordinating relief volunteers. She found that only one city, the city of Takarazuka, delegated the relief volunteer management to this type of government-led volunteer center. According to Prof. Tsutsui’s survey, the responsible department in the other cities could be any of the following: the general affairs department, personnel department, accounting department, and even the international exchange department (Tsutsui, 1995). It should be noted that the Ashiya city office designated the international exchange department to be responsible for volunteer coordination. As may be suspected, these arrangements existed on paper only. In reality, the volunteer leader quoted earlier, rather than the international exchange department, took on the leadership of volunteer management for the city of Ashiya.

The earthquake literally shifted and shook up the way people constructed the reality of society. Suddenly, the domain of volunteerism emerged in people’s reality. It is easy to understand why the Japanese mass media coined the term “Year One of Volunteerism” in order to describe this sudden emergence of a volunteer movement. It is possible to argue, however, that 1995 was not the “Year One”, but rather the “Renaissance” of volunteerism in Japanese society.

This insight started with one phone call from a 93 year old retired schoolteacher, Mr. Ohkura, who called the Kwansei Gakuin Relief Volunteer Center. Mr. Ohkura introduced

himself as a victim of the 1923 Tokyo earthquake. He was a college student in Tokyo at the time of the disaster. He and some other people from the western part of Japan escaped from Tokyo by boat and went to Kobe. When he arrived at the Kyobashi pier in Kobe port, Mr. Ohkura was welcomed by the Kwansei Gakuin University Relief volunteer center volunteers and was given clothing, food and transportation to a downtown Kobe station. He asked if the 1995 relief activities were in any way related to the 1923 relief activities. It was later learned that KGU students did organize a relief volunteer center in 1923 at the Kobe port. That center even sent a group of volunteers to Tokyo.

In the 1920's, the fourth Chancellor, Dr. C.J.L. Bates, a Canadian Methodist Missionary, was very active in the KGU community and made a considerable moral impact upon the university students at that time. One of Dr. Bates' long lasting contributions to Kwansei Gakuin University, was the school's mission statement, "Mastery for Service". This mission statement was revived by the 1995 Kobe earthquake. About 2,300 students of the 14,000 student body were registered at the KGU volunteer center alone during the three month period following the quake. A cumulative total of more than 7,500 students were involved in relief activities under KG Relief Volunteer Center management (Figure 1). When asked, "Why did you come?" the nearly unanimous answer was "Mastery for Service". It was impressive to learn that it was not economic interest but a mission statement that mobilized these many students during the crisis.

Kwansei Gakuin University was not alone in organizing relief volunteers during the 1923 Tokyo earthquake. Students from Tokyo Imperial University, now University of Tokyo, were also very active in responding to public need in 1923. The following is a quote from the relief volunteer center leader at that time, Prof. Izutaro Suehiro summarizing student efforts:

It is my great pleasure as an advocate for young students to observe that those who have been often criticized for selfish conduct and Epicurean inclinations by older generations, have united their efforts, to the point of selflessness, and have been able to make considerable achievement in response to public need (Suehiro, 1923).

There existed a wide array of volunteers to help out people during the 1923 Tokyo earthquake. In fact, those Tokyo Imperial University Students along with the dedicated assistance from Prof. Suehiro and Prof. Shigeto Hozumi, later founded the University Settlement House in a neighboring slum district of Honjo in 1924. This settlement house is considered the possible birthplace of the modern Japanese volunteerism movement. This is why it is not correct to name the year 1995 the "Year One" of Japanese volunteerism.

The End of the 1940 System and the Emergence of Civil Society in Japan

One may wonder why there was not much public consciousness about people-based public interest weaving for the past few decades. The answer to this question can be found in the history of Tokyo Imperial University Settlement House. In 1938, the settlement house was banned due to the order from the then military government (Miyata, 1995). In the same year, the war with China started and the National Mobilization law

was enacted. This was the beginning of what recent economists and political commentators call “the 1940 system” (Noguchi, 1995; Sakaiya, 1995). The 1940 system is the Japanese counter-part to the system enacted by Nazi Germany (van Wolferern, 1989). The system transformed Japan into a bureaucrat-controlled highly centralized society. It has taken 50 years since the last war for people in Japan re-discovered the existence of people-based voluntary weaving of public interests outside of the control of governments.

At the onset of war with China, the National Mobilization Law was enacted. The spirit of this wartime emergency law was very clear. In order to execute the war against China and later against the Allied Powers, all resources and manpower had to be tightly controlled by the state. In 1941, the National School Ordinance was enacted. This was the government’s attempt to place the educational system tightly under state control. The system was modeled after that of Nazi Germany. The name, national school was even a direct translation of *Volksschule*. Since then, school has been the ideological incubator for totalitarian government administrators of the 1940 system. In the field of social welfare, a similar transformation occurred. Until 1938, the state never showed much interest in charity, philanthropy or social services. These were considered to be in the domain of a then existing voluntary sector. However, after the Social Service Law, charity and philanthropy came under the strict control of the state. The main thrust to this move was for the state to take care of disabled soldiers, the wartime widows and their children.

The transformation in economy, politics, education, and social services dated back to the 1940’s. This 1940 system still survived even after the war was ended in 1945. As a matter of fact, the new post war government and business sectors maintained the spirit of this system so that all societal energies and resources were efficiently planned and concentrated solely for economic recovery of the nation (van Wolferen, 1989).

One may wonder how it could be possible for Japan to maintain wartime socio-economic measures after the new democratic constitution was inaugurated. In the case of the disappearance of volunteerism for fifty years after the war, this was possible not despite the new Constitution, but because of it. Article 89 of the Constitution states that “public money and other public equity shall not be spent or used for charity, education or philanthropic services that are not under state control.” This section was included because social services were used in order to assist the execution of war. The occupation forces did not wish the same thing to happen again. Thus, the principle of the division of public and private institutions was introduced (Okamoto, 1984).

Article 89 shocked many social service administrators. This principle threatened to force most social service institutions into chronic financial instabilities. Japan lost most of its economic infrastructure for industrial recovery, therefore, social service administrators could not count for much help from the business sector. After the occupation forces left Japan, a new interpretation of article 89 appeared. If the state could not support any social service institutions that were not under state control, it was decided to let those social institutions be under state supervision. Thus, special social welfare corporations were formed. Those corporations were strictly controlled and supervised by the state. In return, they were able to receive government subsidies and grants to run standardized services. As a result, the bureaucrat’s dream of coherent, systematized, and standardized social

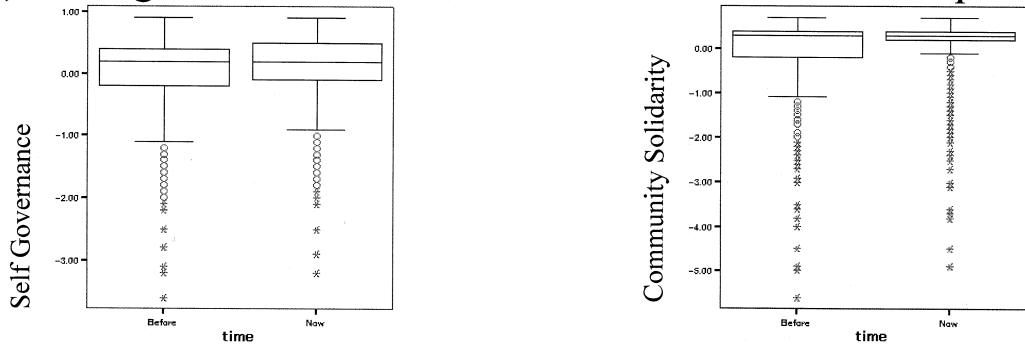
welfare services was maintained after the war. The motive for the state control was of course different in the postwar time, but the centralized structure to govern the system of serving public interests remained just as in the old days (Noguchi, 1995).

More detailed discussions on the 1940 system, why and how it survived after the introduction of the new Constitution go beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the new post war government and business sectors maintained the spirit of this system so that all societal energies and resources were efficiently planned and concentrated solely for economic recovery of the nation (van Wolferen, 1989; Noguchi, 1995).

The 1995 Kobe earthquake really changed the mindset of Japanese people. The earthquake created an open psychological space in post-war Japanese society. It opened a new frontier. The social construction of reality drastically shifted from a one dimensional public interest model to a two dimensional model. This shift allowed Japanese people to share the common language of civil society, active citizenship and community involvement with the rest of the world.

The above hypothesis was supported by a random sample survey conducted in March of 1999 (Tatsuki & Hayashi, 1999). 3,300 questionnaires were sent to earthquake survivors asking their views of society, family, themselves, and their relationship to individual recovery from the disaster. 993 questionnaires were returned of which 623 In-Hyogo

1) Changes in Civic-mindedness Pre- & Post-Earthquake



2) Level of Civic-mindedness by Degree of Recovery

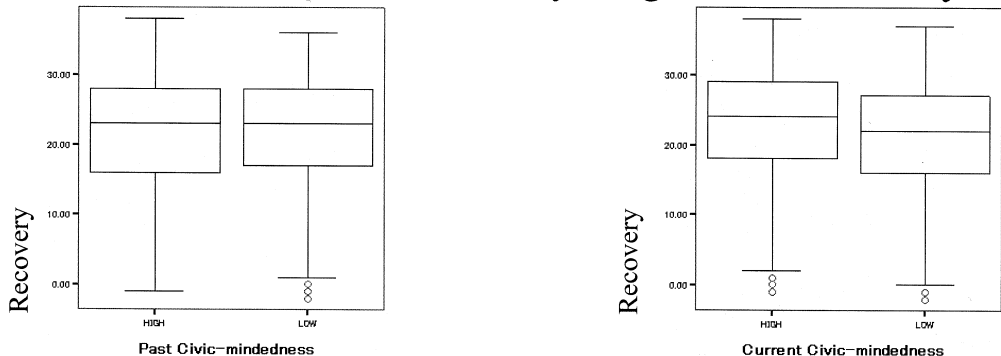


Figure 4 : Interrelationship of disaster, Civic-mindedness, & Recovery

(25.7%) and 292 Out-of-Hyogo residents (37.1%) were valid. One of the variables examined in this survey was the level of civic-mindedness. Reflection on pre-to post-earthquake changes in civic-mindedness revealed that self-governance and a solidarity orientation increased while conformity/obedience to preexisting morality did not show significant change. Furthermore, those who are high on the self-governance and solidarity formation orientation scale tended to be better-adjusted four years after the earthquake than those who were low (See Figure 4).

Many lives and valuable things were lost in the 1995 Kobe earthquake. But, at the same time, a new reality of the society emerged as a response to this mega disaster. This new reality empowered people. The new reality was consisted of two dimensions. One dimension was a dimension of self-governance. An emerging sense of self-governance, rather than a conforming to the outside morality enabled people to think and act on his or her own. The other dimension was a dimension of community solidarity. Rather than pursuing narrow self-interests, people became motivated to solve community issues by forming coalition and pursuing a collective action. Stronger sense of self-governance and community solidarity became a basis to promote a civil society in Japan. It is to be hoped that this trend continues into the next millennium.

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with three topics that are related to the re-emergence of volunteerism in Japan after the 1995 Kobe earthquake. The first topic is in the form of a “veteran’s field story”. It will provide readers with a sense of what is foreseeable and what is controllable during the emergency response period. The second topic is how the earthquake literally changed the way people constructed the reality of the society. Faced with the sudden emergence of an extreme number of volunteers, the mass media coined the term “Year One of Volunteerism”. It could be argued, however, that 1995 was not the “Year One”, but more accurately a “Renaissance” of volunteerism in Japanese society. The third topic is an attempt to provide an historic account of the socio-economic contexts in which the earthquake galvanized the transformation of Japan into a country empowered by a civil society. This paper aims to convey that although Japan is a non-Judeo-Christian nation, it nevertheless shares the common language of civil society, active citizenship and community involvement in preparation for the next millennium.