

COMING TO TERMS WITH DISASTER RECOVERY THROUGH FOLK PERFORMING ARTS: THE CASE OF FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURE

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Fukushima Prefecture is a region in which numerous folk performing arts have been passed down through the generations. In the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, the Hamadōri area was stricken by multiple disasters, both natural and manmade, which affected many folk performing arts. From the perspective of disaster mitigation, I will report on disaster victims' use of folk performing arts as a means of psychological support for coming to terms with the realities of the middle phase of disaster recovery and on their efforts to pass these folk arts down to the next generation.

This report focuses specifically on case studies of two *Taeodori* societies in areas of Hamadōri affected in distinct ways by disasters – the Murakami *Taeodori* Society and the Murohara Folk Performing-Arts Society – and discusses their conditions before and after the earthquake as well as the restoration process undertaken thus far. The 'taue' of *Taeodori* (*taue* dance) refers to the work of cultivating rice. *Taeodori* has been passed down exclusively in the Tohoku region; however, there are geographic variations even within this region, and it is a highly entertaining dance.

Both forms of *Taeodori* passed down by the two societies belonged to the cultural sphere of the Souma Nakamura fiefdom in the early modern period and have numerous similarities, including dance styles, costumes, songs, and the fact that both are performing arts (see Figures 1 and 2). However, there are also many differences between Murakami and Murohara *Taeodori*, such as their means of transmission through generations, their dancers, their methods of administration, and their relationships to religious rites.



Figure 1 Murakami *Taeodori* (2012).
(Source: T. Ichiyanagi)



Figure 2 Murohara *Taeodori* (2017).
(Source: T. Ichiyanagi)

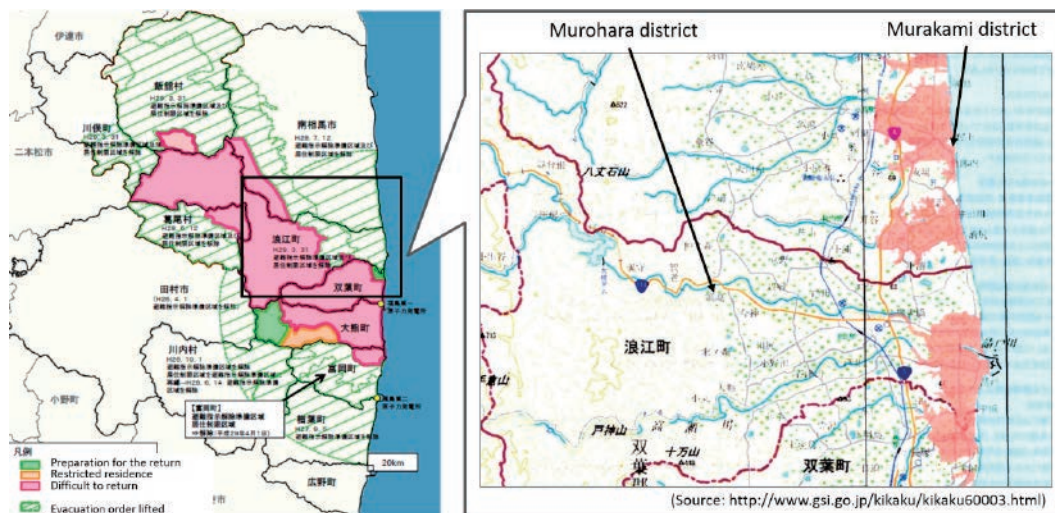


Figure 3 Conceptual diagrams of areas with evacuation orders (as of 1 April 2017) (left); and areas flooded by tsunami (right).

To get a sense of the geographic challenges faced by these societies, we must examine the areas of Hamadōri of Fukushima Prefecture, where evacuation orders remain in effect due to the nuclear power plant disaster (Figure 3, left). The red areas currently remain as difficult-to-return zones due to nuclear disaster damage. The areas shaded with green diagonal lines are those wherein evacuation orders have been lifted. The map on the right cross-references the area in the rectangle in the left, with areas of tsunami damage (indicated in orange).

The Murakami region, where the Murakami *Taeodori* Society is located, is part of the area shaded with green diagonal lines in Figure 3 (left) and part of the orange area in Figure 3 (right). Although evacuation orders have been lifted, the area has been designated a disaster risk area due to tsunami damage, and residents are unable to build their dwellings there. On the other hand, the Murohara region, where the Murohara Folk Performing-Arts Society is located, avoided tsunami damage due to its inland location (see Figure 3, right); however, due to the nuclear disaster damage, it also remains as a ‘difficult-to-return zone’ (see Figure 3, left).

Thus, both societies are facing the challenge in attempting to pass down their *Taeodori* dancing traditions while their members being unable to return to their homelands. In order to perform their folk dances, the members of the societies must leave their disparate evacuation points and gather together. Outside their homelands, they maintain the relationships that existed within their original communities and continue passing down their dances to the next generation.

Before the earthquake, the Murakami *Taeodori* Society was already admitting a few society members and dancers from neighboring districts; since the earthquake, they have continued passing down their art form by loosening the membership requirements. The Murohara Folk Performing-Arts Society, on the other hand, has never admitted a single person from outside the society, neither before nor after the

earthquake, and continues to hold events just once every seven years. However, both societies have managed to preserve their folk performing arts in forms similar to those preceding the Great East Japan Earthquake.

The Great East Japan Earthquake was an unprecedented catastrophe, but the people of these societies have made it through the period immediately following the earthquake. Now, thanks to their efforts at gaining a sense of recovery by resuming the forms of cultural transmission they practiced before the disaster and by continuing to operate the societies, as well as their efforts at reassembling the same communities from disparate evacuation points for the purpose of performing folk dances, the people of Murakami and Murohara seem to have come to terms with the current instability of the middle phase of disaster recovery and to have gained a sense of psychological 'disaster mitigation' through folk performing arts, because folk performing arts evoke among the disaster victims the desire to come together and to do their best.