

Abstract

The main purpose of my graduation thesis is to fully understand how cultural differences can affect people and their reactions to disasters. I did a comparative study of Japan and the United States focusing on the cases of 3.11 and Katrina.

Chapter 1 begins by examining definitions of disaster and culture in order to make comparison clearer and the discussion more precise in the thesis. It then introduces the overview of the two disasters, providing brief background information on the regions that were affected by catastrophes. I then described my research motivation - why I chose Japan's 3.11 and Katrina in the US for this study. I examined those sufferers' reactions and attitudes, taking recourse to such cross-cultural communication theories as expounded by Edward Hall and Geert Hofstede.

Chapter 2 analyzes the two disasters, applying Marsella and Christopher's "six different phases" to the timeline of the events to show how the disasters took place, and what effect they left and to learn how the disasters have emotionally affected the people. It begins with the discussion of the situation in the Tohoku region and the city of New Orleans before the disaster to see how much they had been prepared before. It then makes comparisons -- how the governments, local authorities or local citizens behaved or what kinds of actions were taken in each chronological stage. The chapter also discusses similarities and differences between 3.11 and Katrina by examining sociological aspects such as racial or class differences.

In chapter 3, a case study is conducted in order to see how much of what is discussed in previous chapters can be supported by people's actual attitudes toward disasters in general. It explains the research methods of the case study, as well as making a comparison between the prediction and the results of the survey.

Finally, chapter 4 draws a conclusion out of what has been learned through this study. Reflecting on what has been found as important elements in disasters and cultures, it discusses how this field of study can be applied effectively to the potential future disasters.