

Chapter 5

Kataribe Storytellers: How Can Firsthand Experiences of War and Disaster be Passed on to Future Generations?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines Japan's unique Kataribe (Storytellers) approach to transmitting firsthand experiences of war and disasters. Historically, Kataribe referred to folklore storytellers, but now includes narrators of modern traumas like war, crime, and natural disasters. Kataribe storytelling, often in museums and local archives, emphasizes personal narratives, contrasting with the more factual Western practices. A key example is in Hiroshima, where school excursions involve listening to atomic bomb survivors' testimonies, a model initiated by a survivor teacher. This emotionally connects students with wartime experiences and fosters involvement. However, as time passes, conveying these experiences become harder due to the lack of shared background, and the authenticity of legacy successors, who are not direct survivors, is questioned. We explore how listeners use their imagination in response to storytellers and the role of faculty and museum staff in maintaining involvement. It concludes with a discussion on media use and the significance of listeners as expressive agents.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-2129-4.ch005

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, “dark tourism,” which is “a journey through the memories of human sorrows, such as the ruins of wars and disasters” (Ide, 2014, p. 216), by focusing on the negative history that a site has suffered, has been attracting attention. These journeys include a reflection on modern or contemporary consumptive travel entangled in the “tourist gaze” (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Of course, many people do not conduct such travel purely for purposes of understanding or mourning negative history, but just visit these places as part of a thrill-seeking itinerary.

Japan presents many opportunities to meet *kataribe*, lecture-style storytellers who have experienced mainly negative historical events -e.g., war, violent crime, manmade or natural disasters—and listen to their firsthand experiences at related facilities. We usually learn about these topics from textbooks and the media; however, the “*kataribe* storytellers” we can meet in our travels have experienced these events firsthand, and while speaking to us, they sometimes convey their feelings and perspectives on these events.

Survivors’ direct storytelling of events, including their emotions and opinions, may be part of the Japanese tradition. In Western war-related museums, visitors mainly watch testimonial videos shown in small rooms or select videos on panel screens. According to Sekizawa (2010), survivors of the 1944 Oradour-sur-Glane massacre in France do not include their feelings and only talk about their experiences; further, the guides at the memorial are instructed to talk only about “numbers” and “what happened.” Basically, both survivors and guides explain “facts,” and do not express opinions or grudges, leaving the evaluation up to the visitors. This attitude overlaps with that of the guides at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which will be discussed later, and is quite different from the Japanese *kataribe* who express their feelings and emotions, sometimes evoking “testaments” as survivors. Sekizawa (2010) speculates that, unlike French society, which is based on a rigid ego, the Japanese assume a softer ego and try to expand the scope of sharing by adding emotions to the narrative.

This difference may stem from their intended purposes. To understand the purpose of *kataribe* storytelling in Japan, we first examine *tojisha*. Most *kataribe* storytelling activities are conducted from a broader sense of an educational perspective. Murakami (2018), drawing on Miyaji’s (2007) “Ring Island Model” of trauma, finds the significance of legacy succession activities, such as war, in the development of students’ awareness of the people involved (*tojisha*). The term *tojisha* is sometimes difficult to translate into English. Essentially, it refers to those directly involved in an incident or event; however, in sociology and social welfare, it is also used to refer to those who have some internal issues or lived experiences. In this paper, *tojisha* will refer to a person who has directly experienced a negative event. However, for example, although some atomic bomb (A-bomb) survivors may

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