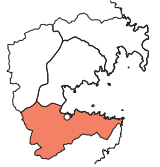


Gyozan-ryu Mitobe Shishi-odori

A story of rebirth



▲ In the days right after the earthquake, it was young people—the to-be leaders of the next generation—who performed the deer dance at evacuation centers.

The gyozan-ryu Mitobe Shishi-odori deer dance originated in the 1600s in what is now Mitobe, Togura district, Minamisanriku. It was danced for five generations before dying out in Mitobe, but continued to be passed down in present-day Maikawa, in Ichinoseki, Iwate Prefecture.

In 1991, Kenichi Muraoka, the present-day chairman of the Gyozan-ryu Mitobe Shishi-odori Preservation Group, took the initiative and asked the Maikawa Preservation Group to teach him the dance, and this led to the revival of the Shishi-odori deer dance in Minamisanriku. After that, children from Togura Elementary School started to participate in practice sessions, and the deer dance became established in the area.

However, the Great East Japan Earthquake resulted in a new crisis. Mitobe was hit by the tsunami; not a single house was left standing. From among the debris, a drum, a deer dancing costume, or a headdress would be discovered. Then another; and another. It was a miracle. All the items were covered in mud and had to be washed. Then, during the holiday period in May of 2011, the deer dance was performed in evacuation centers, mainly by junior high school students. It moved the audience to tears while also offering encouragement.

The old stone monument is inscribed with the words, “We are dancing ▶ as a memorial to the souls of all living creatures” .

