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2011 年東北地方太平洋沖地震における大陸地殻の非弾性変形：大陸地殻の海側への伸張と巨大津波の発生
Anelastic deformation during the 2011 Tohoku earthquake: The role of extensional faulting in the generation of a tsunami

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The 2011 Tohoku-oki earthquake (Mw 9.0) ruptured a wide area along the plate interface (~450 km in the trench-parallel direction) and generated a particularly large tsunami. On the basis of geodetic and geophysical data as well as tsunami records, large slip along the plate interface (~60 m) was estimated to have occurred near the trench off Miyagi. However, the mechanisms of large displacement along the plate interface near the trench are not well understood. Prior to the 2011 Tohoku-oki earthquake, the plate interface near the Japan Trench was thought to be too weak to accumulate strain and, because of this presumed weak lithology, the frontal prism was expected to deform aseismically. Here we identify a series of faults in seismic reflection profiles acquired within and outside of the tsunami source area and examine dynamic changes of the fault traces on the seafloor by comparing observations made during submersible dives before and after the 2011 earthquake, in order to identify characteristic geological structures and dynamic fault activity within the overriding plate in the tsunami source area. During the seafloor observations, we also repeatedly measured heat flow to evaluate the activity of the fault system.

Observations of seafloor morphologies and environments made before and after the 2011 Tohoku-oki earthquake reveal open fissures, generated during the earthquake, where the fault trace is interpreted on seismic profiles to intersect the seafloor. Anomalously high heat flow was observed at a landward-dipping normal fault in August 2011, five months after the earthquake, but by August 2012 heat flow measured at the same station had decreased to close to the background value, which suggests that the normal fault ruptured during the 2011 earthquake. These seafloor observations and measurements demonstrate deformation that was both extensional and anelastic within the overriding continental plate during the 2011 earthquake. Seismic profiles as well as seafloor bathymetry data in the tsunami source area further demonstrate that landward-dipping normal faults (extensional faults) collapse the continental framework and detach the seaward frontal crust from the landward crust at far landward from the trench. The extensional and anelastic deformation (i.e., normal faulting) observed in both seafloor observations and seismic profiles allows the smooth seaward movement of the continental crust. Seaward extension of the continental crust close to the trench axis in response to normal faulting is a characteristic structure of tsunami source areas, as similar landward-dipping normal faults have been observed at other convergent plate margins where tsunamigenic earthquakes have occurred. We propose that the existence of a normal fault that moves the continental crust close to the trench can be considered one indicator of a source area for a huge tsunami.

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