Determining Magnitude of Large Earthquake in Japan using Seismic Stations in China

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Rapid determination of earthquake magnitude is of importance for estimating shaking damages, and tsunami hazards. However, due to the complexity of source process, it is still a challenge for great earthquakes to accurately estimate magnitude in minutes after origin time. A recent example is the 2011 M 9 Tohoku, Japan earthquake. Here we determine the magnitudes of eleven M \(\geq 7.0\) (USGS) shallow earthquakes that occurred in and around Japan from 2008 to 2016, using seismic data recorded in China and across the global. The magnitude is estimated by considering P-wave maximum displacement of global stations and source duration derived from back-projection using dense seismic stations in China. The results agree well with the Mw estimated from W-phase inversion, with a standard deviation of 0.19, and suggest that the magnitudes can be accurately estimated in 3 to 9 min after origin times of earthquakes, depending on the epicenter distances to seismic stations in China. For the case of the 2011 M 9 Tohoku, Japan earthquake, the magnitude is estimated as to be 9.1, 9.0, 8.8, 8.9 at 3, 5, 7, 9 min after the origin time, respectively.

We use station corrections derived from nearby earthquakes to perform back-projection. The final source durations don’t show significant variations, demonstrating that the magnitude of earthquake can be estimated with the pre-stored database of station corrections. Therefore, we propose to build an automated system for determining magnitude of large earthquake in and around Japan using real-time seismic data in China and across the global, for disaster mitigation right after a damaging earthquake, especially when dealing with the tsunami evacuation and emergency rescue.

Keywords: real-time, large earthquakes, back-projection