

## **Pacifism or Peace Movement?: Hiroshima Memory Debates and Political Compromises**

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*This paper explores the complicated workings of Japan's mnemonic praxis in its establishment of moral authority. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima was a decisive moment inaugurating Japan as the torch-bearer of pacifism. Given Japan's ideational multiplicity as the victim and the victimizer, its pacifist ideology needs further examinations in conceptual and empirical manifestations. This research situates the ambivalent amnesia and political compromises demonstrated during the renovation project of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum from 1985 until 1994. As for a nation yet to achieve meaningful reconciliation over the past with Asian neighbors, the political divide opens room for utilitarian considerations in its pacifist discourse. The Hiroshima experience suggests that Japan's pacifism can be a problematic representation given its selective mnemonic praxis and situational ethics. This paper argues that Japanese pacifism should be redefined as 'pacifist movement.' Pacifism is foundational ethics, whereas pacifist movement accommodates political contextualization.*

**Keywords:** *Japanese pacifism, ideological divide, victim consciousness, mnemonic amnesia, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, political compromise, Korean A-bomb victims, pacifist movement*

### 1. INTRODUCTION: MEMORY AND PACIFISM

Japan is a self-proclaimed "peace-loving" country. A majority of the Japanese people pride themselves in being citizens of a "peaceful and industrialized country" that rose from "the ashes like a phoenix" (McVeigh 2004). As the primary source of Japan's national pride, Japanese pacifism needs to be situated within an unresolved entanglement of its present glory and past shame. Post-war Japan emerged as a world economic power benefiting from an externally imposed pacifist ideology, whereas the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki served as the historical precursor of its anti-nuclear pacifism. Somewhere between these two evolutionary trajectories, Japan's soul-searching into its troubling past has fallen into mnemonic oblivion. The on-going "History Problems" in Northeast Asia testify to the haunting past which dampens the spirit of peace and reconciliation.

Often being compared to Germany, the champion of repentance, Japan has been the subject of numerous inquiries about its ambivalence toward the past (e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears and Manstead 1998; Field 1997). Japan's multiple identities for having been the aggressor in the Asia-Pacific, the victim of indiscriminate U.S. bombing, and the pacifist advocate make an interweaving of morality and memory an intriguing enterprise. How could memory have anything to do with morality? Memory is mostly about contemporary interpretations of the bygone eras, whereas morality often stands the test of time. Memory is bound by time, and morality transcends it. Should pacifism, a meta-ideology, remain a time- and context-defying moral principle, peace as a sub-concept is open to transmutations. The Hiroshima experience reminds us that the definition of peace is dictated by the changing contextual and temporal specifications. Hiroshima was the moment

of epiphany when the human race woke up to the appalling possibility for self-annihilation. The classical definition of peace such the absence of war seemed no longer valid. It needed to encompass more holistic and institutionalized perspectives. The unprecedented progress in science and technology was translated into the pressing need to protect ourselves from our own destructive potential. An ominous new era began with the atomic bombs (Hiroshima Heiwa Bunka Center 1991; Galtung 1996).

Can a group claim moral authority when its ambivalence towards its past sins is a target of unresolved grievances? Is the experience of victimhood sufficient enough to exonerate Japan from its previous offenses and grant it a leadership? Japan's Hiroshima is an ideal site to explore the complicated interweaving of contested morality and unsettled memory.

## 2. PACIFISM AND THE "HOLLOW CENTER"

Describing the Japanese mind, Isao (2007: 59) writes: "The psychologist Kawai Hayao has proposed the concept of the 'hollow center' as the key to the Japanese mind. Beginning with the Japanese mythology, he claims that the structure of Japanese culture, society and human relations are [sic] characterized by the emptiness at the center. When forces confront one another on either side of this empty center, the emptiness serves as a buffer zone that prevents the confrontation from growing too intense." Kawai continues to assert that the pursuit of aesthetics takes up a higher priority in the Japanese mind over moral aspirations. The Japanese have never claimed to be moral beings (Kawai 2006: 3-11). If Ricoeur's assertion that "to remember (*se souvenir de*) something is at the same time to remember oneself (*se souvenir de soi*)" is valid to a certain extent (Ricoeur 2004: 15), how does memory work at the empty center in the Japanese mind? It would be better to avoid revisiting the difficult past than confronting it. The act of remembering can constitute an assault on the perceptual aesthetics, while the act of forgetting can be functionally self-preserving. The efforts to search for and give meaning to the shameful past loses its appeal. The "hollow center" filters out the unpleasant engagement of remembering one's own sins by giving it away to ambivalent amnesia. In due process, difficult memory gets transformed into unusable past in the national memory.

The Japanese assessments of the past have been in a constant flux. As the circumstances involved in preparing, prosecuting and ending the war remain to be unearthed (Hasegawa 2005; Irokawa 1995), the interpretations of the war are often ideologically loaded (Hosaka and Matsumoto 2006; Sono 2005; Watanabe 2006). The ideological pendulum swinging between the Right and the Left has been presenting opposing views of the war (Dower 1997), and the public opinion shows a split in assessing the past (Fukuoka 2007). The Left, spearheaded by the progressive circles such as the *Asahi Shimbun* and Iwanami Shoten, continues to push for war compensation and war responsibility issues. The length of the Ienaga trials over history textbooks, which stretched over two decades, shows the tenacity of the Left with its multiple lawsuits filed against the government (see Ienaga 1979). The Right, on the other hand, has been a strong advocate of Japanese nationalism. The successful revision of the Fundamental Law of Education in 2007 opened a way to instill patriotism and accentuate the Japanese identity in the school curriculum. Tsukurukai, an association of conservative historians and journalists, has published their version of History textbook, *New History Textbook (Atarashi Rekishi Kyokasho)*, to counterbalance the narratives of the Left. The conservatives see prerogatives in teaching more about Japan's glory than its shame.

Despite such ideological divide, the Japanese history is rich with the accounts of strategic compromises between political rivals. With tactical innovation as an option, ideology and issues belong to two separate, yet mutable dimensions.

As a country with eight million divinities (Hardacre 1989), the Japanese ambivalence towards its past does not constitute a perceptual assault. Pervasive cultural norms accept contrasts and multiplicity. The Japanese worldviews, for instance, interpret divinities as “a superior and mysterious force of either creative or destructive in character, which resides in natural elements, animals, and certain human beings; it causes ambivalent feelings of fear and gratitude and is the focus of ritual behavior” (Kodansha 2005: 139). As the context dictates the character of a manifested deity, the ebbs and flows of time determine the contemporaneous war-related memories. The multiplicity housed in the Japanese mind is not a post-modern phenomenon per se. While post modernism of the Western origin discusses multiple truths as opposed to the Truth in order to deconstruct the underpinning power structure, its antithetical proposition is to challenges the binary opposition and the dogmatic truth that claims to be within the Judeo-Christian tradition. The overriding tone in search for divine intentions in human suffering is non-existent in Japan (e.g., Barkan and Karn 2006; Berger and Cronin 2005; Brown 1992; Downey 2003; Kraft 2002; Zimmerman 2004). The war testimonies mainly focus on personalized guilt for surviving the meaningless deaths (Lifton 1993: 81-4). The Japanese acceptance of multiple truths accommodates situational variations. Being wrong in one context can be right in another. The interpretive flexibility in each context undermines the stringent moral measurements in assessing the present and judging the past.

Japan’s modes of behavior during contemporary history can be summarized as survival, adaptation, and success. When confronted by the western colonial powers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan quickly adapted itself to the geopolitics of imperialism by becoming an imperial power itself (Ishida 2000: 11-43; Saaler and Koschmann 2007).<sup>1</sup> After defeating China (1895, 1931) and Russia (1905), it aggressively acquired colonies in Asia.<sup>2</sup> As an extension of its territorial expansion, Japan strategically miscalculated attacking Pearl Harbor, which led to its unconditional surrender in the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings (Takaki 1996; Walker 1997; cf. Hasegawa 2007). Ironically, the defeat set the stage for a period of phenomenal economic growth placing Japan second in the world economy.

With the Peace Constitution as the ideological backbone of its mercantile pacifism, Japan succeeded on the grand scale. Yet “making it” is not necessarily a moralistic enterprise. It takes situational awareness, diagnosis of self-interest and strategic marketing of competitive advantages. As Japan’s historical trajectory is often attributed to a Social Darwinistic modality (Ishida 2000: 11-43), the nation’s colonization of less powerful states was an “inevitable” course of events. So was Japan’s “subjugated independence” to the U.S. after its own defeat following the war. Drawing on “the survival of the fittest” paradigm, Japan expanded into the global market by finding its own competitive niche as a country “with poor natural resource endowment and abundant skilled laborers.” Japan’s mercantilist pacifism, located at the “empty center,” has not been a moralistic quest.

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<sup>1</sup> Upon the American Commander Perry’s first docking at the Uraga Bay in 1853, Japan entered an agreement to lease the two ports of Shimoda and Hakodate gratis to the U.S. in 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Japan’s Asian colonies include Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, and Timor.

### 3. HIROSHIMA BOMBING AND PACIFIST JAPAN: IDENTITY TRANSFORMATIONS

The Hiroshima atomic bombing was a decisive event inaugurating Japan as the torchbearer of anti-nuclear pacifism (Buruma 1994: 92; Dower 1997: 44; Igarashi 2001; Yoneyama 1999).<sup>3</sup> Also, the sense of victimization was the definitive moral impetus behind its new identity. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, unprecedented in kind and in scale, served as a powerful tool in exempting Japan from its war responsibility. Japan became more of a victim of America's brutality and less of the victimizer to its neighboring Asian countries. Japan's ideational transformations constitute the core of its pacifist leadership (Kim 2000).

Debates about Japan's pacifism are usually cast in terms of *realpolitik*. Realists argue that the U.S. nuclear umbrella is the savior of the nation's economy, and the Peace Constitution is the bulletproof shield in the global military theater (see Yoshida 2007). Katzenstein (1996: 196-7) summarizes the realist views as follows: "Japan was destroyed in the Pacific War, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki became powerful symbols of that destruction. The American Occupation reorganized Japanese politics, and for half a century thereafter American troops stationed in Japan and the U.S. nuclear umbrella protected Japan. Under the Pax Americana Japan grew rich, and so the discredited militarist tradition had no allure for the Japanese public. Japan defined security in economic and political terms and resisted all attempts to make military policy more important – exactly what one would expect." In other words, pacifism delivers economic prosperity, and Japan has gained wealth at the price of victimhood. But such analyses, ultimately ahistorical, fail to help us see Japanese pacifism in its various manifestations. The faces of Japanese pacifism have been changing amid domestic political bipolarization and flux in the international milieu. Pacifism as a meta-ideology defies situational compromises of core contents, and yet the Japanese pacifist movement has been going through multiple transformations depending on the contextual changes.

The victim mentality among the Japanese began to be internalized through master post-war narratives such as school textbooks.<sup>4</sup> These accentuated ordinary people's pain and suffering during the war, relegating Japan's acts of aggression to a mnemonic margin. The pedagogical contents after the war,<sup>5</sup> in particular, deepened the victim mentality among the general populace by attributing responsibility to the Emperor and the military government. The first post-war history textbook, *The Country's Footsteps (Kuni no Ayumi)*, represented a

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<sup>3</sup> Pacifist movement before the 1945 bombings was mostly anti-war and anti-militarism. Four leading groups of pacifists were literary intellectuals (e.g., Tayama Katai and Yokino Akiko), liberals (e.g., Yoshino Sakuzo and Ozaki Yukio), Christian leaders (Kashiwagi Gien and Yabe Kiyoshi) and Socialists (e.g., Sakaito Shihiko and Kataya Masen). For more details, see Hiroshima Heiwa Bunka Center 1991.

<sup>4</sup> As for the representation of Japan's victimization in popular culture, Kurosawa Akira's film, *Record of a Living Being (Ikimono no kiroku)*, 1955), cartoons such as Nakazawa Keiji's *Barefoot Gen: Out of the Ashes (Hadashi no Gen)*, 1975; 1994) and Takahata Isao's anime film, *Grave of the Fireflies (Hotaru no haka)*, 1988) drew a huge following (Napier 2001: 161-73).

<sup>5</sup> Since 1948 private companies began publishing social studies texts which were subject to review by the Japanese Ministry of Education and the American Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP).

radical departure from the pre-war pedagogical guidelines issued under the Imperial Rescript on Education. Emphasizing democratic values such as egalitarianism and human rights, the textual narratives in the first pre-war textbooks alluded to the government's accountability for having started the war and causing great hardship on the people (Gluck 1993: 68). Since ordinary people had been "duped" by the leaders, they were victims.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the citizens should not be held responsible for the war. And the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal (1946-48) put an end to the discussion about popular responsibility by focusing on a limited number of Japan's top wartime leaders. Chukyo Shuppan's *A Bright Society (Akarui Shakai)* in the 1950s was also vehement in blaming the military and state abuse of power resulting in massive human casualties. Another publication during the same period, Kyoiku Shuppan's *Japan and the World (Nihon to Sekai 1952)*, was the first to include narratives about the Hiroshima bombing. It also described Japan as the "first country to receive the tragic damage of atomic bombs" (Orr 2002: 84). From then on, educational materials linked Japan's atomic victimization to its "unique" moral leadership in "building world peace" (*Ibid.* 85). Panel A6001, "Path to Peace," at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, as an example, states that "The damage done by the A-bomb was so catastrophic that this conviction was deeply rooted in the minds of the people of Hiroshima; humanity cannot coexist with nuclear weapons and their use must not be allowed. Based on this conviction- the Spirit of Hiroshima, an unwavering hope for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the realization of lasting world peace, the city of Hiroshima turned toward the world and began its journey on a path to peace."

The sequence of identity transformation from genocide victim to pacifist hero, however, has gaps in terms of temporal, empirical and moral aspects. As for the temporal gap, the public nuclear awareness did not immediately follow the bombings. With the banning of all materials about the atomic bombings by SCAP, the general public was kept in the dark about Hiroshima and Nagasaki until the early 1950s (Dower 1999: 412-3; Gluck 1993: 66).<sup>7</sup> Due to

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<sup>6</sup> Kumai Masao (a 66-year-old male, retired, resident in Tokyo) narrates the reasons for ordinary people's support of the war, such as the following: "There have been demands for explanations about why we did not oppose the War, and I have been thinking of the reasons why we didn't. The people did not doubt government policies. The people had been educated not to have doubts about what governmental authorities did. The people were not given accurate information. Using such tools as Peace Preservation Law, information that was embarrassing to the military and the government was kept secret. Only information that was altered to suit the convenience of the authorities was publicized. We couldn't oppose the orders of the Emperor. The Emperor was a god. His existence transcended the nation-state. 'Consider your superiors' orders as Our orders' were the Emperor's words. Orders from the military were considered by the general populace to be the same as orders from the Emperor. We couldn't oppose the War until the Emperor ordered the War to stop. The people were easily flattered by a sense of superiority. War leaders always incite people before they begin a war .... In Japan people were incited by the claim that the oracle of the founder of the Emperor had pronounced Japan to be a divine land -the crown of the world- with the unbroken line of emperors ... it made them lose their sense of justice. It caused them to feel that invasion of other countries and other races were justified" (quoted in Gibney and Cary 2006: 9).

<sup>7</sup> SCAP categorized all printed and media publications into 30 types. It banned dissemination of all information about SCAP, the Tokyo Trials and Allied Powers. On the domestic side, information about war propaganda, the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and feudalistic remnants such as Samurai virtues was also banned (Dower 1999: 412-3).

imposed silence, Japan's pacifist anti-nuclear movement did not begin until the 1954 Bikini Incident (Mizumoto 2006: 18). The crew of a Japanese fishing vessel, *Daigo Fukuryū Maru* [Lucky Dragon], was exposed to fallout from a U.S. hydrogen bomb test on the Bikini Atoll near the Marshall Islands on March 1, 1954. Of the 23 crew members, one died of radiation poisoning.

Thereafter, amid heightened awareness of nuclear weapons, the Japanese public began paying serious attention to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their effects. Ubuki (1999) reported a three-fold increase in the number of *hibakusha*'s<sup>8</sup> testimonials printed by the Japanese media after the Lucky Dragon incident.<sup>9</sup> An editorial in *The Asahi Shimbun* of August 6, 1970, the 25th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, linked Japan's pacifist nationalism to the Lucky Dragon incident<sup>10</sup>:

“[We] the Japanese who were exposed to nuclear weapons three times, in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and, in 1954, on the *Daigo Fukuryū-maru* [Lucky Dragon], did not reduce these experiences to matters of racism or anti-Americanism, but rather reflected at the level of all humanity and worked toward the anti-war and nuclear weapons ban...The demand to ban war and nuclear weapons which grew out of experiences with the nuclear weapons should have become the central pillar of new Japanese nationalism, based on Peace Constitution. It could have been much like the nationalism developed at the time of the French Revolution, based on freedom, equality and fellowship, which aimed toward international ideals” (*The Asahi Shimbun* August 6, 1970).

The furor over the Lucky Dragon incident continued to deepen Japan's sense of victimization at the hands of the Americans. For the commemoration of the 1973 anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, the *Asahi Shimbun* printed the following editorial:

“We must not spend the anniversary day of the atomic bombing merely as a day of memorial and ceremony. The Japanese were made into victims of American nuclear [weapons] three times, including the Daigo Fukuryū-maru exposure to the [hydrogen bomb test] in the Bikini atoll. Today must be the day to appeal to the entire world [to recognize] the cruelty of nuclear weapons and renew our commitment to keep working toward the abolition of these weapons in the name of humanity” (*The Asahi Shimbun* August 6, 1973).

Contrary to the usual historical claims, it was a fisherman's death from the exposure and contaminated tuna that drove Japan's pacifist awareness home.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Hibakusha*, used as an original noun, is a Japanese word for atomic bomb victim.

<sup>9</sup> Of the total of 964 *hibakusha* testimonials, about one third (249) were printed before the hydrogen bomb fallout incident and the remainder (715) appeared thereafter.

<sup>10</sup> The August 6, 1973 editorial again links Japan's anti-nuclear movement to the Bikini Atoll incident: “We must not spend the anniversary day of the atomic bombing merely as a day of memorial and ceremony. The Japanese were made into victims of American nuclear [weapons] three times, including the *Daigo Fukuryū-maru* exposure to the [hydrogen bomb test] in the Bikini atoll. Today must be the day to appeal to the entire world [to recognize] the cruelty of nuclear weapons and renew our commitment to keep working toward the abolition of these weapons in the name of humanity (*Asahi Shimbun* 1973).”

<sup>11</sup> Despite its “nuclear allergy,” Japan has sixteen nuclear power plants marking the highest nuclear

The existing empirical evidence suggests that Japan did not emerge as a pacifist country immediately after the war. In the early 1950s Japan went through bitter internal squirmishes among bureaucrats and power elites on its future directions. Prime Ministers Hatoyama Ichiro (1954-55) and Kishi Nobusuke (1957-58) were purged after they failed to seek Japan's rearmament. They tried to defy the Peace Constitution out of resentment toward the U.S. and fear of expanding Communism in Asia. They were not the first in attempting to rearm the country. The post-war Yoshida Cabinet (1949-1954) also tried to rebuild the army only to renounce the proposal later in favor of the pursuit of economic interests under U.S. tutelage (Dower 1993: 208-241; Yoshida 2007: 133-69). During the same period, Japan became surreptitiously involved in the Korean War (1950-53). It dispatched thousands of transportation and logistics experts under U.S. and U.N. command, and Japanese constituted two-thirds of the total ship support crew at the port city of Incheon in South Korea (Katzenstein 1996: 197). The Japanese *zaibatsu* also cashed in on the Korean War by providing UN forces with pre-existing Japanese dual-use technology.<sup>12</sup> Fundamentally, Japan's Peace Constitution of 1946 was the product of external imposition, not the result of self-reflexive internal consensus.<sup>13</sup>

Especially from the perspective of Japan's neighbors, the biggest loophole in Japan's pacifist leadership derives from the history of victimizing others. Its own provocation of war and the existence of foreign *hibakusha* pose a dilemma to its moral agenda. The total numbers of *hibakusha* in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were 159,283 and 73,884, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Of the total, the majority of foreign *hibakusha* were Koreans: approximately 50,000 in Hiroshima and 20,000 in Nagasaki. They had been forced to relocate to Japan to work for military supply factories. Despite a series of lawsuits filed against the Tokyo government by the Korean *hibakusha* seeking medical relief,<sup>15</sup> it was not until 1990 that the Japanese government finally took steps to assist them. A total of four billion yen was allocated as Humanitarian Medical Treatment Funds. The 1990 measures, however, did not settle issues involving foreign *hibakushas* who subsequently left Japan.<sup>16</sup> They are still denied benefits

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energy dependency among the advanced countries in the world. Kashiwazaki Kariwa's nuclear power plant is the world's largest.

<sup>12</sup> Dual-use technology can be utilized both in civilian and military applications. The Japanese *zaibatsu* such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries prospered during World War II and the Korean War.

<sup>13</sup> MacArthur's SCAP drafted the Constitution including the anti-war clause of Article 9 stripping Japan of "the right of belligerency." It reads as the following: "Chapter II. Renunciation of War; Article 9. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. 2. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized" (Irokawa 1995: 149).

<sup>14</sup> The total number killed due to the atomic bombings is difficult to estimate due to the circumstances of the event. Many of those who survived the bombing and radiation exposure have since died, and it is sometimes not possible to determine whether those deaths were the result of radiation exposure or of natural causes (Hiroshima-Nagasaki Cities 1979: 27).

<sup>15</sup> The Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation (1987: 50) urged the Japanese Government to "promote and strengthen — on the basis of a national indemnity — the relief measures for the atomic bomb survivors still suffering both physically and mentally, and for the bereaved families."

<sup>16</sup> About 15,000 from Hiroshima and 8,000 from Nagasaki returned to Korea at the end of the war, but

for all practical purposes. Despite their advancing years, they are required to travel to Japan to receive medical attention. Thus, litigation continues at various local courts to this day (Interview with the Korean Association of Atomic Bomb Victims, March 16, 2008).

Amid the heightening sense of nuclear victimization in the aftermath of the Lucky Dragon incident, the Korean victims were still invisible. A Japanese *hibakusha* stated, "All the Japanese victims were also aggressors towards the Korean A-bomb victims. And yet, we did not care to consider them as one of us."<sup>17</sup> A former prefectural government official continues by saying "The Japanese can be very self-absorbed people. We tend to take our own pains and suffering the most seriously being dismissive of other people's misery."<sup>18</sup> Sil Geun Lee, President of the Council of Atom-bombed Koreans in the Hiroshima Prefecture, describes the double victimization of Koreans exposed to the atomic bombs: "Why do you think tens of thousands of Koreans had to suffer from the A-bombs in Japan, even though they did not start the war? Without Japanese colonial rule in the Korean peninsula and the fact that Koreans were brought forcefully to Japan, few Koreans would have suffered from the A-bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. To put it plainly, Korean A-bomb victims were created by Japanese aggression and colonial rule in the Korean peninsula. Many Japanese people do not acknowledge this fact" (Hiroshima Peace Institute March 2007: 2). The deeply ingrained victim mentality was not seriously visited until 1985 when the City of Hiroshima announced its plan to renovate the Hiroshima Peace Museum.

#### 4. THE HIROSHIMA DEBATES: MILIEU AND COMPROMISES

With its moral leadership as victim defining Hiroshima's place in Japan's pacifist debates,<sup>19</sup> the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum is the authoritative commemorative site projecting the past war to the present audience (Nelson and Olin 2003: 3-4). Hiroshima tells its story to local, national and international audiences through exhibits seeking to help

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about 5,000 and 2,000 from respective cities chose to remain in Japan (Nakamura 2006).

<sup>17</sup> An interview with a Japanese peace activist on February 15, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> An interview on November 11, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> The thematic panel at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum effectively links Hiroshima's victimhood to moral leadership:

Hiroshima is a city on which an atomic bomb was dropped.  
 Hiroshima is a city with many memorials for the lives lost.  
 Hiroshima is a city which continually seeks peace.

Everyone, please, look at Hiroshima's path over the last century.  
 Distant memories, bitter remorse and alarm at an age past.

Everyone, please, look at what the atomic bomb brought.  
 Suffering, pain, anger and apprehension toward an uncertain future.

... Hiroshima,

in this nuclear age, will continue holding  
 high the flame of hope (Panel A1201).



visitors “get in touch with history” (Barthel 1996: 9). Since its opening in August 1955,<sup>20</sup> the Museum has been the commemorative space of contention about what and how to represent the past. The debate was most divisive during the period between 1985 and 1994.<sup>21</sup> The thorniest issues were the proposals including narratives about Hiroshima’s past and the installation of the “*Kagaisha* [Aggressor] Corner.”

#### 4.1. The Milieu

Japan in the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a sudden explosion of interest in Asia and its past (Naono 2002; Orr 2002). Major domestic changes included the death of the Showa Emperor in 1989 and the rise of progressives in 1993 ending 38 years of rule by the conservative Liberal Democratic Party. These developments eased the popular taboos regarding the war. Big changes were also taking place in the international environment. The U.S. was “bashing” Japan as its biggest economic rival. Furthermore, the emergence of Asia’s Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) alerted the Japanese to the region’s rising importance. The “return of Asia” defines the era (Conrad 2003: 87; Fukuoka 2007).

The rising cacophony between the U.S. and Japan and the increasing status of Asia resulted in a series of policies as well as attitudinal changes.<sup>22</sup> And Japan’s mnemonic praxis was no exception to this. Public opinion polling is one of the most effective methods to explore lasting interpretations of the past. New light can be shed on old interpretations of the past by reflecting on what is currently going on now. When a public opinion survey asked to assess Japan’s warfare from the Meiji period to 1945, 48 percent of respondents answered that it was a “history of aggression” and 25 percent disagreed. When asked whether Japan’s military expansion against other countries was “unavoidable,” the responses were almost evenly divided with 40 percent agreeing and 42 percent disagreeing (*Index to International Public Opinion 1988-1989*: 271-2, quoted in Fukuoka 2006: 168). The Japanese were also showing a remarkable situational awareness of Asians’ perceptions of them. A *Mainichi Shimbun* survey of December 1988 asked why the Japanese were perceived as being arrogant by other countries. A simple majority of 33 percent attributed this to Japanese pride for economic successes followed by 30 percent who pointed to Japan’s contemptuous attitude toward other Asians (*Ibid.* 172). Among the major policy changes at the time were extending apologies. Several Japanese prime ministers and the Emperor apologized to Asian countries for Japan’s past aggression. On Prime Minister Hosokawa’s apology in 1993, 53 percent of respondents supported it and 25 percent disagreed, according to a *Yomiuri Shimbun* poll (*Ibid.* 172).

The scope of debates about the war was expanding within the context of political

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<sup>20</sup> With the passage of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Reconstruction Law in 1949, construction of the original Hiroshima Peace Memorial Hall began the following year. Construction of an annex, the Hiroshima Memorial Museum, began in 1951. The Hall, “devoted to the issues of peace and culture,” was opened to the public in May 1955. Since its opening, the museum had more than 53 million visitors (*The Japan Times*, June 10, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> The city is planning another major structural renovation project starting in 2007 and to be concluded in 2010 (*The City of Hiroshima* 2007).

<sup>22</sup> A Harris Poll taken in November 1989 shows that 57 percent of the respondents agreed that the U.S. was trying to bully Japan on trade issues, while 27 percent disagreed (Harris Poll, November 1989, *Index to International Public Opinion 1988-1989*: 197, quoted in Fukuoka 2006: 133).

bipolarization. Leading politicians and Cabinet members continued to make offensive remarks about the war both on and off the record (Orr 2002: 178). Masayuki Fujio, the newly appointed Education Minister in the Nakasone Cabinet, remarked that “killing people in war is not murder in terms of international law” and that the Tokyo War Crimes Trial “cannot be considered correct.” He also equated Japanese visiting Yasukuni Shrine with Chinese visiting Confucian temples. Fujio further claimed that the Nanjing Massacre was a fabrication (*Bungei Shunju* 1986). Despite the noticeable changes in the milieu, the “true believers” resisted and avoided war responsibility. People such as Fujio firmly held to Japan’s victimization, and Fujio refused to retract his remarks even though it cost him his job.

Deeply divided over the past, the situational context determines whose voice gets to be heard. Hiroshima’s museum renovation project was a telling case in point where competing voices of the war vied against each other. Given the variations in Japanese local politics, the Hiroshima experience cannot be generalized to other locales. The contention over the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum was about how the traumatized city wished to be remembered in selecting its story-telling narratives.

#### 4.2. The Kagaisha [Aggressor] Corner

The Museum was a popular tourist spot attracting more than one million visitors each year even before the renovation project started. Many schools, especially those in the Kansai and Tokyo areas, chose Hiroshima for their field trip destination. In 1985 the City of Hiroshima announced a plan to renovate the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Peace Memorial Hall to “expand the exhibit space” and “augment the fragile edificial structure.”<sup>23</sup> As the plan was publicized, several citizens’ groups such as “Hiroshima for World Peace” and “Anti-Nuclear Association for Peace Movement” called for the inclusion of exhibits on Hiroshima’s military role in Japan’s colonial past. Groups with progressive agendas wanted the City to amend the public understanding that Hiroshima was nothing more than an innocent victim of the A-bomb. Amid growing public interest in the project, the director of the Mayor’s Office asked the Exhibit-Planning Committee members for their “advice for the new exhibit contents which were appropriate to convey the truth of the atomic bombing and appeal for world peace” (*Chugoku Shimbun* 1985). The Committee consisted of 12 opinion leaders from local universities, media and City Board of Education. In the Spring of 1987, *Chugoku Shimbun*, the local newspaper, reported the City’s favorable attitude toward the four citizens groups requesting that the City exhibit “the history of aggression” of Hiroshima inside the Peace Park. The groups also pointed out that the current museum exhibit focused only on Hiroshima’s victimization and was, therefore, incomplete in presenting an objective representation of the past to current generations. They insisted that the new museum must include narratives on Hiroshima’s past as a major military base with crucial transportation logistics facilities and as a center of arms production. As the debate over the contents of the exhibit became more heated, the museum became the locus of memory wars. The war initially seemed to favor the progressive cause in the initial stage. In July 1987, the director of the Mayor’s Office announced a plan to include the city’s past as a military base in the museum renovation project.

But the path of the project took an unexpected turn in August 1987 when local Korean *hibakusha* support groups such as “Korean Atomic Bomb Victims Association of

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<sup>23</sup> They are the “official” explanations for undertaking the renovation project.

Hiroshima” made a request to the city to include narratives not only about Hiroshima’s past but also about the suffering of Korean *hibakusha*. On hearing the request at a committee meeting, one committee member expressed concern that Hiroshima’s military past should not be construed to justify the atomic bombing. Another argued that Hiroshima Peace Museum should not be a war museum. Therefore, it should not depict Japan’s history of aggression (minutes of the meeting, Hiroshima City Hall, Hiroshima City, September 3, 1987). Two months after the meeting, the city began considering the inclusion of narratives on Japan’s past aggression. Such consideration had two main objectives: to explore Japan’s responsibility in Asia during the war, and to contextualize the Korean *hibakusha*. When the local newspaper reported that the city had decided to install a “*Kagaisha* [Aggressors] Corner” in the new museum (*Chugoku Shimbun* 1987), the conservative groups such as the “Japanese *Hibakusha* Association” and the members of the “Association of Bereaved *Hibakusha* Families” reacted strongly. “The conspiracy” to classify “our fellow countrymen” as “victimizers,” argued one conservative City Council member, “would leave a deep scar on Japanese children” (Record of Regular Council Meeting, quoted in Naono 2002: 146-7). Others opposed the plan for its “politicization” of the museum, which was “supposed” to be a “sacred site” for the *hibakusha* and their families. The local director of the Great Japan Patriots Party, an ultra-conservative figure, offered the strongest opposition to the city arguing flatly that the war was not a war of aggression. The museum renovation project ignited a memory war along deeply bifurcated ideological lines. The conservatives tried to bury Hiroshima’s strategic importance during the war, while local peace activists and Korean *hibakushas* tried to shed light on the dark side of Hiroshima’s history.

The city under mounting pressure from conservatives found itself forced to reconsider the installation plan. After a meeting with citizens groups in November 1987, the city declined to hold further meetings with them because the officials were “scared of right-wing nationalists.” Given the records of Japanese right-wing violence such as the 1960 murder of Inejiro Asanuma, the head of the Japan Socialist Party; the fear of physical attacks was not an exaggeration. The council members also believed that holding further meetings with the progressive groups could hurt their own election prospects with the conservative citizens. With the progressives thus losing ground, the city decided to withdraw the original plan to install the “*Kagaisha* [Aggressors] Corner” at the new museum.

The following Spring in March 1988, when faced with inquiries about the controversy, the city stated that its political position on the war was congruent with that of Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita who had remarked that “Whether the war in the Pacific was a war of aggression or not should be determined by historians of the future generation” (official statement, quoted in Naono 2002: 147). This, of course, once again prompted strong reactions from both sides and also infuriated Korea and China. In April-May 1988, during a Committee meeting, a City official briefed the Exhibit Committee on the pros and cons of having a “*Kagaisha* [Aggressor] Corner.” He said: “The City of Hiroshima needs to take into consideration possible reactions from the viewers regarding the exhibition about Japanese aggression. What if they considered the atomic bombing as an inevitable outcome of such aggression? That interpretation would contradict our intention to convey the Spirit of Hiroshima; moreover, we are afraid that such interpretation would disturb the souls of atomic bomb victims. Hiroshima has a responsibility to convey the ‘truth of atomic bombing’; therefore, we plan to exhibit Hiroshima’s ‘historical facts,’ such as its role as a major military base and an education center, at the new museum” (The City official document 1993, quoted in Naono 2002: 149). In May 1988, the Committee officially decided to drop the idea

of building a “*Kagaisha* [Aggressor] corner” at the new museum.

The city’s progressive experiment to press on with a balanced revisit to Hiroshima’s past faced strong resistance from the conservative factions. The actors fought with the opposing interpretations of the unfortunate past. There was a parallel in their interpretations of Hiroshima’s place in the nation’s history and the ultimate meaning of collective trauma. An interviewer remarked “what the progressives were arguing for sounded as if all the innocent people died in vain. They died for nothing. It was too much for the bereaved families to bear ... we just could not insult the dead like that ... they were the innocent victims” (Interview, November 25, 2007). As the memory debate was getting very intense and too divisive, the city conveniently adopted the evasive policy lines of the central government: historical judgment belongs to the future observers, not the contemporaries. The “hollow center” let the moral debate slip through for the sake of communal harmony and political compromise. A confrontation is better to be avoided than resolved. Japan’s pacifism is at odds with its ambivalent amnesia.

#### 4.3. The Crusade in Continuum

Even after the city made a concession to the conservatives regarding the *Kagaisha* Corner, the local government pressed on with its accommodation policy toward Korean victims. The progressive City Mayor and former journalist with the *Chugoku Shimbun*, Mr. Hiraoka, tried to keep the flames of the Corner in the torch. He acknowledges the existence and the suffering of foreign A-bomb victims in 1990 Peace Declaration:

“We strongly appeal to the government of Japan to use the Survey of Atomic Bomb victims in promptly instituting a systematic program of support of the *hibakusha* grounded upon the principle of national indemnification. At the same time, we earnestly hope that positive efforts will be made to promote support for those *hibakusha* resident on the Korean Peninsula, in the United States, and elsewhere, and we rededicate ourselves to the cause of peace” (City of Hiroshima August 6, 1990).

The local newspaper continued to carry opinion pieces that informed the public of Japan’s past aggression and war responsibility. It also emphasized the unique role that Japan has to play for the cause of world peace:

“Japan inflicted much suffering and grief upon the people of Asia Pacific under its colonial rule, occupation, and battles during World War II. Bitter memories still live inside those people. Moreover, we must not forget that these acts were carried out in the name of “peace” and “justice.” Instead of dispatching the Self Defense Forces, Japan can contribute to the international community, for example, by providing medical treatment for victims of nuclear tests and waste, which has already been initiated by Hiroshima, but can be an undertaking of the atom-bombed state (*Chugoku Shimbun* 1991).

After the Japanese government’s first public acknowledgment in 1991 of the existence of Korean *hibakusha*, the city again issued a call to address the suffering endured by foreign, particularly Korean, A-bomb victims:<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The same message continued until the 1994 Declaration of Peace which stated: “We must obviously

“Japan inflicted great suffering and despair on the peoples of Asia and the Pacific during its reign of colonial domination and war. There can be no excuse for these actions. This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Pacific War. Remembering all too well the horror of this war, starting with the attack on Pearl Harbor and ending with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we are determined anew to work for world peace...we earnestly hope that forthright efforts will be made to promote support for those *hibakusha* resident on the Korean Peninsula, in the United States, and elsewhere. We call upon the government of Japan to do more in all of these areas .... (City of Hiroshima, August 6, 1991)

#### 4.4. The Theme Panel

Five years after the city dropped the idea of installing a “*Kagaisha* [Aggressor] Corner,” the city convened a meeting of the Panel-Writing Committee in March 1993, which was in charge of supervising the rewriting of the East Building panels at the new museum. The Committee had seven members, mostly historians from local universities. During the meeting, members argued that it was not Hiroshima’s place to bear all of the responsibility for Japan’s war-related wrongdoings. When convened again three months later, the Committee devoted itself solely to a discussion of “how to combine the truths about the bombing” (i.e., Hiroshima as a military base) and the “Hiroshima Spirit”(i.e., Hiroshima as the leader of pacifism). While some advocated an “objective manner” in approaching the painful past, others expressed concern about the implication that “The atomic bombs liberated Asia from Japan’s aggression.” The difficulty was how to simultaneously link Japan’s aggression to Hiroshima’s victimization. The Committee decided against “a victim vs. an aggressor” dichotomy of the City’s past (minutes of the Committee meeting, Hiroshima International Conference Hall, June 7, 1993).

In the fall of the same year, September 1993, Mayor Hiraoka intervened in the Committee proceeding, suggesting that the theme panel title be changed from “Hiroshima and the War” to “Hiroshima Before and After the Bombing.” Before the motion, one of the Committee members proposed this idea to the Mayor who agreed with it. This action reflected the change in Japanese public opinion away from focusing on Japan as victim to a greater consciousness of Japan’s pre-war and wartime aggression (minutes of the meeting, Hiroshima International Conference Hall, September 10, 1993).<sup>25</sup> A January 1994 *Chugoku Shimbun* article reported that the “Hiroshima Before and After the Bombing” section would be included in the new museum exhibition. Unlike in 1987, the article did not provoke public outrage. Due to the city’s continuing progressive crusade in the intervening years, the citizens of Hiroshima had become more aware of Japan’s acts of aggression during the war in the macro social milieu. Most importantly, the consensus of the panel re-writing was an end-result of a tacit compromise between the two ideological camps. Since the progressives had lost their cause in the installation of a “*Kagaisha* [Aggressor] Corner” in 1988, the conservatives conceded on the panel writing issue in 1994.<sup>26</sup>

The East Hall of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, formerly the Peace Memorial Hall,

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never forget Japan’s war against and colonial domination of other nations of Asia” (City of Hiroshima, August 6, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> As an example, the number of book entries with the word “war responsibility” increased from 9 in 1989 to 10 in 1994 and to 25 in 1995 (Fukuoka 2006: 161).

<sup>26</sup> An interview with an academic on November 29, 2006.

“the Space for Learning,” was opened in June 1994 after ten years of planning. The new panel texts are much more explicit in acknowledging Japan’s past aggression and victimization of other countries’ peoples:

In 1931, the Manchurian Incident led to the Japanese army’s engagement in armed conflict in China. By 1937, the incident had become a full-scale war between the two nations. In 1941, a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor hurtled Japan into the Pacific War (World War II), allied with the Axis powers.

Following military orders, many Hiroshima factories shifted production from consumer to military goods. People’s lives grew increasingly austere, and many civilians were mobilized at the front or in military factories. Among them were tens of thousands of Korean and Chinese forced to work for the Japanese (Panel A2201, “Hiroshima in the Showa Period and during War”).

The National Mobilization Law of April 1938 led in July 1939 to an outright order to mobilize available workers. Workers in private corporations were forced to work in military factories, including Koreans and other ethnic minorities. Thousands of people throughout the prefecture were drafted to work at such locations as the electric power plant in northern Hiroshima Prefecture and military factories in the city. Many forced laborers survived extremely harsh working conditions only to die in the atomic bombing (Panel A2203b, “Forced Labor Program for Ethnic Minorities”).

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum continues to attract visitors from inside and outside Japan. In 1993, 1.39 million people visited the museum; in 1994, the figure was 1.41 million; and in 1995, it reached 1.55 million.

Hiroshima memory interweaves culture, politics and morality. As the memory in Hiroshima shifts depending on the context, Japan pacifism has been altering its manifestations (Sasaki-Uemura 2002). As pacifism at the “hollow center” selects moral principles depending on the situation, it should be redefined as ‘pacifist movement.’ An ideology maintains its ethical foundations while being relatively independent of strategic calculations, whereas a movement fluctuates with political opportunity structure (Jenkins and Klandermans 1995). Political facilitation activates movement, while political repression quells activism. Activists engage in various tactical innovations after weighing the costs and benefits of making challenging actions (Jenkins 1985). The controversies over the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum tell a story of political compromise as a form of tactical innovation distancing itself from the core contents of pacifist ideology. Its trajectory reveals ups and downs of activist’s voices within the shifting milieu of municipal and national politics.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The Japanese mind interprets nations as organic entities that respond to the changing environment. The ability to meet such needs defines national power, and a nation’s ability to remember carries less importance in its quest for adaptation, survival and success. For having been a country of identity fragmentation and memory ruptures (Kim 2000), the act of mourning and experience of remorse could be too much of a strain on its “empty center”

(Conrad 2003: 85). The contemporary history of Japan escapes Connerton's (1999: 6) observation that "it is not just that it is very difficult to begin with a whole new start, that too many old loyalties and habits inhibit the substitution of a novel enterprise for an old and established one." Our inquiry into Japan's mnemonic praxis shows the need for contextual sensitivities. Chung (2006: 271), however, warns against such "possibility by universal, objective standard of morality, all moral reasoning risks being reduced to a discussion context, situation, and feeling ... while ethics seeks to be rational, objective, and universal, it also requires concrete, historical, and relative social contexts for critical reflection. Emphasizing contextual appropriateness, however, should not mean ignoring the question of the principled good or the right. Contextual situationalism is likely to be more attentive to objective circumstances, more empirical-minded, and more inquiring."

The debates over the Peace Memorial Museum demonstrate the interactive processes of remembrance involving socio-political milieu and actors of different dispositions. The controversies regarding the museum renovation project illuminate two dynamics in Hiroshima's memory. One is the city's ideational tension between its shameful past and moralistic present. The Hiroshima of past aggression today bears the banner of the "Hiroshima Spirit," and the city had to strike a non-threatening balance between the two contrasting selves. Another dynamic is political bifurcation and compromise. Political bifurcation originates from the passionate belief in an ideology, and that is a moral exercise. On the other hand, making a compromise is a calculated strategic act for the sake of non-confrontational co-existence, and that is a utilitarian consideration. Had the discursive trajectory of the museum renovation been both moralistic and utilitarian, foundational ethics such as pacifism would have become less of a confusing concept. Japan's pacifism, therefore, risks being reduced to a situational *modus operandi* rather than a strict moral principle. This paper on Hiroshima memory argued that Japanese pacifism can be better defined as 'pacifist movement' that rides the tide of political opportunity structure than an ideology of foundational ethics.

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