The Role of Hiroshima in the 21st Century: From Destruction to Reconstruction and Reconciliation
(Draft)

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1. Introduction: Hiroshima and ‘Peace’

Even after half a century since the drop of the atomic bomb, many visitors from all over the world are coming to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Every year, the Peace Memorial Ceremony on August 6th is broadcast to the world through the media. The name of Hiroshima is always cited with the word “peace”.

However, there has been little discussion on such questions as why Hiroshima is regarded as a symbol of peace or how should we interpret the historical meaning of the drop of the atomic bomb. When the Smithsonian Institute cancelled an exhibit on the atomic bomb scheduled in 1995, many Japanese citizens were surprised to know that there is still a huge gap between the interpretation of the drop of atomic bomb in the US and Japan. They were also shocked to hear the remark of the prime minister of Pakistan that there should have been no drop of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki if Japan possessed nuclear weapons then.

If Hiroshima wants to contribute for world peace in the future as before, we should re-examine the link between ‘Peace’ and Hiroshima. Peace in Hiroshima has been closely related to the experience of the drop of atomic bomb. In this paper, I would like to review the destruction caused by the drop of atomic bomb, and then, would like to re-examine the process of reconstruction. Also, I would like to touch upon the importance of reconciliation in the future and the role Hiroshima should play in peace building of the world in the 21st century.

2. Hiroshima and ‘Destruction’

Destruction by the Atomic Bomb and Other Air-Bombings

It is estimated that approximately 140,000 people were killed in Hiroshima since the drop of the bomb in August 6th of 1945 until the end of the year. Also, 70,000 houses were totally or partially burned or destroyed by the bomb. An area of about 12 square kilometers became ash.
On the other hand, a total of 215 cities experienced air-bombings during the war and a total of 2.1 million houses out of 14 million houses then existed in Japan were lost. National Reconstruction Plans were implemented in 112 cities including Hiroshima to rebuild the cities from the destruction of the war.

If you compare the number of death by air-bombings in those cities, the largest number was more than 90 thousands in Tokyo. If you simply compare the number of the victims with that of other cities, Hiroshima’s experience is not quite different from Tokyo’s.

**Special Aspect of the A-bomb Experience**

There is a clear distinction between the destruction by normal bombings and by the atomic bomb. Most of the air-bombings were operated during the night with numerous normal bombs dropped from numerous airplanes. On the other hand, the bombing in Hiroshima was done in the morning by one air-bomber B-29. There are also clear distinctions in the effect of the bombings. In case of atomic bomb, the destruction is a mixture of heat rays, blast, and radiation. Many atomic bomb survivors even today are suffering from aftereffects including leukemia and cancer.

One big distinction from other air-bombings is the death rate. According to a statistics of Japanese government in 1949, the death rate in Hiroshima City caused by the atomic bomb was 38.5 percent. The figure is exceptionally high if you compare it with that in Nagasaki (8.8 percent) and that in Tokyo (1.4 percent). Those of other cities were less than 1 percent. Besides, the figure of Hiroshima was based on smaller estimation of the death in Hiroshima - 78 thousands - and therefore the actual death rate must be much higher.

An official document of the Hiroshima municipal government states that “the death rate is estimated to be higher than 40 percent, historically quite extraordinary, and because of this high death rate, we can easily acknowledge the inhumane nature of atomic bomb.”

**Hiroshima should be Sympathetic to Other Disastrous “Memories” in the World**

The atomic survivors in Hiroshima so far have emphasized the peculiarity and atrocity of the atomic bomb experiences. Surely the destructive power and the aftereffects brought by the atomic power were much different from those caused by normal weapons. However, if you compare the final result, there is one common aspect - death. If Hiroshima only emphasizes the peculiarity of its atomic bomb experience and thinks little of the experience in other areas, the world outside Hiroshima would not pay attention to its experience and Hiroshima would not be able to contribute for the peace.
building in the world.

**Inhumanity of the Drop of the Atomic Bomb**

There are various interpretations in the world regarding the decision to drop the atomic bombs by the United States. In the US, the decision is still supported by the majority of the people who regarded it as necessary and unavoidable to stop the war. On the contrary, the majority of Japanese citizens think that the drop of the atomic bomb was a mass killing of civilians and should not be permitted on the ground of humanity.

Let me introduce the judgement conducted by the Japanese court on the issue of inhumanity of the atomic bomb. Five atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki filed a lawsuit against Japanese government to the local court of Tokyo and Osaka in 1955. The case of Tokyo and Osaka were later jointly handled at the Tokyo local court, called the Atomic Bomb Suit. At the court, the plaintiffs asserted that the drop of the atomic bombs was an act against humanity and international law, and the atomic survivors possess the right to demand compensations from the United States. However, as the Japanese government renounced the claims against enemy states at the San Francisco Peace Conference, Japanese government should make compensations for the survivors, they argued. The Japanese government insisted that the drop of the atomic bombs was not a violation of the international law.

In 1963, the Tokyo local court ruled that, while rejecting the demand for compensations, the drop of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was indiscriminate bombings to the defenseless cities and therefore against international law. As the plaintiffs did not appeal for upper court, the judgement was fixed and became precedent.

Thirty years later, the illegality of nuclear weapon was judged at the International Criminal Court (ICJ) at Hague in 1996. In its advisory opinion, the ICJ admitted the inhumanity of the use of nuclear weapon. The norm that the use of nuclear weapon is against humanity became international by the judgement.

**War Memory in the World and in Hiroshima**

Many nations have experienced wars, destruction, and mass killing in the world. In the case of Holocaust, millions of Jewish people were killed in the concentration camps during the World War II. In Cambodia, the Pol Pot regime killed millions of citizens, mostly intelligent and rich, in late 1970s.

In East Asia, Japan colonized Korea and kept the peninsula under strict military
control. Then, after the WWII, many Koreans were killed during the Korean War. In China, many lives were lost by the invasion of the former Japanese Army. The Nanking Massacre was just an example of its atrocity.

If Hiroshima wants to send any message of peace, it has to face with the experiences and “memories” of other places.

3. Hiroshima and “Reconstruction”

Hiroshima as a Military Capital
Hiroshima had been called “military capital” until the drop of the atomic bomb in 1945. The Emperor’s Command was situated in the Hiroshima Castle during the Russo-Japanese War in 1894 – 1895 and Hiroshima became provisional capital of Japan. Tens of thousands of soldiers were sent to Korea, China, and Southeast Asia from the Hiroshima Port before and during the WWII.

Hiroshima was to become one of the two final commanding posts in Japan – i.e. Tokyo and Hiroshima – if there had been no drop of atomic bombs and if Japan had fought ground battle on its territory with the US. Hiroshima was filled with military troops and facilities. Besides its 250,000 civilian population, there were between 40 and 90 thousands soldiers and army civilian employees. The total expense of the military sector in Hiroshima in 1931 was 5.5 million yen. It was much larger than the revenue budget of the Hiroshima Municipal Government – 3.82 million yen.

As a military capital, the civilian life in Hiroshima was under the tight control once the Pacific War started.

Reconstruction with Former Military Site
At the end of the war, a total of 6.47 square kilometers of lands, approximately one tenth of the total area of the Hiroshima City, were used for the army facilities. These areas became lands of civil purposes after the war such as land for local government offices, schools, roads, parks, and private companies. If you come to Hiroshima, you can see a huge area around the Hiroshima Castle filled with many office buildings, hotels, local governments, sports parks, museums, and so on. This area represents the peace and vigor of Hiroshima and the citizens of Hiroshima really welcomed the change of nature from Military Capital to a “city of peace”.

Various Ideas for Reconstruction based on “Peace”
It should be noted that even within one month after the total destruction brought by the atomic bomb, various plans and ideas for the reconstruction were proposed by
people of different sectors – local government, universities, and private citizens. According to an official document of the city of Hiroshima, a total of 35 elaborate city reconstruction plans were made public from 1945 to 1949 by officials, scholars, artists, architects, and even foreigners of the occupation forces. It should also be emphasized that there was one thing common in those reconstruction ideas – to revive the city of Hiroshima with a new identity of Peace. In many reconstruction plans, the vast zone around the hypo-center, or the ground zero, was kept as a huge memorial green park to pray for world peace. This feeling was shared by most of the Hiroshima citizens.

The Building Act of Hiroshima Peace Memorial City

In its effort to reconstruct the city from the ash, the Municipal government of Hiroshima first tried to negotiate with Japanese government to ask the sell off of former military site and special subsidiaries. Then, the new mayor Mr. Hamai started in 1948 a movement to petition to the Japanese congress to pass a “Building Act of Hiroshima Peace Memorial City” by which Hiroshima would get special funding and treatment for its reconstruction and rehabilitation from the government. The logic to support the petition was “to build Hiroshima as a center of Peace is the hope of world citizens.”

The majority of the congressmen supported the movement, and the Act was unanimously passed in both the lower and the upper house of the National Diet in 1949. The Act was also approved at the referendum in Hiroshima by 91 percent of votes in favor of it. The act is composed of 7 articles. This means that the National Diet of Japan also admitted the reconstruction of Hiroshima as a symbol of world peace.

Reconstruction with ‘Peace’ as the Symbol

There are three major features of the reconstruction plan of Hiroshima. According to one specialist in architect, they are “Peace Memorial Park”, “Peace Avenue”, and “Green Zones along the Rivers”. A huge memorial park was designed near the ground zero with an area of 124,000 square meters in which the Peace Memorial Museum and the Memorial (Cenotaph) were located. Through the Cenotaph, visitors can see the famous “Atomic Dome”, the ruin of former Building for Industry Promotion, The Dome later registered as one of the World Heritages of the UNESCO. The Peace Memorial Park and the Atomic Dome are the symbol of Hiroshima today.

Foreign Aid for the Rehabilitation

Besides the funding of Central government through the Building Act of Hiroshima Peace Memorial City, the reconstruction of Hiroshima was made possible by many foreign aid and donations, especially aiming at rescuing atomic bomb survivors.
One famous example was the emergency medical rescue initiated by the effort of Dr. Marcel Junod, the chief representative to Japan of the Red Cross International Committee, came to Hiroshima on September 8th, 1945. He negotiated with the General Head Quarter of the US occupation forces to send 15 tons of medical supplies, some of which were difficult to obtain at that time. In praise of his activities, a monument was built in the Peace Memorial Park in 1955.

Norman Cousins, chief editor of a US magazine established in 1949 a Hiroshima Peace Center in New York, started spiritual adoption of atomic bomb orphans by US parents for ten years. During the years, 20 million yen equivalent of aid for the expense of bringing up orphans was sent from US to Hiroshima. Mr. Cousins also helped 25 female atomic survivors, who suffered from keloid, to visit US in 1955 to have medical treatment and surgical operations.

It is true that Hiroshima has experienced the inhuman destruction of the atomic bomb. It is also true that it has experienced humanitarian aid from the world, and we should never forget this.

4. Hiroshima and “Reconciliation”

The experience of atomic bomb destruction and recovery from the ash in Hiroshima is not enough for the city to be qualified to appeal for peace to the world. As the meaning of the drop of atomic bomb is interpreted differently in the world, we have to face with them.

Interpretation in the US and Asia

In the United States, the majority view is that the decision to drop the atomic bombs was necessary and unavoidable in order to stop the war. If the bombs were not dropped, there was a ground war on Japan’s main island, and a million of lives of both US and Japanese soldiers were lost. The casualty in Hiroshima and Nagasaki including more than 200 thousands death was acceptable compare to one million, according to this interpretation. The calculation is questionable and many historians in both the US and Japan have found many documents to prove to the contrary, but I will not discuss this issue today.

In Korea and China, some people interpret the atomic bomb as a “liberator” from Japanese military invasion and colonization. There is an expression in Buddhism that “one is punished in accordance with what he has done”. This interpretation is very close to the Buddhist thinking.
Atomic Survivors Movement in Japan

Despite the majority view in Japan that the drop of the atomic bomb is against humanity, most of the atomic survivors in Hiroshima did not take any actions for remedies or compensations for almost ten years. One reason was that in addition to the bad health condition, they were also suffering from prejudice and discrimination inside the Japanese society. The prejudice and discrimination were based on their physical appearance with keloid, possibility to bear abnormal baby, and other groundless rumors or misunderstanding.

The very first nation-wide anti-nuclear movement was started ten years after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki when a Japanese fishery boat was exposed to the Death Ash caused by the US Nuclear test in the Pacific Ocean in 1955. This incident caused a mass anti-nuclear movement in many cities of Japan, and the rescue of the atomic survivors gradually became one of the core issues of the movement.

Until 1960s, the atomic survivors have been regarded as victims of atrocities of war. It is true that the drop of the atomic bomb is an atrocity because it caused indiscriminate mass killing of non-combatants, or civilians, and it is against humanity. On the other hand, in early 1970s, Japanese citizens started to shed light on another aspect. We can say that Japan was victimized to the atomic bombs, but Japan was an aggressor to the neighboring Asian countries as well. We have to admit that Hiroshima itself was an aggressor because it was a military capital, they argued.

When the atomic bomb survivors of Hiroshima visit China to talk about their horrible experiences, the Chinese people point out the responsibility of Japan for the Nanking massacre in 1937. Or, if Hiroshima survivors go to Korea to convey the reality of the atomic bomb, people of Korea emphasize the atrocities of Japanese colonial rule.

In Hiroshima, people started to look at the dual nature of ourselves: victims and aggressors. This view has been reflected in the exhibit of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

Need for Reconciliation

If Hiroshima wants to talk about the atrocity of the atomic bomb to the world, Hiroshima should look at other horrible and wretched incidents in the world. It is even so if they are caused by Japan. Besides, it is estimated that approximately 50 thousands Korean residents in Hiroshima were victimized to the atomic bombs. They were dually victimized, and Japan should provide proper medical treatment and compensations for them.
As today’s topic given to me is not the Japan’s responsibility for colonization and the war, I will not touch upon this issue, but I just want to add that as a citizen of Japan, I am keenly aware of the responsibility, although I was born after the war.

If Hiroshima wants to work for peace in the world, the citizens in Hiroshima as well as Japan should face with the past and make continuous effort to reach reconciliation with neighboring nations. Last year, the Hiroshima Peace Institute organized an international symposium titled “The Reconciliation of Competing memories of Hiroshima” and invited panelists from Korea, China, US, and Japan. This is just one of the effort to build mutual understanding crossing the border by showing that we are not justifying Japan’s past nor emphasizing only the damage of the atomic bomb without looking at the past.

5. Conclusion: The Role of Hiroshima in the 21st Century

As I mentioned earlier, the city of Hiroshima emerged in the history as a western military capital of Japan. Then, after the experience of the destruction by the atomic bomb, it started and achieved reconstruction by adopting “peace” as its new identity. It is true that in the heart of many city planners, there was a solemn thinking that the atrocity should never be repeated again. Whoever caused the result, the result is a big mistake of humanity. This philosophy is reflected in the epitaph (inscription) of the monument in the Peace Memorial Park: Let all the souls here rest in Peace. For, we shall not repeat the evil.

It is very tragic to the atomic survivors, but the city of Hiroshima was awakened to peace because it experienced the atomic bomb. As we have entered into the 21st century, there is a growing sense in Hiroshima that the atomic bomb experience is decaying or being forgotten. However, we also should not forget that we are awakened to peace because of the experience.

Hiroshima is not in a higher position to preach peace to the world. As our reconstruction and rehabilitation were not made possible by ourselves but with the support from outside Hiroshima and outside Japan, Hiroshima in the future should stretch its hands to the people who are currently suffering from destruction. In order to achieve this goal, reconciliation is indispensable.