

“Hiroshima” as a Contested Memorial Site: Analysis of the Making of a New Exhibit at the Hiroshima Peace Museum

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In this paper, cultural politics around how to remember the 1945 atomic bombing will be analyzed through closely looking at the making of the new exhibit at the Hiroshima Peace Museum in the late 1980s and early 1990s. When the city of Hiroshima announced its plan to renovate the Peace Museum in 1985, several citizens' groups called for the exhibition of Hiroshima's role in Japan's colonial past. After a local newspaper reported, in 1987, that city officials had responded favorably to those groups' demands, outraged right-wing nationalists, some *hibakusha* and bereaved family members of the atomic-bomb victims protested the city's plan. The struggle over the content of the new museum exhibit centered around how to represent Hiroshima's past in relation to Japan's colonialism and military aggression while advancing the “Spirit of Hiroshima.” This paper locates this struggle within the larger contestation over how to remember the Asia-Pacific War. The difficulty of remembering Hiroshima as a historic tragedy, the paper concludes, stems from the dominance of national frameworks in remembering the atomic bombing, despite that memories of the bombing are constructed by transnational political and cultural forces.

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I. Introduction: Master Narrative of Hiroshima and Its Criticism

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. (Panel A6001 “path to peace”)

The master narrative of the atomic bombing—the “Spirit of Hiroshima”—appeals to international humanism, based on the extent of the destruction caused by the atomic weapon. At the same time, this narrative helps veil colonial memories of Asia Pacific by reducing all victims of the bombing to a homogeneous subject, “the people of Hiroshima.” In so doing, it erases the

different positionalities of each victim and the particular histories and formations that led them to be constructed by the master narrative of the bombing in the first place.

Indeed, the master narrative of the atomic bombing has been criticized by Japan studies scholars in recent years as the Japanese collective memory of the Asia-Pacific War that produces Japan as an imagined community of “innocent victims,” while fostering the amnesia of its colonial past and brutal conduct during the war (see Dower 1997; Hein and Selden 1997; Yoneyama 1999; Yoshida 1995). Similarly, many Asians and Americans have accused Hiroshima and Nagasaki of not facing Japan’s war responsibility. Some go so far as to assert that these two cities have denied Japan’s militarist past, as illustrated by a letter from an American WWII veteran sent to the *Washington Post*.

Printed in the OP-ED section of the *Post* on March 27, 1995, this WWII veteran expressed outrage at the statement issued by then Nagasaki Mayor, Motoshima Hitoshi, who called the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan a crime as heinous as the Holocaust. Taking Motoshima’s statement out of context and ignorant of his well-known position as a vocal critic of Japan’s war of aggression, this veteran tried to educate Motoshima on Japan’s brutal conduct during the war:

I assume he is young enough to be able to have forgotten or claim to be unaware of such unpleasanties as: The successive invasions and sack of Manchuria, Jehol and China proper from 1931-1938, as well as the attacks, invasions, occupation and brutalization of Indochina, Burma, Siam, Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia from 1940-1942 — which bred the hatred of Japan that smolders to this day in those places. The rape of Nanking. The pillage of Shanghai. The slaughter of 250,000 Chinese in reprisal for Jimmy Doolittle’s raid on Tokyo from “Shangri-La.” The death march on Bataan. The sexual enslavement of legions of Korean girls. These are just a few seeds of Japanese bestiality, which ultimately bore fruit in the form of mushroom clouds blossoming over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If Mayor Hitoshi [*sic*] wishes to indulge in invidious comparisons, he need not look far from home. (*Washington Post* 1995)

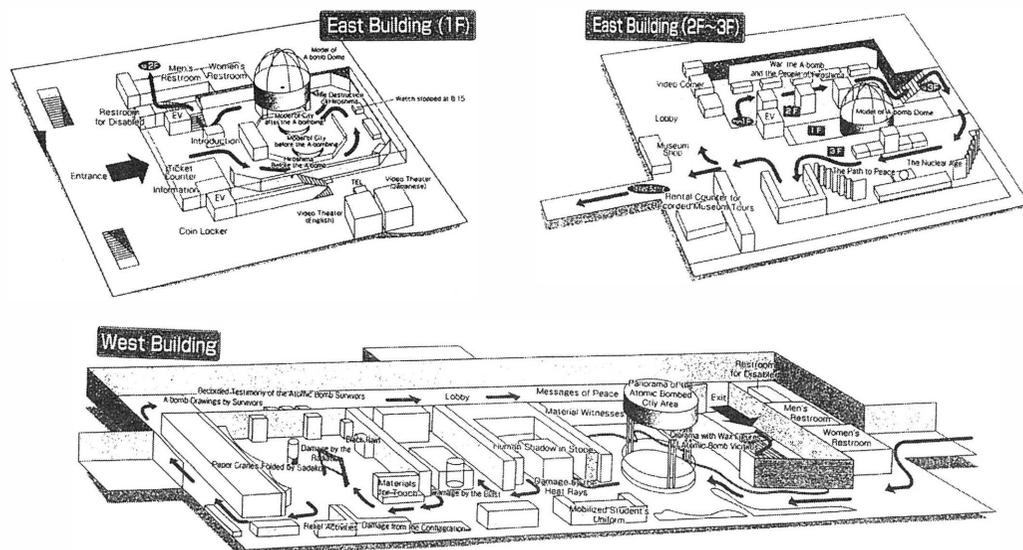
Like this man, many American veterans, scholars, and journalists, as well as Asian residents in the United States, during the 1994-95 controversy over the exhibit of the Enola Gay at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (NASM), criticized Hiroshima and Nagasaki for not admitting Japan’s role as an aggressor during the Asia-Pacific War. If they visit Hiroshima’s Peace Museum, however, they may be surprised to see narratives of Hiroshima’s history as a major military base presented.

When the city of Hiroshima announced its plan to renovate the Peace Museum in 1985, several citizens’ groups called for the exhibition of Hiroshima’s role in Japan’s colonial past. After a local newspaper reported, in 1987, that city officials had responded favorably to those groups’ demands and initiated a plan to include exhibitions of Hiroshima’s past as an aggressor in the new museum, outraged right-wing nationalists, some *hibakusha* and bereaved family members of the atomic-bomb victims protested the city’s plan. The contestation over the content of the new museum exhibit centered around how to advance the “Spirit of Hiroshima” in an increasingly volatile memoryscape of the Asia-Pacific War from the mid-1980s to early 1990s, when issues of Japan’s colonial and militarist past became increasingly visible in Japanese public discourses. In this paper, I will analyze the cultural politics around how to remember the 1945 atomic bombing by tracing the controversy over the making of the new exhibit at the Hiroshima Peace Museum.

II. Narrative Contents of the Historical Context Panels

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum is located inside the Peace Park at the heart of the city.¹ The East Building of the new museum, the former Peace Memorial Hall, opened in June 1994, is divided into six major sections: “Hiroshima before the Bombing,” “The Atomic Bomb,” “Hiroshima in Ruins,” “War, the A-bomb, and People,” “Nuclear Age,” and “Walking toward Peace.” The first three sections are displayed on the first floor. Panels are placed along the wall, which surrounds the central displays on this floor: two models of Hiroshima city, one before and one after the atomic bombing. Visitors leave this room of war and

[FIGURE 1]



Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

destruction and climb the stairs to the second floor, where the “War, the A-bomb, and People” section is exhibited. Here visitors can see how the people of Hiroshima rebuilt their lives and the city despite the hardship they faced after the end of the war.

Proceeding to the Nuclear Age section on the third floor, visitors encounter a large globe piled with plastic models of nuclear arsenals, indicating the danger of a nuclear disaster. Yet, in the last section, “Walking toward Peace,” visitors are provided with hope as they learn of the efforts made by the people of Hiroshima towards the creation of peace. With the particular placing of the displays — the war and the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombing on the first floor and ending with “Walking toward Peace” on the third floor — the physical layout of the exhibition reinforces the progressive historical narrative of redemption presented in the panel texts.²

At the very beginning of the new permanent exhibit in the East Building, the theme panel is displayed:

- 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.

For those within and outside Japan who consider Hiroshima’s appeal for peace the emblem of Japan’s collective amnesia regarding its colonial past, this is a confirming narrative. It places the atomic bombing outside of the context of the Asia-Pacific War by beginning the story with the bombing on August 6, 1945 and ending with a humanistic notion, the “Spirit of Hiroshima,” which helps level out colonial inequality between Japan and other Asian countries. At the same time, this narrative suggests, though in a very vague way, Hiroshima’s colonial memories and remorse toward its militarist past by referring to “Hiroshima’s path over the last century” — a path that includes the years of Japan’s colonial expansion. It will become clear later that this

narrative is a negotiated product, effected after much debate among the peace activists, right-wing nationalists, *hibakusha*, city officials, and academics in making the new museum's content.

Complementing the above-quoted theme panel, the story in a three-minute video, played continuously right next to the panel, also begins with August 6, 1945 and ends with aspirations for peace. The first visuals shown in the video are of people offering prayer at the Cenotaph for the Atomic Bomb Victims and of the Atom Bomb Dome. This is the accompanying narration, "The first atomic bomb in the world was dropped on Hiroshima, and a vast number of her citizens perished." The video concludes with shots of various memorials for the victims and this narration: "But here in Hiroshima, with humankind's survival at stake, the race to achieve solidarity among the world's people has begun."

Unlike the theme panel, the video includes brief visual images and commentary that make a direct reference to Japan's militarist past and Hiroshima's involvement in that past. This voice-over narrates the image of people gathered around the Memorial for the Korean Atomic-Bomb Victims: "Among the victims were people forcefully conscripted as laborers from the Korean Peninsula and China." It continues, "Hiroshima was known for its educational establishments, such as the Higher School of Education. It was also a garrison city, housing various units, including the headquarters of the Army's Fifth Division."

After the opening theme panel and video, the section entitled "Hiroshima before the Bombing" is introduced. This recounts Hiroshima's past as a major military base, and, thus, its involvement in Japan's colonialism in Asia Pacific leading to the Asia-Pacific War. A sub-theme section, "The Meiji and Taisho Periods," focuses on the history of Hiroshima city and how it began to assume a military purpose. In another sub-theme section, "Hiroshima in the Showa Period and during the War," several panels, such as the following, explicitly connect Hiroshima to Japan's war of aggression:

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 Koreans and Chinese forced to work for the Japanese.

(Panel A2201 "Hiroshima in the Showa Period and during War")

Early in the war with China, the Japanese army occupied many Chinese cities. By December 1937, it took the capital city, then called Nanking. The occupation of this important city cheered the Japanese people, who considered the war raging in China a holy crusade. Hiroshima's residents celebrated with a lantern parade.

(In Nanking, however, Chinese were being massacred by the Japanese army. Several views exist regarding the number killed. The estimates vary from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, depending on the calculation of the extent and period of occupation. China has stated the number of dead to be 300,000.)

(Panel A2203a "Lantern Parade to Celebrate the Capture of Nanking")

The National Mobilization Law of April 1938 led in July 1939 to an outright order to mobilize all 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 history of Hiroshima presented in these panels does not characterize the atomic bombing as a natural disaster that befell "innocent" people. Moreover, the

reference to non-Japanese forced labor, especially of Koreans and Chinese, exposes gaps in the official representation of *hibakusha* as exclusively Japanese.

In the sub-theme section, "A-bomb Damage Continues" under the "War, the A-bomb, and People" section, two panels explicitly describe the condition of non-Japanese *hibakusha*:

During the war, Japan funneled all resources into the war effort and forcefully brought thousands of people to work in Japan from Korea and other countries. Many forced laborers died in the A-bombings in Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Many experienced the bombings but survived to return to their countries of origin after Japan's defeat.

Other overseas *hibakusha* include people from China and the countries of Southeast Asia and Japanese who immigrated to various countries in North and South America and throughout the world.

(Panel A4205a "Overseas *Hibakusha*")

In February 1967, the Korean A-bomb Sufferers Relief Association was founded in Seoul. At about the same time, voices were raised in Japan calling for aid to Korean *hibakusha*. Through citizens' groups, *hibakusha* living in Korea were invited to Japan and medical teams were sent to Korea. In December 1973, the Korean *Hibakusha* Medical Center was built by a private organization in Hapchon, a town in the southern part of Korea.

(Panel A4205b "Korean *Hibakusha* Medical Center")

These texts do not address the condition of Korean *hibakusha* who have not received medical care comparable to that in Japan; however, later in the exhibit, the panel "*Hibakusha* Relief" implicitly addresses the unequal treatment of non-Japanese *hibakusha*: "The [Japanese] government must also devise measures that will support *hibakusha* now residing in other countries and non-Japanese *hibakusha* in Japan."

The presence of these narratives at the museum should not be automatically interpreted as evidence that Hiroshima has come to terms with its involvement in Japan's colonialism and accepted a newly uncovered colonial history of modern Japan. Instead, the

narrative representation of Hiroshima's militarist past at the museum needs to be understood in the political and historical contexts in which it was constructed.

III. Hiroshima's Place in Japan's War of Aggression

The city of Hiroshima announced in March 1985 that the Peace Museum and the Peace Memorial Hall would be renovated in the coming years. By the fall of the same year, the exhibit-planning committee was formed: members included local scholars, city officials, a journalist, and *hibakusha*. The official explanation for renovating the museum and the hall emphasized the crowded conditions of the existing museum, especially during the school trips for students, and the fragile conditions of the buildings.

Beginning in the late 1970s, increasing numbers of junior and senior high school students from all over Japan have come to Hiroshima for their school trips, visiting the Peace Museum and listening to *hibakusha*'s testimonies, so that they would learn firsthand about the damage caused by the bomb. As many as about 310,000 students from all over Japan visited the museum in 1979 alone.³ The consequent increased interaction between students and *hibakusha* was partly responsible for pushing the issues of Japan's war responsibility towards the center of the atomic-bomb discourse in Hiroshima (Interview with a *hibakusha*, 27 August 1997, Hiroshima City; interview with a peace activist, 27 August 1997, Hiroshima City).⁴ In December 1986, junior high school students from Osaka, where the largest community of resident Koreans (*zainichi*) is located, requested a change in the representation of Korean *hibakusha* at the museum (*Chugoku Shimbum* 1986). According to the *Chugoku Shimbum*, there were at least two more requests from other Osaka junior-high school students to include the socio-historical explanation for the existence of Korean *hibakusha*.

Although not directly related to those students' requests, in May 1987, four citizens' groups requested that the city exhibit "the history of *kagai* [aggression]" of Hiroshima inside the Peace Park where the Peace Museum is located. The content of the museum exhibit at that time focused exclusively on Hiroshima's victimization. Yet, they argued, only after reflecting

deeply on Japanese aggression during the war would the appeal of “No More Hiroshimas” be taken seriously. The director of the Mayor’s Office told them that the city would consider including the representation of Hiroshima’s past as a major military base in the new museum (*Chugoku Shimbun* 1987).⁵

By the fall of 1987, requests from students and citizens’ groups led the city administration to consider more seriously a possibility of including in the new museum the narratives of Hiroshima’s involvement in Japanese aggression. The day after fourteen citizens’ groups met with the director of the Mayor’s Office in late October 1987, the *Chugoku Shimbun* reported that city officials had decided to create a “*kagaisha* [aggressors’] corner” in the new museum. The objectives in creating the “*kagaisha* corner” were twofold: it would be a space for interrogating Japan’s war responsibility towards neighboring Asian countries, and it would represent the socio-historical conditions of Korean *hibakusha* (*Chugoku Shimbun* 1987).

This newspaper report outraged some right-wing nationalists, along with some *hibakusha* and bereaved families of the atomic-bomb victims. On the day of this report, one bereaved family member made a call of protest to city officials. From that day until February of the following year, the city administration received calls and letters of protest against the proposed plan to create a “*kagaisha* corner.” Some opposed “politicizing” the museum, which, they claimed, was a sacred site for the victims and *hibakusha*. Shimamura Jyōjyu, local director of the Great Japan Patriots Party, challenged the city’s plan on the basis of his historical view that the Pacific War could not be considered a war of aggression (City of Hiroshima 1993a: 14). In the face of increasing political pressures from the right-wing nationalists and conservative city council members, city officials were pushed to reconsider their plan.

At the sixth regular city council meeting, in December 1987, Nishimura Toshizō, a prominent conservative Liberal Democratic Party council member, questioned city officials regarding the exhibition plan for the new museum. He was deeply concerned about the recent report of the city’s positive response to the demands by citizens’ groups to create a special corner at the new museum scrutinizing Hiroshima’s war responsibility.

“The conspiracy” to classify “our fellow countrymen” as “victimizers,” Nishimura argued, would leave a deep scar on Japanese children (City of Hiroshima 1987). Although a Socialist council member stressed the importance of creating a “*kagaisha* corner” at the council meeting held in February 1988, peace activists apparently could not mobilize sufficient political resources to convince the city officials to include this corner at the new museum.

In March 1988, the city issued a secret response to the right-wing organization that protested the plan for a “*kagaisha* corner.” The response stated that the city’s position on the war in the Pacific followed the statement issued by Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru, a conservative LDP member, at the Budgetary Committee of the Lower House on February 18, 1989: “Whether the war in the Pacific was a war of aggression or not should be determined by historians of the future generation” (City of Hiroshima 1993a: 27). The city’s response, in other words, implied a disinclination to address the history of Japanese aggression in the new museum. This exchange between the right-wing organization and the city was kept secret until the local newspaper broke the story two years later. This was kept secret partly due to city officials’ attempt to minimize any “trouble”; if the citizens’ groups found out about this response, it was likely that the local media would report it, since the citizens’ groups tended to be in close touch with the news media, while the right-wingers did not. Given the facts that the city had previously responded positively to the citizens’ groups’ request, and that the issue of whether or not to create a “*kagaisha* corner” had become a public controversy, the city’s response to the right-wing organization was likely to stir up further controversy.

The question of including narratives of Japan’s colonial past in the museum was discussed by the exhibit-planning committee members behind closed doors in April and May of 1988. During these meetings, the members engaged in heated discussions about the “*kagaisha* corner.” At the April meeting, a city official reported on the following response issued to the demands made for the inclusion of accounts of Japan’s military aggression:

The city of Hiroshima needs to take into consideration possible reactions from the viewers regarding the

exhibition about Japanese aggression.⁶ 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 the atomic bomb victims. Hiroshima has a responsibility to convey the *hibaku no jissō* [the fact of the atomic bombing]; therefore, we plan to exhibit Hiroshima's "historical facts," such as its role as a major military base and an educational center, at the new museum. (minutes of the meeting, House of the Committee Chair, Hiroshima City, 22 April 1988)

In response to the briefing, the committee chairperson, an influential scholar in Hiroshima, insisted that the Peace Park remain a space where visitors reflect on the implications of the existence of vast amount of nuclear weapons. He stressed that the Peace Park is a sacred site where controversial issues of war should not be brought in. The best to be done, he claimed, was to exhibit Hiroshima's history and sustain the museum as a site to console the souls of the victims with prayers for the abolition of nuclear weapons (minutes of the meeting, House of the Committee Chair, Hiroshima City, 22 April 1988).

At the May 1988 meeting, the committee members exchanged their opinions on the type of historical narratives the new museum should display. While acknowledging Hiroshima's involvement in Japan's militarism, no one advocated creating a "*kagaisha* corner." Many were concerned that the inclusion of Japan's history of aggression might be interpreted as a justification for the dropping of the atomic bombs. Some stressed the importance of exhibiting a "universal" narrative of the truth of the atomic bombing, rather than "victim" versus "victimizer" narratives, so that the viewers could embrace the "Spirit of Hiroshima." The consensus reached among the committee members was to exhibit the "facts" of Hiroshima's history, including its past as a castle town, an educational center, a major military base, and an A-bombed city, through a focus on citizens' lives (minutes of the meeting, Hiroshima City Hall, Hiroshima City, 13 May 1988; interview with a committee member, 31 July 1997, Hiroshima City; interview with a city official,

25 August 1997, Hiroshima City). After this meeting, the planning of the new museum's content was put to rest temporarily; the committee itself never met again, partly due to the illness of the chairperson, and partly due to the fact that museum staff were busy promoting the conservation of the Atom Bomb Dome (interview with a committee member, 31 July 1997, Hiroshima City; interview with a city official, 25 August 1997, Hiroshima City; phone interview with former museum staff, 3 September 1997).

IV. The Change of the Theme

After the last meeting of the exhibit-planning committee in 1988, the planning of both the content and the building of the new museum was carried out by the museum staff. The content was finalized in 1993 by a newly formed panel-writing committee, which consisted of nine local scholars and intellectuals, only one of whom had served on the previous exhibit-planning committee.

At the first panel-writing committee meeting in late March 1993, museum staff presented the requests for and against portraying Japan's militarism in the new museum. The second meeting was held in June to discuss the manner in which Hiroshima and Japan's roles of aggression during the war should be depicted. Similar to the exhibit-planning committee, members of the panel-writing committee shared a similar historical view on Japan's colonial past. Their discussion, therefore, centered on whether, and if so, the Peace Museum in Hiroshima should exhibit such history and how best to convey *hibaku no jissō* and the "Spirit of Hiroshima."⁷ The difficulty lay in how to depict Hiroshima's involvement in Japanese militarism without justifying the act of dropping the bomb—a view commonly held by many Asians and illustrated in the thought: "The atomic bombs liberated Asia from the Japanese aggression."

After much debate, the committee members agreed that it would be unwise to represent Hiroshima's history in terms of "a victim versus an assailant" framework. Instead, the history of Hiroshima's involvement in Japanese colonialism and military aggression during the war was to be described with "facts," such as the existence of Korean forced labor and Hiroshima's

function as a major military base, in an “objective manner” (minutes of the committee meeting, Hiroshima International Conference Hall, 7 June 1993).

The committee members met four more times before a change in the exhibit theme was made by an intervention of the mayor Hiraoka Takashi. At the seventh committee meeting, in early September 1993, with the mayor present, the exhibition theme was altered from “Hiroshima’s History Before and After the Bombing” to “Hiroshima and the War.” This alteration could explicitly place the atomic bombing in the context of the war, not in an abstract “Hiroshima’s History” (interview with the committee member, 31 July 1997, Hiroshima City; interview with the committee chair, 2 August 1997, Hiroshima City).

Although some members expressed concern over the time limitation to make this change, the committee, as a whole, more or less agreed to make some adjustment, especially in the section of “Hiroshima before the Bombing.” This change in the theme was made possible, in part, because of the support of the new mayor, a liberal former journalist who reported the plight of Korean *hibakusha* in the late 1960s and came into the office in 1991. It was made possible, though, largely because of the shifts in Japan regarding the discourse of the war that used to be dominated by “victim narratives” but began to address Japan’s aggression, which a city official attending the meeting characterized as “a change in the public opinion” (minutes of the meeting, Hiroshima International Conference Hall, 10 September 1993).

The change in the exhibit’s theme was made public through the regular city council meeting in early December 1993. When questioned by a council member about the content of the new museum, the director of the Mayor’s Office announced that the exhibit would convey the “Spirit of Hiroshima” within the context of “Hiroshima and the War.” The first section, “Hiroshima before the Bombing,” he stated, “will exhibit Hiroshima’s history in relation to the war until the bombing.” He further added,

Since it is important to convey to the future generation Hiroshima’s involvement in the war as a major military base, we plan to exhibit the birth of the Fifth Division of the Japanese Imperial Army,

Hiroshima’s development as a military base after the Sino-Japanese War, and military-industrialization and citizens’ lives during the war. (City of Hiroshima 1993b)

The *Chugoku Shimbun’s* story in January 1994 featured the content of the new museum, scheduled to open that summer. It reported that the “Hiroshima before the Bombing” section would include descriptions of Hiroshima’s role as a major military base. Moreover, the news report portrayed the new museum as a space to examine Hiroshima’s involvement with the war and its dual aspects as a victim and a victimizer (*Chugoku Shimbun* 1994).

Unlike the protests in late 1987, this report and the announcement at the city council did not evoke outrage by right-wing nationalists or *hibakusha*, at least publicly. This seems largely due to the increased visibility of narratives about Japanese aggression during the war in the public discourse in the early 1990s. Without any visible disturbance, the East Building of the new Peace Museum opened in June 1994 (phone interview with former museum staff, 28 August 1997).

From this chronological account of the planning of the new museum’s historical content, it is tempting to conclude that the struggle over the making of the new exhibit was one between the right-wing “nationalists” who denied Japan’s colonial past and the left-wing “internationalists” who attempted to insert narratives of Japanese colonialism, or counter-narratives, in the nation’s history. In the end, the latter seemed to have won the victory, in that while it does not host a “*kagaisha* corner,” the new Peace Museum exhibits Hiroshima’s involvement in Japan’s colonialism and war of aggression. Some may hail this “victory” as one of many positive changes, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the discourses of the war and the atomic bombing in Japan (see Hein and Selden 1997). Yet, such an observation would be blind to both the politics of memory and the complex forces at work in constructing the discourse of the bombing. Indeed, this struggle in Hiroshima ought to be placed within a larger context, in the 1980s and 1990s, of writing and re-writing of memories concerning not only the atomic bombings but also the Asia-Pacific War in general.

V. Politics of Memory in Asia Pacific

The presence of narratives about Japan's colonial past in the Peace Museum is not an isolated incident in Hiroshima's memoryscape in the early 1990s. In the spring of 1990, the city of Hiroshima announced a proposal to relocate the unified Korean memorial inside the Peace Park; the annual peace declaration of 1990 mentioned the suffering of non-Japanese *hibakusha*, especially of Koreans; the 1991 peace declaration announced by new Mayor Hiraoka referred to Japan's history of colonial aggression for the first time.⁸ As Lisa Yoneyama points out, these moves were motivated by international, national, and local politics: a May 1990 visit to Japan by then South Korean President Roh Tae-wu,⁹ the 1994 Asian Games to be hosted in Hiroshima,¹⁰ and the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombing, which was expected to draw much international media attention.¹¹

The 1980s and especially the 1990s witnessed increasing eruptions of colonial memories and demands of formerly colonized people to rewrite histories and collective memories of colonial domination in Asia Pacific.¹² Most notably, in December 1991, Kim Hak-sun, a Korean woman who was sexually enslaved by the Japanese military during the war, broke a half-century of silence and demanded an official apology and compensations from the Japanese government. Kim's courageous act encouraged others to come forward not only in Korea but also in other parts of Asia, such as the Philippines and Indonesia. Some of these women filed suits against the Japanese government for sufferings caused by the state-sponsored program of sexual slavery. In the late 1990s, additional law suits were filed against the Japanese government and former military industries by Koreans and other Asians who were drafted under the program of forced labor.

Given the demands made by those who suffered under Japanese colonial and military occupation, combined with efforts by many Japanese citizens' groups, intellectuals, and journalists, the Japanese government came to publicly acknowledge its war responsibility. In 1993, Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro expressed deep remorse for Japan's colonial past and military aggression that inflicted much pain on

neighboring Asian people. Although this historical acknowledgement faced some opposition from the conservatives, administrations that followed basically have adopted Hosokawa's stance in issuing public statements of remorse and commitment to peace.

These changes in the official positions on the colonial past, both locally and nationally, do not solely originate in efforts to face and redress Japan's colonial aggression, however. What appeared as a major shift in the Japanese government's attitude towards its colonial past was actually attributable to changes in national and international politics in the Asia-Pacific region in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Two of the most significant domestic events were the death of the Showa emperor in 1989, which supposedly reduced the "taboo" surrounding public discussions about war responsibility, and the end of the thirty-eight-years of rule by the conservative Liberal Democratic Party in 1993. Major changes in international politics, such as the end of the cold war and the decline of American hegemony and the rise of Japanese economic power in the late 1980s, also played an important role.

In the altered political landscape of the early 1990s, it had become crucial to the Japanese government to settle remaining war issues with its Asian neighbors in order for Japan not to be isolated in the region.¹³ Moreover, an increase in the economic power of neighboring Asian countries made them strong enough to demand a change in the Japanese attitude toward its colonial past.¹⁴ In addition, democratization, following the collapse of military-authoritarian regimes and the transformation of communist regimes in Asia, played a major role in their heightened ability to demand that Japan take responsibility for its role in the war.¹⁵

Memories of Japanese colonialism and the Asia-Pacific War held by Japan's former colonial subjects played a crucial role in bringing about a major change in the discourse of the war in Japan. They disrupted Japanese collective memory as a "victim" by positioning Japan as an imperialist power. Yet, colonial memories that critically challenge narratives of Japanese victimhood are subjected to politico-discursive forces that tame their critical potential. In making public acknowledgement of its colonial and militarist past and expressing remorse, Japanese politicians and officials attempt to distance themselves from such past, bury it

in history and move on, rather than seriously reflecting upon and attempting to redress the sufferings of those formerly colonized and subjected to military violence.¹⁶ In recent years, conservative intellectuals explicitly began to mobilize themselves to police the boundary of Japanese collective memory of the war. A coalition, the “Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform,” was formed in 1997, aiming at “revising” the national history of Japan advocating “the Liberal View of History.” Their campaign to rewrite accounts of Japanese history, which minimizes or even glorifies Japan’s history of military expansion, has gained popularity with the assistance of a national newspaper, the *Sankei Shimbun*. In other words, there is an emergent force which threatens colonial memories and promotes collective amnesia of Japan’s colonial past once again.

VI. Memories Produced in the Transnational Space

While the shifts in the discourses of the war and the atomic bombing produced in Japan have been observed by some American Japan-specialists, in particular by those holding progressive views, many Americans are still only exposed to the victimization narratives of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Their encounter with the victimization narratives leads many Americans to accuse Japan of suffering from amnesia about its history as an imperialist aggressor. This indictment has some validity; however, the position from which they make such accusation must be examined.

As in Japan, the official narrative of the atomic bombing embraced by the United States — the bomb saved thousands of lives — has helped construct an idea of American nationhood. This narrative was initially manufactured by the Truman administration and has been legitimated and disseminated by the succeeding administrations, the Pentagon, the media, veterans’ organizations, and academics, and has achieved a status of master narrative. While counter-narratives have been produced by peace activists, some religious communities, and historians, the prevailing official narrative of the bomb, in accordance with other “Good War” narratives of World War II, has helped produce and maintain American national identity as a merciful defender of democracy and freedom who stands on high

moral ground. The Smithsonian controversy should be understood as the resurgence of the official narrative and an attempt to reproduce this American national identity, which increasingly has been called into question in post-Vietnam America.¹⁷

Challenging the official narrative, the curators at the Smithsonian’s NASM integrated into the original exhibit plan the latest development in the historical research on the dropping of the atomic bombs and, in so doing, questioned the necessity of such acts in the name of “saving lives.” Once this altered exhibit plan was leaked to the Air Force Association and the American Legion, an anti-Smithsonian campaign was inaugurated with the assistance of the news media. Voices opposing the exhibit plan as “revisionist” and “unpatriotic” were loudly expressed through the mainstream news media, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*.¹⁸ These voices gained firm support from many academics, cultural and political commentators, and Republican and Democratic politicians, all of whom repeatedly invoked the official American narrative of the bombing.¹⁹

Moreover, as exemplified in the comment cited at the beginning of this paper, the remarks made by the opponents of the Enola Gay exhibit gave the impression that they were in solidarity with the Asian-Pacific Islanders who suffered under Japanese colonial and military aggression. By reporting, disproportionately, the voices of American WWII veterans and appropriating the voices of Asian survivors of Japanese aggression, American news media coverage of the Smithsonian controversy portrayed the atomic bomb as a savior of the lives, not only of Americans but also of Asians. Interestingly, though, the US media, in its reporting of the Smithsonian controversy, especially in early stage, was almost silent about the lives lost to the atomic bombs.

The most symbolic representation of this discursive space was the testimony offered by Major General Charles W. Sweeney, the only pilot to have flown on both atomic missions. Asserting the importance of free speech and open discussion (i.e., an American ideal), Sweeney allocated most of his testimony to justifying Truman’s decision to drop the bombs as a necessary response to Japanese aggression and, thus, placing accountability for the bombing squarely on Japanese

shoulders. Distinct from many WWII veterans who respond to accounts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with "Remember Pearl Harbor," Sweeney began his account of Japanese militarism with its aggression in Asia:

While our country was struggling through the great depression, the Japanese were embarking on the conquest of its neighbors—the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. . . . This Co-Prosperity was achieved by waging total and merciless war against China and Manchuria. . . . Without the slightest remorse or hesitation, the Japanese Army slaughtered innocent men, women and children. In the infamous Rape of Nanking up to three hundred thousand unarmed civilians were butchered. (Testimony of 11 May 1995 by Charles W. Sweeney)

His narrative positioned him as an ally of Asians who suffered under Japanese rule of the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." Sweeney then proceeded to discuss Japan as "a ruthless and intractable killing machine."

Accusing the Smithsonian of "creeping revisionism," Sweeney expressed his rage against the Smithsonian for portraying the Japanese as "victims" while characterizing the United States as "the evil aggressor." Sweeney then castigated Japan for not facing its aggression toward others but only focusing on its victimhood:

Today the Japanese justify their conduct by artfully playing the race card. They were not engaged in a criminal enterprise of aggression. No - Japan was simply liberating the oppressed masses of Asia from WHITE Imperialism. Liberation!!! Yes they liberated over twenty million innocent Asians by killing them. I'm sure those twenty million, their families and the generations never to be appreciate the noble effort of the Japanese. (emphasis in the original)

Here, in his accusation of Japan's amnesia, Sweeney positioned himself as spokesperson for those Asians who were brutalized by Japanese militarism. He even went so far as to ally himself with the Japanese "people" in suggesting that they ought to hold their military leaders responsible for their own misery during the war, which is consistent with the narratives of war memories promoted by US occupational forces after

Japan's defeat.

Sweeney's testimony functioned, on the one hand, to justify Truman's decision to drop two atomic bombs and place Americans on a higher moral ground by accusing Japan of amnesia regarding its military aggression in Asia. It, on the other hand, helped position himself as an ally of Asian victims of Japanese aggressions and even the Japanese "people," who also suffered under their military leadership during the war. As exemplified by Sweeney, those American veterans, journalists, and scholars who claimed, during the Smithsonian controversy, that Hiroshima and Japan were only concentrating on their national victimization embraced the patriotism and belief in America as the morally righteous "defender of freedom" promoted by the official narrative of the bomb. In other words, they participated in maintaining, reproducing, and legitimizing the American official narrative of the bombing. In so doing, they helped make invisible the act of aggression conducted by the United States, including the tremendous death toll the atomic bombing caused, and conceal the United States' century-long imperial project in Asia Pacific, which was in competition and complicit with Japanese imperialism.²⁰

While American media reports of the Smithsonian controversy blamed Japan for its brutality, closer attention to the manner in which the United States dealt with Asian victims of Japan reveals its moral hypocrisy. It has become widely known that Japanese war criminals who led the infamous Unit 731, which conducted biological experiments on Chinese civilians during the war, were not punished in the American-dominated International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), in exchange for the data obtained by the experiments. The United States subsequently made use of these data in developing biological weapons. In the case of the women who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military, Chungmoo Choi points out that US cold war policy was assigned higher priority than the personal sufferings of these women: crimes committed against these women were not prosecuted in the IMTFE.²¹ Choi considers this active neglect as "the fundamental fallacy" of Western humanism (Choi 1997). Further, much of post-war reconciliation between Japan and its formerly occupied countries was largely forced or blocked by cold war politics, where Japan was assigned by the United States

to become the bastion of the Western block in the Far East.²²

VII. National Frameworks in Transnational Memoryscape

Memories of the atomic bombing have produced narratives of nationhood in both Japan and the United States — Japan as a victim and the United States as a defender of freedom and democracy — and helped conceal histories of Japanese and US state violence, which were in competition and complicit with each other. Yet, progressive cultural and political forces have challenged the nationalization of bomb memories in both countries, as seen in the struggles over the making of the new exhibit at the Hiroshima Peace Museum and the Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian. While the Smithsonian could not display critiques of the American official narrative, Hiroshima museum includes panels about the history of Japan's imperial expansion and war of invasion, thus remembering the 1945 bombing in the context of colonial history of Asia Pacific. Unfortunately, though, forces that attempt to contain memories of the bombing within the boundary of the nation-state remain dominant.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, local initiatives in Hiroshima, combined with national and international movements to insert colonial memories into the Japanese public discourse of the war, pressured the city to acknowledge and take responsibility for Hiroshima's contribution to Japan's militarism. Yet, simply inserting the memories of Japanese colonialism in narratives of Hiroshima is far from enough in universalizing the memories of the bombing.

Hesitancy to portray Hiroshima's role in Japan's aggression in the new museum stemmed largely from a concern that such representation might justify the dropping of the atomic bombs. As an analysis of discursive operations delineated in the Smithsonian controversy shows, voices that justify the use of atomic weapons based on Japan's military brutality are very strong and audible. Responding to this view, many exhibit committee members and city officials resorted to the "Spirit of Hiroshima" and insisted that the museum remain a sacred space for *hibakusha* and the dead. Yet, this could be read as Hiroshima's unwillingness to face its

unpleasant past, as seen in a WWII veteran's comment at the very beginning of this paper.

Desire to keep the museum as a sacred space exclusively for conveying the "Spirit of Hiroshima," furthermore, is easily articulated to serve state's interests and chauvinistic nationalism.²³ The right-wing nationalists claimed that the demands of "leftist" citizens' groups would not only leave deep scars in the nation's history, but also violate the "universal humanism" expressed in the "Spirit of Hiroshima" — "our prayer for abolishing tragedies of war in the world, not the demand to take (Japan's) war responsibility" (*Sekai Nippō* 1987).

While such a claim might be dismissed simply as "nationalist" by the leftist peace activists, their position, too, could be articulated to the nationalist framework. Leftist citizens' groups advocated the display of the history of Japanese aggression in the Peace Museum, arguing that it would help advance the "Spirit of Hiroshima." In their narratives, though, a new Japanese subjectivity — the victimizer of Asia — is constructed. In order to take political actions necessary to force the state to redress the past injuries inflicted on victims of the Japanese colonial aggression, one may need to assume a subject-position as a Japanese citizen. At the same time, leftist narratives run a danger of simply reversing "victims" and "victimsers," and, as a result, conceal complicities, oppositions, and alliances that exceed the relations and boundaries of the nation-state and the empire in Asia Pacific. Furthermore, they could help reinforce the American official narrative, which makes invisible US acts of aggression, as exemplified in Sweeney's testimony.²⁴ In other words, leftist counter-narratives have not been successful either in challenging the American narrative that justifies the use of nuclear weapons, or in universalizing the "Spirit of Hiroshima." Further, they regulate the way Japanese *hibakusha* can speak of their memories. Leftists often accuse Japanese *hibakusha* of being consumed by "victim consciousness" and make it difficult for *hibakusha* to give public testimonies without any account of Japan's atrocities and their own role as "victimsers of Asia." Consequently, some Japanese *hibakusha* stopped giving testimonies in the public.

Resistance to remembering Hiroshima as a historic tragedy is very telling of the discursive conditions regarding the atomic bombing. Precisely because the

memories of the bombing are produced by cultural forces, such as news media, that cross national boundaries, the Peace Museum necessarily is placed inside such transnational discursive space. However, given the discursive operations that smooth over transnational collaboration and contradiction, subsuming them under the national framework of intelligibility both in Japan and the United States, it is almost impossible for narratives displayed at the Peace Museum to be taken as anything other than the "Japanese" view of the bomb and the war. If "Hiroshima" is to become a transnational symbol for peace, serious efforts must be made to redress the unbearable sufferings that were inflicted by both Japanese and US state violence, as well as to interrogate critically the ways in which such efforts for redress were long hindered under the cold war system. These attempts will destabilize the national framework of remembrance, and as a result, could bring forth a possibility for the "Spirit of Hiroshima" to be embraced transnationally.

Endnotes

- 1 Under the Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Reconstruction Law passed in 1949, the construction for the original Hiroshima Peace Memorial Hall began in 1950 and for the original Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in 1951. The Peace Memorial Hall, which was devoted to carrying out research on issues of "peace and culture," opened in May and the Peace Memorial Museum in August 1955. See Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation (1992).
- 2 A close inspection of the sensory effects, such as lighting and spatial arrangements, is necessary for a complete analysis of the workings of the museum displays. A comprehensive analysis of the Peace Museum should include an examination of the manner in which visitors move through and interpret the exhibition.
- 3 See Chugoku Shimbun (1986: 269).
- 4 All 15 interviews for this paper took place in Hiroshima during a three-week research period in July and August and a short stay in December 1997. I initially contacted my acquaintances, including *hibakusha*, city officials, peace activists, journalists, former museum staff and a former member of the exhibit-planning committee. Then, using the snowball sampling method, I contacted others who were involved in the making of the new Hiroshima Peace Museum. Each interview lasted from one-half hour to over several hours.
- 5 Since the peace museum belonged to the Mayor's Office organizationally, it was usually the director and/or assistant director of the Mayor's Office who met with citizens' groups and right-wing nationalists.
- 6 According to the official planning document of 1993, target viewers of the museum included "people around the world," since the museum is a space to "convey the human consequences of the atomic bombing and contribute to the realization of lasting world peace." The same document contains plans to produce brochures and captions of videos in 16 different languages, eight of them Asian. Also, approximately 7,500 people who would participate in the Asian Game in 1994 were considered as possible visitors to the museum. In other words, although not explicitly stated at the time of this meeting in 1988, "ideal viewers" of the exhibit included not only

- Japanese, but also people in neighboring Asian countries.
- 7 See Takahashi (1996); Ubuki (1995).
 - 8 Since this memorial was located outside the Peace Park, it had been characterized as a symbol of colonial subjugation suffered by Korean *hibakusha* and *zainichi* in Japan as a whole. Local activists, including *zainichi* activists, had demanded that the city relocate the memorial inside the Peace Park since the mid-1980s. The plan to relocate the memorial was proposed in 1990, which occasioned much dispute, partly due to the political complication between South Korean and North Korean groups. The memorial was finally moved to the Peace Park in June 1999.
 - 9 During a visit by South Korean President Roh Tae-wu to Japan in late May, the emperor expressed at the imperial palace dinner: "I deeply regret thinking of the pain inflicted on the people of your country." Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki apologized to Roh in their meeting: "[We] humbly reflect on [our deed] and candidly apologize." Even the conservative Ministry of Education directed schools to incorporate lessons in elementary, junior high, and high school classes that teach about Japanese colonial rule in Korea.
 - 10 Hiroshima was the first non-capital city in Asia to host these sports games. In the council meetings, it was repeated that "in the face of the upcoming Asian Games," it was crucial that Hiroshima acknowledge its role of aggression during the war.
 - 11 See Yoneyama (1997).
 - 12 The decisive event that awakened the public regarding Japan's colonial past was the "textbook crisis" of 1982. After it was made public, in June 1982, that the Ministry of Education suggested that a textbook author replace "*shinryaku* [invasion]" with "*shinshutsu* [advance]" to characterize Japan's involvement in the Asia-Pacific War, outraged Korean and Chinese governments loudly protested the re-writing of Japan's history of aggression. Faced with mounting international and domestic criticism, Educational Minister Ogawa Heiji, in early August, publicly admitted that the Japanese-Chinese war was "a war of invasion." On August 26, Chief Cabinet Secretary Miyazawa Kiichi issued words of deep remorse towards neighboring Asian countries, especially Korea and China, and promised to "correct" textbook descriptions of the war. See Yoshida (1995), chapter 7.
 - 13 See Yoneyama (1997).
 - 14 Since the late 1990s, the political situation has changed; the United States has regained its hegemony and Japan and other Asian countries have lost much of their economic and political power in relation to the United States.
 - 15 See McCormack (1996), chapter 6; Takagi (2001), chapter 2.
 - 16 See Yoneyama (1997); Yoneyama (1999), introduction and chapter 5.
 - 17 See Boyer (1996); Hein and Selden (1997); Sherry (1996). For detailed accounts of the controversy, see Harwit (1996); Nobile (1995). For an analysis of the Smithsonian controversy in the larger context of the culture war, see Linenthal and Engelhardt (1996); Wallace (1996).
 - 18 Jonathan Yardley's report in the *Washington Post* on October 10, 1994 about the change in the Enola Gay exhibition's script called the plan "anti-American," "against the United States," "the transparent evils of political correctness," and "anti-American propaganda."
 - 19 The US Senate passed, unanimously, a resolution to portray the atomic bombing as a force "helping to bring World War II to a merciful end." For detailed analyses of the formation of the master narrative and counter-narratives of the bombing in the United States, see Alperovitz (1995); Lifton and Mitchell (1995).
 - 20 See Yoneyama (2001). The United States was one of the imperial powers fighting to achieve hegemony in Asia Pacific at the turn of the 20th century. It colonized the Philippines in 1899 and competed against European and Japanese imperial powers to gain market shares in China. In fact, the United States had no moral authority over Japan and its aggression in Korea; it signed a secret treaty with Japan in 1905, which promised US support for the Japanese annexation of Korea in exchange for Japan's support of US colonial rule in the Philippines.
 - 21 In seeking redress for the women who were formerly enslaved, Asian women and human rights organizations put together a people's tribunal, "Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery," in Tokyo, from

December 8 to 12, 2000. Many aged women survivors from several Asian countries came forward to give testimonies at this Tribunal. The Judges ruled Emperor Hirohito and the Japanese government guilty of crimes against humanity.

22 Under the policy of containment, Japan was, for example, unable to establish economic ties with China until the early 1970s, when the United States "normalized" its own relations with China. South Korea, despite its antagonism toward Japan, was also encouraged by the United States to build economic ties with Japan and sign a normalization treaty.

23 See Naono (2002), chapter 3.

24 Addressing this US hypocrisy and US investment in the imperialist project in the Asia-Pacific region is an important and required political move. Yet, an emphasis on this transnational nature of the Japanese-US imperialist project could further nurture the "victim consciousness" of Japan held by the Japanese, both of the left and the right. For the left, a sense of being victimized by the United States has, on the one hand, promoted a sense of solidarity with other Asian people; on the other hand it has also contributed to an oversight of Japan's past aggressions. This sense of solidarity with the rest of Asia is easily harnessed to Japan's imperialist project by the right who criticize Western imperialism by assuming a position of solidarity with "Asian" or "colored people."

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