The Problem of the “Real”: Representation and Sanctification in the Hiroshima Museum

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In April 2013 the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum declared it would remove a group of mannequins that were part of the permanent exhibit since 1974. The figures, of a survivor family immediately after the blast with the attendant wounds and expressions of horror, include two women and a small boy shown wandering through a destroyed Hiroshima. Originally made from wax, the figures were modeled closely after the accounts and artwork of survivors; the three figures wear tattered clothing as worn by hibakusha at the time of the blast (hibakusha in Japanese means literally a person exposed to the nuclear bomb). Their removal is part of a large-scale renovation planned for 2015-2018, which shifts the focus of the exhibit from the larger historical event to an emphasis on the personal stories of the survivors through the use of photographs, survivor’s testimonies and the ihin: “relics” or artifacts left by the dead. The decision to remove the mannequins sparked anew debates over the proper way the museum should represent the horror of the bombing and whether the focus should be on historical recreation or the objects and mementos left by the dead. What stood at the center of current debates were the issues of the “authenticity” of the exhibit and “reality” of nuclear warfare. Indeed, supporters of the decision, such as Tsuboi Sunao, chair of the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organization (Hidankyō), have criticized the mannequins’ failure to depict the “reality of the atomic bomb,” arguing that the experiences of the bomb to be “far more appalling” than the mannequins depict.¹ Many commentators felt that ihin, “have a power that only actual belongings from the bombing possess.”² Shiga Kenji, the museum’s director, has explained this shift from mannequin to ihin as a turn towards a “focus on reality,” suggesting that the “real life artifacts...connected to memories of individual victims,” are closer to reality than the representational mannequins.³

This article examines the role of the objects left by the victims of the bomb: the Ihin, and the way they were understood historically in Hiroshima.⁴ Focusing primarily on the Peace Memorial Museum exhibition, this paper examines the way that understanding of Ihin evolved and how questions of representations, historical memory and identity were
tackled in Hiroshima through the last seven decades. These debates, in turn, are also briefly examined in relation to and are compared with the status of Holocaust objects in Israel and the West. Current debates over the status of the *ihin* are not the first time questions of representation and the role of objects have been examined in Hiroshima. Debates over the “correct” way to represent the experience of the A-bomb started as early as the mid-1940s and continue in various ways till current times. The current view which sees *ihin* as “real life artifacts” with a special connection to the dead and an almost sacred aura, evolved historically. This development was neither linear in its progression nor uniform in its appearance across the different phases of Hiroshima’s history. Different sides in the debate often shared similar ideas and concepts and were far from consistent. The same issues remained unresolved and continue to surface throughout the seventy year history of commemoration in Hiroshima. But what is clearly discernible is a steady assent in the status of A-bomb relics as sacred objects to be revered. While in earlier decades, A-bomb objects were sometime treated as curiosities, sold as souvenirs or treated as scientific materials (*shiryō*), they are now treated as sacred and invested with an almost religious aura.

The changing way the “reality” of the bombing was represented mirrored the changing sensibilities and practices of commemoration in Hiroshima as well as larger developments in the practice of historical memory in Japan and abroad; especially in regards to Holocaust commemoration. These changes reflect a move in global memory culture from a focus on communal and national narratives to the experience of the survivors themselves and their testimonies. In the debates over Hiroshima objects one could see many parallels to Holocaust objects. As Bozena Shallcross argued, objects left from the camps, “have become the Holocaust’s dominant metonymy.” With the passage of time, and especially the dwindling of survivors’ numbers, objects supply us with the most immediate and concrete reality of the Holocaust. As Stefanie Schäfer noted, *ihin* are thought of as transcendent objects that are capable of providing a “bridge to the past.” And, in recent years, objects have been claiming an increasingly central place in museum exhibits and commemorative sites. In both the Holocaust and Hiroshima cases, the power of objects to connect stems from the violence that transformed everyday objects into a metonymy of destruction. Because the nuclear event, in a very similar fashion to the case of the Holocaust, is so far removed from our “normal” existence and hence extremely difficult to represent properly, the value of *ihin* is significantly increased in the eyes of contemporaries. A-bomb objects, were seen very differently immediately after the bombing.
The “wonders and curiosities of Hiroshima”

The first ones to collect A-bomb materials were the scientific surveyors sent by the Japanese military immediately after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These teams were made of scientists who, accordingly, treated A-bomb objects as scientific specimen with little emotion or religious feelings. Significantly, it was a member of these survey teams, Hiroshima University geologist Nagaoka Shōgo, who initiated a movement to collect A-bomb artifacts, most of which were initially deposited in Nagaoka’s home. Nagaoka made collecting the objects his life’s work. Later he came to believe they had an enormous importance in telling the story of Hiroshima. Asked about his motivation, he told a reporter in 1962, “These articles that cannot talk...will one day serve as a warning to humanity.” Such sentiments, however, only grew with time. There is little information about Nagaoka’s initial motivation. What is clear is that Nagaoka’s initial goal was not to exhibit the materials “for peace” but simply collect these as “data” (shiryō). As a scientist Nagaoka meticulously recorded the scientific qualities of the objects as data in studying the bomb’s effects (angle of exposure, impact of heat etc.), but collected very little information beyond the scientific. Unlike current collections, there is little information concerning many of the objects collected and there are no personal narratives attached to objects. At the time Nagaoka was working at the university and with the city administration. He collected the materials almost as a hobby or, what he called, an “obsession.” Such obsession was, again, invested with meaning and attached itself to the goal of peace only later. This started to happen when Nagaoka met with other activists who collected materials like Yamasaki Yosaburō, who were more active in the nascent peace movement and were starting to see the activity of collecting in connection to projects to collect testimonies and commemorate the dead.

While some were trying to endow these objects with meaning, others were selling and collecting them as souvenirs in the growing tourist trade. The author of a 1946 American military guide to Hiroshima, pointed out to visitors, “Opposite to the park may be seen an amusing example of capitalization upon the bombing. An enterprising Japanese has named his place of business ‘book seller Atom’.” The proprietor sold “atomic trinkets” to passing American and British Commonwealth soldiers. This was not just a cynical “capitalization” on the bomb experience. “The rake-of from the sale of fused gobbets of atom-bomb aftermath,” observed one soldier, fed families who were desperate to survive. When Hiroshima City initially exhibited A-bomb materials it also did it in the context of tourism. The first official exhibit of A-bomb materials was arranged, together with the tourist board, in a small hall next to Nakajima Island (next to
This move was not connected to commemoration but aimed at promoting tourism. As an official 1949 city document reported, this move was part of a plan to “attract domestic tourism to the main city and not just Miyajima and the suburbs.” To promote this, in 1947, the tourist association formed to produce events like Miss Hiroshima, to establish tourist routes and the A-bomb exhibit. Reflecting this line, the press reported on the A-bomb artifacts as the “wonders and curiosities of Hiroshima, [which] both scientific researchers and tourists come to see.” Although, “the room is small and inadequate, it has many objects... [And] the organizers pride themselves on the fact that this is the only place in the world to see them.” The word peace was only mentioned in the article in connection with Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum where the city planned to house Nagaoka’s and other collections.

The idea of A-bomb artifacts as “curiosities” for tourists to see was not so exceptional at the time. In 1940’s Holocaust representations as well there are a number of similar cases. The context, of course, was completely different but the exhibition of pieces of soap (as was done in some Israeli and Polish exhibits – Holocaust lore had it that soap was made out of victims’ bodies in the death camp), or the exhibiting of a shrunken head of Polish prisoner from Buchenwald and lamp shades made out of human skin in the Nuremburg trial shared much with the early Hiroshima exhibits. In both cases, of course, these were not just curiosities. The shrunken head represented Nazi barbarism, which we supposedly overcame with the victory of civilization and the rule of law (and the Nuremburg trials themselves were an evidence of this). But the soap had another, much more subversive, meaning: the Nazis, who employed industrial and scientific method of slaughter, were a part of the European project and modern civilization. Turning people into soap, the ultimate commodification of humans, was particularly troubling as it symbolized the failure of civilization that occurred with the conscription of science in the service of mass murder (the fact of the soap being fake did not hurt its symbolic power). Hiroshima objects (in a different way) shared with the soap this subversive meaning, with their ability to remind viewers of the failure of modern civilization that was Hiroshima, and, furthermore, the possibility of the imminent return of the horror. But if, in the case of the Holocaust the horror was openly displayed, in Hiroshima, under American censorship, it was only hinted at. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, unlike in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, one could not distance oneself from those responsible for the killing and display these as mere sadists and barbarians, or as an aberration in history which we overcame. The Americans were the new rulers and their modern culture was fully embraced by the new Japan. The result was normalization and silencing of anxiety, and a focus on the wonder and immense power of the bomb. Objects were displayed as
the victory of science and not, as Walter Benjamin so succinctly termed it, “a document of civilization which is... [At] the same time a document of barbarism.”

The tying of A-bomb commemoration with the emerging tourist industry contributed much to the normalization of A-bomb objects. Most of the early commemoration and preservation activities of A-bomb sites and materials were done as part of a campaign by the city and tourism officials that sought to capitalize on Hiroshima’s newfound status as a symbol of modernity. In what would now be undoubtedly called a campaign of “dark tourism,” tourist association official Morihiro Sukeharu called the A-bomb “ruins of Hiroshima” (English in original)... a tourist resource” (kankō shigen). Morihiro coupled this with call for preserving A-bomb sites, the A-bomb dome, and A-bomb artifacts such as, “the bricks that were melted by the heat...the people of the world come here to see these as wonders (kiseki) and so we should take measures to preserve these.” A number of tourist brochures it produced called the city itself “Atom Hiroshima.” A 1948 pamphlet by that name (Atomu Hiroshima), published by the Hiroshima prefecture tourist association, called on visitors to see, “the sacred ground for peace...Atom Hiroshima, which the peace loving people of the world...shall never forget.” The brochure then presented the visitor with a number of pictures of “Atomic sites,” which included the A-bomb dome and other surviving buildings and imprints of the bomb such as the famous human shadow on the steps of a local bank. A picture of the kimono-clad contestants of Miss Hiroshima followed these images. In all of these publications Hiroshima was presented as a transformed city of peace, a symbol for reconciliation, which is looking forward into the “bright peace” of the future. Such ideological emphasis on optimism and renewal was the result of both American dictate and genuine Japanese pacifism and hope for the future. Living under severe censorship that precluded any open discussion of the atomic bomb and its horrors, many Japanese sought to talk of the bomb in terms of its transformative power and as a lesson that will prevent the horrors of another global war, this time with atomic weapons.

The Peace Museum and the first ihin controversy

Such optimism was inscribed into the very shape of the city with the 1949 Hiroshima Peace City Law that equated building a city of peace with building a rational modern metropolis. Tange Kenzō, who was responsible for Hiroshima’s city plan, as well as the building of the Hiroshima memorial museum, saw his work as one of spiritual transformation. Spiritual renewal would come through “the making of Hiroshima into a factory for peace” (heiwa o tsukuridasu tame no kōgyō de aritai). Seeing the museum as
a factory was a demonstration of the influence of Le Corbusier, who famously used the phrase a “machine for living.”\textsuperscript{26} Hiroshima’s wide avenues (some as wide as one hundred meters) and rational city plan, with the peace museum’s modernist design of exposed concrete, was an expression of this ideal drawn from Le Corbusier and high modernism.

The Peace Museum was part of this commemoration apparatus but its exhibition was not nearly as impressive as its modernist exterior. According to Hiraoka Takashi, a former mayor of Hiroshima who was then a young journalist covering the city, the city administration did not put any thought into what actually will be inside the large museum Tange planned.\textsuperscript{27} Prior to the 1949 exhibit the city turned to Nagaoka, who agreed to donate a large number of items from his collection. The city made him responsible for the collection and he later became the museum’s first director.\textsuperscript{28} Parallel to Nagaoka’s efforts, Yamasaki and others organized a collection of A-bomb materials to be presented in a local school. The exhibit opened in 1953, this small beginning led Yamasaki, Nagaoka and others to come together in the A-bomb materials preservation society (genbaku shiryō hozonkai) in 1955. Significantly, the only term the society used at the time for the materials was shiryō, meaning data or research materials. Nagaoka’s scientific background and strong emphasis on data collection certainly had something to do with such designation. Collection of A-bomb materials was seen as acting in tandem with the collection of data, pictures and statistics to be compiled in “White books” that documented the damage done to Hiroshima and its residents in minute details.\textsuperscript{29} Both Yamasaki and Nagaoka were part of this effort, Yamasaki in documenting the names of these killed and Nagaoka in his capacity as scientist.\textsuperscript{30}

Accordingly, when the museum opened in 1955 the materials were generally presented as “evidence” and scientific proof for the enormous destructive power of the bomb. In the press many comparisons were made between the museum and the ABCC (Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission – an American research institute in Hiroshima). The press as well as the city, emphasized the many panels and scientific materials the ABCC donated and the high scientific levels of materials collections.\textsuperscript{31} Another strong theme was the suffering of the hibakusha. Indeed, at least judging from newspaper and other descriptions a sort of dissonance existed between the scientific discourse and focus on suffering. Such focus in the museum and other exhibits was relatively new and was the result, partially, of the outpouring of sympathy for Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the end of the occupation, the lifting of censorship and the growth of a Japanese peace movement.\textsuperscript{32} The peace movement saw Japanese as having a special duty to promote peace, having been a victim of the bomb and war.\textsuperscript{33} Especially after a third incident of radiation exposure in the Lucky Dragon Incident of 1954, this time of Japanese fisherman to radiation from
an American nuclear test, the Japanese anti-nuclear movement grew enormously in size and importance. Significantly, it put the suffering of Hiroshima and the *hibakusha* at the center of its efforts to ban the bomb. Both themes came together in the presentation of medical specimens of birth defects and other maligning influences of radiation on unborn babies, which were preserved in formalin jars. Another example, which crossed the line between tourist curiosities, examples of suffering and scientific specimen, was the “Keloid Horse” – a horse that survived the bomb but with terrible burns. The horse died in 1954 but its preserved body was displayed at the Peace Museum thereafter.

Although the word *ihin* was hardly featured in early publications and they were certainly not seen as relics in this point, Religion had a strong presence in the Peace Park. As in other sites of mass death, there was always a strong religious element to commemoration in Hiroshima. The Peace Park was not just the site of the museum but also housed an enormous depository of ashes of the dead; Buddhist and Shinto priests performed religious rites every August 6th, and many of the testimonies given by survivors were couched in religious terms. Indeed, Hiroshima’s memory culture was suffused with religious terms. Christianity was disproportionately influential in Hiroshima. Unlike Nagasaki, where the Christian community was the principal victim and where Christian motives predominated (to an extent), Hiroshima has much lesser number of Christians. Yet this was due to the American occupation’s promotion of Christianity on one hand and the genuine sympathy Hiroshima residents felt for Christian pacifists who were responsible for significant charity work in and for Hiroshima. Christian missionaries were among the only civilians allowed traveling freely to and from Hiroshima and were deeply involved in promoting testimonies and other forms of commemoration. One of the heroes of Hersey’s famous book *Hiroshima*, Tanimoto Kiyoshi was a major figure in Hiroshima. He often tied work for Hiroshima’s victims with work for Christianity. In August 1947, for instance, Tanimoto, together with American representatives from Georgia’s Emory University, presented the city with their plan to supply aid to Hiroshima and rebuild its ruined churches. Another successful campaign was the building of a Peace Memorial Cathedral, with donations primarily from German Catholic organizations that was initiated with papal blessing in 1946. Also in 1946, the Quaker Floyd Schmoe, who eventually settled in Hiroshima, started to gather funds for constructing homes for survivors.

Consequently, Hiroshima’s appeals to the world became more and more laden with Christian language and metaphors. In a particularly extreme example of this discourse, an English language guide to Hiroshima, designed apparently to appeal to American Christian sensibilities, and simply titled *Hiroshima*, the editors told its readers, “The
explosion of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 marked the resurrection of Hiroshima as a city of peace and culture.” Alongside impressions of Hiroshima’s “rebirth” by local occupation officials and missionaries, it featured one testimony by a Dr. T. Fujiwara of Hiroshima University (The T. probably stood for Takeo but the name was not given). The testimony, titled “Love in the Ruins,” in which a survivor is touched by acts of human kindness among stricken Hiroshima residents on 6 August. These acts, the author concluded, “Are symbols showing the resurrection of love in the atomic wrought city of Hiroshima. Love will not perish from earth or from heaven. The atomic bomb is the wonder of the century. Though great is this scientific wonder, the sacred love of human beings and of nature has not been afflicted.” Following this account, demonstrating the coupling of science and victimhood narratives discussed above, Fujiwara, in his hat as a scientist, gave an explanation of the effects of the bomb as “scientific phenomena of the atom bomb.” This was written under the occupation censorship (indeed, even this extremely pro-American and Christian text was censored and was not allowed to circulate openly). In this context, the late forties turn to the language of relics and saints in talking about hibakusha and A-bomb objects is not surprising. The existence of very similar terms in Buddhist practice, especially the Shingon and the Pure Land (Jōdo shinshū) sects popular in Hiroshima made this confluence of terms easier for hibakusha. One should remember, however, that ihin, were not directly connected to religious liturgy. What happened was more akin to a blurring of boundaries between religious and commemorative language, which, with time, invested words with new meanings as hibakusha became “martyrs for peace,” and Hiroshima “a sacred ground for peace.”

In the museum itself, however, articles on display were not referred to in such terms. The articles in the museum as well as in the traveling exhibits that predated the museum (as in department stores or universities) were almost universally referred to as shiryō. That started to change in 1955-1956 when the museum was quite suddenly put to a very different use by the city. Following the aforementioned 1954 Lucky Dragon Five incident, the American government embarked on a large scale campaign to repackage the atom in Japan and abroad not as a weapon of war but as “atoms for peace.” This campaign, which I wrote on extensively elsewhere, targeted Hiroshima as a special location for an all Japan exhibit that featured the wonders of the peaceful atom. The campaign was warmly welcomed in Hiroshima by city authorities. Even Nagaoka Shōgo was enthusiastic. He told the press, “until now the exhibit was only about the suffering [brought by the bomb] but now I am really delighted that with the cooperation of many we can have a proper world level exhibition on the benefits of nuclear power.”

With Nagaoka’s cooperation the city managed to get the backing of the local press,
the Hiroshima University and other institutions. Suddenly, however, “all hell broke loose in Hiroshima.” Local residents and the Hiroshima anti-bomb movement (Gensuikyō) expressed alarm as the city, against Nagaoka’s wishes, removed over two thousand articles from the atomic bomb museum to make room for the exhibit. The city explained that the museum was the only place big enough to accommodate the exhibit and that the removal of the items was only temporary. But many survivors protested. It is in this context that A-bomb objects were first called ihin and relics, and invested with new meanings. Gensuikyō explained, “We are not against the exhibit as such [but against the use of the museum for that purpose]. Behind these a-bomb artifacts there are the 200,000 victims...these ihin are more important than the exhibit and should not be moved.”

Others were more indignant. Abol Fazl Fotouhi, an American diplomat who headed the American Culture Center in Hiroshima, reported hibakusha rage, “The energy which destroyed the city,” claimed one survivor, “is now used as a tool to remove our most sacred relics from their permanent home with the possibility of never putting them back again” (my emphasis).

A petition to the city and a campaign against the exhibit followed. Responding to critics, the exhibit sponsors organized a public symposium in March where the issue was debated. Among those present were city officials, journalists, and survivor organizations. When one resident spoke of the items in the museum as relics, Professor Fujiwara Takeo, who is probably the same Fujiwara who we already met as a proponent of Christian love, protested, “What is the museum? Is it a shrine? Is it a place like our Miyajima? If that is so, why then don’t you have the marking of a shrine? Why should our ancestors object to anything if it means the future welfare of mankind? ... We need to understand the basic principles of peaceful living. We must see what the future promises...”

Though (even at the time) Fujiwara’s outburst was tactless and insensitive (not to mention his hypocrisy given his own use of religious language examined earlier), it exposed a fundamental disagreement over A-bomb artifacts. For Fujiwara, treating the artifacts as ihin was presented as irrational and against progress (which, in turn, was equated to reconciliation with the US). Progress meant in this context embracing science and nuclear power’s promise and not clinging to old irrational beliefs about the A-bomb materials being sacred relics. In a similar vein, American tourists and officials complained to Fotouhi about the museum “being a horror museum...[which] aimed at shaming America.” “One group of visitors,” he wrote, “even went so far as to tell me that it was my duty to see to it that the entire collection was removed and replaced by more appropriate material related to the peaceful uses of the atom.”

Although the exhibit was only removed temporarily, the A-bomb artifacts were
replaced with a nuclear energy exhibit, which remained in the museum. Nagaoka and other hibakusha did not give up without a fight. Nagaoka, who had a change of heart regarding the affair, personably confronted the mayor, “this is a place to show the history of Hiroshima’s suffering.... [Not] for singing the praise of peaceful nuclear power.” Protest continued but as the Atoms for Peace exhibit progressed, and proved to be a smashing success, their voices became a minority. Adding insult to injury the city did not only force Nagaoka to have the exhibit atomic energy in the museum but also made it part of its permanent exhibit. It was only removed in 1967. Quite suddenly and without much explanation this exhibit, a cause for major controversy, was removed. As plans for a first major renovation gathered pace, the local newspaper reported, “the city decided to take the atoms for peace [exhibit] materials out of the museum as the first step in making it a place to learn about peace and Hiroshima’s suffering, and in line with the museum character.” What made the exhibit suddenly “out of character” was not explained. The whole affair seems to have been intentionally hushed up (current museum staff was not aware of the incident and the museum’s official history does not mention the exhibit).

The Realism Debates

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Hall Exhibit Committee (Hiroshima heiwa kinenkan tenji kyōgikai) was created in late 1966. The committee met for four months and concluded its first round of debates in April of 1967. The committee continued to work through 1970. In its second meeting, the committee agreed on a statement of principles. This document defined the goal of the museum renovation: “The museum should be the custodian of and collect materials related to the damage [caused by] the A-bomb; should make visitors - both domestic and foreign - understand, the true conditions (or reality - jitsujō) of the experience of bombing; and promote an appreciation of the importance of peace.” “The basis of this activity,” the statement continued, “should be to introduce the great sacrifice (daigisei) of Hiroshima and the experience of the bombing (hibakutaiken).” The insistence on Hiroshima’s sacrifice was considered the common sense position in Hiroshima at the time. What was new was the insistence on the truth or actuality of the experience the exhibit should convey. This became a recurring theme in Hiroshima discourse at the time. A few months after the committee concluded its work, Mayor Yamada Setsuo said, “the current arrangement (of the museum) is not in accordance with the actual situation after the bombing; I want to bring it as close as possible to reality and
the truth.”63 Both Yamada and the committee were responding to growing anxiety in Hiroshima over the disappearing past, as hibakusha were beginning to pass away and all physical reminders of the bomb, besides the Dome, erased.

How exactly to represent the “real,” became a focus of controversy throughout the seventies renovation. The “realism” debates, and especially its relation to the question of the ihin, were entangled with the new Hiroshima’s administration push to sanctify (seichika) the park. The reasons for that strangely named campaign are quite complex. They go back to debates over preservation of the A-bomb dome and the use of the park by political groups.64 In both cases political use by the left of these sites was countered by the administration and the center-right coalition as “inappropriate.” In his address to the city assembly mayor Yamada declared “The Park is a place for silent prayer... it should not be [a place] for waving red flags and screaming in pitched voices.”65 Indeed, one of the very first acts of Yamada was to revoke permits for the annual May Day demonstration at the Park.66 A further impetus for this campaign was the disorderly presence of youth gangs and vendors at the park. The city decided to crack down on such phenomenon in June-July 1969, with a major police operation that evicted souvenir shops (most run by poor hibakusha), as “it was not appropriate [to have these shops] according to the policy [idea] of sanctification.”67

Behind the campaign to “respect the feelings” of the hibakusha, was not just political antagonism but also a concern with the rising value of tourism. Youth gangs, unregulated shops and political violence (this was the era of student mobilization against the Vietnam War) were simply bad for business. In January 1969 the Chūgoku Shinbun reported the number of foreign tourists to Hiroshima had peaked in 1968 with 155000 tourists from 40 countries visiting the city. Tourism and peace were not separate issues in the seventies but things were clearly starting to change. The Chūgoku Shinbun set up to interview some of those tourists where one could be sure to find foreigners, the Peace Park, in order to find out more about their “idea of Hiroshima.”68 The foreign tourists almost uniformly spoke of their deep felt sympathy for Hiroshima and their appreciation of the work the city did for peace. Similar articles abounded in Hiroshima during those years. A 1968 article, for instance, Yamasaki Yosaburō (the aforementioned collector), talked about the way tourists were transformed by their experience and how impressed they were by the city’s “sacrifice and the way it carries an enormous burden for all of humanity.”69

However, what emanates from Yamasaki’s piece, and what is evident in much contemporary writings about the Hiroshima peace tourism, is a deep unease. Far from seeing atomic sites, as they were seen just a few years ago, un-problematically as a
“tourist resource,” Yamasaki called on the Yamada administration “[to] not make Hiroshima into a tourist city.” Yamasaki wanted the city to be “a pilgrimage site,” and, “a mecca of world peace,” and he condemned “making the A-bomb survivors into a tourism resource.” Significantly, Yamasaki, though against tourism, also was against political use of the memory of the bombing, “The sacrifice of the 20000 should not be in vain, it should not be mixed up with any particular [system of] thought or for all sorts of political goals. Our experience and the collections of materials should only be used to promote peace.” This was noble sentiment but, by 1968 – with the Japanese left torn over the Vietnam War and other issues, completely unrealistic. Yamasaki was voicing the frustration of many survivors who felt that their experiences were cynically utilized and capitalized on. But as one *hibakusha* told Ōe Kenzaburō even collecting testimonies and artifacts, as Yamasaki did, was problematic:

People in Hiroshima prefer to remain silent until they face death. They want to have their own life and death. They do not like to display their misery for use as "data" in the movement against atomic bombs or in other political struggles. Nor do they like to be regarded as beggars, even though they were in fact victimized by the atomic bomb ... Almost all thinkers and writers have said that it is not good for the A-bomb victims to remain silent; they encourage us to speak out. I detest those who fail to appreciate our feeling about silence. We cannot celebrate 6 August; we can only let it pass away with the dead.

Not all *hibakusha* felt so strong about politics. Indeed, many were very active in the anti-war and anti-nuclear movement. But many other *hibakusha*, especially in light of the turbulent politics of the sixties, just wanted to be left alone.

The city’s sanctification plan built on this sentiment, expelling troubled teenagers, radical students and souvenir stands to create “an oasis where people could reflect on peace.” But, contrary to Yamasaki’s wishes, the city also aimed at capitalizing on the growing number of tourists. This was especially important in the early seventies, as shipbuilding and other industries were declining due to the oil crisis and the start of deindustrialization, tourism became an increasingly important source of revenue. In addition, with anti-nuclearism and Hiroshima moving more into the mainstream, growing numbers of Japanese school groups came to Hiroshima. Both of these groups grew in number every year. Yet, not surprisingly, the city found it hard to maintain both the Park’s newfound status as a sacred place and, at the same time, develop the growing domestic and foreign tourist trade. Nowhere were the tensions between sanctification and commercialization as visible as in the “realism” debates.”

The “realism” debate began in earnest with the decision of the city, in 1972, to replace six simple wooden display mannequins wearing clothes worn by bomb victims,
with wax figures which could represent a mother with her child and another woman fleeing the fires that consumed Hiroshima. The wax artist aimed at recreating the wounds and burns suffered by survivors. Their hair and pose was also arranged accordingly, with hands outstretched (the skin having melted), expressions of horror on their faces and a photo of the burning city behind them. The figures were supposed to represent hibakusha fleeing, around 1500 meters from the bomb. The wax artist Nishio Tokiichi, who was brought from Kyoto, interviewed a dozen hibakusha in order to get details for the creation of the dolls. Nishio told the press: “I worked hard to represent it as true as possible as it was at that time. The hardest part was conveying the facial expression, the terror, despair and will to life of the hibakusha... I wanted to show the destruction of the bomb to as many people as possible... and to contribute to peace. [My italics].” In another interview, Nishio explained: “We have avoided dramatic expression. Wax works have been used for medical preparations for a long time. These dummies are also medical material.” Nishio's insistence on the truth of his representation and his claim for medical-scientific validity of the exhibit were clear efforts to defend his work in light of overwhelming resistance from hibakusha and others who resented this trial at representing or recreating (saigen) the horror of that day. Although Nishio sought the status of “true representation,” his detractors, who saw it as a simulacrum, roundly dismissed his claim. In the ensuing debate over the remaking of the museum, ihin was contrasted with saigen (recreation) and designated an almost mythical belief in the power of articles exposed to the bomb to convey the experience of the bomb and sway people to support peace. A pilgrimage site needed its martyrs and relics. A-bomb materials and hibakusha testimony were seen as equivalent, and were opposed to the museum administration’s “shallow tourist consciousness,” which the dolls represented.

Moritaki Ichirō, a well-known activist, in an op-ed in the Chūgoku Shinbun, complained that the exhibit is “just fake... it does nothing but producing shock. It does not contribute anything to peace and [just] cheapens the experience.” Moritaki and others contrasted the “fake” (nise mono) with ihin (or shiryō) that possessed a truth claim by virtue of being actually exposed to the bomb. Seeing these fragmented and broken relics were supposed to transform visitors, they “possessed an aura that allowed the spectator... to bridge the gap between their present and the lost past.” This transformation could not be achieved by representation. “No matter how much we try,” claimed Moritaki, “the situation on that day could never be represented.” Another survivor told the press, “Even though it may not be as strong [as the replicas], each and every artifact contains the truth of the atomic bombing in its silence and contains the longing for peace of those surviving families who donated it.”
But it was exactly the silence of the objects that the recreation camp objected to. It was just not sufficient. “I want this catastrophe,” said Yamada, “in which more than 200,000 people died to burn itself stronger into the minds of the spectators and the Museum to become more efficient.”

Supporters of the figures claimed their mode of representation was truthful, realistic and scientific. At the same time, they also wanted the exhibit to express suffering and emotions. This was necessary “to burn” the memory into visitors’ minds. Yamada intended the same transformation that the ihin camp aimed at; he just did not think the remnants at the museum could do the job by themselves. The “recreation” also benefited from a split in the survivors’ ranks, especially among intellectuals who felt uncomfortable with the religious-like devotion to the relics. Imahori Seiji, one of the most prominent left-wing historians of the peace movement, argued that just collecting materials was not enough. “We need to establish a scientific research center to collect data about destruction caused by the bomb,” he argued, “and use all means necessary to disseminate this information.” A similar argument was advanced by Tahara Tsukasa, a member of Genbaku shiryō hozonkai, who also called for a research center and concentration of all the material in one place. Eventually, Yamada’s camp triumphed. After all, he had the city’s resources and tourism interests on his side. But the debate left a bitter aftertaste in Hiroshima. There was a sense that the times were changing and that with all the talk of sacred place and prayer, Hiroshima was turning into a different place; a more normal place but also one which lost its way.

Paradoxically, with increasing uncertainty and debate the emphasis on religious-like sacredness grew. In the 1980’s with the revival of the anti-bomb movement and the continuing natural decline of the hibakusha population, A-bomb artefacts grew in importance. In a 1982 official Museum publication Ihin ga kataru [Objects left behind speak], for instance, the objects are described as silent storytellers (mugon no kataribe). The increasing status of the A-bomb articles also can be attributed to the exposure of the Hiroshima Museum curators and the activist community to Holocaust commemoration. Although both discourses developed largely separately until the 1960’s there was a surprising affinity between Holocaust and Hiroshima commemoration. Such close understanding was revealed as early as 1963 when a group of Hiroshima activists (The Hiroshima-Auschwitz Peace March) visited Auschwitz and exchanged what they referred to as “mementos of death”: A-bomb and Holocaust articles as well as testimonies (the objects included prisoners uniforms, glasses, empty Zyklon B canisters and even an urn with victims’ ashes). This initial exchange grew, by the 1970’s and 80’s to an institutionalized exchange between the Hiroshima and Auschwitz museums. When an Auschwitz exhibit was shown in Hiroshima in 1970, for instance, the head of the Peace
Memorial Museum, Morihiro Sukeharu, incidentally, also the author of the 1950 “Ruins of Hiroshima” article, wrote, “[When planning for exhibits] just like the recent Auschwitz exhibit touched the heart of Hiroshima residents, [our exhibit] should get people to want to get to bottom of the matter and lead visitors to inquire further.” The use of Holocaust artefacts was an especially important part of these exhibits. A Japanese delegation that visited Yad Vashem in the mid-eighties was also duly impressed by the “sacred atmosphere” of the place. In another context, the press said of Holocaust articles, “if these articles had a voice they would let out a scream” (ihin ni koe ga aru nara sakebu darō). Significantly, the Holocaust articles from the seventies onward are almost uniformly related to as ihin, mirroring the sacred place these also have in Western and especially Jewish memory of the Holocaust.

Further reconstructions did not displace the wax figures. The wax figures were replaced by plastic ones in 1991 but the display stayed essentially the same. The issue was side-lined by the debates over Japan’s role as a perpetrator in WW II and the museum overemphasis on victimization. Significantly, one can also see here parallels to Jewish and Israeli debates about memory. In Israel and the Jewish world, many protested the right wing Israeli government’s use of the Holocaust in justifying its actions during the first Lebanon war (1982-1985). When Prime Minister Menachem Begin, for instance, said that the Israeli forces entered Lebanon “because the alternative was Treblinka, and we decided there will be no more Treblinka,” author Amos Oz wrote to Begin, “Hitler is already dead prime minister...he is not hiding in Nabataea or Beirut.” In Hiroshima, left wing groups argued the museum needed to add an “aggressor corner” (kagaisha ko-na-) on the history of Japanese aggression in Asia. The right and some survivors reacted with indignation. “The conspiracy to classify out fellow countryman as victimizers,” argued one right wing city councilman, “would leave a deep scar on Japanese children.”

Those debates raged through the nineties and the 1989-1994 renovation. As in the seventies, further conflict led to an emphasis on the religious-like and transcendent quality of the victimization experience. This was also part of a larger trend, evident also in the West in the context of Holocaust commemoration of “privatization of memory” and concentration on the individual rather than on the larger political and historical narratives that these experience were used for. Such concentration on the personal is not clear of controversy. As the 1995 Enola Gay exhibit controversy demonstrated displaying personal objects from Hiroshima in the American museum was seen as a highly subversive act by American conservatives and veteran groups as it reflected, what they saw as, an over emphasis on Japanese victimization. Personal stories were seen as obstructing the larger history of Japanese aggression. What was notable about Japanese defenders of the exhibit
(unlike American supporters who talked mostly in terms of acknowledging historical wrongs) was their insistence of the objects’ ability to transcend such controversies.\textsuperscript{94} This emphasis on transcendence was shared by many survivors of atrocities the world over, as well as by those who advocated for them in the name of transnational justice. This was evident in the growing use of TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Committee, modelled on South Africa’s experience, which put testimonies and victims’ sufferings at the center of their activities. Especially in light of the growing trend of “bearing witness” after Bosnia and Rwanda, private stories and suffering became sacrosanct. The museum’s current move to embrace \textit{ihin}, reflects these developments which, if anything, only grew more powerful as survivors die out and living memory is extinguished. The current Hiroshima City position as to the mannequins and the move to preserve \textit{ihin} has focused on the “need to preserve the first-hand accounts of the \textit{hibakusha}, who are decreasing in number each year.”\textsuperscript{95} Ironically, museum authorities now defend the elimination of the mannequins because of their “\textit{lack of realism} or excessive violence in their representation of the atomic aftermath.” [My emphasis]\textsuperscript{96} On the other hand, opponents have argued that the importance of the mannequins stem precisely from the horror they depict. The mannequins, they insist, possess an interactive element that the rest of the museum lacks.\textsuperscript{97} Thus, although arguments came a full circle the debates are hardly resolved.

**Conclusion**

What is strangely absent from current debates over the removal of the wax figures from the museum is the place of science in the exhibit. Historically, curators held a strong belief in the power of scientific research and data to convey the “truth” of the bombing. Nagaoka Shōgo was motivated by this belief, as were all the countless activists who collected photos, materials, statistics and testimonies and created the “white books” compendiums of statistics of destruction, sickness and loss. Many activists believed that if we only knew, if we were only exposed to the empirical certainty of the data, we could achieve knowledge and understanding of the experience of being bombed by nuclear weapons and, hence, would arrive at the logically necessary conclusion of supporting the peace movement. As Kyo Maclear argued in regards to the use of A-Bomb photographs, this enlightenment derived quest for “total knowledge,” was impossible in the face of the horror of the bomb. While pictures of the A-bomb from the Japanese side all show us how the bomb was experienced on the ground and the point of view of the victims, American images, for instance at the Smithsonian, show us the empty expanses destroyed by the power of the bomb with no human in sight. One celebrates the power of science while the
other shows its darker side. Both function as opposite “monologues,” which exclude each other but, even if brought together, they cannot capture the enormity of the horror. This represents the limits of representation and the “limits of vision as paradigm of knowledge.” A similar — perhaps even more pointed — argument can be made regarding statistics. In both cases, “retinal fatigue” and overexposure to horror render the efforts of representation meaningless. Yet, the mystical belief in the power of science persists. This was, especially problematic in the case of the material and psychological bomb damage. As Kanai Toshihiro pointed out, producing white papers and compendiums of data were perhaps politically necessary but, by using the tools of science, one is using the same tools used to produce the bomb itself. Hence reproducing and maintaining the same structures that led to the creation of the bomb. Kanai however, was a lone voice in Hiroshima at the time. The rising status of artifacts perhaps attests to a change in views. The absence of science in the debates is an implicit acknowledgment of the inability of data to adequately represent the horror.

This is a problem that is shared in many similar memorial sites. No matter how much data memorials accumulate, the problem of representing the horror persists. We who never experienced such horror cannot really fathom what it was like or how it feels. Ironically, the more people hear and see horror, the more “retinal fatigue” and overexposure to horror render the efforts of representation meaningless. In this context, both the people and the objects that “were there” gain an aura of authority. Seeing a shoe from Auschwitz, a lunch box from Hiroshima or listening to a survivor, regardless of the actual words included in the testimony, provides a tactile and concrete connection with what happened. Thus, as time passes, although the problem of representation persists, the status of ihin rose and their aura increased.

Ihin, however, are also problematic as they are empty signifiers and could be ascribed a different meaning. The same shoe or piece of cloth can be thought of as data and as a sacred relic. A Holocaust era yellow star of David can be seen as a badge of honor or shame. The context in which these objects are placed, as in the text attached to a display, can completely change its meaning. As the changing attitudes in the museum demonstrate the meaning of artefacts is never stable. Seeking a way out of this conundrum, Maclear suggests that we use art as a more appropriate practice for dealing with the horror of the bomb but, as Adorno’s famous quip about poetry after Auschwitz shows, in light of the aestheticization of politics by the Nazis, art was seen as suspicious, inappropriate, and even dangerous when dealing with the horror of mass death. “Atrocity,” Maclear reminds us, “can be beautiful.” Instead of the art of reportage, such as the socialist realism practiced by communist artists in Japan and elsewhere, which can lead to such
aestheticization, MacLear wants to turn to more abstract art that, again qua Adorno, is supposed to estrange the world and take us away from the dialectics and transcend the “limits of the real.” The “realism debates” revolved around this question of limits, but did not transcend them. Those issues, indeed, are far from being solved. Not only in Hiroshima but in memorials the world over the problem of the “real” persists. Thus, although the status of artifacts grew with time, such developments did not mean the end of controversies around representation, which are likely to persist into the future.

NOTES
I would like to thank Nathan Hopson, Oleg Benesch, and Robert Jacobs for reading drafts of this article. This article is based on a Hebrew language article “Mada Yetzug Ve-Kdusha Be-Mozeon Ha-Shalom Be-Hiroshima,” which is forthcoming in Historia.

1 Chūgoku Shinbun, 7 June 2013. Hidankyō stand for “Nihon gensuibaku higaisha dantai kyōgikai”: The All Japan Organization of A-Bomb and H-bomb sufferers.
2 Chūgoku Shinbun, 19 October 2013.
3 Chūgoku Shinbun, 7 June 2013.
4 The meaning of the term Ihin (遺品) varies with the contest of its usage. One could use the word in a neutral way to describe simply objects which the deceased left after her, or in the context of ancestor worship (sosensūhai) and memorialization which every Japanese household performs. In the later context ihin can have religious connotations. In the case of the Peace Museum, families of victims donated these objects as a way to commemorate them from the fifties to this day. Such objects include clocks (such as the famous one which stopped at 8:15), items of clothing, furniture, bento boxes and the like. Here, objects had a very strong emotional meaning to families and the community as a whole. Objects such as the school uniform of a class that was all killed in the bombing or a tricycle of a toddler became especially important and are shown in many publications about the hibakusha.
5 Because limitations of space I will focus only on Hiroshima and will only mention Nagasaki briefly. Nagasaki’s history is, furthermore, distinct in many ways from Hiroshima’s and I cannot possibly do it justice within the limited space of this article. For more on Nagasaki see Chad Diehl, Resurrecting Nagasaki: Reconstruction, the Urakami Catholics, and Atomic Memory, 1945-1970, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Columbia University (2011).
8 For details on Nagaoka’s role in the geological surveys, see Tagai Tokuhei, Ishi no kioku: Hiroshima, Nagasaki (Tokyo: Tomo Shobō, 2007).
9 The quote is in his obituary. See Chūgoku Shinbun, 9 August 1962.
10 Okuda Hiroko, Genbaku no kioku: Hiroshima/Nagasaki no shisō, Tokyo: Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2010, 121. This was a problem that the museum staff discovered in 1997. Since 1999,
they have reached out to some 800 people who donated approximately 8000 objects to the museum for more information

15 Ibid., 202.
17 Chūgoku Shinbun, 24 September 1949.
20 Morihiro Sukeharu, “Hiroshima no kankō shigen,” in Shin Toshi (hiroshima heiwa toshi kensetu tokushūgo), Vol. 4, No. 8 (August 1950), 44.
21 Ibid., 47. Many of the passages in this essay were reprinted verbatim in Hiroshima tourist guides well into the fifties.
22 Motogi Bunsen, Kankō Hiroshima ken (Hiroshima: yukan minsei shinbunsha hakō , 1948).
27 Author’s interview with Hiraoka Takashi, 13 April 2010.
29 The city and survivor groups published numerous materials concerning the damage suffered by the bomb. One of the best known and exhaustive of these was Hiroshima-shi Nagasaki-shi Genbaku Saigaishi Henshū Iinkai, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Physical, Medical, and Social Effect of the Atomic Bombings (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
31 Chūgoku Shinbun, 6 August 1963 and 26 November 1964.
32 After the end of the occupation and censorship there was a deluge of publications on the A-bomb. See Ubuki, Hiroshima sengoshi, 77-78.
34 These jars are still kept today at the Hiroshima University Medical Library.
35 For more on the horse see Chūgoku Shinbun, 9 September 1954 and 31 July 1971.


38 MacArthur encouraged missionary work and even hoped the occupation would be an opportunity to convert the Japanese to Christianity. See Lawrence S. Wittner, “MacArthur and the Missionaries: God and Man in Occupied Japan,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (February 1971), 77–98.


40 See [http://hiroshima.catholic.jp/~pcaph/cathedral/?page_id=2](http://hiroshima.catholic.jp/~pcaph/cathedral/?page_id=2) accessed on 20 February 2012.

41 Quote is from Zwigenberg, *Hiroshima*, 302.


44 Ibid., 9.

45 Ibid., 11.


47 The full quote, from a 1948 work, is: “the sacred ground for peace…Atom Hiroshima, which the peace loving people of the world…shall never forget.” Motogi Bunsen, *Atomu Hiroshima: kankō Hiroshima ken* (Hiroshima: yukan minsei shinbunsha, 1948).


50 *Chūgoku Shinbun*, 11 December 1955.

51 Fotouhi Papers, 197. I thank Farida Fotouhi for giving me access to her father’s personal archive.

52 Gensuikyō stands for *Gensuibaku kinshi kyōgikai* or the Japan Council against Atomic & Hydrogen Bombs. In here it refers to the local Hiroshima branch.

53 *Chūgoku Shinbun*, 8 February 1956.

54 Fotouhi papers, 198. See also *Chūgoku Shinbun*, 14 February 1956 and Hiroshima Shi, *Hiroshima Shinshi*, 209

55 Fotouhi papers, 200. See the *Chūgoku Shinbun* 22 March 1956 for an edited text of the meeting. Fujiwara’s outburst was censored from the printed version of the article.

56 Fotouhi Papers, 187.

57 *Chūgoku Shinbun sha, Honoe no hi kara n ju nen*, 265

58 See Zwigenberg, “‘The Coming of a Second Sun.”

59 *Chūgoku Shinbun*, 7 May 1967.

60 Further research later revealed that the model nuclear airplane and ship ended up in a Hiroshima kindergarten. See Zwigenberg, “‘The Coming of a Second Sun.”

61 Hiroshima heiwa kinen shiryokan no rekishi memo, HPMA (this collection of testimonies and
documents from former museum directors can be accessed in the Museum Curating Department. It has no special classifying reference)

62 Hiroshima heiwakinenkan tenji kyōgikai; daini kaigi no kettei (25 April 1967) in Hiroshima heiwakinenkan shiryōkan no rekishi memo, HPMA


64 For a larger overview see Zwigenberg, Hiroshima, 208-248.

65 Chūgoku Shinbun, 30 July 1969.

66 Ibid.

67 Chūgoku Shinbun, 28 July 1969.


69 Ibid., 2 March 1968

70 Ibid.

71 Chūgoku Shinbun, 8 March 1968.


73 Chūgoku Shinbun, 2 July 1971.

74 In his article, which examined Japanese tourist guidebooks, Peter Siegenthaler points out that Peace as a tourism theme became mainstream starting in the late sixties with more and more school groups visiting the city. The city efforts in showing itself to be a city of fun and culture notwithstanding, “In most books,” wrote Siegenthaler, “Hiroshima was almost completely identified with bomb.” See his Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japanese guidebooks, Annals of Tourism Research. Vol. 4, No. 29 (2002), 1127.

75 Schäfer, 158.


77 Schäfer, 159.

78 Schäfer, 162.

79 Chūgoku Shinbun, 1 August 1973.

80 Schäfer, 161.

81 Chūgoku Shinbun, 1 August 1973.

82 Schäfer, 262.

83 Ibid., 163.

84 Chūgoku Shinbun, 9 March 1968.

85 Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (ed.), Ihin wa kataru (Tokyo: Chōbunsha, 1982).


87 Morihiro Sukeharu, “Kono toshi naradeha no shigoto ni tazusawari ete,” in Hiroshimashi Taishoku Kōmuin Renmei. Hiroshima no ayumi to tomoni, Hiroshima, 1972. 294

88 Chūgoku Shinbun, 28 August 1986.

89 See among others Chūgoku Shinbun, 7 July 1988; Asahi Shinbun, 4 July and 29 June 1988.


91 Idith Zertal, “ha-shoa besiazi ha-yisraeli; mabat acher,” Yimiyahu Yuval and David Shechem
Zman yehudi hadash: tarbut yehudit be-idan hiloni: mabat exnziklopadi, Vol. 4, (Jerusalem: Keter, 2007), 308

92 Naono, 234.


95 *Chūgoku Shinbun* 7 June 2013.

96 *Asahi Shinbun*, 9 November 2013.

97 Ibid.


99 For Kanai articles see [http://www.hiroshimapeacemedia.jp/peacemuseum_d/jp/text/voice018.html](http://www.hiroshimapeacemedia.jp/peacemuseum_d/jp/text/voice018.html) I want to thank Steffanie Schäfer for letting me know of this article.


101 Kyo Maclear, *Beclouded Visions*, 63

102 Ibid., 65, 103