

“The Coming of a Second Sun”: The 1956 Atoms for Peace

Exhibit in Hiroshima and Japan’s Embrace of Nuclear Power

「もう一つの太陽」——1956年の広島原子力平和利用展と日本の原子力受容

Ran Zwigenberg

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In November 2011 when asked about the Tokyo Electric Power Company’s (TEPCO’s) deteriorating finances, a Japanese official commented, “This is a war between humans and technology. While that war is being fought, we should not talk about bankruptcy.”² The unnamed official, perhaps inadvertently, alluded to something more than the financial issues here; the fact that technological fixes are no longer an option and that Japan, sixty-six years after the bomb and fifty-five years after it welcomed atomic energy, finally is beginning to come to terms with the true cost of over-reliance on nuclear power.

Following the March 2011 Fukushima disaster, a host of commentators, in Japan and internationally, decried the corruption, smugness and shortsightedness that led Japan to choose nuclear power in the fifties. These critics more often than not draw a picture of Japan’s entry into the atomic age as a combination of American imposition and elite (conservative) complicity.³ On the other side of this picture stand the *hibakusha* (A-bomb victims) and other activists who resisted this move. Drawing on the historically powerful symbolism of Hiroshima, Ōe Kenzaburō talked

about Japan as becoming a fourth time victim of the atom, alluding to Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Bikini victims aboard Lucky Dragon # 5.⁴ Speaking of Japan’s postwar history in these familiar black and white terms of the people falling victim to the machinations of powerful Japanese politicians in collusion with American imperialism, though not without credence, obscures the balance of forces of the fifties moment in which Japan went nuclear.

Nothing demonstrates this better than the reaction of the city of Hiroshima to the introduction of the Atomic age.⁵ On the 27th of May 1956 the Atoms for Peace exhibition opened in the peace memorial museum in Hiroshima. The exhibit was a key component of the American plan to present the atom as a positive force for progress and overcome the Japanese “nuclear allergy.” The exhibit proved to be an enormous success, drawing well over 100,000 visitors and enthusiastic press reception. Significantly, the museum, which hosted the exhibit, one year earlier, had hosted the equally successful World Congress Against A- and H-Bombs, and it was also the museum that exhibited the horrors of the bombing.⁶

The Atoms for Peace exhibit was not accepted without some debate and resistance from activists. But opposition was overcome. When a few months later [Hidankyō](#), the principal *hibakusha* organization, was formed, it enthusiastically embraced nuclear energy.⁷

The Atoms for Peace exhibit serves as a lens

through which Japan's nuclear energy policies can be examined. The exhibit was instrumental in solidifying the dominant Japanese view that atomic energy was a legitimate, indeed essential, source of energy in a Japan that relied heavily on imported oil and natural gas. This was especially clear in light of the fact that a similar initiative to use Hiroshima as a symbolic site for domesticating and repackaging of the atom, in the shape of a proposal to build an American-financed nuclear power station in Hiroshima, had failed only a year earlier. In the wake of the exhibit, opponents of the introduction of atomic power faced an uphill battle against an overwhelming political, economic and media campaign in support of atom power. If in 1955 opponents, at least in Hiroshima, could draw on the experience of Atomic victimhood, it was much harder to do so in 1956 when the exhibit came to Hiroshima. As Yuki Tanaka recently demonstrated, many hibakusha supported nuclear energy, calling it "energy for life" (in contrast to the deadly energy of the bomb).⁸ In fact, not only did the experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki failed to prevent Japanese from embracing nuclear power, on the contrary, it was seen by some contemporaries as a justification for Japan to accept this technology.

Fight Poison with Poison: Atoms For Peace Comes to Japan

Following the 1954 Lucky Dragon # Five incident and the radiation scares that came in its wake, the anti-nuclear movement in Japan received a tremendous boost.



Millions of Japanese signed petitions, marched and showed solidarity with Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Lucky Dragon victims. The sudden rise and the massive size of the anti-nuclear movement came as a surprise to many in Japan and outside of it. Some on the Japanese right, and within American diplomatic circles worried about the incident's impact on US-Japan relations. The United States was already engaged, following President Eisenhower's December 1953 "Atoms for Peace" United Nations address, in a worldwide campaign to present the atom as a force for good.

Pres. Eisenhower's "[Atoms for Peace Address](#)" to the General Assembly of the United Nations

The incident seemed to wreck these efforts in Japan and beyond. Louis Schmidt, then head of the United States Information Agency (USIA) in Tokyo recalled, "All the effort we painstakingly put into it seemed to get lost...[as] The Lucky Dragon Five incident turned the Japanese against the program."⁹ It was, Schmidt concluded, a "very unhappy time."¹⁰ In Washington the incident prompted NSC adviser E.G. Erskine to write a memo to the NSC's Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) on march 23rd warning of Japan Communist Party

(JCP) propaganda benefiting from the incident.¹¹ Erskine proposed to build a reactor in Japan (and another in Berlin). "A vigorous offensive on the non-war uses of atomic energy," he concluded, "would appear to be a timely and effective way of countering the expected Russian effort and minimizing the harm already done in Japan."¹²

A number of official initiatives followed culminating in a proposal on April 28th 1954 that the USIA organize exhibitions on the peaceful uses of atomic energy and promote contacts with Japanese scientists and engineers as well as with media figures and politicians who held favorable views of the United States.¹³



The U.S turned to a coalition of Japanese politicians and media people, which included the Kaishin-to's Nakasone Yasuhiro and Shōriki Matsutarō, owner of the Yomiuri Shinbun newspaper, who were trying to promote nuclear power in Japan, and who were also worried. These figures already had a history with nuclear energy. As Evan Osnos has observed, nobody in Japanese politics was more inspired by nuclear power than Nakasone. Nakasone, who had witnessed the Hiroshima blast, wrote: "I still remember the image of the white cloud...That moment motivated me to think and act toward advancing the peaceful use of nuclear power." Nakasone believed that if Japan did not participate in "the largest discovery of the twentieth century," it would "forever be a fourth-rate nation."¹⁴ Even before

Eisenhower's speech, in mid-1953, Nakasone visited Berkeley's nuclear labs and cultivated political and economic connections in the U.S. In March 1954, Nakasone proposed in the Diet Japan's first budget for nuclear research and cooperation.¹⁵ The Lucky Dragon # Five incident, however, risked the success of the measure which had passed the Diet but not yet been implemented.

Nakasone's move faced serious resistance from the left and from some Japanese scientists who feared Japanese dependency on the United States. This did not mean that the scientific community opposed nuclear energy. Many scientists did, however, oppose Nakasone's preference for importing technology, thereby denying budgets (and prestige) for domestic research and assuring technological dependency.¹⁶ The vice chairman of the Japan Science Council (JSC) Kaya Seiji, who was in contact with Nakasone, proposed as early as July 1952 that Japan form its own atomic energy commission, modeled on that of the U.S.¹⁷ (During the occupation the Americans had explicitly prohibited nuclear research.) This and other proposals were opposed by some scientists. Mimura Yoshitaka a physicist and a *hibakusha* argued, drawing on his experience, that "Japan should not embark on nuclear research until the tension between the U.S. and the USSR is eased... If that meant there is a delay to Japanese civilization, so be it."¹⁸ Supporters of nuclear energy, however, could also use the experience of victimization. A leading scientist, Taketani Mitsuo, wrote "the Japanese being the casualties of atomic warfare are entitled to have the strongest say in the development of atomic power...[and] possess the greatest moral right to carry out research. Other nations are obliged to help Japan's effort."¹⁹ Eventually it was Taketani's rather than Mimura's argument that won the day as the JSC endorsed the pro-nuclear agenda. A delay in civilization was out of the question for most scientists and, it turned out, for most Japanese as well.

Indeed, the JSC had little choice in the matter as government and industry quickly moved to forge ties with U.S. industry and government circles that made the introduction of nuclear power almost inevitable. The first nuclear cooperation agreement was signed in November 1955 and Japan moved ahead to build its first reactor. Opponents were also facing a huge public campaign to promote nuclear energy. Shōriki Matsutarō, who would soon become responsible for nuclear power development in the Hatoyama administration, led this campaign. Shōriki's principal interest in promoting nuclear power was to resist communism. Shōriki had a long background of anti-communist activity and, as Yuki Tanaka and Peter Kuznick have demonstrated, anti-communism was at the core of his cooperation with the Americans and the worldwide campaign. Shōriki had previously cooperated with American industry and government in importing Television technology to Japan for similar reasons. As Simon Partner has argued, Shōriki brought American television technology to Japan, like nuclear power, despite the fact that it made little technological or economic sense and overrode domestic technology.²⁰

Shōriki's main lieutenant in promoting both technologies was Shibata Hidetoshi. Shibata, who started his career by successfully breaking a strike at the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, first became involved with nuclear power when visiting the U.S. as part of the television campaign. The head of General Dynamics, Vernon M. Welsh, introduced Shibata to William Halstead, who in turn introduced him to John J. Hopkins of General Electrics. Hopkins called in December 1954 for an "atomic Marshall plan to counter soviet advances into Asian countries."²¹ These connections, and the U.S government's own campaign through the USIA, led to a meeting between Shibata and Daniel S. Watson, an alleged NSC operative in Tokyo. According to Shibata's memoirs, he told Watson that "nuclear power is a double edged sword. We have a saying in Japan *doku wo motte doku wo*

sei suru (to control poison one must use poison); we can use the good side of nuclear power to smash anti-nuclear sentiment."²²

Watson and Shibata, with Shōriki's blessing, invited a high level delegation of leading scientists, headed by Hopkins, to Japan. Shōriki agreed to launch a campaign to promote the visit in conjunction with USIA efforts to launch the Atoms for Peace exhibit.²³ This gave the USIA a powerful ready-made local PR network.²⁴ Meanwhile, the power industry had formed five main groups for developing nuclear power; all were connected to former *zaibatsu* conglomerates. The groups had contacts with General Electric and Westinghouse dating to the prewar period. These connections led smoothly to the adoption of the American light water reactor (LWR) type despite serious safety concerns. That reactor was the one that failed in Fukushima.²⁵ When in mid-1955 the USIA and Shōriki launched their Atomic energy exhibit, the combination of powers that backed Atomic power seemed to possess almost irresistible momentum.

A Dramatic Christian Gesture: Hiroshima (almost) gets a Nuclear Plant

The Atoms for Peace campaign opened in Japan in April 1955. Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichiro and MITI minister Ishibashi Tanzan formally endorsed it. Ishibashi, in what became a mantra, spoke of Japan's right to nuclear technology "as the country which was baptized by the ashes of Bikini."²⁶ The campaign was notable for some of the biggest exhibitions and PR campaigns in Japan to that time. It received the backing not only of Shōriki's *Yomiuri* and *Nihon Terebi* (TV station) but also of many major regional and national newspapers. The result was over 2.5 million visitors nationwide. The media blitz presented nuclear energy as a source of "unlimited energy and the most modern of technologies," which "will open the

way for a new industrial revolution” and supply “unlimited possibilities for mankind.”²⁷ This tapped long-held fears among Japanese about being poor in resources. Many commentators used language reminiscent of the thirties campaign to present Manchuria as a treasure trove of unlimited resources and a lifeline. The campaign also played on the general fifties fascination with science and futuristic technology. Almost daily newspaper articles in the Yomiuri and other papers spoke of atomic planes and trains, space travel and of the atom as “another sun.”²⁸ This did not mean that the campaign was accepted without debate. The momentum was almost irresistible, but the debates in Hiroshima also reveal Japanese anxieties. Even supportive writers wondered, “Whether there is a hint of evil fire mixed with this force which will enable Japanese to make a bright future.”²⁹

These anxieties were illustrated by the fierce debates over an earlier proposal, unrelated to the USIA-Shōriki campaign, to construct a nuclear reactor in Hiroshima. This proposal was made by Congressman Sidney Yates in the form of a motion introduced in the congress in January 1955.³⁰ Yates explicitly connected the bomb and nuclear energy, calling for: “using atomic energy for life rather than death.”³¹ He called for “giving preference for Hiroshima, which was the first victim of the atomic bomb in access to the resources of the peaceful atom.”³² Yates also proposed to construct a special hospital for the thousands of citizens of Hiroshima who were exposed to the bomb and had medical issues as a result.³³ Yates was not the first to make this connection. In October 1954 the Atomic Energy Commission’s (AEC) Thomas E. Murray, in almost identical terms, called on the U.S to give a reactor to Japan . . .

“The only land which has been engulfed in the white flame of the atom. Now, while the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remains so vivid, construction of such a power plant in . . . Japan would be a dramatic and Christian

*gesture . . . a lasting monument to our technology and our good will. We would demonstrate to a grim, skeptical and divided world that our interest in nuclear energy is not confined to weapons.”*³⁴

According to Asahi journalist Kanari Ryūichi, a similar proposal was made by Lewis Strauss, chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, and by Representative Sterling Cole of New York, in mid-1955.³⁵

Although the Eisenhower administration did not support these offers, they produced heated debates in Hiroshima. On January 29th two days after Yates’ proposal, Hiroshima’s mayor Hamai Shinzō, said, “the fact that Hiroshima will become the ‘first nuclear power city’ will comfort the souls of the dead. The citizens themselves, I think, would like to see death replaced by life.”³⁶ In a symposium organized by the local newspaper, Hamai’s stance was supported by leading scientists from Hiroshima University as well as by other leading Hiroshima figures. It gained the support also of some in the city assembly, who hoped to get a share of Japan’s nuclear budget, and the support of Hiroshima’s new mayor Watanabe Tadao.³⁷

The acceptance of the offer by major Hiroshima figures was not an aberration. Rather, it was a continuation of the city’s deep relationship with the U.S. and its self-portrayal as a modern city. The commemoration of the bomb, from very early on, emphasized Hiroshima’s urban transformation and the discourse of science. From the end of the war, American and Japanese elites actively directed Hiroshima’s gaze toward the future. This culminated with the 1949 Hiroshima Peace City law that equated building a city of peace with building a rational metropolis. Much of Hiroshima’s message was about change and transformation. In its most extreme form, Hiroshima politicians spoke of the city of Hiroshima “being born anew on August 6th 1945.”³⁸ The message of

renewal was embedded in the very shape of the city by the architects and city planners who rebuilt Hiroshima as a new modern city. Kenzō Tange, 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 wo tsukuridasu tame no kōgyō de aritai*).³⁹

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. Accepting nuclear energy, which was presented as a "key to the future" was a natural extension of this trajectory.

Many *hibakusha* embraced this message of peace as progress and modernity. This was true for leading *hibakusha* and peace activists, such as Osada Arata who welcomed the idea of nuclear power, though not without some reservation. Osada stated, "I hope for a peaceful people's nuclear power research which is not connected to the U.S."⁴⁰ In addition, as Yuki Tanaka noted, Mayors Hamai and Watanabe and many other politicians, who were *hibakusha* themselves, fully embraced nuclear power.

Not all activists agreed. The Hiroshima branch of Gensuikyō (The Japan Council Against A- and H-Bombs) almost immediately came out against the proposal.⁴¹ Moritaki Ichirō, in the aforementioned symposium, voiced his concern about radiation. Both sides in the debate claimed to speak in the name of Hiroshima's citizenry and, furthermore, both used the experience of the bombing to justify their position. Moritaki stated that, "the opinion of the people of Hiroshima who were baptized (*senrei shita*) by the world's first nuclear bomb is that nuclear power should not be used without proper consideration." Hiroshima Gensuikyō sent a memorandum to the press

listing five main objections to the nuclear plant. What most concerned the activists was the possibility that the reactor would be used for military purposes and that it might become a target of a nuclear strike in a future war. Radiation concerns came second. Interestingly, the organization listed "danger to the prospects of Japan's electric power industry" as one of the grievances.⁴² The local media was also divided on the issue. The local paper featured a series of articles by scientists and doctors who warned against the dangers of radiation and nuclear waste.⁴³

As it became clear, however, that Yates' proposal was not endorsed by the Eisenhower administration, the whole initiative became a non-issue. The anti-nuclear camp had won. Yet within a year, Hiroshima was experiencing a nuclear energy boom following the USIA exhibit of May 1956.

The Exhibit in Hiroshima

What led to this change in Hiroshima was a combination of factors. At the national level, Yomiuri and the USIA launched their formidable campaign. Locally in Hiroshima, almost all major players, Hiroshima's main paper the *Chūgoku Shinbun* (where critical articles disappeared), Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture and Hiroshima University, endorsed and sponsored the exhibit. This endorsement may be credited in part to the tireless work of American diplomat Abol Fazl Fotouhi. Fotouhi was an Iranian immigrant to the United States and a former Marine. Like many of the principal actors in the Hiroshima drama he embodied many contradictions and ambivalences, which make casting the story of nuclear energy in Hiroshima as a black and white morality play impossible. Although he actively promoted the exhibit, Fotouhi was clearly uncomfortable with some aspects of the State Department's approach. Fotouhi served from December 1952 as the head of the

American Culture Center in Hiroshima. Together with his wife and daughter, who attended a Japanese public school, he immersed himself in Japanese culture and became immensely popular in Hiroshima.



Abol Fazl Fotouhi, Agnes Fotouhi, and Farida Fotouhi (Age 6) in front of an American Cultural Center exhibit (circa.1953): photo courtesy Farida Fotouhi.

Fotouhi's papers reveal that the USIA first contemplated the Hiroshima exhibit in December 1954.⁴⁴ The idea was rejected, however, as "there were compelling reasons against both showing it in 1955 and its inauguration in Hiroshima. We felt that in any case the exhibition might be closely identified with the bomb, thus defeating the real purpose of President Eisenhower's atoms for peace program."⁴⁵ The real purpose was of course to disassociate the bomb from nuclear energy. The Yates' and other proposals were rejected for similar reasons. Even before 1954, Fotouhi, working with another American institution the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC), brought materials pertaining to medical uses of the atom into the peace museum.⁴⁶ This, and the larger exhibit, met no resistance initially. Nagaoka Shogō, the director of the peace museum - where the city planned to hold the exhibit - 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."⁴⁷ Fotouhi's main difficulty with sponsors was financial. They feared losing money on the exhibit (the USIA and *Yomiuri* paid only part of the expenses).⁴⁸

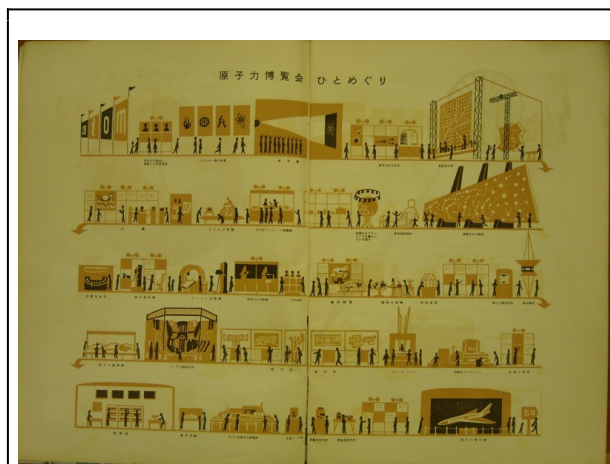
Suddenly, however, "all hell broke loose in Hiroshima."⁴⁹ Local residents and the Hiroshima Gensuikyō expressed alarm as the city, against Nagaoka's wishes, removed over two thousand articles from the atomic bomb museum to make room for the exhibit. The city explained that the museum was the only place big enough to accommodate the exhibit and that the removal of the items was only temporary. 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 are more important than the exhibit and should not be moved."⁵⁰ Others were more indignant. Fotouhi reported the main grievances quoting newspaper reports. "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." Another resident declared, "We cannot sit idly by and let the Americans contaminate our city." The most prevalent complaint, however, voiced by Moritaki and others, was, "if the city and prefecture have funds for this they should pay for *hibakusha* welfare."⁵¹ At no time did the United States provide funds for *hibakusha* relief. At the time these were being provided exclusively by the stricken cities themselves. The Japanese national government did not recognize *hibakusha* needs until 1957.

Responding to critics, the exhibit sponsors organized a public symposium in March where the issue was debated. The editor of the *Chūgoku Shinbun* spoke first, saying, "hundreds of thousands of people have seen the exhibition which depicts the miraculous use of

the destructive atom in many peaceful ways," and urged Hiroshima residents not to lag behind. Fotouhi then similarly told the meeting that, "as a friend of the Hiroshima people and as a member of the community I felt that the Hiroshima people should not be deprived of the opportunity to see the many benefits that the atomic energy is now providing the mankind (sic.) My government therefore agreed to include Hiroshima in the scheduled showings." These conciliatory statements were followed by a representative from the Hiroshima mothers organization which voiced concerns over radiation. These were met by a Professor Fujiwara from Hiroshima University, who, unaware of the historical irony of his words, said "it is absurd to think that an advanced nation like America would knowingly bring unprotected fissionable material to any country." When another resident spoke of the items in the museum as relics, Fujiwara 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..." According to Fotouhi, following this exchange, survivor organizations removed their objections.⁵² This was only partially true at the time, but survivors' organizations soon formally endorsed nuclear energy.

The USIA did all it could to promote nuclear power along the lines of the discourse of peace as modernity. The words "peace" and "modern" are repeated again and again in the professional literature, interviews with experts, and pronouncement by politicians. In the official brochure for the exhibition, a remarkable document, Joseph Evans the head of the USIA Tokyo branch told visitors, "[I] would like to show Japanese and make them understand the true role of the atom in tomorrow's world... How [the atom] can contribute for economic development increased

leisure, the welfare and lengthening of human life... [and] contribute to the achievement of peace." The brochure went on to explain the uses of the atom in agriculture, medicine, industry and transportation with splendid illustrations of futuristic looking machines, never once mentioning the word *genbaku* (atomic bomb).⁵³



The layout of the exhibit as depicted in exhibit official brochure. Visitors walked through the futuristic exhibit examining the application of the atom in agriculture, medicine, space travel and other fields. Source: *genshiryoku heiwa ryo no shiori* (Tokyo: USIS, 1955).

The local media praised the exhibit on its opening day, speaking of "a new human civilization," and, echoing the *Yomiuri*, on man gaining control over "a second sun."⁵⁴ Local dignitaries interviewed after a VIP preview of the Atoms for Peace exhibit were equally ecstatic. The head of the prefectural chamber of commerce told the papers, "we are entering a splendid era (*subarashii jidai*)...it is good that I achieved old age [to see it]. [This era] is full of wonder and [we are laying] the infrastructure to make it happen."⁵⁵ Others, especially scientists, again stressed the importance of understanding the atom. Nakaizumi Masanori, from the ABCC, commented, "the region of Hiroshima has an inseparable relationship with nuclear power and thus should have a correct understanding [of it]." Former (and future) Mayor Hamai took a similar approach. "I heard

much about this. It is good to see it firsthand...it is the first step that people should talk of deepening our understanding of nuclear power.”⁵⁶ The equation of American science and ideas of progress with neutral or positive values was, of course, a peculiar cold war notion. Susan Lindee has shown how these notions played out in another Hiroshima context, that of medical research performed by the ABCC.⁵⁷ To judge from the local media and other reports, the majority of visitors to the exhibit accepted this ideology, albeit not without some major reservations. On the second day of the exhibit another group of high profile visitors was interviewed. An education adviser for Fukuyama prefecture was typical, “we all had quite a bias towards atomic power but now that we see it concretely we have bright hopes for it and [it left a] strong impression. I recommend that everyone see it, even if they are critical.”

Many were indeed critical. Tanabe Koichirō, from the Japan Pen Club, a liberal writers group, responded, “I am fundamentally in agreement with atomic power... it will bring human civilization to a new stage. It is highly advantageous. But,” Tanabe added, “there is also one problem: radiation. After being used for electricity, there is a lot of residual radiation. I heard that in the US they bury radioactive material deep in the earth. There is also the idea of dumping it at the bottom of the sea...[where] it is a danger to water and ocean life...[the exhibit] does not dispel my unease over the problem of the ashes of death.” Fujii Heiichi, the head of the prefectural *hibakusha* organization, was cautious: “if used for peace, nuclear power can bring us closer to a future of happiness and peace for human kind... if used properly, atomic power could promote human welfare. But,” Fujii added, “we who saw atomic power first manifested as evil, and knowing many people who are still ill because [of it], think that the priority should be on prevention and treatment of A-bomb disease...[and] complete eradication of nuclear weapons.”

Moritaki, interviewed again, was even more adamant: “the people of Hiroshima are especially sensitive to effects of radiation...[thus] before we have atomic power we should better understand radiation. [Furthermore] how will they treat the waste? Why is there no explanation of it...They do not show what they will do in case of a malfunction in the reactor, or what they will do with the waste (*kasu*)...[and] the ashes of death. I would very much like them to address these issues.” These critical views show that not all in Hiroshima were convinced. However, these views were the minority. And as the exhibit progressed they were heard less and less. These reservations and criticism notwithstanding, most survivors accepted nuclear power, at least in principle.



The Atoms for Peace exhibit was quite an event for Hiroshima. In the fifties when most Japanese still lived in poverty (Fotouhi recalled driving through mounds of rubble in 1954, almost ten years after the bomb) the exhibit brought color and a view of another world to the city. The papers reported women's particular attraction to the event, "which looked like a fashion show." They were especially attracted to the guides who were dressed in the latest American fashions.⁵⁸ The visitors saw what they were told was the latest technology, and were showered with information and brochures, all with futuristic imagery and bright colors. The big banners for the exhibition, and the flags of many countries (who were part of the atoms for peace program) above it, lent the museum "a festive atmosphere."⁵⁹

The newspapers magnified the celebration with daily features (including cartoons) on the exhibit, visitors' reactions, and various items on it. The items on display included, among others, a full-scale model of an experimental nuclear reactor, a model illustrating a nuclear fission reaction that used electric lights and panel displays that introduced nuclear physics. Significant attention was given to the role that atomic power would soon play in revolutionizing daily life and leisure for the Japanese. Another theme was the atom's medical benefits and its uses in the space race. A special hit was the "magic hands" display, a type of mechanical arm. Visitors operated the device, which was originally designed to handle dangerous materials, to pick up a brush and write "heiwa" (*peace*) and "*genshi ryoku*" (nuclear energy) with the arms.⁶⁰ Kawamoto Ichirō, a noted peace activist, wrote in his diary that the magic hand display was "indeed impressive" and that the exhibition as a whole really "impressed me."⁶¹ A group of atomic bomb maidens, another symbol of Hiroshima and the peace movement, who visited the

museum, was similarly moved. The women, who had been brought to the United States for plastic surgery at American expense, wrote that, "At first, as we were victims of the bomb, we were anxious about [the exhibit]...but after going through the exhibit we understand that Atomic Power can be used not only for war but also can be useful for the advancement of mankind."⁶²



"Magic Hands" Demonstration in Berlin. September 26 1954.

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of transformation came when the millionth visitor (in all Japan) was to visit the exhibit in Hiroshima. The lucky visitor, who was a schoolboy - organized groups were the bulk of the visitors - was to receive a television, a precious gift at the time. This was another reference to the modernity of the exhibit and, unintentionally, also a very fitting gift given the involvement of the principal actors with television. The TV set, however, did not come from the *Yomiuri* or *Nihon Terebi*, but from a local merchant, a hibakusha, who contacted Fotouhi. He told Fotouhi, "My parents and children were all killed by the bomb. I have seen the exhibition and am thrilled with what atomic energy can do for the future welfare of mankind. I wish therefore to offer a large television set to be awarded the millionth visitor."⁶³ This was more than the Americans

and their local supporters could have dreamed.

The exhibit was so successful that Hiroshima City chose to continue presenting atomic energy materials in the museum even after it finished. This presented an opportunity for some Americans and others who were critical of the museum content. Visiting Americans constantly harassed Fotouhi about it. Tourists and officials complained about the place “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.”⁶⁴ Fotouhi had little patience for these arguments. “Can we let Germans or British,” he wrote, “tell us to remove our monuments because they put them in unfavorable light?! So how can we ask it of the Japanese?”⁶⁵ Still, when the nuclear power exhibit ended, Fotouhi, together with Mayor Watanabe, forced the reluctant museum director, Nagaoka, to accept it as permanent. Nagaoka protested, “this is a place to show the history of Hiroshima’s suffering.... [not] to sing the praise of peaceful nuclear power.”⁶⁶ But Watanabe made clear to him that this is what the city wanted and he was forced to accept the order. Nuclear power would continue in the museum making the “Atoms for Peace” agenda an official part of Hiroshima’s own quest for peace.

Conclusion

In 2009, during the early stages of this research, what had become of the formidable exhibit remained a mystery. Almost no one at the museum had ever heard of it and the museum’s official history did not mention it either.⁶⁷ After all the fanfare of 1956 (and even more of it in a second run of the exhibit as part of the 1958 Hiroshima Recovery Expo), a single line from a 1967 article simply 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.”⁶⁸ What made the exhibit suddenly “out of character” was not explained. Further research later revealed that the model nuclear airplane and ship ended up in a Hiroshima playground.⁶⁹ Subsequently, the whole affair was consigned to oblivion. This did not mean that Hiroshima suddenly turned anti-nuclear power. If anything it became ambivalent, but no more. The anti-nuclear power movement, as Yuki Tanaka pointed out, only began after Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, and even then many *hibakusha* refrained from taking part in it.⁷⁰ By that time Japan had constructed dozens of nuclear reactors and the industry became firmly entrenched as a central element of Japanese energy policy.

Much of the failure of the anti-nuclear movement to rally against nuclear power can be attributed to Hiroshima’s support. Perhaps the major coup for promoters of nuclear energy came when even the newly formed *Hidankyō*, the main *hibakusha* organization came out strongly for nuclear energy. Even Moritaki Ichirō came around and, in Nagasaki in August 1956 proclaimed, “Atomic power...must absolutely be converted to a servant for the happiness and prosperity of humankind. This is the only desire we hold as long as we live.” (Moritaki later regretted this statement and came out against nuclear energy.)⁷¹ This was partially politics. *Hidankyō* was campaigning for compensation for *hibakusha* and could not afford to alienate the conservative backers of nuclear power. But as the difference between reactions to the reactor proposal and the exhibit show, there is good evidence to support a change of heart following the campaign by many former opponents of atomic power. This, as we saw, came after heated debates and not a little friction. These debates show how complex this moment was. But the logic of nuclear

energy as progressive and beneficial eventually won. Japan went nuclear.

The USIA, Shōriki, Nakasone and the other backers of nuclear energy of course had enormous resources at their disposal. More than just money, however, what promoters of atomic power had was the confidence that they were marching with the time. The Atoms for Peace exhibit was part of a much larger effort by elites in both Japan and the United States to present the horrors of World War II, the atomic bombings, the fire bombings of 64 Japanese cities, and Japan's Imperial Army's atrocities being the chief ones, as an aberration. The path Japan took, the argument went, its embrace of modernity (even more so after the war) and Western ideas of progress, were fundamentally good. This was true for both left and right. As Sheldon Garon wrote, "So powerful was the Japanese belief in modernization and progress that neither the contradictions of the wartime campaigns nor the nation's disastrous defeat in 1945 rent [it]...For all the contention in Japanese political life most progressive groups joined forces with the conservatives in the modernization of Japanese daily life."⁷² Indeed, with its focus on the modern, and especially the promise of the coming improvement in daily life (Television sets being a fitting example), and as a solution to Japan's lack of resources, the campaign hit all the right spots with Japanese. Other motives for the exhibit like fighting communist propaganda and promoting the fledgling nuclear power industry's economic interests, not to speak of radiation issues, were, of course, concealed behind the shiny façade of the energy of the future with its promise to send man to space and cure diseases. In presenting Atoms for Peace as the wave of the future, the organizers of the exhibit utilized the very logic that underlined Hiroshima's own message. As Fotouhi commented, in an uncharacteristically blunt remark, "was not Hiroshima boasting for being the 'peace city', so why not Atoms for peace?"⁷³ When the atom came to Japan, Japanese were, supposedly,

presented with a rational choice between the "bad" atom and the "good" one. The reasonable, modern liberal – the kind of person Hiroshima appealed to in its numerous campaigns for peace – could only choose the latter. As Japan learned in Fukushima this choice was false.

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Notes

¹ I thank Miriam Intrator and Samuel Malissa for reading and commenting on this paper. I want to also thank Mark Selden for his editorial and substantive suggestions. I wish to thank Koide Madoka and Shimosaka Chikako for their valuable help with translation of sources.

² "Japan's nuclear conundrum: The \$64 billion question," The Economist, November 5th 2011. Accessed November 22, 2011.

³ Criticism of nuclear energy turned into a cottage industry after Fukushima. One can enter any Japanese bookstore and find a whole corner devoted to it. See, for instance, Takagi Jinzaburō, Hangenpatsu demae shimasu: genpatsu jiko eikyō soshite mirai wo kangaeru – Takagi Jinzaburō kōgiroku (Tokyo, Nanatsumorishokan Shinsō Han, 2011).

An earlier example, much quoted, is Arima Tetsuo, Genpatsu, Shōriki, CIA: Kimitsubunsho de yomu Shōwa rimenshi (Tokyo: Shinchōsha 2008).

⁴ Kenzaburō Ōe, “History Repeats,” in *The New Yorker*, March 28, 2011. The address of Hiroshima’s mayor, Mitsui Kazumi, in the August 6th ceremony after Fukushima followed similar lines, [accessed](#) December 30th 2011

⁵ I will deal here almost exclusively with Hiroshima. The Nagasaki case is slightly different.

⁶ The museum, established in 1955, served as the central exhibition space and was situated on Nakajima Island, which was turned in the early fifties into the Peace Park, Hiroshima’s main commemorative space. The park was also the symbolic center for the post 1945 anti-nuclear and peace movements that came out of the reaction to the Lucky Dragon # Five incident, discussed below.

⁷ Hidankyō declaration.

⁸ Tanaka Toshiyuki, “Genshiryoku heiwa ryō to Hiroshima: senden kōsaku no tāgeto ni sareta hibakushatachi,” in *Sekai*, No. 25 (August 2011), p. 257.

⁹ Interview for NHK documentary *Genpatsu dōnyū shinario* (1994) text and German translation [here](#), accessed December 10th 2011

¹⁰ Louise Schmidt interview in *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series* (1988) [accessed](#) November 20th 2011.

¹¹ President Eisenhower created the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) to follow up on all NSC decisions. The OCB met regularly on Wednesday afternoons at the Department of State, and was composed of the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Directors of the CIA,

the United States Information Agency, and the ICA.

¹² Yamazaki Masakatsu and Okuda Kenzou, “Bikini jiken go no genshirō dōnyūron no taito,” in *Kagakushi Kenkyū*, Vol. 43 No. 280 (2004).p. 84. The directive is reproduced in “Japan and Atomic Tests” [accessed](#) October 25th 2011.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Quoted by Evan Osnos, “The Fallout” in *The New Yorker*. 87.32 (Oct. 17, 2011): p.49.

¹⁵ Yoshioka Hitoshi, “Nuclear Power Research and the Scientist’s Role,” in Yoshioka Hitoshi (ed.), *A Social History of Science and Technology in Contemporary Japan: Vol. 2 Road to Self-reliance 1952 - 1959* (Trans Pacific Press, 2005), p. 110.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁷ Morris Low, Shigeru Nakayama, and Hitoshi Yoshioka, *Science, Technology and Society in Contemporary Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.72.

¹⁸ Yoshioka, “Nuclear Power Research,” p.109.

¹⁹ Low et al., p. 71.

²⁰ See chapter 3 in Simon Partner, *Assembled in Japan: Electrical Goods and the Making of the Japanese Consumer* (University of California Press, 1999).

²¹ Yamazaki and Okuda, “Bikini jikogo,” p. 85.

²² Shibata Hidetoshi, *Sengo masukomi kaiyūki* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1985), pp. 346-347. See also Yamazaki, “Bikini jikogo,”p. 83. Yamazaki doubts the meeting was as dramatic as Shibata portrays it, but ascertains, using NSC documentation, that Watson did work in Japan at the time and had a role in the USIS campaign. Watson himself talked of the

meeting and Shibata in the '94 documentary.

²³ Shibata, p. 377.

²⁴ Schmidt Interview.

²⁵ Nakayama Shigeru, "Forming a Nuclear régime and Introducing Commercial Reactors," in Yoshioka Hitoshi (ed.), *A Social History of Science and Technology*, pp. 86-87. Along the way, GE and Westinghouse disregarded safety concerns to sell the LWR as the safer option. See the BBC documentary *Atomic States* (2011) [accessed](#) December 15th 2011.

²⁶ Yomiuri Shinbun, April 29 1955.

²⁷ The industrial revolution quote is from *Chūgoku Shinbun*, November 26 1954. Similar, if more hyperbolic sentiment (and the second and third quotes) can be found in Yomiuri Shinbun, April 29 1955.

²⁸ *Chūgoku Shinbun*, May 31 1956.

²⁹ Editor's introduction to the special edition, "Kaimaku shita nihon no atomiku eiji," in *Ekonomisuto* (June 1955), p. 8.

³⁰ *Chūgoku Shinbun*, January 27 1955.

³¹ Ibid. Also Hiroshima shi (hen), *Hiroshima shinshi: rekishi hen* (Hiroshima: Hiroshima shi, 1984).

³² Quoted in Tanaka, "Genshiryoku heiwa ryō," p.251.

³³ *Chūgoku Shinbun*, February 5 1955. Also cited in Tanaka, *Genshiryoku heiwa ryō*, p. 251.

³⁴ Time Magazine, October 4 1954.

³⁵ [Link](#) accessed January 3rd 2012

³⁶ Hiroshima Shi, p. 208. Also *Chūgoku Shinbun*, January 29 and January 30, 1955. As Tanaka noted, Hamai had also already accepted a similar offer by Bern Porter, a nuclear

scientist who visited Hiroshima in January 1954. By the time these deliberations took place, Hamai was replaced by Watanabe Tadao who was also a survivor and a fervent supporter of nuclear energy.

³⁷ *Chūgoku Shinbun*, January 29 1955.

³⁸ Hamai Shinzō et. al. to President of Carroll College, June 30 1950, Letter attached to Hiroshima Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee., *Hiroshima* (Hiroshima City Japan: The Committee c/o Hiroshima Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1948). Carroll University library, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

³⁹ Kenzō Tange, "Hiroshima heiwa kinen tōshi ni kankei shite," in *Kenchiku zasshi*, (October, 1949), p. 42. Le Corbusier famously used the phrase a "machine for living."

⁴⁰ Quoted in Tanaka, "Genshiryoku heiwa ryō," p. 252.

⁴¹ The all Japan Gensuikyō was formally founded in September 1955. The Hiroshima organization, which went by the same name, was founded earlier. Similar organizations were formed all around Japan following the Lucky Dragon incident.

⁴² The major power companies came together in March and drafted a request for more details, which was sent to Yates. See *Chūgoku Shinbun*, March 3 1955.

⁴³ See for instance the covering of the special symposium about the issue on in the January 29th and 30th of the *Chūgoku Shinbun*.

⁴⁴ I thank Farida Fotouhi for her generous cooperation and, especially, for giving me access to her fathers' unpublished papers (Hereafter, Fotouhi papers).

⁴⁵ Fotouhi papers, p.194.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.186. The ABCC donated a film and a projector as well as other materials.

⁴⁷ *Chūgoku Shinbun* December 11 1955.

⁴⁸ Fotouhi papers, 196.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁵⁰ *Chūgoku Shinbun* February 8 1956.

⁵¹ Fotouhi papers, p. 198. See also *Chūgoku Shinbun*, February 14 1956 and Hiroshima Shi, p. 209

⁵² Fotouhi papers, p. 200. See the *Chūgoku Shinbun*, March 22 1956 for the full text of the meeting

⁵³ The quote is from the exhibit's official brochure *Genshiryoku heiwa ryō' no shiori* (Tokyo: USIS, 1955). The brochure can be found in Hiroshima Peace Museum library, at the *Genbaku shiryō hozon kai* collection.

⁵⁴ *Chūgoku Shinbun*, May 26th 1956.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Susan Lindee, *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima*, 1st ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁵⁸ *Chūgoku Shinbun* June 10 1956. Moritaki and Fuji responses are also quoted by Tanaka.

⁵⁹ *Chūgoku Shinbun sha, Honō no hi kara ni jū nen (1966 nen)*, (Hiroshima: Miraisha, 1966), pp. 263-264.

⁶⁰ *Chūgoku Shinbun*, June 19th 2011.

⁶¹ Kawamoto Nikki, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park Archive (HPMA), Kawamoto Collection, Folder 9, No. 8.2.03.

⁶² *Chūgoku Shinbun*, May 29 1956. Also quoted by Tanaka.

⁶³ Fotouhi papers, p. 201.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁶⁶ *Chūgoku Shinbun sha, Honō no hi kara ni jū nen*, p. 265

⁶⁷ The museum's librarian Kikuraku Shinobu however was very knowledgeable and proved very helpful in this research. The museum director, Steve Leeper, as well, was very supportive of my research. I thank them as well as other members of the museum's staff for their help.

⁶⁸ *Chūgoku Shinbun*, May 7, 1967.

⁶⁹ Author's interview with Ogura Keiko, 28 January 2010.

⁷⁰ Tanaka, "Genshiryoku heiwa ryō," p. 260.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 256. Also Hidankyō, "Message to the World," 10 August 1956, [accessed](#) 29 October 2011.

⁷² Sheldon Garon, "Rethinking Modernization and Modernity in Japanese History: A Focus on State-Society Relations," in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (May, 1994), p 357.

⁷³ Fotouhi papers, p. 201.