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Reflections 68 Years On: How to Address an Irresponsible State 8年目の再考　無責任国家にいかに対応すべきか
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Translated by Hase Michiko

On August 9, 1945, President Truman, who had just returned to Washington from the Potsdam Conference, addressed the American people in a radio report:

> The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack **to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians**. But that attack is only a warning of things to come. If Japan does not surrender, . . . unfortunately, thousands of civilian lives will be lost. . . . Having found the bomb we have used it. We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, **against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war**, against those who have abandoned all pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. (Emphasis added.)

Here Truman justifies the criminal act of instantly and indiscriminately killing an estimated 70 to 80 thousand citizens, using an atomic bomb with the ironic excuse that it was "to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians." It is well known in the United States that this justification of the atomic bomb attacks subsequently was further exaggerated (saving the lives of one million), and the myth was invented that the war would not have ended without them; even today, the myth is deeply rooted in the psyche of most Americans. Truman's explanation that the atomic bombing was a retaliatory attack against the Japanese military's numerous war crimes, betrayed his complete lack of awareness that the atomic bombing he had ordered was itself one of the gravest war crimes in human history.

For its part, immediately following the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, the Japanese government sent a letter, signed by Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori, through the Swiss government protesting the United States action. In the protest letter, the Japanese government asserted:

> [I]t is the fundamental principle of international law in war time that belligerents do not possess unlimited rights regarding the choice of the means of harming the enemy, and that we must not employ arms, projectiles, or material calculated to cause unnecessary suffering. They are each clearly defined by the Annex to the Hague Convention respecting the Law and Customs of War on Land, and by Article 22 and Article 23(e) of the Regulations respecting the Law and Customs of War on Land.

The letter further condemned the United States in these harsh words:

> The indiscriminateness and cruelty of the bomb that the US used this time far exceed those of poisonous gases and similar weapons, the use of which is prohibited because of these very qualities. The US has ignored the fundamental principle of international law and humanity and has been widely conducting the indiscriminate bombing of the cities of our Empire, killing many children, women and old people, and burning and destroying shrines, schools, hospitals and private dwellings. Withal, they used a novel bomb, the power of which exceeds any existing weapons and projectiles in its indiscriminateness and cruelty. The use of such a weapon is a new crime against human culture.

Undoubtedly, those who drafted the letter were familiar with international law. The letter sternly condemns not only the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also the air raids on other cities as indiscriminate mass killings in violation of international law (the Hague Convention). This was, however, the first and only letter of protest that the Japanese government ever issued on the atomic bombings.

On August 15, 1945 Emperor Hirohito stated in his Imperial Rescript on the Termination of the War:

> The enemy has begun to employ a new and cruel bomb with incalculable power to damage and destroy many innocent lives. If we continue to fight, it would not only result in the ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but it would also lead to the total extinction of human civilization. This being the case, I am challenged to know how to save the millions of lives of you my loyal subjects and how to atone myself before the spirits of my heavenly imperial ancestors. This is why I have ordered acceptance of the provisions of the Joint Declaration of the Allied Powers.....

> I cannot but express my deepest regret to our allied nations of East Asia, who have consistently cooperated with the empire towards the emancipation of East Asia.

In other words, the rescript implied that due to the frighteningly brutal weapon that has been developed, continued war efforts could result not only in the annihilation of the Japanese nation, but also in the destruction of human civilization. He therefore agrees to unconditional surrender. He cannot but express his regret to "our allied nations of East Asia, who have consistently cooperated with the Empire towards the emancipation of East Asia."

In singling out the atomic bombings as the decisive factor in his decision to surrender, not surprisingly, Hirohito completely ignored the war crimes the Japanese military had committed in its war of aggression across Asia and the Pacific as well as the anti-Japanese resistance that was taking place across Asia. Not only that, he exploited the "A-bomb damage" to indirectly justify the war as a "war to liberate Asia."

Thus, the Rescript instilled in the people the myth that Japan was *forced to surrender by the inhumane atomic bomb* and cultivated an exclusively victim mentality; in this way, the "atomic bombings" became a means to conceal not only the war responsibility of the emperor himself and other wartime leaders, but also the responsibility of the Japanese people for a war in the name of the Japanese empire that took tens of millions of lives throughout the Asia-Pacific. Just as President Truman fabricated a myth to cover up the U.S. government's responsibility for its grave war crimes by stating that he had ordered the A-bomb attacks "to avoid . . . the killing of civilians," so, too, did the Japanese government use the same A-Bomb attacks to conceal its own war responsibility.

Prince Higashikuni, who on August 16, 1945 was ordered by the emperor to form a new cabinet, stated that wartime Japan's greatest defect had been its neglect of science and technology. He attributed Japan's defeat to the enemy nation's latest science and technology, namely, the atomic bomb. Maeda Tamon, the new cabinet's education minister, also said at his first press conference: 'We lost to the enemy's science. This fact is proven by the one new bomb dropped on Hiroshima' and 'the development of science is the task the nation is charged with from now on.' Thus, the new postwar cabinet, too, disregarded both U.S. war crimes and the multitude of war crimes that Japan had committed in the Asia-Pacific over the preceding fifteen years. It attributed the defeat to the narrow technological factor of science and technology and began enthusiastically to lay the groundwork for the development of science and technology. Within a decade, this would include the "peaceful use of atomic energy."

In 1955, five *hibakusha* [A-bomb victims] from Hiroshima and Nagasaki filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government, seeking compensation for their losses. In the "A-bomb trial" (the so-called "Shimoda trial"), the Japanese government argued as follows:

> The use of the atomic bomb hastened Japan's surrender and consequently prevented belligerent people on both sides from being injured or killed, as could have happened had the war continued. Examined objectively, no one can conclude whether or not the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki violated international law. Moreover, given that an international agreement to ban the use of nuclear weapons is yet to be formulated, we think that it is not possible to hastily define it illegal. ..... From the viewpoint of international law, war is fundamentally a situation in which a country is **allowed to exercise all means deemed necessary to cause the enemy to surrender.** Since the Middle Ages, according to international law, combatants have been permitted to choose the means of injuring the enemy in order to attain the special purpose of war, subject to certain conditions imposed by international customary law and treaties adapted to the times. (Emphasis added.)

In the "Shimoda trial," then, the Japanese government made a 180-degree about-face turn from its previous position articulated in its protest letter against the atomic bombings ten years earlier. Suddenly, it essentially embraced the U.S. justification of the atomic bombings. Moreover, the Japanese government fully approved the United States' indiscriminate killings by the atomic bombings, claiming that in most cases it was permissible to use any method to win a war.

One reason why the Japanese government has been so reluctant to provide relief to the A-bomb victims all these years was Japan's own policy of accepting without reservation postwar U.S. domination of the world by nuclear weapons and its own dependence on the U.S. nuclear deterrent scheme. With regard to medical research on health effects of radiation exposure, moreover, the Japanese government uncritically accepted the radiation exposure standards created by the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission [ABCC], standards that completely ignored internal radiation exposure, and has severely underestimated the seriousness of radioactive contamination. Such policies have resulted in the government's policy to downplay the severity of radiation exposure and contamination caused by the Fukushima nuclear disaster as well as its astonishing lack of awareness of the *political responsibility* that the government and politicians owe the people.

Today, again, Abe Shinzo, Hashimoto Toru, and other politicians are intent on denying Japan's war responsibility, including the historical facts of Japan's "war of aggression," the military "comfort women," and other Japanese war crimes. How did such an irresponsible state come about?

In my view, its origin lies in the emperor's Rescript on the Termination of the War, which as discussed earlier, used the "damage from the atomic bombings" to cover up *Japan's own war crimes*. Due to this exploitation of people's suffering, it failed to properly pursue the U.S. and hold it accountable for the *crime against humanity* that killed many civilians indiscriminately. This left the issue of responsibility ambiguous. Indeed, it avoided raising the question of Japan's responsibility for *its own war crimes,* which Japan still conceals. Undeniably, the Japanese government continues to leave the issue of responsibility vague with regard to both aggression and damage.

In other words, because as a nation Japan does not openly recognize the criminality of the many brutal acts it committed against other Asian peoples or its own responsibility for those acts, it cannot expose the significance of similar crimes that the United States perpetrated against the Japanese people. Many in Japan are caught in a vicious cycle: precisely because they do not thoroughly interrogate the criminality of the brutal acts the U.S. committed against them or pursue U.S. responsibility for those acts, they are incapable of considering the pain suffered by the victims (Asian peoples) of their own crimes or the gravity of their responsibility for the crimes. This lack of an objective attitude is also evident in the failure by both the Japanese government as well as the general populace to recognize the US military atrocities committed in recent wars such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq as criminal conduct. Indeed, the Japanese government is also engaged in evading responsibility by increasingly promoting *civilian self-responsibility* for various political and social issues for which it should, in principle, be responsible. One of the most recent and typical examples is that neither TEPCO nor the Japanese government is prepared to take full responsibility for the catastrophic nuclear accident at the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant. By repeatedly claiming that the accident was "sotei-gai" or "beyond our conjecture," they implied that as a nation all citizens are accountable, thus extricating themselves from sole responsibility.

Ultimately, as a consequence, the Japanese have failed to internalize even a basic awareness of the responsibility of the government and politicians. We citizens have both the right to demand that the government and politicians fulfill their political responsibility *and* the civic duty to hold them accountable. Some of the gravest consequences of a lack of civic awareness are the nuclear power plant disaster in Fukushima and the Abe Shinzo administration's destructive policies that confront us. Such polices can be called "self-annihilating policies": radiation contamination (including the massive amounts of highly radioactive water escaping into the ocean) and nuclear reactor restarts, exports of nuclear power infrastructure and technology, revision of the Constitution, and denial of war responsibility.

In August 1946, a year after the end of the war, the well-known film director Itami Mansaku published a short essay titled "*Senso sekininsha no mondai*" [The issue of those responsible for the war]. In it, he wrote:

> Many people say they were deceived during the last war. No one is yet to step up and say he deceived us. Civilians believe they were deceived by the military and bureaucracy, but those inside the military and bureaucracy will all point to their superiors and say they were deceived by them. I guarantee that those superiors will say they were deceived by their superiors. . . . The crime of those who were deceived lies not just in the fact that they were deceived; the core wrong was the entire nation's cultural apathy and loss of self-awareness, self-reflections, and responsibility; the people lost their capacity to criticize, ability to think, and convictions, entrusting their whole selves to a blind obedience so completely that they were deceived just like that. . . . **A people who are content to say that they were deceived will probably be deceived over and over again**. (Emphasis added.)

Unfortunately, Itami was stunningly accurate. Among the postwar cases in which the populace has been repeatedly deceived are the *three non-nuclear principles* (i.e., the ban on any form of existence of nuclear weapons within Japan) and the *nuclear power safety myth* (i.e., the impossibility of any nuclear power accident in Japan). Pursuit of the responsibility of "those who deceived" must also involve pursuit of the responsibility of "those who were deceived" for having been deceived. Japan's socio-political situation which lacks any such popular self-examination is in marked contrast to that of Germany, where widespread and intense debate on the responsibility of the *German people* for Nazi atrocities and fascism regularly takes place in many parts of the nation. In Japan, on the other hand, the major debate, if it takes place at all, consistently and narrowly focuses on responsibilities of a limited number of military, political and bureaucratic leaders or the emperor.

It follows, then, that on the issues of nuclear power and nuclear weapons, we are radically challenged to confront not only problems of the environment and energy, and those of radiation contamination and relief to its victims; we are also challenged to foster a firm "consciousness of responsibility" in a truly universal sense.

In the words of Tanaka Shozo, a grass-roots environmental protection activist and philosopher, who tenaciously fought against copper pollution at Ashio Mine in Tochigi prefecture more than a century ago:

> *If the state harms and kills its people, it will destroy the nation itself. A true civilization will not damage mountains and rivers, will not destroy communities and will not kill people.*

It would seem that the policies of nuclear power renewal and export that Abe is now promoting are exactly what Tanaka Shozo warned of more than one hundred years ago in reference to Japan's first environmental disaster.

Japanese governments from the Meiji period on have repeatedly created many situations that have killed people both within Japan and overseas, as a result of "wars of colonial expansion" and "economic development policies." As citizens, we must vigorously pursue people in authority and make them accountable for their actions. That is the *responsibility* and *duty* of citizens. Japan has ignorantly augmented the use of nuclear power despite our costly experience as the victims of radiation from the atomic bombing, and at the same time has consistently supported the U.S. nuclear strategies. Undoubtedly, such fallacious action is partly due to the negligence of our own responsibility and duty as citizens. We need to closely interrogate our own past activities in this regard, and dramatically change our way of thinking in order to change our behavior when confronting current nuclear problems. To be effective, the anti-nuclear weapons and power movements must *demand* and *pursue* responsibility both from the government and the people; it is not sufficient to simply be guardians of the environment. Our responsibility and duty is to protect human beings, including future generations, as well as all living creatures and the natural environment of this planet.

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winning documentary Living Along the Fenceline (2011), which tells the unheard stories of seven women and communities that livealongside U.S. bases. A review of the film appeared in Japan Focus.

Asia-Pacific Journal articles on related subjects include:

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