



The Memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945

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Many people abroad seem to be puzzled to see that Japan does not want to obtain nuclear weapons. The security environment that has surrounded Japan since the Cold War era has not been that of peace and calm by any means. Japan was adjacent to the Soviet Union, a superpower that held an immense nuclear arsenal, while China armed itself with nuclear weapons in the 1960s. The first nuclear testing by China was held on October 16, 1964 in the midst of the Tokyo Olympics (China did not participate).



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The security environment in Japan's neighboring areas has not improved in the least, even following the end of the Cold War. Europeans, at various international meetings, speak of their own regions with a sense of triumph, noting that their countries feel virtually no threat from military power in other nations. But this kind of fortune has not knocked on Japan's door. It is quite the opposite and rather, the threat of military power of other countries has intensified in the twenty-four years that followed the end of the Cold War. Specifically, the severity of the nuclear situation surrounding Japan has become more pronounced. North Korea did not keep its promise to the international community and proceeded to develop nuclear arms, having conducted three sets of nuclear tests since 2006. The country has already deployed numerous ballistic missiles, which are means of delivery for nuclear weapons, with nearly all of Japan's territory within range of the medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) Nodong. China has also been modernizing and enhancing its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capabilities. Of the

five official nuclear weapon states, China is the only country that has increased the number of nuclear warheads since the end of the Cold War. Russia continues to be a significant nuclear power, second only to the United States. Despite being confronted with such nuclear threats, Japan continues to maintain its traditional three non-nuclear principles of not possessing, not manufacturing and not introducing nuclear weapons into Japan. It certainly appears as if this attitude runs counter to the common sense prevalent in international politics.



Why does Japan not want to possess nuclear weapons? One major reason is that the Japanese have believed that it would not be a benefit for their country to arm itself with nuclear weapons. A cost-benefit calculation is the foundation of any country's decision-making on its foreign and security policies and the issue of whether to arm or not to arm itself with nuclear weapons is no exception. Thus far, the people of Japan have determined that if Japan were to arm itself with nuclear weapons, the move would deal a major blow to the international environment and damage the alliance between Japan and the United States. The outcome would be lethal for an island nation that is short on resources and has no choice but to pursue a path of economic opportunities internationally. There is no convincing proof that being armed with nuclear weapons would raise the level of Japan's military security. Also, as exemplified by North Korea and Iran, great harm is done to the image of a country that aims to gear itself with nuclear weapons by ignoring the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Japan's soft power – a notion that is becoming increasingly critical in the world today – would be dealt a major blow, if it equips itself with nuclear weapons. Based on these perspectives, the vast majority of the Japanese people have shared the view that their country arming itself with nuclear weapons would serve to invite more harm than benefits.

Japan's refusal to possess nuclear weapons, however, is not about simply striking a balance between profits and gains, but is also rooted in deeper psychological or cultural reasoning. In short, Japanese people who have experienced Hiroshima and Nagasaki dislike nuclear weapons.

Many in the international community have viewed that the experience of Hiroshima or Nagasaki would not guarantee that Japan would stay away from arming itself with nuclear weaponry. They stressed that memory fades with time and the memory of the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki among the Japanese people would not be an exception. Japan does have sufficient economic and technological capabilities to develop nuclear weapons. Like other great powers, Japan will undoubtedly aim toward arming itself with nuclear weapons if the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were to eventually fade. Many national security experts and peace activists overseas have believed as much. But, in fact, the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945 is resolutely being passed down to the younger generation, including children of today.

Naturally, the number of victims who actually experienced the atomic bomb is on a gradual decline. During the seven decades following the Second World War, however, countless books, nursery tales, television and radio programs, movies, comic books, animated features and other forms of communication about the bombs have exposed later generations to the horrors of nuclear war. Hiroshima and Nagasaki continue to leave an immense impact on the postwar culture in Japan.

An opportunity to actually witness this experience was presented during the 64th annual “Red and White Singing Battle” (in short, Ko-haku) broadcast on NHK, the nationwide public network in Japan, on December 31 last year. Ko-haku, a television program that attracts the greatest number of television viewers in Japan, is a gathering of the most popular singers from the past year, with male singers on the white team and female singers on the red team battling it out during the 4.5 hours of live evening broadcast on NHK on New Year's Eve every year. The ratings for this show surpassed the 80% mark in the 1960s and even today, when entertainment has diversified, the show still garners nearly 50%.



One of the highlights of Ko-haku this time around was a passionate performance of *Furusato no Sora no Shita ni* (“under the sky of my hometown”) by Miwa Akihiro, a 78-year-old singer and songwriter from Nagasaki. Miwa, who has been very popular since the 1950s, is famous for his singing prowess, but also for two other things. First, he is openly gay. Miwa, who is normally in drag, has been active in pushing for greater LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights, which is something the Japanese people have accepted with open arms. Another thing is that Miwa continues to recount the story of Nagasaki, having had first-hand experience of the tragedy. Miwa, who was ten years old, was unscathed when the atomic bomb fell on Nagasaki as his home was several kilometers away from ground zero. However, he witnessed terrifying conditions when he ventured out to look for his grandparents, his mother’s parents, at their home that stood near the center of the explosion. The song *Furusato no Sora no Shita ni*, which narrates this experience, has become one of the main songs of his repertoire over the years. The song depicts the sight of a crowd of discombobulated people trying to escape the fire ignited by the atomic bomb and the sadness that ensued as the hills, where families, friends and children used to gather to play, were decimated by the fire. It also illustrates the image of victims of the atomic war soaring from the tragedy and leading a respectable life. The standard amount of time given to one singer on Ko-haku is around three minutes, but Miwa was given over six minutes to sing this song. The annual 4.5-hour Ko-haku takes place in a festive atmosphere, but specifically during these six minutes, some 3,500 people in the audience of the venue, NHK Hall (in Tokyo), were lost in Miwa’s song while seemingly holding themselves back from taking even the slightest breath.

Furusato no Sora no Shita ni transcended any differences in ideology or beliefs and strongly appealed to the hearts of the majority of Japanese people. Miwa’s song brought to light the tragedy of Nagasaki yet again to a multitude of Japanese people.

This is the fundamental reason behind the Japanese advocating a nuclear-free world, long before U.S. President Barack Obama started to do so.

I was born in Kyoto and so was my mother. Kyoto is a city that could have been the target of an atomic bomb if it were not for U.S. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson’s objection, and if it had happened, my mother also would have lost her life. This writer, as an expert on international politics and national security, firmly believes that Japan will need to depend on the nuclear umbrella of the United States so long as nuclear weapons continue to exist in the world and Japan remains under nuclear threat from surrounding nations (and does not equip itself with nuclear arms). At the same time, this writer has a strong aversion to nuclear weapons. The people of Japan will continue to recount the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki based on the conviction that people around the world would one day share this aversion, and Miwa’s performance on Ko-haku this time was symbolic of this sentiment of the people of Japan.

[For detailed information on Japan’s non-nuclear policy and the Japanese people’s attitude toward nuclear weapons, see Kamiya Matake, "Realistic Proactivism: Japanese Attitudes toward Global Zero [http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research-pdfs/BJT_Print_Final.pdf]



Note: The views expressed here are the author's own and do not represent those of the National Defense Academy of Japan or of Japan's Ministry of Defense.

Translated from an original article in Japanese written for Discuss Japan. [February 2014]

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