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# A Symbol of Peace and Peace Education: The Genbaku Dome in Hiroshima

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## Introduction

There are numerous paintings expressing both the glory and horror of war. These pictures are a powerful medium in peace education. According to Peter Burke, images of war have historically shifted in Western society. Until the 1800s, paintings of battles were mainly informed by “the virtue of war” because the images of wars were created according to the notion of heroism. However, Burke points out that, after the 1800s, the horror of war has been more prominently depicted.<sup>1</sup> David O’Brien discusses this transition by analyzing paintings of the Napoleonic period. According to O’Brien, the painting of Napoleon’s failure at the Battle of Eylau did not convey the beauty of war but rather its misery.<sup>2</sup> As the concept of war changed from hero to nation-state, battle images were significantly transformed. Specifically, since mass destruction became possible because of advances in military technology, the number of civilian victims became much higher than previously. Consequently, representations of war emphasized this escalation of suffering and misery.

While this may seem an advance to those concerned with peace education, in fact it is an illusion. Although the rhetoric of the images seems to have changed from the glorification of war to condemnation of its horrors, the focus is still upon war. Peace education, if it is to come about through these images, comes only negatively. That is, peace, far from being a set of positive traits, tempers, or activities designed to promote humanness, community, and general good feeling (what I will now call “positive peace”) is merely the antipode of war, and as such it becomes an empty husk (what

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Figure 1. The Genbaku Dome in Hiroshima City. Genbaku Dome. Copyright 2005 by Hiroshima Peace Museum. Used with permission.

I will now call “negative peace”).<sup>3</sup> Images promoting something beyond negative peace are sorely lacking.

In this article I attempt to rectify this state of affairs by focusing on a symbol of Hiroshima called the Genbaku Dome, a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site (see figure 1).<sup>4</sup> On August 6, 1945, the building was 160 meters from the hypocenter of the atomic blast. The building retained its appearance because the bomb exploded right above it. At present, the building plays a major role within the Hiroshima Peace Park, which was designed for the center of Peace Memorial City by Kenzo Tange.<sup>5</sup> Tange expressed the concept of peace by connecting the peace museum, Cenotaph for the Atomic Bomb Victims, and Genbaku Dome together in a geometric whole.<sup>6</sup> When people stand in front of the cenotaph, they see the upper part of the Genbaku Dome in the center.

Why is the Genbaku Dome included in the concept of peace even though it is a war site? I believe that one major reason is that the building has more permanence over time. The mushroom cloud is also a major image of the atomic bomb. However, since the mushroom cloud is the *momentary* scene of the bombing, the image is often used to illustrate that the atomic bomb exploded at 8:15 on August 6, 1945, in Hiroshima. On the other hand, the Genbaku Dome is a more lasting reflection of the atomic bomb. In that sense, the Genbaku Dome owns *history* because it can be any scene after the bombing. While the Genbaku Dome itself is permanent, the meaning surrounding it can change. In other words, the Genbaku Dome does not provide an image

of peace in itself, although it plays an important role by informing the audience of the specific location of Hiroshima. Representations of the Genbaku Dome are used as evidence that peace has been established after the experience of the atomic bomb. Therefore, the Genbaku Dome can be an image of positive peace.

Here, a question arises: What educational messages do images with the Genbaku Dome possess? I believe that images of the Genbaku Dome are tightly connected to peace education because, without education, the Genbaku Dome is merely an old damaged building. To examine educational messages in those visuals that include the Genbaku Dome I first discuss two major approaches to promoting the image of peace. Second, I analyze how these images of peace are used to teach political ideologies. Next, I interpret an additional picture to examine how political ideology affects the image of peace. Finally, I explore another form of peace education through the representative image of peace.

### **The Genbaku Dome and Images of Peace**

#### *The Genbaku Dome and Children*

Including children in representations was one major approach used in images of peace. The photograph in figure 2 was taken in 1947 at the nearest elementary school to the hypocenter. This picture also appears in a sociology textbook for sixth grade students in Japan.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 2. Children playing at Honkawa Elementary School near the Genbaku Dome. Photographer unknown. Used with permission from the Honkawa Elementary School.

Children are used as effective objects to promote the image of peace. Children are the image of hope and the future. Also, children playing with friends indicates that the social environment is stable and ordered. The picture also supports the image of “restoration” that was emphasized by

U.S. General Head Quarters (G.H.Q.). In the front part of the photograph, many students and a couple of teachers are playing an activity on the grounds. They seem to be having fun making circles. People in the picture are well dressed and look healthy. The school building on the left side looks fine as well. This indicates that children are civilized, disciplined, and ostensibly happy. Note, though, that this scene of happiness is pictured in the foreground of the burnt-out Genbaku Dome. The experience of the atomic bomb is immediately evident. In this picture the role of the Genbaku Dome is to indicate the location as Hiroshima; the children provide an image of revival in Hiroshima.

A similar approach is used in a book, *Genbaku No Ko*,<sup>8</sup> edited by Arata Osada. The book is a collection of experiences of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima from 105 children, ranging in age from elementary to college students. Figure 3 shows the cover of Osada's book when it was published in 1951. Six children are standing by the side of a small river and bridge. Unlike the first photograph, these children are not well dressed. Four of them are wearing shirts, but others are only wearing knee-length pants without shoes. This indicates that they are not economically secure, owing to the destruction caused by the atomic bomb. However, all the children have faces beaming with happy smiles. The children's upturned faces promote the image that they are vigorously surviving with hopes and dreams. In addition to the children's facial expressions, the presence of plants promotes the image of peace. There are no buildings or trees behind the children because of the destruction. However, the children are holding bunches of grass in their hands. It looks like they are holding weeds, which are ignored in ordinary circumstances. However, the presence of grass indicates revival of life over the power of the atomic bomb, which burned out and polluted Hiroshima. The hope in Hiroshima is expressed by the children and grass, both of which are considered powerless in normal situations.

In *Genbaku No Ko*'s preface<sup>9</sup> Osada points out that this book contributes to peace education in two ways. First, describing war from the viewpoint of children is a powerful argument against prowar ideas such as "war for peace" or "armament for peace." Further, Osada argues that the bombing of Hiroshima can be the beginning of world "peace" history. Osada claims that, although the atomic bomb reflects the negative nature of human beings, people have a positive side of nature. Further, Osada states that this positive nature is even visible in the suffering caused by the bomb. For instance, many children witnessed people helping each other under the hellish circumstances after the bomb's detonation. Also, although these children suffered deeply, they never gave up living their lives as well as they could. In other words, the cover of the book expresses Osada's idea of peace education: that life is stronger than the power of the atomic bomb. In addition to the cover, he included three more photographs on the front page of



Figure 3. Cover of *Genbaku No Ko* by Arata Osada (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1951). Used with permission.

the volume. Two of them are, again, photographs of children that provide the same positive messages as the cover. In the photographs children are smiling and demonstrating cooperation. The third photograph is the Genbaku Dome. Unlike figure 2, this photograph of the Genbaku Dome does not include children. However, Osada calls the building the Peace Memorial Dome. In addition to proposing his philosophy of peace education, Osada emphasizes the image of hope and dreams by linking the building to “peace” within social circumstances in which many survivors still suffered and experienced despair.

In contrast to Osada’s original edition in 1951, the covers of the paperback version of his book are completely different. The paperback version, divided into two volumes, was printed in 1990; figure 4 shows their covers. The art used for the cover of the paperback version of *Genbaku No Ko* is part of a collection entitled *Hiroshima Mural*,<sup>10</sup> by Iri and Toshi Maruki. The purpose of the collection of paintings is to show the horror of the atomic bomb. On the cover of the first volume of the paperback edition, a naked child is broiled in fire and is screaming. The picture indicates that children writhed in agony and died without help. The cover of the second volume of the paperback edition depicts a naked mother who is carrying her baby. She is also helplessly wrapped in fire. Although the mother’s face does not show an agonized look, her expression shows her despair for her and her baby’s lives.

These two pictures are powerful images of the horror and death throes of victims. However, these images move away from the other side of Osada’s argument in the book—the power of life. A reason for this shift could be



Figure 4. Covers of *Genbaku No Ko*, volumes 1 and 2, by Arata Osada (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1990). Used with permission.

the international political situation in the contemporary world. The world is under a nuclear threat, and more powerful nuclear weapons are continually produced. In addition, the memory of the atomic bomb is wearing thin with time. Consequently, it could be important to teach the horror of the atomic bomb with shocking visuals in order to prevent future nuclear extinction and to remember the precept of Hiroshima.

However, this type of peace education, which emphasizes the horror of the war, is related to a political ideology. This peace education became dominant, especially in Japan, because of the political influence of antiwar groups such as *Nihon Kyoshokuin Kumiai* (*Nikkyoso*).<sup>11</sup> *Nikkyoso* is the largest teachers' union in Japan and was established in 1947. Although *Nikkyoso* is a labor union, it is also a strong supporter of the antiwar movement in Japan. For instance, *Nikkyoso* is a supporter of an antinuclear group called Japan Congress Against A- and H-bombs, whose symbol is the Genbaku Dome. The group claims that it is the major contributor to the preservation of the Genbaku Dome.<sup>12</sup> *Nikkyoso* is very sensitive about the issue of war and peace because of the imperialist rhetoric that Japanese teachers propagated during World War II. According to *Nikkyoso*, school teachers played upon the sentiments of students through the use of the rhetoric of imperialism and empire. Therefore, teaching antiwar education is a way to express teachers' regret for their predecessors' support of the war. *Nikkyoso* specifically emphasizes teaching about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as central to their antiwar education.

However, Murai Minoru critically analyzes the antiwar education program produced by *Nikkyoso*. He says, "The educational approach oversimplifies the learning theory in behaviorism."<sup>13</sup> This antiwar education assumes that if students merely see the horror of war, they will immediately associate it with the importance of peace. However, Murai points out that it is easy to teach war as horrible, but it is also easy to teach war as virtuous

because the method of both approaches was originally the same: association. In other words, the antiwar education promoted by *Nikkyoso* actually *re-instates* nationalism, whose ideology represents the horror of war. This idea conflicts with Osada's idea of peace education because his peace education does not seek to replace political ideologies but rather to emphasize human dignity. Hence, *Nikkyoso's* version of peace education is in contrast with the education advocated by Osada. Consequently, although covers of both the original book and the subsequent paperback editions use images of victims of the atomic bomb, the ways in which these images represent peace are very different.

### *The Genbaku Dome and Nature*

In addition to children, the Genbaku Dome is often depicted with natural artifacts such as trees and rivers in order to illustrate peace. The beauty of nature here is in contrast to the horror of war. Many times the Genbaku Dome is pictured beneath a blue sky with little white clouds. Blue and white colors support the image of peace because the color of the building, burnt red, is stark and threatening. White is the color of peace, and small clouds contrast with the mushroom cloud. Also, blue sky is associated with freedom and calm. The river exemplifies the power of nature to overcome (human) tragedy. Although there were corpses in the river right after the bombing, the river cleansed all. Moreover, just as the original cover of *Genbaku No Ko* used grass as an image of peace, plants provide evidence of new life and growth, thereby indicating the victory of nature over death and suffering. Right after the bomb, all plants in the surrounding area were razed; some scholars even claimed that the land would be barren for seventy-five years because of the fallout. However, vegetation soon grew back thick and strong. The National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan uses a photograph following this methodological approach to introduce Genbaku Dome as a world heritage site.<sup>14</sup> The image includes a blue sky, green trees, the river, and the national flower of Japan, a cherry blossom. The main part of the Genbaku Dome, the upper part of the spherical ceiling, is the center of the image. Although the picture does not include the entire image of the building, the photo reveals the majority of it.

Describing the Genbaku Dome, UNESCO writes that "not only is it a stark and powerful symbol of the most destructive force ever created by humankind; it also expresses the hope for world peace and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons."<sup>15</sup> As before, the ideological interpretations of the Genbaku Dome are actually much more powerful than this universal reading by UNESCO. Some sociology textbooks for sixth grade students censored by the Ministry of Education in Japan use the image related to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the context of world citizenship and Article 9 of the Peace Constitution.<sup>16</sup> One textbook uses the Genbaku Dome as a symbol

of world citizenship for peace. These images of the Genbaku Dome are also accompanied by many components of nature such as trees, blue skies, and rivers, thereby suggesting the image of peace.

Although the visual image is peaceful, the ideological message of the textbook is not coeval because the purpose is nationalistic. For example, the textbook explains that Japan is the only country that has suffered an attack by an atomic bomb. Because the country knows the horror of the atomic bomb, the Japanese have a responsibility to abolish nuclear weapons.<sup>17</sup> This indicates that “our” nation has a mission to spread peace. This is the same expression of nationalism that justified World War II. During World War II schools in Japan taught that we “Japanese” had a mission to provide “peace” to other Asian countries. Therefore, the war became just because “we” were fighting for “peace.” In other words, although the image is about world citizenship and the Peace Constitution, the textbook actually emphasizes the chauvinistic idea by repeating “we,” meaning the Japanese, in the textbook.

This chauvinistic ideology was clearly pointed out by China when the Genbaku Dome was inscribed as a World Heritage Site at UNESCO’s conference. The statement made by China on this occasions reads as follows:

During the Second World War, it was the other Asian countries and peoples who suffered the greatest loss in life and property. But today there are still few people trying to deny this fact of history. As such being the case, if the Hiroshima nomination is approved to be included on the World Heritage List, even though on an exceptional basis, it may be utilized for harmful purpose by these few people. This will, of course, not be conducive to the safeguarding of world peace and security. For this reason China has reservations on the approval of this nomination.<sup>18</sup>

China was anxious about the decision because the image of the Genbaku Dome promotes the Japanese as victims during World War II. In short, Genbaku represents the Japanese as innocent victims. In fact, the Japanese government uses the image of the Dome to promote the innocence of the Japanese. In the textbook the vivid picture of the Genbaku Dome convinces readers that the included statements are innocent, neutral, and moral.

On the other hand, the United States interprets the Genbaku Dome differently from its received meanings. For instance, the United States also objected to having the Genbaku Dome inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site:

The United States is dissociating itself today from the decision to inscribe the Genbaku Dome on the World Heritage List. The United States and Japan are close friends and allies. We cooperate on security, diplomatic, international and economic affairs around the world. Our two countries are tied by deep personal friendships between many

Americans and Japanese. Even so, the United States cannot support its friend in this inscription. The United States is concerned about the lack of historical perspective in the nomination of Genbaku Dome. The events antecedent to the United States' use of atomic weapons to end World War II are key to understanding the tragedy of Hiroshima. Any examination of the period leading up to 1945 should be placed in the appropriate historical context. The United States believes the inscription of war sites outside the scope of the Convention. We urge the Committee to address the question of the suitability of war sites for the World Heritage List.<sup>19</sup>

For the United States, the interpretation seems to be that the bombing itself was justified because it ushered in peace. It indicates that there is another ideological conflict when the Genbaku Dome becomes an image of peace, which will be discussed in the next section.

*A Poster of the Peace Festival in Hiroshima*

Figure 5 is the poster for the three-year anniversary of the bombing in 1948. Although the designer remains anonymous, since all public advertisements were censored by G.H.Q. at that time the poster was at least an acceptable design for the United States.



Figure 5. Poster for the 1948 memorial ceremony for the three-year anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima City. The artist is unknown.

The center of the image is the ringing bell, and the Genbaku Dome is present in the lower right corner beneath the bell's slanting right back side. The bell is much larger than the Dome, although the actual objects are opposite in size. Although the title of the event, "Peace Festival," is written in Chinese characters on the poster, the slogan is written in English: "No More

Hiroshimas.” This indicates that the poster was created with the assumption that there were at least two different audiences: one Japanese and one American (or English speaking). In fact, the event was international rather than local because the declaration for peace made by the mayor was sent to 68 countries and 160 cities.

The curving line in the poster expands the interpretation of it. For Japanese the curving line is mostly interpreted as a ribbon that promotes the image of peace, as long as the color of the line is not black. Also, since “The Bell for Peace” was built in 1947 in Hiroshima, local audiences might be able to identify the bell. However, the bell was not widely known and was even stolen. Therefore, Japanese audiences understand the meaning of the event from the Chinese characters rather than the visual image. Further, Japanese audiences recognize the location of the event through the representation of the Genbaku Dome.

On the other hand, English speakers, especially Americans, understand the meaning of the event from the visuals, although the title of the festival is not given in English. For Americans, the curving line promotes the image of the likewise cracked Liberty Bell, the symbol of freedom. This indicates that Americans understand the event as something related to their ideological commitments. Moreover, it is possible for Americans to interpret the anniversary as a “festival” because the “freedom” was provided courtesy of the atomic bomb. Since providing freedom and peace is more important than the destruction resulting from the atomic bomb, the wreckage (the Genbaku Dome) is smaller than the symbol of liberty. In short, the poster seems to justify the bombing rather than emphasize its after effects.

This poster provides two completely different ideas of peace within the same image. Although both American and Japanese audiences commonly understand that it is an event to do “something for peace,” the meanings of peace are in opposition. For Japanese audiences the peace represented in this poster means the prevention of future use of weapons of such incredible destruction. For American audiences, however, the peace represented in the poster is meant to indicate the necessity of war to provide freedom and to fight for justice. In other words, in this nuclear age, although it is necessary for peace education to overcome national borders to realize “real” peace in the world, the concept of peace is still limited by national boundaries and ideologies.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I discussed how peace education is strongly affected by various political ideologies through the interpretation of visuals that place the Genbaku Dome in their center. Any image of peace related to the Genbaku Dome is used to illustrate political ideologies. In a democracy each person

as well as each nation has a right to interpret the Genbaku Dome differently as an image of peace. This right should be respected. However, the differences should be negotiated and brought to the fore and engaged with rather than forced into conflicting ideological camps. I do not mean that it is necessary to find a universal interpretation of the Genbaku Dome. The bottom line is that these different interpretations need to be openly discussed in order to avoid doctrinaire abuses of persuasion.

At the same time, political ideologies claiming the image of peace should be critically examined. I believe that it is *possible* to find a common image of peace if peace education becomes driven not by politics but rather by ethics. Positive peace education that emphasizes human dignity as well as the dignity of other living creatures should be discussed more. Furthermore, I believe that positive peace education can be supported by two major images of peace discussed above: children and nature. Maria Montessori claims that "Children are the teachers of peace."<sup>20</sup> She means by this that because of the social prejudice that labels children as immature, society ignores the fact that adults and children are interdependent. Although there are various kinds of peace education, all existing peace education strives to teach the importance of peace to children. However, Montessori overturns this viewpoint. For her, it is peace education that must learn humanity from children. Osada shares the same perspective. Moreover, nature can support another dimension of positive peace education. Environmental ethics is a commonly shared and urgent issue in the world. This educational approach promotes cooperation and interdependency among human beings as well as other creatures.

#### NOTES

1. Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 150.
2. David O'Brien, "Propaganda and the Republic of Arts in Antoine-Jean Gros's *Napoleon Visiting the Battlefield of Eylau the Morning after the Battle*," *French Historical Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003): 281-314.
3. Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167-191.
4. The building called the Genbaku Dome was established in 1915 by the Hiroshima prefecture. The building was designed to sell and display local products. In 1944 the building became an office because of the war situation. In 1953 the building was handed over from the Hiroshima prefecture to Hiroshima City. In 1966 Hiroshima City decided to preserve the building as an historic site. After this decision, the Genbaku Dome was repaired three times, in 1967, 1990, and 2003. In 1995 the Genbaku Dome was marked as national historic remains by the government of Japan. In 1996 the building was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome).
5. Kenzo Tange, *Kenzo Tange, 1946-1969: Architecture and Urban Design*, ed. Udo Kultermann (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).

6. There are several buildings that were left in similar structural condition to the Genbaku Dome. For instance, the Peace Park Rest House in the park is only 10 meters from the Genbaku Dome. The building still functions, although not as a symbol of peace.
7. Takeshi Sasaki, ed., *Atarashii Shakai 6ge*. (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2003), 21.
8. Arata Osada, *Genbaku No Ko* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1951).
9. *Ibid.*, 1-40.
10. Iri Maruki, *Genbaku No Zu: Kyodo Seisaku Maruki Iri Maruki Toshi* (Tokyo: Komine Shoten, 1983).
11. See Benjamin Duke, *Japan's Militant Teachers: A History of the Left-Wing Teachers' Movement* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1973).
12. "Gensuibaku Kinshi Nihon Kokumin Kaigi," *Gensuikin* (accessed October 5, 2003, from <http://www.gensuikin.org/>).
13. Minoru Murai, "Heiwa Kyouiku Wo Meguru Hitotsu No Konponteki Mondai," *Kyouiku Tetsugaku Kenkyu* 42 (1980): 62.
14. Nippon UNESCO Kyokai Renmei, *World Heritage Activity* (accessed September 20, 2003, from [http://www.unesco.jp/contents/isan/shoukai\\_index.html](http://www.unesco.jp/contents/isan/shoukai_index.html)). The image is currently not available due to copyright restrictions.
15. UNESCO, *Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome)* (accessed October 10, 2003, from <http://whc.unesco.org/nwhc/pages/doc/mainf3.htm>).
16. Article 9 of the Peace Constitution states the following: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.  
 "We believe that no nation is responsible to itself alone, but that laws of political morality are universal; and that obedience to such laws is incumbent upon all nations who would sustain their own sovereignty and justify their sovereign relationship with other nations. We, the Japanese people, pledge our national honor to accomplish these high ideals and purposes with all our resources."
17. Takeshiro Shimizu, ed., *Shougaku Shakai 6nen Ge*. (Osaka: Osaka Shoseki, 2003), 51.
18. UNESCO, *Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome)*.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Maria Montessori, *Heiwa to Kyouiku*, trans. Michio Ogasawara and Toshiaki Kouso (Tokyo: Endelule Shoten, 1975), 162.