

# The Major Roles of Grassroots Peace Research in Creating Peace and Reconciliation

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## Abstract

There are many conflicts in the world and peace researchers have been making great efforts to resolve them. Is peace research possible only by peace researchers? It seems that it's important to involve ordinary citizens and students to deal with ongoing conflicts between Japan and other Asian nations such as China and Korea. This is because the Japanese government has not dealt with such issues effectively. Nonetheless, the collaboration of peace researchers and ordinary citizens could lead to creating peace and reconciliation and this paper will provide such examples. For instance, citizens in Fukushima have started to write diaries after the nuclear accident so that they would be able to have enough proof to get free medical care in the future. Such grassroots activities for peace research can lead to promoting peace and reconciliation at the local, national, and global levels.

To cite another example, the relationship between Japan and China has been getting worse and there needs to be a better means of collaboration. Ordinary Japanese citizens who were members of the Grassroots House went to China to investigate results of Japan's aggression which had not been taught at school and then reported their findings in the media. During their visits, some Chinese people refused to meet with these citizens. However, the relationship between some Chinese and Japanese citizens improved after the Japanese citizens learned that their suffering resulted from Japan's aggression. Some Japanese citizens even went so far as to start supporting a Chinese lawsuit against Japan for apology and compensation.

Another example, as mentioned, involves the collecting of data by ordinary citizens. In this case, it started right after the Fukushima nuclear accident. Concerned Japanese citizens began writing diaries so that they would be able to have enough proof to get free medical care in the future. One researcher suggested that mothers keep children's teeth which would show the effects of radiation, especially Strontium 90.

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In regard to radiation, ordinary citizens have been recording the oral histories of atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Such grassroots peace research could lead to the founding of an archive and a peace museum called “No More *Hibakusha* Center for the Preservation of the Legacy of Memory,” which has been in preparation since 2014.

Researching the lives of pacifists is also one of the contributions to promoting peace education. Their case studies clarify the role of ordinary citizens and young people in peace research.

## **I. How Grassroots Peace Research Is Continuing to Improve the Relationship between Japan and China**

Almost seventy years have passed since Japan's defeat in World War II but there are still conflicts over the past between Japan and other Asian countries such as China. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe does not regard the war as Japan's aggressive war. Many historical facts of Japan's aggression have been hidden and have not been written honestly in school textbooks, which is very different from the educational process in Germany.

Members of Grassroots House, a small peace museum in Kochi City, made a peace trip to China in 1991 because it's important to first know the historical facts in order to forge a true and lasting friendship with the Chinese people. It wasn't easy to meet Chinese victims of Japan's aggression. The late Mr. Shigeo Nishimori, the founder and former director of Grassroots House Peace Museum in Kochi, went to a Chinese village with twenty people that included two junior high school students on August 7, 1992. They visited a village called Mashi Mountain, Rushan County in Shandong Province and it was the first time for the Japanese to visit there since the end of World War II. It took over four hours by bus from Weihai City. An old man aged 74 named Wang Shaorong was introduced to Nishimori by the village mayor. He started his talk by saying: “To tell you the truth, I don't want to meet with Japanese visitors.” (Nishimori, 1992, p. 6). Nishimori didn't know what to say at first and asked an old man to tell what had happened in the past so the children who were present would learn not to repeat the same mistake of Japan's aggression. The old man talked about what happened in the village on November, 1942: that his younger brother was killed and he was caught by the Japanese military and forced to work in Qingdao. It wasn't easy for the Japanese students to listen to such raw and truthful historical facts.

However, some Chinese people were impressed to learn that a huge monument which states that Japan will never fight against China was made and

erected by citizens in Kochi City in 1992 in the following trips to China. They were also impressed to learn about poems by Kou Makimura, an anti-war poet from Kochi, and a booklet on the movement for freedom and human rights that started in Kochi in 1874 that demanded the opening of the Diet. This type of information shows our citizens' efforts for peace and human rights in Japan, which is vastly different from the communication emanating from the Japanese government. Information about this poet and the people's movement came from Nishimori's research and was given to the Chinese people during the trip to China.

Such trips occurred six times until 1998 and the corresponding research on the results of Japan's aggression was published in five booklets called: *Not Forgetting the Past But Making it Lessons for the Future* (1991), *To Live as Neighbors* (1992), *The Trip on Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution* (1994), *Never Forget* (1996), and *Germ War was Actually Waged* (1999). This author participated in the peace trip in 1999 and it was shocking to discover the suffering of the Chinese people due to the germ war by the Japanese military during World War II.

A booklet based on the trip was used as part of the curriculum during a class called "Peace & Disarmament" at Kochi University. The citizens' research in China was also shared in the form of additional booklets, lectures, and exhibitions from their peace trip to China. A small peace museum called Grassroots House also played a key role in organizing the citizens' peace research by promoting their research. This is a vivid example of how grassroots peace research is able to improve the relationship between Japan and China via promoting peace education based on peace research. It should be noted that similar efforts have been made between Japan and the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and other countries by NGOs.

## **II. The Documentation of Radiation Exposure**

### **1. Learning the Oral History of Atomic Bomb Survivors**

There is a website<sup>1</sup> created by Asahi Shimbun (newspaper) called "Memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki - Messages from Hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors)." It's possible to read public first-hand accounts written by Hibakusha survivors in Japanese and English. The website states that "By sharing these messages from them, we hope to help propel the growing global movement toward the abolition of

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1. The website of Asahi Shimbun: <http://www.asahi.com/hibakusha/english/>

nuclear weapons.” Because atomic bomb survivors are elderly (sixty-nine years have passed after the atomic bombings in 1945), it’s essential to record the testimonies of Hibakusha survivors before they pass away.

A new project to construct an archive and peace museum in Tokyo called “No More *Hibakusha* Center for the Preservation of the Legacy of Memory” is being considered. Young people have been recording Hibakusha testimonies and they would be kept at the archive and also shared with future visitors. The purpose has been written as follows:

The “No More *Hibakusha* Center for the Preservation of the Legacy of Memory” is an archive devoted to recording the contributions of the *Hibakusha* anti-nuclear movement to human progress and history. This foundation strives to gather testimonials about the influence the atomic bomb has had on the lives and deaths of many people. It will be established in order to preserve the legacy of this tragedy in order to create a more peaceful world, one that is free of war and nuclear weapons.<sup>2</sup>

It’s possible for ordinary citizens to listen and record their own testimonies. For example, eighteen persons attended a meeting to listen to five atomic bomb survivors on March 22, 2014. This meeting was organized by the Association of Listening to Voices of Hibakusha in Coop Aichi in Nagoya City. Such citizens have also attended a meeting of the No More *Hibakusha* Center for the Preservation of the Legacy of Memory that was held in Tokyo on May 24, 2014 and shared their experiences with other people living in various parts of Japan. Through such a project, ordinary citizens and students can contribute to peace research.

Another example is the activities by the Second and Third Generation of Hibakusha in Kyoto. They have a newsletter that is edited by Nobuyuki Taira and published every month with Hibakusha’s testimonies. For instance, Ms. Sumiko Hotani’s atomic bomb experiences were published: Her interview was done on March 15, 2014 and was recorded by the association members and shared with other members of the association. The following is the summary.

Sumiko Hotani was seven years old when she became a victim of the the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and she will be 77 years old as of June, 2014. She had six members in her family: her parents, two brothers, and one sister. All of them were hit by the atomic bomb; and she lost her father who was a journalist on August 6 when

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2. “No More *Hibakusha* Center for the Preservation of the Legacy of Memory”: <http://www.kiokuisan.jp/> It is written in Japanese.

the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Her entire family suffered from horrific injury and great hunger. She did not marry because she was told that a child of Hibakusha would be handicapped. Recently her sister's granddaughter heard her story and broke down crying while listening.<sup>3</sup>

Such testimonies would not be available if Hibakusha did not exist. So instead, they will be available at the archive of the No More *Hibakusha* Center for the Preservation of the Legacy of Memory in the near future. And these activities of ordinary people having recorded atomic bomb survivors will make a major contribution to peace research and peace education.

## 2. The Oral History of Hydrogen Bomb Survivors

The most well known Japanese fishing boat that was exposed to radiation by the U.S. hydrogen bomb test in 1954 is the 5<sup>th</sup> Lucky Dragon (Daigo Fikuryumaru). Aikichi Kuboyama, the captain, died because of illness caused by radiation. This event and his death triggered the peace movement against atomic and hydrogen bombs in Japan, similar to the reaction to those people who had suffered from the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. It's possible to learn about this history at Daigo Fukuryu Maru (Lucky Dragon) Exhibition Hall<sup>4</sup> founded in 1976 in Tokyo. It's explained in *Museums for Peace Worldwide* (Yamane, 2008, p.39) as follows:

The purpose of the Display House of the Fifth Lucky Dragon is "to disseminate the horror of the atomic & hydrogen bombs and the importance of peace by exhibiting the 5<sup>th</sup> Lucky Dragon, a tuna fishing boat, that was damaged by the U.S. hydrogen bomb test conducted on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands on March 1, 1954" according to a questionnaire by the author. The author visited the museum and learned the importance of educating visitors including children on the horror of nuclear tests.

Masatoshi Yamashita, a former high school teacher, researched hydrogen bomb survivors with his high school students. He created a group called Hata

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3. "My Atomic Bombed Experience with Five Family Members" in Newsletter No. 19 of Kyoto Association of the Second and Third Generation of Hibakusha published on May 15, 2014. It is written in Japanese.

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Seminar in 1983 and there were students from nine high schools in the Hata area in the western part of Kochi Prefecture. Around forty to sixty students were in the first group. He expected them to explore local history by themselves and they began to research what happened to fishermen in Kochi in 1985.

They found that there were a total of 992 boats that were exposed to radiation in Japan at that time. Many fishermen did not want to talk about their experiences but they started to talk because they were moved by the high school students search for truth and for making a better future. It was shocking for the students to find that a man named Setsuya Fujii was exposed to radiation twice - the first time in Nagasaki and the second time in the Marshall Islands by the U.S. hydrogen bomb test. He became sick, was hospitalized, and suffered so much that he committed suicide in 1960 at the age of twenty-seven.

The result of their study was published in a book called *The Sea of Bikini Will Never Forget* in 1988 and a film<sup>5</sup> with the same title was made in 1990. Yamashita's research of victims of the U.S. hydrogen bomb tests was recorded by a TV journalist named Hideaki Ito for eight years and a film called "After X Years" was produced and reported on TV in January, 2012. It started to be shown in various places in Japan. Many viewers were shocked to learn that many fishermen were exposed to radiation by the U.S. hydrogen bomb tests in 1954 and, as a result, prematurely died in their 40s and 50s because of cancer. They were also shocked to find out that they used to eat tuna without knowing that they too were being contaminated with radiation.

The tendency for the government to put an emphasis on economy rather than on safety in the 1950s can also be seen today in the situation after the Fukushima nuclear accident. This is because the true information has been hidden by TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) and the government. The TV viewers could clearly see some of the similarities of the present with the past in the film "After X Years," whose title implies that people in Fukushima would suffer from the effects of radiation just like the atomic and hydrogen bomb survivors.

Such films and also books have been used to promote peace education. It's interesting that peace research by teachers and students can lead to promoting peace education at their schools and in their local communities.

### **3. Recording Radiation Exposure during and after the Fukushima Nuclear Accident**

In 2011, according to the Fukui newspaper, Japan's Confederation of A-Bomb

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5. The film called "The Sea of Bikini Will Never Forget" was produced by Yasuyuki Mori in 1990.

and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations (Hidankyo) demanded that the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company issue health booklets to the victims of the Fukushima nuclear plant accident and provide state funded comprehensive health tests several times a year. Terumi Tanaka, the director of the confederation and an atomic bomb survivor, mentioned that it was important to record the condition of the sufferers who were exposed to radiation after the nuclear accident in Fukushima. His recommendation, however, was thwarted by a member of the government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency who officially rejected it.

Because the Japanese government and TEPCO refused to publish this health booklet, medical doctors, NGOs, and citizens including mothers published it anyways so that victims of the Fukushima nuclear accident would be able to record their physical and mental health conditions. The primary motivation of these experts was to ensure that the possibility would exist that these records could be used in court as proof of the effects of the deadly radiation on future generations.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Eisuke Matsui, an expert in radiology, believes that the health booklet would be able to sufficiently prove the relationship between many types of sicknesses and radiation. It should be noted that ordinary citizens including mothers worked diligently with medical doctors – hoping to also inspire further research about radiation related illnesses. Nonetheless, this type of research continues to be ignored by the government. Such research could be very important not only for Japan but for the entire world. This is because there are so many nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons.

Another example of researching effects of radiation is to investigate baby teeth because Strontium 90 tends to be accumulated in this part of the body. The Medical Association of Dentists in Fukushima has been cooperating with researchers at Tohoku University to investigate effects of Strontium 90 on children according to NHK news in 2014.<sup>7</sup> Doctors and researchers responded to the fears of ordinary people who were worried about the effects of radiation on their children. This research could not have been possible without cooperation of parents. Parents were asked to donate the baby teeth of their children ranging in ages from 5 to 15. The results of this research was also shared with the parents.

The Association for Citizens and Scientists Concerned about Internal Radiation Exposures, founded in 2011, has twenty-six inaugural members. Their

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6. "Health Booklet was published for victims of Fukushima nuclear accident" in Chunichi Newspaper on April 3 in 2014.

7. Finance Green Watch: <http://financegreenwatch.org/jp/?p=41618>



purpose is to study radiation exposure with an emphasis on internal radiation exposure and is explained as follows:

What is now needed is the promotion of truly scientific studies about the effects of radiation on the human body that are based on facts and actual radiation exposures including internal exposure and not on policies that promote nuclear weapons and nuclear power. This is an international issue and a task for all humankind. And it is now required that the effects of the Fukushima accident are dealt with scientifically and democratically from the viewpoint of citizens. This includes appropriate measures to protect food and drink from radiation contamination, compensation for the damage, and safeguards so that people can live and work without radiation exposure. The right of every citizen to live safely must be recognized. For this, we must establish the sovereignty of the people who are rightly provided with correct information about radiation exposure.<sup>8</sup>

This association has been playing very important roles in researching the effects of radiation on people and educating ordinary citizens because the true information has been hidden by the government, TEPCO, and the media. Therefore, cooperation between scientists and citizens is essential.

### **III. The Recording of Soldiers and Peacemakers**

Ms. Junko Nakata established the "Japanese Veterans Video Archive Project" in 2004. They've been recording interviews with World War II veterans, the army civilian employees from the old Japanese military, and the civilians who were in the front lines about their experiences in the battlefields. Their war experiences have been forgotten. Former soldiers and young people have cooperated to record these war experiences. Part of the process is to record them regardless of their political ideas and without using their real names.

Because Japan invaded many other countries, there are soldiers who were sent to different parts of the world. Their war experiences are arranged according to time and place. The resultant data is available in Japanese on the website: <http://www.jvvap.jp/>. The slogan of former soldiers who work for the Japanese Veterans Video Archive Project is "Is it possible to die without telling the truth?" It's not easy to understand World War II comprehensively, however, this website

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8. Objectives of the Association for Citizens and Scientists Concerned about Internal Radiation Exposures in <http://eng.acsir.org/objectives>.



could help people understand it better.

These recordings of soldiers are available at museums for peace and history museums. For example, a curator and a student had an interview with a former student soldier. This soldier's war experiences are available as a video at Kyoto Museum for World Peace at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto. It's the story of Former Professor Tadakuma Iwai who was drafted in 1943 when he was 21 years old while a student of Kyoto University. He was sent to a battlefield to work as a suicide bomber but somehow he miraculously survived. He criticized the present situation in Japan in which suicide bombers called "tokkoutai" are glorified because their actions could incite a war.

As for other well-known peacemakers, there are various books that can be read to learn about them. However, it should be noted that local peacemakers have been researched and the stories of their lives have been published. For example, Kou Makimura's life was researched by the late Shigeo Nishimori, a former high school teacher who founded the Grassroots House Peace Museum in 1989 in Kochi City. Kou Makimura, whose real name was Toyomichi Yoshida, was an anti-war poet who criticized World War II and was put into prison and tortured and died when he was twenty-six. His life was chronicled in a booklet called *A Beam of Light in Darkness* (Ankokuno Nakano Koubou) and it was edited by Shigeo Nishimori in 1994. It's interesting that this work was converted into a play in 2013: Ordinary citizens including some members of the Grassroots House performed in this play. The play is based on the research of Kou Makimura and the performance by citizens contributed to promoting peace education in the community.

## Conclusion

It's possible to promote peace research not only by researchers but also through the work of ordinary citizens - including college and university students.

Oral history is ignored by officials of the Japanese government who say that this type is not reliable. There are many events that have been intentionally hidden. They weren't written in school textbooks nor reported in the media. Much important and vital evidence of Japan's aggression was destroyed by the Japanese government and military after World War II and it was their means to escape punishment by foreign governments. One of the prime examples of these types of omissions is that women were forced to work as sex slaves for the Japanese military during World War II.

Ordinary citizens and students can play important roles in researching historical truth that can lead to reconciliation among conflicting countries such as Japan and China.

More peace research should be promoted by involving ordinary citizens and students. Peace education based on peace research should be promoted more locally, nationally, and globally.

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