

Hiroshima's Path to Reconstruction 1

Modernization of Hiroshima

Hiroshima as a City of Politics and Military Importance

The history of Hiroshima City began in 1589 with the construction of a castle located on the delta of the Ota River. Hiroshima was among several large castle towns in the Edo Period alongside Nagoya, Kanazawa and other major towns. After the Meiji Restoration, the town of Hiroshima became home to the Hiroshima Prefectural Government and the Hiroshima Garrison (later the Fifth Division) Headquarters of the Imperial Japanese Army. This helped the city maintain its position as the regional political and military center.



▲ The Imperial Headquarters were established in Hiroshima during the First Sino-Japanese War. (A picture postcard) (Courtesy of Hiroshima Municipal Archives)

Hiroshima's Industries

In the Meiji Era, Ujina Port was completed in 1889, and the railway (later the streetcar) began to operate. In addition, new bridges and road networks traversing the delta were built. In addition to the cotton-spinning industry, one of the earliest industries to construct modern large-scale factories in Hiroshima, the city became home to large-scale factories of the heavy and chemical industries in the inter-war period, and they developed as Hiroshima's major industries.



▲ A photo of Aoi Bridge in the Nakajima District, and the Industrial Promotion Hall taken from the Hiroshima Prefectural Commerce, Industry and Economic Reconstruction Commission Building (the present-day Hiroshima Chamber of Commerce and Industry), located at the end of Aoi Bridge, 1938. (Photo by Wataru Hiroshima)

Hiroshima as a City of Education

Hiroshima was a center of learning, boasting a variety of educational institutions. The state-run Hiroshima Higher Normal School, which opened in 1902, was known as the top school in the field of education in western Japan. Both Hiroshima Higher Normal School in the west and Tokyo Higher Normal School in the east provided superlative education in the country.

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War and Hiroshima, the Devastating Impact of the Atomic Bombing

At 8:15 in the morning of August 6, 1945, Enola Gay, a B-29 bomber, dropped an atomic bomb over Hiroshima. The bomb exploded in mid-air in a nuclear reaction, approximately 600 meters above the ground.

Number of Deaths from the Atomic Bombing

On August 6, at the time of the atomic bombing, it is estimated that there were about 350,000 people in Hiroshima City. According to data Hiroshima City provided to the United Nations in 1976, the number of deaths from the atomic bombing is estimated to have been 140,000 ± 10,000 at the end of 1945.

Heat Rays

In the moment the atomic bomb exploded and a gigantic fireball appeared, intense heat rays were emitted, causing the ground temperature of the surrounding area to reach between 3,000 to 4,000 degrees Celsius.

Bomb Blast

The intense bomb blast created wind speeds of up to 440 meters per second at the hypocenter. The blast spread out radially, sweeping the entire city in about 10 seconds. Wooden buildings located within a two-kilometer radius of the hypocenter were completely destroyed.

Radioactive Waves

At a distance of one kilometer from the hypocenter, the radiation level emitted from the bomb was estimated to be sufficient to kill one out of every two people. People who were not directly exposed to the bombing were also exposed to radiation from sources such as residual radiation or radioactive black rain, which immediately followed the explosion.

Rescue operations, the disposal of the dead and the removal of debris were carried out immediately after the bombing by the military. People searched everywhere for their lost parents, children and siblings. Many had to cremate the remains of their family members on their own. As unprecedented chaos unfolded, Hiroshima was blanketed in a cloud of grief and loss. Signs of the city's future reconstruction from the catastrophe were far, far in the distance.



▲ The mushroom cloud photographed from inside a U.S. military aircraft (Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum)



▲ Hiroshima in ruins, Oct. 5, 1945. (Photo by Shigeo Hayashi, Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum)

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Reconstruction Planning

Reconstruction Planning Immediately after the Atomic Bombing

The atomic bombing completely destroyed the city, including buildings as well as public infrastructure, such as the transportation and communication facilities and water and sewage systems. The citizens of Hiroshima City worked hard on emergency infrastructure restoration from the catastrophic damage.

Restoration of Infrastructure

It is said that the trains and streetcars were among the first services to be restored. As a result of hard work, on August 9, three days after the bombing, streetcar operations partially resumed in one section. The water-supply system was also heavily damaged. Water pumps resumed operation four days after the bombing. However, water leaked and spouted at many places in the city. It is said that it took nine months to restore the water supply to the outskirts of the city. In the meantime, ground water was hand-pumped at many places after the war. The sewage system in Hiroshima was also seriously damaged. The situation gradually improved through efforts including the emergency restoration of the drainage pumping stations and the clean-up and maintenance of the sewer pipes.

Reconstruction Plan Put into Action

As for the reconstruction plan, 34 reconstruction plans were proposed by citizens, government officials, and others. Ambitious plans for roads, including 100-meter wide thoroughfares, parks, green areas, and land adjustments to secure land for infrastructure were formulated. Various forms of aid and support from overseas helped Hiroshima citizens overcome the crisis that followed in the aftermath of the bombing.



▲ A photo of the reconstruction of Aoi Bridge located in the Nakajima District (Photo by Yoshio Kishimoto, Courtesy of Hiroshi Kichimoto)



▲ Proposed recreation plan of Hiroshima. (Courtesy of the Cultural Promotion Division, Culture and Sports Department, City of Hiroshima, Hiroshima City. Created by Yoshiaki Aoshi)

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The Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law

Enactment of a Special Law

The reconstruction planning encountered many problems such as financial difficulties and shortages of public land. In order to cope with these conditions, local people concerned lobbied the national government and the Diet. As a result, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law was enacted as a special law based on Article 95 of the Constitution of Japan in 1949. The law was supported by a local referendum, and was promulgated and enforced on August 6 of that year (1949).

The enactment of this special law paved the way for special assistance from the national government and the transfer of national government properties, and pushed the reconstruction efforts forward. In addition, Hiroshima City was designated a "peace memorial city," stipulated as follows: "Hiroshima is to be a peace memorial city symbolizing the human ideal of the sincere pursuit of genuine and lasting peace." With the establishment of this law, a special project to construct "peace memorial facilities" was approved.

Construction of the Peace Memorial Park

In 1949, a design competition for the Peace Memorial Park was conducted. First prize was awarded to a design submitted by Kenzo Tange's group.

In 1955, four years after the start of the construction work, the construction of the display hall—which later became the main building of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum—and of the Peace Memorial Hall, today's Peace Memorial Museum's East Building, were completed.

The benefits of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law were extensive—not only limited to special financial assistance from the national government. The law also provided moral support to the citizens by assuring them that the national government was watching over and assisting them, thereby accelerating the reconstruction. The efforts made by those in Hiroshima were not the only factors that played important roles in Hiroshima's reconstruction process; both the physical and the moral support played significant roles.



▲ The center of the museum (in the South), the Cenotaph for the A-bomb Victims (in the center) and the A-bomb Dome (in the North) lie on a straight line.



▲ The display hall under construction (July 1, 1952) (Courtesy of Hiroshima Municipal Archives)

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Pains Accompanying Redevelopment and Reconstruction

Spread of Illegal Constructions

In the areas designated as roads, parks, and the riverbank greenbelts under the Reconstruction Plan, clusters of illegal housing shops had been constructed by citizens who had lost their homes. The harsh reality was that the first step in reconstruction had to begin with the compulsory removal of such illegal buildings (in some locations).

Houses in the Peace Memorial Park

The Nakajima district, which would later become the Peace Memorial Park, had a dense concentration of houses, shops, and recreational facilities before the atomic bombing. After the war, the large area was designated as a space for a park, and the residents were forced to relocate to other places. The residents in this area were not able to rebuild their communities as they had no choice but to live separately in different locations.

Housing Construction Immediately after the War

The Moto-machi district was the embodiment of a military city with many military facilities. As the Moto-machi district was located a short distance—just one kilometer—from the hypocenter, it suffered devastating human and physical damage and, as a measure to counteract the lack of residences, emergency housing was built. Later, the old public housing was replaced with mid-rise housing complexes. The construction of mid-rise housing complexes did not lead to the removal of all of the old and illegal structures from the densely packed housing clusters. Redevelopment of this area was the biggest task in the final stage of the war-damage reconstruction project in Hiroshima.

In March 1969, the Moto-machi district was designated by the national government as an area to be developed, and the redevelopment project in the district started. Along the riverbanks, forcible evictions from the illegally built homes were conducted as the greenbelts were developed, and high-rise apartment complexes were built by the residential area improvement project. The mall in the center, the rooftop gardens, and the piloti were also constructed in addition to housing. Today, the high-rise apartment complexes in Moto-machi have become historic structures that tell the story of Hiroshima's reconstruction processes.



▲ Peace Memorial Ceremony held in 1992 (Courtesy of the Chugoku Shimbun)



▲ A photo of mid-rise housing being constructed (Courtesy of the Yomiuri Shimbun (Osaka headquarter))

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Rebuilding the Industrial Economy

The number of employees in manufacturing firms with five or more full-time workers in Hiroshima Prefecture returned to prewar levels between 1947 and 1948.



▲ A photo of a new manufacturing factory in Kenso-Tennocho in 1947 (Photo by Shunichi Kishi, Courtesy of Harumi Tago)

Data shows that the number of very small factories that were primarily family-run and established in areas near the hypocenter decreased sharply due to the A-bombing, preventing their continued operation. After being freed from focusing on manufacturing for the war industry, people from various backgrounds worked to establish new businesses through their robust entrepreneurship. In the 1950s, a highly dense agglomeration of "primary supporting industries" had formed at the center of Hiroshima City and supported the production of major enterprises.

Reconstruction of the Industrial Economy

A high concentration of manufacturing in Hiroshima City in proportion to its population

Both factories and workers were devastated by the A-bombing.

Factors contributing to the quick rebuilding of Hiroshima's industrial economy after the A-bombing

- ◆ Inflow of workers from outside the city
- ◆ Active capital investments
- ◆ A large stock of workers (both male and female)
- ◆ Smooth transformation of the military facilities to private companies

[Hiroshima Prefecture]

- ◆ Special procurement for the Korean War (1950–1953)
- ◆ "Productive Prefecture Plan" and the thriving of manufacturing including the shipbuilding industry



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Medical Care and Support for A-bomb Survivors



Medical facilities and healthcare professionals in Hiroshima City also suffered devastating damage and casualties from the atomic bombing. All medical facilities, except those made of reinforced concrete, were destroyed. A total of 2,168 (91%) out of the 2,370 healthcare professionals in Hiroshima City were exposed to the atomic bombing.

Relief Activities Immediately after the A-bombing

There were 298 physicians in Hiroshima City at the time of the bombing. Of these, 90% were affected and only 28 physicians escaped injury. The healthcare professionals who narrowly escaped death treated people in hurriedly set-up relief stations. Rescue teams came to help from within and outside the prefecture. In addition, when informed of the appalling conditions in Hiroshima, Dr. Marcel Junod, the new head of the International Committee of the Red Cross' delegation in Japan, who arrived in Japan on August 9, 1945, visited Hiroshima himself. He brought pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, and took part in the relief activities.



▲ A photo of a mother and her daughter at a relief station (Photo by Miyuki Hiki, Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum)

Formation of a Law Providing Medical Benefits to A-bomb Survivors

In 1954, the Daigo Fukuryu Maru (Luck Dragon No. 5), a Japanese fishing boat, encountered nuclear fallout ("ashes of death") from a hydrogen bomb test conducted by the United States at Bikini Atoll. After the Bikini Atoll incident, action to petition the national government to support A-bomb survivors began. This action spurred the formation of a law providing medical benefits to A-bomb survivors. It was a major step forward in the health and medical care and welfare of A-bomb survivors.



▲ A photo of Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital around October 1945 (Photo by Toshiro Kawamoto, Courtesy of Yoshio Kawamoto)

Restoration of Medical Facilities

In its prewar days, Hiroshima Prefecture was home to a number of military hospitals. After the war, military hospitals and the Japan Medical Treatment Corporation hospitals were diverted to national and prefectural hospitals. This helped increase the number of public hospitals in Hiroshima Prefecture to 74 by the early 1950s.

Hiroshima's Path to Reconstruction

Media and Reconstruction



Devastation of the A-bombing

The building of the Chugoku Shimbun, which had continued to issue the only newspaper in Hiroshima Prefecture at the time and was equipped with two rotary printing presses, was completely incinerated in the bombing.



▲ Photo taken on Miyuki Bridge, immediately after the bombing (Photo by Miyuki Hiki, Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum)



▲ The city center of Hiroshima, three months after the bombing (Photo taken in November 1945, Courtesy of the Chugoku Shimbun)

The photo (on the left), taken some 2.2 kilometers from the hypocenter just past 11 a.m. on August 6, depicts A-bomb victims on Miyuki Bridge. It was taken by Yoshio Matsushige, a photographer from the photo division of the Chugoku Shimbun. The photos that Matsushige took on the day of the bombing came to represent the devastation of the A-bombing. As the head office of the Chugoku Shimbun was completely burned, they could not run these photos in the newspaper. The first publication of these photos was in the Yukan Hiroshima dated July 6, 1946.

Coverage of the Atomic Bombing under the Occupation

The war ended for Japan on August 15, 1945. During the confusion that came with the defeat, on August 19, a photo of the ruins of Hiroshima was featured in newspapers. After the occupation of Japan by the General Headquarters (GHQ) began, coverage of the atomic bombing was blocked. The media did not completely throw off its yoke and self-imposed regulation until Japan recovered its sovereignty in April 1952.

Media and the Atomic Bombings and the Peace Movement

Later, a national movement demanding the banning of atomic and hydrogen bombs and a movement by A-bomb survivors seeking support in the form of state reparations began following the Bikini Atoll Incident in March 1954. The media responded to these movements by creating a foundation for the coverage of the atomic bombings and peace, and dealt with the issue of nuclear weapons from a humanist perspective, since people are the ones who suffer from the effects of nuclear weapons.

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A City in Search of Peace



Peace Administration

Hiroshima City's peace administration undertook the significant role of creating a new identity for Hiroshima. Two years after the bombing, in 1947, the first Peace Festival was held under the slogan of promoting a lasting peace. Today, at the Peace Memorial Ceremony (to console the souls of those who were lost due to the atomic bombing as well as to pray for the realization of everlasting world peace), the Mayor of Hiroshima delivers the Peace Declaration and conveys Hiroshima's wish for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the realization of lasting world peace.



▲ Peace Memorial Ceremony held on August 6, every year and participated in by 40,000-50,000 people (Courtesy of the Public Relations Division, City of Hiroshima)



▲ A member of the Hiroshima Paper Crane Club making a donation toward the preservation of the A-bomb Dome (Photo by Toshiro Kawamoto, Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum)

Peace Movements

Some were of the opinion that the A-bomb Dome should be preserved, while others felt that it should be torn down. However, as the A-bomb structures gradually disappeared, public support for preserving the A-bomb dome strengthened. Hiroshima City decided to preserve the A-bomb Dome, and a fundraising campaign to cover the necessary costs began. As a result, donations poured in, far surpassing the goal. There have been other efforts to highlight the realities of the atomic bombing and pass them on to future generations. Particularly, the map restoration project of the A-bomb areas led to the formation of various citizens' organizations with objectives including praying for the repose of the A-bomb victims.

Restart of Schools and Peace Education

The majority of the A-bomb schools were used as temporary relief stations for the injured. Therefore, it was impossible to conduct classes at school immediately after the war. However, the first action taken toward resuming classes was quick and, in September, schools had resumed classes. In 1947, the Fundamental Law of Education based on the Courses of Study as the standard for curricula was enacted, and the academic abilities of Japanese children gradually but steadily improved. Worried that the experience of the atomic bombing may become forgotten as the country became more affluent, in 1969, a movement began promoting peace education focused on passing down A-bomb experiences to the next generation. A movement to promote school trip visits to the A-bomb cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which started in the 1970s, was particularly instrumental in stimulating peace education nationwide.

"Hiroshima Global Peace" Plan



As an area destroyed by the first atomic bombing in human history and subsequently reconstructed from ashes, in October 2011, Hiroshima compiled a "Hiroshima Global Peace" Plan outlining the roles that it should play in the process of abolishing nuclear weapons and worldwide reconstruction/peacebuilding efforts, for the realization of world peace.



The Two Concepts That Hiroshima Symbolizes

A concept that developed from the region's experience of being destroyed by an atomic bomb: "the determination to abolish nuclear weapons"

A concept that developed from the region's experience of reconstructing from ruins: "the assurance that reconstruction is possible and that there is hope for the future"

Actions toward the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

- ◆ Continuing to send out the message of abolishing nuclear weapons
- ◆ Encouraging the world to enhance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation

Actions toward Building Peace

- ◆ Developing human resources necessary for reconstruction work and peacebuilding
- ◆ Encouraging the accumulation of research findings for building reconstruction projects and peace
- ◆ Offering a venue for dialogues on building peace to take place

Building a Sustainable Peace-supporting Mechanism

- ◆ Creating a mechanism that allows peace activities to be performed without interruption by bringing, gathering and uniting resources including people, ideas, information, and financial investments from around the world

Examples of Actions With the hope of contributing still further to nuclear disarmament, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction



Holding a Hiroshima Roundtable conference to discuss disarmament and arms control in East Asia



Implementing the Hiroshima Reconstruction and Peacebuilding Research Project, which aims to study and analyze Hiroshima's reconstruction process and disseminate its findings throughout the world



Providing support to the Philippines, Mindanao (the Philippines), Cambodia and Afghanistan for the development of human resources necessary for creating stable societies



Issuing the Hiroshima Report, which presents a summarized evaluation of the efforts made by each