

## Lecture

# Conveying the Memories of the A-Bomb Experience: Building a Museum of Heritage for Future Generations

Kenji SHIGA

Director of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Thank you for your kind introduction. I am Kenji Shiga from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

The title of my talk today is, “Conveying the Memories of the Atomic-Bomb Experience”. I will be reporting briefly on the activities of our museum, or rather, given the challenges that the museum is faced with, I hope you will bear with me as I share with you some of my concerns.



For the last sixty-two years our museum has constantly strived, through a variety of exhibitions, to fulfil its mission to convey the events that happened under the mushroom cloud in Hiroshima on the sixth of August 1945.

Displays are especially designed in such a way as to let the bombed artifacts and relevant items tell their stories.

For today’s presentation, I will be talking about the history of the museum, including the issues and challenges that we have faced. With these in mind, I will then discuss the future prospects and mission of the museum.



Let us begin with our history. In the photo on the screen you can see the founding Director of the museum, circled in red. All photographs shown in this presentation are from the Hiroshima Peace Museum Collection.



(Courtesy of Yūichirō Sasaki)

He began collecting items immediately, starting the day after the explosion. This picture was probably taken around 1949. It shows how our predecessors started exhibiting these items in a rented room in the community hall.



(Courtesy of Shizuko Fukushima)

I repeat, the collection began on the seventh of August 1945, the day after the Atomic explosion over Hiroshima. The current museum was opened in 1955 and is the building you can see in the center of the photo. The buildings on both sides no longer exist.



(Photograph by Yūichirō Sasaki,  
Courtesy of Yūgo Shioura )

The next photo shows how the exhibits were displayed then.



(Courtesy of Shizuko Fukushima)

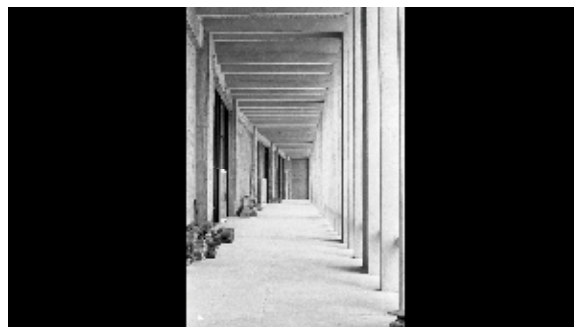
The arrangements were very simple then. Items were just randomly displayed on the floor as was the custom at the time. Some say, however, that they had a more unearthly impact that way as you see in the next few photographs.



(Still photo: Alain Resnais, “Hiroshima  
mon mour”)



(Courtesy of Shōgo Nagaoka)



(Courtesy of Shōgo Nagaoka)



(Courtesy of Shōgo Nagaoka)

The museum was opened on the twenty-fourth of August 1955 and, on the twenty-seventh of May the following year, the first exhibition was held in this building. It was called the “Atoms for Peace Exhibition (Genshiryoku Heiwa Riyō Hakurankai).”

To make room for the exhibits, which were promoting the future of atomic power, the artifacts from the Atomic-Bombing of Hiroshima in our own collection were temporarily transferred back to the Community Town Hall – as you see here.



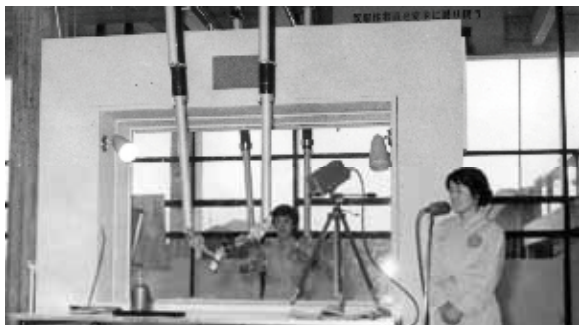
(Photograph by Yūichirō Sasaki,  
Courtesy of Yūgo Shioura )



(Still photo: Alain Resnais, “Hiroshima  
mon mour”)

The top attraction of the exhibition was the magic hands, mechanical arms

used to manipulate radioactive substances. What you see on the left of the room is a so-called nuclear aircraft and here is the magic hand.



Actually, the exhibition ended after one month and the museum's collection was returned from the Town Hall back to this building. For many years after that, as you see in this picture, the two collections were exhibited side by side. Visitors to the museum would look at the bombed materials first, before proceeding to the display promoting the future of nuclear power.



(Courtesy of Shōgo Nagaoka)

The message must have been something like: the nuclear power used for war had devastating consequences, but its peaceful, civilian use could open

up great future possibilities. This continued until 1967.

Let us see a short film extract showing the interior of the museum building in those days.

<A short extract played and stopped>

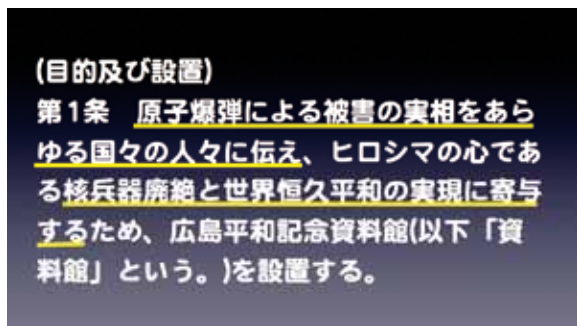
We have seen how, in those days, the A-bomb artifacts were displayed together with items heralding the future of nuclear power.

The extract was from a French film called "Hiroshima Mon Amour" by Alain Resnais released in 1959. The interior of the museum you saw was shot in the autumn of 1958. In those days, such displays (e.g. "magic hand" and "nuclear aircraft") did not seem to raise any eyebrows. The film, by the way, was recently reissued in high resolution Blu-ray.

This photo shows the museum building as it looks today. The East building was a later addition. Both buildings display our collections. The one in the middle is the original 1955 building, which has been designated as an Important Cultural Property of Japan.

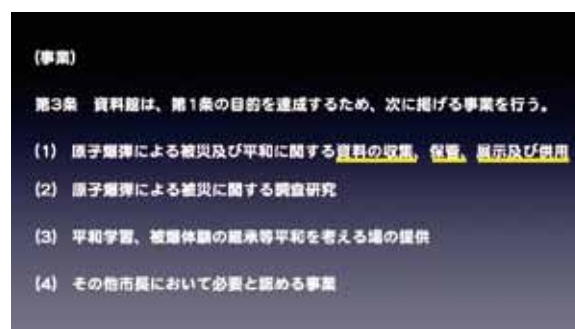
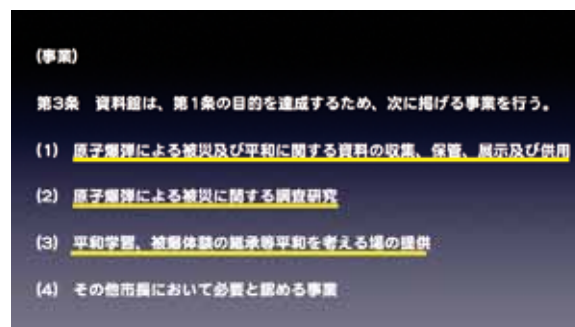


I will now talk about the challenges we face but, before moving on, may I refer to the Ordinance of Hiroshima City that provided the basis for the establishment of this museum. According to the ordinance, the purpose of establishing the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum was to, “communicate to people of every country the reality of the damage caused by the Atomic-Bombing”, and to, “contribute to the abolition of nuclear weapons and the realization of everlasting global peace.”



To fulfil these two founding purposes, the following activities are still being carried out. First, we collect objects pertaining to the damage caused by the Atomic-Bombing, as well as resources for peace and we preserve, display and share them with interested parties through lending schemes. Second, we study the facts about the damage caused by the Atomic-Bombing. Third, we create and offer a space for interested parties to discuss peace through, for example, peace education and passing on the Atomic-Bomb

experience. These three tasks are the designated activities of our museum.



Now I shall describe each of the activities in more detail, namely: collection, preservation, display and loan. The first task is the collection of materials. The photos I am going to show you used to belong to different public organizations.





Their catalogue numbers are visible on the photos, underlined in red. These, from America, used to be housed in the Library of Congress and the National Museums of the US Navy and Army and could be accessed by the public. The museums are located in rather remote areas, but we have been visiting them over the last two years to collect these photos. Our staff visited there again this year.

In addition, many researchers, military personnel and journalists have visited Hiroshima in the past and they also took away a variety of artifacts. Before these get scattered, and lost, and without meaning to cause any offense, we want to claim them back so that we can investigate what actually happened in Hiroshima on that day. This is the recovery work that we are currently undertaking.

To do so, however, we must first locate these artifacts. We are currently investigating reports that some of them might have been kept elsewhere in Russia. Hopefully we will have an opportunity to find out more.

The next task is to prevent the artifacts from deteriorating and this causes us a major headache. This is a photo of a pocket watch in our collection. You see that the hands are pointing to precisely 8:15, the moment it stopped ticking. This is a famous watch whose image appears not only in our catalogue, but in many other places around the world.



Before the sixth of August each year, we thoroughly clean the interior of our museum. One day all the staff were cleaning the exhibits after the closing time when one of them found that the watch's hour hand was broken. I shall enlarge the picture – you see that the hour hand is, indeed, broken.



This is likely due to corrosion. When we discovered this a year ago, exactly seventy-years after the Atomic-Bombing, we were appalled. Seventy years is a long time, however, and that was when we suddenly remembered the extreme conditions that the watch had gone through on that day. It was burnt by a heat-ray of thousands of degrees, blown away in a violent blast and exposed to a tremendous amount of radiation. Given

these conditions, the watch should have been treated to prevent deterioration by ageing, in order to preserve it for longer than just seventy years.

We not only house these physical artifacts, we also have a large number of films, shot in Hiroshima after the bomb. Some of them were stored in protective film cases which, at the time, were the best available. The films have, however, continued to deteriorate to the point where, unfortunately, we can no longer develop any images from them. Materials like these need urgent treatment.



<Video starts>

The next film shows how our museum manages the storage of the large amount of artifacts in its care.

This is our storage room. The temperature is maintained at a constant twenty degrees Celsius and the moisture level at fifty per cent, twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. Each artifact is housed individually in an acrylic case.

These types of objects are carefully wrapped in handcrafted Japanese paper. Each of them has a unique serial code (identifier) for easy retrieval.

This one is a lunchbox that belonged to Miss. Watanabe Reiko. She was a student. The lunchbox was returned to her parents because her name was on it. Her remains, however, were never recovered.

This room looks a little different. These are wooden chests of drawers that house fiber-based materials. To avoid insect damage, clothing, leather-based objects, or papers are placed inside these paulownia chests which are full to the brim. These materials are also facing imminent risk of deterioration.

<The film ends>

Another kind of artifact in our collection are drawings and paintings by hibakusha.



They are not works by professional artists but, even so, they vividly convey the astonishing horror of the scenes of that day. Currently we house about five

thousand such drawings and, even today, we still continue to receive them.

As you see in this example the top section is missing.



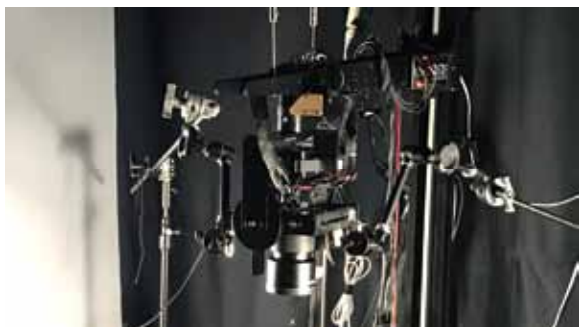
The materials they used are generally of poor quality. Some were drawn on the back of a newspaper advertising flyer with crayons, presumably borrowed from a child. Yet the scenes depicted are vivid reflections of that day: the memories still vividly etched in the artist's mind.



As I mentioned earlier, urgent preservation of the museum's collection against deterioration is our top priority. I will explain below how this is being done.

What you see on the screen is an NHK 8K Super Hi-Vision camera with built-in ultra-high-definition video and 3D audio.





I am not an expert on the technical specs, but it is enough to say its resolution is, I suppose, sixteen times greater than that of a domestic HDTV set. That is a tremendously high resolution and this camera has been used to create digital archives of the survivors' drawings (\*published in English as "The Unforgettable Fire").

It took the team more than a month to complete the shoot.



Each drawing was painstakingly photographed with great care. This compilation has been used by NHK in a promotional film, which I believe will be broadcast soon, but we are also planning to show the film on a hundred-inch high-resolution monitor at our museum.

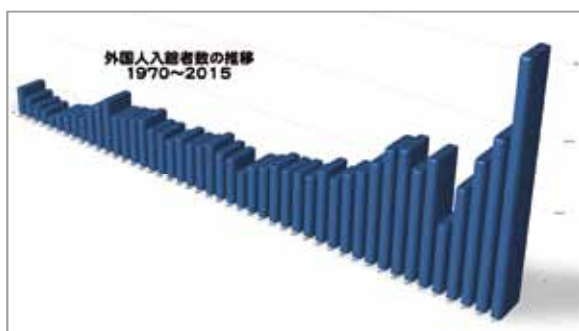
While watching this super hi-vision film, I was struck by the details of the drawings. They are not skillfully done, but the depictions in each drawing are truly moving.

Another task is to preserve the film collection. We have cleaned and digitalized the sixteen-millimeter films that have been entrusted to us by survivors. This one was shot in the streets of Kamiyachō and the previous one was in the Peace Park area. Thus, digitalization is one of the key methods used to combat deterioration by aging.



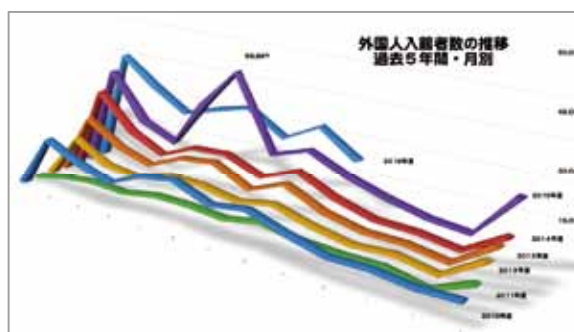
(Still photo, Courtesy of Genjirō Kawasaki)

The next challenge is how to display the artifacts. Perhaps this is a luxury rather than a challenge, but we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of visitors recently. In the last year alone, we recorded 1.74 million visitors to our museum. A humble facility like ours cannot cope with such great numbers, but we have certainly seen a rapid increase in the past few years. In this graph, the top bar indicates the total number of visitors, the light green shows the number of visitors from abroad. Clearly, it is the overseas visitors who are pushing up the numbers.

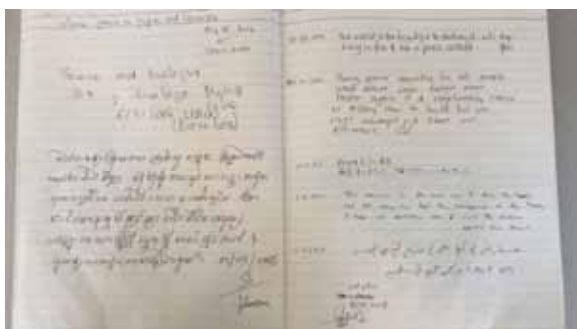


So, the challenge is how to adjust to the rapid increase of overseas visitors.

Since 1970, when we began recording the number of foreign visitors, we have seen a steady increase in the number of visitors from abroad. The only exception was in 2011, when the number significantly decreased, perhaps due to the Fukushima disaster following the 3.11 Great East Japan earthquake, but it quickly picked up the following year and has continued to surge, setting the record of 1.74 million visitors last year. A monthly breakdown is also available. As you see here, each year the popular period for foreign visitors begins in July, peaks in August, and tails off afterwards.



The challenge with foreign visitors is, actually, the language variety: how to cater for them multi-linguistically. We ask visitors to leave comments on the “Dialogue Note”, which is a visitors’ book placed in the hall of the museum. As you see on the screen, a lot of the comments are written in languages which are unfamiliar to us.



Of course, we have not sat back and done nothing about this. Until recently, we had audio guides in seventeen languages although, during the current renovations, we only have them in English and Japanese.



We plan to bring the other fifteen back once the museum fully re-opens.

We investigated which languages provided on the audio guides are most frequently used. The red block in this graph represents Chinese. The surge in the number of Chinese-speaking guests is truly astonishing. Languages indicated in yellow block are also rapidly increasing. These are European languages including English and German, followed by Italian and Spanish. For the

English-speaking audience today I have prepared slides in English here.

In all honesty, however, these figures are not really accurate, because the audio guides have long since passed the machines' service life and many have been broken or are out on loan. This has been the situation for quite some time, as some of the museum's volunteer guides in the audience will know. We do hope to buy new machines but, currently, less than three hundred machines are in constant use.

To tackle the linguistic challenges, we are using touch-panel monitors with recorded guides in seventeen languages. This photo shows a section of the newly opened East building. On the wall next to each exhibit is a description, written in four languages. The Japanese description is written vertically, close to the English which is given at the top, followed by Mainland Simplified Chinese in the second paragraph, and Korean Hangul in the third. A summary of these are also provided in seventeen languages on the touch-panel monitor in each exhibition area.





Next, I would like to discuss the project of passing on the Atomic-Bomb experience while, at the same time, offering a venue for people to reflect on peace. The biggest challenge is taking Atomic-Bomb related exhibitions abroad twice a year.



This shows an exhibition in Zagreb, Croatia. Curators there created an exceptionally thoughtful exhibition using the items we loaned them.



This is because a written description is possible only in Japanese and English due to the limited space available (and we state this on each descriptive panel). The total number of languages we plan to offer in the future will be seventeen, including sign language. The quality of translation, however, is another headache. Despite thorough proofreading and consultation we continue to receive complaints of mistranslation in all languages.



These pictures were taken in Spain.



Last year's exhibition was in Chicago.



To commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Atomic-Bombings we had an exhibition at the American University in Washington D.C. which received a vast number of visitors.



And this year's is currently open in Budapest. This photo was taken during its opening ceremony. This one, too. As we sent kitchenware exposed to the Atomic-Bomb, the staff of the Hungarian museum thoughtfully created a setting that looks like a Japanese kitchen with a Japanese-style chest.





In addition, an Atomic-Bomb-themed contemporary art exhibition is concurrently running. For example, this one, created by Hungarian artists, is a contemporary representation of the black rain. It was, perhaps, inspired by the next drawing of the Atomic-Bomb experience, drawn by a survivor. Looking at these photos, I hope you can see how each museum designs an original exhibition with the items we loan them.

Another issue is the choice of venue. It is not an easy task to find a museum or art gallery that can provide an ideal venue when display conditions and environment are taken into consideration.

Excuse me, I just realized that my time is nearly up, so I would like to jump to the topic of the future outlook for our

museum. If I may, I would like to share more details of our challenges on another occasion.

There is probably no need to point out that the former President of the United States, Mr. Obama, visited our museum on May 27, 2016. I would like to share some reflections from that event as my conclusion.

Just over twenty years ago, in 1995, we and the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum planned to jointly organize an exhibition with the title, Kurosurodo, or “Crossroads” in English.



The exhibition was proposed by the Museum in Washington D.C., who contacted us requesting the loan of material from our collections. We read a draft of their plans and found them quite

objective and, thus, we decided to agree to the loan.

1993年 春 特別企画展開催を立案。  
『クロスロード (分岐点) —第2次世界大戦の終結、原子爆弾、そして冷戦の始まり—』

1993年 4月 スミソニアン航空宇宙博物館館長米広。被爆資料の貸出協議。  
7月 展示計画書到着。  
10月 特別企画展での展示希望「被爆資料リスト」到着。  
11月 広島市「被爆資料」の貸出決定。



In the following year, however, the U.S. Senate voted against the exhibition, reasoning that it contradicted their justification of the Atomic Bombings. The Smithsonian exhibition committee also followed suit and cancelled the project. This was in 1995, more than twenty years ago.



1994年 9月 米国上院、「エノラ・ゲイは第2次世界大戦を慈悲深く終わらせた。」とする決議採択。特別企画展の内容を修正主義的と攻撃。

11月 企画展の名称を、変更。  
『ラスト・アクト (最終幕) —原子爆弾と第2次世界大戦の終結—』

1995年 1月 スミソニアン協会が30日の評議員会で企画展の事実上の中止を決定。



This picture shows the Enola Gay aircraft exhibited there today.



The idea was to exhibit the Enola Gay aircraft and the devastation that it

brought about concurrently, but the plan was derailed. As a result, U.S. citizens lost the chance to see what happened under the mushroom cloud. The U.S. government decided there was no need to see the reality - although this is, perhaps, too strong a statement.

In defiance, we launched our overseas touring Atomic-Bombing Exhibitions, mentioned earlier, as if to say, “if you don’t invite us to show them, we will bring them to you anyway.” Twenty-one years later, the president came to Hiroshima and saw with his own eyes the exhibits showing what happened under the mushroom cloud. His visit was interpreted as a catalyst for the lowering of the barriers preventing U.S. citizens from coming to our museum.

our museum we take pride in. We also like to think that Mr. Obama’s visit may be some indication that our museum’s efforts to be accountable have been recognized.



いつの日か、証人としての被爆者の声を聞く  
ことがかなわなくなる日が来ます。けれども  
1945年8月6日の朝の記憶が薄れるような  
ことがあってはなりません。

「平和記念公園におけるバラク・オバマ大統領の演説」

米国大使館Webサイト

世界中の全ての人々が、平和記念資料館が持つ力を目で  
見て感じるべきです。

資料館は、核兵器の脅威に終止符を打つことだけでなく、  
戦争そのものの回避に全力を傾けることが我々の責務であると、  
明白、厳格かつ説得力のある形で思い出させてくれます。  
戦争は最終手段であるべきであり、第一の選択肢にしてはなりません。

この資料館では誰もが、世界を変え、平和を見つけ、  
世界中の人々が切望している未来を築くために一層の努力  
をする気持ちになります。

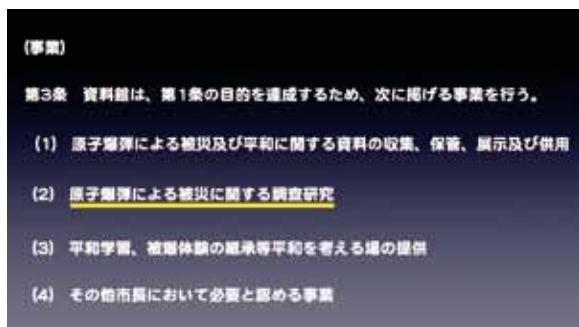
第68代アメリカ合衆国国務長官 ジョン・フォーブズ・ケリー

At the same time, we have continued to depict the reality of the Atomic-Bombings in our exhibitions in a comprehensive historical context as best as we can. We strive to do so in an academic and, perhaps, dare we say, objective way. Our visitors frequently post reviews of our exhibitions on travel websites such as TripAdvisor as “well-balanced and impartial”, a feature of

In that sense, we continue to aim to plan exhibitions based on sound academic research outcomes that narrate why the Atomic-Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and what that has entailed.

I'll hasten to add a topic that I skipped earlier. As regards research studies, we are aware that we need to put more effort into research and hope to strengthen our cooperation, collaboration and mutual support with research institutes and organizations.





There are many museums with similar themes to ours. For example, this is the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.



We visited there in June 2017 and had a meeting with their deputy director. We concurred on the challenges that both museums are facing and agreed to continue mutual support through the exchange of information.

Turning to the States, this is the Battleship Missouri Memorial and this one is the USS Arizona Memorial. We are planning to visit them, too. I have not brought a photo today, but a visit to the National September 11 Memorial & Museum is also in sight. Moreover, we will be visiting the Arizona in mid-September in 2017.

These research-oriented visits are conducted for serious reasons. Thus far, our museum has managed its journey having been supported by the hibakusha with their first-hand experience of the Atomic-Bombings. In the not-too-distant future, however, they will be no longer with us. When that day comes, the museum must be able to stand on the authentic foundation of academic research and, thus we must give this paramount weight in our future planning.

Lastly, there is one more topic I should like to mention on behalf of the organizers of a conference that you see on the screen. An international conference of museums will be held in Kyoto in 2019. Staff from museums and interested groups worldwide will be attending it. The organizing committee has asked us

to host the ICMEMO (International Committee of Memorial Museums), which is a subcommittee meeting, in Hiroshima. The members of ICMEMO are museums with similar themes to ours and this is a good opportunity to build an inter-museum cooperation network.



This concludes my presentation. I had to rush through some parts of my presentation and I apologize for the overrun. Thank you very much indeed for your attention.