

<SPECIAL ISSUE>

## **Atomic Bomb Survivors' Messages for Future Generations: Insights from the Process of Testifying to Their Lived Experiences for Peace**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to systematically understand how Japanese atomic bomb survivors (Hibakusha) confront their experiences and construct peace messages. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Hibakusha aged 84–92 years who mainly testified to children from elementary to high school. In the interviews, participants were asked about their motivations, conflicts, and perspectives on peace. As a result of category analysis, a Modified Grounded Theory Approach, six Categories and 22 Concepts were generated and presented as conceptual diagrams. The results indicate that Hibakusha struggled with challenges, such as recalling traumatic events, societal discrimination, and internal conflict, with the psychological invasion of sharing their experiences. However, motivated by a sense of being understood by non-victims about their desire for peace and responsibility to prevent a similar tragedy and a growing sense of danger due to waning peace awareness, they were encouraged to share their experiences. The findings show that sharing tragic historical memories is a reciprocal process between the narrator and listener, with narrators allowing their memories to be interpreted and contextualized by others. This reveals that the environment and attitudes of listeners impact the feasibility and nature of the victims' testimonies.

**Keywords:** Atomic bomb, *Hibakusha*, Historical testimony, Peace education, Hiroshima

### **Issues and Objectives**

The atomic bomb is a symbol of violence that has defied human dignity and the value of peace. This serves as an important lesson for Japan as well as people worldwide. The impact of the atomic bomb continues to affect several people, and it is essential to pass down the history to prevent similar tragic events from recurring. In Japanese educational settings, testimonies from the actual victims of the atomic bombings, referred to as “Hibakusha,” have been a significant part of peace education. Various challenges and conflicts are envisioned when victims narrate their experiences and convey messages of peace. Systematically clarifying how Hibakusha interprets their bombing experiences and decides to narrate them and what they attempt to convey as their message of peace is crucial for understanding the practice of learning about the impact of atomic bombings in

Japan. Therefore, this study aims to understand the process by which the Hibakusha confront their memories of the bombing and construct the meaning of peace in their experiences.

***The Historical Context of How Atomic Bombing Experiences Were Discussed in Educational Spaces***

Murakami (1997) states, “Peace education in Japan has been centered around ‘anti-war peace education’ that focuses on inheriting the wartime experiences of World War II.” This comprehensive understanding of post-war Japanese peace education is shared among peace education researchers (Ito, 1995; Takeuchi, 2006). In postwar Japanese peace education practice, social science learning as well as a vast array of practices and teaching materials, including war children’s literature, extracurricular learning, and school trips, have been developed. Furthermore, multifaceted learning about war victims’ experiences and perpetration, cooperation/complicity, and resistance have been advocated and developed. In particular, the “atomic bomb education” related to Hiroshima and Nagasaki is recognized for its diverse accumulation of practices (Takeuchi, 2006).

In Japan, the narration of atomic bombing experiences in an educational context began around 1955, after a decade-long gap (Ubuki, 2014). Triggered by the Bikini Atoll hydrogen bomb tests and the contamination by fallout of the Daigo Fukuryū Maru1, discussions of atomic bombing experiences began both within and outside the movement to ban nuclear and hydrogen bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Around 1970, as an educational request to combat the fading memory of war, teachers began to form peace education theories aimed at transmitting the atomic bombing experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to survivors as historical sources, preceding academic research in the field (Murakami, 2000).

Various peace education practices have been devised as extracurricular activities and school events. There were widespread attempts, such as school attendance at the anniversary of the atomic bombings, school trips to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, reading war children’s literature (e.g., summer vacation homework), and testimony collection activities. In addition, numerous supplementary readers, films, and photo collections have been created as self-organized teaching materials for learning peace. Since the 1970s, citizen movements for the excavation and recording of air raids and war disasters have spread nationwide. The results were used as peace learning materials, and practices such as interviewing war and Hibakusha experiences and investigating local war relics were incorporated (Takeuchi, 2011).

These efforts spread from Hiroshima to the whole country through the network of the Japan Teachers Union, and the educational significance of the atomic bombing experience was imparted through school events and extracurricular learning in bombed areas (Murakami, 2009). In particular, practices such as field learning, listening to the testimonies of Hibakusha, and visiting monuments near the bomb epicenters have been widely implemented (Teruoka, 2022).

***The Handling of the Atomic Bombings in Educational Settings Across Asia***

The perception of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki is influenced by historical experiences and national narratives, resulting in significant differences between Japan and other Asian countries. Szczepanska (2017) noted that while the Japanese narrative often focused on victimhood and the rise of peace movements by Hibakusha, perspectives in China and Korea viewed bombings owing to Japan’s wartime aggression. Saito et al. (2014) analyzed history textbooks in Vietnam and Singapore and found limited descriptions of atomic bombings, which often portrayed Japan as an aggressor or enemy, with bombings seen as symbols of liberation from Japan.

These perspectives from various Asian countries must be considered when learning about atomic bombing damage. This is because memories of damages caused by Japan are still profoundly felt in these

countries. They may compare their suffering during the war with the pain of the atomic bombing in Japan (Szczepanska, 2017), or not focus on the civilian casualties, considering them as their responsibility.

### ***The Significance of Addressing the Atomic Bomb in Educational Settings in Asian Countries***

Some of victims of the atomic bombs were from Asian countries

In 1945, not only were the Japanese affected by the bombing of Hiroshima but also were those who lived temporarily in Japan during the war, those who returned or moved to other Asian countries after being affected, and many from the Korean Peninsula under Japanese colonial rule. Estimating the actual number of victims is difficult, with estimates ranging from 25,000 to 28,000 (Hiroshima and Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Disaster Compilation Committee, 1979) and approximately 50,000 (Hiroshima and Nagasaki Korean Hibakusha Survey Group, 1979). Chinese individuals were also forcibly brought to work in Hiroshima, including students from Southeast Asia studying at Hiroshima University of Arts and Sciences (now Hiroshima University) and those working in power plants (Chugoku Shimbun Hiroshima Peace Media Center, 2018).

As previously mentioned, there is often a negative opinion on the discourse that focuses on Japan's atomic bomb damage in Asian countries. Learning about the atomic bomb should be discussed in the context of relations with Asian countries, acknowledging that the damage has extended to the entire region. This awareness allows Japan to focus on its history of aggression while other Asian nations recognize that their people have also suffered. It can foster empathy and solidarity across borders in understanding the inhumanity of nuclear weapons, potentially building a common perception among Asian nations.

#### **Raising Awareness of the Threat of Nuclear Weapons**

Why explore a cross-national understanding of atomic bombing experiences? This was done to comprehend the tragedy that unfolds when nuclear weapons are used. Currently, five of the world's nine nuclear-armed states (China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel) are located in Asia (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2023). Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (2024) reports on ongoing concerns over North Korea's expansion of nuclear and missile programs and the possibility of new nuclear tests. Tensions between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan remain high, and the relationship between India and China is fraught. China is expanding its nuclear arsenal and delivery systems owing to a lack of transparency regarding its capabilities and intentions, causing international concern. Intensifying U.S.–China competition is most evident in the Asia-Pacific region. Recent events, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and wars in Gaza, are geographically close, increasing the risk of nuclear weapons use. With over four billion people living in Asia, comprising more than half of the world's population, the use of nuclear weapons could have a catastrophic impact. Furthermore, the long-lasting physical and social damage to survivors and the hereditary effects of radiation (Kawano, 2008) must also be considered. Educating children living in Asia about the dire and inhumane consequences of nuclear weapons in their region can create international empathy and solidarity against their use, which have educational significance.

### ***Contributions and Challenges of Hibakusha Narration in Educational Spaces***

#### **Contributions**

Murakami's (2013) study of elementary school students in Hiroshima revealed that peace education based on Hibakusha's testimonies formed two key perceptions: first, the strengthening of humanitarian opposition to the atomic bombing and an empathetic understanding of the sufferings of Hibakusha; and second, the recognition of the need to narrate the realities of war and atomic bombings to realize a peaceful society. This shows that by

listening to the victims' testimonies, students can learn about the harsh realities of what happens when atomic bombs are used.

Scott (1983) posited that hearing personal experiences while learning about the atomic bombing, albeit terrifying, engenders deep compassion. He argues that Hibakusha experiences are meaningful in helping youngsters sympathize with others, linking this to the profound issue that every person has human rights. Maguth and Yamaguchi (2020) stated that the stories of Hibakusha aid students in learning empathy towards others and fostering their commitment to improving the world. They concluded that learning from Hibakusha's personal narratives was meaningful in three aspects.

1. This helps students to avoid feeling overwhelmed and desensitized to massive human suffering, allowing them to encounter the personal viewpoint of someone who experienced the bombing firsthand.
2. Hibakusha's experiences often provide a perspective different from that of the events listed in history textbooks.
3. It orients students to certain values that are important in global education, such as the appreciation of life and striving for a world without nuclear weapons.

Thus, personal testimonies of Hibakusha experiences can supplement different national narratives across Asian countries, fostering a sense of peace that aims for life appreciation and a nuclear-free world, and helping to adopt a perspective that transcends national boundaries.

#### Challenges

Previous research has indicated that many Hibakusha refrained from speaking about their harrowing memories, fearing that having these memories interpreted by others might trivialize their experiences or compromise the authenticity of those experiences (Yoneyama, 1999). Therefore, for these tragic memories to be shared, Hibakusha must accept intervention from others in their extreme sorrow and memories of loved ones and acquaintances lost to the atomic bomb, along with the accompanying psychological intrusion (Yoneyama, 1999).

Evidently, various difficulties are associated with the Hibakusha in narrating their memories of the atomic bomb. Influenced by various others, Hibakusha faces the challenge of confronting their memories. Thus, systematically elucidating how Hibakusha interprets and decides to narrate their atomic bombing experiences and what they attempt to convey as a message of peace is of great importance in understanding the practice of learning about atomic bombs. Furthermore, understanding the difficulties involved in victims' testimonies as a method of learning about history offers significant insights into practices for learning about other negative historical events.

#### ***Purpose of the Study***

This study aimed to systematically describe the difficulties and conflicts that Hibakusha confronted in narrating their harrowing experiences, and what they intended to convey as a message of peace.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Question***

The research question of this study is "What is the process by which Hibakusha confront their memories of the bombing and construct the meaning of peace?"

### ***Research Participants***

The interview solicited cooperation from Hibakusha, who engaged in speaking about their atomic bombing experiences with elementary and high school students. Considering the psychological intrusion of recalling traumatic memories, the request was made through RIHO, a supporter already working with Hibakusha, and believed to have established a trusting relationship. The request targeted individuals without cognitive impairment or significant physical illness who consented to discuss their memories of the bombing. Furthermore, given that the experience and attributes of the bombing could significantly influence the content of the testimony, attention was paid to the participants' attributes. Specifically, adjustments were made to ensure that the interview participants covered the four attributes defined under the Atomic Bomb Survivors Assistance Law: 1) direct bombing survivors, 2) those who entered the city afterwards, 3) those involved in the relief and handling of the deceased, 4) those exposed in utero, -as well as foreign Hibakusha, with careful consideration given to avoiding significant biases in their activities.

The research collaborators comprised seven individuals (three women and four men) aged 84 to 92 years who were engaged in peace activities and had suffered from the Hiroshima atomic bombing. A list of participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. List of Participants

Name	Age*	Gender	Bombing Details	Main Activities	Date and time of interview
Jongho	92	Male	Direct exposure near the hypocenter on a bridge. Korean nationality. Suffered severe burns.	Atomic bomb testimonies in Hiroshima City, world ship tour for bomb testimonies.	2020/10/19 1 h 48 min
Kenji	81	Male	Direct exposure at Hiroshima Station. Involved in peace administration during Hiroshima's reconstruction period.	Atomic bomb testimonies in Hiroshima City, administrative project committee member, preservation of bombed buildings.	2020/10/19 2 h 03 min
Yonghee	87	Female	Direct exposure inside a train. Korean nationality.	Atomic bomb testimonies in Hiroshima City.	2020/11/04 2 h 43 min
Sachie	91	Female	Direct exposure near the hypocenter at a school. Trapped under a building; suffered burns, fractures, and lacerations from glass shards.	Atomic bomb testimonies in Hiroshima City.	2020/11/06 2 h 13 min
Fumio	84	Male	Exposure upon entering the city. Searched for his mother and brother.	Founder of a survivors' group (now dissolved), atomic bomb testimonies in Hiroshima City.	2020/10/23 1 h 54 min
Tae	86	Female	Exposure while providing aid. Father went missing, mother died of cancer.	World tour for bomb testimonies (twice), office bearer of a Tokyo-based survivors' organization (now retired), delegate at international conferences.	2020/11/16 1 h 31 min
Masao	74	Male	Exposed in the womb. Born with disabilities. Experienced atomic bomb survivor surveys at ABCC.**	World tour for bomb testimonies.	2020/11/14 1 h 52 min

\* Age at time of interview

\*\* Formerly the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission, reorganized as the Radiation Effects Research Foundation in 1975.

### ***Interview Procedure***

The semi-structured interviews were conducted between 19th October and 16th November 2020, lasting approximately 90–150 min per person. Research collaboration was solicited through RIHO, a peace activity supporter believed to have built a long-term relationship of trust with the interview candidates. When requesting participation, an interview request document explaining the purpose of the research, permission to record, handling of the interview content, guarantee of free response and refusal to answer, among other aspects, were used. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, with RIHO attending as an assistant (except for Tae and Masao). Conversations during the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder with the permission of the participants, and verbatim transcripts were subsequently created.

### ***Interview Content***

In terms of the content of the questions, while emphasizing the subjectivity of the concept of peace, the interviews were guided by prior studies in the field of learning science research on conceptual change (Clement, 2013; Sawyer, 2014). This study aims to elicit narratives from experiences of cognitive conflict and dissonance as triggers of conceptual change. An overview of the interview guide is provided as follows:

- Current activities you are involved in
- The reason for starting these activities
- Memorable events related to these activities and their reasons
- Conflicts experienced during the activities
- Reflections on the concept of peace
- How your thoughts on peace have changed over time
- The meaning these activities hold for you
- Future prospects and outlook

This interview guide was structured to explore participants' involvement in peace-related activities, motivations, experiences, and their evolving understanding of peace.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

It can be very difficult for Hibakusha to speak about their experiences and endure trauma. Hibakusha suffer from the physical and social impacts of radiation sickness, loss of family and friends, and discrimination against survivors, and tend to avoid speaking about these experiences (Yoneyama, 1999). Careful consideration was given to the psychological intrusion of the research collaborators. As a result of these deliberations, interviews for this study were conducted with the review and approval of the Life Science Research Ethics and Safety Office and the Dean of the Graduate School of Education, The University of Tokyo.

Through the activity supporter RIHO, an interview participation request document detailing the purpose of the interview (purpose of the research, outline of the interview content), recording permission, handling of personal information and interview content, guarantee of free response and refusal to answer, freedom to pause in case of psychological or physical distress, measures against infectious diseases, and availability of gratuity were sent to Hibakusha currently active in testimony activities and without cognitive impairments. The interviews were conducted after consent was obtained, with coordination of the interview schedule and location for cases where consent was obtained.

An outline of the interview items was communicated in writing beforehand and participants were requested to prepare as necessary. On the day of the interview, the purpose was explained orally and in writing

and consent for audio recording was obtained before proceeding with the interview. Care was taken to select interview locations where movement was minimal, and to allow for many breaks.

### ***Analysis Method***

In the study by Firouzkouhi and Zargham-Boroujeni (2015) exploring the research question “What do you propose to social studies teachers about the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II?”, a qualitative questionnaire was administered in which participants freely described their memories, opinions, and experiences related to daily life. The analysis was based on a four-stage approach to historical and ethnographic research, relying on Hagström (2015) and Eckerdal and Hagström (2017).

On the other hand, the research question of this study is “What is the process by which Hibakusha confront their memories of the bombing and construct the meaning of peace?” It aims to theorize the phenomenon of how Hibakusha, based on their subjective experiences and considering their social interactions with society, narrated their memories of the atomic bombing as part of peace education. Therefore, semi-structured interviews and a Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA; Kinoshita, 2003; 2007) were employed for category analysis. M-GTA was deemed appropriate for this study because it is an inductive qualitative analysis method that emphasizes the context expressed in the data and aims for theory construction in qualitative research, particularly through a clear analytical methodology.

The M-GTA, proposed by Kinoshita (2003), is a research method that focuses on the practical application of research findings based on the traditional Grounded Theory Approach (GTA) and has been modified to make the analysis procedure clearer and easier to understand. This method is considered suitable for understanding and constructing theories of complex human behaviors that presuppose social interactions.

The critical points of M-GTA analysis, unlike traditional GTA, include the emphasis on the interpretation of data, not fragmenting the data, and the direct generation of concepts from qualitative data. Traditional GTA analyzes qualitative data with the same rigor as quantitative methods to construct theories based on data, fragment the data, and set intermediate stages such as codes and properties before concepts are generated. In contrast, the M-GTA directly generates concepts from qualitative data. The data were analyzed with an emphasis on context, focusing on a detailed examination of human perceptions, actions, and related factors as reflected therein (Kinoshita, 2007).

Emphasizing the contextuality of linguistic data and the suitability of analyzing processes affected by social interactions such as direct human exchanges, it was considered appropriate to clarify the process by which Hibakusha constructed the meaning of peace.

### ***Analysis Procedure***

In conducting an M-GTA, an analysis focal person and theme (which is the content to be clarified through the analysis) were established. In this study, the analysis focal person was defined as “Hibakusha who engage in atomic bombing testimony activities targeting elementary to high school students,” and the analysis theme was defined as “the process by which Hibakusha confront their memories of the bombing and construct the meaning of peace’.”

The M-GTA generates concepts from interview data, interpretively synthesizes the relationships between multiple concepts, and presents them as a resulting diagram. To generate concepts, an analysis worksheet was created for each concept, detailing the concept name, definition, concrete examples, and theoretical notes. The specific procedure is as follows:



1. Analysis began with the data judged to be most richly described in each group.
2. Parts closely related to narratives about memories of the bombing were extracted from the data as specific examples in the analysis worksheets.
3. The reasons for focusing on these parts and their meanings were interpreted from an analytical perspective.
4. Interpreted content was concisely defined and used as a specific example, establishing a concept name that could explain similar examples.
5. After analyzing the first case, the worksheets for each concept obtained were inherited for subsequent cases, continuing to search for and add data examples that fit the concepts and initiate new concepts.
6. If similar concepts were generated, they were integrated, and concepts with many examples were re-examined and divided into several concepts. If a concept lacked rich examples, it was discarded. To prevent interpretative bias, similar examples were confirmed and counterexamples were considered, with the results noted in the theoretical memo section of the worksheets.
7. After analyzing the five participants, no new concepts emerged from the data. Data from the remaining two participants were used for comparative analysis, modification, and validation of the concepts. The results were checked to determine whether they were interpreted based on the analysis focus and corresponded to the analysis theme, leading to a judgment of theoretical saturation.
8. Finally, categories encompassing multiple concepts and groups containing multiple categories were created by considering the relationships among the generated categories. The results of the analysis are summarized from the perspective of the process of constructing the meaning of peace.

This methodological approach provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how atomic bombing survivors construct the meaning of peace through their experiences and memories.

## Results

This study conducted the analysis from the perspective of “clarifying the process by which Hibakusha construct the meaning of peace as they confront their memories of the atomic bombings.” As a result, six “categories” and 22 “concepts” were generated. Table 22 lists the categories, concepts, definitions, and concrete examples, and Figure 1 summarizes the relationships among the concepts based on the relationships between the categories and concepts. Categories are indicated by < > and concepts by [ ], and quotations from specific examples are indicated in italics and bracketed by “\_”. The names of the collaborators in parentheses ( ) correspond to those in Table 1.

### *Storyline*

**The Suffering Caused by the Atomic Bombing.** The survivors of the atomic bomb lived through their suffering from physical and mental injuries from the bombing, the loss of their loved ones, and the enduring memory of the [Cruelty] of the bomb. They lost their homes, family, friends, and much more. In their struggle with disabilities, they faced the [Pain of Living], and over time, they continued to suffer from [Discrimination] due to their status as survivors, the [Unknown Fear] of radiation effects, and the [Burden of Disabilities Passed on to Their Children].

**Inability to Speak about the Experiences.** Among these challenges, confronting their own memories



is particularly challenging. The unbearable memories of the bombing and guilt of not being able to save dying people led to an [Inability to Recall the Memories]. They faced [Unacceptance of the Memories], listeners accused them of exaggerating and lying, the [Negative Impact on Social Life] of disclosing their status as survivors leading to discrimination against their families, and a [Hesitancy to Speak Out] due to the feeling that their experiences seem insignificant compared to the suffering of others, or the belief that others may not understand their suffering, leading them to keep their memories hidden for a long time.

Table 2. Categories, concepts, definitions, and concrete examples\*

Categories	Concepts	Variations (Examples)
The Suffering Caused by the Atomic Bombing	Cruelty	<i>Really, it was truly terrifying. Just one bomb, such cruelty. That day, the air-raid alert was lifted, we were defenseless. The children went outside, and oh, their burns, their hair singed, their skin peeling off, hanging... The peeled skin turned bright red, blistered. Yes, blistered. (Yonghee)</i> <i>Everyone thought their family would return at night. We sat on mats by the roadside in the summer. Every time a silhouette appeared, we thought it might be someone returning from evacuation, so we'd rush over. I did the same. I waited near the embankment, hoping a friend had returned. But none of my peers from the student corps or labor service on the morning of 8/6 returned. Everyone I knew, still missing, unaccounted for, their bodies unidentified. (Yonghee)</i>
	Pain of Living	<i>There were so many dead and injured on the bridge. I managed to reach the west end and looked towards Yokogawa, realizing our house was gone too. Just a burnt field where our home was. I felt utterly devastated realizing I had no home to return to. It was heartbreaking. At that moment, thinking I had nowhere to go, I felt it was okay to die. It was too painful. I just wanted someone to give me water. (Sachie)</i> <i>A soldier among the piles of corpses reached out his hand. Seeing us move, he begged for help, for water... Back then, I couldn't do anything, but now I feel truly sorry. I'm still alive, and yet, I left people to die then. It's still a wound in my heart. I want to speak earnestly for them. (Tears up) It's a deep wound in my heart. (Sachie)</i>
	Discrimination	<i>Like, don't go near that place, don't talk to them, fearing the contagion of the atomic bomb disease. Gradually, people stopped coming around me. (Jongho)</i> <i>My mother never mentioned that she had been exposed to the atomic bomb because she thought it might affect my marriage. (Tae)</i> <i>I often hear that being an A-bomb survivor is a negative factor in marriage. They are often rejected. (Masao)</i>
	Unknown Fear	<i>Back then, they said if your hair falls out, you'll die. Every morning, I'd wake up and pull my hair to check. But it didn't fall out. I thought, 'I'm okay for today.' That's how I spent each day. (Jongho)</i> <i>One day, suddenly, the firefighters started coughing up blood and losing their hair, and then they died... After the atomic bombing, many bodies washed up on the shore with the waves... It was these firefighters who gathered and either cremated or buried these bodies... Their deaths were due to secondary contamination, caused by uranium that had invisibly adhered to the bodies of those affected by the bombing. (Sachie)</i>
	Burden of Disabilities Passed on to Their Children	<i>In my first year of university, I saw a magazine. On the back cover, there was a photo of a child with microcephaly, and next to it, a photo of the father. It was my middle school teacher who had been exposed to the bomb. (Masao)</i> <i>That person never had children. Afraid of having a deformed child. (Tae)</i> <i>When my wife got pregnant and I told my mother, she said to abort it... because I was born with disabilities due to the bombing. And if it passed on to the grandchild. (Masao)</i>

Categories	Concepts	Variations (Examples)
Inability to Speak about the Experiences	Inability to Recall the Memories	<p>┌"Most Hibakusha don't want to talk about their tragic experiences. They prefer not to talk if they can avoid it.┐(Kenji)</p> <p>┌There are few Hibakusha who speak out, even now. I've tried to persuade many to testify with me. More than half refused.┐(Fumio)</p> <p>┌I really hated giving talks about this because I had maggots in my body due to the bombing and couldn't speak about it to others. Also, as a Korean, I feared discrimination... I wanted to ease that discrimination, but it wasn't easy.┐(Jongho)</p>
	Unacceptance of the Memories	<p>┌If my students don't listen when I talk about my bombing experience... I just feel miserable.┐(Fumio)</p> <p>┌When someone is truly listening, I tell it as it is. I don't want to talk to those who are half-hearted. Really, those blackened bodies, hands raised, eyes open, and long tongues. Human tongues are long, really. I didn't count, but three bodies. That's the most painful memory. But others find it hard to believe. When I say such things, they say I'm exaggerating. Hearing that, I didn't want to talk to anyone, didn't want to say anything. It was too painful to tell.┐(Sachie)</p>
	Negative Impact on Social Life	<p>┌My son is a second-generation A-bomb survivor, but I'm afraid to tell others because it might affect his job or promotion if they find out.┐(Tae)</p> <p>┌Like, participating in a protest, getting hurt, making news, it causes trouble, right? It affects my job too.┐(Tae)</p> <p>┌Back then, living in government housing... When word got out we came from Hiroshima, my husband was called to the office. The chief's wife warned, 'It's indecent to speak of the atomic bomb.' He even said, 'I could lose my job if this gets out.' So I started being more cautious.┐(Sachie)</p>
	Hesitancy to Speak Out	<p>┌I've always kept a certain distance from testimony. Hibakusha groups, those seniors who were 10 or 15 when bombed, had unimaginable experiences. I wondered if I, who hadn't gone through the same, had any right to speak.┐(Masao)</p> <p>┌At first, I didn't testify about it at all. I thought I couldn't speak in public as I hadn't experienced something as terrible as others.┐(Tae)</p>
What Prompted Hibakusha to Speak	Influence of Surroundings	<p>┌(At the NY protest) Mr. XX, even while bleeding, walked for 2-3 hours to Central Park... I shouldn't cry (tears up)... Their strong feelings really got through to me. I realized I couldn't just sit back and do nothing, so I started testifying.┐(Tae)</p> <p>┌She probably testified the most at that time, up to four times a day. I told her to stop as it was exhausting, but she'd say, 'If asked, I'll do it.'... She lost one leg, underwent bombing. But she persevered on crutches. I saw that.┐(Fumio)</p>
	Sense of Responsibility	<p>┌Amid the suffering of the atomic bomb, I felt gratitude for being helped by others, a sense of mission for being kept alive. Educated to be ready to die for the country any day, yet when it came time to die under the rubble, I screamed frantically, 'I don't want to die,' 'Teacher!' Overcoming that and living to this day means I'm standing on the sacrifices of many. I can't forget that.┐(Sachie)</p> <p>┌For nuclear abolition. Hibakusha speak out. I, as long as I'm able, will continue testifying. Even if I leave the citizens' group, I won't stop testifying. That's my responsibility for peace. So no matter who it is, even Americans... I want to tell them properly.┐(Fumio)</p> <p>┌I declined testimonies for a long time, but as my family and grandchildren grew... I realized we mustn't let them endure such cruel experiences. Watching the children, I thought I mustn't stay silent. It's on the sacrifices of many that we have today. I started determined to convey the truth as best I can.┐(Sachie)</p>
	Realization that Their Thoughts are Being Conveyed	<p>┌When sixth graders listen intently, write earnestly, and say they'll pass on what they heard, it makes me happy. There are really earnest listeners.┐(Tae)</p> <p>┌Experience inheritance works better the more seriously it's done; there are people who'll receive it.┐(Kenji)</p> <p>┌Children in front sit with their eyes wide open, listening intently, taking notes. When I receive their understanding essays in response, I'm truly happy.┐(Jongho)</p>
	Sense of Crisis	<p>┌Seeing that color photo of the damaged chromosomes, I was shocked. I thought I couldn't just leave it to my seniors.┐(Masao)</p> <p>┌After we die, there'll be no one left Hibakusha. It'll be the second-generation Hibakusha, but they're weaker than real Hibakusha.┐(Tae)</p>

Categories	Concepts	Variations (Examples)
What Hibakusha Want Learners to Understand	Cruelty of the Atomic Bomb	<p>『Thinking back, I must have been under the rubble for about 3–4 hours, crying and screaming in despair. Not knowing if others had left or died, the voices faded. Thinking it was the end for me, the fire would soon reach me and I'd die, I became more frantic. Crying and screaming in the dark, unable to move, crushed. I thought I was going to die, screaming in utter despair. Such things should never happen again. I must tell.』(Sachie)</p> <p>『I want to tell, really. How terrifying the atomic bomb is... Nuclear weapons, as I said, are frightening, absolutely inexcusable as a weapon. I emphasize that. It was so terrifying I didn't want to remember.』(Yonghee)</p> <p>『Everyone, it's sad... Silently bearing it all, it must've been so hard. If only they could shout out loud, cry, hit the ground, and relieve their stress. Staying silent must be hard. Bearing it all alone. This needs to be told.』(Yonghee)</p>
	Preciousness of Peaceful Everyday Life	<p>『For us Hibakusha, when the world finally calmed down, having enough food, clothes, toys... To play and live happily, it's so precious. Peace is valuable. Never again should our children endure the cruelty we tasted. Watching them, I think that.』(Sachie)</p> <p>『First, I talk about how the hardest part during the war was being hungry. Everyone can eat their fill now, do what they like... But during our time, there was no food, we were hungry... It was because of the war. Peace, how wonderful and joyous it is. Think about it.』(Jongho)</p>
	Abnormality of the War	<p>『Back then, we were taught to be willing to die anytime for our country, but when I was truly trapped under the rubble, fighting for my life, I screamed like mad, 'I don't want to die,' and kept shouting for 'Teacher!' The idea of dying for the country, it's just absurd.』(Sachie)</p> <p>『I felt nothing even seeing dead people.』(Sachie)</p> <p>『Japan was 'bombarded,' no food left... We, eating what was meant for American livestock, saying 'thank you,' eating gratefully... Thinking back, it feels strange.』(Yonghee)</p> <p>『Injured soldiers returning from the front. They must've gone mad... Back then, everyone had Japanese swords... They'd pull out their swords, shrieking, running through the hospital filled with corpses and injured people. Seeing that was really terrifying.』(Sachie)</p>
	Equality and Preciousness of Life	<p>『Victims of civil wars, not just Hiroshima and Nagasaki Hibakusha. Those suffering from Agent Orange... Their pain is the same. The horrors of war, innocent children being victims, absolutely inexcusable.』(Masao)</p> <p>『I always say 'equality of life and non-discrimination.'』(Jongho)</p> <p>『I heard that the reason for dropping the bomb was an experiment to see how many people it could kill. Hearing that, I thought, what do they think human life is? Your life, our lives, they're all the same.』(Yonghee)</p>
What Hibakusha Want Learners to Consider	Contemplating the Meaning of Listening to Memories	<p>『I've met various foreign dignitaries, but the most impressive was President Weizsäcker of Germany. He's always asserted, 'Those who don't look back at their past will be blind to the present and future.' I completely agree. Unless we thoroughly examine the past and determine how we should be for the future, we'll repeat past mistakes.』(Kenji)</p>
	Making Sense of the Experience in Their Own Way	<p>『The most important thing is whether one can make the experience their own.』(Kenji)</p> <p>『If you're really involved in peace efforts, I want you to embrace the raw experiences of Hibakusha as your own. Embrace and convey a clear message. Without internalizing the horrendous experiences, once Hibakusha are gone... what are we even doing? That's what I want to avoid.』(Kenji)</p>
	Understanding Their Relationship with Society	<p>『In our student days, we were interested in politics. Now, it seems apathy has increased... People grow within societal interactions. We can't live alone. I want people to pay more attention to their societal relationships.』(Masao)</p>
What Hibakusha Want Learners to Acted Upon	Sharing Thoughts on Peace in Their Own Words	<p>『I told them just listening to testimonies isn't enough. What did the children think after hearing them? They should write it down properly.』(Fumio)</p> <p>『That's right. Just passing on what you've heard to others... Someone said, "Today's listener is tomorrow's storyteller." That's what it is. Those who have heard must speak out now.』(Tae)</p>
	Caring for Others	<p>『I think peace is kindness. It can be expressed in words. Even without special consideration, just being kind, treating everyone equally... Peace is about getting along as humans, no hierarchy... Talking to each other without reserve, openly. Talking means there's kindness between us.』(Yonghee)</p> <p>『To preserve peace, cherish people. Be friends, don't forget to care. Finally, just that message.』(Yonghee)</p>

\* While this section presents excerpts from Hibakusha interviews, they have been translated into English for the purpose of this paper. For a more accurate representation and nuanced understanding, please refer to the original Japanese version at the following link:

[<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1A1nucM94TnnDewqujgruOq6yShd9ldSp/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=106368708837569797214&rtfpof=true&sd=true>].

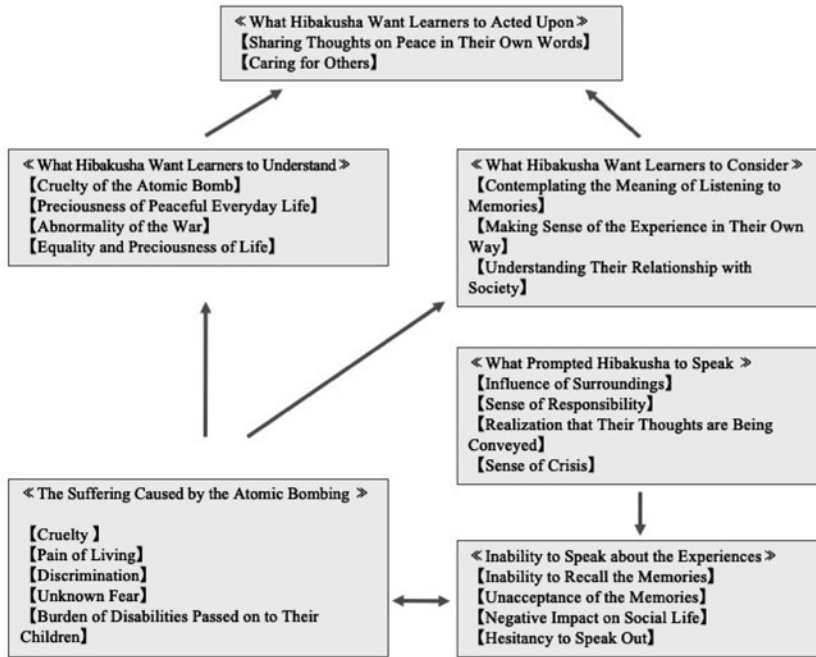


Figure 1. The process by which Hibakusha confront their memories of the bombing and construct the meaning of peace

**What Prompted Hibakusha to Speak.** Survivors, burdened with unbearable suffering, found opportunities to recall their memories. The influence of other enthusiastic survivors striving for a peaceful society (【Influence of Surroundings】), a【Sense of Responsibility】to preserve peace stemming from guilt over surviving at the expense of others, the【Realization that Their Thoughts are Being Conveyed】when sharing their memories, and a【Sense of Crisis】as the consciousness of seeking peace faded in others led them to gradually start speaking.

**What Hibakusha Want Learners to Understand.** Despite various conflicts, survivors began to share their experiences with the younger generation in the hope of shaping their future. They aim to convey the【Cruelty of the Atomic Bomb】that destroyed everything, the【Preciousness of Peaceful Everyday Life】, the【Abnormality of the War】that proves how cruel humans can become, and the【Equality and Preciousness of Life】emphasizing that every life is valuable and should be treated with respect.

**What Hibakusha Want Learners to Consider.** To comprehend these four concepts, it is crucial for learners to focus on【Contemplating the Meaning of Listening to Memories】: why wars occur and why testimonies of atomic bombing are filled with accounts of tragedy. Instead of merely hearing these testimonies, it is important to engage in【Making Sense of the Experience in Their Own Way】and finding personal meaning in these experiences. In addition, understanding one's【Understanding Their Relationship with Society】and pondering what it means to live alongside others are essential. Hibakusha hoped that the learners would reflect deeply on these aspects.

**What Hibakusha Want Learners to Act Upon.** Finally, survivors hope that by【Sharing Thoughts on Peace in Their Own Words】, and by【Caring for Others】without exclusion, everyone can work together to build a peaceful society and prevent terrible, painful, and unending suffering from ever happening again.

## **Discussion**

This section explores the process through which Hibakusha confronted their memories of the atomic bombing and constructed the meaning of peace and what this implies for the manner in which testimonies of the atomic bombing are learned in educational spaces.

### ***Memories of the Atomic Bombing for Hibakusha - Significance of Personal Memories Valued by Hibakusha***

From the narratives of Hibakusha, two main types of memory narration were presumed. The first is public memory, such as that preserved in documents and buildings. The second is memory that is reconstructed within the individual and takes root as a belief. Public memory, similar to that recorded in history textbooks, requires accuracy, and in the inheritance of memory, it does not permit diverse interpretations; it must be preserved in its exact form as an objective fact. The latter is personal memory, which is based on one's own experiences, often reinterpreted through life experiences and self-reflection, and expressed along with beliefs.

While the Hibakusha understood and practiced the importance of transmitting public history using numbers, data, and maps, as seen in the category "What Hibakusha Wants Learners to Understand," they particularly valued and emphasized the latter type of memory in their storytelling activities. In their testimonies, they wanted to convey the **【Cruelty of the Atomic Bomb】** that destroyed everything, the **【Preciousness of Peaceful Everyday Life】**, the **【Abnormality of the War】** that shows how cruel people can become under wartime conditions, and the **【Equality and Preciousness of Life】** that suggests that all life is sacred and should be treated equally.

Regarding such personal memories of the atomic bombing, as is evident from the category "What Hibakusha Want Learners to Consider," they wanted learners to make sense of their personal memories by comparing and associating those with learners' own knowledge, experiences, and social recognition. They particularly wanted learners to consider the following three concepts: **【Contemplating the Meaning of Listening to Memories,】** understanding what wishes are embedded when victims narrate their tragic memories and peaceful messages; **【Making Sense of the Experience in Their Own Way】**, which considers how people would feel if they or their loved ones were in the same situation, what they could do after hearing such tragic memories, and how they should be in the future; and in addition to making sense of it individually—as a human being living in the social fabric—learners must consider the individual while **【Understanding Their Relationship with Society】** from the perspective of peace.

### ***The Narrative Influenced by the Listener - What Prevented and Encouraged Hibakusha to Speak***

Hibakusha sought "reconstruction" by learners, that is, the re-narration of the atomic bombing experiences in their own words. This reconstruction by the listener also implies dismantling the originality of memory. Previous research has noted that many Hibakusha have not spoken about their tragic memories, because doing so exposes the authenticity of their experiences (Yoneyama, 1999). This study observed the same tendency in the concept of **【Unacceptance of the Memories】** within the category "Inability to Speak about the Experiences" ("That's the most painful memory. But others find it hard to believe. When I say such things, they say I am exaggerating. Hearing that, I didn't want to talk to anyone, didn't want to say anything. It was too painful to tell." [Sachie]). However, at the same time, phrases such as "I want you to inherit the tragic memories in your own words (Kenji)" and "You can do it at your own pace (Yonghee)" were narrated, showing their intention to let learners contemplate what the social meaning of the memory of the atomic bombing. This implies two things: first, Hibakusha believes that the tragic memories of ordinary citizens affected by war are beneficial for those who



have not experienced war to understand them, and second, they are willing or actively request that their memories be reconstructed through their interpretations to be meaningful in the context of peace education. This indicates that the Hibakusha in this study have undertaken their activities, accepting that their memories will be interpreted by listeners.

The process by which Hibakusha confront the atomic bombing and construct the meaning of peace involves not only the internal action of suppressing the recall of memories owing to the horror and guilt for the deceased (concepts of **【Inability to Recall the Memories】** within the category “The Suffering Caused by the Atomic Bombing” and “Inability to Speak about the Experiences”), but also the external triggers that influence the decision to speak (concepts of **【Unacceptance of the Memories】** and **【Negative Impact on Social Life】** within the category “Inability to Speak about the Experiences”) and the aspects of starting to narrate memories due to the influence of others (concepts of **【Influence of Surroundings】**, **【Sense of Responsibility】**, **【Realization that Their Thoughts are Being Conveyed】**, **【Sense of Crisis】** within the category “What Prompted Hibakusha to Speak”). This corresponds with the views of prior research that view memory as a “co-construction” process between the narrator and the listener (Fukaya, 2011; Fuse, 2008; Kadono, 2007, 2009), and with the argument that to be subjectified as “narrators of experience,” Hibakusha need to understand the internal changes as well as the surrounding social relationships and historical context that promote the subjectification (Nemoto, 2015). Ueno et al. (1999) stated that “narrating memory is not about exposing or confessing past facts, but rather about reconstructing relationships between the narrator and listener in the present.” Similarly, Kitamura (2006), who examined the inheritance of the practice of peace guides talking about the Battle of Okinawa by those who were not experienced, concluded that testimony was a reconstruction of the past from the present, and that this process was formed through dialogue with various others, including experiencers.

Such tolerance by the narrators can be considered to be formed and maintained by the existence of listeners who seriously engage with the atomic bombing experiences, as seen in the concrete example of the concept **【Realization that Their Thoughts are Being Conveyed】** within the category “What Prompted Hibakusha to Speak” (“When children listen intently, write diligently, and say, ‘I will definitely pass on what I heard to someone else.’ That makes me happy. There are really serious people. They even give me letters.” [Tae], and “That’s why I don’t want you to forget that the more seriously you take the inheritance of experiences, the more there will be people who will receive it” [Kenji]). These results suggest that the feasibility of testimonies from historical victims is influenced by the attitude and environment of the listeners. When setting up a learning environment to hear testimonies from victims, it is suggested that the learning environment be prepared based on the understanding that memory is “co-constructed” by the narrator and listener.

### **Suggestions for listening to historical victim testimony in the classroom**

Based on the discussion thus far, the following suggestions can be made when listening to the testimonies of historical victims.

First, when listening to testimonies of historical victims, it is essential not to adopt an aggressive attitude towards the testifiers. This is particularly true when negating personal memories by comparing them with public memories or common national narratives or when making judgments about their correctness. What discouraged Hibakusha from wanting to share their personal experiences was having their memories dismissed as a falsehood.

This can be understood from statements such as “That’s the most painful memory. But others find it hard to believe. When I say such things, they say I’m exaggerating. Hearing that, I didn’t want to talk to anyone, didn’t want to say anything. It was too painful to tell.” (Sachie), found within the concept of **【Unacceptance of the Memories】** in the “Inability to Speak about the Experiences” category.

However, because public and personal memories are in a complementary relationship, learners should not be encouraged to believe excessively in one over the other. Therefore, it is considered effective to inform learners about the characteristics of both public and personal memories, provide opportunities to contemplate the significance of historical events from both perspectives, and clearly separate forums for discussion regarding public and personal memories. This can convey the importance of understanding historical events from data verified by historians and deeply understanding the tragedy of those events from the perspective of individuals who actually experienced the damage.

Furthermore, the Hibakusha were motivated to narrate their memories and convey their thoughts of peace when they perceived learners to listen seriously and when learners’ thoughts were re-narrated to the Hibakusha, giving them a sense of their messages being conveyed. This can be seen in the concept **【Realization that Their Thoughts are Being Conveyed】**, with statements such as “When sixth graders listen intently, write earnestly, and say they’ll pass on what they heard, it makes me happy.” (Tae) and “When I receive their understanding essays in response, I’m truly happy.” (Jongho). Therefore, when listening to testimonies about historical events, it is effective to have learners consider how to approach the situation from another person’s perspective and check basic etiquette and manners. Learners can also compile what they have learned in the form of a report for sharing with the testifier.

### ***The Significance of the Victim***

As previously mentioned, the impact of negative historical events such as wars on civilian lives cannot be fully understood through objective data alone. In this regard, it is important to understand historical violence from victims’ perspectives. However, for victims to narrate their tragic memories, they need to accept the intervention of others in their most harrowing experiences, such as the loss of loved ones to the atomic bomb, and overcome the category “Inability to Speak about the Experiences,” as indicated in this study. Yagi (2009) critically noted the situation that compels victims, who suffered the most, to keep narrating “until life ends.” This study also observed similar expressions like “I will speak until my life ends” (Fumio). This leads to the argument that understanding the tragic consequences caused by historical catastrophes requires the sacrificial contributions of the victims themselves.

At the end of the 2019 fiscal year, the average age of Hibakusha was 83.31 years, and their number decreased from 372,264 in 1955 to 136,682 in 2019 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2020), indicating a continuous decline in the number of Hibakusha able to narrate their memories. Every historical event has entered an era without any direct victims. In considering future atomic bomb testimonies, it is necessary to move beyond the traditional “co-construction” of memory between the narrator and listener and examine how memories are narrated and reconstructed through cultural artifacts, education, and socio-cultural memories.

### ***Potential Contributions and Limitations of the Study***

#### ***Contributions of the Research***

This study clarifies the process by which Hibakusha constructed the meaning of peace. Recording wars and disasters and transmitting them as lessons to future generations is vital, and learning from victims’ perspectives



is crucial. Therefore, systematically clarifying what influences the Hibakusha, the difficulties and conflicts they overcome, how they construct the meaning of peace, and how they narrate the realities of their victimization can contribute to future educational endeavors to understand events from the perspective of victims of other historical calamities. Moreover, as the number of Hibakusha decreases, recording their difficulties and conflicts and the process by which they construct the meaning of peace based on rich linguistic data provides valuable information for continuing the transmission of their memories after they pass away.

#### Limitations of the Research

Hibakusha experiences of the atomic bombing vary significantly depending on factors such as the location of the bombing age, gender, and family composition. Moreover, the interpretation of these experiences varied among the individuals. The findings of this study are explainable only within the scope of the analysis themes and analysis focal person established for this research. Therefore, caution is necessary when interpreting the perceptions of the Hibakusha in this study as applicable to all atomic bomb survivors. In addition, retrospective interviews reaching back approximately 70 years make it difficult to capture the moment of transformation, possibly leading to coarser granularity in capturing changes in recognition and emotions. Future studies should combine the process model and considerations of this study with longitudinal interviews, observations, and verbal protocols, among other data, for a more precise examination. Moreover, the atomic bomb testimonies addressed in this study are based on personal memories rather than on public history used in historical learning. In atomic bomb testimonies, accuracy and historical interpretation are rarely debated, with a focus primarily on empathetically understanding victims' feelings and the nature of their suffering. While atomic bombing experiences play a crucial role in understanding the consequences of using nuclear weapons, it is essential to distinguish those from the official history. Therefore, learners should be cautious when interpreting the historical interpretations included in testimonies as official interpretations. This research lays the groundwork for further studies on how Hibakusha interpret their experiences of the atomic bombing, narrates them, and attempts to convey their messages of peace.

#### Notes

1. Also known as the Lucky Dragon 5 incident, it refers to an event in 1954 where the Japanese fishing boat *Daigo Fukuryū Maru* was exposed to radioactive fallout from an American hydrogen bomb test, resulting in radiation exposure among the crew members. Some crew members suffered from radiation sickness, and there were fatalities, sparking significant debate and anti-nuclear sentiment in Japan and worldwide.
2. While this section presents excerpts from Hibakusha interviews, they have been translated into English for this paper. For a more accurate representation and nuanced understanding, please refer to the original Japanese version at the following link:

【<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1A1nucM94ThnDgwqijgruOq6yShd9ldSp/edit?usp=sharing&oid=106368708837569797214&rtopof=true&sd=true>】.

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