Humanity against the A-Bomb : An Analysis of the Countervailing Power of the Six Protagonists in John Hersey's Hiroshima

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Humanity against the A-Bomb: An Analysis of the Countervailing Power of the Six Protagonists in John Hersey's *Hiroshima*

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I. John Hersey and *The Aftermath*: forty years of silence

On August 31st, 1946, about a year after the two A-bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a long article simply entitled *Hiroshima* appeared in the *New Yorker*. This was a shocking event for American citizens, because no one had expected from the magazine's pastoral cover that the entire issue was devoted to this article on the horrible event. It was clear that every reader who saw the first few sentences noticed that this story was about the unforgettable bombing a year before. "Hiroshima" created a sensation. Albert Einstein was reported to have ordered a thousand copies, and Bernard Baruch, an American financier, ordered five hundred. In those days, the *New Yorker* had been publishing about three hundred thousand copies a month, but as soon as "Hiroshima" appeared, newsstand copies quickly disappeared. (Lifton, 81)

The author John Richard Hersey (1914-1993) wrote this nonfiction novel at the young age of 31. He was born on June 17th, 1914, in Tientsin, China. He spent his first ten years in China, and after graduating from Yale and Clare College, Cambridge, he became Sinclair Lewis's secretary in 1937. Later he started his career as a journalist. During World War II he wrote to *The New York Times*, and also to *The New Yorker* from China and Italy as a correspondent. His works include *A Bell for Adano* (1944), which was awarded Pulitzer Prize, and *The Wall* (1960), which is about events in the Warsaw ghetto from November 1939 to May 1943. Throughout his career as a journalist and novelist he consistently pursued moral goals, and was

deeply involved in the issues of his day. Right up until his death in 1993, he continued writing.

Before “Hiroshima,” there were several people who wrote about the two A-bombings in the aftermath. However, these reports did not come to fame as much as “Hiroshima.” So, why was “Hiroshima” read by many more people than any other articles on the A-bombings? There are two main answers to this question. First, Hersey had an exquisite talent for compiling a great deal of information into a single book. He had worked as a journalist for about 10years when he wrote “Hiroshima,” so it was natural for Hersey to have learned the way to impress readers through his journalistic career.

The second reason is more important: Hersey wrote “Hiroshima” from the six protagonists’ individual points of view. An American critic named Michael J. Yavenditti writes in *Hiroshima’s Shadow* (1998) that “[t]he contrast between the apparently objective simplicity of his prose and the enormity of the phenomenon he describes makes *Hiroshima* all the more graphic and frightening for most readers.” (290) As Yavenditti points out, instead of simply focusing on Hiroshima’s condition after the bomb was dropped, Hersey paid attention to the six nameless citizens.[1] Hersey developed a single panorama through these six protagonists to describe the bomb. As I mentioned above, there were several other journalists who wrote about Hiroshima/Nagasaki, but none of them wrote as Hersey did. [2]

The following essay is an attempt to examine the fragmentary evidence of Hersey’s insistence against nuclear weapons by focusing on three themes; Christianity, *hibakusha* (Japanese for “radiation-effected people” or survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), memory and trauma. Before getting down to the main subject, I would like to briefly introduce the background of Hiroshima’s writing.

When *Hiroshima* was first published in the *New Yorker*, this novel had four chapters. However, about forty years later, Hersey released the fifth chapter, named “The Aftermath” as the conclusion. About this final chapter, there are several writing differences when it is compared with the first four chapters. For example, we can face new philosophical aspects of what seemed to be “flat” characters. But here

I would like to say that in "The Aftermath," Hersey finally reached his literary and moral goal, and what is more, what the author really wanted to say about the nuclear tragedy is revealed in a more substantial way; namely, "The Aftermath" inherited the author's strong insistence from the former four chapters. In this sense, already in the first four chapters, we can recognize the author's figure through quite a journalistic, monotonous narrative style.

Some early critics like Mary McCarthy and Dwight Mcdonald accused Hersey's objective narrative style of its "lack of moral consciousness." Even today's critics have a severe view of Hersey's narrative style. Margot Norris, who is the author of *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (2000) points out that because of this "objectivity," Hersey's six people become somewhat flat, and more generic characters. However, here we must refer to what Robert Lifton says in his eminent study, *Hiroshima in America*.

> *Hersey had deliberately established a dispassionate tone.* He did this, he later explained, so that he would not became a mediator in this story, allowing the reader to experience the atomic bombing as directly as possible. (Lifton, 89, emphasis added)

Besides Lifton's point, if we consider the strict censorship imposed by GHQ (the General Head Quarters of the US Occupation forces), it is easy for us to imagine the difficulty for the journalists/novelists to write their clear view on the atomic holocausts. In this sense, John Hersey succeeded to satisfy both the U.S. government and GHQ using a tone marked by the absence of the author, but at the same time, he was trying to leave traces through the first four chapters of which he most intended to speak. And this attitude of Hersey's is, as a result, linked to "The Aftermath." To explain this point, I would like to examine some of the contents of this novel, the opening scene, and a woman named Mrs. Nakamura.

> At exactly fifteen minutes past eight in the morning, on August 6, 1945, Japanese time, at the moment when the atomic bomb flashed above Hiroshima, Miss Toshiko Sasaki, a clerk in the personnel department of

> the East Asia Tin Works, had just sat down at her place in the plant office and was turning her head to speak to the girl at the next desk… and the Reverend Mr. Kiyoshi Tanimoto, pastor of the Hiroshima Methodist Church, paused at the door of a rich man's house in Koi, the city's western suburb, and prepared to unload a handcart full of things he had evacuated from town in fear of the massive B-29 raid which everyone expected Hiroshima to suffer. (3-4)

This opening scene is a portrait which describes what the characters were doing when the first A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. In this scene, what is told by the author is civilian's "daily life." But this makes the massive power of the A-bomb more vivid. Although most American readers would have noticed that this "daily life" was actually not so much "daily" as "abnormal life," which was led by fanatical people who adored the Emperor. But the author does not differentiate between these two lives; that is, he described "abnormal life" at the same level of the reader's daily life. In brief, the author is trying to tell the terror of the destruction of the bomb as directly as possible, and, he puts both Americans and Japanese at the same level. The similar effect can be seen in the following sentences.

> They still wonder why they lived when so many others died. Each of them counts many small items of chance or volition—*a step taken in time, a decision to go indoors, catching one streetcar instead of the next* —that spared him. (4, emphasis added)

The italicized part shows the causes which determined the *hibakusha*'s life-and-death, using a series of daily events. This structure has an effect on readers —that is, readers who perceive the bomb not as an unimaginable event, but as part of their daily lives. This scene is quite a shocking one, because it shows that one's daily routine like reading a newspaper, riding a train, or going outside, actually exist within the same category as atomic warfare. And here we can recognize the appearance of the author who hardly shows up through the first to fourth chapters.

Mrs. Nakamura, a tailor's widow, is not described as a "flat" character, as Norris points out. In chapter one, just before the bomb exploded, she is portrayed

as a person who defeats the stereotypical image of Japanese, who sacrifice themselves in the name of Emperor.

> Mrs. Nakamura went back to the kitchen, looked at the rice, and began watching the man next door. At first, she was annoyed with him for making so much noise, but then she was moved almost to tears by pity...but undoubtedly she also felt a generalized, community pity, to say nothing of self-pity. (12)

Her sentiment moves from irritation toward the neighbor who is destroying his house, to pity toward him and finally, to pity toward herself. "Self-pity" might be a most irrelevant concept to the Japanese citizens during World War **II**, because they were forced to sacrifice themselves for the Emperor's sake. Just after this scene, her unfortunate circumstances are explained by the narrator: that her husband died in Singapore honorably, and all he could leave for her was a sewing machine. Here, the author uses phrases like "honorable death," or "his [Isawa's] only capital was a *Sankoku* sewing machine" with a strong outraged tone toward the war through the eyes of this poor woman.

As we have seen in the above examples, it can be said that Hersey had already expressed his stance on the U.S. act of dropping the bomb in the first four chapters. Besides, although some critics condemned him that he ignored moral issues, in fact, he never abandoned them. Because he was under a difficult publishing situation when he first wrote *Hiroshima*, he avoided writing his standpoint directly, and he turned the situation into his advantage. To accomplish this, he had portrayed his characters as a vehicle of his insistence.

II. Hersey's Portrayal of "Religion"

First it should be noted that *Hiroshima* is directly connected with Christianity. This is one of the most obvious characteristics in this novel, because half of the six protagonists, as a result, devote themselves to God. But of course in this novel, God does not appear, and what is more, He does not give them a helping

hand. No matter how the characters pray to God, and no matter how they need him, He never shows up. The following scene exposes the powerlessness of one Christian, that is, Father Kleinsorge, and here we are faced with the silence of God in this dreadful situation.

> The hurt ones were quiet; no one wept, much less screamed in pain; no one complained; none of the many who died did so noisily; not even the children cried; very few people even spoke. *And when Father Kelinsorge gave water to some whose faces had been almost blotted out by flash burns, they took their share and then raised themselves a little and bowed to him*. (49, emphasis added)

Father Kleinsorge had nothing for the people who were about to die but to give them water. Ironically, “a cup of water” which was given by a Jesuit priest has much more meaning than God. The water surpasses in God. Miss Toshiko Sasaki has a severe yet quite natural question about God, and she asks Kleinsorge, “If your God is so good and kind, how can let people suffer like this?”(109). But Kleinsorge’s response to her question is a somewhat ordinary, disappointing one. As a result, his lecture does not impress Miss Sasaki, because religious words have no meaning when one is faced with these terrible realities. What is the most important thing for the people in an extreme situation is not superficial sympathy represented by something like a sermon, or quotes from the Bible, but concrete conduct led by a person who has a truly profound knowledge about religious words.

As we can see above, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge seems to be a rather frail person. He often gets sick when he encounters some kinds of cruel sights. The horrible events he saw in Hiroshima after the bombing left him with traumatic nightmares later on. However, Kleinsorge is never described as a helpless character. Although he is at the mercy of the nuclear weapon, he has the potential to overcome this irresistible force. As an evidence for this, he miraculously salvages Miss Toshiko Sasaki from the edge of despair. For this point, I would like to observe the relationship between Kleinsorge and Miss Sasaki.

As I have already mentioned above, Miss Sasaki had doubts concerning

Christianity, because God seemed powerless to her. However, in "The Aftermath," she gradually opened her mind toward Kleinsorge, because she was deeply moved by his act of love:

> The confident logic of his instruction did little to convince her, for she could not accept the idea that a God who had snatched away her parents and put her through such hideous trials was loving and merciful. *She was, however, warmed and healed by the priest's faithfulness to her, for it was obvious that he too, was weak and in pain, yet he walked great distance to see her*. (154-155, emphasis added)

In the italicized sentence, we face an obvious fact that Kleinsorge's "act of love" overcomes religious logic. There is a reminiscence of Jesus in Kleinsorge's way of acting: although he too, was weak and in pain, he is concerned with her, and he tries to purify her despairing soul. His series of acts works as an only means to rescue Miss Sasaki from her traumatic experience. As a result, Miss Sasaki gets a revelation right after she was deeply moved by Kleinsorge's act:

> Her house stood by a cliff, on which there was a grove of bamboo. One morning, she stepped out of the house, and the sun's rays glistening on the minnowlike leaves of the bamboo trees took her breath away. She felt an astonishing burst of joy—the first she had experienced in as long as she could remember. She heard herself reciting the Lord's Prayer. (155)

In this scene, Miss Sasaki is likened to one of the "minnowlike leaves of bamboo trees," and when "sun's rays glistening on" them, her deeply despaired soul has been purified. However, it is a mystery that the woman who was indifferent to Christianity suddenly realizes God's existence. Why did this happen? I would like to emphasize that her epiphany was generated by sharing her trauma with Kleinsorge. Just before this epiphany happened to her, she was strongly conscious of her identity as a *hibakusha*. She was deserted by her fiancé, who thought that Miss Sasaki must have had some trouble because of radiation sickness. Kleinsorge too noticed his

particular identity as *hibakusha*, and when he was interviewed by Dr. Robert J Lifton, he hinted that there was a particular relation among hibakusha.[3] Their trauma which was caused by the A-bomb experience can only be shared among *hibakusha*, and it is an unshakeable fact that there is a particular psychic connection between them. In this sense, an epiphany which suddenly appeared to Miss Sasaki resulted not from her sympathy for religious logic, but from her discovering this particular psychic connection with Kleinsorge.

However, there is an obvious difference between Miss Sasaki and Father Kleinsorge. While Father Kleinsorge continues to be conscious of his identity not so much as Japanese or German as *hibakusha*, Miss Sasaki retains a much more sophisticated identity. In the orphanage named "White Chrysanthemum" where she has worked, there were many children whose fathers are American soldiers and mothers are Japanese prostitutes. In this scene, she finds out the egoism of the war for the first time. She feels compassion for all the victims of the war, including Chinese civilians, young Japanese and American soldiers, Japanese prostitutes, and their mixed-blood children.

Her philosophy about the war reminds us of one excerpt from the Bible, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Although she was also suffering from the trauma of the A-bomb experience, she thinks that those who became the victims of the war egoism should be salvaged from their sorrow. It could be said that Miss Sasaki has greatly changed from merely a *hibakusha*, who keeps dwelling on the trauma, into a truly gracious woman, who can feel compassion for others. Her attitude toward the sorrowing people strongly represents her outrage toward the war, which result from the bad side of civilization. We can find her attempts to recover humanity which was lost because of war.

The lives of Father Kleinsorge and Miss Sasaki Toshiko are directly connected with war, and ironically, Miss Sasaki's spiritual breakthrough resulted from her A-bomb experience. As we have already examined above, in this novel, we should focus not on what Kleinsorge said, but on what he did. His sincere attempt for salvation is described as an important factor which enables Miss Sasaki to escape

from her traumatic damage. Miss Sasaki, on the other hand, got an epiphany by sharing her trauma with Kleinsorge. At last, she has greatly changed from a tragic girl into a religious woman who has a particular, yet solid philosophy about war. Her transformation could be said as a representation of her strong resistance toward the dark side of our civilization. Thus, "Christianity," which is deeply connected with some of the protagonists, is focused as one of the most important themes. However, "Christianity" itself does not have a significant meaning, and God seems to possess a rather powerless existence. Hersey's portrayal of "religion" is thus understood as a close-up of "action" led by characters who do not just depend on superficial doctrine. And these actions have enormous power to reject *hibakusha*'s traumatic scar which was inflicted by A-bomb experience.

III. Hibakusha's A-bomb Memories and Identities

As we have already seen, Father Kleinsorge recognizes that he was strongly conscious of himself as a *hibakusha*. His identity as a *hibakusha* is much stronger than as Japanese with which he chooses to live. In this sense, his identity is deeply connected with his memory of A-bomb experience. The *hibakusha*'s A-bomb memories are one of the most important factors which determine their identity.

Contrary to Kleinsorge, who continued to recognize himself as *hibakusha* for the rest of his life, Dr. Sasaki stubbornly refused to live as *hibakusha*. One of the reasons of his rejection is that he cannot get over the traumatic nightmare about the days after the explosion when he cared for numerous victims. As a result, he decided to quit working for the Red Cross Hospital six years after the explosion, because it reminded him of his awful memories. Just after he quit working for the hospital, he chose not to live as a *hibakusha*. Dr. Sasaki's attitudes toward his memory are consistent, and even when he happened to know about the radiation sickness, he is indifferent to it though he is too, one of the victims.

We should notice that Dr. Sasaki's story can be divided into two phases. The first phase is characterized by his strong rejection in recognizing his identity as

a *hibakusha*, as I mentioned in the above paragraph. In this phase, he thoroughly excludes everything which reminds him of A-bomb experience. The second phase starts with his near-death experience, which happened to him after having a lung cancer operation. This near-death experience had a greater impact on him than the A-bomb experience.

After this experience "the most important of his life," his impression starts to change gradually. For example, he starts to go to the bank frequently to take out a large amount of loans for rebuilding both his hospital and his house with sophisticated facilities. He drives a BMW, and finally, he comes to think that he should make a great hot spring spa along with three hotels. Thus, "money" became his consistent companion.

After his near-death experience and his wife's death from cancer, Dr. Sasaki "achieved now another sort of loneliness connected with death," and "he threw himself more tirelessly than ever into his work." (138) However, after all this, Dr. Sasaki comes to think with great suddenness that it is a beneficial deed for elderly people like him, to build a large clinic with luxurious facilities or to open a marble bathhouse. It is a mystery that he suddenly stopped being depressed over everything, and changed his attitude into a positive one. Here, I would like to say that such a large capital investment with which he suddenly started after his near-death experience could be said to be an act of substitution for having lost his identity as a *hibakusha*. That is to say, instead of sealing his A-bomb memory, Dr. Sasaki found a new identity in his act of investment. Although he is one of the survivors of the A-bomb, his later life seems to have had nothing to do with that fact. His way of living does not remind us of his A-bomb memories. Instead, what is exposed is his economical richness, which seems to be inappropriate for the people who suffered from a traumatic experience. The community to which Dr. Sasaki belonged consisted of elderly people like him, and he thrives on works which supply senior citizens with more sophisticated lives. In brief, instead of having extinguished his identity as a *hibakusha*, he came to recognize himself as one of the frail elderly who needs something like heat therapy, acupuncture, and comfort from a friendly

physician. Dr. Sasaki is also, one of the "flocks," whom he thought would come to his clinic, and he projects himself on these people, so to speak.

What should be noted here is the author's attitude toward a character's way of living after the A-bomb: that is, whether the author's attitude toward him is positive or not. I would like to say that this author's attitude toward his characters is important, because in this novel, his point of view seems to be reflected in the way of his portrayal of the characters through his somewhat monotonous tone. In Dr. Sasaki's case, it could be said that the author is not very affirmative to him. That is to say, Hersey seems to have a rather bitter opinion toward Dr. Sasaki. We can find that the author cynically describes Dr. Sasaki's option to throw away his identity as a *hibakusha*. For example, the excerpt below should be noted:

> This branch of the *compassionate* art was attracting some of the ablest Japanese doctors, and it also happened to be growing extremely *lucrative*. (139, emphasis added)

This excerpt shows that Dr. Sasaki's business which is intended for elderly people as part of his benefaction resulted in a large profit. However, the italicized word "compassionate" should not be interpreted literally. These two words above are emphasized through their contrast. That is to say, the word "lucrative" is set against the word "compassionate," and as a result, Dr. Sasaki's business has a strong impression of hypocrisy. The excerpt above is one of the examples where we can find author's negative attitude toward Dr. Sasaki's deeds. As I mentioned above, if Dr. Sasaki faced his identity as a *hibakusha*, he would not throw himself into a financially "lucrative" businesses. To enforce this point, I would like to quote from the last scene of Dr. Sasaki's chapter:

> He could face Hiroshima now, because a gaudy phoenix had risen from the ruinous desert of 1945…If past memories did stir up in him, Dr. Sasaki had come to be able to live with his one bitter regret: that in the shambles of the Red Cross Hospital in those first days after the bombing it had not been possible, beyond a certain point, *to keep track of the*

> *identities of those whose corpses were dragged out to the mass cremations, with the result that nameless souls might still, all these years later, be hovering there, unattended and dissatisfied*. (142, emphasis added)

The subjunctive sentence ("If past memories did stir him up…") demonstrates the very fact that Dr. Sasaki's past attempt to erase his dreadful bomb memories with a somewhat ironic tone. In this excerpt, the author indicates that not to have kept track of the identities of thousands of victims was a mistake of Dr. Sasaki, or, of the survivors in general. Their mistakes are equal to harm the dignity of human beings. The above excerpt does not merely show the author's condolences for the victims of Hiroshima: we should notice a strong epigrammatic impression from the description of a man who could not help refusing to face his A-bomb memories. In this sense, it could be said that Dr. Sasaki's attempt to substitute his large capital investment for his identity as a *hibakusha* is a "sin." Of course, there must have been a lot of survivors, who suffered from traumatic memories, then sought to live for something as a substitution for their lost identity as *hibakusha*. Dr. Sasaki is as it were, one of the people like them. However, "unattended and dissatisfied" souls of the victims continue to hover on the city of Hiroshima, as long as the survivors like Dr. Sasaki do not recognize their "sin."

Here, I would like to focus on Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto as another example in which we can find author's prophetic connotation through his story. However, we should notice that there are differences in many ways between Mr. Tanimoto and Dr. Sasaki. Contrary to Dr. Sasaki, Mr. Tanimoto continues to recognize himself as a *hibakusha*, and from his viewpoint, it is quite a natural thing to be convinced that "the collective memory of the *hibakusha* would be a potent force for peace in the world" (176) In this sense, Mr. Tanimoto's idea about the A-bomb is contrastive to that of Dr. Sasaki, and Mr. Tanimoto's entire life is directly related to the bomb experience.

However, equally to Dr. Sasaki's case, what should be noted here is the author's existence which we can catch a glimpse of behind the story of Reverend

Tanimoto. In Mr. Tanimono's chapter, the author's attitude toward a series of events is more ominous and prophetic. For example, I would like to show the italicized excerpt which demonstrates the U.S. nuclear weapon tests.

> *On July* ***I****, 1946, before the first anniversary of the bombing, the United States had tested an atomic bomb at the Bikini Atoll. On May 17, 1948, the Americans announced the successful completion of another test*. (175)

In fact, these italicized phrases are inserted with great suddenness between Mr. Tanimoto's peace movement stories. Although this italicized part seems to give a rather monotonous impression, this could be said as the author's own voice. At first sight, there seems to be no relation between the explicit insertion of the nuclear tests and Mr. Tanimoto's individual peace movement. But the fact is that these two are parallel with each other, and such an insertion can be seen everywhere in Mr. Tanimoto's chapter, namely, the author often comes to appear. These structures strongly signify that a sequence of Mr. Tanimoto's peace movement and the international situation do not react on each other. Here, the readers are faced with a despairing proposition, that is to say, however hard an individual tries to involve in peace activities, he/she is still powerless toward the massive power of nuclear weapons. In this novel, however, we cannot find a solid answer whether human beings are wholly powerless to cope with the A-bomb issue or not. On this point, the author keeps silence, or rather, he avoids giving an obvious answer. Instead, however, he implies in the closing scene of this novel that he has a misgiving about the uneasy atmosphere in the near future:

> He lived in a snug little house with a radio and two television sets, a washing machine, an electric oven, and a refrigerator, and he had a compact Mazda automobile, manufactured in Hiroshima. He ate too much. He got up at six every morning and took an hour's walk with his small woolly dog, Chiko. He was slowing down a bit. *His memory, like the worlds, was getting spotty.* (196, emphasis added)

What is described here is that a person who once had a vivid memory became one of the common crowd, and the fading of his memory is equal to the disappearance of the witnesses of the A-bomb experience. In this concluding scene, the author obscurely expresses his anxiety toward the uneasy situation of the world.

As I have already repeated above, *hibakusha*'s identities are directly connected with their A-bomb memories. If their memories vanish, their identities would be lost at the same time. This proposition signifies a warning to the world: the loss of *hibakusha*'s memories are synonymous with the lost of heirs who can transmit their dreadful experience to posterity. In fact, we live in an uneasy situation which Hersey was anxious about. It is as if he had already foreseen the future when he wrote this novel. So, *Hiroshima* could be reread as a prophetic novel, if we focus on the descriptions of *hibakusha*'s memories and identities. Both Dr. Sasaki and Reverend Tanimoto appear, or rather, are "created" by the author to convey his warning in this novel.

Ⅳ. Unerased Trauma: Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura, Dr. Masakazu Fujii

In *Hiroshima*, the word "trauma" is hardly used by the author. However, it is an obvious fact that the A-bomb experience left many deep scars on the characters, and that scar sometimes comes back to them suddenly. In this chapter, I would like to focus on two characters: Dr. Masakazu Fujii and Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura. By focusing on their "trauma," I would like to disclose the author's accusation toward the U.S. decision to drop the two bombs on August 6th, and 9th, 1945.

The first thing I would like to say is that in the first stage of these two characters' stories, they are portrayed as flexible people who can accept their unfortunate experience as their fate. Dr. Fujii tries to live happily. He "enjoyed the company of foreigners," and he starts learning foreign languages because he "was eager to make friends with Americans." (164) Besides this, he makes every effort to make his life as luxurious one, as if he forces himself to throw himself into civilization, and luxury, and forget all the incidents that happened to him. He is quite

different from Dr. Sasaki, because Dr. Fujii does not force himself to erase his bomb memories, as did Dr. Sasaki. Instead, Dr. Fujii voluntarily gets in touch with *hibakusha*.

On the other hand, Mrs. Nakamura tries to accept her doom more painfully than Dr. Fujii. She tries to accept her bomb experience with a philosophy which is peculiar to Japanese, "It can't be helped," and she equates her bomb experience with other natural disasters, as in the following:

> She was not religious, but she lived in a culture long colored by the Buddhist belief that resignation might lead to clear vision…*and the hell she had witnessed and the terrible aftermath unfolding around her reached so far beyond human understanding that it was impossible to think of them as the work of resentable human beings, such as the pilot of the Enola Gay, or President Truman, or the scientists who had made the bomb*. (122, emphasis added)

In the italicized sentences, it could be said that Mrs. Nakamura's idea and the author's idea are blended with each other. In this part, it is as if the author faithfully describes what Mrs. Nakamura had said through a simple, monotonous tone, but in fact, he criticized all parties concerned in the A-bomb project through the thoughts of Mrs. Nakamura. In this scene, the author incorporates his severe satire toward the U.S. A-bomb parties through the eyes of Mrs. Nakamura. Thus, both Dr. Fujii and Mrs. Nakamura barely accept their A-bomb experiences in their own ways. They are described as courageous characters, and their strength is based on resignation.

However, later in their stories, their strength is found out to be quite a frail one. Namely, they cannot get over their bitter experience after all. Here I would like to quote the Japanese novelist Kenzaburo Oe's important point about "humanity" and "strength" of which the American A-bomb party was misunderstanding their meanings. In his essay named "The Unsurrendered People," Oe points out the hypocritical "humanism" which American bomb planners hold with them.

> If this absolutely lethal bomb is dropped on Hiroshima, a scientifically predictable hell will result. But the hell will not be so thoroughly disastrous as to wipe out, once and for all, all that is good in human society… There are, after all, people in Hiroshima who will make the hell as humane as they possibly can…. I suspect that the A-bomb planners thought in such a way; that in making the final decision they trusted too much in the enemy's own human strength to cope with the hell that would follow the dropping of the atomic bomb. If so, theirs was a most paradoxical humanism. (Oe, 434)

As Oe accuse of these hypocritical logic, it is obvious that bomb planners' attitude toward *hibakusha* look like quite a benevolent one, but they are in fact, a false humanism.

Now, I would like to emphasize that the author intentionally destroys a fabulous concept which the A-bomb project members thought about the "strength" of Japanese citizens. In this way, it seems that the author accuses the hypocritical humanism which American bomb project participants and decision-makers had on Japanese people. As I mentioned above, at first, Dr. Fujii and Mrs. Nakamura are described as courageous characters who try to accept their traumatic experience as their fate. However, later on, their physical weakness is revealed with a great suddenness. As a result, the revival of their A-bomb memories causes the destruction of this fabulous notion of "strength."

For example, Dr. Fujii, who tried to overcome his A-bomb nightmare by living positively, found out to be in misfortune in his later years.

> Was he, nine years later, in Hiroshima, *still* so happy-go-lucky? His daughter Chieko's husband thought not. The son-in-law thought he saw signs of a growing stubbornness and rigidity in him, and a turn toward melancholy. (168, emphasis added)

As his son-in-law testified, Dr. Fujii turned "toward melancholy," though he seemed to have enjoyed his life since the war ended. Just after this son-in-law's testimony, the circumstances around him start to change gradually. By the way, who is the

narrator of the first sentence in the above excerpt? I would like to say that the author's implicit insistence can be seen in this first sentence. That is to say, by emphasizing the word "still," he tries to say that it was almost impossible for *hibakusha* to continue to live while forgetting the A-bomb experience completely, and they were not as physically strong as the American A-bomb planners thought that they must have been.

Another example can be seen when Dr. Fujii fainted because of carbon monoxide. After being rescued, he asked the bearers "Are you soldiers?" (171). In this scene, it is obvious that his fainted consciousness retrogrades to the war periods. Hovering between life and death, he moved back to August 6th, 1945, and saw again a dreadful sight which is exactly the same one as what he witnessed on that day. His situation, when he asks the bearers if they were soldiers or not, reminds us of his characteristic as one of the unarmed citizens who was caught up in the war and as a result, became the eyewitness of historically significant event. In this way, it could be said that Dr. Fujii was making a conscious effort to act tough, but in the realm of his unconsciousness, he could not get over his trauma.

In Mrs. Nakamura's case, the author portrays her transformation more enigmatically. Her three children have developed well, so she seemed to have nothing to be worried. However, what should be noted here is that the author never misses this woman's unhealed scar which was still left deep in her soul. In the last part of her story, Mrs. Nakamura danced with the women of the folk-dance association to celebrate the annual flower festival. The festival seems to have a cheerful atmosphere. However, as soon as she heard "a song of happiness," what is called "Oiwai-Ondo" in Japanese, her condition suddenly changes, and was sent to the hospital. What was the main cause which brought about a sudden change of her condition? I think the mystery lied in the song lyrics.

> Green pine trees, cranes and turtles…
> You must tell a story of your hard times
> And laugh twice. (131)

In this song named “a song of happiness,” she found something desperate which no one can recognize from it. I would like to say that her sudden change was resulted mainly from a flashback of her dreadful bomb experience. The song itself could be interpreted as extremely optimistic meaning. That is, one can forget all the incidents that he/she suffered in the past. Yet, here we should notice Mrs. Nakamura’s complex psychology. The first time she heard this song in the flower festival, she must have realized that however hard she tries, she can never erase her A-bomb memories simply by laughing, as it was written in the song, because her memories of the A-bomb were so vivid, and they were completely different types of experience compared to any other event. Therefore, I think that she might have been in great despair facing her situation. And then she collapsed not only because of her bad condition caused by the blazing sun, but also because of shock. In this sense, “a song of happiness” has two ironic or contrastive meanings. It could be interpreted as literally a sense of well-being, but on the other hand, it could also awaken *hibakusha*’s traumatic nightmare with its optimism.

Thus, both Dr. Masakazu Fujii and Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura are portrayed as individuals who tried to accept their A-bomb experiences with their own philosophies, yet after all, both of them are at the mercy of the A-bomb trauma. Here, the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima appears as an overwhelming disaster which no one can resist. However, what should be noted is that the author John Hersey strongly reacts against the specious logic that Kenzaburo Oe calls “paradoxical humanism,” which is based on the conviction of Japanese people’s “strength,” by emphasizing these two protagonist’s powerless or, enfeebled characteristics. Hersey turned their weak characteristics into a countervailing power against the A-bomb, so to speak.

Conclusion

As we have seen in chapter one, John Hersey could not write his clear insistence which included his own individualistic interpretation of the Hiroshima’s bomb strike, because he was under perplexing political restraint with which the U.S.

publication industry was then surrounded. Thus, Hersey wrote Hiroshima objectively with a distinctive monotonous narrative style. Yet, it should be noted that he was not forced to write like that, but voluntarily adopted this style: He turned his "objective tendency" into a strategy. Some early critics pointed out Hiroshima's characteristic narrative style, and criticized this novel's lack of moral consciousness. However, in fact, when he wrote the first four chapters, Hersey had already chosen to describe his six protagonists as human beings, not as savages. He had left some traces which were later linked to his final chapter, "The Aftermath."

We can recognize the author's appearance through the description of the six protagonists. He used them as a means of transmission of his attitude toward the Hiroshima bombing. In this thesis I have examined some themes which are deeply connected with this novel.

"Religion" is one of the most significant themes, yet in this novel, religion itself is considered to be powerless. However, as we saw in Kleinsorge's case, what is needed in an extremely horrible situation is some kind of "act," which enables one to give salvation to someone. Thus, these acts led by human beings are showed against the extremities caused by the A-bomb. Furthermore, the author also provides a somewhat admonitory, prophetic connotation. As I have argued, "A-bomb memories" could be considered one of the most important factors which determine *hibakusha*'s identity. There is a contrastive difference between Reverend Tanimoto and Dr. Sasaki in respect of their attitudes toward their bomb memories. However, both of their bomb memories fade with the passing time. Dr. Fujii and Mrs. Nakamura tried to accept their bomb experiences as their inevitable fate, but after all, they could not avoid suffering from their trauma. These four characters' "fading memory of the A-bomb" and "weakness" is thus emphasized by the author for the purpose of accusing the bomb planners' "paradoxical humanism," which Oe pointed out, destroying U.S. belief for the "strength" of Japanese citizens.

In this way, the author shows his attitude and opinion toward the A-bomb connotatively through the eyes of his six protagonists. These six people's

individualistic ways of living thus become a countervailing power against the A-bomb, which might yet bring a horrible nightmare to human beings.

Notes

1. David Sanders points out that these six people were chosen by the author “only because they had been good interview subjects, and not for any more dramatic reasons such as their closeness to ground zero or the extent of their sufferings or because they made up any convenient cross-section of Hiroshima.” (45)
2. Perhaps John Hersey was the first novelist who wrote about A-bomb through the eyes of the others. His works have a strong impression of documentary style, and he was later said to be as a pioneer for what is called New Journalism.
3. Kleinsorge was supposed to become an interviewee for *Lifton’s Death in Life : survivors of Hiroshima* (1967).

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