

# A JOURNEY BY 'ANTI-WAR EXTREMISTS'

Hyun Dae Song

Almost three years have passed since I came to Japan, but my understanding of Japanese history and culture, let alone Japanese foreign policy, which I wanted to study, is still far from sufficient. Thinking that the best way to understand the culture of any foreign country is to look around various parts of the country, I was planning to travel around Japan during my summer vacation this time or never. As good luck would have it, I was asked to participate in the Discovery of Japan by Foreign Students event sponsored by JR East Cultural Foundation, which gave me a golden opportunity to travel in Japan.

The Foundation's offer was unbelievable! "...travel wherever you like at our expense." Eventually, it was decided that Mr Saengchai from Thailand, Miss Shya from Hong Kong, Miss Nozaki from Japan, and I would journey together. When we met for the first time to decide our Journey theme and itinerary, we all had entirely different opinions. Saengchai was hoping to go fishing in a seaside village, Shya to visit the Kansai area to enjoy its delicious food, and Nozaki to fly to Okinawa to see its scenic spots. For my part, I wanted to visit the coast of Japan to witness the way of life of Japanese living in harmony with the sea. After talking to find a compromise, we all agreed: "Why don't we make our journey one of visiting historic spots, rather than merely appreciating beautiful scenery? Since this year marks the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, let's consider war while travelling at this time of peace." Thus, using the name 'anti-war extremists,' we decided to visit Okinawa, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, where there are still scars left by World War II, to indirectly experience the war of 50 years ago. We all agreed not to question who were the aggressors and who were the victims, but to try to feel directly the agonies war inflicts on all people.

We visited Okinawa, Nagasaki, and Hiroshima in that order. In Okinawa, we saw the remains of trenches dug by the Japanese Navy, Himeyuri-no-to, Mabuni-no-oka, the Peace Chapel, and Peace Monument. Mabuni-no-oka where the Peace Chapel

stands was the site of a fierce battle fought at the war's end. It is said that more than twenty bombs exploded per square meter, taking some 230,000 lives, one-third the population of Okinawa. But the scene of this tragedy has few remaining scars nowadays. The only reminders were a good number of tombstones and monuments on the cliff overlooking the serene Pacific Ocean. As a matter of fact, rather than feeling the cruelty and bitterness of war, we were almost carried away by the exquisite landscape.

In the Peace Park, we saw the Peace Monument (called Heiwa-no-ishiji) erected in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of the War. While the tombstones honour the Japanese soldiers who fought for their country, the Peace Monument carries the names of the war dead on both sides. We were especially impressed by this, which might be the only monument of its kind in the world. It seemed to me that the Monument and the tombstones revealed two different aspects of Japan which entertains two contradictory sentiments toward the war.

When we travelled around central Okinawa,

I was shocked to find quite a few American military bases occupying 12% of the total area of Okinawa, and fully equipped to provide against nuclear war that might break out in the Middle East or Asia. I felt sad to know that this beautiful island—an island with a tragic past—is still at the forefront of modern war. We left for Nagasaki with the distressed feeling that in Okinawa war has still not ended.

It was raining when we arrived in Nagasaki. As we went to the site of the epicenter of the A-bomb explosion, I recalled scenes from the Japanese movie *Black Rain* I saw years ago.

It was a little disappointing to find fewer relics than I had expected on display in the Atomic Bomb Museum. Nevertheless, the photographs vividly illustrate the atomic bombing and really wrung my heart. The statue of the headless angel in Uragami Catholic Church made me shiver as I felt sure that God would some day punish human beings for their profane deed.

Our next destination was Hiroshima. In Okinawa and Nagasaki, we easily forgot the war completely, while we were visiting peaceful sightseeing spots. However, after visiting the Atomic Bomb Museum in Hiroshima, I could not really enjoy the beautiful scenery of Itsukushima, or Miyajima, the 'Shrine Island,' one of Japan's three most famous scenic attractions, because everything I saw in the Museum lingered in my head. Actually, I have seen photographs of A-bomb-stricken Hiroshima many times before, but this time they made me shudder with their vividness. Not a few photographs were so horrible that I could hardly bear to look at them. When we left the Museum, I was full of



■ The Cornerstone of Peace (Heiwa-no-ishiji) in Heiwakōen, Okinawa

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sadness beyond description.

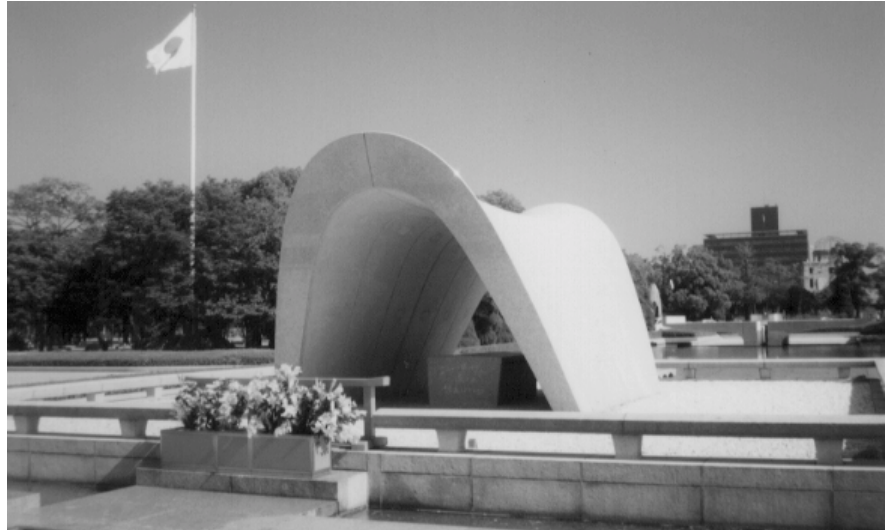
Outside, I saw a Rising-Sun flag floating high near the cenotaph against a cloudless sky. At the sight, I had a strong feeling of something strange. "Wasn't that cenotaph erected to the memory of those who died for that flag?"

Takehiko Fukunaga, a Japanese writer, says that when he was on a platform of Hiroshima Station, the announcement of the station name sounded like "Shi-no-shima" (meaning "island of death" in one sense). He eventually wrote the book *The Island of Death* dealing with the Japanese memory of the atomic bombing as the main theme. Personally, however, I think that to all people living in this atomic age, Hiroshima means "island of precepts" in another sense. As great people lose their nationality after they pass away, by the same token, I think that Hiroshima of Japan became Hiroshima of the world at 08:15 on August 6, 1945. So, in my eyes, the United Nations' flag depicting a dove as the symbol of peace would be more suitable than the Rising-Sun flag which still seems to have something to do with militarism.

Zenkoji Temple in Nagano, our last destination, has a monument to the memory of the kamikaze who sacrificed themselves in the War. Most of the deceased kamikaze were 16 to 18 years of age. For what cause did those young men die? I cannot help thinking that a handful of Japanese generals and politicians mobilized those young men and deprived them of their priceless lives. The Rising-Sun flag I saw in the Peace Park and the one worn around the forehead of each kamikaze overlapped in my mind.

In his paper, *The Clash of Civilization?*, Samuel P. Huntington says world politics is entering a new age and predicts that the major cause of disputes will be the confrontation of civilizations. According to Huntington, the world of the future will be governed by the relationships between eight major civilizations: Western European, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-orthodox, Latin American, and African civilization. Huntington maintains that since Japan has established a peculiar society and culture, it will find it difficult to accomplish economic integration in Asia as has been implemented in Europe and North America. Gregory Clark, in *The Japanese Tribe—Origins of a Nation's Uniqueness* advises Japan not to try to assume the leadership in international society because Japan is cut out to be an economist.

But in my opinion, Japan should examine itself from a more global perspective. Even if Japanese society and culture lack universality on a global basis and even if Japan has to



■ Atomic Bomb Memorial, Hiroshima

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■ Peace Statue, Nagasaki

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solve various problems before it can assume leadership in international society, it is an undeniable fact that Japan is the only country that has suffered atomic bombing, and that it is one of the few countries that have a peace constitution denouncing forever the use of armed force in settling international disputes. Today, when the whole world is walking on a tightrope of peace, shouldn't Japan play the leading role in the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements? In this sense, I felt that replacing the Rising-Sun flag in the Peace Park at

Hiroshima first with an anti-war, anti-nuclear flag would be an important step forward.

Although my journey lasted only a little longer than a week, it was a valuable experience. On the train back to Tokyo, I swore in my heart that I will bear witness to Hiroshima by joining the anti-war and anti-nuclear-weapon movements.

The journey of the 'anti-war extremists' in the true sense, begins now. ■



## Hyun Dae Song

Hyun Dae Song was born in Pusan, South Korea, in November 1961. He travelled the world as navigation officer of a cargo liner from 1980 to 1986. In 1992, he graduated from the Department of Politics and Diplomacy of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. He came to Japan as a Ministry of Education scholar in 1993, and, since 1995, has been majoring in international politics in the Master's course of law and politics at Tokyo University. He is fond of travelling, drinking, scuba diving, and kendo (Japanese fencing).