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CCAS Statement of Purpose

Critical Asian Studies continues to be inspired by the statement of purpose formulated in 1969 by its parent organization, the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS). CCAS ceased to exist as an organization in 1979, but the BCAS board decided in 1993 that the CCAS Statement of Purpose should be published in our journal at least once a year.

We first came together in opposition to the brutal aggression of the United States in Vietnam and to the complicity or silence of our profession with regard to that policy. Those in the field of Asian studies bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession. We are concerned about the present unwillingness of specialists to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring American domination of much of Asia. We reject the legitimacy of this aim, and attempt to change this policy. We recognize that the present structure of the profession has often perverted scholarship and alienated many people in the field.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars seeks to develop a humane and knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies and their efforts to maintain cultural integrity and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that to be students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them.

CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia, which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism. Our organization is designed to function as a catalyst, a communications network for both Asian and Western scholars, a provider of central resources for local chapters, and a community for the development of anti-imperialist research.

Passed, 28–30 March 1969
Boston, Massachusetts
U.S., Japan, and the Atomic Bomb
Censorship of the Bombs’ Effects
Philippine Counterinsurgency War
Radicalism and Change in Modern China

Korean Atomic Bomb Victims
Kurihara’s Antiwar Poems
Indian Women and Revolt
Indian Rural Struggles

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The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars is a refereed quarterly that welcomes unsolicited essays, reviews, translations, interviews, photo essays, and letters on modern and contemporary Asia, particularly those that challenge the accepted formulas for understanding Asia, the world, and ourselves. Manuscripts should be submitted in quadruplicate, and generally should be unpublished and not under consideration for publication elsewhere. The decision regarding publication in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editors after consulting with members of the editorial board. For more details on our philosophy and requirements, send for a copy of our "Guidelines for BCAS Authors." Please direct all correspondence to 3239 9th Street, Boulder, CO 80304-2112, U.S.A., or phone (303) 449-7439. The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Inc., is a nonprofit corporation, and contributions are needed, appreciated—and tax-deductible.

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On the front cover is Yang Ki-song of Seoul, in 1989 a sixty-eight-year-old Korean survivor of the atomic blast in Hiroshima. Drafted at the age of twenty-two to work in an armaments plant there, he was among the 750,000 Koreans forced to work in Japan during the war. Yang Ki-song is lucky to be alive, since 30,000 of the 50,000 Koreans estimated to be living in Hiroshima at the time of the blast died immediately or during the following year. However, he and many other Korean survivors of the bomb, even more than their Japanese counterparts, have found their lives since then to be filled with difficulties caused by the bomb. Yang Ki-song, burned and incapacitated, would like to die, but he does not feel it would be right before his ninety-six-year-old father. For more on Korea’s atomic bomb victims, see the article by Kurt W. Tong in this issue. This picture is a still from the 1989 Korean Broadcasting System documentary *Haebang 1944 nyon, pipok 1944 nyon* (Liberation, forty-four years; atomic bomb victims, forty-four years), in Korean, and the picture is used here courtesy of the Korean Broadcasting System.

With the exception of the names of authors in the list of books to review at the end of the issue, BCAS follows the East Asian practice of placing surnames first in all East Asian names.

Contributors

Dolores F. Chew is with the Centre for Developing-Area Studies in Montreal, Canada. She is researching the legal constructions of gender and property in nineteenth century Bengal.

Tito Craige of Durham, North Carolina, U.S.A. spent three years in the Philippines, ending in 1990, working with the Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace and other organizations under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee. In the United States he has worked on literacy and advocacy programs with farm laborers.

Arnel de Guzman of Manila was a Marcos-era detainee in the Philippines and has pressed for both the government and the New People’s Army to adopt and implement humanitarian law provisions for the treatment of noncombatants. He has recently started a desktop publishing company for the alternative press.


Richard H. Minear teaches history at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts, U.S.A. He is the author of *Hiroshima: Three Witnesses* (1990).

Mark Selden teaches sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton, New York, U.S.A. His recent books include *The Atomic Bomb: Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki* with Kyoko Selden, and *Chinese Village, Socialist State* with Ed Friedman and Paul Pickowicz.

Kurt W. Tong recently began work as a junior officer at the U.S. Embassy in Manila and formerly worked for a business consulting firm based in Tokyo with assignments to various places in Asia. He has published an article on the Kwangju incident and anti-American sentiment among Korean students.

Peter Zarrow studies modern Chinese intellectual and cultural history. He teaches history at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A. and is the author of *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture*.

A New Book from BCAS!

*Coming to Terms: Indochina, the United States, and the War,* edited by Douglas Allen and Ngo Vinh Long in collaboration with BCAS, August 1991. Ca. 300 pp., illus.; paper, $16.95, and cloth $44.95.

Despite the plethora of works on the Vietnam War, this is the first book to present an accessible overview from both the non-Western and antiwar perspectives. The authors trace the history, war years, and postwar experiences of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos before turning to the U.S. experience, where they focus on government policies, the antiwar movement, U.S. scholars and the war, veterans, and films and literature on Vietnam. Those who experienced the war will find their memories vividly rekindled; those who wish to learn more about Indochina, the war, and its aftermath will find these issues provocatively discussed and analyzed.

This book originated with the BCAS anniversary issue on Indochina and the War, volume 21, numbers 2–4 (combined) from April–December 1989. The book is designed as a text, and the original articles have been revised and entirely new articles on postwar Vietnam and U.S. veterans, an appendix, and chronologies have been added. Not included are the anniversary issue’s material about BCAS, interview with Daniel Ellsberg, articles about how to teach about the war, and the course syllabi.


*Coming to Terms* will be available at bookstores and from Westview Press, 5500 Central Ave., Boulder, CO 80301, U.S.A., tel. (toll-free) 1-800-456-1995. Please add $2.50 for postage and handling.

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The United States, Japan, and the Atomic Bomb

by Mark Selden*

Two events associated with World War II in the Pacific virtually obliterated the distinction between combatant and noncombatant, that fragile distinction at the heart of international efforts of the last five centuries to regulate and restrict human and environmental destruction during wartime. These were:

- The Japanese onslaught against the peoples of China and Southeast Asia as exemplified by the bombing of Shanghai, the rape of Nanjing, and the attacks on civilians in the “three-all policy” (burn all, kill all, destroy all) directed against rural North China.
- The use of air strikes by several major powers to terrorize and destroy cities and populations, notably in the firebombing of European and Japanese cities and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States.

The common element linking all of these events, in which the awesome technological might of modern war was directed indiscriminately against combatant and noncombatant alike, was the denial of the humanity of enemy populations, and, in extreme cases, their wholesale annihilation.

This article reflects on the implications of the firebombing and nuclear bombing of Japan with an eye toward assessing their significance for war and peace in our times. It considers the historical context and weighs the human cost of U.S. destruction of Japanese cities and the wholesale killing of noncombatants in the context of the international conflicts of the era. It seeks to bridge the gulf separating studies of global strategy and international conflict on the one hand, and those that chronicle the travail of the victims of war on the other. In particular, it offers a view from inside the inferno as a means of illuminating the significance of the first, and thus far only, nuclear war in an era of total war in which the capacity to annihilate whole populations has now been extended to the capacity to terminate human life on planet earth.

Firebombs, Atomic Bombs, and the Road to Total War

The U.S.-British bombing of Dresden, an undefended city with no significant war industry, remains the single best known and most widely condemned example of firebombing and the deliberate annihilation of civilian populations in the history of war. Dresden carried to its inexorable conclusion the escalation of urban bombing by both sides in Europe. Dresden also marked the transition in air strategy from precision bombing to area bombing, that is, from striking at strategic targets to the destruction of cities and killing of their residents. On 13 February 1945, 1,400 British aircraft followed by 1,350 U.S. bombers destroyed Dresden and unleashed a firestorm visible 200 miles away. The U.S. writer Kurt Vonnegut, then a young POW, recalled: “They burnt the whole damn town down. . . . Every day we walked into the city and dug into basements and shelters to get the corpses out, as a sanitary measure. When we went into them, a typical shelter, an ordinary basement usually, looked like a streetcar full of people who’d simultaneously had heart failure. Just people sitting there in their chairs, all dead." The destruction of Dresden, killing 35,000 Germans, was the prelude to the wave of U.S. B-29 firebomb and napalm attacks that sowed destruction across virtually every major Japanese city and exacted a heavy toll in human life in the spring and summer of 1945.

The Firebombing of Japan

U.S. Air Force planners first explored the possibilities and techniques of firebombing the densely populated cities of a prospective Japanese enemy at the suggestion of General Jimmy Doolittle in the 1930s. Long before Pearl Harbor, General George Marshall contemplated “general incendiary attacks to bum up the wood and paper structures of the densely populated Japanese cities.” Throughout most of World War II, however, U.S. Army Air Force

*This is a modified version of the introductory essay in Kyoko and Mark Selden, eds., The Atomic Bomb: Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Armonk, NY; and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1989). Some sections have been expanded, but an entire section on atomic censorship has been omitted since Glenn Hook’s article in this issue of BCAS covers this topic so well. I am indebted to Herbert Bix, Noam Chomsky, John Dower, Edward Friedman, Terence Hopkins, Iriye Akira, and Michael Klare for perceptive comments and suggestions. Monica Braw and Anzai Hisashi directed me to a number of documentary and archival sources.

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The use of nuclear weapons to destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the culmination of a policy of firebombing and napalming Japanese cities that was put into effect in the spring of 1945 after strategic bombing of military targets failed to incapacitate Japanese industry. Almost every major city in Japan was badly damaged, and more than 500,000 civilians were killed in these attacks. A single raid on Tokyo in March 1945 destroyed vast areas of the city and killed about 100,000 people, injured many more, and created about one million refugees. The death toll was greater than in any previous six-hour period in history.

In late 1944, the failure of strategic bombing attacks to incapacitate Japanese industry (much of it earlier dispersed to small workshops) or to force surrender led to the appointment of General Curtis LeMay as commander of the 21st Air Force Headquarters. LeMay pioneered and promoted the firebombing and napalming of defenseless populations, first in the cities of Japan and in subsequent decades in city and countryside in Korea and Vietnam. The blunt-speaking LeMay, for thirty years the most visible spokesman for the doctrine, if not always its practice, emphasized strategic bombing of military targets as the most efficient road to victory.

On 25 February 1945, two weeks after firebombing Dresden, U.S. bombers in a “test raid” destroyed a one-square-mile area of a snow-covered Tokyo. Robert Guillain, a French journalist in Tokyo, described the raid:

"Falling endlessly in the absolutely still afternoon air, the flakes smothered the throbbing of the B-29s in a plume of white, muffling the shrouded whine of the bombs. Suddenly, the slowly descending snow was lit up by a mysterious inner light—huge, invisible fires that I judged to be near my neighborhood. The half-light veiling the city gradually took on a luminous yellow tint shot with a wondrous pink gold that pulsed weirdly. fading slowly. then flaring anew. At last, in the total silence that returned at the end of the day, everything bathed in a final raspberry-colored glow that flickered and dwindled, disappearing in the snow-filled air behind a curtain of bluish twilight.

The full fury of U.S. firebombing was unleashed on the night of 9–10 March 1945. Abandoning high-altitude daylight raids, LeMay sent 334 B-29s flying low over Tokyo from bases in Guam, Saipan, and Tinian. Their mission: to reduce the city to rubble with jellied gasoline and napalm, a technology that would be put to devastating use in subsequent U.S. wars in Asia. Whipped by fierce winds, the flames leaped across Tokyo, generating firestorms so turbulent that the giant B-29 superfortresses were tossed hundreds of feet in the air and then sucked groundward.

In contrast with Vonnegut’s cool “wax museum” recollection and Guillain’s lyrical description, accounts from inside the inferno that engulfed Tokyo chronicle scenes of utter carnage. Police cameraman Ishikawa Koyo remembered the streets of Tokyo as “rivers of fire. Everywhere one could see flaming pieces of furniture exploding in the heat, while the people themselves blazed like matchsticks” as their wood and paper homes exploded in flames. “Under the wind and the gigantic breath of the fire, immense incandescent vortices rose in a number of places, swirling, flattening, sucking whole blocks of houses into their maelstrom of fire.” Dr. Kubota Shigenori, head of a military rescue unit, recalled that “In the black Sumida River countless bodies were floating, clothed bodies, naked bodies, all as black as charcoal. It was unreal. These were dead people, but you couldn’t tell whether they were men or women. You couldn’t even tell if the objects floating by were arms and legs or pieces of burnt wood.”

Fleeing the flames, thousands plunged in desperation into the freezing waters of rivers, canals, and Tokyo Bay:

A woman spent the night knee-deep in the bay, holding onto a piling with her three-year-old son clinging to her back; by morning several of the people around her were dead of burns, shock, fatigue, and hypothermia. Thousands submerged themselves in stagnant, foul-smelling canals with their mouths just above the surface, but many died from smoke inhalation, anoxia, or carbon monoxide poisoning, or were boiled to death when the firestorm heated the water. Others, huddling in canals connected to the Sumida River, drowned when the tide came in. In the Hongo and Asakusa districts people jammed onto steel bridges. As the metal
became unbearably hot, those who clung to the rails started to let go, falling off in waves, and were carried away by the waters below. Huge crowds lined the gardens and parks along the Sumida, and as the masses behind them pushed toward the river, walls of screaming people fell in and vanished.

Father Flaujac, a French cleric, compared the firebombing to the Tokyo Earthquake twenty-two years earlier:

In September 1923, during the great earthquake, I saw Tokyo burning for 5 days. I saw in Honjo a heap of 33,000 corpses of people who burned or suffocated at the beginning of the bombardment... After the first quake there were 20-odd centers of fire, enough to destroy the capital. How could the conflagration be stopped when incendiary bombs in the dozens of thousands now dropped over the four corners of the district and with Japanese houses which are only match boxes?... In 1923 the fire spread on the ground. At the time of the bombings the fire fell from the sky. Where could one take refuge? In the shelters where I was sure to suffocate? Where could one fly? The fire was everywhere. It was impossible to find refuge in such a furnace, and besides, an order was given to stay and put out the fires. Yes, an inferno was created by the war and the wind made it even more wicked.

Nature reinforced man's handiwork in the form of *akakaze*, the red wind that swept with hurricane force across the Tokyo plain.

The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey provided a technical description of the firestorm and its effects on the city:

The chief characteristic of the conflagration... was the presence of a fire front, an extended wall of fire moving to leeward, preceded by a mass of pre-heated, turbid, burning vapors. The pillar was in a much more turbulent state than that of [a usual] firestorm, and being usually closer to the ground, it produced more flame and heat, and less smoke.... The 28-mile-per-hour wind, measured a mile from the fire, increased to an estimated 55 miles at the perimeter, and probably more within. An extended fire swept over 15 square miles in 6 hours.... The area of the fire was nearly 100 percent burned; no structure or its contents escaped damage.

The survey concluded—plausibly, but only for events prior to the summer of 1945—that "probably more persons lost their lives by fire at Tokyo in a 6-hour period than at any [other] time in the history of man." People died from extreme heat as the winds fanned temperatures to 1,000 degrees centigrade, from oxygen deficiency, from carbon monoxide asphyxiation, or from being trampled beneath the feet of stampeding crowds.

How many died that night in what flight commander General Thomas Power termed "the greatest single disaster incurred by any enemy in military history"? The Strategic Bombing Survey provided precise figures for what can only be the crudest estimates: in that single raid on Tokyo 87,793 people died, 40,918 were injured, and 1,009,005 people lost their homes. Richard Rhodes, estimating the dead at more than 100,000 men, women, and children, suggests that probably a million more were injured and another million were left homeless. The Tokyo fire department estimated 97,000 killed and 125,000 wounded. In sum, vast areas of Tokyo lay in ruins, more than one million refugees fled, approximately 100,000 people died, and many more were injured.

Following the raid, General LeMay explained that he wanted Tokyo "burned down—wiped right off the map" to "shorten the war." Tokyo did burn, far beyond LeMay's hopes and expectations. But the war ground on. In the following months, U.S. firebombing destroyed substantial areas of virtually every important Japanese city, killing tens of thousands and driving many more to rural and mountain areas, although no subsequent firebombing raid ever exacted a comparable toll in lives. By July 1945, in attacks involving 6,960 B-29 sorties and 41,592 tons of bombs, U.S. planes had bombed sixty of Japan's largest cities, driven eight million citizens from their communities, and destroyed millions of homes. LeMay's bombers were rapidly running out of targets to strike.

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The evidence suggests that had the United States softened the language of unconditional surrender, indeed, had it employed the very language that secured Japan's surrender after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, surrender could probably have been achieved without the atomic bomb or an invasion.

In July 1945 U.S. planes blanketed Japanese cities with an "Appeal to the People." "As you know," it read, "America, which stands for humanity, does not wish to injure the innocent people, so you had better evacuate these cities." Half the leafleted cities were firebombed within days of the warning, bringing home to their residents the absolute invulnerability of U.S. bombers to counterattack by Japanese batteries and fighter planes. Despite the pounding of defenseless cities, the destruction of important industrial concentrations, and the virtual paralysis of Japanese air and naval forces, the war continued.

Throughout 1945, U.S. planners deliberately spared five cities from firebombing. Kyoto, the ancient imperial capital, Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata, and Nagasaki were reserved by the Atomic Bomb Target Selection Committee to display the power of the atom to Japan and the world.

A few U.S. military men raised questions about the efficacy of the area bombing of Japanese cities in the spring and summer of 1945, but no significant discussion of the ethics or the political ramifications of civilian bombing took place either in policy circles or in the public domain. In routinizing the uses of air power for the extermination of urban populations, firebombing constituted the critical background to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Despite fleeting discussions about demonstrating the power of the bomb at an uninhabited test site, discussions that took place largely outside the corridors of power, the road to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was essentially devoid of consideration of the ethical implications of its use.

**The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki**

With the successful atomic test at Los Alamos on 16 July 1945, and with Soviet troops scheduled to enter the war on 15 August, the United States raced to deliver the final blow against

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1. In 1964 the Japanese government awarded General LeMay the First Class Order of the Rising Sun for his contribution to the postwar development of the Japanese Air Force.
The New York Times banner headline proclaimed:

**FIRST ATOMIC BOMB DROPPED ON JAPAN; MISSILE IS EQUAL TO 20,000 TONS OF TNT; TRUMAN WARNS FOE OF ‘RAIN OF RUIN’**

Three days later, on 9 August, the United States dropped a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, with a population of 270,000.

The uranium weapon known as *Little Boy* exploded 1,850 feet in the air above Hiroshima with a force estimated at the equivalent of 12.5 kilotons of TNT. The plutonium bomb *Fat Man* exploded over Nagasaki with a force of 22 kilotons, equivalent to the power packed by 4,000 B-29s carrying conventional bombs. Within one millisecond of the second of the explosion, the temperature rose to several million degrees centigrade, and 0.1 millisecond later an isothermal sphere 15 meters in radius with a temperature of approximately 300,000 degrees centigrade formed. Within one second the fireball expanded to 200 meters, emitting shock waves and thermal radiation.

**Atomic Holocaust: The View from the Ground**

“The hour was early, the morning still, warm and beautiful. Shimmering leaves, reflecting sunlight from a cloudless sky, made a pleasant contrast with shadows in my garden,” Hachiyu Michihiko, director of the Hiroshima Communications Hospital, recorded in his diary of the early morning of 6 August.

A student clearing firebreaks recalled her teacher saying “Oh, there’s a B!” and, looking skyward, “felt a tremendous flash of lightning. In an instant we were blinded and everything was just a frenzy of delirium.”

A female junior college student recalled the instant of the explosion: “I felt as though I had been struck on the back with something like a big hammer, and thrown into boiling oil. ...I seem to have been blown a good way to the north, and I felt as though the directions were all changed around.”

The force of the blast and the heat of the thermal flash tore away the clothing and peeled away the skin from many of the victims. A young sociologist described “a park nearby covered with dead bodies waiting to be cremated. ...The most impressive thing I saw was some girls, very young girls, not only with their clothes torn off but with their skin peeled off as well. ...My immediate thought was that this was like the hell I had always read about.”

Hiroshima was in flames. A girl of five at the time of the bombing recalled: “Black smoke was billowing up and we could hear the sound of big things exploding. ...Those dreadful streets. The fires were burning. There was a strange smell all over. Blue-green balls of fire were drifting around. I had a terrible lonely feeling that everybody else in the world was dead and only we were still alive.”

A history professor looked down at the city from Hijiyama Hill to find “that Hiroshima had disappeared. ...that experience looking down and finding nothing left of Hiroshima — was so shocking that I simply can’t express what I felt. ...Hiroshima didn’t exist—that was mainly what I saw—Hiroshima just didn’t exist.”

Ichikawa Hiroaki, five years old, was trapped under his house but was able to wriggle free. Fleeing the city, at Hijiyama Bridge he saw “naked people with their burnt skin hanging from them like rags. We saw others covered with blood, being carried to safer places on trucks.”
Twenty-year-old Shibayama Hiroshi entered Hiroshima on foot within hours of the bombing from his suburban workplace. Crossing the Kyobashi River he encountered a scene reminiscent of "a painting of hell."

Floating there were scores of dead bodies, faces swollen to twice their normal size and trouser-encased legs stiff as logs. The upper half of one body was burned black and the lower half swollen and waterlogged. The sight chilled us to the bone...it began to rain. Black stains spotted shirts. The multicolored smoke generated at the time of the blast had become a cloud of dirty brown and black hanging like a pall over the city. It was a demonic ceiling, a malediction.

Returning to the city the next day he encountered a sight he would never forget:

a man, his face burned and his blue clothes in shreds, riding along apathetically with what looked like black wood fastened to his bicycle with coarse straw rope. As he approached, we saw that what we had taken for wood was a stiff, blackened corpse, probably the remains of a loved one. The man himself seemed crazed. All the inhabitants of Hiroshima appeared deranged.

Okabe Kosaku, a young soldier, entered Hiroshima on the afternoon following the bombing to find a burnt-out wasteland. "Burned into my memory is the sight of a young mother, probably in her twenties, a baby on her back and a three- or four-year-old child clasped tightly in her arms. Caught against a girder of the bridge, her body bobbed idly in the gentle current." Approaching Hiroshima station, he observed that

Houses had been shattered and their inhabitants buried in a welter of tiles and plaster, their naked bodies covered in ashes. Here and there an arm or a leg protruded. Other bodies lay strewn about, their stomachs torn open and their entrails pouring into the ashes.... The expressions on the dead faces as they gazed emptily into space were more contorted and agonized than those of the fierce gate-guardian deities of Japanese temples.

Sato Kiyoko, a third grader, entered a darkened Hiroshima at night two weeks after the bombing in search of her mother. "No life disturbed the dead streets," she later wrote.

What was more frightening than anything else was the sight, in the moonlight, of the skeleton of a burned-out streetcar with its load of fire-blackened passengers. One corpse was still clinging to a strap. I could see trails of silvery phosphorus weaving all about, for all the world like the spirits of the dead in my storybooks.

Survivor accounts of the agony and destruction of terror bombing are among the most important and neglected documents of modern war and the nuclear era.

In both Hiroshima and Nagasaki 50 percent of all those located within 1.2 kilometers (three-quarters of a mile) of the hypocenter died on the day of the explosion, and 80–100 percent of those exposed at this distance eventually died from wounds or radiation inflicted by the bomb. Within five months, the atomic bomb claimed the lives of 140,000 of Hiroshima’s 350,000 people and 70,000 of Nagasaki’s 270,000 people. A study conducted in Hiroshima one year after the bombing revealed that 118,661 people or 37 percent of the civilian population of 320,613, were killed, 3,677 were missing, and 79,130 were injured.

Despite fleeting discussions about demonstrating the power of the bomb at an uninhabited test site, discussions that took place largely outside the corridors of power, the road to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was essentially devoid of consideration of ethical implications.

Richard Rhodes plausibly estimates that within five years, Hiroshima’s atomic bomb–related deaths numbered nearly 200,000 and Nagasaki’s 74,000. No single attack in the annals of warfare exacted so heavy a cumulative toll in human lives as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Bomb-related deaths have continued at lower levels in subsequent years down to the present. Hundreds of thousands of others continued, and many continue today, to suffer “death in life,” in Robert Lifton’s evocative phrase. The victims included not only those who felt the direct effects of blast and fire but tens of thousands of others, including fetuses in utero, who were exposed to residual radiation days after the bombing.

One measure of the destruction of the firebombing and atomic bombing is the comparison with U.S. wartime casualties. The U.S. Armed Forces lost 292,000 troops and very few civilians in all theaters during all of World War II, that is, a fraction of the noncombatants killed in the U.S. bombing of Japanese cities in the spring and summer of 1945.

Michael Sherry has reflected on the qualities that distinguished the Tokyo firebombing from the experience of the atomic bomb. Tokyo was a process of destruction, not a simple act, as the American bombers poured gasoline and chemicals into the inferno, the observer could see the destruction take place and watch the thing come alive, becoming some living, grotesque organism, ever changing in its shape, dimensions, colors and directions....In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, most victims did not know what hit them, confronting personal extinction first; the survivors only later suffered the shock of communal annihilation as they crawled out of their wreckage and met the parade of the damned.

This unfathomable quality of the atomic experience, together with the vastly greater power unleashed, however puny by the megadeath standards of today, distinguishes the atomic bombing from earlier forms of holocaust.

The Decision to Drop the Bomb

The atomic bombing of Japan and indeed much of the firebombing which preceded it were directed against a nation that
was militarily defeated in all but name yet whose leaders continued to spurn surrender: Isolated and without allies following the defeat of Germany; in full retreat across Asia and the Pacific; its cities and much of its industry in ruins or starved of raw materials; its civilian morale at low ebb; its navy and air force virtually paralyzed, and its armies still largely intact but desperately short of food and supplies. By spring 1945 Japan lacked the capacity to wage aggressive war beyond its borders against the United States and its allies. Soviet troop mobilization to attack Japan in Manchuria on 15 August increased the desperation of the situation. Nevertheless, the Japanese military had not lost its capacity to inflict substantial damage on forces invading the home islands. Throughout 1945, halting and inconclusive efforts by Japanese leaders to negotiate acceptable surrender terms through Soviet and Swiss mediation to assure the person of the emperor and the continuity of the imperial system came to nought. The war continued.

Given the destruction of Japan’s naval and air power, and the Soviet decision to send large armies against Japan in Manchuria, there is strong reason to believe that without the atomic bomb Japan’s surrender could have been secured well before the invasion, which was planned to begin three months in the future.

How are we to understand the U.S. decision to drop the atomic bomb? Four mutually reinforcing factors lay behind the decision to bomb Hiroshima and then, three days later, Nagasaki. These were:

- wartime goals that required Japan’s unconditional surrender;
- the belief, subtly reinforced by racist stereotypes, that the behavior of Japanese forces, from attacks on Chinese cities in 1937 through Pearl Harbor to the Bataan Death March and the rape of Manila in 1945, nullified any humanitarian consideration for the Japanese people;
- the conviction that the atomic bomb would save the lives of numerous U.S. soldiers by obviating a costly invasion of Japan otherwise required to secure surrender and assure unilateral U.S. domination of a leading industrial power;
- the commitment to establish U.S. primacy and to check Soviet advance at the outset of a postwar era that would be shaped by Soviet-U.S. conflict.

The Good War and Unconditional Surrender

“There never has been—there never can be—successful compromise between good and evil. Only total victory can reward the champions of tolerance, and decency, and faith,” Franklin Roosevelt told the U.S. Congress one month after Pearl Harbor. From the outset, U.S. leaders defined the war in Manichean terms of unmitigated good versus evil that required unconditional surrender, and never questioned the legitimacy of the U.S. mission. In July 1945 at Potsdam, Truman’s decision to overrule suggestions by Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Under Secretary of State Joseph Grew to soften the unconditional surrender provisions precluded an armistice prior to dropping the atomic bomb. “The bombs,” Richard Rhodes has observed, “were authorized not because they refused to surrender but because they refused to surrender unconditionally.”

The evidence suggests that had the United States softened the language of unconditional surrender, indeed, had it employed the very language which secured Japan’s surrender after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, surrender could probably have been achieved without the atomic bomb or an invasion. The cruelest irony lies in the fact that after dropping the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the United States did soften its unconditional surrender provisions with respect to the emperor. Emperor Hirohito retained not only his life, but he continued to occupy the throne for more than forty years as U.S. occupying forces assured the existence of the imperial system while transforming Japan into an “imperial democracy.”

Viewing the end of the war from the perspective of the responsibility of Japanese leadership, the price of ignoring the welfare of the Japanese people and holding out to secure guarantees for the person and institution of the emperor—the single issue blocking surrender prior to dropping the bomb—was the loss of more than 250,000 lives in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the estimated 300,000 out of a total of 1.3 million Japanese prisoners who never returned from detention in the Soviet Union and are presumed to have died, and 81,000 Japanese soldiers who died overseas after surrender before they could be repatriated.

Japanese Atrocities

By 1945, U.S. officials had closely studied examples of Japanese treachery, brutality, and fanaticism that became staples of U.S. war propaganda: from the Nanjing Massacre, when marauding Japanese troops killed several hundred thousand Chinese, to Pearl Harbor, when 3,000 U.S. military personnel (but few noncombatants) were killed, to the Bataan Death March, when hundreds of U.S. and Filipino prisoners died or were killed en route to a prison camp, to the desperate resort to kamikaze suicide missions in 1944 and 1945. Many U.S. military and civilian leaders concluded from the examples of such barbarous or fanatical behavior by the Japanese military that the Japanese people had forfeited all right to be treated like human beings. Air Force general Haywood Hansell recalled the “universal feeling” that Japanese were “subhuman.” And Air Force commanding general Henry Arnold believed that Japanese brutality and atrocities were so immoral as to justify U.S. retribution from firebombs to the atomic bomb. Canadian prime minister MacKenzie King privately expressed relief that the bomb was dropped on an Asian people and not on “the white races of Europe.” Most important, as John Dower has brilliantly shown, U.S. leaders, who had carefully distinguished throughout the war between Nazi leaders and the German people, made no such distinction between Japan’s leaders and the Japanese people. These judgments—with their racist overtones, embodied in four years of unremitting U.S. and allied wartime propaganda presenting the Japanese as barbarous, subhuman creatures, madmen and yellow vermin—precluded any morally grounded hesitation about dropping the bomb.

The conclusion that racist assumptions shaped patterns of U.S. bombing in Asia emerges out of comparison with bombing patterns in the European theater. Noting the “agonized handwringing” by Allied leaders prior to bombing European cities and its absence in the Asian theater, Michael Sherry concludes that “a different set of standards applied not only to the enemy
The indiscriminate killing and maiming of massive numbers of Japanese noncombatants through firebombing and nuclear explosions was made easier by the prevalent Western view at that time of the Japanese as subhuman and repulsive. The cartoon on the left by David Low of the Evening Standard in London was published in July 1941, months before Pearl Harbor, and even then offered a stark contrast between three stalwart servicemen, identified as the United States, Britain, and the USSR, and the monkey labeled “Jap,” hanging by its tail and contemplating which white man to stab in the back. Throughout the war years the U.S. and British media, from conservative to liberal, popular to highbrow, portrayed the Japanese as buck-toothed and nearsighted little creatures, most commonly caricatured as monkeys or apes, but also as dogs, mice, rats, vipers, rattlesnakes, cockroaches, and vermin. After learning of Japanese atrocities, the media emphasized their bestial savagery and the need to exterminate them. The cartoon on the right was published in the U.S. Marine monthly Leatherneck in March 1943, the same month that the United States adopted the policy of low-level incendiary bombing of Japanese cities. These cartoons and most of the information in their captions are from John Dower’s War Without Mercy.

population, but to conquered friendly people as well.” This difference was similarly manifest in the decision to intern Japanese-Americans but not German-Americans for the duration of the war. In short, U.S. bombing of Japan exemplified “the lower value Americans put on Asian lives.”

Several of the major participants in World War II developed self-justifying ideologies framed in significant part in racist comparisons. The centrality of racial, and racist, elements in these ideologies differed substantially, leading the Nazis, for example, to pursue a deliberate course of racial genocide culminating in the annihilation of 6 million European Jews. Precisely because the United States was hardly alone in acting on racist impulses in the Pacific War, it remains essential to understand the part played by constructed communal hatreds in countering moral misgivings about premeditated mass murder of entire populations, whether by gas chambers, poison gas, or air power.

In focusing on U.S. firebombing and nuclear strikes, we do not minimize the savagery of the Japanese military and the imperial state in its conquest and rule of China and much of Northeast and Southeast Asia, nor their direct responsibility for the loss of more than 2.5 million Japanese military and civilian lives in World War II. Nor do we minimize the many times larger numbers of deaths inflicted on Asian victims of Japanese aggression. The Japanese army’s rape of Nanjing, the use of poison gas and bacteriological warfare against Chinese troops and civilians, and the savage repression of resistance movements in colonial and semicolonial areas from Korea to the Philippines to China were all elements integral to the subjugation of Asian peoples. Japan’s aggressive war of conquest in China and Southeast Asia, like the U.S. air war against Japan, eradicated the distinction between combatant and noncombatant in military campaigns, thereby bringing about the slaughter of noncombatant populations. Interestingly, Japanese racist ideology was more sharply honed toward the “inferior” peoples of Asia than toward the Western powers who constituted the major rivals for empire. In juxtaposing and comparing Japanese killing of noncombatants in colonial wars in Asia and U.S. firebombing and atomic bombing of Japan, our focus is on the indiscriminate killing in both instances.

The Ethics of the Bomb

U.S. disregard for the distinction between the Japanese imperial-military state and the ruled civilian population, comprised predominantly of women, children, and the elderly, and the deep confidence of U.S. leaders in the justice of their own conduct and mission, produced one of the great tragedies of the twentieth century in the final months of the war. This antimony of high U.S. moral purpose and savagery is well brought out in the Truman diaries. In a private diary on the events leading up to the atomic bombing discovered some years after his death, Truman underlined the distinction between strategic and civilian targets, but in a most curious fashion:

I have told the Sec. of War, Mr. Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop this terrible bomb on the old capital or the new.

On Stimson’s prompting, Truman spared the ancient capital of Kyoto. But U.S. firebombing had long since inflicted heavy damage on the new capital of Tokyo and sixty other Japanese cities. And on 10 August, following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, General Thomas Farrell recommended that Tokyo be added to the list of prospective nuclear targets. Most important, in the end, it was precisely the women and children of Hiroshima and Nagasaki who bore the brunt of atomic attack.

For U.S. policymakers, the firebombing of Japanese cities and

Louseous Japanicas

The first serious outbreak of this lice epidemic was officially noted on December 7, 1941, at Honolulu, T. H. To the Marine Corps, especially trained in combating this type of pestilence, was assigned the gigantic task of extermination. Extensive experiments on Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Saipan have shown that this louse inhabitats coral atolls in the South Pacific, particularly pill boxes, palm trees, caves, swamps and jungles.

Flame throwers, mortars, grenades and bayonets have proven to be an effective remedy. But before a complete cure may be effected the origin of the plague, the breeding grounds around the Tokyo area, must be completely annihilated.

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the extermination of large numbers of their residents in the spring and summer of 1945 eased the transition to nuclear holocaust by weakening any remaining moral constraints against noncombatant bombing. “We scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo on that night of March 9–10 than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.” General LeMay later lashed out at critics of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The best evidence available today indicates that LeMay’s numbers were incorrect. Death totals at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, long underestimated in standard U.S. accounts, substantially surpassed those in Tokyo. But LeMay did graphically capture the central element of continuity that lay behind the new phase in air warfare, which negated all distinction between combatant and noncombatant, and which exacted so heavy a toll in human life prior to dropping the atomic bomb. The great majority of those killed and maimed by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, like the victims of earlier firebombings, were women, children, and the elderly.

A few high-ranking U.S. officials voiced doubts about the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the months and years after the bombing. Admiral William Leahy, chief of staff under Roosevelt and Truman, rumination that it would “take us back in cruelty toward noncombatants to the days of Genghis Khan. It will be a form of pillage and rape of a society done impersonally by one state against another whereas in the Dark Ages it was a result of individual greed and vandalism.” In his diary, David Lilienthal, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, reflected on both the firebombing and the atomic bombing:

Then we burned Tokyo, not just military targets, but set out to wipe out the place, indiscriminately. The atomic bomb is the last word in this direction. All ethical limitations of warfare are gone, not because the means of destruction are more cruel or painful or otherwise hideous in their effect upon combatants, but because there are no individual combatants. The fences are gone. And it was we, the civilized, who have pushed standardless conduct to its ultimate.

Perhaps the most trenchant contemporary critique of the U.S. moral position on the bomb and the scales of justice in the war was voiced by the Indian jurist Radhabinodbh Pal, the lone dissenting voice at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal who balked at accepting the uniqueness of Japanese war crimes. Recalling Kaiser Wilhelm II’s account of his duty to bring World War I to a swift end—“everything must be put to fire and sword; men, women and children and old men must be slaughtered and not a tree or house be left standing”—Pal observed:

This policy of indiscriminate murder to shorten the war was considered to be a crime. In the Pacific war under our consideration, if there was anything approaching what is indicated in the above letter of the German Emperor, it is the decision coming from the allied powers to use the bomb. . . . If any indiscriminate destruction of civilian life and property is still illegal in warfare, then, in the Pacific War, this decision to use the atom bomb is the only near approach to the directives of the German Emperor during the first World War and of the Nazi leaders during the second World War.

Pal concluded that a victor who destroyed noncombatant populations with weapons ranging from firebombs to atomic bombs had no moral claim to unilaterally brand its enemy as a desecrator of the laws of war.

One final critique of the nuclear bombing, which the U.S. government effectively suppressed for twenty-five years, bears mention. On 11 August 1945 the Japanese government filed an official protest over the atomic bombing to the U.S. State Department through the Swiss Legation in Tokyo, observing that combatant and noncombatant men and women, old and young, are massacred without discrimination by the atmospheric pressure of the explosion, as well as by the radiating heat which result therefrom. Consequently there is involved a bomb having the most cruel effects humanity has ever known. . . . The bombs in question, used by the Americans, by their cruelty and by their terrorizing effects, surpass by far gas or any other arm, the use of which is prohibited.

Japanese protests against U.S. desecration of international principles of war paired the use of the atomic bomb with the earlier firebombing, which massacred old people, women and children, destroying and burning down Shinto and Buddhist temples, schools, hospitals, living quarters, etc. . . . They now use this new bomb, having an uncontrollable and cruel effect much greater than any other arms or projectiles ever used to date. This constitutes a new crime against humanity and civilisation.

It is tempting to view Japanese charges of U.S. atrocities as no more than the pot calling the kettle black, particularly because Japanese leaders since 1931 have shown no greater willingness to accept responsibility or apologize for crimes committed against other Asian peoples than have their U.S. counterparts. Nevertheless, the Japanese protest correctly pointed to U.S. violations of internationally accepted principles of war with respect to the wholesale destruction of noncombatant populations.²

In the United States, as in Japan, the dominant scholarly and official interpreters of World War II and other wars have generally ignored the dark side of their own nation’s behavior and hewed to celebratory themes. Louis Morton is representative of mainstream U.S. writing in this respect: “In the late summer and autumn of 1945 the American people had every reason to rejoice. . . . Unprecedented evil had been overcome by the greatest display of force ever marshaled in the cause of human freedom.” Our analysis suggests the necessity to reexamine the scales of justice in World War II, in particular to draw insight from the experiences of its victims.

A Means to Save Lives

The conventional justification for the atomic bombing is that the only alternative capable of securing Japan’s surrender was allied invasion, which would necessarily result in massive U.S. casualties and, inevitably, far greater Japanese casualties. The most influential text is Truman’s 1955 Memoirs, which states that the atomic bomb probably saved half a million U.S. lives—anticipated casualties in an Allied invasion of Japan planned for November. Stimson subsequently talked of saving 1 million U.S. casualties and Churchill of saving 1 million U.S. and half that number of British lives.

The heavy casualties incurred on both sides in Japan’s defense of Pacific islands in 1944–45 provided U.S. planners ample reasons for caution in planning an invasion of Japan. Between March 1944 and April 1945, 13,742 Americans died battling in the Pacific while killing approximately 310,000 Japanese, a “kill ratio” of 24:1.

² As with U.S. interventions in Korea, Indochina, and Panama since 1945, noncombatants, especially women, children, and the elderly, have been killed and injured in large numbers in the Persian Gulf War. At this point, March 1991, we have no accurate information about whether tens or hundreds of thousands were killed since the U.S. government and media have suppressed, minimized, or ignored noncombatant deaths, injuries, and diseases.
indicative of the overwhelming supremacy of U.S. firepower and particularly the near monopoly of power at sea and in the air. In the battle for Okinawa from April to June 1945, 13,000 U.S. troops died and nearly 36,000 were wounded while an estimated 70,000 Japanese troops and 150,000 Okinawan civilians—one third of the island’s total population—lost their lives.

U.S. leaders, who had carefully distinguished throughout the war between Nazi leaders and the German people, made no such distinction between Japan’s leaders and the Japanese people. These judgments...precluded any morally grounded hesitation about dropping the bomb.

Nevertheless, retrospective accounts by Truman, LeMay, Stimson, Churchill, and other U.S. and British leaders claiming that the atomic bomb saved half a million or more allied lives are grossly inflated. Declassified files reveal that U.S. military planners at the time worked with estimates in the range of 20,000 to 46,000 U.S. lives as the projected cost of landing in Kyushu. Most important, however, given the destruction of Japan’s naval and air power, and the Soviet decision to send large armies against Japan in Manchuria, there is strong reason to believe that without the atomic bomb Japan’s surrender could have been secured well before the invasion, which was planned to begin three months in the future.

U.S.-Soviet Rivalry

Revisionist historians have long argued that the United States dropped the atomic bombs not in order to defeat Japan but to highlight U.S. primacy in the already brewing Soviet-U.S. conflict, which has, of course, organized the postwar international order. Their analyses of planning for the postwar world, from 1942 forward, underscore official designation of the Soviet Union as the primary threat to U.S. supremacy in world affairs. We have seen that by the spring of 1945 a crippled Japan was no longer a significant military rival to the United States, whose strength had expanded dramatically through the war effort while all rivals and potential rivals suffered heavy damage. Nevertheless, while the U.S. military had destroyed Japan’s capacity to fight aggressive war beyond her borders, devastated major cities, and blocked access to critical materials, it had neither secured Japan’s surrender nor broken the Japanese military’s will to fight.

In short, the factors that led to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima certainly included, but cannot be reduced to, the desire to preempt Soviet entry into the Pacific War and to demonstrate the unrivaled might of the United States in the postwar era. They also included the goal of forcing the immediate surrender of a gravely weakened enemy that faced certain defeat yet still retained the capacity to inflict heavy losses in the event of a U.S. invasion of the Japanese home islands. Neither factor in my view justifies the decision to drop the atomic bombs with their deadly impact on the large noncombatant populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And neither, alone, constitutes an adequate explanation of the reasons for the U.S. resorting to the bomb.

The atomic bomb thus simultaneously punctuated the end of World War II, including Japanese subordination to the United States, and provided the opening salvo in U.S.-Soviet conflict. From the perspective of establishing U.S. supremacy, the atomic bomb served a triple purpose: It contributed to a swift end to the war on U.S. terms; it forestalled a possible Soviet invasion of Japan, leaving the United States free to unilaterally shape Japan’s postwar course under the Occupation; and it sent an electrifying signal to the world, particularly to the Soviet leadership, of nuclear power and U.S. readiness to deploy it ruthlessly in the service of its global ends.

The speed with which U.S. planners shifted their sights from the defeat of Japan to zeroing in on the Soviet Union as the primary target is graphically illustrated in Air Force commanding general Lauris Norstad’s 15 September 1945 top secret memorandum to General Groves, the head of the Manhattan Project. Just one month following the end of World War II, Norstad posed the question: How
large an atomic bomb stockpile did the United States need to assure “immediate destruction of the enemy centers of industry, transportations, and population”? What enemy? Given that “Russia and the United States will be the outstanding military powers,” the study took “destruction of the Russian capability to wage war” as the basis for calculating U.S. atomic requirements. The study included a map displaying the sixty-six leading Soviet industrial cities and the number of atomic bombs needed to destroy each assuming an estimated 7,000-foot radius of destruction. The Air Force estimated that a maximum of six bombs were needed to take out the largest Soviet city, and specified a total of 204 bombs as “optimum.”

The Legacy of Atomic War

Japanese annihilation of Asian peoples in the course of suppressing resistance to the expanding frontiers of colonial rule, and U.S. firebombing and atomic bombing of Japanese cities, for all their differences, represent two faces of the pattern of total war that carried the killing of noncombatants to new heights during World War II. This legacy threatens the survival of humanity in the atomic era.

“Before 1945,” Michael Sherry has observed, “it had been possible to see in air war the potential for global destruction, but survivors of Hamburg or Tokyo rarely connected the extinction of their cities with the fate of the species. For atomic bomb victims, that connection became indissoluble.” The voices of the victims of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki continue to provide the most eloquent testimony of the consequences of nuclear war for humanity in the 1990s as they have for nearly half a century.

References


3. This estimate is particularly significant in view of the fact that the United States now has at least 20,000 nuclear bombs, many of which are much more powerful than the ones that existed when this estimate of 204 was made. Such gigantic overkill is used to threaten and coerce Third World nations as well as being targeted against the Soviet Union. Not only is a first-strike capability deemed necessary against the Soviet Union since it could retaliate with its own nuclear weapons unless completely incapacitated, but ‘tens of thousands of weapons of all varieties...are necessary if you want to dominate every rung of escalating violence anywhere in the Third World.” See Michio Kakut and Daniel Axelrod, To Win a Nuclear War: The Pentagon’s Secret War Plans (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1987), p. 9 for the quote.
Censorship and Reportage of Atomic Damage and Casualties in Hiroshima and Nagasaki

by Glenn D. Hook*

Introduction

In the summer of 1945 a number of leading scientists on the Manhattan Project, members of the newly created Committee on Social and Political Implications headed by James Franck, argued against the unannounced use of the atomic bomb against Japan. The committee’s report, known as the Franck Report, was shaped by Leo Szilard, who focused on the problem of using the bomb during the war rather than the problem of developing atomic energy after the war, as did many of his colleagues. Although the report did not take up the moral question of the bomb’s use so much as the pragmatic question of its international control, it did contain the following comments on the moral implications of using the bomb: “The military advantages and the saving of American lives achieved by the sudden use of atomic bombs against Japan may be outweighed by the ensuing loss of confidence and by a wave of horror and repulsion sweeping over the rest of the world and perhaps even dividing public opinion at home.” It is true that in the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombings “horror and repulsion” did arise, even in the United States; however, the report was surely off the mark in predicting “a wave of horror and repulsion sweeping over the rest of the world.” Why was this so?

This article addresses the above question by examining the mode of censorship and reportage of atomic damage and casualties in one of Japan’s leading newspapers, the Asahi Shimbun, during the months of August and September 1945, as well as representative cases of censorship during the early years of the Allied Occupation. By thus going back to the very start of press coverage of atomic damage we hope to be able to shed light on the evolution of the nuclear discourse in Japan and, to a lesser extent, the United States. For during this time the Japanese media operated in three distinctly different political environments: first, when the Japanese authorities carried out censorship of atomic devastation as an extension of wartime censorship (7–14 August

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3. The Asahi Shimbun (Japanese) was selected for this study as it is now, and was even more so in the early postwar years, the most authoritative newspaper in Japan, particularly in the political, bureaucratic, and academic world. Moreover, as all newspapers were censored by the Japanese and Occupation authorities, any difference between the censorship and reportage of atomic damage in the Asahi and other newspapers should not be so significant as to invalidate the conclusions drawn in this article, although research focusing on other newspapers naturally needs to be carried out in the future.

4. The Allied Occupation of Japan, dominated by the United States, lasted until April 1952.
1945); second, when the media were virtually free from censorship (15 August–18 September 1945); and third, when the Occupation authorities imposed censorship under the Press Code (19 September 1945–31 October 1949). The similarities and differences in censorship and reportage during these three periods should elucidate the political motivations of the Japanese and U.S. authorities in censoring, suppressing, reporting, or permitting reporting of information on the atomic bombings. This should deepen our understanding of the formation of pronuclear and antinuclear discourses.

Reportage under Japanese Censorship
7–14 August 1945

Reports on atomic damage and casualties during the first period, 7–14 August, centered on the official announcements of the Japanese authorities. These announcements, together with other information on the atomic bombings, had three salient characteristics: first, they minimized the damage and power of the "new-type bomb"; second, they emphasized the possibility of adopting countermeasures against future atomic attacks; third, they highlighted the contradiction between the declared values of the enemy, "justice and humanity" (seigijindo), and the injustice and inhumanity of the attacks.

A few hours after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August the managing editors of the Asahi Shim bun, other major dailies, and Domei Tsushinsha, the news agency responsible for telegraphing news of the bombing to Tokyo, were called to the Information and Intelligence Agency, the government agency in charge of censorship. As that agency decided that information on the Hiroshima attack was still insufficient, the editors were told to "bury the news of the bombing in some obscure place." Thus news of the attack in the 7 August edition of the Asahi, which appeared under the headline "Small- and Medium-Sized Cities Attacked by 400 B-29s," was no more than a few lines on how Hiroshima and vicinity had been "slightly damaged" (jukan no songai) by incendiary bombs. The front-page headlines in the Asahi on the following day, which were based on an announcement from imperial headquarters, were more informative: "New-type Enemy Bomb Dropped on Hiroshima," and in smaller print: "Considerable Damage (soto no higai); Details Being Investigated." Still, the announcement conveyed no more about the enormity of death and destruction in Hiroshima than the following: "A considerable number of buildings were destroyed and, along with this, fires broke out everywhere."

On insisting to the briefing officer, Brigadier-General Thomas Farrell, deputy-chief of the Manhattan Project and chief of the Special Manhattan Engineering District Investigation Group, that he had seen convincing evidence of the effects of radiation in Hiroshima, he was told: "I'm afraid you've fallen victim to Japanese propaganda."

On 8 August the government received scientific confirmation that the new-type bomb dropped on Hiroshima was an atomic bomb. On the evening of that day Nishina Yoshio, the leading Japanese nuclear scientist and the head of Japan's atomic bomb project at the Riken Institute in Tokyo, who had been sent to Hiroshima to investigate the damage, reported back to the prime minister's office with the following information:9

What I've seen so far is unspeakable. Tens of thousands dead. Bodies piled up everywhere. Sick, wounded, naked people wandering around in a daze... Almost no buildings left standing.

It's all true then? Hiroshima is completely wiped out? Completely... I'm very sorry to tell you this. The so-called new-type bomb is actually an atomic bomb.

Despite this information from Nishina, the announcements made by the authorities during the next few days still gave absolutely no sense of the tremendous damage suffered, and continued to refer to the atomic bomb as the "new-type bomb." Moreover, even though the Asahi mentioned that the "new-type bomb" was an atomic bomb and carried news of the Japanese government's official protest to the United States in the 11 August edition under the headlines "Disregard of International Law. Cruel New-type Bomb," the 12 August edition, which gave the first news of the Nagasaki attack, simply states in a small headline: "New-type Bomb also Dropped on Nagasaki." The few lines of commentary do little more than mention the time and place of the bombing.

5. From 1941 onwards nothing in Japan could be published without an advance permit. In the confusion attending the war's end, censorship by the Japanese authorities may perhaps have lasted a little beyond 14 August. I have relied on Monica Braw's study as a guide. Braw states: "The time between the announcement of Japan's surrender August 15 and the actual signing of the surrender documents September 2... was possibly the freest that the Japanese press had experienced and would experience until the end of 1949." See Monica Braw, The Atomic Bomb Suppressed: American Censorship in Japan, 1945–1949 (Lund, Sweden: Liber Forlag, 1986; and Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), p. 21. References are to the Swedish edition.

6. Even though the Occupation authorities set up the censorship machinery immediately after Japan's surrender, as there appeared to be no significant difference in reportage between 2 and 18 September (except the incidents of censorship noted below), we have taken the actual imposition of the Press Code on 19 September as our starting point.

7. Although the Press Code officially ended on 31 October 1949, this does not necessarily mean that the Japanese media were free from "self-censorship" as a result of the continued Allied Occupation. In this sense, Braw's study needs to be extended to the period between the end of the Press Code and the end of the Occupation.


9. By the end of the war the Japanese people were probably distrustful of government announcements claiming that a city had been only "slightly damaged." Such announcements were thus of most utility in restricting concrete information people could use to form an independent judgment of the damage. The mode of reporting in the next period of press freedom is markedly different in this respect.

Relief workers and family members search for survivors and remains of the dead in the rubble of Nagasaki 700 meters from the hypocenter on 10 August, the day after the bombing. Presumably to avoid alarming people elsewhere in Japan, the early reports in Japanese newspapers and announcements by Japanese government authorities minimized the power of the "new-type bomb" and gave no sense of the severity of the damage. In Hiroshima 62,000 of the city's 90,000 houses were completely destroyed, and 6,000 more were damaged beyond repair, and yet the initial report in the Asahi Shimbun said that the city had been "slightly damaged by incendiary bombs." This photo was taken by Yamahata Yosuke, and it and some of its caption information are from Kyoko and Mark Selden, eds., The Atomic Bomb: Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Armonk, NY; and London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1989), as is also the case with the next photo and the last one accompanying this article. The information about the destruction of housing is from Hans Dollinger's The Decline and Fall of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, trans. Arnold Pomerans (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 388.

and state: "The damage, now under investigation, is expected to be relatively light" (hikakuteki kinsho). This typifies the Japanese authorities' attempt to minimize the damage of the atomic bombings.

The attempt to minimize the power of the bomb is also evident from the Asahi's lead story of 9 August. It suggests that, as in the case of the German V1 missiles, "the power of the new types of offensive weapons to appear during the course of war is in many cases greatly exaggerated." On 10 August, moreover, a staff officer of the Chugoku district (where Hiroshima is located), who had arrived in Osaka from the bombed city, informed Asahi readers that "a bomb of this level is already in the process of being tested in our country, too... the new-type bomb is hardly something beyond what we could imagine."

Second, reportage consistently emphasized the possibility of adopting countermeasures against future atomic attacks, which also functioned to minimize the damage and power of the new-type bomb. Three announcements made by the Air Defense Headquarters are typical of the authorities' attempt to treat the atomic bomb as nothing more than a powerful conventional bomb. So, too, are the comments made in support of the official view of the atomic bombs' effects by the above-mentioned staff officer and a nuclear physicist. Finally, even three Asahi reporters who provided at least some sense of the scope of damage in Hiroshima concluded this mostly resulted from the people's lack of familiarity with the new-type bomb.

The first announcement by Air Defense Headquarters was made on 8 August and published on the front page of the Asahi on the following day. It starts out by warning of the dangers from the blast and thermal heat of the "new-type bomb," but soon goes on to recommend a number of countermeasures, including the following: take cover in air-raid shelters, reduce the exposed part of the body, and take care to extinguish open flames in the kitchen and elsewhere when evacuating.

The second announcement, made on 9 August, appeared in the 10 August edition of the Asahi. The military authorities continued to proffer advice on "The Way to Beat the New-type Bomb," as the subheadline runs, advising people to "trust in air-raid shelters as these are extremely effective against the new-type bomb," to wear gloves in order to "completely protect your hands from being burned," and to "lie on the ground or utilize the shadow of a sturdy building" for protection if, for some reason, the air-raid shelter cannot be used.

The third announcement was made on 11 August and published in the 12 August edition of the Asahi. Additional advice at this time was based on surveys conducted by the military and...
specialists sent to the atom-bombed cities. Even so, the “new-type bomb” is not referred to as an atomic bomb. In fact, under the headline “Wear White and Head for the Air-Raid Shelter,” Defense Headquarters continued to inform the populace in the same vein as in the previous two announcements, adding advice such as beware of flying glass when sheltering in ferroconcrete buildings, put oil on burns from thermal heat, and suggests “white underwear is effective for protection against burns.”

Comments by both the staff officer and the nuclear physicist Fushimi Koji of Osaka University, which appeared in the 10 August edition of the Asahi, helped to legitimize the official view of the destruction caused by the atomic bombs. The staff officer, after prefacing his observations with the comment, “there is absolutely no reason to fear the new-type bomb,” draws a number of “military lessons” from Hiroshima. One lesson is to refrain from wearing short-sleeved shirts and shorts because, so long as you cover yourself, you are “absolutely safe” (zettai anzen) from exposure to thermal heat. The fact that ferroconcrete buildings remained standing despite the destruction or collapse of almost all Japanese-style buildings led the officer to conclude confidently, “we are absolutely safe even against the blast of this bomb so long as we construct sturdy buildings.” Fusumi adds to the staff officer’s advice. Under the headline “Make Ready to Live Underground,” he states: “The path to victory so far as air defense is concerned is to live underground.” However, as living in an air-raid shelter twenty-four hours a day is impractical as well as bad for production, he recommends, “at the earliest possible moment to start the rapid construction of factories in caves.”

By obfuscating the victims’ perspectives, at least in the period immediately after the explosion of the bombs, the perspective on nuclear weapons as inhuman and a violation of international and humanitarian laws was undermined, and the possibility of building more such bombs greatly enhanced.

A more realistic description of the damage in Hiroshima is given by the three Asahi reporters in the 12 August edition of the paper under the headline “Hiroshima Transformed Instantaneously.” The reporters state that “Hiroshima was for the most part reduced to ashes and a large number of innocent people were killed or injured,” and go on to discuss the details of the devastation. They nonetheless consider the reason for the large amount of damage to be not so much the lethal nature of the “new-type bomb” as “unfamiliarity” with it. So, like the official announcements, they end on a positive note: “We cannot even dream of the Japanese race losing the will to fight just because of this.”

The third characteristic of reportage at this time, the emphasis on the contradiction between the declared values of the enemy in fighting the war and the injustice and inhumanity of dropping the atomic bombs, is salient in foreign as well as Japanese comments on the bombings. Most prominent, of course, is criticism by the Japanese authorities, which focuses on the contradiction between the enemy’s values of “justice and humanity” and the unjust and inhuman effect of the means used to pursue these values, in other words, the mass extermination of innocent civilians. Typical is the initial announcement of the Hiroshima bombing made by the Imperial Headquarters on 7 August: “The enemy’s use of this new-type bomb plainly reveals his brutal aim of shedding the innocent blood of civilians... The enemy, who dared such inhuman cruelty, should not for some time once again be able to utter the terms justice and humanity.”

This point is stressed in further reporting on the bomb. For instance, under the headline “The Enemy’s Inhumanity. Resolute Retaliations,” the Asahi’s lead story of 9 August declares: “The fact that the enemy is resorting to the violence of bombing the innocent masses while advocating justice and humanity has been finally made clear by the results of the survey [of Hiroshima].” Again, by reporting the reactions in Europe, the Asahi demonstrates the Japanese are not alone in criticizing the inhumanity of the atomic bombings. Thus, in the 13 August edition, the Asahi’s correspondent in Stockholm reports on criticism by Anglican ministers, European newspapers, and then a Swedish newspaper:

The leaders of the United States responsible for prosecuting the war should have been able to select a target other than a major city to demonstrate the power of the atomic bomb. If it was necessary for the United States to test the atomic bomb against a city, then ample time should have been allowed for the evacuation of the residents prior to its use. This...[action] by the United States is a truly inhuman, frightful thing.

With the Japanese government’s official protest to the United States, moreover, criticism of the use of the new-type bomb was placed squarely in the context of not only justice and humanity, but also humanitarian and international laws. The protest was published in the Asahi on 11 August:

...it has been established on-the-scene that the damage extends over a great area and that combatant and non-combatant men and women, old and young, are massacred without discrimination by the blast of the explosion, as well as by the radiating heat which results therefrom. Accordingly, this bomb has the most cruel effects humanity has ever known...

[The Americans] have shown complete defiance of the essential principles of humanitarian laws, as well as international law. They now used this new bomb, having an uncontrollable and cruel effect much greater than any other arms or projectiles ever used to date. This constitutes a new crime against humanity and civilization.

This protest by the Japanese government was delivered to the U.S. State Department via the Swiss Legation on 11 August. The Japanese ambassador to Switzerland was also instructed to explain the gist of the protest to the International Red Cross. The U.S. State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, which discussed the project on 5 September 1945, made the following recommendations:

1. That the receipt of the Swiss memorandum be merely acknowledged.
2. That no reply to this Japanese protest should be made in view of the events that have transpired since the receipt of this note from the Swiss legation.
3. That no publicity whatsoever be given to the receipt of this protest from the Japanese government.

A wounded Hiroshima policeman issues casualty certificates to victims of the bomb on the afternoon of the bombing, 2.7 kilometers from ground zero. Initially Japanese reports said that 10,000 people had died from the bombing at Hiroshima, but a study one year later stated that 118,661 people were killed, 3,677 were missing, and 79,130 were injured. Although early statements to their people by Japanese authorities minimized the bombs' effects, the Japanese government was quick to point out their extreme cruelty, charging the United States with having violated principles of international law as well as fundamental principles of humanity.

That the U.S. government was highly sensitive to criticism of having violated international and humanitarian laws will become clearer as we discuss U.S. censorship in Japan. Before that, however, let us examine reportage on the effects of the atomic bombs during the brief interval between Japanese and U.S. censorship.

15 August–18 September 1945

The emperor's announcement of surrender, which appeared in the 15 August edition of the Asahi, includes the following reference to the atomic bombings: "...the enemy has for the first time used new, cruel bombs to kill and maim extremely large numbers of innocent people, and the heavy casualties are beyond measure. Continuing the war would not only bring the downfall of our nation but the destruction of all human civilization." The dropping of the atomic bomb, the accompanying Asahi commentary suggests, was one of the reasons for the termination of hostilities, along with the Soviet Union's entry into the war on 8 August 1945.

The emperor's concern over the cruel impact of the atomic bomb on "innocent people" and the possible destruction of "all human civilization" should perhaps be regarded as part of a convoluted excuse for losing the war. But these comments can also be taken to symbolize a growing awareness of the irreversible transformation in the nature of warfare resulting from the first use of nuclear weapons. This is not to say that even after the end of the war the possibility of exploiting the bomb for political purpose was not entertained by government officials: at least one suggested starting a worldwide campaign on the horrors of the atomic damage and casualties for the express purpose of creating a counterbalance to Allied accusations of Japanese war crimes, as we will see in section 3 below. But the mode of reportage on atomic devastation in the month or so between the end of Japanese censorship and the imposition of the Press Code does seem to suggest a more profound awareness of the meaning of being atom-bombed.

The media's role in the political vacuum between Japanese and U.S. censorship is here crucial. Three points deserve mention: first, critical comment on the U.S. bombings, as in the period of Japanese censorship, continues to be voiced by both Japanese and foreigners. This point of commonality stands in marked contrast to the other two points, which suggest the Japanese media were taking advantage of their new-found freedom: (1) criticism of the Japanese authorities is tentatively voiced; and (2) the atomic damage is reported from the perspective of the bombs' victims. As we shall see below, to the chagrin of U.S. officials, at least one foreign journalist also adopted this perspective in reporting on Hiroshima.

Direct criticism of the United States for the atomic bombings was openly voiced by Hatoyama Ichiro, a leading politician who later became prime minister, who pointed to the incompatibility between U.S. actions and international law. In an article in the 15 September edition of the Asahi he...
declared: "So long as the United States advocates 'might is right', it cannot deny that the use of the atomic bomb and the killing of innocent people is a violation of international law and a war crime worse than an attack on a hospital ship or the use of poison gas." The charge was too much for the Occupation authorities. With these remarks as the catalyst, the Asahi was suspended from publication for forty-eight hours. This action was the first concrete manifestation of how the Press Code was to be used in order to prevent the media from not only voicing approval of ultranationalist ideology, but airing criticism of the United States, too.

Indirect criticism of the United States through reference to the cruelty of the bomb, which surfaces in Japanese reportage on the victims, discussed below, was also voiced outside Japan. Thus, in the 21 August edition of the Asahi, an overseas dispatch reports how the Bishop of St. Albans had "severely criticised the inhumanity of the atomic bomb" in a sermon on 19 August. Again, in an interview with U.S. GIs in Japan carried in the 12 September edition of the Asahi, the public is made aware of the division of opinion in the United States:

GI: How do the Japanese people feel about our use of the atomic bomb?

Reporter: They feel resentment. As someone who witnessed the terrible destruction of Hiroshima at the time I can well understand them.

GI: I guess so. Even in the United States loud voices are being raised in criticism of the atomic bombings. They are saying that, if any bombs are left, they should be dumped into the Pacific Ocean.

Second, unlike in the period under Japanese censorship, when the Asahi simply followed the official line, tentative criticism is now voiced of the way the authorities tried to minimize the atomic damage. In the editorial of 9 September, for instance, the Asahi complains: "Treatment of the atomic bombing and the terrible destruction caused by it should be scientific from start to finish. Nevertheless, in the case of Hiroshima, it seems that the initial policy of the authorities was to make announcements minimizing the facts to the extreme."

The third and most striking characteristic of reporting on atomic damage to surface during this brief period of press freedom is the salience of the victim's perspective. Apart from the first pictures of the atom-bombed cities, which appeared respectively in the 19 and 25 August editions of the Asahi, information on the bombs' effects is provided through eyewitness accounts and scientific evidence, rather than announcements by the Japanese authorities as had been done until then. Such information exposes the reader to the tremendous destruction inflicted by the bombings. In the 23 August edition of the Asahi, for instance, one of the three reporters who had earlier described conditions in Hiroshima provides concrete details on the actual

Five years after the atomic bombing it was estimated that 200,000 people had died from it in Hiroshima and 74,000 in Nagasaki, and bomb-related deaths have continued to this day. The damage inflicted on people includes burns from heat radiation and fire, as seen in these pictures from late August 1945 in Nagasaki on the left and from 7 August 1985 in Hiroshima on the right. Other people were crushed under debris, injured by the blast wave, or had atomic diseases from initial and residual radiation, with symptoms of fatigue, nausea, vomiting, high fevers, diarrhea, bleeding, loss of hair, and decrease in white blood cells. Since then many survivors have suffered aftereffects such as leukemia and cancer. At first U.S. authorities denied that people in the bombed cities were suffering from exposure to radiation. The photo on the left is by Matsumoto Eiichi, and the ones on the right are by Onuka Masami, and they appeared in the pamphlet Hibakusha, edited and published by Nihon Hidankyo (the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations) of Tokyo.

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destruction Little Boy had caused: 90 percent of the buildings destroyed, 200,000 casualties, even mosquitoes totally wiped out. Unlike previously, when “unfamiliarity” was given as the reason for the large-scale damage, the reporter this time states flatly: “There was no time to evacuate nor time to extinguish flames. There was absolutely no time to put into effect the countermeasures already established for air defense or fire prevention.”

The cruelty of the Hiroshima bomb is clear from the suffering of its first victims, as his description shows:

... Although initially the number of dead was given as 10,000, the number increased with the passage of time and it is finally said to have reached 100,000. It can be imagined from this just how cruel the atomic bomb’s power is. Moreover, as is usual with those who succumb to burns, the victims were fully conscious until their death. Those who were looking after the patients, who continued to scream out “kill me quickly,” declared in unison, with a sense of anguish going straight to the bone, “it’s a living hell on earth.”

A journalist’s comments on Nagasaki in the same edition of the Asahi provide a similar picture of the damage wreaked by Fat Man. Under the headline, “Baked to Death in Air-Raid Shelters. 23,000 Dead or Missing,” which belies the earlier optimistic reports on a shelter’s protective value, he starts out by contextualizing the power of this new weapon: “The atomic bomb’s power of destruction and slaughter is completely beyond imagination.” He then goes on to give concrete details of the destruction, which includes “two kilometers in every direction being instantly turned into a scorched wasteland.” As for the victims of the Nagasaki bomb:

They are lying around in every conceivable place. Just their eyes are burning with indignation; their faces and bodies are covered with blood due to glass shards. They are groaning, their faces distorted, with the skin peeled off their faces due to being burned. Some, with half the body turned to skeleton, could at last be distinguished as to whether they are male or female. But that’s all. You cannot tell who anyone is.

The bomb’s cruelty to human beings, it is stressed in a later edition of the Asahi, does not draw to a close with the actual bombing, nor with Japan’s surrender, but continues even after the formal end of the war. Under the headline “Hiroshima Possessed by an ‘Evil Spirit’: Death Toll Continues to Rise Two Weeks Later,” the 25 August edition describes the situation as follows: “Even though this is said to be after the war has ended, the citizens of Hiroshima, who have lost home and kin, are being whipped cruelly by continuing damage, which shows no sign of abating.” This is clear from the death toll: whereas a survey conducted three days after the bombing gave a total of 30,000 dead and 160,000 injured, the Asahi reports the number of dead had mounted to 60,000 within two weeks and was still rising.

The reasons for the increasing number of deaths are discussed in the 29 August edition of the Asahi by Tsuzuki Masao, head of the Department of Surgery at Tokyo Imperial University, Japan’s most prestigious institution of higher learning, who visited Hiroshima shortly after the attack. Tsuzuki focuses on the pathological implications of the atomic bombings, and describes how “victims, who had suffered nothing more than a scratch at the time, lost their hair a few days later... and died.” Based on autopsies and other scientific evidence, Tsuzuki concludes: “We had originally thought that the range of [damage by] the atomic bomb was limited to two: destruction from blast and burns from thermal rays. It has now been proved that, in addition to these two, harmful after-effects also result from the action of ‘radioactive particles’.”

Despite Tsuzuki’s conclusion, those speaking on behalf of the U.S. government denied any such harmful aftereffects from radiation. Wilfred Burchett, the “maverick” Australian reporter who first entered Hiroshima, found this out when he returned to Tokyo on 7 September. Unknown to the Occupation authorities, Burchett had made his own way to Hiroshima, arriving on 3 September slightly ahead of the officially sanctioned Occupation press corps. Unlike his colleagues, who concerned themselves principally with the physical destruction of Hiroshima, Burchett focused on the bomb’s impact on human beings. As he laconically commented to one of the press corps (who paid no heed): “The real story is in the hospitals.” His firsthand account of the damage in Hiroshima, “The Atomic Plague, which appeared on the front page of the 5 September edition of Britain’s Daily Express, and then worldwide, describes the situation as follows: “

In these hospitals I found people who, when the bomb fell, suffered absolutely no injuries, but now are dying from the uncanny after-effects.

For no apparent reasons their health began to fail. They lost appetite. Their hair fell out. Bluish spots appeared on their bodies. And then bleeding began from the ears, nose and mouth.

At first, the doctors told me, they thought these were the symptoms of general debility. They gave their patients Vitamin A injections. The results were horrible. The flesh started rotting away from the hole caused by the injection of the needle. And in every case the victim died.

That is one of the after-effects of the first atomic bomb man ever dropped and I do not want to see any more examples of it.

Shortly after returning to the capital Burchett appeared at a briefing being held by the U.S. top brass, the main purpose of which was “to deny my [Burchett’s] dispatch from Hiroshima that people were dying from the after-effects of the bomb.” On insisting to the briefing officer, Brigadier-General Thomas Farrell, deputy-chief of the Manhattan Project and chief of the Special Manhattan Engineering District Investigation Group, that he had seen convincing evidence of the effects of radiation in Hiroshima, he was told: “I’m afraid you’ve fallen victim to Japanese propaganda.”

According to Farrell, who at the time had not visited

12. Various casualty figures for Hiroshima and Nagasaki appeared at the time and in the years to follow. Figures submitted by the two cities to the secretary-general of the United Nations in 1976 give the total deaths to the end of 1945 as 140,000 (+10,000) for Hiroshima and 70,000 (+1,000) for Nagasaki. For details, see the Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1981), p. 113.
Hiroshima, the people seen by Burchett in the hospitals in Hiroshima were not victims of radiation, but "victims of blast and burn, normal after any big explosion." The height of the bomb's explosion, Farrell explained, precluded any "residual radiation" in Hiroshima. Farrell’s response to Burchett actually touches on two related yet separate issues, although he does not seem to distinguish them: delayed death due to radiation exposure at the time of the blast, and delayed death due to residual (lingering) radiation. In both respects, however, Burchett was correct in insisting on the aftereffects of the bomb: first, the delayed death of some of the hospitalized victims would have been due not only to blast and burn, as stated by Farrell, but more importantly to exposure to radiation at the time of the blast as well as residual radiation. Second, despite Farrell’s disclaimer, the bomb did produce residual radiation, as is clear from the existence of atomic bomb victims who were not in Hiroshima at the time of the blast, but entered the city soon after.

But blanket statements such as these, which were not based on a proper scientific assessment of the effect of radiation on human beings, fail to reflect any such ignorance. They instead reflect an attempt to restrict information on the uglier aspects of the atomic bombings.

The scope of the atomic devastation was to some extent confirmed by Farrell’s own visit. His comments on visiting Hiroshima, as reported in the 11 September edition of the Asahi, are illuminating: "I fairly well understood from various mid-air photographs that the damage in Hiroshima was enormous, but after coming here and inspecting the scene I have learned that the damage is enormous and beyond description (gengo ni zessuru). I think something so horrible should never be used again." Another member of the party expresses similar surprise at the devastation: "The devastation in Hiroshima is terrible (hidoi), quite beyond what we had imagined." He similarly opposes future use: "We should never again use this kind of thing." In Nagasaki, as reported in the 17 September edition of the Asahi, Farrell states: "As the atomic bomb was tested on an open plain, military personnel, obviously, and even those scientists directly involved in production could not predict at all what kind of influence the atomic bomb would have on the human body and buildings."

The surprise registered by Farrell’s party on visiting Hiroshima and Nagasaki suggests the difficulty the Americans experienced in foreseeing the scope of the atomic injuries, deaths, and destruction. As Norman Ramsey, chief of the Delivery Group at Los Alamos, was to later reflect:

The people who made the decision to drop the bomb made it on the assumption that all casualties would be standard explosion casualties. . . .The region over which there would have been radiation injury was to be a much smaller one than the region of so-called 100% blast kill . . . Any person with radiation damage would have been killed with a brick first.

Farrell’s denial of Burchett’s report of people dying from the aftereffects of the atomic bombing may have rested on this selfsame assumption. Nevertheless, even if we accept at face value a degree of ignorance on the part of Farrell and others involved in the Manhattan Project as to the scope of damage from radiation, this in no way implies ignorance of the facts of radiation damage. Three points bear mentioning.

First, the safety precautions taken at Los Alamos and other atomic facilities demonstrate a keen awareness of the danger from exposure to radiation. Second, on 21 August 1945 Farrell and others at Los Alamos gained firsthand knowledge of this danger when one of the scientists, Harry Daghlian, broke a safety rule and was exposed to a temporarily uncontrolled chain reaction. Phyllis K. Fisher, the wife of one of the physicists, describes the consequences:

Daghlian died by inches over the next twenty-four days. We learned of his suffering from those working in the hospital. It was a horrible death and sobering knowledge for those who learned about it. Our first death by radiation was an example of what was happening to thousands in Japan as a result of the work done at Los Alamos.

Third, not everyone in the United States regarded reports of death from aftereffects as Japanese propaganda. As is shown by the Records of the Chief of Engineers, Manhattan Engineering District, Howard W. Blakeslee, Associated Press science editor, thought those reported to have died mysteriously in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were probably the “victims of a phenomenon which is well known in the great radiation laboratories of America. They died from the after-effects of rays created at the instant of the explosion.”

The denial of aftereffects by those speaking in an official capacity would help to undermine such opinions, which indirectly supported criticism of the inhuman nature of atomic weapons. Burchett’s experience, together with other facts accumulated over the years, convinced him of the reason for Farrell’s attempt to deny his report—"the existence of an official policy to suppress accurate reporting of the terrible after-effects of nuclear war."

The different coverage of Farrell’s own visit to Hiroshima in the Japanese and U.S. press is here revealing. As we see below, there is no mention in the Asahi, as there is in the New York Times, of Farrell’s denial of “lingering radioactivity." Moreover, with the imposition of the Press Code, critical comments on the

23. U.S. National Archives, Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, Manhattan Engineering District, RG77, number A46KX.
atomic bomb, such as those made by Farrell and one of his party, no longer surface in the Asahi. In this we can see the utility of censorship for shaping the nuclear discourse in Japan.

19 September Onwards

The aim of denying radiation aftereffects was furthered by William Laurence, the New York Times reporter-cum-War Department correspondent on the atomic bomb, who entered Hiroshima as chief of the occupation press corps. Despite this visit to Hiroshima, Laurence’s report on Hiroshima in the New York Times, which “unaccountably” did not appear until 13 September,25 did not give a firsthand account of his observations in the ruined city. Instead, under the headline “No Radioactivity in Hiroshima Ruin,” he relates how Farrell “denied categorically that it [the atomic bomb] produced a dangerous, lingering radioactivity in the ruins of the town.” He makes no mention of Farrell’s opposition to the bomb’s future use, as does the Asahi. Laurence’s delayed report on the Alamogordo test, which appeared in the New York Times the day prior to his Hiroshima report, also dismisses the possibility of aftereffects due to radiation: “This historic ground in New Mexico... gave no longer surface in the Asahi. In this we can see the utility of censorship for shaping the nuclear discourse in Japan.

The overall aim of the U.S. government was to regard the atom-bombed cities as test sites to be investigated in case of future involvement in nuclear war. . . . The aim of U.S. medical investigators . . . was thus the study, not treatment, of the atomic bomb victims.

It is true that, as we saw earlier, ignorance as to the scope of radiation aftereffects existed at this time. But blanket statements such as these, which were not based on a proper scientific assessment of the effect of radiation on human beings, fail to reflect any such ignorance. They instead reflect an attempt to restrict information on the uglier aspects of the atomic bombings. Continuing the wartime policy of nuclear secrecy helped to insure this ignorance would remain hidden from public view.26 Accusing the Japanese of propaganda served to cast doubt on the validity of information on the atomic bombings based on Japanese sources.

If we regard these denials of aftereffects as a means to promote disinformation on the bomb’s cruel effects on human beings, the Press Code can be regarded as a means to restrict, suppress, or censor such information. It is in this sense an extension of the policy of nuclear secrecy. Although the Press Code guidelines do not refer specifically to the atomic bomb, material on the atomic bombings could easily be brought within its range of application since one of its ten points was that “Nothing shall be printed which might, directly or by inference, disturb the public tranquility.” This was to profoundly affect reportage on the damage, although as Monica Braw concludes in her pathbreaking study: “American censorship, from the viewpoint of efficiency and consistency, was lacking in almost all respects.”

Despite this lack of efficiency and consistency in terms of the principles of censorship, the Press Code nonetheless effectively reduced the quantity and perverted the quality of information on the atomic damage. The reduction in the quantity of information is clear from a study by Ubuki Satoru: whereas in the forty-three days between the day following the first atomic bombing (7 August) and the day prior to the imposition of the Press Code (18 September) the Asahi carried news related to the atomic bomb on all but three days, the quantity of information was drastically reduced after the Press Code came into force.29

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<td><strong>Editorials</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Foreign News</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Domestic News</strong></td>
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<td><strong>News</strong></td>
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Of course, a reduced volume of material may not be the direct result of censorship, as even without the censor’s pen the editors of the Asahi may have decided that the atomic bomb’s “newsworthiness” had declined. This brings us to the second point. It is in the perversion of the quality of information that we can see the role of the Press Code, either directly through censorship or indirectly through the creation of an environment of self-censorship. For along with the overall decrease in the amount of information published, an accompanying increase occurs in uncritical reportage on the atomic bomb.28 Ubuki summarizes the difference in reportage before and after the imposition of the Press Code as follows: “Articles criticizing the atomic bombing completely disappeared.”

The material of particular concern to the censors can be understood from the forty-eight-hour suspension of the Asahi. In this case, as discussed above, Hatoyama had charged that the use of the atomic bomb was both a violation of international law and a war crime. Domei Tsushinsha, the Japanese news agency, was also put

28. Ibid., p. 148. It should be added that the “efficiency rating” of censorship is much higher when the self-censorship among Japanese writers and editors, which resulted from the existence (not application) of censorship, is taken into account.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
on twenty-four-hour suspension on 14 September for sending out news likely to "disturb public tranquility," such as: "Japan might have won the war but for the atomic bomb, a weapon too terrible to face and one which only barbarians would use."

With the passage of time, moreover, some victims of the atomic bombings who were able to overcome self-censorship attempted to gain authorization to publish eyewitness accounts of their experience. Some of these were suppressed by the Occupation authorities. For instance, a personal account of the atomic bombing by a fifteen-year-old girl, *Masako Does Not Collapse*, which was submitted to the censors in March 1947, was suppressed for fear it "would disturb public tranquility in Japan and that it implies the bombing was a crime against humanity." Sentences such as "many innocent people were killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki" were deleted. This novel did not reach the Japanese public until 1949. Nagai Takashi's *The Bells of Nagasaki* was similarly delayed for two years. It, too, was allowed to be published in 1949, but only on condition that "The Sack of Manila," a description of Japanese atrocities in the Philippines prepared by the Military Intelligence Division, Headquarters of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), was appended to the work. The personal accounts of members of the Hiroshima YMCA collected in 1947 suffered a similar two-year delay due to the Press Code. Finally, as a result of the suppression or delay in publication of such accounts, many other Japanese did not even submit their materials to the Occupation authorities' censors.

While suppression of these personal accounts can be viewed as an attempt to restrict the free circulation of information likely to provoke charges of U.S. inhumanity, barbarity, or violation of international and humanitarian laws, the suppression of medical research findings, a particularly perverse application of the rule of nuclear secrecy, helped justify such charges. The delay in publishing research findings in Japan, which must have directly or indirectly led to undue suffering and an increase in fatalities, was intimately linked to the overall aim of the U.S. government to regard the atom-bombed cities as test sites to be investigated in case of future involvement in nuclear war.

This approach surfaces in the memorandum on Study of Casualty Producing Effects of Atomic Bombs, drafted on 28 August 1945 and approved by the chief surgeon of the General Headquarters, U.S. Armed Forces in the Pacific. The memorandum states: "A study of the effects of the two atomic bombs used in Japan is of vital importance to our country. This unique opportunity may not again be offered until another world war. Plans for recording all of the available data therefore should receive first priority." The aim of U.S. medical investigators, who visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki together with Japanese researchers from September to December 1945 as part of the Joint Commission for the Investigation of the Effects of the Atomic Bomb in Japan, was thus the study, not treatment, of the atomic bomb victims.

That the U.S. investigators focused on the study of the bombs' casualties and not their treatment, a charge to be later made against the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission, is suggested by a firsthand account of the work of the Joint Commission: "To obtain any given

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33. Ibid., p. 99.
34. Ibid., p. 139.
35. For details, see ibid., pp. 99–104. This is the most extensive treatment of the suppression of Nagai’s book, although it should be noted that from the Occupation authorities’ point of view, Nagai’s mystification of atomic destruction as "atonement" for the war was not at odds with the overall purpose of censoring atomic damage.

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Above all, U.S. Occupation censors were wary of reports by survivors, and one of the books the U.S. censors and army intelligence were concerned about was Ota Yoko’s *City of Corpses*, a straightforward narrative of Ota’s experience of the atomic bomb, both on 6 August in Hiroshima and during subsequent months. A U.S. intelligence officer advised her to forget her memories of the atomic bomb since the United States wouldn’t be dropping another one, and when the book was finally published in 1948 a chapter had been deleted due to fear of censorship. This picture of the cover of *City of Corpses* shows the notations of the censors. The picture and the information about Ota in this caption are from Richard H. Minear, ed. and trans., *Hiroshima: Three Witnesses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), which includes the first translation into English of City of Corpses. The artist for the cover is Fukuzawa Ichiro, and the cover is reproduced here courtesy of the Gordon W. Prange Collection, University of Maryland College Park Libraries.
A primary goal of U.S. Occupation censors was to keep people from realizing that it might be legitimate to ask if such a bomb should be used or charge the United States with having violated international law. The U.S. authorities even suppressed medical research findings that would have been helpful in the treatment of victims. This picture shows some of the 23,000 items such as clinical records, slide specimens, and human remains that were taken to the United States from Hiroshima in 1945 for use in writing up the results of the U.S. investigation. These items weren't returned to Hiroshima until May 1973.

number of persons from any particular locality it has only been necessary to speak to the police chief, who obtains precisely what is requested at precisely the right time. The people who appear have been entirely docile, submit readily to questioning and examination, and seem grateful for the vitamin pills which are doled out after the examination. Moreover, masses of records, slides, and tissues collected by the commission were sent to the United States for use in writing up the final report of the survey. Furthermore, the reports prepared by Japanese researchers, which contained "suggestions for treatment and protection in the light of experience," were submitted to the U.S. side.

Japanese researchers had started collecting material on the effects of the atomic bombs virtually from when the bombs exploded. They also gained much knowledge through their work on the Joint Commission. Thus, they were naturally eager to publish their findings. As Braw comments:

The Japanese scientists were eager to publish their papers. They wanted to discuss their findings from a scientific point of view with colleagues. But maybe most eager to present their observations were the medical doctors. They were battling every day with trying to cure the illnesses caused by the atomic bomb, illnesses and injuries they had never seen before and which they were at a loss how to treat. Only by exchanging information with colleagues could they hope to be able to help their mysteriously dying patients.

Although oral reports on the effects of the atomic bombs were given at the annual meeting of the Japanese Association of Medical Sciences in April 1947, and some reports on the bombs' effects were in fact written up, it was not until January 1949, three-and-a-half years after the atomic bombs exploded, that the Occupation authorities, following a policy change in the United States that permitted declassification of Japanese research, first cleared scientific manuscripts for publication in Japan. The Occupation authorities were bringing their policy into line with new instructions issued by the Atomic Energy Commission, which allowed publication by Japanese "if they had had no access to U.S. classified technical information and if they had had no collaboration involving classified technical information with Americans who had had access to restricted data." This deep-seated concern for secrecy, which had characterized the Manhattan Project, was thus carried over to Japanese medical research of use for treating atomic bomb-injured patients after the termination of the war.

Implications of Atomic Censorship and Reportage

How does the censorship and reportage of the atomic damage during the period of Japanese censorship, press freedom, and U.S. censorship facilitate our understanding of why the indiscriminate killing of tens of thousands of noncombatants did not create a "wave of horror and repulsion sweeping over the rest of the world?" Apart

38. Ibid., p. 138.
41. Ibid., p. 113.
from the public's acquiescence in the erosion of the moral and legal constraints on legitimate targets as a result of the advent of "total war," the following five points, which bear specifically on the atomic bombings, warrant attention.

First, for both the Japanese and Occupation authorities, censorship proved an efficacious means to obfuscate the victims' perspectives on atomic destruction in the two cities, albeit for different reasons. The Japanese authorities obfuscated the victims' perspectives by excluding concrete information on the actual effects of the atomic bombs on human beings. Nishina's vivid description of the horrendous damage in Hiroshima was not reflected in any of the authorities' announcements. The goal here was to prevent the erosion of the Japanese people's will to continue the war. The Occupation authorities obfuscated the victims' perspectives by suppressing material written by the victims themselves. The suppression of Masako Does Not Collapse and The Bells of Nagasaki is typical. The goal here was to restrict publication of information implying the atomic bombings were inhuman and a violation of international and humanitarian laws. It was thus only during the interval between Japanese and U.S. censorship that a victim's perspective surfaced freely, suggesting press freedom is a necessary, though not in itself a sufficient, condition for reporting on nuclear issues from the perspective of the victim.

A second point common to the treatment of information on the atomic bombings by both the Japanese and U.S. authorities is the use of expert opinion to bolster the desired perspective. The Japanese authorities, aiming to minimize the damage and power of the atomic bomb and convince the population of the effectiveness of countermeasures, utilized the "expert opinion" of a military staff officer and a nuclear scientist to substantiate their perspective on the bomb. These opinions were duly reported in the Asahi. The Occupation authorities, aiming to undermine charges of U.S. inhumanity and violation of international and humanitarian laws, utilized the "expert opinion" of a high-ranking military officer to deny people were dying from the aftereffects of the atomic bombings. William Laurence, the War Department's "nuclear propagandist," faithfully reported these denials in the New York Times, claiming such charges by the Japanese were nothing more than "propaganda." In this we can see the critical role journalists and newspapers can play in shaping the nuclear discourse.

Third, the Japanese authorities and the Japanese press, as evidenced by the Asahi, continued throughout these three periods to insist upon the incompatibility between the espoused values of the United States in fighting the war and the actual means used to pursue these values. The goal here was to demonstrate that even though Allied propaganda painted the Japanese as the barbarian, inhuman enemy, the Allies themselves were capable of inhuman acts in violation of international and humanitarian laws, as especially manifest in the atomic bombings. This is not to say that the motivation of the Japanese authorities in making these charges was pure—a result of concern for the bombs' devastating effects on the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The possibility of exploiting the atomic bombings to offset the U.S. "upset" over Japanese mistreatment of prisoners of war was an idea to at least cross the mind of Foreign Minister Shigemitsu. As seen from his request of 13 September to the Japanese legations in Sweden, Switzerland, and Portugal, he wanted Japan's overseas legations to "make every effort to exploit the atomic bomb question in our propaganda." But the continued stress on the inhumanity of the bombings and the accusation of violating international and humanitarian laws, even during the period of press freedom and U.S. Occupation, not to mention during the period since the end of the Occupation, suggests this criticism was not simply against the United States, but against the atomic bombs as intrinsically inhumane weapons.

Fourth, the accusation of "Japanese propaganda" should be viewed as much as a denial of the incompatibility between the ends and means of war as a denial of the aftereffects per se. For the denial of aftereffects did not result solely from ignorance, although this may be part of the reason, but from the need to establish America's moral superiority in the postwar world. In short, unless the United States denied the inhumanity of the atomic bombings and established a position superior to the Japanese in terms of "justice and humanity," then the trial of Japanese leaders for "war crimes" would be regarded as nothing but victor's justice. If the victors as well as the vanquished had committed acts of comparable barbarity in pursuit of their espoused values and goals, then why should only the latter be tried for war crimes? And if the United States could not retain moral integrity in respect of the atomic bombings, then how could the public be persuaded to knowingly support, through Congress, the disbursement of funds to produce more nuclear weapons?

Finally, the U.S. attempt to keep the "nuclear secret" compounded the inhumanity of using the atomic bombs. The logic up to the end of the war may quite well have been that as no Japanese is "innocent" (as implied in the censorship of Masako Does Not Collapse), then the death of noncombatant men, women, and children was unavoidable in order to "end the war quickly and save lives." Thus the atomic bomb could be seen as necessary to end the inhumanity of a war started by Japan. But even this logic, if conceded, should not extend beyond the war's end. Secrecy meant that the war ran a longer course: by delaying publication of medical research useful for the treatment of atomic bomb patients, innocent Japanese died or suffered unduly even after surrender.

Conclusions

The above discussion on the implications of censorship and reportage of the atomic damage in Hiroshima and Nagasaki should help to shed light on the reasons for the formation of pronuclear or antinuclear discourses. A pronuclear discourse is taken to hinder a "wave of horror and repulsion" from sweeping over the world; an antinuclear discourse seeks to facilitate it.

I have suggested elsewhere how important a victim's perspective on nuclear war may be as the core of an antinuclear

47. Burchett's term, Shadows, p. 16.
49. For details, see Dower, War Without Mercy.
discourse. The censorship and reportage of the atomic damage seems to substantiate the importance of such a perspective by negative example: the suppression of information on the cruel effects of the atomic bomb on human beings. By obfuscating the victims' perspectives, at least in the period immediately after the explosion of the bombs, the perspective on nuclear weapons as inhuman and a violation of international and humanitarian laws was undermined, and the possibility of building more such bombs greatly enhanced. This can be seen to have contributed to a long-term trend of moving away from the state-level taboo of discussing whether nuclear weapons should even be permitted as instruments of war. The Japanese government's change of attitude towards the atomic bombings epitomizes the acceptance of the bombs' use from an "objective" point of view. As stated by the government in the 1963 atomic bomb court case:

This [the protest by the Japanese government during the war] emphasized that the use of a new-type weapon by an enemy nation violates the principles of international law as well as fundamental principles of humanity. But seen objectively, not from the position of one of the belligerent parties, such a conclusion cannot necessarily be drawn.

In this sense, it is not so much the Japanese state as the Japanese people who have continued to adopt a victim's perspective on nuclear war by insisting that the use of nuclear weapons is inhuman and a violation of international and humanitarian laws. Needless to say, the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, supported by a relatively free and independent press, have been in the vanguard of the movement to spread the victims' perspectives on nuclear war in Japan and overseas.

The second point is that, as in the case of the nuclear power industry, expert opinion may be utilized to promote a pro- or antinuclear discourse. That the denial of aftereffects was useful for promoting a pro- rather than antinuclear discourse should be clear from the above. This suggests care needs to be taken in evaluating expert opinion. How Farrell's remarks were used by Laurence and the Asahi is here instructive: In the former case, they were used to deny radiation; in the latter, to show how even those responsible for the atomic bombings recognized their fundamental inhumanity—hence, Farrell's call to never use atomic weapons again. In this way, an expert's comments could be used in the United States to undermine the formation of an antinuclear discourse centering on the inhumanity of the bomb; on the other hand, they could be used in Japan to reinforce the perspective on the atomic bombings as inhuman and a violation of international and humanitarian laws. How journalists and newspapers employ expert opinion is thus of crucial significance for shaping the nuclear discourse.

Third, the Japanese attack on the legitimacy of using atomic weapons was placed in a universalistic rather than a particularistic framework. The appeal to a universalistic criterion can be seen in the stress on the bomb's inhumanity: the atomic bomb should be condemned for its cruel effects on human beings, irrespective of the particularistic identity of most of the victims as Japanese. The charge that the United States violated international and humanitarian laws similarly attempts to place the atomic bombings squarely in a universalistic context. The Occupation authorities, in contrast, attempted to relativize the cruelty of the atomic bombings by placing them in a particularistic context: the appending of "The Sack of Manila" to Nagai's book symbolizes how the universalistic criterion for judging the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was undermined by placing the atomic bombings in the particularistic context of the atrocities the Japanese had committed. The retort of "Remember Pearl Harbor!" to criticism of the atomic bombings is another way the appeal to a universalistic criterion has been relativized in the intervening years. The success or failure of such rhetoric can be taken as one indication of the extent to which U.S. values have become nuclearized and nuclearism has taken root in society.

Fourth, the discussion of the impact of nuclear secrecy on the suppression of medical research is instructive in highlighting the degree to which the nuclear agenda in the United States has centered on military secrecy. Such secrecy, it is argued, is essential in order to maintain U.S. security. What the suppression of medical research nonetheless suggests is that, irrespective of the validity any claim of military secrecy may have, nuclear secrecy, itself, ineluctably leads to a gap between state security and people's security, with the latter suffering as a consequence. When Judge Sherman Christiansen, who reversed his ruling in favor of the government in the famous "fallout trial," declared "the U.S. government deliberately concealed evidence, pressured witnesses and engaged in deceitful conduct" he was providing evidence that nuclear secrecy has not only affected the lives of former enemies, but the lives of citizens of the United States, too.

These four conclusions suggest an antinuclear discourse may be strengthened by:

1. promoting a victim's perspective under a free and independent press;
2. challenging or utilizing expert opinion;
3. criticizing the cruelty of nuclear weapons from a universalistic, unrelativized perspective; and
4. undermining nuclear secrecy.

54. Quoted in ibid., p. 19.
55. For details, see Committee for the Compilation of Materials, *Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, part 4.
58. Allied prisoners of war as well as laborers from Japanese colonies, particularly those forced to come to Japan from the Korean peninsula, were also victims of the atomic bombings. (On the Koreans, see the study by Kurt Tong in this issue of BCAS.)
Five Poems (1974–91) by the Hiroshima Poet Kurihara Sadako

translated and introduced by Richard H. Minear

Two years ago the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (21:1 [Jan.–Mar. 1989], pp. 46–49) published my translation of wartime poems by Kurihara Sadako (born 1943). The poems in this issue trace the evolution of Kurihara’s thinking down to the present. Her conviction that the fifteen-year war was morally wrong insured that despite being a victim of Hiroshima, she did not lock herself into the role of atomic victim. She wrote “When We Say ‘Hiroshima’” in 1974.

When We Say “Hiroshima”

When we say “Hiroshima,”
do people answer, gently,
“Ah, Hiroshima?”
Say “Hiroshima,” and hear “Pearl Harbor.”
Say “Hiroshima,” and hear “Rape of Nanking.”
Say “Hiroshima,” and hear of women and children in Manila
thrown into trenches, doused with gasoline,
and burned alive.
Say “Hiroshima,”
and hear echoes of blood and fire.

Say “Hiroshima,”
and we don’t hear, gently,
“Ah, Hiroshima.”
In chorus, Asia’s dead and her voiceless masses
spit out the anger
of all those we made victims.
That we may say “Hiroshima,”
and hear in reply, gently.
“Ah, Hiroshima,”
we must lay down in fact
the arms we were supposed to lay down.
We must get rid of all foreign bases.

Until that day Hiroshima
will be a city of cruelty and bitter bad faith.
And we will be pariahs
affire with remnant radioactivity.

That we may say “Hiroshima”
and hear in reply, gently,
“Ah, Hiroshima,”
we need first
to cleanse
our own filthy hands.
Like Ota Yoko, Toge Sankichi, and Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, Kurihara has paid particular attention to the plight of Korean victims of the bomb. She published "Out of the Very Stone" in 1979. The stone is the large monument to the Korean victims; it is located across the river just to the west—and outside the confines—of Peace Park. *Mul! Mul tal la!* (Kurihara gives it phonetically) is Korean for "Water! Water, please!"

**Out of the Very Stone**

Out of the very stone they sound,
the voices of the tens of thousands who burned to death;
charged with age-old bitter feelings,
they fill the night air:
*Mul! Mul tal la! Mul tal la!*
Water, please! Water, please!

From the riverbank monument
for which there was no room in Peace Park,
all night long, they come, the voices
of the tens of thousands dead:
*Mul! Mul tal la! Mul tal la!*

Rounded up
as they tilled the soil in the fields of home,
rounded up
as they walked the streets of the towns and villages of home,
not allowed to say even a word of farewell
to wives and children, parents, brothers, sisters,
they were packed like livestock into transports
and shipped off, across the strait.

Forced to pray to foreign gods,
to swear allegiance to a foreign ruler,
in the end burned in that flash,
they were turned into black corpses
for swarms of crows to peck at.

*Aigu! Mul! Mul tal la!*
The homeland was torn in two,
and one torn half forced
to house thousands of atomic weapons.
Why should the atom be forced
on us and our half?
Leave, you foreign soldiers!
Take your atomic bombs, and leave!
The homeland is one.
O Wind, take the message—
that this torn half calls out to its own kind
out of the very stone.
"Hiroshima and the Emperor's New Clothes" needs a word of explanation. "The Emperor's New Clothes" is a story by Hans Christian Andersen about an emperor who had been convinced by a pair of itinerant tailors that the garment they had made him was so fine that people who were unfit for their work or hopelessly stupid couldn't see it. Neither the emperor nor those around him wanted to admit they couldn't see the garment, and so he ended up parading in the streets nude. His loyal subjects watching the parade also didn't want to say that they couldn't see any clothes on him, but finally a child shouted out the truth—"But the emperor has nothing on at all!" When this European tale is translated into Japanese, the term for emperor is osama, generic prince, not reigning emperor. Hence the reference here is not to Hirohito but to Suzuki Zenko, prime minister in 1981 when Kurihara wrote the poem.

**Hiroshima and the Emperor's New Clothes**

Chubby,
glossy face shiny with sweat,
the emperor of the new clothes,
his (nuclear) bellybutton plain to see,
says he's coming to Hiroshima.
He says he'll pay his respects at the atomic cenotaph.
Can he really stand
bellybutton-bare before the monument
that says "the mistake shall not be repeated"?
The emperor of the new clothes,
who says black is white
and white is black
and makes lies and fraud the policy of the state,
says he's coming,
bare bellybutton and all.
In Hiroshima
not only the children
but also the old people, the men, the women
laugh, get angry
at the chubby emperor's
bellybutton antics.

In April he pays his respects at the shrine to war;
in August he pays his respects at the atomic cenotaph.
Repeating flat contradictions every day—
in the country across the sea
he says what they want him to say;
here at home, for domestic consumption,
he says black is white
and white is black.
But Hiroshima will not be fooled.
O, you 200,000 dead!
Come forth, all together,
from the grave, from underground.
Faces puffed up with burns,
black and festering,
lips torn,
say faintly, "We stand here in reproach."
Shuffle slowly forward,
both arms, shoulder high,
trailing peeled-off skin.
Tell them—
the emperor of the new clothes
and his entire party—
what day August 6 is.
"The Day the Showa Era Ends" is dated 8 December 1988. The emperor died (and the Showa era ended) one month later, in early January. This poem is Kurihara’s contribution to an “anti-emperor anthology” (the words are from the jacket) of eighty-eight poems by eighty-eight poets to herald the passing of the Showa era; Kurihara herself was one of the organizers of the project.

The Day the Showa Era Ends

On the moat a swan drifts, oblivious; deep within the Palace, the emperor lies ill, now vomiting blood, now passing blood; semiconscious, does he think of them?

—the victims of the atomic bomb lying on straw in those sheds and stables of the farms to which they fled that summer’s day forty-three years ago, afflicted by fevers, trembling from chills, red spots breaking out all over, hair falling out, receiving no medical treatment of any kind, not knowing even the name of their disease, who died with blood pouring from ears, mouths, noses; —the victims of the atomic bomb who passed so much blood their bowels seemed to have melted, who hadn’t even rags to use for diapers, who died drowning in blood.

Revived by transfusion after transfusion, semiconscious, does he mount his white horse and roam distant battlefields?

The hell of starvation in the jungles on southern islands and in the rocky mountains of the continent, that made people eat snakes, frogs, even human flesh; the soldiers wracked by malarial fevers and shivering from chills beneath the sizzling southern sun, arms and legs blown away by naval artillery, unable to move even an inch, who breathed their last on foreign soil—semiconscious, does he pay them a call?

A single life counts the world; one life counts as much as any other. Yet counting less than a feather, husbands and sons went to their deaths singing, “At sea be my corpse water-soaked; on land let grass grow over it. Let me die beside my lord.”

As he wanders the borderland between life and death, does their one-time lord make his painful way to Greater East Asian battlefields to hand out Imperial gift cigarettes and award Orders of the Golden Kite?

Even after the war ended their one-time commander-in-chief never expressed regret for his sin—the war. The day the Showa era ends, will the Greater East Asian war finally come to an end? Or does Japan stand already on the threshold of new war?

In August forty-three years ago the cicadas cried bitterly throughout Japan; their voices resound now, deafeningly loud.
Kurihara wrote "Rather than Weapons, Roses" on 19 January 1991; it appeared in the *Asahi Shimbun* on 24 January. The *Hinomaru* is the Japanese flag.

**Rather than Weapons, Roses**

War: blood flows in rivers, 
flows and is sucked into the sand— 
a futile affair.

If war starts in the desert, 
the desert will be red with blood, 
corpses will lie exposed to the hot sun, 
and the stench of rotten flesh 
will flow out into the world.

Families in America 
will pray for the safety of loved ones; 
but fathers, children, husbands, lovers 
will come back in body bags— 
this when families are still crying Vietnam tears.

When the young people of America 
come home in body bags, 
America will ask that Japan, too, shed young blood, 
show the *Hinomaru* in the Gulf, 
give money, supplies, lives. 
Setting Grenada and Panama to one side, 
America confronts the Arabs: 
the Palestinian problem is past, unreal, 
but Kuwait is real.

In the Arabian sky, high-tech weapons 
with their black fuselages intersecting, 
black smoke billowing up; 
sirens screaming— 
forty-five years ago we too 
lived in and out of air raid shelters, night and day. 
Babies and the sick we took with us; fear immobilized us. 
And at the end of it all, 
Hiroshima was burned alive in the atomic flash. 
We must not let the people of the desert 
be wiped out by atomic and biochemical weapons.

Armed force won’t bring about peace. 
Stop the blasphemous broad-daylight carnage! 
Japan, first country in the world 
to renounce war for reasons of conscience: 
the bellicose may criticize us 
as unrealistic, one-country pacifists; 
but let’s stop them 
from stuffing young people into body bags; 
let’s not let the *Hinomaru* wave again.

Rather than weapons, roses; 
rather than sanctions, talks; 
no side has hands 
unstained by blood.

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*"Denunciation of Nuclear Death—Humanity on Thin Ice"*

This 240 cm x 120 cm ceramic work and the 53 cm x 40 cm melting face, "Atomic Stigmata on Wall," on the torso on p. 28 are by the Japanese “people’s artist” Kita Kazuaki and were created in 1985. They are reproduced here courtesy of Richard Minear, Milton Lowenthal, and Kita Kazuaki. For information about the other graphics accompanying this article, see the note on the inside back cover. © BCAS. All rights reserved. For non-commercial use only. www.bcasnet.org
Korea’s Forgotten Atomic Bomb Victims

by Kurt W. Tong

Introduction

It is not commonly known in the United States that tens of thousands of Korean nationals were killed and injured in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the atomic bombings of 1945. It is even possible that President Harry Truman was unaware of the existence of Koreans in the target cities when he made the fateful decision to use nuclear weapons against Japan. This final act of war engendered lasting misery for several thousands of the very people the United States was trying to liberate from Japanese domination.

Many Korean atomic bomb victims survive today, scattered in rural villages in South Korea or in the slums of urban Japan. Hundreds are still burdened by physical or radiation-related injuries sustained four decades ago. How these people became casualties, and how they have managed since, is a complex story—but one worth telling, if for no other reason than to remind us of the way in which decisions of violence made in time of war have lasting effects far beyond what is intended.

The story of Korea’s atomic bomb victims dates back to 1910, when Japan formally annexed Korea and began its thirty-five-year colonial occupation of the Korean peninsula. In the years after the annexation, Japanese development policies placed heavy economic and social burdens on the Korean populace, and many Koreans were attracted to the Japanese home islands by the relatively high wages offered in factories and mines there. By 1935 there were more than 600,000 Koreans residing permanently in Japan.

After the Japanese army invaded China in 1937, the colonial government in Korea took steps to increase the efficiency of its exploitation of the Korean populace. Soon the military took over exclusive control of labor conscription, and established a system of forced migration and virtual slavery. Entire Korean villages were surrounded and the people captured, imprisoned, and transferred to Japan or Manchuria. In all, approximately 750,000 Koreans were conscripted for work in Japan, 250,000 assigned to military-related labor in China or the South Pacific, and 85,000 drafted into the army.

The Association of Korean Atomic Bomb Victims estimates that there were over 50,000 Koreans living in the city of Hiroshima in 1945, with heavy concentrations in Fukushima-cho and Minami Kannon-cho, areas that were 2 and 3 kilometers from the bomb hypocenter, respectively. Population estimates for Nagasaki are generally less reliable, but it seems that there were probably as many as 30,000 Koreans residing in the city proper.

Koreans in Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Over 400,000 people—Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, and a handful of American prisoners—were directly or indirectly exposed to the blast and radioactive effects of the atomic explosion at Hiroshima on 6 August. Of these some 70,000 to 80,000 died immediately. Tens of thousands more died in the hours and weeks that followed—from burns, infectious disease, and radiation sickness, a gradual deterioration of the body’s internal organs that doctors had no experience in treating.

Estimates of Korean hibakusha at Hiroshima (hibakusha is the commonly used term for atomic bomb casualties) range from 48,000 to 50,000, including about 30,000 who died immediately or within the following year, and about 20,000 who survived. The higher death rate of Koreans compared to Japanese is attributable to several factors. Many Koreans lived in the poorer downtown neighborhoods near the hypocenter, and a high proportion worked outdoors, where they were directly exposed to the blast and radiation. Also, overcrowded emergency hospitals set up after the bombing frequently turned away Korean victims seeking treatment, deciding instead to give native Japanese victims priority treatment. Finally, since few Koreans had relatives in the countryside, most remained in the city after the blast, thus taking in radiation through poisoned food and water. Still other Koreans who had been stationed outside the city at the time of the explosion were organized into brigades to clear the main thoroughfares downtown and were irradiated at that time.

Casualties in Nagasaki were lower for both Japanese and Koreans, but there were approximately 20,000 Korean casualties.
on 9 August, of whom half died immediately or in the weeks and months thereafter. Approximately 10,000 Korean casualties from Nagasaki survived.7

A Lifetime of Suffering

For the Korean hibakusha, injuries sustained at the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have posed great hardships in the decades following 1945. Those exposed to the radiation have an exceptionally high incidence of cancer and anemia. Many have keloid scars, the result of radiation burns, which grow at abnormal rates and have to be periodically treated. The children of victims are also sometimes sickly or malformed as a result of radiation-altered genetics.

But aside from medical problems, hibakusha also carry unusually heavy social and psychological burdens. Hibakusha are frequently ostracized, especially if they have readily visible physical scars, and they and their children have found it difficult to find partners for marriage. Psychologically, many still suffer from shell shock, the condition now referred to in the United States as post-traumatic stress disorder, commonly associated with Vietnam War veterans.

The special burdens that atomic bomb victims carry have been particularly heavy in the case of Korean hibakusha, especially those who returned to Korea after the war. Medical facilities are inadequate in the regions of rural Korea where most hibakusha who returned to Korea reside. Social ostracism—the perception by their peers that they are somehow tainted—is even more severe in Korea than in Japan because there has been less public education about the real effects of an atomic bombing. These hardships have been compounded by politics. Systematically ignored by the governments of Japan, South Korea, and North Korea, these Koreans have truly become the forgotten hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, although in 1990 steps were taken that might improve this situation.

Of the roughly 30,000 Korean hibakusha who survived the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, about 23,000 returned to Korea and 7,000 remained in Japan. Let us look at the situation of the minority of Korean hibakusha who remained in Japan.

In terms of access to medical treatment, Korean hibakusha who stayed in Japan as permanent residents have been more fortunate than their cousins who returned to the peninsula. Two laws passed in the 1950s and 1960s established a system of registration and free treatment for atomic bomb victims in Japan. If identified by two independent witnesses (not relatives) as having been within a certain distance of the hypocenter at the time of the atomic explosions, a hibakusha can receive an atomic victim's registration (commonly referred to as a techo). The techo entitles that person to free or discounted inpatient and outpatient medical treatment at registered clinics throughout Japan, as well as assistance with funeral expenses. Techo are also awarded in Hiroshima to those who passed within a 2 kilometer radius of the hypocenter before 20 August and to those who worked in hospitals or temporary morgues disposing of irradiated corpses. In 1980 certain privileges were also extended to the children of hibakusha.

In all, over 7 billion dollars has been spent since 1957 establishing and maintaining this system. The municipal and provincial governments of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as citizen groups in both cities, lobbied especially hard to raise nationwide consciousness on the issue. As a result, the two cities have been able to shift some of the costs incurred in meeting special hibakusha medical needs to the national government.

In the 1960s and 1970s a number of Korean hibakusha entered Japan illegally in order to get access to Japanese hospitals. They were most often arrested and deported.

Japan's 600,000 permanent Korean residents have fought hard with the postwar Japanese national government (most particularly the ministries of justice and health) to obtain the same legal treatment as Japanese citizens. Much remains to be accomplished, especially in the area of employment discrimination. But fortunately for Korean hibakusha the Hiroshima and Nagasaki municipal governments, not the more conservative national government, administer the techo system. Both cities decided early on to extend similar treatment to Japanese and Korean hibakusha.

Nevertheless, of the 4,000 Korean hibakusha still alive in Japan in 1979, only 2,200 were registered with techo (of whom 86 percent were receiving help with medical expenses). More than 1,000 Koreans have applied for techo but failed to qualify, usually because of the inability to find two reliable witnesses. Since the majority of Koreans in Japan returned to the Korean peninsula after 1945, finding witnesses has been particularly difficult. Also, many Koreans are remembered by the Japanese names they used during the colonial years, adding to the confusion and making cross-referencing difficult. Only recently have witnesses from outside Japan been accepted, or have local officials been allowed to act as scribes for the illiterate.

Hibakusha in Korea

By the terms of its 1965 treaty with South Korea, the Japanese government absolved itself of accountability for Korean claims related to colonial-period or wartime losses (North Korea has no diplomatic relations with Japan). The treaty was essentially an arrangement whereby Japan was forgiven its past sins in return for a pledge to support the South Korean regime and assist in its economic development. South Korea and the Korean hibakusha who live there have as a result

received no direct reparations from the Japanese government.²

There are now somewhere between ten and twenty thousand hibakusha surviving in South Korea, as well as several thousand in North Korea. However, all estimates of the actual number are extremely rough. Of the nearly 2 million Koreans who poured back into Korea after the war, the 23,000 hibakusha were a small minority, and no systematic effort was made to keep track of them.³ Most returned to the obscurity of rural poverty in their original home villages. No one knows exactly how many hibakusha died in the Korean War of 1950–53, which took 3 million Korean lives, or how many died of disease or old age in the three decades since then. The only reasonably reliable count of Korean hibakusha existing today is that of the Association of Korean Atomic Bomb Victims, which has registered 9,362 hibakusha since its founding in the late 1970s.

Under conditions of increased media coverage and public awareness, the provision of medical treatment to Korea’s hibakusha was made into one of many sideshows in the greater Japan-Korea political game. Both governments want to avoid taking full and public responsibility for the hibakusha, for both political and fiscal reasons.

Many Korean hibakusha do not want to be found. Atomic bomb victims have frequently suffered discrimination in employment, and their children find it more difficult to marry. Because in Korea there has been little education about the effects of the nuclear bomb, association with so-called tainted hibakusha is seen by some as bad luck. Social discrimination outside the family also creates strained relations within the family. Sometimes the children of hibakusha escape to the more anonymous environment of the urban working class, leaving their parents behind.

Medical treatment at the best hospitals in Seoul is comparable to that available in Japan. But extended hospital care in Korea, when compared to individual income, is still prohibitively expensive. The most advanced hospitals are still out of reach for those who live in rural society. Few people outside the more educated urban middle and upper classes carry medical insurance, and the government-supported social welfare and health care systems are underdeveloped. When one goes out into the Korean countryside, where most hibakusha live, the standards of medical treatment decline rapidly. Rural clinics simply do not have the facilities or know-how to treat complex cancers or handle the removal of keloid growths.

The single largest concentration of hibakusha in Korea is in the township of Hapchon, in southeastern Korea’s Kyongsang Province. Fully one-third of the total membership (or 3,570 members) of the Association of Korean Atomic Bomb Victims reside in that one valley. People started migrating from Hapchon early, after a series of poor harvests in the 1920s; the first migrants from the Hapchon area happened to move to Hiroshima, and so latecomers followed suit. By the time the war with China broke out, there was already a considerable population of Hapchon people in Hiroshima.⁴ In all, 6,087 Hapchon people are believed to have been in the atomic bombing, of whom 1,295 died.

Hapchon is unique in that it has the only clinic in Korea specializing in the treatment of radiation-related diseases. The clinic was built in 1973 with the assistance of the Japanese Conference for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, an organization with ties to the minority Democratic Socialist Party. However, there are still no inpatient facilities at the clinic, and of the five or six staff members, none have specialist training in radiation-related illnesses. A 1979 Japan-Korea agreement on assistance for Korean hibakusha provided for the training of Korean physicians at the specialized atomic hospitals in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but to date no such training has taken place.

Traveling to Japan for Treatment

Because of the gap in the availability of medical treatment for hibakusha in Korea and Japan, some Korean atomic bomb victims have returned to Japan for treatment. As one seventy-five-year-old hibakusha confided to this author: “I went back to Korea because I thought it would be better to die there, but now I think it would have been better if I’d stayed in Japan. I would have been treated better here.” The problem is that Japanese immigration laws are extremely strict, and so traveling to Japan for treatment has not been easy. In the 1960s and 1970s a number of Korean hibakusha entered Japan illegally in order to get access to Japanese hospitals. They were most often arrested and deported.

In the 1970s a now-famous legal battle developed as Son Jin-doo, a Korean hibakusha arrested for residing illegally in Japan, took his case to Japan’s highest courts. Son was born in Osaka in 1927, and he was living in Hiroshima in 1945. He returned to Korea after losing his Japanese citizenship as part of the automatic mass denationalization of 1951. In 1970 he illegally reentered Japan, but was arrested and imprisoned in the city of Fukuoka for ten months. The Fukuoka Court rejected Son’s application for an atomic techo on the basis of his status as an illegal alien.

Son appealed to the district court and won. He then won twice more as the Fukuoka municipal government fought the decision all the way to Japan’s Supreme Court. Finally, the Supreme Court decided in March 1978 that since the war was an act of the state, Son had a right to national compensation from the state. The court also stated that “in the interests of humanitarianism” the right to treatment should be given to all atomic bomb victims regardless of their nationality or legal status in Japan.

Son had won the case, but being eligible for guaranteed

2. In 1974, for example, an organization called the Association of Families of Hiroshima Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Atomic Victims was formed in Korea to sue Mitsubishi and the Japanese government for assistance in the location and transportation of remains (especially important in Korean family and religious traditions) and the payment of back wages. However, the case never even made it to court on account of the legal terms of the 1965 treaty. Only very recently has the Japanese court system agreed that Japan should pay veterans’ benefits to the families of Koreans and Taiwanese who died as soldiers in the Imperial Army.

3. Of those who returned to Korea, an estimated 70 percent had light wounds of some variety, while 30 percent made the trip with serious injuries.

4. This is why only 5 percent of the hibakusha registered in Hapchon today report that they were sent to Japan under the conscription plan.
Of the roughly 30,000 Korean hibakusha who survived the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 23,000 returned to Korea, most returning to the rural poverty of their original home villages. A surprising number of hibakusha had come from Hapchon in southeastern Korea and thus returned to that area. Park Gyu-mook, a seventy-two-year-old farmer from Hapchon, had been conscripted to work in Hiroshima as a young man. He suffered burns there and has a foot that never healed.

Korean Atomic Bomb Victims

All the pictures on these two pages are stills from the 1989 Korean Broadcasting System documentary Haebang 44 nyon, pipok 44 nyon (Liberation, forty-four years; atomic bomb victims, forty-four years), in Korean, and the pictures are used here courtesy of the Korean Broadcasting System. We are grateful to Wee Ki-bong and Alex Wee of the Korea Times for helping us obtain the video. Adam Kim of Havana Video-TV of Denver for providing it, and Hyun Im for translating the caption information that is from the video.

Kim Pil-lae is a Hapchon woman who had migrated to Hiroshima with her husband and two sons. At the age of thirty-four she lost them all and suffered severe disfigurement in the blast.

Fifty-year-old Hapchon hibakusha Lee Jae-im is retarded and shakes when she moves. She was normal until she lived through the bombing of Hiroshima at the age of five. Since then a mental, emotional, and neurological disorder has arrested her development at the level of a five-year-old.

Kim Moon-song, a fifty-two-year-old electrician in Pusan, was an eight-year-old riding his bicycle in Hiroshima when it was bombed. As was the style at that time, his hair had been shaved off the sides of his head, and his skin was completely burned where it wasn't protected by hair. His leg and foot were also badly burned, and his foot is severely twisted as a result. He can walk only on the inside of his foot, greatly weakening his leg, and he has a wound on his ankle that still oozes blood after forty-five years.
Korean hibakusha Son Jin-doo was born in Osaka in 1927 and was living in Hiroshima at the time of the blast. In a famous legal battle he won the right to compensation from the Japanese government for treatment, but he was then deported from Japan as an illegal alien. When this picture was taken Son Jin-doo was complaining that Korean hibakusha were treated like beggars after having been taken over as laborers and working very hard for the Japanese. The Japanese government was not providing them with any compensation, and the Korean government was not helping them either. Son Jin-doo lives with his son and feels himself a burden because he can't contribute to the household.

Shin Yong-su of Seoul is head of the Association of Korean Atomic Bomb Victims, and when this picture was taken in 1989 he was pointing out that Korean president Roh Tae-woo had promised to help the hibakusha when he was campaigning for office but hadn't done anything yet. Nevertheless, Shin Yong-su went on to say that it is mainly the responsibility of the Japanese to clean up the mess created by the war. He should be pleased, then, that in May 1990 President Roh asked the prime minister of Japan, Kaifu Toshiki, for more cooperation from Japan in helping Korean hibakusha, and in 1991 Kaifu budgeted U.S.$12.6 million for the treatment of Korean hibakusha during the year ending in March 1992.

It is often difficult for the children of hibakusha to get married because of fears of possible genetic damage. Baek Hyo-soon from near Seoul is the thirty-six-year-old daughter of a Korean hibakusha who had been conscripted to work in Hiroshima. When she was fourteen, Baek Hyo-soon began having problems with a progressive muscle weakness and lack of coordination in her legs that is spreading up her body. It is now difficult for her to perform such everyday tasks as lifting objects and getting up from a sitting position. Her brother developed the same problems and committed suicide thirteen years earlier because of them. Religion is Baek Hyo-soon's solace—she feels that all she can do is pray that the problems aren't getting any worse.

Twelve-year-old Park Jin-ch'ul of Seoul is the grandson of a Korean hibakusha who died in 1988. When Park Jin-ch'ul was born his leg was much blacker than it was when this picture was taken in 1989, and he had black spots all over his body, some the size of a baby's hand. Although genetic damage from exposure to radiation from the bombs has not been as apparent as some had predicted, no one knows for sure when the damage and suffering will end.
treatment did not make him a legal alien, and he was still deported to Korea. The techo status he received is useless in Korea, so in the end he has obtained no medical assistance for all his efforts.

Hibakusha coming to Japan as illegal aliens for treatment are almost always forced to return to Korea, regardless of the progress of their medical treatment. This is apparently the Ministry of Justice's way of showing its determination to enforce immigration law. In 1986 the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun reported the case of a Korean woman who came to Japan as an illegal alien in 1972 to get medical treatment not available in Korea. Living in Osaka, she went regularly to local hospitals, but for lack of a techo she could not afford the major operation she really needed. She was finally arrested in 1985 for residing without an alien registration. Knowing the Son precedent, she then publicly searched for the two necessary witnesses and received a techo. But in February 1986 the Osaka immigration authorities deported her to Korea, where her techo is now useless.

Systematically ignored by the governments of Japan, South Korea, and North Korea, these Koreans have truly become the forgotten hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, although in 1990 this situation began to improve.

Largely because of the publicity surrounding the Son case, the Japanese government in 1979 decided to do something about the Catch-22 paradox of its own stance—that Korean hibakusha were eligible for free treatment in Japanese hospitals, but were usually not allowed to come to Japan in the first place. After negotiation with the Korean government, a plan commenced in 1981 whereby 100 Korean hibakusha could travel to Hiroshima each year for medical treatment, with the transportation costs paid by the Korean government and the hospital fees handled by the Japanese national and municipal governments. Tests of the eligibility for and necessity of treatment were conducted in Korean hospitals, after which the patient traveled to Hiroshima’s Atomic Hospital for two months of diagnosis and treatment. Each patient’s stay in Japan could be extended to six months if necessary for medical reasons.

From 1981 to 1985, 228 hibakusha made the trip to Japan under the sponsorship of this plan. During the same period, another 40 or so patients crossed to Japan for treatment under the sponsorship of citizens’ groups in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The plan was discontinued in 1985, at the end of its original statute of limitations.

The idea of bringing Korean hibakusha to Japan for treatment was not without flaws. Some hibakusha expressed reluctance to leave their families for such a long time, while others were frightened by the idea of returning to the city where they experienced the bombing. Many simply did not trust the Japanese enough to accept their treatment. But the most fundamental and obvious problem with the scheme of bringing hibakusha to Japan for treatment is that many of the people most in need of medical attention were not healthy enough to make the trip.

A Political Impasse

The Korean government refused to continue the program after 1985, explaining that those who were in most urgent need of the sort of treatment available in Japan had already taken advantage of the program. Furthermore, the Korean government asserted, medical facilities are now sufficiently developed in Korea to handle any new needs the hibakusha might have.

In 1986 the Japanese Federation of Lawyers publicly called for an extension of the program. Relevant authorities in the Japanese government agreed and sent representatives from the ministries of health and foreign affairs to Korea to discuss the matter. But they encountered a distrustful Korean government and came away without an agreement.

There are several interpretations of the Korean government’s reasons for not wanting to extend the program. Three explanations seem likely. First, there is the matter of pride—government officials did not want to focus attention on the deficiencies of the country’s medical system. Proud Korea does not like to take handouts from its former colonial master. Second, some Korean government officials apparently objected to the fact that during the 1981–85 program Korea had to pay the transport costs of the patients. These officials asserted that their care is not Korea’s responsibility because Japan caused the problem. Third, some Korean officials were reportedly worried that the Japanese government would use an extension of the program as a propaganda opportunity.

Under conditions of increased media coverage and public awareness, the provision of medical treatment to Korea’s hibakusha was made into one of many sideshows in the greater Japan-Korea political game. Both governments want to avoid taking full and public responsibility for the hibakusha, for both political and fiscal reasons. The Japanese and Korean governments are concerned that concessions made to hibakusha will inspire greater demands for support from other categories of war victims. Japan’s bureaucracy is also worried that concessions on the matter might wound national pride, or at least offend powerful conservative establishment factions in Tokyo. The Korean hibakusha, meanwhile, insist that the Japanese government take clear national responsibility for the atomic bombing.

6. Concerns about growing budgets may have prompted the Japanese Ministry of Health to tell Korea in 1986 that “the sharing of expenses has been part of this formula from the beginning,” and “we are not considering contribution to or participation in the construction of a hospital in Korea.” In short, the program would be continued on Japanese terms or not at all. (See Asahi Shimbun, 7 Nov. 1986, p. 4.)

7. Eighty percent of the Korean hibakusha polled in a 1979 survey blamed Japan for what happened to them. (See Lee, Hibaku Chosenjin mondai.) As one woman explained to me, “If Japan had not attacked Korea and subjugated it, there would not now be Korean atomic bomb victims.” Still, some believe that the United States was also responsible to some degree. Several hibakusha told this author that they thought the atomic bomb was an “unnecessarily cruel” weapon.
Possible Resolution

The year 1988 brought new leadership to the helm in both Korea and Japan, and there were some signs of progress on hibakusha issues. In March 1988 Japanese Foreign Minister Uno Sosuke expressed willingness to support a new aid program, and sent a government study group to Korea in May and June to research the problem. The research team reported that the problem was severe and deserving of attention, and recommended that: (1) the Japanese government pay the travel costs for patients coming to Japan, (2) an exchange of physicians and other medical staff be established, and (3) a mobile clinic be set up to reach those too seriously injured to travel. In actuality, all that was set up was a conduit for Japanese support funds for basic medical treatment, totaling about $300,000 per year.

With the May 1990 Roh-Kaifu summit in Tokyo, however, the plight of Korea's hibakusha finally found its way into the headlines and onto the national-level agenda of both countries. President Roh enunciated clearly a Korean government request for more "cooperation" from Japan in providing support for Korean hibakusha. Prime Minister Kaifu responded with a proposal for a $25 million fund designated to follow through on some of the actions recommended by the 1988 Japanese survey team, and in 1991 he appropriated $12.6 million in the budget for the year ending in March 1992 for the treatment of Korean hibakusha.

How this money will be used, and whether or not it will be effective in assisting Korea's hibakusha, depends on the commitment of the authorities concerned to follow through on this agreement. For the time being, however, Korea's hibakusha are not being forgotten. This new atmosphere was symbolized by the announcement on 19 May 1990 that, forty-five years after the bombing, the city of Hiroshima had agreed to move the memorial dedicated to Korean bomb victims from its current position across the Ota River into the Peace Park itself.

Additional References


Counterinsurgency War in the Philippines and the Role of the United States

by Arnel de Guzman and Tito Craige*

Our fact-finding mission’s truck bounces wildly down a potholed road on Mindanao, the second-largest Philippine island. We clutch handkerchiefs to our mouths to avoid the dust and worry about dangers lurking in a free-fire zone. As we pass over the site of a recent landmine explosion, I ask our Filipina guide a question that has been on my mind all day: “Why, Luz, do you risk your life? Aren’t you afraid?”

Luz turns and calmly says, “I am a ‘human rights victim’. My father was murdered in 1987 and we fled from our village. My mother and the family are hiding in another province, but I came back. I want to help families like my own.” Protectively, I wonder aloud, “Are you safe?” Without expression she says, “Soldiers are asking lots of questions about me.”

Luz’s family members are among the one million Filipinos displaced since 1986 by U.S.-assisted counterinsurgency operations. This massive uprooting of rural villages has eerie parallels to the forcible relocations of Vietnamese by the United States twenty-five years ago. Why has the Aquino government chosen guns when “butter” is rarely on the Philippine table? What are the effects in the battlefield and on civilian institutions? What is the role of the United States in this conflict?

After coming to power in 1986, the Aquino government faced several tortuous decisions. None was more difficult than how to deal with the widespread revolutionary movement founded during the Marcos regime and led by the National Democratic Front (NDF). Aquino could have chosen to let the new civil freedoms and constitution speak for themselves. Time would tell if the insurgency’s historic grievances held their allure.

Instead, Aquino made the risky choice to negotiate a cease-fire with the insurgents’ political arm, the NDF. The talks failed and Aquino pondered her next move. Her choices were clear: should limited government revenues be used for badly needed land reform and social services that would, indirectly at least, destroy the basis for rebellion? Or, was the rebellion itself an obstacle to development and stability? Either option seemed costly.

Choosing to fight first and let private enterprise take care of development, Aquino vowed to destroy the insurgency by the end of her term in 1992. She declared a “moral basis” for war against the NDF’s armed wing, the New People’s Army (NPA), and initiated offensives throughout the country. Now that the election is approaching, how can we assess the role of the insurgency and the attempts to destroy it?

The Insurgency

The NDF is a revolutionary movement that claims the support of 11 million Filipinos and is active in over half the country’s barangays (the smallest administrative division in the Philippines, equivalent to a rural barrio or an urban neighborhood). A coalition of groups declared illegal by the Philippine government, the NDF includes sectoral organizations, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), and the New People’s Army. According to both U.S. and Philippine government officials, the indigenous CPP does not receive aid from Moscow and Beijing.

Founded in 1969 in Luzon, the New People’s Army bases its strategy on the cultivation of a sympathetic “mass base” that provides food, new enlistments, and contributions. In the waning years of the Marcos dictatorship, the NPA grew rapidly, doubling its size between 1980 and 1985. Since the boycott of the 1986 “snap election” by the NDF, however, the revolutionary movement has suffered a number of setbacks, not the least of which is the detention of many key leaders. Also damaging are the purges of suspected spies, the massacre of civilians in Digos in 1989, and the aggressive “total approach” to war promoted by the Aquino government. Moreover, human rights groups have criticized the NPA for numerous acts of violence against noncombatants. “These include

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*This article is a modified and abridged version of the book Primer on Militarization, researched and written by Arnel de Guzman and Tito Craige for the Manila-based Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace (EMJP), which holds the copyright for the book (© 1990).
NPA guerrilla leader Fr. Frank Navarro in Augustan del Sur, Mindanao. His men are taking a break in a sympathetic village where they have built rudimentary housing. Navarro is the most illustrious and charismatic of the largely unknown NPA leadership. According to Gregg R. Jones in Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), p. 8, in early 1989 the NPA had about 24,000 guerrillas, with an arsenal of more than 10,000 high-powered rifles, grenade launchers, and a few mortars—virtually all captured from government forces. This photo is by and courtesy of Tito Craige, who also provided the information about Navarro.

the killing of or use of force against government officials and property owners who resist NPA 'taxes' or interfere with NPA activities, local criminal elements in the custody of the NPA, and suspected military informants.” Nevertheless, the NPA has proven to be quite resilient and has approximately 23,000 regulars, half of whom are armed.

Among the NDF demands are comprehensive land reform, fundamental redistribution of wealth and power, and removal of U.S. bases. Both critics and supporters of the insurgency agree that the true causes of rebellion are the structures of land and capital ownership, plus ineffective and corrupt local government officials. Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos, for example, freely admits that the problems are “not the New People’s Army nor the Moro National Liberation Front nor the criminals,” but rather “poverty, illiteracy, injustice, graft and corruption and fear.” In congressional testimony in the 1991 fiscal year budget, Ramos admitted that “the lack of government services in the countryside contributes...to the growth of the insurgency and the popularity of the ultra-rightist campaign to overthrow the government.”

Peace and the Sword of War

In 1986 Filipinos celebrated the establishment of a democratic Philippine government and the fall of dictator Ferdinand Marcos. President Corazon Aquino released political prisoners, reinstated the writ of habeas corpus, signed international protocols on human rights, and promised land reform. Aquino’s popularity soared further when she initiated peace talks with the National Democratic Front. The talks and cease-fire agreement bred hope that twenty years of hostilities would finally end.

On 22 January 1987, however, government troops fired on farmers demonstrating for land reform near Malacanang Palace. Nineteen died, and on the following day a key government panelist resigned. Maria Serena Diokno voiced her bitter disappointment with the military: “Despite official public assurances that the Armed Forces today are new and have been re-oriented...the violent dispersal of the farmers’ rally demonstrates the opposite.”

1. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Out of Control: Militia Abuses in the Philippines (New York, 1990), p. 7. These charges have been echoed by Asia Watch and Amnesty International.
2. F. Ramos, interview with International Fact-finding Mission on Internal Refugees, 30 Oct. 1989. One of the insurgent groups in Mindanao has been the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a militant group concerned with land rights and demanding to have an autonomous region controlled by Muslims. After years of brutal fighting between the MNLF and government troops, a treaty was signed in 1976 calling for the eventual creation of an autonomous region.

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In a climate of mutual suspicion, the talks soon collapsed. President Aquino claimed that the failure of the NDF to lay down its arms gave her government a “moral basis” for war. On 23 March 1987, at the Philippine Military Academy graduation ceremonies, Aquino announced that “when it becomes necessary to take out the sword of war... I want a string of honorable military victories.” In a remarkable departure from her previous insistence on reforms as the way to defeat the insurgents, she proposed that “the answer to the terrorism of the left and the right is not social and economic reform but police and military action.” In 1988 Aquino rallied the troops by announcing that she would accept the military’s choice of war-making tactics: “Fight with every assurance that I will stand by you, share the blame, defend your actions, mourn your losses and enjoy the final victory that I am certain will be ours. You and I will see this through together.”

Indeed, nothing has deterred the government from spending billions of pesos and thousands of lives to wipe out the communist-led insurgency. “Seeing this through together” has not been easy, however, and the “final victory” remains elusive. The military is not “together” and is split into opposing camps that have kept Filipinos guessing daily who will be presiding over Malacanang Palace when they wake up.

Since the imposition of martial law in 1972, the military has become a highly politicized institution. Young military officers started to see governance of civilian institutions as one of their prerogatives. The most powerful of the dissident officers’ organization is known as RAM (Reform the Armed Forces Movement), but considerable power also rests in the shadowy Young Officers’ Union. In fact, since Aquino’s 1986 inauguration, dissident soldiers have come close to seizing power in six different coup attempts. Each government victory was costly: the military gained enormous concessions in the weeks following the rebellions and now function as the de facto government throughout the countryside.

The Aquino government, besieged by rightist coup attempts, Muslim resentment, ecological destruction, impatient creditor banks, and disasters such as the 1990 earthquake, has made a pact with the devil. In order to retain the semblance of a civilian government, the military governs from the back rooms and the sincere, honest, and pious figurehead presides. As is often said in Manila: “Cory reigns but does not rule.” In her defense, Aquino insists that she always intended to be the transition from dictator to constitution and nothing more. Fortunately for Aquino, the Gulf War has diverted attention from some domestic problems. The respite may be temporary, however, since the reduced dollar inflow from Filipino contract workers in the Middle East means political and economic stability is more elusive than ever. One fact sums up the desperation felt by the 75 percent who live in squatter communities and rural barrios: by 1991 the peso had lost a third of its 1990 value.

**Population Control and Constriction**

President Aquino and her U.S. military advisers mapped out a strategy dubbed Lambat Bitag (Operation Fishnet-Trap), a Filipino expression that suggests a noose tightening around a victim’s neck. Lambat Bitag relies on traditional military offensives bolstered by political and psychological warfare that are supposed to pave the way for peace and development. The strategy is not new; it was used by the United States in the Philippine-American War, was used to crush the Huk rebellion in the 1950s, and was the mainstay of Marcos-directed counterinsurgency warfare in the 1970s and 1980s.

The victims of the tightening noose are of course meant to be the insurgents, especially the leaders, but since they are so elusive, a broad net with small openings is needed. Casting such a net risks catching innocent fish, but this, reasons the military, would be an acceptable byproduct of war. In regions where the net fails, the entire population (the water) may have to be removed in order to starve the fish.

The military has focused on severing the ties between the rebels and their mass base because insurgent strength does not lie in the hands of a few leaders but in broad-based systems that support the underground armed groups. This is known as “population control,” a strategy of separating the civilians from the insurgents in order to cut off their food supply and remove suspected supporters. The various types of population control are:

- hamletting—military grouping of village residents for the purpose of denying insurgents food, cash, and emotional support. Families are forced to live inside village clusters and are closely monitored by the military;
- evacuation—mass withdrawal of people from residences due to military operations, intense fighting between government troops and rebels, or raids by paramilitary groups or vigilantes;
- food and medical blockade—the limiting of food and medicines to villagers in order to keep them out of insurgent hands. The military takes a village census and then rations supplies.
- zoning—the military practice of securing a residential area, usually involving house-to-house searches. In many cases the male residents are forced to line up in front of government informers who then identify the “rebels”;
- checkpoint—place where motor vehicles and pedestrians are searched by the military or police;
- illegal arrest—taking a person into custody without a legal arrest warrant or without witnessing the person committing a crime.

Today the government is implementing its counterinsurgency strategy through three tiers of its military forces, totalling 285,000 people. The top tier is the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), consisting of the army with 70,000 personnel, the navy and marines with 28,000, and the air force with 10,000. These units use conventional military hardware and may be deployed anywhere in the country. On the second level, and now not part of the AFP, are the territorial forces, such as the Philippine National Police with 104,000 personnel, and the paramilitary Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAGPU) with 70,000. On the local level are civilian volunteer organizations that include vigilante groups. There are also 3,000 presidential security guards, a part of the AFP, charged with protecting the president.

“Constriction” is a four-part process of destruction and construction that destroys shadow or alternative governments and then builds a progovernment citizenry. The first phase of the “net trap” is clearing, and it involves large-scale mobile military operations to remove the rebels’ politico-military apparatus. Included among the targets to be attacked are nongovernmental organizations of workers, peasants, urban poor, students, and urban rights advocates. The hold-and-defend stage consists of the establishment of territorial

A heavily armed paramilitary trooper watches over Philippine villagers. President Aquino's highest priority has been "total war" against the revolutionary movement, and the Philippine countryside is completely militarized with free-fire zones, bombing and strafing, the displacement of civilians, the hamleting of villagers suspected of being National Democratic Front sympathizers, and an estimated 700 political detainees. Government-backed vigilante groups have terrorized the population with assassinations, rape, disappearances, and torture. The above information is from an interview with Makibaka, "Women of the Philippine Revolution," in Prairie Fire (Atlanta, GA), vol. 13, no. 1 (spring 1989). This photo is by and courtesy of Jeanne Hallacy, and it appeared in the Alliance for Philippine Concerns (San Francisco). Death Squads in the Philippines.

Checkpoints and detachments to thwart returning rebel forces. Then comes consolidation: the civilian government machinery forms and coordinates with paramilitary and intelligence units to gradually take over the "territorial defense." Local Bantay Bayan groups (town guards) and vigilantes are the key elements of these local militias. The final stage is development—local government-initiated livelihood projects and civic-action programs such as medical missions and road building. To encourage rebel NPAs to surrender and establish a new life, the government has allocated P 3.5 billion for the National Reconciliation and Development Program.

A June 1990 closed-door military assessment gave high marks to the first three stages but admitted failure to carry out the fourth, development. Brigadier General Lisandro Abadia, the deputy AFP chief of staff operations, chastised the military for failing to deliver the basic services that would remove the reasons for an insurgency: Lambat Bitang's "main weakness is how development is to set in after the clearing and holding phase. There is a problem of coordination."

Militarizing the People and the Government

The most controversial elements of the military forces now in power are the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units and the vigilantes. A popular clamor forced President Aquino to disband the notorious Marcos-era militia called the Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF). In its place would be the CAFGU, established on 25 July 1987 with Executive Order No. 264. The master plan states that the AFP will eventually increase its combat-ready forces by 50 percent, and there will be 80,000 in the CAFGUs. The government insisted that the AFP would strictly supervise the new militia and that it would resemble a national guard. Critics in Congress and the press, however, said that the "CAFGU is the same dog [as the CHDF] with a new collar."

The CAFGUs were supposed to be exercised of these original sins in three ways: local officials approve the recruits, the army trains and supervises, and the CAFGUs defend their own communities. "Some CAFGUs are successful," said Defense Undersecretary Quisumbing in June 1990, "but there are mixed reactions. At least we now have warm bodies in crucial areas that might have gone to the other side." Recent AFP data show that many of the warm bodies have become cold bodies: in Mindanao 50 percent of the casualties are CAFGUs who were placed in frontline military operations.

A number of problems have surfaced, the worst being recruitment. The screening is in the hands of the military, and this is expressly illegal. General Ernesto Calupig described the subordinate positions of the civilians this way: "If there is a difference of opinion between the civilian and the military, the opinion of the senior military commander will prevail." He added that applicants with criminal records are rejected. Since virtually none of the abusive CHDF members or vigilantes had been convicted of criminal behavior, this safeguard is meaningless. The CAFGU appears to have become a dumping ground for misfits.

Reports from around the country indicate that CAFGUs are illegally recruited, trained, and deployed. Local officials seem to be powerless against a militia that has the potential to terrorize the community, and many of them oppose the CAFGUs. A mayor in Mindanao said, "I am for the dismantling of the CAFGUs. They are haphazardly trained and cross boundaries they are not

supposed to...I was supposed to supervise the CAFGU but I have no jurisdiction. ...My head was worth P 35,000, and now it's P 40,000 because they say I'm an NPA [for criticizing the CAFGU]. ...My control is nothing."

One monitor of CAFGU abuses is the U.S. government, since according to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 U.S. financial assistance to foreign countries is tied to human rights performance. The State Department commented enthusiastically about the CAFGUs just nine days after Pastor Zenaido Ruelo died from a CAFGU bullet in Zamboanga del Sur on 19 April 1989: "The control of CAFGUs by the AFP appears to be generally effective and proceeding to Government guidelines." One year later, after a string of bombings and murders by CAFGUs, the State Department dramatically altered its assessment: "A number of human rights violations by the CAFGUs have been reported, and private funding of some units by landowners or businessmen has raised concern about the Government’s ability to control the units."

Both critics and supporters of the underground NDF agree on one thing: The true causes of rebellion are the structures of land and capital ownership plus corrupt public officials.

Also of concern are the vigilantes. The Spanish word "vigilante" originally meant "guard" or "watchman," but it has come to mean ordinary citizens who appoint themselves as law enforcers. Vigilantes argue that they have to take the law into their own hands because public officials are unable to bring peace and order to their local communities. Philippine vigilantes have existed for over a century, but not until the 1940s did military officials incorporate vigilantes into their anticommunist campaigns. At the present time there are 600 vigilante groups, ranging in number from a few individuals to hundreds of members.

The most notorious vigilante group is the Tadtad ("chop chop"), a group reported to have committed heinous crimes. Tadtads are known to have beheaded victims, and in 1985 they murdered Italian priest Tullio Favali and even ate his brains. The first well known vigilante organization to be formed since 1986 is the Alsa Masa ("rising masses") of Davao City. Partly in response to complaints about NPA abuses, the Alsa Masa gained the support of many, but so far it has not been able to carry out its promises of socioeconomic development.

Unarmed vigilante groups are legal and known as Civilian Voluntary Organizations, but the Philippine Constitution is clear about armed vigilantes being illegal. Nonetheless, government practice is another thing altogether. In fact, vigilantes have become an integral part of the government’s counterinsurgency drive. On 29 March 1987 Aquino praised the Alsa Masa, "While other regions are experiencing problems in fighting the insurgen­cy, you here...have set the example." In 1988, however, embarrased by the revelation that abusive vigilante groups had murdered and beheaded numerous victims, Aquino insisted that the vigilante groups be unarmed, voluntary, and free of criminals. The Philippine Senate and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights have judged that these limitations have been almost completely ignored.

Recruiting from the 70 percent of the Philippine population that is poor, vigilante groups offer both weapons and a cause—anticommunism. The recruits know they can avoid being labeled subversive by the government; they know that the conflict has boiled down to a simple equation: if you are not a CAFGU, vigilante, or soldier, you must be a rebel. To avoid being labeled, which could be the same as a death sentence, fearful civilians sign up. Then the military provides rifles, which the recruits supplement with handguns, bolo knives, spears, or sticks.

Militarization has increased in the cities as well as in the countryside. Urban slum areas have been the sites of "zoning" operations and squatter demolitions, often carried out by or with the military. In 1990 Oplan Laging Handa Metro Alpha (Operation Always Ready) deployed 2,000 antiterrorist troops, 51 mobile "choke" checkpoints, and community-based vigilante groups made up of gun club members and radio operators. Capital command chief General Marino Filart dismantled the checkpoints in June 1990, but the mobile patrols continue.

As has been pointed out earlier, the civilian government of the Philippines has itself become militarized. Since Aquino’s inauguration, the military—a force that grew enormously in size and weaponry under President Marcos—has systematically eroded civilian control and tightened its hold on the government. President Aquino, Congress, and the judiciary—the three branches of government—have all given in to the continuous pressure for one principal reason: they accept the logic of the counterinsurgency. Congress has been sharply criticized by civil libertarians for granting President Aquino six months of emergency legislative and police power in 1989 and 1990, and civilian government advocates have been alarmed by the fact that in 1990-91 retired AFP officers held top-level posts in the government. Since 1986 military officials have lobbied for an Internal Security Act, a national identification system, and legalization of the death penalty, although so far they have been unsuccessful.

A little-understood presidential veto best symbolizes the loss of civilian power. Presidential Decree 1950, a Marcos-era law, mandated a military court-martial for a soldier charged with crimes against civilians, and as a result virtually no one was convicted of abusive behavior. In May 1989 the International Commission of Jurists urged the repeal of PD 1950 in a letter to Senator Wigberto Tanada. Congress overturned PD 1850, and civil libertarians were ready to celebrate the end of a historic wrong. Shocking many of her supporters, however, Aquino cited advice from Secretary Ramos and AFP Chief of Staff de Villa and vetoed the bill during December 1989.

Aside from creating the CAFGUs, supporting the

Refugees fleeing. Since 1986 a million noncombatants in the Philippines have been forcibly relocated, 89 percent due to government counterinsurgency offenses. Since the Philippines is an island nation, these refugees cannot simply cross a border to safety in another country, and sanctuaries are hard to find within the Philippines since the military has created so many free-fire zones and burned so many villages. This photo is from Exodus from Counterinsurgency Warfare, a report of the International Fact-finding Mission on Internal Refugees in the Philippines (Oct.–Nov. 1989), courtesy of the Council for People’s Development, Manila, and Tito Craige.

vigilantes, and granting concessions to rebel soldiers, Aquino has knuckled under to the military’s war cries even in a time of natural calamity. After the devastating earthquake of July 1990 Aquino rejected the Senate’s plea to declare a cease-fire in the war against the NPA and AFP rebels. She could have united the country in rebuilding the mountain communities, but instead she elected to press ahead with the war.

Psychological Warfare (Psywar)

The military has tried to bring the war to every village in the country by blurring the distinction between military and civilian roles. This privatization of the war eventually forces each citizen to make a public choice: either you are for the government or you are a subversive. According to University of the Philippines history professor Maris Diokno, “the war system has become so pervasive that every Filipino, in the name of love of country, can be called to fight a war that he might not even understand or accept.”

The cutting edge of psywar is the special operations team. Trained to use “social engineering” on the barrio level, the elite squads try to become friends with local people and influence them to back the government. Through the use of informants and forced confessions, the teams uncover “subversives” and then “neutralize” them. The New York Times compared the program to the notorious Phoenix psywar strategy by the United States in Vietnam: “Although this effort is tailored to the Philippine situation, it is essentially similar to some of the tactics used by the United States in Vietnam, both Philippine and American diplomats acknowledge.”

Provincial reports credit special operations teams with being insidiously effective: now there is fear and suspicion between neighbors where none existed before. Tragically, this spy-vs-spy and rat-on-your-neighbor tactic eventually tears the social fabric that holds communities together.

Hot War in the Countryside

Combatants: According to estimates by the Department of National Defense, every day 10 government soldiers or enemy troops are killed. This means that since 1986 at least 10,000 combatants have died. In a Vietnam War–style body counting report to Commander-in-Chief Aquino on her thousandth day in office, Defense Secretary Ramos announced that the “kill ratio” is two to one in favor of government troops.

An infant victim of a measles epidemic in a refugee camp near Bacolod in Negros in 1989. In April 1989, 35,000 villagers from Negros fled counterinsurgency drives of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Neither villagers nor public health officials were adequately warned of the impending government offensives. Many of the villagers lost their livelihoods when they fled, with their houses destroyed, utensils and tools gone, livestock killed or dispersed, and the planting cycle disrupted. Lacking even rudimentary health care facilities, the refugee sites became centers of disease and starvation. Epidemics of measles spread through the crowded, unsanitary quarters, and 315 children died from measles and other easily preventable maladies such as diarrhea and dysentery. This photo and most of its caption information are from Exodus from Counterinsurgency, courtesy of the Council for People's Development and Tito Craige.

Noncombatants—Internal Refugees: Citizens Disaster Relief Center (CDRC) data from relief and human rights organizations show that a million noncombatants have been forcibly relocated since 1986, 89 percent due to government counterinsurgency offensives. Due to the cease-fire, the number of evacuees in 1986 was “only” 54,299. By 1987 the “sword of war” was unsheathed and 340,305 people fled their villages. In 1988 the offensives continued to depopulate the countryside, and 321,495 were displaced. For 1989 the as-yet-incomplete total is 196,868. The total through the end of 1989 is 912,897.

Since the Philippines is an island country, fleeing families cannot cross a border and claim asylum from persecution. Instead, displaced people must relocate within the country and are therefore called “internal refugees.” Finding sanctuary is no easy task. Large areas of Leyte, Samar, Panay, northern Luzon, and Mindanao have been made into free-fire zones. Many villages have been burned and remain abandoned. In October 1988 Brigadier General Jesus Hermosa, then-Commander-in-Chief of the Visayas (a group of major islands in the central Philippines), defended this policy, saying he would not hesitate to use air strikes even if his bombers endangered the lives of innocent noncombatants. Hermosa received heated criticism from churches and human rights groups but never retracted his order.

The single-largest exodus occurred in the province of Negros Occidental in May and June 1989 due to a massive military operation called Operation Thunderbolt. Launched on 24 April 1989, the military aimed to avenge the 18 April killing of five soldiers and one civilian by the NPA. Propeller-driven Tora Tora planes dropped bombs, and Sikorsky helicopters rocketed suspected rebel hideouts, including many towns populated by civilians. By May 1989 35,000 Negros refugees had fled their homes, more than at any time since World War II. The subsequent deaths of some 315 evacuee children brought the tragic situation to the attention of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR).

Public officials were unprepared. Epidemics of measles spread through the crowded, unsanitary refugee centers, and children began to die of easily preventable diseases like measles, diarrhea, and dysentery. In Bacolod a coffin industry thrived, and priests said last rites almost every day.

On 3 and 4 July 1989, I (Tito Craige) was part of a health mission that visited internal refugees in the mountain community of Dumogok on the southern island of Mindanao. Nestled in a fertile mountainous valley, the village was practically a chamel house: 72 refugee children had died needlessly in a measles epidemic. Over and over, shocked parents told us the same story: they thought they had saved themselves by fleeing artillery fire; instead, their babies died from disease at the evacuation center. The Department of Health vaccine put an end to the disease, but the damage was already done. As the village captain told us bitterly, “We want schools and a health center, but the government sends bullets.”

Ethnic Communities: Tribal organizations have charged the military with genocide, since whole ethnic communities face

On the front cover is Yang Ki-song of Seoul, in 1989 a sixty-eight-year-old Korean survivor of the atomic blast in Hiroshima. Drafted at the age of twenty-two to work in an armaments plant there, he was among the 750,000 Koreans forced to work in Japan during the war. Yang Ki-song is lucky to be alive, since 30,000 of the 50,000 Koreans estimated to be living in Hiroshima at the time of the blast died immediately or during the following year. However, he and many other Korean survivors of the bomb, even more than their Japanese counterparts, have found their lives since then to be filled with difficulties caused by the bomb. Yang Ki-song, burned and incapacitated, would like to die, but he does not feel it would be right to die before his ninety-six-year-old father. For more on Korea’s atomic bomb victims, see the article by Kurt W. Tong in this issue. This picture is a still from the 1989 Korean Broadcasting System documentary Haebang 44 nyon, pipok 44 nyon (Liberation, forty-four years; atomic bomb victims, forty-four years), in Korean, and the picture is used here courtesy of the Korean Broadcasting System.

With the exception of the names of authors in the list of books to review at the end of the issue, BCAS follows the East Asian practice of placing surnames first in all East Asian names.

The Bulletin is indexed or abstracted in The Alternative Press Index, The Left Index, International Development Index, International Development Abstracts, Sage Abstracts, Social Science Citation Index, Bibliography of Asian Studies, IBZ (International Bibliographie der Zeitschriften Literatur), IBR (International Bibliography of Book Reviews), Political Science Abstracts, Historical Abstracts, and America: History and Life. Back issues and photocopies of out-of-print back issues are available from BCAS. Microfilms of all back issues are available from University Microfilms International (300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, U.S.A., phone: U.S., 800-521-0600; Canada, 800-343-5299).
Contributors

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Tito Craige of Durham, North Carolina, U.S.A. spent three years in the Philippines, ending in 1990, working with the Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace and other organizations under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee. In the United States he has worked on literacy and advocacy programs with farm laborers.

Arnel de Guzman of Manila was a Marcos-era detainee in the Philippines and has pressed for both the government and the New People’s Army to adopt and implement humanitarian law provisions for the treatment of noncombatants. He has recently started a desktop publishing company for the alternative press.


Richard H. Minear teaches history at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts, U.S.A. He is the author of Hiroshima: Three Witnesses (1990).

Mark Selden teaches sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton, New York, U.S.A. His recent books include The Atomic Bomb: Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki with Kyoko Selden, and Chinese Village, Socialist State with Ed Friedman and Paul Pickowicz.

Kurt W. Tong recently began work as a junior officer at the U.S. Embassy in Manila and formerly worked for a business consulting firm based in Tokyo with assignments to various places in Asia. He has published an article on the Kwangju incident and anti-American sentiment among Korean students.

Peter Zarrow studies modern Chinese intellectual and cultural history. He teaches history at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A. and is the author of Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture.

A New Book from BCAS!

Coming to Terms: Indochina, the United States, and the War, edited by Douglas Allen and Ngo Vinh Long in collaboration with BCAS, August 1991. Ca. 300 pp., illus.; paper, $16.95, and cloth $44.95.

Despite the plethora of works on the Vietnam War, this is the first book to present an accessible overview from both the non-Western and antiwar perspectives. The authors trace the history, war years, and postwar experiences of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos before turning to the U.S. experience, where they focus on government policies, the antiwar movement, U.S. scholars and the war, veterans, and films and literature on Vietnam. Those who experienced the war will find their memories vividly rekindled; those who wish to learn more about Indochina, the war, and its aftermath will find these issues provocatively discussed and analyzed.

This book originated with the BCAS anniversary issue on Indochina and the War, volume 21, numbers 2-4 (combined) from April–December 1989. The book is designed as a text, and the original articles have been revised and entirely new articles on postwar Vietnam and U.S. veterans, an appendix, and chronologies have been added. Not included are the anniversary issue’s material about BCAS, interview with Daniel Ellsberg, articles about how to teach about the war, and the course syllabi.


Coming to Terms will be available at bookstores and from Westview Press, 5500 Central Ave., Boulder, CO 80301, U.S.A., tel. (toll-free) 1-800-456-1995. Please add $2.50 for postage and handling.

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possible extinction. Having been gradually forced off their ancestral land since the 1500s, tribal groups are making strong cases for land titles and reparations. Unfortunately, displacement has quickened with the military’s use of modern weaponry. Aerial bombings of Mangyan, Higaonan, Isneg, and Manobo villages are well documented.

Statistics compiled by the CDRC show that in Mindanao, where 15 percent of the population is tribal Filipino, 28 percent of the internal refugee population is tribal. And in Luzon (excluding Metro Manila), where only 6 percent of the population is tribal, tribals make up 42 percent of the refugee total. In Luzon, therefore, tribal communities are seven times more severely affected than other communities.

Children of Armed Conflict: UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund) estimates that as many as 2.4 million Filipino children have been directly or indirectly victimized by the war. In a war not of their making, they have been killed, disappeared, mutilated, and forcibly evacuated.

External Refugees: It is one of this war’s strange ironies that the Philippine government rolls out a red carpet for Indochinese refugees seeking asylum but does virtually nothing beneficial for its own displaced persons. In the Indochinese refugee camps, housing, food, and education are paid for by foreign relief organizations and coordinated by the UNHCR. The Philippine Refugee Processing Center has resettled 320,000 Indochinese refugees since the program began in 1979.

The situations of the two refugee groups could not be more different. The Indochinese refugees receive assistance plus asylum in a First World country. The dormitory-style housing has been nicknamed “the Beverly Hills of Southeast Asian refugee camps.” Filipino internal refugees, on the other hand, have been abandoned.

Truly, Filipino internal refugees are strangers in their own land. At the present time no international monitoring of internal refugees exists, although there is a growing movement pressuring the UN to create categories for crossborder refugees and for internal refugees. The problem, of course, is that affected governments do not want outside interference in their affairs.

Political War: Civilian Targets

The military’s political offensives seek to discredit legally registered nongovernment organizations, reformers, and civil libertarians. Defense Undersecretary Fortunato Abat emerged as the point man for this policy when he announced that the military would not hesitate to destroy registered legal organizations suspected of carrying out subversive activities: “We are now working toward the dislodging of these legal fronts.” Although they neither carry arms nor advocate armed struggle, a broad range of church, human rights, and cause-oriented groups have been targets for simply opposing various government and military policies.

Human Rights: Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, a leading human rights organization, has documented human rights violations by military and paramilitary forces since 1974. The numbers of abuses are approximately the same now as during the Marcos years.

Human Rights Monitors: In 1988 Asia Watch reported the disturbing news that the Philippines has “the dubious distinction of accounting for the largest number of killings of human rights monitors, seven during the year, four of them lawyers... The place occupied by the Philippines in this report, and the violence suffered by those who attempt to defend the rights of others, makes it plain that the advent of civilian government should not be equated with the advent of respect for human rights.”

The Church: Church clergy and lay workers have been arrested, tortured, and killed. In 1989 United Church of Christ in the Philippines pastor Zenaido Ruelo was fatally wounded by a paramilitary trooper. Later that year Pastor Vizminda Gran was killed, allegedly by paramilitary troops. In 1989, Fr. Dionisio Malalay was murdered by a Philippine Constabulary member, and Fr. Carl Schmitz by the paramilitary. A military officer labeled the National Council of Churches in the Philippines “communist,” but the charges were withdrawn a few days later.

<table>
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*1 March through 31 December 1986  
** Figures are through October 1990

Health Workers: Marilyn Danguilan, a staffer on the Senate Committee on Health, reported that even “the health worker is considered by the military to be a ‘communist in disguise’. Whenever he treats a farmer or worker he is labeled.” Since 1987, according to the Medical Action Group, seven health workers have been killed by military and paramilitary forces. Each killing is a direct violation of medical neutrality as defined by international law.

Lawyers: Since 1986, more attorneys have been murdered by military and death squads than in the twenty-one years of Marcos’s administration. The lawyers were killed, ironically, for defending victims of human rights violations. They are David Bueno, Vicente Mirabueno, Ramos Cura, Noel Mendoza, Oscar Tonog, Gervacio Cadavos, and Al Surigao.

Journalists: Since 1986 twenty-four journalists have been killed by armed vigilantes, the military, security guards, the NPA, and unknown assailants. The Philippine Movement of Press

Freedom, a monitoring body for human rights abuses, notes that during the Marcos years thirty-two journalists died in armed attacks. This makes the last four years the bloodiest ever for journalists.

Farmers, Workers, Students, Universities: Farmers have been pushed off their land, massacred at Mendiola Bridge in 1987, and their leader, Jaime Tadeo, has been imprisoned because of a politically tainted embezzlement conviction. The highly touted land reform program is moribund. Unions have been destroyed by armed goons and students’ peaceful rallies have been met with truncheons. Even Nemesio Prudente, the president of the largest university in the Philippines, has been ambushed twice, allegedly by policemen and a vigilante.

It is one of this war’s strange ironies that the Philippine government rolls out a red carpet for Indochinese refugees seeking asylum but does virtually nothing beneficial for its own displaced persons.

Government Reaction to Abuses: Asia Watch and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights have concluded that, on paper, the Philippine government is committed to human rights. Nonetheless, the record shows that Marcos-era abuses continue unabated. Some of the reasons are that President Aquino (a) offered support to armed vigilante groups and abusive paramilitary forces like the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units, (b) tolerated the military’s failure to convict soldiers for massacres at Escalante, Mendiola Bridge, Lupao, and Paombong, (c) vetoed the bill returning military human rights violators to the civilian courts (there has not been a single conviction of an active-duty soldier for offenses against civilians since 1986), and (d) accepted the Supreme Court decision allowing warrantless arrests of “subversives.”

Paying for War

Philippine Pesos: The current Philippine military budget is approximately 23 billion pesos or $1 billion. In the Philippine context, this is a huge sum that is used entirely against internal enemies. In 1988 Rep. Gregorio Andolana noted that the military intelligence fund alone is large enough to pay for 7,661 classrooms for 612,900 students, immunize one million children from one kind of disease, and construct at least fifty kilometers of roads.

U.S. Dollars: The United States provides 83 percent of the procurement, operations, and maintenance budget (excluding salaries) of the Philippine military. U.S.-financed helicopter gunships, armaments, troop transport vehicles, communications equipment, and training provide the means by which the Philippine military wages war. Philippine officers are trained in the United States and learn psywar tactics from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In the 1990 fiscal year, U.S. military assistance totaled $140,095,000 for Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credits and $2,600,000 for International Military Education and Training (IMET). FMS funds hardware, and IMET offers training in “counterinsurgency and counter-dissident operations.” Apparently the training component is very comprehensive. Vigilante godfather Col. Francis Calida proudly told a fact-finding mission that his course in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, on mess hall operation included a unit on counterinsurgency warfare.

The two biggest U.S. bases in the Philippines are Clark Air Base in Angeles and Subic Naval Base in Olongapo. Clark is the third largest U.S. air base overseas and is the transit hub for all airborne activities from the western Pacific to the Indian Ocean. It has bombing, gunnery, and electronic warfare facilities, about 10,000 U.S. military personnel, and employs 42,000 Filipinos civilians. Subic is the training and support base for the Seventh Fleet and the Philippine navy. Over 6,000 U.S. military personnel are stationed in Subic and about 37,000 Filipinos are employed there.

The Philippine-U.S. bases treaty expires in 1991, and a new one must be ratified by both governments for the bases to stay on Philippine territory. There are several reasons that public figures from Aquino on down advocate a phased withdrawal: the bases compromise national sovereignty, the bases heighten internal conflict, police and military have been used to stifle legal and peaceful dissent, the social cost of the bases is massive, and the bases draw the Philippines into a global nuclear arms race. Even Philippine foreign secretary Raul Manglapus, who has been accused of caving in to U.S. pressure on several occasions, said that “...there is only one indisputable reason why [the U.S. bases] are here. They are at the center of a 90-year-old U.S. global strategy, and the Philippines is hosting them as an accommodation to that strategy.”

Largely to protect its bases option, the United States is pushing for a military solution to the insurgency and chastises the Philippine government for not following U.S.-designed tactics. In testimony before the House Committee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, for example, then-assistant secretary of defense Richard Armitage criticized the Aquino government for “[fail­ing] to develop a comprehensive counterinsurgency plan that integrates military, political, economic and social programs.”

To speed up the insurgency’s demise, in 1987 President Reagan issued a secret intelligence order allowing the CIA to increase its aid to the Philippine armed forces by $10 million. The two-year grant, according to a source in the U.S. government, could cover “the planting of news stories and the creation of new political groups.” Sure enough, numerous fabricated stories on alleged communists have been published, and right-wing political parties have proliferated between 1987 and 1991. Currently fifteen CIA operatives, working under diplomatic or church cover, are alleged to be stationed in the Philippines.

U.S. interference has been sustained by a steady influx of U.S. policy makers, right-wing ideologues, and experts in terrorism. Major Gen. (ret.) John Singlaub, director of the World Anti-Communist League, has been a regular visitor to the offices of military and government officials. Singlaub has sometimes been accompanied by Ray Cline, ex-deputy director of the CIA.

Judging Counterinsurgency

International Humanitarian Law: The relevant provisions are included in Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 (to which the Republic of the Philippines is a signatory). Article 3 of Protocol II describes certain minimal guarantees that governments must give to noncombatants such as children, doctors, nurses, and detainees. Humanitarian law stipulates that civilians must not be targets of armed attacks and deserve protection from abuses such as torture. It seems clear that the military has used excessive force against civilian targets and may be in violation of Article 3.

U.S. Congressional Human Rights Review: The U.S. Congress may withhold aid from countries that consistently show a pattern of human rights violations. In light of the massive number of alleged abuses and the paralysis of the judiciary and court-martial system, the United States should consider cutting off all military aid to the Philippine government.

If all the costs of militarization are added up—lives lost, minds terrorized, property destroyed, rights abused, pesos wasted—the losses are incalculable. Is the war worth all this? Will the war bring peace? Filipinos like Luz don’t think so.

The last time I saw Luz, she was nursing Noel, a nineteen-year-old rice miller, who was hospitalized for wounds received when Tadtad vigilantes attacked him. Noel had been slashed fourteen times with long knives, and had crawled to a clinic and told the nurse he wanted to live long enough to identify the assailants. Then, amazingly, while waiting for bandages, Noel arose from his bloody stretcher to assist another moaning patient. The nurse screamed, “Don’t you know you’re almost dead! Lie down!” He lay down but refused to die. He recovered and gave a sworn affidavit to the bishop. Then Luz helped him find a home in another city, and he joined the growing population of internal refugees. Luz and Noel want peace and want to return home.

Can the United States encourage peace in the Philippines? Certainly the United States could promote a negotiated settlement, and the first step would be to cut the $140 million worth of weaponry that further destroys a country already reeling from debts, earthquakes, and ecological disaster.

In a jungle hideout near Agusan, Mindanao, in October 1989 refugee children watch for military helicopters. The UN estimates that about 2.4 million Filipino children have been directly or indirectly victimized by the war. In a war not of their making, they have been killed, disappeared, mutilated, and forcibly evacuated. This photo is by and courtesy of Tito Craige.
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Review Essay:  
Social Change and Radical Currents in Republican China, 1912-49

by Peter Zarrow*

Introduction

The spring 1989 antigovernment demonstrations and the June Fourth Massacre at Tiananmen Square require that most scholars rethink their conceptions of Chinese political culture and the Chinese revolution. Did the rise to power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the head of a social revolution give it legitimacy? What does it take to maintain that legitimacy? What are the roots of the state created since 1949? Decollectivization and economic reforms since 1976 may have won the CCP further support. Yet to what extent, at least in rural areas, have “local bullies,” with or without implicit state backing, returned? Is the state increasingly dependent on coercion? How rationalized are the lower echelons of the bureaucracy? These problems became manifest early in the twentieth century.

More particularly, did the relatively weak state of the late Qing and twentieth century governments leave a long-term imbalance in state-society relations that encourages authoritarianism? Is there anything specially authoritarian about Chinese communism? The three works reviewed here offer some insight—indirect but valuable—into the above questions. More complementary than overlapping, they present a valuable picture of Republican China.

The crisis China faced in the beginning of the twentieth century was severe in social, political, and cultural spheres alike. The outlines of this crisis have long been clear, but the precise devolution of the traditional order remains to be explored. In the countryside, where the vast majority of Chinese lived, militarization and severe tax burdens imposed by a state intent upon modernization, among other factors, brought about worsening conditions. One does not have to romanticize the past to acknowledge that the moral glue holding the old system together was dissolved. A widespread sense of moral devolution may be ultimately linked to the absence of a proper Son of Heaven after the Revolution of 1911. Coupled with the failure of republican principles, the polity in its broadest sense—including social order and the entire corpus of Chinese tradition—collapsed. Much of what had been taken for granted, from occasional charity and paternalism to the very bond of Confucian loyalty, was lost. Modern China’s attempts to reverse this moral devolution and find a new basis upon which to build a society were slow and painful. Yet a new combination of cultural, political, and social reforms took shape even as China faced imperialism from without and dissolution within.

CULTURE, POWER, AND THE STATE:  


THE ORIGINS OF CHINESE COMMUNISM,  

*The author would like to thank Mark Selden, Diane Scherer, and Marilyn Levine for their careful and critical readings of an earlier draft of this review.
**Culture, Power, and the State**

Prasenjit Duara's *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942*, centers around his notion of "state in­volution," from which he traces the decay of the traditional rural elite, the inability of a new elite to institutionalize itself, and the ways this in turn weakened the state. The book consists of eight chapters that are really thematically overlapping essays exploring this thesis. Based largely on data from six villages in the north China plain gathered by Japan's South Manchurian Railway Company (Mantetsu) during a 1940–42 research survey (plus gazetteers' and some other observers' accounts), Duara's study focuses on the effects of the Chinese government's efforts to strengthen itself from the post-1900 Qing reforms through the warlord and Nationalist periods to the Japanese occupation. These efforts not only roused peasant resentment because of their costs—ironically, they also ended in weakening the state's legitimacy by finally decimating, almost by accident, the rural elites that were the state's natural supporters.

This is a complex thesis that has important ramifications for our understanding of the Chinese Revolution of 1949 as well as the early twentieth century. The place to start unraveling it is probably Duara's notion of the "cultural nexus of power." Duara is here essentially answering the question: Why do people more or less willingly obey orders not evidently to their own advantage? His answer lies in interconnected "networks and organizations" whose "norms and symbols encode religious beliefs, feelings of reciprocity, kinship bonds, and similar sentiments" (p. 24). Subject to competing interests and interpretations and including much that was un­orthodox by Confucian or gentry standards, the nexus nonetheless provided a basic consensus that linked peasants, local elites, and the state. The prime examples of how the cultural nexus worked are probably popular religion and the lineage, both of which provided means of local organization under the general umbrella of the state.

As the state deliberately began to modernize in the late 1890s, it tried to assert more direct control over lower levels of the administrative hierarchy. Schools and a modern military are expensive, and a fiscally strapped state sought not simply more tax revenues but to rationalize the entire bureaucracy—both to promote its reforms and to insure its control. During the Republican era, various governments, including the Nationalists, also gave local jurisdictions more formal powers than they had ever held previously. Villages as well as provinces were allowed to establish budgets and collect their own taxes.

Yet the unanticipated result of "state building" was to break the cultural nexus and delegitimize the local elites of north China. Traditionally, the state had more or less depended on tax farming. The Qing, for example, constantly complained about both evasion (lands kept off the tax registers) and engrossment (in effect, tax farming, whereby a man, typically lower-level gentry, undertook to pay, say, an entire neighborhood's taxes— for a fee, of course). These strictly unofficial tax farmers served the government by giving it substantial revenues and, to a degree, served their humbler clients by protecting them from additional tax pressures. Duara thus calls this pivotal elite "protective brokers," or middlemen. To break this system, the Qing would have had to expand and rationalize its regular bureaucracy. This would have required a veritable corps of tax collectors and loyal and trusted officials in every neighborhood to determine what land was in production and who owned it. Building and maintaining such a system, in the face of naturally determined resistance from local elites and populace alike, was a fearsomely expensive proposition. But this was exactly what the state began to do by the 1890s. Duara speculates that if the state could have attracted support from the local elite, as perhaps happened in the state-building process in Western Europe, it might have succeeded. The Qing presumably failed to offer local elites sufficient assurances that their interests would be protected either through or in spite of centralization.

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After 1911 neither could the emperor be restored nor could any new government find an equivalent basis of legitimacy. Thus one reason why intravillage relations worsened so dramatically in the early decades of the twentieth century was the inability of any local elites to claim legitimacy.

Successive Chinese regimes from the late Qing forward did indeed manage to increase their tax revenues. The state grew, and state presence in rural areas grew. But if I understand Duara correctly, it did so ultimately at the cost of its own legitimacy. When, for example, temples were forcibly converted into schools, the faithful were naturally upset. Poorer believers noted that the new schools were reserved for the better off. Moreover, to the extent that popular religion supported the state, state attacks on religion tended to undercut its own basis of legitimacy. More to the point, Duara shows that the growing police powers of the state and growing tax pressures to support costly new programs delegitimized local elites. Elites were in the end measured locally by their ability to protect their communities from excessive state pressures. Not only were taxes being raised, but year after year ad hoc levies were placed on the villages themselves (rather than on households). The local elites, unable

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1. That religious values and symbols were deliberately used by the Qing is beyond doubt. As Duara points out, the Guandi cult emphasized loyalty to the state; he has expanded this theme in "Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Nov. 1988), pp. 778–95. The interpenetration of the imperial bureaucracy and the bureaucracy of Heaven and the underworld is well-known—see Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974). And, as Duara also points out here, since village elites were closely tied to religious leadership in their communities, a weakening of religious sanctions could weaken the elites. The problem with this approach to popular culture, as always, is that it provides no clues to how the peasants themselves interpreted the changes at issue. The potential for religiously based popular rebellion was latent not merely in those sects the state labeled heterodox but in cults that it tolerated as well.

Schools might in the end have proved their worth. Modern schools in rural China not only cost more than the traditional village Confucian teacher, if there was one, but the education they provided, with its curriculum oriented toward preparation for Western-style secondary education, may have seemed even less useful to most peasants.
The technology employed in the farm economy in China remained unchanged for centuries, and for lack of draft animals many peasants and their families had to pull farm implements themselves. Their living conditions became even worse during the Republican era when the government increased militarization and taxes to support its modernization programs. The peasants saw that traditional local elites were no longer able to protect them from the state, and new elites, known as “local bullies,” often taxed and otherwise exploited them for the state and for absentee landlords. All of these factors undermined the peasants’ trust in the government, and they came to play a key role in the communist revolution. This photo is courtesy of the Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

to fulfill their traditional middleman roles, in most cases literally withdrew from public life, leaving in charge locals who acted purely as expropriating agents. In several cases, Duara is able to trace the resignations of the older local elites from village office and position. The new men acted chiefly on behalf of the state and sometimes also for absentee landlords, thereby gaining some wealth and power for themselves but antagonizing local farmers.

This is what Duara means by “state involution”: the state did not precisely weaken, for it managed to expand and even modernize, but it did so by relying increasingly on an ever more brutal system of tax farming. As the state expanded, so did the system of what Duara calls “entrepreneurial brokers.” These were the “local bullies” of popular lore, and though not a direct threat to the state, they drained monies into their own hands.

Duara’s thesis is an important and sophisticated elaboration of recent interpretations of state-society relations in modern China. Though, unlike Philip Huang’s work, which was largely based on the same sources, Duara’s study does not directly attempt to explain communist success, his thesis is enormously suggestive on this score. Theda Skocpol has pointed to the “incapacitation of the central state machineries” of the states that went on to experience social revolution. Duara would revise this (explicitly, see p. 253) without diminishing the thrust of the argument. The state may become stronger in certain areas while the process of state involution can nonetheless “unleash a process of self-destruction and revolutionary transformation.” Duara traces much of the former process, but, ending his story in 1942, has little to say about the latter.

In other words, Duara succeeds in illuminating the role of the state and elite responses to it, but he tells us little about peasant perceptions, motivations, organization, and the like—items beyond the scope of his already large work. In a presentation of the structure of the relationship between peasant (or, better, peasant community: village) and state, the inner workings of each inevitably remain somewhat murky. Duara’s own brief discussion of the relevance of his work to 1949 (pp. 250–55) emphasizes that the communists appealed to a range of peasant grievances. Anti-landlord class struggle, at least in the areas he studied, was less important than peasant opposition to taxes and the new local elites (the “bullies,” or in Duara’s terminology, “entrepreneurial brokers”) that had recently emerged.

It may well be true, as Duara argues, that the bully was more political type (pursuing profit directly through power, depending on connivance and physical strength) than social type (he could be from any class background). But popular resentment of local bullies may well have more of a class character than Duara allows. The relationships between bully and state and between

2. Philip C.C. Huang, The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985). Huang discusses economic involution in the north China plain, focusing on a particular form of peasant immiseration he considers semiproletarianization. He discusses the role of the state (pp. 219–91) and village-state relations (see esp. pp. 275–91).

bullies and absentee landlords seem essentially clear: He was their representative. But what was the relationship between new and old elites in the villages? The old elites were almost always relatively well-off. Did they lose property as well as power and position? Or did they reach a modus vivendi with the bullies and find a reasonably secure place for themselves? Duara shows how new state demands made impossible the traditional role of a village elite that simultaneously met the community's state tax quota and protected the community from excessive exploitation. That some individuals of the old, legitimate elite may have become the bullies of the new, illegitimate order should not obscure the structural changes involved. But the fate of the old elite—and its ties to the new—is quite relevant to the shape of the Chinese revolution, the role of class struggle, the pool for communist recruitment, and so forth. Only detailed local history will provide the answers; it is not clear here. 4

Were the bullies as new a phenomenon as Duara suggests? If so, it is a sad irony that they arose precisely when the village was being given unprecedented autonomy as a governmental division. Nonetheless, it is not clear that the bullies were structurally different from gentry (or gentry agents) without their clothes on. The full phrase in common use was “local bullies and corrupt gentry” (tuhao lieshen). A related question is, to what degree were the bullies, whatever their social class, protected by the state—by county and provincial if not central authority? The basic analytical problem lies in the distinction Duara makes between entrepreneurial and protective brokerage. He recognizes that in practice the two may overlap, but I would argue that the distinction, though partially useful in practice, is suspect theoretically. Historically, Duara contrasts the “entrepreneurial” sub-bureaucracy of clerks and runners of the yamen (headquarters of an official or department), existing on informal fees and bribes, with a protective, entirely non-governmental elite that may or may not be gentry. But this distinction obfuscates class lines and the question of exploitation. Socially, Qing local elites, if sometimes not major landlords, were landowners who possessed class interests distinct from those of the rest of their community. Their protective functions, while one aspect of their behavior, should not be exaggerated.

It is not clear that what mattered to the peasantry was the nature of the middleman—local elites or state agents—so much as the extent and predictability of taxes. It may well be that the “protection” local elites offered to their communities was highly particularistic and therefore generally resented. A majority of the community would normally be outside of particularistic ties. In other words, did these middlemen perform real services or were they grudgingly accepted, from the peasant’s point of view, as an inevitable part of the state apparatus itself? Conversely, even runners were members of communities and may not entirely deserve their reputation for rapacity, a reputation largely given them by their Confucian rivals, the magistrates.

Though the distinction between protective and predatory local leaders is problematic, the notion of state involution and delegitimation remains highly useful. However, it is not clear to me that Duara’s “cultural nexus” comprises much more than legitimacy pure and simple. He wants to get beyond discussions of imperial legitimacy in terms of Confucianism and its sacred texts and the high orthodoxy. But the worm’s-eye view of the cultural nexus here, referring generally to popular culture and more particularly to religious and kinship norms and organization, comes down to a broad-based and flexible consensus about social justice—in a word, legitimacy. Duara seems to want to use “cultural nexus” to refer to a process larger than legitimation. He would thus limit the scope of legitimation to conscious efforts of the state. But the ways legitimacy is won and lost are, in fact, broader. The point is much the same: the state lost legitimacy both when pieces of the cultural system were attacked deliberately (for example, replacing temples with schools) and when they were attacked as an accidental byproduct (the decline of traditional village elites as fiscal pressures mounted).

Nearly every bandit gang depended on at least implicit popular support: Bandits might or might not reach some modus vivendi with local power holders, but they absolutely needed the local populace to refrain, at the very least, from informing on them.

The cultural nexus formulation allows Duara to get beyond the oversimplified debate about how sociopolitical systems function in terms of interests and coercion on the one hand and ideas and abstract cultural constructs on the other. But, since cultural nexus implies a functioning system of fitting parts, Duara may impute more stability to the traditional Qing system than it in fact possessed.

Moreover, cultural nexus allows Duara to ignore some important, if frequently vexatious, issues that “legitimacy” raises. For example, it seems to me that the ideology of social relations in China depended on the imperial system. After 1911 neither could the emperor be restored nor could any new government find an equivalent basis of legitimacy. Thus one reason why intravillage relations worsened so dramatically in the early decades of the twentieth century was the inability of any local elites to claim legitimacy, which, as Duara himself shows, had traditionally been ultimately linked to the state, that is, the imperial system. Entirely new standards were called for, and into the vacuum came the bullies, a local phenomenon that parallels the coercion by the warlords on the regional national scene. This is not to deny the role played by fiscal pressures, the expansion of predatory brokerage and the like, but to add to the story.

Culture, Power, and the State is a rich book. Topics delineated by Duara but not covered in this review include kinship groups in north China; normally thought to be much less developed in this regard than in the south; a useful typology of rural religious organizations; patronage; Skinnerian market systems; village cohesion; and so forth. It would be churlish to complain that there is not more in the book. But there does seem to

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be a gap between the theory about state and society on the one hand, and the nitty-gritty of village data on the other. Some of the context and perhaps some mediating concepts are missing. Political concepts, including those of Chinese Marxism, need not be foreign to the social historian. Imperialism and exploitation are central to Duara's story but are not mentioned. For instance, imperialism. The Qing and Republican states were not simply modernizing for the hell of it but were operating in an international context of acute tensions; indeed, by 1900 the fiscal needs of the state were in no small part due to the crushing load of indemnity payments imposed by the Western powers and Japan. Imperialist pressures, including missionary incursions, cost the state in terms of legitimacy as well, certainly among lower-level gentry if not demonstrably among peasants in the hinterland. The north China plain where Duara's study is focused was part of the Boxer conflagration of 1900. Surely this and the Qing reforms that Duara discusses are important for understanding peasant culture as the twentieth century began. It matters whether the Boxers were motivated by a kind of anti-imperialism and whether they saw themselves opposing the state. Delegation may have begun well before major state reforms got underway, creating obstacles for the state from the start.

**Bandits in Republican China**

A proof of the state's incompetence, and a direct cause of its further delegitimation, lay in banditry. Phil Billingsley's *Bandits in Republican China* provides a thorough survey of the subject. Billingsley examines the social and ecological causes of banditry; the private motivations of bandits; their way—or ways, for Billingsley wants to emphasize the complexity of banditry—of life and of crime; their relations with the poor, the rich, and the powerful; and their relations with both Japanese invaders and communist insurgents. Billingsley has tried to combine the analysis of social history with the bandits' points of view. He neither romanticizes nor moralizes.

The sheer prevalence of banditry in twentieth century China marked the breakdown of both society and the state. Militarization blurred traditional distinctions between who could and who could not have access to coercion. New opportunities for social mobility became evident. Vertically, non-elites might find themselves under siege. Horizontally, as well, people might move between a variety of local leadership, militia, and bandit roles.

The historical significance of twentieth century banditry can thus hardly be exaggerated. Neither rural elites nor the “average peasant” can be understood without reference to this new—or at least newly prevalent—career option. The line between the minor warlord and the bandit chief is difficult to draw, and it was often crossed in reality. Bandits usually died young, but exceptions existed. Zhang Zuolin is the best success story. From minor gang leader he rose to take control of Manchuria and became a significant political actor nationally. But others of the Republic's power holders began as bandits or worked with them; more men moved back and forth between bandit gangs and warlord and government armies. Banditry also affected China's international status. In the 1920s, kidnapping foreigners became a popular means of insurance for a gang—and there was little foreign gunboats could do about it. Japanese imperialism was able to take advantage of bandit activities to weaken Beijing’s authority, especially in Mongolia and Manchuria.

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**In contrast with the older intellectuals who led the party in its early years, younger radicals in the CCP were less immediately concerned with doctrinal understanding of Marxism and more eager to consummate the revolution; their understanding of the CCP was probably instrumental, and their goals remained roughly anarchist.**

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I suspect the study of banditry in modern China has suffered not only from misplaced moral and social bias as Billingsley points out (p. xiv), and not only because the sources are difficult, but more fundamentally because the phenomenon is surprisingly hard to pin down. Usually, the key to any definition of banditry is its unlawful, predatory, and illegitimate nature. It is marginalized, cast out from normal society. But in the absence of a clear source or definition of legitimacy in early twentieth century China, the very language became corrupted. Any enemy would be referred to as a “bandit” (*fei*), and the term became the derogation of choice: “communist bandits,” “bandit officials,” and the like. In other words “bandit” (*fei, dao*) simply came to mean “illegitimate” in the eyes of the beholders, who would themselves be considered illegitimate by others. It should not be surprising that banditry in fact as well as name could not be marginalized during a period of moral disintegration.

Sociopolitical or material circumstances were of course of more immediate interest than moral considerations to the people who became bandits or had to live with them. Billingsley demonstrates that banditry flourished in the chaos of the late Qing and throughout the Republican era, especially in peripheral areas poor in resources to begin with—poor, and therefore with traditions of private militia, blood feuds, self-reliance, and machismo (a word Billingsley does not use, perhaps to avoid crosscultural implications). Bandits were youthful and usually, though by no means always, male. The rank and file were generally landless laborers without other options; people did not tend to leave home to join a gang unless starvation was the likely

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5. Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 68-95, clearly demonstrates that exogenous pressures as well as direct anti-imperialism were two of the several factors that worked to produce the Boxers in Shandong. But of course its origins do not entirely explain the movement’s phenomenal growth.

6. As Alitto points out in "Rural Elites," p. 236 and passim.
alternative, although some joined to seek vengeance, protection from the law, and even adventure (pp. 70–82). Nonetheless, if banditry offered the likelihood of early death, it also brought hope of great rewards: survival, prestige, power, and wealth.

Billingsley notes that banditry became endemic in areas traditionally poor and subject to natural disasters, as well as in “difficult or isolated environments” (p. 17). More specifically, we might refer to Elizabeth Perry’s schema, and treat banditry as a predatory strategy for survival as opposed to sedentary (farming) and protective strategies. Predatory activities involved forcible redistribution of goods, whereas protective strategies defined the countermeasures adopted by the groups that wished to defend their property through village guards, crop-watching associations, community defense leagues, and the like (Perry, p. 80). Protective strategies may be expected to be less important in peripheral areas with widespread poverty, particularly in a time of overall militarization. However, Billingsley traces a number of bandit groups that shift back and forth between banditry and soldiering (perhaps still a predatory occupation), and between banditry and private militia (protective, at least for the most part).

Two questions may be of particular interest to readers of this journal. To what extent did modern Chinese bandits exemplify “social banditry”? And what were the relations between bandits and the early stages of the communist movement? Social banditry is the notion, most notably explored by E.J. Hobsbawm, that some bandits in peasant societies fight against oppression, or at least oppressors—tax collectors, landlords, and the like—and in a sense represent the usually powerless peasant.

At the same time, this kind of banditry, which consists merely of protest and occasionally of immediate redistribution, takes place within the prevailing system without challenging the system itself. Social banditry may challenge a regime and mount a rebellion but never a revolution. The bandits, like the rural elements from which they recruit new members, lack political consciousness beyond the most rudimentary ideas of some kind of status quo ante.

Yet, does social banditry really exist? Do not bandits almost invariably cooperate with some elements of the local elite for mutual protection and advantage? Representing themselves, bandits cannot represent the peasantry and indeed naturally gravitate toward forces of social conservatism.

Billingsley suggests that the two views are more complementary than exclusive. However, he grants social banditry a very limited sphere indeed. As an ideal, Robin Hood lived in China through the novel Shuihu zhuan [Water Margin] but throughout history no bandit, not even the famous Bai Lang (White Wolf), functioned primarily to succor or empower the poor. On the other hand, nearly every bandit gang depended on at least implicit popular support: bandits might or might not reach some modus vivendi with local power holders, but they absolutely needed the local populace to refrain, at the very least, from informing on them. As numerous folk sayings make clear, no one wants to foul his own nest (or, “a rabbit does not eat the grass around its own burrow”); even bandits who preyed on ordinary farmers at least did so at some distance. Furthermore, the wealthy obviously presented the best targets for bandit attention. Billingsley concludes, “The typical bandit gang was thus prone to shifting allegiances, now standing for the poor and landless, now in the pay of the rich with a mission to put down upstarts of the sort they themselves had once been. ... Their presence, though not always visible, was felt much more strongly than that of local officials, and often earned them the loyalty of the poor and even the grudging respect of the rich” (p. 151).

Away from their bases bandit gangs rarely showed any restraint in their dealings with peasants; very few gangs, whether seasonal or professional, practiced systematic redistribution of their gains. Indeed, successful gangs often turned to extortion and protection rackets, which meant in effect a tax on the wealthy.

**Two Manchurian bandit chiefs, probably in the 1920s.** Unlike revolutionaries, bandits seldom tried to change the existing system, but their activities constituted a sharp critique of the status quo. This photo appeared in Billingsley’s Bandits in Republican China and is from A. Mackay, “Held in a Bandit Lair,” Asia, no. 27 (March 1927).

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rather than attacks; and in the numerous cases of gangs whose ambition was to be recruited into a regular army where they would receive regular pay, bandits attacked communities at random, seeking to cause enough havoc to force the government into coopting them. But though he does not find the social bandit thesis particularly useful, on the whole Billingsley believes bandits stole mostly from the rich (pp. 179–80), and retained as much of their gains as they could. Peasant attitudes toward bandits probably mixed fear and respect. Official taxes, on the other hand, could be expected to fall on those least able to pay while soldiers garrisoned in a community are best compared to locusts.9

Billingsley finds that bandit chiefs, at least those who successfully emerged on the national stage, were marked by “conservatism and opportunism” (p. 201). Others became major landlords. Few hesitated to accept Japanese aid if it was offered. Some Manchurian bandit gangs were actually led by Japanese adventurers, though throughout the 1920s it was more common for Japanese government agents interested in keeping China in turmoil to give arms to Chinese gangs. (Some gangs resisted the Japanese, it should also be noted, especially after the full-scale invasion of July 1937.) It is more difficult to generalize about the political stances of the rank and file. The professional bandit chose this line of work in preference to peasant life. A bandit world view, it seems to me, should nonetheless closely resemble a peasant one: bound by tradition and with still very little knowledge of the outside world. Many were probably waiting for a new emperor to emerge—perhaps even out of bandit ranks. Billingsley notes the psychological stresses of bandit life, with its long periods of hunger and cold interspersed by riotous living after a successful robbery or kidnapping, the running from soldiers, the constant fear of violence, and disease and discomfort (pp. 124–29). Such a life would seem to encourage individualism and a sense of community with the gang, and thus militate against larger loyalties to class, nation, or even the kind of sectarian but universalistic religious vision that marked such traditional rebellions as the White Lotus uprising of 1798–1804.

The relationship in twentieth century China between banditry and revolution was enormously complex. Prior to the communists, revolutionaries had virtually no success in working with bandits. Understandably, neither side trusted the other. When the communists had to turn to the countryside after the purges of 1927–28, contacts between bandits and revolutionaries became unavoidable. Yet fundamental differences remained. As Billingsley points out, “revolutionaries begin from an awareness of the need for an alternative, better society, and all their actions derive from the strategy for realizing that vision. Bandits, however, saw better prospects in the world they knew, and organized and behaved in accordance with its values.”10 This did not prevent some bandits from converting to the revolutionary cause through their contacts with revolutionaries, while others persisted in bandit careers well past 1949. Still, it is worth noting that if bandits were “conservative” in the sense they failed to challenge the system itself, they were nonetheless offering a sharp critique of the specific status quo.

Billingsley suggests that from the viewpoint of revolutionaries searching for allies, the part-time bandits temporarily driven out of their villages were more susceptible to conversion than were the professionals. Mao Zedong (brought up on the Shuihu zhuan) began with a fairly romantic image of bandits, whom in 1926 he considered amenable to revolutionary leadership. More to the point, Billingsley credits bandit example and even bandit teachers with certain successful communist tactics, including the sitting of soviets in remote and administratively weak areas, and the guerrilla emphasis on mobility (p. 252). Yet land redistribution was of limited appeal in the remotest and poorest areas of endemic banditry, as for example the Eyuwan Soviet, for there was little enough to distribute. And without the ability to guarantee the safety of the peasants against reprisals, the communists could not draw them into class struggle. The communists therefore found themselves engaged in the typical pursuits of the ideal social bandit: seizing granaries and food shipments for redistribution, attacking power holders, preventing rent collection, and so forth. Thus real bandit gangs could be either allies or rivals. Meanwhile, the explicitly political position of the communists invited the kind of government repression bandits seldom had to face. Peasants might appreciate the communists’ actions, but were neither educated about revolution nor drawn into the struggle.

The distinction between Bolshevism and Marxism is central to Dirklik’s study, and he concludes that Chinese communist theory and practice were far apart. Dirklik is not so much pointing to nonrevolutionary tendencies in the labor movement as to authoritarianism within the party.

Mao thus learned that bandit models were inadequate and that a guerrilla army not only demanded a centralized command structure (only within which individual units could make independent tactical decisions), but also needed “overall comprehension at all levels of the army of all the issues at stake in the struggle—hence a need also for ‘intensified education’” (p. 260). Alliances of convenience between communists and bandits continued throughout the war years (1937–45), but when the communists were strong enough they would incorporate not whole gangs into the Red Army but individual bandits amenable to reeducation. Meanwhile, the revolution left the bandits behind, though banditry would continue to resurface during times of economic stress in the 1950s and 1960s. Billingsley suggests that bandit values of blood brotherhood, friendship, and mutual

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9. In Billingsley’s formulation, “Peasants did not expect the bandits to be kind, for masters were not like that, but they did expect them to be discriminating. This was what distinguished the bandits from the outside authorities, and was the source of their local acceptance” (p. 188). On occasion, gangs could even represent village solidarity.

10. Ibid., pp. 226–27; again, Billingsley takes a moderate approach: “Though bandits were not the hopeless social rejects that many arrogant, urban-educated revolutionaries considered them, neither were they the natural revolutionaries they often appeared to be to more sanguine militants” (p. 230).
aid may well exist today under the surface of communist orthodoxy as they existed previously under the surface of Confucian orthodoxy.

Bandits in Republican China is a work of immense scholarship on a difficult subject of central importance to Chinese political and social history. Billingsley's sources include a variety of contemporary accounts in Chinese, Japanese, and English. His topical or analytical organization sometimes obscures chronological shifts. This is probably inevitable, given the large territory he has to cover and its unexplored nature. Billingsley covers a range of topics from bandit argot and life styles to the relations between bandits and revolutionaries, and scholars may disagree with some of his specific interpretations. But the monograph will be of interest to many pursuing subjects other than bandits across the terrain of the twentieth century. Billingsley's measured conclusions about the role bandits play in traditional societies should be of interest to comparative historians as well as China specialists. In the end, Chinese bandits formed, of course, but one segment of an increasingly militarized and morally rudderless society.

The Origins of Chinese Communism

The intelligentsia was preoccupied with the acute social, political, and cultural crises of China. Arif Dirlik's *The Origins of Chinese Communism* offers a comprehensive reexamination of the ideological parameters of May Fourth radicalism. Concentrating on the years 1917–21, Dirlik shows how the Communist Party and Chinese Marxism emerged out of a much more eclectic radicalism. He finds that Marxism was but one minor strand of a growing Chinese conviction that socialism was the wave of the future. More particularly, through the late 1910s (and well into the 1920s) anarchism provided a widely shared world view for Chinese radicals. The May Fourth Movement itself, through the end of 1919, led to increasing radicalization, particularly of a new student generation, and to growing interest in “social revolution.” Social revolution, Dirlik is careful to point out, refers to basic but not necessarily violent social change. Although the movement won its immediate objective—China did not sign the Versailles Treaty granting Shandong to Japan—its most radical participants continued to seek a reordering of Chinese society. They sought to achieve this primarily through communitarian “small groups” that worked through work-study programs and the “New Village” movement. However, as the larger society appeared to be unmoved and these groups fell apart, a sense of failure spread.

Meanwhile, the Chinese labor movement was growing, emerging in the May Fourth Movement as a political force. To radicals sensing decay in their various projects, workers seemed to offer new organizational options and a new field of action. Also, in turn, the evident conflict between labor and capital (both domestic and imperialist) gave new relevance to Marxism. Yet even several years after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Chinese radicals continued to reject much of Marxism. They distrusted what they saw as Marxism’s economic determinism and gradualism, and for the most part they rejected class struggle as well. Indeed, the most sophisticated interest in Marxism was largely shown by men who would have nothing to do with an organized Chinese Communist Party. Indeed, the Communist International alienated social democrats and members of the Chinese Youth Party as well.

Dirlik finds few signs in early 1920 of a particular triumph, intellectual or otherwise, of Marxism. Then in March of 1920, Comintern representatives began to organize with leading Chinese intellectuals, such as Li Dazhao and particularly Chen Duxiu, the groups that would form the Chinese Communist Party. On the one hand, the Comintern played an essential role here; on the other, some Chinese radicals were ready for more tightly organized, exclusive political groups precisely at this point because of their disillusionment with earlier May Fourth attempts to instigate social change. Above all, the Comintern offered a method of social revolution. From existing study societies came the regionally based groups that came together finally to define Chinese Marxism as an organizational ideology. Chinese communism, then, was a particular form of Marxism that moved between 1920 and 1922 to exclude from its ranks the anarchists, socialists, and even noncommunist Marxists who had been pivotal in its founding. Chinese Marxism itself emerged out of this process of defining organizational identity, an identity that finally achieved coherence in the Second Congress of July 1922.

This is a revisionist thesis, and Dirlik spends a good deal of time explaining exactly where he differs from received wisdom on the subject, both Western and Chinese. The standard account moves smoothly from the Russian October Revolution in 1917 to growing Chinese interest in Marxism (spurred by Li Dazhao), to the founding of Marxist study groups and, with the help of the Comintern, to the CCP in July 1921. Dirlik offers not so much to correct mistakes of commission but of omission, or what he calls “silences.” Frankly pursuing a “historicism” course, he has attempted to recreate the conditions as they existed for radicals in the late 1910s, not as they may seem in the retrospect of communist teleology. For Dirlik, Chinese communism emerged not out of the October Revolution and not out of growing May Fourth interest in Marxism, but out of the immediate needs of Chinese radicals as the initial May Fourth political thrust faltered—and the coincidence of Comintern support. The year 1920, not 1917 or 1919, was crucial because only then did various factors come together in a way that explains the receptivity of a small group of radicals to the Comintern’s lessons about how to organize for action. These factors included strains of radicalism going back to the revolutionary ferment beginning shortly after the turn of the century, socialist debates since 1912, the political stresses of the May Fourth Movement, and the explosion of labor unrest associated with the movement. Once organized—or, rather, in the process of organization—a deeper but still limited understanding of Marxism was reached. The eclectic May Fourth study groups were the “material” that the Comintern had to work with in shaping a Leninist party. Dirlik thus feels that the Second Congress of 1922, when the CCP established a clear demarcation between itself and other Chinese socialists, marks a more significant point in CCP history than did the founding Congress of 1921, when the party still retained an essentially inclusive character (and only three of whose representatives attended the Second Congress).


12. The main Western interpretations are Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), and Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), which, coming out of a debate with Cold War studies emphasizing the rise of Chinese communism as spread from the Soviet Union, cited indigenous sources and developments. Although Chinese historians are coming to a new understanding of the origins of Chinese communism, Dirlik is also critical of much of the work of Sima Lu, Ding Shouhe, and Li Xin.
Dirlik would add to rather than overthrow the standard view of the May Fourth Movement as a political and nationalistic movement or as a movement dedicated to “enlightenment” stemming from the “New Culture Movement,” usually dated from 1915. But the political radicalism of the May Fourth Movement was largely fueled by anarchism, which, though largely forgotten today, then prevailed in circles concerned with social questions. This anarchism has to be understood “not simply as a formal ideology but also as a mood, a style, and even a social-cultural moment of everyday life” (p. 259). Dirlik is one of the first historians of China to take anarchism seriously.

As Dirlik shows in a meticulous reading of texts, even the man usually considered “China’s First Marxist,” Li Dazhao, was nothing of the sort. Li’s reaction to the October Revolution and his first interpretations of Marxism in 1918, while generally favorable, were marked by deep reservations. Indeed, Li, while no anarchist, understood the events of the day in a largely anarchist framework. That is, he continued to understand the goals of revolution in anarchist terms as community (encompassing both national unity and “humanitarianism”) and equality. Like most Chinese radicals, Li still hoped China could avoid the revolutionary violence of class struggle and that even if class struggle was necessary, it was at best an evil means to good ends. Dirlik also points out that Chen Duxiu, the first CCP chairman and a figure Dirlik considers more central to the founding of the CCP than Li, missed the founding congress, soon took a job away from party headquarters, and deprecated “professional revolutionaries.” In contrast with the older intellectuals who led the party in its early years, Dirlik suggests, younger radicals in the CCP were less immediately concerned with doctrinal understanding of Marxism and more eager to consummate the revolution. The implication, though Dirlik does not pursue it in much detail after 1921, is that their understanding of the CCP was probably instrumental and their goals remained roughly anarchist. This would be true even for those who disavowed anarchism as impractical.

Dirlik successfully synthesizes the academic debate about the origins of the CCP: native development versus foreign, Leninist conspiracy. As he well shows, it was both. The Comintern was more than a catalyst, but its success cannot be understood except in terms of Chinese receptivity. This receptivity, if I understand Dirlik correctly, was a product of both the loose anarchism and socialisms of the 1910s and the setbacks radicals faced by the end of that decade. Chinese radicals were receptive first to the promise of communism—the organization that would lead to action—and secondarily to Marxism, which then grew out of organizational and ideological exigencies. Thus, Dirlik answers two questions: What was the nature of May Fourth radicalism that led to the particularity of communism; and how did the communists, once they existed, define themselves in the Chinese political context?

Dirlik’s answers are richly detailed, and his work gives new insight into the May Fourth Movement as well as the origins of Chinese communism. The theme of social revolution unified the various strands of the radical intelligentsia and fully merits the emphasis he gives it. This raises the question of whether the two chapters Dirlik spends on proving a negative (that the October Revolution did not have the immediate repercussions in China generally ascribed to it) would have been better spent tracing the notion of social revolution from 1900 to 1920. Dirlik feels that intellectuals “discovered Chinese society” only with the May Fourth Movement, and traces the wide diffusion of a variety of socialisms to 1919. For, frustrated with politics (the failure of the 1911 Revolution to create viable institutions), intellectuals had turned to culture; in the May Fourth era, however, they realized the limits of cultural change and turned to social analysis and a new kind of mobilizational politics.

Obviously, this is true as far as it goes. But I would suggest that the parameters of Chinese understanding of society were shaped by more or less continuous debate about socialism. Dirlik mentions such figures as Liu Shipei, Sun Yat-sen, Jiang Kang-hu, and Liu Shifu, but more as distant antecedents than representatives of an ongoing tradition. The family, generational disputes, and feminism remained key issues in May Fourth intellectual discourse, along with labor, as they had for some time. They were not suddenly replaced by interest in labor, nor does a clearer sense of the relationships between social, political, and cultural change leap suddenly to the forefront of radical discourse.

This lacuna is also troubling because of the break with New Culture ideas that Dirlik suggests marks the shift to communism. Were Chinese radicals by the beginning of 1920 so suddenly disillusioned with the course of the May Fourth Movement that they were particularly eager for new organizational and ideological solutions? There is no doubt about the enthusiasm for small-scale communitarian experiments in the “heady atmosphere of May

13. For example, the significance of anarchism is missed in both Meissner’s Li Ta-chao and Chow Tse-tsung’s influential The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China, and by virtually all other historians of the communist movement in the 1920s. For an overview of anarchism, see Robert A. Scalapino and George T. Yu, The Chinese Anarchist Movement (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, 1961). See also Peter Zarrow, Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

14. Dirlik also points out that Marxism seemed to explain the apparently sudden emergence of capital and labor. However, though it is true that Marxism, or as Dirlik clearly shows, certain aspects of Marxism, could be and were immediately seized upon to resolve problems of describing conditions in China, anarchism for one also paid a good deal of attention to the “crisis of capitalism.”

15. An example of Dirlik’s insight into the factors behind early Chinese attraction to Marxism is his observation that although Chinese interpretations were highly critical of what they saw as Marx’s economic determinism, which would obviously discredit revolutionary efforts, they could still use the theory in their attacks on the past, which could be explained away “in terms of the working out of economic forces” (p. 116). This gave a special coherency to the cultural iconoclasm that the early Marxists shared with other intellectuals but did not threaten the voluntarism of the present.

Thousands of Beijing-area students gathered at Tiananmen in Beijing during May and June 1919 to protest foreign interference and ask for "democracy and science." This May Fourth Movement led to increasing radicalization of students and interest in social revolution. By 1922 this had evolved through anarchism, socialism, and noncommunist Marxism into Chinese communism, although at that time Chinese communism was still only one of many radical currents. This photo is by Sidney D. Gamble, and it is reproduced here courtesy of the Sidney D. Gamble Foundation for China Studies, Inc.

Fourth China" (p. 93), which were sometimes thought to offer means of social change and not merely a positive model. Such enthusiasm could not be expected to last (and the crisis in the work-study program in France occurred only later). It is true that the mass movement of the summer of 1919 soon receded and government repression increased. Yet Dirlik presents no evidence that a real break in radical consciousness occurred, or that, if it did, radicals embarked on a new search at this time.

I am struck by another kind of disillusionment. As Charlotte Furth, among others, has pointed out, the barbarism evidenced by World War I as well as the Versailles Treaty itself led Chinese intellectuals to reevaluate the West as a model for reforms. As Chinese conservatives turned away from the ideal of liberal democracy in increasing numbers, some of their critique of the West may have influenced more radical thinking. These were not closed discourses. But this general sense of the failure of the West does not explain a shift to Bolshevism in particular on the part of Chinese students.

Dirlik may well be right about a qualitatively new sense of pessimism or defeat, but he has not given us the evidence. In any case, what conclusions follow? Was there a new search or the continuation of multifarious interests? Indeed, even in a study as carefully historicist as this is, and as careful to avoid teleological fallacies, it is easy to forget how small the Chinese communist movement remained. As Dirlik notes, through 1922 (Dirlik's own terminus) very few radicals saw much use in Leninist organization or Marxist ideology, however important certain strands of nondogmatic Marxism such as class struggle were becoming in the analysis of Chinese society. In other words, if a few radicals were turning away from past paths, many more were interested in adding new paths to the old. There can be no question of imputing intellectual hegemony to communism precisely because of the exclusiveness the CCP adopted, as Dirlik himself well shows. Though the CCP and Marxism were on the verge of rapid growth in 1922, this growth was not at the expense of May Fourth eclecticism and a wide variety of approaches to social revolution. Nor can the growth be understood solely in terms of party organization and mobilization: the mass movement had other roots as well.

If indeed a general feeling of pessimism, resulting in part from the failures of communal experiments by 1920, led to a turn to new solutions, it is not clear why the CCP did not have even more defections by 1922–1923. Between 1920 and 1922 acceptance of such tenets as class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat, as well as the organizational rigor demanded by

Comintern representatives, led many to leave the movement, as Dirlik notes. It is not new to point out how small the CCP was at its inception. It is, however, interesting to note that many of those who started it left almost immediately, and those who remained faced immense hurdles. It would be nice to know more about the individuals who stuck to the CCP, and who built the “organizational and ideological identity” (p. 244) that Dirlik establishes for the party. Dirlik could perhaps also make clearer that radical activities outside the CCP continued to be as vibrant as before. He fails to bring out fully the double image we may justifiably hold of the CCP after the Second Congress: on the verge of great growth, to be sure, both through its alliance with the Guomindang and through grass-roots organizing; but also, especially as of 1922, on the edge of the radical intelligentsia. Nor did the CCP assume hegemony over the labor movement. Anarcho-syndicalists and other activists continued to have a greater impact on the labor movement for some time.

Dirlik suggests that communist polemics with the anarchists were key, because they demarcated strategic differences among social revolutionaries who had been allies as late as 1921. The communist critique of anarchism essentially consisted of the contradiction, but that the party’s very exclusiveness limited the equality. The problem was not that communist strategy was self-centered, because it demarcated strategic differences with anarchists” (p. 239), that is, ultimately, freedom and equality. The problem was that communist strategy was self-contradictory, but that the party’s very exclusiveness limited the range of even internal debate. Another consequence follows:

There was something disturbingly authoritarian in the conception of revolution that Chen [Duxiu] and the other Communists promoted: that revolution itself was in some ways coercion, coercion of the oppressed to remake themselves in spite of themselves. Many of the Communists intended “the dictatorship of the proletariat” not just to suppress the bourgeoisie but also to coerce the working class into a revolutionary mold. The idea is clearly Bolshevik, but not necessarily Marxist. (p. 244)

The distinction between Bolshevism and Marxism is central to Dirlik’s study, and he concludes that Chinese communist theory and practice were far apart. Dirlik is not so much pointing to nonrevolutionary tendencies in the labor movement as to authoritarianism within the party. In the end, the difficulty with this criticism, of course, is the same difficulty facing Chinese radicals of the day: How can social revolution be achieved except through Leninism? Would a more democratic party have been able to lead the revolution?

Conclusion

The authors considered here raise important substantive and methodological questions. It is now clear, following what will undoubtedly come to be known as the June Fourth Massacre of 1989, that China’s prolonged cultural crisis is not over. The disequilibriums of social structure, political form, and national identity are still being worked out, although the rural problems that Duara outlines were at their most acute earlier in the century.

Methodologically, intellectual history is, if not exactly in crisis, facing problems of definition, scope, and significance. Dirlik’s “solution” is essentially to root the diverse thinkers that form the movements he is considering firmly in their times and their immediate context. At one point he sharply disavows: “Influence is an astrological concept, not a historical one. To render the concept historical, it is necessary to take as the point of departure for analysis not the influence, but the influenced, who appropriate for themselves an event or an idea outside their own history that is not of their making” (p. 23). In fact, Dirlik frequently alludes to influence in perfectly normal ways (as, for example, on p. 112), but he never makes the mistake of predating beliefs on influences. That individual “A” holds a particular belief earlier expounded by individual or book “B” is not proof that B influenced A. Nor does Dirlik trace ideas as such. Nonetheless, much of Dirlik’s methodology remains traditional. His protagonists are firmly rooted in their times, the meaning of their remarks carefully judged according to context.

Since Dirlik does not place particular importance on tracing ideas through history, in this analysis not only the pre–May Fourth debates over socialism but also the October Revolution throw little light on the rise of Chinese communism. Nor does Dirlik fall prey to teleological fallacy; hence, the eventual eclipse of anarchism, for example, does not blind him to the way it formed part of the environment out of which Chinese communism arose. Carried to an extreme, emphasis on immediate context would leave no room for change over time. But in any event, intellectuals are presented here as real, politically committed social beings. The major problem is that a few leading intellectuals continue to stand out while important generalizations about, for example, the “younger generation of radicals” remain just that—generalizations. Nonetheless, Dirlik’s approach provides an analysis that is not precisely intellectual history in the traditional sense because it contains much material usually considered political history, but it still makes for a solidly grounded study of a shifting political discourse.

Duara explicitly discusses the dilemma of the social historian trying to examine changes in local institutions through time (pp. 261–65). He calls for “mediating concepts” that would enable the scholar to move between the local, popular, and structural on the one hand and the national, high culture, and historically contingent on the other. His “cultural nexus of power” is intended to do this, but, as noted above, I am not sure this notion is much more than another name for legitimacy. Duara’s insight is that the same institution can produce contradictory effects (or functions). Kinship and ritual, depending on local perceptions and needs, may produce either competitive stratification or egalitarian solidarity.

18. See also Vera Schwarcz, “Out of Historical Amnesia: An Eclectic and Nearly Forgotten Chinese Communist in Europe,” Modern China 13 (Apr. 1987), pp. 177–225, for a discussion of Zhang Shenfu’s relations with the CCP.

19. The books are also well printed. However, Duara and Billingsley, both published by Stanford, unfortunately use a style of notes that combines the worst of social science and humanities usages. When one turns to their notes, one finds simply name and date and then has to turn, again, to the bibliography for the complete reference (and back to the note for the page). How is this an improvement over the name and date being incorporated into the text (requiring one turn, to the bibliography), or over the complete endnote (requiring one turn, to the note)? Publishers must be told to avoid this practice.
The social changes and radical currents of Republican China met, in a sense, to produce the communist revolution of 1949. Future scholarship should increasingly pass back and forth across the barrier of 1949 to understand the precise ways in which the revolution affected Chinese society, culture, and politics. More work is needed in the areas the books reviewed here open up. More local histories will continue to round out our knowledge of the wide variety of local responses to the twentieth century crisis. One hopes for further studies of violence and underground organizations in China, especially of secret societies both in the countryside and as they became increasingly urban. And much of the history of the CCP remains a closed book, especially the story of its early successes with mass mobilization in the mid-1920s. Hopefully, more primary source material will continue to be declassified by the government.

Meanwhile, the superb studies reviewed here implicitly but powerfully suggest the depth of the roots of some of today's problems: authoritarianism, violence, class struggle and competition for scarce resources, and the continuing need to find a commonly accepted source of legitimacy. The crisis of legitimacy is itself but part of a larger moral crisis. The twentieth century has seen China move a long way down this road, achieving both sovereignty internationally and a newly egalitarian, meritocratic, and economically expansive society at home. Studies of the Republican era have the incidental virtue of reminding us of China's successes, which we can be sure will form the basis of future steps.
Review Essay: 
Women’s History and Peasant Revolts —the Tebhaga and Telengana Struggles

by Dolores F. Chew

The field of women’s history in India is relatively new and has tended to be dominated by case studies, while theoretical writings are remarkable by their absence. Two new additions to the field potentially hold excitement and promise. They are Peter Custers’s *Women in the Tebhaga Uprising* and Stree Shakti Sanghatana’s *“We Were Making History...”: Life Stories of Women in the Telengana People’s Struggle*. Traditional studies of popular movements, revolts, and left-wing struggles in India have either neglected the participation of women or paid scant attention to them. Where the role of women has been covered it has tended to be in male-defined terms of achievement and heroism. So these two books are pioneering in their stated aims. They join a worldwide trend to examine women’s participation in radical movements, assess the nature of this participation, and compare the status of women once the revolutionary struggle is over to that while the movement was in progress. Sandino’s Daughters’ is part of this trend, as is *Passbook No. F.47927: Women and Mau Mau.*

In his preface, Peter Custers asks: “Why does male dominance remain unbroken, in spite of women’s demonstrated capacity to organise, struggle and lead?” (p. ix), and “Under what conditions have women led proletarian struggles in history? And why have socialist movements, in spite of the given experiences, not ended but prolonged the inequality between women and men?” (p. x).

While Custers’s book pays more attention to women’s participation in Tebhaga than does any other published work in English, it is a rather rambling description and discussion of many aspects of both the Tebhaga and Telengana struggles. This is preceded by chapters on the history of peasant rebellion in Bengal, as well as two on the immediate background and events preceding the Tebhaga struggle. It concludes with a general


discussion of women’s participation in socialist revolution, drawing briefly on the Vietnamese example and then proceeding to the Chinese case with a detailed discussion of Mao Zedong’s writings. In all, only three chapters (30 percent of the book) deal with women in the Tebhaga uprising. Anticipating the latter as the subject of the book, one is left slightly bewildered at the end by all these meanderings.

On the other hand, the authors of the Telengana book (a collective) state: “The history of the Telengana struggle has been written by some who have led the struggle...and by others in the form of memoirs...Our idea is not just to repeat that exercise...It is an attempt to broaden the history of that struggle by recovering the subjective experience of women. The real question that needs to be posed is whether women could have been present at the decision-making level or not” (p. 2). Already one can identify crucial differences between the two studies.

**Where Custers is innovative is with regard to identifying the failure of the Communist Party to respond to the needs and the enthusiasm of women. He indicts them for “doubly-failing” the “doubly-oppressed.” They robbed peasant women of the opportunity to take destiny into their own hands.**

Stree Shakti Sanghatana’s book has twenty-one chapters. One is a description of the Telengana struggle, followed by the essay “Writing About Women in Struggles.” The next sixteen chapters are the edited transcripts of interviews with seventeen women participants in the Telengana struggle. These women speak about their involvement, what preceded their involvement, and qualitative and quantitative aspects of women’s participation in the movement, along with their current level of activism. The last three chapters include an afterword, a discussion by the authors of issues concerning women in popular movements, raised by the women participants in the course of their interviews. The chapter concludes with some comments by the collective on how to avoid the pitfalls of relegating women’s concerns to the private sphere. Two brief chapters follow, one of short descriptions of the circumstances governing the collective’s meetings with the women and their personal impressions of them. This greatly assists the reader by giving tangible form to the women, a process complemented by the photographs included on the covers. The last chapter is a comment on the language of the book and some of the problems encountered in doing oral history.

Custers, though losing out in a comparison of the effectiveness of his work as far as his self-proclaimed aims go, has made some important contributions, augmenting knowledge and information on a crucial aspect of Tebhaga as well as identifying serious gaps in discussions of this movement.

**Tebhaga**

The Tebhaga struggle occurred in 1946–47 in then-undivided Bengal. Confined in the beginning mostly to the northern reaches of the province, it spread all over Bengal, and pockets of struggle erupted in many other districts, most notably in the Kakdwip area. The demands of the movement were that sharecroppers should be able to retain a one-third share of their crops and that illegal feudal assessments should cease. The movement was organized by the Kisan Sabha, the peasant front of the Communist Party of India (CPI). However, once the movement gained momentum, the sharecroppers and poor peasants often resorted to enthusiastic spontaneous action, which was frowned upon by the party. With the partition of India in August 1947, Bengal was divided. The movement lost much of its impetus as the party cadres were separated by borders and became preoccupied with other problems like communal violence. In the last phase of the struggle, the party proved incapable of organizing the people to defend themselves against state repression.

**Telengana**

This struggle occurred in a princely state in India, Hyderabad, ruled by the fabulously wealthy Nizam. After 1947 the Nizam attempted to prevent his state from being included in the Union of India. The Indian army entered the state and the Nizam surrendered. The antifeudal movement initially opposed the extremely cruel feudal oppression, which included forced labor, feudal exactions, and serfdom, by the Nizam, the Razakars (his militia), and his deputies. The Telengana struggle took place in the Telugu-speaking districts of Hyderabad State and was led by the Communists. Later, the Indian army invaded Hyderabad State, and the Nizam eventually surrendered. Then the army began to subdue the popular movement. Finally, in a very controversial decision, the CPI withdrew from the struggle, leaving thousands of cadres and activists feeling bewildered and betrayed.

**Oral History**

As its name indicates, the Telengana book is an oral history. The Custers book has also drawn on personal reminiscences for much of its data, but Custers has ordered the material differently, utilizing the findings thus garnered to substantiate and illustrate the general discussion. Custers has used reports in contemporary newspapers and journals as well, especially those of the CPI.

Both books are concerned with women’s participation in these movements. Yet, as is evident from the quotations included at the beginning of this review, their queries and hence approaches are quite different. Custers is more concerned with questions of socialist construction of society and the reasons for continued gender subordination after women have demonstrated their capabilities in revolutionary struggle. The Stree Shakti Sanghatana authors are concerned with changing the terms of reference for discussion and collection of information on women’s participation in struggles. Thus what Custers’s well-intentioned book attempts to show is that peasant women were as brave as peasant men and in many instances braver, they showed exemplary courage and leadership qualities, and they were as heroic as their male counterparts. Despite all this they were not accepted as equals and were generally relegated to second place in the organization. After the struggle ended they returned to traditional roles as if their pattern of life had never been interrupted. Stree Shakti states that it is the male-defined parameters for measuring women’s participation that have contributed to their exclusion from any significant leadership positions. Their unique contributions are glossed over or
Women's participation in radical movements has generally been neglected, minimized, or discussed only in male-defined terms of achievement and heroism. We Were Making History attempts to remedy this situation by using oral histories to present the subjective experiences of the women involved in the Telengana struggle against feudal oppression in Hyderabad. But why, then, does the front cover feature this picture of women shooting rather than showing women using the lifesaving strategies they developed? This photo is reproduced here with the permission of the Stree Shakti Sanghatana working group on the Telengana People's Struggle.

unrecognized. The whole situation of women's existence, the threads that weave the tapestry of their lives, are overlooked or trivialized as women's work and women's concerns that have little connection to important events like revolution. By conducting these interviews and documenting an oral history of Telengana women, the collective seeks to create new criteria for assessing women's participation in struggle. While the inspiring example may be good for morale, in the long term it has a disastrous effect on promoting gender equality, since once more the parameters for judging participation and content are defined in male terms. As it stands, only when a peasant woman has performed in a way similar to a man can her contribution be assessed. Thus lifesaving strategies evolved by women during the upheaval of revolution are dismissed and overlooked.

In recapturing women's history, what has been methodologically most useful is the acknowledgment of the private sphere as perfectly valid and suited to understanding and regaining women's history. This area had received scant attention because the parameters of historical research have traditionally been defined by the male-dominated public sphere.

Oral history is particularly useful for this type of research. Long used to document the history of the marginalized sections of society, it allows individuals to emphasize what is important to them and recover the everyday rather than just the spectacular. However, because of conditioning, women themselves tend to assess their participation in male-defined ways, as in the case of Acchamamba, the barefoot doctor in the Telengana struggle. Conditioned by the expectations of heroism, she dwelt more on the adventurous and heroic rather than on the unique skills she learned and administered in treating the wounded. In many ways, Acchamamba was aware of the pressures that were on her to be a heroine. She said, “Mohan Rao kept pleading with me—he said I was brave, I was the Rani of Jhansi [a woman ruler who took on the might of the British Empire in 1857]. I was stubborn. I said, no, I did not want any greatness” (p. 163). Yet she reconstructed her past in terms of the heroic, saying “He pointed a gun at me. The bullet just whizzed past me” (p. 164), and deemphasized the uniqueness of her role. This she described rather matter-of-factly: “We were taught to clean and bandage wounds and give injections. I was given a doctor’s responsibility” (p. 161). While Acchamamba was conscious of the discrepancies between Mohan Rao’s expectations and her own perception of her role, she still succumbed to the image of the heroic and the terms of cultural reference to which she was accustomed. There is an obvious need to deconstruct experience.

Traditionalism and Sexuality

While studying women’s history, researchers continue to discover how crucial is the admission that female sexuality, reproduction, and child raising are pivotal to a woman’s existence. They define her life. The total neglect of these areas leaves women’s experience bereft of its essence. By controlling female sexuality men minimize and dominate women’s lives and force them into decisions that have lifelong implications. Very often party leaders and organizers would advise women comrades to marry to avoid gossip, slander, and other problems. Acchamamba described how she was expelled from the party because she was accused of having an affair with one of the men. She denied it, but to no avail (pp. 161–62). This incident illustrates how traditional and puritanical the morality of the party was. S. Sugunamma said, “I felt that the only protection
I could get would be through marriage” (p. 87). And regarding another female comrade, “Sharada... had been widowed twice. And they were pesterling her to marry a third time!” (p. 89). The book documents a similar sentiment of ambiguity regarding the party’s ideology and practice. “He (the party leader) said I should marry someone. It was better that way. So I agreed. After all they would only advise me for my own good. Till then the idea had not occurred to me. I thought I would just stay like that—single” (p. 168).

Moturi Udayam recounted an amusing yet telling example of the same puritanical strain. A Swiss woman, Mellie, visited them. “She had a flat bosom and wearing a pajama-shirt she looked like a man.” At a state conference Basava Punthia (a male comrade) saw Mellie embracing Moturi Udayam and said, “Who is that fellow kissing Udayam on the stage—blah blah; what is this behaviour, Udayam? Where is our tradition? We must settle this!” Even when Udayam told him she was a woman he didn’t believe her! (p. 195). In a similar but more humorous vein is an incident described by Udayam in which she found a woman comrade from the north a place to smoke a cigarette in the women’s toilet so she could calm herself prior to giving a speech. The roof was made of thatch and palm leaves, and there was panic because it was thought it had caught fire. When the cause of the smoke was discovered there was shock: “What is this—a woman smoking?” (p. 196).

**Oral history allows individuals to emphasize what is important to them and recover the everyday rather than just the spectacular. However, because of conditioning, women themselves tend to assess their participation in male-defined ways.**

Dayani Priyamvada described a situation in which she felt betrayed by the party, illustrating the neglect of the emotional element. She got involved with one of her comrades, but later realized that she did not wish to continue the liaison because of his views on personal aggrandizement. But before she came to this realization, the party felt it was a time of political repression and the marriage they were considering should wait till later. Dayani felt that this was irrelevant as it was common to have simple ceremonies performed before important party leaders and this could have been arranged. The man drifted off and she finally stopped hearing from him. She held the party responsible.

“The Party did not bother about this at all. It did not even inquire why such a thing had happened... You know, don’t you, how difficult it is for a woman to tread any ground without the help and support of a Party?... We make mistakes sometimes knowingly, sometimes unknowingly. Then it is better to get over the whole thing than to keep on suffering. In that situation if my family had let me down the way the Party had, what would have happened to me? (pp. 70–71)

The Telengana book is replete with accounts of all aspects of women’s participation in revolutionary struggle and the problems they faced, both private and public. Noticeably scant are descriptions of women in decision-making positions, revealing traditional influences at play.

**Personal as Political**

Rarely in accounts of popular struggle does one encounter women’s bodily functions, however inconvenient and painful, aggravated by being on the run, underground, or in jail. Some of the interviewees in the Telengana book deal with childbirth, breastfeeding, and menstruation, demystifying these processes. For example: “Hanumayamma and I were dancing very vigorously. We were almost at the end of the song. One of the women dancing was having her period. Her sari got loose and the cloth she was using fell out. As I was dancing, I picked it up and hid it in my shirt!” (p. 196). In another instance, a new mother was imprisoned without her infant and suffered terribly from engorged breasts. Her comrades spent hours in jail squeezing milk out to give her some relief. One of the demands of the peasant women was that female field laborers be allowed to feed their babies while working in the landlords’ fields. And many women activists became pregnant and bore their children while they were with squads in the forest.

I kept moving around with them. It was time for the child to be born... No hope of getting a midwife. I was very troubled by the very thought of delivering the child. There was a village nearby called Sampeta... there was an old midwife there and they fetched her. I delivered under a cluster of bushes in the night and after the old woman had done her work they sent her away before daybreak. (p. 49)

The responsibility for children remained women’s alone. This is illustrated by one of the most wrenching segments of the book. Kamalamma bore a child when the army was pursuing the guerrillas. The party told her that because his crying would lead to their discovery, she should take the child and leave the squad or abandon him with a note around his neck. They added: “If you go, they will chop you up to bits, they will put chilli powder on you. They will torture you, they will kill you. It’s your decision. Think about it” (p. 50). Pulled in different directions, Kamalamma wanted to consult her husband who was away and was told, “This is not the correct consciousness for the working-class.” She reported: “My head reeled. Why should I have to listen to such accusations? I had come into the struggle for a livelihood. I had come to do my share of work and die” (p. 50). She decided to abandon the child but after walking two days met an organizer who suggested they find someone to give the child to. They found a coal miner who had lost three sons and agreed to take the child. “I placed the child in his hands and left. After that neither my body, my mind nor my eyes stayed in my control. There was one torrent of tears from eyes to earth... It is thirty-six years today and I do not know what has happened to that child” (pp. 50–51).

4. One of the exceptions is Winnie Mandela. In *Part of My Soul Went With Him* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: England: Penguin Books, 1984), she describes how the onset of her period in jail was used as yet another mechanism to humiliate her. “During menstruation we only got toilet paper or they say, ‘Go and use your big fat hands’” (p. 99).
Resistance, Heroism

From the book we learn of combat and the incidents of women passing stones to men to hurl from slings. Women also used guns, but everyday necessities—pestles and chilli powder—were more often their weapons. These instances are featured in the books on Telengana that have already been published. In discussing women’s participation, it is usually these aspects that have been documented.

In the Tebhaga struggle, fighting was at a different level—there were no guerrilla squads and resistance tended to be village-based. Custers emphasizes women’s offensive and defensive roles. Discussing how women encircled a contingent of police who had arrested male peasant cadres and how women determinedly resisted despite police firing, he concludes, “When the firing took place, the women became more daring!” (p. 112).

While both the Telengana and Tebhaga struggles were aborted, the nature of the revolutionary process that the participants engaged in should have engendered permanent change in certain aspects of their lives. However, while the women participants’ self-perception was permanently affected, the gender relationship between men and women changed little.

Custers accurately draws attention to the spontaneity with which women assumed positions of leadership. When the male cadres were arrested, women often replaced them. He accurately locates the reason for this: The “Communist Party with its patriarchal prejudices no longer dominated the movement once it had entered its most militant phase. . . . The Nari Bahini women’s squad was created and rural poor women gave leadership because of the spontaneous character that the struggle had obtained” (p. 130). The activities of the Nari Bahini included defending villages, confronting police, “arresting” them, and repelling and humiliating police patrols (p. 131). Their weapons, common household appliances, illustrated the character of the militia—jhanta (broom), bonti (food cutter), sticks, and small knives (pp. 130–31).

Custers loses no opportunity to pillory the CPI for its failure to grab the initiative and maintain the momentum. This criticism has been leveled by others as well. Where he is innovative is with regard to identifying the failure of the party to respond to the needs and the enthusiasm of women. He indictsthem for “doubly-failing” the “doubly-oppressed.” They robbed peasant women of the opportunity to take destiny into their own hands. Their restricting the spontaneous actions of the peasantry, including women, deprived them of the opportunity to advance the movement and robbed them of a unique opportunity to change their lives. Queries related to the gender question were never raised. Along with the CPI he also indicts the Kisan Sabha and MARS (the Mahila Atrna Raksha Samiti—CPI women’s front) for failure to institute conscious policies to eradicate rural poor women’s social oppression. In cases where these issues were raised it was done by local Mahila Samitis or peasant women themselves (pp. 179–80). Custers recognizes, however, that the Nari Bahini was a very significant achievement of the Tebhaga struggle. He calls this “Greater than any other achievement which the people [made] during the Tebhaga Uprising” (p. 134). He links the spontaneous character of the uprisings to the prominent role women played. As long as the party maintained control, women were eclipsed. The patriarchal structures could not accommodate them. In the later stages, with the absence of recognized leaders when the movement became more autonomous, women entered the arena and assumed leadership positions.

Despite his additions to the study of women in the Tebhaga, Custers maintains a left-patriarchal tradition of not dealing with women’s lives on their own terms. It is only when they stray into the public arena that he recognizes their contribution. Several times in his book Custers points to the Left’s preoccupation with loss of chastity of peasant women as a result of rape and postfamine prostitution. By so doing, he points out that the Left denies the “cruel male oppression” that was its corollary: “Surprisingly, even cadres...
of the Communist-led women’s movements ignored the social nature of such exploitation of destitutes” (p. 35). Gender inequality was not adequately recognized by the CPI. Manikuntala Sen, a female party organizer and a MARS leader commenting on the CPI’s protests against the proposals of the Rao Committee to ameliorate the status of women and MARS antidowry campaigns, says that even within the CPI “objections were raised against giving women property rights!” (p. 174).

Simple economism does not resolve the problems of gender inequalities. Yet Custers supports the view that land holds the key to women’s liberation, and he approvingly and appropriately quotes from Fanshen. In so doing he falls into the usual popular misconception concerning gender inequality and overlooks the emotional and psychological dimensions of the problem.

Peter Custers dwells extensively on the heroism of women in Tebhaga. Certainly there were martyrs and individuals who served as inspirational models. Thus we have an account of Rashmani, who, armed with only a dagger, attacked a band of soldiers. Although she died in the process, the Hazong volunteers following her continued the battle till they were victorious (p. 112). Birnala Maji was another heroine whose numerous exploits are worthy of great admiration and respect. More needs to be known, however, of the countless unmentioned women who gave shelter or used an alarm system of conch-shell blowing and gong beating to alert the peasants to attack. We need to know more about the lives of these women. Perhaps Custers has begun a process that will be continued, for there is much more that must be told about women in the Tebhaga uprising. Yet one cannot but be disappointed that the extensive interviews he undertook were not more fruitfully utilized. With the Telengana book, however, one sees that it is not just the interview process that is unique. The questions that are posed are equally if not more important.

And after the Revolution?

Perhaps the effectiveness of change wrought in women’s lives by revolutionary processes can best be measured by the aftermath. While both the Telengana and Tebhaga struggles were aborted, the nature of the revolutionary process that the participants engaged in should have engendered permanent change in certain aspects of their lives. However, while the women participants’ self-perception was permanently affected, the gender relationship between men and women changed little. While it is very difficult and often impossible to maintain revolutionary principles in the face of repression and an adverse political atmosphere, such a basic element as more egalitarian gender relations is not as easy to suppress. The poststruggle reality of Telengana and Tebhaga in this area is therefore a reflection of official party neglect of this all-important issue during the movements.

In Telengana women invariably returned to hearth and home. All the husband of Swarajym, a legendary fighter, would say to her former comrade was “She’s cooking and eating, nothing more.” I thought if that is what happened to her, who will bother about me? . . . My children always ask, ‘What did you achieve? What could you do?’” There is no indication in Custers’s book of what happened to women who participated in the Tebhaga movement, but one can surmise that on the surface the situation reverted to the status quo, except, as in Telengana, women themselves must have been forever affected by the tumultuousness of the previous couple of years and the dream they had unsuccessfully reached for.

In revolution, the potential for change is very great. The sense of the world turned upside down and the inversionary nature of the situation all bode favorably for women’s emancipation. The need for women’s participation insures opportunities never before dreamed possible. Women grasp this potential. The state of expectant enthusiasm is revealed in such comments as: “Many women came into the struggle happily. . . . There was so much excitement. Well, that is how I joined the movement. I was fourteen years old then; I too was caught up in the excitement” (p. 160). In the Tebhaga movement, women stepping into positions left vacant by male leaders also reveals a shift away from traditional hierarchies and the potential for change, not just in economic terms but regarding gender inequality. The women who speak in the Telengana book reveal a death-defying courage. They knew the treatment that awaited them—rape, torture, and murder. Even after being tortured, some returned to continue the struggle. Even while in jail they harassed their captors as much as possible. They lived for the moment and hoped for a better future. Yet even amidst all this it is they who maintained the daily necessities of food preparation and serving. They used their sexuality for protection. To hoodwink a raiding party in a village, women would often gather and feign an impending delivery or a ritual for a newly menstruating girl. The male attackers soon left.

Yet perhaps it is in these areas where both women’s power and subjugation lie. The neglect of these areas and the lack of importance extended them resulted in insuring a future where women were once more relegated to the private sphere and denied a premier place in society.

It is important that these two works have been published. The Telengana book does fulfill its aim of broadening the history of the struggle “by recovering the subjective experience of women,” and it has provided sufficient material to positively answer the query posed at the beginning, “whether women could have been present at the decision-making level or not.” While in a few instances slightly confusing, the oral history transcriptions have been successful in capturing the cadences and expressiveness of the speakers. Repetitions by the women reinforce their areas of concern, and the times described are vividly recreated.

5. The importance attached to women’s participation in revolutionary struggle and their status in postrevolutionary society have been cause for concern for a very long time. Soviet women have found their equality results in the freedom to choose a double burden—the factory and home—and many are opting to stay single. The dearth of female faces in all socialist or communist states, including the Chinese and Vietnamese, where women were extremely active in the revolutionary process and wars of liberation, indicates how the lack of importance given to the real situation of women’s lives and their unique contributions results in continued gender imbalances. Nicaragua, where the male/female ratio at all levels is more balanced, recognizes the problem, and AMNLAE (Nicaraguan women’s organization) sees gender inequalities as one of its major areas of concern.

Unfortunately, posing the problem and indicating that neglect of women’s concerns—the private sphere, women’s unique contribution, issues related to sexuality, and so on—often results in accusations of dichotomizing issues, that is, socialist versus feminist. What new trends in feminist (and socialist feminist) scholarship are indicating are analytical tools that must be utilized to genuinely understand women’s experience and participation in revolutionary struggles. There is a dialectical relationship between activism and scholarship, and neither should be neglected to the detriment of the other.
The authors indicate that initially they had not envisaged the book as a series of life stories. Only after conducting nearly forty interviews did they decide on this format. While they have attempted some analysis and theoretical discussion in the opening and closing chapters, there is much to be done in this area, now that they have available the rich collections of interviews (only sixteen are included in the book; thirty-three more were recorded). Let us hope that their concluding remark "an analysis could follow at any time..." hints at such a follow-up volume.

The Tebhaga book, while promising much, does not match expectations. This is unfortunate because Custers appears to have conducted many interviews with Tebhaga participants. His failure to utilize these adequately to portray women’s participation in Tebhaga reveals a partial grasp of the different elements of women’s lives. There is still a great deal to be done, and time is running out as the participants grow older. The Stree Shakti Sanghatana collective has vividly illustrated the richness of the life-story method in recapturing women’s history. With respect to an event like the Tebhaga struggle (which was contemporaneous with the Telengana struggle and where many protagonists are still alive), this work of chronicling the experience of the participants is an obligation that women’s historians and those committed to righting the gender imbalance in scholarship must fulfill!

Stree Shakti Sanghatana has demonstrated how as women activists and researchers they successfully accessed the role of women in revolutionary and popular movements. Their own experiences equipped them with the ability to understand the dilemmas faced by the women they interviewed, and most importantly, to formulate the questions that elicited responses a traditional historian and scholar perhaps would not have received.

The women of Telengana and Tebhaga have much in common with other women in the Third World engaged in popular struggles to improve their lives. The members of Stree Shakti Sanghatana say they were inspired by Domitila Barrios de Chungara’s *Let Me Speak* and also by *Sandino’s Daughters*. While the objective situation and conditions may be different, there exists a commonality of experience. Serious students of women’s participation in popular movements to improve their lives will do well to make a comparative study of the growing literature in the area.

6. See the last paragraph of note 5 above.

Review

by Richard W. Franke

In March 1987 Kerala voters returned a Marxist-led coalition to power, ousting a conservative ministry that had held office since 1982. It was the fifth Communist-oriented government in the thirty years since the founding of the state.

The success of left electoral parties in Kerala has engendered intense interest among scholars both in India and abroad, but most studies have focused on the elections themselves, and few have looked underneath the surface at the long and often painful building of radical movements and organizations that are the foundation of Kerala's strong left tradition. Even fewer have attempted to analyze the nature of Kerala's reforms and their impact on the lives of ordinary people in the state.

With K.P. Kannan's book new groundwork has been laid that sheds enormous light on the development of the radical tradition in Kerala while simultaneously raising issues for future study. The history of the origins and struggles of Kerala's workers and peasants offers many lessons for the rest of India, for radical and revolutionary movements around the world, and for academics debating the importance of participation and empowerment for development. Kannan makes clear that the many recent gains of Kerala's poor must be traced to the organization of a particular section of the state's people—the rural proletariat, which has led the way for decades in the redistribution of wealth, reduction of caste ideology, and achievement of substantial social and personal dignity for the state's people.

But how has this organization taken place? Why did it come so early and so successfully to Kerala compared to other parts of India? And what are the critical problems faced today, with or without the Left Democratic Front in power? These are the major questions addressed in this excellent study.

Overview of the Study

Kannan opens with a discussion of various conceptions of a rural proletariat, briefly comparing Marx, Mao, Alavi, Shanin, and others. He then focuses on the specific Indian context of the problem with reference to Charles Tilly's ideas on mobilization. The second section of the book takes up the specific conditions in Kerala that may have led to the early emergence of rural proletarian mobilization there, followed by an even more specific history of the coalescence of the workers' movement, and its radical and then Communist leadership.

The third part of the book contains case studies of three important groups of Kerala workers that have been among the leaders in radical mobilization—toddy tappers, beedi workers, and agricultural laborers. Kannan concludes with several comparisons and theoretical observations drawn from the history and the case studies. The author's general hypothesis is that a series of conjunctures were critical in the particular mobilization trajectory followed by the rural proletariat in Kerala. We shall concentrate in this review on the second and third sections and on Kannan's conclusions.

Capitalist Penetration and the Origins of Kerala's Rural Proletariat

Several factors combined to thrust Kerala's workers into early radical political action. These include: (1) the specific ecological and demographic features of the region, (2) the nature of colonial rule and in particular the type of capitalist penetration, (3) special features of the social structure, and (4) the historical conjuncture of the state of development of the proletariat within the context of the timing of the Indian independence movement.

First to be noted are the ecological and demographic conditions in Kerala. Unlike most of India, Kerala has undemarcated villages and rather evenly distributed high population density. This means that rural-urban differences are not very great, a fact that may have facilitated colonial labor recruitment (though the author does not emphasize this point), adding to the attractiveness of the region to late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial enterprises. It was later a factor in aiding the development of the proletariat within the context of the timing of the Indian independence movement.

Early investment included tea and rubber plantations in the Western Ghats followed by coir (coconut fiber) weaving factories, cashew processing, and oil, saw, and textile mills, along with the building of the necessary infrastructural supports of...
railways, roads, and docks. The spread of these relatively large-scale capitalist undertakings brought, in the early twentieth century, a large number of workers out of traditional agriculture.

A second pattern was the establishment of smaller-scale industries such as toddy tapping (the production of a mildly alcoholic drink from coconut trees), coir processing to prepare the coconut husk fibers for weaving, beedi (cigarette) making, and vegetable oil extraction. In addition, in the southern part of Kerala, then the princely state of Travancore, rice agriculture itself and associated cash crops such as coconut, pepper, and arecanut came under capitalist development, in part to feed the non-food-producing workers in other sectors. Particularly in the Kuttanad/Alleppey region, large-scale farming with drainage works and substantial investment in pumps and other equipment transformed the earlier small-scale, feudal farms, creating new relations between landowners and agricultural workers.

Despite the importance of the caste and literacy campaigns, of course, the main activity of the budding union movement of the 1930s and its increasingly radical leadership was to secure better wages and working conditions for its members.

Some results of these processes can be seen in the fact that by 1971 Kerala ranked first of all Indian states with over 45 percent of rural workers in nonagricultural employment, with Assam, the nearest competitor, having 27 percent, Haryana 23 percent, West Bengal and Punjab 22 percent, and the all-India average of just 18 percent. Within rice agriculture, as early as 1931 the three regions later to make up the state of Kerala had 31 percent (Travancore), 56 percent (Cochin), and 68 percent (Malabar) of the agricultural population listed as laborers, with the remainder as landowners, tenants, and the like. Thus, by the early twentieth century, Kerala had experienced far deeper capitalist penetration than many other parts of India, with forces operating to loosen the rural population from traditional landlord-tenant and patronage ties.

Added to this factor were two special features of Kerala’s social structure. First, the state had an exceptionally complex and elaborated caste system, with as many as 500 castes and subcastes named in the 1931 census returns. Caste indignities were also more elaborate with untouchability supplemented by “unapproachability,” which meant that some low-caste groups had to maintain prescribed distances away from their overlords even when passing them on the roads.

Secondly, the great complexity of the caste structure meant that no one caste could be considered “dominant” in the sense in which that term has been developed by some Indian scholars. Although the author does not really develop the precise importance of this idea, he seems to imply that it made it easier for different castes to join in opposing forces other than another caste.

A final feature of early proletarian development in Kerala was its particular timing—the conjuncture with the rise of the Indian nationalist movement. Since workers had begun experiencing oppression and exploitation primarily as workers by the 1920s and 1930s, they were ready to be organized by the more radical leaders of the independence movement who brought Marxist and socialist ideas directly into the combined workers’ and anticolonial movements.

Processes of Mobilization

Despite the advantages of Kerala’s proletariat in overcoming caste, the author is keenly aware of the important role of caste organizations in the earliest stages of mobilization. Kannan sees the process of radicalization as passing through three stages. First came caste improvement associations, significantly starting with an oppressed but somewhat middle-caste group, the Ezhavas. The Ezhava Social Reform Movement began in 1905 and was followed just two years later by a similar Pulaya (untouchable) association. These and other caste movements agitated for educational access, an end to indignities such as unapproachability, and the right to enter Hindu temples, which were often closed to them. Temple-entry movements reached their height in the 1925–36 period, but were supplemented with struggles for the right of the lowest castes to wear clothes on the upper parts of their bodies, and the right to interdine with members of other castes. All these struggles tended
A Kerala toddy tapper climbs one of the state's thousands of coconut trees. Tapping is highly skilled work requiring specialized tools and a great deal of time and careful attention to the delicate spathe from which the sap is extracted. Because they are skilled workers and critical to production, Kerala's toddy tappers have been relatively successful in attaining better wages and benefits for themselves. Details of the toddy-tapping process can be found in the Census of India 1961 VI-B, Village Monographs, 45-49.

Although Kannan feels that class solidarity is declining among many tappers, his dramatic account of the changes in their living conditions before and after the rise of the union will leave little room for doubt that Kerala's 43,000 toddy tappers are among the most successful rural workers in the Third World in improving their lives and offering a strong base for even further advancement for their children.

There are still many missing links in Kannan's history that await future research. Why, for example, did rationalism gain ground so quickly among the caste improvement associations? And why did literacy become such a major focus of the unions? How important was the role of radical intellectuals, writers, poets, and dramatists—cited by Kannan—in bringing the idea of education directly to some of the lowest-caste groups? This major area of Kerala history needs to be more fully detailed.

Despite the importance of the caste and literacy campaigns, of course, the main activity of the budding union movement of the 1930s and its increasingly radical leadership was to secure better wages and working conditions for its members. First in general, and then for each of the three case studies, the author outlines major events, processes, achievements, and difficulties in Kerala's labor struggles. The overall story is a familiar one of workers demanding improvements, being forced to demonstrate and strike, then facing arrest, police attack, and even murder at the hands of the police or of hired private thugs. What stands out in the Kerala case, however, is the relative success of many of the workers in winning a large portion of their demands. The author analyzes these struggles and their outcomes primarily through the case studies.

Toddy Tappers, Beedi Workers, and Agricultural Laborers

The core of Kerala's Communist proletarian organizing has historically been the coir workers, particularly in the Alleppey region, but Kannan studies three of the other most concentrated radical workers' groups: toddy tappers, beedi workers, and—with major limitations—agricultural laborers. In analyzing the relative success of toddy tappers in gaining substantial wage increases, paid holidays, leaves, tool allowances, and a welfare fund, Kannan draws attention to the highly skilled nature of tapping, which requires constant attention and detailed knowledge of the trees and the product. Tappers...
are especially critical in the production process, and because of their strategic position, if they are highly organized and disciplined they could—like Marx’s concentrated industrial proletariat—exert power far greater than their numbers would suggest. This is precisely what happened, although it seems the author could have added a bit more recognition of another factor: the great courage and sacrifices of the tappers in the face of intense repression in the period before the election of the first Communist ministry in 1957. More generalized class solidarity was also important as tappers could depend on support from agricultural laborers for food and hiding places when necessary, often because caste and family ties cut across the employment spectrum.

Despite their many gains, the toddy tappers today face difficult times, in part, according to the author, because of the political fragmentation of the left parties, each with its own union, and in part because of the “institutionalization” of the Left, which has resulted in a less committed, creative, and forceful union leadership and the rise of some cynicism among the workers. Here the importance of the case study is great indeed, and one wishes the author had published his questionnaire schedule, as examples are drawn from it in a sometimes rather haphazard way to illustrate points. But the overall argument is convincing, and the author also notes the important loss of some strategic position by the tappers as a result of competition from other drinks, including the lower quality arrack and outside “foreign liquor” as it is referred to in Kerala. This competition results in a declining market for the tappers’ product and weakens their bargaining power both with shop owners and with the unsympathetic governments that result whenever the Left loses the state assembly elections.

Although Kannan feels that class solidarity is declining among many tappers, his dramatic account of the changes in their living conditions before and after the rise of the union will leave little room for doubt that Kerala’s 43,000 toddy tappers are among the most successful rural workers in the Third World in improving their lives and offering a strong base for even further advancement for their children. The detailed descriptions of the living conditions of workers before and after unionization, supplemented with useful tables and other quantitative data, are among the most valuable parts of the study.

The beedi cigarette workers illustrate a somewhat different kind of success. Here various factors led the workers finally to take over a portion of the industry and run it as a cooperative. Frequent Communist Party power in the state government was the critical factor in the success of the cooperative by making loans and initial assistance available from the government at crucial moments. Even here, however, working class solidarity was a key because the co-op initially depended on getting other unions to encourage their members to smoke the co-op’s beedisses rather than those of private producers. The co-op also offered a superior product, and its general influence in the Kerala beedi industry is strong enough that even nonco-op workers have garnered improvements in wages and working conditions as a result. However, because the co-op offers better pay and benefits than private industry, it faces stiff competition as it cannot keep profits very high. This means it must ultimately depend on a friendly state government to support it if difficult times emerge. Among the 90,000 beedi workers in Kerala, the 27,000 workers at the Kerala Dinesh Beedi Co-operative Society include some women who label and pack the cigarettes at wages even above those of the mostly male rollers. Overall wages are 25 percent higher in the co-op than outside.

The final groups studied intensively by Kannan are agricultural laborers in two different districts of Kerala: Kuttanad (Alleppey) and Palghat. In Kuttanad, where early capitalist penetration brought drainage and irrigation works that have put rice production on a tight schedule, workers attained a strategic position that has aided them in gaining substantial concessions from landowners. By contrast, in Palghat, only harvest time allows a serious threat from organized labor, and gains have been more modest. More than toddy tapping, which is all male and almost all Ezhava caste, and beedi work, which is mostly male and heavily Ezhava, agricultural labor is largely female and involves a high percentage of the very bottom caste members—Pulayas, the main Kerala Harijan group. In Kannan’s view, the difficulties of organizing agricultural labor and the relatively weak strategic position of these workers combines with the social and political weakness of women and Harijans to produce the least success in their struggles, despite Communist leadership and often sympathetic state governments. Thus, what farm laborers could not fully achieve through union organizing, the left governments attempted to impose by law in the 1974 Kerala Agricultural Workers’ Act, which set minimum wages, working conditions, and other guarantees. The act, however, has not been well implemented, except in areas such as Kuttanad where the workers were powerful enough to enforce it themselves.

Overall wages are 25 percent higher in the co-op than outside.
Theoretical Questions

In weaving together history, economics, political organization, and several detailed case studies based on interviews and questionnaire responses, Kannan has offered many valuable insights into Kerala's radical traditions. At the same time, his work points, sometimes intentionally and at other times not, to a number of problems that require further study.

One of the main topics glossed over in the book is the role of the Indian national state and the class forces that dominate it in limiting the gains of Kerala's workers. In particular, the 1957 CPI government was dismissed in 1959 in the midst of a highly suspicious right-wing "liberation movement" that was apparently aided and abetted by the central government in Delhi. Many of the Communist reforms in land tenure, minimum wages, and education were delayed for years and then watered down after protracted struggles with the courts and the central executive. A more dialectical approach to the problems of rural proletarians would include some of the interplay between these forces: the workers and their organizations versus the (national) state and its financial and repressive apparatuses. Such an approach raises the further question: what classes are in power in India and what local Kerala classes are their natural allies? The recent history of Kerala certainly shows it is not the workers. In places Kannan does refer to Syrian Christian bankers, high-caste landlords, and others who have bitterly opposed certain redistribution policies of the Left, but no sustained analysis is offered of the actual class forces in conflict.

A second issue concerns various “random” forces and processes outside the immediate control of the workers’ movement but which have enormous, and probably harmful, consequences. One example might be the large-scale labor migration to the Persian Gulf States. This migration has resulted in huge remittances back to Kerala benefiting some groups of workers. In the larger economic and political sense, however, most of the money has apparently been invested in nonproductive areas such as large houses, ownership of taxis, high-priced consumer items such as video machines, and the like. Now with the oil price boom of the late 1970s collapsing, many migrants are returning and the local economy is threatened by an oversupply of labor.

Yet another untapped subject is the continuing role of caste and religious identification in dividing workers. Although, as mentioned above, Kerala has gone further than other Indian regions in replacing caste with class consciousness, “communalism,” as it is known in Kerala, seems to be resurgent. Far-right communal candidates won 7 percent of Kerala’s vote in the 1987 elections, taking two seats in the 140-member Legislative Assembly. Hindu fundamentalist gangs known as the RSS have violently attacked Communist and other left organizers, even killing some in recent years. A particular difficulty that this situation raises for the most organized sections of the Left is that they must maintain tight discipline and preparation for physical defense of their cadre and offices on the one hand while appealing as a movement committed to law and order to maintain electoral strength on the other. Nonetheless, Kerala’s Left Communists (the CPI-M) conducted a highly principled, anticommunal campaign in 1987, helping to reinforce and reinvigorate rational and class understanding of issues.

Kannan’s data in Alleppey seem to suggest that length of time in struggles and intensity of penetration of Marxist ideology are positively associated with overcoming caste and gender inequality.

The difficulty of maintaining electoral appeal in a situation of fragmenting communal loyalties was illustrated in 1987 during agitation over a theater production of “The Last Temptation of Christ.” Right-wing Christian agitation led to a banning of the play, but left forces were not able to take a clear position on either side of the issue, apparently not wanting to undermine their traditional support of democratic rights but also apparently not wanting to alienate potential Christian voters. With 20 percent of Kerala’s population Christian and another 20 percent Moslem, the state presents potential problems in maintaining worker solidarity when issues such as this arise. Here again is a problem for class analysis that has yet to be fully investigated in the Kerala context.

A most intriguing element in Kannan’s analysis of success versus failure of workers’ organization is his pinpointing of the roles of Harijans and women. The agricultural unions, he argues, have in part been less successful because their membership base contains a larger percentage of these two groups, who suffer greater limitations on their ability to participate owing to various kinds of social and cultural bonding. Precisely what these limitations are is not explored in detail. However, one might presume that for Harijans continuing lack of full social integration with other castes and continuing caste prejudice would be the main factor. For women a combination of the intense demands on their time within the household, along with male unwillingness to see them in successful roles outside the home, would make it difficult for them to attend and participate in meetings, and so on. Even so, Kannan’s data indicate that in Alleppey, where agricultural unions have the longest tenure and the greatest Communist influence, both Harijans and women are making greater imroads into the male- and middle-caste-dominated union leadership than in Palghat where the unions are more recent. This seems to suggest that length of time in struggles and intensity of penetration of Marxist ideology are positively associated with overcoming caste and gender inequality. Surely here is a subject for more detailed research, and Kerala is an ideal laboratory for it.

*BCAS readers may also want to consider the more critical view on this point offered by Gail Omvedt in her review of this book in Economic and Political Weekly, 4 June 1988, pp. 1164–66.
The Conjuncture Approach

Finally, at the most general theoretical level, how useful is Kannan's conjuncture approach? The author seems to use the concept in two related senses. First, there is the conjuncture of various factors in a particular time and place. Toddy tappers had a favorable conjuncture in organizing their union: strategic position in the production process, mostly or all male workers, little caste division within the profession, and a product of great importance to the state economy. A second conjuncture was that of timing and the first conjuncture: increasing class solidarity and militancy at a time of general social upheaval created by the Indian independence movement, followed by the favorable conditions created by the election of the first Communist ministry in 1957 that greatly reduced local police repression against the union, for example.

Although this approach opens promising lines of inquiry, it can also lead to hasty generalizations, as has perhaps occurred in the author's conclusion, where he rejects out of hand Eric Wolf's identification of middle peasants as a key force in Third World revolutionary organization, opting instead for a rather vacuous quote from Skocpol that "varying social structures, political configurations and historical conjunctures constitute much more appropriate terms of analysis and explanation" (p. 327). There is little in this latter statement that one could dispute, but has Wolf's hypothesis been seriously considered? In fact, Kannan's own study suggests a possible extension of Wolf's idea concerning middle peasants. It was the Ezhavas, an oppressed but middle-caste group, who were first to feel the intense exploitation of capitalist penetration, and they were also the first caste to organize militant opposition and then to lead in the organization of class-based struggle in Kerala. Isn't this rather like Wolf's hypothesis, extended into India-specific structures? In addition, by rejecting Wolf without detailed consideration, Kannan might have overlooked another important component in the Kerala workers' struggle: the role of tenants in the radical peasant movements that were especially critical in building Communist bastions in Malabar and to a lesser extent, Cochin, where land redistribution was as burning an issue as wages and working conditions.

To what extent did rural proletarians gain from the solidarity of the tenants' struggle? And how much is that solidarity now threatened by the very success of the land reform that has transformed these tenants into smallholders who often employ—and are thus potentially at odds with—agricultural laborers in the same Communist parties? Wolf's approach may need modification, but his specific formulation of the process of radical mobilization in places like Cuba and Vietnam still offers fruitful grounds for investigation. In many respects, despite its somewhat unique conditions, Kerala may resemble other Third World situations more than is sometimes realized.

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Books to Review

The following review copies have arrived at the office of the Bulletin. If you are interested in reading and reviewing one or more of them, write to Bill Doub, BCAS, 3239 9th Street, Boulder, Colorado 80304-2172, U.S.A. This is not, of course, an exhaustive list of the available books in print—only a list of books received. We also welcome reviews of important works on Asia that are not listed here, and if you ask us to get particular books for you to review, we can usually do it. We generally prefer review essays that compare two or more books and discuss problems of approach or analysis. For more details on our preferences, please write for a copy of our “Guidelines for BCAS Authors.”

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Southeast Asia


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Out of print for about 15 years, through special arrangement with the original publisher in Japan, we have made available again the three photo-panoramas of the destroyed city of Hiroshima. This is a not-for-profit project; the proceeds will be used for project continuation and other educational work focused on ending the possibility of nuclear war. The project has no official connection with the city of Hiroshima, nor with Shima Hospital there, but we believe both would support this effort. Our project name is taken from the title given to one of the panoramas 15 years ago.

All panoramas are on heavy chart paper and folded.

1. NEAR SHIMA HOSPITAL (Ground level from the hypocenter) by U.S. Research Group. Almost 360°, Paper: 13.75" X 91.5"; Photo: 10.25" X 89.25"

2. FROM THE (rooftop) FORMER CHUGOKU SHIMBUN BLDG. by Shigeo Hayashi; 360°, Paper: 13.75" X 106.6"; Photo: 10.25" X 104.5"

3. FROM THE (rooftop) HIROSHIMA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BLDG. by Shigeo Hayashi; 360°, Paper: 13.75" X 106.5"; Photo: 8.1" X 102.4"

The panoramas show the physical effects of a small nuclear weapon on a city of 400,000. Japanese and English text in the photo border indicates significant landmarks. This is a remarkable photo-record of an extraordinary historical event. Displayed, they should provoke serious thought from students and adults. The photo on this page (reduced in size) represents approximately 1/10 of Panorama #3. It shows the "T-Bridge" (Aioi Bridge), which was the aiming point, and in the distance beyond, the Honkawa and Kodo Elementary Schools. 1/10 of the panorama is only 36°; the additional 324° of this panorama sweep over the remainder of the destroyed city.

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Graphic Information for the Kurihara Poems, p. 26

The other graphics accompanying the Kurihara poems are: P. 26—a still from an early film showing a victim of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima or Nagasaki. The photo in the background is of a baby amid the wreckage of North Station in Shanghai after the city was bombarded by the Japanese in the 1930s; although many believe this picture was staged, Japanese destruction and atrocities during their conquest of China are undisputed, and this photo has become a symbol of the horrors of war. P. 27—The Hiroshima monument to Korean victims of the bomb, photographed in 1991 by and courtesy of Kurt Tong. Above the monument is a painting by the Japanese muralist Masahiko Toshi, and above that is a map of U.S. military installations in Korea that was prepared by Washington Headquarters Services and is courtesy of the Center for Defense Information in Washington, D.C. P. 28—In the background is a modified and enlarged detail of a 1981 painting by Michael Hague showing the emperor parading in his "new clothes." This picture is @ Michael Hague, and it is reproduced here with his permission from his Favorite Hans Christian Andersen Fairy Tales (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 117. Covering the emperor's face and body are a photo of Suzuki Zenko's face, source unknown; the ceramic work by Kota Kazuaki acknowledged on p. 30; and the painting by A-bomb survivor Koyabashi Masao of Shinsenguri Bridge about one kilometer from Hiroshima, reproduced here from the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation's Unforgettable Fire (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), courtesy of Pantheon Books. P. 29—Emperor Hirohito inspecting bomb damage in Tokyo following the U.S. firebombing on 25-26 May 1945, an Imperial Household Agency photo. P. 30—Besides the ceramic work by Kota Kazuaki acknowledged on p. 30, a drawing of a body bag by Robert Thawley, courtesy of Robert Thawley.

The photo on the back cover by Tito Craige is of Philippine refugee children in October 1989. They are in a jungle hideout near Agusan, Mindanao, and they are watching for military helicopters. During the counterinsurgency war in the Philippines noncombatants have been the targets of armed attacks as well as psychological warfare, and since 1986 more than a million noncombatants have been forcibly relocated. The UN estimates that about 2.4 million Filipino children have been directly or indirectly victimized by this counterinsurgency war. See Tito Craige's article in this issue of BCAS for more about the counterinsurgency war and the role of the United States.