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Japanese Perspectives on the Manhattan Project

Japanese people understandably have a vastly different perspective on the Manhattan project and the destruction of their two cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, than Americans. For Americans who lived through the experience, even if they had personal qualms with the amount of destruction caused by the nuclear explosion or the fact the bombs had never been tested before detonation, most Americans agreed it was a necessary action to end the war. Although American opinion has evolved and changed from the World War II generation through the present generation, Japanese perspectives have relatively remained constant.

For Japanese people who experienced the explosion, the survivors suffered from feeling of shock and confusion. Those who saw the explosion described it a bluish white flash and a huge mushroom cloud. Rescue teams were greeted with horrific sights that they still remember vividly today.

-Burned bodies

-Skin hanging off bodies

-Thousands of dead children

-The horrific smell of burned flesh

-Survivors trapped under piles of rubble, begging for water

-Fire and destruction everywhere

-Bodies of those desperately trying to escape the explosion floating in the river, boiled due to the intense heat

Such scenes were captured by numerous artists who copied the spirit of Picasso’s work on the Spanish Civil War. Survivors a half century later captured the scene in water-color painting and created a horrific image of what it was like immediately following the blast.

The effects of the blast lingered far after the initial explosion. Radiation poisoning, something never before dealt with, caused hundreds of deaths. Those who did not die still experienced symptoms such as loss of hair and internal bleeding. The bombs at Hiroshima, and later Nagasaki also severely crippled the next generation of the Japanese population. Thousands of children went to school in the heart of Hiroshima and were in the center of the impact radius. Thus, a large portion of this generation was eliminated in a single blast.

Japan never forgot the blast at Hiroshima. It was the first nuclear explosion, and along with the second explosion at Nagasaki convinced Japan to sue for peace. Even today, it is still remembered. In Hiroshima every year on August 6th, the anniversary of the atomic detonation, the city of Hiroshima floats thousands of candles down the river flowing through the city. The candles are released next to a building that partially survived the blast and acts as a memorial for the city.

Today, Japan’s views on nuclear technology are directly influenced by its experience in World War Two. Japan has advocated for peaceful nuclear energy. Due to their experience with the atomic bomb, Japan has vowed never to possess nuclear weapons and many of its people call for worldwide nuclear disarmament. Thus even today, Japanese perspectives are still influenced by that fateful August day in 1945.